

BEST SELLING AUTHOR
JAYNA KING



SAVAGE SONS MC

PRODIGAL



PRODIGAL SON

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by

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Prologue

Sable

*Friday, July 2, 1982 - Flagstaff,
Arizona*

Sable Bellamy tossed her backpack into the passenger side of her 1974 Chevrolet Caprice Classic, and she turned around to give her friend, Jennifer, one last hug.

“Thanks again. For everything,” Sable whispered into Jennifer’s ear before letting go.

“You be careful,” Jennifer said for the third time, reluctant to say goodbye

to the girl she'd first met twelve years before during first grade orientation at Colfax Elementary School in Denver, Colorado. "You have change for the pay phone if anything goes wrong, don't you?" Jennifer asked, worried about the dozens of things that could happen to a pretty eighteen-year-old girl on the road alone.

"I do, and I'll be fine. Nothing's going to happen. Thanks to you and your parents, I have a fresh start, and I'm not gonna waste it." Sable opened her car door and stepped back as the heat rolled out of the long black car. "Hope my a/c holds out," she said as she walked around to roll down the passenger window, hoping to get some air moving

inside the car that felt more like an oven.

“Say hi to Daniel for me when he gets home, and don’t you dare forget to call and let me know when you get in, okay?”

“Will do.” Sable checked to make sure that her map of Arizona, folded to show the route from Flagstaff to the Grand Canyon, was tucked beneath her backpack. “I think I’m all set. I’ll call you tomorrow night when I get home.”

Jennifer stood at the curb, watching as Sable pulled away from the house, and turned toward the highway that would lead her north to the Grand Canyon. She waved one last time and headed back inside, looking forward to

the air conditioning even though it was only eight in the morning.

Sable drove away, blinking back tears and trying to distract herself with thoughts of the Grand Canyon — a sight she'd never seen. She realized that Independence Day was just two days away, and she took a deep breath, placing her hands deliberately at ten and two on the steering wheel, determined to think of her drive as traveling toward a new life and toward liberty.

“I can't change the past,” she said out loud. “I have to look forward toward my future.”

Sable had always talked to herself, for as long as she could remember. She

tried to do it only when she was alone, but the conversations were so second nature that she was accustomed to being on the receiving end of strange looks wherever she was. She knew that people looked at her because she was pretty — young, petite, but with curves, and with the most gorgeous head of nearly black hair that most folks had ever seen. But she also knew that people looked at her because she walked around in conversation with herself half the time.

About an hour-and-a-half after she'd left Jennifer's house, she pulled into the parking lot near the visitor's center at Mather Point. She parked the car and gratefully stretched her legs as she got out.

“Guess I should crack the windows,” Sable said as she walked to the passenger side, rolled the window down a bit, locked the door, and closed it again. “Well, let’s go see this hole in the ground.”

After she took a long drink at the water fountain in the visitor’s center, Sable headed back outside for the short walk to the edge of the canyon. She didn’t really care much about how many years it had taken for the river to wear away the rock and create the natural wonder. She just wanted to see it and move on. Following the path toward the edge, Sable watched all of the families out enjoying a holiday weekend together. She smirked at frazzled parents pleading

with their precious darlings to behave, and she walked to the edge of the canyon, brave as could be.

“Oh, my,” she whispered.

No one even glanced at her, because they'd all had the same reaction when they'd come up on the profoundly massive chasm, lined with rocks that almost looked like they'd been painted with the striking colors that showed off the layers of their composition. Sable decided to take a few minutes and let the scene sink in. She looked around, feeling a little sick to her stomach at the edge, and she found a rock off to the side. It was situated a few feet away from the edge, and it was a little out of the way.

Sable took a seat and rested her tennis shoe-clad feet on a smaller rock that looked like it had been placed there as a footrest.

She sat, quiet and full of her own thoughts. She watched birds floating on the thermal currents in the canyon, rising and falling in a way that looked effortless.

“Easy and free,” Sable said as she watched the birds, wheeling and turning in a descending spiral.

“Pardon?”

Sable was startled when she heard the man’s voice, and looked over to see a man about her father’s age. He wore a U.S. Marine Corps hat, studded with

pins.

“Sorry,” Sable apologized. “I was talking to myself. I do it all the time.”

“That’s all right, honey. I just thought you were talking to me.”

Sable watched the man walk away, back toward the visitor’s center, and she thought about Daniel. The man’s hat had reminded her of him, though he was never very far out of her thoughts. He was due home from the Persian Gulf in less than a month, and Sable had very mixed feelings about his return. They hadn’t parted on good terms, but the few letters he’d sent from overseas had tried to explain things, and Sable had agreed to give him another chance.

“It’s better if he doesn’t know everything,” she said, having looked around to make sure no one would overhear her.

She scanned the little overlook point, watching people creep toward the edge and peer into the depths. Parents clutched their children’s hands, though there was no way they could get past the barriers that the National Park Service had put in place. Sable wondered for a moment what that would feel like — to shoulder the responsibility for another person’s life.

“Too much for me,” she said, preparing to return inside, get another drink and get back on the road.

Just before she stood up, she saw a young couple walking toward Mather Point. The father held an infant in one arm, the little boy sound asleep, his head resting on his father's chest. The young woman, who looked just a few years older than Sable, let go of her husband's hand and walked closer to the edge, looked for a moment, and returned to take the infant from the man so that he could inch closer without endangering their child. Sable watched the woman shift the child so that he lay across her body. They were close enough that Sable could see that his hair was damp from the heat, and she watched the woman smooth the boy's hair and tuck a few strands behind the ear of the sleeping

child.

The man rejoined his wife and they headed toward the visitor's center, leaving Sable still sitting on the rock, tears streaming down her face.

Chapter 1

Luke

*Saturday, May 4, 2013 - Denver,
Colorado*

I had never been so glad to get out of my car as I was the day I arrived in Denver. I grabbed my ancient L. L. Bean backpack from behind my seat and groaned out loud as I stood up to stretch my legs. I handed the keys to the valet and pointedly ignored the skepticism in his expression. I waved off his offer to carry my bags, retrieved my large, nondescript duffel bag from the back of my dust-covered Jeep Wrangler, handed

a couple of dollars to the man who looked like he wasn't relishing the thought of climbing into my dirty, nearly ten-year-old car, and headed toward the hotel's front door.

I started to reach for the door, but before I could grab the handle, a bellman beat me to it.

“Welcome to the Ritz Carlton, sir”

I nodded at him as I walked into the luxurious lobby and headed for the front desk.

“Checking in,” I said to the man behind the counter, whose trendy eyeglasses looked like they'd come direct from Italy and whose suit — I shit you not — looked like it had been

handmade.

“Welcome to the Ritz Carlton. The last name on your reservation, please?”

“Callaway. First name Luke.”

I watched the man’s eyes widen slightly as he read the information on the screen and read it a second time to confirm. When he spoke, there was a greater tone of deference in his voice.

“We have you in our Ritz Carlton Suite — our largest and most luxurious. The reservation appears to be open ended, Mr. Callaway. Do you know how long you’re planning to stay with us?”

“Not yet. At least a week, as long as you don’t need the room before then.”

“We’re happy to accommodate you for as long as you like, sir.”

I smothered a laugh. I’d had a feeling that they didn’t have people lined up around the block to pay nearly a grand per night for their fanciest suite. I probably shouldn’t have booked the biggest suite, but I felt like splurging.

“I’ll have one of the valets take your bags up and show you around your home for the week, if you’d like, sir.”

“Nah. I can manage.” I was looking forward to seeing the ridiculously enormous set of rooms that I’d be paying for, but I didn’t need people kissing my ass any more than they already were.

“Very good, sir. We’ll just authorize

your card, which will put a hold of four hundred dollars on your account. Is that acceptable?”

“Fine.”

“You’re all set. Thank you for staying at the Ritz Carlton, Mr. Callaway. Please let us know if there’s anything we can do to make your stay more enjoyable.”

“Will do,” I said, as I took the card key and headed for the elevators. I was looking forward to the view.

The room was ridiculous and I loved it. I wondered what my buddies from college would think if they could see me at the moment that I walked into the

rooms that, at over three thousand square feet, were twice as big as my condo back in Flagstaff. They'd be envious for a minute, I realized, until they realized where my newfound wealth had come from. I shook my head, determined not to wallow in self-pity any longer than I already had.

I was going to be grateful for the good things in my life — more money than I ever thought I'd see, a job that was flexible enough to give me an indefinite leave of absence to sort out the bombshell that my parents had dropped on me, and...well, I couldn't really think of anything else that was good in my life at the moment. The huge gaping hole — the center of my life that had been ripped

away a week ago — kept me from feeling terribly sunny.

I missed my parents. I was certain that I always would.

I dropped my bags just inside the door and walked over to the huge windows that looked out onto the Rocky Mountains.

“What am I gonna do?” I wondered out loud as I looked into the sun that was about to set just behind the mountains.

I turned away from the window and took a walk through the rooms. There was a dining room with a table set for six people, several seating areas, a bath with a huge soaking tub that looked out over the city and the mountains, and the

bedroom...wow. It was a shame that I'd be sleeping in that big bed all by myself.

Grabbing my bags from the living room, I brought them into the bedroom, taking a few minutes to unpack into the dresser and put my suitcase away in the closet. I didn't see the point of cluttering up such a gorgeous room with my ratty old bag. I pulled a thick folder, embossed with the logo of my parents' attorney, from my backpack and I headed back out to the living room.

I sat down on the couch that faced the windows, and I flopped the folder onto the cushion next to me. I'd already skimmed the contents of the folder, but I hadn't taken the time to read the whole

thing carefully. I really didn't want to, but I knew that I needed to. I opened the folder and pulled out a single sheet of paper — a sheet I'd read several times already. The sight of my parents' signatures at the bottom nearly made my eyes well up with tears, and I was finished crying. I took a deep breath and reread the letter.

September 25, 1999

Dearest Luke,

Before we ever brought you home — you, our greatest treasure — your father and I agreed that we would find a way to share with you the information that we had about your birth parents should anything happen to the two of

us. When we signed the final paperwork to adopt you, though, the social worker told us that the birth mother, a woman we never met, wanted your adoption to be completely closed. We knew nothing about her or your father, and we were so thrilled to have you that we decided that it didn't really matter. We were a family, and we didn't need anyone else.

The thought of leaving you alone in the world just haunted me, though, and I convinced your father that we should hire a private investigator to find your birth parents and leave the information with our attorney to share with you once both of us have passed on. Though I was curious, neither of us read the file that the investigator shared with

us. We feel like the information is yours — that it's your history to explore if you wish.

Whoever your birth parents are, they did one wonderful thing, and that was give us the child we wanted so desperately and couldn't have. We have known more joy as your parents than we ever could have imagined. I don't know under what circumstances you will read these words. I hope it's many, many years from now when you're settled and raising a family of your own, but just in case it's not, we don't want you to feel like you're alone in the world.

We love you, and we're so very

proud of you,

Mom and Dad

The signatures that followed those words were the same ones that had been at the bottom of my report cards, permission slips, and absence notes when I'd been growing up, and a fresh wave of sadness at the fact that I would never again see my parents washed over me. I wondered what Roger and Jeannie would have thought about Daniel and Sable (nee Bellamy) Hall. They were certainly from different walks of life.

I walked over to the bar that faced the living room and decided to pour myself a drink before I cleaned up and headed out for dinner. I spied a

miniature bottle of Dewar's scotch and went in search of a perfectly chilled can of ginger ale in the silver refrigerator behind the bar. I found a rocks glass, added a couple of cubes and mixed my scotch and ginger ale. I walked back over to the window and thought about the enormous differences between my biological and my birth parents.

Roger Callaway, sixty-one years old at the time of the car accident that claimed his life, had been the most respected civil attorney in Flagstaff. Handling wills, divorces, and custody matters, Roger was nearly a mythical creature — an attorney with a reputation for scrupulous honesty and abundant compassion. Jeannie had been a talented

goldsmith and jeweler, whose business had allowed her the flexibility to stay home with me for most of my childhood. They'd been well-educated, practical people who'd raised me with patience and love, teaching me that I could become anything that I wanted, as long as I was willing to work hard for it.

Based on what I'd picked up from my quick read of the file, Daniel Hall had never made much of himself, being variously underemployed at several low wage jobs over the course of his life — the one exception being his military career, which he'd completed with distinction. Sable, clearly a smart woman, had briefly attended community college after she'd graduated from high

school, but she'd taken a job working as a secretary/receptionist at a construction company, and she'd never moved on. Nothing much about their lives stood out to me, with the exception of the fact that Daniel had, along with his brother, started a motorcycle club called the Savage Sons. Based on the PI's research, it looked like the club wasn't exactly one of the outlaw, one-percenter gangs, but they were a rough crew. I was a little curious.

I was also hungry.

I headed into the bathroom, a shiny chrome and marble-filled fantasy, peeled my clothes off and stepped into the shower that was large enough to

house a sorority. I felt much better after I'd washed the traveling dirt off myself and was dressed in clean jeans and a fitted black long-sleeved t-shirt. Though the day had been warm, I knew the evening would be a little chilly.

I flipped through the binder in the office — yes, the freakin' hotel room had an office — and found a listing of restaurants nearby. I was in the mood for a beer — okay, more than one — and I decided on the Falling Rock Taphouse, which looked to have good food and a huge selection of craft beer on tap. I knew the place was likely to be busy on a Saturday night, but I'd never had trouble striking up a conversation with strangers, and I thought it might do me

some good to get outside my own head
for a few hours.

Chapter 2

Krystal

*Saturday, May 4, 2013 - Denver,
Colorado*

I looked down the bar at the Falling Rock Taphouse, and I was finally satisfied with everything. Even though I'd come in a few minutes before my five o'clock shift, it had still taken an hour to get the bar in order for a busy Saturday night. I looked up to see the manager coming my way.

“Hey, Mark, you got a minute?” I called out as he headed up toward the

front door.

He walked over and faced me across the bar. “What’s up?”

“Hey, I know I’m new here, and I don’t want to cause problems, but this bar was in lousy shape when I came in.”

I liked Mark so far. He was thoughtful and seemed to be a fair, stand-up guy.

“We weren’t very busy at lunch. There’s no reason that you shouldn’t have walked in to find everything ready to go. I’ll talk to Sam when I see him next week. Won’t happen again.”

I was surprised. After all the years I’d spent hanging out with the Savage

Sons, I wasn't used to people — especially men — paying any attention to what I said. Moses had been the only one who'd ever talked to me like I was a real person and not just a piece of ass. And Moses was gone. God, did I miss him.

“Thanks, Mark,” I said as he waved and headed to the front, always on the move.

I looked over the dinner specials menu while I thought about my new gig. I'd been just heartbroken when Moses had died, and I'd thought all kinds of crazy things in the week that I'd spent in my pajamas staring at the television. Bug had been pissed that I was so upset

about Moses, but he'd always made everything a competition between the two of them — or he would have if Moses had given a shit.

I'd thought that Bug would be happy that I didn't work for Moses anymore, but when I'd finally cleaned myself up and headed out to look for another job, Bug had found something wrong with every single one of them. I was glad he and I hadn't moved in together yet, because he was starting to really grind my gears. It was like he wanted me around just to wait on him hand and foot — be his fuckin' arm candy, but I knew better than to be dependent on him. I'd wanted to move up to an old lady, but I was starting to think that it wasn't gonna

be worth it to be Bug's old lady. I'd be better off being handed around the Savage Sons or even getting out of the MC scene altogether. But I knew that if I left, I'd always miss the leather, the bikes, the tattoos, and the sexy men of the Savage Sons.

I wasn't sure what I was going to do with myself, but I thought that getting a job at the Taphouse was a good start toward something better. A couple of good-looking young guys walked toward the bar. Something better indeed, I thought, as I set a couple of cocktail napkins in front of them.

Business started picking up, and by eight o'clock, I had a nearly full bar. I

waved Mark over on his next fly-by and asked him to keep an eye on things so that I could run to the ladies' room. As I washed my hands, I checked myself out in the mirror, and I was pretty pleased with what I saw. I'd had to tone down the rough edges for the bar, and I had been surprised to discover that I liked the less skanky look.

I wore my favorite Falling Rock ladies' t-shirt—the one that was the exact same blue as my eyes and had a low v-neck. My favorite jeans were pretty low rise, and I knew that my lower back tattoo was visible every time I bent over or reached for a glass overhead. There were a lot of shitty tramp stamps in the world, but the one

Moses had done freehand on my lower back was a work of art. The lines were graceful and followed the lines of my body beautifully. I checked to make sure the little bit of makeup I wore looked okay, and I applied some fresh lipgloss. Certain that I looked pretty good, I hurried back to my bar.

“Thanks, Mark,” I said as I scanned the bar to make sure no one needed a drink right that second. I had just started to unload the dishwasher full of pint glasses when I looked up to check out the new arrival.

Wow. My view had definitely improved. The man that walked toward the bar was tall — nearly as tall as

Moses, probably about 6'3", I guessed. He was blond, which wasn't usually my thing, but good grief, was he perfect. His hair was short, but not in a pretty boy preppy way, and the golden stubble along his sexy, strong jaw looked like he belonged in some outdoorsy catalogue. I hoped that he wasn't about to be joined by his supermodel girlfriend, and I decided at that instant that I would play it cool, but I was determined to chat him up a little.

“Evening,” I said as I tossed a napkin in front of him.

The guy turned to face me after he sat down on the last available stool in the bar, and his blue eyes nearly took my

breath away.

“What’s on tap?” he asked.

I reached for the menu and set it on the bar, and he looked at it and laughed.

“Didn’t realize I’d have to read a novel just to get a beer.”

I could tell that he was being good-natured rather than genuinely irritated by the beer geek’s dream of a menu that I’d given him.

“Whatcha in the mood for?” I asked with a smile.

Was it my imagination, or did a flicker of interest in something other than beer cross his face?

“Something local and hoppy,” he answered. “I’m in from Arizona, so I’d like to try something new.”

I nodded and grabbed a couple of sample glasses, filling them and returning to place them in front of the gorgeous stranger.

“This is Boulder Brewing’s Hazed and Infused, and here’s Oskar Blues Deviant Dale’s. Let me know what you think. Name’s Krystal.”

I turned to walk the length of the bar, clearing empty pints and dishes and taking a couple of orders, looking forward to getting back to the sexy new face. While I scanned the bar, I realized just how much I was enjoying the new

scene that my job provided. I was used to hanging out at the Sons' clubhouse, and while it could be a lot of fun, I was starting to see the benefit of not having half-dressed hookers around while I was trying to catch a guy's eye. I was also grateful for a break from Bug.

Bug was becoming a problem, and I was afraid that I was going to have to find a way to break things off with him. I wasn't sure how he was going to take the news.

Bringing my focus back to the bar, I headed back to the blond stranger with a smile on my face.

“What do you think?” I asked, pointing at the beer samples.

“I like them both, but I’ll take a Hazed and Infused.”

“You got it. Want a menu?”

“Food any good?” he asked with a smile.

“Absolutely. The tamales are great, and the burgers are all good.” One thing that I liked about Falling Rock was that they made us taste everything on the menu so we could talk about it with the customers.

“Then yes, I’ll take a menu.”

I brought him his beer and the menu and checked to make sure that the rest of the bar was content for the moment. I didn’t usually start conversations with

customers, unless it was obvious that they were looking to talk, but this guy sure didn't look like an average customer. I figured he was worth a shot.

“So, you're from Arizona?”

“Yup,” he answered. “Flagstaff. Just got in this afternoon.”

“Staying nearby?”

The man looked a little embarrassed, and he actually blushed before he answered. “Yeah. I'm at the Ritz,” he answered.

I raised my eyebrows. “Wow,” I said, surprised. He didn't look like the filthy rich type, but I knew that the Ritz was an expensive joint.

“Yeah. I don’t normally stay in fancy places, but since...” he paused. “Well, let’s just say I decided to splurge for once.”

“Well, welcome to Denver. Let me know if you need anything, and I’ll be back in a minute to get your dinner order.”

The man opened the menu and I got caught up on the server orders that had come in while I’d been deciding if the man was worth full-on flirting with. I’d decided that he was. I filled pint glasses, mixed a couple of cosmos for the girls at the far end of the bar who were eying the stranger like he was dessert, and headed back to take his order. He decided on the

tamales, and I was about to turn and put his order in, when he stopped me.

“So are you from around here?” he asked.

I couldn't tell if he was really interested in me or if he was just uncomfortable being alone and trying to make small talk. Either way, I figured it was a good sign.

I leaned on the bar in a way that I knew made the most of the low cut t-shirt I wore. “Born and raised in Denver.”

“You like it here?” he asked.

Even though I'd only been at Falling Rock for a few weeks, I'd already

developed the good bartender's sense of when they're needed. "Hold that thought," I said, regretfully. "Be right back."

I headed down to a group of guys about my age — mid-twenties -- and I took their order for half a dozen shots of Fireball. The cinnamon-flavored whiskey was one of our most popular shots, and I liked it because I didn't have to mix anything. I measured the Fireball into a cocktail shaker, added some ice, and poured out four shots for the guys and two for the girls they were trying to pick up. The girls barely looked twenty-one, but I'd checked both of their IDs carefully. I hoped they'd be careful. The guys they were talking to looked like

they could be trouble.

I knew it was really none of my business, but I had seen so many girls in bad situations that I felt like I had to keep an eye out for young, innocent girls who might get into trouble before they realized what was happening. More than once, I'd sent one of the busboys or servers out to walk a girl to her car if I'd gotten a bad vibe from one of the guys at the bar. I didn't want to see any more girls get hurt.

Planning to keep a close eye on the group I'd just served shots to, I headed back to Mr. Gorgeous.

“So do you like Denver?” he asked again when I got back to him.

“I guess. I haven’t really been much of anywhere else.”

The man looked a little surprised.
“Really?”

I figured that he had no idea that I didn’t have an extra dime to my name.
“Yeah. I don’t really get to travel much.”

He thought for a second. “Well, you’d be the perfect person to help me out, then. I’m going to be in town for a week or so, and I could use some recommendations for good restaurants.”

I didn’t get to eat out very often. Goodness knows, Bug didn’t ever take me out. But I did know the hotspots from hearing other people talk about them.

“I’ll be happy to give you some places.” I looked around. “Be right back.”

A bartender’s work was never done, and I made another round of fresh drinks and to deliver some food that was ready. I set the plate of tamales in front of the man and decided to take a chance.

“What’s your name?” I asked, as I gave him silverware and a napkin.

“Luke,” he answered. “And that looks amazing.”

“Well, enjoy, and I’ll be back to check on you in a minute.”

Chapter 3

Luke

The tamales tasted like heaven. The filling was smoky, spicy chicken, and the green tomatillo sauce was tangy and blended perfectly with the sweet cornmeal. Just as I finished my beer, Krystal appeared in front of me to ask if I wanted another.

What I wanted was to know if she was single. She didn't have a ring on, but she was young — probably too young to be married. The one thing I knew for sure was that she was smoking hot. She had long, dark hair that she

wore pulled back in a ponytail, a fringe of bangs framing her face. Her bright blue eyes make my stomach flip, and the glimpse of a tattoo I'd caught when she'd been making drinks made me want to see the whole tattoo — preferably with her naked. She was gorgeous. Amazing cleavage, perfect ass, and beautiful smile. I kinda liked Denver so far, and I realized that for a few minutes I hadn't thought about my parents' death or the prospect of tracking down my birth parents — people who may or may not be happy to see me.

“Want to try something different?” Krystal asked, with a wide-eyed expression that made me wonder if she knew that I was thinking about her rather

than another beer.

“What do you suggest?”

She turned around without a word and headed down to a tap at the far end of the bar.

“Trinity Flo IPA from Colorado Springs. It’s new, and it’s great with the tamales,” she said with confidence.

I took a sip, and she was right. The beer was aromatic and bitter, and it was the perfect complement to the sweet, spicy, smoky tamales.

“Perfect,” I said after I’d tasted it. I checked up and down the bar to see if she needed to tend to any other customers, but she seemed pretty caught

up. “So what’s there to do in town besides drink beer and stare at pretty girls?”

She smiled at me, and it looked for a second like she was blushing a little. I was surprised, because she seemed so sexy and confident.

“Well, the Rockies get back into town in a day or so, and going to a baseball game’s always fun. We have some great restaurants in town, and some great trails if you’re the outdoorsy type.”

Krystal seemed pretty friendly, and I decided to roll the dice.

“Any chance I can talk you into going to a ball game with me?”

She looked surprised. “Well, I’m gonna have to check my schedule and let you know,” she said with a wink before turning to pour a couple more beers for the server waiting at the end of the bar.

She hadn’t said no. That was a start.

I hadn’t realized just how hungry I was until I polished off the last bite of the huge plate of tamales. I watched Krystal work, turned on by her fantastic body and the ease with which she managed the very busy bar. She took the time to talk to everyone there, giving them her undivided attention, even if it was just for a few minutes. The little glimpses of her lower back tattoo made my mouth water, and I wondered what

the chances were that I would have a chance to see it all.

“Another beer?” Krystal asked when she returned.

“Absolutely. I’m not driving, and after the last week, I’m ready to drown my sorrows.”

Krystal looked perplexed. “You don’t seem down in the dumps.”

“I’m not gonna burden you with my sob story, but it’s been a rough week.”

“Well, drink up, mister. I’ll keep ‘em coming until you tell me to stop.”

It might have been the two beers, but a vision flashed in my head of Krystal naked in the enormous bathtub in my

suite. I imagined water just barely covering her breasts until she stood up to lead me into the bedroom, water running off her body as she turned to reveal her perfect ass that was just begging me to grab it with both hands.

Jesus, I had half a hard-on, and I hoped it wasn't visible to anyone else at the bar. I had to find a way to distract myself from thoughts of Krystal naked. I decided to check out the other folks at the bar. I made the mistake of making eye contact with an older woman a couple of seats down from me. She had the look of a cougar on the prowl, and I wasn't about to become her prey. I looked away quickly and started watching the group of six at the far end

of the bar.

They looked determined to get drunk, and the laughter and suggestive talk was loud enough that I could hear them from time to time. I wasn't sure how the math was going to work out — with four guys and two girls — but I knew that at least some of the guys were getting lucky. One of the guys kinda hung on the edges of the group, and I realized that he was trying to get Krystal's attention. She finally finished up an order of frou-frou drinks for a couple of ladies, and she smiled as she appeared to ask for the guy's order.

He had a full beer in his hand, and he leaned across the bar to get closer to

Krystal. She looked like she didn't entirely trust the guy, and I thought she was smart to suspect his motives. I watched as she stood up straight, turned on her heel and walked away.

“In your dreams,” she called out, clearly irritated.

Shit. As gorgeous as she was, Krystal probably got hit on all night, every night, and she probably just thought I was another horny jerk who wanted to get in her pants. I mean, I did want to get in her pants, but I wasn't gonna be an asshole about it.

Krystal was shaking her head and laughing when she came back over.

“Friend of yours?” I asked when she

put another beer in front of me.

“Hardly. I shouldn’t let guys like that get under my skin, but he was really rude.”

“I won’t ask you what he said, but I’m hoping it doesn’t affect my chances of getting you to go to the ballgame with me.”

“I have a mighty busy week ahead of me,” Krystal said, and I couldn’t tell if she was kidding or telling the truth. “I’ll have to let you know after I check my calendar.”

“Well, I’m not heading anywhere anytime soon,” I said. “I’m enjoying both the view and the company.”

I hoped she wouldn't take my comment the wrong way, and as I watched her working, I realized that she hardly stood still for a second. I was betting that she was exhausted when she finished a shift and that she had a fat stack of cash from tips. I wondered how late she'd be working and if there was any chance I could talk her into having a drink with me later that evening.

I figured I had nothing to lose.

“So how late you working?” I asked the next time she ended up at my end of the bar.

“We close at two, but my manager's going to close up for me. I worked a double yesterday, and I'll be over forty

hours if I work until close tonight. I'll probably finish up around midnight.”

“I don't want you to think that I'm like that asshole at the end of the bar, but is there any chance you'd have a drink with me when you get off?”

The thought of Krystal getting off — and I was thinking sexually — made me hard again.

“You know, I don't usually do that, but I'm gonna make an exception for you.”

I tried to keep a straight face, but a grin kept trying to find its way to my face. “Great. You want to stay here or go somewhere else?”

Krystal laughed, “Oh, we’ve got to go somewhere else. If any of the customers here saw me with someone else from the bar, they’d never leave me alone. I don’t want to sound conceited, but I have enough troubles as it is.”

“I’m sure you do,” I said. “You pick the place. My treat.”

“Deal,” Krystal said as she headed back into the trenches, smiling, laughing, filling glasses, serving food, and absolutely captivating me with her easy charm.

It was a few hours and a few beers later when Krystal appeared on my side of the bar. She’d changed out of her work shirt into a plain black t-shirt that

hugged her curves and made me want to explore those curves with my hands first, and then my mouth. I tried not to stare as she walked toward me, but I don't think I was very successful.

“Ready?” she asked. “Sober enough to walk?”

I laughed. “Yeah. I didn't have that many. Didn't want to get drunk and stupid and embarrass myself in front of a beautiful woman.”

I saw it again...that hint of a blush, as if Krystal wasn't used to sincere compliments.

“You want more beer, or would you prefer wine or cocktails?” Krystal asked as we walked toward the door together.

I felt the glare from the guy at the end of the bar who'd been so rude, and I have to admit that I took great pleasure in putting my hand on the small of Krystal's back — just over the tattoo I'd glimpsed — as I opened the door for her. I knew that I was the envy of every single guy in that bar.

“Your pick,” I said once we were on the sidewalk. “You deserve to get the drink you want after working that hard.”

“Oh, I don't care. I'm easy.”

“Oh, I saw you handle that guy. I doubt that,” making it clear that I was deliberately misunderstanding her.

She laughed. “I mean that I'm not

picky about drinks. I used to be a rum and coke girl, but since I've been working at the Taphouse, I've learned a lot about craft beer, and even a little bit about wine.”

I thought for a second. “There’s a bar at the Ritz,” I said, hoping that she wouldn’t take the suggestion the wrong way.

“That’s fine.”

She stopped walking, and I figured that she was about to refuse to go to my hotel with me. I was preparing to protest that I didn’t have any ulterior motives when she spoke.

“I’m dressed pretty casual. You think a swanky place like the Ritz will let me

in this way?”

“Absolutely,” I answered with confidence. “They let me in,” I said, holding my hands out and gesturing to emphasize that I was dressed casually as well.

“Well, then take me to the Ritz,” Krystal said with a smile. “Just don’t get any ideas.”

Even though I had all sorts of filthy ideas about what I’d like to do with Krystal, I reassured her. “I’ll be a perfect gentleman.”

“What a shame,” she said as she entered through the door that the valet held open.

Chapter 4

Krystal

Hoping that I wasn't making a huge mistake, I walked inside the fanciest building I'd ever been inside. The ceilings were high, and the room was enormous, leading to a front desk decorated with huge flower arrangements. The light fixtures probably cost more than my car.

I was a little nervous, and I wasn't sure how to act around Luke. He was clearly a whole different class of man than I was used to. I wanted to fuck his brains out, but I was also surprised that I

enjoyed talking to him — at least as much as I could talk to anyone while I was working. I was gonna owe Mark big time for covering the rest of my shift. I hadn't been exactly honest about how I'd managed to leave early, but for some reason, I felt like it was important that I go have a drink with Luke.

I hadn't realized how much I missed having Moses to talk to until Luke had walked into Falling Rock. My conversations with Bug were limited to occasional discussions about where to go for dinner on the rare occasions when he took me out to eat and Bug's instructions for how he wanted me to suck his dick. He wasn't very creative in bed, and to be honest, he didn't really do

much for me in that department. He was selfish and wanted to feel like he was in control. In another man, the control craving might be sexy, but in Bug it was just pathetic. I couldn't remember the last time I'd been completely satisfied in bed...and then I realized that it had been with Moses.

Realizing that I had the chance to forget about how pitiful I felt chasing after Bug — a man I neither liked nor respected — I decided to just try to enjoy having a few drinks with Luke.

“Here we are,” he said, as we walked into the bar.

“Wow,” I said. I was used to the mountains since I'd grown up in Denver,

but the view really was spectacular. The bar felt warm and inviting, and Luke held my seat out for me while I sat down.

The bartender came over. “Evening, folks. What can I get you to drink?”

“I think I’ve had enough beer for one night. You have any decent scotch back there?” Luke asked.

“Of course, sir. We have Macallan twelve-year-old and twenty-one-year-old, as well as several small production scotches from Bruichladdich. We have Oban, Laphroigh, and Balvenie Double Wood.”

I had never even heard of most of the scotches he mentioned, and I wasn’t a

scotch girl, in any case. Luke ordered one of the scotches with a couple of ice cubes.

“I’ll have a glass of red wine, please,” I said to the bartender, hoping that he wasn’t going to ask me any complicated questions about the wine and embarrass me. I felt completely out of my element in the fancy bar that just oozed money.

“We have both a Cabernet and a Pinot Noir by the glass, ma’am,” the bartender told me.

That much I could handle. “Cabernet, please,” I said, relieved that I had managed without looking like an idiot.

The bartender walked away and Luke looked at me, as if he was studying something fascinating.

“What?” I asked.

“I was just thinking that I’m glad I walked into your bar this evening, that’s all.”

I looked back at Luke, unable to figure out if he was feeding me a line to get me into bed, or if he really meant what he’d said. Most of the guys I’d been with had just wanted a fuck, and to be honest, I wasn’t sure that I believed that there were any men who wanted anything else. I figured I’d just be careful. That was easier said than done, though, because Luke made me think of

all sorts of things that were less than innocent.

“I’m glad you did, too,” I replied. “I sure wouldn’t be at the Ritz, otherwise.” I realized that I might sound like a gold digger, so I tried to change the subject. “So you’ve had a tough week?”

Luke looked up as the bartender brought us our drinks. “Thanks,” he said as the bartender set them down. After he walked away, Luke continued. “My parents both died a week ago. It was a car accident.”

“Oh, Luke, I’m so sorry. How awful.”

“Yeah, to be honest, I feel a little lost. They were really my only family,

and we were pretty close.”

I put my hand on Luke’s arm, and even though I really was trying to be thoughtful, I couldn’t help but notice the hard muscles beneath his black shirt. “Only a week ago?”

“Yeah.” He stopped talking for a moment. “Are you sure you want to hear this? I might not be very good company tonight, now that I think about it.”

I took a sip of my wine. “The wine’s delicious, this bar is gorgeous, and I’m happy to listen. Sometimes it helps just to talk about things.”

“You’re very sweet.”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “I sure

don't hear that very often.”

“Well, I think you are.”

“Go ahead, talk away, if you like,” I told Luke, taking another sip of my wine.

“Well, it was bad enough that my parents both died, but what happened next was the shocker. My parents adopted me when I was a baby, and they'd always told me that because it was a closed adoption, I had no way of locating my birth parents. A few days after they died, I met with their attorney — the one who'd drawn up their will, and he gave me a file.”

I was riveted. “What was in it?”

“My parents had hired a private

investigator years ago to track down my birth parents. The file contains their names and their address at the time the investigation was done. My parents wanted me to be able to contact them so I wouldn't be completely alone after my parents passed away.”

“Wow. That's huge news.”

“I know. And I don't know how to feel about it. Part of me wonders why my birth parents didn't want me, and part of me can't wait to meet them.”

I felt just awful for Luke. “So what are you going to do?”

“Well, they live in Denver, so I'm here to find them. I haven't decided whether I want to talk to them or not, but

I at least want to see where they live and try to get a look at them. I figure I'll decide when I see them if I want to say anything.”

“Well, I'm sure they'll want to meet you.” Given the dirtbags I'd spent time with, I couldn't imagine parents not being proud of Luke. I'm sure my parents would be much happier if he had been their kid instead of me, in fact. Listening to Luke talk fondly about his parents who'd just passed away tugged at my heart a little as I remembered the huge fight we'd had over a year ago — the last time I'd talked to either of them.

“Maybe not, though.” Luke's statement brought me pack to the present.

“What if they have other kids and don’t want to have to explain that they gave up a child? What if they don’t want another complication in their lives?”

“A complication?” I asked. “How could you think that? Meeting you could be something they’ve hoped for.”

“Could be. Could be the opposite. Anyway, I figured I’d take a little time off work and come find out. My parents left me some money, and I figured I’d blow a little of it on a fancy hotel — hoping to take my mind off the mess I’m in.”

“You sure picked the right spot for that,” I said, wowed by the fancy bar.

“Yeah. Part of me wants to drink

until I can't think straight anymore, and part of me wants to just dive in, tackle this problem, and get it all over with.”

“I can't imagine how hard it is to deal with everything that's happened.”

“Yeah,” Luke said, polishing off the last of his scotch. “Let's talk about something else. Tell me about yourself.”

“Not much to tell. I work at Falling Rock and go to school part time. I wish I could afford to go full-time, but it's just too expensive.”

“Where do you go to school?”

“I'm at the community college.” I looked at my watch and realized that Bug would probably be calling me soon.

He was ridiculously jealous, even though I didn't think he actually cared about me that much. I think he mostly didn't want anyone else to have me. He'd been so jealous of Moses, and I thought that after Moses had been killed that things might settle down. They hadn't.

“You have somewhere to be?” Luke asked when he saw me check the time.

“No, but I'm expecting a call at some point.”

“Boyfriend?” he asked.

I sighed, unsure how to answer. “Sort of. Maybe. I don't know. It's complicated.” I didn't want to lie to Luke, but the situation with Bug really

was complicated — not exactly settled.

“What a shame. I was hoping that you were single, to be honest.”

“Well, he doesn’t own me, that’s for sure. I don’t really want to get into it, but I can do what I want.”

“Do you want to go to a ballgame with me?”

I smiled at him and thought that I’d never been asked out by a man as sexy as he was. Moses had been as hot, but we hadn’t really dated. There hadn’t been candlelight dinners and romance. There had been plenty of hot sex, though. Knowing that Luke was in town just for a short while, I wondered if I should just

leave him alone, or if I should try to make something happen. He was so gorgeous that I wanted to sleep with him. I'd never been with a guy as polished as he was, and I wondered what he'd be like in bed.

I didn't know what to say. Part of me wanted to take him upstairs to his room and keep him up all night long. Part of me wanted to let him move on with his life without getting involved with a girl as messed up as me.

