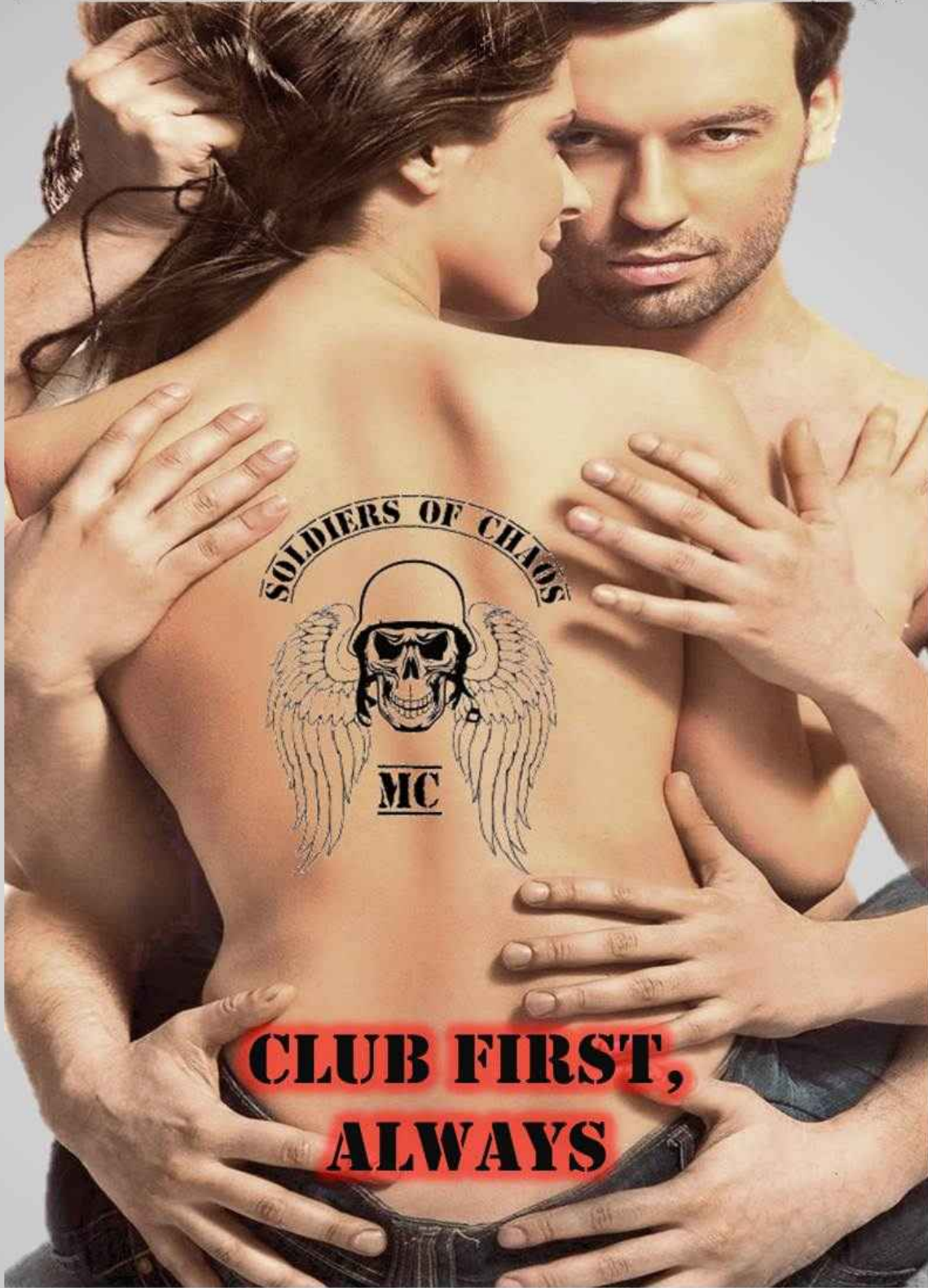


AMONG THE CHAOS



**CLUB FIRST,
ALWAYS**

A **SOLDIERS OF CHAOS MC** Novel

Written By

A.A. Askevold

Soldiers of Chaos
Among the Chaos

Written by A. A. Askevold

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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Chapter 1

Nikki heard her door open. She didn't bother to turn around knowing it would be one of the boys, they never knocked.

"Hey Ace," Tex's husky voice reached her ears.

She knew that delicious tone and what it meant. Sex. She turned around with a sexy little smirk on her face and was surprised to find Trace standing behind Tex, both of them looking like the cat who got the cream.

"Oh. Hey. What are you two looking so pleased with yourselves about?"

Trace shut the door behind him locking it. What the fuck?

"We have come up with a solution to our little problem," Tex answered.

Problem?

"What problem?"

Nikki had no idea what they were talking about.

"This problem," Trace gestured between the three of them.

All of a sudden Nikki wasn't sure if she wanted to get into this conversation.

"I didn't know we had a problem."

They both took a step towards her.

"We have a problem Baby girl. We've always had a problem," Trace replied.

She stared at them warily.

"We have had enough of this back and forth bullshit between us. We don't want to do it anymore," Tex stated forcefully.

Nikki's heart began to pound with fear. What was he saying?

"We know you'll never make a choice between us," Trace spoke, "so we've decided for you."

She didn't want to hear this but at the same time the question flew out of her mouth anyway, "And?"

They edged towards her both of them wearing intense looks on their faces. Unconsciously Nikki began backing up. Her back hit the dresser and she couldn't go any further. She reached back gripping the edge tightly.

"You don't have to choose," Trace explained softly.

She regarded his face closely and saw the gentle love there. What did he mean she didn't have to choose?

"We don't want you to."

They were practically on top of her at this point. Trace glanced at Tex as if he was waiting for him to make the next move. Nikki's gazed moved to Tex. His eyes were filled with hunger and that blazing passion he had for her.

The heat coming from both of them had her body reacting. Her breathing came quick and hard. Her mouth went dry. A pulse began to beat hard in her clit. The tension in the room rose higher. Nikki's brain struggled to link their words with their actions.

"Where exactly are you going with this?" she asked.

"C'mon Ace you know exactly where this is going. It's going the one place you've always wanted it to go but been way too afraid to ask."

She felt Trace lean in from the other side of her.

"And where would that be?" her voice came out a breathy whisper.

Tex brought his mouth close to hers and spoke quietly, "Your bed with the two of us."

Somewhere in the back of her mind a little voice asked the question, the two of them? But this voice was drowned out by her body screaming YES!

The sound of yelling pierced through their sexually charged bubble. She felt the barest brush of Tex's lips against hers then they were gone. Someone was bashing on the door.

"For fucks sake," Tex growled.

His body was gone and he was stomping across the room to the door. He wrenched it open.

"What the fuck do you want?"

Brodie's face was the final mood killer. He looked like death warmed up.

"It's Rat."

A scream like nothing Nikki had ever heard before pierced through all the other noises. It was bone chilling and heart breaking and it kicked them all into action. Tex launched himself out the door nearly knocking Brodie over. Both Trace and Nikki ran for the door hot on his trail. They burst out of the clubhouse and into the anarchy that was strewn across the forecourt. The sound of bikes roaring off into the distance carried through the night.

The ungodly wail sounded again and Nikki glanced over at Rat's old lady. Jodie was crumpled on the ground clinging to Rose like it was the only thing keeping her from going insane with grief. Some of the other girls were crowding around them crying or attempting to comfort Jodie and each other. The brothers were crowded around the main gate. The boys pushed through the group, parting it like Moses and the red sea, and Nikki followed right in their wake.

She hit the front and what she saw made her sick to her stomach. Rat lay in the dirt at their feet. He was covered in blood. His club ink was entirely removed, crudely carved from his flesh. His cut lay next to him ripped to shreds. She felt her heart ache as she stared at a man she knew, a man she considered family.

"Rat," she whispered his name.

It was like staring at Sheila all over again.

"What happened?" She heard Tex ask.

"We heard a car horn beeping and ran to the gate. When we opened it Rat was here and a white ford v8 was taking off down the road."

Niners. That car had appeared everywhere they had run into the Niners. This had to be Bridges.

"Was it the same car from the clubhouse attack?" She asked.

"Looked like it."

"He's sending us a message," she stated quietly.

"You think it's Bridges?" Tex asked.

Nikki nodded in response, she could feel it in her bones.

"We're gonna have to call it in," a voice suggested from her left.

She turned to look at King. He looked old and tired as he stared down at Rat's lifeless body.

"It'll bring too much attention to the club," Reaper warned them from the peripheral of the group.

"He is a founding member. I am not having him sent to Ash, never to be seen or spoken of again. He deserves better than that and Jodie deserves better than that."

They were both right. The club didn't need the heat right now but they also needed to honour a good man.

"I'll call it in."

Both men turned their eyes to her. King nodded his ascent.

Nikki palmed her phone and dialled with a heavy heart. She knew there was only one man for this job and every time she called him she felt like she was the worst thing to have ever happened to Detective Alex Winter.

"Alex. It's Nikki."

Chapter 2

One week earlier

Nikki was standing in her mother's bedroom staring at Sheila's mutilated body. The red of her blood was a stark contrast to the white of the sheets. Every piece of her flesh had been carved into with a knife and not one bit of her skin was free from blood. Sheila's face was twisted in an ugly grimace her eyes wide open with fear. Blood dribbled down her face from the bullet hole in her forehead. Nikki was frozen there. She couldn't move if she wanted to, she was fixated on her mother's face. Maybe it was because they looked so alike and looking at Sheila was like looking down the barrel of her own fate. Then Sheila's mouth moved.

“You're just like him.”

Her eye's locked with Nikki's and she was powerless to look away.

“You think you can hide that thing inside you but you can't. He gave that to you. I'm dead because of him, because of you.”

The darkness inside her reared its ugly head and pushed forward shoving through her till she was a powerless bystander inside her own body.

Her mother was screaming at her, “You did this to me. You did this.”

Blood began oozing out of Sheila's wounds in earnest as she yelled and taunted her. Nikki's body moved taking a step towards Sheila. The rage powering through her body was clearly directed at the screaming dead woman. Then she heard a voice on the other side of the room.

“You're no different than me,” Creepy guy stated, “no different than him.”

Nikki turned towards him. The darkness inside him showed in his eyes as he stared at her. His gaze bored holes into her as if he could see straight through her skin and deep into the blackest part of her. He smiled at her, an evil twisted grin and she found her face smiling back. What the hell was happening to her? She was nothing like him. Her head turned slightly

to look over Creepy guy's shoulder and there in her mother's bedroom mirror she saw it. The monster inside her was looking back at her through the mirror. She could see the menace, destruction and death it would bring and she felt its glee as it stared back.

The words left her mouth even though they weren't her own, "Just like him."

Nikki woke from her dream heart racing, her body covered in a sheen of sweat and her mind reeling. The nightmares were getting worse. They'd returned soon after she left Cole, if leaving is what you'd call it. Because even though she was physically nowhere near him he was still with her. From the scars on her back to the darkness inside her that called for him, she couldn't escape him. She'd managed to wrangle the monster and drive it deep down inside herself, corralling it in a box made of sheer will and desperation. She feared what they were telling her, that without Cole to keep the monster in check she wouldn't survive and neither would those around her.

She sat up and rubbed the sleep from her eyes as her brain tried to compute this latest version of her nightmare. She knew what her mother had meant when she said Nikki couldn't hide the thing inside her. The amount of control she had to exert over herself to keep from cracking was immense and the dam she'd built around that darkness was starting to leak. She could even understand Sheila saying her death was Nikki's fault. She'd felt like that often enough to know it was the guilt talking. But the thing about him giving her the darkness inside her? She had no idea who him was.

Was she referring to Creepy guy? Sure he'd brought out this thing inside her but hadn't he said 'no different than me, no different than him'. Clearly he wasn't just referring to himself. Bridges maybe? He was inadvertently the cause of everything from that night forward, but to say she was just like him. Nikki did not even want to contemplate that, he had to be a cold, calculating, power hungry son of a bitch to be where he was and who he was. She was none of those things, was she?

She shook her head trying to clear it. It was Tex's fault. He'd insisted on dragging her out to Sheila's grave yesterday after months of managing to avoid it. All it did was drag up unwelcome feelings of guilt and hate and vengeance. Then they'd had an argument about her and Cole when they got home. They'd babied her for a little while as her injuries healed. As soon as she was up and about though, Tex gave up on that and the questions had started.

Nikki refused to answer them and she'd ended up in several shouting matches with Tex over it. Him demanding answers and her demanding he stay out of it. She knew he wouldn't give up and she couldn't put up with the fighting anymore so she'd decided reverted back to the age old tactic of avoidance, starting today. It was bad enough that she'd copped some weird looks from the rest of brothers without adding the angry tension between her and Tex into the equation.

Speaking of avoidance, she listened to the quiet in the house trying to pick up any indication that Tex or Trace were awake. She heard nothing. She glanced over to the corner of her room where three boxes sat waiting to be opened. They were Sheila's and for some reason Rose had insisted Tex save them from her mother's now burnt home and give them to Nikki. They'd sat there untouched since Sheila died.

Nikki had no idea what was inside them and she dreaded finding out. They were probably just filled with paperwork or old clothes or maybe casino chips. Mind you with her mother's love of money if they were casino chips they'd be cashed in and spent not boxed up and saved. Rose had wanted her to have them for some reason though and the more they sat there the more they called to her. Nikki swept back the covers and slowly climbed out of bed.

She wandered cautiously over to the boxes. She wasn't sure what she was afraid of. It's not like Sheila was gonna jump out of them at her. Well she hoped she wouldn't, having her in her dreams was bad enough. She knelt on the floor next to the boxes as she contemplated which one to

open first. She slowly folded the first box open. Clothes. Well that was a letdown.

Nikki reached in and pulled out several items of clothing. An old men's Harley shirt, a white summer dress, a cut? It looked too small to be for a man. She unfolded it and on the back was a property patch, 'Property of Reaper'. Wow must've been from when they were first together because Nikki sure as hell couldn't ever remember her mother wearing it. She put it aside and dug further into the box retrieving a shoe box. Nikki opened the lid to reveal a collection of photos.

They were old pictures from an MC party back when the original members had been young. She spotted one shot in particular where Sheila was heavily pregnant arms around Reaper. Reaper's eyes were on Sheila's protruding belly and his body language was tight. Perhaps the idea of his impending fatherhood was getting to him or perhaps it was being tied to Sheila that was the issue. Standing next to them were Rose and King. She smiled as she looked at her surrogate parents. Their love for each other was immediately obvious.

The next picture was similar to the first one only Reaper's head was turned back over his shoulder. It was hard to tell what he was looking at with all the people in the background. Nikki shuffled to the next one and it became clear what had caught her father's attention. A slim olive skinned woman appeared on the edge of the photo. Nikki's first assumption was she was some piece of club ass her father was eyeing off. The more she stared the less sure she was about that.

She was too well dressed to be ass and the way this woman carried herself suggested she was not from their neck of the woods. Nikki went to the next photo in the hopes of getting a better look at the woman but she was no longer in that shot. She continued to shuffle through all the photos discarding them all into a pile until she came across one last picture. Her father was standing on the edge of the party with the woman from the earlier photo. They were half hidden by shadows but even so Nikki could see the tense body language between them. Reaper's hand appeared to be

resting on the other side of the woman's face and the woman was clinging to his shirt.

She flicked back to the first image of her and stared some more. There was something familiar about her that Nikki just couldn't place. She felt like she'd seen the mystery woman somewhere before although she didn't know where. She filtered all the faces of the Soldier's women through her mind. She was no one's old lady and she'd be far too old now to be club ass or to work at Eros. Nikki couldn't figure it out and for some reason it really bothered her. She folded the photo and slid it into her phone case thinking she'd check it later.

Just as she closed the case her phone vibrated in her hand. She flipped the case open and checked the screen. Her heart stopped. She knew who it was. She may have deleted his name from her phone but every time he rang she knew it was him. Every time she declined his call she put another brick in the wall surrounding the darkness inside her. Nikki cancelled the call and glanced over at the clock. Nine am. Nikki headed for the shower. She better get her shit organized and get to the workshop before any of the brothers fucked shit up. Grown men and bikes were never a good idea without supervision.

Tex woke to the sound of running water and the smell of sex. He cracked one eye open and peered around the room. His bed sheets were twisted around and a bottle blond body lay in the bed next to him. Strewn across the room were various bits and pieces of clothing including a barely there lacy thong. Wait make that two lacy thongs. What the fuck did he do last night? He remembered arguing with Nikki again about that bastard.

She still refused to tell them who the sick asshole was that beat her bloody. Tex couldn't let it go. It killed him not being able to seek retribution for the injuries done to her. He wanted to find that bastard and take him apart piece by piece. The fact that he couldn't do anything about it left him

feeling frustrated, angry and useless. When you added to that the arguing with Nikki, it drove him to drink.

After their argument last night he had come back to the clubhouse with some of the boys. What had started out as a few drinks turned into a rager and he knew he'd downed way more alcohol than usual. The sound of water stopped and after a few seconds the door opened. Melanie stepped out of the bathroom still naked. He closed his eyes again mentally cursing himself. It was one thing to sleep with a piece of club ass it was another to sleep with that bitch.

He felt the bed shift with her weight and opened his eyes to see her crawling up the bed towards him.

"Morning big boy," her voice was the kinda rough that told you she was working her way towards throat cancer.

Sure it would've been sexy after several drinks but right now it just made his skin crawl. She leaned forward to kiss him and he quickly shoved his hand in her face to stop her.

"Morning. Now if you wouldn't mind collecting your clothes and your little friend here and getting out of my room. I've got shit to do."

She pulled her little pouty face bullshit and it made Tex's stomach churn.

"Are you sure you don't want another round?"

Oh he never wanted another round and even as drunk as he must've been he couldn't believe he even decided to go there in the first place.

"Pretty sure I can do without."

Tex got up out of the bed in a hurry flicking Melanie off him and onto the still sleeping body next to him.

The bottle blonde woke with a start, "Hey what the fuck?"

Melanie gave Tex daggers but didn't respond to his insult.

"C'mon Brenda we gotta go."

"What? Really?"

Brenda rubbed her eyes and made a very half assed attempt at sitting up. Honestly some people were so fucking pathetic and he was one

of them.

“I’m going for a shower and I expect both of you to be gone by the time I get out. Got it?”

He needed to scrub all traces of that dirty skank and her friend from his body and fast. He and Trace were pulling workshop duty with Nikki today and there was no way he was going in there smelling of that bitch.

“Don’t worry we’ll be gone,” Melanie replied trying to hustle her friend up and out of bed.

At least the bitch knew the score. He didn’t want to leave that skank unsupervised in his room but if he looked at her any longer he was in danger of puking.

“And if I find any of my shit missing you’ll be the one paying for it.”

Melanie shot him a dark look then turned back to her friend. Tex stomped off to the bathroom locking the door behind him, no reason to give the bitch any ideas.

Nikki rode into the compound on her Harley. She was getting back into the routine of her life before Sheila and before Cole. Just thinking his name had a shiver running down her spine and she didn’t like that, not one bit. Nikki was working the shop with Tex and Trace today and she was kind of dreading it after last night’s confrontation with Tex. They’d got into it big time over Cole. Despite what he’d done to her she couldn’t give him up to the boys. What you reap, you sow. That had definitely been the case with Cole. She’d known all along it was going to end badly for the both of them and in her mind she deserved no better than what she’d received.

Nikki parked up glancing around the empty forecourt. She’d arrived early in the hopes of ducking into the workshop and getting busy before either of the boys could corner her again. The club house door squeaked open catching her attention. Melanie walked out with one of her pathetic friends in tow. That bitch still made Nikki’s blood boil and she just couldn’t help but want to stomp the pavement over to her and punch her

right in her face. Melanie's friend was looking rather seedy struggling to put one foot in front of the other. Melanie on the other hand looked fresh from the shower her hair still wet. Looks like one of the boys or several showed them a good time last night. Melanie spotted Nikki and a smug smile spread across her face. Bitch.

She turned her attention back to her bike. As she placed her stuff into her saddle bags the clubhouse door squeaked again. Someone really needed to oil those hinges.

"Hey Tex thanks for last night. Brenda and I had a great time."

Nikki's head flew up to see Melanie blowing Tex a kiss and throwing him a little wave. She watched as Melanie turned back towards her.

"Hey Nikki," she gave Nikki a sweet smile.

Nikki had to fight hard not to go over there and give that skank the flogging she deserved. She felt the hum of the monster way down inside her. She would not let it out. Nikki turned away no longer able to look at Melanie's face and glanced at Tex. He was standing rigid by the door staring at Nikki. She couldn't believe he would sleep with that bitch. They weren't in a relationship and she didn't expect him not to sleep with people, but Melanie? Nikki despised that bitch and after the disrespect Melanie had shown her she expected that at least he, and Trace, would be freezing her out if none of the brothers were. She couldn't help but feel that maybe he was punishing her for her refusal to talk about Cole.

The boys were desperate to punish the person who hurt her and she was desperate to keep it from them. Last night's argument had been particularly heated and Nikki had felt the monster stir. She'd ended up slamming her bedroom door in his face and locking it behind her. She was locking him out as much as she was locking the monster in.

She'd already been dreading working with him today as it was. For him to stoop so low? She was so disgusted she couldn't even look at him. Nikki turned quickly and spotted Trace standing in the doorway of the

workshop. Shit just what she needed. She pounded the pavement with her boots and pushed straight passed him into the workshop.

Fuck. That's all Tex could think. That and how he was going to punish Melanie for being such a bitch. He saw the hurt in Nikki's face even if she masked it well. Why the hell did it have to be Melanie? He could've had anyone of those women last night but for some reason he'd ended up with her. He knew what it looked like too. It looked like he'd purposely sought out Melanie to punish Nikki for their argument last night and maybe he had.

He was angry at Nikki, frustrated at not being able to punish that bastard who hurt her but mostly he was hurt. He was hurt she wouldn't confide him now but he was also hurt she hadn't confided in him before. He'd thought he was that thing she needed, the one she could trust, that she could turn to. Instead she'd chosen to let some sick bastard she barely knew beat her. What did that say about the pair of them?

"Well done Brother!" Trace yelled at him the sarcasm in his comment obvious.

Like he needed to be told? Time to try some damage control. Although at this stage he wondered if it wasn't too late for them anyway. Tex crossed the forecourt towards the workshop.

"You really are a dickhead sometimes," Trace chastised him as he too pushed past him into the workshop.

He ignored Trace and kept moving into the office. There he found Nikki shuffling through some paper work.

"Ok so today we need to finish that bike for the Preacher."

So she was gonna ignore him.

"Ace?"

"The parts have come in for the custom job on that Night Train I don't care which one of you takes that one."

He tried again louder, "Ace?"

“I’m gonna take that rebuild on the pan head.”

This time Tex made sure he made himself heard, “Nikki?!”

She stopped fussing with the papers and moved over to the computer.

“What Tex? You wanna take the pan head?”

Jesus she could be so frustrating sometimes.

“No I do not want to take the rebuild on the fucking pan head.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

She glanced at him quickly then turned back to the computer screen.

“About what just happened out there?”

Nikki peered at the screen and started clicking on random things. She was really doing a half assed job of this nonchalance thing, he could tell.

“Look Tex you’re single you can do what you like. Who you sleep with is none of my god damn business same as who I sleep or slept with is none of yours. Now there’s a pan head out there calling my name so I’m going to get my gear on and get to work.”

She left her randomly clicked order form and ducked into the bathroom locking the door behind her.

This is what they’d been reduced to shouting matches, emotional warfare and locked doors. Tex took a step toward the bathroom but Trace grabbed his arm stopping him from pushing his case through the closed door.

“Leave it Brother. You’ve done enough damage. Let her work it out then talk to her later. And word to the wise you better freeze that skank Melanie out, the same way the rest of us are. Cos she just screwed you good and I don’t mean the time she spent on your dick.”

Tex sighed and hung his head. Trace was so right.

“Right, which job are you taking?”

Trace glanced out into the workshop.

“Better to put some distance between the two of you for today so you take Preacher’s bike it’s set up on the other side of the shop. I’ll take

the Night Train.”

Tex nodded and headed out into the shop.

Nikki waited until Trace and Tex’s voices had gone quiet. She hated this shit. She wanted to throw some stuff around, break something and scream the walls down but she couldn’t. She wasn’t giving in and going back to that place. She was all about keeping her shit tight. More like holding on to her shit by the tips of her fingers. She could feel the darkness smoldering away inside her just waiting for the right trigger, or the wrong one, to cause a major explosion.

She needed to shove that shit deep and refocus, try to get her life back. The last thing she needed was to lose her shit. If it happened at the wrong moment it could cost her everything, the club, the boys, her life. She needed to find a way to soothe the beast and to control it. Her thoughts immediately went to Cole. She couldn’t do that anymore either. Nikki screwed her eyes shut and took several deep breaths. She buried those feelings behind the wall and opened her eyes. Now she needed to get busy and quick.

Chapter 3

Nikki could hear the music coming from inside the club as she exited the workshop. The boys had closed up shop and left a couple of hours ago. Trace had tried to drag her out but one look at Tex and she needed more time out. She'd buried herself in that engine rebuild until it had leached most of the energy out of her. Now she was ready to go home. Instead she was headed across to the club house because if she didn't make an appearance there'd be questions asked and she just couldn't put up with it.

A cold wind blew across the forecourt waking her up some. A movement at the corner of the clubhouse caught her eye. Nikki glimpsed a cut as someone slipped into the shadows around the side of the building. Nothing unusual about seeing a brother wandering around the clubhouse but this felt weird. Maybe it was the unnatural stealth of the movement or the shiver that moved through her body but something was off.

Instead of heading for the door Nikki ducked around the opposite side of the building. As she neared the rear corner of the clubhouse she heard Reaper's voice.

"So what's the results?"

There was silence and then he spoke again, "How much longer will I be able to shoot?"

A short pause, "And riding?"

What was he talking about?

"Right. You sure there's no other explanation?"

A string of profanities poured from Reaper's mouth. A loud thud like fist on brick accompanied his rant.

Nikki leaned back against the wall and listened as his footsteps moved away from her and the side door of the clubhouse slammed shut. She was thoroughly confused. What could be wrong with him that he wouldn't be able to shoot or ride? She hadn't noticed he was unwell but

then why would she? It's not like she socialized with him or even worked with him really. Her phone buzzing drew her attention.

*Hey Baby girl get your head out of that engine and come inside.
I'm so lonely in here even Tex is starting to look attractive*

It would appear from that text the boys were quite a few drinks ahead of her already. She had better get in there and show her face or they'd send a search party out for her. She sighed and pocketed her phone. Time to get in among the chaos.

Trace sat at the bar bourbon and coke in hand. He watched as Tex sunk himself to the bottom of another bottle. He had some skank rubbing herself all over him. That was not a great look after this morning but at least it wasn't Melanie. That's what happened when emotions ran deep, sometimes you got carried away.

A cold breeze swept through the room bringing Trace's attention to the main door. Nikki stepped in to the room. God she was beautiful. Even though she was rolling in her cut she never looked like a bikie moll. Her legs stretched up from her ankle boots to her short tight black skirt and Trace wanted to wrap them around his body. Her blouse was light and floaty and rather feminine for her. The top buttons were left undone revealing the creamy valley of her cleavage. His mind filled with images of his mouth on her skin and he knew he couldn't wait any longer. Tonight was the night.

She spotted him and headed straight for him a soft smile on her face.

"From grease monkey to sex goddess in thirty seconds," he exclaimed as she perched on the chair next to him.

Her smile brightened. "It took a bit longer than thirty seconds. I was already on my way over when you messaged me."

"You want a drink?" he asked her.

"Sure."

Trace flagged the bar bitch to grab Nikki a drink and when he turned back he noticed her attention was elsewhere.

Trace followed her line of sight and spotted Tex. The bird he was with earlier was now working his lap despite Tex's obvious disinterest. He gave it five minutes before she was out of Tex's lap and on her ass on the floor.

"He didn't mean to hurt you, you know?"

"I know. He doesn't think before he acts," she shrugged, "It's just him."

Her gaze came back to him and he could detect the hurt hiding behind those beautiful eyes. It was always there. Some days it was less obvious than others but it never really went away. He wanted to rescue her from it. But he couldn't do it on his own. He needed to get that idiot to pull his head out of his ass because the only way they were going to bring Nikki back was if they worked together. The two of them had to look at this thing between them and Nikki from a different angle. Right now though, it was about him and her.

Trace reached up and caressed her cheek gently. His soft and gentle touch was a familiar relief. Nikki closed her eyes hypnotized by the repetitive stroke of his fingers on her skin.

"Come to bed with me?" His words were soft and seductive.

Nikki's eyes screwed tightly shut. She needed every ounce of herself to keep her shit locked up tight and she just didn't know if she had anything left for anyone else.

"I don't think I can give you what you want Trace," she answered him her voice full of regret.

He continued to stroke her face softly and Nikki felt his body heat shift closer to her.

"I'm not asking for anything other than this moment. Let me take you away for a little while."

She wanted to go away for a while, to leave all the shit behind and spend a night back in her old life. Trace's lips brushed gently over the skin of her neck, his breath caressing her flesh. She wanted so badly to give in and let his gentle touch take her to another place and time.

"You need this Nikki."

She needed a lot of things.

"I need this," the longing in his voice came out loud and clear.

She'd never been able to say no to Trace or Tex. Not if it was something they truly needed. She wasn't going to start now.

Before she could answer him Trace's lips gently brushed against hers. His tongue swept out tentatively seeking entrance to her mouth. She parted her lips and his tongue stroked against hers slowly and purposefully. The room around them began to fade away but more than that the constant hum of the monster deep inside her seemed to dim. Her hands travelled from her lap up to his face and into his hair. She clung to him praying this moment of peace would last.

Suddenly he stood between her legs his arms encircling her waist. Nikki felt the press of his body against hers. The evidence of his need rested against her sex. He rocked into her applying a delicious amount of pressure to her clit. She moaned quietly into his mouth and his hold tightened on her. Trace's lips disappeared and the chaos around them invaded her senses once again.

"Is that a yes?" he asked.

Was there any other answer to that question?

"Yes."

Trace helped her from her stool and lead Nikki through the crowd. As they were moving through the party Nikki felt eyes on her. Her gaze went straight to Tex. He was trying his best to discreetly dislodge the slag on his lap. She was too drunk and too busy trying her hardest to fuck him with her clothes on to take any notice of his efforts and he was clearly becoming frustrated. The next second Tex upended the bird and she landed on her ass on the floor. Nikki shook her head and turned away.

