



# DELTA FORCE SECURITY

*Tech*

*Bestselling Author*  
**SONJA B.**

# **Delta Force Security, Book 2**

**Tech**

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# Synopsis

To some I am Dexter Broussard, to those who really know me I am Tech. My keyboard purrs loudly as a woman being caressed by me when I am hard at work. There isn't anything my fingers will not uncover about you once you are in my team's clutches. Women think I am sexy with my nerdy glasses and computer skills. They flock like geese. But I was only interested in having a little fun until Madison Rowe. Madison is the type of woman you give everything up just to share her space. And I will share her space, heart, body and mind.

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# Chapter 1

## Dexter ‘Tech’ Broussard

Letting out a sigh of relief, I stared at my house as I put my truck in park. I bowed my head and said a silent prayer, thanking the Lord for allowing my brothers and I to make it home once again from a dangerous mission. This last one took us to San Diego, California.

I learned my lesson years ago after missing data about our former boss Secretary Wright and Ricardo Esteban. I blamed myself for the shit Mad Dog and Janae had to go through because I didn’t dig deep enough even though I thought I did. Never in all my years of being a member of Delta Force had something like that happen, but I let myself off the hook when we found out Secretary Wright was the reason their shit was so hidden.

After a week of intel, Mad Dog, Venom, Lethal, and I left to rescue a dozen young girls and boys from being transported by a semi-trailer, headed to Tijuana, Mexico. I could only imagine what the kidnappers had waiting for them.

Normally, I would be at a distance, guiding the unit where to go, but this time I wanted to be there to help. Too many children of our country are snatched away from their families because of traffickers. Ever since the Secretary was taken down and we cut ties. Our mission now is to help those who needed us.

“Does everyone have visuals?” Mad Dog’s voice asked in our earpieces.

“Roger that,” Venom, Lethal, and I responded.

On a lonely dark highway, the semi hauling the kids travelled with a SUV in the front and back of it. The four of us were riding on zero noise dirt bikes. Mad Dog and I were on the left of it with Venom and Lethal on the right. Using our night vision goggles to see in front of us, we didn’t use the headlights of the dirt bikes, we used the darkness to cloak us.

“Lethal, take out the SUV in the back. I’ll take care of the front SUV. Tech and Venom, you already know what to do.” Mad Dog ordered.

Nothing else was said. Mad Dog raced up to the SUV ahead. The flash of bullets leaving his gun as he discharged left the driver of the vehicle to lose control before it veered to the right. I quickly looked over my shoulder



and didn't see the rear SUV, knowing Lethal had taken care of it as well. Now it was time for me and Venom to do our part.

I sped ahead, paralleling the dirt bike next to the back of the driver's side door. Counting to five, I leapt off the bike onto the semi. The driver never slowed his speed as he continued down the highway. Through the space between the truck and trailer Venom gave me a thumbs up.

Against the wind, I carefully maneuvered just outside the door. I took a peek in and saw the driver and another guy in the passenger seat frantically arguing on what they should do. As the passenger took out a cellphone, I used the butt of my gun and broke the driver's window. He almost lost control as Venom did the same on the other side.

Caught off guard neither one of them knew what to do. Luck was on my side as I reached for the handle, and it opened. The driver began to hysterically yell in Spanish, but I didn't give a shit. I grabbed his arm, then yanked him from his seat. His body rolled as it hit the ground.

I quickly jumped into the driver's seat and brought the rig to a stop. Venom now occupied the seat where the other guy once sat.

"I got those two," Venom said as he jumped out of the cab. Their bodies might have rolled but that didn't mean they weren't dead.

After putting the truck in park, I got out and met Mad Dog and Lethal at the back of the trailer.

"So, we know there are two handlers in the trailer with the kids, so there's a chance they will use at least two of them as shields. If that is the case Lethal, you already know. Tech, you and I will cover for him," Mad Dog said.

Lethal and I nodded, then aimed our guns toward the doors as Mad Dog unlocked them. When he opened the first door, just like we anticipated, the two men came forth holding girls in front of them with pistols pressed against the sides of their heads.

"Déjanos ir y no los mataremos (*Let us fucking go and we won't kill them.*)" The one on the right demanded. His eyes moved from side to side like a meth addict, but I was more concerned about the little girl he was manhandling. Her tear stained face let me know he didn't just randomly pick her. That nasty motherfucker had touched her long before this.

Just seeing the fright in her eyes did something to me and before my friend, my commander could give his directive, I shot both of them in the head before they could react. The girls scrambled back with the others as

their captures bodies fell. I could feel Mad Dog and Lethal's eyes on me, but I didn't acknowledge them. Yes, I stepped outside of the plan we had laid out, but after hearing that bullshit, plans be damned.

Through the help from one of our contacts, we were able to put the children with an underground network who would make sure they were returned to their families. While we were getting that done, the dirt bikes were returned to us. Once we had all of the children's information for our files, our equipment along with the bikes were loaded onto a cargo jet for us to return to Dallas.

The entire flight I remained silent as Mad Dog scolded me for not adhering to the plan we had set forth. As they say 'In one ear and right out the other' is how I felt. Sometimes you have to differentiate from the 'plan.' I don't have any children, but I would hope that if someone were in my position to save them from a life of abuse, they would do everything necessary.

When the jet landed it was close to nine on Saturday morning. I quietly gathered my laptops, then left the aircraft. After placing the laptops in the Hummer, I went back to help the others load the dirt bikes and our gear into the 8.5 x 20 cargo trailer.

Once we had everything secured, we got into the SUV with me and Venom in the back and Mad Dog in the front passenger seat with Lethal driving, taking us to the office for debriefing.

Fifteen minutes into the ride as I'm downloading the children's information into an encrypted file, Venom leaned over and whispered, "Are you alright?"

I let out a deep breath as I kept working, replying, "Yeah, I'm just tired from the last few days."

From my peripheral I could see the skepticism on Venom's face, but he didn't push the issue.

"All right then brother. Once we finish debriefing, you'll be able to get some rest. I think we all could use some," he said.

"Roger that," I stated.

At the office, Mad Dog led the debriefing. Although he gave us praise for completing the mission without any injuries, I could feel his heated gaze on me. Honestly, if he asked me if I would change the way I did things, I would've told him flat out 'hell no.' The girl might not have died but at that

moment I got a glimpse of what our brother Chains must have felt when he tried to save the little girl that died in his arms.

Unlike Chains, I wouldn't have walked away from saving those who needed us, but at the same time I now understood why he did. This shit can start to fuck with your head. The shit we've seen and done, it can become a ten ton weight on your back.

My cell phone starts to ring, bringing me out of the last twenty-four hours. Looking at the screen, I smile. It's Madison Rowe. We rescued Madison on our first unsanctioned mission. She was being held captive by a lowlife asshole who we sent to the afterlife.

Having a degree in psychology, I gave Madison my card the night we returned her to her family. I knew she would need someone other than her parents to talk about what she went through. I didn't think she would call but was surprised when she did a week later.

On that call, I could barely hold onto my anger as she told me the shit that son of a bitch put her through. I wanted to go back and find his remains to make his soul suffer more. Madison didn't deserve what he did to her, hell no woman did.

As I gave her comforting words of encouragement, I told her to call me anytime she needed to talk or wanted to vent, and I would be there for her. Over the next six years, we not only spoke on the phone but met in person, in a public setting, of course. I like to think that our talks helped her come a long way since that night we found her.

Despite what she went through, Madison went back to school and obtained a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She invited me to her graduation, but I declined. Even though I kept my true feelings for Madison at bay, I couldn't find myself at the graduation. I was there in the background cheering her on as she walked across the stage.

Hitting the answer button, I greet, "Hello, Madison. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing good. How are you Dex?" she answered.

I told her my real name after the first time we talked. For some reason I felt more comfortable with her using it. Madison started off calling me Dexter, but over the course of time she has shortened it to Dex, and I didn't mind.

"I'm well. It's almost eleven, shouldn't you be heading to the gym?" I questioned.

Strange as it was, I knew her schedule. Monday thru Friday she worked as a private nurse for one of the prominent families in her town. On Saturdays, she went to the local gym to work out, then met up with her best friend, Skylar Yates for a late lunch and shopping, then ending her day with either hanging out with her family or going out with Skylar for a night on the town...or with her boyfriend Quinton Gregory. I'm Tech and I can find out any and everything I need to. This Quinton guy better treat her right. Madison deserved happiness not and if I ever find out he isn't doing his job as her man, then me and Mr. Gregory are going to have a serious conversation.

She giggled, replying, "I'm about to leave. I swear Dexter Broussard if I didn't know any better, I'd think you were keeping tabs on me."

I chuckled because she didn't know how much of her assumption was true. I knew when Madison had started dating Quinton Gregory.

After what Madison had been through, I had this deep connection to make sure she was safe at all times. On this aspect I didn't want her to end up in the same situation as before.

"No, I'm not keeping tabs on you, Madison. I just know you're usually on your way to gym class by now. Anyway, how is the family?" I ask, changing the subject.

Although I hadn't personally met Mr. and Mrs. Rowe, I felt like I knew them from the stories Madison told. I have the utmost respect for Mr. Rowe especially after finding out he served in the Marines. After six years in the service, he was honorably discharged and moved back to his hometown of Gilmer, Texas. He got hired on with the fire department.

Two years after being with the department, there was a call of a fire at the local bakery. The bakery is where he met Paula who was the assistant manager of the establishment. Once the fire was contained, Mr. Rowe asked her out on a date and that was the start of their relationship.

One year later they were married and a year after that, Mrs. Rowe was pregnant with Madison. After Madison was born, Mrs. Rowe didn't go back to work at the bakery. Mr. Rowe had diligently worked his way up to become the Lieutenant, so he was able to financially take care of his family. By the time James came along five years later, they welcomed Pilar almost two years after that, Mr. Rowe had become Captain of the fire department. He recently retired two years ago after thirty years on the job.

“They’re doing good. Momma and daddy went to visit daddy’s aunt this weekend in San Antonio. She’s not doing too well, and he wanted to see her before things took a turn for the worse. Pilar and James are typical young adults who will run wild while their parents are away, but I will be staying at the house this weekend to keep them in check.”

That’s one thing I’ve learned about Madison and her younger siblings after her ordeal, she has kept them close to her to make sure they didn’t fall into the same shit she did.

“As you should,” I told her.

She paused before saying, “And I always will. Hey, I was just checking in with you since I hadn’t talked to you in the last few days.’

“Is everything all right?” I quickly asked.

“Yes, it is. I’ve just got accustomed to hearing your voice at least once a week and when I hadn’t, I decided to reach out to make sure everything was all right with you,” she replied.

Rubbing my temples, I wondered how I could respond to that. Madison was unlike others we had rescued. She knew what we did and also if she hadn’t heard from me in a certain amount of time she would either send a text or call to see how I was doing.

“I’m fine, Madison. Thank you for calling to check in with me. I hope you have a great weekend and if you need to talk, you know I am always here for you,” I stated, knowing I wanted to say so much more.

There was a moment of silence before Madison said, “Yeah, sure and you have an awesome weekend as well. Talk to you soon.”

Dropping the cell phone onto my lap, I grip the steering wheel. The one woman who sees me as I am and the things I do, I can’t have.



# Chapter 2

## Madison Rowe

Ending the call with Dexter, I felt relieved he was all right. After he and his brothers, who I saw as angels, saved me from my worst nightmares, I have always had a connection with him.

When everything happened, I was a nineteen year old sophomore, finally getting adjusted to college life. I never thought I would fall victim to the ill fate I landed into.

I had spent most of the evening studying for my midterms in the library. If I looked back on the scenario that took place that night, I would have done things differently. Like, there was this one Hispanic guy who kept coming over to my table asking if I knew what time the library closed. With his broken English, I didn't think anything of it because the university was so diverse.

When he approached me the last time, I became alert. How many times can you tell a person the same answer? When he left my table, an uneasy feeling came over me. I looked around the library for the guy, but he was nowhere to be found. Gathering my things, I took that as my chance to get the hell out of there and make a beeline for the door.

When I stepped outside, night had fallen, and two students passed me as they entered the library. With my dorm only being two buildings away, I thought if I speed walked there I would be safe but was I fucking wrong. Ten steps from the library a hand came from behind me and placed a cloth over my mouth.

I tried my best to fight off the person, but it seemed like the more I fought, the more they had the advantage over me. My muffled screams were not heard, as the person dragged me into the dark recesses of the building as I kicked and scratched at their flesh. Soon I felt my body begin to tire. Whatever inhalant that was on the cloth started to take its effect on me. I gave one last kick before my eyelids finally dropped.

When I woke up, I was in a small room with only a bed and a small bathroom. Trust me when I say I tried everything to find a way out of that room. Whoever had taken me made sure there was no escape.

Days had passed and I didn't see or talk to anyone. The only human interaction was when a person slid a tray of food through the slot at the bottom of my door.

Was I in jail? I didn't recall doing anything that would land me in this type of situation.

I start to replay the events in my head of the night I was at the library.

The library, my way to the dorm, being attacked from behind. Realization hits me. I wasn't in a jail cell; I was in a cell of some crazy motherfuckers.

I'm not even going to go into the details I went through. All I can say is that I would never wish that shit on my worst enemy. After a while I lost track of day and time. I had given up hope of my family or authorities to save me. The only thought that repeated in my mind was if I took my life, the abuse I was suffering from Bryan would be over. I prayed that God would forgive me and let me enter the pearly gates because he couldn't have let me endure what was happening to me without me retaliating in my own way.

On the last day of my captivity, I was let outside of my room, not knowing what was coming afterwards. Once Bryan's people cleaned me up and took me into his room of doom, I prayed the Lord would take me right then and there. If I lived through this, there was no way any man would want me after hearing what I had been through. But there was Tech and his brothers.

