

Changeling Press

Harley  
Wylde

DEVIL'S BONEYARD MC #2

SCRATCH

## **Scratch (Devil's Boneyard MC 2)**

**Harley Wylde**

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## Scratch (Devil's Boneyard MC 2)

Harley Wylde

Clarity -- I've been on my own since I was sixteen, and I've fought tooth and nail to make a life for myself and the son I never planned to have. Caleb is my entire world, despite the circumstances of his birth. Being homeless a second time certainly hadn't been in my life plans, so when a gruff yet sexy biker offers a bit of help, how can I possibly say no? Doesn't hurt that the older man is easy on the eyes, and he's so good with Caleb. I'd thought I wasn't able to trust anyone ever again, but looking into his eyes, I know deep down he'd never hurt us. It just never occurred to me that I'd fall completely in love with him.

Scratch -- The young woman and kid I find sleeping outside my club's chop shop make me feel things I shouldn't. Hell, she's younger than my damn daughter, but it's obvious she's been to hell and back, and she's still fighting. There's fire in her soul, but the gentle way she treats her son leaves me wanting things I shouldn't. Like a new chance at a family. What the hell would she want with a man thirty years older than her? When I took her home with me, I never counted on wanting to keep her. I'll slay her demons, bury the monsters from her past, and then I'll do the one thing I thought I'd never do... claim an old lady, then make her my wife.

## Chapter One

### Clarity

I held Caleb on my hip while I dug through the trash behind the diner. I had a box of peanut butter crackers and a few packages of snacks in my backpack, but I was saving those for my son. They weren't nutritious, but at least they hadn't come out of the dumpster. I might eat whatever I had to in order to survive, but I refused to let Caleb do that. He was only two years old, and he needed real food. Hot food, and a clean table where he could sit and enjoy a meal. That wasn't going to happen, though.

Giving up on finding myself something to eat that wasn't rotten, I backed away from the smelly trash bin and headed back up to the street. It was late, and even though the diner, Laundromat, and a bar up the road were all still open, the sidewalks were pretty empty. Not that the sleepy little Florida town where I lived was ever truly busy. We were off the path a bit. Not close enough to the beach to get a lot of tourists, and too small for anything else.

I hitched the bag on my back and tried to find a relatively safe place to sleep for the night. We didn't have a local shelter, and while the churches would sometimes let people stay there, I couldn't ask every night. I worried they would take Caleb from me. Maybe I should have let him go, found him a home where he'd have clean clothes, a roof over his head, and food in his belly. But my heart ached every time I thought about parting with him.

I had no one. My mom had died when I was two, and when my dad remarried, he'd chosen a woman who liked to pretend I didn't exist. Soon enough, my dad decided I didn't exist either. Once his new kids starting popping out every few years, I was pushed to the side, and eventually I left. I'd been sixteen when I'd hit the streets, and no one had come looking for me. I was sure that my dad was relieved I was gone. It hurt, but crying over it wouldn't change anything.

I'd thought I was doing okay when I found a man about five years older than me who offered me a place to sleep and help getting a job. I should have known not to trust him. Things had been fine for a while, but then he'd started asking to be repaid for his kindness. Blowjobs mostly, except for the night he was high on who knows what and decided to take more than I was willing to give. Caleb was the result of that night. Once I'd found out I was pregnant, I'd taken off. Even though the man hadn't touched me again, I hadn't wanted to take any chances.

A women's shelter had helped at first, even found me a job and a place to live. Things had been going pretty well, until two months ago. The little thrift store where I'd been working shut down without notice. I'd had enough in the bank to keep our tiny apartment for another month, and then the money had run out and I hadn't been able to get another job. So we slept where we could, ate what we could, and just tried to survive.

The church over on Pine Avenue would let me take a shower and would give me a dress out of the donations to wear for interviews, and the nice lady who worked in the church office would watch Caleb for me. I'd applied to every place in town that was hiring, and no one had wanted me. Our situation was bleak, but as long as we had each other, then I'd keep fighting. If Caleb weren't with me, I might have given up by now. Or decided to join the ladies who worked the street corner on the other end of town. But I'd been a virgin when Caleb's dad had raped me, and I couldn't bring myself to take that step. Not yet. I didn't think badly of the women who made their living that way, but I didn't think I could do it.

An auto repair shop was just a few more steps away, with a large enough doorway that Caleb and I could hide in the shadows and get some sleep. I checked the hours on the window and saw it wouldn't be open for at least five more hours, which meant I could rest a little. I'd learned to sleep lightly, so that I'd wake up at the first sign of trouble, or whenever Caleb stirred. I was always scared I'd sleep so hard that he'd wander off and I'd never see him again. Hunkering down into the corner of the doorway, I settled Caleb on my lap and used my backpack as a pillow. My son snuggled against me and closed his eyes.

I didn't think I'd been asleep for more than an hour when I heard a loud rumble. My eyes opened as a single headlight focused on us, making it hard for me to see. I held a hand up to my face, and shielded Caleb with the other. The light stayed on, but I could barely make out a shadowy figure dismounting from what I'd figured out was a motorcycle. The man approached and loomed over us.

"This is private property," he said, his voice deep and raspy.

"I'm sorry. We'll go," I said, struggling to stand.

I could feel his gaze raking over me. I managed to get to my feet without stumbling, got my backpack straps over my shoulders, then hefted Caleb into my arms.

"Where are you going to go?" he asked.

"Doesn't matter. I'm sorry we trespassed," I said. I hitched my backpack a little higher over my shoulder and clutched Caleb to me. I tried to step around the large man, but he reached out and placed a hand on my shoulder.

I froze under that touch, tensing and waiting to see what would happen. Is this where he offered me a place to sleep in exchange for the use of my body? Wouldn't be the first time I'd had that offer made to me, and I doubted it would be the last. I would do anything for my baby to have a place to rest and food to eat, or nearly anything. We'd struggled and things were bad, but I didn't think I could handle having strange men touch me. Not after Caleb's dad, or more like sperm donor. I didn't think he would come after Caleb, even if he knew my baby existed, but I'd decided not to take any chances. Thankfully, I hadn't seen him since we'd left. For all I knew, he wasn't even in town anymore.

"Christ, you don't even look old enough to have a kid," he muttered.

My chin raised a notch. "I'm nineteen. Well, almost nineteen. Not that it's any business of yours."

I saw a flash of white teeth as he smiled in the darkness. "All grown up then, aren't you? Eighteen, nearly nineteen, and think you know everything I bet. Why are you sleeping in the doorway of my business?"

I glanced behind me before facing him again. "I told you we didn't mean to trespass."

"That doesn't answer my question."

"We didn't have anywhere else to go," I admitted softly, my arms tightening around my son.

"There's a lot of expensive equipment in there. Going to steal anything?" he asked.

I felt fire ignite inside me and I clenched my teeth a moment. I might be broke, but I wasn't a thief!

"No!"

"Come on." He walked up to the doorway I'd just vacated, then he unlocked the front door and pushed it open.

I hesitated. I didn't know if I could trust him, and figured my chances were better out here in the open than inside, but what if he was going to offer food for Caleb? Or maybe there was a couch in the waiting room and he'd let my baby rest there for an hour or two. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up, but at the first sign he was going to be a perv, I was out of there.

I stepped inside as he flipped on the lights, and I blinked at how bright they were. There was a beat-up leather couch with duct tape holding it together, and a scarred table with a few magazines on top. But the man didn't stop in the front room.

He kept going, so I followed at a slight distance. If I needed to run, I wanted a head start.

He entered a small, cluttered office and turned on a lamp. It glowed softly, the light dim, but there was a huge couch on one wall that looked a little too inviting with its overstuffed arms. It was leather, but unlike the one out front, it didn't have so much as a scratch on it that I could see. The man pulled a blanket off the back and motioned toward the couch.

"You can rest here a while. I can either lock you in and reset the alarm, or I can stay until you've had a chance to rest. I'll leave it up to you. But know that if you steal so much as one thing, I will track you down," the man said.

I focused on him and noticed he wore one of those black leather vests I'd seen the local bikers wearing. *Scratch -- VP* was stitched on the front. He was an older man, a bit of gray at his temples and in his beard. I was horrible at guessing ages, but if I had to, I'd place him in his late forties or early fifties. He had the kind of eyes that looked like they had seen far too much, like he'd fought wars I could only imagine but was still standing. He was strong, his muscles stretching the sleeves of the T-shirt he wore, and his jeans encased muscular thighs. He could easily overpower me, and yet he hadn't come close to me since grabbing my shoulder earlier.

"You can lock us in," I said. "We won't take anything."

He nodded and looked at Caleb, who was yawning on my shoulder.

"When's the last time the two of you ate?" he asked. "And I mean real food, not something you've scrounged from somewhere."

"A while," I admitted.

"There's not much here. Some bottles of water in the mini fridge," he said nodding to a small black one in the corner I hadn't noticed. "I'll bring you something to eat when I get back. He allergic to anything? Are you?"

"No, we're not allergic to any food, but you don't have to get us something. Just giving us a place to sleep for a while is more than enough."

He grunted and looked around the room a moment before locking his gaze on me again. "We'll talk when I get back. For now, get some sleep. Both of you. There's a bathroom through there," he said pointing to a door behind his desk.

"Thank you," I said grudgingly, still not knowing what this would cost me. Or rather what he'd demand. Didn't mean I'd give it to him.

He turned to leave but paused in the doorway. "I have a daughter, a bit older than you. And a grandson close to your son's age. She was in trouble a while back and someone helped her. Just think of this as my way of paying it forward. If you're worried

I'm going to ask for some sort of repayment, you don't have to be concerned about that."

My cheeks warmed and I wondered if I'd been transparent.

His lips twitched as if he fought back a smile. "Pretty thing like you, I imagine you've had a lot of assholes try to get into your pants. Didn't want you anxious I would be the same. When you wake up, you can tell me how you came to be on the streets, and maybe I can find a way to help you in a more long-term way than loaning you a couch for the night. The bathroom has a small shower if you want to clean up. Use whatever you need in there. Towels are in the cabinet and there are a few new toothbrushes in there too."

"You loan your couch out to people often?" I asked, wondering why he'd have spare toothbrushes at his work of all places.

"No, but I've crashed here a few times. I keep a lot of toothbrushes on hand for the guys who work out in the shop. They've come in one too many times with their breath smelling like they last used a toothbrush a decade ago. No one wants that in their face all day."

I bit my lip so I wouldn't smile and just nodded.

"Get some sleep, sweetheart. You can lock the office door if it makes you feel safer. I have a key, but I won't come in without knocking first." He gave me a searching look. "You're safe, all right?"

"Thank you," I said again. "I mean it. No one's..."

He held up a hand. "I'm not a saint, but I don't like thinking about what could happen to a pretty thing like you and that sweet little boy out there on the streets. This might be a small town, but bad shit still happens."

I nodded and eyed the couch. As much as I wanted to sleep, Caleb and I were both rather dirty. After Scratch left, I locked the door behind him, then pulled out a clean outfit for both of us and carried Caleb into the bathroom. Tiny was right, but it would be heavenly to have a hot shower and get clean. I tried not to abuse the kindness of the local churches by asking for things too often, so it had been a few days since we'd had a chance to get clean.

I stripped us both down, made the water just the right temperature for my sweet boy, then climbed in with Caleb splashing at my feet. I washed him first, then wrapped him in a towel I'd found in a cabinet, letting him sit on what looked to be a clean bathmat. Then I scrubbed myself until my skin turned red. I kept a disposable razor in my backpack for the times I was able to shower and I shaved as best I could since the blade was getting a bit dull.

Once we were both clean and dressed in fresh clothes, I bundled up our dirty stuff, pulled a plastic bag out of my backpack and put the dirty things in there. I tied it off and shoved it into my backpack before curling up on the couch with Caleb. I put him between me and the back so he wouldn't fall off while he slept, then covered us with the soft blanket. Once my baby was breathing evenly, I let myself relax enough to fall asleep.

My eyes popped open every now and then as I looked at our surroundings, making sure we were still alone and still safe. There wasn't a window in the room and I didn't see a clock anywhere. I had no idea how much time had passed since Scratch had left us, but it felt like hours. Caleb still slept soundly, and I eventually went to sleep again. The next time I opened my eyes, I heard loud noises from the other side of the office door.

I held Caleb a little tighter, wondering if someone would try to come in. What would they do if they found me in here? Scratch had been nice, hadn't demanded anything for his kindness, but it was my experience that most men didn't act that way. The ones I'd been around had thought they could have whatever they wanted from me, even if I didn't agree.

I curled into a ball in the corner of the couch, Caleb clutched in my arms. There was a loud knock at the door and I fought back a whimper.

"It's just me," said a gruff voice I recognized. "I'm coming in."

I heard the rattle of keys, then the knob turned, and Scratch stepped into the office. There was a paper sack clutched in one hand and a plastic bag hanging from the other. His eyebrows lifted when he saw me cowering on the couch, and he glanced over his shoulder before focusing on me again.

"Anyone bother you?" he asked.

"N-no. It was just really noisy out there. I didn't know who..." I trailed off.

He nodded. "It's all right. I picked up some breakfast for both of you. Probably not the most nutritious meal, but this early in the morning it was either the diner or the only drive-thru open this time of day. I got both of you a chicken biscuit."

He handed the paper sack to me and the smell made Caleb's eyes pop open, his little nose twitching as he looked for what smelled so good. His eyes went wide when he saw the bag in my hand, and he slowly reached for it, then jerked his hand back at the last minute, looking up at me for permission.

"It's okay, baby," I assured him. I reached into the bag and took out a sandwich, unwrapping it for him.

Scratch handed me a bottle of orange juice and a bottle of milk. I assumed the

milk was for Caleb and opened it for him. I watched as he devoured his sandwich then gulped down his milk. My heart ached that I hadn't been able to give him something this simple in quite a while.

"You need to eat, sweetheart. If he's still hungry, I'll get him something else, but you can't starve yourself."

"Clarity," I said. "My name is Clarity."

He smiled a little. "Nice to meet you, Clarity. People around here call me Scratch."

"You're part of the biker gang in town," I said as I unwrapped my sandwich.

"Club. We're a club. The Devil's Boneyard, but don't let the name scare you. None of us would ever hurt a woman or child."

"So, Scratch as in..."

"Like Lucifer, but I promise you're safe with me."

I nodded and finished my sandwich slowly so I wouldn't get sick. It had been a really long time since I hadn't had to share my food with Caleb, and I wasn't sure how my stomach would handle it. I managed to eat the entire thing and slowly sipped my juice. When I was finished, I tried not to fidget. Scratch had said he wanted to talk to me this morning and I didn't know what to expect.

He was leaned back against his desk, his arms folded, and one booted foot crossed over the other. While he appeared relaxed, there was a coiled tension in his muscles that probably came from years of having to watch his back. Just looking at him, I could tell he was completely in tune with everything around him. It made me feel safe, something I hadn't felt in a while. I relaxed back against the couch cushions and Caleb rested against my side.

A knock sounded at the door and it pushed open, a mechanic covered in grease stepping inside. His eyes widened in surprise as he saw me and Caleb, then he focused on Scratch.

"Sorry to interrupt, but there's some guy out front causing trouble. I'm surprised you didn't hear him shouting all the way in here."

"I'll be out in a minute, Killian," Scratch said.

Killian looked at me again, swallowed hard and looked back at his boss. "Um, he's armed, and I don't think he's completely stable if you know what I mean."

Scratch nodded and pushed off the desk. I saw a flash of a gun under his vest and my heart nearly stalled in my chest before it took off at a gallop. Scratch looked at Caleb before meeting my gaze. He didn't say anything, but he didn't have to. There was a promise in that look, one that said he would keep us safe.

"Be careful," I said softly.

He smiled faintly, then followed Killian out of the room. He shut the door behind him, and I was left with my chaotic thoughts, trying to figure out if I'd just landed myself in even more trouble than when I'd accepted help from Caleb's sperm donor.

## Chapter Two

### Scratch

“Sorry,” Killian said again as we walked toward the front. “I didn’t realize...”

“It’s fine, but whoever is out front isn’t getting down this hallway. Understood?”

Killian nodded. “Yes, sir.”

He was a good kid, and I had no doubt he’d patch in before long. He’d been prospecting for the Devil’s Boneyard nearly two years and proven himself again and again. He and Seamus were the youngest in our crew, but they’d seen more shit than most men their age, both having enlisted in the military when they were young. I’d trust either of them. A lot of clubs patched in after six months or a year, but our Pres, Cinder, wanted to make sure they had staying power and could stomach whatever we threw their way. He didn’t give a shit about length of time and more about what they’d done to earn their name and patch.

Just as Killian had said, there was a man in the front lobby, waving a gun around and screaming at anyone within hearing distance.

“I want it back! You stole it and I want it back,” the man yelled again and again, like he was stuck on repeat.

“Calm the fuck down and tell me what you think we stole,” I said, my hand resting on my gun in case I needed to pull it.

“My pig!” the man screamed. “You stole my pig!”

My eyebrows went up and I looked at Killian who shrugged. Yeah, he’d been right. This man was batshit crazy and had either taken something he shouldn’t have, or he was off his meds. Either way, he was a danger to the woman and child down the hall in my office. I had to be careful getting that gun from him. If it accidentally went off, it could easily penetrate the office door and hit either Clarity or her son.

Neither was going to happen if I had any say in the matter.

There was something about that young girl and her boy, something that pulled at my heart and made me want to take care of them. I hadn’t quite figured out yet what I was going to do with them, but I wasn’t letting them back out onto the streets. That was for damn sure.

“You can either calm down and put your weapon away, or we’ll have to do this the hard way,” I told the crazy man. “There are innocent people in this building. You shoot them, and your pig will be the least of your worries.”

Not that I thought for a single moment the man actually had a pig.

I saw Seamus ease into the front lobby through the front door. The man was so quiet the crazy guy in front of me hadn't even noticed the ex-SEAL. In a blur of movement, Seamus disarmed the crazy person and had him pinned to the ground, his arms pulled behind his back. Seamus dug his knee into the center of the man's back and looked up at me.

"How are we handling this one?" Seamus asked.

"Let the cops take care of it. The man's crazy and clearly in need of treatment of some sort," I said. "There's nothing in the shop right now they would consider suspicious."

Seamus nodded and I saw Killian pull out his phone to make the call.

"I'll be in the office if you need me. Try not to need me."

Killian smirked and humor lit his eyes. I knew the moment I was out of earshot he'd be telling Seamus all about the woman and child in my office. And as damn young as Clarity was, she definitely had the curves of a woman. Even as malnourished as she was, the woman still had a body that most men would beg to touch. I wasn't blind, and despite the availability of club pussy, it had been a while since I'd been with a woman. After finding my daughter, Darian, my life had changed. Seeing her, and watching the way the Dixie Reapers and her old man, Bull, treated her had me realize I was missing something in my life.

Finding a woman around here wasn't that easy, though. Not the kind of woman you kept, the kind who would be a good mom. Even though my daughter was a grown woman now, I'd missed out on her childhood, and I wanted to experience all those firsts. Hell, at my age, it was probably stupid to even think about having more kids. I was a grandpa for fuck's sake.

When I entered the office, Clarity had her body wrapped around her son, and she'd made herself as small as possible in the corner of the room. I hated that she'd been scared, but it couldn't be helped. At least the threat was neutralized and no one had gotten hurt. Regardless, the two of them couldn't stay here, not long-term. I had to find a spot for them, other than letting them roam the streets again.

I shut the door and twisted the lock. Clarity slowly rose and lifted her son into her arms. I took a moment to study her. While her hair was a cloud of dark corkscrew curls, now that it was clean, her son's was such a light blond it was nearly white. I rubbed a hand across my beard and wondered what the next move should be.

"I think it's safe to say that staying here isn't in your best interest," I told her.

She nodded. "We'll just get our things and head out."

I held up a hand to stop her. "Just wait a minute. I didn't say I was throwing you out, just that staying at the shop isn't the best idea. There's no way I'm letting you go back out on the streets."

Her back straightened and she pushed her shoulders back. "Let me?"

I had to fight not to smile. Tiny little thing like her acting all big and tough. It was cute as hell.

"Put the claws away, kitten. It's not safe for you out there and you know it. How many times have you been propositioned just for a hot meal or place to sleep?" I asked.

"Maybe a few," she said unconvincingly.

"Uh-huh. And what are you going to do when someone doesn't take no for an answer?" I asked.

She glanced at Caleb quickly before looking at me again. It wasn't much, but it was something. The way the color drained from her face and her eyes got a haunted look, I knew that she'd already faced that horror head-on, and if I were a betting man, I'd say that her son was the result of that altercation. It made my blood boil to think of someone hurting her, especially since she had to have been a kid when it happened.

I moved closer, but went slow so I wouldn't spook her. "I want a name."

Her eyes went wide and she swallowed hard. "A name?"

"The man who hurt you," I said, looking from her to the boy and back again.

Her shoulders slumped and her gaze dropped to the floor. "It doesn't matter. It's over with, and I haven't seen him since I walked out."

"You're going to tell me that story one day. For now, the two of you will come home with me. And no, I don't mean for you to sleep in my bed, or offer sexual favors of any kind to me or anyone else."

"Then what am I going to do?" she asked. "I can't stay with you free of charge."

I tipped my chin up and thought about it a moment. "You keep the house clean, do the laundry and crap, then we'll call it even, and I'll throw in some extra cash so you can start saving up. It's the only way you'll ever get back on your feet."

"Scratch, I..."

I placed a finger over her lips to silence her. "If you won't do it for yourself, do it for your boy. You'll each have a room of your own. Plenty to eat. No more finding doorways to sleep in, and you'll both be safe. You have my word, kitten. No one will hurt you while you're under my roof. They wouldn't dare."

"For how long?" she asked.

"As long as you want," I said. "I live alone. Don't have a steady woman in my life to cause trouble. You'll have free run of the house."

She looked at her son, then slowly nodded. Her gaze met mine. "We'll come with you, but we can't ride on your bike to get there. Is it a far walk?"

"I'm not going to make you walk. Give me a few minutes and I'll have someone bring my truck." I paused and looked at Caleb. "And maybe have them stop and pick up a car seat. It's not safe for him to ride around without one."

"We don't want to be any trouble," she said.

I took her chin between my thumb and forefinger, tipping her head back. "You're not any trouble. Neither one of you. I promised to keep you safe, and putting your boy in a secure seat in the truck is part of that."

"All right," she said.

I released her and pull my phone from my pocket. I shot off a message to one of the prospects with instructions to bring my truck here and pick up a car seat on the way. I'd learned a lot about kids just from spending time with my grandson, Foster. I'd never had the chance to raise my daughter, but she'd turned out to be a strong woman. And thankfully, she had a good man watching out for her. I might not have chosen Bull for her, but I had to admit the guy loved her and treated her like a queen. That's all any dad could hope for his little girl.

I wished Darian were here now. Maybe she could set Clarity at ease. Foster was close to Caleb's age, and the two of them could play together. The problem was that while my house was big enough for all of them, I didn't have all of the bedrooms furnished. Darian had never come here to see me, and I wasn't sure about uprooting Foster even for a short stay. Bull would likely insist on coming too, and then I'd have to clear it with Cinder, my club President. Asking permission was only a formality, as the Reapers were like family. In the case of Bull and Tank, they *were* family. With my daughter married to Bull, and Jackal married to Tank's sister, we were one big happy family.