She set her gaze to the rest of the room. Just before they entered the hallway she caught a glimpse of Reaper. He was standing in the far corner of the bar away from everyone. His eyes seemed to be on her for only a second before he returned his attention to his drink. As he lifted the bottle to his lips Nikki was sure she caught the slightest tremor in his hand. Then they were out of sight.

Trace led them to her room and closed the door behind them. Nikki watched as he removed his boots and his cut laying it on the dresser. He threw her that dazzling hundred watt grin and in spite of everything it still had the power to still her heart. She couldn't help but grin back at him. Then his shirt was gone and her gaze was refocused on the lean muscle of his chest and stomach. He had the physique of an athlete. Sleek and toned with the ripple of abs and a hint of the v.

Trace stepped forward and swept her hair back from her face. With one hand cupping her cheek and the other at her waist he resumed his gentle slow kiss from earlier. Nikki let her eyes close as she began to respond to Trace. He guided her backwards gently lowering her to the bed. As her head hit the soft cushioning of her mattress she felt her shoes disappear and Trace's mouth disengaged from hers.

"Lay back and relax baby girl."

He nuzzled at her neck as he slowly began to unbutton her shirt. His mouth traced a path down to her cleavage where he nibbled at the swell of her breasts. Nikki could feel the warmth of his breath through her lace bra as his mouth hovered over her. She knew if she opened her eyes he'd be watching her face intently with those baby blues. He'd be waiting for her to react, to give him an indication of the right path. Nikki took a deep breath forcing her breasts to rise up towards Trace's waiting mouth. That was the indication he'd been waiting for. His mouth latched onto her nipple and suckled at it through the lace.

As the wet lace rasped across her nipple Nikki let out the breath she'd been holding. The rush of air was accompanied by a slight moan.

"Music to my ears," she could hear the smile in Trace's voice.

His mouth travelled down her stomach while his fingers busied themselves with the button and zip on her skirt. He slid the material down her legs discarding it somewhere on her bedroom floor. Trace began to massage her tired muscles starting at her calves and working his way up. The movements of his hands were accompanied by light teasing kisses.

Nikki's body began to soften under Trace's touch. Some of the tension she now carried with her every day began to leach out of her. She forced her mind to empty and to concentrate on his touch alone. His mouth made contact with her inner thigh in a warm wet teasing kiss and began to make its way up. The ache inside her built as he teased her. His warm breath caressed her moist heat and she sucked in a breath anticipating the contact she was craving. His mouth moved away over to her other thigh to start the climb again.

Nikki's breaths came quicker as Trace's kisses moved closer to their target. His fingers teased the edge of her panties finding purchase on her skin and opening her up. She waited for him to sweep the material aside but he didn't. Instead his mouth locked onto her over the lace. His lips and tongue sought out her steadily throbbing knot of nerves. Trace used his mouth to drag the lace across her clit. The rough sensation added a little sting to his movements. Something caught in her mind, something about that sharp sting.

Nikki rocked into his mouth forcing more pressure and friction between her clit, the lace and Trace's mouth. He moaned against her. A sound like that of a man enjoying a well-earned meal. It drove her to move her hips more urgently, seeking the relief she desired. Trace's hands shifted to her hips in an effort to still her movements

"Slow down baby girl. We'll get there. Just relax and let it happen."

Nikki held still but Trace didn't return his mouth to its former task. Instead it travelled back up her body till it found her own. Trace gently lifted her into a sitting position and he reached for her shirt pushing it off Nikki's shoulders. She felt the material slide down her back. God her back. The scars. Her mind flicked back to that moment and she instantly stiffened.

Trace felt Nikki freeze up on him. He had no idea what he'd done wrong. Suddenly she moved pulling her shirt back on.

"Whoa slow down Nikki. What's happening here?"

He grabbed both her arms halting her hasty movements.

"The shirt," her words came out in barely a whisper.

What the hell was she worried about her shirt for?

"What about it?" he prompted her gently.

"It needs to stay on", she paused, "My back. I don't want you to see it."

Trace's blood began to boil. Her scars. That sick bastard. Trace wanted to rip the guy limb from limb, whoever he was, for making her ashamed to share her body with him. He stared at Nikki as she looked everywhere but at him. Trace didn't care about the scars. All he cared about was giving her the love she needed, that she deserved.

"I don't care about the scars Nikki."

She continued to avoid his eyes. "You always talk about my skin. How perfect it is and now," her sentence broke off.

Didn't that just make him feel like an asshole. She was right. He had always made a big deal about her beautiful, flawless creamy skin. But the scars didn't change how he felt about her or how he felt about her body.

"Your skin is still perfect," he ran his fingers down her thigh.

"It's soft and delicate," he leaned in to her neck, "and delicious."

Trace tasted her skin with warm wet nibbling kisses and he felt her soften slightly.

He eased back from her and placing his hand under chin he forced her to look at him.

"I don't care about the scars Nikki. I want to touch every inch of your skin but if you want to we can leave the shirt on."

She relaxed a little more.

"But I want you to take the bra off. Can you do that for me?"

She nodded and slowly removed it without taking the shirt off. How women managed that he'd ever know.

His gaze caught on the rise and fall of her beautiful breasts. Her dusty pink nipples stood at attention begging him to suck them. He wanted so badly to latch on to one sweep her panties aside and bury himself deep inside her. For her sake he needed to take it slow. He wanted to show her that she didn't need what that bastard had done to her. This was what she needed. He wanted to prove that they could be together like this again. Trace brought his mouth back to hers gently coaxing her to succumb to him with gentle strokes of his tongue against hers.

He lay her back down onto the mattress and as she began to respond he broke off the kiss and went in search of those rosy buds that begged for his attention earlier. Trace slowly began to stroke her body his fingers working her muscles. He licked her nipple then blew a cold breath across it, watching as it hardened further. Nikki sucked in a quick breath. As he covered it with his mouth he had to remind himself to take it easy, treating it to lazy licks and soft sucks.

Nikki had to work harder to relax. The lingering memory of her scars stirred the monster and it pushed at the edges of the box she'd trapped it in. She pushed back desperate to keep it locked up tight inside her. She managed to force it back down into its little enclosure. A small victory in a world full of losses.

Her mind refocused on his mouth and the alternating slow circle and quick flick of his tongue on her nipple. She sighed and closed her eyes. Her hands found their way into Trace's hair where she stroked his scalp and played with his soft thick locks. They followed his head lower. Her panties finally disappeared and his mouth pressed against her naked sex. His tongue continued a similar pattern of slow circles and quick flicks. Trace stoking a slow burning fire that warmed her from the inside. Her body tingled all over and her chest swelled with emotion. Nikki hadn't felt this in a long time.

The way Trace could work her emotions along with her body had always perplexed her.

Trace listened to every sigh and whimper that came from Nikki's mouth. He felt each and every one of them in his cock. He lapped at her slowly reveling in the taste of her. It had been so long since he'd had her like this, since he'd had her in any way, and he was not going to waste the opportunity. He slid his tongue down away from her clit dipping it inside her. Her fingers dug into his scalp and he knew what she wanted. He slid two fingers into her slick passage and returned his tongue to her slippery nub. She moaned and clenched around his fingers. God he wanted to slide his cock inside her and feel that clench.

Trace worked his fingers in and out in time with his tongue increasing the speed and pressure of both, just enough to push her higher.

"Trace," his name came out of Nikki's mouth half husky moan half pleading demand.

He knew it was time. He found that knot of nerves inside her and massaged it while pressing his tongue flat against her. He felt the quaking start, her muscles fluttering around his fingers. Unconsciously his hips began grinding into the mattress mimicking the movement of his fingers.

Her body squeezed tight then exploded in a series of tremors. A flood of liquid flowed around his fingers. Trace didn't stop. He continued working her drawing out Nikki's orgasm till she was out of breath and barely lucid. Then he withdrew his fingers and knelt up spreading her fluids over the head of his penis. He was about to slide inside heaven and the knowledge nearly had him coming in his hand. As he took in the beautiful broken woman laying before him his heart stuttered. The love he had for her was so intense he would do anything for even share her if he had to.

Nikki floated on a cloud of ecstasy barely aware of her own body. That familiar sweet burn had become a fierce fire at Trace's hands and mouth. When it burned through her it left not a piece of her untouched. Not a piece of her except that box hiding away the darkness inside her. Suddenly she felt Trace slide inside her incredibly wet entrance. He hissed out a breath through his teeth as he advanced further into her. The sound went straight from her ears to her clit causing her muscles to clench suddenly.

"Uunnhh. Christ baby girl don't do that to me."

She wished Trace's request were that easy to follow but it felt too good to have him inside her. Familiar, beautiful, right and oh so fucking sweet. This is what she'd been missing, what she'd been depriving herself of. His body came down on top of hers and her arms went around him. His mouth sought hers again. She lost herself in him, all her senses drowning in Trace. He tasted of sweet bourbon and spicy salsa and he smelt of grease, musky sweat and Acqua di gio. His sharp intakes of breath and low moans filled her ears and she ran her fingers over his body as if trying to memorize every inch of his skin. The world became nothing but the pair of them.

He worked himself in and out of her slowly stoking that fire until she was writhing underneath him. The sweet burn that had begun as small spark was now a roaring fire warming her from the inside. His fingertips fluttered over clit and it was enough to tip the balance in her favour. She exploded shattering into a million pieces as she called out his name. He followed shortly thereafter and her name on his lips sounded like a hallelujah.

When all the pieces of Nikki finally found their way back into her body she felt like something had shifted inside her. She felt as though she were a new person somehow. Like that weak little box where she'd hidden her darkness was suddenly reinforced with thick steel and locked up tighter than Fort Knox. Maybe she could do this? Maybe she could get her life back?

Chapter 4

Nikki woke the next morning wrapped in Trace's arms. She wasn't covered in the sweat of fear and she didn't have the echoes of a nightmare rolling around her brain. She searched inside herself expecting to find the hum of the monster buried deep inside her. Nothing. Maybe the key to taming the monster had been to erase Cole. Trace's gentle touch had certainly gone a long way towards erasing the flesh memory of Cole's hands on her skin. Even as she had that thought she wondered how long the peace would last.

Nikki shifted slightly and glanced down at herself. She was still wearing her blouse and she thanked god for that small miracle. She really need to speak to Van, the club's tattoo artist, about getting the marks covered. If she had any hope of keeping the monster at bay she needed to remove its master's marks from her body. She pulled her blouse closer around her and wriggled out of Trace's hold.

"Where you goin' Baby girl?" Trace's voice was hoarse from sleep.

"I was thinking of taking a shower," she replied as she grabbed some clothes from her draws.

"I like where your train of thought is going," he said as he shifted around.

"Shit. Is that the time? We slept half the day away," Trace exclaimed, "might have to pass on the shower because if I climb in with you we won't be getting out for hours."

Nikki chucked her clothes on the bench then turned to look at Trace. He had that cheeky smile going as his eyes wandered lazily up her body. Nikki couldn't help but tease him. She posed provocatively in the doorway, her shirt hanging open to reveal one of her breasts and her sex.

"That's a shame 'cause I was kind of hoping you could help me with this particularly dirty spot," she teased.

"What dirty spot?" he asked.

“It’s right down here,” she replied sliding her fingers down her body and brushing them against her lower lips.

Trace’s eyes were totally fixated on her fingers.

“But you’re right it’s not such a good idea.”

The second the words were out of her mouth Trace jumped out of bed.

“I’ve changed my mind.”

He leapt across the room but Nikki was already closing the door and had it locked before he reached it.

“Tease,” he called through the door.

“Love you too Trace,” Nikki replied.

“Love you back Baby girl,” came his soft words.

Trace.

When Nikki exited the bathroom a bit later she found Trace sitting on her bed. His face held all sorts of questions. This had been the conversation she didn’t want to have. It was the reason why she had hesitated last night. Now she was on the other side of her choice and the conversation was looking totally different.

Trace opened his mouth to speak but Nikki cut him off.

“I wish we could go back to before all this shit happened but we can’t,” she watched as Trace’s head dropped, “If we are going to do this thing then we need to leave the past in the past and start from scratch, no expectations.”

Trace’s head came back up, his eyes hopeful.

“I can’t tell you things will be the same as they were but I can tell you I’m done with the running. I’m ready.”

Trace moved across the room picking up something from her dresser. He turned back to her with that hundred watt smile plastered across his face.

“Welcome back Baby girl. We’ve been waiting for you.”

He held her out to her, an invitation back to into her life and she gladly accepted it from him. She pulled it around herself like another layer

of armour and she knew she was ready to venture back among the chaos of her world.

“Now we really need to get you back out there and up to speed with all the shit that’s going on around here.”

Trace threw his arm around her shoulders and escorted her out into the main room.

As they entered the space Nikki’s gaze fell on Tex. He was sitting in the corner booth looking a little worse for wear. Their eyes met briefly before he quickly turned his head toward the window.

“Go let a brother off the hook hey?” Trace suggested nudging her in Tex’s direction.

Let him off the hook? For some reason Nikki felt like she was the one who needed letting off the hook. Trace headed to the bar as some of the brothers gave him shit about coming out of the room with Nikki. She simply flipped the bird at them in response and headed over to Tex.

Tex stared out the window at nothing. He was hung over but more than that he was hurting. He was hurting because someone had hurt the woman he loved and there wasn’t a damn thing he could do about it. And now he was the one causing her hurt and he hated himself for it. She didn’t need the bullshit he was putting her through. He’d caught her eye for a moment and he’d seen the confidence and calm returned to her. She was carrying herself tall and facing outward for the first time instead of being hunched inward. He wanted that look to stay there.

He felt Nikki’s presence but didn’t acknowledge her as she sat next to him.

“Hey,” she greeted him softly.

Time to grovel.

“I’m sorry,” the words he’d been thinking tumbled out of her mouth.

“What for?” he asked in surprise.

“For driving you insane, for dodging you, for hiding shit from you, for everything.”

This was not what he was expecting at all.

“You don’t need to apologise Ace. If anyone owes an apology it’s me. The things I said and the way I’ve been acting,” he paused trying to gather his thoughts, “I just can’t stand sitting around doing nothing. I need him to pay for what he did, to pay for hurting you.”

Nikki’s hand came up stopping him in his tracks.

“I can’t rehash that shit Tex. It’s in the past and that is where I want it to stay,” the determination in her voice came through loud and clear, “You need to let it go, for my sake.”

That last little comment was meant to be the crusher. For her sake. He would do anything for her and he knew that she held that knowledge firmly in her palm with that comment.

“I understand that it’s hard for you to do that but it is the best thing for everyone, you, me, the club, that all that shit stays right where it is and never comes up again.”

It drove him mad not to be able to put his hands on that sick bastard and torture him. He wanted to make that asshole scream the same way Nikki had when Doc had treated her back. He could still hear her agonizing cries. The sound was burned into his memory forever.

“You want to bury it? Fine, but I’m telling you now if I even suspect that something like this is happening again, there will be no way you can stop me from taking care of shit.”

And he meant that shit. Nikki nodded in response.

“Right, you two done the whole kiss and make up thing?” Trace asked as he approached them.

“No kiss yet but there’s plenty of time for that later,” he replied, winking at Nikki, “right now I think we need to get Ace up to speed with club business.”

Nikki breathed a sigh of relief as Tex changed the subject. When she approached him she couldn't get a read on his mood. The minute his gaze locked with hers she knew how she needed to approach him. Sure he'd hurt her and she could see the remorse in his eyes but she could also see the hurt and anger there. She'd dragged them along on this rollercoaster right alongside her. While she didn't expect those feelings to disappear straight away she knew that acknowledging how she wronged them was a good way to start.

"You've been missing a lot of action Baby girl. The last few shipments have picked up tails and we've had to make some major changes to the trucking routes. They've fired a few shots but nothing successful."

Tex took over, "They're testing us, looking for weak spots. So now we're not just putting on extra protection we're also having to scout ahead of the run and man the route itself. We don't seem to be able to shake them."

Issues with the shipments had started after Sheila had been killed. The brothers had been attacked by a group of men not long ago, a premature attempt without a lot of thought or success. Maybe they were trying to steal the guns for sale. Maybe they were trying to steal the Soldiers business by proving the club couldn't safely courier the goods. Whatever their reasons this was not good for the club.

Tex lowered his voice, "Seems like every time we make a change they are on us. It's almost like they know our moves before we make 'em."

Nikki's eyes went wide at that revelation. There was no way in hell they had a rat. The club was solid and so was every member in it.

"I don't like what you're suggesting," she told Tex.

"We don't like it either Baby girl. But the fact remains that these guys have to be getting their intel from somewhere and we sure as shit ain't broadcasting the shit on the airwaves," Trace responded.

This was bad.

"That's not the only problem we got," Tex paused a moment, "Someone's been loading the Crow's streets with scumbag dealers and they've been slowly leaking into our territory."

That is one thing the MC would not tolerate, drugs. They didn't traffic drugs, they didn't deal drugs and they didn't allow junkies as members. You had a drug habit you were out and you were out in bad standing. That was some serious shit in their world. They also didn't allow that shit to touch their streets or infect their neighborhoods. You did not deal drugs on Soldiers turf because if you did the Reaper would greet you swiftly.

"What are we doing about that?" Nikki asked.

"We're trying to find out the source but we are either running into a wall of silence or these guys genuinely don't know who they are dealing for." Trace explained.

Now that rang alarm bells in her head. There was one man who operated like that.

"Bridges," the name hissed out through her clenched teeth.

The name made her blood boil. She took a few deep breaths and calmed herself. Getting crazy was not going to help anyone.

"That's our theory."

If he was behind the drugs then he was probably behind the attacks on the gun shipments. This shit was getting messy. She wished she had the whole picture. All she had were snippets like her mother's death, the threat to the shipments, the drugs, Lenny and the niners. It was all connected to Bridges somehow.

"There are too many links to Bridges now to ignore it anymore. There's a lot of questions we never asked you that we should've asked before. You need to tell us everything about Sheila, Lenny, Black, Bridges. The whole lot even if you think it's insignificant."

She would share but only if they did. She was not being kept out the loop any longer.

"I will tell you everything but you need to do the same for me. No more hiding things."

They boy's body language was tense and she knew they didn't want to give up protecting her yet. They would have to.

"Agreed," Tex answered.

"Everything," Nikki demanded.

"Everything," he agreed.

"I went in to Sheila's and found her in the bedroom. Black and Roach were still in the house. They bailed me up in the bedroom. I grabbed my old gun and I shot Black's brother and then I killed Roach and before he died he told me Bridges had sent them," she ran through the event as quickly as possible.

No need to poke the monster with a stick.

"Did they say anything else to you? Either of them?" Trace questioned.

Nikki thought back to the conversation. There was nothing that stood out.

Nothing except, "When I made a move towards him I remember him saying 'A brave little thing are we? So more like your father then.' It made me think that it had more to do with Reaper than Sheila."

"That fits with Reaper's story as to why they struck," Tex replied.

"Maybe, but I don't get why they'd pick Sheila as retribution. She didn't have anything to do with the club anymore and the club wasn't exactly hurt by it."

"We think there's more to it than that but we'll get to that later," he explained, "Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"What about Lenny?"

That was a subject that was intertwined with Cole. How was she gonna divulge everything without divulging everything?

"Lenny said nothing to me about Black, Bridges or the niners. This thing with him was personal, not business."

"C'mon Ace there's more to it than that," Tex coaxed.

"You already know about the niners links. He also had links to Black. Alex placed a tracker on Black's car the night we were at the Crows meet," her comment left the pair of them focusing on her intently.

Yeah she may have forgotten to divulge that info.

"I know Black made a stop on the way home from that meet and it was Roach's house."

Trace nodded his head, “Yeah he turned up at Lenny’s house while Tex and I were scoping it out.”

That was news to her. They scoped out Lenny’s house? There had been no mention of a house in the info Cole had given her.

“Didn’t know he had a house.”

“Big waterfront joint in a group of properties Black owns,” Trace answered.

“So wait, Alex has Black under surveillance?” It was Tex who asked the question.

“Yeah, kind of. He’s watching him from a distance. Black’s too smart and a tail would be way too obvious to him so he installed a tracking device.”

“Jesus Christ we could’ve been tracking this asshole from day dot,” Tex complained.

“Do you think he could’ve been the ninja?” Trace asked.

“Nah don’t think so. That guy moved with way too much precision,” Tex answered.

“What Ninja?” Nikki asked confused.

“When we were at Lenny’s this guy all dressed in black was sneaking around inside. The guy was a pro. He moved so silently and stealthily that I barely noticed him. We spotted him again as he was leaving,” Tex paused a moment, “It was weird because he spotted us but showed no reaction. It was like he was almost expecting us to be there.”

Nikki got the feeling that was about Cole. The more she thought about it the more it made sense. Lenny had that video of the two of them with Lucy and there’s no way Cole would’ve sent Lenny to his grave without that evidence back in his pocket. So Roger had probably snuck in there to find it.

“Weird,” was all Nikki said.

“You’re sure there’s nothing else?” Trace prompted quietly.

Nothing else? There was plenty more. But how much did she say.

“I think Black knows I had something to do with his brother disappearing.”

Tex raised an eyebrow at her.

“The way he touched my scar and asked about it and the way he showed too much interest in me at the meet,” she paused.

Could she mention Lenny’s words without implicating Cole?

“And now that I think about it Lenny said something about how bringing me down would be a bonus for his friends,” she added quickly.

Tex scrubbed a hand through his hair. It was an anxious habit he’d had all his life.

“Jesus Ace. This is shit we needed to know.”

Did he think she didn’t know that?

“That’s all I’ve got Tex, I swear. Everything I know, you know. That’s all of it,” she reassured him.

Tex didn’t want to question her word so, even though his gut told him there was more he kept his mouth shut.

"We know that Lenny is intertwined with Black. It's the why I don't get?"

He couldn’t figure out how these two came to have a relationship or what that relationship was.

"They have a common enemy," Nikki stated.

"Who? You?"

Nikki nodded at him, "Let's assume that Black somehow knows I killed his brother. Lenny wants me dead. Lenny tells his brother, his brother's a niner and the niners work for Bridges. Jason Black obviously works for Bridges."

He couldn’t deny the logic although there was no way Black could know that Nikki killed his brother.

"Let's take his brother out of the equation. If we assume it's Bridges behind these attacks on the shipments and the drugs leaking onto our streets, you've still got a common thread between Lenny and Black. Who would make the best target for a definitive declaration if war?"

Tex could definitely see the logic there too. Nikki was the daughter of their man-at-arms, the surrogate daughter of their president and the darling of their club. Plus it didn’t hurt that she was also a woman and also

the only woman their VP had ever loved. They would not be going to war with Bridges, they would be bringing hell itself down on the man's head.

"You would."

"Exactly."

"What did you find out while you were snooping around Lenny's place?"

"We didn't get a chance to get inside so not much. Except there's no way Lenny could afford the digs he was living in. The houses in the estate belong to Black so we know Black was paying Lenny's way for some reason," he answered her question, "Black rocked up while we were there but we had to cut out, the boss was calling."

Trace broke his silent contemplation, "I still don't see why Black would need Lenny to kill you. Surely if Bridges wanted to start a war, then Black would want us to know it was him. He wouldn't need to hide behind Lenny. If it was revenge for his brother, maybe he wouldn't want to draw attention to Bridges, but he'd have no way of knowing it was you that killed him. No way."

They were going round in circles here.

"Look none of this is concrete and none of it fits quite right. We're just going round in circles," Tex stated.

"You think it's Bridges hitting the shipments right?" Nikki asked, "And you think he's behind the drugs? So why hasn't he approached us? He sent Black out to talk to Bull yet here we sit none the wiser."

That's something Tex had considered. Why hadn't Bridges approached the club? Instead he was attempting to poison their streets and take their business from them without so much as a warning or an ultimatum.

"I don't know why he hasn't come to us," he replied.

"Because he doesn't want to work with us. He wants to destroys us slowly, piece by piece. The question is why?" Nikki frowned, "It feels personal Tex."

She was right. If he wanted to take over the business why not just do what he did with the Crows and offer a deal? It felt like a level above and beyond business.

“What about the hits on the shipments? Any clear indication it is him? Any messages? Anything?” Nikki was clearly as frustrated as Tex was.

“That first hit. We managed to get hold of one of the guy’s. He said he worked for someone and no one,” Trace explained.

“That fits Bridges,” Nikki nodded.

What was that other thing he said? Tex wracked his brain trying to remember the phrase.

“What did he say when you asked him how he knew about the shipment?”

Trace shrugged in reply to Tex’s question.

“Et tu Brutus or something like that.”

Nikki knew that phrase. He meant et tu Brute. William Shakespeare’s play Julius Caesar. They were the last words of a dying man to his traitorous best friend. Was he trying to say that someone had betrayed them? That a club member would turn on them like that was just beyond belief for Nikki. She knew that explaining what it meant would only support the boy’s traitor theory. She said nothing.

"So you've been keeping me out of the loop on a lot of things?" She asked.

She wasn't angry about it. The boys were only doing what they thought was best.

"We were waiting for you to come back from that place you were in," Trace explained quietly.

Nikki nodded her head. She was back from that place and she needed back into her life.

"Well I'm back now and I want in on everything."

Tex and Trace both nodded in agreement.

"We're with you on that one Baby girl but it's not going to be easy. Some of the old boys are saying you're a liability."

She should’ve known that was coming. It wasn't the first time she'd experienced resistance to her being an active member of the club.

Her first steps in were through a cracked window, a back door, the shadows of a dirty alley. The boys refused to let her in so she would sneak in. After saving their asses a few times they stopped shutting the door in her face and just left it wide open. The brothers loved her and they respected her, so they didn't protest. Instead they put her on protection for the girls and they let the boys take her along wherever they saw fit.

Her patch on the other hand had been harder won. The boys put her in that prospect vest after much debate. She'd had to work three times as hard as any other prospect. She 'manned up' and did the crappy jobs, she still worked the garage in between everything else, she turned a blind eye to all the shit that went on at the clubhouse and she'd learnt to hold her drink better than most men. She copped things the other prospects didn't, like sexual passes from some of the brothers. She blew them off with some witty reply and if someone took it too far she used her MMA training to secure a hold on them or drop them to the floor. After a couple of those they gave up.

Even then she wore that vest twice as long as some of the other prospects. Trying to get chauvinistic bikers to patch a woman was like trying to pull teeth. She had to get them all on side one by one. In the end she'd received her patch though she had known some of the brothers had voted it under pressure from the boys and King. She knew she'd been called into question again when Alex came on the scene. He was a cop and she was a crim. She'd already proven she could keep her mouth shut but a lot of that was conveniently forgotten when he was around.

So now they were at it again and she could understand why. Her personal shit had leaked so far over into club shit even she would be calling herself into question.

"It's not the first time and it probably won't be the last time. Put me back in the mix and I'll prove to them I have my shit locked up tight," she stated.

"We got no doubt Ace," Tex's words held nothing but confidence. She had no doubt either.

Chapter 5

Nikki woke up to the sound of knocking. She rolled over and glanced at the clock. Four pm. She cursed out loud. She really shouldn't have slept that long. Hopefully he hadn't already. The knocking at the door sounded again and Nikki could hear the boys stirring. She dragged herself out of bed to the front door.

Nikki peered through the peephole. All she could make out was a large bunch of flowers and what looked like a delivery guy's shorts. Nikki frowned. This dude clearly had the wrong address. She opened the door.

"Hi. I'm looking for a Nikki Jones," the delivery guy said.

"Um, I'm Nikki," she replied.

Who the hell would've brought her flowers?

"Right can you sign here please?" He asked wiggling his clipboard at her.

She signed the paper then took the giant mass of roses from the delivery guy. She placed the flowers on her kitchen table and plucked the card from its little holder.

"Who bought you flowers?" Trace asked as he wandered passed her to the coffee machine.

"It obviously wasn't you then?"

Trace shook his head. Nikki glanced down the hall to Tex's room where he slept soundly. It definitely wouldn't have been him. Tex was a lot of things but he definitely was not the flowers type. She slid the little card out of the envelope and flipped it over. There was no name just a web address.

This had to be the weirdest thing she had ever received. She moved into her bedroom and grabbed her phone typing in the address. It took her to an audio file and asked for a password to access the file. Nikki checked the card again for a password. There was nothing on the back but the web

address. The front of the card had the insignia for the florist and that was it. Maybe if she typed in the name of the florist.

Nikki entered the name into the password request and the audio file booted up.

“Hello Angel.”

Nikki froze. The phone slipped from her hand and hit the carpet with a soft thud. God, that voice. It reached right down inside her and threatened to unlock the monster from its prison.

“I wanted to do this face to face but I haven’t been able to get near you. What I did,” Cole's voice cracked and then his speech paused, “God, I hurt you Angel. I hurt you so badly and I will never forgive myself for that. I wanted a chance to show you how sorry I am, to beg your forgiveness. Please Nikki I need to see you.”

He wanted to see her? The darkness inside her rattled its cage furiously and growled ferociously a demand to be let out and taken to its master.

“Ace are you ok?” Tex asked from her doorway.

His voice broke Nikki from her trance and she dropped to the floor scrambling for her phone.

“This whole time I thought it was I that owned you but in truth it is you who owns me. I love you Angel,” Cole admitted through the speaker as Nikki fumbled with her phone.

“Please meet me at,” Nikki cut the audio file off there and stared at the floor in front of her.

A battle began to rage inside her between the darkness and her will. She could not let it out. Damn Cole. Damn him and that vulnerable boy quality to his voice, because she knew if she looked closer she'd find that not only had his call tugged at the monster it had tugged at her heart too.

Tex growled audibly forcing her to look up. His eyes held something like pure fire and the darkness inside her paid some very unwanted attention to it.

“He called you?” Tex's growled question brought Trace to her door.

"That sick bastard had the audacity to call you and tell you how much he loved you?" Tex's voice was filled with dark hatred and unconsciously a shiver of the good kind slid through her as the monster inside her tested the walls of its prison. Nikki quickly tore her eyes away from him and looked back at the floor. Her heart beat faster and her breaths came quicker. A pulse began to throb between her legs. God, what was she doing?

All three of their phones beeped in the pause after his question. Nikki knew what that was. It was King calling them in and just in the nick of time too. She screwed her eyes shut and took several deep breaths to calm herself. It was enough of a reminder to drag her back to reality. She couldn't risk Cole sneaking back into her life and turning it upside down again. Nikki closed off the audio file and deleted it from her browser history. Then she collected the card and stood up pushing past the boys and into the kitchen.