Not only did they save my life, but Tech and his unit brought me back to my family. I prayed they would continue to do the same for others who were in my position. I am forever thankful to them.

As time passed along, Tech became a good friend I could call on when I needed a shoulder to cry on. Even though I saw a therapist to help me through my trauma, it was easier to talk to Tech because he didn't ask questions. He just listened as I got whatever emotion I was in at the time off my chest.

Somewhere along the way my feelings for Dexter turned into something more. Even with his wire framed glasses, Dexter is a hunk. I found myself absent mindedly gawking at his muscular arms and chest that his shirts couldn't hide or the firmness of his thighs that flexed under his jeans with every step he took. The six foot one, two hundred and thirty pound man was built like a running back.



Dexter always kept himself groomed with a fresh haircut and trimmed mustache and beard. His sun kissed skin made me wonder if he had tan sessions because it looked too perfect but found out early on that his mother is Caucasian and his father is of Creole descent.

Staring out at the peaceful view from my patio window, I push those thoughts of Dexter to the side. I never told him how I felt because we were so good at being friends, I didn't want to ruin that. Plus, I didn't know if he shared the same feelings because he was always a gentleman and never showed that he had an interest in me like that.

Swirling the last of the herbal tea in my cup, my cell phone rings. I smile when I see my boyfriend's name on the screen.

Putting the call on speaker, I sing, "Hello."

"Hello, pretty lady. What are you up to?" Quinton's deep voice asks.

Quinton Gregory and I have been in a relationship for the last six months. He was the grandson of my last patient, Mrs. Bonnie Boone. After the first day we met, Quinton would periodically stop by on my shifts to check on me and his grandmother.

I thought he was handsome with his smooth coffee skin and dark brown eyes. Over the course of time and many talks, Quinton mustered up the nerve to ask me out on a date and I happily agreed. I often wondered what took him so long to ask. Maybe he thought I would look down at his job as the assistant manager at the local grocery store, which was definitely not the truth. I would never judge a person by their job and Quinton had one, plus his own car and apartment. His goal was to one day become manager of that store or one of the other ones in the nearby town.

Sadly, Mrs. Boone passed away in her sleep four months ago. Out of all his cousins who rarely come to visit her, Quinton seemed to be the one who took her death the hardest. It was a tough time for him, and I was happy to be there to help him through it.

Walking to the kitchen, I sat my cup on the counter as I replied to Quinton's question. "I'm about to leave in a few minutes to go to the gym. What are you doing?"

"I'm on my way to the barber shop to get a fresh cut. I was calling because I know we have plans to Netflix and chill tonight, but one of my homeboys got released from the pen earlier. Me and some of the fellows want to take him out tonight to celebrate. We're going to do it up big for him and go to one of the spots in Dallas."

I wasn't in the mood to be in a club. Plus, I don't know this homeboy he spoke of. I've been out with him and his *homeboys* before and let's just say they are a hard bunch to be around.

Sighing, I request, "Quinton, we haven't seen each other all week and I was looking forward to us spending some quality time together. Can't we stay in for the night?"

"No," he says. "My guy just got out, so what would it look like if I wasn't there to support him?"

I roll my eyes. If it's not my immediate family, why would I want to celebrate a stranger being released from jail? Hell, and if it were someone in my family, depending on what they were locked up for, I'd probably be feeling the same way.

"What's it going to be pretty lady?" Quinton asks in a calm tone.

Rubbing my forehead, I tell him, "Quinton, I'm not in the mood to hang out with a lot of people tonight. Go ahead and enjoy your friend's release and I will see you tomorrow."

It doesn't take him long to snap back, "Look Madison, I need you by my side tonight. I'm not going to be the only guy there without his lady. I'll be there around eight to pick you up, so make sure you wear something sexy tonight. Pack an overnight bag too because I've made hotel reservations to stay in the city."

Quinton hangs up before I can argue. I stare at the phone, shaking my head. *Well, I guess a peaceful night wasn't going to happen.* I grab my backpack and keyring, then leave my apartment.

An hour and a half after my personal trainer gave me the workout from hell, I'm on my way to meet Skylar at Applebee's. Luckily, the gym has private showers, and I was able to clean the sweat from my drenched body. I always keep an extra pair of clothes in my backpack to change into on days like this.

Pulling into the parking lot, I spot Skylar's white Maxima and park my dark gray Malibu next to it. I reach for my backpack, then unzip it to take my wallet out. Once I have it, I sit the backpack on the passenger floorboard, then grab my keys and cell phone before exiting the vehicle. After setting the alarm, I headed into the restaurant.

As soon as I walk in Skylar shouts my name, waving me over to where she's sitting at the bar.

"I'm with her," I laugh to the hostess as I point to my best friend.

She smiles, then steps to the side.

“Girl, you are too much,” I say, giving her a quick hug.

“I was just saving you the trouble of having to look for me,” she states as I let her go, then pull out the bar stool to take a seat. “I already ordered us margaritas on the rocks and the spinach artichoke dip to get us started.”

“Thank you,” I returned, sitting my items on the bar. “I’m going to need a drink to get ready for tonight.”

The bartender arrives then, placing our drinks in front of us. “Your appetizer should be out soon. Do you need more time to look over the menu to order your entrees?” he asks.

“Yes, please,” Skylar returns. “She just got here, so we’ll let you know when we’re ready.”

He flirtatiously grins at her. “I’m at your beck and call.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Skylar flirts back with a wink as he walks away to tend to other diners.

Nudging her side with my elbow, I whisper, “Your ass is too damn hot.”

Skylar giggles, picking up her margarita and takes a sip before saying, “Hot enough to make a man simmer in his pants and I don’t mean in the nasty women’s way either because you know I don’t play about that shit. Which leads to my other hotness to burn an asshole up if he tries to play me.”

“I know that’s right,” I cosign, lifting my glass up to clink against hers.

When Skylar’s done with her second sip, she asks, “So, what’s going on tonight. I thought you and Quinton were hanging out.”

After taking another sip from my straw, I told her, “We were, but he called earlier saying one of his *homeboys*,” I do the rabbit ears with my fingers, “got out of prison today and they want to go to Dallas to celebrate. I really don’t want to go because you know how I feel about his friends. When I told him that he basically implied I didn’t have a say in the matter, and he would be by later to pick me up.”

Skylar dips one of the tortilla chips in the dip, then takes a bite. She covers her mouth chewing as she says, “Madison, if you don’t want to go, then don’t. No one, not even Quinton can make you do something that you don’t want to do.”

And she’s right, but I’ve seen how Quinton’s friends get down and I know if I’m not there, there’s no telling what type of bullshit they’ll get him into.

Trying to protect Quinton, I state, “He’s not making me go. I understand he wants to be there for his friend, so I’ll do my job as his girlfriend and support my boyfriend even if it’s something I don’t want to do.”

Skylar glares at me, then breaks out in a fit of laughter. “Yeah, okay. If that’s what you need to tell yourself, but we both know that shit is a lie.”

I instantly became heated by her words, not because they were false but because they’re true. The only thing that keeps me from calling Quinton and telling him I wasn’t going is because he hasn’t given me any reason to question his actions. He practically begged me to accompany him tonight, so that is what I will do.

“I’m going to go,” I said, picking up the menu. “I may not like his friends, but he wants me there and I will be. If shit gets out of control, then I’ll tell his ass we need to leave.”

Skylar sucks her teeth, reaching for her menu. “Okay, but if shit goes south you better call me. I don’t mind driving the two hours to come and get you.”

Draping my arm around her shoulders, I respond, “And I know you don’t, but I’m sure everything will be fine.”

“All right girl, but just know I’m only a phone call away.”

Tightening my arm around her, I say, “Thank you.”

We demolished the margaritas, and dip before ordering another round of drinks. When we decided on our entrees, Skylar ordered the chicken and shrimp scampi, and I played it light with the chicken wonton tacos.

It was nice to catch up with my friend. Our schedules are so busy with me being a nurse and Skylar having to travel during the week because of her position as a regional manager for one of the top drug stores in our surrounding areas, Saturdays are the only days we can spend together.

Once we finished our meals and substituted the margaritas for sweet tea, we left, heading to the mall to find me something to wear tonight.

When our retail therapy was done, I left the mall with a stunning black spaghetti strapped dress that gathered at the waistline then stopped above the knee. I didn’t know what type of club Quinton and his friends had decided upon, but I knew I would be the sexiest female in their group.

By the time I made it home, it was close to six. I had two hours to get ready before Quinton knocked on my door. He has often suggested that we swap keys to each other’s homes, but I wasn’t ready for that. We’re still in

the getting to know each other stages, and it would take some time before I felt comfortable to allow a man to have access to my home.

I took my time showering and getting my hair the way I wanted it. A Chinese bun with the chopsticks going through it is what I settled on. Not too long after, my doorbell rang. Misting on Gucci Bloom, I sit the bottle on my dresser, then head towards the front door.

Peeking out the peephole, I see Quinton on the other side looking handsome as ever donning a crisp black long sleeved dress shirt, blue jeans with black stitching, and a pair of black gators.

Opening the door, Quinton surveys me with a smile. “Baby you look good tonight.”

“Thank you,” I nervously replied, moving to the side for him to enter.

As I go back into my bedroom to add my jewelry, Quinton follows. “Okay, so I know it’s a ways from here, but we’re going to this club in Dallas called The Edge. It’s supposed to be the happening spot in the city and that’s where Rang wants to go. I’ve made a reservation at the Holiday Inn a few blocks away. Did you pack your bag?”

Leaving the trepidation from my voice. “A night in the city will do us some good. My bags over there.” I point at it on my vanity chair. Call it sixth sense, but somehow I knew this night wasn’t going to end the way either one of us thought.

When we finally park in front of The Edge, Quinton gets out of his Excursion, then comes to my side of the SUV and opens my door. I place my hand in his when he extends it to me.

Steadying my footing in my heels as I exit the vehicle, Quinton looks at me and says, “Don’t embarrass me in front of my friends with your sidity ways. I can put up with it, but my homeboys don’t like that shit.”

Plastering on a fake smile, I tell him, “I would never embarrass you, love. Tonight is all about your friend. Unless I need to go to the bathroom, I will always stay by your side.”

Quinton peers at me. “That’s what I like to hear. Baby, we’re here to have a good time. I know you don’t like my friends, but I’m happy you decided to join me tonight.”

He tosses his keys to the valet as he escorts me inside. Doja Cat’s *Freak* greets us as we enter. In normal circumstances, I would have dropped it low and did a little twerk, but I needed to be on alert, so I hummed the words.

Quinton paid our cover charge, then led us to a small VIP section. His friends were in the section with females crowding around them as they held up bottles of Cristal. I felt like I just walked into a nineties Puff Daddy video.

I mean, at what point in a man's life do they finally acknowledge they are no longer in their twenties and need to start dressing like the grown men they are and not like the sons they bore?

Quinton ushered me through the mass of gyrating bodies to where I assume Rang is. He's standing, puffing on a cigar with a bottle of Cristal in his other hand.

"Rang, let me introduce you to my lady, Madison," Quinton says.

Rang takes a long pull from his cigar, then blows the smoke close to Quinton's face. Quinton might not have seen it as a gesture of disrespect, but I did.

Rang extends his hand out to me. "Nice to meet you, Ms. Madison. Q has said nothing but good things about you. I can't wait to get to know you better."

A deaf man who could read lips and a blind man who read Braille knew what this asshole was trying to say. And for him to have the audacity to say that shit to me in front of Quinton is another blatant disrespect. But as the seconds passed and Quinton didn't come to my defense, I knew where he and I both stood.

I unwillingly shake Rang's hand. He holds on much longer than I want him to, making me side eye Quinton who averts his eyes to the couples on the dance floor.

Rang gives me a predatory look before releasing my hand. Quinton daps him up before telling him he'll be right back. He takes me to an empty spot on one of the VIP couches.

"What do you want to drink, baby?" he asks like the shit with his friend just didn't happen.

With a heated gaze, I'm not able to hide my annoyance. "I don't want shit. Did you not see the way your *friend* was fucking me with his eyes?"

Showing his ignorance, Quinton glances around the room, then back at me. "Rang? You thought Rang was trying to get at you?"

"Hell, yes. His ass just disrespected you and me. And what kind of name is Rang?"

Quinton stands in front of me, then leans down. “He was given the name Rang because everywhere he went, there was a ninety percent chance bullets were going to rang out. As for him trying to get at you, I think you’re reading too much into that shit. So, I’ll ask again if you want something to drink?”

Standing my ground, I reply, “No, I’m straight.”

“Whatever,” Quinton murmurs as he walks away, going back to hang with Rang and the other guys.

Sitting back on the couch, I cross my legs, then gaze around at the people living their best lives. My stomach turns when my eyes fall on Rang who is staring back at me. A sinister smile spreads on his face as he winks at me. I quickly look away from him as a sense of uneasiness washes over me.

One of the girlfriends, Criss, who is one of the only females I normally get along with, comes and sits next to me.

“Madison, I know this is way out of your element but let the guys have this time. Since I am one of the only females to grow up with them, I’ll be the first to tell you they’re all assholes. I’m saying this to you because you’re not used to this lifestyle. These men bounce from woman to woman and the ones who are their day ones are supposed to sit back and ignore it. You...you have a chance to leave this shit. You’re new and don’t have any attachments like being married or having any kids.” She places her hand on my shoulder, “I’m just saying, if someone would have given me this type of information, I would’ve listened to that shit. I would’ve turned into Speedy Gonzales and ran away the first opportunity I had.”

My eyes swell, hearing Criss’ story, but I tell her, “Quinton has been nothing but good to me. I understand what you’re saying, but I could never see Quinton doing something like that to me.”