I figured I'd hedge my bets. "Haven't had a chance to check my calendar yet," I said with what I hoped was a sexy smile.

"A gorgeous woman who plays hard

to get,” Luke observed while shaking his head. “I do love a challenge.”

Chapter 5

Luke

I ordered another scotch for me and a second glass of wine for Krystal. I knew I should probably lay off the booze and go to bed, but I was really enjoying talking to Krystal. Not only was she smoking hot, but she seemed like a genuinely nice person. The fact that she had a boyfriend — or whatever he was — gave me pause, but she was a grownup, and they weren't married. I figured it was okay to give it a shot — try to get her to agree to go out with me. It wasn't like I was proposing. I was

only in town for a little while, and I was enjoying the company.

“So about that ballgame?” I asked again.

Krystal sighed dramatically, and I couldn't help but notice her curves underneath her t-shirt. Goddamn, did I want to see her naked. I realized that the scotch wasn't helping my decision-making.

“Tell you what,” she said after a moment's thought. “I'll give you my number, and you can call or text me if you check the schedule and want to go later in the week.”

I felt like I'd won the lottery.
“Done,” I said instantly. “I'd check the

schedule now, but I don't want to waste a moment of my time with you, and anyway, I think I've had too much to drink to manage it."

Krystal laughed and reached into her purse for a pen and paper. "Well if you can't look up the schedule, then I can't very well trust you to store my number." She wrote down her number and handed me the piece of paper. "Don't lose it, now."

"Not a chance," I said, putting it carefully into my wallet. I was really starting to feel the booze.

"Luke," Krystal started, as she looked at her glass of wine. "This has to be my last drink. I'd love to stay longer,

but I have a long day tomorrow. I have an assignment due by ten o'clock, and then I have to work the lunch shift.”

“Well, it would be ungentlemanly of me to keep you out later than you want. I’m glad you agreed to have a drink with me, and I will call or text you tomorrow for sure.”

I wasn’t sure, but it looked like Krystal was almost disappointed that I wasn’t trying to get her to stay out later.

She finished off her wine and stood up. “Thanks for the drink, Luke. It was nice to meet you.”

Goddamn, was she sexy. I decided to make one last play. “Wanna come up and see my room? It’s the biggest suite

here.” I could hear myself slurring my words a bit, and I hoped Krystal wouldn’t notice.

She stood there, studying me, and she looked like she was struggling to decide what to do.

“I promise to be a gentleman. I won’t attack you. The room is really gorgeous, though. Great view of the city and a bathtub big enough for four people.”

“Okay,” she said at last. “I’ll come up, but just for a minute. I don’t guess I’ll have another opportunity to see a suite at the Ritz.”

I slammed the rest of my scotch, waved over the bartender and signed the

slip to charge the drinks to my room.

Krystal and I walked back into the lobby and I pointed the way to the elevators. All of a sudden, I felt nervous. I wondered what Krystal was expecting from me. I could tell that she was interested in me, but she seemed a little conflicted. I figured it had something to do with the guy whose call she was expecting. I resolved to be a gentleman, though, and I pressed the button for my floor.

I turned to face Krystal. I was all nervous, and she looked cool as a cucumber. I was about to try to make small talk when I heard her cell phone vibrate. She pulled it from her purse,

pressed a button, and put it away.

“Not going to answer it?” I asked.

“Nope,” she replied. “I’ll deal with it later.”

The elevator chimed to announce our arrival at the floor, and I gestured for Krystal to precede me into the hall. She stood there, unsure which way to go, and I stared, unable to take my eyes off her absolutely perfect ass. She turned around and caught me staring.

“Enjoying the view?” she asked with a wicked, sultry smile.

“I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about,” I said as I put my hand on the small of her back, just over

the tattoo that had teased me at the bar.

I directed her toward the room and concentrated hard so that I wouldn't fumble with the key. I was trying to act much more sober than I felt. I slid the card key into the lock, and opened the door. Krystal stepped inside and I followed her, looking forward to hearing her reaction to the enormous, lavish suite.

She walked toward the huge windows, turning to take it all in. "Wow. Just wow. All of this space just for you?" she asked. "You could fit a circus in here."

I laughed. "Maybe tomorrow. For tonight, it's just me...and you, for now."

She turned to look back at me, and I had no idea what she was thinking. She studied me for a while, and looked me up and down, as if she were evaluating something for sale. She turned back to the window without a word.

“Want a drink?” I said, walking over to the bar to get myself a ginger ale — without the scotch this time.

Krystal turned and watched me, silhouetted in front of the window, unconsciously showing off her delicious curves.

“I shouldn’t, but I’ll stay for one,” she said after she’d made up her mind.

“What’s your poison?” I asked, rattling off her options. “Red wine,

white wine, vodka, scotch, beer?”

“I’ll have a glass of red,” she answered.

I opened the half bottle of Pinot Noir, grateful that it was a screw top and that I wouldn’t have to fumble with a corkscrew. I poured a generous glass, thinking that more wine meant more time that Krystal would be spending in my suite.

I walked over to join her at the window. “Here you are,” I said, holding the glass out.

She turned toward me, and her eyes landed on my mouth. She stared at me, and I couldn’t help but return the favor,

studying her lips, trying to decide if I should kiss her or not. Her mouth was full and perfectly shaped, and I felt the beginning of an erection as I thought about what her lips would feel like on mine....and in other places.

Krystal waited, motionless, giving me no indication of what she wanted. I thought about setting down the drinks and pressing her against the glass and kissing her hard and deep, satisfying my desire to feel her body pressed against mine. I wanted her, but I wasn't sure what I should do. I remembered my promise to be a gentleman, and I handed her the glass, breaking the sexual tension between us.

“Thanks,” Krystal said as she took the glass.

I hoped that it was disappointment that I saw in her face, but I wasn't certain enough to just take what I wanted. I knew that it was possible that the alcohol was interfering with my decision-making skills, and if that meant that I had to let an opportunity pass me by, so be it.

“Want to see the rest of the place?” I asked, hoping to end the awkward silence that was building between us.

“Sure,” Krystal answered, taking another sip of wine.

I led her into the dining room and then into the second bedroom, complete

with its own bathroom.

“Too bad you don’t know anyone in town,” Krystal said as she walked into the full kitchen. “You could throw one hell of a party here.”

“Well, I was thinking about filling the room with hookers and blow,” I joked.

“I know people who could make that happen,” she replied.

I expected her to laugh at her joke, but I realized that she wasn’t kidding at all. She must run in different circles than I was used to. I didn’t exactly know what to say, so I just led her back through the living room and headed for

the master suite.

“Holy shit, there’s more?” Krystal asked.

“Yeah. Believe it or not, that’s only half of it.”

I walked her through the sitting area and opened the room to the master bedroom.

“So we’re finally going to end up in the bedroom,” Krystal said with a knowing, backward glance at me as she walked through the door.

Jesus, did she turn me on. I couldn’t tell whether she meant the sexy, flirtatious things she was saying, but I knew I wanted her. She walked past the

bed, trailing her hand along it, and I thought about what she'd look like, naked on the bed. My mouth felt dry, and I followed her into the bathroom, where she stood, staring at the huge tub.

“Wanna get naked?” I asked, mostly joking, but also hoping that she'd just strip down.

She looked at me as if she was sizing me up. “I don't think you could handle it, sugar,” she said as she turned around and walked back into the living room.

I was insulted and turned on all at the same time. I wondered if the sway of her hips was deliberate, or if she just couldn't help oozing sex. When I got back into the living room, Krystal

polished off her glass of wine, set it on the bar and turned to look at me.

“I really do have an early day. Thanks again for the drinks.”

I was puzzled. She acted like she was interested but then she was ready to walk out. I couldn't figure the girl out, but I certainly hoped that I'd have the chance to give it another shot.

“I'll call or text you tomorrow,” I said as she headed for the door.

“And I'll check my calendar,” she said with a smile as she walked out.

I resolved to finish my ginger ale and check the baseball schedule first thing in the morning. I had to see Krystal again,

one way or another.

Chapter 6

Krystal

As soon as I got into the elevator, I could feel my phone vibrating again, and I decided that I'd wait until I got back to my car before I called Bug back. He was probably already going to be pissed, and I wasn't going to have an embarrassing conversation in the lobby of a fancy hotel. He'd never been exactly pleasant, but since the Savage Sons had completely stopped selling meth, money had been tight for all of the guys, and that made his temper even shorter. I figured that if Bug knew that I'd been drinking

wine in some guy's fancy hotel suite, he'd probably kill me.

I walked the couple of blocks to my car and dialed Bug's number without listening to any of the four messages he'd left me.

“Where the fuck have you been?” he asked.

“Wow,” I answered. “I'm fine. How're you?”

“Don't fuckin' play games with me. Where are you?”

“I'm leaving work. On my way home.”

“Bullshit, you lying fucking whore. I called the bar, and that pussy manager of

yours said you'd left early.”

Goddamn it. I hadn't thought to ask Mark to cover up for my absence. It hadn't occurred to me that Bug would call my work to track me down. He really was unbalanced, and he just seemed to be getting worse.

“I went out for a drink.”

“Where did you go? Knowing you, you probably went to some shitty motel with some dumb fuckin' college kid.”

I had to smother a laugh when I thought about the contrast between the hotel room that Bug had in mind and where I'd actually spent the evening.

“Bug, that's just stupid. I went out

for a drink. That's all."

"Don't you call me stupid, you fuckin' whore. If you think I'm so stupid, you can just go back to being a club whore. You've already fucked practically all the Sons anyway."

Jesus. I wanted nothing more than to tell Bug to go fuck himself, but he was right. I had slept with practically everyone in the MC, and I couldn't expect to do much better than to become the VP's old lady. That was probably too good for me. Bug always knew how to make me feel small and shitty about myself.

"Can we just talk about this tomorrow? I'm tired, and I have

homework due early tomorrow.”

“Maybe there’s nothing to talk about. I can’t have my old lady slutting all over town.”

“Bug, I wasn’t slutting around. I had a drink. That’s all, I promise.”

“Whatever. Maybe I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“Maybe you should let me make it up to you, sugar.”

I knew Bug liked it when I used sex to try to get my way.

“Maybe I will, and maybe I won’t.”

He hung up, and I sighed with relief that the conversation was over. I really

needed to decide what to do about Bug. What I wanted to do was to finish school, get my degree, get a good job, and find a man like Luke. I knew that was practically impossible, though, given my past. No decent guy was ever going to want a washed up club whore. If that was the way everyone was going to think of me, I might as well have just fucked Luke, rather than trying to do the right thing. At least he seemed like a decent guy.

I'd been telling the truth in that ridiculously gorgeous bathroom, though. I really wasn't sure that Luke was the kind of guy who could satisfy me. He seemed a little timid, and timid was not my type. I wanted a man who saw what

he wanted and took it. I could tell that he'd wanted to kiss me in front of the window in his room, but I wasn't about to make it easy for him. I'd wanted to see if he would take charge and go for what he wanted. He hadn't. I had no time to spare for wishy-washy men.

Chapter 7

Luke

Sunday, May 5, 2013

I woke up, and before I even opened my eyes, I knew that I needed ibuprofen. The headache got even worse as I walked into the bathroom to get a glass of water to wash the pills down. I called room service for some coffee and breakfast, and I sat down to make a plan for the day. The first order of business was checking to see when the Rockies played. I saw that they were scheduled for a home game on Friday night, and I picked up my phone, pleased to see that

I'd remembered to charge it the night before.

Good morning, gorgeous. Baseball game Friday night?

I figured that Krystal would know who the text was from. I hoped she wasn't working Friday night, but I figured that if she was, that I was sticking around until she had a free evening. It wasn't like I had anywhere to be.

The knock on the door startled me, and I let the room service guy inside. He set the breakfast table up for me, and I signed for the tab. I poured myself a cup of black coffee and realized that I couldn't avoid the issue of my birth

parents any longer. Sooner or later, I had to do what I'd come to town for. I rooted through my backpack and pulled the private investigator's file out.

Sable Bellamy Hall and Daniel Hall. The file showed that they lived out east of the city in a two-story house that looked much nicer than you'd expect based on Daniel's spotty work history. I was thinking that there was no way that a secretary could afford a house like the one in the photograph when my phone chimed to let me know a text message had arrived.

There's nothing on my calendar for Friday.

I grinned like a little kid as I

answered Krystal's text.

It's a date. I'll txt you later to work out the details.

I was stoked that I had something to look forward to, and then I realized that I had nearly a whole week to wait before I could see Krystal again. I didn't know if showing up at the Taphouse would make me look like a stalker and I thought that maybe I'd get in touch with her in a day or so to see if she'd go out to dinner with me.

But first things first. The Halls. I couldn't bring myself to think of them as Mom and Dad, but biologically, that's what they were. I'd always known that I was adopted, but had believed that I'd

never meet the people who created me and gave me up. I was curious and apprehensive, and even a little bit angry at the people who would desert an infant. Yes, Sable and Daniel had given me up to wonderful parents — people who had supported me and loved me just as if I'd been born to them, but I couldn't quite get over the little bit of anger that I felt at having been abandoned in the first place.

I pulled up Google Maps on my laptop and put their home address into the computer. With the relatively light Sunday morning traffic, the drive should take about twenty minutes. I thought about heading down to the fitness center to work out, but I decided that my

hangover was just a little too intense. Promising myself that I'd get some exercise later that day, I headed for the shower.

It was about an hour later when I pulled into the Hall's neighborhood. The neighborhood wasn't new, but it was full of surprisingly big houses. I wondered again how on earth a secretary and someone who was mostly unemployed could afford the huge house on an enormous lot that I studied from the stop sign at the opposite corner. I didn't want to do anything to attract attention, so I just sat in the car and hoped that anyone who saw me would assume I was lost.

The house was a combination of

wood and stone, and there was an oversized two-car garage attached. Judging by the fact that there was a Corvette and a pickup truck in the driveway, I figured that Daniel and Sable must have other children at home. As I was sitting at the stop sign, the garage door opened, and I panicked, afraid that I'd be spotted.

I managed to calm myself down. It wasn't like the Halls were looking for me. They didn't know me, didn't know that I'd be there. I figured I was safe, so I stayed put a while longer. When the door was open all the way, I saw that the garage didn't hold any cars, but instead held three motorcycles that I could see. The other half of the garage was full of

tools and what looked like bike parts.

“So maybe no one but Sable and Daniel lives there after all,” I said out loud. My habit of talking to myself always got more noticeable when I was anxious.

It was a warm day, so my Jeep was open, and I heard a bike start up, loud and rumbling from the garage. I couldn't get a very good look at the man on the bike, but as he pulled away from the house, I was certain that he was Daniel Hall. I'd just seen my father. He'd been largely concealed behind sunglasses and his helmet, but my first impression was that he looked older than my dad — probably the result of years spent in the

sun and hard living.

“And he has no idea,” I said aloud, still sitting at the stop sign. “He’s just going about his business like the son he’s never met isn’t sitting across the street.”

I laughed out loud at myself, sitting in the Jeep and talking to myself. I decided to drive around the neighborhood and take another look at the front of the house before I left. I couldn’t just walk up to the front door. I wouldn’t know what to say.

Driving slowly, I made my way around to the road behind the Hall’s. It looked like there were well-tended gardens that had recently been planted,

and I wondered who the gardener in the family was. Based on Daniel's appearance, I was going to guess it was Sable. Other large houses obscured my view of much else, and I drove along a thick, tall line of trees that screened one side of the Hall's front yard from view. I stopped at the corner, unable to see the house through the dense hedge.

I felt okay. I'd been worried that I might flip out — get upset or something — but I didn't really feel much. I was surprised, but not displeased. I decided on one more drive-by, and I rounded the corner and came face to face with my mother — about to put some letters in the mailbox at the curb.

She stood and stared at me, not with any recognition — how could there be? But she stared as if she couldn't figure out where I'd come from or what I was doing there.

She was beautiful. Not very tall, but clearly fit and healthy. She wore tight indigo jeans and a black leather jacket over her shirt. I couldn't see much detail, but tattoos on both of her wrists peeked out from beneath the sleeves of her jacket. She had nearly black hair that she wore in a ponytail that made her look younger than she probably was.

I hit the brakes much harder than I'd meant to, and then I realized that the natural-looking thing to do would have

been to continue driving. As soon as I came to a full stop, Sable's expression grew a bit wary — like she suspected that I was up to something. I came to my senses and started to pull away, but as I got closer to the mailbox, she spoke.

“Can I help you with something?” she asked in a tone that indicated that she thought I was up to no good.

“”Um,” I fumbled. “No, I'm fine, thanks.”

“You looking for something?” she asked.

I'm not quite sure what happened to me. I hadn't planned out a speech to introduce myself, and I hadn't even known if I'd see Sable and Daniel at all.

I could have just apologized for appearing creepy, and I could have driven away. But I didn't.

“Are you Sable Hall?” I asked, even though I knew the answer.

I could see alarm — maybe even fear — flash in her eyes, and she instantly took a couple of steps back from my Jeep.

“Who are you?” she asked. “What do you want?”

I wasn't sure how to answer.

“My name's Luke Callaway,” I answered.

“Well, that answers one question,” Sable replied. “What are you doing

here?”

“It’s kind of hard to explain.”

“You can either try, or I’m heading back inside,” she said, staring me square in the eye.

“Do you mind if I pull into your driveway and get out?” I asked, unwilling to have a conversation while I was leaning over the passenger’s seat.

Sable studied me for a moment.

“That’s fine. But I want you to know that I’m armed.”

She pulled her leather jacket out so that I could see a holster holding a handgun. I was a little surprised that a woman would wear a gun to get the

mail, but given the fact that her husband was a biker, maybe she spent time with a rougher crew than I imagined. I pulled forward and decided that I was going to take a deep breath and tell her that I was her son. In the few seconds that I had to think, I realized that she might not take the news well, and I pulled out one of my business cards from the case I kept in the glove box. If she ordered me off the property, I wanted her to have a way to get in touch with me if she had second thoughts.

I got out of the car and held the card out in front of me. “Here’s my card,” I said, waiting to give her time to read it.

She took the card cautiously and

looked it over. “So what does a ‘Business Analyst’ from Scottsdale want with me?” Her gaze was direct and challenging.

I fumbled around for the right words. “I’m not here in a business capacity.” I hesitated before going any further.

“You’ve got about fifteen seconds to tell me what ‘capacity’ you’re here in, or I’m going back inside. Spit it out.”

I took a deep breath. “I’m your son.”

Sable didn’t move a muscle. She looked me up and down, taking in every detail before coming to rest on my face. She studied me, and I stood still, uncomfortable under her gaze, but unwilling to disturb what had to be an

incredibly tangled mess of thoughts and emotions. She opened her mouth to speak and thought better of it, closing her mouth and continuing her examination.

She finally spoke. “I guess you’d better come inside.”

She started toward the house without looking back, leaving me standing behind her.

Chapter 8

Krystal

Sunday, May 5, 2013

I was glad I hadn't stayed longer at Luke's hotel, or at least that's what I told myself. I was staring at my accounting homework and drinking coffee, grateful to not have a hangover and a headache. I couldn't help daydreaming about Luke, though. I thought about him — a little drunk the night before — and wished he'd had the guts to kiss me. I wanted him, but I wasn't going to chase him. If he didn't understand that a man who takes what he wants is the sexiest thing I

could think of, then he wasn't the guy for me.

My phone chimed to tell me that I had a text message. I dreaded picking up the phone, assuming that it was Bug letting me know that if I played my cards right, he'd let me give him a blow job. Such a romantic.

I was pleasantly surprised to see that the text was from Luke. I agreed to go to the ball game with him, and the grin on my face made me realize how long it had been since I'd actually been happy about seeing a man. Maybe it was finally time for me to rethink my relationship with Bug.

Realizing that my homework wasn't

going to do itself, I forced myself to forget about the tall, blond, sexy man that had walked into my bar last night. I finished the assignment, turned it in online, and remembered that I needed to pay some bills before I got ready for work.

I pulled up my bank account online and realized that there was no way I could pay my car insurance, and my cable and internet that were both due in a couple of days. Even if I deposited my tip money from the night before, I'd still be a little short. When my roommate, Red, had moved out a few weeks before, I'd been so fucking relieved. She was a crank-loving whore, and I'd been happy to see her go. I didn't know where she'd

gone, but I'd been happy that I'd never have to come home to find her having overdosed again.

What I hadn't calculated was how much money she'd actually paid toward the bills every month. Deciding that I'd just have to work extra hard for tips during my lunch shift, I figured I could probably talk Mark into giving me another shift or two that week. If I was careful, I was pretty sure I could cover at least the two bills that were due right away. I didn't even want to think about how I was going to pay for my tuition for the summer classes I wanted to take. Maybe I was a fool to even try.

Feeling a little down, I looked at the

clock and realized that I needed to get ready for work. I fished a clean work shirt out of my dresser, and I wished I could wear street clothes to work. I figured that if I could, I could probably rake in more tips per shift. Even though I knew that I wouldn't be young forever, I figured I should enjoy looking hot while I could. My clothes laid out, I took off my pajamas and was just about to get in the shower when I heard a knock at my apartment door.

I grabbed a towel and went to the door. I had a feeling that I knew who I'd see when I looked throughout the peephole.

“Hey, baby. I'm about to get in the

shower.”

“Open the door,” Bug said from the hallway.

I thought for a second and couldn't figure out any way to make Bug leave without starting a huge fight. I sighed and unlocked the door. Before I could turn the doorknob, the door swung open so fast that it clipped my shoulder before I could get out of the way.

“Ow!” I said, as I stepped back from the doorway. “You shoved the door into me.”

“Well, I wasn't the one out fuckin' around last night,” Bug growled as he stepped inside. “You alone?”

I looked at him, dumbfounded, like I was seeing him for the first time. He was about my height — roughly 5'7" or so, and even beneath his black leather Savage Sons cut, his shoulder muscles bulged. I'd never told Bug this, but he looked ridiculous — all upper body strength and puny little legs that were ridiculously out of proportion. When you coupled his odd physique with the fact that the steroids that he took to build his arm muscles meant that he couldn't always get it up, I was seriously starting to wonder why I was with him at all.

Beneath his long and not-very-clean brown hair, Bug's bloodshot eyes told me that he probably hadn't gotten much sleep last night, and I'd bet my rent

money that he hadn't been alone if he'd spent any time in bed. Bug's rules said that it was fine for him to sleep around, but I was for his eyes only.

I realized that Bug was waiting for me to speak. "Of course I'm alone."

Bug grunted as he walked into the living room and proceeded to check every room in my small apartment. I sighed as I closed the door that he'd left hanging wide open, and I realized that I was starting to get pissed.

"Hey," I called. "What do you want? I need to get ready for work."

"You expectin' someone?" he asked as he came out of my bedroom.

“Jesus, no, Bug. I told you. I need to get ready for work. My shift starts in a little over an hour.”

He just stared at me like he was trying to decide if I was telling the truth. As much as I needed the money, I decided to try to smooth things over so that I didn't end up in a big fight that would make me late for work.

“I wish I could spend the day with you, but I need the money, sugar. Can I see you later tonight?”

Bug shrugged, like it was no big deal either way. “I guess. I'll be at the clubhouse. If you don't show up, I won't have any trouble finding someone to keep me company.”

I didn't feel like it, but I knew that if I wanted to keep my options with Bug open that I needed to flatter him a little so that he didn't just dump me. Even though he wasn't much of a catch, any of the sluts at the clubhouse would be happy to take my place — at least until they figured out what Bug was really like.

“Oh, I'll be there. I need some of what you got, sugar,” I said in the sexiest voice I could muster.

Bug looked pretty pleased, and I assumed that I must have been pretty convincing. He looked me up and down and reached out for my towel. He pulled it hard, leaving me standing naked in the

hallway outside the bathroom.

I put my arms out and turned around slowly to let him take a good look. “Seeing what you’ll be getting later?” I teased.

He reached out and pinched my right nipple hard, so hard that it brought tears to my eyes. I knew better than to say anything, though. I’d discovered that showing pain turned Bug on more than anything else. If he got worked up and wanted to fuck me, there would be no way for me to stop him, and I’d be late for work for sure. If he couldn’t manage to get hard for the job, I’d probably end up bruised and calling in sick to work. It wouldn’t be the first time.

“I can’t wait to show you how much I want you,” I said, walking around behind him and pressing my tits up against his leather cut.

The cut really did turn me on, with all it symbolized. There was nothing sexier than a badass biker who did what he wanted and didn’t give a shit about what anyone else thought. For a second, I thought about what Luke would look like wearing a cut and straddling a Harley. Jesus, talk about a sexy mental picture.

“You can show me tonight,” Bug said as he handed my towel back to me.

“Can’t wait,” I said, feeling better when I was covered up again.

Bug studied me for a second. “Hey, baby, why don’t you bring some of that tip money with you to the club tonight?”

Motherfucker. He was being nice because he wanted money?

“Sugar, I’m short for my bills this month since Red moved out, and I’m gonna need every dollar I make.”

“Well, I haven’t seen you offering to buy your own beers. You expect me to pay your way even though you want to run around on me at night?”

“Jesus, Bug.” I was starting to get really pissed. “I wasn’t running around on you, and I hardly drink except when you’re trying to get me drunk so I’ll let you do things I don’t like.”

“Krystal, you’re gonna have to start paying your way. Since the money from the MC’s business has dried up, I can’t make ends meet anymore. If you can show me that you’re willing to pitch in, I was even thinking about asking you to move in with me — making you my old lady, officially.”

How could this be happening? I’d wanted to be a Savage Sons old lady as long as I could remember. And now, when I’d finally started college and was trying to make something good of my messy life, it looked like Bug was gonna be the guy who could make it happen. The problem? Bug was an asshole, and I knew it. I also knew that I wouldn’t get

more than one chance at an old lady spot, and I decided to hedge my bets until I could decide what I really wanted.

I let my towel slip a bit, exposing most of one breast as I leaned over to kiss Bug. Jesus, he smelled like old whiskey and cigarette smoke. He kissed me back and reached out to tweak my nipple, less painfully this time.

“Get in the shower and get to work, girl. I’ll see you tonight,” Bug said as he headed for the door. He turned just before he opened it. “And wear something that makes you look hot tonight. If you’re gonna be the VP’s old lady, you gotta look the part.”

He closed the door behind him, and I leaned against the wall. What was I going to do?

Chapter 9

Luke

I followed Sable up the driveway to the front door of the house. All of a sudden, I felt like I was gonna either pass out or throw up, and I didn't think it was my hangover. I was about to walk inside the home belonging to the woman who'd given birth to me and left me behind. I stopped walking once I got to the porch.

“You all right?” Sable asked as she turned to face me from the front door.

“Um, I'm not sure,” I answered. “I didn't expect to actually see you, let

alone come inside your house and have a conversation.”

“Well, you want to leave?” she asked.

“No,” I answered quickly, realizing that I was being silly and needed to go inside and face my past like a man. “I’m fine.”

I took a step inside and was surprised. The house was even bigger than it had looked from the outside. I guess I’d expected something more along the lines of a trailer in a mobile home park, so this spacious, tasteful upper-middle class home was a little perplexing.

“You have a lovely home,” I

observed, using my manners in a way that would have made my parents proud.

“Yeah, it’s bigger than we really need, and we almost never have anyone over, but...” Sable paused. “I don’t know why I’m talking about a stupid house when you’re standing here. Want some coffee?” she asked, heading toward the kitchen.

“Yes, please.”

“Have a seat,” she said, pointing at the bar in the kitchen that faced the counters.

I pulled a bar stool from beneath the counter and sat down, watching her work without saying a word. I wanted to

know what she was thinking, but I decided to let her take her time in telling me.

She used one of the single cup coffee brewers, and she slid the mug over to me in less than a minute.

“Cream or sugar?” she asked.

“No, thanks.”

She made herself a cup, added a splash of cream and leaned on the counter facing me, studying my face.

“You look a little like your father,” she observed, finally ending the silence. “I guess you have some questions for me, huh?”

“I hardly know where to start,” I

admitted, feeling a little ridiculous for having gone to the trouble of tracking my mother down, only to find myself tongue-tied.

“Well, do you want me to tell you my story?” Sable’s voice was quiet.

I felt choked up all of a sudden by the emotion that my birth mother’s voice held, and all I could do was nod.

Sable sighed and took a drink of her coffee before she started. “I was all of seventeen years old when I met your father. I was still in high school, but he was an older man — twenty-two when we met.”

I didn’t want to say a word, but I watched as Sable’s expression turned

softer — like she was nostalgic for a past that could never be revisited.

“Your father was in the service — the Marines — and he traveled all over the world, while I was stuck here in Denver waiting for him to return, only to have him leave again. My parents didn’t really like Daniel ‘cause they thought he was too old and a little too rough around the edges for their baby girl.” Sable set down the coffee cup she’d been holding and looked out the window. “They may have been right.

“Anyway, on one of Daniel’s visits home, I got pregnant. He was only home for a couple of weeks that time, and he left before I knew I was expecting a

child. We didn't exactly part on good terms — we'd had a huge fight the night before he left — so I didn't tell him. I knew that he probably had a right to know, but I wasn't sure that he'd be any kind of father, and I wasn't sure that I ever wanted to be with him again. It was a hard decision, but I went to stay with an old high school friend who'd moved to Arizona. I waited it out, had you, and I gave you up for adoption.”

Sable stood up and walked over to the sink, as if she was looking for an excuse not to look me in the eye. “I only saw you once in the hospital before they took you away. The social worker told me that you'd be going to a good home, and I just felt like I couldn't take care of

you all by myself.”

She turned to look at me. “It was the hardest decision of my life, and I’ve regretted it ever since.” Sable’s eyes started to fill with tears. “Excuse me for a minute,” she said as she walked out of the room and up the stairs, leaving me alone in her kitchen.

I looked around the room, trying to make sense of all of the thoughts and feelings that inundated my mind. I pictured Sable as a tiny, vulnerable teenager, faced with the prospect of being responsible for another person’s life. I imagined her fear, and I wondered how hard it had been for her to give me up. She said that she’d regretted it, but I

was curious about whether she would have room in her life today for me. She was the only one who could answer my questions, so I resigned myself to waiting for her to come back downstairs.

In the meantime, I studied the kitchen. It was pretty, but in a way that felt like a designer, rather than an enthusiastic cook, had bought the appliances. It had a very different feel than my mother's kitchen had. Jeannie had cooked practically every day of her life, and she was always happiest when she had both me and my father to wow with a new recipe. It didn't look like Sable and Daniel did much in the way of cooking.

I heard Sable coming back down the steps and I watched her carefully to assess her state of mind. She seemed fairly composed, especially for a woman whose adult son had just showed up unannounced on her doorstep.

“Sorry,” she said as she picked up her coffee mug. “This is hard for me.”

“I’m sure it is, and I’m sorry to spring it on you like this. I didn’t really have much in the way of a plan today, but I sure didn’t expect to be drinking coffee with you.”

“How did you find me?” she asked.

“My mom and dad passed away about a week ago.”

Sable put her hand over her mouth.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Thank you. They were wonderful parents, and they were killed in a car accident.”

“How terrible.”

“It was. I met with their attorney about their estate, and he gave me a file full of information about you and my father. My parents had hired a private investigator to find you both in case I ever wanted to know who my birth parents were.”

“So you came here to find us?”

Sable asked.

“Yes. I took a leave of absence from

work and decided to learn what I could about my past. I didn't exactly expect to find you standing at the curb today."

Sable looked at me with an unexpected warmth in her eyes. "I'm glad you did. So tell me about yourself."

"Well, I graduated from Arizona State, and I'm a business analyst for GoDaddy in Scottsdale."

"Wow," Sable said. "A 'business analyst' sounds pretty important. And you went to college?"

"Yeah. My dad was an attorney, and education was really important to him. They were so proud the day I graduated."

Sable looked like she was going to cry again. “So you were happy? You have had a good life?”

“Absolutely,” I answered. “My parents were wonderful, loving people. I was lucky to have been adopted by such good folks.”

“Did you ever wonder about your father and me?” Sable asked, in a small voice that sounded like she was afraid to hear the truth.

“Always. Not because I was unhappy, but I wondered what my birth parents were like.” I thought for a moment. “Can you tell me more about yourself and Daniel?”

“Well, we got married after your

father ... Daniel ... got out of the service. My parents weren't very happy, but they came around. We've been pretty happy, I guess."

"Do you have any other children?"

"No. I wanted to, but it never happened. I asked Daniel to go see a doctor, but he refused, so there wasn't much I could do. I knew that I was healthy and that there didn't seem to be a problem on my end. I guess it just wasn't meant to be."

"Did the two of you ever think about trying to find me?" I asked.

Sable hesitated, as if there was something she didn't want to say out

loud. “Um,” she hesitated. “I never told your father about you. He still doesn’t know that I was pregnant and that he has a son out there somewhere.” She looked embarrassed.

I didn’t know what to say. I’d been apprehensive about meeting my birth parents, but part of me had been really excited. To discover that my father had no idea I even existed was a bit of a shock.

“I don’t know if I was afraid that he’d be mad at me for having gotten pregnant in the first place, or if he’d be mad that I had given you up, but I just never got up the courage to tell him.”

“Well, are you ... are you going to

tell him now?”

“Yes,” Sable answered decisively. “He’s going through a really hard time right now, and I’m not sure how he will take it, but I’m going to tell him. He has a right to meet his son, even if he doesn’t know that you exist.”

“I guess you want to tell him on your own?” I asked.

“I need to think it through. I’m afraid the old man will have a heart attack if I just spring you on him. I guess I should try to break it to him gently.”

“What’s he like?” I asked, curious about the man I hoped to meet.

“Well, he ain’t exactly

complicated,” Sable laughed. “He’s in a motorcycle club. Actually, he founded the MC with his brother, your uncle.”

“An uncle?”

I must have looked excited, because Sable put her hand on my arm as if she was trying to calm me down.

“He passed away a long time ago. They were best friends, and it broke your father’s heart when his brother died.”

“I wish I could have met him.”

“So your father loves his bikes, his booze, and the Savage Sons — that’s the name of the MC — more than anything, including me, some days,” Sable said

with a laugh.

I realized that I didn't want to cause problems in Sable's life, even if it meant that I wouldn't get to meet my biological father face-to-face. "I'm going to leave this up to you, Sable. I don't want to come between you and Daniel, so I'm going to let you decide how to handle this. If you want to tell him about me, and if he wants to meet me, then I'll be there in a heartbeat. But if you want to keep your secret, I'll understand. You gave me two wonderful parents, and I'll respect your privacy."

Sable looked at me and nodded. "I'm gonna tell him. He may be mad at me, but he has a right to know. For that

matter, he probably had a right to know thirty years ago.”

I smiled at her. “Thirty-one, actually.”

“You don’t look thirty-one. You have the baby face your dad used to have before he spent so many late nights in the bar.”

I stood up. “You have my card. I’ll let you figure things out, and I’ll wait for your call. If you change your mind, I’ll understand, and I won’t bother you again.”

“Bother me?” Sable asked. “Oh, Luke, you have no idea how happy you’ve made me. To know that my son lived with good people, got an

education, has a good job ... you've made me believe that I did the right thing. I may have suffered, wondering all these years, but you haven't, and I'm so thankful for that." Sable started crying, reaching for a tissue. "Luke, I'm sorry I left you, and I hope that you'll be able to forgive me someday."

"Sable, there's nothing to forgive." I put my hand over hers. "I'll be in town for at least another week. I hope to hear from you."

I wondered for a second if I should hug her, but I felt a little awkward, and I needed some fresh air. Even in the big house, I felt like I couldn't breathe. I walked out the front door, closed it

quietly behind me, and headed for my Jeep. I felt like I was moving on autopilot as I climbed in, started my car, and backed down the driveway.

Chapter 10

Krystal

The lunch rush had been fantastic, especially for a weekend. Even though Falling Rock was in the perfect area to pull in both tourists and business people, the tips on the weekend usually weren't as good, especially for a pretty girl. It doesn't matter how hot you are if a husband's sitting at the bar with his wife looking over his shoulder while he signs the credit card receipt.

I'd done well over the course of the afternoon, though. I'd hustled and really worked on selling some of the obscure,

higher priced beers. It still blew my mind that there were people willing to pay twenty dollars for a single bottle of beer, but I was glad those folks were in Denver today!

I checked my watch and realized that I only had about forty-five minutes to get the bar back into shape for the dinner shift, and I still had a bar that was about half full. *Time to shift into higher gear*, I thought, as I started wiping down the liquor bottles I'd used to make what had felt like about a thousand bloody marys. I'd just finished a quick cleanup of the back bar, when I turned to scan the bar and see if anyone needed another drink.

And in walked Luke.

I'd wondered if he'd be miserably hung over from the night before, but he didn't appear to be. He waved as he crossed the room.

"I promise I'm not stalking you," he said as he pulled out a bar stool and took a seat.

"But here you are," I said, narrowing my eyes and trying to look suspicious.

"Seriously," he said, as he started to stand up. "If you want me to go, I will. It's just that I don't know anyone else ... and I ..."

"Jesus, Luke. I was kidding."

"Oh," he laughed. "I feel like an idiot."

“Actually, I’m glad to see you, to be honest.” I wasn’t sure why I told him how I felt, but I realized that it felt good to be able to say what I thought, rather than having to worry about how he’d react — I didn’t have to measure my words and try to anticipate what would make him explode ... like I did with Bug.

“If you’re busy, I can leave, but I thought I could drink a beer and tell you about my day if you’re not too slammed.”

“As long as you don’t mind if I work while you talk, that’s perfectly all right,” I answered, getting out the lemons, oranges, and limes I needed to slice to

get things set for the closing bartender.

“Go ahead,” Luke said as he looked over the beer menu. “I’ll enjoy every second of watching you work.”

I poured his beer — not one of the twenty-dollar bottles, but a draft from California, and I slowly bent over to place it on the bar in front of him. I looked around to make sure no one was watching, and I ran my finger around the edge of the glass, catching the foam from the beer’s head. I brought my finger to my mouth and slowly licked the foam from my finger, maintaining eye contact with Luke the entire time, finally finishing by inserting my finger into my mouth and sucking it clean.