Tex could feel his anger threatening to boil over. Why couldn't that prick just leave her alone? He'd done enough damage already and if Tex could only get his hands on the guy he'd return the favour and then some. He watched in silence as Nikki walked out into the kitchen. She scooped up the flowers from the kitchen table and walked out the back door. Where the hell was she going?

Both he and Trace followed her outside and watched as Nikki unceremoniously dumped the flowers into one of the fire drums in the backyard and doused the lot with fire starter. As she picked up a lighter from the nearby table Tex couldn't help but feel a little better. She held a little florists card up to the flame and once it caught she tossed that into the drum also. As the flames took off with a woosh Nikki turned back towards them.

"Let's go. We got shit to do," she told them as she pushed back passed them into the house.

Tex felt a wave of relief wash over him. Nikki wasn't curled up in a ball on the floor crying and she wasn't running out to meet up with the guy. Maybe their plan would work. He didn't have time to contemplate that right now. They had church and then they had a long list of places to search for Black.

It was the first time she'd been in that room for a couple of months. She was nervous about facing them all in there but she wasn't going to let it show. She walked into that room with her head held high and went straight to her normal seat behind the boys. She felt the eyes on her.

"Move over you two let Ace in to the table," King commanded. Just like that she was back in. No one questioned the Pres.

"We got a number of things going on here. These tails on the shipments, the drugs hitting our streets and this morning I got a call from Lacey."

Nikki knew what that meant.

"One of the girls got worked over bad. She's in the hospital. New girl, she took an off the books call so we got no info on the John and she won't talk to anyone," King paused, "Nikki I want you to head down there after this see if you can get anything out of her. She's really bad so I don't know if she can tell us anything."

Nikki nodded her head in acknowledgement.

"The shipment situation is a ticking time bomb. We need to do something about this shit before it becomes a battle on the streets. Tex and Trace are taking control of the shipments. Next one is tomorrow night. We need to lock this shit down. No more bikes and no more cuts on that job. We gotta figure out how these guys are picking us up. I'm leaving it to you two to figure this shit out."

The boys acknowledged him with a lift of their chins.

"This drug thing is not good. We exist here without issue because we keep these streets clean. We can't keep them clean we are going to start

have issues with the people. The promise we made to this community was that we invest in them and that none of this shit touches them, and in return they turn a blind eye to our endeavours. I intend on keeping that promise,” King looked each and every one of them in the eye as he made the statement.

“Reaper & I are on this. We need to find these guys. We know where they’re coming from,” he paused, “Bull has been dealing with this on his side. He says this is Bridges coming back at him. The minute he takes out a guy there’s another one back there working the same strip and now Bridges is pushing over into our territory and I won’t have this shit. We get hold of these guys and we send them back with a clear message. The Soldiers are not to be messed with.”

Nikki felt the rumble of agreement move through the group. They were not to be messed with and it was about time they started showing Bridges and his men exactly that. Fuck with the Soldiers and the Soldiers will fuck back twice as hard.

“Last but not least, Beard’s stepping down from his position as Road Captain. Trace got put forward and we need to vote this shit now. All in favour of Trace for Road Captain?” King asked.

Nikki raised her eyebrows at Trace. She couldn’t believe he didn’t tell her he’d been nominated for the position. Every hand in the room went up. Nikki wasn’t surprised about that, as far as she was concerned it was a no-brainer.

“The aye’s have it. Here you go son,” King handed him his Road Captain badge.

“Any questions?”

The room remained silent.

“Right. Everyone out.”

The room started to clear and Nikki rose from her chair to follow.

“Not you Ace. I want a word,” King’s demand had a few heads turning in her direction.

Both Tex and Trace halted alongside her.

“Alone,” King demanded.

The boys looked at her and she warned them off with her eyes. No point in them getting busted alongside her. She turned back toward King and regarded his face. He was serious as all hell as he stared at her. She heard the door close behind her and they were alone again.

“You got you’re shit sorted?” a hard glare accompanied his question, “Cause if you don’t I need to know now Ace.”

“I’m sorted,” her answer was confident.

“Good ‘cause right now we need everyone on board. Beard’s gonna take over the shop floor and we’ve hired a bird to do the office work.”

He was kicking her out of the shop? That was her thing.

“Like I said we need everyone on board and Beard’s getting too old for this shit. It’s high time you became a full-fledged member of this club. Now I’m giving you a chance. You want the vote? You want to be an equal member? This is your opportunity to earn it.”

Nikki couldn’t believe her ears. After everything that happened he was offering her an equal place.

“You knew heading into this you’d never be on the same level as the guys. Well now I’m giving you that chance. Prove it to me and to them that you are not a liability, that you can hold your own just as much as they can.”

This was not what she’d expected at all. She’d expected King to give her a massive dressing down for her recklessness, to grill her about Cole until she cracked and then bench her for eternity. Instead he was offering her what she’d always wanted. He was offering it to her right when she needed it most.

“Consider it done,” she stated.

He acknowledged her with a nod of his head then gestured towards the door, dismissing her. As she reached for the handle he spoke once more.

“Be careful what you wish for Ace,” his voice was tired and held the slightest hint of regret.

If anyone knew the meaning of those words it was her. She walked into this life with eyes wide open but still things could happen that made you question everything about yourself.

“I can handle it Pres.,” she reassured him then turned and left the room.

Trace knew King was in there laying down the offer of full membership to Nikki. He and Tex had known it would be irresistible to her. A couple of the old boys had been resistant to the idea, just as they were resistant to her being patched in in the first place. It was with the same brothers who’d requested the partial status of her patch as if they were threatened by a woman having an equal spot to them. The boys had always thought it was bullshit. Trace thought King had been secretly happy to approve their conditions. He hadn’t wanted to see his pseudo-daughter shot at or beaten up or dead.

Now though things were different. The club was under siege and the reality was they needed every body they could get. She had proven herself more than capable before the shit with her mother. And after? Well they all strayed from the path at one point or another. And these days she seemed to be holding her shit together. So King would give her something to work for and he and Tex would give her something to hold on to. Maybe between them they could keep her from disappearing into that self-destructive world again.

“So have you thought any more about our discussion yesterday?” he asked Tex.

“Yeah I’ve thought about it Brother. You sure you wanna go down that road?” Tex eyed him seriously.

He thought about the woman behind those closed doors and he knew there was no other answer than yes. She’d never choose between them so they’d take the choice out of it and hopefully it would work.

“Yeah I’m sure,” he answered.

“Well I guess we need to figure out how we’re going to get our girl. But right now we probably need to ring Alex. We need to be working this Jason Black, Lenny angle,” Tex suggested.

“Yeah but you better let me make that call. Neither of us are his favourite people right now but you are at the top of his shit list,” he replied.

“I can’t help it if the man finds me intimidating,” Tex replied with a smirk.

Trace had to laugh at that. Alex wasn’t intimidated by either of them, he was just a sore loser when it came to Nikki.

The pair of them moved outside away from the other brothers and Trace dialled Alex’s number.

“Shit. What do you want Trace?”

“Wow Alex your phone manner really needs work, you know that?” he replied with a smile.

“I haven’t got time for your jokes Deveraux. Now what do you want?”

“That tracker you have on Black?” Trace prompted.

“Jesus fucking Christ. Are you serious right now? Does that girl tell you two everything?” Alex growled down the phone at him.

The man was pissed.

“Yeah, everything,” Trace emphasised the word just to annoy Alex even more.

“I need to know where he’s been Alex.”

“Look I helped you out with the info for Nikki’s sake and now that she’s safe I’m done.”

If Alex thought he was gonna get off that easy he was wrong.

“Now that she’s safe? We don’t know that she’s safe. Lenny might be dead Alex, but Jason Black is still alive and we think he was involved in Lenny’s little plot to kill Nikki,” Tex informed him.

“Why because Lenny lived in a place owned by Black? That’s a bit of a stretch. What reason would he have to want Nikki dead anyway?”

Alex didn’t have the whole picture like they did. He had no idea that Black’s brother had killed Sheila and Nikki had killed him. He was working on limited info.

“You don’t have the whole picture Alex but I’m telling you now there’s more to this than you know. Now are you gonna tell me what I want

to know?”

“I’ll tell you what you want to know Deveraux but first you need to give me the whole picture.”

Trace should’ve known that was coming. This is what happens when you piss off a cop.

Trace glanced over at Tex who had been listening to the conversation. Tex nodded his head in acknowledgement, even though he looked about as happy with giving Alex that info as Trace felt about it.

“Fine. But I’m telling you now if you go digging you will find nothing.”

He did not want Alex poking around and investigating this shit. It was the last thing any of them needed especially Nikki.

“Understood,” his reply sounded like it came out between gritted teeth.

“Nikki killed Black’s brother.”

The silence on the other end of the phone communicated Alex’s shock.

“How the hell did,” Alex stopped abruptly, “Actually don’t answer that. Does Black know it was her?”

“We’re not sure. It’s just speculation at the moment but if he does she’s far from safe.”

“That’s an understatement,” Alex agreed, “I’ll get you a list but I’m warning you, you make a move without informing me first and I will not hesitate to make your life such a living hell that neither you nor Tex will be able to spit in public without copping time. You get me?”

“Yeah Detective. I get you,” he answered.

Chapter 6

Nikki walked through the double doors of the hospital and headed straight for the elevators. Lacey's girl was on the third floor in a private room. The MC had her switched there after they'd gotten wind of her situation. They looked after the girls in any way that they could. They provided them with a safe and organised system for taking clients. If they were off site clients they sent a driver with the girls to lay down the rules to the client and to take the cash. But if the girls took a john off the books there was little the MC could control about that. Now it was about retribution and unfortunately this girl learned that the hard way.

Nikki crammed herself into a car full of visitors carrying balloons, flowers and other gifts. The awkward silence that filled the space once the doors closed had always amused her. Now though it made her feel off. Maybe it was because of the reasons she was here. She stepped off on the third floor and turned left searching for room 308.

She came upon the door partially open and a southern drawl drifting out through the gap.

"You need to talk to me girl," Lacey begged, "We want to get the deviate son of a bitch who did this to you and make sure he never does this again, to anyone. We can't do that if you won't talk to us."

So the girl was keeping quiet. She was probably frightened of the asshole who did this coming back to get her. Nikki knocked gently on the door.

"Come in," Lacey invited.

Nikki opened the door and entered the room glancing at the girl in the bed. Jesus fucking Christ. If she'd been anyone else Nikki might've tripped over her own feet in shock. She'd received the low down from Lacey on the girl's injuries. She had several broken ribs on both sides of her body, a broken leg, a broken arm and wrist, a broken nose and a shattered

eye socket. But that didn't really prepare her for the horrific visual before her.

Both the girl's eyes were black and swollen shut. She had stitches down one cheek and the other was a shade of purple that Nikki had never seen before. Her mouth was also terribly swollen and while Nikki didn't think the girl's jaw was broken she was sure that was probably part of the reason why she didn't want to talk. The arm that Nikki could see was also a mottled variety of scratches, cuts and bruises. Nikki could only imagine the sort of pain a beating like that brought on.

Lacey sighed and vacated her chair stopping as she neared Nikki.

"Her name's Chrissy. I don't know that you'll have much luck with her. She hasn't said a word to anyone. Not the doctors, not the police and not me," she explained then left the room.

Nikki moved slowly towards the girl.

"Hi Chrissy, my name is Ace," she said softly, "King sent me to talk to you about what happened."

The girl stirred and turned her head slightly in Nikki's direction.

"I'm sorry that this happened to you. No one deserves to have this happen to them. No one."

The girl's body language seemed to relax slightly.

"You must be in a lot of pain and I'm sure you're very scared right now but I promise you that we will find whoever did this to you and end them. Until we do you have my assurance that we will protect you. We will post a guard on your door," hopefully Alex would agree to that, "and once you are well enough you can stay at the clubhouse under our protection until we finish this, ok?"

Chrissy dropped her head slightly and Nikki took that as her cue to continue on.

"I'm going to ask you a couple of questions ok?" She placed her hand in Chrissy's as she spoke, "I'll try to ask you mostly yes or no questions but there's some you're probably going to have to answer with words. I want you to squeeze my hand once for no and twice for yes. Do you understand?"

Two weak squeezes gave Nikki her answer.

“You took the job off the books right?”

Two squeezes.

“How did you make contact with the guy? Was it through Eros?”

One squeeze. Then she released Nikki’s hand and made a sort of gesture.

“Sort of. What do you mean sort of?”

That wasn’t a question she could answer with her hands. Chrissy lips parted and a dry rasp came out.

“Hang on let me get you some water,” Nikki offered.

After a few sips she tried again and with Nikki leaning in close she managed to pick up the word.

“Party.”

Party bookings, the thought made her grimace. A couple of girls and a bunch of guys all fucking each other in a single room. She’d have to get Lacey to check the details of the booking.

“So he was at a party booking with you and what? You gave him your number and he called for a private booking?”

Two squeezes.

“Did you get a name?”

Two squeezes. Chrissy tried to whisper the guy’s name to her. Dave or David or something. Nikki shushed her, it probably wasn’t his real name anyway.

“Do you remember the place where you met him?”

Two squeezes.

“Can you tell me?”

“Water,” she croaked out.

Nikki grabbed the bottle and held it to her lips. Chrissy shook her head gently and groaned.

“You don’t want the water?”

One squeeze.

“Wait, you met him by the water?”

“Waterfront,” she whispered her voice paper thin.

The waterfront? Nikki instantly knew this worse than she first thought. Chrissy's grip on her hand started to weaken. She was losing her strength.

"Stay with me Chrissy. You met him at the waterfront? At a house?"

Two squeezes. Damn it. This had to be Black.

"Do you remember which one?"

One squeeze.

"More," Chrissy whispered.

"There was more people there?"

Two squeezes.

"How many was there Chrissy?"

She held up four fingers. She knew it had to be Black and his goons but who was the fourth man?

"Did one of them have really dark creepy eyes?"

Two squeezes. She knew it.

"Did they say anything to you? Anything at all?"

Two squeezes.

"What did they say?"

Chrissy half mumbled half croaked a weird mess of sounds, "eh oo oo."

Nikki scrambled for the water shoving the straw in Chrissy's mouth.

"Take a drink Chrissy and try again," she commanded.

Chrissy sipped then took a breath and Nikki leaned close.

"Eh too boot."

Eh too boot? Oh shit. Et tu Brute? There was that phrase again. The words of a dying man to his traitorous friend. Question was who the hell was betraying who?

Nikki rode back to the clubhouse with that phrase rolling around in her mind. She just didn't get it. Why the hell would their enemy warn them about something that would be to their enemies advantage? She checked in

with Beard and offered to close up shop for him. It would give her some time to think.

She was locking the roller door when she heard the clubhouse door slam. She looked up to see Reaper crossing the forecourt.

"Where is everyone?" he asked.

"I think everyone's out."

Tex and Trace had fed her some crap about a job and she'd let them. King was at the cabin with Rose for their anniversary. They'd left Case, Rock and her behind. But Case had home shit going on and Rock, well he was probably balls deep inside some cop pussy. She had no idea where Rat was and Beard had already left. So the only one left was her. Well her and Dumb and Dumber. As if on cue the Dumb dropped a heavy box of discarded parts on Dumber's foot.

"Obviously they're here."

Nikki eyed him carefully. He was mega tense and his hands were balled into fists.

"You need something?" she asked him.

He turned his head slightly in her direction glancing at her from the corner of his eye.

"Nah. I'm good," he stated and then stormed off across the forecourt.

Nikki shut the locked the door and moved through the workshop and into the office. She peered out the back window at Reaper as he stood next to his bike.

He was staring down at his hands. From that distance she couldn't see the shaking but she knew that was what he was staring at. She was seriously concerned about him. If he was working a job and that shit started it would put him in some serious trouble. Reaper made a fist and beat it against the seat of his bike. Nikki turned away. She'd offered him her help and he'd refused. That was his choice. She listened to Reaper's bike roar to life and she knew she couldn't walk away. She quickly ducked out the office door taking her mustang keys with her.

She only just managed to catch up with him as he moved out of the industrial area and into the suburbs. It was just getting on dark and the traffic was beginning to thin. With the uncongested roads she'd have to keep her distance especially if she didn't want to be seen. She stayed a few blocks back as Reaper slipped into the inside lane and hit the throttle. Shit. Nikki pulled across and increased her speed weaving between a few cars. They cleared Soldier's territory and moved into Crow's terrain.

By the time he started to slow Nikki was barely keeping Reaper in her sights. She nearly missed him chucking a left and had to pull a mad maneuver, cutting off a very angry truck driver. Nikki knew exactly where they were she just had no idea why they were here. Unless it was for a job. But if it was a job surely one of the brothers would've been with him? They moved through residential streets and into an industrial area. He made a quick right into Main street and Nikki heard the sound of his bike gearing down through the open window. They must be close.

Main Street was not the sort of area most people wanted to drive through never mind stop in. The buildings were dilapidated and vandalized but they weren't necessarily abandoned. The residents here were either homeless people, junkies or drug pushers. It was the part of the Crows stronghold that Bull had always struggled to clean up. Depression and desperation were a lethal cocktail that was brewed with great success in that part of town. At the least Bull had always managed to keep the infection contained to this part of town but now the drugs were leaking out, bleeding into other parts of their territory.

This place had always been a dump but now it looked like a third world slum. The warehouse buildings that were still occupied were surrounded by tall barbed wire topped fencing and security cameras. Those that weren't, were a mix of boarded up, dirty, dilapidated buildings covered in layer upon layer of graffiti. Nikki rolled up to the corner and watched as Reaper slowed in front of an old run down warehouse. He drove past the main entry turning into a side alley. Nikki turned the corner and drove past the warehouse stealing a glance down the alleyway. She glimpsed the back of his bike disappearing around the rear of the warehouse.

Nikki parked on the next block and did a quick scan of the street. She so did not want to leave her Mustang here but she had little choice. The last of the light lost its hold on the buildings darkening the area around her. Nikki slid from the car and slipped through the shadows toward her target. As she reached the first building Nikki peered around the corner into the laneway that ran behind it.

The taillight on Reapers bike cast a red glow back through the laneway towards her. Ahead of his bike a doorway on the left of the lane way was dimly lit by a single overhead light. Next to the light was a security camera pointed straight at the door. Further ahead the laneway came to dead end. Perfect ambush territory. Nikki did not like this one little bit.

Reaper switched off his bike putting the laneway back into shadow. He was clearly comfortable enough not to need a quick getaway. He removed his helmet and mask attention locked firmly on that door. Nikki needed to get closer. She ducked around the corner of the building and took cover behind a nearby dumpster. There was another bin on the other side of the rear door of the nightclub. If she could make that one it would put her close enough to see and hear what was going on. It would also give her two exits down the alleyway to Main Street or back down the lane to her car.

She ducked around the first bin and hit the wall of the building low down. Nikki slowly crept along the wall to the edge of the bin. In a low crouch she peered around the bin and watched as Reaper approached the door. He knocked firmly on the metal and a sliding sound followed.

"Back again old man."

A dark face appeared behind the barred window.

"You got my shit?" Reaper's voice was gruff and no nonsense.

"Yeah I got your shit. You got my money?"

Reaper took a wad of cash from his pocket and flashed it.

"Wait here."

The slide closed.

What the hell was going on here? He was buying drugs? This did not make sense at all. The slide reopened and lower down a drawer slid out of the door.

"The money."

Reaper placed his cash in the drawer and it disappeared. The drawer reappeared and Reaper collected the contents. He held a small black bag in his hand. He unzipped the bag and pulled out a small liquid filled glass vial. GHB? He placed it back inside the bag and she heard the clink of glass against glass as he slipped the bag into his pocket. What the fuck was she supposed to do with this shit? The club did not tolerate drug addicts. If they knew he'd be kicked out on bad standing. His life would be over.

"Enjoy."

The slide slammed shut.

Reaper turned away from the door and Nikki quickly ducked back behind the dumpster. Shit. Double and triple shit. She so did not need this. She'd have to confront him. She'd have to confront him and give him an ultimatum. Give up the drugs or give up the club. But first she wanted a word with that dealer. Judging by the setup, she'd have to wait until he came out of his steel fortress before she could get to him. She was in for a long night.

The screeching sound of protesting hinges was her first warning that something was not right. Instinct drove Nikki to reach for her gun. She swiveled back towards the door. Her father too had spun around his Zigana, the Turkish pistol he favoured, cradled in his grip. Her eyes skipped over him to the open doorway.

"Well if it isn't Reaper Jones."

A guy stood in the doorway sporting Niners' colours with the dealer standing behind him. They each held a Berretta, pointed straight at Reaper.

"When Zero told me you were buying from him I thought he was full of shit. But here we are," the guy who was doing all the talking sneered at Reaper.

"Dopamine hey?" he asked.

Dopamine? Nikki couldn't believe what she was hearing. She wanted to run out there shake Reaper and demand the truth. Somewhere deep down she already knew it to be true. Nikki didn't know much about dopamine but she did know what drug use looked like and the evidence was there. The shaking in his hands, the mood swings, the growing absences from the clubhouse and the weird freak out he'd had where he pummeled his fists into the seat of his bike. She looked at the hold he had on his weapon. It was awkward and unsteady. Withdrawal maybe? He was in trouble here.

"The club know about your little problem?" the guy retorted.

"What do you want Forty?" Reaper asked gruffly.

"I got a message for the Soldiers," Forty stated.

"What is it?"

"This."

Forty raised his gun. Unlike Reaper Nikki had no trouble pulling the trigger on her weapon. Forty went down like a sack of shit. Nikki quickly followed up that shot with a second one hitting Zero in the chest. Reaper turned his gun on her out of instinct. When he realized it was her he relaxed it would've been way too late anyway if she'd been aiming for him.

"Is it just these two?" she asked Reaper as she ran towards the doorway.

"Should be. By this time most of the drugs have been collected and usually Forty and the muscle have taken the cash to wherever it goes," he replied.

Nikki peered through the open doorway into the dimly lit interior. She couldn't detect any signs of other life.

"Yeah well Forty's still here," she retorted.

"The money?"

She did another sweep of the room with her eyes and came up with nothing.

"No."

"Then there's no one else here. We should be not here too," he stated.

Nikki whirled around on him with her gun still pointed in front of her. Reaper's eyes narrowed but he didn't raise his weapon.

"What you doin' kid?" he asked.

"You gonna tell me what those little vials in your pocket are?" she urged him.

"What they are kid is none of your business. Now let's get out of here," he answered turning his back on her and striding over to his bike.

She was not letting him off the hook that easy.

"I just saved your ass old man I think I deserve to know what I nearly got myself killed for."

"Please kid. You were nowhere near getting yourself killed. Your mother may have given you those looks of hers but the rest of you is all me. Keen instincts, eagle eye, lightening reflexes and winning personality included."

In another time and place she might've laughed at his winning personality quip but not today.

"You don't explain to me what is going on here I'm taking this shit straight to King," she warned him.

Reaper turned back toward her and pressed his chest to the barrel of her gun.

"You do not want to do that kid," he said through gritted teeth.

"You can't intimidate me Reaper. You think I haven't noticed your issues. The shaking in your hands, the weak grip you had on your weapon. Hell I watched Sheila come down off that shit enough times to know what withdrawal looks like. You wouldn't even have the strength to take me down without my gun."

He tensed up as if preparing to take action but did nothing. He broke off their little stare down.

"It's not withdrawal symptoms," he replied as he returned to his bike and swung a leg over the machine.

"What do you mean it's not withdrawal symptoms?"

"The tremors and weakness are caused by my condition. The dopamine stops them," he explained.

"Condition? What condition?" Nikki asked warily.

He brought his bike to life and put it in gear while Nikki watched.
He was going to take off without answering her.
“What condition?” she repeated loudly.
He yelled out the answer as he took off out of the alleyway.
“I’ve got Parkinson’s.”

Chapter 7

Nikki pulled in to the driveway of the house she shared with the boys. Nikki couldn't deal with the clubhouse tonight. She needed the sanctuary this place afforded her. It had been her house originally but when she'd moved in with Alex the boys had taken it over. After she left Alex she moved right back in and the boys stayed. It offered them this surreal little bubble of peace where no one and nothing else existed but them. She needed quiet and she needed a drink before she could get her head around her father's confession.

He had Parkinson's. The words just kept rolling around in her head. She hadn't been sure he was telling the truth until she'd looked it up on the internet. All the evidence certainly fit the scenario. The symptoms she'd attributed to the drug use and the weird phone call she'd overheard. She was in this weird numb state of shock as she got out of the car and entered the house. She didn't even notice Trace until she practically bumped in to him.

"Hey Baby girl. You ok?" he asked smiling at down at her.

"Yeah sorry just a bit tired is all."

"Well it looks like we've got the rest of the night off. Why don't you go have a nice hot shower and then you can sit down and watch a movie with me," Trace suggested.

"Sounds good," she replied and quickly escaped to her bedroom.

Nikki plonked down on the edge of her bed. So Reaper had Parkinson's it wasn't the end of the world. Obviously it was treatable. It was just a case of how treatable and for how long? Why the hell hadn't he told anyone? And why was he getting drugs for it from that Niners' dealer? Shit, the dealer. She'd been so distracted she'd just left the dealer and his Niner buddy lying in that doorway. That part of town could get pretty nasty and she was sure they wouldn't be the first dead bodies to show up there. Nikki just hoped those bodies didn't cause Bull any trouble. After all it was Crows territory and she was there unannounced and had made a kill without

informing the powers that be. That was just not how shit was done. How could she have been so stupid?

She looked down at her feet as she cursed herself. A smear of something dark and wet glistened on the toe of her boot. Blood? Damn it. She must've got some on her shoe when she'd stepped over the bodies to check the inside of that bloody warehouse. Nikki went straight for the bathroom pulling off her shoe and running water over it to remove the blood. She frantically checked the rest of her clothing and hoped to good none of that shit had transferred from her shoe to anything else in the house. She jumped into the shower and washed all traces of the event from her body. She took those dead bodies and Reaper's confession and shoved them deep down alongside the safe that held the darkness at bay. She couldn't share that shit with anyone.

Trace listened to the sound of the shower running and was thoroughly tempted to join her. He'd only had her the night before last and he wanted her again every minute since. That was nothing new though, he always wanted her. He couldn't go in there though. There was a plan he had to follow. He went through his little checklist in his head. Ice bucket and drinks? Check. Snacks on table? Check. Fire burning nicely? Check. Rug for later? Check. Lights off? He flicked the switch. Check. Movies set up? Check. There were only two things missing now. Make that one.

Nikki entered the lounge area in an old oversized Harley shirt of Tex's. She always looked sexy in that shirt. Her cleavage peaked through at the top and it gave a completely uninterrupted view of her beautiful smooth creamy legs. She couldn't reach up or bend forward without the shirt riding up and giving a peek at that delicious round firm ass of hers. Even though it wasn't his, he loved that shirt.

"Hey we're all set," he told her as he flopped on to the couch and patted the seat next to him.

As she crossed the room he watched the hem of her shirt skim across the tops of her thighs. A few more centimeters and he'd know what sort of panties she was wearing. The thought had him hard quicker than an adolescent boy viewing an adult mag for the first time. She had that effect on him.

“So what are we watching?” she asked as she curled up on the couch next to him.

“Well I've got that nineties classic Fear 'cos I know how much you loved that rollercoaster scene back in the day.”

He smiled at her as he thought about how much she'd liked that scene when he'd put his own fingers to work during it. She smiled right back at him that same cheeky minx grin she'd had back then.

“And then we can follow that up with whatever you like.”

He passed her a drink, flicked on the movie and settled her back against his chest.

He tried to be patient as he watched her watching the film. Her mouth turned up in a sexy little knowing smirk as the rollercoaster scene approached. He wondered if it was because she was remembering his hands on her the last time they'd watched it. His eyes travelled down to her creamy thighs and his fingers began to stroke her soft skin. He traced light circles on her thigh slowly moving his hand towards to the prize. He leaned down into her neck kissing her lightly teasing her in the way he knew made her squirm. Her legs parted slightly and her own hand slid backwards up his leg. If she touched him he wouldn't be able to wait.

He shifted slightly taking away Nikki's ability touch the growing bulge in his sweat pants. She tried to wriggle around but he held her still.

“Uh aahhh Baby girl. Just lay back, close your eyes, relax and let me touch you ok?”

She nodded her agreement and settled her head against the arm of the couch with her back across his lap. The change of position gave him access to her lips as well as what was between her legs. Trace switched the movie off and turned on some mood music. Nikki smiled.

“You always were the smooth one,” she said.

“I try my best.”

He stroked and petted her skin coming so close to touching her sex then his fingers skipped over to her other thigh. Her sigh of frustration was audible. He smiled and looked up towards the kitchen.

Tex was leaning against the island watching them. Trace nodded at him and Tex began to move forward quietly. Trace let his fingers drift up under the hem of her shirt and find their way to. He froze. No panties. He exhaled loudly as the realisation that she was completely naked under that shirt hit him. Tex’s head came towards him and he caught his questioning gaze.

“No panties,” he mouthed to Tex.

Tex groaned quietly, “Show me.”

Nikki shifted at the sound and Trace quickly captured her lips and slid his fingers into her wetness hoping she hadn’t picked up on Tex’s faux par.

Nikki relaxed and let go of the crap rolling round in her brain. All she could feel were Trace’s fingertips teasing her, coaxing her to arousal. It wasn’t a difficult task. She was naked under her shirt and jammed up against Trace with his hard shirtless torso and his soft sweat pants. Trace’s finger suddenly changed direction sliding over her naked sex. She heard Trace release a breath loudly. Very faintly whispered words reached her ears. Was that Tex? She opened her eyes to check but Trace pounced. His lips found hers and his tongue swept into her mouth. His fingers mimicked the movement of his tongue sliding into her wet heat and sweeping over her clit.

Her shirt slid up and she felt the air caressing her. He nudged her thighs further apart spreading her wide. His fingers circled her clit teasing her and making her grow wetter still. He eased out of the kiss and made his way down to her neck. His breath warmed her skin and his wet nibbling kisses sent shivers through her body.

“Trace,” she whispered his name in appreciation.

Her eyes opened slowly and the first thing she saw was Tex. He was lingering in the kitchen doorway. His gaze firmly locked between her legs. His body was tense and she could clearly see the serious bulge he was sporting in those jeans. She thought for a moment about saying something when he lifted his gaze to hers. The look in his eyes was pure hunger and it sent a shiver of arousal through her. He lifted a finger to his lips motioning her to keep silent. She didn't know if she should. Her first instinct had been to alert Trace to Tex's presence but then something made her hesitate and in that moment Trace slid his fingers inside her.