With sorrowful eyes, Criss rests the palm of her hand on my cheek. “Oh, dear Madison. If you think that, then you’re already stuck.”

Criss released her grasp, then disappeared into the crowd on the dance floor as my eyes followed her. I remember my granny saying “*Baby, sometimes when you’re not looking for the answers, they will fall in your lap. Then you’ll be put in the position to either see what’s in front of you or ignore it. The choice is up to you.*” It didn’t make sense back then, but it makes sense now.

Now the question remains what choice I will make.

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# Chapter 3

## Madison

We've been at the club for over an hour now and I'm ready to go home. Quinton has only come to check on me once and that was to see if I wanted to take a drink from the champagne bottle I witnessed him pass around others. I wasn't putting my mouth on that damn thing. Who knows what some of those people have.

Ready for the night to end, I get up from the couch to look for Quinton through the crowd. I spot him laughing with Rang. Two other guys stand with them along with four scantily dressed women. I head in their direction. As I approach, I notice one of the women whisper something in Quinton's ear as she places her hand on his chest. Whatever she said to him has Quinton grinning and nodding his head up and down as he scans her body with lust. My conversation with Criss earlier pops in my head. Shit.

"Quinton," I yell over the music to get his attention.

He and the too friendly heifer look at me. She gives me a smirk as I move closer to them.

"What's up, pretty lady?" Quinton asks. His speech is slightly slurred.

"I can name a few, but I'll start with this one," I respond, removing the hood Barbie's hand from his chest.

"Oh, excuse me," she giggles.

Ignoring her ass, I tell Quinton, "I need to talk to you."

"Okay, so talk," he returns, taking a drink from the glass in his hand.

I folded my arms under my breast. "In private."

Quinton laughs. "Madison we're in a fucking club, there's no privacy in here." Rang and the people around us laugh with him.

"Fine, I'm ready to go home."

Quinton's head falls back as he says, "Come on Madison. Don't start this shit. Everyone's having a good time."

"Do I look like I'm having a good time? If you don't want to take me home, then give me the keys to your SUV, so I can go home or at least to the hotel."

I take a step back when Rang steps towards me then stops. "I can take her home, Q." His eyes roamed over me like I was fresh meat, and he was a

wild beast who hadn't eaten in weeks.

"Naw, that's okay Rang. We're all here for you and you're not leaving your own party. Madison will leave when I'm ready and not one minute before," Quinton fumes, then glares at me. "Now take your ass back over there and wait until I come get you."

He turns his back to me, and they begin to party again. I stood there wondering who the hell he was. This is a side of Quinton I have never seen before. With the feelings of hurt, embarrassment, and anger, I turn and walk away. I bypass the couch and leave the VIP section in search of the women's bathroom. Holding back my tears as I comb through the crowd, I find it and there's a line of women waiting to get inside.

Minutes later I was finally able to enter the bathroom. I didn't need to use it; I just needed a stall to hide the tears that wanted to fall. As ladies cackled and reapplied their makeup in the mirror, I dashed into an available stall.

I barely got the door locked before the tears rolled down my face. I have never been so humiliated in all my life and never thought Quinton would be the one to do it. The saying of two sides to every coin fit him to a tee. His actions showed that he didn't care about my feelings. It was all about him and his friends. I'm going to take Criss' advice and leave this relationship before it goes any further.

Knocking on the stall door from a woman cursing she needs to use the facilities has me rolling a wad of toilet tissue in my hand to dry my tears.

"I'm coming out," I shouted, throwing the tissue in the toilet, then flushing it.

As I open the door the woman rushes into the stall, then pushes me out of it. She slams the door, locking it as I stared at her in disbelief. I'll give her a pass because apparently she was in a tight position.

I find an open space in front of the mirror. My eyes are puffy from crying. Thank goodness my mascara is waterproof or else I might've looked like one of the zombies from *The Walking Dead*.

After washing my hands, my mind is already made up to get the hell as far away from this club and Quinton. Leaving the bathroom, I gasp when someone grabs my arm, then forcefully pulls me to them. I close my eyes as flashbacks from the night I was kidnapped explode in my head. Well, this time I'm going to put up one hell of a fight.

“Unlike Quinton, I watched as you came this way.” Rang’ foul cigar and liquor breath hit my nostrils.

Trying to get out of his grasp, I curse, “Get you’re fucking hands off of me. I don’t think Quinton would like you manhandling me like this.”

He lets out a hearty laugh before stating, “I don’t think Q would have a problem with it seeing we’ve shared women in the past and you are no different. Come with me and I’ll show you why most of his so-called women have left him for me.” He runs his nasty ass hand along my backside. “Don’t fight it, Madison. I saw the way you were looking at me earlier and I know you want me too.”

Digging my nails into his forearms, I sneer, “The only thing I want for you to do, is let me fucking go.”

“That’s what they all say before I prove them otherwise,” he says, trying to kiss me.

I move my head to the side, avoiding his lips before kneeing him in the nuts. Rang groans as he releases his hold on me to grab his package, giving me the opportunity to get away from him.

“Bitch, I’m going to fuck you up,” Rang growls as I push past the people in front of me.

“Madison,” I hear Quinton call out in the distance, but I don’t look back. I needed to get the fuck out of there ASAP.

Running out the club doors, I keep going before stopping at the end of the parking lot. I hide in between two cars. I inhale a deep breath, then slowly release it through my nose trying to calm myself. With shaky hands, I dig in my purse for my cell phone to call the one person I know who could get me out of this situation. It’s late, so I hope he’s still up.

“Hello,” Tech answers, sounding fully awake.

“Dexter,” I cry into the phone.

“Madison, what the fuck is going on?” he demands.

My voice shakes as I reply, “I need you to come get me.”

“Where are you?”

Using the back of my hand to wipe my nose, I tell him, “I’m in Dallas at this club called The Edge. Can you come get me?”

“I know where it’s at. Are you still in the club or are you outside?”

Sniffing, I reply, “I’m outside, hiding in the back of the parking lot.”

“Hiding,” Dexter yells. “What the fuck? Send me your location and stay the fuck where you are.”

“Okay,” I whispered, ending our call, then sending him the location.

Damn my overnight bag was still in Quinton’s SUV. I could live without those items, but my self-respect and dignity I couldn’t.

Quinton has been blowing up my cell phone ever since I left out the club. I have nothing to say to him, nor do I want to hear his lies and excuses, so I put the phone on do not disturb.

Unlike in the club, time seemed to pass by quickly because the next thing I knew, a silver Chevy Silverado slammed on its brakes where I’m hiding. The driver’s side door swings open. From where I’m crouched down, I can only see the lower part of black cargo pants heading my way.

“Madison, I’m here,” Dexter says, looking for me.

I jump up and run straight into his arms. More tears flow as I hold onto him with dear life.

“It’s okay, I’m here now,” his calming voice soothes as he caresses my back.

I don’t know how long we stood there as Dexter held me with such comfort, but after what I had gone through, I needed it.

“Come on, let me help you in the truck,” he whispers.

I nod as he walks me to the passenger side then opens the door. After helping me inside, Dexter closes the door, then goes around to the driver’s side door and gets in.

He turns in his seat to face me and asks, “What happened, Madison?”

I close my eyes as I begin to break down and tell him what Quinton and Rang had put me through. When I’m done, I open my eyes only to see the coldness in Dexter’s eyes like the night he and his brothers saved me.

Before I can utter another word, I grip the armrest on the door as he flies through the parking lot before stopping in front of the club. Dexter slams the truck in park before reaching over to open the glove compartment. He reaches in, then pulls out a pistol.

Taking the safety off he hands it to me. “I’m going to step inside for a moment. If anyone other than me tries to get in here, use this to stop them.”

Dropping the gun on my lap, I seize his arm. “Dexter, wait. We can leave right now and let everything they have done be a past memory. I don’t want you to do anything to get yourself in trouble and from what I’ve seen with that Rang guy, Quinton and the others follow him as if he’s some kind of God.”

Dexter stares at me with the same expression he had on his face the night they found me bound in that room. He declares, "If he's a God, then I'm the Devil. No one and I mean no one has the right to make you feel the way you did. I knew that fucking Quinton wasn't right for you."

Frowning at his words, I ask, "What do you mean, you knew?"

Dexter pays no attention to my question as he reiterates, "Stay here, and use that if you need to." He points to the pistol in my lap.

"Put your seatbelt on and lock the doors," he orders before closing the door, then heading for the entrance of the club.

I follow his orders, hoping I wouldn't have to use the pistol.

It doesn't take long before the club's doors open and Dexter backs out, going back and forth with Quinton and Rang.

Cracking my window, I hear Dexter yell, "And like I said, if I hear that any of you motherfuckers have tried to reach out to Madison, I will make your ass disappear from this earth. You don't know me, so you don't know what I'm capable of, but if you want to find out," he gives them a challenging look before continuing, "try me."

Quinton looks over at Rang and laughs. "Do you hear this geeky looking white boy? Does he really think he can take my woman away from me?"

Rang grins, replying, "Naw, Q. I don't think this white boy knows who he just crossed lines with."

My heart drops, but Dexter, with a show of absolute defiance, laughs in their faces. "That's funny as fuck because I don't think you know who the fuck you just crossed." His laughter quiets as red dots start to land the chest of Quinton, Rang, and their friends.

"What the fuck," Rang croaks, looking at the dots on all off them.

Dexter smiles again. "Like I said, leave Madison alone and you'll live a long healthy life. Please continue to enjoy your evening gentlemen," he says before I unlock the doors and he hops in. With Quinton and the others still unable to move because of the red dots, Dexter shifts the truck in drive, then pulls off.

"Where are we going?" I ask as Dexter turns onto the access road next to the highway.

"My house," he replies, maneuvering around the few vehicles ahead of us.

I nod staring forward. “So, who had those red lights on Quinton and the others?”

Dexter gives me a look that answers my question. His brothers were there and if shit went left with him, Quinton, and Rang, they were there to make sure their brother and I had a smooth getaway.

I shouldn't be surprised because this is the same way they came and rescued me from that ill reputed night.

I remained silent as Dexter took every back street to his home. When we finally pulled into his driveway, two dark green Hummers turned in behind him.

“Who are they?” I asked with concern, not sure if I should get out. Shit, it could've been some of Rang's men following us, doing some pay back shit for how Dexter made them look weak in front of those who stood outside of the club.

With a soothing smile, Dexter replies, “Those are my brothers.” He gets out, then comes to open my door. I get out, then stare at the familiar faces.

Dexter takes my hand in his as he closes the truck's door, then stating, “You are completely safe here.”

I let loose the tension holding my muscles captive, then let Dexter guide me to his front door. After entering his security code, he uses his key to unlock the door, then opens it.

As I stepped in, I would have praised him for having a lovely home, but at that moment my mind was on nothing else other than that.





# Chapter 4

## Tech

I sat at my desk, gathering intel on the next mission for Delta Force. A school bus full of students on their way to a cheerleading competition disappeared into thin air, but I knew differently. We've seen this type of shit too many times before. Those children were taken, and they needed the help of Delta Force to save them.

When my cell phone started to ring and I saw Madison's name on the screen, I immediately answered her call. After hearing the fright in her voice, I abandoned what I was doing to get to her. As I hopped in my truck, I called Mad Dog and told him what was going on. He assured me that he and my other brothers were on their way. I knew there would be questions once we had her out of harm's way. He was probably wondering how I was aware she needed help. I never told him Madison and I were still in touch with each other after all those years.

After getting to Madison and hearing what those assholes did to her, I saw red. I wanted to teach their asses on how to treat a lady but realized that was some shit a young man learned as he grew up. Me laying hands on them wouldn't change the way they saw the fairer sex but that didn't keep me from going inside and telling them how I felt.

The whole drive to the house, a million ideas flooded my head on how to execute that asshole Quinton and his friends. By the look on their faces, I knew my threat went through one ear and out the other. I needed to talk to my brothers to come up with a plan to make sure they didn't fuck with Madison again.

Once we made it to the house, I took Madison inside with Mad Dog and the other behind us. I brought her to the couch and sat down next to her.

With her hand in mine, I ask, "Can I get you something to drink?"

"No, I'm fine," she replies.

I gave her a small smile, then focused on my brothers standing in front of us.

"Madison, you remember Mad Dog, Venom, Blade, Lethal, and the twins, Thing One and Thing Two."

“I do and thank you guys for being there tonight. It seems like the only time I see you guys is when you’re saving me,” she nervously laughs with a tear in her eye.

Wrapping my arm around her shoulder, Mad Dog comes and lowers to one knee in front of her, assuring, “It’s okay, Madison. We are always here for you.”

“Thank you,” she whispers.

Needing to talk to my brothers alone, I tell Madison, “Hey, let me show you where the bathroom is so you can freshen up.”

She nods as I help her stand.

“I’ll be right back,” I tell the guys as we leave the living room. “Are you sure you don’t want anything to drink? Maybe something to eat?”

As I guide her down the hallway to the bathroom, Madison answers, “Maybe a bottle of water.”

“Okay, I’ll have one waiting for you when you come out.” We stop at the bathroom door.

“Thanks, Dex,” she returns, then hugs me. “I don’t know what I would’ve done if you hadn’t come.”

“Shhh, don’t even think about that. I’m just glad you called me.”

The feeling of her in my arms again felt right, like this is where Madison should have been all along. If I would’ve let her know my true feelings years ago, she wouldn’t have ended up in this type of situation. But no more. From this day forward I wasn’t going to hide how I feel about Madison. Since the day I met her the need to protect her has always stuck with me and tonight only proves that I’m willing to be her protector and more for the rest of our lives. I think I fell in love with Madison Rowe the first time I laid eyes on her.

Not wanting to let her go, I reluctantly pulled back. I couldn’t stop myself from reaching up to wipe away her tears.