I watched the little boy clutched in Clarity's arms and I wondered when he'd last had a normal day-to-day routine. My daughter was always telling me how important it was for my grandson to have a routine. I figured that must apply to all kids. Did Clarity have toys hidden in her backpack for Caleb? They were going to need some things, but I had a feeling I'd have to fight Clarity to get her to accept them. She seemed like a proud young woman, and I didn't think she trusted easily.

I'd noticed in the early hours this morning that she'd followed me at a distance. It had been a smart thing to do since she didn't know anything about me. The fact she'd accepted my help at all was a miracle. My phone dinged a little while later. I pulled up

the text from Seamus and tried not to laugh. He'd sent a picture of about six different car seats asking what the fuck he was supposed to get.

I was momentarily distracted by the sound of the man in the front lobby screaming and I figured the cops must have arrived. I listened harder and heard him being dragged away, which set me at ease. I hadn't liked that man being so close to Clarity and Caleb.

"Clarity, which one of these would you like to have for Caleb?" I asked, showing her my phone. I knew two of them weren't the right size, but the others would be okay.

"Whichever one costs the least amount," she said, not even looking at them.

I narrowed my eyes a moment, then sent a message back to Seamus with my selection. It was by no means the cheapest, but it looked the safest. I hesitated a moment, then sent another message asking him to pick up a stuffed bear and a few toddler toys for a little boy. I bit my lip to stop from laughing when I saw his response.

*What the fuck is a toddler toy?*

"How old is Caleb?" I asked Clarity, wanting to make sure we got the right toys.

"He's two," she said.

I nodded, then responded to Seamus.

*Get toys for a two-year-old little boy. You were a boy once, right?*

I smiled, knowing that he was probably cussing me out, but would never do it to my face. Not until he'd patched in. Now that I'd taken care of that, I figured we had a little time to kill, and there was no way the chicken biscuits I'd brought with me had satisfied two people who hadn't had a real meal in who knew how long.

"Are you up for a walk?" I asked.

"To your house?"

"No, kitten. We'll drive to the house, but it might be a little bit before my truck gets here. I thought we'd head over to the diner and get an early lunch."

She nodded and reached for her backpack, but I stopped her.

"You won't need that right now. No one will mess with your things. My boys wouldn't dare come in this office when I'm not here."

She looked tired, despite the fact I'd left her here for hours to get some rest, and Caleb looked like he was weighing her down. I held out my hands and waited to see what she'd do. I might be offering my help, but I was still a stranger, and she likely had some reservations about me. From what little I'd witnessed, she seemed to be a good mom, and was likely very protective of her son. She stared at my hands, then her son. Reluctantly, she handed him over.

"I'll protect him with my life," I told her.

Caleb pulled at my long hair and looked up at me with curiosity in his eyes. I wondered how many men he'd been around during his short life. As skittish as his mother was, I didn't see her as the type to bring a lot of men home, when she'd had a home anyway. If she'd been raped, there was a chance she'd never trust another man to get that close to her, which broke my heart. She was young enough that someday she'd find a good man, someone who would love her and protect her. If she gave him a chance. There were still good men out there, good role models for Caleb.

I led the way out of the office and down the hall. I could feel the gazes of the boys on the shop floor through the large window as I headed out the front door with Caleb in my arms and Clarity one step behind me. I pushed open the door and waited for her to walk through.

"You know, you can walk beside me," I said.

Her cheeks flushed and she fell in step with me. The diner was only a few blocks away. We got a few looks from people passing by, but I figured it had more to do with my cut than anything else. Clarity's clothes might be worn, but they were clean. She looked cute in the shorts and tee she'd put on. Hell, maybe they thought I was out with my daughter and grandkid. Probably feared for the safety of the kid in my arms, what with me being a big, bad biker who did horrible things. It wouldn't take long for someone to warn Clarity to stay away from me and the Devil's Boneyard. I wasn't a saint by any means, but I'd never hurt a woman or kid. Well, not a woman as innocent as the one next to me. Some of the poisonous bitches who hung around the club would be a different story. I wouldn't hesitate to end their miserable lives if they crossed the club.

When we entered the diner the bell over the door jingled.

"Sit anywhere you want," said a waitress as she passed by with a tray of drinks.

I picked a table at the back and snagged a highchair from along the wall near the hall to the restrooms. I put Caleb in the chair and buckled him in. Clarity took the seat next to him and I sat on the other side. The little boy slapped his hands on the table, a big smile on his face.

"Thank you," Clarity said. "It's been a while since he's been able to sit at a table like this and have a real meal."

"You don't have to keep thanking me for things, Clarity. I want to help. I don't know what happened to put you out on the streets with a small kid, but I won't let you come to any harm. And staying out there? That way lies trouble."

She reached over and placed her small hand over my larger rough one. "You're a good man, Scratch. Caleb and I have been homeless for two months. You're the first one

to truly try and help us.”

“Don’t read too much into it, kitten. I just don’t want anything bad to happen to either of you. There are men in this world who do horrible things, as you’ve already found out the hard way. But that’s just the tip of the iceberg. You could have landed yourself in a much, much worse situation.”

“I know.” She glanced down at the table. “It’s not like I asked to lose my apartment. The place I worked closed up, and I was unable to find another job.”

“The local churches wouldn’t help you?” I asked.

“They do what they can, but I can’t exactly ask to just move in. We stay there some nights, and they feed us a hot meal once or twice a week. Usually soup and some bread. The nearest women’s shelter is too far for me to walk to, and... well, there just aren’t many options here for homeless people.”

“Especially ones with small children, I would imagine.”

She nodded.

“Well, you’ll have a place to stay for as long as you need one. I keep some odd hours, but I’ll try not to wake you up if I come in really late.”

“I don’t expect you to change your life for us, Scratch. Don’t worry about waking us up. I haven’t slept the night through in the last two months. Maybe one day I’ll be able to relax enough to do that.”

I hated that she’d been through so much in her short life. But there was one thing I needed to ask before I took her home. If she had family out there looking for her, the last thing I needed was them showing up on my doorstep, irate that I was corrupting their daughter. Not that I intended to do any such thing, but it was how most of the citizens here saw me. Biker filth. If only they knew...

“What about your parents? Or Caleb’s dad? Will either of them come looking for you? You said you hadn’t seen Caleb’s dad, but do you think he’s ever tried looking for you?” I asked.

Her eyebrows rose and she looked like she was trying not to smile. “Why? Are you planning to kill me and want to know how well you should hide the body?”

I narrowed my eyes at her. “Funny.”

She shrugged. “I ran away from home when I was sixteen and made my way here. I only lived one town over, but as far as I know, my family never tried to find me. They didn’t want me anyway. But maybe if I’d known how rough things would be on my own, I’d have stuck around long enough to finish high school and moved out the right way and not snuck off without a penny to my name.”

“And Caleb’s dad?” I asked. “You’re positive he’s out of the picture?”

She looked at her son, her expression softening. "He doesn't know I was pregnant, so he's not looking for his son. Like I said, I haven't seen him since the day I ran off. For all I know, he isn't even in town anymore. As small as this place is, I would imagine I'd have seen him by now."

"I still want a name, kitten. I can't protect you if I don't know who could come knocking on the door."

"Why do you call me that?" she asked, tipping her head to the side as she stared at me. "I don't mind it, but... no one's ever had a nickname for me before and we just met."

"Because you're tiny but fierce." I smiled. "And I have no doubt that when you're angry the claws will come out. I've seen a hint of that side of you already, and I'd imagine the more comfortable you are around me, the more you'll let that side show. I like that you have some fire in you. Without it, the world would swallow you whole."

A waitress came over, pad in hand, and harried look on her face. "What can I get y'all?"

"Menus?" I asked.

Her cheeks flushed. "Sorry! I'll be right back with those."

She scurried off and returned a moment later with three rolls of silverware and two menus. Then she ran off again while we decided what we wanted to eat.

"I think she likes you," Clarity said.

"What?" I looked at the waitress who was sure enough casting a glance my way. "Huh. I wonder if she's done that before and I never noticed."

"Yeah. I'm sure men like you don't notice when a woman likes them." She shook her head. "I have no doubt you have to beat the women off with a stick."

I couldn't hold back my laughter.

Clarity rolled her eyes, which showed she was getting used to me. Or at least I hoped she was.

"Kitten, in my world, I can have a woman with the snap of my fingers, but it doesn't mean I want them. They're... well, they're not like you or our waitress. Good girls like the two of you tend to stay clear of me."

"That's kind of sad," she said. "There's no reason you can't go out with a nice woman. Maybe you should ask the waitress out on a date."

"Not my type." I smiled. I wasn't entirely lying. The woman seemed nice enough, but looking at her I didn't feel a thing. She didn't stir even a tiny bit of interest, above or below the belt. "You ready to order?"

She nodded and I waved the waitress over. Her nametag said Helen, and her

eyes were bright as she smiled widely at us. I hoped like hell she didn't do something awkward like ask me out on a date. It had happened a time or two, just not with a nice woman. Club sluts were more my norm, and I was tired as hell of their shit. Nothing but drama with the whores who spread their legs for the club.

"Ready to order?" Helen asked.

Clarity gave her order, and I made sure she got Caleb his own plate of food, then I told Helen what I wanted. We ordered drinks and I got a coffee on the side since I had a feeling I was going to need a good bit of energy to keep up with the two people sitting with me. Especially the smaller of the two. If he was like my grandson, once he had free run of the house, he'd be hell to keep up with.

As Clarity watched me talking to Helen, there was something in her eyes I couldn't quite discern. I had a feeling I'd want to analyze it more later, but right now, I just wanted to get them fed, then get them settled at my house. Shit. Caleb wouldn't be able to sleep in the big beds I had. I pulled out my phone and sent another message to Seamus, in hopes he was still at the store or close enough to run back inside.

*Get a toddler bed and some sheets and blankets for it too*

*What the fucking hell is a toddler bed? Jesus. Kids need to come with an instruction manual. And apparently a money tree. Do you have any idea how much I've spent?*

I tried damn hard not to laugh. Seamus was one of the biggest, toughest men I knew. But ask him to get some things for a small kid and he didn't know what the fuck to do. It was fucking hilarious and I had no doubt the club and I would have a good laugh over it later. As for the cost, I wasn't worried. It wasn't like my bank account couldn't handle it, and he was likely using the club money. I'd just put it back once I had the receipts from today.

*And get anything else he'll need for a bedroom*

*This is fucked-up. I don't know shit about baby stuff*

*Aren't there any cute sales associates? Just ask one of them... Knowing you, you'll walk out with her number as well as the shit I need*

*Well, there is a blonde up by the register*

I snorted. Yeah, figured he'd already scoped the place out. The man couldn't go anywhere without landing dick first in some pussy. One of these days, that shit would catch up to him. Either he'd get some woman pregnant, or he'd find himself a sweet girl who turned her nose up when she found out about the countless women in his past. Either way, I wanted a front row seat when that shit went down.

## Chapter Three

### Clarity

My eyes had to look like they were going to fall out of my head as I looked at Scratch's home. I had been expecting something small, or at least modest. The house in front of me was a sprawling Victorian in mint green with white gingerbread trim. I'd never seen anything like it before, and it didn't even remotely look like a home owned by a biker. I should have known he had some money when he'd helped me into the shiniest, prettiest truck I'd ever seen. It even smelled like new when I climbed inside, and I could tell the car seat he'd bought for Caleb was far from cheap.

As my son kicked his feet against the leather seats, I winced, hoping Scratch wouldn't get mad if my son scuffed his truck. The man turned to look at Caleb and just smiled. Then he gave me a wink before getting out of the truck. Before I could offer up a word of protest, he'd pulled Caleb from the car seat and was carrying him toward the house. I scurried to follow him up the front steps of the large home, and came to a halt as I went through the most gorgeous door I'd ever seen.

"I... Um..." I looked around at the maple-colored hardwood floors and the pristine white woodwork and doorways. "Maybe this isn't such a good idea."

He turned to face me, my son still clutched in his arms. I think I swooned a little. Scratch was a big, tough man in jeans and a black leather vest, and my son looked so damn small in his arms. And yet, they looked incredibly right together. I had to swallow hard and look away. He was being nice and helping me out, nothing more. Not once had he touched me inappropriately or made any advances. The man probably just saw me as a kid. He'd even said he had a daughter close to my age.

"Why are you worried, Clarity?" he asked.

Was it wrong that I was disappointed he hadn't called me kitten again? No one had ever given me a pet name before, and every time he'd said it, I'd felt all warm and gooey inside.

"What if Caleb messes up your floors or walls?"

Scratch came closer, and his woodsy scent wrapped around me. Now that I wasn't quite so scared, I was noticing more things. Like the way his eyes crinkled at the corners when he smiled. Despite the tough overall appearance of the biker, he seemed to have a heart of gold. Or at least, that was the side of him I'd seen.

He reached out and gently cupped my chin. "Kitten, it's just a house. If he scratches the floors or draws on the walls, I'm not going to get mad or throw the two of you out. A house is meant to be lived in, not kept as a display."

"I just..." I bit my lip. If he wasn't worried about Caleb messing up his house, then maybe I shouldn't either.

He smiled softly, then nodded his head toward the stairs. "Come on. I'll show you where you'll be staying. Caleb's room isn't put together just yet, but I have two guys coming over to take care of it."

"He can just stay with me," I said. The last thing I wanted to do was make him go to any trouble for us. What if he changed his mind and decided not to let us stay? It had been so long since I'd felt safe, or we'd have a nice place to stay, that I was worried it would all be taken away just as quickly as I stumbled into the situation.

"Kitten, I already bought stuff for him to have his own room. If I make Seamus take it all back, his head will likely explode."

"I can't pay you back," I said, worrying at my lower lip.

Scratch froze at the top of the stairs and turned to look down at me. "Have I asked you to pay for anything?"

"No."

"Then don't assume I expect payment. Of any kind."

"I'm sorry." My cheeks flushed with embarrassment. I'd learned early that you didn't get something for nothing, and while he'd offered to let me clean his house in exchange for a place to stay, all this seemed like too much.

With Caleb still on his hip, he reached for me with his other hand and tugged me down the hall. All the doors stood wide open, and the room at the far end of the hall looked like it might be his bedroom. We drew closer to it, and I saw a massive bed with rumpled sheets. Scratch stepped into the room next to his, dragging me in behind him. My breath caught when I saw how pretty the space was. The walls were a pale lemon and what looked like a queen-size bed was pushed against one wall. A white eyelet cover was on the bed, and sheer curtains hung from the windows flanking the headboard.

"It's beautiful," I said.

"Once I found out my daughter was still alive, I set up this room in case she ever came to visit. So far, I've always gone to see her, which is fine. It's nice to get out of town now and then."

"Still alive?" I asked.

"Her mother lied and said my daughter was dead. I'd had no reason not to

believe her. My daughter ended up getting claimed by a man in another MC and that's how I found out she was still alive. I'd missed out on her entire life, but I see her as frequently as I can, and I mentioned my grandson earlier. He's about the same age as Caleb."

"I still can't believe you're a grandpa." I knew he was older, but he didn't seem old enough to have grandkids.

He nodded. "I'm hoping they'll have another one sometime. I like kids, and since I never got to spend any time with Darian when she was growing up, I feel like I missed out on a lot. At my age, it's not likely I'll have more kids."

"You make it sound like you're ancient," I said.

"I'm fifty-one, kitten. A hell of a lot older than you."

Right. Maybe that's why he hadn't made a move on me? Then again, some of the guys who had propositioned me were even older than Scratch. It wasn't that I wanted him to hit on me, but a man like Scratch falling for me wouldn't exactly be a hardship. I'd never met anyone like him before.

He tipped his head toward the hall. "I'll show you where Caleb will sleep, once his things are brought in and set up."

We passed the door next to mine, but I peered inside. The walls were blue and the furniture was darker and heavier than in my room, but I could see why he didn't want to put Caleb in there. It wasn't a room for a little boy for certain.

The room on the other side was empty and the walls were a soft gray. Darker gray curtains hung from the window, and Scratch gave them a tug.

"I'll have the guys take these down. Don't want Caleb pulling on them and getting hurt if the curtain rod comes down," he said.

"The members of your... what's it called?" I asked. I'd seen them around town before, but their name escaped me.

"Devil's Boneyard MC, but you can just refer to it as the Club if you want. And the men coming are prospects. They want to be members, but they have to put in the time to prove themselves first. We don't take just anyone," he said.

"And they'll be wearing a vest like yours?" I asked, remembering seeing some around town before. I'd never paid the men much attention, though, other than staying out of their way.

"It's called a cut, kitten. And yeah, they'll be wearing one, but theirs will say Prospect on it under the Devil emblem on the back."

He turned and showed me the back of his, with a horned skull over a set of bones. There were wings coming out from either side, but they were leathery like a

demon's wings and not angelic by any means. It was a rather sinister image, but the man wearing it was the kindest, gentlest person I'd ever met. I didn't think he'd appreciate me saying that to his face, though.

The doorbell rang downstairs, and I tensed for a moment. It was silly because Scratch had protected us when trouble had come to his shop earlier. After that, I didn't see him letting someone come to his house and hurt us. He still held Caleb as we went back downstairs. When he swung the door open, there were two men on the other side. They both looked like they were maybe around thirty, and they wore equally shocked expressions when they saw Caleb, and then their gazes landed on me.

"Holy hell, VP. Seamus said he'd been out buying baby shit, but I'd thought he was just yanking my chain," one of them said. "When I saw them in the office this morning, I didn't realize you were bringing them home with you."

"Knock it off, Killian," Scratch said. "The stuff in the bed of my truck needs to be hauled upstairs and put into the gray room. You'll have to put the furniture together. Toolbox is in the workshop out back."

"Told you there was a kid here, smartass," the second one said. "Need us to do anything else while we're here, VP?"

"Not right now, Seamus. The room will need to be set up, but make sure Cinder doesn't need you for anything first."

Both men eyed me with curiosity blazing in their eyes, but Scratch didn't introduce us. He shut the door and I followed him into the kitchen. The double ovens and counter space nearly made me sigh with pleasure. Back before I'd run away, I'd enjoyed cooking. When I'd gotten my own place, the kitchen had been so small that making anything in it had been difficult at best. But in here? The possibilities were endless. He even had one of those fancy stainless-steel refrigerators with the bottom drawer for a freezer and some sort of screen on the door. I'd seen an advertisement for them on TV once.

"I know we just had lunch not that long ago, but I thought Caleb might like a cookie. They're just store bought, but I keep a package on hand," Scratch said.

"You don't strike me as the type to have a sweet tooth."

He smiled and winked. "I like all kinds of sweet things."

My cheeks warmed, but I figured it was just a little harmless flirting that he likely did with all women. Not once had he given me the impression he was attracted to me. I sat down at the kitchen table and Scratch placed Caleb in my lap. Then he disappeared into a small room off the kitchen, which I figured must be the pantry. I'd never been in a house with a pantry before. It made me feel completely out of my depth.

My family had been far from rich, and I'd certainly not achieved anywhere near the amount of wealth Scratch must have.

He came back and set a package of chocolate chip cookies on the table, then got some milk from the fridge. He started to reach for a cupboard and then stopped.

"I don't have any of those sippy cup things like my grandson uses. I noticed Caleb drank from a straw at the diner, but I don't have any of those either," he said.

"Oh, well. We can try using a regular cup, but maybe a plastic one? He did okay with the small bottle of milk this morning."

He nodded and took down a plastic cup, then poured milk into it. After putting the carton back in the fridge, he carried the cup over and set it on the table in front of us. I helped Caleb take a drink, grimacing as it dribbled down his chin. Scratch just handed me some napkins, but didn't utter a word of complaint as the milk splashed onto the table from Caleb's chin. I tried to clean up the mess we were making, but as Caleb bit into a cookie, crumbs fell everywhere and I pretty much gave up. Scratch didn't seem to mind, if the smile on his face was any indication.

It was sad that he hadn't been able to raise his daughter. From what I'd seen so far, he probably was a great dad. Caleb trusted him, and that was saying something since he seldom trusted anyone. Scratch shoved his hands into his pockets and leaned against the kitchen counter.

"At the risk of you hissing at me and showing your claws, we need to talk," he said.

"About what?" I asked, wondering if I'd been wrong all along and he was going to ask for payment of some sort.

"There's not much room in the backpack you carry around, which means the two of you don't have many clothes."

"We'll get by with what we've got for a while longer. We each have three outfits in there. I just roll them tightly to make them fit, and it keeps them from wrinkling much." As if wrinkles really bothered me when most days I couldn't even shower.

His jaw firmed and the muscles in his arms bulged as his body tensed.

"You've spent too much on us already," I said, trying to make him see reason. "I can never repay you for all this."

"And I didn't damn well ask you to, now did I?" he asked.

"No, but..."

His eyes turned frosty as he pushed away from the counter. When he came closer, his gaze softened, but I could tell he was frustrated. He leaned in closer and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"I'm not the man who took advantage of you and left you pregnant and alone on the streets. I'm not one of the men who offered you food or shelter in exchange for sexual favors. I have not done one damn thing to make you fear me or think for a moment that I want anything more than to help you."

I swallowed hard and dropped my gaze. He was right. He'd been nothing but kind to us, and hadn't once tried to grab my ass or my breasts, hadn't tried to get in my pants. But trust didn't come easily to me. I probably trusted Scratch more than I had anyone else in a really long time, but he didn't know that.

I glanced at Caleb, but he was busy with his snack and wasn't paying the least bit of attention to us. He hummed as he chewed on his cookie and sipped his milk. The table was a mess, but Scratch didn't seem bothered by it.

Scratch's touch was gentle as he tipped my chin up, forcing me to look him in the eye. I expected anger or resentment, but all I saw was a man who seemed to care what happened to us, even if I didn't understand why.

"As long as you're under this roof, you have nothing to fear from anyone," he said. "Not even me. I will lay down my life if that's what it takes to keep you and your boy from harm. Despite everything you've been through, when I look in your eyes, I see innocence. You are the sweetest woman I've ever met, and I refuse to let anyone ruin that part of you."

My throat burned with unshed tears and I did something I shouldn't have. Leaning forward, I pressed my lips to his. I felt him stiffen almost immediately and I pulled away, my cheeks burning with embarrassment. His thumb stroked my cheek.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

"I don't know. It was impulsive, but I... I wanted to know what it was like to kiss you. I've never known a man as good as you are, and I wondered if kissing you would be different from the others."

His thumb pressed to my lower lip. "Kitten, that wasn't a kiss. This is a kiss."

When Scratch claimed my lips, he didn't do it gently. His kiss was harsh and demanding, his tongue sliding into my mouth as if he had every right. If I hadn't been sitting down, my knees would have buckled. Never in my life had I been kissed so thoroughly. He slowly pulled back but didn't release me. I found myself leaning toward him, wanting more. In that moment, I wasn't a mom. I was a woman who desired a man. Something I hadn't ever experienced before.

"That's a kiss, kitten. And it was the best one I've ever had."

I smiled faintly, then touched my fingers to my lips. They tingled and I still felt the pressure of his mouth on mine.