"Mmmmm," she moaned and her muscles clenched.

Both boys groaned in reply and the sound ratcheted her level of arousal up a hundred percent.

Her gaze flicked back to Trace as he pulled her shirt up her body revealing her breasts.

"You are so fucking beautiful," his eyes ran the length of her body as he spoke.

She rewarded his compliment with a long deep kiss. When his mouth left hers it went straight for her nipple enclosing it in wet warmth. He laved the sensitive bud with his tongue then sucked gently. Nikki's eyes closed and even then she could see Tex standing on the other side of the room watching Trace's fingers move between her slippery folds. Her mind began to wander into dangerous territory.

It filled with images of Tex approaching them, of his hands sliding on to her body and his fingers joining Trace's. As she imagined, Trace found that little sweet spot inside her and began to stroke it driving the liquid fire inside her higher still. She pictured Tex kissing her, a bruising animalistic kiss then Trace following it up with a soft loving one. Trace's thumb began to work her clit and Nikki felt that fire spread through every limb in her body. Then both their mouths would move to her breasts Tex nibbling with his teeth and Trace licking and blowing cold breath across her nipple.

"Oh god," she cried out and her eyes flew open to find both men staring down at her.

The idea of both of them was too much for her and that liquid fire exploded. Her muscles convulsed around Trace's fingers and neither of the men tried to hide their reactions.

"Mmmmm fuck," Trace moaned.

And Tex's groan across the room was loud and full of need.

The noises set off a second wave of tremors as Nikki's eyes closed again and she let bliss sweep over her. As she came down from that place Trace's fingers were still stroking gently inside her prolonging the sweet ache.

"Hello Brother," Trace greeted Tex as if he knew he'd been standing there the whole time.

"Evening," Tex's voice was husky and full of sex.

Another shiver passed through her.

"She's so fucking beautiful when she comes isn't she?" Trace asked.

"Beautiful doesn't begin to cover it," Tex replied.

Trace had definitely known Tex was there.

"You knew?" she whispered to Trace in astonishment.

"Yeah Baby girl I knew," he replied shrugging his shoulders.

Nikki's mind was spinning. He'd known Tex was there. She looked down at the way they were positioned and where Tex was standing. God, not only had he known he'd displayed her perfectly so Tex could watch. What the hell?

Trace withdrew his fingers from inside her drawing an automatic whimper from Nikki.

"I know Baby girl but I think that's enough for now," he responded.

Enough for now? She couldn't get her head around this shit. Had they planned this, the two of them? What was going on here? She opened her mouth to say something and Trace put his finger to her lips.

"Sssshhhhh Baby girl. We'll talk about it another time ok?"

She just nodded at him as he smoothed her shirt back in to place and adjusted her legs so she was no longer on display. Tex picked up her feet and sat down on the couch placing them in his lap. Trace switched the

movie back on and both boys turned their attention to the screen. It was like something incredibly hot and extraordinary hadn't happened at all and this was just another ordinary night. Except for the hard ons both men were sporting no one would think any different.

Tex lay awake in bed thinking about what had happened tonight. He had to admit he had not been prepared for that. He didn't expect it to affect him quite so much as it did. The thought of any other man's hands on his woman made him want to beat the shit out of something but for some reason with Trace it had never bothered him as much. He guessed that's because he trusted the man and he loved him as a best friend and a brother. It should've been weird though. It should've been weird watching Trace's hands on Nikki but it wasn't. It was hot, it was beyond hot. Maybe Trace's idea wasn't so crazy.

He wondered what she'd been thinking about before she came, if he featured in her little fantasy, if the both of them featured in her fantasy. God he needed to think about something else. He was hard as hell and being just down the hall from Nikki knowing she was naked under his shirt and having watched her come didn't make it any easier. Or maybe it was the fact that it had been so long since he'd had his hands on her that the mental tease was driving him crazy. He needed her so badly but that wasn't the plan and he had to stick to the plan.

Nikki screamed suddenly frightening him out of his thoughts. He jumped out of bed and raced down the hall throwing her door open. She shot upright in bed whipping her Glock out from under her pillow and swinging around to face him her feet hitting the floor. He held his hands up as Trace skidded to halt behind him.

"Whoa there Ace. It's only us," he stated as he held his hands up in surrender.

Her finger halted on the trigger as his voice pierced the sleepy fog inside her brain. The horror of what she'd nearly done hit her and she cursed dropping her gun to the bed. She'd nearly fired at them. Tex entered slowly while Trace squeezed past him and rushed to her side.

"Are you ok Nikki?" Trace asked as he smoothed her hair back.

She could see the concern swirling in those ocean blue eyes of his. The fact that she'd pointed a loaded weapon at them not even factoring in with him. She flicked her eyes to Tex. He hung back eyeing her warily. From his body language she could tell he wasn't so sure she wouldn't have pulled the trigger. He was right. If he'd have spoken a second later he might've been bleeding out on the floor.

She stared blankly at Trace trying to hide the turmoil of emotion going on inside her.

"I'm fine," her voice came out flat.

She could tell from the look on his face he didn't believe her. She took a deep breath and prepped herself for the fake.

"I'm fine Trace. It was just a bad dream. I'm not the ones who were on the other side of a loaded pistol."

A fucking nightmare is more like it. Seeing Chrissy in that hospital bed and killing those two Niners had fed the monster inside her and if she wouldn't let it out when she was awake it would get her in her god damn sleep.

She dreamt she took Chrissy's place. She was laying on the floor of this large room while Black's goons beat the shit out of her. Black was standing back in the corner an evil smile plastered across his face. He was laughing with someone, the fourth person, the unknown one. Even though their back was to her and the silhouette was blurry it was somehow familiar to her. As she lay there in pain her body being beaten black and blue the unknown figure turned around. Fear, real fear over took her as she stared at her herself laughing sadistically with Black. Only it wasn't her. The eyes were all wrong. The eyes belonged to the monster inside her and as she opened her mouth to scream it had launched itself at her. That's why she'd woken and gone straight for her weapon.

Trace smiled at her. His smile had always warmed her insides and melted her heart.

“Not the first time and I doubt it’ll be the last. You wouldn’t have shot us. Anyway I’d happily take a bullet for you Baby Girl.”

She had to smile at the faith he had in her.

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Trace asked.

She sighed. She was trying to be but it would seem the world conspired against her in that department.

“Yes. You two go back to bed I’ll be ok.”

“Ok Baby Girl just scream if you need us,” He grinned at her standing up and leaving the room.

On the way past he and Tex shared a look then he gave Tex a quick nod before he continued down the hall to his room.

Nikki dropped her head into her hands. She could’ve killed one or both of the only people in this world that truly cared about her.

“Don’t,” Tex’s voice was firm.

She looked up at him. He was still standing at the far side of her room his face hard with.... anger maybe?

“He’s right you know. You wouldn’t have pulled the trigger,” he sounded confident as he made the statement but he was still standing as far away from her as possible.

“Really? Then why the hell are you standing all the way over there looking at me like I could take your head off any minute.”

It wasn’t because he thought she would take his head off it was because he was so pissed off. Pissed off at himself, at Trace, at her father, at the club, pissed off that they hadn’t done enough to protect her, and pissed off that she was the way she was because of all of it. She was hard on the outside no doubt about it but inside she was broken and he couldn’t figure out a way to fix it. Instead he did the only thing he knew how to do.

He crossed the room and slid to his knees in front of her. His hands slid slowly up her arms over her shoulders. One hand slid round the back of

her neck the other cupped her chin bringing her face up to look at him. He could see the doubt, the pain and the conflict in her eyes and there was only one way he knew how to take it away. He leaned forward brushing his lips gently against hers. She crushed her lips against his mouth opening in invitation to his tongue.

Tex needed this as much as she needed this. He'd waited long enough to get his hands on her. He'd endured the heartache of watching her fall apart. He'd suffered through the hurt he'd purposefully caused her. He knew this was not a part of their plan but he was impatient and couldn't help himself where Nikki was concerned. He wanted to show her he still loved her and worshipped her too.

She needed this. She needed everything in her mind gone if only for a short time. She needed to be numb to everything but his touch. Her hands went immediately to his chest smoothing their way over his pecks and down his abs. The man had the body of a greek god. His six feet something frame put them face to face with her even though he was on his knees. His shoulders were wide, his waist narrow and what lay in between was a wall of solid mouth-watering muscle. He stood leaning over her keeping their mouths locked together their tongues sliding hungrily over each other.

She scooted back on to the mattress Tex following crawling over the top of her. He released her mouth and gripped the bottom of her shirt ripping it up over head leaving her in just a pair of lace boy short panties. His eyes moved hungrily over her body and she revelled in his heated gaze. He stopped when his eyes hit her panties and licked his lips sending a shiver through her body that went straight to her clit.

All of a sudden her body was alive for him her breath fast and shallow, her nipples hard and begging for attention, her clit swollen and her pussy wet and aching. Tex had always had this sort of control over her body

one hungry look and she was ready to drop her panties and take him on the spot.

Fuck she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, she always had been. Her long dark hair framed her pale skin, stormy blue-grey eyes and dark pink lips that were wet and swollen from their kisses. And her body, her body was so sweet it would bring the hardest man to tears. She had the sexiest curves, going in and out where a woman should. Her breasts were perfect teardrop shaped, sloping down to dusky pink nipples the weight of them sitting just below that, they just fit inside his large hand. Her legs were long, not slender as such she was a runner, but toned and sleek. And what lay between those creamy thighs of hers was heaven and hell all at the same time.

His eyes stalled exactly there the knowledge of what lay under those lacy panties had him licking his lips in anticipation. Nikki shivered and squeezed her thighs together. His cock was hard as hell the material of his sleep pants rubbing across the head every time he moved. He couldn't wait any longer. Tex hooked his fingers inside her panties and ripped. A low moan escaped her and his cock twitched at the sound. He tossed her destroyed panties into the corner of the room and dove on top of her latching on to her nipple with his mouth.

"Tex," Nikki moaned his name and he felt an ache start in his chest.

He knew exactly what it was. He felt it every time the reality hit him that this moment wasn't gonna last. He felt it every time he looked at her with someone else. He felt it every time he thought he was losing her. For the most part he was a hard ass but Nikki, she was his one weakness. He wanted nothing more than to hear her say his name like that every day for the rest of his life.

She just wanted him inside her hard and fast. Tex was alternating between sucking and flicking his tongue over first one nipple then the other. She brought her feet to his hips and used them to push his pants down over his legs freeing that big beautiful cock of his. He finished discarding his pants and his hand moved to her slick folds.

“Are you wet for me Ace?” his voice was hoarse against her breast as he slid his fingers through the wet warmth of her.

He skipped over her clit and slid two fingers straight inside her. Her only answer was a whimper and the clench of her muscles around his fingers.

“What do you want Ace?” he asked while he slid his fingers in and out.

She couldn't speak she could only gasp and moan. He withdrew his fingers and placed the head of his cock at her opening.

“Tell me. I need to hear it,” a shade of desperation seeped into his voice.

Nikki realized then just how badly he needed her and how badly she needed him.

“I need you inside me Tex. I need you hard and fast.”

She normally wouldn't have used such delicate language with him but this wasn't about fucking. This was about washing away the pain she'd put him through and the pain she'd endured.

He was already rigid as steel but at her words he hardened further leaking pre-come. Tex gripped her hips hard and slammed forward into her. A scream ripped from her body and her insides clamped down on him. That first stroke always felt like heaven, not that every other stroke didn't but on that first stroke the weight of all the stress he'd been carrying began to seep from his body. God he missed this. He pulled out and powered in again and again. She was his release and without her Tex had been sinking himself deeper and deeper into the bottom of the bottle to ease his stress.

He increased his pace as he felt her body winding up, tighter and tighter. He knew she was close as she writhed under him. He wasn't going to last much longer either. It'd been too long since he'd felt her in his arms, her sweet body beneath his, his cock buried inside her. The way she squirmed, the sound of her breathy moans, the way her tight little pussy sucked at him. As if on cue a little tremor passed through her causing her inner walls to flutter around him begging him for more.

“Fuck Ace. I've missed you and this greedy, little, pussy.”

Now that was more like Tex. His dirty mouth sent another shiver through her. She felt the burn begin between her legs and spread slowly through her body. He brought her legs up against his chest an ankle on each shoulder and changed the angle hitting a sweet spot inside her. That was all it took for the sweet burn to explode in a rush. Her mind emptied of everything but that sweet release. Nikki cried out his name her muscles rippling around him. Seconds later Tex joined her spilling himself inside her. Nikki's legs slid down from his shoulders back to the bed as his movements slowed.

Tex leant down over her sweeping his nose over her neck and ear.

“We'll get through this Ace. You just need to trust Trace and me. Ok?” he said quietly.

She trusted them without question. It was herself she didn't trust.

Chapter 8

The three of them were huddled together in the corner booth at the clubhouse. Tex was sharing his theory about Lenny's house.

"There has to be something in that house that's worth something. I mean what else would explain that random Ninja guy and Black all skulking around there," he explained.

"There's something else," Nikki stated quietly, "Chrissy, Lacey's girl, she said she met the guy who beat her up at a house on the waterfront. There were four of them. Black was one, I'm assuming two of them were his goons but the fourth one, I have no idea."

So there was an anonymous player in the mix.

"Maybe it was Bridges," Trace offered.

"I doubt it. Why would he bother to be there for something so trivial?" Tex replied.

Nikki glared at him.

"What? I don't mean to sound harsh but they beat up a prostitute it's not exactly making a big statement," he explained.

"Really? You didn't see the girl's face Tex. I did and you know what it screamed to me? It screamed we can and will get to your shit and when we do we will destroy it," Nikki hissed at him.

She had a point.

"Ok. You got a point. Sorry," he said holding up his hands in surrender.

The clubhouse door opened and Reaper walked in. He glanced around and as his gaze fell on their Nikki he threw her a look that could kill. He made a beeline for King and the two men disappeared into the boardroom. Tex hoped they weren't pulling some more secretive bullshit. The last time that had happened Sheila had ended up dead and Nikki had ended up in a bloody hospital bed and he wasn't having that shit happen again. He watched as Reaper reached out and pushed the door shut. Nikki glanced briefly behind her at the two men secluding themselves from the

rest of the group. There was no surprise or confusion on her face and he wondered if she knew something he didn't.

“Nikki?” a soft feminine voice called her name.

She turned to find Cassie, the office girl from the shop, standing near their table.

“Sorry to bother you but there's a guy in the shop who says you did some work on his bike awhile back. He's having a little trouble with it and Beard tried to help but he insisted that because you did the work he wants you to look at it,” her voice was filled with hesitation.

Poor girl looked like frightened mouse. She was peering around out of the corners of her eyes as if discreetly searching for the nearest escape route. Nikki sighed and the girl visibly tensed as if waiting for a verbal attack. Jesus, Nikki didn't think she was that scary.

“Right, tell him I'll be there in a second,” at her words Cassie scurried off as quickly as she could.

“You two figure out what you wanna do about Lenny's and I'll be back in a minute,” she told the boys as she rose from the table.

Nikki moved through the office and out into the front parking lot of the shop. Standing next to a Harley with his back to her was a very familiar looking man.

“What are you doing here Roger? Are you out of your mind?” she hissed at him.

“Afternoon Miss Jones,” Roger turned and greeted her with that polite manner of his.

“You're going to get yourself shot. You need to go now,” she demanded.

“I can't do that Miss Jones,” he replied.

Of course he couldn't. Cole had obviously sent him here to do his bidding and god that pissed her off. She might not want to see the man but

for him to be so cowardly as to send his bodyguard to get shot in his place absolutely boiled her blood.

“And why not? Because Mister Cole sent you down here to grovel for him? Didn’t he have the balls enough to come here and face me himself?” Nikki growled.

“Actually,” Roger’s gaze flicked over her shoulder as he spoke.

Nikki screwed her eyes shut tight. Please no. Please do not be there. She turned around and her eyes fell upon a black on black Range Rover parked down the street.

She tore her gaze away from the vehicle.

“You can’t be here Roger. He can’t be here,” she told him as she hurried for the workshop door.

“Nikki wait, I need to talk to you,” Cole’s growly voice hit her ears and the monster inside her immediately became restless.

That voice. She hated it as much as she craved it. It was like dangling a hit in front of a reformed addict. She would not take a hit, she would not take a hit. She froze, anchored to the spot as she battled to keep the darkness contained.

“Please Angel. Just look at me,” his plea was more demand than request.

And at his order she nearly turned around but as she looked up she saw Trace and Tex through the office window. For them she could walk away, for them she could do anything.

“He can’t be here,” she growled at Roger and propelled herself through the office door.

The sound of the office door slamming brought Tex’s gaze to Nikki. She looked stressed out. He glanced through the office windows and glimpsed the frame of a man out in the front parking lot. Something about the guy looked familiar.

“You ok Baby Girl?” Trace asked her as she reached them.

Nikki blew out a deep breath, “Yeah I’m fine. Now are we going to Lenny’s place or what?”

“You don’t have to go there if you don’t want to Baby girl,” Trace told her.

God he was such an ignorant ass. What was he thinking? Of course she was stressed out. Hey Nikki you wanna come hang out in the home of the homicidal maniac who tried to kill you? Real smooth Tex.

“Sorry Nikki I didn’t think.”

Nikki cut him off, “Will you two relax? Stop treating me like I’m gonna break. The guy’s dead it’s not like he’s gonna jump out at us from some dark corner of his house. If there’s something there I wanna know what it is.”

The hinges of the door squeaked as Reaper came out of the clubhouse. His gaze came their way and locked on to Nikki before he disappeared around the corner of the building.

"I'll be back in a second," Nikki declared as she headed off in Reaper's direction.

"What the hell is that about?" Trace asked him.

"I have no idea."

Tex watched with curiosity as she disappeared around the dark corner. Nikki had always had very little to do with Reaper or the other way around. Then again Reaper had less and less to do with his brother's too as time had gone on. The man flitted in and out as he was needed. He ran on his own schedule and really was a law unto himself. Tex felt like King gave Reaper too much rope to do as he saw fit. The man was like an unpredictable animal that was allowed to wander around off leash. Nikki came back moments later looking even more like the weight of the world was on her shoulders. He knew how she felt.

The three of them stood in the dark alley beside Lenny's waterfront mansion. Nikki’s head really wasn't in the game tonight. She was too focused on Reaper and the little war of wills they'd had earlier. She'd handed him her ultimatum. She either rides with him or she dishes the dirt to the club and he rides nowhere. He might've agreed to her terms but she still hadn’t trusted him enough not to lift his keys while he wasn’t looking.

He wouldn't be going anywhere on his own bike tonight and he sure as shit wouldn't ask the others for a ride. That would have to be enough reassurance for now. Then there was that other incident, the one she wasn't going to think about.

Tex got down on one knee and held out his hands.

"Over you go Ace."

Nikki placed her foot in his joined hands and he boosted her up and over the fence. Her feet hit the grass softly and she immediately ducked into the nearby foliage. Tex landed solidly beside her.

"Could you make any more noise?" She hissed at him.

He sniggered slightly, "Like I said to Trace this much muscle can't help but make an impact."

That much muscle definitely made a serious impact. He pressed close to her demonstrating just how much of an impact it could make as it distracted her from her surroundings.

"Stop thinking about it," he teased.

Nikki elbowed him in the ribs then snuck through the garden to the wall of the house as Trace came over the wall behind them.

Trace led her along the wall to toward the street side of the house while Tex searched for a way in.

"The power for the alarm and everything is here."

Nikki pulled her lock picks from her inside her jacket and got the power box open. The wires were badly patched together. Nikki doubted the system worked efficiently if at all. She loosened the wires some more just in case then she relocked the door. No sense in leaving any evidence behind. They moved quickly through the foliage towards the other end of the building finding Tex next to an open window.

She wondered if Cole knew Lenny was renting this place from Jason Black. It hadn't been listed in the file Cole had given her about Lenny which meant if he knew about it he hadn't wanted her or the MC to know about it. Maybe it was because he thought Lenny was hiding the tape here and he hadn't wanted her to find it. That would explain what the stealthy

ninja, or Roger as far as she was concerned, was doing sneaking around inside the building.

They slid through the window one after the other. Even in the barely there light coming she could tell this place was expensive. She knew Lenny had been extorting money from Cole and now she began to wonder exactly how much Cole was paying him. This place looked like it cost a mint. Nikki pulled out her torch and shone it around her. She didn't even know where to start or what the hell to look for.

"I'm gonna take upstairs. Tex you take the garage and Nikki you check out down here," Trace ordered as he headed towards the staircase.

Nikki moved through the front section of the house. A giant wall of glass separated the open plan living from the giant outdoor entertaining area. Filmy curtains hung from the ceiling allowing enough light in that Nikki decided to turn off her torch. As she moved quietly through the space she began to think how much it reminded her of Cole's penthouse. All this space and large, expensive furniture for only one person seemed ridiculous. She went through all the draws and cupboards. Nothing but she'd expected that, you're hardly going to leave evidence that links you to criminals lying round now are you?

There was an open door leading off the rear of the main space into an office. Nikki approached the large desk in the centre of the room. There were computer cables laying on the floor discarded and a mark in the slightly dusty surface showed where the computer once sat. Damn! That was exactly the sort of thing she could've used. She searched the draws then did a quick scan of the shelves. Nothing but books and decorative items and certainly not anything she could picture Lenny buying. Maybe the place came fully furnished and decorated? A large cupboard in the corner was her next target. She pulled both doors open and eyed the contents. There were some boxes stacked in the corner haphazardly but otherwise the cupboard was empty. No shelves for books or files. Nothing but those boxes.

Nikki turned her attention to the boxes. She opened the top one and sifted through it. Nothing but shredded newspaper. She pulled the box off the top and opened the next one. Same thing. This was just weird. Why the hell would you keep boxes filled with newspaper in a cupboard.

"Nikki," Tex hissed her name and she jumped slightly.

That boy could move quietly when he wanted to. He grabbed her arm and shoved her into the cupboard, Trace hot on his heels. A weird hollow sound from under their feet caught her attention for a moment. Tex covered her mouth with his hand and motioned for her to be silent. She frowned at him but followed his command. Trace closed the cupboard doors behind him cramming them in and plunging them into darkness.

The boy's bodies took up much of the room in the cupboard. Add the boxes to that and Nikki found herself pressed into the corner with Tex covering the left half of her body and Trace the right. She listened to the silence straining to get a sense of what had forced them into this dark cramped space. She couldn't hear anything. Nikki tilted her head up straining to listen to what had spooked them. Tex's breath puffed out against her lips as Trace's skimmed across the skin of her neck. Suddenly she became very aware of just how close they were.

Tex's chest was tight against hers the hard muscle pressing against her left breast. One of his legs was jammed between hers the other one on the outside of her thigh. Trace was squeezed against her other side. His hand was at the small of her back and her arm was pinned to her side by his torso. She felt that familiar twinge in all the right places and she totally forgot where she was.

The moist heat of their breath mingled together in the dark cramped space. The memory of the time she woke to the two of them in her bed came to her and her body began to respond. His mouth inched closer and he pushed his thigh against her sex adding just enough pressure to bring her clit to life but not enough to send it on its way. The hand Trace had at her back shifted lower grabbing her ass and kneading it. His other hand moved

to her breast and he gently brushed her nipple with his fingers. God damn these two. What the hell were they playing at?

Nikki did a little shift and wriggle of her own trying to gain a little space. It didn't work. Instead she ended up rubbing her hip against Tex's crotch and brushing her hand over Trace's growing bulge. Tex responded to her movement with a small sigh and began rocking into her. His thigh shifted back and forth between her legs building the friction. He kept his mouth just out of reach of her lips tempting her to close the gap and kiss him. Trace worked his hand from her ass down between her legs stroking the seam of her jeans from behind.

A foreign noise reached Nikki's ears. Someone or something else was in the house. She opened her mouth to warn them but the words never got out. Tex took that moment to press his case. He captured her mouth with his own sinking his tongue into her mouth in a heated kiss. Her body's response was automatic. Her tongue duelled with his in a fierce battle for control where neither side was giving an inch. At the same time Trace's mouth found the sensitive skin at the side of her neck. Her body gained a mind of its own, rubbing against theirs frantically seeking just the right amount of friction. Her hands moved. One going for the front of Trace's jeans rubbing and stroking him and the other digging her nails into Tex's ass.

The sound of a voice carried through to them, "Looks like the wiring is loose."

Nikki froze and both Tex and Trace stopped.

"We'll look around just to make sure."

One of Tex's hands went for Nikki's fly. She was straining so hard to hear more sounds that at first she didn't notice what he was doing. Her button popped open and Nikki removed her hand from Trace's crotch grabbing hold of Tex's wrist to stop him. They could not do this here.

"Can I get a hand here Brother?" Tex whispered the question to Trace.

Trace grabbed her hand and twisting it around behind her back and pinning it there with his body. The restraint triggered a little shiver of

arousal which she chose to ignore.

"They'll hear us," she hissed at them hoping they'd stop.

He brought his mouth to her ear and whispered, "You'll just have to be quiet then, won't you Ace?"

The challenge in his voice was clear and as he slid her zip down slowly she leant back against the wall in acceptance.

Trace had felt the instant tension as the three of them pressed together in their cramped hiding place and he was not going to let the opportunity pass. Luckily for him it seemed Tex'd had the same idea. He had not expected Tex to want to share Nikki so readily with him but maybe he had underestimated the man's selflessness. Trace would do anything for the woman he loved and clearly so would Tex.

Trace helped Tex tug down Nikki's jeans just far enough to allow them access to the prize. Nikki turned her face towards him and while he couldn't see her clearly in the dark of the cupboard he knew what it would look like. Her cheeks would be flushed, her eyes hooded and her wet swollen lips slightly parted. He brought his mouth to hers attempting to stifle her sounds as he slid his hand over ass and into her wet heat from behind. His fingertips bumped Tex's as they both explored her slippery folds. As he slid a finger inside her alongside Tex's he didn't know which sigh was louder his, Tex's or Nikki's.

Trace kept one ear trained on the noises in the house and another on the noises coming from Nikki. He could tell she was fighting it. Her body was tense and from the stifled noises she was making she was also biting her lip. She huffed and sighed as they stroked their fingers in and out of her. The ache built in his already throbbing cock and he wished they were somewhere else. Somewhere he could get these jeans off her and slide into the wet warm heaven between her legs.

The noise of footsteps caused him to break of their kiss. Which way where these bastards going? The footsteps move away from them Heading

up the stairs. They really needed to move this party along and he knew just how to do it. The problem was he couldn't get to it at this angle.

"Tex," he whispered.

"Reading you loud and clear Brother," came Tex's reply.

Tex knew exactly what he needed to do. He swept his thumb back and forth across her clit. Nikki gasped and the start of a moan escaped from her mouth. Tex's heart leapt with the twinge of anxiety that passed through him. He felt Trace scramble to cover her mouth with his hand muffling the noise. While their fingers kept working her he listened to the house. Nothing. No indication she'd been heard but he didn't think it was safe for Trace to remove his hand. While he may have been ok with sharing his Nikki with Trace he was not ok with sharing with anyone else.

He leaned close and whispered in her ear, "You're gonna get us caught Ace and I don't know about you but I'd like to finish this without interruption."

She nodded slightly. He nibbled on the sensitive skin of her neck and smiled as she squirmed but didn't make a noise.

"Trace is gonna keep his hand there just in case," he told them both.

Tex could feel the beat of her heart against his chest and the quivering of her muscles as fought to stay quiet. He had her right where he wanted. A noise out in the main room took his attention for a moment. They were coming back downstairs. Time to speed things up. He sought out that knot of nerves inside her. As his fingers stroked across it Nikki shuddered against him and he felt the flutter of her inner walls. His cock convulsed begging to get inside her.

The voices got closer.

"Hey did you check this room here?"

"Nah not yet."

Tex felt Nikki's desperation as the footsteps drew nearer. He added more speed to the stroke of his fingers over her sweet spot and Trace followed his lead.

"It's just an office. Looks like the computer is missing but there's a layer of dust so it's been gone awhile."

Nikki's body tensed and her insides strangled their fingers. She was right on the verge.

"Come for us Ace," he whispered to her as the footsteps began to head out of the room.

With one last flick of his thumb Nikki came. Her inner muscles sucked at their fingers and he nearly groaned in response. A small muffled whimper escaped from behind the hand that Trace held over her mouth.

"Did you hear that?" The voice asked from the hallway.

Nikki heard the question and knew she'd made a noise. She mentally cursed both of them for their skilled fingers and their intimate knowledge of her body. She tried to still herself as much as possible but the sweet after burn of her orgasm still lingered and neither of them were removing their hands.

"I didn't hear anything," came the reply.

Nikki plastered herself against the back of the cupboard as if that would somehow save them from being caught.

"Nothing's been touched. Let's just go back and report the faulty wiring," suggested the other man.

"Yeah you're right."

The footsteps moved away from them and the front door slammed loudly.

"You need to remove your hands," her words came out muffled.

Trace's hand came away from her mouth but their hands stayed buried inside her.

"All of them," she stated clearly.

They slowly withdrew their fingers sending another shiver of arousal through her. The cupboard door opened and the light began to filter in. She watched as Tex slid his fingers into his mouth tasting her.

"Mmmmmmm. You always taste so sweet Ace," his voice was husky, sounding like sex, "Don't you agree brother?"

"Definitely," Trace replied before sliding sucking her juices from his own finger.

Another shiver moved through her. God damn it. What the hell were these two playing at? Not that it wasn't incredibly hot and not that she wasn't incredibly turned on but seriously? Now suddenly they were sharing her, as in 'sharing her' sharing her.

"Did you find anything upstairs?" Tex abruptly changed the subject.

"Nothing except an already open safe. What about you guys?" Trace too seemed suddenly back to normal.

The question reminded her of the hollow sound she'd heard beneath her feet.

"We got nothing," Tex replied.

Nikki moved the boxes out of the cupboard and shone her torch around the floor. The edges of the carpet didn't look fixed to the floor. Nikki grabbed it and lifted. The carpet came away with no resistance.

"What the hell is that?" Tex asked.

Nikki ignored his question as she stared down at the floor. There was a small handle in the wood.