“You can watch all you like,” I said, as I headed to the other end of the bar to check on a couple who — after a couple of drinks — had started to kiss and whisper in one another’s ears. I laughed as I saw Luke close his mouth and adjust himself inside his jeans. I wondered if I could push him — get him so hot and turned on that he would be unable to control himself and would let his self control slip, just enough to let himself take what he wanted. I realized that I wanted him, wanted him to want me enough to take me. Luke wasn’t the only one turned on.

“So what’s got you so excited?” I asked when I got back to Luke.

“Besides you?”

“Me?” I asked, as if I couldn’t believe him. “I have you excited?”

“You know exactly the effect you have on me, Krystal.”

“Besides me, then.”

“You know how I said I was here to find my birth parents?”

I nodded as I sliced the fruit on the bar.

“I found them.”

“And?”

“I talked to my mother. Sat down and had a cup of coffee in her kitchen, as crazy as that sounds.”

“How did it go?” I looked him over to see if I could tell what kind of emotional state he was in. He seemed to be fine. Excited, but fine.

“It went really well. She’s happy that she gave me up to good parents, and she has regretted leaving me. She seemed like she was happy to see me.”

“Does she have any other kids?” I asked.

“No, and she’s married to my father. My father’s the only possible complication. He doesn’t know about me.”

“What? He doesn’t know he has a son somewhere in the world? How did she hide it from him?”

“She was young, and he was overseas in the military. She went and stayed with a friend and gave me up for adoption. He never knew.”

“Wow,” I said, trying to think about what it would be like to discover that you had an adult child that you had never known about.

“She’s going to tell him, though, and see if he wants to meet me. I’m trying not to get my hopes up, but I really want to meet my birth father.”

Luke seemed so wholesome, so sweet, that it nearly broke my heart. “I hope you do,” I said, not sure what else to say.

Luke reached out and picked up my hand, not caring about the lemon juice that covered my fingers. “Thank you, Krystal. I just had to tell someone, and you’re the only person I know in town. I feel like celebrating.”

“I bet you do,” I told him, taking my hand back to wash it.

“Come have dinner with me,” he said, barely able to contain his excitement. “We’ll go someplace outrageously expensive, and we’ll drink champagne until sunrise.”

For a second, I let myself think about what it would be like to spend the evening with Luke. Dinner, expensive drinks, conversation with a man who

actually listened to me and didn't think I was a whore. It sounded like heaven to me.

But it couldn't happen.

“You have no idea how much I'd love to have dinner with you tonight, but I can't.” I decided not to explain any further. He didn't need to know that my evening was likely to consist of me ignoring Bug's insults and end with an unsatisfying sixty seconds of Bug pumping away inside me while I pretended to enjoy it.

“C'mon,” Luke pleaded. “Cancel your plans, just for tonight. Come celebrate with me. I'll make it worth your while,” he said, with a sexy gleam

in his eye.

He had no idea how gorgeous he was and how much I wanted to take him back to his hotel room and not come up for air for days. But I couldn't. If I didn't meet Bug at the clubhouse that evening, any chance I had at moving up to be his old lady would be gone. I was gonna have to work my ass off to afford my apartment on my own, but if I could move in with Bug, even if it was for a couple of years, I could afford to finish college and maybe even make a respectable living on my own. I couldn't throw that away for the first sexy blond guy who walked into the bar.

“I can't, Luke. You have no idea

how much I wish I could, but I have something I have to take care of tonight.”

He actually looked disappointed. “I understand. We’re still on for Friday, though, right?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world,” I answered. I was sure I could come up with some way to get out for one night without making Bug too suspicious.

Luke finished the rest of his beer while I wrapped up my side work, making sure that the bar was in better shape than it had been when I’d come in the day before. We chatted a bit, but he seemed a little subdued after I refused his offer to take me out for dinner. He asked for the check, and I printed it and

put it on the bar in front of him.

“Luke, I’m glad you came in to tell me about finding your parents. I’m so happy for you that it went well.”

“You’re very sweet, Krystal. I hope that your boyfriend — or whatever you call him — appreciates you.”

I smiled. “Thanks again for the invitation for tonight. You have no idea how much I wish I could go.”

“That makes two of us, but I’ll just look forward to Friday.”

“Me, too.”

Luke put some cash down on the check, and he waved as he walked away. I noticed that I wasn’t the only

woman watching the tall, blond man cross the room, and I hoped that he wouldn't meet some gorgeous woman who actually had her shit together before Friday. I just knew that if Luke realized how screwed up my head was, that he'd run and never look back.

Without thinking, I automatically picked up the cash and took it to the register to close out the check.

“Holy shit,” I said when I looked at the denomination of the bill Luke had set down. He'd left me a hundred dollar bill on a six-dollar tab. Adding up the tips I'd already made, I realized that I had enough to pay some bills and probably even have enough to set a little aside for

the summer class I wanted to take. I wasn't sure how I felt about Luke's leaving so much money, though. I might be desperate, but I didn't want a man to think he could buy me.

I picked up my phone.

You left \$100 on the bar. I'll give you ur change on Friday.

I got back to work and was about to leave when I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket.

Left it on purpose, but if you want, you can buy a round of beers at the game.

Deal :-)

Luke didn't seem pissed, and I'd

made my point, I hoped.

After my shift was over, I got a sandwich to go since I figured that Bug wouldn't be taking me out to dinner and I knew that I didn't have anything to eat at home. It could be a long night if Bug planned to drink all night, and there was no way he'd let me leave early. He liked to show me off to his brothers.

After I wolfed down my dinner, I looked in the mirror and decided that I could use another shower. After having had Luke ask me out, I was feeling pretty good about myself, and I decided that I was gonna wow Bug. If he was an asshole, I'd just walk out of the clubhouse. He could either chase me or

let me go, but I was starting to think that his bullshit wasn't really worth it at the end of the day. Even without Luke's crazy tip, I'd had a good day, and if I could up my tips a little, I thought I could pay for school and manage to pay my bills.

I felt fierce, and I was gonna find an outfit to match my attitude.

Chapter 11

Luke

I'd felt so elated when I walked into Krystal's bar and saw that she seemed genuinely happy to see me, and now I just felt like an idiot for having asked her out for dinner. She obviously had a boyfriend, even if she insisted that the situation was complicated. I knew better than to get drawn in by a pretty face — and a fantastic ass, in her case — but there was something about Krystal that called to me. Sexual attraction aside, she seemed sweet and a little sad all at the same time, and I felt compelled to try to

make her happy, give her something to smile about.

I needed to grow up.

“If she’s interested in me, she knows how to get hold of me,” I said to myself, unaware that the person standing at the bus stop was watching me walk and talk to myself.

No sooner had I spoken than my phone chimed.

You left \$100 on the bar. I’ll give you ur change on Friday.

I hadn’t really thought it through when I dropped the big bill for the beer, but I realized that Krystal might take my gesture the wrong way. She’d mentioned

that her school was expensive, and I had more money than I knew what to do with at the moment. I'd meant to be nice, but I was afraid that I'd come off like an asshole. I agreed to let her buy a round of beers at the ballpark and let it go.

My phone chimed again, and I assumed that it was Krystal calling me to talk, but when I looked, it was a number I didn't recognize.

“Luke Callaway,” I answered.

“Luke, It's Sable Hall.”

My heart jumped into my throat. “Yes?” I hadn't expected to hear from her so quickly. It hadn't been more than a few hours since I'd left her house.

“I talked to your ...um ... Daniel, and not only is he thrilled that he has a son, but he wants to meet you.”

“Wow. I don't know what to say. Guess he wasn't too mad at you, huh?”

Sable hesitated. “Well, he isn't exactly happy with me, but he's seriously excited about meeting you.”

“I can't wait.”

“You mean that?”

“Of course. I drove all the way from Arizona, you bet I want to meet him.”

“You busy tonight?” Sable asked.

“Nope. Free as a bird.”

“Well, if you're interested, you

could stop by the house around seven and meet your father. He is dying to take you to his club and introduce you to all of his friends, but I've convinced him to take baby steps and meet you here first and see how things go. I figure it's kinda like a first date, and it's been a long time since he's had one of those."

I laughed. "You're a smart lady, Sable. I'll be there at seven."

I could hear her sigh with relief. "Good."

"And thank you," I said before I hung up.

"No, Luke. Thank you," she said quietly before she hung up.

I stood in my hotel suite and tried to decide what I should wear to go meet my old man. I knew he was a blue collar sort of guy, so I figured that I shouldn't get too dressed up. I didn't want him to be uncomfortable, but I didn't want him to be insulted either. I stood naked in front of the window that looked out over the city and the mountains, and I decided on clean jeans and a collared shirt. I'd leave it untucked so it didn't look too stuffy.

As I buttoned my jeans, I was glad I'd made myself go to the fitness center in the hotel. The workout had helped me clear my head and given me a chance to sweat out all of the beer and scotch from

the night before. I felt good — nervous, but good. I checked the time on my phone. Time to leave.

The drive to the Hall's house felt like it was over in an instant, probably because I was a little anxious. When I pulled into the driveway, my mouth was dry and my heart was racing. What if Daniel didn't like me? Or what if we had absolutely nothing in common? After all, I knew he was a biker, and I didn't know the first thing about motorcycles. Taking a deep breath, I climbed out of the Jeep and headed for the front door.

I didn't even make it to the door before it opened and Daniel stepped outside, clearly eager to see me. I stood

still and waited for him to speak.

“Oh, my God,” he said, shaking his head. “You remind me so much of your uncle when he was your age. Come here and let me get a look at you.”

I walked toward him and held out my hand. “Luke Callaway, sir,” I said.

“Fuck shaking hands,” Daniel roared, holding out his arms. “Come here.”

I stepped into his embrace, and I thought he was going to squeeze me to death. He held on like his life depended on it.

“Nice to meet you, Daniel,” I said when he finally let me go.

“Call me Joker,” he said, coughing as he tried to calm down. “That’s what my brothers call me.”

I assumed that he meant the other members of the MC, and I nodded. “Okay. Joker, it is.”

“Come on inside,” he said, gesturing toward the doorway, in which I could see Sable watching the two of us.

“Hello, again,” I said as I walked inside.

“Want a beer?” Joker asked.

“Sure,” I answered. “That would be great.”

I was surprised to see Joker nod to Sable and sit down in the living room.

He waved me toward a love seat and Sable brought me my beer. Clearly, the gender politics in the household were old-fashioned.

“So your mother’s told me a little about you, but I want to hear it straight from you. We’ve got a lot of catching up to do.”

I felt strange about the situation. With Sable, I’d felt her wary nature, recognized her attempts to make sense of what was a very strange and unexpected set of circumstances. But Joker was acting like nothing was wrong. He was treating me like a son who he hadn’t seen for a month or two, rather than a guy who he’d just met for the first time

in his life. It felt really strange, but I figured that I was fortunate that he wanted to talk to me at all. I'd just have to play along and see where the evening took me.

“So Sable filled you in on what happened to my parents and how I found out about the two of you?” I asked, figuring I had to start somewhere.

“Yeah. Sounds like you had some nice folks. Wish I could thank ‘em for taking such good care of you for us.”

“Yeah. I miss them a lot.”

“But you have a new family now, Luke. Your mom and I are so happy to have you here, I can't even tell you.”

Wow. Joker's enthusiasm was a little overwhelming. I caught Sable's eye as she sat down at the dining room table, and she shrugged her shoulders, as if she knew that Joker was acting strangely, but she knew she was powerless to stop him.

“So tell me about what you do for a living, son.”

“Well, I'm a business analyst. I look at my computer screens all day and help my company make more money.”

“Well, that doesn't sound very exciting,” Joker said. “You any good at it?”

“Actually, I am,” I answered honestly. “I'm the head of my division,

and I have about twenty people who report directly to me.”

“You must have gotten your mother’s smarts. I was never any good at school or computer stuff. I think those fuckin’ machines hate me.” Joker fished a pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket and lit one. “Your mama went to college, though.”

“Just for a couple of semesters. I didn’t finish,” Sable said from the other room.

“What do you do for fun?” Joker asked me.

“Well, I work out a lot to stay in shape, and I like to play some poker

every now and then.”

“Ever ride a bike?”

I wasn't sure what kind of bike he meant. “Do you mean a bicycle or a motorcycle?”

“So the answer's no, then,” Joker laughed. “If you rode, you wouldn't have to ask. How long you in town for?”

“I don't really know, sir,” I answered. “I took a leave of absence from work, and I...”

“I'm gonna teach you how to ride a real bike,” Joker said definitively, as if there was no way he'd entertain an objection.

“Jesus, Joker,” Sable hollered from

the dining room. “You’ve known the man for all of five minutes, and you’re already talking about your fuckin’ bikes.”

“Well, I figure it’ll give us some father-son bonding time. Isn’t that the sort of thing people on those fucking talk shows you always watch ramble on and on about?”

I couldn’t tell if the squabbling between Sable and Joker was typical or the result of tension because I’d showed up, but it made me uncomfortable. I’d had friends who seemed to thrive on arguments, but I’d never been that type.

“So tell me about you,” I said to Joker, hoping to change the subject.

“Not much to know. Ain’t really working right now, and your mom and I are having some money troubles, but I’m sure we’ll find a way to get through it. We always do.”

Sable spoke up again. “Maybe you could take this chance to get a real, legit job, rather than always looking for a way to make a fast buck.”

Clearly, this wasn’t the first time the topic of work had come up between them.

Joker stood up and emptied his beer. “I haven’t heard you complaining for all these years that you’ve lived in this big house. Like you could afford it with your ‘real job.’”

I wasn't about to get in the middle of this argument. I stood up with Joker. "Can I take a look at your bike?"

"See," Joker said to Sable with a bit of a sneer. "Like father, like son."

I wasn't sure about all of the father-son buddy-buddy bullshit, but I knew that I wanted to defuse the situation and end the argument. I followed Joker out to the garage and nodded and smiled as he pointed out the bazillion differences among the three bikes he kept there. He kept up a pretty steady drinking pace, emptying beer bottles within minutes after opening them, and I was glad when he opened the garage door, as the smoke in the garage was making my eyes water.

My general impression was that Joker and I had absolutely nothing in common. When he suggested that we go to his club so that I could meet his brothers, I wasn't sure if I wanted to go or not, but since it seemed so important to him, I agreed. He went back inside to get his cut, and as he put it on, he explained its significance to me.

“Luke, your cut is ... well, it's almost like a wedding ring, except it's harder to leave an MC than your wife. You wear it to show the world that you're part of a brotherhood and that you'd die, or kill, for your brothers. The Savage Sons are a way of life.”

I wasn't sure exactly what to say. I'd

never really been much of a joiner. I hadn't been in a fraternity in college, and I just didn't really get the point of grown men wearing matching clothes. I wasn't about to say that to Joker, though.

“Sounds intense,” I said.

“You'll understand when you meet the guys and when you get on a bike for the first time. Trust me.”

“Is Sable going to come to the club?” I asked.

“I'll ask her, but she doesn't hang out there much anymore.”

Joker went inside, and I realized that I should probably offer to drive, since Joker had consumed roughly half a dozen

beers. I opened the door from the garage to the house and heard Sable yelling at Joker.

“You’re like an overgrown child, you stupid fuck. You think taking him to your stupid fuckin’ club is going to fast forward through thirty years of his life, and you’re gonna be best friends? I give up. You’re hopeless.”

“Shut your fuckin’ mouth, woman. You don’t get to order me around. If you hadn’t lied to me for all these years, I wouldn’t have to make up for lost time.”

“Joker, you can be mad at me, but why can’t you just sit down and talk to Luke instead of going to the clubhouse and spending money we don’t have on

drinks you don't need?"

I knew that I shouldn't be eavesdropping, but I couldn't help myself.

"Always with the fuckin' money," Joker growled, sounding furious. "I've told you I'm working on something. We had to get out of the business after Moses ended up with a dead DEA agent in his house. You know that. What the fuck do you want me to do?"

"Maybe, after all these years, I want you to finally grow the fuck up." Sable stormed out of the room toward the garage and saw me standing with one foot inside the house.

I hoped she'd think I'd just taken a

step in. “I’m sorry. I was just coming in to offer to drive since Joker’s been drinking.”

“I’m sorry you had to hear all this. We’re having some money troubles, and it just makes things tense around here.”

I thought about the money that my parents had left me — more money than I’d ever really need — but I didn’t think that my giving Sable and Joker a check was going to solve all of their problems. And I barely even knew these people! They could be con artists, for all I knew.

“Money problems are tough. I know,” I said, wishing I could alleviate the tension and knowing that the problems in the room went deeper than

what I could fix.

Sable lowered her voice. “He always retreats to the clubhouse when we have an argument, and there’s not a damn thing I can do about it.”

“Well, I’m happy to give him a ride,” I said, trying to be helpful. “I have to admit that I’m a little curious to see an MC.”

“Oh, it’s nothing but a bunch of old, immature drunks. At least that’s what it is now. It wasn’t always, but since the money’s dried up, all they can do is sit around and bitch like a bunch of old ladies.”

“Do you mind if we go?” I asked.

Sable looked a little surprised that I'd asked. "Can't stop you, and it might be good for him to cool off a little. You can just leave him there, and I'll pick him up in the morning."

"He's going to spend the night there?"

"Does it all the time. He keeps a room there, and sometimes it's good for us to get a break from one another."

"Okay, then. If you're sure it's all right, I'll go offer to drive."

I wasn't sure exactly what was going on, and I couldn't tell who was right — or if they both were wrong — but I knew that I wasn't going to sit around and listen to Sable and Joker argue all night.

“Joker,” I called. “You wanna show me your club? I’ll drive.”

“Yeah,” he answered, getting another beer from the refrigerator. “Let’s get the fuck outta here.”

Chapter 12

Krystal

By the time I was ready to head to the Sons' clubhouse, I was spoiling for a fight. I'd thought about everything that Bug had said and done to me, and I was pissed. I know I hadn't exactly set myself up to be treated like a queen when I'd started hanging around the Savage Sons, but I was starting to think that maybe — at the ripe old age of twenty-five — I was starting to grow up a little.

I looked in the mirror, studying my reflection and thinking about what I

expected from the evening ahead. Bug had wanted hot? I was gonna give it to him ... and then some. My hair looked like I'd just rolled out of bed after spending hours having kinky sex — long, dark, tousled waves framed my face. My eyes were lined with smoky black liner, and I'd slicked nude gloss on my lips to emphasize my eyes even more. The best part, though, was that I'd emphasized every single asset that I had with my wardrobe choices.

Bug would recognize the clothing that I had on, but no one else would. I was wearing an absolutely skin tight black dress that I usually wore only in the bedroom. The hemline barely covered my crotch, and cutouts on each

side made my hips look super curvy and my waist look tiny. The top was cut so low that the pushup bra I wore made it look like I could spill out of the dress any minute, and the fabric was so sheer that every now and then, it looked like you could almost see my nipples. I'd worn my highest heels — ones that Bug hated because they made me at least two inches taller than he was. My legs were bare, and I'd smoothed on lotion with a slight shimmer, so they looked toned and fantastic.

I slipped on a black leather jacket just in case I needed to cover up at some point, picked up my keys and my phone, and I headed out to the car. As I drove, I wondered what Bug was gonna do when

he saw me. There was no telling. He might be turned on and decide to treat me like something other than a piece of shit. Or he could be pissed that I was showing so much skin, and he might pick a fight. I realized that I was ready for anything. It would have been one thing if he was helping me with my bills. I might have been willing to accept his typical alpha-male wannabe bullshit if he wasn't also asking me to pay for his fucking beer at the club. The more I thought about it, the madder I got.

If Bug didn't appreciate me, I told myself that I could find something better.

When I pulled into the parking lot, I

saw that it was pretty full for a Sunday night, and based on the ratio of Savage Sons' bikes to cars in the lot, I figured that most of the people were in the section of the building that was reserved only for the Sons and their guests. The other half of the club operated as a kind of social club that served drinks to folks in the neighborhood that the Sons trusted to drink their beers and not complain to the authorities about things like smoking indoors and an occasional impromptu strip show. The Sons had run hookers out of the club for a while, but after Moses was killed, they had decided that it would be smart to lie low for a while.

I checked my lipgloss in the mirror and headed toward the unmarked door.

Bug had never given me a keycard that would let me enter on my own, so I just waited until I heard the door buzz. Whoever who was manning the security cameras had been pretty quick on the draw.

I'd left my jacket in the car, and I stepped into the vestibule like I owned the place.

Zeno was sitting at the stool next to the interior door that would open to the Son's private bar, complete with posters of half-dressed women, pool tables, and a bartender serving up beer, whiskey, and weed.

“Jesus, Krystal. You look good enough to eat. Seriously.”

I smiled at him. He'd been Moses' best friend in the Sons, and he'd taken Moses' death as hard as I had. He and Joker were the only members of the Sons that I hadn't slept with, and I realized that maybe I hadn't slept with Zeno because he wasn't the asshole that some of the guys were. He didn't treat me like I was stupid or order me around just because I was a woman, and consequently he hadn't really turned me on. Shit, I seriously needed to get my head on straight.

“Hey, sugar,” I purred, as I threw one arm around his shoulders. “Bug here?”

Now, I knew damn well that Bug

was there, because I'd seen his bike in the lot, but I figured that just in case I wasn't going to break up with him that evening, I should hedge my bets.

“Yeah. He said he was expecting you, but he didn't tell me you were gonna come in here dressed like a wet dream. You look gorgeous, girl.”

“Bug told me to get fixed up. Just trying to please your VP,” I said with a wink. “Gonna let me in?”

“Wish I could keep you out here to myself, but I guess so.” Zeno reached for the doorknob and paused. “Hey — you're never gonna guess who's here.”

“No clue, sugar.”

I didn't really care who was there because I was looking forward to seeing Bug's face when I walked through the door, but I figured that I should be polite to one of the few decent guys in the MC.

“Joker's here, and he brought his son.”

Now that actually *was* news. “His son?”

“Yeah. Tall blond guy.”

“Holy shit. Does Sable know he's got a kid?”

“It's their kid together, that's the crazy thing. Sable gave him up for adoption when Joker was in the service, and he never knew until today.”

“Wow,” was all I could say.

In hindsight, I guess maybe I should have put the pieces together, but since there was absolutely nothing that connected a guy who could afford a suite at the Ritz Carlton with Joker and the Savage Sons, I had no idea what I was walking into.

Zeno opened the door, and I saw Bug and J.C. in their usual places right away. Bug preferred the very end of the bar facing the front door so that he could see everyone come and go and keep tabs on the room. When I walked in, he had a beer bottle halfway to his lips, and he froze. He looked me up and down, and I couldn't decipher his expression. What I

could tell for sure, though, was that he thought I looked good.

I took my time walking over to him, making sure that I stopped to greet every single man between me and Bug. He watched and I could tell that his temper was coming to a simmer. I wanted to make a point, but I most definitely didn't want him to boil over.

“Well, look what the cat dragged in,” Bug said to J.C. as I got closer.

“More like the cat's meow, man,” J.C. said before dissolving into laughter.

J.C. wasn't very smart, but his comment had been pretty funny. I came right up to Bug, almost touching his knee, and I stopped.

“This what you had in mind?” I asked in a sexy voice, as I slowly turned around to let him take a long, hard look.

“You look good,” he said. “If a man’s looking for a hooker. You’re on your own, sweetheart, if you have trouble with guys wanting to handle your merchandise.”

I pulled myself up to my full height, supplemented with the sexy heels I wore. I realized that it felt amazing to look down at Bug, especially when I knew how good I looked. “You said you wanted me to look hot. I was just doing what you asked.”

“I didn’t ask, Krystal. I told. And I

also told you to bring some money. Why don't you head over to the bar and take care of our tab?"

The fuck I was gonna pay the man's bar tab.

"Hm," I said, as if I were upset. "I seem to have forgotten my purse."

Before I knew what was happening, Bug's hand shot out and he grabbed my elbow — the one next to the bar, so that no one else in the room but J.C. could see it.

"Do not fuck with me, you cunt," he hissed into my ear.

Tears came to my eyes as he squeezed the pressure point at my

elbow, threatening to make my knees buckle under the pain. He had called my bluff, and I caved.

“Bug, honey, don’t be mad at me. I really did forget my purse. I’ll get you some money in the next day or so.”

“Get me another beer,” he said, even though he was sitting at the bar.

I walked down a couple of steps to get the bartender’s attention. “Kris, give me a Coors Light for Bug, and I’ll take a vodka and Red Bull.”

While I was waiting for the drinks to arrive, I tried to figure out how to handle Bug. He’d only full-on beat me up a couple of times, but I was absolutely certain that he would if I pushed him far

enough tonight. I wouldn't look quite as pretty if he broke my nose or knocked my teeth out. I was going to have to be very, very careful.

“Thanks, honey,” I said to Kris as I picked up the drinks. “And here you are,” I told Bug as I handed him his beer. I'd decided that my best bet was going to be to stand next to Bug and keep my mouth shut for the rest of the evening.

I took a huge drink and looked around the room. A big group of people was clustered around one of the pool tables over near the jukebox, and I could hear Joker's laugh from where I stood. I thought about asking Bug about Joker's son, but I figured that anything I said

could be taken the wrong way. Silence was probably safer.

Bug reached out and ran his hand over my ass, grabbed my waist, and pulled me closer to him. He loved to make it clear to his brothers that I was his property, and he could do anything he liked to me. He didn't even look at me, but he ran his hands up until his hand was on my breast. He found my nipple and squeezed hard, making my eyes water just as he had that morning.

“She likes it when I give it to her rough,” he said to J.C.

I blinked back tears and stared off toward the bar, unwilling to make eye contact with anyone in the place. He slid

his hand from my breast and slid it down, beneath my skirt, running his hands over the curve of my ass and tugging at the thong I wore.

“I think I need to see what you have on under this dress, you slut,” Bug said, again, looking at J.C. The expression on his face didn’t reveal arousal, but looked like cruelty. “Turn around,” he commanded.

I considered resisting, but I knew for sure that there wasn’t a soul in the place who’d back me up if Bug decided that he needed to put me in my place. I suppressed a sigh and silently turned around, facing the bar and presenting my backside to Bug and anyone who

happened to look over.

Bug grabbed my hips and pulled me closer before he put both hands under my skirt and slowly slid it up, over my hips, exposing my ass, which happened to be completely uncovered since I'd worn the tiniest thong I could find. He ran his finger underneath the underwear and down the crack of my ass. I finally couldn't stand it any longer.

“Do you like it, Bug? I wore these panties just for you.”

He reached up with his free hand and slowly pushed my shoulders toward the bar, and I could feel him moving my underwear aside before he inserted his finger inside me.

“Fuckin’ pussy is dry as the desert, you slut,” Bug said before releasing me.

Face burning in embarrassment, hoping that few people had seen Bug humiliate me, I pulled my dress back over my ass. I’d had it.

I knew better than to say anything publicly, but I couldn’t let Bug’s behavior go unchecked. I leaned over and whispered in his ear. “It’s only dry because you’re the one touching it, you pathetic piece of shit.”

Before he could grab me, I took off, practically running for the safety that I hoped to find in the bathroom.

And I ran straight into Luke.

Chapter 13

Luke

Joker had absolutely talked my ear off on the way to the club. I knew he'd had a few beers, but good grief, could the man run his mouth.

“So I told Moses, ‘You tell those motherfuckers that if they want their bikes back, then they can leave their money and guns at the door.’”

Joker dissolved into laughter, and I wasn't sure what to think. If half of the stories he'd told in the short time we'd been in the car were true, then he

belonged in prison or some kind of badass hall of fame. I was trying to piece everything together, and as far as I could tell, Moses, his nephew, had been the closest thing to a son that Joker had ever had.

He couldn't explain what Moses had been doing in the same room with a DEA agent, much less what circumstances had caused both of them to end up dead. Moses had been shot by the DEA agent, and Moses' old lady — some girl called Max — had shot the agent to save her own life. Joker didn't even seem to think twice about telling me about the illegal activities the Savage Sons had been involved in, chief among them a meth operation that apparently

spanned all of northern Colorado and stretched into Wyoming as well. The prostitution had gone hand in hand with the drugs.

I felt like I'd stepped into a movie. I knew shit like this went on, but outside of having grown some amazing hydroponic weed in college, I had little experience with harder drugs. I loved booze, and I loved weed, but while I'd never admit it to Joker, anything else scared me a little. The thought of a bunch of cranked up bikers cooking meth didn't exactly inspire my confidence that their wares wouldn't kill me. Clearly not everyone was so discriminating.

“So, the short version of the story is

that we're all kinda fucked, to be honest," Joker had said as we pulled into the lot. "Your mother is right that we're gonna have to do something soon, or we're gonna lose the house. It's paid off, but the taxes are fuckin' ridiculous and we need a new roof." Joker looked at me. "I'm sorry to throw this shit on you. I'm just overwhelmed. I thought of Moses like my son, and when he died, it nearly killed me. To have you show up is the answer to my prayers ... or it would be if I prayed." Joker laughed as he got out of the Jeep. "Come in and meet my brothers," he hollered after he'd shut the door.

I wasn't sure what I was expecting, but I was sure it wouldn't be boring.

The whole entrance thing was odd — like the entrances had been designed by a paranoid drug dealer, which I guess made sense. Once we got inside, I felt like I spent more time under bikers' armpits than I'd ever thought I'd care to. I had to have endured hugs from every man in the room at least once, and Joker spent most of the evening with his arm thrown over my shoulders. Since I was a couple of inches taller than he was, it made for some uncomfortable moments.

I'll say one thing for the Savage Sons: they were generous hosts. I never lacked for a beer, and Joker made it perfectly clear that any woman in the room was mine for the taking — with just a few exceptions. I couldn't see

around the huge group of people around us to see exactly who he'd gestured toward over by the bar, but I expected that I wasn't interested in an "old lady" anyway.

Jimmy, a Son from someplace up north, was telling me a story about Joker and my uncle having outrun the police back when they first started the MC, and I had to admit that once the shock of the scene had worn off, I was enjoying the company. I marveled at the men — committed to backing one another up — and absolutely not giving a fuck what anyone thought about them. It felt a little dangerous and a little exciting.

"Joker, I gotta take a leak," I said

after I'd finished laughing at Jimmy's story. "Can I get you a beer?"

"Nah, son, I'm good," he said as he continued to laugh and light another cigarette.

So he was weirding me out a little, jumping right into the "son" thing, but he seemed like a good enough guy, and he was just so freaking happy to have me there that I couldn't get too terribly upset. I figured I'd get through the evening and sort out my feelings and how I'd handle the Halls later. I took a couple of steps toward the hallway that Joker had directed me toward, and ran straight into Krystal.

"Krystal?" I said, stunned. "What are

you doing here?”

She shook her head, as if she didn't quite believe her eyes. “What am *I* doing here? Are you kidding? What are *you* doing here?”

I just stared at her, and I realized that she looked a lot different than she had at the bar. “Wow,” I said. “I thought you were hot before...” my voice trailed off.

“Oh, my God,” she said. “You're Joker's son?” Her hand flew up to cover her mouth.

“Yeah. How did you know?”

“Zeno at the door told me that Joker was here introducing his son — a tall blond guy. It never occurred to me that it

could be you.”

“Why would it? Denver isn’t a small town. But seriously, what are you doing here?”

Before Krystal could answer, a man with massive shoulders pushed my shoulder, forcing me to take a step back from her.

“She’s with me.”

The man just stared at me, having to look up a bit since I was a good six inches taller than he was. He stuck his chin out, as if he was trying to intimidate me, and I nearly laughed in his face, but I realized instantly that the guy gave off a seriously unbalanced vibe — like the kind of guy who could go batshit crazy

with no warning at all.

I held up my hands and took another step back. “Hey, nothing going on here, man. I was just talking to the lady.”

“What the fuck right do you think you have to come in here and start talking to another man’s old lady?”

I couldn’t help it, but something about his having referred to Krystal like she was his property just rubbed me the wrong way.

“She doesn’t look like an old lady to me, man, but no offense intended. Good to see you again, Krystal.”

I started to walk toward the hallway when I heard the man speak to Krystal

and I stopped, just in case the situation was about to get out of control.

“How the fuck does he know your name, you fuckin’ slut?”

I turned around to see Krystal put her hand on the man’s arm.

“Sugar, there’s nothing for you to worry about. I’m here with you tonight.”

Her voice sounded terrified, and she caught my gaze for the briefest of moments, and she shook her head slightly. I assumed that she was warning me off to avoid a confrontation, and it didn’t take a rocket scientist to know that the man she’d called Bug was the boyfriend — or whatever — whose phone call she’d avoided the night

before.

I turned away but didn't walk any further. I didn't want my presence to inflame the situation, but I wasn't about to walk away from a woman who was obviously scared of a man. When Bug just turned and walked over to a pool table, I let out the breath I hadn't realized I was holding and headed for the bathroom.

When I was finished, I looked at myself in the cracked mirror over the sink while I washed my hands.

“What did you walk into?” I asked my reflection.

Clearly the dynamic between Krystal

and Bug was complicated, and I didn't want a fight on my hands, but I also wasn't going to walk away and let him be abusive. Whether she knew it or not, she didn't have to put up with his bullshit.

And Jesus, what had she been thinking when she walked out of the house dressed the way she was. She was an absolute fantasy — all sexy hair, bedroom eyes, and that sexy dress that didn't hide anything. She looked even more amazing than I'd imagined. I felt an instant surge of jealousy at the thought of her in bed with that piece of shit who'd pushed me out of the way, but I'd seen his cut. I was on his turf, and I had no option but to walk away — as long as he

didn't push things too far.

As I left the men's room, I realized that I couldn't drink much more and still get back to the hotel safely, and I resolved to try to make an exit sooner rather than later. I didn't want Krystal to get into trouble, but I couldn't solve all the world's problems.

"Hey, Joker," I said, leaning in so that he could hear me over the jukebox blaring ZZ Top. "I'm gonna take off after this beer."

"All right. If you're too big a pussy to hang with your old man, I get it." Joker's voice was loud enough for all of his brothers to hear his good-natured teasing. "'I'm just fuckin' with you," he

said, throwing his arm around me once again. “Hey, you busy tomorrow?”

I looked over at Krystal sitting at the bar, by herself in the corner, watching the room and trying not to let her eyes rest too long on my face in case Bug was watching her. I wished like hell that I had plans with her tomorrow.

“Nah, man. I’m free.”

“Perfect. Jimmy and I are gonna take you on your first ride. You’re gonna love it.”

“That sounds awesome. Should be a great day for a ride. Should be sunny and warm.”

“Only pussies wait for a nice day to

ride,” Jimmy said with a straight face.

I wasn't sure if he was serious or not. “Well, I guess I'm just lucky then. What time do you want to head out?”

“‘Bout ten? That work for you both?”

Jimmy and I nodded in answer to Joker's question, and Jimmy finished the last of his beer and waved to the bartender for another.

“I was thinking we could ride up to Cripple Creek. I know a couple of girls up there, and we can have a little fun and be back before dinner.” Joker looked at me. “What do you say?”

I wasn't sure exactly what Joker

meant about having fun with the girls he knew up there, but I'd never been to Cripple Creek, and I'd heard the drive was nice. "I'm in," I said, before I finished my beer.

I hugged Joker, waved to Jimmy and the other guys and headed to the bar — ostensibly to set down my beer bottle, but really to talk to Krystal. I made sure Bug was occupied with his pool game, though I was certain he'd be watching. It wasn't like I was planning on doing anything but talking. There was plenty of room around Krystal, as if everyone in the room was afraid to get too close to her.

"You okay?" I asked as I set the

bottle down.

“I guess so,” she answered. “It’s the usual. I might as well have brought my homework to do. Bug’s pissed, so he’s just gonna shoot pool and glare at me all night. Heaven forbid I actually talk to anyone or have some fun.”

“I just want to make sure he’s not going to hurt you.”

“He won’t do anything too awful while we’re here, and I’m gonna try to get out of going to his place.”

“I know this is none of my business, Krystal, but has he hit you before?”

Krystal waved to the bartender for another drink. “You know that’s a stupid

question, Luke.”

I checked again to make sure Bug hadn't made a move toward us. “Why do you stay with him?”

“I told you, it's complicated. I can't explain it to you here.” Krystal shook her head and laughed. “Who the hell am I kidding? I can't explain it to myself, no matter how hard I try.”

“I don't want to stay here too long and cause problems for you, but I just want you to know that if you need help, you can call me. Any time, day or night.”

“Thanks. I can take care of myself. I'm tougher than I look.”

“It's dangerous for you to bring up

how you look, Krystal. I would give anything to take you out of here with me and take you back to my suite.”

I could see the desire in Krystal’s eyes. She wanted me, but she had her hands full with the mess she’d created with Bug.

“Will you do me a favor?” I asked.

“Depends on what it is,” she said.

“Will you send me a text when you get home safe? I’m gonna worry about you until I get it.”

“I will.”

I wanted to reach for her hand or lean over and kiss her, but I knew that I couldn’t. “I have to go,” I told her. “See

you soon?” I asked quietly enough that no one could overhear us.

“Absolutely,” she whispered.

I turned away from the bar because I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to leave her if I didn't go right that minute. I waved to Joker and the guys again, ignored the glare Bug sent me, and headed for the door.

The cool air was a refreshing change from the smoky bar, and I immediately felt clear-headed and wide awake. As I drove home, I thought about the mess that Krystal was in, and I wondered why on earth a young woman who was clearly smart and capable would spend even a minute in the company of a man like Bug.

It occurred to me that I'd seen Joker treat Sable in a way that I would certainly consider sexist, and I shook my head as I realized how pervasive the MC mentality was for all of its members and hangers-on. It made me reconsider taking a ride with Joker and Jimmy tomorrow, but I decided that a few hours on a bike wouldn't change my life, and if I canceled, it would certainly disappoint Joker.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

Chapter 14

Krystal

I knew I should have asked Luke to walk away right after he'd put the bottle on the bar, but I just couldn't. He was so sincere in his desire to make sure that I was okay, and I knew there was no way he could possibly understand the depth of Bug's insane jealousy. The fact that I was attracted to him made it even harder to ask him to leave. I knew that chances were good that Bug would make me pay for the conversation, but just the few moments of looking into his blue eyes would be worth it.

Sitting in Bug's usual corner of the bar, I watched J.C. finish a conversation with Bug, nod his head, and walk toward me.

“Bug wants to talk to you,” he said, gesturing to the hallway.

“If he wants to talk to me, he can walk his ass over here and talk to me,” I replied. “He ain't the King of England.”