“No one, and I mean no one will ever fucking put their hands on you or take you back to that place you’ve fought so hard to leave behind. I will destroy anyone who tries. I’m here with you, Madison and I’m not going anywhere,” I vow, then gently kiss her brow. “Now, go ahead and get cleaned up while I talk with Mad Dog and the others.”

She closes her eyes as she places her hand on my chest. I close mine too, silently conveying to her that every beat of my heart was for her.

Madison gives me a tight smile before we release each other and she goes into the bathroom, then shuts the door.

I stand there for a few seconds, getting my head right before going to rejoin the others. Entering the living room I find Mad Dog and Blade sitting on the couch, the twins sitting Indian style on the floor, Venom and Lethal are standing, eating sandwiches. Those two stay eating, so I know they ransacked my refrigerator.

“How’s she doing?” Mad Dog asks.

“She’ll be okay,” I reply, going straight to the kitchen to get a bottle of water. When I returned, I sat on my recliner.

Mad Dog regards me, then asks, “You want to tell us why she called you?”

And here we go. This is the main reason why I wanted Madison out of the room because I knew he wanted to get started on his interrogation.

Staring at my friend, brother, and Commander in the eyes, I tell him, “Madison and I have kept in touch since that night. You know I gave her my card that night and she called me a week later. Things just kind of progressed after that.”

Mad Dog arches his right eyebrow. “When you say *progressed*, what exactly do you mean by that?”

Running my hand down my face, I let out a deep breath. “Before tonight, my relationship with Madison has always been platonic, but I’m not going to sit here and lie to you all that I don’t have a deep connection with her. I’ve done my best to keep it suppressed, but I’m not doing that shit anymore. Madison is mine and those two mother fuckers are going to pay for what they did to her.”

Blade chimes in. “Brother, why did you keep this from us?”

Sighing, I reply, “I don’t know. I guess because once we finish a mission, it’s done, but that first mission was never over for me. Things between me and Madison started off with me just being someone she could talk to...you know with my background, but our conversations gradually shifted into our personal lives.”

“Does she know about what our unit does?” Venom asks, scooting to the edge of the couch.

Moving my head from side to side, I reply, “I’ve never talked to her about it, but seeing we were the ones to rescue her, I’m sure she has a notion about us.”

Mad Dog holds up his hand. "Clearly it doesn't matter now. The only thing we need to be focused on is whether those two assholes will try to fuck with her. I saw the looks on their faces and they're not going to just walk away from this."

"I know," I say. "Madison doesn't need any more of their bullshit."

"Wait if I recall, Madison lives two hours away from here. How are you going to watch over her if she's there and you're here? If something happens, you only have two hours to get to her and a lot of shit can happen during that time," Lethal adds in between chewing.

Things One and Two stare at me, waiting for my response.

The reality of Lethal words slap me in the face. All types of shit could happen within two hours, even death and that will never happen with Madison.

With no room for argument, I boldly say, "I won't need those two hours because Madison will be here with me."

Mad Dog connects his eyes with mine. I've known my brother long enough to know he has a manifest of questions that I can't answer right now.

"What about her job?" Lethal asks, tossing his leftover plate with breadcrumbs onto the coffee table.

"What about my job?" Madison echoes as she comes back into the room.

I get up and go to her. Handing Madison the bottle of water. "I was thinking maybe you could take some time off and stay here with me while things with Quinton and his people cool down. I don't want them coming to your apartment and starting any shit."

Madison peers at me before saying, "Thank you for the offer, but I can't take any time off of work. I just started a new contract. I'll stay with my parents for the time being."

"Madison, I don't think that's..." I started but she cuts me off.

"Dex, I promise I'll be fine. Plus, Quinton will never pop up at my parents' house because my daddy has made it clear on several occasions he doesn't care for him."

*Good man*, I think to myself. If Madison wants to go to her parents, then I would have to let her. It wasn't like I could make her stay here with me. Although the thought of doing what our Greek friend Alistair did to his wife crosses my mind, I would never do that to Madison.

Clutching her hand, I say, “Fine. I’ll take you home in the morning so you can pack some things and get your car, then I’ll trail you over to your parents.”

She smiles. “Thank you, Dex. I’m ready to lay down. Can you show me where I’ll be sleeping tonight?”

“Of course. Excuse me guys.”

They nod as we leave the room again.

I take Madison to the larger guest room with its own full bathroom.

“This is nice, Dex,” she says, glancing at the yellow, white, gray décor around the room.

“Thank you,” I responded, letting her hand go. “Hold on a sec.”

Dashing out of the room, I go to my master bedroom. Going to my dresser, I pull out one of my t-shirts for her to wear to bed.

As I reenter the guest room, Madison is sitting on the edge of the bed, looking at her cell phone. I sat down next to her, laying the shirt beside me.

“Quinton has called over fifty times and has left numerous text messages. I looked at a few of them and they were awful. It’s like the whole time we were together, he was putting on a front. I met the true Quinton tonight.” she whispers.

Taking the phone from her hand, I erase all his calls, text messages, then block his number.

I handed it back to her. “I was always told when people show you who they really are, believe it. It’s a good thing you found this out now instead of months or years down the road. You’re too good for him, Madison. You deserve someone better.”

She surprises me as her beautiful brown eyes look into mine and asks, “Someone like you?”

I swallow the lump in my throat and honestly reply, “Yes.”

I fight the urge to kiss her pouty lips. When it happens, and I know it will, I don’t want it to be like this. I want our first kiss to be an amazing experience for the both of us. I don’t want it to seem like I’m trying to take advantage of her vulnerable state at this time.

Picking up the t-shirt, I sit it between us.

“I brought this for you to wear. There are fresh linens in the bathroom as well as toiletries. I’m going to finish talking to the guys. If you need anything let me know. I’ll check in with you before I turn in.”

As I start to stand, Madison grasps my hand. “Thank you again, Dex.”

I smile, giving her hand a light squeeze. “Always,” I say before she releases my hand.

After closing the bedroom door, I slowly walked back to my office wishing Madison was sleeping in my bed with me tonight instead of in the guest room.

Stepping into my office, I go over to my desk and pick up my two laptops. I had a lot of homework to do before I took Madison home in the morning.

Going back into the living room, I place the laptops on the coffee table then sit down. Opening them up, I tell the guys, “I already have a file on Quinton, now I need to find out everything on that motherfucker Rang.”

“What do you need us to do?” Mad Dogs asks as I start typing on keys of the first laptop that has Quinton’s file.

Staring at the screen, I reply, “Once I’ve gotten the details on Rang and where he lays his head, I think we should pay him a little visit and show him why it’s not a good idea to put your hands on a woman when she tells you no.”

“A good old fashioned ass whooping in manners, I like it,” Blade laughs.

“Indeed,” I chuckle.

Mad Dog stands, “Email us what you find on Rang and what you have on Quinton. We’ll take this on as any other mission. Call if you want us to go with you tomorrow. I’ve got to get home to Janae.”

I look up from the laptop, and tell him and the others, “Thank you all. I appreciate you guys for tonight.” Getting up, I shake each one of their hands, ending with Mad Dog. “Tell Sis I’m sorry for pulling you away from her tonight.”

“She was irritated at first because we were watching a movie, but after I told her what was going on, she damn near pushed me out the door,” he laughs.

I laughed with him. Janae, Mad Dog’s wife, is a sister to all of us. She is sassy and doesn’t take any shit from anyone. We have a genuine love for her.

“Okay, but still tell her I’m sorry.”

“I will. Don’t forget to send us those files. I want us to be fully prepared for what we’re about to walk into,” Mad Dog states.

“Roger that. You should have everything in the morning.”

Once they were gone, I locked the door, then set the alarm system before picking up the plates on the table and taking them into the kitchen. After putting them in the sink, I turned off the lights, then returned to the living room to do the same.

Grabbing my laptops, I tucked them under my arm as I made my way to the hallway. I stop outside of the room Madison is in. The sound of the television seeps through the door. With a light tap on the door, I wait for her to respond. When she didn't, I quietly turned the knob and opened the door. Madison is asleep in my t-shirt with the covers laying right at her hips.

I took a few moments to etch the vision in front of me in my brain before closing the door. With my mind going haywire with thoughts, the only one that stood out the most is as long as I draw breath, no one will ever have the opportunity to fuck with her.

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# Chapter 5

## Tech

I woke up on the couch with both my laptop screens staring at me. With my connections, I was able to get everything I needed. Reginald 'Rang' Armstrong was just released from prison after doing a five year sentence for assaulting a woman and drug possession. I'm still wondering why he got such a light sentence because his rap sheet is almost a mile long. Theft, grand larceny, drug distribution, and assault were just the tip of the iceberg with this guy. He had to have a Judge or DA in his pocket or one hell of a lawyer.

I also found out; he is the leader of a gang that has an affiliation with the South Dallas Boys which is ironic because Janae's brother Trappa is the head of the one here in Dallas. I needed to speak with Trappa to see what his relationship with Rang is since he is supposed to be the grand poobah of the South Dallas Boys.

Quinton with his fake façade of being this nine to five working man was just that. He's just as dirty as they come. I don't know how he got his job, but he has a very checkered past as well. I didn't see this at first when I ran a background check on him, but after running him through my more extensive program, his shit ran like diarrhea.

Apparently, he was able to get with a lawyer who could have his prior conviction sealed which resulted in him getting his job. Mr. Clean was anything but that. His rap sheet read like a how-to for criminals. If it was illegal, he's done it. Without even knowing this, Madison's father had every right to not like him. Sometimes parents can see the shit we don't. A lot of times we will hear what they say and ignore it until it's too late. I guess that's how Madison is feeling right now.

Luckily, Madison had the love of her parents to protect her. My parents, Willam and Jolene were never the nourishing type.

Growing up in a small town of Fouke, Arkansas, my parents were more into catching their next high than being parents of the year. Life was hard for me and my little brother Mathew. We slept on the couch in the living room with him on one end and me on the other in our one bedroom trailer home.

Going to school was the worst. From being teased about my clothes to being bullied by the kids whose parents brought them expensive clothes and shoes, I already had it in my mind after I graduated to get as far away from my parents and that Podunk town. My only concern was Mathew.

When a recruiter with the Marines visited the high school early in my senior year, I happily began the process to enlist. Thinking ahead, I thought I could join the Corps, make enough money to take Mathew away from our worthless parents, and we would have the life we both needed, but things didn't go as planned.

Our parents separated, then divorced when I was nineteen. Neither one of them wanted to take care of my little brother Mathew who was thirteen at the time. I was away in basic training, so I couldn't get to him but my dad's father, Holden Broussard of Iberville Parish, Louisiana got custody of him.

My Papa owns an alligator and seafood market called Broussard's Market. He and his workers go out into the Bayou Sorrel to trap the fresh meats like alligator, fish, crawfish and such for the market. At first I was surprised that reality show didn't contact Papa to be on it. He later told me that they did, but he didn't want to be a part of it.

He explained how he wouldn't trivialize the many decades our family has survived in the business just to be on a television show. None of his ancestors before never did and he was going to follow in their footsteps.

To ease some of Papa's financial burden, I started to send half of my military paycheck to help cover some of Mathew's expenses.

I was so mad at my parents for turning their backs on Mathew. If you don't want to be together anymore, then fine but that doesn't give you the right to do your child like that. I was grown and could take care of myself, but Mathew wasn't. Their actions made him feel abandoned by the only two people in the world who were always supposed to be there for him.

We've pretty much disowned them. The first few years after they left, our mother tried to reach out to us, but we wanted nothing to do with her. She had gotten involved with a piece of shit who would knock her around and she refused to leave him.

One day she and the asshole showed up on my Papa's doorstep demanding Mathew leave with them. Papa knew my mother only wanted Mathew back to collect a check. Their demand was forever silenced when Papa stepped out on the porch holding his double barreled shotgun. He told

them if they didn't get off of his property, he was going to shoot both of them, then drag their corpses to the swamps to feed the gators.

We never heard from our dad once he left. To this day we don't know if he's alive or dead, and really didn't care.

I guess my thoughts of Mathew must have telepathically reached out to him because my cell phone starts to go off with the Zydeco ringtone I assigned to him.

"Little brother, long time no hear. I was going to call you tomorrow to see how you and Papa were doing," I quickly greeted.

"We're doing good Dex, but unfortunately I think this will be the last gator season for Papa," he softly returns in his Louisiana accent he has picked up since living with Papa.

"Why do you say that?" I questioned.

Mathew breathes heavily into the phone, replying, "Dex, Papa can't line the hooks like he used to and today, if I wasn't there, a gator would've gotten his arm."

"Fuck," I murmur.

They say when it rains it pours. Not only do I have to deal with the piece of shit Quinton, but I also have to deal with my own family issues. Hello to the torrential storm that lay ahead of us.

"Mathew, you know the access code to the house and where I keep the extra key. Bring Papa here tomorrow. I'll be gone when you get here. I have some shit to take care of, but bring him here, okay?"

"Okay, Dex. It'll take some convincing, but I'll get him there," Mathew says.

"Just tell him you all are coming to surprise me, and he'll be okay with it," I state.

"Will do." Mathew says before hanging up.

"Fuck," I groan as I fall into the deep recesses of the couch. I know it's said God won't put more on you than you can handle but I think my cup is about to spill over.

After the call with Mathew, I got back on track to do my research on Rang. Regardless of them coming, I still needed to stay focused on the task at hand.

I guess I must have fallen asleep on the couch at some point because I was woken by the slight shake of my shoulder while the most angelic voice called my name.

“Dexter, wake up.”

I semi smile at the sweetness of her voice. It was like ambrosia in the summertime. Catching a mess of crawdads in the springtime. Having your first sip of sun infused tea in the summer.