Nikki grabbed the handle and she hesitated a moment. She didn't really want to open it. A trapdoor in the house of some sicko who got off on legitimately hurting women? This could not be good. Nikki took a deep breath and pulled. The trapdoor opened revealing a set of stairs leading down into the dark. This was horror movie creepy. She shone her torch to the room below. She couldn't see much from that angle. Only one thing for it. Nikki took the first step

"Wait maybe one of us should go first," Tex suggested grabbing hold of her arm.

"No. I've got this," she replied and headed down the stairs.

As she entered the space lights flickered on and it became immediately obvious to Nikki what this room was. It was Lenny's

playroom. Although looking around she thought the term dungeon of torture would be more accurate. The floor and walls were both made from cold concrete. There was a platform style bed off to the side almost as if it were forgotten or discarded. The rest of the room was filled with a variety of benches, chains and metal contraptions for trapping and holding a body.

A large built in cupboard ran the length of one wall the mirrored doors reflecting the image of the room back at them. Nikki knew what was behind those doors without even looking. Tex moved passed her grasping the last door and pulling it back. Slowly they opened revealing the tools of the trade. A collection of sex toys, clamps and cuffs, paddles, canes and belts appeared in front of her. She felt her skin grow clammy as she stared at the items. Something stirred deep inside her and Nikki knew exactly what it was. She may have had the monster all locked up but that didn't mean it wasn't capable of rattling its cage.

“Fucking hell,” Tex’s curse broke her out of her trance.

Her gaze swung his way but stalled on the metal rack in front of him. Her stomach churned at the sight before her. The rack was filled with knives, spikes, needles and black leather. The knives were the least frightening things displayed on there. An array of leather cuffs and weird looking harnesses adorned the wall. The harnesses themselves were covered in sharp needle like spikes. Nikki couldn't figure out how the hell they worked and she really didn't want to know. One thing was for sure though they were all about blood and pain.

“What kind of sick fuck gets off on this shit?” Tex exclaimed.

Nikki would've had half a mind to be offended if she hadn't thought the same thing herself.

“Is this what he was into too?” Tex emphasized the word he in such a way that there was no mistaking who he meant.

“No. This shit is extreme. It's designed to maim and permanently damage people. That was not what he was about.”

“Really?,” Tex paused his eyebrows raised at her, “He whipped you till you bled Nikki. I don't know if you remember it but I do. The blood and sweat pouring down your back, the horrible moans you made every time we

moved you and when Doc tried to treat you, god the screams, the horrendous fucking screaming,” his voice broke on the last word causing her heart to ache.

“Tex lay off,” Trace warned him.

She remembered it alright. The flashes of lucidity she’d had that night remained embedded in her memory. Her back still itched and burned from time to time, the flesh memory repeating itself. It messed with her head constantly. She hated Cole and even feared him a little for what he had done to her. She also felt guilty as she had driven him down that path by promising him more than she had to give. And even though she didn’t want to acknowledge it deep down parts of her still called out for him with a faint and distant yearning. She had always known that playing with that fire was going to get her burnt and it did. She couldn’t entirely blame Cole for that.

Tex was looking away from her when she finally had the courage to look at him. She knew him well enough to know he was choking down whatever emotion had crawled its way up to the surface. She had done wrong by so many people through this whole thing and she didn’t want to drag anyone through that shit again. She also knew that in this life you often had to do things that you didn’t want to do regardless of the consequences. She turned back to the cupboard in front of her.

“I don’t want to remember it,” she said firmly as she reeved the sliding door closed again.

As she turned to walk away something caught Nikki’s eye. Something inside one of the ventilation grates on the wall. Was that a light flashing? She moved to it and as she reached up she noted that the screws were missing, the grates seemingly just popped in to place. She slid her nails between the grate and the wall prying it loose.

“Cameras, fucking cameras,” she said as she whirled around to check the other grates.

The boys were already at it, pulling off the grates one by one to reveal a throng of cameras covering the room from all angles. Nikki

frantically searched the room for where the feed might be running to. She ran her hands over the walls but found nothing.

“You’re sure there was nothing upstairs?” she asked Tex.

“Just that safe. Maybe Black or the Ninja guy already got the evidence?” Trace replied.

Shit.

“Maybe the recording device is gone but that doesn’t mean the footage is right?”

Tex nodded at her.

“Search the whole place again. Look for discs or thumb drives anything that might hold video footage. Maybe these sick pricks play together,” Nikki commanded as she began rifling through the few draws in the room.

Between the three of them they would turn this place upside down to find anything that would lead them to the man who killed Rat and ultimately the man who killed her mother too.

They’d scoured the place from top to tail every single draw, cupboard, piece of furniture or any other crack and crevice that presented itself. They’d found nothing and Tex was getting frustrated to say the least. He yawned as he leant back against an empty dresser in one of the upstairs bedrooms. He’d been up for over 24 hour, he’d been confronted by the sick and twisted playground of a man who’d wanted the woman he loved dead and he’d hurt her again. On top of all that he’d run the gamut of all the emotions he could think of lust, love, anger, sadness, disgust and frustration.

He could hear the sounds of tinging metal in the next room as he paused in his search. Nikki entered the room in a hurry heading straight to the wall vents.

“What are you doing?”

“If the bastard is hiding his cameras in the vents maybe he's hiding other shit in there.”

She had a point. As Nikki set to work with her knife undoing the screws on one vent Tex did the same to another. Nikki growled in frustration as she came up empty and moved on to the next one.

Tex reached inside the vent and ran his fingers over the inside surface. Nothing.

“There’s something in this one I can’t quite reach it,” Nikki stated.

Tex quickly rushed over to help her. Reaching further back into the vent his hand swept over the metal surface. Something was taped to the bottom of the duct. Tex tore off the tape and brought it out.

“A key?”

“What for? The safe maybe?” she asked.

Tex shook his head the safe was a combination lock not a key lock.

“There has to be something around here,” Nikki said the look in her eyes one of complete determination.

Tex scanned the space for the hundredth time. There was nothing here, no locked draws or secret doors or hatches. They were clutching at straws here desperation driving them forward. The key could’ve been for anything. Hell, it could’ve been here before Lenny even lived here.

“Got you, you bastard. In here,” Nikki called from the closet.

“Did you find something?” Trace asked as he entered the room.

Tex watched as she stepped down from a small wooden step stair in the corner of the closet. The manhole in the roof above her was open and as she turned to face him she held a small lock box in her hands. She placed the box on an empty shelf and held her hand out for the key. He let her do the honours and when she opened it, the box was full of thumb drives just as Nikki had suggested.

Tex’s lip curled up in disgust as he stared at the little black items. The last thing he wanted to see was that twisted fuck at work and he certainly didn’t want Nikki watching that shit.

He grabbed the box of the shelf in front of her, “Not that I’m in a hurry to look at this shit but let’s get out of here.”

He turned and walked out of the room before she could argue with him.

Nikki sat in front of the screen her insides churning with revulsion and hatred. The thought had occurred to her that Black and Lenny's bedroom tastes might run the same way. What she hadn't considered was that it wouldn't be Jason Black on the footage but his brother. Those evil black eyes pierced right through her from inside the screen. The idea of the two of them working together was beyond frightening. Only a few minutes in and Nikki had seen more than she'd ever wanted to.

She turned her attention back to the box full of little black thumb drives. The only way to identify them was by the small numbers on the side that Nikki realized were dates. She sifted through the box. A flash of red caught her eye. She picked up the little thumb drive. It was a different brand than the rest of them and it looked older. There was no date on it just two little letters that made her heart jump. M.C. Marcus Cole. Shit.

"Right I've seen enough of this shit. Turn it off," Trace told Tex.

Nikki panicked and pocketed the little red and black thumb drive before the boys could notice.

If it was what she thought it was then what had Roger pulled from the safe? If the ninja even was Roger. God, this just got more and more convoluted the further they dug.

"So I guess that explains the link between Lenny and Black," Tex said as he pulled a thumb drive from the computer and threw it back into the box.

Nikki briefly wondered if they shouldn't let Alex take a look at these files.

"All those women," Trace said as he looked at the small memory sticks as if they were poisoned.

All those women. He was right, all of these women. Her blood boiled and her gut twisted up some more.

"Maybe we should," Trace began.

"Burn them," Nikki cut him off.

What was the point if dragging the women in these videos back through the trauma inflicted upon them, if they were even alive. Even if both men weren't dead their victims would never see justice.

"Nikki, don't you think," he began again.

"We burn them all," she stated firmly.

It was too late for all these women. Too late for them and too late for her mother. Her rage was starting to build. Nikki's twisted logic started making the links for her and where they led her was straight to Bridges. The man was responsible for all this. He enabled these psychopaths to roam free. She would make him suffer for this, she would. Nikki felt the monster rattle its cage and she cursed at herself inwardly. She needed to take a deep breath and get her shit back under control. She was beginning to realise that it was one thing to cage an animal but it was another thing altogether to tame it.

Chapter 9

Nikki watched the street around her from the comfort of her mustang. Tex and Trace had given her this section of the shipment route. She was supposed to stay in her car and watch for any signs of activity. As she sat there she tried her hardest to avoid all thoughts of Cole and that little black and red memory stick. Instead she focused on the boys and their little interlude in the cupboard. That and the incident in the lounge room and that time in her bedroom at the clubhouse. As the car began to fog up with her breath Nikki decided maybe she shouldn't think about that either.

Her phone beeped breaking into her thoughts.

Anything up ur end?

It was Brodie. He was positioned up the other end of the street from her. They'd scouted this section between the two of them and figured out the best positions to be in. She'd been glad the boys had put her with Brodie. He was still a bit pissed at her for the handcuff stunt she'd pulled on him. Mostly it was because it hurt his pride. But he was dealing with it and even joking with her a little bit.

She hadn't spotted anything unusual. The only people out here were business people in suits moving from one office building to the next. That and a bunch of town cars and taxis.

Nothing

They didn't have enough people to watch the whole route so they were operating in a leap frog style pattern. Each pair had their own section of the route. Once the truck was clear of your section you cut across in front of the other pairs to your next section. They were heading through the city which was not their usual MO either. The tails they were picking up had forced them to go non-traditional routes.

Nikki hadn't thought travelling right through Bridges playground was a good idea. But the thing that it did have going for it was that it was crowded. No one would be game enough to jump the shipment with this

many witnesses around. It was also a pretty popular route for trucks supplying all the shops, restaurants, clubs and hotels in this area. Their truck just looked like one more truck among a bunch of trucks travelling this way. The danger was they were on the enemy's doorstep. Although that wasn't the only reason Nikki didn't like it. They were also dangerously close to the Mint and that made her uneasy to say the least. Not that she was going to reveal that to the boys or anyone else for that matter.

Nikki's phone beeped again this time it was Trace.

How you doing Baby girl? We are just about to you.

Tex and Trace were taking point on this one.

All good. Nothin sus.

By the time she'd sent the reply she caught the first glimpse of the boy's van moving into their section. The large white truck was a couple of cars behind it. She glanced between the street in front of her and the truck behind but nothing happened. The van and the truck rolled past her without incident. Nikki pulled out trailing a few cars behind them and followed them until Case picked them up after the turn.

She texted Brodie to make a move to their next location and did a U-turn breaking away from the truck. She glanced up in the rear view to get one more look at the departing convoy. Her mirror quickly filled up with the traffic behind her. She took a quick left searching for Brodie in the cars ahead. She got a brief look at his silver sedan making a right two sets of lights up from her. She sped up to make it through the orange light.

Another quick check of her rear view mirror sent Nikki into a tail spin. A familiar looking black Range Rover was filling up her vision. Jesus Christ. She could not panic, she had a job to do. She went through the next orange and hit the right hand turn just in time. The car behind her followed right on her ass. There was no doubting it now. He was tailing her. Shit. She did not have time for this bullshit. She'd have to try and lose him.

Nikki focused on the traffic in front of her. She hit a set of lights and took a quick left. The car came with her. Nikki stuck her phone in the holder and opened up the GPS. She typed in the street Brodie and her were

supposed to be covering next. Somehow she had to lose him and still make it to her spot. She weaved in and out of the traffic ducking into and out of any gap she could find to put some distance between them. But the Range Rover was no slouch she barely managed to put four cars between them.

As she approached the next set of lights she saw her opportunity. The light turned orange and she swung into the middle lane expecting the car in front of her to run it. At the last second it braked. Nikki had nowhere to go. The outside lane was blocked and it was too late to brake in time. She put her foot to the floor and lurched out onto the wrong side of the road barely missing the car that had been in front of her. As she hit the intersection she turned the wheel and braked hard sliding her mustang around the turn. The tires screeched in protest and smoke billowed out behind her.

She stomped on the gas and straightened up flying down the road. She glanced in her mirror and saw nothing but the slow moving city traffic coming through the intersection behind her. She wasn't taking any chances though. Nikki kept on the gas until she found a small lane way on her GPS. She turned into it and followed it across two streets before turning back out into the normal traffic. Luckily her detour had only taken two blocks from her original route and she quickly found the street they were supposed be watching.

Brodie was taking the forward position on this one and he raised his eyebrows at Nikki as she drove passed. She just shrugged at him and moved down the other end of the road. She pulled into a free parking space on the road side just as the truck turned into the other end of the street. They were now really close to the middle of town. Cars and foot traffic were heavy in all directions making it difficult to pick out any one person or vehicle. This is why Nikki was on the opposite side of the road watching the truck and oncoming traffic.

She watched as the truck crawled along in the packed traffic. It passed Brodie's position but Nikki couldn't tell if he managed to squeeze in behind it. Nikki continued to scan the street in front of her. Nothing stood

out. Maybe the change of route to a more public location had been enough of a deterrent.

A weird feeling spread over Nikki as the trucked neared and she peered at the crowded street more intently. Nothing. Her eyes flicked to her rear view mirror and it became immediately obvious what that feeling had been about. The Range Rover was back. Why the hell couldn't he leave her alone? Nikki's hackles rose as the door to the Range Rover opened. She did not want to see him, she couldn't. Her eyes flicked back towards the convoy. She could now see the van among the traffic. This was not good. Nikki slid her hand into her jacket retrieving her trusty Glock. She pressed the muzzle against the glass of her window. The knock on the glass came and she squeezed her eyes shut. She so didn't want to look but she had no choice.

Nikki glanced out of the window to see Roger standing there rather grim faced. Nikki let out the breath she'd been holding and wound down the window a smidge.

"What do you want Roger?" She demanded turning her attention back to the road in front of her.

"That was one hell of a manoeuvre back there Miss Jones," Roger replied.

"I'm sure you're not standing here to tell me how much you admire my driving skills. I thought I told you yesterday to stay away from me."

She glanced in the mirror eyeing the Range Rover. She wondered if he was in there.

"Technically Miss Jones you said I can't come near the clubhouse."

"Semantics Roger. Now you have 30 seconds to tell me what you want?" she replied.

"I wanted to know that you were ok. Mister Cole wanted to know that you were ok," he stated quietly.

Hearing his name threw her emotions into a blender. She wondered which one would pop out today.

"Well you can see now just as you saw yesterday I'm fine. Now leave," she told him.

The van and the truck moved forward again crawling through an intersection. Another truck pulled alongside them blocking the van from Nikki's view. If that truck moved the boys would have a clear look at Roger standing over her car and that would not end well for anyone.

"He needs to see you Nikki. He's really distraught about what happened," Roger continued.

"He's distraught?" she yelled at him drawing a few eyes their way. Ok so anger it was. Shit! She could not do this.

She lowered her voice, "I do not want to make a scene Roger but if you don't leave now I will not hesitate to create one."

Nikki emphasised her words with a tap of her Glock on the glass. Roger's eyes dropped down to the source of the noise and he sighed.

"Very well Miss Jones," he replied.

Roger turned away from her and Nikki breathed a sigh of relief.

"Miss Jones?" Roger's voice broke through her calm, "He won't give up."

She ignored his comment and wound up her window. She glanced up to see the small truck turning across traffic, revealing the van and the boys inside. She wouldn't and couldn't give up either.

She watched as the boys rolled through the intersection. Their heads turned her way and she prayed they paid no notice to the vehicle parked behind her. She nodded at them and Tex returned his attention to the road in front of him. Trace's gaze lingered on her and as he turned slowly she was sure he spent a few seconds studying the car behind her.

She held her breath waiting for something dramatic to happen but nothing did. Trace's gaze moved forward and the van and truck rolled past. She let go of the breath she was holding and took another look in the mirror. The car was still there but Roger was gone. Maybe he got into the car before Trace could get a look at him. As she pulled out of her parking bay and sped off down the road to their next spot Nikki couldn't help but feel that this was just the beginning where Cole was concerned.

Trace was distracted momentarily by the Range Rover parked behind Nikki's Mustang. He didn't get a look at the driver as he hopped into the large black luxury SUV but he had a strange feeling about that car. He studied it briefly thinking it was the car from the security footage outside the compound, the one that had whisked Nikki off to apparent safety. But the longer he'd looked the less sure he was. For starters the rims were different than the one he remembered. Also he was sure there was a lot more chrome on the one from the footage. This one was all black on black and pretty bad ass even if something about it was off.

He glanced in the side mirror and watched as Nikki tore off down the road. The Range Rover didn't make a move and while logically that made it less suspect, Trace couldn't help the way he felt about that car.

"You right Brother?" Tex asked.

"Yeah fine. Just keeping an eye on Nikki. She's gonna get a ticket the way she tore out of there," he answered.

Tex laughed, "I'm sure she'll find a way to get out of it."

Nikki certainly had a way with law enforcement.

"Speaking of which have you got that info from Alex yet?" Tex asked

"Nah. Rock's gonna get it from Rachael tonight," he replied.

"Those two are playing with fire," Tex commented.

Trace knew he was right. Rock was definitely asking for trouble with that bird. Trace didn't trust her and he didn't trust her interest in Rock either.

"Let's just hope our boy isn't the one who gets burnt," he responded.

He checked the mirror as they entered the next section of the route. Brodie peeled off the back of their convoy as Rock picked them up. This was the last segment through the entertainment district. After that it was Crows territory and that leg was the most unpredictable. Bull had assured them safe passage but that didn't mean that things were gonna go off without a hitch. Bull was having major issues both internal and external.

The guy needed to take serious control of his club and his streets and he needed to do it soon. Trace was in no position to tell the man that though and they just had to take him at his word.

King and Reaper were working with Bull on the drugs that were suddenly flooding out onto the streets in their areas. That shit had always stayed in the entertainment districts or to the north side of the city. They did not dabble in drugs. It had been an unwritten rule in their club. Although a slightly hypocritical one as the guns they shipped were often sold to those in the drug trade waging war on each other and the police.

They'd kept this route as public as possible, broad daylight and busy streets, in order to reduce the chances of a strike on the convoy. Working in separated teams in the leap frog pattern they'd decided on gave them a few advantages over the enemy as well. If someone picked up a tail between spots they had time to lose it or to investigate it. It would also appear to outsiders that they were working with a small team and this might encourage the enemy to severely underestimate them. They could scout ahead and be given the opportunity to change the route if they needed to. For his first job as Road Captain he thought it was a pretty good plan even if he did say so himself.

He kept flicking his eyes back and forth between his map and the surroundings as they moved through the streets. The buildings had gotten decidedly smaller as they neared the end of Case and Rock's section. The last few bars and restaurants disappeared and were replaced by cafés, corner stores and residential buildings. The next huge bend in the road would take them straight from upper class suburbia into the working class neighbourhood that the Crows called home.

Trace's phone beeped alerting him to a text message. It was Rat.

Truck accident blocking access to James St. Might have to change route?

Shit. Even the best laid plans as they say. Trace knew the area well enough to re-route them but he still double checked the map on his phone.

We'll turn after that down Main St. Adjust your position. I'll get Nikki to pick us up from there.

Rat texted back in the affirmative.

"We're gonna have to change our route slightly. Rat says there's a truck accident blocking access to James Street going into the industrial," He explained to Tex.

"Shit. Just what we need. Well Road Captain you're in charge, which way do we go instead?" Tex asked.

"We'll have to go down Main Street. Not ideal but it'll only put us out a couple of blocks and it leads straight to the road out," he stated.

"Yeah but it'll put us right in the thick of Bull's problems," Tex complained.

"It's a risk we'll just have to take brother," he responded.

Trace shot off a text to Nikki and Brodie explaining the situation and giving them their new positions. The reply he got from Nikki was along the same lines as Tex's comments but what could he do?

Nikki quickly took a left as she dialled Brodie's number.

"Hey. You get that text?"

"Yeah, Main street right?" he confirmed.

"Yeah listen wait a couple of blocks from the end near the old bike shop ok? And be careful a lot of Bull's problems seem to be culminating around Main," she warned him.

"Got it," he replied before hanging up.

This was so not good. Nikki's internal warning bells were firing off big time.

Main Street was several blocks over from their original path and it bypassed the busy areas of the industrial section. It would take them right through the heart of the decaying drug filled quarter of the Crow's territory. Nikki slowed as she turned into the lower end of Main street. She spotted Brodie and gave him a wave then proceeded down the street scouting their

new section. She didn't know how any of the businesses around here still survived anyway.

There were very few people out. A scattering workers from the warehouses mingling in their yards for their break but that was it. It was too early in the day for majority of the drug fiends and their dealers to be out. She knew the houses they hid in though. You could tell them from a mile away. The windows were all boarded up and the gardens wild and overgrown. Parts of the building were sagging or just plain falling off and the stench of despair rolled off them in waves. This was what drugs did to a neighbourhood. They ate away at it piece by piece until there was nothing left but an empty shell, buildings and humans alike.

Nikki did a U-turn and parked a couple of blocks up from the where the truck would be turning in. She continued to watch the street and though nothing stood out an uneasy feeling sat in her guts. She shot off a text to Trace telling him they were in position. She also checked in with Brodie who informed her he had nothing down his end of the street. That still didn't dislodge the feeling of doubt working its way through her.

Nikki watched as a car pulled into the street up ahead of her. It was the first car she'd seen moving along here. It was a late model black sedan, nothing unique about it except it didn't look like it belonged in this neighbourhood. Then again addicts came in all shapes and sizes. The car pulled over and stopped on the next block up from her. She glanced in the rear-view mirror, no van yet. The car doors opened and out stepped a familiar looking bulky figure. Jesus Christ, it was one of Jason Black's goons. She knew this was not going to go well.

Nikki quickly palmed her phone and dialled Trace.

"We may have a problem," she announced down the phone.

"What?" Trace's voice was wary.

"There's sedan up ahead of me and one of Black's goons just got out of it," she explained.

A string of profanities left Trace's mouth.

“Get Brodie to move up. I’ll send Jay in front of us and get Rat to pull up the rear.”

The bulky figure walked towards her tuning in to a driveway a few houses up from her. He stepped up onto the porch of the house as Nikki dialled Brodie’s number.

“Hey Brodie’s need you to come up this way. I just spotted one of Black’s goons,” the sound of Brodie’s beater starting up interrupted her words, “Might need back up.”

The dude at the door glanced back at his sedan and another goon got out of the car. This was really not looking good. The other goon rounded the sedan and his eyes locked on the vehicles. He reached for the handle of the car and Nikki knew what was coming next.

“I’m on my way now Ace,” Brodie replied, “Where is he?”

Jason Black stepped out of the vehicle. Shit.

The last time they saw Black they were all pretending to be Crows. If Black had been helping Lenny then she was sure he would have to know who they were now. If he made any of them things were gonna get ugly and fast.

“Shit. There’s two of them now, Black is with them. They’re just up ahead of me,” She explained.

“Ok be there in a sec,” he stated and then he hung up.

Nikki watched as Black walked down the footpath towards her bringing his special brand of creepy all the closer.

The sound of the truck gearing down drew her attention to her rear-view mirror. Jay was just pulling round the corner and as she looked forward again Brodie was coming towards them a little faster than necessary. She wasn’t the only one whose attention had been drawn by the sound of the truck. Black was now looking down the road in their direction. Nikki could tell from the tension in his body that the sudden influx of traffic had put the man on alert. She checked her mirror again. The van was now making the turn followed closely by the truck.

Black said something to one of his goons and suddenly they were both beside him. Nikki had to do something and quick. She turned the Mustang's key and it roared to life bringing Black's attention to her. He peered at her probably trying to get a read on who was occupying the vehicle. Before Nikki could make a move Jay pulled past her and Brodie made a U-turn at the same time. She watched in open mouthed shock as their cars collided in a screeching of tires and a scraping of metal simultaneously clipping Black's sedan.

Black and his men quickly turned in the other direction having forgotten all about the other vehicles. Both Jay and Brodie's cars skidded to a stop further down the road. Jay was fully on the verge and Brodie was half on the road half up the curb. She wanted to get out and check if they were ok but that was not an option. Brodie and Jay had just given them a window of opportunity to escape unrecognised. The van, the truck and Rat rolled by her and down past the crash. Black and his men were too busy inspecting the damage on their sedan to give the convoy even a glance. Jay and Brodie were climbing from their vehicles as she considered her exit. The movement got Black's attention and his goon's started toward the prospects.

The prospects took one look at each other and ran. The goon's began a pursuit and Nikki prepared to chase them down in her vehicle but there was no need. Jason Black yelled out to his enforcers gesturing toward the house they had approached. Obviously whatever the original reason for their being there was, it was more important than retribution for a dinged up car. Part of Nikki wanted to stay and investigate but after the close call they just had that would be playing with fire.

The engine of her Mustang growled as she accelerated into the road and Black's gaze came back towards her. Their eyes met for the briefest of seconds and recognition flared in his eyes. Her heart stopped and her blood ran cold. She swung her car into a U-turn and headed back in the direction the truck had come from. She shook her head. She was imagining things. There is no way he could've recognised her. Her phone beeped.

No need to thank us. We'll wait by the shopping centre on Ray.

It was from Brodie. Looks like she had some soon to be patched prospects to pick up on the way too.

Chapter 10

“Are you ok?” Alex’s voice was full of concern.

“Sort of. Not really. It’s not me, it’s Rat,” Nikki fumbled over her words.

“What about him?”

“He’s dead. He was dumped on the club’s doorstep and I’m calling it in,” she heard rustling noises in the background.

“Ok I’m on my way. You know the drill, call emergency and don’t touch anything,” he instructed her.

Nikki hung up and dialled emergency services. She reported the body being dumped at the front of the clubhouse and she heard the report go out on the scanner. As she listened she heard Rachael pick up the call. Things would be so much harder without those two.

Nikki went back to the group.

“It’s done. Alex is on his way.”

“Right, we heard the beeping when we came out the car was gone right?” He paused waiting for everyone to acknowledge his words, “Make sure the women know.”

Nikki moved back inside the gate. The women had divided themselves into two clear groups. This is what happened in these situations. Those that were family were brought into the fold and those that were just hangers on were pushed out.

It was time for the skanks and the hangers on to go.

“Right ladies time to go,” she told them, “You need to go out through the side gate and disperse and we need to make it quick yeah?”

She herded them out the gate in a matter of minutes. Where they went after that was their problem? She checked the forecourt and spotted a particular skank milling around the edges of the other group of women.

“You too Melanie,” she stated loudly as she crossed the forecourt, “time to go.”

Melanie sneered at her, "I'm not going anywhere. You might have Tex and Trace covered but some of these men are gonna need comforting and I intend on being there for them if they need me."

Nikki had no patience for this shit.

"If they need you bitch they can come find you in whatever hole you crawled out of. I'm sure it won't be too much of a taxing search for them. They should be able to smell your dirty snatch from a mile away," she quipped back.

Melanie narrowed her eyes and tensed up, preparing to throwdown no doubt. Then Reaper stepped up behind her.

"There a problem here?" he asked.

She watched Melanie smile sickly sweet at Reaper and rub up against him like a cat.

"Nikki said I have to go but you won't make me will you Reap," her pouty face and flirty tone made Nikki want to smack the bitch and hard.

"If a patched member of this club gives you an order bitch you follow that order. Now do as Ace said and piss off."

The smile disappeared from Melanie's face quicker than you could say, what a skank? She turned back towards Nikki and shot daggers at her then stomped past her to the gate. She was getting way too big for her boots and if one of the brothers didn't put her in her place soon Nikki certainly would.

Rose had already ushered the rest of the women inside leaving her alone with Reaper. She knew this was one of the only opportunities she was going to get to speak to him.

"What are you going to do?" she asked him.

"About what?" he replied.

"Don't play dumb with me Reaper. You know exactly what I'm talking about. You're not going to be able to hide it forever you know," she glared at him as she spoke.

"Maybe, maybe not," he answered vaguely, "don't worry about it kid. I've got an end game."

Not worry about it? One of her Brothers was lying in the dirt metres away from them. If he thought she wasn't going to worry about the

lives of her other brothers he was sorely mistaken.

“How far away from this end game are you? Because from what I saw last the other night you don’t have much longer before that unsteady hand of yours starts to cost the club and the lives of your brothers.”

Silence followed.

“What happens when you can’t pull that trigger? When you can’t hit that target anymore? You’re putting your life at risk and the last thing this club needs is another dead body. And what about your brothers? You willing to put your pride ahead of their lives? Cause I don’t know about you but that shit will not fly with me.”

“What are you saying kid? I should tell them about my condition. Let them know the one man they rely on to take care of the real problems is no longer able to have their back anymore. What do you think happens to me then kid? I’ll tell you what happens to me then. I become a liability, a burden. Someone who feeds off the system but never contributes anything. I become a damn leech.”

Her anger was rising and she felt a distant hum coming from the prison locked up inside her.

“Better a leech than a murderer,” she spat the words at him.

“I’m not there yet kid and besides who would replace me? Rock? Case? One of your boyfriends? On a bad day I’ve got more skill than them.”

They would manage without him. A man with less skill who you could count on was better than a man with skill whose reliability was unpredictable.

"Look kid I just need a bit more time. That end game is not that far away. All I'm asking for is a little time to get myself sorted then I can bow out with dignity and disappear somewhere sunny and warm where I won't be a liability to anyone but my damn self. Jesus kid after everything I've done for this club don't you think I deserve that? Don't you think I deserve to leave on my own terms?"

She couldn't argue with him on that one. He had done everything for the club. He'd maimed, tortured and killed for the club. He'd sacrificed his relationship with his daughter for the club. Hell one look in his eyes and

you could see that man had sold his soul to the devil for his club. Not one of them would deny him his request if they could make it happen. There was only one way she could make this happen for him and he wasn't gonna like it.

"What about me?" she asked him.

"What about you?" he frowned at her.

"Face it old man, you need help. I am not gonna let you put my brother's or my club at risk and I sure as hell am not gonna stand by and knowingly let you get yourself killed. You say the others don't have what it takes to keep up with you on your bad days well I'm saying I got what it takes to keep up with you on your good days."