J.C. leaned closer. “Look, Krystal, I don't exactly know what game you're playing with that blond guy showing up here, but Bug's pissed, and if you know what's good for you, you won't make him any madder than he is.”

It sounded like he was actually concerned about me, so I sighed and

stood up from the bar stool, pulled my dress down to a slightly more modest length, and followed him down the hallway to one of the bedrooms. I didn't have more than a few seconds to wait before Bug came inside. I expected J. C. to leave as soon as Bug walked in, but he shut the door and watched silently as Bug approached me.

“You're the hottest fuckin' girl in the room. Too bad you're a fuckin' slut.”

I stood, silent, unsure what he wanted from me.

He raised his hand to my face, slowly. “You say that I'm not man enough for you? You need another man to get that worn-out pussy of yours wet?”

“No, Bug, you’re the only man I want. The only man I need.” I didn’t know exactly what he had planned, but I knew it wasn’t anything I wanted.

He looked me up and down, letting his eyes linger on my tits as he reached out to grab me roughly with both hands. He pulled me toward him, slipping his hands beneath the cutouts on the side of my dress. He tugged at the fabric, and I suspected that he was considering ripping the dress right off me.

“We’ll see, won’t we?” he said as he reached down, beneath my dress to cup my ass. “You say I’m man enough for you? Let’s see if you’re telling the truth. If you’re not, then J.C. here is

gonna help me give it to you the way you really want it.”

Bug stepped back and turned me around, shoving my shoulders forward until I caught myself with my hands on the edge of the bed. I knew that the back of my dress was short enough that they would both be able to see at least some of my ass. Bug reached over and caressed my rear end, almost lovingly, before he drew his hand back and it landed on my ass with a loud smack. I gasped and nearly pulled away. Bug really didn't turn me on, but the smack on the ass did. I wondered — trying to forget about the man standing behind me — if Luke had ever smacked an ass hard enough to turn a girl on.

I figured that I had to play along if I wanted to avoid getting fucked by two guys at once. “Oh, Bug, you know that turns me on.”

He rubbed my ass where he'd smacked it, and he reached forward to grab my tits, squeezing them as he ground his crotch into my ass from behind. Oh. Shit. He wasn't hard yet, and the only person he'd blame that on was me. I had to figure out a way to get him hard enough to fuck me so that he wouldn't take out his frustration on my face. I also had to hope that I could somehow get wet enough that he wouldn't be mad that he couldn't turn me on.

I wiggled my ass. “I put this dress on just so you could take it off, Bug.”

“Do you want to suck J.C.’s dick, you dirty fuckin’ whore?” I could feel him starting to get hard.

“The only dick I’m gonna suck is yours, Bug. You’re the only one I want.” I stood up and turned around, sitting on the edge of the bed and reaching out to stroke his beginning of an erection through his jeans. “Why don’t you get rid of J.C. so you can fuck me just the way I like it.”

I could see the uncertainty in Bug’s face. He started to unbuckle his belt.

“Stand up, you slut,” he commanded, as he unbuttoned his jeans.

I stood up, unsure what he wanted.

“Take off that hooker dress.”

Even though I'd slept with J.C. a few times over the years, I really didn't want to be standing naked in front of him, but the tone in Bug's voice sounded like he meant business and would tolerate no refusal.

I decided to make it as sexy as I could, hoping that, at the very least, I could get this over with quickly. “I've been wanting to take this dress off for you ever since I put in on.”

“Enough talking. Do what I told you.” Bug unzipped his jeans and shifted them down long enough to pull his cock

out. He was hard enough that I thought that maybe I could end this awful situation quickly.

I stood up and pulled my dress over my head, bending forward to show extra cleavage as I set the dress on the bed. I hoped like hell that a blow job was gonna get me out of this fucking mess as I knelt on the floor in front of Bug. I was hopeful that the prospect of being blown in front of an audience would get it over with.

“Oh my, look at that huge, hard dick,” I said, nauseated by the adoring tone of my voice. I didn’t want to do it, but I was afraid that Bug was really going to hurt me if I didn’t distract him.

“Can I please put it in my mouth?”

Bug grabbed my hair and roughly pulled my face to his crotch. “You’re gonna suck my dick, and you’re gonna swallow it. If you don’t do it good enough, you’re gonna suck his dick, too, you fuckin’ slut.”

He forced himself into my mouth, pushing to the back of my throat right away. I’d learned a few tricks about sexy, awesome blow jobs, but this was nothing like that. He fucked my mouth, pure and simple, his rage and frustration taken out with every thrust down my throat. I gagged, and he didn’t stop until he finally shot his load into my mouth, making the same ridiculous expression

that he always did.

He pulled out, zipped up and walked toward the door, leaving me on my knees, jaw aching from his rough motions. “Put your fuckin’ clothes back on, you whore. I want you back at the bar in five minutes.”

He walked out of the room with J.C., not even bothering to close the door.

I wanted to slam the door, but I didn’t want to give Bug a reason to come back inside. I stood up, closed and locked the flimsy door, knowing that it wouldn’t keep anyone out if they wanted in badly enough. I grabbed my purse and fished through it until I found my makeup bag. I fished out my travel toothbrush

and toothpaste, and I headed for the bathroom. I brushed my teeth and tongue twice, hoping to get rid of the taste and the memory of Bug inside my mouth.

Looking in the mirror, I saw that my eye makeup was smeared a little, probably because my eyes had watered when Bug had viciously forced himself into my mouth over and over. I cleaned myself up and headed back out to get my dress from the bed. Dressed again, I sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to figure out what I should do.

I wanted to walk out the door of the club and never return. I wanted to slap Bug, kick him in the balls and never see his face again. I wanted to tell everyone

in the room to fuck off. I wanted to tell every one of the girls that clung to the pathetic, out of shape fuckers who believed that their cuts made them invincible that they could do so much better.

But I was scared. Scared of being alone, afraid that Bug would follow me and kill me, afraid that I wouldn't be able to make it on my own, that I'd never amount to anything and have to come crawling back to Bug. I felt weak and powerless, and I was ashamed of myself, but I walked back outside and I took my seat at the bar, just like Bug had told me to. Maybe someday I'd find the strength to do something about my fucked up life, but right then, I just didn't have

the energy.

Chapter 15

Luke

Monday, May 6, 2013

I was completely hooked.

We rounded a sharp turn as we ascended up the final rise before we would arrive in Cripple Creek. As I slowly accelerated out of the turn, I felt the power of the engine, growling, masculine, and just fucking awesome.

Joker looked back at me to make sure I was okay. “Ready to give it some gas?” he hollered over the rumble of the three bikes.

“Let it rip,” I yelled back.

The roar of the bikes became deafening, and as we picked up speed, the tourists standing outside the little cog railway station all turned to look at us as we drove by. Feeling the warm sun and the wind on my face, knowing that people were stopping to watch us ... it made me feel powerful in a way I never had before. I'd pushed numbers around on spreadsheets, and I'd made a lot of money for my company, but riding a bike was more primal, kind of an assurance that I was really alive in a way I never knew was possible.

By the time we parked in front of one of the little wild west-style casinos that

lined the main street, I couldn't get the grin off my face.

“Oh, my God. That was fucking awesome!” My hands and arms shook a little as I took my helmet off. “Wow, my arms are shaking.”

Jimmy laughed. “Yeah. That goes away as you get used to riding. Two hours was pretty long for your first ride, but you handled it like a champ. You're a chip off the old block,” he said, tucking his helmet under his arm. “I need a beer.”

“I can get you beer, whiskey, company — anything you want,” Joker said, lighting a cigarette while he was still astride his bike. “The Midnight

Rose over there's the place. You walk in there with a Savage Sons cut, and you'll have the run of the place.”

I ran my hand through my hair, not even caring that it was probably a mess from the helmet and the wind. “Now that you mention it, I am a little thirsty. A beer sounds like heaven.”

“Can't smoke inside,” Joker said, shaking his head as if the fact disgusted him. “Mind if I finish?”

Jimmy laughed and turned his face up to the sun. “We got all the time in the world. No schedule to keep and fuel in the tank. What more could you want?”

I looked around me, at the tourists on the street, the casino windows that

revealed people sitting at slot machines, and at the two men in front of me — looking like they didn't have a care in the world. I knew that Joker had some money problems, and I was sure that Jimmy had everyday bullshit that he had to deal with, too — who doesn't? I realized that both men shared the ability to let their problems go for a few hours and enjoy the moment. While they might not exactly be role models in every aspect, I admired their willingness to embrace the present — soak up the sun, the mountains, and the raw pleasure of the wind in your hair. Maybe I could learn something from the Savage Sons.

Joker threw his cigarette butt on the ground and stepped on it as he stood up.

“Let’s go see what kind of trouble we can get into.” He looked over at me.

“Any reason you have to be back in Denver tonight? Just in case?”

“No reason in the world.”

I remembered that I hadn’t checked my phone since I’d gotten off the bike. That morning, I’d awakened and checked to see if Krystal had texted me, but no texts had arrived while I’d been asleep.

You ok? I didn’t hear from you, & I’m worried.

Even after I’d had breakfast and showered, she still hadn’t answered. I’d thought about calling her, but I didn’t want to make things worse if she’d gone home with Bug. I didn’t even know if

they lived together, for goodness' sake. Even though I knew it was stupid to be so worried about a girl who didn't even think enough of herself to pick a halfway decent guy, I couldn't help it.

I pulled the phone from my pocket and was relieved to see two texts from Krystal.

I'm fine. Got home late and fell asleep right away. Sorry I forgot to txt you.

Sorry about the f-ed up mess last night. I need to figure some things out. It was good to see you.

I thought for a second before I answered.

Glad U R ok. Call me if you need anything.

I hoped she'd take me up on it. I hated the thought of that little prick hurting her, but there really wasn't much I could do about it.

“I might as well have a beer,” I said out loud.

“Are you talking to yourself?” Joker asked, looking back at me from halfway across the street.

“Yeah. I do it all the time,” I answered with a grin. “I can't help it.”

“Your mother does the same thing. Drives me crazy, especially when she tells me it's the only way she can have

an intelligent conversation.”

I laughed and thought about how strange it was that I had something in common with Sable even though we'd never met before yesterday. Funny thing, genetics.

Jimmy held the door open to the casino and I followed Joker inside, nearly tripping because the dark was such a contrast to the bright sunshine outside.

“Goddamn, I love a dark bar in the middle of the day. All those poor fuckers working for a living today don't know what they're missing,” Jimmy laughed as he followed us inside.

We made our way through a sea of

slot machines and video poker players and found the bar.

“Gypsy here?” Joker asked the bartender.

He looked us over as if he was deciding how to answer the question ... or perhaps whether to answer it at all. He nodded, set down the glass he was polishing, and picked up a phone from behind the bar. He replaced the handset. “She’ll be right down. Get you a drink, gentlemen?”

“Three Crown Royals and three Coors Light longnecks,” Joker answered, not bothering to consult us.

Three generous shots and three cold

beers appeared on the bar, and just after we'd slammed the whiskey, a woman dressed in what looked like old-fashioned saloon garb approached us.

She walked up to Joker, threw both arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. I'd expected the kiss to be a brief one, but it didn't end until Jimmy cleared his throat and interrupted it.

“Cool it, or get a fuckin’ room, you two,” he said. “Good to see you, Gypsy.”

“You too, Jimmy,” she said, slipping her arm around Joker’s back. She looked me up and down. “And who do we have here?” she asked, her voice betraying her interest in me.

“Baby, this here’s my son, Luke,”

“Well, my goodness, I didn’t know you had a son,” Gypsy said, extending her hand.

“Neither did I,” Joker laughed as Gypsy and I shook hands.

“Well, if there’s anything you need — anything at all — while you’re here, you just let me know, and I’ll take the very best care of you, Luke.”

Gypsy’s forte was not subtlety.

She led us upstairs to a private room in a hall of closed doors. It looked like the upstairs of an old-time brothel, and I suspect that was, in fact, what I was really looking at. A small bar covered

the back wall, and the windows were shuttered from the inside, letting in some natural light from the top, but obscuring the view inside for any curious folks outside on the street. There were several gaming tables in the room, and two poker games were underway. Gypsy led us to a table.

“Dutch is the bartender, and he’s gonna take real good care of y’all. Anything you want, he’ll get it for you. If you want to play some poker, just let me know and I’ll get it set up.” She looked toward the door and waved over a young lady standing in the doorway. “This here’s Clara, and she’ll bring you some lunch and anything else your little hearts desire.” She took a seat on Joker’s lap.

“And I’m all yours for as long as you require me, boys.”

I was pretty sure I was in Heaven.

Over the course of the afternoon, I had more drinks than I probably should have, got my ass handed to me in a game of Hold ‘Em, and successfully fended off Clara’s attentions. She seemed really interested in me, but since I figured that her favors came with an hourly charge, I wasn’t terribly flattered. After the poker game was over, Joker asked Gypsy to have some lunch sent up to us, and he sent her away for a bit so that he could talk to us.

“What’s on your mind?” Jimmy

asked once we had some privacy.

“Well, I want to bounce some ideas off you both.”

I was perplexed, unsure why he'd want my opinion on anything, especially since it seemed like the only things Joker really cared about were the MC (which I knew little about,) bikes (which I knew even less about,) and having a good time (which I heartily endorsed.)

“Jimmy, we have to do something about the Sons. We have to figure out a way to replace the income that we lost when we gave up the crank business. I'm not gonna lose my house, and I don't want to get a job and have to work for a fucking living like every other poor

slob.”

Jimmy looked surprised. “Joker, no offense, man, but we should not be talking about this in front of Luke. I know he’s your kid, but he ain’t a Savage Son.”

“I can give you guys some privacy,” I said, starting to stand up.

Joker put his hand on my shoulder. “You don’t need to go anywhere. Jimmy, Luke’s my son, and even though that don’t mean much, it means that if he wants to be a part of the MC, I’ll vouch for him.”

I didn’t know what to say. It was my first day on a bike, and even though I’d enjoyed the ride, it had never occurred

to me to think about becoming a Savage Son.

Jimmy looked pissed. “That ain’t the way things work, Joker. We can’t start making exceptions just ‘cause some kid shows up and says he’s related to you. You don’t even know if he’s telling the truth. He could be a fed, planted to get intel about the Sons, brother. We don’t discuss club business in front of outsiders.”

“Luke is no outsider. He may have just gotten here, but I aim to make up for lost time. I founded this MC, and I make the rules. Now, can we get back to the subject? How are we gonna make up the money we’ve lost?”

Jimmy shook his head and looked like he wanted to argue, but decided against it. “Joker, I don’t know, man. I got nothing. We know that the feds are probably watching us, and that don’t leave a whole lot of room for starting up a new operation. I’d thought about taking a page from the casinos and opening up our back room for poker games, but I’m afraid it’ll draw too much attention, and I don’t know how much money it’ll actually bring in.”

Joker lit another cigarette — the rules that governed the rest of the casino obviously didn’t apply in the room we occupied. “I got some girls ready to go back to work, but that’s only gonna make up a fraction of what we’re missing.” He

ran his fingers through his hair and leaned back in his chair. “I need a new idea. Something that people want that we can give ‘em and charge lots of money for.”

A thought occurred to me. I remembered the one time that I’d actually had more cash than I knew what to do with, and I knew right away that the Sons could make my idea work for them.

“I know this really isn’t my business, but have you thought about weed?”

Jimmy shook his head. “Nah, man. The feds would shut us down in a minute. And there’s not enough money in weed.”

I sat up straighter as the idea worked itself out in my head. “Hear me out. The feds aren’t going to shut you down if you’re not doing anything illegal. You live in Colorado. There’s a dispensary on every corner, selling more weed than you can imagine — and it’s all perfectly legal.”

Joker wasn’t buying it. “That’s part of the problem, Luke. That’s one of the reasons there’s no money in weed anymore. It’s too easy to get, and the shit they’re selling now is so fucking potent, one hit, and you’re stoned.”

“So you open a dispensary and you sell the best weed in town — sticky, nasty buds that will blow your mind.

You'll have people lined up around the block to get your shit because it's so good."

"Where the fuck do you get weed like that? And open a dispensary? There's no way in hell they'd give us a license for that." Jimmy waved his hand as if he wanted to dismiss the whole topic.

I held up a finger. "One, you grow it, and two, all you need is an investor, someone who's never been in trouble with the law who's willing to be the license-holder."

Joker looked at me like I was speaking another language. "Luke, we're outlaw bikers. We don't have fucking

investors, man.”

“You might be surprised.”

“And we don’t know anything about growing weed,” Jimmy added.

“I do,” I said with a smile. “When I was at ASU, my friends and I grew the best weed on campus. We started in our dorm room, believe it or not. We set up grow lights in our closet and supplied everyone on our floor. When we moved off campus, we rented a house with a basement and converted the whole downstairs to a pot farm. We had more money than we knew what to do with.”

“But can’t the cops tell when you’re growing?” Joker asked. “I heard that they can monitor your electric bill and

shit.”

“Yeah, in some cases they can catch people who are too stupid to cover their tracks, but here’s the thing. You can grow legally in Colorado now. If you’re selling to a dispensary, it’s legit.”

Joker and Jimmy looked at one another.

Jimmy spoke first. “You know, it never occurred to me to do something legal.”

Joker still wasn’t convinced. “But won’t you lose all the profit to taxes and shit?”

“Absolutely not. A college buddy of mine has a medical marijuana business

in California. He started with just a few plants and a single store. He now has a huge farm and a string of stores. We could make this work.”

“But where would we get the money to get started?” Jimmy asked, as if he was afraid of getting too excited about an idea that might not be feasible.

“Dude, I’m a business analyst. I can do this shit in my sleep. My parents left me some money, and I could get the license and cover the startup — for a percentage, of course.”

Joker looked like he was starting to get on board. “You sure you know enough to grow the stuff and get the business started?”

“Really? I’m insulted, Joker. Our bud was famous all over Arizona. Part of the key is marketing. You create a great name for the product, and I bet we would even have other dispensaries wanting to buy our weed. This will work, I guarantee it.”

Jimmy nearly jumped out of his chair. “We could call it Savage Bud, or something like that.”

“That’s the spirit,” I said, surprised to discover that I was actually getting excited about the prospect of starting a new venture.

“There’s one problem,” Joker said, looking me square in the eye. “The Sons will never do business like this with

someone who's not a member ... or at least on his way to becoming one. You'll have to become a prospect if this is gonna work.”

“Can't you just make me a member? Give me the cut and call it a day?”

Jimmy shook his head. “No way. There's no shortcut to becoming a full member. Everyone has to be a prospect for at least a year.”

“A year? That's ridiculous.”

Joker agreed with Jimmy. “He's right. It's a year before you're official, and no one ever moves up to prospect this quickly, but I'll make an exception for you, both because you're my son and because you may have the fuckin' idea

that gets us back in the money.”

I hadn't really thought about trying to join the MC, but I'd had fun hanging out with the Sons the night before, and I'd sure enjoyed the ride up to Cripple Creek. Maybe I could take a longer leave of absence from work and actually do this thing — join the Savage Sons and start a new business. It would give me a chance to get to know Joker and Sable, and the change of scenery and of pace might be good for me.

“All right,” I said with a grin. “I'm in. Let's do this thing, brothers.”

Jimmy ordered another round of shots, and I realized that my afternoon trip to Cripple Creek might turn into an

all-nighter. We laughed, drank, and spent the rest of the day planning how Joker would announce me as a prospect and sell the other guys on the weed shop idea. He was sure he could get the Sons to vote me in, and he knew that everyone was so hard up for money that they'd welcome any plan to remedy that situation.

I pulled my phone out of my pocket to check the time and realized that a text message from Krystal had arrived about an hour before.

Looking forward to Friday ;-)

“Another benefit to staying in Denver,” I said under my breath as I tried to sober up enough to type out a

coherent response.

Chapter 16

Krystal

Thursday, May 9, 2013

I picked up my black eyeliner and brought it to my face before I realized that my hands were shaking too badly for me to even put makeup on. I was completely fucked. I was furious, I was hurt, and I was gonna find a way to get even with the piece of shit I called my boyfriend. Bug wasn't gonna know what hit him, but he was gonna be sorry.

I'd finished my shift the night before and met Bug at the clubhouse. He never

wanted to go anywhere else, and by the time I'd gotten there, he was drunk. Every now and then, he got kinda happy drunk, less groping and more affectionate. Last night hadn't been one of those times. A couple of months before, a new guy from the Fort Collins chapter of the Savage Sons had patched over, and Bug was putting on quite the show for Nate, making sure that the new blood respected the Denver V.P.

Careful not to appear flirtatious with Nate — even though he was pretty freaking hot — I'd gone straight to Bug's side. Since I'd known from the beginning that he was shitfaced, I'd been careful not to drink very much so that I could get myself home safely. I was just marking

time until Bug would let me leave. After I'd listened to Bug tell Nate what great blow jobs I gave, and after I interrupted his listing all the guys in the MC that I'd fucked, I'd had enough. I went to the ladies room, told Bug that I was leaving because I had an early class, collected my purse from beneath my barstool, and I'd headed out with a sigh of relief.

Not until the next morning did I notice that every penny of my money was missing from my purse.

“Fucking Bug,” I muttered under my breath when I thought about it again.

I'd dumped the entire contents of my purse onto the kitchen counter, but it was all gone. My tip money from Wednesday

night, and even worse was the missing envelope with all of my rent money. I knew that I shouldn't carry that much cash, but my landlord gave me a five percent discount if I paid in cash, and every dime mattered to me. Now, I had no spending money, and no way to make the rent that was due in just a couple of days.

I was sure Bug had taken it. Ever since he'd stopped getting his cut of the meth and the hookers the Sons used to run, he'd been short on money. I'd thought about suggesting that he get a fucking job, but I knew that would go over like a fart in church. The first couple of times that he pretended to leave his wallet at home, I'd paid his

bar tab, but I didn't believe that bullshit anymore. He was broke, and he'd stolen my hard-earned money.

I wanted to kill him.

But I knew I couldn't, if only because he wasn't worth going to jail over. I checked the clock and saw that I had about forty-five minutes before I needed to leave for class. I poured myself another cup of coffee, and I sat down at the kitchen table to try to figure out what to do.

There were two problems I had to solve: the rent money and the Bug situation. I wondered if there was some way to solve them both at the same time. If I could get the money back from the

asshole, then I could pay my rent and worry about dumping his ass later. I had two days before rent was due, and if I had to, I could probably dodge the landlord for a few more.

I picked up the phone to text Bug, deciding that I'd try to get him to let me cook dinner for him later that night. I knew I could make sure he had enough to drink that he'd sleep like a rock and I could look for my money later that night. Shit, I even had some sleeping pills that Red had left behind that I could put in his food that would knock him out. Maybe I'd be lucky enough that he'd never wake up.

Fantasizing about Bug's lifeless

body, I nearly jumped out of my skin when my phone beeped to tell me a text message had arrived.

Game starts at 7. Can I pick you up at 5:30?

I set the phone down and sighed. I wanted nothing more than to pretend that I could somehow have a normal relationship with a guy like Luke, but if I was honest with myself, there was no way it could work. If you put a lineup of guys in front of me, I was sure to pick the biggest asshole every time. That didn't mean that I was gonna turn down a date, though. If I took my money back from Bug tonight, then he'd probably be pissed enough that he wouldn't bother to

try to find me tomorrow.

I looked around my apartment, thinking that I really didn't want Luke to see where I lived. It was clean, but it was in a shitty part of town, and it just looked so dingy, especially compared to his fancy suite.

I work until 5. Can meet u at the bar or at your hotel.

I figured that we could walk from either spot to the field, and I wouldn't mind hanging out at the Ritz again.

“Back to reality,” I said as I packed up my books and headed out to class. As early as it was, and as drunk as Bug had been the night before, I figured that I should wait to call him until he'd had a

chance to sober up and get some sleep. It wasn't like he had a job that he had to get up early for.

In the break between my classes, I took a deep breath and called Bug.

“Yeah?” he said when he picked up.

“Good morning, sugar,” I said, just pouring on the sweetness.

I got an unintelligible grunt in reply.

“I'm feeling like I'm in the mood to cook a good dinner for you tonight. Your place or mine?” I put as much sex into my voice as I could, hoping that the promise of a meal and a piece of ass would make him overlook that fact that I

could easily figure out where my fucking money had gone.

“Mine, I guess.”

It sounded like Bug stood up and stretched. I figured he probably was just getting out of bed.

“Long night?” I asked.

“Kinda. I gotta piss. What time you comin’ over?”

“I’ll be there around seven. See you then.”

I hung up the phone, just revolted by the man. I’d always been turned on by guys who were rough around the edges, but Bug was just gross. I knew that I wasn’t exactly the classiest girl around,

but he was vile. I wanted to get my money back and leave him behind. I hoped it would be that simple.

Chapter 17

Luke

If you're trying to get back into my hotel room, you win! See you around 5:30 tomorrow.

I put my phone back in my pocket and picked up the socket wrench that Joker had asked for.

“This the one?” I asked as I handed it to him.

“Yeah. You're gonna be a natural, Luke.”

I watched while he tightened — or

loosened, I wasn't quite sure — a bolt on the bike he was fixing up for me. I'd told him that I could probably afford to buy a new one, but he'd insisted that if we worked on one together that he could teach me more. I had enough money in the bank to buy all of the Sons new bikes, but I figured that I should keep that information to myself.

“Well, I don't know about that, but I guess if I pick up a little here and there, the Sons will be more likely to vote me in as a prospect on Sunday.”

Joker put down the wrench and headed over to the refrigerator in the corner of his garage. He pulled out another beer. “Want one?”

“Nah. Little early for me,” I answered, astounded at my biological father’s capacity to consume alcohol.

“Luke,” he said after he’d taken a drink. “You got nothing to worry about on the vote. I’m the President of this MC, and you’re my son. You’ll be voted in.”

I’d learned a lot over the last few days, having spent time with Joker, Zeno, and even with Bug. I’d learned nothing that improved my impression of the VP, and I knew that even though he hadn’t officially made Krystal his old lady, I still probably wasn’t supposed to be taking her out tomorrow night. I’d decided that my game plan was going to

be to beg for forgiveness if I got busted, rather than asking for permission ahead of time.

“Joker, I ‘m pretty sure Bug doesn’t like me. It only takes two votes to keep me out, right?”

Joker laughed. “Son, Bug don’t like anyone. I’ve already talked to J.C., and he’s gonna to what I’ve told him to do. Everyone else will fall in line. Trust me.”

“And you’re sure I should pitch the dispensary idea on the same day?”

“Yup. Every one of us is hurting for money. You give us a plan, and the Sons will be on your side. Even Bug will see the sense of keeping you around if you’re

giving the MC some income.”

“Yeah. I talked to my buddy in California last night, and he said it’s going to take some time to get the license approved. Since the government’s involved, everything will take longer.”

“He give you any ideas about where to get some merchandise before we get our own supply planted and harvested?”

“Yeah. I wanted to talk to you about that.”

“Shoot.” Joker went back to work on the bike.

“He knows a couple of guys in Arizona who’re growing the same strain that we did in college. He said that he

can hook me up with them and that they can probably sell us enough high-quality weed to get the whole state high.”

“Sounds good.”

“I thought we could maybe take a ride to Arizona. I think I’m ready for a longer ride.”

“Well, we can bring it up in church on Sunday. See if any of the guys want to go along.”

“I figure some of them might be pissed that I’m gonna be a prospect after only having been around for a week, and that might give us a way to get to know one another.”

Joker shook his head. “Look, Luke, I

get what you're saying, but I wouldn't talk like that — all touchy-feely, psychology bullshit — in the meeting.”

I must have looked a little taken aback.

“We're brothers, but we don't usually talk about bonding and shit. You just do it, but you don't really talk about it. Make sense?”

I nodded and thought for a few minutes while Joker started up the bike and listened for something only he could hear. While he made minute adjustments to fix whatever problem he'd perceived, I realized that I had a lot farther to go than I'd realized. I wasn't just going to have to learn how to ride and maintain a

bike. I was going to have to learn what it meant to be a part of a whole new culture. I wasn't used to thinking of women as property or feelings as embarrassing. The last thing I wanted was for Bug to tell me to man up.

Joker killed the engine.

“I get it, man. I can do this,” I told him with confidence.

“Of course you can. You're my son.”

The door from the house opened, and Sable walked out into the garage, saving me from having to respond to Joker's statement. I was happy that he was so enthusiastic about meeting me and opening his home and his MC to me, but it still felt strange. It was almost too

much, too fast.

“Beer for breakfast, Daniel?”

“Mind your own business, woman,” Joker replied, rolling his eyes.

“Did you get everything set up?” I asked Sable.

“Yup. We have an appointment at ten tomorrow morning at Cannabis Club, and another meeting at two with THC Healing.”

“Great. It was a good idea to see if we could talk to the owners of some other dispensaries. Hopefully, they can give us some tips about getting our license as quickly as possible.”

“Yeah, I went to high school with the

guy at the THC place, and Moses had done a lot of tattoo work for him and his friends, so he was happy to see us.” Sable sat down on the steps that led from the house to the garage floor. “I wonder what Moses would have thought about all of this.”

I was riveted. Everyone in the club still talked about Moses like the man was a god. No one seemed to know exactly what a federal agent had been doing in his house, or why both Moses and the agent had ended up dead, but I was sure curious. I didn't want to ask a bunch of questions, but I listened carefully anytime the topic came up.

Joker pointedly avoided Sable's

glare while he opened another beer.

“Something had been going on with that boy. I don’t know exactly what, but I think he would have supported Luke’s idea.”

Sable studied Joker. “I think so, too,” she agreed. “And it’ll be nice to have some legitimate income coming in.”

Joker looked like he was going to argue with Sable, but he closed his mouth. “You’re right,” he agreed. “It will. I just hope it’s as profitable as Luke thinks it will be.”

“Oh, there’s no doubt,” I said, absolutely certain I was right. “The only people who fail in this business are the

ones who don't have sound business plans, or the ones who smoke up all their profits. Neither is the case here. I can write business plans in my sleep, and I'm going to make sure that we run things on the up-and-up."

Sable smiled. "You're going to need to decide who you're going to have work the grow operation and the shop."

Joker looked at Sable like she had three heads. "I don't recall asking you for you input on club business."

Sable rolled her eyes. "Whatever, Joker."

"Actually, I was thinking about asking Sable to help with getting started growing, and she was nice enough to

make the appointments for tomorrow.”

Sable stood up. “Or maybe Daniel will take up gardening, and he’ll be able to help you. He has such a green thumb.” She left her sarcasm behind as she headed back inside.

“You’re gonna learn,” Joker said. “It don’t pay to get women involved with club business. Next thing you know, they’re gonna be telling you how to run things and trying to meddle in shit that’s none of their concern.”

I wasn’t about to get into a debate about gender politics with Joker. “I hear you, man,” I said.

Joker clearly wanted to make a

point. “Look, Luke, if you want to ask your mother some bullshit gardening questions to make her feel better, then go right ahead. But she’s not involved in club business.”

“She’s going with me to visit the shops tomorrow. Is that okay?” I wasn’t really asking permission, so much as trying to figure out where the boundaries were.

“I guess. Your mother’s actually pretty smart about money, but don’t tell her I said that.”

I laughed. “You know, she might actually like to hear you say something nice every once in a while.”

“Yeah? Well, maybe she shouldn’t

be such a bitch all the time. Look, Luke, I know she's your mother, but Sons don't get involved with members' relationships with their old ladies. That's my business."

Good grief, there were a lot of rules involved in being an outlaw biker.

Chapter 18

Krystal

I checked my phone for the time and was relieved to see that it wasn't seven quite yet. The day had been a blur, and I was so tired that I could just crawl in bed and not come out for a week. I'd gone to my two classes, worked the lunch shift at the Taphouse, gone grocery shopping, and had freshened up before I loaded my groceries in the car and headed for Bug's house.

Bug wasn't exactly an adventurous eater, and to be honest, I hadn't been either until I'd started the new job. Since

then, I'd tried all sorts of things I'd never had before, and I was going to try a couple of new recipes that night. I'd also packed a secret ingredient in my purse — two sleeping pills, crushed up as fine as I could get them. I figured that I'd mix them with some whiskey before dinner, or just sprinkle them on Bug's steak if all else failed. I just had to make sure I kept his plate separate from my own!

I pulled into Bug's drive and knew better than to expect him to help me carry stuff inside. I threw my backpack over my shoulder, not that I planned to spend the night, but I didn't want Bug to know that. I grabbed the bags of groceries and headed inside.

“Jesus, Christ,” Bug said as I set the groceries on the counter. “How long is dinner gonna take? I’m fuckin’ starving.”

“Lovely to see you, too, darling,” I said, knowing that I was taking the risk of pissing Bug off, but unwilling to just let his rudeness slide.

He must have realized that he’d really been rude. “It was nice of you to offer to cook dinner,” he mumbled as he left the kitchen.

I was about to get dinner going when I looked at the sink and realized that it was completely full of dirty dishes. The fuck I was going to do them. I mixed up some cornbread, stirred in some finely chopped jalapeño and tomato, and put it

in the oven to bake. I went outside, stepping over empty beer bottles on the back patio, and turned on the propane grill to let it warm up. The bagged salad I'd brought wouldn't take more than a minute or two to throw together, so I figured I had a little time.

I found Bug in the living room, watching a television show about Navy SEALs.

“Want a drink?” I asked, hoping that I could knock him out sooner, rather than later.

“Is the Pope Catholic?”

I laughed, even though I'd heard his lame attempt at a joke hundreds of times. “Whiskey or beer?”

“Maker’s on the rocks, sweetheart,” he answered, without even looking away from the television.

I saw the rest of my life spread out before me if I didn’t make some changes. I saw a man who called me “sweetheart” only when he wanted another drink, and then only if he was in a good mood. I saw bruises that he would tell me were my fault. I saw Bug unable to get it up until he could make me cry out in pain. I saw myself — dropping out of school to take care of Bug’s children and raising a son who would treat women as badly as Bug treated me. It was right at that moment — when Bug had actually said something halfway nice to me — that I

knew I had to get out. One way or another, I had to force myself to walk away from Bug and find something better for myself.

I wasn't sure when, but I knew it had to happen.

On my way back into the kitchen, I picked up the bottle of Maker's Mark on the dining room table. I scanned the table top — not that anyone would ever be able to eat a meal on it, covered with junk mail and bills, most of which had past due notices in red ink at the top. If the mail was anything to go by, Bug's money troubles sure weren't getting any better.

Pretty sure that nothing would

separate Bug from the sofa other than a nuclear bomb, or perhaps the urge to pee, I fished the ziplock bag from my purse. I looked at the white powder and tried to decide how much to put in the drink. I wasn't concerned about his safety; I knew that two sleeping pills wouldn't kill him, even if I mixed them with whiskey. I was more worried that they would make the whiskey taste different and that he wouldn't finish the drink. I needed him to drink more than a sip to knock him out.

I grabbed a glass from the counter and put half of the powder in. If I had to, I'd fix him a second drink. I went to the freezer and opened it to find four empty ice cube trays and only two ice cubes in

the bucket. I sighed, filled the empty trays, telling myself that I wouldn't have to clean up after Bug for much longer, and I dropped the cubes in the glass. I topped it off with several ounces of whiskey, stirred it until the pill had completely dissolved, and headed back out to deliver my cocktail.

I put the glass in Bug's hand without a word and walked back outside to clean off the grill. I didn't wait around for the thanks I knew I wouldn't get. Grill scraped clean, I headed back inside to get the steaks, and I was pleased to see that the glass of whiskey was nearly half empty already. If I could get him drunk and sleepy quickly enough, I wouldn't even have to bother trying to act like I

wanted to sleep with him, a bonus for sure.

Salad in bowls, mine with the caesar dressing that had come in the bag, Bug's with ranch — the only dressing he would eat — I called into the living room. “Bug, dinner will be ready in five minutes. Where do you want to eat?”

I knew what he'd answer, but I figured I'd give him a choice.

“My show's on, and besides, that table's a fuckin' mess,” he called back, like it was my fault he'd stacked all his junk on the table.

“Coming right up, my lord and master,” I muttered under my breath.

“Huh?” he hollered from the living room.

“Ready in a minute,” I said as I went back out to get the steaks off the grill.

I pulled my steak off when it was about medium and left Bug’s on longer, until I was certain he wouldn’t see any pink in the middle. I plated everything and carried Bug’s in to the living room. He hadn’t bothered to even set up the tray tables, so I set down his dinner, set up his table, and put his plate and salad bowl in front of him.

He looked at the food. “What the fuck did you put in the cornbread?”

“I added some fresh tomato and jalapeño. That’s the way we serve it at

Falling Rock, and people love it.”

Bug simply grunted, and I was actually surprised that he didn't order me to remove it from his plate. Maybe the sleeping pill had chilled him out a little.

“Enjoy,” I said as I headed back to the kitchen for my own food.

The show on TV was about crazy people who hoard food and build shelters in their backyards to prepare for the end of the world.

“I think these people know something, and the government's trying to cover it up,” Bug said, with his mouth full of food.

“Some cover[up,]” I said. “It’s on television.”

“Like you fuckin’ know,” he snorted. “You think you’re so smart just ‘cause you’re going to college, but you ain’t got no common sense.”

I listened to Bug insult me while he chowed down on the dinner that I’d made him (and he hadn’t bothered to thank me for.)

“You just wait. I’m gonna build me a shelter, and you’ll be the first one knocking on my door, beggin’ me to take you in when things go to hell.”

I had no worries about the end of the world, and I knew for sure that Bug wasn’t actually going to get off his ass

and do a fuckin' thing about it. He'd been saying stuff like this for years, and he'd yet to lift a finger.

“Really?” I asked, knowing that I shouldn't, but unable to stop myself. “You're going to build a shelter? With what money?” I knew it was a mistake as soon as the words left my mouth. I never should have mentioned money.

Bug's eyes narrowed. “Why are you asking about money?”

I hoped that I didn't look as nervous as I felt. “Well, you've been bitching about how you don't have any money, and now you're going to start building a shelter? That just sounds a little crazy.”

Bug stood up and nearly knocked over his tray table, steadying himself on the arm of the couch. He looked a little lightheaded, and I hoped like hell that the sleeping pill was working. He walked out of the room and into the kitchen, and I could hear him open the refrigerator and pull out a beer. I hear the sound of the bottle cap hitting the counter, where I was sure he'd expect me to pick it up later, and Bug walked slowly back into the room.