Opening my eyes, I see a ray of sunshine standing in front of me. Madison has arranged her hair with a French braid going straight back. I just want to reach out and caress her satiny brown skin. She has on her dress from last night, but I would have preferred it if she had woken me up wearing my t-shirt.

“Dexter, you gotta get up. It’s almost eight and my parents go to Sunday school at nine followed by church services at eleven. If we leave now, we can get to my apartment and grab some of my things. Whether me or my siblings attend church or not, we are all required to be at my parents for Sunday dinner at two. If they ask why I need to stay with them, I’ll say I forgot management is coming in to fumigate the premises.”

“I don’t want you to lie to your parents,” I said, opening my eyes.

“I don’t want to either, but I don’t want them to worry about me also,” Madison says.

Sitting up to crack my back from sleeping on the couch, I roll my shoulders. “I understand. Let me take a quick shower, then we’ll head out.”

“Okay” Madison returns as I get up. “Do you have stuff for me to cook for breakfast?”

Chuckling, I reply, “No, I usually make a protein shake in the mornings. We can stop and grab something on the way.”

Madison giggles, rolling her eyes. “Okay, what about coffee? I’m a beast in the mornings without my caffeine.”

Tapping her nose with the tip of my finger, I reply, “Now that I do have. Everything’s on the counter.”

“Thank God, because I can deal without breakfast food, but if you would’ve said you didn’t have any coffee, I was going to start walking to the nearest convenience store.”

“Well, please know you are always welcome to drive one of my vehicles.”

Madison smirks. “That’s right. I forgot about the Porsche, your chick magnet.”

I let out a loud laugh, shaking my head. “Chick magnet, I don’t think so. If that was true, then where are the chicks?”

“Maybe you’re just too picky,” Madison teases.

Or maybe I was just waiting for her. Sure many women have approached me when I drive the Porsche, but they only saw the vehicle as dollar signs. Definitely not the type of woman I care to entertain.

Winking at her, I return, “Maybe I am. Go ahead and get your morning Joe started. The kitchen’s right through there,” I point to the entryway to the kitchen. “I’ll be back shortly.”

“Okay”

Heading to my bedroom, I pull my cell phone out of my pocket to call Mad Dog. After dialing his number, he answers on the second ring.

“What’s up, Tech?”

“Hey, Mad Dog,” I say, entering my room, then closing the door. “Madison and I will be leaving soon. I emailed over the files, so they should be in your inbox. I’m not sure how long I’ll be out that way, but I plan to be back before this evening.”

“All right, I check them when I get up,” he states. “Is there anything else?”

Before I can reply, Janae snickers in the background, “Good morning, Tech.”

“Good morning, Sis,” I responded, then continued, “Mathew and Papa are coming in today.”

“Oh, yeah?” Mad Dog asks.

Going into my closet, I reply, “Yeah. Papa had a rough day yesterday, so I told Mathew to bring him here. Papa doesn’t understand that he can’t do the things he used to when he was younger. His stubborn ass won’t step down and let Mathew take over the business, so I think the two of us are going to have to sit him down and have a heart-to-heart with him.”

Mad Dog laughs. “Yeah, we know Holden, so good luck with that. He’ll shoot the both of you if you try to take him away from what he loves to do.”

“We’re not trying to take him away from it, we only want him to let the younger guys go out and set the hooks. Mathew said if he hadn’t been with Papa yesterday, he would have one less arm today and I can’t have that,” I declare.

“I understand, brother. Fucking with those alligators is already a dangerous job, and if you don’t have the reflexes you used to, then it’s time to let it go,” Mad Dog counters.

“Exactly. Anyway, I need to jump in the shower. I’ll call you when I get back.”

“All right, brother. Be careful,” he says.

“Always,” I say as we end the call.

Turning in the closet, I picked a dark blue V-neck t-shirt. Going back into the bedroom, I toss the clothes and phone on the bed. Entering my master bathroom, I hoped things would go smoothly today with Madison and trying to convince my Papa it was time for him to retire.

An hour later, Madison and I were in my truck, traveling down the highway to her hometown. I gave her one of my Yeti cups for coffee. Before hitting the highway, I stopped at McDonalds where she ordered a chicken biscuit sandwich and a hashbrown. I didn’t order anything because I whipped up a quick protein shake before we left the house.

As I enjoy the country’s scenic view, Madison turns in her seat to face me.

“Dexter, I have a question?”

Smiling, I reply, “I might have an answer.”

“I’m serious,” she says, swatting my arm.

Quickly glancing over to her, I playfully say, “Me too.”

“Yeah, okay. Anyway, I was thinking about what you said earlier.”

“And what was that? I said a lot of things.”

Through the corner of my eye, I see Madison look down and start playing with the button of the middle console.

“The part about you being picky. Why is that?”

Well I didn’t expect that to be her question, but my Papa always told me to speak the truth, so that’s what I’m going to do.

With my eyes on the road, I reply, “I’m picky because I don’t have the time or energy to deal with the women who seem to be attracted to me. They see my car or my truck and find out that I’m doing well in life, then things turn into them wanting me to fund their lifestyle.” I finally glanced over at her. “I want someone who wants to help me build our future together, not someone who wants to sit back and reap the benefits as I do it alone.”

“That makes sense. Although I make a good salary, I would like to be with someone who I could grow with too and clearly Quinton was not that person,” Madison says, still messing with the button. She suddenly stops,

then looks up at me. I can feel the heat of her gaze on me. “Dex, what if we’ve been overlooking what has already been right in front of us?”

I grip the steering wheel tighter. I didn’t want to have this conversation I thought we would have on our ride but fuck it.

“I was never overlooking Madison. I knew who and what I wanted; I was just waiting on you.”

She gasps. “Me?”

“Yes, you. I’ve always had this connection with you, but I knew at the time you had been through something so traumatic, you needed a friend more. Plus, you needed time to heal, but after you reached out to me that first time, I knew the dynamics of our relationship would eventually change.”

Madison sits forward. “I’ve felt the same way.”

“Look Madison, at this point I’m not going to sugar coat shit with you. I want you and always have. You called me last night when you could have called Skylar, your father, or your brother but you didn’t. That let me know you trusted me enough to call me. I’m tired of shielding my feelings about you and if you don’t feel the same way, then I promise nothing will change in our relationship. I’ll still be there for you as your friend. I know you’re going through this shit with that asshole Quinton, but believe me when I say, that motherfucker and any of his friends will never, ever fuck with you again.”

I hadn’t noticed that my grip on the steering wheel had tightened so much I could see the white of my knuckles. The thought of someone hurting her again and I wasn’t there to protect her makes my blood boil.

Madison’s warm soft hand covers my right one, instantly sending a calming rush over me. I let the steering wheel go to lace my fingers with hers, then rest them on my thigh.

“Dexter, it’s okay.” She captures my eyes with hers. “I think this has been a long time coming. We both thought that if we kept our interaction platonic, our other underlying feelings would disappear...and we see that is not the case. After last night, I’m not saying we should jump into a relationship, but let’s just see how things progress. Quinton is not the type to just walk away.”

Veering onto the exit that leads us to her hometown, I state, “Don’t worry about Quinton. He’d be a few bricks shy of a full load if he decided to approach you.”

“Either way, I don’t want to see him or lose any oxygen communicating with him. After last night when he didn’t stand up for me against Rang, I’m good. If Quinton cared about me like he proclaimed, he would have taken me out of that place when I asked him to. He was so wrapped up in hanging with his friends, he ignored how uncomfortable I was.”

“Today is a new day, last night is in the past, and your future will always be bright. Now, let’s talk about something other than that asshole,” I tell her.

Madison smiles at me, saying, “You’re absolutely right. So, how has work been?”

Not wanting to bring up the mission we had just returned from, I began to tell her about the last security installation job I did. The rest of the ride went smoothly as we talked and laughed about our day to day lives. It reminded me of our phone chats and meetings where we sat and talked for hours as if the two of us were the only ones on the earth.

As I pulled into Madison’s apartment parking lot, I found an empty space two rows over from her car and parked. I remember when she told me she was moving out of her parents’ house and into these apartments. Of course, I did a check on them and the surrounding area. Everything checked out, but the only thing I didn’t like was the apartments were only two stories. Madison’s apartment is on the second floor and the only way to get to it is by the open staircase. Although it was well lit and the property had a twenty-four hour security patrol, it wasn’t enough for me. So, once Madison moved in, I came over and installed a security system for her. I also made sure she had pepper spray and a whistle for her keyring.

I started to take things a step further and add cameras in the apartment but didn’t. I knew I would have been too tempted to access them and see what Madison was up to. That would’ve made me a peeping Tom, plus encroaching on her privacy.

“Okay, we have enough time to run upstairs, get my stuff, then head to my parents before they get home from church,” Madison says, checking her watch.

Shutting off the engine, I tell her, “All right.”

Madison doesn’t wait for me to come around and open the door, she does it herself, then gets out. I follow behind her, keeping an eye on our surroundings as we make our way through the parking lot, then to the front



of her building. Halfway up the stairs, I couldn't help staring down to get a peek of her toned calf muscles. *Not now, Tech. Not now.*

I stop and turn around to make sure no one is following us, but really it's to take my mind off reaching out to touch her skin.

"Dexter," Madison calls. "What are you doing?"

I face her, she's standing at the top of the stairs, in front of her apartment.

"I was just making sure I set the alarm on my truck," I lied. The alarm on the truck automatically sets on its own.

"Oh, okay," she says, digging into her purse, then pulls out her keys. I take two stairs at a time to join her.

Madison inserts the key, then twists the knob. When she opens the door, the alarm starts to beep. Madison enters, then types in the four digit code to disarm it. *Two, six, one, nine.* Yeah, I knew it.

Coming in, I step to the side for Madison to close the door.

"Make yourself at home. I'm going to run to my room to get my things."

"Okay," I return before she leaves the living room.

Ten minutes later, I went into the kitchen and got a bottle of water and was now looking at Madison's family pictures hanging on the wall in the living room. She was a cute little girl with an infectious smile. It was a timeline of her life from when she was full of joy with her parents and siblings up until that unfortunate incident. The picture after that her smile seemed more forced than natural, but over a period of time her genuine smile began to show itself again.

I go over to the sofa to take a seat. Grabbing the remote, I turn on the television. After finding the station with sports highlights, I lay the remote next to me. Seconds later, there is a knock at the door. Looking towards the hallway to Madison's bedroom, I wait for her to say whether she's coming to answer it. When there's a second knock, I sit the water on the coffee table, then go to the door. Looking through the peephole, I grin.



# Chapter 6

## Tech

On the other side is Quinton. Thank God the sound from the television is drowning out his knocks. I have to give it to the man, he has some elephant sized balls to show up here, but I had a surprise for him. I turn up the volume on the television. Instead of Madison greeting him, it'll be me. He knocks again. Removing my 9mm pistol that has been hidden by my shirt, I take the safety off and make sure it's ready in case I need to squeeze the trigger. Thinking about it, I slid the safety back on, then put the pistol back into the back of my jeans. I don't need it to deal with a scumbag like Quinton.

Doing a mental countdown from three in my head, when I got to one, I snatched the door open. Quinton's surprised look is priceless before I hit him with a right punch to the side of his face. As he stumbles back I seize his shirt, then forcefully push him into the wall behind him as I drag him to the backside of the apartments.

With my forearm under his neck, Quinton gasps to breathe as he claws at my skin like a bitch.

"Did you think I was playing when I told you not to fuck with Madison?" I sneer, pushing my arm harder into his throat. "My Papa used to tell me some people didn't think fat meat was greasy, and now you're about to find out."

I hit Quinton in the throat to silence his screams but not enough to kill him. As his hands go to his neck, I take the opportunity to lift his lightweight ass up, then toss him over the rail. He lands hard on the low cut lawn under him.

"Dexter," I hear Madison summon from inside the apartment.

Putting on a happy face, I meet her at the door.

"What are you doing out here?" she questions.

Taking the travel bag from her, I reply, "It's such a beautiful day, I thought I would step out and enjoy it."

"Is that right?" she returns, looking at the clear skies.

Wanting to get her away from here before Quinton starts to regain consciousness, I ask, "So, do you have everything? We're good to go?"

“Yes.”

Quinton begins to moan loudly in agony.

“What is that?” Madison questions, trying to make her way to the back of the landing.

“I’m sure it’s nothing,” I reply.

I cringe when a woman from downstairs yells, “Oh, my God. Somebody call nine-one-one.”

Madison slithers out of my grasp and runs to the back railing. Before I can get to her she looks down and see her neighbors at Quinton’s rescue.

“Madison we need to leave now,” I inform, grasping her forearm.

She swivels her head toward me, asking, “Did you do that?”

“I did,” I responded as I tried to lead her to the stairs.

Madison snatches her arm away from me.

“Dexter, the shit last night was messed up, but never did I want Quinton to be knocking on death’s door.”

Closing the space between us, I argue, “Well, he did, and believe me, he is far from death’s door. Obviously, he didn’t heed to your words of being done with him, nor what I said.” With a stern expression on my face, I ask, “What would have happened if I wasn’t here, huh?” I point to Quinton who is slowly trying to come back to the land of the living. “He probably would have done worse to you than that mother fucker Rang. He doesn’t give a shit about you, Madison. His only concern is where his position sits with his boys. If last night didn’t show you that, then I don’t know what would.”

Honestly, I didn’t want to go that hard on her, but Madison needed to hear the hard cold truths with no chaser.

She lowers her head. “You’re right, Dex. I need to stop giving him the benefit of the doubt. Despite what I’ve been through, I have to stop thinking everyone I encounter are good people.”

Grasping her hips, then pulling her close to me, I whisper, “*Cher*, you...me, we are good.” Without knowing it, my Louisiana dialect comes out.

Madison frowns but says, “I don’t know what that means, but hopefully you will tell me on the way.”