"Really?" He raised his eyebrows in question, "Don't make me laugh kid."

"What you don't think I've got the skill?"

"Ain't no doubt you got talent kid. You got my keen eye and quick reflexes but I don't think you could handle doing what I do."

She knew what he was saying. He doubted her ability to kill in cold blood. What she doubted was her ability to tell the difference between hot blood and cold blood, especially if the monster escaped from its cage.

"And I think you underestimate my motivation to keep my brothers safe and this club alive."

He was quiet a moment as he seemed to ponder what she was saying.

"So what, you're gonna ride along on every job I have? And do what exactly? Watch my back in case something goes wrong? Help me execute our enemies? Help me torture men, women who have information we need?"

He was trying to put her off.

"That's exactly what I plan on doing, either that or I divulge your condition to the rest of the club and you get sidelined anyway."

"You're not really giving me a choice here kid," he responded.

"No I'm not," she agreed.

"You sure you can handle it?" He questioned.

"We'll soon see won't we?" She replied.

She'd have to handle it. It was the only way to keep Reaper in the club, keep him alive and keep her brother's safe.

"I guess we will," he called out to her back as she walked towards the main gates.

Nikki heard the bikes rolling up and the gates opened. Rock and Case rolled in with some of the other brothers in tow. Nikki approached them but Rock shook his head at her. They hadn't caught up with the car. She made her way out to the front as flashing red and blue lights approached. Two marked cars appeared and the uniforms got out herding the bikers away from the body and setting up a marked off area around Rat. Thirty seconds later Alex's unmarked vehicle pulled up to the scene and Rachael quickly took over giving the uniforms instructions.

Alex looked over Rat briefly before he approached Nikki. She couldn't help but notice that both Tex and Trace simultaneously gravitated toward her.

"Hey," he greeted her awkwardly.

She really couldn't expect much else. She'd destroyed a part of his life and instead of being able to walk away and forget about it, she just kept dragging him right back into the mess.

"Hey Alex," she replied just as quietly.

"What happened?"

"We were all inside having a party. A couple of the prospects made patch. This car horn started beeping incessantly and some of the brothers headed to the front. When they got out here Rat was there, like that."

"Did anyone see the car?"

"I don't know. I don't think so," she looked down the road away from him.

The lies she told to him were endless and she knew he saw threw all of them.

"Where were you when it happened?" he questioned her.

"I was inside the clubhouse, in my room."

He nodded his head at her and turned his gaze to Tex and Trace both hovering within earshot of their awkward conversation.

“And where were you two?” Alex’s tone was stiff and very unfriendly.

“We were both in the clubhouse,” Trace replied.

“In her room, with her,” Tex added.

Alex’s eyes went wide before he closed off completely. Nikki shot Tex a dark look. He could be such an asshole sometimes.

“Right, well don’t go anywhere we may need to question you later,” Alex stepped into cop mode.

What else did she expect? She lied to the man, cheated on him, left him and only called on him when there was a dead body or some info she needed. Alex Winter was the biggest regret of her life but only because she wronged a good man in so many ways and he just didn’t deserve that.

Alex and Rachael along with a few uniforms interviewed the crowd. They weren’t going to get anything out of them and they knew it. It was the usual drill and she knew Alex only put up with it for her. She often wondered why he just didn’t leave her hanging. Then he would turn and look at her and she would see exactly why he came whenever she called. He still carried that look in his eyes, the one that said he cared about her far more than he wished he did.

One of the brothers led them into the clubhouse to speak with the women but Nikki stayed outside the gate. She stood in a dark corner and watched the Medical Examiner go over the scene with a clinical attachment she wished she could muster. The more she stared at Rat’s lifeless mutilated body the worse the hurt and anger got.

Bridges was trying to destroy them and this was only the beginning of what he had in store for them she was sure. They could no longer waste time with defensive measures. The club needed to act and it needed to act quickly. If King wasn’t going to sanction action then they might just have to go behind his back and take action themselves. The idea of spurning both her Pres. and the one solid father figure she’d had in her life didn’t sit well with her. The more Nikki went over it the more she saw there was no other way than to go to war.

They needed to start with what they knew. What they knew was Lenny, the Niners, Jason Black and Bridges were all connected. The drugs were connected to him as well although this wasn't something she could share without divulging her father's little secret. That bastard had just made shit so much more difficult for her. She hated lying to the boys and hiding shit from the club went against the grain of everything she'd been taught.

She could feel the rumble of disquiet deep inside her and knew the warning signs. She needed to detach or she was going to let the dark from the box and that would not be good for anyone. She stayed while they carted Rat away and closed up the scene. The uniforms left and all that remained was some crime tape and some bloodied marks on the ground where Rat's body had lain. She had been staring at that spot so hard and for so long she lost a grip on everything around her.

"Hey Nikki," Alex's voice shocked her out of her frozen state.

"Is there anything at all you wanna tell me about this, about anything?" His eyes pleaded with her for some sign of hope that she still needed him, that she would still confide in him.

"No. Nothing," she replied her voice devoid of emotion.

He sighed and nodded his head.

"I am really sorry Nikki," his eyes flicked to where Rat had been as he spoke.

"So am I Alex. More than you'll ever know," with that quiet admission from her he walked away.

As she watched his retreating form she hoped that he found something good to replace all this bad she'd brought into his life.

The high that had been running around the clubhouse on their return had been contagious. Brodie and Jay had been the heroes of the day. They earned their patches and everyone had been revelling in the celebrations that followed. He and Trace had been loaded on a high and they were going to get their girl tonight. How quickly things could go from one extreme to the other?

Tex's insides were a mash of wild feelings from blood boiling anger to gut wrenching sadness. He'd lost a brother tonight and he'd lost him in the worst way. Rat had nicked off to his sister's house to drop off some cash to her. He promised he'd be back within the hour. He'd come back alright just not in the way Tex had expected. As the image of his brother's mutilated body came to mind he realised that this thing with Bridges was beyond business. It was personal now, personal and brutal. This was the tipping point for him, for all of them. Bridges was now priority numero uno. What happened tonight was a declaration of war and if anyone questioned that fact he would personally have them admitted to the nearest psyche ward for assessment.

The cops were long gone and Rat's body had been carted off to the morgue. The women were out in the main room of the clubhouse except for Nikki of course. She sat beside him in silence her blue-grey eyes slowly moving into dark and stormy territory. He could feel her slowly disappearing into herself as her anger grew. They needed to get her out of here as soon as possible.

"We can't cool our heels on this shit any longer. We know who's behind this shit and we need to hit back," Rock was throwing his opinion out there for everyone to hear.

Tex didn't need to hear it he was well past being on board with that shit. In fact he was so far passed that shit he was already planning his next move. They needed to get a bead on Jason Black and hope to god he would lead them to Bridges. Speaking of which, the piece of paper that held his most recent locations was burning a massive hole in his pocket. Alex had come through as promised delivering them a list of all the places Jason Black had showed up in the last few weeks. As soon as they were done here he was starting on the list.

"Before we go hitting anything we need intel. We don't know shit about this dude and he seems to know a shit load about us," Case added.

"This guy has got to be on someone's radar. What about the PD? Ace you get anything out of Winter?" King asked.

"Not a lot. The PD knows about as much as we do. Bridges has links to the Niners and Jason Black is his right hand man. They've had trouble getting anything on Black and getting him to lead them to Bridges is near on impossible."

"He's given us a couple of starting points to work from," Tex interrupted causing Nikki to frown at him.

"Well start now and keep me informed."

"Just in case he's not being as helpful as he could you work that skirt Rock. Seems to me that access to her info is directly related to access to her panties. You get in there man and good," King's comment got a couple of sniggers.

"You two," he gestured towards Brodie and Jay, "stay here in case that asshole comes back and the rest of you take your women home get them sorted. We got shit to deal with tomorrow."

Everyone piled out of the room and off in their respective directions.

King pulled him and Trace aside.

"Black is to be your one and only focus starting tonight and I do not want Nikki anywhere near this. If this guy has even an inkling that she killed his brother," King's words broke off but Tex knew exactly what he was saying, "That man has gotta have a weakness. Find it and use it. We need to find Bridges and end this before anymore Soldiers end up lying dead in the dirt."

Tex couldn't argue with that plan. Cut off the head and the body will fall. The sooner they removed Bridges the better.

"Now take that girl home and get on it," King said as he gestured to Nikki.

She was standing in the middle of the open gates staring at the patch of dirt where Rat had lain. The more distance they put between her and this place right now the better.

Nikki woke to the sound of someone in the house. It was still dark outside. Something about the noise told her it wasn't Tex and Trace. It wasn't the sound of someone moving confidently through their home. It was softer, more hesitant. She reached under mattress searching for her gun. A creak sounded in the hallway close to her door. Nikki slipped out of bed and tiptoed across her bedroom to the door. As she reached for the handle it turned. She took several quick steps back and raised her weapon.

The door opened slowly and a dark menacing shape filled the doorway. A monster. Its eyes glowed like flickering flames in the dark and she felt herself drawn towards it.

"Come," it called to her beckoning her forward.

That dark part of her told her to go but she resisted it. A low growl emanated from the dark mass and Nikki's finger went straight for the trigger of her gun.

"You know this is what you want. Stop fighting it and come to me," the monster's arms went out as if offering her an embrace.

Her body leaned toward the darkness and unconsciously she stepped forward.

"You can't resist me," it told her.

Nikki dragged her eyes away from the monster momentarily looking down at her moving feet. The sight knocked her out of her trance and dragged her back to reality. She could resist it and she would. Her gaze came back up and she squeezed the trigger of her Glock firing a single round into the monster's chest.

The shape flickered like a faulty television picture then suddenly took the shape of a man. She recognised the silhouette immediately. Cole. He fell backwards onto the floor and Nikki felt a surge of panic.

"Cole," she cried out to him as she ran to his fallen body.

She stared down at his face as he lay there black blood flowing from the wound.

"I'm so sorry Cole," she sobbed over him.

She watched as the darkness disappeared from his eyes and those beautiful otherworldly green eyes became unburdened.

"It wasn't supposed to be like this," he croaked as he reached up to touch her face.

The moment his fingertips touched her skin something happened. It was like a jump in time and suddenly she was on the floor in his place with him crouching over her. She couldn't move her limbs and as she looked down at the gaping hole in her chest and the inky blood pooling on the floor around her, she knew this was how it would end.

He smiled softly down at her, "this is the only way it can be, for now. But don't worry we'll be together again soon."

He leant down and kissed her gently on her mouth.

"My Angel," the words whispered reverently from his lips.

Nikki woke with a start. The lingering feeling of lips on hers and Cole's words echoing in her ears had her on edge. She glimpsed movement to her right and rolled from the bed grabbing her gun from the bedside table. She landed on the floor in kneeling position her gun trained on her curtains shifting in the breeze. She took a deep breath and shook her head. Bloody dreams had her jumping at shadows or in this case moving curtains.

Wait, moving curtains? She hadn't left her window open last night. As she frowned at the open window she lifted her fingers to her tingling lips. Surely not? He wouldn't? The clink of the side gate latch had her moving again. She raced to the front of the house, skidding down the hallway and crashing into the front door. The sound of a car door slamming and an engine turning over reached her ears as she wrenched open the front door. Nikki launched herself into the front yard the screen door slamming against the wall. Her eyes went straight to the blacked out Range Rover idling at the curb. There was a pause, a small moment in time when, even though she couldn't see Cole, she felt his eyes on her. Then the Range Rover took off flooring it down the street and away from her.

He was in her house, in her room. Why? She raced back inside to her room and the first thing she noticed was her cupboard door wide open. Hanging inside was the lace Bien Savvy dress she'd warn for him, an envelope taped to the hanger. She approached it cautiously as if it might suddenly grow teeth and bite her. His pet name for her was inscribed across the envelope, Angel, in beautiful script. She turned the envelope over in her hands. There was paper inside and what felt like a card.

Nikki hesitated. Did she really want to open up that can of worms? The monster was already out of its cage. She could feel it rumbling around inside her as she thought about its master. She couldn't afford to tempt it by dangling Cole in front of it. The roar of bikes broke through the quiet cutting Nikki's contemplation short. The boys were back.

Nikki threw the envelope back into the cupboard and quickly shut the door. She went for the window next closing and locking it. She did a quick inspection of her room. As her gaze swept around the space she noticed the top draw of her dresser was not quite closed. The memory stick. Nikki reefered open the draw and rifled through her underwear. Nothing. The little black and red memory stick was gone. How the hell had he known she had it?

The sound of the garage door opening signalled the boy's entrance. Nikki didn't want to deal with the third degree from them. She quickly shoved everything back into her draw and closed it then slipped back into bed. With everything swirling around in her head she doubted she'd sleep anymore tonight.

Chapter 11

"You can stop skulking around waiting for something to happen kid," Reaper's voice drifted back towards her.

Nikki stepped out of the nearby shadows. She hadn't tried really hard to disguise her presence. She wanted him to know she was watching him, that he couldn't make a move without her knowing.

"You planning on giving my keys back any time soon?" Reaper asked her.

"Just making sure you keep to your end of the deal old man," she responded.

"Well I guess that means you better saddle up kid 'cause we got shit to do," he told her gruffly.

Nikki had known something was going to happen. A brother was dead and they could no longer ignore the threat hanging over them. As she'd left last night she'd seen King call Reaper aside and she knew that now the real war would begin. Tex and Trace had planned on chasing down Jason Black and as much as Nikki wanted to do that, she couldn't let Reaper go out by himself. Luckily for her they'd been instructed to keep her out of it. She was pissed at King for making that call but it worked in her favour.

"Where are we going?" she responded.

"Back to Main Street. Apparently our little confrontation the other night stirred up a Hornet's nest and it would appear that maybe Rat was the result."

God, Rat.

"Where are your shadows? Aren't they going to wonder where you are if you keep disappearing on them?" He asked her as he threw his leg over his bike.

"They've got their own stuff to worry about. Now let's go," she said as she mounted her bike.

They roared out of the compound following the same route as last time. Reaper took them in through the bottom end of Main Street. He pulled around the back of the old bike shop and parked up in the deepening shadows of the building.

"What are we doing here?" she asked him.

"Recon kid," he replied reaching into one of the saddlebags on his bike.

When his hand came back out a Colt M4 Commando followed. Nikki's eyes went wide. He was gonna wake up the whole neighbourhood and then some with that thing.

"Relax kid. We're just watching for now," he explained as he tapped the scope with his finger.

Reaper reached into the saddle bag and brought out a spare scope. The man had been prepared for company. Maybe he wasn't as resistant to the idea of her accompanying him as she thought. He handed it to her then headed for the shop door. He tried the handle and when it wouldn't budge he stepped back preparing to kick it in.

"Hold up. You'll alert the whole neighbourhood to our presence," she hissed at him.

Nikki pulled her lock picking gear from her pocket and stepped in front of him. Brute force wasn't always the best method. She popped the lock in a matter of seconds and stood up pushing the door open.

"After you old man," she said as she smirked at him.

"Maybe you will be useful after all kid," he said as he pushed passed her into the building.

Nikki followed him through the gloomy interior up a ladder in the back corner of the building and onto the roof. Staying low she moved to where her father was crouched behind the small wall surrounding the roof.

Reaper settled into position and scanned the street focusing his attention on one area in particular. He gestured to a familiar pale blue coloured house down the street. It was the same house she'd seen Black approaching when they encountered him during their shipment. She looked through the scope and into the front room of the house. There was a lone occupant sitting in the lounge area.

“Ok and now?” She queried.
“Now, we wait,” he replied.
Of course.

On paper Jason Black was a legitimate businessman but in real life his hands were as bloody as his twisted brothers were. Supposedly he was a real estate mogul, some kind of rich property developer. The man owned a whole portfolio of investment properties which just meant he had a lot of closets to hide his skeletons in. The man visited his investments here and there but there was one building in particular that he frequented on Mondays and Thursdays at the same time without fail. It was the one place they were guaranteed to find him.

They waited in the park across from the luxury apartment complex lingering in the shadows of the trees. Trace knew there was only one reason a man would come to the same place at the same time on the same day every week. Either it was family or it was a woman and with Black he'd bet it was the latter of the two. Trace checked his watch. They had five minutes before Black would show up. He signaled to Tex that he was heading in and crossed the road to the apartment building.

They'd scoped out the place earlier and had known that jeans, t-shirt and their cut was not gonna cut it around here. Trace being the pretty boy of the two had been lumped with the pretend to be a rich prick role. So dressed up in his designer jeans and sweater he approached the apartment building. He noticed a young blonde women hurrying along the footpath. That was his in.

He stepped in front of her so she bumped into him her grocery bags dropping to the floor.

“I'm so sorry,” he said at the same time she did scrambling to pick up the items that had spilled out onto the side walk.

They scooped all the things into the bags one of which was split.

“I am so sorry. I was off in my own little world. Please allow me to help with your bags?” he requested as he threw her his most dazzling smile.

He could see the easy trust in her eyes and felt a little twinge of guilt about using her.

“That’s very nice of you to offer but it’s fine really,” she tried to politely dismiss him.

“I insist it’s the least I can do. Plus this bag is split and it’ll be very difficult to carry with only one hand,” he insisted.

“Um ok thank you,” she said and blushed a little.

Women, always a sucker for a dazzling set of pearly whites and innocent baby blues.

They made their way down the footpath and into the building while he made small talk with her. As they reached the bank of elevators Trace’s phone buzzed. That had to be Tex telling him that Black had arrived. He’d cut it too fine and now he was going to either ditch this girl at the elevator to look for Black or go with her and hope he could spot him when he returned to the lobby. He glanced over at his new friend. Nope he couldn’t leave a damsel in distress.

The elevator doors opened and he stepped inside. As he turned he caught sight of Black entering the building.

“Daisy?” Black’s voice echoed across the lobby towards them.

The girl’s head came up and a smile lit up her face as the elevator doors closed. She reached for the open doors button but it was too late they were already moving.

“Was that your boyfriend?” Trace enquired gently.

“Yes,” she replied.

The smile on her face was one he knew all too well, as he wore it whenever he thought about being with Nikki. It was one of admiration and love.

Trace had to wonder about the way the universe worked. It put this poor sweet girl in the clutches of the deadly criminal. It put her right in his path and made her a pawn in the deadly game of cat and mouse they were

embarking upon. But love was blind as they say and this poor girl would learn the hard way that love could be deceptive and it could hurt like hell.

They exited the elevator on the twenty first floor and stopped in front of apartment two 'o four. His pocket vibrated again.

“This is me. Thank you very much for your help,” Daisy said with a genuine smile.

Trace was very antsy to get out of there. Black would be up here any second now and if he spotted Trace with his woman all hell would break loose.

“You’re very welcome,” he said, “I’m sorry to say that I’m going to have to run. I was supposed to be meeting a friend and I can tell by the insistent vibrating of my phone that I am already quite late.”

She smiled warmly at him, “Of course if you want to just leave the bag right down there by the door I’ll come back and get it in a minute.”

He did as she asked.

“Enjoy the rest of your night Daisy. Maybe I’ll see you again sometime,” he said.

He had the feeling they would definitely be meeting again only next time she wouldn’t be smiling. He walked back towards the elevators. As she entered her apartment he ducked past them and around the corner just as he heard the ting of the elevators and the slide of the doors opening. He waited a breath or two before peaking around the corner.

Black scooped up the busted grocery bag just as Daisy reached the door. She threw her arms around him and smiled up at him so lovingly that Trace wanted to vomit. But it was Black’s response that really got his attention. His body relaxed instantly and his face softened so notably you’d swear the man wasn’t the hardened right hand man of a mob style gangster. Every man had a weakness and sadly for Daisy she was Black’s.

Chapter 12

Nikki had been sitting on the roof of this building every night for nearly a week. The ridiculous amount of trouble she'd gone to, to orchestrate her frequent disappearances was beginning to become tiresome. Although it hadn't been for nothing, there had been frequent movement around the house for the last few days. The same guy seemed to be there every night always taking and making phone calls in between games of cards.

He'd had some visitors too. Niners mostly, until last night when Black's goons had shown up. They spent a lot of time talking and Nikki spent a lot of time wishing she could read lips. They were organizing something, something big and she was sure Reaper knew more than he was letting on. She had a feeling he was keeping her in the dark as a last little protest against her being there with him.

Tonight all of a sudden the house had additional occupants. Two men armed and patrolling the outside of the house. It wasn't much but it was enough to tell her that something different was happening tonight. Her thoughts were confirmed when a familiar black BMW rolled past the house and into the driveway. Jason Black. This time Nikki had to hear what was going on.

"I'm going to take a closer look," she told Reaper as she laid down the scope she'd been using.

"You think you can get in close enough to hear anything kid?" he asked her.

She nodded at him and even in the dark he seemed to sense her determination.

"Righto kid but they see you it's gonna fuck with what I'm tryin' to achieve here," he warned her.

"And what exactly is that old man?"

"You'll see for yourself soon enough kid," he replied cryptically.

Nikki snuck out of the shop and into the dark streets. She ducked from building to building hiding in the deepest shadows she could find while always keeping the house in view. She made it into the yard next door and slowly worked her way down the fence line towards the back of the yard. The properties around here were all in terrible condition and about half way down the fence she found what she was looking for.

As she peered through the hole in the fence she watched Black enter the house leaving one of his goons outside with the two patrolling men. They were moving in a pattern circling the house one at a time while the other one waited at the rear door. Black's goon took the place of the man at the rear door sending him around to the front. She waited for the next man to circle then slid through the darkness and into the overgrown bushes next to the building.

She pressed herself against the wall of the house and inched her way over to the nearest open window.

"Are you sure this location is secure?" Black's words drifted quietly out through the open window.

"We cleared this place out a while ago and with the threat of death and the lure of cheap junk even the addicts are steering clear," came the reply.

"We'll get a man across the street anyway."

"Will you be handling this Sir?"

"No. Malakai will handle the deal," Black's name drop had alarm bells ringing in Nikki's ears.

Malakai was high level Niner. If he was handling stuff for Black this meant the gang had to be well and truly entrenched in this Bridges bullshit.

"I don't trust these guys. Anyone willing to cross their own club is more than capable of double crossing their enemy," Black's words reached her ears and bounced around inside her brain.

Anyone willing to cross their own club? Who the hell was he talking about? Nikki thought Reaper had gotten rid of the Crow's traitors. Unless there were others or even worse unless they were Soldiers? Nikki's

blood roared in her ears as her mind raced through the possibilities. Et tu Brute. Jesus Christ. This is what they were doing here? Waiting to execute the traitor among them? She glanced in the direction of the old bike shop roof. Bloody Reaper, he could've told her.

“They prove to me that they are on our side by killing one of their own then maybe I'll trust them,” Black's statement sent chills down Nikki's spine.

She wished she knew who they were talking about. She'd hunt the bastard down now and end this before it had even begun.

“Tomorrow night we will have our answer and then we'll see if we can't squash these cockroaches.”

Cockroaches? Reflexively Nikki's hand went to the gun at the small of her back. She'd show that bastard how extermination was done.

A sound to her left drew her attention away from the conversation. Black's loose man was rounding the corner of the house his eyes on the garden bed. She cursed silently and searched frantically with her eyes for an escape path. Nikki spotted an opening into the crawl space under the old house. She'd just have put her belly to the dirt and go under or risk being caught. Nikki did a quick dive and slid into the black pit under the house.

In the cramped dark musty space she could hear muffled voices above her and the crunch of nearby footsteps. The footsteps came to a stop right near her cubby hole. The distinctive sound of a zipper coming down followed by the trickle of liquid had her sliding back further. Her noise wrinkled up as the smell permeated her cocoon of darkness. The guy seriously needed to drink more water.

As she lay in the darkness she contemplated what to do with this information. Sure as shit no one knew about this except her, Reaper and King. While that might keep the traitor from knowing they were on his tail it also meant more lies and under the table crap. This was some serious stuff and something that at the very least the club's VP should know about. Surely they couldn't think Tex was the traitor or Trace for that matter. She couldn't understand why they hadn't been included in this.

The voices began to die off and footsteps moved over Nikki's head. Black's goon swore and quickly zipped up running back to his post no doubt. She slowly crawled forward on her belly through the dirt staying as far away from that acrid wet patch as she could. She heard car doors opening and shutting, the sound of an engine coming to life then Black's BMW rolled past the house and out onto the street.

Nikki quickly slid from her hiding space and with a quick glance around made a run for the gap in the fence. As she made her way through the neighbouring yard the sound of a vehicle coming down the road caught her attention. She peered out from the deeply shadowed corner of the building to see a familiar vehicle driving past. The van? Nikki quickly ducked back into the darkness. Shit. The boys had been following Black. She prayed to god they hadn't seen her as she waited for them to disappear.

"Did you see that?" Tex glanced back at the building they'd just passed.

"See what?" Trace asked him glancing in the mirrors.

"I swear I just saw someone hiding at the corner of that building. A woman maybe," Tex continued to search the darkness behind them but saw no further movement.

"Probably some junkie. You know what this place is like."

Trace was probably right but something about that shadowy figure stuck in his mind. Then again maybe it was his own paranoia catching up with him.

They'd been following Black for a few days now and Tex was surprised at just how easy it was. Either the guy was so arrogant he just didn't believe anyone would have the balls to follow him or he was letting them follow him. The second idea had Tex on edge waiting for an ambush somewhere. Probably the worst part about this whole thing though was working with Winter. The man was dedicated to Nikki and he had to give him credit for that but the fact that Nikki had nearly chosen the guy over

them still hurt and angered Tex. He couldn't help but turn everything with the guy into some sort of pissing contest. He knew he was doing it but he did it all the same. Nikki was his and he was gonna make sure the guy got that point every time he interacted with the man.

“What did Winter say about that house?” Trace asked.

“It's not on Black's regular visit list and they've got no information on that address in particular. He had heard a rumour about someone moving in to the area and clearing out all the junkies but nothing concrete on who it was or why. His first thought was that Bull was finally getting his shit together and cleaning the joint up but obviously not. He's gonna get eyes on the joint anyway,” He explained.

The place wasn't their priority. Their priority was finding a way to use Black to get to Bridges. So far they hadn't managed to ascertain any contact between the two. Hell even Winter couldn't get a phone tap and getting into the guy's house was near on impossible. He had a gatehouse manned twenty four hours a day. The walls were littered with security cameras and then there was his staff both domestic and security. The man's house was Fort Knox. The only time he was remotely vulnerable was when he was being driven around or at the girlfriend's apartment.

That was a prospect Tex was beginning to entertain. The girlfriend might be the only opportunity available to them to extort information out of Black. Tex didn't like the idea of involving anyone innocent in this mess but time was running short. They had another shipment coming in two days and Tex had a bad feeling in the depth of his guts. That last minute detour had taken them right past Black and he couldn't believe that had been coincidence. While Jay and Brodie's bravery may have earned them a patch that was not a situation he wanted to repeat.

They followed Black's car all the way to the harbor. The place operated twenty four hours a day so at least their work van wouldn't look out of place amongst the traffic. They headed towards the west dock. The BMW pulled up in front of a large sign for a construction site. CMB Constructions, another one of Black's projects no doubt. Tex wondered

what horrors were hiding in this one. The gate slowly opened and Black's car rolled in to the site. One look at the man on the gate and his gun told Tex this wasn't regular security. Trace immediately turned off the road parking in a small laneway between the two buildings next door.

"What do you wanna do?" Trace asked him.

"Let's go check it out Brother," Tex answered as he slid from the vehicle.

He jogged quietly to the back end of the building and peered around the corner. In the middle of the site he could see a large building taking form. Concrete pillars held up three concrete floors. Scaffolding went up to each level. A huge crane towered over the site and pieces of machinery were dotted around the space. A tall fence surrounded the construction site, or at least the parts of it that were sitting on land.

"Feel like going for a swim Brother?" he asked gesturing toward where the fence ended and the water began.

Even in the dark he could tell Trace was less than pleased about the idea. He gave Trace a quick grin before taking off low across the wharf towards the fence. He slid along it towards the water as Trace followed him.

As he reached his target he realized they might not need to get in the water after all. They should be able to swing around the end of the fence and reach the dock behind it. Provided there was nothing and no one on the other side to stop them. He could see some machinery lined up against the other side of the fence and figured it might provide them some cover. He gestured to Trace that he was going to take a look.

He leaned out over the water a little while Trace grabbed the back of his belt to steady him. Tex craned his neck around the fence. A few portable light towers cast an intermittent orange glow around the site. Tex glimpsed Black's car through the gaps in the machinery. From what he could see there were a few armed men dotted here and there through the site.

Leaning back to his side of the dock he whispered to Trace, "The machinery just there should give us enough cover to duck around the fence.

There are at least six armed guys on the other side plus Black's men. Won't know if that's it till we get over there."

Trace nodded in acknowledgement, "let's do this shit."

Tex swung around the fence first and went straight for the cover off a loader with Trace hot on his heels. Tex peeked through the spaces in the machinery. From here he could get a better look at the scene before them. Black's car was parked close to the building his goons were standing around the vehicle. Tex assumed the man himself was still inside it. The six armed men he'd counted appeared to be it. Still they needed information not a confrontation so they'd have to be careful.

The gate opened again and another black BMW entered the site. Bloody suits. All the money in the world and they still chose the same shit.

"We need to get closer than this," Trace whispered to him, "if we track round to the left there seems to be more cover that way. We should be able to get in close enough to hear what's going on if we can get into the building."

Tex looked at the path between them and the building.

"Right let's go for it," he agreed.

Tex took off crouching low. He weaved his way between covers, piles of debris, pallets of construction materials, bins, site boxes and machinery.

By the time they made it to the edge of the building Black was out of his car and the other car had come to a stop. He and Trace crept forward using the dark shadows of the building and its pillars for cover. The door of the other vehicle opened and a man dressed in a black suit got out of the car his back to them.

"Good evening Sir," Black greeted the other man in a formal voice. Could this be Bridges? Tex wished he could get a better look at the guy.

"Mister Black," the other man greeted Black as he approached him.

Something about the way the guy moved sparked a sense of déjà vu in Tex's mind. His movements were sure, his footfalls strong but light. He moved like an operator.

“Have the links with Washington been sorted?”

Black hesitated before answering, “We found nothing Sir, although when we entered the property the safe had been opened.”

Tex thought back to the night they’d gone to Lenny’s place. They hadn’t gone inside that night because of another man dressed in black. Suddenly Tex began to assess Black’s companion with new eyes. He certainly had the right height and build. He didn’t flinch at the information Black had just imparted. Who the hell was this dude?