“Krystal,” he said, in a low voice that gave me chills. “My money is none of your fuckin’ business. We ain’t married, and if we was, you still wouldn’t be privy to club business. You hear me?”

I wasn't about to provoke him any further. "Yes."

He sat back down, and I suppressed a sigh of relief. He polished off his steak and most of his salad, leaving the cornbread (which was delicious, if I did say so myself) untouched. He finished off his beer, set it on the table, and announced that he was finished.

I correctly interpreted his statement to mean that he wanted me to clear his dishes, so I left my half-eaten dinner there, while I moved his dirty dishes next to the sink.

"Want another whiskey?" I called, hoping he would.

"Yeah."

I emptied the last of the crushed sleeping pill into the glass, added whiskey and a splash of water, and brought it to him. “You’re out of ice. Those trays don’t fill themselves.”

“Whatever,” he said, taking the glass and throwing back half of it in one long drink.

I went back into the kitchen and put the dishes I’d used in the dishwasher, leaving all of the other dirty ones right where they’d been when I walked in. I took my time, and when I’d finished up as much cleaning as I was willing to do, I tiptoed into the living room, hoping to find Bug having trouble keeping his eyes open.

Not only were his eyes closed, but his mouth was hanging open, snores starting to rival the television volume. Perfect. I could start my search.

I went over to the dining room table and reached in all of the pockets of his leather jacket that he'd thrown over one of the chairs. Nothing. I quietly went into his bedroom, where I knew he stashed his weed and cash sometimes, and I went through all of the dresser and nightstand drawers. I did find weed, but no cash.

“Goddammit,” I whispered. “Where would he have put it?”

I realized that he may have stashed the money in the saddlebags of his bike,

and the thought of touching his bike without permission nearly scared me to death. If my rent money was anywhere on that bike, though, I simply had to find it.

Walking back through the living room, I was amused to see a little drool starting at the edge of Bug's open mouth, and I hoped like hell that I had a few more minutes before he woke up. I hurried through to the kitchen and quietly let myself into the garage. The bike was there, of course, and I knew the keys would be in the ignition. I opened the saddlebags, and sure enough, there was my money. I didn't stop to count it, but I shoved the roll of twenties into my pocket and got the hell out of the garage,

remembering to close the door quietly.

Without even bothering to check to make sure Bug was okay, I grabbed my purse and headed out the door. I started my car and as I pulled away from Bug's house, I felt scared to death and fiercely proud of myself all at the same time. I'd done it! I'd taken back what was mine and kept Bug from stealing from me and treating me like shit.

Feeling like I'd just climbed Mount Everest, I headed home, proud that my plan had worked and that I'd be able to pay my rent.

Chapter 19

Luke

Friday, May 10, 2013

The first thing I thought of — even before I opened my eyes — was Krystal. I stretched, my hands and feet barely able to reach the corners of the enormous king bed, and I wondered what the chances were that I'd be waking up alone tomorrow morning. The notion of her, naked and asleep in my bed, gave me a hard-on that wouldn't have been quite so uncomfortable if she'd been there. Since she wasn't, I took matters into my own hands and

decided to hit the hotel gym before I picked Sable up for the weed shop visits.

Just before I left, I thought to call down to the front desk and ask them to stock the refrigerator with some champagne and to send up some strawberries shortly before Krystal was supposed to arrive. If strawberries and champagne didn't impress a girl used to hanging out with dirty bikers who sucked down Coors Light like there was no tomorrow, I didn't know what would.

“Hey, Sable,” I called from the Jeep as she walked down the drive toward me.

“Mornin’,” she said cheerfully.

“Joker here?” I asked, since the garage door was closed.

“Oh, yeah,” she answered, clearly irritated. “I doubt he’ll be up before noon.”

“Was he out late?” I asked, already regretting have brought it up.

“Luke, that man still acts like he was in his twenties and still drinking with his Marine Corps buddies. I’m not sure if he’s ever gonna grow the fuck up and start taking better care of himself.”

I didn’t say a word. I remembered Joker’s warning to stay out of other Sons’ relationships, and I kept my mouth

shut.

Sable looked over at me as she fastened her seat belt. “I can see he’s already gotten to you. That you’re learning the ‘stay out of your brother’s business’ bullshit that they all live by, but you mark my words. If that man doesn’t start taking better care of himself, he’s gonna end up in the hospital with a heart attack. He isn’t exactly a young man anymore.”

I hoped she’d change the subject, and I didn’t say anything, just letting the silence follow us out of their neighborhood. Finally, after a few miles, I decided to end the awkwardness.

“So you know both of the people

we're meeting with today?"

"Yeah. Bobby Findlay owns the first store, and we went to school together."

"And his business is doing well?"

"When I talked to him yesterday, he said he's making way more than when he ran his construction company, and he has a fraction of the overhead."

I smiled and nodded, her conversation confirming what I'd heard from my friend in California. "I really think this could be the answer to the MC's problems," I told her. "And my ticket in."

Sable got quiet, which I was quickly learning meant that something was

wrong.

“What?” I asked, mentally bracing myself for the lecture I feared was coming.

“Luke, I know that I don’t really count as your mother since I abandoned you, but will you at least listen to me for a minute?”

“Sure.”

“Luke, even though I had nothing to do with it, I couldn’t be prouder of you and what you’ve accomplished. You have a college degree and a professional job. You wear a tie to work, for heaven’s sake. Your father owns one tie, and he’s worn the same on to every funeral we’ve gone to as long as I’ve

known him. And funerals aren't that uncommon, Luke.

“You never met your cousin, Moses, but he was just a couple of years younger than you. He was smart and successful, and he's dead now. He'd be alive if it weren't for the Savage Sons. This club won't be good for you, Luke. I couldn't be happier to have met you, and I want more than anything to continue to be a part of you life, but you should go back to the life you've built for yourself fin Arizona. I'll come visit, if you'll let me, but I'm scared about what the Sons will do to you.” Sable exhaled, like she'd just gotten something off her chest that had been weighing her down.

My first instinct was to tell Sable something that would keep her from worrying, and I realized that that instinct — my tendency to be a peacemaker, to try to make everyone happy — was one of the main things that made me different from the rest of the Savage Sons. I realized that I wanted to be different, wanted to live more like the Sons did — doing what I wanted and letting the chips fall where they may. I realized that I wanted to feel like I did on the bike — wind, sun, and nothing else. All the other bullshit — what Sable thought, what the people at my job were going to say if I came back and told them I was quitting — I just needed to let it roll off my back. Let it go. That was going to be my new

attitude.

“So I buy mostly female seeds from this guy up in Oregon. You know why you want female plants, right?”

Bob Findlay looked exactly like what I'd expected. He was about fifty-fifty salt and pepper, with a full head of hair pulled back in a loose ponytail. He wore a faded tie-dye t-shirt, jeans with frayed bottoms, and Birkenstocks. He was very proud of his plants.

“Yeah,” I answered. “I grew some kick-ass bud in college. I get the higher yield and no seeds thing. So how much of what you sell is your own bud?” I asked.

He'd showed us around the store — pointing out the lollipops, vaporizers, brownies, and nearly thirty varieties of marijuana — before taking us back to his house, the site of his grow operation.

“Depends,” Bob answered, bending over to smell an enormous bud.

“Sometimes it's mostly ours, and sometimes it's not. I have a kush strain that's been pretty hot, and when that's around I can't keep it in stock. When I sell out, I sometimes buy from other growers.”

Sable had been stunned by the variety of edible forms of THC-laden items for sale. “And the lollipops and gummies? You buy all of those?”

“Yeah. You see a lot of the same brands from store to store here, except for the baked goods. A lot of growers bake their own stuff, and some even partner with local bakeries. It’s turned out to be a bigger part of our business than we’d thought.”

I knew it was a far cry from growing a few plants in college to handling both the growing and the operation of the store, but I was pretty sure that with some help, I was going to be able to make it work.

“So you’re pretty friendly with the other folks who own dispensaries?” I asked.

“For the most part,” Bob answered.

“There’s plenty of room for all of us to make a living. We got a few bad apples, same as any other business, but you’ll find that most of us are pretty mellow.”

I laughed and looked at Sable to see if she had any other questions.

“Bobby, we sure do appreciate your taking the time to talk to us.” Sable put her hand on Bob’s arm, and it was obvious that he was far from immune to her charms.

“Sable, honey, you know I’d do anything for you. You still married to that biker of yours?”

“Yup,” Sable answered. “Joker and I are still together. In fact, we’re gonna make this something of a family

business.”

“Well, you and Luke are welcome to call me if there’s anything you need. You have a grow problem, or if you’re having trouble tracking down the seeds you want, you just let me know.”

I held out my hand. “Thanks, Bob,” I said. “It’s been helpful.”

After lunch, we headed over to THC Healing, a shop run by a woman who also owned the new age bookstore next door. We walked inside and the vibe was completely different from Bob’s store, which had a serious bud fanatic atmosphere. This second store felt more like a place you’d go to have your palms

read, and I half expected to see a fortune teller emerge from the back room.

“Can I help you?”

I turned to see a tall woman who had a stuffed dragon on her shoulder.

“Sable,” she said with a huge grin, coming out from behind the counter to give Sable a hug. “You look fantastic.”

“Thanks, mama. The tea you gave me has done wonders for my hot flashes.” Sable turned to me. “Luke, this is my friend, Ellomere. She owns the shop.”

I shook the woman’s hand. “Nice to meet you. Your shop’s sure different from the other we just visited.”

Ellomere laughed, a deep and sexy

sound. “We’ve positioned ourselves a little differently from other dispensaries. We focus on the healing aspects of marijuana.” She leaned a little closer. “Not that we balk at selling you a little somethin’ somethin’ just to get you high.”

I laughed with her, and I could see why Sable had wanted me to see two very different kinds of stores. “For medicinal purposes, eh?” I asked as I looked over the selection of brownies made with fair trade organic chocolate.

“You know it. One of the benefits our store has is that there’s a medical doctor next door during all of our business hours. You want to come in but

don't have a medical card? Not a problem here. A consultation fee and a few minutes puts you in business.”

Sable looked at me. “I think it would be worthwhile to find a location where we can do the same thing. Employ a doctor to be on call so that anyone who wants one can get a red card.”

“Makes sense,” I said. “So do you grow your own?”

Ellomere shook her head. “I grow a few plants at home for personal use, but I don't have time or space to grow as much as we sell here. I have several reliable growers nearby, and I have some great sources for some hard-to-get imports.”

“So I’d guess your margin’s a little lower than shops that grow their own.”

“It is, but we’re doing surprisingly well. My markup on the rare strains is a little higher, so it evens out.”

I laughed. “Wow. It’s just like talking to someone in any other business. I’m a little surprised.”

Ellomere went behind the counter and set a vaporizer on the counter. “It is a business, but it’s a business with some unique benefits. Care to sample anything?”

Sable walked over to the jars that held buds and started reading the labels.

I shook my head “I’m good, but

thanks. I have a date tonight, and I'll need a nap first if I smoke anything now.”

Sable turned to me, her face showing her surprise. “A date? You've only been in town a few days.”

I knew that telling Sable I was meeting Krystal would start a complicated conversation, and really, it was none of her business. “Yeah. I met her my first night here. We're going to the baseball game.”

Sable just shrugged and asked Ellomere about a couple of the kinds of weed she had for sale, settling on one to try. We spent about another half hour with Ellomere, and I discovered that she

was a really cool chick. Sable smoked a couple of different kinds of bud and bought a quarter ounce before we left.

“Thanks for the information. It was nice to meet you,” I said as we were heading out.

“Anytime, Luke,” Ellomere said. “You need anything, just give me a call.”

Overall, I’d been surprised by how friendly the business was. I’d been worried that folks would be territorial, which could add some complications and expense to opening the Sons’ operation. Knowing how helpful and friendly both Ellomere and Bob had been made me hopeful that getting our dispensary up and running would be a

breeze.

As I dropped Sable off, I let myself think about how much I was looking forward to seeing Krystal again. It had been far too long since I'd seen her in that awful confrontation with that little jackass, Bug. I hoped she'd finally dumped the guy since he was clearly no good for her. I figured that I 'd have to find some way to bring the subject up since I wasn't the kind of guy who would make a move on another man's girl.

Chapter 20

Krystal

I'd felt like a million dollars all day long. I'd gone in and taken back what was mine, and I was gonna be goddamned if Bug was gonna steal from me again. I'd paid my landlord — a day early, thank you very much — and I was pretty sure that I'd aced the test I'd taken in my morning class.

And then there was Luke.

I'd spent all day fantasizing about getting to spend the evening with the tall, blond, sexy man, and I couldn't wait. I'd

talked Mark into letting me leave a little early so I'd have time to run home, shower, and change before I drove back to meet Luke. I'd been looking forward to getting ready, and I was planning to look absolutely perfect before I left my apartment.

My only worry was Bug. As good as I felt about what I'd done, in the back of my mind I'd been a paranoid mess, worried that he was going to show up at my apartment in the morning or walk into my classroom or the Taphouse. So far, so good, though. He hadn't called or texted, and as I raced home and pulled into the parking lot, I saw no sign of his bike. I knew I wouldn't completely get away with what I'd done, but I hoped

that I'd at least get to enjoy my evening.

It had occurred to me to wonder if he was alive, but I was pretty darn sure that two sleeping pills — even if you mixed them into whiskey — wouldn't kill him. I figured that if he were dead, then the cops would have shown up at my door, and since they hadn't, I figured he was probably just licking his wounds, embarrassed and probably plotting his revenge.

I made sure I locked the deadbolt and double-checked to make sure all of my windows were locked before I got in the shower. When I got out, I checked my phone — still no word from Bug. I stood naked in front of my closet, trying to

decide what to wear. I wanted sexy as hell, but casual, since we were going to a ball game. I decided on purple and black — Rockies' colors, and I made sure that I had underwear to match.

Pulling on my favorite black boots and doing a final check on my makeup, I decided that if Luke didn't like what he saw, then he had to be blind. I got a drink from the kitchen, and as I was putting the glass upside down in the dish drainer, I looked out the window over my sink. Clear as day, I saw Bug turning into my parking lot on his bike.

Fuck.

I grabbed my purse and keys and tried to calm myself down enough to

figure out a plan. I knew that I had about twenty seconds before he started pounding on my front door. I was on the ground level, though, and I thought if I was very lucky, that maybe I could slip out the sliding glass door and get to my car before he could see me. It would mean leaving my slider unlocked in a neighborhood that wasn't the best, but it was the only alternative I could see to having Bug beat me, or worse.

I stood at the back door, waiting to hear his fists on the heavy metal door that opened from the common area of my building. I could hear him coming — heard the exterior door open, and heard his feet descend the five steps to my front door. The second he knocked, I

silently slid open the sliding glass door, closed it quietly and took off around the building toward the parking lot.

Pausing at the corner to make sure he hadn't come back outside, I made a run for my car. I prayed that the engine would start, and as I pulled out of the parking lot, I looked in my rearview mirror. Bug stood on the sidewalk, watching me drive away, hands on his hips, radiating a fury I'd never seen before.

My nervous energy emerged, and I laughed like a crazy woman as I drove off, knowing that I'd just delayed the inevitable showdown that would have to occur, but quite pleased with myself

regardless.

“Next stop, the Ritz,” I howled, realizing that I was on the verge of tears. I didn’t want to ruin my mascara, so I forced myself to calm down and pay attention to the road.

I looked down at my phone and saw two missed calls from Bug. I wasn’t sure what to do, but I knew he couldn’t reach through the phone and hurt me, so I called him back.

“You rang?” I said when he answered.

“You’re a stupid, fucking cunt, and I’m gonna make you wish you’d never been born.”

“What seems to be the trouble, sugar?” I figured I might as well have some fun, since there was no way I could calm him down.

“I’m gonna fuckin’ kill you, but first I’m gonna fuck you until you bleed, you fuckin’ whore.”

“Well, as delightful as that sounds, I’m afraid I have other plans for this evening.”

“Go ahead, you fuckin’ cunt. You go ahead and laugh. I’m comin’ for you when you least expect it. You ‘re gonna think you’re all safe and sound, and you’re gonna wake up to find my cock in your ass, you fuckin’ slut.”

Now I was pissed and more than a

little scared. “You don’t scare me, Bug. I’ll tell Joker what you’ve said, and he’ll stop you.”

“Not a one of my brothers will believe a whore instead of me. I’ll tell ‘em you’re all pissed because I won’t make you my old lady. I’ll tell ‘em that your old pussy is too worn out, and I don’t want it no more.”

“Fuck you, Bug. I just took back what was mine, you piece of shit.”

“When you least expect it, cunt. When you least expect it.”

He hung up and I nearly had to pull over because I was shaking from head to toe. I was absolutely terrified, and I

believed every word of what he'd said. Bug wasn't the smartest guy, but he was certainly mean enough to at least attempt to do the horrible things he'd promised. All the pride I'd felt at having taken my money back evaporated into a cloud of fear and helplessness. I felt like I couldn't breathe, like I was going to pass out. I found the nearest gas station and pulled into it, managing to get my car into a parking space before I completely lost it.

I opened the car door and got out, gasping for air and starting to feel light-headed. What had I done? I'd been all proud of myself, thinking that I'd finally stood up for myself and that I'd taken a big step toward making better choices in

my life, and look what it had gotten me. I finally caught my breath and started deliberately slowing my breathing down, trying to get myself under control. My heart was racing, and I realized that I needed help. There was no way I could handle Bug by myself, and he was right — I couldn't rely on the Savage Sons to protect me. They'd take his side, every last one of them.

Finally calmed down enough to drive again, I got back in the car and wondered if maybe Luke could be the answer. Even though his father was the MC's President, Luke seemed like a genuinely nice guy, and he'd clearly been bothered by the way Bug treated me the night Luke and I had run into one

another at the clubhouse. Part of me wanted to be independent enough to handle everything all on my own, and part of me just wanted some big, strong man to come in and fix all of my problems. If he looked good enough to eat, that was even better.

Feeling better about the plan I was working through in my mind, I got back on the road toward Luke and the Ritz Carlton.

Chapter 21

Luke

When I heard the knock on the door, I nearly jumped out of my skin, even though I'd been pacing around the enormous suite waiting for Krystal to arrive. Champagne and strawberries were ready on the top of the bar, and I looked in the full-length mirror that covered one of the walls in the sitting area. I'd had the laundry service at the hotel press my dress shirt, so my white shirt was crisp and perfect, untucked over perfectly broken in jeans and flip-flops. The look was casual and polished,

the perfect contrast to the biker guys that Krystal usually hung out with. The irony of the fact that I was about to join the same MC wasn't lost on me, but I really wanted to impress Krystal.

I opened the door and was reminded how stunning Krystal was. I knew that she realized that she was a pretty girl, but I wasn't sure that she knew just how exceptionally gorgeous she was.

“Hello,” I said as I stepped back to let her enter. “And wow.”

Krystal seemed a little off. She looked fantastic, a fitted purple shirt unbuttoned just enough to show a decent amount of cleavage that made my mouth water. She wore fitted black jeans and

boots with big metal buckles and stacked heels that added at least a couple of inches to her height. Her dark hair was perfectly messy, and I was pleased to see that she didn't have a bunch of lipstick on. Those lips were begging to be kissed. But Krystal was acting a little odd, like she was nervous, or like something was bothering her.

“You okay?” I asked as she walked inside my room.

Krystal looked at me like my question had surprised her. “Not really, to tell you the truth. I've had a crazy day, and I could really use a drink.”

“What a coincidence,” I said, as I waved her over to the love seat, which

had a great view of the city and mountains. “Do you like champagne?”

“I do like champagne,” she answered, bending over to sit down and revealing another tantalizing glimpse of her lower back tattoo. “But I’d probably drink anything right now.”

“Want to talk about it?” I asked, as I opened the bottle.

She sat for a moment before she answered, and it looked like she was blinking back tears. “Not right now. Maybe in a little while. Is that okay?”

I handed her a flute of champagne and set the bowl of chilled strawberries on the table in front of the love seat. “Absolutely, that’s okay. You take all

the time you need, and if you don't want to talk about it at all, that's your business. Just let me know if there's anything I can do to help.”

She gave me a sad little half-smile and held up her glass. “Cheers,” she said as I clinked her glass with my own.

I took a sip and watched as Krystal downed more than half the glass. I stood up and went to get the bottle to top her off.

“Thanks,” she said. “Not very classy, I know, but if I get a drink in me, I'll chill out a little. Right now, I feel a little scattered.”

“No problem,” I said, trying

unsuccessfully not to think about whether or not my chances with Krystal might be better if she had a couple of drinks. Hell, my chances of being able to muster the courage to make a move might be better if I had a few drinks!

“This is delicious,” she said, looking at the tiny bubbles in her glass. “What’s the name of it?”

“I didn’t even look,” I said, picking up the bottle. “Wow, that’s a lot of French,” I said, as I tried to figure out how to pronounce everything on the label without looking like an idiot. “Pommery Cuvee Louise,” I finally announced, fairly certain that I’d said it somewhere close to right.

“I haven’t had a lot of champagne, but this one’s my favorite,” Krystal said with a flirtatious smile.

I leaned forward and tucked a piece of her hair behind her ear. “Maybe it’s the company.”

“No,” she answered, wicked smile on her face. “I’m pretty sure it’s the champagne. Or maybe the view.”

She leaned back against the cushion at the end of the loveseat, and her shirt stretched open a little between the buttons over her breasts. I caught a glimpse of black lace over the curve of her breast, and I realized that Krystal was watching me watch her.

She sat up and leaned closer to me.

“Thanks for the drink. I’ve actually been looking forward to this evening all week.”

All I could see were her lips, full and tempting. I made myself look away.

“Me, too.” I tried to discreetly adjust myself inside my jeans, and I was glad that my untucked shirt hid the fact that I was completely erect. She was intoxicating, and I wanted her. I realized that I might even want her badly enough to make a move even though she belonged to someone else, at least partially.

“Have you spent any more time with Sable and Joker?”

Goddammit, I'd missed another chance.

I polished off my glass of champagne and refilled it. "Actually, I've spent a lot of time with them."

"Going well?"

"Surprisingly well. Sable is a little more reserved than Joker, but he's acting like we're best buddies who've known each other for years."

Krystal smiled. "That sounds like Sable and Joker. She always takes her time — evaluates everything, and Joker just dives in headfirst. They're so completely different that I can't imagine how they've stayed married for as long as they have."

“Yeah, I see some of that. The Sons’ money troubles have put quite a strain on their relationship.”

Krystal’s expression showed her surprise. “Joker has talked to you about club business? That surprises me.” She took another long drink of champagne and topped off both our glasses again. “Apparently this brand of champagne evaporates quickly,” Krystal laughed as she poured the last of the wine into my glass. She brought the bottle to her lips and licked the last drop from the mouth of the bottle, maintaining eye contact with me while she slowly set the bottle on the table.

“I just lost all capacity for rational

thought,” I said as I watched her take a sip from her glass. It was like watching a movie made exclusively for me — a beautiful woman seated next to me who was seducing me without lifting a finger. I wanted her more than I’d ever wanted any other woman, but I knew that she came with complications. Her attachment to the MC and specifically to Bug meant that she really should be off limits, especially for someone who hoped to be voted into the MC in a couple of days. I felt like a bit of a pussy, with a gorgeous woman in front of me who was clearly interested. All I had to do was teach out and take what I wanted, but here I was — worrying about whether or not I should.

It was like Krystal could read my mind.

She set her glass on the table and leaned toward me, giving me a quick look down her shirt. “I have a crazy idea.”

I swallowed and tried to drag my gaze away from the curve of her breast. “What’s that?”

“Have you already bought baseball tickets?”

For a second I had no idea what she was talking about, having completely lost myself in the delicious thought of unbuttoning the rest of the buttons on her shirt. “Um, no, I haven’t. They weren’t sold out, so I figured we could just get

them at the gate.”

“I say we blow off the ball game, stay here, drink all the champagne they’ll send us, and order room service for dinner.”

“You’re not just beautiful,” I said. “You’re brilliant, too. I think that’s a fantastic idea.”

Before I could say another word, Krystal reached out, took my glass from my hand, and set it on the table. She leaned toward me. “If you’re not going to make the first move,” she whispered, “I will.”

Krystal kissed me, and it took my breath away. She smelled like soap and

something a little spicy, and the gentle pressure of her lips on mine threatened to make me lose all control. She slid her hand onto my thigh, and I couldn't help myself. I reached up and tangled my hand in her hair, pulling her closer to me. I felt Krystal open her mouth slightly, and lightly touched the tip of her tongue with mine, and I imagined the other places I wanted to put my tongue.

Without warning, Krystal pulled away and stood up. She kicked off her boots, faced me, and before I knew it, she straddled me and sat down with her knees on either side of my hips. I knew she'd feel my erection, and all I could think about was wanting to get her as turned on as I was. I reached up and

pulled her down to cover her lips with mine again, and as she leaned into the kiss, I could feel her rubbing against my cock that suddenly felt too large for my jeans.

Fingers wound through her hair again, I pulled back long enough to look at her. “Goddamn, you are gorgeous.”

Krystal held my gaze as she reached up and unbuttoned a single button on her shirt, revealing the curve of both breasts and a glimpse of black lace. “I’ll get you started, Luke, but if you want me, you’re going to have to take me.”

I leaned forward and kissed her neck very softly, savoring her soft skin and her delicious smell. Krystal started to

breathe a little faster, and I could feel her back arch as she leaned into the kiss. I'd clearly found a spot she liked. I thought about unbuttoning her shirt the rest of the way while I kissed her neck, but I wanted to watch while I revealed the amazing body that she'd kept covered up.

“Oh, don't stop,” Krystal said, sounding disappointed that I'd lifted my lips from her neck.

I laughed. “Don't worry. There's more where that came from. I just think you're wearing far too much in the way of clothes. Mind if I fix that?”

Krystal rolled her eyes, and I couldn't tell if she was really irritated or

just playing with me.

“Jesus, Luke. Do you have to ask? If you want to see me naked, just make it happen.”

I looked at Krystal sitting on my lap, pressed against my hard cock, and I decided that if I was ever going to learn how to take what I wanted — be tough enough to fit in with the Savage Sons — that right that moment, with a gorgeous girl who’d just offered herself to me — that was the time to start. Fuck doing what I thought I should. I wanted Krystal ... whether she was still with Bug or not ... and I was gonna take her. Fuck self control. I was going to lose myself in her and refuse to have regrets.

Part of me wanted to throw her on the floor, tear off her clothes and fuck her hard, regardless of whether or not she was ready. I wasn't going to act like a complete animal, though, and I wanted her to be as turned on as I was. I unbuttoned the rest of her shirt, and I slipped it off her shoulders, letting it slide to the floor.

“Jesus,” I whispered, as I ran my hands over her, feeling her nipples harden beneath the thin lace of her black bra. Her breasts were larger and fuller than I'd guessed, and her narrow waist was the natural spot for my hands as I turned my face up to kiss her. I ran my hands down to her hips and around to her back, feeling her jeans stretched tight

over her hips and finding her ass. I squeezed as I kissed her hard. “We’re gonna need more champagne.”

I stood up, keeping my hands under her ass to take her with me. I crossed the room in a few steps and reached the wall near one of the six telephones in the suite. I pressed Krystal — her legs wrapped tightly around me — against the wall, and I kissed her hard, pinning her to the wall with the weight of my body. She wound her arms around my neck and pushed her breasts against my chest.

“You still have too many clothes on, and I’ll handle that in a second,” I said just before I picked up the phone. Room

service picked up. “I need another bottle of the champagne that I ordered earlier.” Holding Krystal against the wall while I ordered more wine, thinking about the things I planned to do to the gorgeous and willing girl I had in front of me made me feel powerful, like I was in control, and I liked the feeling. “Knock, and then bring it in and leave it in the living room. I’ll be busy, and I’ll sign for it later this evening when I order dinner.” I hung up without waiting for a response.

“Krystal?”

“Yes?” she answered, looking puzzled.

“By the time I’m finished with you,

you're going to be screaming my name.”

“Promise?” she asked.

“And then I'm gonna do it again.”

I pulled her away from the wall, carried her into the enormous master bedroom, and closed the door.

Chapter 22

Krystal

So maybe Luke wasn't going to be as boring as I'd feared. When he'd asked if he could take my shirt off, I'd nearly gotten up and left the hotel altogether. I had straddled him, for fuck's sake, and I'd completely thrown myself at him, and he asked me if he could undo a few buttons. Maybe I'd been ruined by too many strong, alpha male bikers, but I wanted a man who would take charge. Luke was gorgeous, but if I had to walk him through every step of getting it on, I just wasn't going to bother.

When he'd stood up and held me up against the wall, though, I started to think that there might be some hope for him. I wanted him to want me so much that he'd lose control, that he'd just lose himself in the moment.

He didn't say a word when he set me down on the bedroom floor. I'd been in the room before, but I'd forgotten how huge it was. I stood at the foot of the bed, just where Luke had left me. I was determined to make him take control. He ran his hands over my tits again, and I could hardly stand the fact that there was still lace between his hands and my nipples. He brushed his fingers over me, lightly, but with just enough pressure that a moan escaped from my lips. His soft

touch was somehow more erotic than I'd expected.

“There's something I've been wanting to see from the very first moment I met you,” Luke said, as he teased my nipples, visible through the black lace.

I caught my breath as he squeezed them both, very gently at first, but increasing the pressure before he slid his hands down to my hips.

“And what's that?” I asked, feeling almost a little light headed from the excitement.

Luke turned me around to face the bed, and reached around from behind me to unbutton my jeans. He slid his index

finger beneath the waist of my jeans, and he ran his hand around to my lower back. “This,” he said, when his hand reached the area where my skin was tattooed.

He moved his hands to the front of my jeans again, and he unzipped them and, very slowly, slid them down over my hips, making sure to leave my black and purple lace panties in place. The low rise boy shorts exposed the curve of my ass cheeks, and Luke took his time pulling the jeans down, finally holding them while I stepped out of them. He tossed them onto one of the chairs, and he stepped back to look at me. In the mirror above the headboard, I could see him looking me up and down from

behind, looking like he was starving, and I was something delicious to eat.

I knew the tattoo was gorgeous. I felt the light touch of Luke's hand as he traced the graceful arc of the cherry blossom branch that stretched over the koi pond that held three fish. The cherry blossoms that dotted the water were meant to symbolize the fragility and fleeting nature of life and beauty, or that was what Moses had told me when he'd drawn the design. He'd always had the best eye for tattoos that suited a person perfectly. My work of art was no exception.

“It's gorgeous. Even more beautiful than I'd guessed from the few glimpses

I'd gotten in the bar.”

“Thanks. Your cousin Moses did it, and I love the way he incorporated the Savage Sons symbol into the design in a way that makes it blend in.”

“Oh, wow,” Luke said, as I felt him touch the little “SS” design that Moses had inked into the branch. “I wouldn’t have even noticed it, if you hadn’t pointed it out.”

I turned around. “Perhaps you should study it this evening.”

“Oh, I have every intention of studying every inch of your body, Krystal.” Luke’s voice was low, and it made my feet feel a little weak.

He ran his hands down my arms before he grabbed my ass with both hands, pulling me toward him, pressing me against the hard-on I could feel through his jeans. Feeling his hands full of me made me feel impatient, like I shouldn't be the only one standing around in my underwear. While Luke ran his fingers underneath the lace trim on my panties, I reached out and began unbuttoning his white dress shirt. Its crisp, starched smell was intoxicating, so different from the smells of a man who'd spent all day drinking whiskey and working on a bike.

I discovered just the perfect amount of dark blond chest hair on a chest that was far more muscular than I'd guessed.

Rippled abs led my eyes down to the low-slung waist of Luke's jeans. I unbuttoned the cuffs of Luke's shirt, took it all the way off, and walked across the room to hang the shirt in one of the two closets. I knew I could have just thrown it on the floor, but I figured I'd give Luke a little show while I still had my underwear on. I knew I wouldn't be wearing it for long.

Hands on his hips, Luke watched me walk slowly toward the closet. I hung up his shirt and paused, knowing that I was silhouetted by the closet light behind me. I turned the light off, closed the door, and nearly jumped out of my skin when I heard a knock on the door in the other room.

“Champagne’s here,” Luke said with a smile. He walked over to me and kissed me. “They’ll leave it. I don’t want any interruptions.

Sure enough I heard the door to the suite open, and I could hear the sound of the ice bucket as the waiter arranged the fresh bottle. When Luke reached around and unhooked my bra, I lost all interest in whatever was going on in the next room. When he tossed my bra aside and cupped my breasts with his hands, gently squeezing my nipples, a bomb could have gone off, and I wouldn’t have wanted to leave the hotel room.

“Bed,” Luke said in a voice that sounded like he would accept nothing

but obedience. “Now.”

“With pleasure,” I said, turning and climbing up onto the raised bed. I knew that I was giving Luke quite an eyeful as I crawled away from him, toward the pillows at the head. I turned and looked back at him, and I saw him watching me and stroking himself through his jeans. “I can do that for you, you know,” I said as I pulled the comforter and top sheet down.

“You look like a fantasy, Krystal. I can’t tell you how often I’ve thought about you naked in this bed.”

“Naked?” I asked. “Your wish is my command.” I pulled my panties off and tossed them toward Luke as he crossed

the room to join me. “Your turn,” I said, reaching to unbutton his jeans.

I could feel the muscles of his flat stomach tense as I ran my hands down his chest toward the top of his jeans. I unbuttoned them and slowly, carefully, lowered the zipper. “Commando, eh?” I said when I realized that he wasn’t wearing underwear. I reached in and wrapped my fingers around his cock, very pleased to discover that Luke was hard as a rock and definitely larger than I’d guessed. “Wow,” I said, looking up into his eyes. “You’re going to be a lot of fun to play with.”

I slid the jeans down his hips and watched as he stepped out of them.

Goddamn, was he spectacular. His broad, muscled shoulders, narrow hips, and muscled limbs made my mouth water. For a second, I realized that I was with a gorgeous naked man in a suite that had to have cost more per night than my apartment cost per month. I watched as Luke walked toward the bedroom door, completely at ease even though he was naked.

He turned before he opened the door. “More champagne?” he asked.

“All night long,” I answered with a smile.

He left the room, and I thought about covering up, and decided that there would be plenty of time for that later. I

pulled down the covers on both sides and stretched out, face down, my chin propped on my hands. I knew that my ass was one of my best features, and I figured I might as well show it off.

Luke came back into the bedroom with the bowl of strawberries and the champagne. He stopped in his tracks when he saw me stretched across his bed. He walked over to the night stand, set down one of the glasses and the bowl. He sat next to me on the bed, and before I realized what he was going to do, he poured a splash of ice cold bubbly onto my back.

I squealed and started to turn over, but he held my shoulders in place with

one hand.

“Be still,” he said as he bent over the small of my back. He licked me, and the contrast of his warm tongue and the cold wine made me shiver with delight. He ran a hand over my ass and removed his hand from my shoulders. “Turn over,” he said, still holding the glass in one hand.

I did as I was told, exposing both my breasts and my perfectly smooth, shaved pussy. I wondered if he liked women who shaved it all.

“Oops,” Luke said as he poured a tiny bit of champagne onto the nipple that was closest to him. He bent and first licked the wine off, his tongue making

me gasp. He opened his mouth and sucked the pink bud inside, tugging gently before letting it slip from his mouth.

“Oops,” he said again as he spilled champagne on my other breast and repeated his actions — licking and sucking until I was practically writhing under his touch.

He looked down and answered my unasked question. “Very nice,” he said,” as he ran a finger over the smooth shaved surface. “Oops,” he said one last time as he poured a generous splash of wine over my already wet pussy. He set the glass down and moved to the other side of the bed, moving my knees apart

so that I was completely exposed to him as he knelt between my legs.

“I seem to have made a mess,” he said as he bent toward my wine-covered nether regions. “Let me clean that up for you.”

I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. He took his time, starting by licking all over the outside, making sure he licked up every bit of wine he'd spilled. He parted my lips with his tongue, and I thought I might pass out. I realized that I was breathing fast, open-mouthed, while I watched him plunge his tongue between my lips, seeking my clit. He moved his hands up between my legs and spread me wide open, bending to

flick his tongue against the slick, wetness he found there. I arched my back and couldn't help lifting my hips toward his tongue, wanting more from him.

“Oh, my God,” I said, not even realizing that I was speaking aloud until I heard the words. “You're amazing.”

I heard Luke laugh while he continued to work me over with his tongue, bringing me dangerously close to a climax. I continued to writhe and grind my hips toward his face.

And then I heard it. My phone ringing from the next room.

“Goddammit,” I said, hoping Luke wouldn't stop what he was doing. “I thought I'd turned the ringer off.”

“Should I stop?”

“Don’t you dare,” I warned.

The phone went silent, and Luke returned to teasing my clit with his tongue. I gasped when he inserted a finger inside me, and all I could think about was how much I wanted to feel him inside me.

The phone rang again.

“You sure you don’t need to get that?” Luke asked.

I was worried that he was going to be pissed at me because my phone was interrupting our fun.

“No. I’m sorry. Let me go turn it

off.”

“Not a chance,” Luke said, completely serious. “There’s no way I’m letting you out of this bed anytime soon.”

He moved up so that he could fondle and suck on my breasts, and I felt like I was going to explode. I could feel myself dripping wet, and Luke could, too, when he kept his mouth on my nipple and slid two fingers together inside me. I was so hot and so wet that I could hardly even think straight.

“Please, Luke,” I said, again surprising myself by the sound of my voice.

“Please what?” Luke asked with a smile as he buried his fingers deep

inside me.

“Please, you’re driving me crazy.”

“What do you want me to do? I want to hear you say the words.”

I’d talked dirty before, usually in an attempt to get Bug hard enough that he would be embarrassed and pissed at me. Luke was different, though. Even though all I could think about was wanting his hard cock inside me, I felt strange about saying something he might think was vulgar. I actually liked the guy.

“I want you,” I hesitated because he’d just managed to get his finger on my g-spot. “Oh, my God, Luke. I want you to fuck me. I want you to fuck me all night

long, as hard as you can.”

“Can do, sugar. Just remember that you asked for it.”