I closed the door, then entered the code to the alarm.

I gave Madison her purse and keys. Holding out my free hand I state, “*Cher* is a Louisiana term of endearment for love or dear. Take my hand and I will tell you everything you need to know.”

She looks down at it then back at me. I had a moment of doubt when she didn't take my hand, but when she did, I knew that solidified everything between us.

"I'll make sure there will be no footage of you or I being here today," I declare as I lead her down the stairs.

At the sidewalk, Madison plants her feet, asking, "And how are you doing to do that?"

I couldn't stop the wild laugh that left me. I released her hand and the suitcase, then placed both of my hands on my knees.

"Madison, you may have your own insights of what me and my brothers do but trust me when I say...erasing camera footage is like throwing water on a sidewalk scribble to me."

She raises her eyebrow. "That's a little harsh don't you think? Some poor baby took their time to be creative and here you come to wash away their hard work."

"I was metaphorically speaking. You know I would never do that to a child," I argue.

Madison glares at me, then says, "I know you wouldn't, but you need to come up with a new metaphor."

"Madison," Quinton cries out.

The sounds of sirens grow nearer. Needing to get me and Madison far away from that asshole, I tell her, "We need to leave. I understand how you're feeling right now but, if we stay here, there's a good chance I will end up in jail because of what I did to him." Holding out my hand again, I plead, "Please, Madison, don't let the cries of a motherfucker who showed up here put on a false front of caring about what happened to you last night over the true feelings of those who really had your back."

"Just get me to my parents."

Picking up the suitcase, I led her to my truck. After opening her door, I opened the back passenger door and placed the suitcase on the seat. Closing both doors, I rushed to the driver's side, then jumped in. Madison gave me her parents address and I typed it into the truck's GPS.

As we were leaving out of the parking lot, two police cruisers and an ambulance were pulling in. I wasn't worried about any of Madison's neighbors saying anything because no one saw me toss his ass over the railing, but I needed to take care of the security footage.

A few miles down the road, I turned into a busy grocery store parking lot. After finding a place to park, I reached around to the backseat and seized my laptop.

“What are you doing?” Madison questioned.

Moving my seat back, I laid the laptop on my lap, then opened it.

“Taking care of the security video,” I replied as I clicked on the file I already had on the owners of the apartment complex and the security company they use.

Madison watched in silence as I typed away. The security company had a firewall that I easily overriden. After rewinding the footage, I stopped at the frame where we entered the parking lot. Starting there I erased everything all the way up to us leaving the complex. I must say the part where I tossed Quinton ass over the railing made me chuckle. I started to save it to show the guys but decided not to. I would have more fun retelling them what happened.

Once I was finished, I closed the laptop and returned it to the back. I gave Madison a wink as I backed out of the parking space, then left the grocery store, heading to her parents.

Fifteen minutes later, we arrived at her family home. I parked behind a maroon Chrysler 300.

“Shit my parents are already home,” Madison says unbuckling her seatbelt.

“Maybe church let out early,” I said, undoing mine, then getting out to open her door.

Helping her out of the truck, she says, “Maybe, but I doubt it. Have you ever been to a Black Baptist church?”

Closing the door, I reply, “No, but anything is possible.”

“I guess,” she murmurs, walking towards the house.

The front door opens with a younger version of Madison stepping out on the porch. This has to be Pilar.

She puts her hands on her hips, stating, “Fifteen more minutes and I would’ve taken James money.”

“What are you talking about, Pilar?” Madison asks, stepping onto the porch.

“I bet him that you wouldn’t make it Sunday dinner on time and here you are,” she replies.

Madison gives her a quick hug, then says, “That’s what you get. You all are wrong for betting on your big sister. I should tell momma and daddy.”

Pilar’s eyes widened. “No, don’t do that. You know how they feel about gambling.”

“Exactly,” Madison counters.

Pilar finally sees me standing at the bottom of the stairs.

“Who is that?”

Madison looks over her shoulder at me, then back to Pilar.

“That’s my friend Dexter. He’s going to join us for dinner.”

Pilar moves Madison to the side. “Oh, so you’re Dexter. Shit, I just lost some more money.”

“Pilar,” Madison gasps.

Pilar swivels her head in Madison’s direction. “What? I thought he was an imaginary friend. Come on, Madison. You’ve talked about this man for how many years, and we’ve never met him, heard his voice, or nothing. James thought he was real, but I didn’t.” She grasps Madison’s arms, pleading, “You have to tell them a different name other than Dexter. I don’t have all the money to pay James. Help me out, sis.”

“I will not,” Madison giggles, removing her hands. “I’m too damn old for imaginary friends, so I suggest you bust open your piggy bank because James is going to want all his money in one lump sum. Come on, Dexter.”

I went up the three stairs, then stopped in front of Pilar.

“Nice to meet you, Pilar.”

Her mouth drops, hearing my deep tone. Madison grabs my wrist and pulls me into the house, leaving Pilar on the porch.

The aroma of an authentic Southern Sunday dinner hits me as we enter the living room. A young man sits on the couch clutching a football with his eyes glued to the television.

“Hello, James,” Madison greets.

Without moving his body, he shifts his eyes to her. “Hey, sis. Who’s that?”

“This is Dexter,” she replies.

The football falls from his hands as he jumps up. “*The* Dexter?”

Madison laughs. “Yes, Dexter.”

James comes over to us. He extends his hand out to me.

“It’s really nice to meet you man.”

“Same here,” I returned, shaking his hand.

“Excuse me while I go collect my money,” he laughs, releasing my hand, then going to the front door.

“I swear, those two...” Madison says, taking my hand. She guides me to where the delicious aromas are coming from.

Entering the kitchen, her mother stands over the stove, stirring a pot while her father sits at the table, reading the bible.

“Hey momma, daddy,” Madison announces. They focus on her. “I want to introduce you to my friend Dexter. I hope you don’t mind, but I invited him to eat with us today. Also, I have to stay here a few days because the management at the apartments are going to fumigate. I totally forgot about it.”

Mrs. Rowe lays the wooden spoon on the counter. “Baby, you know that’s fine and it’s nice to finally meet you Dexter.”

“You too ma’am,” I return.

Mr. Rowe closes his bible, then eyes me. “So, you’re the invisible man who has been in our daughter’s life all this time?”

Not wanting to be rude, I quickly formulated how to respond in my head. Once I had the words right, I replied, “Sir, as you can see I’m not invisible. Madison means a great deal to me. If I could’ve met you all sooner, then I would have. Madison would have introduced us when the time was right.”

“Momma, what are you cooking?” Madison nervously asks, going to her mother’s side as her father and I have a serious stare down.

Her mother must have sensed the tension in the air, because she replied, “Oh, baby you know me. I started my dinner last night. The roast is warming in the oven, the collards are done, hot water cornbread is in the warmer, and I just finished the sweet potatoes. All I need to do now is make fresh squeezed lemonade.”

Mr. Rowe stands with his eyes still on me. “Good. While you all do that, Dexter and I will have a little chat.”

Madison moves toward her daddy saying, “Daddy, is that really necessary? It won’t take us long to get the food on the table.”

“It is and we won’t be long,” Mr. Rowe replies. “Young man, please follow me this way,”

I glance at Madison who moves her head from side to side. *It’s okay*, I mouth back at her. Honestly, I wanted to hear what Mr. Rowe had to say. He sure as shit didn’t intimidate me nor have I been one to back down from any



threats. Just because he is Madison's father wasn't going to stop me from protecting her.

Mr. Rowe took me into their two car garage. On one side was a covered vehicle and the other was vacant. I guess the open space is where they park the Chrysler 300.

Mr. Rowe walks to the back of the covered vehicle and stares at me.

"The night Madison was returned to us, other than seeing each one of my children come into this world was one of the happiest moments of my life." He grips the end of the cover. "For months I thought I had lost my baby for good, but the Lord said differently. Then when she came home, all Madison could talk about were these angels who saved her." He snatches the cover away, displaying a 1970 Chevelle. Holy fuck, the car look like it was just driven off the showroom.

Mr. Rowe studies the car, then peers at me. "This car, I bought because my baby girl said if she could have any car it would be this one. Why she picked this one years after she was born, I don't know, but I got it."

He drops the cover, then spreads his arms out.

"This is how much I love my kids. If they do what is expected of me and their mother, I will one hundred percent make sure all their dreams come true."

Taking a step further, I state, "And I applaud you and Mrs. Rowe for doing so. My parents were drug addicts who didn't care if my little brother and I had food on the table, nonetheless if our dreams came true."

Mr. Rowe's expression softens as he says, "I'm sorry to hear that. Children need their parents to show them how to navigate through this harsh world we live in."

"I totally agree sir, but luckily my grandfather got custody of my younger brother and I was enlisted in the service at the time my parents split up."

Mr. Rowe pulls down the stairs to the attic, then climbs them. Minutes later, he comes down with a box in his hand. He points to one of the two chairs in the garage.

"Sit."

I follow his order.

He sits in the other, then opens the box. He flips through the contents before stopping at a photo. Mr. Rowe pulls it out, then hands it to me.

“I don’t know if Madison told you about what happened to her, but this is a family picture of us before she was taken.”

I examined the picture. It was the same one she had in her apartment.

Looking at her father, I state, “Yes, sir I have seen this picture before.”

I handed it back to him.

He stares at it before saying, “Then you should know that I find it funny after she returned to us not a week later all she would talk about is this Dexter person who none of us has ever heard about or ever met and now you show up with her six years later. Why is that?”

My Papa always told me to always be direct and concise when a man questions you about your actions and I’m not going to change that for Mr. Rowe. He wants answers and I’m going to give them to him.

“Mr. Rowe, I have always had feelings for you daughter, but I kept things platonic between us. Last night she went out with that Quinton guy, and she found herself in an awkward position. She ended up calling me to come and get her.”

Mr. Rowe fists the picture in his hand. “What did he do to her?”

“He took Madison to this club in Dallas with his rowdy friends. She asked him to take her home, but he refused. Then one of his friends inappropriately touched her. As I stated before, she called me, and I went to get her. It was late, so she stayed at my house...in the guest room. This morning we went to her apartment so she could grab some things for her to stay with you and Mrs. Rowe as things with Quinton blew over, but while we were there he showed up.”

He slides to the edge of his chair. “Did he hurt my child?”

I raise my hands. “No, sir he didn’t. I was able to get to him before anything could happen.”

“What did you do?” Mr. Rowe questions.

Running my finger around the neck of my t-shirt, I reply, “I kind of threw him over the railing of her apartment.”

Mr. Rowe glares at me in complete shock before laughing. I couldn’t stop my own laughter from leaving me.

He wipes his eyes. “Damn, I wish I could’ve been there to see that. I never liked his ass, but Madison seemed like she was happy, so I kept my feelings about him to myself.”

Now I wished I hadn’t deleted the video of me tossing his ass. I’m sure it would have been a delight for Mr. Rowe.

Dropping my laughter, I put on a serious expression. “Mr. Rowe, there’s something else you should know.”

“What is that?” He inquisitively glares back at me.

“I’m a part of a top secret military unit called Delta Force and we were the ones who rescued Madison those years back,” I reveal.

“You?” Mr. Rowe queried with a shocked expression.

“Yes, sir,” I replied. “Which is probably the same reason why she called me last night. I don’t want to cause disruption within the rest of your household, but I think it would be best for Madison to come and stay with me until all of this boils over.”

If the heat of someone’s stare could slice through them, then I would have been cut into a thousand pieces from Mr. Rowe’s gaze.

I held his gaze until he broke it and rummaged through the box again and pulled out another picture. He stares at it before offering it to me.

When I take it and look at it, my chest tightens. It’s a picture of Mr. Rowe dressed in fatigues with other marines, but the one that stands out the most is Secretary Wright.

“I’m sure Madison has told you I was enlisted in the Marines. I loved my time in the Corps. When our then Commander took on a higher position, we got a new Commander by the name of Otis Wright. I thought he would be on the up and up like our last Commander, but he proved to be something entirely different. I saw how he underhandedly did things; I wanted no part of it. When my time came up, I decided to end my career with the Corps.”

Running my hands over my hair, I tell Mr. Rowe, “Well, I hate to tell you this, but Commander Wright, who eventually became the Secretary of Defense, is no longer among the land of the living.”

Mr. Rowe peers at me. “Can’t say that I’m not surprised. I knew one day his shady behavior would catch up with him. As for Madison going with you, I think it’s a good idea since you all protected her before, I trust that you will do so now.”

“And we will, sir,” I vow.

I handed him back the pictures. He puts them back into the box, then takes it back upstairs to the attic. When he returns, Mr. Rowe looks less stressed from the time we came into the garage.

“Dexter, I want to thank you for telling me what happened with Madison; back then and now. I’m truly grateful she has you in her life. With

that being said, I have to let the other members of my family know what is going on. I can't have them out there not knowing. You keep Madison safe, and I will do the same with the others."

He extends his hand out to me, I take it, then say, "Roger that, sir."

Mr. Rowe tightens his grip as he proudly states, "Semper Fi."

"Semper Fi" I echo.

"I'm sure dinner is ready, so let's go inside and join them," he says, releasing my hand.

"After you, sir," I responded before trailing him back inside the house.

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# Chapter 7

## Madison

As I helped momma with finishing up dinner, I wondered what daddy and Dexter were talking about in the garage. I tried ear hustling through the door, but momma shooed me away from it.

“Girl, stop being nosey. You should’ve known this day was going to happen. You have talked about that man so many times, so it’s only right for your daddy to have some questions for him. And as handsome as Dexter is, I’m surprised you haven’t brought him by sooner. He’s definitely a better looker than Quinton and more respectful.”

“I know that’s right, momma,” Pilar co-signs coming into the kitchen. “Even with those nerdy glasses on, the man is gorgeous. I’m telling you, big sister, if you don’t want him, then put in a good word for me.” Pilar laughs.