"But you need to stop thinking I'm some saint," he said. "I'm not a good man, and I've done some seriously bad shit. I'll never hurt you, but don't think for one second that I'm some tame, sweet old man."

"I never called you old," I said. "Or tame. But you are sweet. At least, you are to me and Caleb. No one's ever treated us so good before."

"Then the people in your life were complete idiots."

"Scratch?"

"Damon," he said. "When we're alone, you can call me Damon."

"Damon," I said softly. "Will you kiss me again?"

"I don't think that's such a good idea." He drew away from me. "You're far too tempting, Clarity, and too damn young for me."

My back straightened. "I may be young, but I've lived through more than other women my age. I lived on the streets twice now, had a kid when I was seventeen, I've been raped and propositioned like I'm a whore all because I don't have money. I've seen the ugly side of life, Damon. Watched people get killed just for a few dollars or a handful of drugs. You don't have to sugarcoat things for me. I'm a big girl, and I can handle whatever things in your past you think should scare me."

His lips twitched like he was fighting a smile. "All right, kitten. But let's table the discussion for now."

My sweet boy finished his snack and Scratch put the cup in the sink, then wiped down the table and swept up the crumbs. Caleb began squirming and whimpering. I knew what that meant and shot up from my chair before he had an accident.

"Bathroom?" I asked, hauling Caleb up against my chest, hoping he didn't pee on himself and me.

Scratch pointed to a door behind me. I hurried through it and barely got Caleb onto the toilet in time. He was still too small to learn to pee standing up. I'd left the door open and Scratch peered around the doorframe.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Yes, he just needed to go pretty bad."

"He's not in pull-ups?"

I shook my head. "We had to learn to potty train pretty quick the last two months. It's hard to get diapers or pull-ups when you're living on the street. He's been a good boy, though, and picked it up pretty quick. Getting him to hold it until I find a bathroom isn't always easy, though."

"What about at night now that he'll have his own room?" he asked.

I hadn't thought of that. "I don't know. He hasn't slept by himself since he potty

trained.”

“When he’s done, we’re going to go shopping for some stuff. And don’t argue with me, kitten. You may have claws, but I’m bigger and meaner. There’s shit you both need and you’re damn sure going to have it.”

Part of me wanted to argue and tell him we’d be fine with what we had, but at the same time it was really nice that someone wanted to take care of us. No one had given a shit about me in a long time, and no one had ever cared about what Caleb needed or wanted except me. I didn’t care what Scratch had done, or would do in the future. He was a good man when it came to me and my son, and that meant the world to me.

“Okay,” I said. “I’ll let you buy some stuff for us, but not too much. We’ve made do with the few things in the backpack for the past two months. I don’t need material things to make me happy, Scratch. They’re nice and all, but I’ve found that what’s important is my son and the fact that we’re together. I could have given him up, found him a stable home with a loving couple, but I couldn’t handle parting with him. And I’m glad because if I didn’t have him, I’d have given up.”

I helped Caleb wash his hands, and then to my surprise, he lifted his arms for Scratch to pick him up. The man smiled at my boy before lifting him, and I swear it was the sexiest thing I’d ever seen. I felt my heart thaw a little more and my throat tightened with emotion. I wanted that for Caleb, for both of us. A man who cared, who could smile at us like that. Didn’t hurt that his kiss had damn near turned me into a puddle of goo. I’d never in my life been kissed like that.

“Come on, kitten,” he said. “Let’s go shopping, and then I think this little guy could use a nap.”

Caleb yawned as soon as Scratch said the word nap, then laid his head on the big man’s shoulder. Yeah, I was in trouble. The big, tough biker holding my sweet baby boy did strange things to me. I’d never been the type to swoon, but that’s how I felt watching Scratch with my son. If ever there was a man who was meant to be a father, it was him. It didn’t seem right he’d been robbed of taking care of his daughter when she was little. I didn’t know what had happened with the mom, and I was scared to ask. He’s said she’d lied to him, and if there had ever been a trace of her in this house, it was long gone. No pictures, no womanly touches.

The upstairs hallway held a few photos. I’d noticed a woman who looked close to my age, and I’d assumed that was his daughter. There’d been others of a cute little boy near Caleb’s age, and an older man with long blond hair and a beard. He’d been wearing a cut like Scratch so I assumed he was either in Scratch’s club or another one. I

didn't really understand this world, but I was willing to learn. I'd seen a few episodes of *Sons of Anarchy* so I wasn't completely in the dark, but it hadn't really been my type of show so I hadn't stuck it out past the first three episodes.

I followed them out to the truck, and Scratch opened my door before buckling Caleb into his seat. I'd expected him to just stop at one of those twenty-four-hour stores that carried a little bit of everything, but instead he took us to the mall. I wanted to protest but bit my lip instead. Accepting a place to stay had been hard enough, but all this? It was too much, but telling him that didn't seem to do anything.

"First thing we're doing is getting this little guy a stroller," Scratch said. "He'll enjoy the mall a bit more if he can ride through it, and if he gets tired he can sleep."

"Not an expensive one," I said.

He smirked and something told me that my son was about to own the priciest, fanciest stroller in the mall. Scratch reached for my hand and clasped our fingers together, then led the way. He bought Caleb a big padded stroller that probably weighed a ton, then he grabbed a diaper bag and anything he seemed to think my son needed for our outing through the mall. After he'd paid, he put everything into the new diaper bag, then stuck it in the basket under the stroller seat.

I apparently wasn't the only one who found the biker hot while he was pushing the stroller. I swear I heard women sighing as we passed by, and I couldn't blame them. There was just something about seeing a rough guy like Scratch being so damn gentle and caring with a small child. I think ovaries were exploding all over the mall as we went from store to store. Eventually, he let me push the stroller so he could carry our purchases, and there were far too many sacks in my opinion. He definitely bought way more than we needed, but he couldn't be deterred. If I tried to object, he just arched an eyebrow and stared me down until I relented.

Probably a good thing we weren't in a relationship. It would be far too easy for him to get his way all the time. When I couldn't walk another step, I convinced him it was time to head home, but he stubbornly herded me into a Bath and Body Works store. Everything smelled so good, and I migrated over to the aromatherapy selection. I'd never been someone who enjoyed wearing perfume, but the eucalyptus and mint bodywash, lotion, and spray weren't overpowering, and I ended up with all three.

I wandered the store with Caleb while Scratch paid for my things, except he had a much too large bag when he made it back to my side. I eyed the sack, then him, but he just smiled and tipped his head toward the door. I had no idea what else was in that bag, but I had a feeling he'd spent way too much. The man had easily spent over five hundred dollars on us today, and if I added in the furniture and toys at his house, it was

well over a thousand. I couldn't even imagine having that kind of money, much less spending it all in one day. I didn't think for one minute that his little shop paid enough to cover all that, but I wasn't about to ask how he earned his money. There were whispers around town about his club, and some of them were probably true. Not the sacrificing of virgins, though, unless the poor girls died from too much sex. Every member that I'd seen of the Devil's Boneyard was sexy in some way or another, and I doubted any of them lacked for female companionship.

Scratch loaded our bags into the back floorboard of his truck, then put Caleb in his seat. The stroller went into the bed of the truck, and he stood there frowning at it. I went to stand beside him and placed my hand on his arm, drawing his attention.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Need a bigger vehicle."

"Bigger than a truck?" I asked, my eyebrows shooting upward. "This thing is massive."

"It needs more space inside. Maybe a big SUV."

"Are you trying to tell me that you're going to buy a new car just because Caleb and I are staying with you right now? You know that's insane, right?"

He muttered something that I didn't quite catch.

"What?" I asked.

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "What's insane is that I want to keep the two of you. Get in the truck, Clarity."

He wanted to keep us? I wasn't entirely certain what he meant by that, but the kiss we'd shared in the kitchen gave me an idea. I didn't think us being a permanent part of his life would include me sleeping in a separate bedroom, and for the first time in my life, the thought of sharing a bed with a man was... exciting.

"Make me," I said, folding my arms.

He bit the inside of his cheek, but the humor shining in his eyes told me he wasn't mad at me for defying him.

"Make you? Are you three? Get your ass in the truck, kitten."

I shook my head.

Scratch placed his hands on my shoulders, turned me around and marched me to the passenger door of the truck. He pulled it open, then swatted my ass hard enough that it stung. I gasped and jerked my gaze up to his. That evil smirk was back in place, the one I wanted to kiss, the one that made me want to get naked. He placed his hands at my waist and lifted me into the truck, his hands lingering on my body.

"You're playing with fire, kitten, and you're going to get burned."

Maybe, but I had a feeling it was the good kind of burn. The kind that left you satisfied and achy the next morning. The kind I'd only read about in books. He clicked my seatbelt into place, gave me a heated look, then shut the door. I fanned myself as he walked around to the driver's side, and I wondered if it was possible to combust from sexual tension. The swagger in his walk was quite a sight to behold, and I wasn't the only one noticing. Two women on the next aisle were checking him out and I stared them down. It wasn't like I had a claim on the man, but maybe I wanted to? I felt so confused.

Maybe I just needed a few good nights of sleep, then whatever I was feeling would die down. The last thing I needed was to get involved with Scratch. He'd said himself that he was too old for me. If he kept kissing me, though, all bets were off. The way his lips devoured mine, I knew I wouldn't be able to remain strong. I'd end up throwing myself into his arms and begging him to show me what it was supposed to be like between a man and a woman. Something told me that if I took that step, if I went to his bed, I'd never want to leave. Scratch was the kind of man who ruined you for anyone else. I didn't have to be experienced to know that. The way my body reacted to him gave me that message loud and clear.

## Chapter Four

### Scratch

*What the fuck are you doing, old man? She's younger than your damn daughter.* Giving myself a pep talk didn't stop my dick from getting hard when I was around Clarity. I'd managed to think of her as just some helpless waif who needed some assistance. Then I'd gone and kissed her. Biggest fucking mistake I'd ever made because now all I wanted was another taste.

Caleb was upstairs in his new bedroom sleeping, and Clarity was putting her things away in the bedroom I'd given her. Fuck if I didn't want her things mixed in with mine, though. It was completely insane, and I felt like a pervert for wanting in her pants. It was more than just that, though. I enjoyed the time we'd spent together today, liked talking to her, and just something as simple as holding her hand. I'd never felt like that about a woman before, which meant I was in deep shit.

The doorbell rang and I went to get it, not wanting it to ring a second time and wake up Caleb. Poor kid probably hadn't had a decent nap since they'd been out on the streets. I pulled open the door and stared at the President of my club. Cinder tossed down his cigarette and put it out with his boot before pushing past me into the house.

"Well, come in," I said.

"What the fuck, Scratch?" Cinder asked. "Half the club is talking about some woman and kid you moved into your house. Did you knock up some club slut?"

"Again, you mean?" I asked, thinking about my daughter's mother. "Clarity is so far from being a club slut the mere thought of that is laughable."

"But you aren't denying knocking up some woman?" he asked.

I crossed my arms and knew I needed to make a decision. I could claim Caleb as mine, and get shit for supposedly being with a seventeen-year-old girl, which is how old she'd been when she was raped, or I could tell the truth. Then again, I didn't know shit about genetics. Could two dark-haired people have a kid with white-blond hair? It was possible no one would believe me anyway, just from looking at the kid, but I didn't like the thought of the club thinking badly of Clarity, and I didn't want them to know she was raped, not unless she wanted to tell them. That shit was personal, and I knew most women didn't exactly want to scream something like that from the rooftops. I remained mute as I stared at my Pres, but I heard the soft tread of footsteps and knew Clarity would be here any second.

"All you need to know is that they're under my protection," I said.

"Jesus Christ," Cinder muttered. "First you knock up some club slut, then Jackal knocks up a Reaper's sister, and now this? Why can't any of you do things the normal way?"

I felt Clarity's small hand on my back. "Everything all right?"

"It's fine, kitten. My Pres was just stopping by to say hi. Isn't that right, Cinder?" I asked the man who was still shaking his head in disbelief.

"She doesn't even look legal. Are we going to have to worry about cops?" Cinder asked.

"I'm nineteen," Clarity said. I wasn't going to correct her, since she'd told me was *nearly* nineteen. Still way too fucking young for me, and I knew it.

"And your boy is how old?" Cinder asked.

"Two," she answered.

Cinder let out a slew of cuss words and began pacing my living room. Clarity's hand wrapped around my bicep, and she gripped me tight. I felt a slight tremor and knew she was scared. Wrapping an arm around her waist, I pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "Kitten, why don't you go check on Caleb? I'll be up in a few minutes."

She nodded and slipped out of the room, casting one last nervous glance at Cinder.

"Calm the fuck down," I told him. "You may be the president of this club, but you're also my best friend. Do you think I'd do anything to hurt her? That woman is the sweetest thing I've ever met, and I'd sooner cut off my balls than harm her in any way."

"She was seventeen when that kid was born," he said, his voice a near growl.

I sighed and knew I'd have to tell him the truth, but I didn't want it spread around the club. "This stays between the two of us," I said. "I won't have anyone looking at her differently because of what happened to her."

Cinder stopped and faced me. "What the fuck does that mean?"

"Some asshole raped her when she was still a kid herself. Knocked her up and she took off. I found her living on the streets with a little boy clutched in her arms. Something about them..." I shook my head.

"So this is you being a knight in shining armor?" he asked, seeming a bit calmer. "You're not fucking her?"

I shrugged. I wasn't. Not yet, but after kissing her and the way she'd responded to me, I had a feeling if she stayed in my home it would happen sooner or later.

"This is fucked-up," Cinder said. "I won't tell the club, but they won't be happy with the idea of you sleeping with a kid, especially at your age."

I snorted. "You're older than me."

"Yeah, and I keep my dick in my pants if they aren't over thirty. Even then I feel like a dirty old man since I could easily be their daddy. Why do you think I don't get laid as much as I used to? It's not because I can't get it up. It's hard to find a club slut who isn't some naïve kid wanting to claw her way up the ranks and thinking she'll get there by spreading her legs for anyone in a cut."

He wasn't wrong about the club whores.

"Just be careful," he said. "When Darian finds out, she's going to blow a gasket, and I can only imagine how her husband will react. We have peace with the Dixie Reapers. They're like fucking family, and I don't want to wreck that."

"They *are* family," I corrected. My daughter was property of a Reaper, and Jackal was married to a Reaper's sister. Hell, one of our prospects had met the daughter of another Reaper and had enough of a reaction to the girl it scared the shit out of him. Ever since Janessa had been here, Seamus had gone around fucking anything that would hold still long enough, like he was trying to prove something to himself. I had a feeling that was going to be a shitstorm one day.

"They could stay at the compound," Cinder offered. "I know it's not big and we only have a few homes there and the rooms in the clubhouse, but we could make it work. They'd be safe and you'd be free to carry on as usual."

"I want them here," I said. "They're under my..."

"Protection," he finished for me. "Yeah, I heard you. You going to claim them? Do I need to prepare for that?"

"Don't know what the future will bring, but I wouldn't entirely rule out the possibility."

He nodded ran a hand through his close-cropped silver hair. "Fine. Just let me know if things change."

"You still looking at that property out in the county?" I asked. A larger compound farther outside town could mean big changes.

"Yeah, why?"

"I know you wanted to hang onto our compound before, because of the history of the place, but if we sell our current location and set up a new, larger compound, I'm not selling this house. I know you like the way the Reapers have their shit set up, but we're not them. I like living in town."

Cinder shrugged. "We can talk about it if we move forward with a bid on the property. If you get an old lady, she may have her own opinion on where she wants to live. She'd be safer behind a fence. Her and the kid."

He wasn't wrong, but I'd cross that bridge when I got to it. I saw him out, and then went to find Clarity. She was pacing the hall upstairs while Caleb slept soundly in his room. I wrapped my arms around her when she came barreling into me. She trembled and I hated that she'd been scared. If she was going to stay here, though, she'd have to get used to my brothers dropping by, even if they asked questions she might not like.

"Do I have to leave?" she asked. "I don't think he liked me."

"Kitten, it's not that he doesn't like you. He was concerned that Caleb might be my son."

She looked up at me. "Why would that be a bad thing?"

"You're obviously young, and you were still a kid when you had Caleb. Even if it had been consensual, it still would have been statutory rape. Cinder was worried the cops might come down on the club. I would be honored to be Caleb's dad, but he's right to be worried," I said.

"I hadn't thought of that," she admitted. "I don't want you to get into trouble. Maybe we should go?"

"Kitten, I'm sure it's going to be fine. Most people go out of their way to avoid my club. Cinder just wants to be cautious in case someone tries to start shit. All it would take is one phone call to arouse suspicion and bring the cops to the door. Even though a blood test would prove that Caleb isn't mine, it could bring the club under scrutiny, and that's the last thing we need."

I smoothed the wrinkles between her eyes as she frowned at me, then did the only thing I could think of to get her mind off it. I leaned down and kissed her. It was getting to be a habit, but she tasted so damn sweet. Her body melted against mine and she clutched my shirt. My cock pressed against my zipper and I knew I needed to put a stop to whatever was going on between us before it was too late. She wasn't ready for this. We barely knew each other, and she wasn't the type of woman to fall into bed with a stranger. I might not know her well, but I knew enough to discern that much.

I tried to pull away, but her grip tightened on my shirt and she wouldn't let go. It was damn good for my ego, not that I'd ever lacked female company. A woman like Clarity, though? That was new. She was good, sweet, and if she hadn't had her innocence stolen, she would likely still be a virgin. The exact opposite of the type of women who flocked to me and my brothers.

"Kitten, we shouldn't do this," I said before kissing her again briefly, unable to resist the temptation.

"Caleb will sleep for a while," she said.

I smiled and smoothed back her hair. "That wasn't my concern. I'm more than thirty years older than you, and I haven't exactly led a law-abiding life. You can do a hell of a lot better than me. Hell, I'm old enough to be Caleb's grandpa and your dad."

She arched a brow, but didn't move away.

"I'm not calling you Daddy," she said.

I gave a bark of laughter and tightened my hold on her. Some men might be into that shit, but I certainly wasn't. I didn't want a little girl in my bed, I wanted a woman. And despite Clarity's young age, she was certainly all woman.

"If you did, I'd have to spank your ass. I'm too damn old for those games."

"I know I'm young," she said. "But I had to grow up fast. I'm not some kid who doesn't know what she wants. No matter how many times you say you're a bad man, I'll never believe it. You've been wonderful to me and Caleb."

"If we go down this path, it changes things, kitten. I don't think you're ready for that. There's too much about me and my life that you don't know."

"What are you worried about?" she asked.

"You're different. It's not a bad thing, but it means that once I get you in my bed, I'm not going to let you leave. The last thing you need right now is a commitment. And if I claim you, make you my old lady, there's no going back. You'll be mine until one of us dies. Focus on you and your boy, get adjusted to life here and to me, and then if you still think you want me, we'll talk about it."

"Why do you have to go and be all reasonable?" she asked.

I smiled a little. "Comes with having lived so damn long."

She snuggled closer; then she yawned.

"You should rest while Caleb is down for nap," I said. I doubted either of them had slept well the months they were on the street. It would probably take a few days before she looked and felt well rested.

"I don't want to be alone," she mumbled.

I lifted her into my arms and carried her down the hall to her bedroom. Even though she was a little on the curvy side, she was too damn light. It made me wonder just how badly she'd been starving herself to make sure her son had food. I left the bedroom door open and eased her onto the mattress, but she refused to let go. It took me a minute to get my boots off while she clung to me, but then I climbed onto the bed with her and held her close. She curled into me and rubbed her nose against my chest. After her third deep breath, I had to fight back a laugh.

"Are you smelling me?" I asked.

"Maybe," she said, pressing her nose closer to me.

I rubbed my hand up and down her back. "Go to sleep, kitten. I'll stay right here."

Once her breathing evened out and her body relaxed, I eased out of the bed and went to check on Caleb. He still slept soundly, his tiny body sprawled across his toddler bed, one foot hanging off the edge. The bear I'd asked Seamus to purchase was clutched in the little boy's arms, and he looked completely at peace. I looked in on Clarity once more and then decided to do something about the problem I'd had since I kissed her in the hall.

I left my bedroom door open a crack in case Caleb woke up and needed something, but I went into my bathroom and stripped my clothes off. It took a minute for the shower to heat up, then I stepped under the spray and closed my eyes as I wrapped my hand around my cock. I'd been fucking hard since my lips had touched Clarity's. Club sluts could plaster themselves to me and I didn't get hard -- most of the time -- but that sweet woman in my arms made my dick stand at attention.

I soaped my hand and started stroking. Long, hard tugs that felt damn good, but not good enough. I tried to picture her, naked and kneeling at my feet, those pouty lips of hers parted. Would she let me grip her hair and fuck her mouth, take complete control of her? Her mouth would probably feel like heaven wrapped around me, sucking me off. I stroked faster and harder, my other hand braced on the wall.

My breath sawed in and out of my lungs, and when I imagined her hands on my body, I could feel them, like she was standing in the shower with me. I felt her lips trail down my spine, her small hand slide around my hip and cover my hand and cock. It was when her thumb stroked over the slit at the head of my cock that my eyes jerked opened and my body went tight. I looked over my shoulder and the little angel was smiling at me shyly.

"Clarity, what the fuck are you doing?" I asked, my voice harsher than I'd meant it to be.

She didn't flinch, or draw away. If anything, she came closer, pressing her naked body to mine. She slipped under my arm and faced me as her hand gripped my cock again, sliding up and down my shaft.

"Clarity..."

"You might think we shouldn't have sex, and I understand your concerns, but at least give me this much. Let me make you come."

My eyes closed tight and I gave a slight nod, having no doubt I was going straight to hell for allowing her to do this. Fuck, I already had a seat reserved. But all the bad shit I'd ever done didn't compare to giving into her when I knew it was wrong. One

of us needed to be the voice of reason, but with her small, soft hand stroking my dick, any sense of self-preservation I'd had was long gone.

Her lips touched my chest, then she gently bit down on my nipple. It was enough to send me over the edge and I came, spurts of cum coating her belly and breasts. When my balls had been drained, a shudder raked my body. It was the hardest I'd come in a while and I stared down at her, trying to figure out what she was thinking or feeling. Her body was flushed and the look in her eyes was pleading with me to touch her.

"Kitten... you shouldn't have come in here."

"I want you. I've never wanted anyone before, and while it's a new and scary feeling, I know that I'll regret it if I just sit back and do nothing. I don't care if you're older than me, or that your club does illegal stuff. You make me feel things no one has ever made me feel before, treat Caleb like a treasure, and I..."

I cupped her cheek and ran my thumb along her skin. "You what?"

"Well, we aren't technically in your bed, so if anything happens here in the shower..." She shrugged.

I bit my lip so I wouldn't laugh. "Found a loophole, did you? Maybe I should have been a bit clearer. Once my dick is inside you, you're mine, Clarity. You and Caleb. That's a big fucking step to take, kitten, especially since you don't know shit about me."

She opened her mouth, probably to protest, and I silenced her.

"You trusted Caleb's dad and look what happened. Just because you think you know me, that you think I'm a good man, it doesn't mean we should do this. I'm not who you think I am, kitten."

She ran her hand across my chest, tracing the lines of my tattoos. "The fact you keep pushing me away tells me enough. Anyone else would have had me naked within minutes of letting me into your shop, or pushed me to my knees and ordered me to suck them off. You didn't do any of that."