Chapter 23

Luke

When that damned phone rang for a second time, I could tell that something was bothering Krystal, and if it had been a week ago, I would have stopped what we were doing and asked her to tell me what was wrong. I would have talked it all out, and I'd have gone to bed with blue balls. Fuck that.

She'd come over dressed the way she was to turn me on, and she'd suggested that we stay in the hotel room, rather than going out. I would never force sex on a woman, but she'd thrown

herself at me, and I was going to take what she was giving. If she wanted to cuddle or talk afterwards, then we could do that, but for the first time I felt like a man in charge of his destiny. I'd always done what other people wanted me to, even down to going to the college my parents had picked out for me, and tonight I wanted to fuck Krystal. That was all I wanted, and I was gonna get it.

“Turn over,” I said, my cock getting even harder as I heard the tone of command in my voice.

Krystal looked surprised, but she smiled — this wicked little half smile, and rolled over. “See anything you like?” she asked, looking over her

shoulder at me.

I was afraid I was gonna cum right that second. She was clearly dripping wet and ready for my hard cock, but I wasn't quite finished playing with her yet. The sound of her begging me to fuck her was one of the sweetest things I'd ever heard.

I put my hands on her shoulders and ran my fingers down her sides, lingering over her tattoo, and coming to rest on her perfect ass. Her skin was smooth and warm, and I bent down and bit her — very gently — right on one of her cheeks. Her skin reddened slightly, and I wondered what it would look like if I spanked her. Would that briefly leave a

mark as well? Maybe I'd find out later. I sat up and straddled her from behind, my hard cock resting just between her cheeks.

Pressing my cock against her, I leaned forward slightly, using my weight to push myself a little further. I had no idea how Krystal liked it — what her favorite positions were — but I wasn't sure that I could wait any longer to find out.

“Get up,” I said, as I climbed off the bed and rummaged through the dresser drawer to find a condom.

“How do you want me?” Krystal asked, clearly excited.

I walked back over to her, rolled a

condom on and kissed her, reaching up to squeeze her nipples and make her moan. “Bend over,” I said, pointing to the bed. I stood back while she spread her feet apart, bent down, and rested on her elbows. She tossed her hair back and met my gaze.

“Will you fuck me, Luke? Will you make me cum?”

I looked at her — dark, tangled hair, mouth slightly open, and her pussy glistening from her arousal — and I couldn't stand it another second. I took two steps and positioned the head of my cock just at her opening. I bent forward and could just reach the tips of her nipples. I brushed them lightly, flicking

them before I put my hands on her hips and slowly eased the huge head of my cock inside her.

She was so hot and so slippery wet that it took all the restraint I had not to just force myself inside all at once. I knew I was bigger than most guys, though, and I didn't want to hurt her.

Krystal looked back at me. "Luke, I want to feel you all the way inside me. I want all of you."

That was all it took.

My hands on her hips, I plunged deep inside. I felt her stretch and heard her gasp with pleasure. She pressed her hips back against me, and I ground my hips forward, burying myself as deep as

I could. Even though she was tight around my cock, she could take all of me. The sight of Krystal's tattoo and her full, sexy ass was almost more than I could stand. We found a rhythm in no time, and I watched as Krystal put her hand between her legs to touch herself while I fucked her.

She started to breathe quicker, and I hoped she was close to an orgasm, because I knew I wasn't going to last much longer. She made a sound — almost like a whimper. “Luke? You're gonna make me cum,” she cried out. “I'm gonna cum on your cock.”

“Do it. Do it now. I want to feel you come.”

She threw her head back, and I grabbed her hair with one hand while I forced myself inside her pussy over and over.

I knew the second her orgasm started. She called out my name as her muscles clenched my cock. I lost all control and it felt like nothing I'd ever experienced before. I let her pussy milk my cock, and as my explosive orgasm finished, I could feel her shaking from her own release.

“Oh, my God, Krystal,” I said, as I put my hands on the bed, to either side of her hips. I stayed inside her, not wanting to lose the warmth and the memory of my climax just seconds before.

She stayed bent over the side of the bed and laughed — a deep, throaty, sexy sound that made her pussy tighten over my softening cock. I reluctantly slid myself out of her.

“You okay?” I asked, unaccustomed to a woman laughing after sex.

“Are you kidding?” she asked as she stood up slowly. “I’m fantastic. That was amazing, Luke.”

Relieved, I leaned forward and kissed her lightly. “I’ll be right back.”

She laughed again. “I’m counting on it.”

I went into the bathroom and disposed of the condom, and when I

caught a look of myself in the mirror, I realized that I had a ridiculously huge grin on my face. I hadn't looked or felt that happy since my parents had passed away, and I realized that Krystal might be exactly what I needed.

Walking back into the bedroom, I saw a spectacular sight. Though I hadn't realized it, the sun had started to set while we were in bed, and the last rays of the sun threw a rosy glow into the room, highlighting the perfect skin of the gorgeous — and very naked — woman in my bed. Krystal lay stretched across the bed with her champagne flute in hand. She looked like a picture, or an advertisement for — oh, I don't know — something really sexy and amazing.

“Wow. What a view,” I said as I picked up my own flute and lay down next to her.

“The view from here’s not so bad, either,” she said, as she ran her fingers lightly across my chest.

I heard the phone ringing again from the living room.

Krystal shook her head and looked a little embarrassed. “Let me go turn that thing off,” she said, getting up from the bed. She reappeared a moment later, shaking her head. “Ringer’s off. We shouldn’t be bothered again.”

“Is whoever’s blowing up your phone what’s bothering you?” I asked, admiring her body from across the room.

“Yeah,” she admitted, clearly unwilling to elaborate.

“You want to talk about it?” I asked.

“Nope. Right now there’s something else I want to do.”

“Gonna clue me in?” I asked as she walked slowly toward the bed.

“Definitely,” she answered, as she took the glass from my hand, drained it, and set it on the nightstand.

Krystal walked around to the other side of the bed and crawled in beside me, leaning on her elbow and looking down at me. Her hair brushed my chest, and I couldn’t help but notice that her breasts were still bare and temptingly

located within reach. I reached up and ran my hand along the curve of her breast and down along the curve of her hip and let my hand come to rest on her thigh.

She bent down and kissed me while she put her hand between my legs. “Hard again so soon, Luke?”

“Krystal, I can’t help it.” I thought about confessing the fact that I really liked her, but I decided to keep that to myself. I suspected that she had a bit of a thing for bad boys, and I was pretty sure that I didn’t fit that bill ... yet. I was going to work on it, though. “Before? The first time? That was just a taste. By the time I’m through with you, you aren’t

gonna be walking straight.”

Krystal smiled and began to stroke my cock. “Want me to suck it?” she asked, wide eyed and eager.

“Absolutely.”

She licked her lips like she was getting prepared, and she moved down so that she was between my knees. She held my gaze while she lowered her mouth to the head of my cock, and I thought I was gonna cum right away as she extended her tongue and licked me from base to tip. She licked a drop of pre-cum off me. “Mmmm. You taste good.”

The tone of her voice made me want to fuck her mouth, and when she opened

up and took me inside, I lifted my hips and pushed in a little further. She took every inch of me inside her mouth and down her throat. It felt like nothing else in the world existed except for Krystal's warm, wet mouth on my cock. She worked me, up and down, glancing up from time to time to find me watching her, absolutely enthralled with the sight of a gorgeous woman with her lips wrapped around me. My excitement was building, and I was getting close to a climax when she sat up.

“Oh, my God, Krystal. Don't stop,” I groaned.

“I'll swallow your load later. Right now, I want to fuck you.”

She reached over and picked up a condom from the pile I'd tossed onto the nightstand. "Safety first," she said with a smile, as she opened the wrapper and rolled it down over me.

I reached up and grabbed her tits, squeezing her nipples hard. "I want you to fuck me, Krystal. Right now."

I expected her to climb on top and ride me while I fondled her tits, but she clearly had other ideas. She stood up on the bed, put one foot on either side of my hips and bent over, giving me an amazing view of her ass and her pussy, clearly wet and ready for my cock. She wiggled her hips from side to side and I realized that she was watching me look

at her, enjoying the fact that I was entranced by everything she was showing off. She knelt, facing the foot of the bed, and as she brought her ass and her tattoo down, I knew I'd never wanted anyone as much as I wanted Krystal.

She reached down and guided my cock to her pussy, hovering so that the head just brushed her opening. I wanted to be inside her, but her teasing, slow pace was making the wait delicious. She finally, slowly lowered her body onto my cock, and I was completely buried inside her. She moved — a slow, sexy motion that made it feel like I was reaching every inch of her tight pussy. She ground down on me, rubbing herself

from side to side on top of me, and I could tell that she was getting close to cumming as I felt her muscles start to tighten.

I lifted my hips, and she started to writhe, working my cock and her clit at the same time. She reached up and grabbed her breasts, and I imagined her squeezing her nipples as she started to go over the edge. I grabbed her hips as I started to cum. Holding her hips, I felt her muscles start to pulse around me. We came together, and she screamed as I called out her name. She bent forward when she'd finished, and I could see my cock still inside her, stretching her wide, and I knew right then that no other woman would ever be Krystal's equal.

Chapter 24

Krystal

I'd been a little worried that Luke would be kinda boring in bed, and I couldn't have been happier to be wrong. First of all, he was fucking huge. I'd never been with a guy as big as he was, and he sure knew how to use what he had! I was in the master bathroom, trying unsuccessfully to make my hair look like I hadn't just been fucked, but I settled for just making sure I didn't have eyeliner smeared across my face. Rather than walk all over the suite looking for my clothes, I opted for one of the amazingly

thick, soft white robes that was hanging in the master bedroom.

“The menu’s on the table,” Luke said when I walked back into the living area. “Order anything you like.”

I picked up the menu and a bottle of sparkling water from the bar. I didn’t want to wake up in the morning with a wicked hangover — assuming Luke let me sleep at all. I walked over to the love seat and looked at Luke. He sat on the sofa, bare-chested and wearing only his broken-in jeans. He looked relaxed and sexy as hell. He held out an arm, indicating that he wanted me to sit down next to him.

“That was fucking fantastic,” I said,

sitting down and feeling a little ache deep inside me from his huge cock. I smiled at the reminder of how good he'd felt.

“I'm not finished with you,” he said. “I'm gonna feed you and take you back to bed.”

“Or maybe that enormous tub?” I asked hopefully.

“Hm,” he said, stroking his chin as if he were deep in thought. “Both?”

“Deal,” I said.

I opened the menu and tried to focus on the extravagant dishes that were listed — at outrageous prices — but I was distracted by two things. Luke was

toying with a piece of my hair, twirling it around his finger, and I realized that I really liked Luke. Not just for the sex — which if I was honest was the best I'd ever had — but because I actually liked him as a person.

“See anything that looks good?” he asked.

“It all looks amazing. I want one bite of everything on the menu.”

“You mind sharing?” Luke asked, as he leaned over to look at the menu with me.

“Not at all.”

“How about if I order a bunch of different things, and we can share

them?”

I smiled up at him as he stood up to walk over to one of the phones. “That sounds perfect.”

While Luke ordered, I thought about pinching myself. Bug, in addition to being an impotent, abusive asshole, absolutely refused to share his food. He had gotten so pissed the few times I’d asked for a bite of his meal — on the few occasions when we went out to eat — that I’d just stopped trying. As far as I could tell, other than not being as assertive as I usually liked, Luke appeared to be an absolutely perfect man, and I wondered how long it would be before he realized that I was

seriously damaged goods and left me behind.

A little down after having realized that I was nowhere near good enough for Luke, I got up and poured myself another glass of wine. He'd asked me what was bothering me a couple of times already, and I decided that maybe I should just tell him about the mess I'd gotten myself into. Who knew — maybe he could even help protect me from Bug and his vengeance. I could sure use some help from someone.

“Dinner should arrive in about half an hour,” Luke said after he hung the phone up. “The woman who took my order sounded surprised that we only

needed place settings for two. It's possible that I over ordered."

I laughed. "Well, I'm freaking starving, and we might find ourselves in need of a midnight snack, too."

Luke sat back down next to me. "I like the way you think, Krystal."

I took a deep breath. "You asked about what was bothering me. Do you really want to know?"

"Absolutely."

Even though I knew Luke was different from other guys I'd been with, I was still a little surprised that he wanted to hear my bullshit. "Okay, here we go."

I told him the whole story about Bug

having stolen my money and the way that I got it back. Luke had laughed at the fact that Bug had been drooling in his sleep as I drove away, but when I told him that Bug had come to my apartment just a few hours before, he realized how serious the situation was.

“He really called you that?” he asked after I’d told him all I could remember of Bug’s phone call.

“Yeah, and he swore he’d get me when I least expect it.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Well, I’d thought about calling Joker and telling him what Bug had said.”

Luke sat up straighter. “That’s a perfect solution. I’m sure Joker will take care of Bug for you.”

I shook my head. “No. I thought that for a second, too, but there’s no way. He’ll take Bug’s side because they’re brothers in that stupid fucking motorcycle club.”

“Wait a minute, Krystal. You say that like being brothers is a bad thing.”

“Luke, you don’t even get it. Those fuckers will back each other up, no matter what they’ve done wrong. Joker might stop Bug from killing me if we were standing in front of him, but I wouldn’t even bet on that. Bug treats me like trash, and that’s okay — perfectly

normal, even — for the Sons.”

“I know you’re upset, but you can’t really mean that.” Luke put his hand on my arm. “I’ve spent some time with the Sons this week, and they’re good guys.”

“I’m sure they are good guys to you. They’re all excited about meeting Joker’s son, but if you had something they wanted, they wouldn’t hesitate to run you over.” I stood up and walked over to the window, frustrated because I knew that Luke didn’t have the history that I did with the Sons. “You don’t know them like I do.”

“Actually, Krystal, I know them better than you realize. At church on Sunday, the Sons are gonna vote me in as

a member, at least, I hope they are.”

I spun around and my jaw fell open. “What the fuck are you thinking, Luke? Why the hell would you want to be a member of the Sons? You have a college degree and a good job, for God’s sake. You’re fuckin’ out of your mind.”

“Jesus, Krystal, you sound just like Sable.”

“Well, maybe you should listen to your mother.”

“She’s only my birth mother. She left me behind because she didn’t want her life screwed up, and she doesn’t have the right to tell me what to do.”

“Even if she’s right?” I felt like my

heart was going to beat right out of my chest. Luke couldn't possibly make it as one of the Savage Sons, even if they did vote him in. He wasn't hard enough, not that I was gonna tell him that.

“Sable made her choices, and I'm going to make mine.”

“Luke, I just don't understand. Why are you doing this? Are you leaving your job?”

“I'm taking a leave of absence, and my reasons, quite honestly, are none of your business. I've learned that I shouldn't discuss club business with anyone who's not a member.”

“Jesus,” I shook my head in disgust. “You sure learn quick. So you want a

guy like Bug for a brother. That piece of shit?”

“Krystal, I don’t really know Bug. Honestly, from what you’ve told me, he doesn’t sound like a good guy, but I’m not gonna get in between the two of you.”

“Wow.” I picked up my shirt from the floor. “You’ve got a thing or two to learn, Luke Callaway.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“Well, if you’re too big a pussy to stand up for what’s right, then I don’t know that I can stand to be in the same room with you any longer.”

“What the hell, Krystal? You come

in here with your sob story about some shithead that you were stupid enough to get involved with, and you want me to rush to your rescue? Maybe you should be more careful about who you sleep with.”

I stood still, staring at Luke, unable to believe what I'd just heard. I walked into the bedroom, closed the door, hung up the fancy bathrobe, and got dressed. When I walked back out to the living room, I had composed myself enough to string a sentence together.

“You're right, Luke. I should be more careful about who I sleep with, and you were clearly a mistake. I thought you might be different, and I was wrong. The

only difference that I see between you and the Savage Sons is that you're too weak to take what you want. You're gonna back off and let Bug beat the shit out of me, and I hate you for that."

"Krystal, I'm not gonna let Bug beat the shit out of you, but I'm not gonna get involved, otherwise. You need to work this out for yourself. He probably didn't even mean what he said, and you need to sort out the mess you've made with him."

"You have no idea what you're getting yourself into, Luke. Bug is shit, and the Sons are poison. Moses wanted to make things better, but he's dead, and that cesspool will never change."

I walked to the door and turned around to look at Luke, trying to decide what to say, and I decided that nothing I said would matter anyway. I opened the door, walked out, and let the door slam behind me. When I got to the elevator, part of me hoped that Luke would come rushing out of the room to stop me from leaving. He might not be as tough as I would have liked, but he was a good man, or at least I wanted to believe he was. Determined not to cry in the hallway, I waited until the elevator doors closed behind me to let the tears start running down my face.

Chapter 25

Luke

Sunday, May 12, 2013

The whiskey burned my throat, just as it had for the first two shots I'd downed.

Joker threw his arm around me. "A Son and a brother. You've made me proud, Luke."

"Thanks, man. Glad the vote went the way you said it would."

"Never any doubt, son. You're part of the family."

Joker headed over to the bar to order yet another round of drinks, and I headed to take a leak. I was gonna have to slow down the whiskey, or I'd be passed out before sundown. I locked the door and looked in the mirror. I was a Savage Son.

“Quite a week,” I said aloud.
“Yesterday a Harley, and today a member of an MC.”

Joker and Zeno had driven me up to one of the dealers in town on Saturday morning so that I could pick out a bike. Apparently, you had to own a bike to be voted in, and since Joker had asked the Sons to waive the hang around period that was typically required of prospects,

I hadn't wanted to push my luck. Joker had offered to give me one of his bikes, but I didn't want to take advantage of his good nature. And besides, I had wanted my bike the second I laid eyes on it. It was a 2013 Harley Davidson Dyna Street Bob FXDB, loaded with nearly every option they could add on. It had set me back just over fifteen grand, but it had been worth every penny. Even Bug had looked a little jealous when I'd rolled into the clubhouse parking lot after an hour's ride on Saturday night.

I'd been worried about Bug and how he'd vote, but he and all of the guys had followed Joker's lead, and the vote was unanimous. Joker had told me — as a formality — that there was no guarantee

that I'd be voted in as a full member in a year, but he seemed certain that it was a done deal. After the club had voted me in, they'd also approved the plan that I laid out for the legal weed business. I'd been worried that they wouldn't vote for such a big operation if it was pitched by a guy who wasn't even a full member yet, but Joker had insisted that I present the plan. There had been surprisingly little resistance, and most of the guys said they were ready for an Arizona run to pick up some supplies to get us started.

I was really worried about Krystal, and I couldn't get her out of my head. I'd picked up my phone to text her more times than I could count, but each time,

I'd deleted the text rather than sending it. I hoped she was alive, but she was the one who'd walked out on me, after calling me a pussy, of course. As much as I liked her, I wasn't going to chase after her like a kicked puppy. I had plenty going on without worrying about some girl with shitty taste in men. Even though I knew it would be awkward, I'd hoped I'd see her around the clubhouse just so that I knew she was alive, but so far, nothing.

Back out at the bar, I watched Bug and J.C. approach me.

“So this weed biz is all your idea, huh?” Bug asked, in a tone that was neutral — neither friendly, nor hostile.

“Yeah,” I answered, taking a drink of my water and hoping that it would help prevent a hangover. “I was talking to Joker about the problems after y’all had to ... change your business arrangements, and it sounded like you needed a new source of income.”

“Major understatement, man,” J.C. agreed. “Zeno’s the only one of us who works a full-time job, and as far as I know, he’s the only one current on his house payment.”

“So you think there’s enough money in the legal weed business to make it worth our while?” Bug asked. “We have to divide it up into a lot of shares.”

“Yeah, I know,” I agreed. “It’ll take

a while — I think a year — before the business is completely self-sufficient and making real money, but when my parents died, they left me with a little money, and I'm backing the startup costs. I have an attorney who's going to draw up the paperwork, and Joker wants us to sit down as a club and review the important parts of it.”

“Shit, man, we don't use fuckin' lawyers for our business deals,” Bug snorted, dismissively. “You think you can bring your fancy-ass college degree in here and tell us how to run this MC?”

I'd been afraid that some of the members wouldn't be thrilled about all of the hoops we were going to have to

jump through to get a legitimate business off the ground. “Wait a minute, Bug. I’m not changing anything except the fact that you’re all broke.”

J.C. looked at Bug, and I was afraid for a second that they were going to pick a fight.

I held my hands out, hoping to defuse the situation. “Listen, guys, it sounds like you were making an assload of money before Moses died and you had to cool it. I’m not saying you don’t know how to bring in cash. What I’m saying is that you have to get some legal things in order if you’re going to run a legitimate business, especially one that’s licensed and regulated by the state. We can’t just

half-ass this stuff.”

Bug looked at J.C. and nodded, indicating that he should back off. “So who’s this lawyer?”

“He’s a guy I went to school with, and he’s also one of the guys I used to grow and sell weed with in college. He lives in Colorado now, so he’ll be up on the licenses and permits we’ll need.”

“So I got a question, man,” J.C. asked. “You got this money, and you got a job, right? Why would you invest in this new business with a bunch of guys you don’t even know?”

I laughed. “You know, I’ve asked myself the same question. Two reasons. One, I’ve discovered that I fuckin’ love

riding bikes, and two, I've never really been part of a group that's this tight. I like it, and I like knowing that there are people who'd have my back."

Bug looked around, and I figured he was checking to make sure Joker couldn't overhear what he was about to say. "You know, we don't usually vote a brother in before we really know him. I did what the Pres told me to, but I'm gonna be keeping an eye on you, Luke. You can't just expect to walk in here and take over just because your old man's the President."

"I hear you," I answered. "I'm not trying to take over anything. I'm happy to be a brother, and I'm making a business

investment. My plan is for all of us to get rich as shit off this deal.”

“I hope it works out that way, man,” Bug answered. “Hey, I was talking to J. C. earlier. What do you think about setting up the grow operation to have enough to sell outside the store?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

J.C. spoke up. “There’s no reason why we can’t sell it legally and kinda off the books as well. The weed for sale in dispensaries is expensive, so it hasn’t hurt the illegal biz at all, from what I hear.”

I shook my head. “I don’t know. From what I hear, the DEA had their eye on Moses. I don’t think we should risk it.

That's the beauty of a legal dispensary. It's all above board."

"Yeah, I guess." J.C. didn't look like I'd convinced him.

"The other thing is that if we can grow a strain that's in high demand, we'll be selling all we can produce. Whether we sell it directly, or to other dispensaries, I think we'll manage just fine all legal and aboveboard."

Bug gave J.C. a look that clearly meant something to the two of them, but puzzled me. "If we run out of weed to sell, I'm sure we could get some from our amigos south of the border."

Something about his expression

troubled me, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was. "South of the border?" I asked, confused. "Mexico?"

I could see that Joker was headed our way, and Bug could see it, too.

"Never mind, man, that's all history. See you around. I'm watching you," he said, before walking away.

J.C. followed, of course, and I knew that I'd have to be careful about the tension that Bug seemed to create within the club. Joker had told me that Bug and Moses hadn't seen eye to eye, and I suspected that Bug probably saw me as a rival and suspected that I'd try to take his place.

"Luke," Joker called as he

approached. “Come talk to Sally about getting this ride to Arizona scheduled.”

I’d met Sally, the Road Captain, briefly, and I’d liked him right away. He was soft-spoken, but had asked several pointed questions about the dispensary proposal that revealed that he must have some history in business.

After ordering yet another round of shots from the bartender, Joker led me over to a table in the corner occupied by Sally and one of the young women who were always hanging around the club. I tried not to stare when I realized that Sally actually had his hand up beneath the skirt of the woman who sat on his lap.

“Take a walk, Angel,” Joker said as we sat down with Sally.

She stood up, much to Sally’s disappointment, and sauntered off, the sway in her hips no accident.

“That your old lady?” I asked, wanting to make sure that I knew which girls were single, so I didn’t make any mistakes.

“Nah, man. She’s just one of the girls who hangs around. Mighty handy, if you know what I mean.”

I wasn’t entirely comfortable with the idea of women who just slept with anyone in the MC, and I didn’t really get the appeal of sharing your sex partner with the guys you hung around with. I

wasn't going to rock the boat, though. Just because my brothers slept with all the same women didn't mean that I had to.

Joker tossed back his shot and slammed the glass on the table. "So when we riding to Arizona?"

"Well, the guy's going to harvest in about a week, and then it'll need about a month to dry and cure," I answered, eyeing up my shot and trying to decide if I wanted to drink it.

"We have Sturgis at the beginning of August, so end of June, beginning of July should work for most of us," Sally said, looking at the calendar on his phone. "You're going to Sturgis, right?" he

asked me.

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world, man. I’ve heard some wild tales, and I’m ready.”

“Arizona will get you ready for a long ride, too,” Joker added. “And you’ll get to spend some quality time with your bike and your brothers.”

“Can’t wait.” I was curious about when I might see Krystal again. I wanted to be prepared in case things were awkward. “So do the guys bring their old ladies on these long rides?”

“Sometimes,” Sally answered. “We usually have one of the guys drive behind us in a van in case something goes wrong along the way. Sometimes

an old lady or two will tag along. Why?” he asked. “You got an old lady?”

“Nowhere even close, man. Just curious.”

“Well, there won’t be a shortage of company on the road. We know folks along the way, and I’ll have us scheduled for stops in some friendly places, if you know what I mean.”

To be perfectly honest, I wasn’t sure exactly what he meant, but I wasn’t going to tell him that. Was he talking about prostitutes? More MC girls? Thinking about girls made me remember Krystal from two nights before — how gorgeous she’d looked naked in my bed, how sexy her tattoo was. Maybe I should

text her. What if Bug had killed her or something crazy? I didn't actually think he would, but I didn't know for sure.

“Excuse me,” I said, as I stood up from the table. “Need to see a man about a horse.”

I pulled my phone from my pocket in the men's room and sent a text to Krystal before I could change my mind.

You okay? Just want to make sure you're alive and safe.

I took another leak and checked my phone, surprised to see that she'd answered.

I'm fine. Can you talk?

Call you in five.

I walked back out to the table, where Joker and Sally sat, poring over a map.

“Wow. Still do things old-school, I see?”

“Google Maps don’t know where the pretty girls are,” Joker said with a laugh. “Have a seat and you can help us plan the trip.”

“I’ll be right back. I have to step outside and make a phone call.”

Joker put his hand on my arm. “Time you started to learn, son. Don’t say anything on your cell phone that you don’t want the police to hear. We’ll get you hooked up with a couple of our pre-pays, in case you need to talk business.”

“Thanks, man, but this is personal. Nothing I need to worry about.”

I walked outside and dialed Krystal’s number.

“Hello?” she answered.

“Hey.” I wasn’t sure exactly what to say, and then I figured that since she’d wanted to talk, she could break the ice.

“Hey, I’m really sorry about the other night. I shouldn’t have said what I did to you, and your joining the Savage Sons is none of my business.”

“You’re right. It’s not.”

There was a moment of silence. I figured that she hadn’t expected me to be so blunt, but I was done kissing people’s

asses.

I decided to break the silence. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she answered. “I was scared to go home, so I’m staying with a friend from school.”

“You’re that afraid of Bug?”

“Yeah. Luke, you don’t know how out of control he can get. He’s one giant mean streak, and I was afraid he’d kill me.”

“Have you talked to him?”

“That’s part of why I wanted to talk to you. We talked this afternoon, and he told me that if I come back and agree to move in with him, he’ll forget about the

whole thing.”

“What?”

“He said he’s sorry for having taken my money, and he wants to get back together.”

“What do you want, Krystal?”

“Well, I want to be alive this time next week. I’m afraid if I don’t take him up on his offer, that he’ll hurt me.”

“If I had some way to threaten him, I would, but I don’t.” I wondered if Krystal was fishing for me to offer to step in and save the day. “Krystal, I’m not gonna get involved. This is between you and Bug.”

“I know.”

I could hear the disappointment in her voice, and part of me wanted to go inside and pound Bug into the ground. That wasn't how I dealt with my problems, though, and I wasn't gonna start just because I was a Savage Son.

“If you need anything, you can call me, but I'm not going to say a word to Bug. And he's not going to know that we've been together.”

“Good. He'd lose his mind if he knew I'd slept with you.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I guess I'll get back together with him. I don't feel like I have any other choice.”

“Well, if that’s what you want, then I wish you the best.”

“It’s not what I want, Luke. I want to be with someone who doesn’t treat me like I’m just a hole to fuck, someone who will actually talk to me. Someone like...” Her voice trailed off.

“Someone like who, Krystal?”

I wanted her to say someone like me. I wanted to be with her, but I wasn’t going to be the one who stepped in between a brother and his old lady. She was going to have to say the words. I wasn’t going to do it.

“Never mind,” she said in a soft voice, full of regret.

I remembered how much I'd enjoyed her — not just the amazing sex, but being with her, and I was so tempted to take her from Bug and damn the consequences, but I couldn't do it. Maybe I was weak, but I couldn't do it.

“Well, then, you take care of yourself. Call me if you need me,” I said, feeling like a shit for leaving her in a horrible situation, even if it was her fault.

“Yeah. I guess I'll see you around.”

She hung up, and I stood outside the clubhouse, trying to get a handle on what I was feeling. After a few minutes, I decided to do what the other Savage Sons would do. I went back inside and

ordered a shot of whiskey.

Chapter 26

Krystal

Saturday, June 29, 2013

As soon as I heard Bug's motorcycle pull away, I breathed a huge sigh of relief. He'd be gone for five whole days, and I couldn't be happier. I poured myself a cup of coffee and sat down at the dining room table — the half of it that I kept clean — and tried to decide how to spend my five delicious days of freedom.

I'd been living with Bug for a couple of weeks so far, and while it hadn't been

unicorns and rainbows, it hadn't been awful, either. He was kind of like a pet — if I kept him fed and cleaned up after him, then he didn't whine too much. I'd been trying to keep a low profile while I figured out my long-term plan. I was not going to live with Bug forever.

Reaching into my purse, I pulled out the little notebook that I used for grocery lists and things I wanted to remember. Maybe if I made myself a list — wrote things down — I'd be able to figure out a plan and stick to it.

- * Six more classes

- * Job

- * Apartment

I'd looked at the college's course catalogue, and I figured that if I could save enough money to take three classes in the fall and three in the spring, that I'd have my degree in about a year. What I wasn't sure about was whether I could stand to live with Bug for that long. Part of me worried, too, that he was only biding his time and had every intention of getting back at me for taking my money back from him.

“When you least expect it,” I said, repeating his promise from the enraged phone call.

I hoped that he'd gotten over being angry, but I didn't know for sure. I knew for certain that I couldn't keep my job

and finish school if I moved out. He'd make my life hell, and clearly no one was gonna do a thing about it. Not Luke, anyway. I sighed as I thought about the evening we'd spent together, and I wished that I was a different kind of girl, one who deserved to be with a man like him.

My problem was that I wanted a bad boy. As much as I liked Luke, I was afraid that even if — by some miracle — we did get together that I would find him wishy-washy, too preppy for my taste. A nice body only went so far. If a man wasn't going to stand up for himself and the people he cared about, I wasn't sure he deserved the time of day.

Realizing that I really wanted to be the kind of girl who could stand up for herself, I decided right then that I was going to come up with a time frame and an exit strategy for my relationship with Bug. Even if I had to wait a whole, year, one way or another, I was going to shake free of him and make it on my own. I could be strong, and I could be independent. I could — maybe — with a whole lot of work, become the kind of woman who would deserve a man like Luke.

Luke.

The last few weeks had been awkward, hoping that Bug wouldn't somehow magically figure out that we'd

been together, but so far, he didn't seem to suspect anything. He had been a little more vulgar in public than he typically was, and I was pretty sure that every single member of the Sons had seen my tits the night before when he'd unbuttoned my shirt in the clubhouse. I think he'd been contemplating making me strip completely, but Luke and Joker had started a dart tournament that distracted everyone. I suspected that Luke may have done it on purpose.

I stood up from the table, full of fresh resolve to do something about my life. I was gonna work my ass off, take every extra shift I could get, do well in my classes, and I was gonna make something better of myself. I went into

the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror.

“You deserve better, Krystal,” I said to my reflection. “You will get out and make something of yourself.” I studied myself and realized that I had reached a turning point, and it hadn’t even taken some awful, life-shattering event. I was going to be smart, deliberate, and I was going to find my own way out of my fucked up life.

Feeling like a new person, I put on shorts and a tank top and went for a walk through the neighborhood as I planned and dreamed about making my escape.

Chapter 27

Luke

Monday, July 1, 2013

My head pounded before I even opened my eyes, and when I tried to lift my leg to swing it over the side of the bed, I realized that most of my body ached as well. Wishing I'd taken some aspirin rather than doing the last few shots of tequila the night before, I laid still, hoping that I wasn't going to add nausea to my problems.

Eyes still closed to keep out the sunlight that I was sure streamed in

around the edges of the motel curtains, I took a deep breath and steeled myself to open my eyes.

“What the fuck?” I whispered when I saw the tangle of bleached blond hair on the pillow next to mine. I had no recollection of having brought anyone back to my room the night before. Wow. I must’ve had more to drink than I realized.

The woman in bed with me stretched and rolled over to face me, and I realized that she was pretty young. Jesus, I hoped she was at least eighteen. Underneath the makeup, she was pretty, and she looked like her head was much clearer than mine.

“Well, good morning, big fella,” she said with a smile, reaching out to grab my cock.

I jumped and put my hand over hers to stop her.

“I think I had a little too much to drink last night,” I said, reaching down into my bag that was on the floor next to the bed. I fished through it until I found my aspirin bottle, and I winced as I got up to go get a glass of water. I contemplated washing the pills down with the beer that was left in the bottle from the night before, but I realized that getting on my bike after drinking wasn't the smartest idea. I also realized that I had a morning erection, which hadn't

been helped by the young lady who'd had her hand on it just seconds before.

I walked back toward the bedroom after I'd taken the aspirin, and I decided that I should lie down for a few minutes to let the pills get to work on my headache.

“You know what's great for a headache?” the girl asked.

“Please tell me,” I answered. “I could use it.”

She threw off the covers, and I realized that she was naked except for the tiny, red satin thong she wore. Both of her nipples were pierced, and the silver barbells looked surprisingly sexy on her small, but fantastic tits. I

immediately got harder as I watched her crawl toward the side of the bed where I stood.

“A blow job,” she said. “Great headache cure.”

My first instinct was that I shouldn't do it. I'd been brought up to respect women and believe that they weren't just there to be used for sex, but I was pretty sure, having seen three used condoms in the bathroom trash, that I'd already fucked this girl. It wasn't like I was forcing myself on her, and Jesus Christ, she was pretty fucking hot, and she had her mouth open, and ... Jesus.

“Holy shit, that feels good,” I said as she guided the head of my cock into her

mouth. Her ass was in the air, and the sight of that tiny scrap of red underwear made me want to rip it off and fuck her again. Who was I to say no to a pretty girl who was down to fuck?

I'd never been a fan of one-night stands, but I had to admit, waking up in bed with a girl who wanted to satisfy me was mighty fucking nice.

“Hey,” I said, putting my hand on her shoulder and stopping her.

She lifted her eyes up to meet mine, and she slowly slid my cock out of her mouth. “Yes?” she asked, continuing to slowly work her hand up and down on my shaft.

“What’s your name?”

She laughed, low and sexy. “Thought you might need a reminder. It’s Rose.”

A memory emerged from the tequila haze of the night before. I looked at her upper arm. “I remember,” I said, stroking the rose tattoo there. “Rose.”

“And Luke,” she said, licking her lips and preparing to suck me off.

“Honey, your mouth feels great, but I want to fuck,” I said, seeing what she’d let me get away with.

She straightened up with a smile, perky, pink, pierced nipples bouncing within my reach. I reached out and pulled gently on the two barbells, and she shivered, putting her hand between

her legs and spreading her knees apart on the bed.

“How do you want me?” she asked, looking like a fucking wet dream.

“I’m gonna tear those panties off your ass, and I’m gonna fuck you from behind.”

I reached down and ripped the strings at her hips and pulled the scrap of fabric from between her legs. I wondered what she’d do if I just took what I wanted, regardless of whether she was ready. I decided to find out. I grabbed her shoulders and turned her around. She turned her hips as well and spread her knees apart so that I could see her wet, waiting snatch. I shoved her

shoulders to the bed, fumbled on the nightstand for a condom, put it on, and I drove my cock hard and deep inside her without another word.

I lost myself in the pleasure of being buried deep inside a woman's body. There were no complications, no jealous boyfriends, nothing but a girl who wanted to have sex with me. As I fucked Rose hard and fast, I thought about how amazing it was and how powerful I felt with women at every turn who wanted to sleep with me. I fucking loved being on the road. The two stops we'd made so far had been amply supplied with willing women lined up to pair up — or even threesome up — with any of the Savage Sons. I'd been a little unsure the

first night, but apparently the tequila had lowered my inhibitions and given me the courage to reach out and pluck myself a Rose.

I finished, driving hard inside her as I blew my load, and I pulled out and walked to the bathroom to get rid of the condom.

“You good?” I asked, pulling on the jeans that I found on the floor.

“Uh, yeah,” she answered, looking around the room for her clothes. “I mean, I could go again, if you wanna. I could fuck that huge cock all day long.”

I realized that I wanted her gone. I didn't really owe her anything — at least, I was assuming that she wasn't a

hooker. I felt a little dirty for having banged some chick I didn't even know, and I wasn't gonna let my conscience get too out of control, but I was finished with Rose.

“Nah. Gotta hit the road early.” I handed her the shirt that had been tossed onto the chair near the bathroom, and she put it on. “I'll look for you the next time we're in town.”

I was surprised that Rose didn't seem the least bit upset about my dismissal of her. She got dressed like it was no big deal, and she headed for the door.

“Hey, Luke. Thanks. That was fun.”

“Yeah, Rose. You take care.”

She walked out the door and I sat down on the bed, stunned at how easy it had been to get rid of her. Apparently I could just pick a girl up, fuck her, and send her on her merry way. No one seemed to care — not even Rose, herself. As I fumbled with the coffee maker in the room, a vision of Krystal popped into my head — the same vision that haunted my dreams lately — her naked on my bed, with champagne pooled in the small of her back.

“Goddamn, why could things not have been as simple with Krystal?” I said as I put the styrofoam cup beneath the brewer.