I whipped my head towards her, shooting invisible daggers. I know my little sister was playing, but I couldn’t help the sense of protectiveness and jealousy for Dexter that overtook me. I was about to step to her, but momma moved in front of me.

“Pilar, leave Madison alone. You might be joking but from the look on her face, she’s about ready to pull that front lace from your head.”

She sees my no nonsense expression, then quickly changes her attitude. “Sis, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean any disrespect. You’ve always said the two of you were just friends, so I didn’t think there was more to it.”

Momma places the pan of chicken and dressing on the table. “Well, obviously you can see that there is. I always knew it.”

Surprised by her acknowledgement, I ask, “But how?”

Momma smiles at me. “First of all, I’m your mother and I know things about my children without them telling me. For one, every time you talked about Dexter your face would light up with excitement. Second, there had to be a reason why you have kept him away from us all this time. You’ve brought Quinton and others, but never Dexter. You probably thought we wouldn’t like him, or he had a sordid past.” She turns to look at me. “So, which one is it?”

Before I can answer, daddy and Dexter came in from the garage.

“What is going on here?” daddy asks.

Momma deflects by answering, “Oh, nothing. Just us girls chatting.”

“Is dinner ready yet? I’m starving,” James grumbles, coming into the kitchen.

Momma snickers as she walks over to him, then pats his cheek. “Yes, son. Help Pilar set the table please.” She then turns to Dexter. “Dexter, you will be joining us, right?”

I nod when he glances over at me, then back to momma.

“Yes, ma’am. I would love to, thank you.”

“Good,” she says, smiling. “Madison, show Dexter where the bathroom is, so he can wash-up.”

“Sure, momma. Follow me, Dex,” I state.

Leaving out of the kitchen and into the hallway, I ask Dex, “So, what did you and my daddy talk about?”

“You,” he answers behind me, halting my footsteps.

I spin on my heels to face him.

“You told him?”

“I did,” he replies.

My heart starts to pound in my chest. I feel like the wind has been knocked out of me. I never went into details about what happened to me while I was kidnapped. The only people who know about it are my therapist and Dexter. I couldn’t even bring myself to tell Skylar when she asked.

“Breathe, *Cher*, breath,” Dexter whispers as he wraps his arm around me.

He leads me down the hall, pushing doors open until he finds the bathroom. Dexter lets down the top of the toilet, then slowly sits me down on it. He grabs a face towel from the cabinet before turning on the cold water and placing the towel under it.

Once the water is good and soaked, Dexter turns the water off, then squeezes the excess water from the towel. He kneels in front of me and dabs the cool towel against my forehead.

“Madison, are you alright? What happened back there? I thought you were going to pass out.”

As he moves the towel to the back of my neck, I whisper, “You told my daddy what Bryan did to me?” I can feel the tears start to fill my eyes.

“No, Madison I didn’t, but I did tell him that we were the ones who rescued you,” Dexter informs.

My eyes shot up to his. Shocked that he would reveal that to my daddy, I question, “But why? I’ve kept you guys secret since that night. Why would you tell him?”

“Because your father is an honorable man and fellow Marine. I respect him and he needed to know. I didn’t go into details, just that we were responsible for you returning home to them. The other part of your story is not for me to tell,” Dexter pauses, then states, “I did however inform him of what happened last night, and we both think it would be a good idea if you came and stayed with me for a few days.”

Taking hold of his wrist, I move his hand with the towel away from me. Dexter rises as I do, peering at him.

“I thought we agreed I would stay here. What about my job, Dexter?”

He softly clutches my shoulders. “Yes, we did but after that piece of shit showed up at your apartment, I don’t want to take any chances of him coming here looking for you. Your father trusts that you will be safe in my care.”

“In your care like some damn damsel in distress,” I huff.

His grip tightens as he sneers, “No Madison, definitely not like some damsel in distress, but more like my woman who I’m willing to do anything to protect.”

Taken aback by his words, I stammer, “Your...your...?”

“That’s right, my woman,” he confesses before capturing my lips in a heat fueled kiss.

Good Lord and the Pharaoh’s above. I dreamed of what kissing Dexter would be like and it was never like this. Warmth shoots up from my toes to the tips of my ears. With this one kiss, he has proven to me he is all Alpha.

Fisting his shirt, I stand on my tiptoes as our tongues sensually intertwine like two cobras. I want more and I know Dexter does too as I feel the hardness of his erection poke my side.

“Madison, you all come on. The table is set,” Momma yells, dowsing our mini make out session like a bucket of water.

Dexter gradually moves his head back. “I meant what I said, Cher. You are coming with me, okay?”

With my body tingling all over, I reply, “Okay.”

On autopilot, I take the towel from Dexter and toss it in the hamper. He lets me wash my hands first before cleaning his. Once done, we rejoin the others in the dining room.



Of course as usual, momma's Sunday dinner was amazing. I kind of felt bad for Dexter because she kept refilling his plate, but he didn't complain as he ate everything she put in front of him.

Looking around the table, I smiled, loving my family more. They welcomed Dexter without question and treated him as if he had always been a part of us. I guess in some way he had been. I talked about him enough to them. A twinge of guilt hits me as I think about all the Sundays we could have spent together like this. Holidays, birthdays, and other special occasions he could've been right here by my side. I take a deep breath, expelling the guilt. Things happen for a reason like when Dexter first came into my life. Back then, I wasn't ready to admit what my heart already knew and after last night, I can honestly admit what has been there all along. I'm in love with Dexter Broussard.

"Mrs. Rowe, I can't tell you the last time I had a home cooked meal that good. Thank you again for inviting me to stay," Dexter praises, then wipes his mouth with his napkin.

Momma smiles, returning, "Well, if you think that was good, wait until you have a slice of my buttermilk pie." She winks at him. When momma starts to stand, daddy stops her.

"Before you do that Paula, we need to talk about something as a family."

Momma tilts her head to the side, asking, "What kind of things, Jack?" Daddy moves his eyes to me and Dexter, causing momma, Pilar, and James to do the same.

"I'm going to be an auntie?" Pilar shouts, jumping the gun. She dances in her seat, clapping her hands together.

"Damn it Pilar, sit your ass still. Nobody's pregnant," Daddy barks, quieting her display.

Momma rests her hand over daddy's, saying, "Then what is it, Jack?"

Daddy gives me a supportive smile as he answers her, "That boy got Madison into some shit last night and will be staying with Dexter for a few days."

Momma covers her mouth as she gets out of her seat and comes to me. My heart breaks when I see the tears in her eyes. She engulfs me in her arms as I stand.

"What did he do, baby? What did he do? I swear I will kill him if he hurt you. Nobody messes with my babies."

“Apparently, Mr. Clean has a shady past,” Daddy says. “And some even shadier friends.”

Momma gazes at me before asking, “Baby did they do something to you?”

“Dexter got there before they could. Just like he did before,” I reply, leaving out what Rang did to me. Taking a deep breath, I divulge, “He and his team were the ones who helped me get away from my capture that night years ago.”

Momma gasps as all eyes fall on Dexter. “You? It was you who brought my baby home that night?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Dexter answers.

Momma releases me, moving behind my chair and stops next to Dexter’s. As he stands, she catches him off guard, hugging him tightly.

“Thank you, thank you,” she cries. “I prayed every night for the Lord to let my baby come home and now to find out that you were a part of it only lets me know he was listening to my prayers.”

“You don’t have to thank me, Mrs. Rowe. At the time I was doing a job, but now it’s personal. I will fight the devil himself to keep Madison safe.”

She studies his eyes for sincerity and when momma sees no deceit, she hugs him again, laughing, “In that case, stop calling me Mrs. Rowe and call me momma.”

Dexter laughs. “Okay, momma.”

Without going into too much detail, Dexter and I told them about last night. After talking with everyone, I understood the need to let them know. If we hadn’t, there stood a chance of Quinton or Rang catching them off guard, and I didn’t want that. They needed to be aware of what’s going on.

I wasn’t too worried about James, because since he was six, daddy had him in the woods hunting game. If Quinton, Rang, or any of their people tried to get to him, they’ll have to deal with the Remington Model 700 he keeps under the seat of his truck or the Glock 19 stashed in the glove compartment.

With the mass shootings happening from schools to large chain stores, daddy made sure Pilar and I got our Conceal Carry Permit. I never thought I would have to use my 9mm, but I made sure to pack it in my suitcase.

Daddy taught momma how to shoot way before I came along. I used to wonder why her purse was so bulky and found out when I was around nine. Momma was in her room, ironing one of daddy’s work shirts when she

called for me to bring her purse. I was small for my age, so as I carried the heavy bag to her, I wondered what was inside of it.

“Momma, do you have a brick in here?” I joked, handing it to her. She drops it on the bed and sits beside it.

She smirked, replying, “Baby, I got a brick, a cinder block, and the Rock of Gibraltar in this.” Momma takes the purse from me and starts to dig into it before pulling out a pack of spearmint gum. “Want a piece?”

“No, ma’am,” I replied as I stared at the huge gun that laid in her purse.

Momma unwrapped the piece of gum, then put it in her mouth. She put the remaining pack back in her purse before getting back to ironing daddy’s shirts.

Back then I didn’t think anything of it, but now I know if momma had to protect us, she wouldn’t be pulling out a pack of gum.

Daddy taps on the table, getting our attention. He stands with his knuckles pressed into the wood of the table.

“Dexter didn’t have to tell us the truth about his and Madison’s past, but he did. If he kept her safe once...hell, twice, then I know he will continue to do so. James and Pilar, I know after finding this out, the two of you will be on high alert. Baby,” He says, gazing at momma. “I know you always stay ready.”

“Always, baby,” momma cosigns.

Daddy smirks, surveying all of us, then stops at Dexter. “Keep my baby girl safe. We will handle things on this end. You should get going.”

“Yes, sir,” Dexter responds.

“What about dessert?” Momma inquires.

“Paula, they need to get back to Dallas. Wrap them up a to-go plate for later,” Daddy says.

I see that momma wants to say more, but from the look on daddy’s face, she holds it in.

“Madison, Pilar come help me,” she says.

“But momma, I want to know...” Pilar argues but daddy shuts her down.

“Pilar do as your momma says,” daddy orders.

Pilar doesn’t utter a word as she gets up, then trails behind me and momma.

“Dexter, James let’s go into the living room,” daddy says.



# Chapter 8

## Tech

After talking some more with Mr. Rowe and James in the living room, Madison, Mrs. Rowe, and Pilar came in carrying Tupperware containers filled with leftovers from dinner and slices of the buttermilk pie. Madison and I said our goodbyes with me telling Mr. Rowe I would be in touch soon.

As we were driving back to my house, Madison asked, “Dex, I’m supposed to be at work at nine-thirty tomorrow morning. How can I do that if I’m all the way in Dallas? We would have to be up by six to get ready and leave no later than six-forty-five in order for me to make it on time.”

Moving into the left lane to pass Miss Daisy, I replied, “Don’t worry about your job, Madison. I will take care of that.”

“But how?” she questioned.

“I can’t tell you how, but just know you are about to be on a paid two weeks’ vacation.”

I glanced over at her, and she was staring at me with doubt. I chuckled.

“Just trust me, Madison. You will still have your job when all of this is over with.”

“Yeah, we’ll see,” she murmured as she sat forward.

I shook my head, clearly Madison didn’t know what I’m capable of doing. If I wanted, I could put her on a month-long vacation with pay and her job wouldn’t be able to figure out how she ended up with so much personal time off.

We were quiet for a while, until I broke the silence by asking if there were any places in Dallas she wanted to visit while she was there. Madison said she would love to go downtown and sightsee. I made a mental note that’ll be what we do on our official first date. I would take her to some of my favorite parts of downtown, then to dinner at one of the romantic restaurants in the area.

Almost an hour and a half into our drive, my cell phone starts to ring. Digging it out of my pocket, I see that it’s Mad Dog calling. I drop the phone on my lap to pick up my left AirPods and put it in my ear. Once connected, I answer the call.

“What’s up, Mad Dog?”

“It’s been hours since I last talked to you. I was just checking to make sure everything went okay,” he replies.

Clearing my throat, I say, “Well, not exactly.”

“Shit,” he groans. “What happened?”

Without moving my head, I shift my eyes toward Madison who is staring at me.

I focused back on the road, telling him, “That douche showed up at Madison’s apartment and I had to handle him.”

“And when you say, ‘handle him,’ what do you mean by that? Is he still breathing, or will his family be looking for his body?”

I laugh because Mad Dog knows how we get down. Most of the time we don’t leave an enemy alive. The only reason why Quinton is still above ground is because I didn’t want to bring his death to Madison’s doorstep.

“I kind of roughed him up a bit before tossing him over the second floor railing.”

There’s a brief moment of silence on Mad Dog’s end before his raspy laugh fills my AirPods.

“Oh, shit. Tell me you got that on video,” he laughs.

“I did, but I erased it.”

“What?” Mad Dog bellows. “Why would you do that?”

“Because I know what I did, and I didn’t need a reminder of it.”

“Okay, brother I understand. Where are you now?”

“We’re on our way to my house. We should be there in less than forty minutes.”

“Well as you know we usually have our weekly cookout at my house, but since Madison is going to be there with you, we can go to your house today...if that’s okay with you.”

I think it was a good idea. Madison can meet Janae who could give her more insight on what it’s like to be with one of us.

“Sounds good to me, brother. I’ll text you when we arrive,” I tell him.

“Okay, I’ll call the others and let them know the change in plans,” he returns before ending the call.

“What was that all about?” Madison asks.

“On Sundays we usually have dinner at Mad Dog and his wife Janae’s house, but today they have decided to come to my house.”

Madison gasps. “Do you think that’s a good idea?”