“If there had been something in there and someone had taken it we’d know about it by now,” the man replied.

“Any response to our message yet?”

Those bastards were talking about Rat.

“None Sir,” Black answered.

Our response is coming don’t you worry about that.

“And things have been set in motion?”

“Yes Sir. The meeting is set for tomorrow night,” Black answered.

“You made it clear that no harm is to come to her?” the man asked.

“They are well aware of Mister Bridges conditions and the consequences should anything go wrong,” Black replied confidently.

So this guy wasn’t Bridges then.

“We’ll make contact after it’s done then,” the man dismissed Black.

“If I may Sir, this seems to be a hell of a risk to take for some gash,” Black’s comment sent the other man into immediate action.

The guy reached out and grabbed Black’s arm swiftly turned around the man pinning his arm behind his back. In the next second he had Black shoved up against his BMW with that arm severely bent up behind him.

“Watch your mouth Mister Black. Your only concern is following the orders of the man you work for and you’d do well to remember that,” the man’s words were a command, an order.

He moved so quickly and smoothly Tex knew this guy was trained. He was definitely an operator, ex-military maybe? He couldn’t shake the idea that this was the guy from the alleyway but there was something else.

“Yes Sir,” Black mumbled through gritted teeth.

The other man released him and moved back towards his vehicle.

They needed to make a decision here. They only had one vehicle and they couldn't follow both men. They either tailed the new guy, possibly find Bridges and lose Black or they continue to tail Black and hope it turns up something.

“I say we follow the new guy,” Trace whispered to him.

Great minds think alike. Tex nodded at Trace and signaled to him that it was time to leave. They began to weave their way towards the edge of the fence. Tex kept one eye on that vehicle as they moved. Trace was a few steps ahead of him and as they neared the large digger he checked the progress of their new target. The gate was opening for the car to leave and if they didn't haul ass they weren't gonna catch him.

Tex heard the crunch of gravel behind him. The sound sparked a wave desperation in him. Shit. Ahead of him Trace ducked behind the digger. Ten steps. That's all that was between him and the last bit of cover that would shield their escape. More footsteps on the gravel. He peeked out from behind the pallet of cement he was hiding behind. The car was gone the gate closing behind it. Suddenly the cement bags next his head burst open as bullets ripped through them. Tex couldn't get back behind his cover fast enough. He heard the shouts that went up around the construction site. Gunfire sounded from in front of him as Trace squared off against whoever was shooting.

Trace stopped firing and signaled to him to run. Tex stepped out from behind the pallet and a new barrage of bullets sent him back in to hiding. They did not have time for this.

“Go Brother!” Tex yelled over the noise of shouting and more bullets flying, “We can't afford to let him get away.”

Trace shook his head at him. While Tex appreciated the loyalty now was not the time to get all self-sacrificing on a Brother.

“We don't have time for this Trace. Think about Rat, Nikki, the club. For Christ's sake go before we lose him.”

He could see the look of resignation on Trace's face as he came to terms with the knowledge that Tex was right. Of course he was right. Club first, always.

Trace knew Tex was right. This might be their only chance to find Bridges and end this before it really becomes all-out war and costs them more lives. He hated to leave a Brother without back up though. He lifted his chin in acknowledgement of his brother and Tex returned the gesture. Trace turned and ran and he ran hard. Swinging out around the end of the fence and racing for the van. He threw himself into the driver's seat and brought the vehicle to life.

If he was lucky his target might only be halfway along the main exit road by now. He took off circling one of the warehouses and pulling back out on to the road. He put on a bit of speed and charged his way through the traffic. It appeared that luck was indeed on his side. The traffic had been blocked off for an oversize truck to make a turn on to the main road. With no alternative route out of there the black BMW had become stuck in the waiting traffic with everyone else.

Trace hadn't got a real good look at their man from his hiding spot at the construction site. He'd caught glimpses of the guy, dressed in black and quick on his feet, as he'd bailed up Black for insulting some woman. The references to the woman had been vague but clearly whoever she was she was important to Bridges. Her name would've been handy information to know. It was always a good thing to know your enemies weakness.

Trace kept one eye on his target and one eye on his rearview mirror watching for any sign of Black. The oversize load finally turned off the main exit road and normal traffic speed resumed. A flash of light reflected in Trace's mirror followed by a distant bang. He had no idea what that was but he hoped it meant that Tex had found a way out.

He followed the BMW out of the harbor along the main trucking route and into the city. He stayed back as far as he could from the car. Even though the van looked like dozens of other delivery vehicles travelling this route he couldn't risk this guy getting wind of him. They entered the main hotel and gambling district. The stomping ground of criminals masquerading as legitimate businessman. The traffic became slower and heavier the further in they got.

The BMW did a U-turn at the lights up ahead. Trace watched as the car came back down the other side of the road. He wasn't gonna make that light. He gave the van a bit of gas and got up the ass of the car in front of him. He kept flicking his gaze back and forth between his mirror and the road in front of him. He pushed the guy in front of him through the orange light and swung the van around just in time to see the black sedan turning into a hotel driveway. The vehicle disappeared inside the private car park entry of the hotel. He frowned as he read the sign above it. The Mint.

Tex crept along the pallets to the other end and took a quick peek. From this position he could see the body of the first shooter laying on the ground a few metres away. The second shooter was tucked behind a piece of machinery further down the site from where he was. As he took in the movement further afield he knew the other guards were coming to the assistance of their mate. As he considered the odds he realized just how totally up shit creek he was. At least 5 men armed with automatic weapons. He heard a car start up and saw Black's BMW escaping through the gate.

If he was gonna get out of this alive he needed a distraction and fast. He searched the area around him and spotted something that gave him an idea. He rushed back to his original spot and fired a few shots at the second shooter. The guy reengaged and Tex used that moment to make a run for his salvation. Two steps out from the site box the gunfire swung his way. He fired wildly behind him before diving behind the box. A second burst of gun fire came from further around and it told him the guy's backup had begun to arrive.

Tex didn't have many bullets left and not much time to pull off this little trick. He turned to the oxy torch sitting behind the box. He was aiming to recreate a homemade bomb he'd read about on the internet. He had no idea if the damn thing would even work but if he wanted to tip the odds in his favour it was a risk he'd have to take. He used all his strength to undo the nuts on the hoses. The shouts moved closer and Tex leaned out from his cover firing of another volley of shots. He attached the hose of one tank to the other and opened up both valves. A deafening volley of gunfire sounded in reply to his shots as he flicked his lighter open and placed the lit zippo next to the tanks. Now he just had to work his way back toward the water and hope to god his little trick worked.

Tex waited for a lull in the gunfire to make a run for it but that just wasn't happening. He'd just have to chance that the rest of these guys were as bad a shot as their friend. He picked out a path to the edge of the wharf and he ran. Bullets whizzed past him as he dodged left and right weaving his way toward the water. He heard the shout go up as the armed men gave chase. Tex fired blindly behind him as he ran. The shouting got louder as the men gave chase. A loud boom followed the flash of light and heat as Tex's unorthodox acetylene bomb exploded. He flung himself off the edge of the wharf and into the water. He guessed he was living to fight another day. God bless the internet.

Chapter 13

Nikki watched Rat's coffin disappear into the hole in front of her. Every ounce of energy she had she was using to keep her crap locked up tight. Today it was burning her up inside, knowing that somewhere in the crowd of people standing shoulder to shoulder around their fallen brother a traitor was hiding. A wolf in sheep's clothing or in this case a dog in a man's clothing. She was antsy as hell and tonight could not come soon enough as far as she was concerned.

Nikki had felt the boys on top of her all day. She felt like at any second she was going to lose her shit and the smallest things were making her edgy. She needed to put some physical space between her and them. As soon as the service was done she excused herself to the bathroom. She made a beeline for the farm's main cabin. Her phone vibrated in her pocket as she crossed the yard. She pulled it out of her pocket as she opened the door. Her shoulder bumped into something and her phone went clattering to the floor popping clean out of the case.

"Sorry sweetheart," Rose said as she ducked down to pick up Nikki's phone and case.

"No it's my fault I wasn't watching where I was going," she replied.

"Wow. Now this is an old picture," Rose exclaimed, "Where did you find this?"

Nikki had forgotten all about the picture she'd tucked in the back of her phone case.

"I found it in a box of Sheila's stuff," she explained, "Actually I'd been meaning to ask you about it."

"Really Darlin'? Why's that?" Rose asked as she unfolded the photo.

As soon as the edge of the photo came in to view Rose's body language changed. Nikki could sense the awkwardness.

“I was wondering who this woman was, the one in the background here.”

Rose sighed, “There’s a long version and a short version of this story and we probably don’t have time for the long one.”

“So give me the short version,” she prompted gently.

“She’s an old girlfriend of your father’s. She was more than that really. She was his first love, probably his only love no offence to your mother. She grew up dirt poor and though I believe she loved your father in the end she left him for some rich guy who could provide her with all the pretty things in life, had a kid with him too from memory. This was all well before he met your mother though.”

“Have you got any idea why she might have shown up at the clubhouse?”

Rose’s brow furrowed, “No idea darlin’ but she can’t have stuck around for long.”

“What makes you say that?” Nikki queried.

“She died around the time you were born. Not sure how though. I wouldn’t let Reaper see this if I were you Sweetheart. Sometimes the past is better left in the past as they say.”

Amen to that.

“I better get back and check on Jodie. I’ll see you in a little while Darlin’,” Rose said as she slipped out of the Cabin door.

Nikki’s phone began to vibrate again and with her thoughts still on the mysterious woman she absentmindedly answered the call, “Hello.”

“Nikki don’t hang up. We need to talk,” Cole growled his demands down the phone at her and it lit a fire under the monster inside her.

“I have information. Information that affects the club,” Cole spoke quickly not giving her brain a chance to catch up, “The club is in danger, you’re in danger.”

The snarling pulsing darkness in her gut was working itself into a frenzy trying to break free of its prison. For her own sake she needed to hang up but for the sake the club she knew she had to hear him out.

“What the hell are you talking about?” she hissed at him as she shut the Cabin door and moved toward the back of the building.

“I take it you didn’t read my note then. Did you burn it like you did my flowers?” the incredulity in his voice was obvious.

“Don’t even start that shit with me Cole. I have every right to despise you,” she spat at him as she struggled to calm the darkness inside her.

“I’m so sorry Angel,” his tone went soft, “I know those words will never be enough but.”

Nikki cut him off, “You rang me with information.”

He sighed, “Yes I did but I can’t give it to you over the phone.”

Nikki knew what he was doing. He was trying to lure her to meet with him.

“You can and you will,” she replied with a growl of her own.

“This is not something we can discuss over the phone. If you want this information you’ll have to meet with me,” he told her.

“You’re wasting your time. I am not going to fall for your bullshit.”

This time Cole cut her off, “Et tu Brute.”

Nikki’s heart stopped at that tiny phrase.

“What did you just say?”

Cole ignored her question, “I’ll meet you in the alleyway behind the Mint in an hour.”

Then the call went dead.

Tex had endured a long cold swim across the harbour only to have to take a long walk to find a working pay phone. At which point he’d tried calling in a pickup from Ace only to have his call declined several times. In the end it was Brodie who’d collected him from the other side of the harbour wet and freezing his damn ass off. He called Trace and then not only was he wet and cold he was both relieved and confused. Trace had managed to follow mystery man and he’d followed him all the way to the private parking garage at the Mint. It seemed like there was more to that place than a casino and a hotel.

Their mission tonight was to go back there and with Slick's help find out who this guy really was. Tex would've sat on that building all day if it hadn't been for Rat's funeral. The man deserved to be honoured by all his brothers and regardless of their current problems the club, the family, came first. As Tex had stood shoulder to shoulder with Nikki at Rat's funeral he realized this was the first time he'd seen her in a week. And even though she was standing next to him she wasn't really there. There was something going on with her, something other than the funeral. He just knew it.

As soon as the service was over Nikki had slipped away from them under the guise of going to the bathroom. Something was off, really off.

"Are you getting the same vibe from Ace as I am Brother?" he asked Trace.

"Yeah, something's not right with her and I think it's got something to do with Reaper," Trace replied.

Tex gave his brother a quizzical look, "What the hell would it have to do with him?"

"I was talking to Brodie earlier and he was telling me that Nikki and Reaper have been riding out together every night this week."

That revelation worried Tex. Reaper was a necessary part of Soldiers of Chaos machine. He did the jobs that no other man was capable of, those evil sick and twisted things that sometimes had to be done to keep the club alive. The man was a natural born killer. He could enter a room full of armed men and come out the other side with barely a scratch, he could move silently and kill just as soundlessly. The man was a ghost, a deadly unholy ghost. He was the reaper in human form, hence the name. The fact that Nikki had suddenly become the man's shadow was deeply unsettling.

Nikki reappeared from the cabin and without so much as a glance at anyone she headed straight for the vehicles parked next to the barn.

"Where the hell is she going?" Trace wondered out loud.

"I don't know but you follow her. I'll take Reaper," Tex ordered.

Nikki pulled into the Mint car park her senses on high alert. She knew this was a bad idea. All logic pushed her to turn around and she almost had twice on the way over. This was dangerous ground for her right now. The darkness inside her was quaking with anticipation and that sick need he inspired in her was sitting right below the surface. She needed the information he had, the club needed the information he had. Nikki rolled around to the alleyway behind the club. The memory of the last time she was here drove the tension higher.

As she stopped her bike halfway down the alley, the door opened and Cole stepped out into the yellow light of the afternoon sun. The minute she laid eyes on him she knew just how much of a bad idea this was. The monster inside her roared with the need to be near that man, for a taste of what he could do for her. She was barely keeping her shit together as it was and when you put him into the equation she knew what little grip she had would fail. She needed to get this over and done with and fast. Nikki avoided eye contact with him as she dismounted her bike leaving her helmet, mask and glasses behind.

Nikki walked slowly down the alley her eyes flicking back and forth searching for any sign of danger.

“There’s no one here but you and me Angel.”

God, that growling voice. Her breathing became slightly more labored at the sound of his name for her rolling off his tongue. She stopped a few feet from him and waited warring with the instinct to kneel before him and beg for relief from this thing inside her.

“You said you had information?” her voice came out husky and she wanted to curse her traitorous body for the reaction.

“Look at me Angel.”

His command rumbled through her body, a wave of heat and darkness. She couldn’t look at him, she knew if she looked at him that would be it.

She ignored his command, “the information Cole.”

He took a step toward her and she stiffened. Don't touch me, was all she could think, please don't let him touch me.

"I will give you the information you need but first I want you to look at me."

A voice inside her head was screaming no even as her eyes went to his. The second her gaze met Cole's she was lost to the darkness inside her, to the darkness reflected in his eyes.

"Oh Angel. Let me take care of what's going on inside you."

He reached out to her placing his hand on the side of her face. His touch sparked another wave of dark need within her. She wanted to give in. She wanted let him feed the monster inside her.

"Let me give you what you need."

His hand slid quickly into her hair and tightened. The sting from his grip returned her to that room which was just an elevator ride away. She felt the ache build between her legs and the monster inside her smiled with glee. He closed the space between the two of them molding their bodies together. Then he struck.

Cole pulled her head back and his mouth crashed down on hers. His kiss was ferocious. He ate at her mouth like a starving man offered his first meal just in the nick of time. Nikki lost all sense of herself and her surroundings as she began to respond to Cole. She needed this so badly she was helpless against. Suddenly Nikki found herself pinned against the alley wall both her arms twisted up behind her back Cole's hand securing them in place. His other hand was buried back in her hair. His mouth left hers and travelled down to the crook of her neck. He stopped kissing her skin briefly then he sunk his teeth into her flesh. Her eyes closed and the moan that left her mouth was pure sin.

The loud roar of a twin cam had her eyes opening wide and Cole's head whipping around. She watched as an unmistakable figure on a Harley Fat Bob turned his bike and thundered through the car park. The afternoon glow from the sun lit him up as he exited onto the street and disappeared. Trace.

Nikki's brain was shocked back in to action. She shook loose from Cole's hold and dropped her eyes to the ground. She knew this would happen. She knew if she came here she would let him suck her back in.

"I shouldn't have come here."

She moved quickly towards her bike.

"You can't keep denying it Angel. I am the only one who can give you what you need."

She pulled on her glasses and mask as she straddled her bike.

"You can't hide what's inside you," his words echoed that of her mother in her nightmares.

He was right but she couldn't find salvation with him. She started her bike and quickly throwing on her helmet she roared out the alleyway.

Nikki entered the clubhouse through the side door. She'd been looking for Trace for two hours. She'd already been to the clubhouse but there was no one there except for Melanie and the prospects. Dumb and dumber hadn't seen him. She'd gone to the house and found it empty. She'd asked the girls at Eros but they hadn't seen him. She was furious at herself and the monster was clawing away at the walls of its prison. She also had nothing to show for her meeting with Cole either. No information about the rat among them. Not that it mattered now. In a few hours her and Reaper would ride out to that house and take down the bastard traitor anyway. He'd told her to meet him at the clubhouse away from the funeral goers that had gathered at the farm.

As Nikki neared the corner of the short hall she heard Rose's voice coming from the main room.

"What are you doing here?"

Something about her tone of voice put Nikki on alert. She approached the corner cautiously.

"I asked you a question. What are you doing here?"

"Get your hands off me you old hag," Melanie's voice made Nikki's insides burn with hate.

Bitch. Melanie was really pushing her luck giving the President's old lady shit was a big no, no.

“What did you just call her?” that sounded like Case’s old lady Joanne.

“You heard me you fugly bitch.”

Nikki rounded the corner just in time to see Joanne punch Melanie in the face. Didn’t that make Nikki smile? She wasn’t the only one smiling. Nikki could see Casey, Joanne’s best friend, standing behind Rose.

“Watch your mouth you stupid skank. You have no right to talk to the Prez’s old lady like that.”

Melanie held her cheek and hid behind her hair.

“Unless you want another one I suggest you leave now bitch plus I’m pretty sure you’re still on a freeze out.”

Melanie dropped her hand from her face and reached into her purse. She pulled a gun.

Joanne backed up quickly moving Rose behind her. Melanie pointed her pistol at the three women, her hand shaking.

“Don’t you fucking come near me.”

As she stared at Melanie Nikki felt cracks begin to form in the monster’s enclosure but she couldn’t stop them. It was time she sorted this skank out. Melanie was turned slightly away from the side entry hall and hadn’t seen Nikki yet. Nikki flattened herself against the wall and slid closer to Melanie.

“I’m here because I was fucking invited.”

Who the hell would invite that skank back here?

It was Joanne who asked the question, “Who the fuck invited you?”

Nikki was almost at Melanie’s side.

“Your man did.”

Lying bitch. Case may have had a dirty mind, a dirty mouth and a dirty sense of humour but he would never actually follow through with any of the shit that came out of his mouth and Nikki knew that Melanie wasn’t telling the truth. The hurt in Joanne’s eyes angered her further. She withdrew her Glock from its holster and leveled it at Melanie’s skull.

“Drop the gun,” she demanded.

Melanie's head swung her way quickly. Her eyes travelled from the barrel of Nikki's gun to Nikki's face and back again. Then she straightened up like all of a sudden she had a spine.

"You drop yours or I'll shoot them," Melanie warned.

Nikki smiled at that comment she'd spotted something that Melanie obviously hadn't.

"You aren't going to shoot anyone."

"What makes you so sure about that bitch?" Melanie asked.

Nikki smiled wider before replying, "You forgot the safety bitch."

Melanie turned back to her gun and Nikki took advantage of her distraction. She stepped towards Melanie and pistol-whipped her in the side of the face. Melanie dropped the gun and fell to the floor. Nikki grabbed a handful of Melanie's using it to maneuver her around on to her knees. Melanie struggled scratching at Nikki's arm till Nikki put the muzzle to her temple. Melanie froze and Nikki tilted her face up so she could see the fear in her eyes. It filled her with an undeniable satisfaction.

"What's that look for Melanie? You should be used to being on your knees. I mean sucking dick is what you love right?" Nikki slowly dragged the barrel of her pistol down Melanie's cheek as she spoke, "Sucking Soldier's dick in particular?"

Nikki wedged the muzzle against Melanie's mouth and forced it between her lips. Melanie squealed and tried to shake her head in protest but Nikki just gripped her hair tighter. She slid the barrel back and forth in Melanie's mouth.

"How do you like this Soldier's dick bitch?"

"Enough!" Trace's voice sounded from over Nikki's shoulder as he stepped into the main room.

She stopped and looked down at Melanie's tear streaked face. The woman disgusted her and Nikki wouldn't lose sleep over Melanie's dead body.

"Let her go Nikki," Trace demanded.

Oh she'd let her go alright but not without a warning. Nikki slid her Glock from Melanie's mouth and pulled her to her feet by her hair. She

leaned in close to Melanie's face keeping the muzzle of her Glock wedged against Melanie's chin.

"You listen to me bitch. You go and you don't come back do you hear me?"

Melanie gave a slight nod of her head in acknowledgement.

"Because if I ever see you here again, I won't hesitate to paint these walls with the inside of your skull. Now run."

Nikki let go of Melanie's hair and watched as she scrambled across the clubhouse stumbling as she went.

The door closed and the three other women in the room breathed a sigh of relief. Then she felt the anger in the room swell again.

"Who invited that skank here?" Joanne's voice was filled with a mixture of hurt and fury.

"It wasn't Case Joanne. He's still at the Cabin," Trace's answer came swiftly and the relief on Joanne's face was obvious.

"Who did then?"

Nikki glanced at Trace. His eyes immediately moved away from her gaze, his face full of guilt.

"I did."

Those two little words set off an eruption of darkness inside Nikki. The cracks became fissures as the darkness began to escape from the box she had locked it in. She was going to kill that stupid gash. Nikki went for the door blind fury driving her out of the clubhouse and into the car park. Melanie was gunning it out of the compound when Nikki spotted her. She raised her Glock and unloaded a couple of rounds into the back window before the car disappeared around the compound wall.

Trace's voice followed the sound of his thundering footsteps.
"Nikki!"

At the sound of his voice the sense of betrayal crept in. How could he do that to her? Tex sleeping with that bitch upset her sure but Tex was the act without thought type. Trace on the other hand thought carefully about everything he did, which meant that his actions were always

purposeful. That made it hurt more than anything else, the fact that he set out to cause her pain.

“Jesus Nikki I saw you with him and I.”

She couldn't listen to his excuses. Nikki swung her gun towards him.

“Don't. Don't say a fucking word to me.”

If she didn't leave now she was gonna lose it and she hardly had herself under control as it was. She went straight for her bike leaving Trace standing in the forecourt in silence.

Chapter 14

Nikki had ridden around and around with the blackness inside her slowly leeching through her. When Reaper had finally called to say he was on his way to the bike shop Nikki could barely contain the satisfaction at knowing that soon she would be destroying the bastards that threatened her family. Now they sat on the roof of the building waiting.

The unmistakable sound of throbbing twin cams came roaring down the road. Nikki put her eye to the scope. Four bikes turned into the driveway of the house they'd been watching and disappeared around the back of the house. The lack of lighting made it difficult for her to identify the riders until they appeared in the front room of the house. Two Crows members stepped in to view shaking hands with the resident of the house. She recognised them immediately.

The first one was Jimmy Romero. The guy was a complete dick. He was left over from before Bull took the reins of the club and tried to turn it around. He was a traditionalist and a small picture guy who couldn't look past the cash in his back pocket now. Nikki had never liked the guy, not that she'd been around him often, he just gave off a bad vibe. The other patch was Rez.

Nikki nearly fell over with shock. What the hell was the VP of the Crows doing talking to a Niner?

The other two riders stepped in to Nikki's line of vision and what she saw next had her insides growling with fury. There in the lounge of that house was Dumb and Dumber. Those traitorous scumbags.

"What the fuck?"

"Indeed kid, indeed. Wouldn't have believed if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes," he said.

The sound of a car coming toward them caught Nikki's attention. She looked up to see a white ford sedan moving down the street in the direction of the house. She recognised that car and wasn't surprised as it too

parked behind the pale blue house of treachery. She watched all the men in that house closely as Malakai and two other Niners greeted their compatriots. Their body language wasn't stiff and wary telling her this wasn't the first time they met. The conversation appeared to flow back and forth easily which told her the people in that room were all on the same page.

"You know what they are discussing right now?" Reaper asked. She knew. They were discussing a hit on one of her Brothers.

"They want Rez and Jimmy to take out on Bull & King at a little meeting they are setting up. The retard twins, who you might notice are not quite as retarded as you thought, are meant to take out me," he explained.

They were planning on killing her family? Her blood ran ice cold then lava hot in a matter of seconds as she considered the possibility. She felt the monster inside her pulse with fury. Those walls were gonna be all but destroyed in a matter of moments and Nikki knew it. At this point she was beyond caring.

"How do you know this?" she asked him.

"Because Rez is playing double agent. Did you honestly think he would betray Bull like that?" Reaper sneered at her in disgust.

That made more sense than believing he was a traitor and it just made the whole thing seem more real.

"So what are we gonna do about this?" she asked Reaper unable to hide the contempt from her voice.

"These shaky hands aren't gonna do shit about this kid," he paused and looked her directly in the eye, "but you are."

He shifted over gesturing his weapon towards her. He wanted her to put them down. She had no problem with that.

"Right how do you want this shit to go?" She asked as she shouldered the weapon properly.

"You got the gun in your hands kid," he said.

Nikki eyed each of her targets, "traitors go first."

She squeezed the trigger the bullet shattering the window and popping Dumb in the back straight through the heart. That's where she'd aimed and her aim was never off. The darkness inside her roared with triumph as it finally exploded free from what was left of its confines.

Dumber was next. Without thinking she put one through his throat as he was ducking for cover. She saw the blood squirt and knew she'd hit an artery, he'd bleed out within minutes.

The others were still scrambling for cover when she fired her next shot. It hit true, straight through the house resident's skull and out the other side. The other four were hiding now. The two nameless Niners were crouched behind the sofa and Malakai was down under the windows. All she had to do was wait until they popped their heads out and bang, they'd be dead. But she didn't have time to waste. Those shots were loud enough to wake the dead and they didn't need the attention.

"I'm going in," she said as she thrust the gun back at Reaper, "just don't shoot me ok?"

He nodded in acknowledgement and Nikki turned running in a crouch for the stairs.

"Hey Ace," Reaper called to her.

He never called her that.

"Show them what your old man gave you," he said smiling wildly at her.

She smiled right back just as wildly before she turned and ran across the rooftop.

Nikki scrambled down the stairs to the sound of Reaper firing the M4 probably trying to pin those bastards down. She rounded the back of the old store and ducked across the road. Adrenalin flowed through her feeding the dark being inside her that revelled in the violence. Even as she crept through the shadows towards the house she began to accept that feeling, to let it wash over her. Nikki ducked through the yard next door and went up over the fence into the backyard. She dodged the vehicles in the yard and made it to the back door. Reaper was still putting down fire. Brandishing her trusty Glock she slowly opened the back door and slipped into the house.

Light filtered into the laundry from the next room. On soundless steps she moved toward the door way. Peering around the frame she checked the room was clear and went straight for the lounge room entry. Nikki couldn't see jack from the angle she was on. She ducked across the

open entry way and flattened herself against the wall on the opposite side. A quick look in the room told her that Malakai was still under the window. From the shouting she could tell that the two nameless Niners were still behind the couch. Jimmy and Rez on the other hand were nowhere to be seen.

Malakai popped up and a volley of shots from Reaper hit the frame and ripped through the curtains. Nikki didn't understand how Reaper didn't hit the guy. Maybe his symptoms were worse than she thought?

"Fuck," Malakai shouted loudly, "Did you make the call?"

"Yeah I made it," one of the guys behind the couch yelled back.

"How long till they get here?"

"Ten minutes."

"Shit. We gotta find out where this guy is firing from. I'll distract him you run for the door," Malakai ordered.

"OK."

Nikki turned her attention there. She caught a glimpse of him as he shuffled to the edge of his hiding place. Nikki quickly pulled back so as not to alert the guy to her presence. Flattening herself against the wall again she waited.

"On three," the other voice called, "One, two, three."

Nikki stepped out of her hiding place just as the guy behind the couch made his run for the door. His steps faltered and his face showed his surprise but it was too late for him to do anything else. Nikki fired at him hitting him dead in the chest. He stumbled falling forward and crashing into the shelving near the door. The noise caused Malakai to whip around. Nikki already had her Glock trained on him. She let fly but Reaper's wild shots collected the guy twisting him so her bullet went through his shoulder. He went down his gun bouncing on the carpet away from him.

The volley of fire from Reaper stopped and the world went suddenly silent except for the ragged breaths of the man dying on the floor across from her. She felt a shift inside her. She knew she should cover and make a play for the other man behind the couch but instead something commanded her to move toward Malakai and finish the job. She tried to resist, telling herself she was not an executioner, that her best move was to

go for the couch guy but it was no good. Her feet took her towards the body under the window with determined strides.

The darkness urged her to flip Malakai over. His breaths gurgled out of his mouth and despite the fact that she knew he was as good as dead. She stood up and aimed her barrel at his head. One quick squeeze of the trigger ended him quickly. The sound of running footsteps behind her had her swinging around. The man behind the couch was making a run for it. Coward. She aimed and fired dropping him with one shot through the back of his head. A roar of triumph echoed loudly inside her, the monster declaring its victory over the enemy and over her.

The front door burst open and Nikki swung her weapon that way her finger preparing to squeeze that trigger.

“Whoa Kid,” Reaper said as he raised both hands up, “It’s just me.”

Nikki turned her attention back to her surroundings. As she surveyed the carnage around her the old part of her tried to feel remorseful. It was too late the monster had taken over.

“Cavalry’s on its way. We gotta go,” she told Reaper.

“What about Jimmy?”

“I wouldn’t worry about that. Rez went after him,” Reaper assured her, “Now let’s go.”

She dipped her chin in acknowledgement and took one last look at the room before she headed out. The darkness had engulfed her entirely and it cried out restlessly, thirsty for more violence. There was only one way to assuage its thirst.

“I lost Reaper,” Tex admitted to Trace as he climbed off his bike.

“Don’t worry because I lost Nikki and I think I’ve lost her more than physically,” Trace replied.

That did not sound good.

“What did you do?”

“Do you want the long version or the short version?”

Tex didn’t have time for the long version.

“The short one,” he demanded.

“I followed Nikki to the Mint and caught her making out with none other than Mister Corporal Punishment.”