I knew the answer, though. Krystal was wrapped up with one of my brothers, and, maybe more importantly, I actually liked Krystal. There was something in her — some spark, some hint — that she was not just some club whore, a woman you could fuck and walk away from. I was clear evidence of that. As much as I was enjoying the ride — the wind, the road, the sun — I couldn't help but think about how much fun it would be to be riding with Krystal. To have her to talk to when we stopped for a beer and a meal. She was smart, and I really liked her.

“Too fuckin’ bad for me,” I said as I poured some powdered creamer into the coffee cup. “She’s off limits,” I told

myself. I said the words, but I couldn't make myself believe them.

My headache had abated a bit, so I took my coffee cup, found my sunglasses, and headed outside in hopes of clearing my head. When I stepped outside my room, I saw Joker sitting on a wooden picnic table across the parking lot, and I walked over to join him. As I approached he put out one cigarette and lit another.

“Mornin’, son,” he called as I approached.

Even though I was discovering that I really liked Joker as I got to know him, I didn't think I'd ever call him “dad,” but he didn't seem to mind.

“Mornin’,” I replied as I sat down at the other end of the table.

“How’s the head?” he asked. “I saw your girl leavin’ and she said you were a little hungover.”

“She was right,” I said as I took my first sip of the far-too-weak coffee. “But a little coffee and some breakfast, and I’ll be ready to ride.”

“So how you liking the road so far?”

“I gotta tell you, man, I fucking love it. It feels so free — no place to be, no hurry to get anywhere. I could do this forever.”

Joker laughed and took another drag. “Happy to hear it. You’ve earned a little

break with all the work you been doin’.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “It’s been a lot of work, but I’ve enjoyed it. You know, I’ve made a lot of money over my career so far, but it’s always been for other people. It’s nice to know that all the work I’m doing is going to put money in my own pocket for a change.”

Well, yours and eight other guys.” Joker nodded as Sally and the Sergeant at Arms, Trey, crossed the parking lot toward the Waffle House next door. Joker turned to me. “Everything okay with all the guys? I don’t see you and Bug or J.C. talking a whole lot.”

“The guys are great,” I answered, trying to decide how to handle the Bug

issue. “Can I be honest?”

“Only way to be.”

“I don’t really like Bug all that much. J.C. is okay if you can get him on his own, but I think Bug’s kind of an asshole.”

Joker sighed and shook his head. “I can see why you’d say that. Moses never warmed to him, either. He ain’t actually a bad guy, once you get to know him, but he’s mighty protective of his position in the MC. He’s always on the lookout for guys trying to bump him outta the V.P. spot.”

“Well, I’m not even a full member. Why would he be wary of me?”

“Luke, he’s got a little bit of the short guy’s complex. He feels like guys look down on him, even if they don’t. It ain’t exactly a rational thing. He sees you as steppin’ into Moses’ role — kinda an unofficial leader of the Sons — and he envies your natural leadership.” He put out the cigarette on the bottom of his shoe. “Least that’s how I see it. That’s enough of the psychological bullshit. I sound like your mother watching them psychologists on talk shows.” He stood up. “Let’s go get us some breakfast.”

We took our seats at the bar next to Sally and Trey.

“So we’re gonna meet your buddy

and get our stuff today?” Trey asked.

“Yeah. We should roll into town around one this afternoon if we’re on the road by ten. He’s gonna show us around his grow houses. I figured that we should learn everything we can from the guys who are doing it right.”

Sally poured some sugar into the coffee that the waitress set in front of him. “So he’s got plants that are ready to sell?”

“Yup. He’s curing them now, but they’ll hold for a few months until we get our shop open. By the time all of the licenses and permits are ready, it’ll be perfectly in its prime. One of the biggest mistakes people make is smoking the

stuff too early. It has to mellow for a while.”

“And he had some seeds too, right?” Joker asked.

“Yeah. I talked to him and described how we’ve started setting up our warehouse, and he recommended half a dozen kinds that he thinks will work best. We can harvest the first crop and make decisions about which ones fared the best.”

Sally laughed. “I volunteer to be part of the quality control group.”

“Yeah, you and everyone else,” I laughed. “We’ll have a lot of work to do getting everything planted, but I think Sable’s help is going to make a

difference. She really has a green thumb.”

Joker agreed. “It’ll be nice for her to spend her time on something that’s gonna make money, rather than those roses that just cost me a fortune.”

Our breakfast arrived, and the haze of my hangover started to clear with the omelette and home fries. While we ate in companionable silence, I realized how much my trip to Colorado to find Joker and Sable had changed my life — forever, I suspected. As sore as I was from the two days of riding, I couldn’t wait to get back on my bike. I loved my cut and the statement it made to the people we passed on the highway. I

loved the feeling of being a brotherhood, guys who rode together, drank together, and were building a business together. I loved being able to walk into a bar and find women willing to suck my cock at the drop of a hat.

I felt powerful, and I knew I would never be able to give that feeling up. I loved being on the road, and I loved being a Savage Son.

Chapter 28

Krystal

Thursday, July 4, 2013

I checked the time on my phone while I folded the last of the laundry I'd done that morning. I'd spent the last few days cleaning Bug's house from top to bottom, deciding that if I was going to have to spend the next year of my life there, I wanted it to be clean and organized. I'd had plenty of time to think while Bug had been on the ride to Arizona, and I thought I'd come up with a plan for how to make the next year of my life something other than miserable.

I was going to be the perfect old lady. I'd keep the place clean, dutifully give blow jobs on request, and I'd bide my time, keeping the monster calm while I plotted my escape. My goal was to have a job lined up in another city — maybe even another state — by the time I graduated. I knew it might be hard to job-hunt in another location without tipping my hand to Bug, but I was determined. Until then, I'd be all sweetness and light.

When I heard Bug's bike coming down the street, I checked on the roast I had in the oven, looked in the mirror to make sure I looked okay, and I waited for him to come inside.

“Krystal,” he called as he opened the door.

“Right here,” I answered, a smile fixed on my face.

“Jesus Christ,” he said, looking around the living room. “What the hell happened here?”

“I cleaned up. I decided that since I’d moved in, I’d get everything fixed up. I even planted some flowers out back. Want to come see?”

“I don’t give a shit about any flowers. I’m hungry, and I’m tired. I need a shower and a nap.”

“I have a roast in the oven with potatoes and carrots. It’ll be ready in

about forty-five minutes or so.”

Bug grunted in response. “It’s the fuckin’ Fourth of July, Krystal. We should be having burgers on the grill.” He walked over to the refrigerator. “We have any beer?”

“Of course. I didn’t really think about the fact that it’s a holiday. Is roast okay?”

“You can ask Joker and the boys when they get here.”

“You invited people over? I had no idea.”

“It’s my fuckin’ house, isn’t it? I always have the guys over for the Fourth, ‘cause we can walk to see the

fireworks at the park down the street. Usually, J.C. brings a bunch of fireworks and we blow shit up in the yard.”

“We’re going to need more food. I only planned on a dinner for two.”

“Guess you better get to the store, then,” Bug said as he tossed a bottle cap onto the counter. “I’m gonna go shower and lay down for a little while.”

I was furious that Bug had made plans without talking to me and just expected me to take care of everything, but I wasn’t going to let him get to me. I could do this — be patient and wait it out. “What time are people coming over?”

“Whenever they fuckin’ feel like it.

Probably a couple of hours. You have plenty of time to shop and get dinner ready.”

“How many people should I plan on for dinner?”

“All the guys are invited. I guess most of them will show up.”

“Old ladies?”

“It’s a family fuckin’ holiday, Krystal. I’m sure they guys will bring their old ladies or some young hot pussy, if they ain’t got an old lady.” Bug reached down and stroked himself through his jeans. “Speaking of pussy, I ain’t had yours in days. I want a fuck before I shower.”

Ugh. I had zero desire to sleep with Bug, but I really had no choice, not if I wanted to keep the peace. We walked into the bedroom, and Bug unbuttoned his jeans and pulled out his cock, which — thankfully — was erect. He was always at his worst when he couldn't get it up. With one hand fondling himself, he reached out, lifted up my shirt, and pinched my nipple, hard enough to make my eyes water.

“Want it rough and hard, bitch?” He pulled the thin, sheer fabric of my bra aside and exposed my breast, pulling at my nipple until my skin reddened slightly. “Bet you missed my dick while I was gone.”

I stepped back and pulled off my t-shirt and unhooked my bra, tossing both onto the dresser. I just wanted to get the whole thing over with as quickly as possible. If I was lucky, Bug would cum quickly, and I could get the fuck out of the house for a little while.

“Take your jeans off,” he said, as he continued to stroke himself.

I stripped completely down, and Bug pulled his jeans down over his hips. He let go of his cock long enough to reach out and pinch both of my nipples so hard that I couldn't help but cry out, and as I took hold of his cock, I could feel it stiffen even more at the sound of my cry of pain. He really was a sick fucker. He

let go of my tits, turned me around roughly, and shoved my face into the comforter on the bed. He slapped my ass hard enough to leave a mark, I was sure, and he shoved his fingers into my pussy.

“Jesus, Krystal, you’re dry as dust.”

I couldn’t hide the fact that Bug didn’t turn me on. If I’d had some warning, I’d have lubed myself up so that he wouldn’t know that the prospect of having sex with him didn’t exactly get my juices flowing.

“Here, baby, let me help,” I said, hoping to deflect his attention. I grabbed the bottle of lube that I kept in the nightstand, and I used it to cover his cock, working it with my hands, hoping

that I'd get him closer to cumming so that he wouldn't spend as long inside me.

“Want me to suck your cock?” I asked.

“No. You can do that later tonight. Turn around, bend over, and spread your legs.”

If those words had been coming from someone else, they'd have turned me on. I loved men to be assertive in the bedroom, but when Bug ordered me around, it just made him feel weaker somehow, like his orders were trying to compensate for the fact that he had a smaller than average cock that he couldn't even keep hard all the time.

I did what he asked, and as I spread my legs, I felt him pushing his now-slick

cock into me. He pumped a few times, and I could tell that he wasn't going to last long, thank God. I couldn't help but compare the way Bug felt as he kept shoving himself inside me and leaving me completely unsatisfied with the way I'd felt with Luke's huge cock inside me, filling me up and making me scream. As I thought about Luke, I started to move and I could feel my pussy start to get a little wet. I thought that I might actually have a chance at an orgasm when I felt Bug shudder as he came. He pulled out and left me there without saying a word.

When I heard the shower turn on in the bathroom, I got up, got dressed, and promised myself that I'd spend some time with my vibrator and my memories

of Luke later.

“I’m heading to the store,” I called out, not caring if Bug even heard me.

I pulled my tips from the night before out of my purse and counted the stack of cash, hoping that I had enough money to get burgers, buns, and a couple of sides for everyone. I figured that I should have enough to cover it, and I headed out to the car. I couldn’t help but wonder if Luke would be coming, and it occurred to me that he might not come alone. I really hated the prospect of watching him with some club slut hanging all over him, but since I was with Bug, I figured I really had no right to complain. Someday, my life would be different.

“I’ll take the potato salad out. Need help with anything else?”

Sable had been a huge help, showing up early, just as I’d gotten back from the grocery store.

“No, I think that does it,” I answered, filling some bowls with chips and salsa. “Thanks so much for your help. I don’t know what I’d have done without you.”

From out back I could hear the sounds of the men laughing, firecrackers exploding, and slutty little club whores giggling. The last time I’d been outside to deliver a round of beers, fucking Bug had Angel sitting on his lap. While I was

inside working to put together the last minute party that Bug had planned, he was out there with his hand on some slut's ass. Right in front of me. I set the salsa jar down and took a deep breath, closing my eyes and trying to calm myself down.

I really shouldn't be upset. It wasn't like I really wanted Bug for myself, but the disrespect just got to me. I had to get it under control, though. I didn't want to start a fight at all, much less in front of all the Sons, especially Luke.

Luke had shown up last, smelling like the expensive Ritz soap and looking like a fantasy, blond hair windblown and in need of a haircut. I'd watched him

from the window as he pulled into the drive on his new bike, and I fantasized about how much I wanted to climb on the back of that bike and have him take me away from everything. The only consolation in the whole evening was that he had shown up alone.

“Hey.”

I jumped, startled to hear Luke’s voice interrupt my thoughts about him.

“Hey, yourself,” I replied, busying myself with replacing the lid on the salsa jar and topping off the chips in the bowl.

“Need a hand with anything?”

“I think I’ve got it, but thanks. Sable was a life saver.”

“Yeah,” Luke said, stepping inside the kitchen and looking out the window at the scene in the back yard. “I think I’m pretty lucky to have found my birth parents. They’re good people.”

“They sure seem happy that you’re here.”

“Yeah, I got to spend a lot of time with Joker on the Arizona run, and he’s a good man. Not perfect, but a good man.”

I looked into Luke’s eyes and remembered how much I’d enjoyed talking to him. I snuck a glance outside to make sure Bug was still out there. “Did you enjoy the run?”

“Krystal, it was amazing. So much freedom. The only thing I can think of

that would make it better would be to have an awesome girl on the back of the bike with me.”

“Well, from what I’ve heard about these trips, I wouldn’t imagine that you were lonely.”

“No, I wasn’t, but as much as I love women, I’d rather be with the right one than with a string of meaningless fucks.”

This was dangerous territory. I didn’t know if Luke knew how much I really liked him, but I couldn’t have Bug walking in on the two of us talking about sex. I had my plan to get out, and I wasn’t going to let a little flirtation with Luke get in my way.

“Well, I hope you find the right one,” I said as I picked up the salsa and chips to head outside.

I stopped in my tracks when I felt Luke’s hands on my hips as I’d attempted to pass him on the way to the door.

“What if I already have?” he whispered in my ear, bending forward so that I could feel his lips barely brushing my ear.

I turned around to face him, and I wanted nothing more than to wrap my arms around him and feel that golden stubble on his jawline brush against my cheek, my throat, my whole body. But I couldn’t. I still wasn’t entirely sure that

Bug wasn't plotting some kind of revenge, but I knew for sure that if he walked into the kitchen and found me in Luke's arms, that he would kill me.

“Luke, I can't.” I said, shaking my head in regret. “I'm with Bug to keep myself safe until I can leave Denver forever and start a new life for myself. He'll kill me if he thinks I'm fooling around with you behind his back.”

Luke turned and looked out the window. “He doesn't look like he's terribly concerned about you right this minute. He has his hands all over Angel's tits.”

“Luke, I really couldn't give a shit about where he puts his hands, but his

rules for me are different. He will kill me.”

“Krystal,” Luke said, taking the bowls from my hands and setting them on the counter. He took both of my hands in his, and I felt tears threaten at the unexpectedly sweet gesture. “I had a revelation of sorts on the road. I’ve spent all my life worrying about what other people would think and trying to do the right thing, even if it meant putting what I really wanted on the back burner.”

“That’s what makes you a nice person.”

“No,” he said, shaking his head and squeezing my hands. “That’s what makes

me a pushover. I'm done being that guy. I'm done being the guy who watches the sexiest woman he's ever met go home with a piece of shit like Bug. I know he's my brother in the Sons, but he doesn't deserve you. Krystal, you deserve a man who will treat you with respect and who is strong enough to protect you from all the petty, cruel bullies like Bug."

"Luke, I have a plan to get myself out of this fucking mess I've created for myself. I'm glad you had your revelation, but I can't afford to piss Bug off. I really can't."

Luke looked at me, still holding my hands, his blue eyes holding me in his

very serious gaze. “Krystal, I want you. I want you more than I’ve ever wanted any other woman, and I don’t mean just for sex. You’re smart, you’re fun, you’re sweet, and to top it all off, you’re absolutely fucking gorgeous. I want you.” He dropped my hands and put his hands on either side of my face, holding me gently. “I think you want me, too, but if I’m wrong, just tell me, and I’ll leave you alone.”

I didn’t know what to say. Luke was, quite simply, the man of my dreams, but I was stuck, so stuck, that I was afraid that if I answered him honestly, that one or both of us would regret it. I decided to be honest. “Luke, I do want you, but I’m scared. Scared of Bug and what he’ll do

to both of us.”

“Krystal, I’m brave enough for both of us. Let me handle Bug.”

“You don’t know him like I do. If you’re not scared of him, you’re a fool.”

“No, the old Luke — the one who wore a tie to his corporate job in Arizona — he would have been scared of Bug. I’m not. I want you, and I’m going to have you, Krystal. You know we belong together.”

He tilted my face up and bent to kiss me, but I pulled away, too afraid of what might happen if anyone walked inside the kitchen.

“Luke, I want to, but I can’t.” I

grabbed the bowls and headed for the door once again.

Luke put his hand on the doorknob and paused before he opened the door for me. “Krystal, one way or another, we’re going to be together. I’ll let you go for now, and I’ll let you pretend that you want to be with Bug while you get your head together, but I will have you. You will be mine. Don’t forget that.”

I felt like I couldn’t breathe as I headed outside, an artificial smile plastered on my face. I didn’t see Bug anywhere, and I nearly panicked at the thought that he might have seen me and Luke in the kitchen.

“Where’s Bug?” I asked no one in

particular.

No one in the group would make eye contact with me except for Kris, the girl who tended bar at the clubhouse most nights. She'd never been particularly friendly to me, and I knew something was up when she smiled at me and pointed to the yard on the side of the house. It was then that I realized that Angel was missing from the group as well. I was fairly certain that the two of them were together, and I had a pretty good guess as to what they were doing. I hesitated for a moment, trying to decide if I really wanted to walk around the corner and see what Bug and Angel were doing, and I saw Sable's concerned expression.

As unsettled as I was by the conversation I'd just had with Luke, I wasn't sure I was thinking very clearly, but all I could wrap my head around was my anger at Bug. He'd dumped this party preparation on me with no notice, and then he'd gone off to fool around with Angel while I cooked for his friends. Fuck him.

I took off for the side of the house, and I turned the corner to see Bug's bare ass pumping while he fucked Angel from behind. She was bent over the big wooden box that housed the trash cans, and I could hear her whimper as Bug pulled her hair. The harder he pulled, the louder her cries and the harder he fucked her. I stood and watched, disgusted by

the fact that he'd had sex with me just a couple of hours earlier. While I watched, Bug pulled Angel's hair even harder, and he started thrusting so hard that the girl tried to slow him down.

“Bug, that really hurts, honey. Slow it down.”

“Shut the fuck up, you whore. You're gonna take it any way I want to give it to you.”

Bug pulled his cock out and started to work at it with his hands, and it was clear that he was losing his erection. Angel could be in trouble, whether she knew it or not. Part of me knew I should step in and put a stop to the scene, but part of me was transfixed, unable to

move, appalled at what was playing out in front of me.

“Jesus, you’re pussy’s so loose from all the guys you’ve fucked, you can’t even keep my dick hard.” He pulled her hair again, yanking so hard that she stifled a scream. “You know what I’m gonna do? I’m gonna fuck you in the ass. Right fuckin’ now.” He stroked his cock faster, and I figured that he was excited enough about the anal sex to get harder.

“No, Bug. I don’t have any lube. It’s going to hurt.” Angel sounded scared.

“Shut the fuck up, you cunt. You’re gonna take it, and you’re gonna tell me how good it feels to have my dick in your ass.” He spit on his hand, rubbed

his cock, and bent his knees to put it inside her.

Angel started to cry, begging him to stop, and the sound of her pitiful cries shook me out of my stupor.

“Stop it, Bug. Leave her alone.” I walked around so that he could see me. “Pull your skirt down and get the fuck out of here, Angel.”

Bug held her down, a positively evil expression on his face. “You come around here ‘cause you want some, too?”

“Bug, I don’t really give a shit who you fuck, but I’m not gonna let you hurt this girl.”

He laughed. “Oh, you’re not gonna let me? How the fuck do you think you’re gonna stop me?”

“Bug, let her go. You don’t want me making a big scene out of this, trust me.” I wouldn’t normally have threatened him, but he’d officially pushed me past the point that I could keep my mouth shut.

He studied me for a second, as if he was unsure whether I’d really make a scene, and he backed up, letting her go and pulling his jeans back up. “Get the fuck out of here, you slut,” he said to Angel before turning his attention back to me. “And you? You jealous that I have to find other women to satisfy me

because you're such a lousy fuck?" He tucked his limp dick away and zipped his jeans.

I'd thought I could stick it out, and I'd been wrong. Without a thought for my safety, and with no idea where I'd spend the night, I turned around without saying another word. I'd decided — right at that moment — that I was going to pack a bag, leave, and never look back. I'd had all I could stand, and I remembered looking at myself in the mirror and the hope I'd felt, thinking that I deserved better. I was done.

I hadn't taken more than a step toward the back yard when I heard Bug's footsteps coming toward me. I

turned to tell him to stop — to leave me alone, but I never got the chance. I saw the clenched fist coming toward my face, and tried to turn and duck, but I was too slow. Pain exploded along my jaw, and everything went black.

Chapter 29

Luke

I watched as her eyelids fluttered, and I breathed a sigh of relief to see her blue eyes, unfocused and confused at first, but clearing as she saw my face and started to smile, stopping as the pain kicked in.

“Wh ... where am I?” she croaked, confused.

“You’re in the emergency room. You’re going to be just fine.”

“He hit me,” Krystal said, clearly remembering the events of the evening.

“Sure did. Angel told everyone that you’d stopped him from hurting her, and when I got around to the side of the house, Bug was gone, and you were lying on the grass, out cold.”

Krystal put her hand to her jaw.
“Jesus, it hurts.”

I reached down and carefully brushed her hair back from her face.
“I’m sure it did. Bug’s a pretty strong guy, and he clearly didn’t hold back.”

“Where is he?”

“Don’t know. We didn’t call the police. Joker didn’t think it was a good idea. He said that Bug has a house full of knives and guns, and he was afraid that it would look bad for the MC.”

Krystal grimaced. “Sounds like Joker. Taking up for his brothers above all else.”

“A month ago, I’d have insisted on calling the cops, but not today. If I ever lay eyes on Bug again, he’ll be sorry he was ever born, and if he so much as thinks about touching you again, I’ll kill him.”

Krystal looked worried, and she tried to sit up. I gently pressed her shoulder back down onto the hospital bed.

“Don’t worry. I’m not going anywhere, and you’re safe. I’m in no hurry to sort things out with Bug. His day

of reckoning will come, and I won't have to do a single thing to make it happen.”

Krystal seemed to relax a little, and she looked up at me with the tiniest of smiles. “I'm glad you're here, Luke.”

“Nowhere else I'd rather be.” I moved from the bedside chair to sit on the edge of her bed. “Krystal, I meant what I said earlier today. We are meant to be together. You're mine, and I've learned how and when to protect what's mine. Baby, no one is ever going to hurt you like he did, not if I can stop it.”

“Luke, I don't want you to feel sorry for me. I don't need someone to fight my battles for me.”

“Krystal, you may not need it, but you’ve got it. I did a lot of thinking on the road, and I know what I want. I want to be a Savage Son, and I want you. That’s it. It’s that simple. And I’m not the kind of guy who’s going to wait around and hope that I get what I want. Not anymore. I want you, and I’m gonna have you.”

“You know what’s funny, Luke?” Krystal asked. “I had just — right before he knocked me out — decided that I was going to leave Bug once and for all. It had nothing to do with you, either, but it was a decision I had to make for myself.”

Krystal stopped talking as the

physician's assistant came in the door.

“Ah,” he said, seeing that his patient was awake. “Krystal, nice to have you awake and alert. How're you feeling?”

I stood up and got out of the way so that the man could examine Krystal, check her responses, and assess whether she was thinking clearly. He told her that there was — surprisingly — little chance that she had a concussion, and that their x-rays had shown not a single broken bone. He looked at me before he continued, and I noticed some hostility in his gaze.

“Krystal, I know this wasn't the result of an accident. Is there anything we need to know about how you were

injured? Anyone we should talk to?”

I could see him inclining his head toward me, and I realized that he thought that I might have hit her. Before I could say a word, though, Krystal spoke up.

“I get what you’re asking. My ex-boyfriend hit me, and Luke is just cleaning up the mess. I don’t want to press charges, and don’t want to talk to the cops. I’m sure it won’t happen again.”

“You know, we don’t usually see women in here just once for domestic violence, Krystal. You’ll be safer if you press charges and get a restraining order.”

“No need. Luke will keep me safe,

and if I see my ex around again, I'll call the cops right away. That make you feel better?"

"I guess that's the best we're going to get, isn't it?" he asked, not convinced in the least, but resigned to her right to make her own decision.

I finally stepped forward. "She'll be fine, and we appreciate your taking such good care of her."

He nodded and turned back to Krystal. "As long as you're feeling okay, we'll go ahead and get started on your discharge paperwork." He looked at his watch. "I'm afraid you'll miss most of the fireworks, but at least we'll get you home in a couple of hours or so."

Krystal shook her head and winced, holding her jaw. “That’s quite all right. I think I saw enough fireworks this afternoon.”

It was nearly midnight by the time I helped Krystal out of the car after the valet opened her door. He was circumspect enough to keep any comments to himself, as he hurried to get the door for us, too. I kept my arm around Krystal’s shoulders while we walked to the elevator and she wrapped her arm around my waist for support as we left the elevator and headed for my suite.

“I intend to wait on you hand and

foot,” I said, as I got her settled on the couch and went to get an extra blanket to cover her up. “I’ll head downstairs and get you any toiletries that you need.”

Krystal looked tired as she sat there, watching me fuss over her. “You know, I had turned around to go inside and pack a bag, when Bug came at me. I wish I’d had a chance to get my things.”

“I’ll take you by there tomorrow to pick your stuff up. I’ll call ahead and get Joker to make sure that asshole’s not there. In the meantime, what do you need for tonight?”

She thought for a bit. “I could use a hairbrush, toothbrush, and toothpaste. That’s all, I guess. I’ll just throw these

clothes on tomorrow until I get mine back.” She looked up at me. “Hey, do you mind if I take a bath while you run downstairs? I feel like I need to wash this day off.”

“Anything you want, baby,” I said, covering her hand with mine. I leaned forward and pressed the gentlest of kisses on her mouth, hoping I wouldn’t hurt her. “I’ll go run the water for you if you’d like.”

She smiled and nodded, and as I laid out the thick white robe and added some perfumed bubble bath to the hot water, I realized that being around Krystal — even after the awful circumstances of the afternoon — felt right and made me

happy. She came into the bathroom before I left, and I watched, speechless, as she stripped out of her clothes, folding them neatly and placing them on the expansive counter, and slipped into the water.

She sighed as she eased herself into the hot water and I watched, aroused, as the bubbles covered her breasts.

“Heaven,” she said, looking at me with a smile. “Thank you, Luke.”

“Want a glass of wine?” I asked before I left the room.

“Hell, yes,” she laughed. They didn’t give me painkillers, and I think a bath and a glass of wine will send me right to sleep.”

“Your wish is my command,” I said when I handed her a glass of the very same red wine that she’d had the first night I’d met her.

I scooped up her clothes from the counter, figuring that I could find someone in the hotel willing to launder them overnight, and I headed down to the front desk.

When Krystal finally emerged from the bathroom nearly an hour later, I’d poured myself a scotch and was standing in front of the window, looking at the city lights.

“Better?” I asked as she walked into

the room carrying her empty wine glass.

“I feel like a new person,” she answered, looking even younger than she usually did, with all of her makeup washed away and her hair all wet.

“How’s the jaw?” I asked, as I poured her another glass of wine.

“Sore,” she answered. “But it could have been worse, I guess. If people hadn’t been there, he might have hit me more than once.”

“You’re never going to have to worry about that again,” I said. “You’re safe now.” I pointed at the end table next to the couch. “I got you a little something.”

She smiled at me and looked puzzled. “Where did you find a shop that was open? It has to be nearly midnight.”

“Oh, I talked the nice lady at the front desk into opening the gift shop for me. Thought you might like this,” I said, pointing at the box that the woman had thoughtfully wrapped.

Krystal untied the ribbon, and lifted the lid on the box, pushing aside the tissue paper to see what was inside. She reached in and lifted the pale pink silk straps, letting the rest of the nightgown ripple to the floor. “Oh, my,” she whispered reverently. “That’s just gorgeous.”

“I guessed at the size, but I figured

you could use something lovely and soft to sleep in.”

“I’ve never had anything this beautiful,” she said, eyes shining.

“Well, that ends right now,” I answered. “Want to try it on?” I asked, dying to see what she looked like in silk.

She left the room and returned, having brushed out her long, dark hair. She stepped inside the room, and I couldn’t take my eyes off her. She looked sweet, and my heart just ached at the thought that Bug had hurt her so badly. I tried to ignore the fact that I could see the hard buds of her nipples beneath the thin silk, and I held my arms out to her. She crossed the room and laid

her head on my chest as I wrapped my arms around her.

She looked up at me. “Thank you, Luke,” she said.

I couldn't resist, and I bent to kiss her, gently, because I didn't want to hurt her, but I was surprised when she pressed her lips to mine even harder and opened her mouth, her tongue seeking mine.

“Come to bed with me,” she said.

“I thought you might just want to sleep, with everything that's happened today,” I protested, trying desperately to ignore my hard-on.

“I'll sleep,” she said with a smile.

“But first I want you to make love to me.”

Without another word, I picked her up and carried her to bed. It hadn't gone unnoticed that she hadn't said that she wanted me to fuck her, and I was pleased at her choice of words. I had every intention of fucking her, hard, fast, and every way we could think of, but some nights — this night — was for making love.

I slid the silk from her perfumed skin, and I licked and sucked her nipples, pleased to slip my hands between her legs and find her wet and ready for me. As I looked down at her, gorgeous, beneath me in my bed, I

couldn't think of any place I'd rather be. I slid my cock into her, and we both gasped with pleasure. I took my time, with slow, deep strokes intended to bring her to orgasm slowly and surely. When I felt her breath quicken, I drove a little quicker, savoring the sensation of having every inch of my cock covered by her pussy.

As I felt myself start to lose control — felt my own orgasm beginning — I looked down at her to find her blue eyes seeking mine. We held our gazes while the wave of our mutual climax rose and subsided, and not until I shuddered at the very end, did I let myself relax and fall to the side of her naked body, careful not to hurt her. I wrapped her up in my arms

and drifted off to sleep, happy to have Krystal in my arms, safe and satisfied.

Chapter 30

Krystal

Friday, July 5, 2013

I opened my eyes, and had no idea where I was. I felt a warm body and strong arms wrapped around me, and the events of Independence Day came back to me in a tangled rush of horror, pain, and deep satisfaction at Luke's body beside mine. I realized I was naked and that I needed to pee, so I shifted a little to see if Luke would let go so I could slip out without waking him.

Managing to extricate myself from

the gorgeous man who was still sound asleep, I slipped on the night gown he'd gotten for me and smiled as I looked down at his messy blond hair and relaxed, sprawled out pose. Was it possible that I could really end up with a guy like Luke?

In the bathroom, I looked at myself in the mirror, and all things considered, I didn't look too awful. My jawline was starting to show a bruise that I figured would blacken a good portion of my face. I might need to talk to Mark about my work schedule, because I wasn't sure he'd want a bruised-up bartender on duty. I'd just have to figure out a way to deal with the lost wages, but I kinda figured that Luke wouldn't mind if I

spent a few days with him while I sorted a few things out.

I was certain that I'd left my clothes on the bathroom counter, but I couldn't find them anywhere, so I put on a robe over my nightgown and headed out to the living room, intending to order some coffee from room service. Looking over the menu at the ridiculous prices, I decided to just order coffee and some fruit. Luke had been amazingly generous, but I realized that I could spend more money on breakfast at the Ritz than I pulled in in an entire shift. No one could possibly have enough money to live this way forever, and I wasn't going to needlessly blow Luke's inheritance.

When room service arrived, I was pleasantly surprised to find a bag with my clean clothes inside, neatly pressed and folded. I signed for the food, thanked the man, and got down to the very serious business of getting myself a cup of coffee.

I was just pouring my second cup from the elegant silver coffee pot when Luke emerged from the bedroom, running his hand through his messy hair, bare-chested, and drop-dead gorgeous. He dropped a kiss on the top of my head and poured himself a cup of coffee before joining me at the table.

“Morning, gorgeous,” he said, making me feel like the sun had just

come out, filling me with the warmth of genuine affection that went beyond just wanting to fuck my brains out.

“Good morning,” I answered, thinking that I could get used to starting my morning with Luke around.

“Sleep okay?” he asked.

“Better than I expected. Face hurts like hell, but I think I’ll live.”

Luke sat up and examined my face in the sunlight from the window. “The bruise is gonna look worse before it looks better, but I’m just glad you’re safe and here with me.”

I smiled at him and leaned over and kissed him. “Me, too. And thanks for

having my clothes cleaned. I was afraid I was gonna have to walk outta here naked. Couldn't find them anywhere.”

Luke laughed with me before he set down his coffee and leaned over to take my hand. “Krystal, I want you to know that I meant everything I said yesterday. This isn't just about the sex — although there's gonna be a lot more of that. I really like you, and I want to be with you. You're mine now, and whatever we have to do to sort that out with the Sons and with Bug, that's what we'll do. You belong to me, and I don't share.”

Well, I'd wanted Luke to be more assertive, and it looked like I'd gotten that ... in spades. I squeezed his hand.

“I’m all yours, Luke, and not just because you’re protecting me. I’m yours because you’re a good man, and I want to be with you.”

“Fair enough,” he said, returning to his coffee. “So what’s the game plan for today?”

“I looked in the mirror, and I’m definitely not going to be able to go to work for a few days. I’ve already texted my manager, and I’m waiting to hear back from him. Really, the only other thing I need to do is find some way to get my stuff out of Bug’s house.”

“I’ll call Joker and see what we can do about getting Bug out of the house so you can get what you need.”

Despite my aching jaw, and the fact that I had one set of clothing in my possession, and I wasn't sure where I would live, I felt warm and safe, and like a very fortunate girl.

“Do you have things set up?” I asked an hour or so later, after I'd had a chance to shower and get dressed.

“All set,” Luke answered. “Joker talked to Bug, and he's left town for a couple of days — going to visit Jimmy in Fort Collins.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “Does he know I'm going to get my stuff?”

“Joker told him, and he told him that he's not to come anywhere near you.”

“Does he know about you and me?” I asked, worried about what would happen when Bug got back into town.

“Don’t know. Don’t care,” Luke said, jaw set in a determined line. “I’ll deal with Bug if I need to, but he’ll realize soon enough that he’s better off just staying the fuck outta my way.”

Wow. It was like Luke had gone to Arizona a boy and come back a man. “Maybe we’ll get lucky and he’ll move to the Fort Collins chapter,” I said, hoping that somehow, I’d never have to see Bug again.

“He can do whatever he likes, except for touching you again,” Luke said, in a tone of voice that said he’d

entertain no arguments to the contrary.

“Ready?” he asked, holding his hand out for mine.

“Absolutely,” I answered, looking forward to leaving Bug behind and moving on to the next chapter of my life.

On the way to Bug’s, Luke and I talked about the future. Luke knew that he couldn’t live at the Ritz forever, and I was surprised to hear that he’d looked into a few houses for rent.

“I want to buy or build something eventually, but renting will give me a chance to figure out exactly where I want to live in the area.”

“Are you going to sell your condo in

Arizona?”

“Ever been to Flagstaff?” he asked.

“No. I hear Arizona’s hot.”

“Parts of it are, and Flagstaff gets hot during the day in the summer, but because of the elevation, it cools down at night. It’s a gorgeous city, and I think I’ll keep the condo. I can take you there and introduce you to my old friends — before my MC days.”

We both laughed, and I realized how much his life had changed in a relatively short period of time.

“Aren’t you worried about money?” I couldn’t imagine having enough money to be able to pay for more than one place

to live.

“I told you that my parents left me some money. If I’m smart — and I am — I won’t have to worry about money ever again. And if you’re smart — and I’m sure you are — neither will you.” He reached out and took my hand, and we were quiet for the rest of the drive to Bug’s neighborhood.

Luke pulled into the driveway, and I realized that all of my muscles were tense. I wanted to get my shit and get out of there.

He put the Jeep into park. “I’m going to stay out here and keep an eye out for Bug. I don’t trust that he won’t come back and try to catch you here.”

I nodded.

“When you have everything packed up, let me know, and I’ll help you carry it out.”

“Will do.” I stood on my tiptoes and kissed Luke. “Thanks again.”

“No thanks necessary, gorgeous,” he said, getting out of the car and leaning against it. “I’ll be right here when you’re ready.”

I was smiling back at Luke when I unlocked the door, and I must have been in a fog from the flood of emotions, or I’m sure I would have noticed that something was wrong before I stepped inside, closed the door, and felt the hand cover my mouth and the knife blade at

my throat.

“If you make a sound, I will kill you right now, and then I’ll kill that little prick outside.” Bug’s whisper was deadly serious, and I felt all the blood rush from my face. “You understand?” he asked.

I nodded, feeling his hand pressing painfully on the jaw that he’d bruised the day before. He pulled me — slowly, so I wouldn’t stumble — into the master bedroom, the furthest point from the front door, and I knew that even if I screamed, that there was no way Luke would hear me. My only hope was to stay alive and hope that Luke came inside to check on me.

Bug picked up a roll of duct tape from the dresser, tore a piece off, and covered my mouth with it, grabbing me by the jaw after he'd silenced me and examining the results of his handiwork the day before. "Looks like you're a little bruised up, you fucking cunt."

I stood still, shaking in fear, trying desperately to think of a way to get out before he killed me.

"Now, I was going to take my time with you, sweetheart. I guess I have to change my plans a bit since you've brought your stupid fucking lover boy with you. I was gonna fuck you every way I could think of, and I was gonna kill you with my dick in your ass. I was

gonna make you bleed to death while I fucked you bloody.” Bug started to stroke himself through his jeans, and I could tell that he was turned on by the thought of my pain.

“But I don’t have all day, do I?”

It wasn’t like I could answer, not with tape over my mouth, and all I could hope was that maybe I could escape while he fumbled with his pants, or maybe I could distract him somehow. I forced myself to stay calm, even though I could feel the telltale signs of a panic attack beginning.

Bug pushed me backward onto the bed, and I stumbled and ended up sprawled across it. He reached down

and pulled my t-shirt away from my skin at the neck. Using his knife, he slowly sliced the shirt down the front until it fell away, exposing my bra.

“Unbuckle my belt,” he said, rubbing his hard-on.