The fact I'd just tried to be a decent human being and she acted like I'd made the sun rise and set told me quite a bit about everything she'd been through. The things I'd done were things any person should want to do for another, without expecting repayment. Maybe not all the shopping I'd done for them, but giving them a safe place to sleep, feeding them? It was just human decency to do those things. Even a bad man like me wouldn't let a little kid starve on the streets.

"Please," she said softly. "No one's ever touched me the way you do. I want to experience it all. With you. I want to know what it should have felt like the day Caleb

was conceived, what it would have felt like if I'd been with a man I'd chosen and not one who took what he wanted."

Christ! She was fucking killing me with her big eyes and her soft pleas.

"Kitten, I doubt that you're on birth control, and I don't keep condoms at home because I never bring women here. I'm clean. I get tested every month, and I always use protection, but you could get pregnant. If only took the one time before..."

"Then pull out."

"That's not foolproof, Clarity. You could still get pregnant."

"Are you going to throw me out and make me leave?" she asked. "I don't mean out of your shower, but if we... if we're intimate, will you change your mind and make us leave?"

"No, baby. I told you, once I'm inside you, I'm not letting you go. You'll be mine, both of you. I've lived long enough to know that a woman like you is one in a million. I'd be stupid to let you go."

"And if I got pregnant, you'd want the baby, wouldn't you?"

"Of course, I would, but I'm not taking that chance, kitten. You're still vulnerable and shouldn't be making that kind of decision right now. I'll make you feel good, but we aren't taking this any further until I've picked up some condoms. And before you argue, I'm doing it for you. I'd love nothing more than to be inside you bare, but I don't think that's what you need right now. After you're more rested and have had a few more meals in your belly, you'll likely see that I'm right. We don't have to rush things."

She wound my hair around her hand and pulled my head toward hers. "Then make me feel good. No one's ever made me come before. I've never even come by my own hand."

My lips crashed against hers as I kissed her hard and deep. I reached between her legs, stroking the soft hair covering her pussy before seeking out her wet heat. She was so slick and more than ready to be fucked. I thrust a finger inside her, then added a second. I groaned at how fucking tight she was. Just two of my fingers barely fit inside her, and I wondered if I'd split her in two if I did claim her the way I wanted. If I hadn't just come, the feel of her around my fingers would have made me hard as a fucking post.

I thrust my fingers in out and of her while I brushed over her clit with my thumb. She made soft sounds and her pussy squeezed tight. I could tell she was already close, and I wanted to push her harder, make her fall and scream out my name. I drew back a little so I could watch her, the cream coating my fingers making me wish it was

my cock inside her. She looked fucking beautiful as she panted and sweetly begged me for more.

"I... I feel..." she stammered and bit her lip as she moaned.

"That's it, kitten. Come for me. Let go."

"I... I..." She screamed as her hips bucked. "Damon!"

Fucking hell! A woman had never said my real name as she orgasmed, and even though I'd thought I was too damn old to get hard again so soon, my dick seemed to have other ideas. I slid my fingers out of her pussy, then sucked off her cream. Her eyes dilated as she watched me.

"I didn't know men actually did that. I thought it only happened in books," she said.

"You taste so damn good, kitten."

Her gaze dropped to my cock. "You're hard again."

I rubbed the back of my neck. "Yeah. Seeing you come seems to affect me that way. I'll be fine. You should get dressed and check on Caleb."

She kissed me sweetly, then got out of the shower. Once she had a towel wrapped around her and was gathering her clothes, I turned the hot water all the way off and tried not to curse as the icy water beat down on me. It took a few minutes, but my dick finally deflated and I was able to get out.

Something told me that my life was about to get a hell of a lot more complicated. Now that we'd crossed a line, there was no going back. I only hoped that she didn't regret it after she'd had some time to think things over. Clarity was the first woman I'd ever invited into my home, other than the invitation I'd extended to my daughter, and she was the first woman who had ever screamed my name like that.

No matter what she decided, I knew this moment was a life changing one for me. After being with her like that, someone as sweet and innocent as she was, club sluts would never do it for me. I leaned against my dresser and crossed my arms as I stared at the opposite wall. Logically, I knew I shouldn't have touched her, should have never shared that moment with her. But I also knew I'd never regret it. Not even if she walked away and didn't look back. It would be a memory I'd cherish the rest of my life.

Fuck. I was turning into a goddamn sap in my old age.

## Chapter Five

### Clarity

It was both frustrating and touching that Scratch had held back in the shower. I wanted him more than I'd ever wanted anyone before, but the fact he was thoughtful enough to consider protection and insist on using it kept me from being mad. The fact he'd given me my first orgasm, and it had completely rocked my world, definitely hadn't hurt. My body was still humming. I had to wonder if he'd been able to make my knees turn to jelly just with his fingers, could I handle being in bed with him? If sex between us got any better, I wasn't sure I'd survive it.

By the time I'd dressed and run a comb through my hair, Caleb was already awake. His blond hair stood every which way and reminded me a little too much of his father, but his dark eyes were definitely mine. Even though I'd inherited my father's pale white skin, I'd gotten hair and eyes from my mom. I'd sometimes wondered if that was why my stepmom hadn't seemed to want me around. She'd made racist comments on more than one occasion, and it had to make her burn that her stepdaughter was mixed race. Or maybe she'd just been embarrassed by me, since she'd always asked me to stay in my room when her friends came over.

I picked up a still somewhat sleepy Caleb, made sure he used the bathroom, then carried him downstairs. He'd never been around a staircase before, and I didn't want to take a chance on him falling on the way down. If we were going to stay long-term, maybe I could talk Scratch into putting a baby gate across the top and bottom. Caleb was my entire world and if anything happened to him, something I could have prevented, I would never forgive myself.

Scratch was in the living room with his feet up in a recliner. He was flipping through TV channels when he saw me lingering in the doorway. He gave me a wink and smiled at Caleb.

"Hey, little man. Do you like watching TV?" Scratch asked.

Caleb shoved his fist in his mouth and nodded. My boy could talk, but he seldom did. If I'd had the money for a specialist, I'd have asked them to test him, make sure he didn't have a learning disability or hadn't been traumatized in some way that would make him go silent. He'd been a real chatterbox when he'd first learned to talk, then about six months or so ago, he'd suddenly stopped. I'd thought it was strange, but he'd

seemed perfectly healthy. We'd gone to the free clinic the church hosted once a month and they'd assured me he was perfectly healthy.

I eased onto the couch, nearest to Scratch, and held Caleb in my lap. I was a little surprised when Scratch put an animated movie on TV, something Caleb hadn't seen since it was still fairly new. Glancing his way, I found him watching me. Or maybe it was more that he was watching both of us.

"You watch cartoons often?" I asked.

His lips twitched and he smiled a little. "I added a bunch to my digital movie library in case the grandkid ever came to visit. So far, he hasn't. I see him often enough, though."

"Where does he live?" I asked.

"Alabama. His daddy is a Dixie Reaper, and our clubs get along just fine, but Bull would technically need permission to be in our territory. I have no doubt that Cinder would give it to him and it's not a complicated process or anything, but it's just easier for me to go there. I'm on good terms with their Pres and everyone knows me. Besides, routine is good for Foster. Maybe when he's older they'll come for a visit."

"How often do you go visit?" I asked, hoping I wasn't prying too much. I figured if I crossed a line, he'd let me know.

"Sometimes I'm over that way once a month, other times it's a few months between visits. It depends on what's going on with my club, their club, or my business. I usually head over there for a long weekend, or occasionally I'll stay for a week. It's nice getting to spend time with Darian after missing out on so much."

I wanted to ask about Darian's mom, but I didn't dare. If she'd made Scratch think his daughter was dead, then I had a feeling she would be a sore spot with him. I was more than a little curious, though. What type of woman had he cared enough about to have a child with her? He'd said he'd never been with someone like me, but he must have cared about her at least a little. Unless his daughter had been a mistake, which was possible. Caleb had been the result of a rape, but it didn't mean I loved him any less, and I could tell that Scratch loved his daughter, no matter who her mom was or how she'd been conceived. He definitely seemed crazy about his grandson. His eyes lit up every time he talked about the little boy.

"What about your parents?" he asked. "What made you run away from home?"

"My mom died when I was younger, and when my dad remarried, he picked a woman who seemed to hate me. My dad is white and so is my stepmom."

"But your mother wasn't," he said.

"No." I shifted Caleb onto to the sofa. "Wait right here."

I shot up and ran up the stairs, going for the backpack I'd stashed in my room. I hadn't had a chance to wash it yet, and I had to admit it was making the room smell a little funky, but it held my most prized possession. I hadn't been able to keep much when we'd been evicted, but I did have a picture of my mom I'd salvaged from our stuff on the street and kept it in the front pocket.

I carefully took the picture out and carried it downstairs. Standing next to Scratch's chair, I showed it to him.

"This is my mom. My dad told me it was taken around the time she found out she was pregnant with me. It's the only one I have of her."

He took the picture from me, holding it gently, and he grinned. "You look like her. Your skin might be lighter, but you have her eyes, her hair, and you definitely have her smile."

I took the picture back from him, looking at my mom. She'd had such pretty skin, a light mocha that I'd often wished I had too. Anyone who'd seen a picture of my mom always asked how I could be so pale. If it weren't for my decidedly non-white hair, no one would ever know my mother was African American.

"I have my dad's nose," I said, wishing I didn't look anything like him. Once upon a time, I'd loved him and I'd been convinced he loved me too. You didn't throw away the people you loved, and as easily as he'd pushed me aside I had to wonder if he'd ever felt anything for me, or if he'd just been going through the motions.

"You're beautiful, kitten, and so was she. I'm sorry you lost her and that your dad turned out to be an asshole. If you ever want to talk about her, or about how your dad made you feel, I'll always listen." He reached for my hand and tugged me down across his lap. "I can promise you right now, if I make you mine, I will treat Caleb like my own son. It doesn't matter how he was conceived or who his birth father is, that boy will be mine and he will be loved."

"If you make me yours?" I asked.

"Going slow, remember? Or trying to." He smiled. "You seem to want to run full steam ahead."

I curled against his chest and grabbed onto his shirt. I felt his heartbeat and let his scent surround me. If I could spend every night for the rest of my life just like this, curled up in his lap, then I would be happy. I'd never felt so content, so at peace, as I did right that moment. We watched the movie, and eventually Caleb came over, lifting his arms up.

Scratch helped him onto the recliner and I worried the chair might break with all three of us in it, but he didn't seem to mind. He wrapped his arms around us. For a

moment, I could picture Scratch as my husband, Caleb as our son, and us having a happy family. I didn't think everything would always be all sunshine and roses if he did decide to keep us, but it would be the first time my son had been part of a complete family unit. I wanted that for my sweet boy, and I wanted it for me too.

When it was time for dinner, Scratch ordered some pizza and breadsticks. Caleb's eyes went wide when he saw all the food and my heart hurt, knowing I hadn't been able to do something like this for him. Even when I'd been working, our meals had been inexpensive but filling. Eating out had been a treat, and usually meant ordering off the dollar menu, or getting the special at the diner.

Caleb ate an entire slice and then reached for a breadstick, but his hand froze partway and he looked at Scratch. The fear in his eyes nearly took my breath away, his small hand trembling as if he'd done something wrong, and I didn't understand what was happening. I'd always given Caleb as much as he wanted, often going hungry myself to make sure he was full. Not once had I disciplined him for wanting more food, or for helping himself to whatever was on the table.

Scratch met my gaze before looking at Caleb, and I knew he'd seen it too.

"It's okay, Caleb. Take as much as you want," Scratch said, his voice low and soft.

My throat tightened and my heart raced as I wondered what had happened to my small boy to make him that scared. Caleb ate his breadstick, eyeing Scratch as if the man might snatch it away at any moment. After dinner, we cleaned up and I bathed Caleb, then tucked him into bed. I shut off his light and pulled his door partway closed, then met Scratch back down in the living room. He was standing in the center of the room, his expression fierce and his arms folded.

"What the fuck happened to make him think he'd be punished for eating?" Scratch asked.

"I don't know. He's never done that around me before, and I always give him as much as he wants."

I was wringing my hands and shifting from foot to foot, scared about what might have happened to my son, and not knowing who was responsible. There was only one person I could think of, but it scared me. My gaze met Scratch's and told him my fears.

"When I was working, I would have to leave Caleb with a sitter. There was a woman two doors down who had a few kids. She said watching him wouldn't be any trouble, and I paid her twenty dollars every shift I worked to make sure he stayed safe. No one else had access to Caleb, unless it was through her," I said. "What did she do to my baby?"

His stance softened as did his expression, and Scratch came toward me, pulling me into his arms. "Did you notice any behavior changes in Caleb at all?"

"He stopped talking about six months ago. He talks, just not nearly as much. I wondered what would have caused it and had thought he was sick, but the doctor at the free clinic said he was fine."

"I want the name and address of that woman," he said. "I think I need to pay her a visit and find out what she did to that boy."

"I'm scared," I admitted. "I'm terrified you'll find out something horrible, and I'm responsible for putting him in that situation. It's my fault someone hurt my baby."

I couldn't hold back my tears and sobbed against his chest. Scratch rubbed my back and tried to soothe me, but my heart was breaking. I was supposed to protect my child, make sure he didn't come to any harm, and I'd left him with someone who had possibly abused him. What kind of mother did that make me?

"Kitten, I'll figure out what's going on, and I will keep the both of you safe. Whatever it takes. Understand?"

I nodded and tried to dry my tears, but more kept coming.

"I failed him," I said, sniffing.

"No, you didn't. You left him with someone you thought you could trust, so that you could work and earn money to keep a roof over his head and food in his belly. No one is going to fault you for that. There are bad people in the world, and sometimes they wear really good disguises. Did her children ever look like they'd been abused? Were there any warning signs?" he asked.

"No. Her kids were always clean, looked healthy, and seemed well mannered. I'd thought maybe she was one of those super moms who had kids who always behaved."

He chuckled. "I don't think there's such a thing as a kid who always behaves, but I get your point. Now understand mine. There was no way you could have known that she would do something to scare Caleb. If she never left a mark on him, and he couldn't tell you what was happening, how would you have known? When he stopped talking, you took him to the doctor like any concerned mother would. It's not your fault, kitten."

I clung to him, wishing there some way to rewind the last hour or so, turn back time to when I didn't know someone had hurt my little boy. I had suspected something was wrong, something that had made him feel like he couldn't speak anymore, but maybe I hadn't wanted to know what happened. If I knew, then it was real and someone had harmed my sweet little boy, and I wasn't sure I could handle that knowledge.

"Can I stay with you tonight?" I asked softly, not daring to look up at him. If he rejected me, my heart might completely shatter.

"Do you just want to be held? Because I can do that if that's what you need right now."

I shrugged. "Yes, and no. I want that, but what if I decide I want more than just holding?"

"Then I'd better have a Prospect bring me a box of condoms."

I tried to remember the biker show I'd watched a while back, but the word Prospect was drawing a blank. Scratch had told me before what he'd meant by calling them that, but I must not have paid close enough attention. "What's a Prospect?"

"It's someone who wants to join the club. They have to do whatever jobs we give them, have to prove themselves as loyal to the club, and after a while the members vote and decide who is allowed to patch in and who isn't. We only have a few of them because our Pres is rather selective."

"Like the men who put Caleb's stuff together?" I asked. I remembered them wearing a cut like Scratch, but theirs had been different.

"Yes, those two were Prospects. Why don't you go soak in the tub and change for bed? I'll wait down here for him to bring the condoms, and then I'll come up and we can go to bed. And if sleep is all you want to do, then I'm perfectly okay with that. You never have to do something you don't want, and I don't want you to feel obligated to have sex with me. Or with anyone for that matter."

"I don't feel obligated." I looked up at him. "But I'll go up and run a bath like you suggested. Maybe it will make me feel better, but I doubt it."

He kissed the top of my head. As I walked out of the living room, I saw him pull his cell phone from his pocket, and I heard him speaking to someone as I went up the stairs. Butterflies swarmed my stomach at the thought of sharing a bed with him, but they were quickly squashed by the horrid feeling someone had abused my child. No matter what Scratch said, I still felt responsible. I'd given that woman permission to care for him, paid her to do it for that matter, and it made me feel like I'd condoned her behavior. I knew deep down that wasn't true, that I hadn't known and couldn't have known that there was something wrong with her. It didn't ease my guilt any.

I soaked in the tub until my fingers and toes began to prune, then drained the water and dried off. As I looked around, I realized I hadn't grabbed any clean clothes from my room, so I wrapped the towel around my body and walked down the hall to the spare room Scratch was letting me use. I pulled on some of the new things he'd bought me, a silky pair of panties with a cute shorts set that had stars on them. Then I

padded into his bedroom. He'd removed his cut and shirt, and stood barefoot in nothing but his jeans.

My breath caught in my throat as I stared at him. In the shower, I hadn't really taken the time to admire the scenery. He wasn't overly bulky with muscle, but his abs were defined and biceps were still large in my opinion. The ink that swirled across his chest traveled along his shoulders and down his arms. He watched me, but didn't make a move to bring me farther into his space. I put one foot in front of the other, until I stood right in front of him.

"Feel any better?" he asked.

"Not really. I don't think I'll be able to relax until I know for sure what happened to Caleb, and even then I can't guarantee it will change anything. I might actually feel worse depending on what you find out."

"Whatever it is, I'll handle it. If she hurt that boy, I'll make sure it doesn't happen again."

My stomach clenched, and I wasn't sure I wanted to know exactly what he meant by that. He'd said that he'd done things I didn't know about, bad things. I still didn't think that made him a bad man. If he did something to the woman who hurt my kid, it wouldn't make me see him any differently. I wouldn't fault him for wanting to protect innocent children, no matter how he went about it.

I noticed the box of condoms on the nightstand. Instead of the fear or revulsion I'd always felt when sex came up with other men, it just felt right when I thought about doing those things with Scratch. I didn't care about our age difference, or that he thought he was all wrong for me. No one had ever looked at me the way he did, ever treated me as good as he did, and they certainly hadn't made me feel the things he did. Once I'd let down my guard even a little, I'd realized that I felt safe with him. When I looked into his eyes, I just knew that he would protect me, and maybe even love me one day if things went that far. As broken as I was, I had a feeling he was a little bit broken too, or had been at some point. The strong man holding me right now wasn't broken anymore, but maybe just a little damaged. Whatever he'd been through, it had made him into the man he was today, a man I would be proud to call mine.

"Make love to me," I said. "Show me what my first time should have been like."

"Remember what I said?" he asked.

"That if we do this, then I'm yours, and Caleb is yours."

He nodded. "I shouldn't want you, should send you back to your room and stay the hell away from you. But I don't know that I'm strong enough to do that. You make me feel..."

“Complete,” I said, because that’s how he made me feel. “It feels like you’re the piece that’s been missing from my life. Do you believe in soul mates?”

“People destined to be together?” he asked. “Always thought it was a bunch of crap.”

“Oh.” I nibbled my lower lip, but he reached up and pulled it from my teeth, smoothing his thumb across it.

“Until I met you,” he said. “I tried to tell myself I just wanted to help out a single mom who was struggling, but I think it was something more. I’ve never loved a woman before, Clarity, and I may not be capable of it. I love my daughter, and I already love that kid of yours. But women...”

“Someone hurt you,” I said.

He shrugged. “Everyone gets hurt at some point, but yeah. I’ve had some women fuck me over in the past. I won’t promise you love, but I can promise that I will respect you, I will take care of you, and that I do have feelings of some sort for you even if I don’t have a label for them. Which is insane since we’ve only known each other for about a day. It doesn’t feel like that, though.”

I smiled a little. “I know. When I look at you, when your eyes lock onto mine, I feel like I’ve known you forever. Like maybe we knew each other in past life or something.”

He chuckled a little. “Now you believe in past lives too?”

“Don’t you?” I asked. “Haven’t you ever had something happen and it felt like you’d been faced with that situation before, even though you knew you hadn’t? Or maybe you heard about something that happened long enough and you could vividly picture it your mind, even smell the scents that would have been there? I think it’s memories of what happened in a life before this one.”

“Maybe you’re right. Never really thought about it that way.”

“I won’t hear that often, will I?” I teased.

“Hear what?”

“That I’m right.”

He grinned and then leaned down and kissed me hard. “Kitten, I will always admit when you’re right and I’m wrong. Just not in front of my brothers. I have a badass image to uphold after all.”

“I think we’re wearing too many clothes,” I said, reaching for the button on his jeans.

“Caleb?” he asked, nodding toward the hall.

“He’ll sleep for at least a few hours. Even on the street he’d doze off for three or

four hours at a time. Now that he has a home to sleep in, a place to feel safe, maybe he'll sleep longer. With that episode at dinner, I can't guarantee it, but I think we have time."

He pressed his forehead to mine. "Then get naked, kitten."

I took a step back and slowly removed my clothes, loving the heat that flared in his eyes as he watched me. I didn't feel nervous or scared like I'd thought I would. I just felt desirable and wanted. He removed his jeans and boxer briefs, his cock already hard. When he pulled me into his arms again, I felt like I'd come home, like I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

We toppled to the bed as he kissed me, his hands sliding up and down my sides, then gripping my hips. His cock pressed against me and I felt a thrill run through me. He took his time, tasting me, licking along my collarbone before taking my nipple into his mouth. I sank my fingers into his hair, wishing we could stay in this moment forever. My body came alive, every nerve ending humming as he lovingly traced my curves with his lips and hands.

Pleasure consumed me, and I gladly gave myself over to Scratch. I was his. His to touch, to protect... And my heart felt full.

## Chapter Six

### Scratch

Her skin felt like silk and she tasted sweet as honey. She had the prettiest nipples I'd ever seen, and I loved the way she shivered when I sucked them into my mouth, then lightly bit them. I stroked the curls between her legs, feeling how wet and ready she was for me. Her clit was swollen and I lightly rubbed it. Not enough to get her off, but just enough to have her begging for more.

"Feel good, kitten?" I asked.

"So good," she murmured, her eyes fluttering as she tried to keep them open. A soft smile curved her lips.

I remembered how tight she'd been in the shower and used my fingers to stretch her a little. My cock wasn't fucking huge, but I was bigger than average and could hurt her. If she didn't have a son, I'd have sworn she was a virgin.

"I can't wait to feel this pussy wrapped around my dick," I said as I kissed along her neck. I added a second finger as I worked her pussy, and the soft moans coming from her damn near made me come.

"Damon, please," she begged.

"Please what, kitten?"

"I need... I need..."

I knew exactly what she needed, wanted, and drove my fingers in and out of her harder and faster. I pressed down on her clit with my thumb. Her hips bucked against me and I could feel that she was close. Sucking her nipple into my mouth again, I lashed it with my tongue before biting down just hard enough that she came.

"Damon!" She shuddered and trembled as her pussy gushed around my fingers.

Before she had a chance to come down from her high, I slipped my fingers out of her, sucked her juices from them, then ripped open a condom. It had to be the fastest I'd ever put one on, then I braced my weight so I wouldn't crush her and I slowly eased into her tight little pussy.

"Fuck, Clarity! So damn tight!"