Tex’s blood pressure went from normal to heart attack territory in a matter of seconds.

“To be honest I think it was him who kissed her and she did chase after me but I ditched her. I was so angry and hurt and I did something so fucking stupid. I slept with Melanie and Nikki walked into the clubhouse as she was leaving and she went off. She made Melanie suck on her gun, then she shot at her as she tried to escape. Then when I tried to speak to her she pointed her gun at me and Jesus Tex I have never seen her so angry in my life.”

Tex wanted to punch Trace right in his stupid face but he couldn’t. Not too long ago Tex had made the same mistake for the same reason.

“I’m gonna give you the same advice you gave me Brother. Give her some space. We got shit to do right now and as much as I want to go chasing after Ace to make things right between you two we can’t afford to lose any more time on this new guy. Slick’s waiting for us and hey we are at the Mint anyway so maybe we see that sick bastard while we’re there and maybe we give him a taste of what it’s like to be on the other side of the beating.

Chapter 15

In the early hours of the cold dark morning Nikki once again stood outside the Cole ' s empire. The building looked ominous against the deep dark stormy clouds hovering low in the sky above. On another day at another time she would ' ve seen that as a bad sign. Right now it looked like an invitation and the key card that Cole had left her with his letter was now burning a hole in her skin where it sat. She ' d opened the envelope and extracted the card without so much as glancing at that piece of paper. She didn ' t need it.

Nikki had barely made it through the lobby when a familiar voice sounded behind her.

“ Miss Jones? ” Roger ' s confusion was apparent.

“ Hello Roger. I ' ve come to see Cole, ” Nikki stated matter-of-factly, there was no need to give the man any hints as to her intentions.

“ I ' ll call him down for you, ” he offered reaching for his phone.

“ No need, ” she replied flashing him the key card, “ I ' ll meet him upstairs. ”

With that she went straight for the bay of private access elevators and left Roger to make his call.

As the elevator rose so did the need inside her. The doors opened slowly and a small voice inside tried to tell her she shouldn ' t do this bit was drowned out by the roar of the darkness as her gaze fell upon its master.

“ Nikki? ”

“ Hello Sir, ” her greeting had him frozen to the spot.

She stepped from the elevator and dropped her jacket to reveal the dress he had left for her in her closet. His eyes grew dark filling with hunger and it sent a shiver right through her. Then the mirrored doors of the elevator closed behind her and his face changed instantly.

“ Oh Angel.You ’ re back, ” he exclaimed the regret in his voice loud and clear.

This was not what she had come here for.

“ Stop Cole.Whatever you are about to say save it. I don ’ t want to hear your apologies or your excuses. I didn ’ t come here for that, ” she told him.

He seemed to shake himself free of whatever had taken over him.

“ What did you come here for? ”

“ I came here for you Sir, ” she replied and just like that the Dom was back.

“ Oh Angel, what you do to me. ”

Slick had met at the rear entrance of the hotel in the very alleyway where Nikki had been making out with that prick. The thought made Trace ’ s skin crawl but then so did the way he ’ d hurt Nikki hours ago. He was such a grade A asshole and he prayed to god that she would be able to find it in her to forgive him. He wondered where she was now and hoped to god she was hiding out at home or riding off her anger.

“ So who ’ s this guy you ’ re looking for? ” Slick asked as they wound their way through the back halls of the entertainment complex.

“ We ’ ve got no idea. Like I said on the phone all we know is the guy drives a black BMW and he entered the private parkingarea for the penthouses, ” Trace explained.

“ That could be anyone of those rich pricks. They ’ re all the bloody same, ” Slick replied.

“ Hey have you ever seen that guy again the rich boy Nikki hooked up with? ” Tex asked.

“ Nah man Sorry. Must ’ ve been a one-time only thing.We all have them, ” he replied with a shrug of his shoulders.

They both nodded but something told Trace Slick was lying a quick glance from Tex told him that he was thinking the same thing.

“ This place is huge so I ’ m not even sure where you ’ d start. You guy ’ s know what he looks like at least? ”

“ Yeah I ’ d know him if I saw him. The guy looks ex-military. Has that close cropped hair cut, perfectly pressed clothing and moves like an operator. Ring a bell? ”

Slick ’ s silence was a little too long before he answered, “ Nah could be someone from security maybe or some rich dude ’ s bodyguard. ”

He knew something and he just wasn ’ t willing to say it. The guy had let them in though and that had to count for something.

Trace sat watching the lobby for hours waiting for the guy to show while Tex searched as much of the complex as he could. Tex had even tried to get in to the parking garage using the code that Nikki had given them. It hadn ’ t worked he figured they must ’ ve changed it since then. The sun was beginning to filter in to the building when he met Tex and Slick in a shadowy corner of the lobby.

“ No luck? ” he asked but he already knew the answer from the frustration on Tex ’ s face.

Tex shook his head.

“ Might have to just cut and run. Maybe we can chase down Nikki and, ” Trace began saying.

Tex cut him off, “ That ’ s him. ”

Trace followed Tex ’ s line of sight. The guy had the right haircut, the right build and he certainly moved like he could handle himself.

“ I think you ’ ve got the wrong man there mate, ” Slick replied his brow deeply furrowed.

“ What makes you say that? ” Trace asked.

“ Because that man works for Marcus Cole, ” he said the name as if they should know who he was.

“ Who the hell is Marcus Cole? ”

“ He ’ s the guy who owns this place. ”

Nikki pulled at her wrists testing her bindings. She was strapped to the wooden cross in Cole ' s playroom. Her wrists and ankles bound so that she was displayed in an X shape. He stood before her in just his suit pants. His huge rippled torso was exposed providing evidence of the power within his body

“ You ok Angel? ” Cole ' s tone momentarily softened.

She was wet as all hell and ached for him to touch her, to hurt her.

“ Yes Sir, ” her voice was husky with desire and his eyes darkened further still at the sound.

The darkness inside her purred like a cat as she watched him eat her up with his eyes.

He prowled over to the closet and opened it considering which tools he was going to use. His fingers ran over a range of items his belt on the shelf, the cane the paddle and the cat-o-nine tails. She moaned as his fingers brushed the lather of the whip handle. He turned at her frowning slightly.

“ I think we ' ll leave the whips out of it yes? ” he said as he eyed her suspiciously.

“ No, ” she replied instantly.

“ No? ” he raised his eyebrows at her, “ You want the whip? ”

“ Yes Sir, ” again she replied without thought.

“ This is not like the other one. I won ' t do that again Angel, not ever. Do you understand? ”

“ Yes Sir. ”

Cole took the whip down and grabbed a pair of gloves from a draw below. As he slipped his hands into the gloves Nikki caught site of the small metal spikes that donned the palm and fingers of the gloves. She quaked in anticipation of the touch of those spikes and a fresh flood of liquid flowed from her sex. Cole prowled across the room towards her with the whip in hand. The animal in him beginning to surface from deep within. His movements were liquid and predatory. The promise of violence was nearly

too much for the monster inside her to take. It urged her to lean forward to get closer to him. She pulled at her restraints again.

The first flick came, a sharp quick sting on her hip. She gasped as the sting warmed her body. The second one landed on her inner thigh the same light stinging sensation. Two more like the first two and she knew he was holding back. She could see it in his body language. He was afraid of hurting her again. That was not what she wanted, what she needed.

“ You ’ re holding back Sir, ” she chastised him in her breathy voice.

“ Am I just? ” he asked her his tone light with sarcasm.

“ Yes you are. I want more. I need you Cole, I need you to make me hurt, ” she begged him.

The feral lust that moved into his eyes only served to make her wetter and drive the ache inside her higher. She shifted restlessly in her bonds trying desperately to gain some kind of satisfaction.

A deep animal growl erupted from deep in his chest as he flicked the next strike. It bit into her skin like nine tiny little hot needles. The blows came again and again. On her arms, her stomach, her breasts and her thighs. All the while she begged him to go quicker to strike her harder. The monster hit a state of utter euphoria as the last strike fell on her naked sex. The stinging bite sent her spiraling into an orgasm. One she ’ d barely gotten through before Cole was on her.

He grabbed hold of her hips and plunged into her in one long stroke. He didn ’ t stop there again and again he drove deep with blistering speed and strength. Her inner walls pushed and grasped alternately trying to resist his brutal invasion on the in stroke then trying to keep him from retreating on the out.

Her skin was raw from the whipping he ’ d given her and everywhere that his body rubbed against hers burnt with pain. The spikes on his gloves felt as though they were piercing her skin, slicing into her. One of his hands wandered from her hip. He grabbed her thigh first the spark of pain sending a flash of ecstasy through. He scraped the spikes down the soft

underside of her arm. She moaned at the weird painful yet ticklish sensation. This was what the monster needed, what she needed after all they were one now.

His hand came up to grasp a fistful of her hair. She knew what came next and he didn't disappoint. His mouth crashed down on hers with such force that their teeth clashed. His kiss was as searing and bruising as she remembered but it wasn't enough. She bit his lip hard and he drew back with shocked gasp. She could taste his blood in her mouth as she smiled at him wickedly.

"Two can play at that game Angel," Cole quipped with a devious smile of his own.

He moved his hand down to her breast gripping it with his spiked glove. Those little pinpointed tips felt like a hundred hot knives slicing into her skin. She spasmed hard around his cock and Cole growled ferociously.

"Not yet Angel. You wait for me," he commanded.

"Yes Sir," she moaned her answer loudly as she desperately tried to get back some control.

Cole pushed her breast up towards his mouth as he lowered his head. His tongue flicked over it warm and wet. The he struck, his teeth biting hard into her overly-sensitized flesh.

The pain went straight from her nipple to her brain and back down to her clit travelling straight through the monster's centre on its way. Her body exploded with an intense burn. Every inch of her felt as though she were being engulfed in some devilish hellfire of sexual desire and pain.

"Tell me Angel," he commanded as the burn raged on through her.

"You own all of me," she cried out in ecstasy not knowing or caring about the lie coming out of her mouth.

Nikki woke to the hangover of the millennium. Her whole body ached and every time she tried to move a flash of pain would slice through. So she lay still listening to nothing but the steady heartbeat and slow breaths of the man wound around her. There was nothing else. No restless growl, no persistent hum just sweet silence.

“Morning Angel,” with those two words reality came crashing back in on her.

What the hell had she done?

“Morning?”

“Actually it’s more like evening,” Cole replied.

“Evening?” she yelled the question as she scrambled from Cole’s bed.

Every inch of her flesh screamed in pain at the quick and exaggerated movement.

“Slow down Angel. You’ll hurt yourself,” Cole soothed as he too slid from the covers.

She didn’t need to hurt herself, he’d done all the hurting she needed last night and into the early hours of the morning.

“I’ve got to go Cole,” she said as she searched the room frantically for her clothes, for any clothes.

She wrenched open Cole’s draws grabbing the first articles of clothing she could lay her hands on.

“Why so you can run on back to your traitorous father?”

His question stunned her, “What did you just say?”

“I told you yesterday I had information. Information that tells me your father is a traitor.”

She could not believe what she was hearing.

“Et tu Brute, Angel,” he said the phrase that had been following her around like the stink of frustration.

“That was you? Trying to warn me? How? Why?” she asked beyond confused.

“The how doesn’t matter. What does matter is that you are in danger. Your father is working with Black Nikki.”

She couldn’t listen to the bullshit, she wouldn’t. Her father had sacrificed everything for the club. He was no traitor.

“You lie,” she growled at him.

“I wish I was lying Angel. Did you know he was planning to kill Bull and King? Him and Alvarez. Bull got wind of it through one of his men. He planted a man in the mix and went to King,” Cole explained.

Nikki's head was spinning. No, this couldn't be right. He had his information all mixed up. If King knew about this he would've done something, he would've told her, he would've had Reaper killed.

"If this is all true why hasn't King done anything about it?" she questioned.

"He has. He did the only thing he could, the only thing that wouldn't alert Reaper to his knowledge of the man's betrayal, the only thing that would keep Reaper in the game long enough for him to lead the club to Bridges. He gave him the perfect accomplices. Two stupid prospects who don't seem like they have a brain between them and who he wouldn't bat an eyelid at for accompanying him in his treachery."

Nikki's stomach dropped. He wouldn't?

"How do you know all this?"

"It doesn't matter how I know Angel, I know. If you don't believe call Bull, ask him," he told her handing her phone to her.

With shaking hands she dialed Bull's number.

"Bull it's Ace. I need to ask you something and I need you to tell me the truth," she demanded.

Bull's voice was tight as he replied, "Are you sure you wanna hear the truth Ace?"

That one comment told her everything she needed. There was no reason for Bull to lie to her.

She asked him anyway, "Is he working with Black?"

"Yes. It gets worse last night he."

Nikki cut him off, "I gotta go."

She already knew what he did last night or more accurately she did. How could she have been so stupid? King had given him the perfect accomplices and Nikki, well, she'd given him the perfect scapegoat.

Chapter 16

Nikki paced the house restlessly. Her mind raced a million miles a minute as the blackness spread through her. How deep did this run? When the hell had it started? What other things had he lied about? Did he have something to do with Rat's death? With Sheila's? Was he really going to throw her under the bus? But mostly her mind screamed, why? Why would he do this to the club? Why would he do this to her? He'd turned her into a weapon against the club she loved. She'd killed innocent men, not just innocent men but members of her club. That traitorous dog. Her anger swelled and the monster began to vibrate with fury.

"Fuck," she screamed the word long and loud giving voice to the anger inside her.

The need for destruction and violence took over. All she could think was destroy, destroy, destroy. She threw her bedside lamp across the room smashing it against the wall. She picked up more items from her dresser, glass bottles and ceramic nick nacks, hurling them at every hard surface in the room reveling in the satisfying sound of shattering as they broke. She swept the rest of the items onto the floor before upturning her dresser. She stomped on the weak backing splitting it into pieces. She kicked boxes across her floor the contents spewing out as they hurtled across the space. She pummeled her cupboard door with her fists and feet until the damn things fell off.

Nikki's knuckles burned and her ankles ached. All that destruction and all it did was take the edge off. As she surveyed the state of her room a muffled sound caught her attention. Nikki followed the noise all the way across the space to one of her mother's upturned boxes. It was a voice talking, a familiar voice. She threw the cardboard box aside and frantically dug through the pile of crap underneath it. As she got closer to the source her mother's voice came on. Nikki pulled an old mp3 player from a twist of clothing.

“Are you serious? How the hell do you plan on destroying the Soldiers?” Sheila asked.

“We’ve got a man inside.”

It was Roach’s voice. What the hell was she doing with him?

Her mother laughed loudly, “Oh darlin’ you crack me up.”

“I’m not joking woman,” growled Roach.

“Please. None of those bastards would turn on their precious club,” the disdain in Sheila’s voice was clear.

“You’re wrong about that Sheila,” Roach replied.

“So who is this so called inside man?”

“Reaper Jones,” the ‘so there’ went unsaid though it was obvious from his tone.

“Really?” Nikki could hear the sadistic glee in her mother’s voice.

There was only one thing Sheila hated more than the club and that was Reaper. But there was one thing she desired even more than causing that man’s downfall, money. Her mother’s death suddenly made so much more sense. Nikki’s anger swelled again and she knew she had to end this shit tonight. Tonight she would become the club’s executioner, their angel of death.

“You won’t be able to get to him.”

Tex turned his head toward the darkened corner of the room. Nikki leaned forward into the light slightly. She was absentmindedly turning her gun over in her hands staring off into space. He’d had no idea she was there and judging by the sudden still tension in the air neither had anyone else. He’d told her to stay home, to leave this shit alone but she hadn’t listened. They all watched her silently for a moment then the table resumed arguing about what they were going to do with Reaper.

She was right they would find it nearly impossible to get to him. His eyes flicked to Trace across the table. He was still watching Nikki frowning at her. Tex turned back to her. Her father had killed the prospects but worse he’d killed Rat and Tex just knew that somewhere he’d had a

hand in Sheila's murder. He'd betrayed them all adding another nail to Nikki's coffin. He knew she was close to breaking point and he wanted right now to steal her away and hide her till all this shit was over. Suddenly she stood and slipping her Glock into the waistband of her pants she strode out of the room with a look of hard determination on her face. Tex wanted to go after her but there was no way any of them were leaving that table till shit got sorted.

"What do you think he's just gonna let us waltz on up to him and put a bullet in his brain? Ace is right none of us are gonna be able to get within an inch of him," Case fired off.

"No one except her maybe. They have appeared to be rather chummy the last little while," Rock quipped.

No one except her.

"That's enough. She had nothing to do with her bastard father's betrayal and the next man that suggests so will find my fist buried firmly in their skull. Got that?" King yelled at the group.

No one except her. Shit. Both he and Trace started for the door at the same time.

King called after them, "Where the hell are you two going?"

To save Nikki from herself.

Nikki had sat and listened to them discuss Reaper's traitorous actions. She'd listened to some of her brother's try to sell her down the river right alongside him. He'd played them all but he'd played her more than anyone. The things she'd done for him. The darkness that was her constant companion rose up from inside her. She should've seen this coming. He'd allowed her to help him too easily. She'd been his scapegoat and now there was only one way to prove she hadn't been in on it with him. Nikki pulled her phone from her pocket as she exited the clubhouse and dialed a number.

The call connected.

"Reaper it's me don't hang up."

"What do you want kid?" his voice was harsh.

"The club knows I did those hits. They're saying they weren't sanctioned by King. I don't understand this shit. You told me King

sanctioned this? Why would he lie?” She tried her best to sound anguished.

“Woah slow your roll kid. What do you mean they found out?”

She didn’t know if Reaper was playing along for shits and giggles or if he was genuinely surprised.

“I don’t know. I overheard them talking. They think you work for Bridges. That I work for Bridges. They’re going to kill me.”

Silence followed and she knew Reaper was considering the truth of that statement.

“I need your help Dad. You’re the only one who can sort this out, who can tell them the truth.”

Several choice words exited his mouth, “I can’t kid. They think I work for Bridges they’ll shoot me on sight. There’s no way they’d take my word over King’s.”

He was gonna leave her to hang for his crimes. She knew the man was hard but shit she never thought he’d let her take the fall for his actions.

“So you’re gonna leave me to die?”

Silence followed by a low growl, “No kid I’m not gonna leave you to die. I’ll get you out. Meet me at the old mill.”

Then nothing, he’d hung up on her.

Nikki mounted her bike and slid her mask over her head. She let the darkness slip through her and reign over her body. Her bike roared to life and she threw her helmet on. A shout from the direction of the clubhouse brought her head around. Tex and Trace stalled in the doorway staring at her. She felt a twinge of something, then it was gone, the monster having already taken hold of her. She tore out of the compound towards the old mill. Tonight she would hear the truth from his mouth. Tonight she would know for certain the extent of her father’s betrayal.

As she neared the lonely stretch of road that once held the entry to the mill she glimpsed Reaper waiting for her. The light from his headlight lit the road near the entrance to the old mill. Her father leant against his bike his arms crossed over his chest. Nikki came to a stop a couple of meters from him and switched off her engine leaving the headlight on. She pulled down her mask leaving it to hang around her neck and removed her

helmet and glasses leaving them on the seat of her bike. Nikki took a couple steps towards him as he pushed away from his bike and turned to her.

“Hold up kid.”

She stopped a few steps from him as he pointed a gun at her.

“Lift up your cut and turn.”

He didn't trust her and he was right not to. She lifted her cut and spun around slowly to show she was unarmed. Her Glock was stashed inside her saddle bags.

“Sorry kid just had to check.”

She watched as Reaper stowed the gun in the waistband of his pants at his back.

“Are you sure about all this shit kid?”

Nikki moved again throwing herself at Reaper her arms going around his waist and her head ducking into his shoulder. He froze. His body instantly tensed as if he was preparing for her to attack. She turned on the tears.

“They voted it,” she sobbed into his shirt, “They all voted yes.”

Reaper's arms closed round her awkwardly, “I'm sorry kid. We made our bed and now we have to lie in it.”

We've made our bed? She had made no such bed. Nikki moved quickly. She brought her head up at the same time as her hand closed around Reaper's gun. She head butted him her forehead connecting with his nose. Reaper's grip loosened and she ripped the gun out of his waistband. Nikki backed up quickly pointing Reaper's gun at him.

“Smooth kid, very fucking smooth,” Reaper said as he swiped at the blood dripping slowly from his nose. “So where's everyone hiding? King gonna pop out of the bushes and finish me?”

She didn't need King to do this.

“There's no one here but you and me.”

His eyes narrowed further.

“Now get on your knees.”

Reaper shifted slightly towards his bike. Nikki knew he'd have more weapons stored in his saddlebags.

"I wouldn't bother old man. My aim is faultless and you haven't got a hope in hell of getting to those bags before I drop you. Now get on your fucking knees."

He slowly knelt on the bitumen, "Think about this kid. What's killing me going to achieve? This how you're planning to get right with the club? It won't work. You're still gonna be in the same position only with me gone you won't have an out."

Play the game Reaper, play the game.

"How long?" His eyes narrowed at her.

"How long what?"

"Don't bullshit me, *Dad*. I know. They all know. How long have you been working for Bridges?"

She couldn't believe the audacity, trying to play her this late in the game.

"Since before you were patched."

His answer took her by surprise. He'd been working for Bridges for that long? How the hell had no one noticed?

"His people are on their way to meet me here. So you better decide quick kid whether you're going to kill me or not."

She ignored his threat.

"Why would you betray the MC like this?" That was the one thing she couldn't figure out. The reason behind Reaper's treachery eluded her.

"Because they killed the only woman I ever loved."

Nikki's eyebrows hit her hairline as those words left his mouth. The woman in the pictures?

"Who was she?"

Reaper looked off into the dark but said nothing.

"You've destroyed my life and yours for the sake of this woman the least you can do is tell me who she was. Who meant more to you than your own daughter's life?"

He continued to look off into the dark as he spoke, “she was beautiful, olive skin, dark hair and the most exquisite green eyes I’d ever seen. She was young, wanted to take a walk on the wild side and I gave her that opportunity. We were in love but love don’t mean shit. She was a poor kid chasing a better life and I couldn’t give that to her so she left me for a rich man who could give her the life she deserved. She married him and they had a kid together. I met Sheila and you know the rest.” He paused, probably taking a trip down memory lane. “She came to me one night warning me about some shit going on with the Bridges and the club. The next thing I knew Sophia was dead. The club killed her.”

That made no sense to Nikki. If this woman was warning the club why the hell would they kill her? They had more reason to keep her safe than kill her.

“If she was helping the MC why would King have her killed?”

His gaze came back to hers and she glimpsed pain and anguish there. If the darkness hadn’t spread through her already she may have felt a twinge of sorrow for her old man.

“She was Bridges wife.”

Holy fucking shit.

His eyes turned feral with hate as he spoke, “King knew who she was to me and he killed her anyway.”

Now she understood why her old man hated the club but to throw his own daughter under the bus?

“Those hits we did?”

His mouth lifted into a sneer, “It was a setup kid.”

Of course it was.

“All so you could frame me?”

He shrugged his shoulders, “What can I say kid? You’re predictable and oh so fucking faithful, a Soldier to the core.”

He’d turned her into a traitor and a cold blooded killer. There was no going back from there for her, no going back for either of them.

“And Sheila? At what point did you decide she needed to die?”

Reaper’s face was solid as a rock and completely emotionless.

“That was her decision, not mine. She chose to sleep with the Soldier’s enemies and she chose to go snooping in places she had no place in being,” he answered.

“You lie. She found out you were working for Bridges and you had her killed,” she snarled at him.

He sneered back at her, “She was sleeping with Roach and the pillow talk made her a liability. You’ve got no proof either way.”

It wasn’t the pillow talk itself that made her a liability it was the fact that she had threatened Reaper with going to the Soldier’s and divulging his secret if he didn’t pay her hush money. Nikki had no idea how Sheila could’ve been so stupid as to think she would get away with it.

“That wasn’t what made her a liability. It was the recordings she had that made her a liability.”

His eye twitched slightly. He had no idea she knew about the recordings

“You didn’t think she’d only have one copy of them did you?”

His hands curled into fists. He hadn’t thought there were any more copies either.

“I’ve got the proof but I don’t need it. Whether it’s me, the club, the crows or Bridges who pulls the trigger, you are a dead man.”

Reaper stared past her into the darkness beyond them as he spoke, “I was dead long before this all started.”

She could no longer put off the inevitable. It was Reaper’s turn to die.

“Take off the cut and put it on the floor,” she commanded quietly.

He removed his Soldier’s cut and dropped it on the ground behind him. Nikki placed her finger more firmly on the trigger and Reaper smiled at her, this creepy evil pride filled grin.

“You are more like me than you’ll ever know kid.”

She was nothing like him. She would never betray her real family the way he’d betrayed her.

“I am nothing like you,” her words came out on a dark growl and she knew the monster was really taking control now.

“You sure about that kid? Everything you have I gave you, everything you are now I made you and everything you know you learnt from me.”

She shook her head at him, “You have given me nothing but the hatred I have in my heart for you. What you have made me I can erase with one squeeze of this trigger and there is only one lesson I have ever learnt from you.”

“And what’s that kid?” he asked with a sneer.

“Club first, always,” Nikki answered then squeezed the trigger.

The bullet entered her father’s skull right between his eyes and exited out through the back of his skull spraying his cut with blood and gore. He fell forward onto the pavement in front of her. As she stared down at his lifeless body she felt as dead inside as he was. That is what he had given her.

Nikki picked up Reaper’s cut from the ground behind him and placed his gun in the shoulder holster she wore under her cut. Taking his make from his saddle bags she tried her best to wipe the gore from his cut. The blood smeared across the patch leaving a streak of red through his white patch. She gave up folding the cut trying her best to keep the bloodied parts on the inside. Nikki reached into her saddle bag and removed her other gun shoving the cut into the now empty bag. She turned back towards Reaper’s body. It could stay there. It would serve as a warning to Bridges that the Soldiers were not to be messed with. The unmistakable growl of a group of Harley’s sounded in the distance. The cavalry were on their way.

A crunching noise sounded from the darkness behind her. Nikki swung in that direction raising her gun to shoot.

“Whoa there Angel, I’m not here to hurt you.”

Cole. He stepped from the darkness into the light slowly walking towards her with his hands up showing he was not carrying a weapon. She stared at him in shock. She hadn’t laid eyes on him since that night and while some small part of her was screaming at her to run the monster inside

her was shivering with anticipation. His green eyes glinted in the light from Reaper's headlight, those beautiful other-worldly green eyes.

"Put the gun down Angel."

His words snapped her out of her trance.

"What are you doing here?"

"I've come to rescue you," he explained.

To rescue her? From what?

"You're in a bad position here Angel. You've killed one of Bridges most trusted allies."

Cole gestured behind her. She shifted her eyes back to Reaper's body and Cole took a couple of quick steps toward before she turned her attention back to him. The growl from the bikes grew louder. Nikki threw a quick glance in the direction of the sound. Headlights were breaking through the darkness. As she watched the club hurtling towards them through the dark she pictured the confrontation that would happen if Cole didn't disappear and quick. The men she loved facing off against the man who was her demon personified.

She turned back to Cole, "You need to leave now."

He shook his head at her, "Not without you Angel. You think they'll welcome you back with open arms because you've killed Reaper. You killed your own Angel, they won't accept you back. Both Bridges and the club will be after you now. You have only one safe harbor and that's me."

Cole was anything but safe. More footsteps sounded from behind Cole.

Roger stepped out of the darkness behind him, "Miss Jones. We need to go Cole and we need to go now."

Killed her own? How did he know about the prospects?

"How did you know about that?" she asked quietly.

Cole looked between the bikes bearing down on them and Nikki.

"Come with me Angel. No one has to get hurt if you just come with me know."

A tall thin figure stepped out of the shadows. The minute Nikki's gaze fell upon him her blood ran cold. Jason Black. What the hell was Bridges right hand man doing here with Cole?

"What is going on here?"

Her question brought Black's gaze to her. Creepy guy's eyes stared right out of his face into her soul calling the monster inside her into action. She raised her gun again pointing it in his direction. He immediately trained his aim on her.

Cole turned slightly towards Black, "Lower your weapon Black. You hurt her, I will kill you where you stand."

Jason Black averted both his eyes and his aim away from her.

Now he was taking orders from Cole. Nikki was clearly missing something here. She swung her gaze and the muzzle of her gun back to Cole.

"Cole you better tell me what the fuck is going on here and now."

Those otherworldly green eyes of his locked on to hers, calling to that darkness within her beckoning it to go to him. That part of her wanted to go with him, needed to go with him. The rest of her screamed that she couldn't do it, she couldn't abandon her family. If he was somehow mixed up with Bridges, her brain couldn't even compute the possibilities.

"What are you doing with Bridges scum? Why is Jason Black taking orders from you?"

"I don't want to do this here Angel. Come with me and I will explain everything to you later," he said as he took a step toward with his hand out.

"I am not going anywhere until you tell me what the fuck is going on here."

"I believe Miss Jones has made up her mind Cole. She has done the job we came to do and now I believe it's time for us to leave." Roger nodded towards the MC roaring down the road. One more turn and the club would be on them.

"C'mon Angel. You know you belong with me. No one understands you like I do. No one can do the things I can do for you. Come with me now," he growled.

She was frozen to the spot as the gears in her mind worked slowly towards the one and only conclusion for all this. The bikes appeared around the corner and the noise built toward a deafening roar. Roger grabbed one of Cole's arms trying to drag him back into the dark with little success. Black joined Roger in his attempts.

"Unless you want us all to die Bridges I suggest you move," Black yelled at him as they disappeared into the black void of the forest.

Nikki's world caved in on itself as Black's words confirmed the conclusion her sluggish brain had been coming to. Cole was Bridges.

About the Author

I've always enjoyed reading books and writing, English was my favourite subject at school, and you would always find me with my nose buried in a book. They were both outlets for my emotions and my escape from the world. I've read hundreds and thousands of books in all genres but was always fascinated by both crime and romance. It was the interplay between characters and the inner workings of the human mind that drew me to these books. I particularly enjoyed strong female characters who held their own in a 'man's world' and who despite their strong exterior had flaws that very few were able to see. I had something in common with those characters, the outward projection of strength covering a world of insecurities and their journey was something I related to.

This is my second book and the second one in my Soldiers of Chaos MC series. I would love to hear your thoughts about my books, you can email me at a.a.askevold@hotmail.com or you can visit my Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/AA-Askevold/536349909809709>

There is more Nikki to come so keep an eye out for the next instalment in the Soldiers of Chaos MC Series.

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