I sat up, not even bothering to try to cover myself with the remains of my shirt, and I unbuckled his belt, waiting for further instructions.

“Undo my pants.”

I did what he asked, and he stepped back to shift his jeans down over his erection and step out of them, keeping the knife pointed at me.

“Wrap your hands around my cock,

whore,” he said, stepping toward me and pointing the knife right at my throat.

Knowing that if I tried to hurt him, he'd kill me, I complied. He grabbed my face while I rubbed his cock, and he turned my head to the side, pressing painfully on my jaw. I must have moaned in pain, because he pulled his erection out of my hands and stepped back, looking at me in tears on the bed.

“Does that hurt?” he asked.

I nodded silently.

He reached out with the knife and ran the blade along my stomach, just beneath my breasts. The knife must have been really sharp, because for a second I didn't feel anything but pressure. I

looked down and saw blood welling from the cut and the pain hit me.

“How about that?” he asked. “Does that hurt?”

I nodded, and it occurred to me that I was going to die that day. I was going to die at the hands of the monster I'd slept with, cooked for, and lived with. Bug was going to kill me, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Bug reached down with the knife again, and I flinched as he cut my bra, right in the center, so the cups fell away and my breasts were exposed. He used the knife to circle my nipple, light enough that he didn't break the skin, but terrifyingly close to it. I drew in my

breath, trying to keep still and hoping that somehow, some way, he would stop. He pulled the knife away from the nipple he'd toyed with, and casually sliced toward my other breast, opening a cut that stopped just short of my other nipple. I breathed in, wishing my mouth weren't covered, and I flinched and pulled away.

“Don't you fuckin' move, you piece of trash. I'm gonna make you bleed to pay for what you've done. Your whore's body will be taken out of here in pieces when I'm done with you.”

I closed my eyes and felt the tears running down my face. When I opened my eyes and looked down, I saw tears

and blood mingled on my chest, and I
felt any hope for survival disappear.

Chapter 31

Luke

I was standing outside Bug's house, enjoying the sunshine and thinking that it wouldn't take much effort to make the front yard look one hundred percent better, when my phone vibrated. I looked down and saw a Colorado number that I didn't recognize.

“Luke, here,” I answered, assuming that the call was about the dispensary.

“Um, Luke, this is Nate.”

“Yeah?” I wasn't sure what the new patch-over from Fort Collins thought

about Bug's assault on Krystal yesterday because he'd seemed pretty tight with Bug and J.C., but I figured that he'd called me for a reason.

“Hey, is Krystal with you?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, good.”

I could hear the relief in his voice.

“Why?” I asked. “What's going on?”

“Oh, it's nothing. As long as she's with you, I'm sure she's okay.”

“What's going on?” I asked, suspicious.

“Well, it's nothing since you're with her. It's just that Bug stopped by the

clubhouse this morning and told Joker he was on his way to Fort Collins. Said he was clearing out so Krystal could pick up her shit. He told J.C. and me that he wasn't leaving until he'd seen her, though, and it didn't sound like he planned on just talking. Glad you have it under control.”

“Wait a minute,” I said, my blood pressure rising. “Are you telling me that Bug didn't leave town?”

“Don't think so, not yet. But I'm sure you can handle him, man, if you happen to run into him.”

I hung up the phone and froze, my mind racing as I thought through the possibilities. My best guess was that

Bug was inside his house with Krystal, and there was no one but me close enough to do anything about it. I knew the MC didn't like to involve the cops with our problems, but I knew that Bug had guns and knives all over his house, and that some help could mean the difference between life and death for Krystal. I made a snap decision.

I dialed 911 and looked at the front of the house for the address.

“I have an emergency. A man is armed — guns and knives, and he has my girlfriend. I need help.”

I gave the dispatcher the address, and hung up, even though he was asking me questions. They had the information

they needed, and I had to go do what I could to protect Krystal.

Part of me wanted to barge in the door, calling her name, but I realized that if Bug was actually inside, that I might be better off using the element of surprise. I approached the front door, looked in through the windows beside the door, and couldn't see anything or anyone out of place. Hoping that the door would open quietly, I turned the doorknob, only to discover that it was locked.

“Goddammit,” I said under my breath, starting to panic. There was no reason on earth for Krystal to have locked the door. Bug was inside and he

had her. I ran to the garage, hoping to find it unlocked. No luck. I ran to the back door and relief flooded over me when the handle turned and the door opened. I stepped inside and paused to listen — trying to find out where Bug and Krystal were. I heard it right away — Krystal's muffled cries that just broke my heart, coming from one of the bedrooms.

Cursing the fact that I didn't have a weapon of any kind, I grabbed the only thing I could see that might be any good to me. The metal baseball bat was leaning against the entertainment center, and I picked it up as I hurried for the bedroom. I tried to keep my emotions in check and figure out the best way to

handle the situation. I didn't want to rush into the bedroom if Bug had a gun and end up with both Krystal and me held at gunpoint. I had to find a way to assess the situation in the bedroom, and fast. I could hear Krystal whimpering, but it was muted, like Bug had his hand over her mouth. All I knew for sure was that she was alive, and I was going to keep it that way.

I moved down the hall quickly and quietly, following the sounds in the bedroom. I could hear Bug's voice, and his sick words became more distinct as I got closer.

“Don't you fuckin' move, you piece of trash.” He continued to talk, but I was

so angry that I couldn't even distinguish the words.

It sounded like Bug was facing away from the bedroom door, and I took a chance, looking around the door way into the room. What I saw nearly made me lose my mind. Bug faced the bed, naked from the waist down. He was between me and Krystal, and all I could see of her, seated on the bed, was one arm, streaked with blood. My vision swam with the fury that overwhelmed me, and without a word, I swung the baseball bat right at Bug's head, putting everything I had into the blow.

He slumped to the floor, curled in a heap, unmoving, his knife falling from

his hand. I rushed to Krystal.

“Oh, my God,” I said as I saw her.

She sat on the bed, her clothes in pieces, blood everywhere. Duct tape covered her mouth, and her eyes were enormous, terrified, and tears ran down her face.

“Can you hear me?” I asked, worried about whether or not she was coherent.

She nodded, and I quickly sorted out my priorities in my head. She was a mess, but she was upright and conscious, so I decided that ensuring Bug couldn't hurt either of us was most important. I turned to the man sprawled on the floor, clearly unconscious. I looked around the room for the roll of duct tape, planning

to secure his hands until the police arrived.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Krystal stand up, shed her ruined clothing, pull a shirt out of the dresser and put it on. I knew there were injuries under that clothing, but I figured we could assess her condition as soon as I had Bug immobilized. Duct tape in hand, I grabbed Bug's wrists, turning him so that he was facedown on the floor. I could see that some blood had pooled beneath his head, and a massive bruise covered the side of his face. I didn't bother to be careful with him as I roughly wrapped the tape around his wrists and dropped his hands onto his back. I might have injured him further,

but I didn't care.

I kicked at his feet, trying to see if I could rouse him, but there was nothing. No response, no movement. I stepped back, and decided that when he did wake up, that I'd probably incapacitated the fucker and that we could handle him if he tried to come after us. Only once I was certain he was immobilized, did I turn my full attention on Krystal.

“Baby, come here,” I said, pulling her into my arms briefly, before stepping back and examining her.

She tugged at the duct tape over her mouth, eyes watering at the pain of separating the strong adhesive from her skin. I let her do it at her own pace, and

when she'd finally gotten it off, her face red and bleeding in a couple of spots, she sat down on the edge of the bed, shaking from head to toe.

“Luke, he was waiting just inside the door for me. He covered my mouth, and dragged me back here.”

“Hush, baby,” I said, afraid to touch her because I didn't know the extent of her injuries. “You were covered in blood. How badly did he cut you?”

“Oh, my God, it was so awful. He was gonna kill me.”

Krystal was shaking and started to breathe faster as she became more and more upset. I was afraid she was going to pass out if I didn't get her calmed

down.

“Krystal,” I said, as I knelt on the floor in front of her. “Baby, listen to me. Calm down. I’m here, and he can’t hurt you. I need to see how badly you’re hurt. You have to calm down and let me take care of you, okay?”

The tone of my voice soothed her a little, and she took a deep breath, made eye contact with me, and seemed to calm down a little. She lifted her shirt, and I gasped as I saw her injuries. The cuts didn’t look deep, but they were ugly. He’d cut one of her breasts, beneath her breasts, and he’d scratched her repeatedly. I could only imagine how terrifying it must have been to have that

evil fucking man torturing her with the blade of his knife. I pulled her shirt back down to cover her, and I took her hands.

“The police should be here any minute. I called them before I came inside.”

“You called the police?” Even in her distress, she seemed surprised.

“I know that’s not usually the way the Sons do things, but I couldn’t take the risk of your being hurt, not if I could prevent it.”

We heard sirens approaching, and in no time, we heard someone banging on the door.

“Denver Police. Open the door.”

“Go open it,” I told Krystal. “I don’t want to leave Bug alone, just in case he comes to.”

She left the room, and I looked at the man on the floor. I supposed that I should feel guilty, that another human being was injured because of what I’d done, but I didn’t. I felt nothing but contempt for the man I’d taken down. He didn’t deserve my pity or my mercy. I had done what I knew was right, and I had protected Krystal.

Two policemen rushed into the room, guns drawn, and interrupted my thoughts. I held my hands up, even though I was sure they wouldn’t shoot me. I was unarmed, and I hadn’t done

anything wrong.

“Are you the one who called 911?” one of the cops demanded, pointing his gun at the floor near my feet.

The other officer holstered his weapon and went to check on Bug. He put his hand at his neck to feel for his pulse and looked up at me and his partner. “This man is dead,” he announced.

Chapter 32

Krystal

I sat on the couch in Bug's living room, trying to calm myself down enough to explain to the police officers in the living room what had happened. A paramedic came rushing in from the ambulance that had just arrived, and she took my pulse while I talked to the cops.

“No, I didn't see a gun,” I answered, for the second time. “He might have one, but all I saw was the knife. I flinched as the paramedic brushed up against my chest. “Ow,” I yelped, as I saw fresh blood seeping through the t-shirt I'd

thrown on to cover up.

“Hey, back off a minute,” the paramedic said to the cops, waving them away. “She’s bleeding.”

The paramedic called for help and for a stretcher, while one of the police officers in the living room called back to the guys in the bedroom.

“Everything okay back there?”

I didn’t really think that I needed to be taken out on a stretcher, but I was too overwhelmed to argue with the medical folks. I was settling myself as one of the cops came out of the bedroom, and I couldn’t believe that he was pushing Luke ahead of him. The man who’d rescued me was in handcuffs.

“Luke!” I cried out, horrified at the rough treatment he was getting. “What’s going on?” I yelled.

The officer who held Luke’s arm explained. “We have a dead man in the bedroom, and this man admitted to killing him. Baseball bat is his weapon of choice, apparently.”

I was frantic, and I pulled at the sleeve belonging to one of the cops I’d been talking to, but he ignored me.

“He says he had no choice, but we have to take him in and at least get his statement. We need a statement from the girl, too. He says she’s injured, and we’re going to need to know the extent

of her injuries.”

I watched, helpless as the cop took Luke outside.

I grabbed the arm of the cop who stood nearest me. “He saved my life. You can’t arrest him.”

“Ma’am, calm down,” he said. “You’re injured. We’re going to get you taken care of, and we’ll sort this out. If he didn’t do anything wrong, then he has nothing to worry about.”

“But you don’t understand. Bug was gonna kill me.” I could feel myself start to hyperventilate, and I started crying as my breathing became increasingly rapid and shallow. “You have to stop them. He saved me from...”

“Ma’am, you have to calm down,” the paramedic told me. “If you don’t calm down, we’ll have to give you something to sedate you. Do you hear me?”

I took a deep, ragged breath, and forced myself to be still, stop talking, and focus on what was most important.

“I’m okay,” I said. “I’m calm now,” I said, sounding much more composed than I felt.

The paramedic smiled and put her hand on my arm. “I know you’ve been through a lot, honey, and we’re gonna take good care of you. Everything will be okay.”

She and her partner put me in the ambulance, and one of the police officers sat silently off to the side, while they temporarily patched me up on the way to the hospital. His blank expression revealed nothing, though I tried to listen in to the phone calls he received on the ride to the emergency room. When we arrived, I had no idea what was going on with Luke, but I tried to stay calm and figured that I could be most helpful by explaining everything that had happened, as clearly as possible.

“Well, Krystal,” the physician assistant said as he entered the room. “I can’t say I’m happy to see you again. Want to tell me what happened?”

The police officer who had been asking me questions stepped back when the PA entered. “I’ll be right outside the door, and we’ll finish up after your exam,” he said as he exited.

I told the story to the PA, and he examined all of my injuries, deciding that as long as we kept butterfly bandages on them, that they weren’t deep enough to need stitches.

“You’ll need to keep them clean, of course, and Krystal,” he said, looking me straight in the eye. “You need to stay away from the guy who did this to you. Two days in a row in the ER is too many.”

“Oh, you don’t need to worry. I

won't be back.”

“Well, all things considered, you were pretty lucky. We'll get you all cleaned up and bandaged up, and you'll be free to go. You take care of yourself.”

He walked outside the room and I could hear him talking to the cop. It hadn't completely sunk in that Bug was dead, and I figured that I should probably feel sorry, or guilty, or something, but to tell you the truth, all I felt was relief. I hadn't realized how much of my energy had been consumed by him until that burden was gone. As soon as Luke was cleared and released, my fresh start could begin.

Not until I'd gotten my discharge

orders and signed all of the paperwork, did I realize that I had no way to get home. I tried to call Luke, but his phone was turned off, and I assumed that he was still at the police station. I managed to catch the police officer who'd taken my statement just before he left.

“Hey, I don't have a car, and I don't really have anyone to call. Can you take me to the station where Luke Callaway is?” I figured that in the worst case, I could call Joker or Sable to give me a ride home if the police were still talking to Luke. If for some reason I couldn't get Joker or Sable, I figured that my parents would be my last resort. I really didn't want to call them under these circumstances, but maybe that wouldn't

be the worst thing in the world.

“Sorry,” the cop said, once we were out in the parking lot. He was holding the back door of his cruiser open.

“Regulations prohibit me from carrying passengers up front.”

Hoping no one would see me, I climbed in. “I appreciate the ride.”

“Least I can do. You’ve had a hell of a day.”

Once he got in up front, I asked him if he knew what was going on with Luke, explaining that his phone seemed to be turned off.

“I don’t know, ma’am. Given that there was a dead man on the scene, it

may take some time to clear up exactly what happened. I'm sure if he tells the truth, and if he didn't do anything wrong, that he'll be out in no time."

I leaned back and stared at the grate that separated the back seat from the front, and was thankful to arrive at the station in just a few minutes. The first thing I noticed as we pulled in was that there were four familiar bikes parked in front of the station. I sighed in relief. At least I wouldn't be alone. The cop opened my car door — since I couldn't do it myself — and I followed him inside to find complete chaos in the huge waiting area in the lobby.

“What the fuck do you mean, they're

charging him with murder?” Joker’s voice boomed throughout the linoleum hallways that led from the waiting room.

“Sir, I’m going to have to ask you to either lower your voice or leave,” the police officer said, her voice a firm indication that she wouldn’t tolerate much more from the furious biker who stared down at her.

“Joker, honey, let me handle this,” Sable said, pulling at Joker’s arm, trying to get him to step back from the officer he was glaring at.

He stormed away, clearly struggling to regain some control over his anger.

“Is there someone we can talk to who can explain this to us?” Sable

asked, surprisingly calm. “We’re his parents.”

The officer looked puzzled and referred to a file in her hand. She shook her head. “Ma’am, Mr. Callaway informed us that his parents are both recently deceased. He listed a Krystal Shaw as his emergency contact.”

Sable sighed and lowered her head. “We’re his birth parents. He was adopted, and we just recently met him again. Can you please tell us what’s going on?”

“I’m sorry, ma’am. I can’t talk about an ongoing investigation. If Mr. Callaway is charged, there will be a grand jury hearing to indict him, and the

judge will set bail. If he's not charged, he'll be free to go, but I'm not the one who makes those decisions. There's not much more I can tell you."

I stepped forward. "I'm Krystal Shaw. It's my fault Luke's in here. Can I see him?"

Sable turned to look at me, and I swear that if looks could have killed, I wouldn't have survived.

"Jesus, you look awful, Krystal," she said, in a voice that conveyed little sympathy for my condition.

I was sure I did look awful, wearing bloodstained clothes and bearing bruises from the previous day's encounter. "Sable, Luke saved my life. Bug was

about to kill me, and Luke came in and hit him with a baseball bat. He didn't mean to kill him, but he couldn't let him continue to slice me up.”

Joker hurried to my side. “Are you okay, honey?”

Sable put a hand on his arm. “At least she's not in jail,” she pointed out. “Are you going to straighten this mess out?” she asked me.

“I've already told the cops everything, that he came in and saved my life.”

Sable looked at me, and I stepped back, stunned by the anger I saw in her eyes. “If that's the case, then why are

you out here, while he's locked up?"

The police officer stepped in between us, and faced me. "Ma'am, if you'll come with us, I have some people who want to talk to you." She took my arm and ignored Sable, who stood still and glared at me.

I could hear the confusion of voices behind me as I walked down the hallway with the cop, and in addition to being confused and worried about Luke, I also started to feel a little light-headed. I stopped walking abruptly, and the cop came to halt beside me.

"Krystal. You okay?" she asked, looking at me with obvious concern. "Good grief, honey, I know you've been

through a lot. I'm gonna find you a place to sit down, and we'll get you something to drink, okay?"

I nodded and clung to her arm, realizing that I hadn't had anything to eat or drink since the fruit and coffee that morning. The Ritz seemed like a lifetime ago.

I finished the last of the orange juice in the styrofoam cup and set it on the table in front of me. The peanut butter crackers and juice that the cop had brought me had leveled out my blood sugar and made me feel much better, physically, anyway. Looking around the room, I wondered how long the police

planned to keep me, and I wondered when I'd be able to see Luke.

The door opened and a man and a woman entered the room. I hadn't met either of them, and they were both dressed in suits, rather than police uniforms.

“Krystal, I'm Special Agent Kate Tanner with the FBI,” the woman said, as she sat down across from me.

“Sounds like you've had quite a day.” She smiled at me sympathetically, and I instinctively felt like she was a person I could trust.

“I'm Mark Singer, DEA,” the man said as he set a cup of coffee in front of me, along with packets of sugar and

creamer. “I know you’ve answered a lot of questions, but we have a few more for you, if you feel up to it.”

I shook my head, confused. “Where’s Luke?”

“We have him here, and we have some folks talking to him. There are some questions we need answers to, and we think he can give us a hand with that.”

“I don’t understand,” I said. “I’ve told the police everything I know. Why are the FBI and the DEA here, too?”

Kate leaned forward. “Krystal, I know you’ve been through a lot, but if you will help us out, we’ll get you out of here as quick as we can.”

I was frustrated, and I sighed. “If I answer your questions, can I see Luke?”

“Absolutely,” she answered.

I felt like we spent four hours in that bleak room, but it was probably closer to one hour. They took turns asking me a whole bunch of questions about how long Luke had been in town, what he'd done for a living in Arizona, how he'd gotten hooked up with the Savage Sons, and what his plans for the future were. They also asked a bunch of questions about how well I'd known Moses and if I'd ever traveled to Mexico with him. The questions came in what felt like a completely random order, and I could only answer about half of them, but I

was completely honest. I didn't see any reason not to be. The weird thing was that most of the questions didn't have anything to do with any kind of criminal activity, and not a one of them had anything to do with Bug's death.

By the time we were wrapping up, I'd decided that I liked and trusted Kate, but I wasn't at all sure that I would trust Mark as far as I could throw him. I looked at Kate as she reviewed her notes. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course," she answered, with an expression that said she'd be completely open with me.

"What does all of this have to do with Bug's death?"

She looked over at Mark and back at me. “Krystal, I’m going to be completely honest with you. Probably nothing.”

“Then why...”

She held her hand up to stop me.

“There’s not a lot I can tell you, but it’s possible that Luke may have some information we need with regard to some other, probably unrelated investigations. We’ve found that the best way to get that information is to ask lots of questions, even if we’re not sure how — or even if — someone’s involved.”

I was starting to feel frustrated.

“Well, that tells me a whole lot of nothing.”

Mark stood up. “We appreciate you

taking the time to talk to us.” He walked to the door and waited for Kate.

She put her hand over mine.

“Krystal, I’ll go see what I can do about getting you in to see Luke.”

Chapter 33

Luke

By the time the door opened and Krystal rushed into the room, I'd been at the police station for nearly eight hours. Eight hours of incessant questions, threats, and a whole lot of confusion on my part.

Krystal didn't even seem to notice the other person in the room as she crossed the room and threw her arms around me. "Luke, my God it's so good to see you. Are you okay?"

I held her face in my hands. "Am I

okay? I can't even believe you're asking that. The last time I saw you, you were covered in blood and on a stretcher. Tell me how you're doing."

"I'll be fine. No stitches, and they don't even think the scarring will be bad as long as I'm careful." Krystal finally realized that there was someone else in the room with us, and she looked at me, questions in her eyes.

"Krystal, this is Bryan Boyd, my attorney."

Bryan held out his hand. "Nice to meet you. Wish it were under better circumstances."

Krystal shook her head. "Luke, what's going on? Joker said something

about a murder charge, and I've just spent the last hour with the FBI and DEA.”

Bryan gestured at the table. “Let's sit down, and I'll try to explain my understanding of what's going on here.”

I sat down and pulled a chair close for Krystal. I put my hand on her thigh, and she leaned in toward me as we looked at Bryan.

“It appears to me that there's more than just a simple investigation into Bug's death going on here. Based on what Luke has told me, if that's all this were, he'd be home right now. Now, I don't know if the prosecutor has evidence that points to some other

version of what happened that completely contradicts Luke's story, but the fact that the feds are involved means that this isn't necessarily going to be an open and shut case."

"But how can that be?" Krystal asked. "The agents I just talked to asked more questions about the Sons than they did about Luke."

"Yeah." Bryan ran his hands through his curly brown hair. "I don't know for sure, but I'm afraid that Luke's being held — that the police are holding murder charges over his head — because they think he has, or they think he can get, information about a different investigation."

“What the fuck, Bryan. How can they do that?” Before Krystal had come in, Bryan had been trying to explain to me that the police could hold me for a few days without actually having to charge me, and I was just furious. I’d never been arrested, never been charged with a crime, and I’d always had positive associations with the legal system. My father was an attorney, for Christ’s sake.

Bryan leaned forward and looked me in the eyes. “Luke, I’m gonna be frank with you. You’re a smart guy, and you’ve obviously kept your nose clean until now, but you’ve created some new associations for yourself who are less than pristine.”

“Yeah, but I’m working on a legit business deal with ...”

He cut me off. “I don’t think you understand the way that your new brothers appear to law enforcement officers. Are you aware, Luke, that every single member of the Denver chapter of the Savage Sons has a criminal history, a couple of them for federal crimes?”

“Well, no.” I thought about that for a few seconds. “I know that they were involved with some shady stuff before Moses died, but they’ve cleaned up, as far as I know.”

“So this Moses, he’s the one that was shot in his home by a DEA agent, right? And then his girlfriend shot and

killed that agent?”

“That’s what I understand,” I answered. “But Krystal may be able to answer more questions about that than I can. I never actually met the guy, even though he was my cousin.”

Before Krystal could say a word, Bryan directed her attention to the wall opposite the door, which had a one-way mirror. “Krystal, you need to know that it’s possible that we have an audience. Even though it’s not legal for cops to record conversations between attorneys and their clients, I wouldn’t necessarily trust that. Do you understand?”

She nodded.

“Krystal, without getting into ...

incriminating details, do you know why there was a DEA agent in Moses' house that night?"

"No," she answered. "That's the crazy thing. No one knows. Now, I'm not privy to the business dealings of the MC, but I worked with Moses at his tattoo shop, and I knew him pretty well. Nobody has any explanation for why he'd be meeting a DEA agent, especially at his house."

"And that DEA agent's death has caused the club to ... reevaluate its business dealings, right?"

She considered her answer. "I believe so."

Bryan sat for a moment, looking from my face to Krystal's, to the mirror set into the wall. He finally put his hands flat on the table. "I'm going to level with you, Luke. We've seen the summary of Krystal's statement, and it corroborates yours to the last detail. It's my opinion that there's no evidence to prosecute you — not for manslaughter, and certainly not for murder. I'm going to do everything I can do to get them to charge you or release you as soon as possible." He sighed. "The fact is, though, that if the feds think that you have information they want — or if they think you can get information they want — they may hold you for a few days, and there's nothing I can do about that. If that's the case, then

we're going to have to let this unfold and see what exactly the FBI and the DEA are after.”

“This just doesn't make sense to me, though,” I protested. “If the FBI wants to ask me questions, I'm happy to answer them any time. I haven't done anything wrong.”

Bryan shook his head. “I believe you, Luke. And I understand that this may be hard for you to wrap your head around, since you've been a law-abiding citizen your whole life, but sometimes — even if you haven't done anything wrong — these investigations work out in ways that end up inconveniencing innocent people. I'm going to do my very

best to make sure that doesn't happen to you, but I want you to understand the possibilities here.”

I sat back in the chair, feeling angry and frustrated. “I hear you. And I appreciate the help.” I looked around the room. “Any way I can get a few minutes alone with Krystal? There are a few things I want to talk to her about.”

“Absolutely.” Bryan stood up. “Just remember,” he said, pointing at the mirror. “The walls have ears.”

He knocked on the door, waited for it to be unlocked, and closed the door behind him. I could hear him talking to the officer stationed outside the room as the door swing shut and locked once

again.

I turned my chair to face Krystal, and I carefully took her bruised, beautiful face in my hands. I knew that people were probably watching us, and I didn't care. I pressed a kiss to her lips before I said a word.

“Baby, tell me how you're doing.”

“Luke, I'm so sorry,” she said, tears starting to well in her eyes. “This is all my fault. You wouldn't be here if it weren't for me and the fucked up choices I've made.”

I shook my head. “Krystal, it's not your fault. You weren't the violent one, and if I hadn't been there, you'd be dead at the hands of that sick, sadistic asshole.

I'm glad I was there for you. You're mine to protect, and I'll do anything I need to keep you safe."

"What can I do to help get you out of here?" she asked.

"I don't exactly know yet, but I've told Bryan to get your contact information from my phone, and he's going to notify the Ritz that you'll be staying in my suite for the time being."

"That's crazy, Luke. I don't need all that space, and you don't have to provide me with a place to stay. I'm not your responsibility."

I looked into her eyes. "Oh, but you are, Krystal. You're mine, and I'm going

to take care of you, no matter the cost.” I picked up her hands and kissed them both. “I realized something when I was trying to get inside that house to find you.”

Krystal looked at me and waited for me to continue.

“Krystal, I realized that you — your safety and your happiness — were more important to me than anything else in the world. I realized right then that I love you, and I won’t ever let anyone or anything keep us apart.”

Krystal’s hands flew to her face, and she winced as she bumped her jaw. “Ow,” she said, half laughing and half crying. “Luke, are you sure? I mean, look

at the mess I've gotten you into. You're in the police sta..."

I leaned forward and stopped her with a kiss. "Don't ever question my love for you, Krystal. I'm absolutely certain that we're meant to be together." I paused and looked at her, realizing that she'd never told me how she felt, and hoping that I wouldn't have to work to get her to see what was so perfectly clear to me. "Unless, of course, you don't feel the same about me."

Her eyes, shining with tears and with emotion met mine, and before she said a word, I knew that she loved me too.

"Luke, I knew I loved you in Bug's kitchen, before everything went so

terribly wrong yesterday.”

She was going to continue, but I stopped her with another kiss.

“Krystal, I have no idea what the fuck’s going on and why I’m stuck in here, but I promise you that when I get out, I’m going to spend the rest of my life showing you just how much I love you.” I leaned forward, like I planned to kiss her neck, but I whispered to her instead. “Baby, I told Bryan a few things that he’ll fill you in on later. Don’t trust anyone but me or Bryan — not Joker, not Sable, no one? You got that?”

She nodded while I kept my lips near her ear. “I love you, too,” she said, making it look like I’d whispered

something sweet to her.

I continued keeping my voice low. “Krystal, the Savage Sons have some secrets, deep dark ones, and I’m gonna sort out the truth, but I’m gonna need your help.”

She played along, and I felt a flush of pride at how well she could think on her feet.

“Oh, baby, I can’t wait for you to get out,” she purred, still keeping up the show.

I had so much that I wanted to tell Krystal, but between the audience I was sure was behind the mirror and the fact that I was sure I didn’t have much time left, I just pulled her into my arms and

held on like my life depended on it. I knew that there was a good chance that my life was about to get really complicated, but for just a moment, I wanted to put my arms around the woman I loved.

The door opened far too soon, and Bryan came inside. He didn't look happy.

“Listen, Luke, they're going to charge you.”

“With what?” Krystal said, lifting her head from my chest and taking my hand. “Luke didn't mean to kill Bug, and he only did it to protect me.”

Bryan shook his head and ran his

hands thought his increasingly messy hair. “Look, I have no doubt that I can keep these charges from sticking, but I can’t keep them from charging you. It’ll most likely be manslaughter, but they may go full-bore and charge you with murder. I don’t think they have a case, but I won’t know for sure until we get in front of the grand jury. That won’t happen until Monday, and there’s nothing I can do about it. You’re stuck here for the weekend.”

The door opened again, and two cops came in. I didn’t like where this was heading.

“Let’s go, Callaway,” one of the men said, indicating that I should turn around

so that he could handcuff me.

I looked to Krystal, afraid that she'd start crying, which would break my heart, and I was surprised to see that she was perfectly composed.

“Luke, we'll get you out of here,” she said, dry-eyed and certain. “I love you.” She went to stand next to Bryan, and he put an arm around her shoulders in support. My last sight of her that day was her standing in the police station, looking fierce, despite her bruised and scratched face and her bloodstained clothing. I knew I was in a bad situation, but the sight of Krystal, so determined despite all she'd been through, gave me the hope I knew I'd need to get through

the next few days.

Epilogue

Monday, July 8, 2013

Kate Tanner and Mark Singer stood in the hallway outside the office belonging to the Assistant Special Agent in Charge for the Denver field office of the FBI. They both looked composed, buttoned down, and confident. They didn't speak to one another because they'd met for breakfast an hour before and put together a game plan.

The door to the ASAC's office opened, and Celeste Jenner walked out, down the hallway, and past the two

agents without saying a word. Singer looked at Tanner, a question in his gaze. She merely shrugged her shoulders and continued to wait. Celeste returned in a couple of minutes, carrying a fresh cup of coffee. She walked past the agents again, entered her office, and sat down behind her desk.

“Get in here, Tanner, and bring your DEA friend with you.” Celeste’s voice clearly indicated her displeasure.

Kate and Mark entered the office.

“Door,” Celeste said.

Mark closed the door, and the two agents took their seats in the chairs that faced Celeste’s desk.

“Tanner, you want to tell me what the fuck is going on?”

“Yes, ma’am. Luke Callaway is the son of Sable and Daniel Hall, the president of the Savage Sons. Callaway is relatively new to the area, and came to Denver from Flagstaff to find his birth parents after his adoptive parents died in a car accident.”

Celeste leaned back in her chair.

“Tanner, I don’t want an analysis of the dysfunctional family dynamics of outlaw bikers. I want to know why my boss got a call from the head of the DEA this morning.”

“Agent Singer and I believe that Luke Callaway could be an opportunity

to get back inside the Savage Sons.”

Celeste shook her head impatiently. “Tanner, you know the history there. Frankly, I think I’m lucky not to have been transferred to Detroit or East Bumfuck for the colossal mess that our last collaboration with the DEA turned into. Why on earth would we put another cent or another man hour into this MC?”

Mark sat up straighter. “Ma’am, we believe that Luke Callaway represents our best chance to get information that we otherwise won’t have access to.”

Celeste held her hand up, palm facing the DEA agent. “I’m not talking to you. I’m talking to my agent.”

Kate took over. “We currently have

Callaway in custody. He killed a man on Friday, and we're going to use the threat of facing a murder charge to encourage him to work with us. He will agree, and we'll have a guy inside the MC."

"Wait a minute, the guy's a murderer, facing charges, and you want him to be your informant? When? When he's eighty and finally gets out of prison?"

"It wasn't murder, ma'am. We're charging him, but there's no case. He stopped an evil, violent man from slicing a girl into pieces. No jury in the world would convict him of manslaughter, let alone murder. But Callaway doesn't know that. We're going to make him

believe that he's choosing between spending the rest of his life in prison or helping us out with a little information about some really bad people.”

Celeste looked at Mark. “Singer, what's the DEA's angle on this?”

“Back when Moses was working with us, he told us about their Mexican source for some of their meth supplies. We need more information — specific names and places — so that we can work with the Mexican government to shut that pipeline down.”

Celeste shook her head. “Are the Sons still in the meth business? I thought they were laying low after Moses and Tombley were killed.”

“They are out of the meth biz, but those connections still exist between some of the Sons and the people they dealt with in Mexico. Callaway’s fronting the new dispensary they’re about to open, and we think we can lean on him to lean on Daniel and the other Sons to use their old Mexican connections to get weed for their shop.”

Celeste sat still for a few minutes, turning things over in her mind. “What time does the grand jury convene?”

“One o’clock this afternoon,” Kate answered.

“And you’ve talked to the prosecutor?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“And he’s going to go in there and tell the grand jury that they have to indict a man you know you can’t convict.”

Kate’s answer was calm and confident. “That’s right.”

“Bail?”

“We’re confident that we can get bail denied. His parents left him a very rich young man, and we’ll have no trouble showing that he’s a flight risk. That way we’ll have easy access to Callaway, and he can sit in a cell and decide where he wants to spend the rest of his life.”

Celeste looked at both Kate and Mark. “You understand my apprehension

about approving this.” It wasn’t a question, but both agents nodded.

“Okay,” Celeste said after another long pause. “But Tanner, I’m gonna be so far up your ass on this case that you’re going to see me in your dreams. There will be zero latitude given here. Everything — and I mean everything — will be documented and carried out to the letter of the law. We will not fuck this case up as badly as we and the DEA did last time. I’m giving you a limited budget, and a very short period of time to show me some big results. Is that clear?”

Kate and Mark nodded again, both carefully controlling their expressions to

conceal the triumph they felt at having gotten what they wanted.

“I want daily reports from you, Tanner.” She looked at Mark. “And I will be in frequent contact with your supervisor. Any sign that this operation is going south, it’s over. Any sign that the quality and the quantity of the information obtained isn’t spectacular, it’s over. Any sign, any whisper, any hint of conflicting interests or something not quite above-board, I will shut you down, and see to it that you spend the rest of your career in the worst place I can arrange to send you. Is that clear?”

“Yes, ma’am,” both agents answered in unison.

“Anything else I need to know?” she asked, clearly ready to move on to the next item on her agenda for the day.

Kate shook her head. “No, ma’am.”

“I want your first report tonight, Tanner. Close the door behind you when you leave.”

The agents stood up, left the room, and closed Celeste’s office door. They didn’t say a word as they exited the federal building and walked to the coffee shop down the street.

They got coffee and sat down at the table in the window.

Mark was the one to break the silence. “Jesus, you were right. She is a

hardass.”

Kate shook her head. “That was nothing. She took it pretty easy on us in there. I expected her to put up more of a fight than she did.”

“We’ll just have to make sure we stay in her good graces, I guess,” Mark said, stirring sugar into his coffee.

Kate checked the time on her phone. “I’m thinking about heading over to the jail before the grand jury convenes.”

“Why? There’s nothing more we need to do there. I think it’s best to let Callaway sit and worry for a while.”

“It’s not Callaway I want to see,” Kate said. “I bet his little white trash

girlfriend's there, and she may be of some help to us in getting Luke to agree to work with us. If I can put a little fear into her — in my helpful and understanding way, of course — she may pressure him to accede to our demands.”

Mark nodded. “Yeah, she seemed to take a shine to you on Friday. I don't think she trusts me, but she would probably hear what you have to say and take it to heart.”

“I'm a very trustworthy woman, Mark. I keep telling you that.” Kate's smirk made Mark laugh and spill his coffee. “Better change your suit, mister, we have a date with a grand jury and a ‘murderer’ in a couple of hours.”

Kate's air quotes around "murderer" made Mark chuckle again, and he stood up and blotted his suit with a napkin. "Goddammit," he said. "My wife told me I should have worn the black suit." He put a lid on his coffee cup and headed toward the door. "I'll see you in court, Kate," he said, as he headed out to the street.

Kate sipped her coffee and contemplated the approach she'd take in getting Krystal exactly where she wanted her.

Freedom's Son

Look for *Freedom's Son* (June 2014) to wrap up Luke and Krystal's story. *Sinner's Son* (July/August 2014) takes you back in time to explain Moses Hall's past, and *Fortunate Son* (September 2014) brings the whole series to a breathtaking conclusion. Sign up for the official Savage Sons email newsletter to be the first to hear when new books are released.

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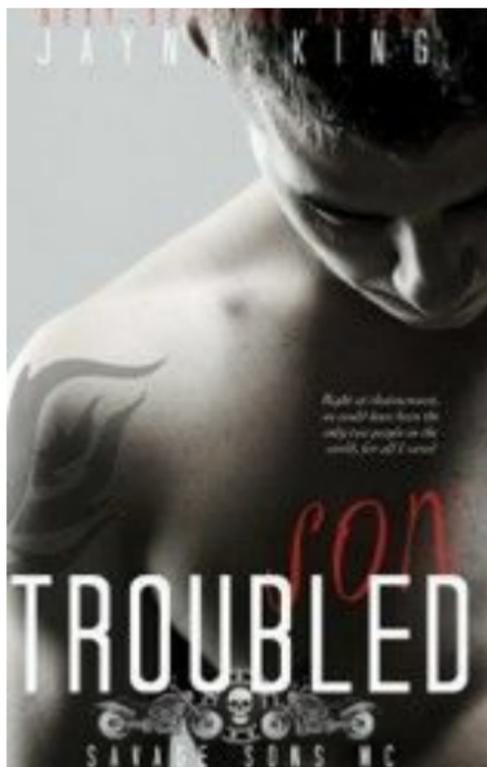
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