I used short thrusts to work my way inside her, and when she'd taken all of me, I knew I wouldn't be able to hold back. I wanted to make it perfect for her, to take my time, but I felt like a randy teenager with her lying under me, looking up at me with wonder in her eyes.

I fucked her hard and deep, taking her like a man possessed. Her hands clung to me and her passionate cries spurred me on. It didn't take long before she was coming again, and as her pussy clamped down on me, my balls drew up and I came so fucking hard. I growled as I kept stroking in and out of her, our hips slapping together. When every drop of cum had been wrung from me, I stilled with my cock buried inside her. My chest heaved like I'd run a fucking marathon and I felt sweat slicking my skin.

Clarity smiled up at me with a dreamy expression, then she ran her fingers through my beard.

"Sorry that didn't last very long," I said. Embarrassment made my cheeks warm. I hadn't come that fast in a long fucking time, but being with her... Damn. There were no words to adequately describe the way she made me feel.

"Don't apologize for one of the greatest moments of my life," she said. "Did you hear me utter a single word of complaint?"

"No," I admitted.

"That's because I didn't. I was too busy screaming because of how good you made me feel."

I kissed her, wondering what I'd ever done to deserve such a sweet woman in my bed. When I pulled away, I gripped the condom and slid out of her. I stepped into the bathroom to throw the condom away and wash up, but I froze as I looked down. Holy shit!

My heart pounded in my chest as I stared at the broken condom. I'd been fucking girls and later women since I was fifteen years old. Not once in all that time had a condom ever broken. I pulled it off and tossed it into the trash, then rinsed my dick off in the sink before walking back to the bedroom. Clarity had curled onto her side, the sheet pulled over her body. She gave me a contented smile that quickly slipped away as she looked at me.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Condom broke."

Clarity sat up, the sheet falling to her waist. I was momentarily distracted by her rather perky breasts, but I snapped back to reality when she gripped my hand.

"Damon, it's okay."

"You don't need a pregnancy to deal with right now," I said. "I promised to protect you, and that means from me too."

She bit her lip and I could tell she was fighting not to smile.

"What?" I asked, my tone gruff as I sank onto the bed next to her.

"Did you not say that I'm yours now?" she asked. "That you were keeping me?"

"Yes."

"And you're going to love the baby if we have one?" she asked.

"Of course, I will."

"Then what would be the harm in expanding our family?" she asked. "I'm not a naïve young girl, Damon. I've faced more in the last three years than a lot of thirty-year-old women have dealt with. Don't let a number on a piece of paper fool you into thinking I'm some silly girl who doesn't know what she wants."

I wrapped my hand around the back of her neck and kissed her softly. "I know you're not. You're a strong, capable woman. It's part of what I like about you."

"Part? What's the other part?"

"Your perky breasts, obviously." I grinned and she playfully smacked my arm. "I like the way you care for your son and put him first, I like that you don't see the world through rose-colored glasses. You left a bad situation and forged a life of your own through hard work and dedication. And when everything was yanked out from under you, you still protected your son and did your best to keep him safe. You're an absolutely amazing woman, Clarity."

Her eyes misted with tears and one rolled down her cheek. I wiped it away before kissing her again. From what she'd told me, I knew that no one had ever shown her any appreciation, had ever really noticed her. I didn't want to make the same mistakes everyone else in her life had made. I wanted her to know that she was special, and that I could see how strong and capable she was, not only of caring for herself but her son too. I wasn't trying to rescue her and dictate her life, I just wanted to give her the tools she needed to get where she was going... as long as it ended with her in my bed every night.

"I'm claiming you," I told her. "I'm not putting it to a vote, not asking anyone for permission. Not even you, and if that makes me a Neanderthal, then so be it. But having said that, I'm not going to lock you away or keep you in a cage. If you want to work, I'll support your decision. If you'd like to go back to school, I'm okay with that too. Or if you want to stay home and be a mom to Caleb and any other kids we might have, then I'll do whatever I can to help you."

She tugged on my beard. "Are you real? I didn't think a man like you existed."

"I'm real, kitten. And I admit that I can be a real asshole sometimes, but I'll try not to be that way with you. I'm old and set in my ways so you'll have to stand up to me every now and then. Just don't do it front of my club. That's the one thing I can't allow. You want to get sassy around the house when it's just us, I have no problem with it."

“Right now, I just want to curl up in your arms and go to sleep.” She yawned so wide her jaw cracked. “It’s been a while since I really and truly slept, but I feel safe with you holding me.”

“Before you go to sleep, there’s one thing I need.”

“What?” she asked, sounding drowsy.

“The name of Caleb’s father. And your dad’s name too. I’m not backing down on this one, kitten. They hurt you, and I’m not going to sit back and let them get away with it.” I paused a moment. “And I need the name of the neighbor who watched Caleb.”

“Caleb’s dad is Damon.” She smiled up at me. “But his sperm donor is Ryan Peterson.”

“And your dad’s name?” I asked, trying to ignore the warmth spreading through my chest when she’d called me Caleb’s father.

“Heath Davis. And the neighbor who watched Caleb was Mary Hurst.”

“So you’re Clarity Davis and your son is Caleb Davis?” I asked, needing to know if she’d given Caleb his daddy’s name. Since she’d claimed Caleb’s dad didn’t know about him, he couldn’t have signed the paternity papers required to be on the birth certificate. I did remember that, even if I couldn’t remember much from the day my daughter was born, probably because I’d likely been drunk off my ass.

She nodded, but I could tell she was mostly asleep already. I retrieved my phone from the pocket of my jeans and texted Shade. He was our club wizard when it came to anything electronic, and could probably hack into government files without anyone even knowing he’d been there. If anyone could find information on those men, it would be him. And once I knew where they were, I was going to pay them a little visit.

*See what you can find on a Heath Davis, daughter’s name is Clarity, and a man named Ryan Peterson who was in the area about two or three years ago. And look for a woman named Mary Hurst here in town.*

*Is this club business or personal? Heard you had a woman and kid at your place*

*Both. She’s my old lady and those two men hurt her, and the woman might have abused Caleb.*

When there wasn’t an answer right away, I started to wonder if maybe I’d killed him with shock by saying I had an old lady. The proper way to do things was to put it to the club during Church and let them vote. Fuck if I was going to take even the slightest chance they’d say no. Kitten was mine, and I wasn’t letting her go. If the club didn’t like it, too fucking bad. I knew they’d love her once they got to know her. Being their VP had to have some sort of perks.

*I’m on it. And congrats. Can’t wait to meet her. If the bitch, Mary, hurt your son, there’s*

*nowhere she'll be able to hide*

I snorted and put my phone away. Yeah, I'd just bet he couldn't wait to meet her. Shade was a good guy, a great brother, but when it came to the ladies he was like a natural disaster that left chaos in his wake. He'd probably broken the heart of nearly every female under the age of fifty in a ten-mile radius. As for Caleb... it made me smile that he'd called the boy my son, and same for Clarity. I'd be honored to be considered that boy's father.

I shut off the light and then pulled Clarity into my arms. It had been a long fucking day, but I just couldn't sleep. I could hear Caleb rustling around in his bed, and I wondered if he was having a bad dream or if he was awake. I pressed a kiss to Clarity's forehead, then got back out of bed. After I pulled on some boxer briefs and a tee, I headed down the hallway to check on the boy.

Caleb was lying on his side with his thumb in his mouth, but his eyes were wide open. He blinked and stared at me as I stepped into the room, but I didn't see even a hint of fear in his gaze. If he was confused about where he was, he didn't show it. I moved farther into the room until I was standing next to his little bed. Kneeling down, I refrained from touching him in case it made him feel afraid. He hadn't been leery of me so far, but it was dark and it was his first night in a new place.

"Hey, little man. Can't sleep?"

He shook his head.

I held my hands out to him, letting him decide if he wanted to come to me or not. If he didn't, then I'd back away and figure out some other way to soothe him. I wasn't going to press him for more than he was willing to give. Caleb looked at my hands, then pulled his thumb out of his mouth and launched himself at me. I caught him against my chest, then stood.

I didn't want to take him to my room since his mom had fallen asleep naked, so I went downstairs to the living room. I turned the TV on low, then stretched out in the recliner with him sprawled across me. His fingers tangled in my hair, and he held on, like he was scared I was going to leave him. Rubbing his back, I hoped he'd go back to sleep so he wouldn't be tired and cranky tomorrow.

"I know being in a new place can be scary, but you're safe here, Caleb. And so is your mom. I won't let anything happen to either of you."

He picked his head up and looked at me, staring hard, almost like he was trying to see into my soul. I briefly wondered if he was able to actually do that. I didn't get unnerved by grown-ass men, but the toddler lying on top of me looked like he'd seen too much already in his young life.

"I wish you'd tell me what happened to you." I ran my hand over his head. "I know the lady who was taking care of you did something bad. I'm going to find out what it is, and I'm going to punish her for hurting you."

Probably not something you should tell a toddler, but his body relaxed a little more and he laid his head back down. I flipped through the channels until his breathing evened out, but every time I shifted to get up and carry him back to bed, he'd wake up again. I ended up staying in the recliner all night, dozing off and on, until the sun started streaming through the living room windows in the morning.

I was getting too damn old for this all-nighter shit, but if Caleb felt safe and was well rested, then I'd give up a few nights of sleep. I turned on the morning news but only half paid attention to it. When I heard movement on the stairs, I watched for Clarity. She stood in the entryway, rubbing her eyes, and looking completely adorable. She'd put on her pajamas again and looked around as if she didn't quite know where she was.

"In here, kitten," I said loud enough she could hear but not so loud I'd wake up Caleb.

She padded into the room, then stopped and smiled when she saw her son sprawled across me. "I wondered where you were when I woke up this morning. I see I lost you to our son."

Our son. My throat tightened and I felt like a sentimental fool.

"He couldn't sleep last night so I brought him down here. Every time I tried to get up and put him to bed, he woke back up. Figured it was better to just sit here and let him sleep."

"Want me to take him?" she asked.

"I've got him. If you'll get my phone off the nightstand upstairs, I'll have a Prospect bring us some breakfast."

"Or I could cook something for us," she offered. "I'm not a gourmet chef by any means, but I won't give you food poisoning."

"If you want to cook, you certainly may. But don't cook because you feel like you need to."

She stretched and I shifted in my seat when my dick started to get hard. Her breasts pushed out against her thin pajama top, and strip of her belly showed as her shirt lifted. She looked really damn good in the morning, but I wasn't surprised. Even covered in dirt, she'd been pretty irresistible.

When she was finished tormenting me, she stepped out of the room and I heard her going upstairs. Guess having breakfast brought in won over cooking. I smiled,

wondering how many mornings we'd have like this one. If I'd known that something so domestic would be this appealing, I may have considered having an old lady a little sooner. Then again, no one had tempted me to make that kind of commitment, not until Clarity showed up on my doorstep. She was different from anyone I'd met before, and in a good way. There was an innocence to her, even though I knew she'd seen more shit than most women her age.

There was a strange look on Clarity's face as she came back into the room, my phone clutched in her hand. I instantly went on alert, my body tightening. She came closer and set the phone on the arm of my chair before sinking down onto the couch. When she didn't say anything, I started to worry even more. There wasn't anything in the bedroom that should have put that look on her face, and my phone was locked so she couldn't have seen any messages from the club.

"Kitten, the look on your face is scaring the shit out of me."

"I think your daughter might be on her way here," she said.

"Darian? Why the hell is Darian coming here?" And how the hell had she come to that conclusion? I unlocked my phone and saw a recent call from my daughter, and that it had lasted roughly three minutes. My gaze locked on Clarity. I had nothing to hide from her, except club shit she didn't need to know about. Didn't really bother me she'd answered my phone, but something must have transpired between the women in my life, and I doubted it was a happy occurrence.

"Your phone was ringing when I went upstairs. I saw Darian's name and remembered she was your daughter, so I answered, thinking maybe it was important." Her hands fidgeted in her lap. "She, um... she didn't handle it well when I picked up your phone."

"I don't think anyone has ever answered my phone but me. Doesn't explain why she'd be upset over it, though."

"She asked who I was and why I had your phone."

My eyebrows went up. "And you told her what?"

"That you'd claimed me and I was living here with you." Her cheeks warmed. "She said I sounded like a teenager. I assured her I'm an adult, but she's convinced I did something to force you into claiming me. She wasn't very happy when she hung up."

"Shit," I muttered. The last thing I needed was my daughter on my doorstep, irate over the woman I'd chosen, and she'd likely have that hulking husband of hers with her. The bright side would be seeing my grandson.

"Yeah, so..." She chewed on her lip. "I'm sorry I answered your phone. I won't do it again."

“Kitten, it’s fine that you answered it. I just didn’t want to deal with my daughter right now, especially if she’s worked up. I’ll call my Pres and give him a heads up in case her husband asks permission to come with her. It’s just a courtesy thing for Bull to check with Cinder, but I want to make sure the Pres knows what’s going on. We’ll deal with it, and once she calms down, the two of you will get along fine.”

I knew my daughter, though, and she was going to have a shit fit when she realized Clarity was only eighteen. Yeah, she was a legal adult, but compared to my advanced years, she was still a kid. Younger than my daughter, and younger than any of the old ladies with the Dixie Reapers. I was going to catch some serious shit for this, but I wouldn’t give up Clarity and Caleb. There was a sense of rightness that I felt bone-deep when they were with me.

I sent a text to Reed, one of the Prospects, and asked him to pick up three breakfast specials from the diner and bring them by the house. I’d have to take Clarity grocery shopping later. I had some food in the house, but I didn’t know their favorite meals, or if they even had favorites. There was still a lot we needed to learn about one another, but we had a lifetime to figure it out. Well, my lifetime anyway. With thirty-two years between us, I didn’t doubt for a moment I’d kick the bucket before she would, especially if my club got mixed up in any dangerous shit again.

Clarity still looked freaked out over her talk with Darian, and I hoped I wouldn’t have to kick my daughter’s ass whenever she showed up. I stared at my phone, knowing I needed to give Cinder a heads up, if it wasn’t too late already.

*Claimed Clarity as my old lady. No, I’m not putting it to a vote. Darian found out and she’s pissed. Bull might need permission to come with her when she shows up to give my woman a piece of her mind.*

*I can deny both of them permission. I’ll let them know it’s not safe right now. That should keep them away.*

I stared at my phone. What the fuck did he mean it wasn’t safe? Or was he just trying to find a way to give me more time with Clarity before subjecting her to my daughter and son-in-law? I’d have thought if anyone would understand, it would be my daughter. Hell, she’d been twenty-one to Bull’s forty-nine when they’d gotten together. Maybe it was just hard for her to picture her daddy with a woman, especially one as young as Clarity.

*Get your family settled for the morning. I’m sending a Prospect to watch over them. Then get your ass to the clubhouse. We have shit to discuss.*

Well, that was cryptic as fuck and didn’t sound the least bit promising. I sighed and set my phone down, not quite sure what to tell Clarity. I didn’t know if the things

being discussed were about her, or if something else was going on. The last thing I wanted was to drop her and Caleb into the middle of a war. I'd thought all that was behind us, that it was safe for us to have families now. Had I been wrong?

"Kitten, it seems I have some club business to deal with this morning. I'll have breakfast with the two of you, then I need to leave for a little while. Someone will be out front to make sure you're safe, and you can tell them if you need anything."

She stared at me a moment, then nodded. I'd expected some questions, but if she had any, she was keeping them to herself. I let Caleb sleep until the food arrived, then I transferred him to Clarity's arms and went to answer the door. No way was I letting her get it while she was dressed in her pajamas. Her curves were only for me to enjoy.

Reed looked about half-asleep as he stood on my doorstep. I took the food from him, then watched as he stumbled down the steps and climbed into one of the club trucks. A tarp was pulled over the back, and I wondered what was under it. I shut and locked the door, then took our food to the kitchen. There was some thumping around upstairs and I figured Clarity had tried to put Caleb back to bed. When she came back down, she'd put on the robe she'd bought at the store yesterday.

I set her breakfast in front of her, then poured us each a glass of juice while I brewed some coffee. I put Caleb's food in the oven so it would stay warm. Whenever he woke up again, he'd likely be hungry. The coffee finished brewing and I pulled down my largest mug and filled it, then fixed a regular-size cup for Clarity. If I was going to sit in Church, I needed to be clear-headed, and I had a feeling she would need the caffeine to keep up with Caleb once he woke up.

I didn't have a fucking clue what Cinder wanted to discuss, and I knew I needed to be prepared for anything. I only hoped it didn't take me away from Clarity and Caleb all day. I wanted to introduce them to Jackal's family. Allegra was close to Caleb's age and I hoped the two would become friends. Hell, Josie was pregnant with another one and was due within a few months. It made me wonder what Clarity would look like pregnant with my kid.

My phone dinged and I picked it up to check the display.

*Church in twenty.*

Fucking hell. So much for enjoying breakfast with my woman. I shoved a few bites of food into my mouth, drained my coffee, then stood. Clarity blinked up at me, and I gave her a smile.

"Sorry, kitten. I have to go for a bit. Make yourself at home." I paused a moment, realizing she didn't have a way to reach me. "We'll get a phone for you when I'm finished with club business."

“You don’t have to...”

I held up my hand. “No arguments. You need a phone.”

She sighed and nodded. I knew it was hard for her to accept all the things I was buying for her and Caleb, but they were mine to take care of, and I was going to make sure they had everything they needed. I pressed a kiss to the top of her head, then went upstairs to shower and dress. I scrubbed my skin until it turned pink, and took the time to use the conditioner Darian had talked me into buying during my last trip to visit her. I hadn’t really given a shit about my appearance in a long ass time, but I combed out my beard and added a little oil to it, then pulled my hair back in a ponytail.

I dressed in my usual black tee, jeans, and my Harley Davidson boots, then pulled on my cut. When I got back downstairs, Clarity had finished her meal, and Seamus was standing in the front entry. My eyes narrowed as I remembered locking the door, then I sought out Clarity. She was nervously twisting her hands in front of her, and I wondered if Seamus had said something he shouldn’t have.

I pulled Clarity into my arms. “Everything all right, kitten?”

She nodded. “Was it all right that I let him in? I could see his Devil’s Boneyard patch through the peephole in the door.”

“It’s fine, but in the future, you should probably leave his ass outside. Or anyone else for that matter. I want you to stay safe.”

“I’ll make sure her and the kid are okay while you’re at Church,” Seamus said. “Don’t worry about them, VP. I’ll protect them with my life.”

“See that you do.”

I gave Clarity a quick kiss, nodded at Seamus, then went out to my bike, grateful a Prospect had brought it to the house. The compound wasn’t too far from my home, but I was still running a little late. In all the years I’d been with Devil’s Boneyard, I couldn’t remember ever being late for Church before. My brothers would likely give me shit about it, but I knew they’d understand. I clomped up the steps of the clubhouse and went inside, then down the hall. Two wooden doors at the end of the hall had the Devil’s Boneyard symbol burned into them, and I pushed them open.

Cinder looked at me with raised eyebrows, but didn’t make a comment. I made my way over to my seat on his left, and the second my ass hit the chair, he called the meeting to order. I noticed all of our patched members were present, and one Prospect. Killian.

“I’m sure word has spread that our VP claimed a woman and kid,” Cinder said. “We’re not putting it to a vote. They’re his and if anyone at this table wants to say otherwise, I’ll have someone on standby to clean up the blood.”

There were a few snickers around the table.

"It seems his woman, Clarity, has come with a bit of trouble on her heels. I had a few people picked up this morning for questioning based off facts that Shade dug up on his computer. The boy, Caleb, was left in the care of a neighbor and it seems he was abused," Cinder said.

My gut clenched and I wondered what Shade had discovered. He hadn't gotten back to me, but whatever he'd found, he must have turned the info over to Cinder. I looked down the table where he was sitting. He glanced at me, but didn't give anything away. Something told me that I was going to hear some shit I wouldn't be able to forget.

"The neighbor, Mary Hurst, had a boyfriend who was into some bad shit," Cinder said. "She didn't protect the kids in her care, which makes her just as guilty. When we picked her up, she wasn't even remorseful over what happened, just begged for her worthless life. Didn't think of her kids once."

"Where is she?" I asked.

"In a building out back, along with her boyfriend. Danny Simmons is wanted in several states for child pornography. Shade hacked the man's files. I know you don't want to see that shit, Scratch, but if you'll provide the club with a picture of Caleb, we'll go through every damn bit of that crap and make sure he's not in there. From what we can tell, the clips seem to go back further than when Caleb would have been anywhere near the asshole, but we want to make sure."

I'd done some fucked-up shit in my lifetime, but the thought of child pornography made me want to puke. Part of me wanted to get up and walk out, not listen to another word, but I needed to know just how bad it had been. What had Caleb been exposed to while he was with that woman? And more importantly, how did I keep this shit from Clarity? If my kitten thought for a second she'd put her child in that situation, I worried what she might do. I knew she'd blame herself, that it would possibly even break her.

"I'll take a picture when I get home," I said.

"Until we know more, we're going to hold on to Mary and Danny. If Caleb is in any of those files, we'll let you take whatever justice you want. Otherwise, the club will handle it. The cops aren't going to dig too deep when a child pornographer shows up dead in a ditch," Cinder said.

"And Clarity's dad?" I asked. "Or Caleb's father?"

"That man was never a father to the boy. Caleb's sperm donor is dead," Shade said. "Overdose a year ago. And I checked. He was never listed on Caleb's birth certificate. Your woman put *father unknown*."

I nodded.

"As for Clarity's dad, he's a piece of work. Just like she said, he remarried after her mom died and they have several kids. He's never so much as looked for her after she ran away. Their lives carried on as usual. I can't find any illegal dealings surrounding her family, they're just assholes," Shade said.

"Leave them be," I said. "But if he ever comes knocking, I'll be having a conversation with him that might require a little cleanup."

"No one would fault you for that," Cinder said.

Shade cleared his throat. "There's one other thing that you may or may not know."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Clarity's birthday is tomorrow. But there's something I found when I was digging through her background." He lifted a hand before I could say anything. "I only checked to see if there were any skeletons that could bite the club in the ass. Didn't find anything quite like that, but I did discover a hidden paper trail. And it's a bit... strange."

"What kind of hidden trail?"

"She's not turning nineteen tomorrow," Shade said.

"Not turning..." My stomach felt like it might revolt. "Then how old will she be? Do I need to worry about the cops showing up on my doorstep? Christ! I knew she looked too fucking young."

"Quite the contrary. Clarity's daddy isn't really her daddy. Her mom had her before she even met Heath Davis. For whatever reason, they had a document forged that made Clarity younger than she really is and claimed Heath as her birth father. I'm still looking into her real daddy to see what's going on there," Shade said.

"Tell him," Cinder said. "All of it."

"Her real name is Clarity Jane Parkhurst, daughter of Tamara Clarke and Scott Parkhurst. Her momma was married to Scott Parkhurst a year before Clarity was born, and then her daddy disappeared when Clarity was just a baby. From what little I've been able to find on Scott Parkhurst, he was a philanthropist who met Tamara on a trip through Mexico, South America, Haiti, and Jamaica," Shade said.

"I don't understand. Why lie to her and forge new documents?" I asked.

"I'm looking into it," Shade said. "But the good news is that your girl just ages really fucking well. Probably helps that she's the size of a pixie. I bet she was a really tiny kid. She's going to be twenty-two tomorrow, not nineteen. How the hell her mom

ever convinced her that she was three years younger I don't know. None of this shit makes any sense."

"But if Heath wasn't really her daddy, then that would explain why he didn't seem to give a shit about her," I said. "Maybe knowing that will give her closure, even if it does bring up some other questions."

"There are quite a few pictures of Tamara and Scott in the early part of their marriage. I printed them off," Shade said, sliding a folder down the table to me.

I flipped it open, but what I saw made me freeze. I stared at the woman in the picture, and there was no doubt she was related to Clarity, but it wasn't the woman in the picture Clarity had shown me. They looked similar enough, maybe sisters? And the man... Clarity definitely had his eyes, and his hair was nearly white blonde just like Caleb's. They were definitely related. But why was this woman different from the one Clarity thought was her mother?

What the fucking hell was going on?

"Find out everything you can on Tamara's family, and then find out what happened to Tamara." I looked up at Shade. "Because this woman isn't who raised Clarity."

I didn't know how Clarity was going to handle this information, or if I should even tell her until I knew more. She'd have questions I wouldn't be able to answer, and the last thing I wanted to do was stress her out. The least I could do was tell her that Caleb's father wasn't going to be an issue. The pornography bit... I was keeping that to myself for now too. If Caleb hadn't been exposed, then there was no sense in torturing Clarity with the knowledge her son could have been in that sort of danger.

I ran a hand down my face and tried to focus as the club discussed other business, but my mind was on the woman and boy at my house. I wanted to protect them from all the horrid things in the world, but I knew that wasn't possible. Not without placing them inside a bubble, and neither of them would appreciate that. Once I knew all the facts, I'd sit down with Clarity and we'd figure everything out. Until then, I just had to hope that Shade would work fast, and that he didn't dig up anything too horrible.

## Chapter Seven

### Clarity

Seamus hadn't talked much since Scratch had left. Mostly, he prowled around the house, peeking out the windows and tensing at every sound. Who the hell did he think was going to come after us? I was a homeless woman with a family who didn't give a shit, and I didn't have so much as one friend in the world. I hadn't exactly made a bunch of enemies during my short life. Of course, I didn't know anything about the Devil's Boneyard except the rumors around town. For all I knew, the club was into something bad and Seamus had a right to be overly cautious.

I'd gone upstairs to change, but I still wasn't quite comfortable around the Prospect. He didn't look at me inappropriately or make me feel unwelcome, but there was a predatory air about him. I'd gotten a quick look at some ink on his bicep that made me think he'd been in the military. I wondered how he'd gone from serving his country to being part of a motorcycle club, but not enough to ask.

Caleb was still asleep upstairs. I'd checked on him a few times, but he must have been completely exhausted. His chest rose and fell evenly so I left him rest as long as he wanted. He'd likely be hell to get to bed later tonight, but it had been a long time since he'd felt safe. I'd done my best, but he couldn't hide the fear I'd sometimes caught in his eyes while we were on the street.

"You aren't worried about people thinking you're too young for our VP?" Seamus asked out of nowhere. He wasn't looking at me, though. He was still watching out the window.

"He's said several times he's too old for me, but no one has ever made me feel so safe, or cared for. Not since my mother died. If other people have a problem with our age difference, that's on them."

He nodded, but there was a tenseness in his shoulders and back.

"Someone special out there you like who is maybe younger than you?" I asked.

He snorted.

Interesting. I moved a little closer. "Maybe she likes you too?"

He finally looked at me. "She's a kid. A sixteen-year-old kid and I don't... it's not like that. But there's something about her. She has this magnetic personality and when you look into her eyes, it's like..."

"Like you're free falling?" I asked.

He nodded.

"You going to wait for her to grow up?" I asked.

"Maybe. It's complicated. Her dad is a Dixie Reaper. Pretty sure he'd kick my ass for dating his daughter even if she was legal." He shook his head. "Best if I stick with women my age, or at least over the age of twenty-one."

"Do those women make you happy?" I asked.

"Happy enough," he muttered, and I knew he was damn well lying.

It was a slippery slope that he was on. Yes, the girl was underage, but he made it sound like he wasn't thinking of her sexually. I wondered if he felt drawn to her like I did with Scratch. More a sense of rightness, like two puzzle pieces that fit together perfectly. I truly did believe in soul mates and I thought maybe Seamus had met his, even if fate was a cruel bitch and the girl was too young for him. For now, anyway. She'd grow up in a few more years, and I couldn't wait to see what happened between them.

"You know, I really do believe that there's someone special out there for each of us, someone we're destined to find. Maybe she's yours and you just have to be patient while she grows up. There's thirty-two years between me and Scratch. Do you have a problem with that?"

"No," he said quickly.

"Are you saying that so Scratch won't kick your ass? Or because you really mean it?" I asked.

"Can it be both?"

I bit my lip so I wouldn't laugh. "You're at least twenty years younger than him. Don't think you can take him?"

"No way in hell. He's the boogeyman. Maybe he's a cuddly teddy bear with you, the rest of us? None of us want to meet him in a dark alley, unless we're on the same side."

I could kind of see that. I didn't know anything about Scratch's background, but when he said he'd take care of us, protect us, I knew he'd do whatever it took. If someone told me the man had left a trail of bodies in his wake, it wouldn't surprise me. Wouldn't bother me either, since those people were likely bad men and women.

"He's a good guy," Seamus said. "The kind you want to have your back in a bad situation."

"He's the kindest man I've ever met," I said. "No one's ever treated me or Caleb the way he does. He makes me feel special, and he gives me hope for the future."

Seamus smiled faintly.

I heard the rumble before the bike pulled up out front. Seamus peered out the window again, then gave me a wink.

"Looks like your man is home."

Butterflies rioted in my stomach and I went to the front door, pulling it open just as Scratch stepped up onto the porch. There were shadows in his eyes, but he pulled me against his chest and held me tight. I clung to him, breathing in his scent.

"Hey, kitten. Miss me?"

"Yes." I looked up at him. "Caleb is still asleep."

He nodded, then looked over my head. "Seamus, you can head out. Stop by the clubhouse and see if anyone needs help, then you're free until someone calls."

"Yes, sir," Seamus said as he brushed past us and down to his bike parked in the driveway.

After Seamus had pulled down the driveway, Scratch led me into the house, then locked the door behind us. He cupped my face with both of his hands and leaned down to kiss me softly. It surprised me every time such a big, gruff man was tender and sweet. It wasn't something I was used to, but I liked it.

"Caleb is a pretty sound sleeper," I said.

He arched an eyebrow, a smirk playing along his lips. "Is that right?"

I nodded.

"Is there something in particular you'd like to do while he's asleep? Clean the kitchen? Play a board game?"

"Not unless it's Twister, and we're in the bedroom."

Scratch burst out laughing, then led me up the stairs and down the hall to our room. I hadn't moved my things in yet, but I knew he'd want me to. Right now, my new things were all still in the guest room. He shut the door and twisted the lock, then turned to face me with a predatory gleam in his eyes. I licked my lips as he shrugged out of his cut and tossed it onto the dresser. The hem of his shirt lifted and he pulled it over his head, letting it fall to the floor. Scratch stalked closer and I backed toward the bed.

"Think you can handle me, kitten? All of me? No holding back, just the two of us, and my cock as deep and hard as you can take it?"

My knees trembled and my panties grew damp. Oh yeah, I wanted that. I felt my nipples harden, and he prowled even closer. He settled his hands at my waist and tugged on my shirt. In a matter of seconds, he had me completely naked and at his mercy. Scratch dropped to his knees, then gave me a gentle shove so that I sprawled

across the foot of the bed. He pressed his palms to the insides of my thighs and spread me wide open.

"So pretty," he murmured, running a finger down the lips of my pussy. He held me open with his fingers and brushed my clit with his thumb. My body trembled and I fought to hold still. "Does my kitten want me to make her feel good?"

"Yes. Please, Damon. I need you."

"You come for me, then I'll fill this pretty pussy with my cock."

His beard tickled my thighs as he rubbed his face against one leg and then the other. He kept rubbing my clit, his gaze dark and hungry as he stared at my pussy. I was close to coming, but couldn't quite get there. Lifting my hips, I wanted more but wasn't brave enough to ask.

He sank two fingers inside me and I couldn't hold back my cries of pleasure. I nearly came off the bed when I felt his tongue swipe across my clit, then he was sucking it into his mouth as his fingers worked my pussy. Waves of ecstasy rolled over me, making my thighs shake and my heart race. I fisted the bedsheets and nearly sobbed, I wanted to come so badly.

"Damon, I... please..."

He lashed my clit with his tongue and drove his fingers into my pussy harder. I saw stars as I came so hard it left me breathless. I could hear my heart thundering in my ears and I blinked trying to clear my vision. Damon kissed his way up my body, pausing to suck and bite my nipples. Not hard enough to hurt, but it made my pussy clench and ache for more.

"You have on too many clothes," I said.

He smiled and pulled away, then kicked off his boots and stripped out of his jeans and boxer briefs. I locked my gaze on him as he came around the bed, but when he reached for the bedside table drawer, I reached out and stopped him.

"The last one broke," I reminded him.

He stared down at me a moment, then pulled the drawer open anyway. I wanted to scream in frustration. Didn't he understand that I wanted to feel him inside me without barriers? He'd already admitted he would love a baby if we had one, and I knew I would too. If we were together, the kind that lasted forever, then did it really matter if we used a condom? I could see the determination in his eyes, though.

He rolled the latex down his cock and crooked his finger at me. I crawled to him, placing my hands on his chest and leaning up for a kiss. He tangled his fingers in my hair as he kissed me long and deep, his tongue stroking mine. When he pulled away, he gripped my waist and flipped me onto my belly. I squealed in surprise and looked at

him over my shoulder. The sexiest smirk I'd ever seen was on his face, and he looked like he was ready to devour me.

I got my knees up under me, then he spread my thighs wide. With his hands holding my hips tight, I felt him slowly sink into me, his cock stretching me in the most delicious way. I pressed my forehead to the bed and nearly moaned with how damn good it felt. He started to stroke in and out of me, and fuck if it didn't feel like he went a little deeper each time!

I clenched on his cock and I heard him curse.

"Fuck, kitten! You're going to make me come if you keep doing that."

"Please, Damon. Harder. Take me harder."

He growled softly and gave me exactly what I'd asked for. Our bodies slapped together as he pounded into me. I felt his cock swell and I knew he was close. I slid my hand down between my legs and rubbed my clit.

"That's it, baby. Make yourself come," he said.

No matter how fast or slow I rubbed, I wasn't getting any closer and it was leaving me frustrated. I whined and pulled my hand away.

"I'll get you there, kitten," he said.

His fingers spread my pussy open and he teased and tormented my clit as he thrust into me hard and deep. When he pinched down, I screamed out my release, feeling like I was flying. He kept toying with me, even as he came. His cock jerked inside me and he soon had me coming again. Damon's body slumped over my back, but he held most of his weight off me.

I felt his lips trail across my shoulders, and then he was pulling away and slipping out of my body. I collapsed onto the bed and watched him through blurry eyes as he went into the bathroom. When he came back out, he was rubbing his hand down his face and looked unsettled.

"I think that punk ass Prospect gave me a faulty box of condoms," he said.

"Did that one break too?"

"Yep. In over thirty years of fucking, I've never had one break. Until you. So either you have a magic pussy that destroys condoms, or there's something wrong with that box."

"Or maybe it's the universe telling us that we don't need condoms," I said.

He snorted, then crawled into bed with me. He wrapped an arm around my waist and kissed my forehead. I loved the way he smelled and I pressed my nose against him, breathing him in.

"All right, kitten. We'll do this your way. No more condoms. If you end up

pregnant, then we'll just get a nursery set up and prepare Caleb for being a big brother." He sighed. "I don't like denying you something you really want, and I have to admit that the thought of taking you bare is pretty fucking tempting."

"I think Caleb would be a good big brother," I said.

"There are some things we'll need to discuss in the upcoming days, but I want all the facts first. But one thing I found out today is that it's your birthday tomorrow. Why didn't you say something?" he asked.

I rubbed my face against his chest. "Didn't seem important. I haven't celebrated a birthday in a really long time."

"Well, we're going to celebrate this one. We'll have a small party at the clubhouse. You can meet my brothers and Jackal's wife, Josie. They have a daughter about Caleb's age. Doesn't talk much, but she's a sweetheart."

"Wife? Not his old lady?" I asked.

"She's both."

"Oh." I thought that over for a minute. When he'd talked about making me his old lady, I'd thought maybe bikers didn't get married. Now that I knew one of them was, I had to wonder if maybe Scratch just didn't believe in marriage. Or maybe he just didn't want that with me.

My stomach cramped at the thought and I hoped he didn't sense my agitation. If all he was willing to give me was status as his old lady, then I'd take it and be happy. I'd try to bury my fear that him not wanting to marry me meant he didn't really want me forever. The little devil on my shoulder wasn't making it easy to ignore that feeling though. I didn't want to fall for him, for Caleb to love him, and then have Scratch ask us to leave one day. I'd rather live back out on the streets than put either of us through that kind of heartache.

"We should probably rinse off in the shower, get dressed, and check on Caleb," he said. "If he sleeps all day, we'll all be up into the wee hours of the morning."

"I'll check on him if you want to go ahead and shower," I said, moving to rise from the bed, but he wrapped his fingers around my wrist and held me still.

"Kitten, what's wrong?"

"Nothing." I couldn't bring myself to look him in the eye, though.

He pulled on me until I was lying next to him again.

"Don't lie to me," he said, his voice stern and deeper than usual. "Never fucking lie. About anything."

I swallowed hard and felt my eyes sting with unshed tears. I slowly nodded, but didn't know how to tell him what I was feeling. That I was scared he'd change his mind

and ask us to leave one day. I knew a marriage license didn't mean forever would really happen, but it would make me feel more secure.

"Why are you trying to put distance between us?" he asked.

My throat grew tight and I didn't think I could answer without crying.

"Look at me, Clarity."

I took a shuddering breath and looked up, our gazes locking. I couldn't hold back the tears and they silently slipped down my cheeks. I wasn't this person, this weak woman who cried so easily. But as he stared at me, it felt like the wall I'd put up around my heart was cracking. The blue of his eyes darkened and the harsh lines of his face softened. Scratch cupped my cheek and wiped away my tears.

"Kitten, talk to me."

"I'm scared," I admitted.

"About what? The party? We don't have to have one, but I thought it would give you a chance to meet everyone."

"No. Not the party. I'm... I'm scared that you'll change your mind."

"Change my mind?" he asked.

"What if you decide not to keep me? What if you wake up one day and want us to leave?" I asked softly.

"Kitten, what made you think I'd ever want to get rid of you?" he asked.

"You said that Josie was Jackal's wife and old lady. I just thought..." I couldn't finish saying it.

"You thought because I hadn't asked you to marry me that I wasn't as serious about keeping you?" he asked.

I shrugged.

Scratch sighed and pressed another kiss to my forehead. "Kitten, I'm an old man and I'm set in my ways. I honestly never thought about getting married, or having more kids. If you want a ring and a piece of paper that says you're mine, then we'll talk about it."

"You're not old," I mumbled.

He chuckled and hugged me tight. "Only you don't seem to think so."

"I'm sorry I got emotional."

"Kitten, you've been through hell, and you've fought long and hard on your own. You were bound to break down sooner or later."

"We should go shower and then check on Caleb. You were right. He shouldn't be allowed to sleep all day. He needs to get into a routine now that we're not sleeping in doorways."

"I'll start the shower. Just lie here and relax a moment, give the water some time to heat up."

I watched as he walked into the bathroom, and a few minutes after I heard the shower running, I followed him. It hadn't escaped my notice that he'd said he'd give me a ring if that's what I wanted, but he hadn't said it was what he wanted. If he didn't really want to get married, then I wasn't going to beg him to do it. Maybe one day he'd want the same thing I did, but until then, I'd be content with what he was willing to give me.

## Chapter Eight

### Scratch

Caleb had played in the living room for most of the day, enjoying the few toys we had for him. The way his eyes lit up whenever he saw a train on TV, I knew that would be his next present. I'd downloaded a shopping app on my phone and had already started pricing them, along with a few other things I thought he'd like. When I finished browsing through the toys, I picked out a few things for Clarity and added them to my cart with overnight shipping. With some luck, they would arrive before her party. If we had one.

Clarity was in the floor with Caleb, pushing cars around, when my phone chimed with a message. I swiped the screen and frowned when I saw it was from Shade. I glanced at Clarity, but she wasn't paying me any attention, which was a good thing at the moment.

*we need to talk*

*can it wait?*

*you'll want to see this. My house.*

I closed out the messages and watched Clarity and Caleb for a moment. They both seemed content, and I didn't want to worry them, but if Shade said it was important, then I needed to go. I stood up and Clarity gave me a slight smile.

"I'll be back soon," I said. "We'll go out for dinner tonight since we didn't make it to the store."

"Be careful," she said.

I nodded, then went out to my bike. Shade lived on the other end of town, but the traffic was light and I made it in fifteen minutes. I knocked on his door, then turned the knob. It twisted easily and I pushed the door open, stepping inside.

"Shade!" I called out.

"Down the hall."

I went down to what he called his war room, and looked at the bank of monitors. There was a file folder on the edge of his desk and he picked it up and handed it to me. I hesitated only a moment before opening it and reading the contents. I blinked a few times and re-read the documents, certain that I was misunderstanding.

"You're not reading it wrong," Shade said. "Your girl was hidden to keep her safe. The mom she knew was really her aunt, her mother's half-sister. And her dad had

a lot of enemies. He wasn't a bad guy, quite the opposite. Donated to charities, gave his time to mission projects, and would have given the shirt off his back to a homeless man on the street."

"So what kind of trouble was he in?" I asked.

"Parkhurst inherited a company from his father. It's what helped fund his philanthropy, but the board wasn't happy with the way things were being handled. I found some transactions between one of the board members and a hit man. It looks like Parkhurst was murdered, and Tamara was with him when it happened."

"So the sister took off with Clarity in hopes of keeping her alive," I said.

"Right. The original birth certificate is in there, along with Scott Parkhurst's will. In the event of his death, all his possessions were to go to his only daughter, his heir."

"Are you saying Clarity is well-off?"

Shade snorted. "Yeah, if you consider half a billion dollars as well-off. Once we prove she's the heir of the Parkhurst fortune, she'll have access to all that money. Downside is that it's been so long, the family home was sold and the business was run into the ground by corrupt board members. The money would likely be gone too, except Parkhurst had it well-hidden. Only his lawyer knows where it's located, and it looks like no one has touched the account."

"Half a billion?" I asked. What the fuck would she need me for once she had all that money? Right now, I offered her comfort and shelter, but she could buy the entire damn town several times over with all that money.

"A DNA test would be required. She should consider herself lucky. I don't believe the aunt ever told Heath Davis about the money, or he likely would have found a way to force Clarity into signing it over. If he didn't do something worse. From what I can tell, the aunt tried to cover her tracks. Only a hacker would have been able to find her, so the lawyer was unable to find Clarity. I'm a little surprised he didn't hire someone, unless he didn't feel it was safe."

"I'll take this home and show it to her." I stared at the file, wondering if the family I thought I'd gained was about to walk out the front door. Now I understood how Clarity felt earlier when she'd been afraid I'd kick her out, and I felt like a shit for the way I'd handled it. I didn't know how she'd gotten under my skin so fucking fast, but now that I had her in my bed and had claimed them both as mine, I didn't want them to leave.

"There's something else," Shade said. "I looked into the situation with the boy a bit more. I can't guarantee he didn't see what was happening, but he wasn't in the

videos. I asked Seamus to come take a look since he'd seen him. Doesn't mean they didn't abuse him in some other way, though."

I nodded. "Or whatever he saw could have traumatized him, but it's the fact he thought he'd be in trouble for getting food that bothers me. Guess there's only one way to find out for sure what happened."

"You're going to pay them a visit?"

"Yep. Looks like I'm about to get dirty, and find out exactly what Clarity can handle. Maybe this inheritance is a good thing. She might see me covered in blood and take off."

Shade stared at me a moment. "You really think she wants to leave you? Even if she did inherit a shit ton of money? I may not have met her, but Seamus said that woman thinks you hung the moon."

"She's just grateful I'm taking care of her."

Shade arched a brow but didn't say another word. When he turned back to his computers, I knew that was all I would get from him. I took the file out to my bike and stuck it in a saddlebag, then I drove to the compound. The bitch who had been babysitting Caleb, and her fucked-up boyfriend, were still being held in a building out back.

Killian was guarding the building and gave me a nod as I approached. I pulled off my cut and handed it to him as I passed by and went inside. My clothes could be burned if necessary, but I didn't want my cut getting fucked-up. The building smelled like piss and shit, which meant they hadn't been released from their bonds for any reason. I smiled grimly as I approached the two figures hanging from chains in the center of the building. There was a drain directly below them for easy cleanup. I pulled out my knife and tried not to laugh as the woman started thrashing and screaming against her gag. Served the bitch right to be afraid. Anyone who allowed children to be harmed didn't deserve to fucking live.

I cut the gag away, and she started blubbering about how she hadn't done anything, it was all a mistake. Her boyfriend knew the score, though, and just eyed me, like he knew the end was coming. Man like that had to know his sins would catch up to him sooner or later. It just wouldn't be a prison cell he'd be living in, but a hole in the ground when I sent his black soul straight to hell.

I backhanded the woman. "Shut up!"

She whimpered and tears ran down her cheeks. Didn't fucking move me, not knowing she'd hurt Caleb either directly or by standing back and letting something happen to him. Either way, she would be joining her boyfriend in the fires of hell soon

enough. I pressed the tip of my blade against her throat and her eyes went so wide all I saw were the whites of them. "I'm going to ask you once, and only once. What the fuck did you do to Caleb?" I asked.

"C-Caleb? I don't k-know a Caleb," she stuttered.

I pressed the blade a little harder and watched as blood started to run down her neck. Gripping her hair tight, I made sure she couldn't move away from the pain. "Let's try this again, before I lose my patience. You used to babysit Caleb while Clarity went to work. What the fuck did you do to him?"

She pissed herself and I knew I was right. She'd hurt the boy in some way, or allowed her boyfriend to do it.

"Why is that kid afraid to reach for food? Why doesn't he talk?" I asked.

"He was a greedy little bastard," she said. "I had to stop him from eating everything in my house. That's all."

I pushed the knife in a little more. "And how did you do that?"

The man next to her was trying to talk through his gag so I released the woman and moved over to him. If he wanted to talk, I'd let him. Wouldn't change his fate any. I cut off his gag and his hard eyes stared me down. "You obviously have something to fucking say, so say it." I waved my knife in front of his face. "Or do you need some encouragement?"

"She hit him, whenever he would try to get some food. And don't listen to her skank ass. She wouldn't even let him have one meal, much less go back for more."

My gaze slid to the woman, who had paled at least three shades. I looked back at the man and waited to see what else he had to say.

"She got off on it, you know. Watching me strip those kids naked and film them. Bitch enjoyed every second of it, got her all hot and bothered. The kid saw it all."

"Caleb wasn't in your videos," I said, my voice deceptively soft. "Why not?"

"None of my clients wanted a kid with white-blond hair. Guess he got lucky."

I leaned in close. "Just so there's no misunderstanding, you aren't leaving this building while you're still breathing. Can't let a sick, twisted fuck like you loose on the world, now can I?"

He smiled and it sent a chill down my spine.

"You give that sweet momma of his a kiss from me. I had plans for her, before she vanished. Bet she has the sweetest screams."

I had to fight for control. I knew what he was doing, trying to egg me on and get me to end his life quickly, but I wasn't going to fall for it. The man had tortured and abused kids, and I wasn't about to let him off the easy way. I backed up and faced the

woman again. The fight had drained out of her and she stared at me with nearly vacant eyes. Yeah, bitch knew her time was up, but she didn't realize that I could make it last a while. I knew what my club called me. The Boogeyman. They weren't far off. Only Cinder knew the truth about my background, and he'd never asked for the details, and I knew he never would. Not unless my past came knocking at the clubhouse door.

I took my time over the next hour, inflicting as much pain on the bitch as I could and still keep her alive. I'd learned a few torture methods over the years and could get a person right to the edge of death, then back, and start over again. I toyed with her, leaving her a bloody, whimpering mess as I sliced at her clothes and skin, whispered dark taunts in her ears. My club didn't believe in harming women or children, but this bitch was barely human in my opinion. Carving her up and seeing the fear in her eyes didn't bother me in the slightest.

When I knew she'd had as much as she could handle and remain breathing, I stepped back and turned to the boyfriend. As much as I wanted to get a pound of his flesh, exact some revenge, I decided to let the club handle him. I knew some of them had been abused as kids, even sexually abused, and I figured they'd have fun with this one. Make him scream and beg, and I knew it would take a lot to make that happen. The guy was completely dead inside, evil to the core.

"My brothers will have their fun with you." I looked at the woman again. "And we're not done with you just yet."

She pissed herself again and I chuckled as I wiped my knife off on my shirt and backed away. It was already covered in her blood, so what was a little more? I pulled it over my head and tossed it into a metal barrel, knowing it would need to be burned later. Using the utility sink on the far wall, I cleaned myself up to get her likely tainted blood off my skin and out of my hair, then I left the building, knowing I'd never see either of them breathing again.

Killian handed my cut back to me, and Cinder stood with his arms folded, feet braced a shoulder's width apart. He tossed a black tee to me and I pulled it on, then shrugged on my cut. Cinder looked from me to the building, then back again. "They still alive?" he asked.

"Yep. I'd let the woman rest a bit before you work her over anymore. Otherwise, she won't last long. Found out what I needed to know, and now I'm going home."

Cinder nodded. "Take care of that woman and kid, we'll handle this shit. Shade called. I know what you found out, but don't go in half-cocked and determined you're going to lose her. I think that woman might surprise you."

"Her name is Clarity, not 'that woman,'" I said.

Cinder cracked a smile. "Clarity might surprise you. I know you think she's with you because she has security with you, money... but I don't think that's it."

"Let me guess. Seamus was running his fucking mouth to you, too."

"He's told everyone that woman -- Clarity -- is head over heels in love with you, and you're too damn stupid or blind to see it. Maybe you need to get your eyes checked, what with your advanced years and all."

I flipped him off. "Younger than you, asshole."

"Yeah, but I'm wiser. So listen the fuck up before you screw everything the hell up and lose something precious. It's obvious to all of us that you feel something for her and that kid, so man the fuck up and tell her how you feel."

"Too soon to feel anything."

"Bullshit! When you meet the right woman, you just know. It's a deep down, gut-clenching reaction. If she can walk away and you won't give a shit, then let her go. But if you're going to miss her and be a miserable fucking bastard, then convince her to stay."

Killian cleared his throat.

"Something to add?" I asked.

"Sometimes we're only given one great love," he said. "Don't lose yours because you can't admit you want to keep her. Some of us never had a chance to hold onto the woman we loved."

That was more than I'd ever heard the man speak about his past. There were shadows in his eyes, something we'd all noticed from the beginning, but now I understood a little more about what put them there. One day he'd tell us the entire story. "Fine. I'll go home and be a pansy ass and tell her how I feel," I said. "And when this all blows up in my face, I'm coming after you fuckers."

Cinder slapped me on the back. "It will all work out the way it's supposed to. And just because I'm such a nice guy, I'm going to let you in on a little secret."

"What?" I asked.

"Your daughter is at your house." He smirked. "Better hurry home before she runs off your woman and kid. The money won't matter much then."

I started cursing and ran for my bike, my tires spitting gravel as I revved the engine and took off. Why the fucking hell hadn't someone told me that sooner? Shit. If Darian was pissed and trying to protect her papa, there was no telling what the fuck she'd say or do. I broke every traffic law between the compound and my house, burning rubber as I came to a screeching halt in the driveway. I'd barely cleared my bike before the front door opened and Bull stepped out onto the porch.

“What the fucking hell!” I demanded as I stomped up the steps. “No warning what-the-fuck-so-ever?”

He shrugged. “You know how Darian can get, especially since she’s hormonal as shit right now.”

That made me pause. “You’re making me a grandpa again?”

“Yep, and it’s been a roller-coaster ride. One minute she’s screaming and threatening to cut off my balls and the next she’s sobbing and saying she’s a horrible wife.”

Fuck my life.

I went inside and listened to see just how far off the rails my delightful daughter was, but silence greeted me. And that scared me far fucking more. I peered into the living room and saw Caleb and Foster playing in front of the TV, and Darian and Clarity seemed to be having a civilized conversation. I cleared my throat and made my presence known, and Darian flew off the couch and into my arms.

“Daddy!”

“Hey, baby girl. A little notice next time would be nice.”

“If I’d given you notice, then you might have run off with Clarity,” she said.

“You’re not wrong.” I glanced at my woman and noticed that she seemed calm and perfectly fine. Maybe I’d been worried for no reason. Until I noticed the only breakable items in the living room were missing and a broom was leaning against the wall. I looked at Darian and she just smiled up at me.

Bull squeezed my shoulder. “I hope you weren’t fond of the vase in the corner, or the two pictures frames you had in here, or the candy dish. They’re in the kitchen trash.”

“Fucking hell,” I muttered. I looked at Clarity again, but she calmly stared back at me. “You okay, kitten?”

She nodded and the tension inside me loosened a little.

If she could handle Darian, then maybe she could handle anything. Including finding out she’s rich beyond her wildest dreams, and that her boy had seen some shit that was going to require some trips to a therapist. It was a reminder that she was a strong woman, someone worthy of standing by my side. And fuck if I was going to let her go.

## Chapter Nine

### Clarity

Meeting Darian had been a bit... well, honestly, she'd scared the shit out of me. She'd just barged inside, pushing her way past me, and started screaming about how I was taking advantage of her dad. When I'd tried to explain things to her, the breakables had started flying, and I was grateful to her husband for keeping the kids out of the way. It hadn't taken long for her rage to turn into tears, and that's when I'd noticed her slightly rounded stomach and put a few things together. Like the fact Darian was a hormonal bitch because she was pregnant, and I was guessing that Scratch didn't know yet.

He didn't look convinced when I said I was fine, but he hadn't exactly let go of his daughter and come to me either. He rubbed her back and hugged her before greeting his grandson. When he came toward me, he took my hand and gave it a squeeze. I was about to say something with stray droplets of blood along the leg of his jeans caught my eye.

"Trouble while you were out?" I asked, staring at the stains.

"Shit. I didn't realize it got on my pants."

"Go shower and change. I'll keep everyone entertained," I said.

He nodded, pressed a kiss to my cheek, then left the room. Darian was gaping at me and Bull merely gave me an assessing look.

"What?" I asked.

"He comes in with blood on him and you just calmly tell him to shower and change?" she asked. "You aren't concerned about where it came from or if he might have killed someone?"

"If he did, I'm sure they deserved it," I said. "And since I didn't see any cuts on him, I'm assuming it's someone else's so I'm not too worried about him."

Bull smiled faintly. "I think you're just what he needs."

Darian elbowed him in the ribs. "Shut it. He's with a woman even younger than me."

Bull cleared his throat and gave her a pointed look. Darian's cheeks flushed.

"Right," she said. "And I'm younger than Ridley."

"Who's Ridley?" I asked.

"My daughter," Bull said. "I have two granddaughters who are older than my son, and Darian is a few years younger than my daughter. So if anyone shouldn't be throwing stones at you and Scratch, it's Darian. She's been in your position."

"You're right," she sighed. "You couldn't have started off with that before I lost my shit earlier?"

"Would it have done any good? You didn't seem to be in a reasonable mood," he said.

Darian snorted, then came and sat back down next to me. She held out her hand and I gripped it.

"Sorry. Truce?" she asked. "I guess I feel a little protective of my dad. I didn't even get to meet him until a few years ago, but we've gotten really close."

"I understand." Well, sort of. I couldn't care less if someone set my dad on fire, but I would do anything to protect Caleb, or Damon for that matter.

"So you and my dad," Darian said. "You aren't wearing a property cut, but you said he'd claimed you."

"Property cut?"

She turned so I could see the back of the cut she was wearing, and the stitching that said *Property of Bull -- Dixie Reapers*. Was I supposed to wear something like that? Scratch hadn't mentioned it to me, but we hadn't really had a lot of time either. We were still bonding, and there was the shit from my past to consider. Maybe he just hadn't gotten around to it yet.

"Have you met Josie?" she asked. "Her brother is a Dixie Reaper, but she's married to a Devil so she lives here now."

"No. Scratch has mentioned her before, but we haven't had a chance to meet. There are some things that have needed our attention."

"I knew it," she muttered. "A fucking damsel in distress. Figures. It seems to be every biker's kryptonite."

"She's not a fucking damsel in distress," Scratch said from the doorway, his wet hair in a ponytail. "That woman has been through hell and she's still standing, still fighting. Never met anyone stronger."

"So she doesn't need you?" Darian pressed. "Maybe need your money?"

I felt the blood drain from my face.

"Nope," he said. "She's a fucking heiress so the last thing she needs is the paltry amount in my accounts."

"Paltry?" Darian asked. "You have like half a million in the bank, Daddy. That's not paltry."

"Heiress?" I asked.

"We'll talk later," Scratch said. "Found out some things about your dad. Your real dad."

My real dad? That meant... Heath wasn't my father? My mom had lied to me? They both had? My mind was spinning and Scratch came over and picked me up, settling me across his lap as he sat in his recliner.

"There's some stuff we need to go over, things Shade found, but right now we're just going to have a family visit, okay? I'll answer all your questions later."

"We were hoping to stay here," Darian said.

"There's a perfectly fine hotel five minutes from here," Scratch said.

Darian's mouth dropped open. "I can't stay in my dad's house?"

"Not a good time, baby girl. You'd have known that if you bothered to call before you decided to come save me from this nefarious woman. You can tell she's a killer and I might not get out alive."

I bit my lip and choked back my laughter.

"Told you he was fine," Bull said. "Your hormones are going to get you into trouble."

She narrowed her eyes on her husband. "You mean my out-of-control hormones because *you* knocked me up? I'm pregnant, not irrational."

"Same difference," Bull muttered.

I was glad there weren't any more breakable items in the living room or I had a feeling she'd have launched a few at her husband's head. It would have been funny as hell to witness, but I didn't want to be searching for microscopic pieces of glass over the next several months. It made me nervous that the kids were playing on the floor when there could be some stray pieces still down there.

"We're going to get checked in at the hotel," Bull said. "Then maybe we can all meet up for dinner somewhere. If you're all right with it, we'll stick around a day or two so Foster can play with his new friend."

"You mean his uncle," Darian said with her lips twisting. "If my dad is claiming them, that makes Caleb his uncle. That's fucked-up."

"You mean like grandkids having an uncle who's younger than them? At least Foster and Caleb are about the same age. Stop being bitchy and get your ass out to the truck, Darian."

She rolled her eyes but got up and walked over to him.

"Foster can stay here," I said. "If you're all right with that. They're playing and having a good time. No sense in upsetting either of them."

Bull smiled and nodded. "If you're sure you want to watch him, that's fine."

"I'll call you after I've had a chance to talk to Clarity about a few things," Scratch told him. "Thanks for giving us some space."

I heard the front door close a moment later and focused on Scratch. "What do you mean I'm an heiress and Heath wasn't my real dad?"

"I have the papers out in my saddlebags."

"Just tell me. I don't have to see a piece of paper."

He rubbed his beard. "Well, your mom wasn't your mom. The picture you have? It's your mom's half-sister. Your parents were Tamara and Scott Parkhurst. Your daddy was a philanthropist who was worth a lot of money, inherited a big company. And it put a target on his back. Your parents were killed so the board members would have control of the company, which they ran into the ground. But your daddy's accounts are still intact, and with a DNA test, we can prove you're the rightful heir to his fortune. You'll have half a billion dollars at your disposal."

I blinked. Then blinked again, trying to process what he was saying. His words were ricocheting around my brain and nothing was making any sense.

"I'm not Clarity Davis?"

"No, kitten. You're Clarity Parkhurst. I have a copy of your birth certificate, which brings up another matter. Your age."

My breath stalled in my lungs. Oh God. If my age was wrong, did that mean I was even younger than I'd thought? If I wasn't legal, I couldn't remain with Scratch, and he could get into serious trouble for being with me.

"Don't tell me I'm younger than eighteen."

He smiled a little. "No. You're actually turning twenty-two tomorrow. I have no idea how your aunt convinced you that you were three years younger. Maybe they brainwashed you somehow."

I frowned, something pulling at my memories. No, not brainwashed, but... There were flashes of a man with a deep, soothing voice. Having to sit in a chair. But it wasn't anything I could completely grasp.

"Hypnotized maybe?" I asked.

His eyebrows shot up and he seemed to think about it. "That's possible I guess. Don't really know much about hypnosis, but I've heard it can make people stop smoking or lose weight, so it's certainly possible they could trick your mind into thinking you're younger, especially if they did it when you were just a little kid."

"What does all of this mean?" I asked.

He ran a hand through his hair. "It means you don't have to stay with me. You're

rich beyond your wildest dreams and don't need anyone to take care of you. Not that you ever really did need that. You'd have gotten yourself off the streets sooner or later. I don't doubt that for a moment."

My heart fell like a lead balloon. "You don't want me to stay?"

His gaze locked with mine. "Kitten, I want you here, but I know you were only with me out of necessity."

"That's what you think?" I asked softly. "That I only agreed to be with you because of what you could do for me? For Caleb?"

"You'd do anything for that boy."

"Never once did I give my body away to keep him fed or a roof over his head. Do you really think so little of me? Am I just a whore now?"

I struggled to stand up, but he banded his arms around me.

"I have never, and would never, call you a whore," he said, his voice deep and gruff. "Fuck, kitten! You're the closest damn thing I've ever met to an angel. You really think I would ever believe you're a whore?"

"It's how you made me feel," I said, my throat growing tight as I dropped my gaze from his. "I didn't sell myself to you for a roof over my head or for money or anything else. I gave myself to you because I wanted you. You're the only man I've ever wanted that way. You make me feel special, like I'm important. Or you did until just now."

He cupped my cheek and forced me to look up.

"I'm not good with words, or expressing my feelings to a woman. Never had to do it before. I want you here, both you and Caleb. You're my family, my woman and son. It's what I feel here," he said, pressing his hand to his chest. "I know you can do better than an old man like me, and that money can give you a new life. You could move anywhere in the world, find some young man who wants to marry you and have a ton of children."

"I don't want some young guy, Damon. I want you. Only you. You're my other half, the man who makes me feel whole. Age is just a number. Are you going to stop wanting me when I get older and get gray in my hair? If I gain weight and no longer look cute and young?"

"Of course not," he said.

"Then why would you think I can't fall in love with you just because you're older than me? And yes, I'm falling for you. I know it's only been a few days, and it seems completely insane, but I know that you're it for me. Please don't push me away. It would break my heart."

"I'm sorry, kitten," he said softly, running his fingers down my cheek. "I wasn't trying to push you away. The second I heard about that money, I got scared. I'm man enough to admit it. The thought of you walking out was the most painful thing I've ever faced. Even when I'd thought Darian had died as a baby, I hadn't hurt like that."

"Do you think you could ever love me, Damon? Maybe someday?"

He smiled faintly. "Clarity, you're really damn easy to love. You said you're falling for me, but, kitten, I'm falling for you too. And I already love Caleb like he's my own. I'd like to adopt him, make it official."

"You want to adopt Caleb?" I asked, my eyes stinging with unshed tears.

"Yeah, baby. I want to adopt him." He took a deep breath. "And if you'll have me, I'd like to marry you. Make us an official family. My club already sees us that way, but I want everyone to know you're mine, and Caleb is too."

"You don't have to marry me," I said, remembering how he'd reacted before. "I'll stay even if we don't get married."

"I want to, kitten. And it's not about the money. I'll have the club lawyer draw up a prenup so that I won't have access to your inheritance."

"Do you really think I care if you use that money? What if I want to give part of it to the club? You mentioned something about a new compound. I'd imagine a million dollars would go a long way toward making that happen. Maybe it would even allow you to keep the one you have and buy some extra space?"

"Kitten, my Pres isn't going to take money from you, not even for the benefit of the club. But it was generous of you to offer. We need to have your DNA tested first. Don't spend the money before you have it."

"I want to make a difference, not just go crazy spending money."

"We'll talk about it later. Right now, I need to know if you're going to marry me."

"Yes," I said, smiling widely. "I would love to marry you, Damon. And nothing would make me happier than for you to adopt Caleb. I think he'd like that too."

"Then I guess we'd better go ring shopping later. We'll stop on the way to dinner with Bull and Darian."

I glanced at the boys who were still playing and ignoring us. "Um, we only have one car seat. Exactly how are we getting both of them to the restaurant?"

He looked at the boys, then back at me. "I have no idea. I guess it wouldn't hurt to get a Prospect to pick up another seat. Now that Darian has been here once, I'm sure she'll show up again."

"Yeah, with two kids in tow. Maybe you were right about needing something

bigger. You're not going to fit your grandson, another grandbaby, Caleb, and any other kids we have into the back seat of your truck."

His gaze dropped to my stomach and I felt his cock harden under me. My cheeks flushed, and if we hadn't had both boys to watch, I had no doubt he'd have carried me off somewhere and made me scream his name.

I kissed him, his beard tickling me.

"After Caleb goes to bed, I'm going to do my damndest to knock you up," he said, kissing me again. His voice dropped low so the boys wouldn't hear us. "Going to fill up that sweet pussy of yours until it's overflowing with my cum. Every damn night for the rest of our lives. Or until I can't get it up anymore."

I snickered. "They make little blue pills for that."

"Smartass."

"I thought you liked my ass."

He placed his lips against my ear. "I love your ass so much, one of these nights I'm going to fuck it. Can't wait to see that tight little hole stretched wide around my dick, and hearing you beg me for more."

My breath caught and my eyes widened. I swallowed hard as my panties flooded and my clit pulsed. He subtly slid his hand under my ass and squeezed. If we didn't have the boys, I'd have unbuckled his belt here and now, and ridden him until we both came. I didn't think it would take much for me. His words alone were enough to turn me on.

"Later, kitten. If you're really good, we'll see if this old man can get it up twice tonight. Maybe I'll fill up that pussy and your ass."

I clenched my thighs and knew I couldn't wait. Later wasn't going to get here fast enough. I frantically grabbed at his phone, but the damn thing was locked.

"What are you doing?" he asked, his voice laced with humor.

"Call a Prospect. Any of them."

"Why?"

"So he can take the boys out back to play."

Damon chuckled, but he unlocked his phone and made a call.

"Get your ass to my house. You're on babysitting duty while I make sure my woman is taken care of."

I didn't hear the Prospect's reply, but whatever it was made Scratch laugh.

"Just get here. And do it fast."

He hung up the phone and teased me with light strokes along my thighs and lower back. When the boys weren't looking, he ran his fingers across my breasts,

making my nipples harden. By the time Seamus arrived, I was a quivering mess. I barely heard the instructions Scratch gave him before I was bolting up the stairs. He shut the door behind us, and I quickly removed my clothes.

“Eager, kitten?”

“You know damn well I want you. All that teasing and playing downstairs when I couldn’t do anything but sit there.”

He removed his clothes, then prowled closer. When he reached me, he slipped his hand between my thighs and stroked my pussy. I groaned as he flicked my clit, then thrust a finger inside me. My nipples tightened even more, and I was ready to spread my legs and take whatever he wanted to give me.

Scratch placed his other hand at my waist while he finger-fucked me. His thumb stroked over my clit, back and forth, in a slow lazy motion. When he took my nipple between his teeth and lightly bit down, I saw stars and my knees nearly buckled. He kept teasing until I wanted to cry in frustration.

“Damon, please.”

“Please what, kitten?”

“Please fuck me,” I said.

“You want me to fuck you here?” he asked, his fingers playing with my pussy. Then he slid them out and pressed against the tight hole between my ass cheeks. “Or here?”

It felt like the world was spinning and I could barely breathe. My gaze latched onto his and he smiled, then slowly turned me to face the bed.

“Ass in the air, baby.”

I pressed my breasts to the bed and watched as he took a tube of something from the bedside table drawer. He lightly stroked my back before reaching for my hands. He placed them on my ass cheeks.

“Hold yourself open for me, kitten. Show me how much you want this.”

I trembled at his words, but did as he said. The lube was cold, and I gasped as he started working it into me. It burned as he stretched me with his fingers, but it felt strangely good too. While he worked on loosening me up, his other hand played with my pussy, pinching and rubbing my clit.

“Come for me.”

I whimpered and pushed back against him as he fucked my ass with his fingers. He put more pressure on my clit and it was enough to send me soaring. I screamed out his name and it felt like the world exploded around me. I was still disoriented from

coming so damn hard when I felt his cock pressing into me. Biting my lip, I tried to keep still and quiet. It took a few thrusts before he'd worked his way inside.

"Fuck, kitten. You look so damn beautiful taking my cock like this," he said, fucking me with slow, long strokes.

I already felt another orgasm building. His hands spread my ass cheeks even wider.

"Please play with your pussy, kitten. Let me feel you squeeze my dick when you come."

I worked my clit hard and fast and soon I was begging him for more.

"Faster, Damon! Harder!"

He growled and slammed into me, again and again, until I was screaming out his name again.

"Damon! Yes! More! Don't fucking stop!"

He growled and I felt the splash of his cum filling me. When he stilled, buried in my ass, my heart started to slow and I was able to catch my breath. His hands ran along my sides and back, gentle strokes that were likely meant to soothe me. If I'd known it would ever feel that good, I'd have begged him to do this sooner.

"Don't move, kitten."

He pulled out and I winced at the momentary twinge. My ass was sore, but it was the good kind. I had no doubt every time I sat down for the rest of the day, I'd remember him taking me so hard and deep, riding me until we both came.

I heard the bathroom water running, then he returned a moment later.

"Fucking beautiful," he said. "Let me see."

I reached back and spread myself open for him again. He groaned and I felt the heat of his body as he came closer.

"Fuck. I don't think it would take much to get me hard again. No one has turned me on this much in a really long fucking time. And back then a stiff breeze was enough to get me hard."

I couldn't hold back my laughter at that. I rolled over and looked up at him, a smile curving my lips. "Maybe he just needs a little assistance?"

Before he could say anything, I dropped to my knees at his feet and took his cock into my mouth. I had no clue what the hell I was doing, but I hoped my enthusiasm made up for my lack of skill. I licked and sucked, and was soon rewarded when his cock hardened. I wasn't ready to let him go just yet, enjoying the taste and scent of him. Pre-cum hit my tongue and I sucked harder, wanting more.

"Enough, kitten," he said, pulling me to my feet. "If I come in your mouth,

there's no way I'll get hard again fast enough to please you. Downside of being with a man my age."

"There aren't any downsides to being with you, except that you're stubborn."

He smiled. "I am that. How do you want me, baby? You want to lie on your back? Get on your hands and knees? Want to ride me?"

"You'd let me do that? Be in charge?" I asked.

He sat on the edge of the bed and motioned for me to come closer. "Put your legs on either side of my hips."

I put my knees on the bed on either side of him and felt his cock brush against me. Scratch gripped his shaft and I lowered onto it, my eyes nearly sliding shut in pleasure as he filled me. He helped guide me until I found a rhythm we both seemed to enjoy. Sweat slicked my body as I rode him harder, faster, chasing an orgasm I could feel was so close. I gripped his shoulders tight as the world spun around me and I came really damn hard.

Scratch clamped his hands tight on my waist and surged upward, thrusting until I felt the heat of his cum spurting inside me. I clung to him, slumping against his chest with my head on his shoulder. With his arms around me, I felt safe, happy, and like I was home. My heart rate started to slow and I lifted my head.

"Guess we'd better clean up and rescue Seamus from the boys," I said.

"The man could handle a platoon of Marines. I think two small boys should be a walk in the park."

"Do you not remember what toddler boys can be like?" I asked.

"Fair enough, kitten. We'll take a quick shower and go save Seamus. Then we'll figure out how we're taking the boys with us to go ring shopping and meet my daughter for dinner."

"After babysitting two toddlers, a trip to the store for a car seat should be easy enough for Seamus to handle."

He smiled. "I'll be sure to tell him you said that."

I kissed him hard, our tongues tangling as I pressed myself close to him. I wanted more days like this and wondered if I could put Seamus on speed dial.

## Chapter Ten

### Scratch

The ring Clarity picked out wasn't quite what I'd had in mind, but as long as she was happy that was all that mattered. She claimed the sapphire in the center reminded her of my eyes. It was just an average-size round stone with small diamond chips surrounding it, on a plain platinum band. I'd gone into the store prepared to spend a chunk of money and I'd walked out with my bank account only five thousand dollars less. I'd been assured there was a matching wedding band they could order when I was ready.

After we'd finished eating and had dessert, Darian noticed Clarity's ring and blinked at me like an owl. "You're engaged? To a woman you've only just met?"

Bull nudged her with his elbow, probably a reminder that they'd been all over each other when they'd first met. Darian pressed her lips together and looked from Clarity to me, then back again before giving a nod of her head.

"All right. As long as the two of you are happy, then I'll be happy for you. Besides, Foster likes playing with Caleb, even if it is a little weird that my son is the same age as my stepbrother."

Clarity snorted her water and started coughing. I patted her back and stared at my daughter. Darian just shrugged with a sheepish smile.

"Play nice," Bull murmured to her just loud enough for me to hear. "Or I won't do that thing you like."

And that was more than I needed to know about my daughter and son-in-law.

A basket of breadsticks was on the table between Caleb and Foster. When I saw Caleb reaching for a second breadstick, I watched and waited. He did the same thing he had at home, freezing with his hand partway to the food, then looking around nearly frantic.

Clarity tensed next to me and I reached for her hand. "That's the other thing I needed to talk to you about."

"What did she do to my baby?" Clarity asked.

"She was abusive, and he saw some things he shouldn't have. Bad things. She also forbade him from eating. We need to talk to a pediatrician and see what they recommend, but as he gets older, he might need counseling," I said.

"What kind of things?" she asked, fear blazing in her eyes.

I leaned in closer so I could whisper and not let the entire restaurant hear our business. "Mary's boyfriend was running a child pornography ring. He never filmed Caleb, but our boy saw some of it happening, and he saw that his babysitter got excited by it. We're going to have some damage to reverse, but he's going to be okay, kitten. And Mary and her boyfriend aren't going to be an issue ever again."

She looked into my eyes and nodded.

"I will always protect you. Both of you, no matter what it takes."

She cupped my cheek and kissed me softly. "Thank you, Damon. I only wish..."

"You couldn't have known, Clarity. Don't beat yourself up over something that's in the past. We'll make sure Caleb gets whatever help he needs, and we'll give him a good life. Now let me go talk to my boy a minute." I winked and pushed my chair back.

Caleb was still staring at the breadsticks with longing, but he'd put his hand back in his lap. I knelt by his highchair and got his attention.

"Hey, buddy. Still hungry?" I asked.

Caleb just stared at me.

"It's all right if you're hungry, Caleb. You can eat as much as you want, whenever you want. The bad lady can't hurt you anymore, all right? My family made sure she went away and won't ever come back."

I reached for a breadstick and held it out to him.

He wrapped his chubby hand around it, then grinned at me before taking a bite. I kissed the top of his head and went back to my seat. It would take time, but he would be fine, just like I'd told Clarity. I'd see that he had whatever he needed, and I'd make sure the club put those bodies where no one would ever find them. I'd also have Shade track down the kids who exposed and make sure they were taken care of, in whatever way was necessary. Her kids would either go to family or they'd likely end up in the system. It sucked, but they would hopefully be better off than they were with her. There was too much evil in the world, and I hated that kids had ever been a part of it. They were to be sheltered and protected, not exposed for monetary gain.

My woman reached out and placed her hand on my thigh. I put my hand over hers and gave it a squeeze. We'd get through this, and whatever else life threw our way. I had a strong woman by my side, and I knew she could handle some serious shit if the need arose. Maybe she was right about the soul mate thing and she'd been chosen for me by the universe.

"You love her," Darian said.

"What?" I glanced at Clarity, but she was focused on Caleb and Foster.

"You love her," my daughter said again. "And I don't think you even realize it."

You're different when you're around her. You've been protective of me and Foster, but with Clarity and Caleb you're like..."

"Like I am with you," Bull told her. Then he nodded. "I would have to agree, Scratch. I think it's obvious you're in love with her. And the deer in the headlights expression on her face tells me you haven't said that to her yet."

I looked at Clarity again and her eyes were wide.

"You love me?" she asked. "You said you were falling for me, but you never..."

"Never been in love before," I told her. "Maybe that's what I'm feeling and I just don't realize it, but I do know that you own my heart. I don't see any woman but you."

"Someone should tell the club sluts that," Darian muttered.

"What's a club slut?" Clarity asked.

"Oh my God." Darian cast an accusing glare my way. "You haven't even taken her to the clubhouse or told her about those women? When she buries you in a shallow grave, I'm not crying over your corpse."

"What's a club slut?" Clarity asked again, keeping her voice low enough the boys wouldn't hear.

"It's, um..." I glanced at Bull and Darian, but they weren't going to help me with this one. "There are some women who hang around the clubhouse and they..."

"They're whores who have sex with all the club brothers," Darian said. "And I'm sure Daddy Dearest hasn't exactly been a monk, so those women are going to think they have a prior claim on him and won't give a shit the two of you are engaged. They'll still try to get into his pants."

"Thanks, Darian," I said. I sighed and looked at Clarity, who didn't seem too pleased with this new knowledge.

"You've slept with random women who still hang around the clubhouse, and they'll expect you to sleep with them again?" she asked. There was a flicker of uncertainty in her eyes and it nearly gutted me.

"Kitten, I'm not going to touch any of them. I can't throw them out since most of my club are single men and they have needs. But yes, I've been with some of the club sluts. It didn't mean anything. It's never meant anything, not until you."

"But you have to go be around them?"

"Yes and no. There are times I'll need to be at the clubhouse and they'll be there, but my party days are over. I'd rather be home with you and Caleb."

"You're the VP, Dad. You can't just ghost on the parties," Darian said. "Don't lie to her because you think it's what she wants to hear."

"Darian, you might be a grown adult, but I will take you over my knee and beat

some sense into you if you don't shut the hell up," I said casting her a glare. Bull merely raised his eyebrows, but stayed out of it.

"I don't want to take you away from your club duties," Clarity said. "But I won't lie and say I'm okay with you being around those women."

I looked at the clock on my phone. Our meal was over and we didn't have plans for the rest of the night. Maybe if Clarity saw the clubhouse, she'd understand that those women couldn't hold a candle to her. They were all used up and not the least bit attractive to me. Being with them had just been a way to find some relief, but it was just meaningless sex. They hadn't been more than a willing place to stick my dick.

I looked at Bull and my daughter. "Can Caleb go with the two of you for a little while? We can swing by the hotel and pick him up in about an hour."

"Sure," Bull said.

I tossed him the keys to my truck and he got up to go transfer the car seat. Darian studied Clarity, and I could tell she had questions. I also knew her pregnancy was making her batshit crazy and her emotions were all over the fucking place. She was supportive one second and a fire-breathing fucking dragon the next. I didn't envy Bull in the slightest.

"Caleb can stay the night, if you'd like," Darian offered. "He gets along really well with Foster and they're about the same size. I'm sure we have some pajamas that will fit him."

"You okay with that, kitten?" I asked.

"He's never stayed the night away from me before," she said.

"We can pick him up when we're done if that's what you want, or he can stay with Foster and they can have some more playtime until they go to bed. Up to you. Darian might be a hormonal witch when she's pregnant, but she's good with kids."

My daughter stuck her tongue out at me, which just made Clarity laugh.

"All right. He can stay the night," she said. "But call us if he wants to come home."

Darian nodded, then gathered the boys and took them outside. Caleb went without so much as a backward glance, which I was sure had to hurt Clarity. She'd been his entire world, and now he was opening up to new people and making friends. It had to be hard on her.

I paid for dinner, then led Clarity out to the truck. She was quiet on the way to the clubhouse, and I only hoped that I was right and she could handle this. If our roles were reversed, I knew I wouldn't be too happy right now either. The thought of her

being in regular contact with men she'd slept with, had there been any, would have infuriated me.

The parking lot outside the clubhouse was pretty packed considering we weren't an overly large club. I parked the truck and went to help Clarity out. She smoothed her hands over her outfit and fidgeted.

"You look beautiful, kitten, and I'll be right by your side the entire time. If you're uncomfortable or want to leave, just say the word and we'll go home, or go get Caleb if that's what you want."

"All right."

I took her by the hand and led her up the steps and inside. Music was booming and smoke filled the air. A few brothers were already screwing the club sluts out in the open and I felt Clarity tense. We went to the bar and I ordered a beer, then got her a virgin drink. She stared at it with her brow furrowed.

"No alcohol. Just in case," I said, looking down at her stomach.

Her cheeks flushed, but there was a pleased look on her face as she sipped her drink. It didn't take long for Cinder to make his way over to us, and he looked confused as fuck.

"Thought you wanted to keep this one," he said.

"I do. We're engaged."

"Uh-huh. And you thought bringing her here was a good idea? Is this some sort of test?" Cinder asked.

"Not exactly. I tried to explain club sluts to her and didn't do such a great job."

Cinder looked over at Clarity, who was staring a little too hard at her drink. Maybe this wasn't such a great idea after all. Cinder shook his head and moved away, leaving us alone at the bar. I finished off my beer and was going to suggest that we leave when a hand wrapped around my arm and a naked body pressed up against me.

"I wondered when you'd come and have some fun with us," the whore said, her make-up so heavy it cracked at the corners of her eyes. She might have been attractive once, but hard living had aged her.

"Not tonight, Stella. Or any night." I removed her hand, but she wasn't deterred.

"Oh, come on, Mr. VP. You know we had us a good time. Wasn't all that long ago you were taking me up against that wall over there," she said nodding across the room.

I felt Clarity tense even more and I wondered just how fucked I was going to be once I got her out of here. Before I could open my mouth and say a word, my fiancée skirted around me and got right in Stella's face.

“He said to back off, bitch.”

I put my hand over my mouth to hide my silent laughter as my little kitten showed her claws. It seemed I might have been worried for nothing. Well, maybe not nothing. When we got home, I might get an earful, but I’d gladly take a tongue-lashing from her as long as she was still speaking to me. I hadn’t done the best job preparing her for this life, and if she needed to vent her frustrations I’d let her. In private. In front of the club was another matter, but watching her stand up for herself and claim me wasn’t a bad thing. I was damn proud of her.

Stella flipped her hair over her shoulder and sneered at Clarity. “And who the fuck are you to talk to me that way?”

Clarity put her finger an inch from Stella’s nose, her engagement ring shining under the lights. “I’m the woman he’s going to marry, you whore. Take your sagging tits somewhere else.”

Stella’s lips thinned and she pulled back her hand. I reached out to catch her mid-slap, but Clarity didn’t give me a chance. She barreled into Stella, knocking the whore down, then grabbed a handful of hair and slammed her head on the floor. My jaw dropped as my sweet little kitten stood up and started dragging Stella’s naked ass through the club and out the front doors. I followed in their wake, along with half my brothers, and watched my woman kick the slut down the steps.

“Damn,” Renegade said in a hushed tone. “Your woman is badass. Where can I get one?”

“Hands off, dickhead,” I said, but I was smiling. It was kind of hot watching her take care of the club slut all on her own.

“You ever think of trying to fucking hit me, and I will beat your sorry ass,” Clarity said. She pulled her foot back and kicked Stella in the stomach. “And keep your skank ass away from Scratch. He’s mine and doesn’t want a nasty whore like you.”

I reached out and wrapped an arm around her waist. “Easy, kitten. I think she gets the message.”

A woman snorted behind me and I heard a muttered, “We all got the memo. Hands off the VP.”

Yeah, my fierce little kitten had made an impression. I was not only proud of her, but really fucking turned-on. I’d never had a woman fight for me before, not like this. Cat fights between the club sluts happened from time to time over any officer in the club, but Clarity claiming me like that? Big difference.

“You really fucked her? I hope you doused your dick in antibacterial soap.” She pressed against me and fisted my cut, but I could feel the anger still simmering under

the surface.

"Come on, kitten. We'll go home. I think you've made your point. No one's going to touch me."

She nodded and let me lead her to the truck, but a hand on my shoulder stopped me. I turned to look at Shade, Renegade, and Phantom.

"Mind if we welcome her to the family?" Renegade asked. "Mostly because I want to hug the fiercest woman I've ever seen."

I snorted and introduced Clarity to my brothers. They each hugged her, and Renegade gave her a kiss on the cheek. She stiffened for a moment, but as Renegade held her gaze, the tension drained from her. He reached out and squeezed her hand, and Clarity relaxed even more.

"You ever need anything and Scratch isn't available, you come find me," Renegade said. "I've got your back."

Clarity smiled a little. "Thanks. It was nice to meet all of you. Sorry about..." She waved a hand toward Stella, who was still crying on the ground.

Shade shrugged. "Honestly, that was the hottest fucking thing I've seen in a long ass time. You can come stake your claim on Scratch anytime you want. We could use some entertainment around here."

Phantom snickered. "He's not wrong. And I'm with Renegade. You need anything, we'll be there. You just gained a bunch of big brothers who will gladly beat the shit out of anyone giving you crap. Make sure you get all our numbers from Scratch."

"Shit," I muttered. "I never got her a phone."

"I'll take care of it," Renegade said. "I'll drop it by tomorrow morning. I think you two need some alone time tonight."

The other two smirked and I flipped them off before helping Clarity into the truck. They were assholes, but I knew they would protect her with their lives if necessary, and that was all that mattered. I'd deal with their taunts and teasing, for a little while at least. Then I'd have to remind them who they were fucking with.

I climbed into the truck and started the engine. Clarity reached over and put her hand on my thigh.

"I like them," she said. "I thought they'd make me nervous, but I'm comfortable around them. But the club sluts I can do without."

"Noted." I smiled at her. "For what it's worth, I don't think any of those women will come anywhere near me now. You as good as peed on my leg."

"Funny," she muttered, but her cheeks were turning a bright pink. "I've never

lost control like that before.”

“Sometimes the situation warrants a little more force. This was one of those times. You just gained the respect of every brother in there, and the Prospects. Pretty sure the whores will be giving you a wide berth next time they see you. You just showed them you’re in a position of authority and not to fuck with you.”

“You sound proud,” she said.

“I am. Damn proud.” I lifted her hand and kissed it. “You’re the perfect old lady for a VP. Don’t change a damn thing about you, kitten. All soft and sweet at home, and badass when we’re around the club. The perfect combination.”

“Take me home,” she said softly. “Then you can show me just how much you liked that little show.”

I put her hand over my zipper. “That’s all for you, kitten. And you can have it anytime you want.”

“Home, Damon. I’m not adventurous enough to have sex in your truck, especially in the clubhouse parking lot. I don’t think you want your brothers seeing that much of me anyway.”

“Fuck no!”

I put the truck into gear and headed for the house. The woman at my side completely amazed me, and I was lucky as fuck to have her. I just hoped she knew how much I cared about her, how devoted I was to her and Caleb. I’d lay down my life for them, and I’d love them until I breathed my last. Maybe Darian was right and I was already in love with Clarity. The pint-sized woman next to me already had too much power, more than she realized. I’d tell her how I felt when the time was right.

## Epilogue

### Clarity

#### Three months later

I was nice and toasty with Damon pressed up against me, his arms holding me close as I slowly woke up. The sun was barely streaming through the window and as I became a little more alert, my stomach twisted and turned. I clamped a hand over my mouth and ran for the bathroom, barely making it before I retched into the toilet. I heard Damon stumbling around, and then he was holding my hair back.

"I thought you were calling the doctor," he said, still sounding half asleep.

"I went to the doctor," I said.

Taking a few deep breaths, I looked up at him. He still hadn't put it all together yet, clueless man. Throwing up at all times of the day, my breasts were more sensitive than usual and a bit bigger, and I couldn't handle certain foods or smells.

"I'm pregnant, Damon. Not sick."

He blinked a few times, and then the light bulb came on. He fell to his knees next to me, pulling me against his chest.

"Pregnant?" he asked.

I nodded. "The doctor said I'm about two months along. Didn't take you too long to knock me up."

"Damn." He placed a hand over my belly, and the look of awe on his face nearly made me cry.

"I was hoping you'd go to my appointments with me. I was referred to an OB-GYN and my first appointment is next week. I know you missed out on everything with Darian. I'd like you to be there every step of the way with this one."

"I'd like that, kitten." He kissed the top of my head. "You've made me really fucking happy."

"Guess it's a good thing the club arranged a wedding for us last week. Now the baby will have your name without extra paperwork. Do I even want to know how Shade got a marriage license without me having to go to the courthouse and apply with you?" I asked. "It's not that I'm upset about it. Getting to marry you was the best day of my life, and I'm really glad we share the same name, and that you're adopting Caleb."

"Probably don't want to know. There are things we just don't ask when it comes to Shade. He's good. Damn good. Whenever we go see Darian, I'll introduce you to

Wire. He's with the Dixie Reapers and is way more badass than Shade. I think even the government is a little afraid of Wire. As for Caleb, now that we're married, adopting him should be easy. Then we'll all have the same name."

I smiled. "He sounds like an interesting person to meet. I'd love an introduction to the Dixie Reapers. If they're half as nice as Bull, then I think I'll like them."

"Bull is family, but the Reapers will treat you well, and I'm sure they'd all like to meet you. Darian has already told her friends about her stepmom who's younger than her. Ridley, Bull's daughter, thought it was fucking hilarious. She asked if Foster was going to call you Grandma."

I nearly choked I laughed so damn hard. "Grandma?"

"Ridley had a lot of fun getting her kids to call my daughter Grandma. You should see the looks Darian gets when she's out somewhere with all the kids. She's given Ridley some death glares. Bull finds it amusing as hell, though."

"Grandma," I muttered and giggled again. "I think it would be funny to see the looks on everyone's faces if Foster did that while we're out in public, especially if Darian is with us when it happens."

"Yeah, I picked the right woman," he said, his laughter rumbling in his chest.

"Damon?" I looked up, all laughter gone. "There's something I need to say. Should have said it before now."

"What is it, kitten? You feeling okay? Baby's all right?"

"I'm fine. We're fine. No, it's..." I reached up and ran my fingers through his beard, something I loved doing. "We're married and have been living together a few months now, but I've never told how much I love you."

"Love you too, kitten. So damn much."

"I..."

Small footsteps thundered down the hall and Caleb came bursting into our bedroom, quickly finding us in the bathroom.

"Momma. Daddy. Want pancakes!"

Damon held me tighter. I knew he loved it when Caleb called him daddy. Over the last few months, Caleb had started talking more. We'd consulted a child psychologist and she'd helped us break through his shell. He went to something called play therapy twice a week and had improved so much. I only hoped that what he'd witnessed, and the abuse he'd suffered, wouldn't have lasting effects.

I'd been assured the club had made sure Mary and the monster she'd been dating would never be found. I didn't know the details, and I didn't need to know them. Though I suspected the day Damon had come home with blood spatters on his

jeans that he'd had a little "talk" with one or both of them. The violent side of him and the club might frighten some people, but it made me feel safe because I knew they would never hurt me or my family, but anyone who fucked with us was fair game.

"What kind of pancakes?" Damon asked.

"Mouse pancakes," Caleb said, trying to squeeze himself between us.

"Mouse pancakes? You mean the pancakes with the round ears?" I asked.

He nodded enthusiastically. "Mouse pancakes!"

Damon nodded. "All right. Let's give your momma a minute to herself and we'll head down to the kitchen and get started. Think you can stir the batter for me?"

Caleb clapped and latched onto his daddy. Damon gave me a wink as he headed out of the bathroom and carried Caleb downstairs. I brushed my teeth and splashed some water on my face, then joined them.

Mornings like this one it was almost hard to remember what life had been like before I'd been claimed by the VP of the Devil's Boneyard. I was happy, my son was happy, and we were both loved by so many people. Falling asleep in that shop doorway was the best decision I'd ever made, because it brought me to the love of my life and the father of my kids.

I couldn't wait to see what the years would bring for us, but I knew the future held many happy memories for us. Now I just needed to find a way to bring that happiness to others in the Devil's Boneyard. Jackal had Josie, and Scratch had me. Maybe it was time to find a happily-ever-after for the others. A little matchmaking never hurt anyone, right?

## Harley Wylde

*Short. Erotic. Sweet.* Harley's other half would probably say those words describe her, but they also describe her books. When Harley is writing, her motto is the hotter the better. Off the charts sex, commanding men, and the women who can't deny them. If you want men who talk dirty, are sexy as hell, and take what they want, then you've come to the right place.

Harley Wylde is the "wilder" side of award-winning author Jessica Coulter Smith. Visit Jessica's website at [jessicacoulter.com/](http://jessicacoulter.com/) or Harley's website at [harleywylde.com/](http://harleywylde.com/). Join her Facebook fan group for book discussions, teasers, and more [facebook.com/groups/244192023075587](https://www.facebook.com/groups/244192023075587). For fans of Gay Romance, Harley/Jessica also writes as Dulce Dennison.

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