“I do. My sister, Janae, who I spoke to you about before will be there to help you understand what it’s like from a woman’s perspective of being in a relationship with a member of Delta Force Security. She can answer any questions you might have.”

She giggles, retorting, “Oh, so we’re in a relationship now?”

Veering off onto the exit ramp, I boldly reply, “Madison, we have been in a relationship since the day we met each other. It took the bullshit from last night for the two of us to recognize it. You can keep asking yourself that question, but we both know the truth.”

Silence filled the cab of the truck once again as I continued to drive. A part of me thought maybe Madison was joking when she asked that question, but I saw no humor in it. Could she have been fishing to see how I really felt about the two of us? Either way, I thought I had made myself clear in her parents bathroom. She is my woman and there was no way around it. Madison needed to get on board with her new reality because I wasn’t going anywhere.

We made a stop at the local market to pick up food for the cookout and to restock the kitchen with much needed groceries. When we finally pull into my driveway, a black GMC Dually is parked in it. I park next to it. Shit, with everything that happened today, I totally forgot Mathew was bringing papa here today.

“Whose truck is that?” Madison asks as she unfastens her seatbelt.

Putting the truck in park, then shutting off the engine, I reply, “That’s my little brother Mathew’s truck. He’s here with my Papa.”

Madison scoots forward in her seat, then swivels to face me.

“Dex, you told me they live in Louisiana. I know they are not here for an in and out. I don’t want to inconvenience you or them, so you can take me to the nearest hotel, and I’ll be fine.”

I frown, glaring at her. “You’re staying right here. Besides my bedroom, I have three guest rooms. One for each of you, so going to a hotel is out of the question.”

“But Dex, I’m not sure how to feel about staying in a place with people I don’t know. I’m not trying to be a prude but imagine how I might be feeling right now,” she says.

As I remove the keys from the ignition, I gather my words. Not only was I offended by Madison’s words, but they were downright hypocritical. Just like her, I loved my family and would stand by them till none of us

were left standing. I wanted to get out of the truck and not address what she said, but she needed to hear this.

“Madison, let me tell you something. The shit you just said was not only offensive but disrespectful. You’re talking about not knowing how to feel staying with people you don’t know, but didn’t I just spend hours with your family? How do you think I felt the first time meeting them and under these circumstances? I sucked that shit up and was there by your side. My papa and brother mean you no harm. Hell, if shit ever went sour, those two are the ones you want to have your back. My papa can skin and dismember a human body within two hours and leave any remains. Mathew is just as good because papa has taught him everything he knows. Trust me, once they know who you are to me, they will protect you like family.”

Madison seizes my hand. “Oh, my God Dexter I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean for it to come out like that. I know Mathew and your papa wouldn’t do anything to hurt me. I’ve never met them personally, so I don’t know what to expect. Plus, I don’t want to crowd your space with all of us staying here.”

“It’s fine, Cher. You could never crowd my space. I don’t care if the President wanted to stay at my house, I would always make sure you had room. I would sleep on the floor and give you my bed before I let you go to a hotel.”

Madison cups my cheek with her palm before leaning in to kiss my lips. It’s brief but enough to let me know we’re back on the same page.

“I’ll open my door,” she says, grinning at me.

“All right”

As we got out of the truck, everyone started arriving. Mad Dog parks Janae’s Mustang behind my truck before they get out, carrying grocery bags.

“Hey, brother,” Janae greets. I took the bags, then hugged her.

“Hey, sis,” I returned before letting her go. “Janae, I would like to introduce you to Madison Rowe...my girlfriend.”

Janae forms her lips in a perfect ‘O,’ then says, “Madison, it’s so nice to meet you. Honestly, you are the first female any of these heathen’s have addressed as such, so welcome to the second tier. Top tier is when you make wife status, but I do believe you will make that sooner than later from the way my brother is looking at you.” Janae goes in to hug her. I’m relieved when Madison hugs her back.



“It’s nice to meet you too, Janae,” Madison returns. “Dexter told me if I had any questions about being the significant other to a member of Delta Force Security, then you are the one I need to direct them to.”

“And he told you right, but before we get into all of that, let’s check out Tech’s patio and see if it needs some cleaning. Mike, you guys take everything inside. Madison and I will meet you all on the patio. We’ll then go inside to get the meat cleaned, seasoned, and ready to throw on the grill,” Janae says as she pulls Madison to the back of the house.

Once their out of ear range Mad Dog asks, “Is that Mathew’s truck?”

I nod. “Yeah, I told him to bring papa here today. Mathew said papa almost lost an arm yesterday to a gator from not paying attention. I need to lay eyes on him to see what’s going on. We all know he doesn’t want to give up trapping or the market, but at some point he’s going to have to deal with reality. I’ll tie his ass up before I let him succumb to a gator. Knowing his ass, that’s probably the way he wants to go out.”

Mad Dog smirks. “You’re probably right. Does he know about Madison?”

Moving my head from side to side, I reply, “Nope, this will be the first time they get to meet each other.”

Venom chuckles behind Mad Dog. “This should be interesting.”

“And why do you say that?” I ask, slightly offended.

He holds up his hands, “No disrespect brother, but you know just as well as we do, your grandfather is old school. While we don’t give a shit about who you fall in love with, he might have a problem with you being with a Black woman. He is old school.”

I’ve never wanted to lay hands on any of my brothers until this moment. For Venom to suggest such a thing, makes me question his outlook on things.

I stalk towards my brother in arms ready to put him in his place, but Mad Dog intervenes. “That’s enough.”

Whether on duty or not, Mad Dog’s commands are always respected. He’s our Commander so to disobey him is like turning your back on our unit. Funny thing is we all used to call him by his given name, Mike, but we’ve grown accustomed to calling him Mad Dog. Calling him by his first name wouldn’t sound right, which is why we all call each other by the names we earned in the Corps. We may joke every now and again referring

to others by their government names, but you will never hear us say them in public.

Venom looks sorrowful as he states, “Tech, brother I apologize if my words might have seemed untasteful. That was not my intention. I don’t care who you are with; as long as you’re happy, then I am happy for you. Madison is a sweet girl, so I’m sure your papa will like her.”

“It’s fine, Venom. I don’t think papa will have a problem with Madison seeing that he’s part Creole,” I state.

The front door opens with Mathew coming out. Damn, he’s almost as big as I am with his broad shoulders and muscular build. When I visited them two months ago, he was sporting a five o’clock shadow, now he has a full beard and mustache.

“Dexter, I don’t know who those pretty ladies are out there on the patio, but you might want to go save them. Papa is out there laying on his Creole charm,” he laughs.

“Ah, shit,” I murmur, closing the distance between us. I give him a tight hug when I reach him. “How are you doing, little brother?”

“I’m still above ground, so I would say I’m doing damn good,” he replies as I release him. He looks at the others. “Hey, fellows. It’s good to see you all again.”

“Same here,” Mad Dog says, shaking his hand, followed by the rest.

“Let’s get this food in the house, then I can see what the old man is up to,” I say before entering the house.

Stepping into the kitchen, I sit the bags on the counter. Hearing the girls laugh draws me to the opened patio doors. Madison and Janae are sitting in the wicker chairs while papa with his back towards me, is hosing down the patio, talking to them.

“Old man, what do you think you’re doing?” I tease, marching over to him.

Papa stops the water flow. He spins around, raises the nozzle, then points it at me. He moved so fast; his actions reminded me of one of those sharpshooters from the old western shows.

“Now son, I don’t think you’re in the position to ask me questions. I am your elder therefore I ask the questions around here,” he says, raising his eyebrow like Clint Eastwood. “You want to tell me why these lovely ladies were out here cleaning your patio?”

Holding up my hands, like the bad guys of the West would do when they were caught, I replied, “Papa, they wanted to check and see if it needed straightening up before we barbecued. As you can see it didn’t really need it since I had everything covered. Do you mind lowering that?” I point to the nozzle.

Papa smiles, then says, “Sure, but first...” He blasts me with the water. The girls damn nearly fell out of their seats from laughing so hard. “Next time, you check on your patio yourself. These girls are too pretty to be doing that. Now, come over here and shake your Papa’s hand.”

I chuckle, wiping the water from my face as I make my way to him. Papa snickers, staring at my wet clothes. When he extends his hand, I take it, then pull him into a bear hug.

“You play too damn much, old man.”

He lets out a hearty laugh. “That’s how I stay young at heart, son. I refuse to be old, bitter, and mean like some of the men my age.”

“And how old are you, Mr. Broussard?” Madison asks.

“I am sixty-eight years young,” he proudly answers as he releases me.

“Wow, you look good for your age, Mr. Broussard,” Janae praises.

And he does. Papa has always been fit and has maintained his physique. Other than the grey hair sprinkled through his dark brown hair or the few wrinkles on his face, Papa has aged really well.

“Why thank you, darling and stop with that Mr. Broussard shit. Call me Papa like the rest of them do,” he says, winking at them. They giggle like two school girls.

“Thank you, papa,” they say in unison.

“Damn, what happened to you?” Mad Dog asks as he and the others come out onto the patio.

I point to the nozzle still in papa’s hand.

They start to laugh, but Mad Dog’s is cut off when papa aims the nozzle at him.

“I should spray your ass too for sending your wife back here to clean.”

“Hold on papa, I didn’t send Janae back here. She suggested that her and Madison go check out the patio,” he insists, then peers over to his wife. “Tell him Janae.”

She shrugs her shoulders, playfully smiling at him. “Tell him what? I am quite enjoying this.”

“Really, Janae?” he challenged.

“Yes, really,” she returns, giggling.

“Damn, I never thought I’d see the day when the big bad Mad Dog who has bravely stood in the line of fire from bullets is afraid of a water nozzle. Say it ain’t so, bro. Say it ain’t so,” Lethal chortles in delight.

“Shut the hell up, Lethal,” Mad Dog growls.

Still laughing, Janae takes Madison’s hand, and they stand. “While you all are dealing with Watergate, Madison and I are going to go into the kitchen and start getting everything ready,” Janae informs.

As they start to walk away, they stop next to Papa. Janae leans over to him. She might not have thought no one heard what she whispered but I did. “Papa, you have my permission to wet his ass up.”

Papa grins as they stride on.

“What did she say?” Mad Dog asks papa.

“This,” he replies before spraying Mad Dog with the water. The others around him dash out of the way.

“What the hell?” Mad Dog hollers as he tries to get away.

“Stop your damn whining, it’s just water,” Papa laughs before he stops soaking him. “Shit, I’d hate to see how you act when you wash your ass.” He moves the nozzle around to the rest of us before adding, “Now that we have that cleared up, the rest of you make sure the grill is clean and ready for those two angels to put the meat on it. You all can finish spraying down the patio. I didn’t come here for this, but I started it and now you youngsters can finish it.” He drops the nozzle and hose on the patio. “I’m going to help the ladies.”

“Fine,” I remarked. “But remember Old Man, those two women in there are already spoken for.”

Papa’s eyes scan me from head to toe before he says, “You say they are spoken for, but unless I hear the same from their mouths, they’re unclaimed women in my eyes.”

“Papa,” I groan.

“What? Rules are rules. You know how it is in the Bayou. Our beliefs follow us wherever we go,” he says, then cuts his eyes at Mad Dog. “After earlier, I’m already one step ahead of you. Count your days, youngster.”

Papa goes back into the house with Mad Dog glaring at me. I raise my shoulders at him. Surely he wasn’t intimidated by a man who was close to seventy. Papa has always been a looker with his emerald-green eyes and chiseled jawline. If Mad Dog wasn’t secure in his relationship with Janae to

know she wouldn't do anything to jeopardize their relationship, then that was on him.

Once the patio was cleaned down, we fired up the grill. Fifteen minutes later, Janae and Madison brought the seasoned meat out. I'm not sure what they seasoned the meat with but the aroma of the seasonings on the grill made my mouth water.

Over the next few hours of manning the grill while playing corn hole and exchanging war stories. The guys and I killed time by doing barbeque techniques to see who would have the tenderest steak while Madison and Janae prepared the sides. They periodically came out with foil pans to collect the meat that was done from the grill.

This was so much better than Mad Dog's normal Sunday dinner of steaks and baked potatoes, but I would never tell him that. Usually, we would be at his house doing what we would normally do, but today we're at my house. Mad Dog had to get used to the rest of us wanting to have the family at our houses for barbeques.

Madison along with the help of the others and Thing One and Thing Two started to bring the sides out and put them on the extended picnic table I have on the patio. Once they were finished, tossed salad, homemade baked beans, potato salad, cole slaw, and grilled corn on the cob sat on the table. They went back into the house to get the rest of the food.

Papa made sure to pick the water nozzle back up to stop the others from taking a seat until everything was ready.

Janae, Madison, and the Twins re-emerges with pans covered with foil. Once they sat them on the table, they removed the foil covers. The guy's roared like Vikings after an abundant day of pillaging.

"Anyone who touches a piece of meat will be hosed down," Papa threatens, ready to squeeze the nozzle.

"It's okay, papa," Madison said, touching his forearm. "Let them sit, then we will bless the food."

I honestly thought he was going to ignore her, but when he lowered the nozzle and said, "You heard Madison. Sit your asses down and don't touch shit. I know you all are used to behaving like cavemen, but it's not going to happen today." He glares at each of us. "You are in the presence of beautiful women, have some respect.

We remained quiet, waiting to see what else Papa was going to order. After tossing the water nozzle behind him, Papa went to the chair at the

head of the table. Whether at my house or in the bayou, papa will always sit at the head.

“Join hands, then bow your heads,” Papa instructed.

Once we did that, Papa said, “Dexter, since we are here on your behalf, I think it’s only right that you bless the food and ask for protection over your family and friends.”

With Madison’s hand still interlocked with mine, I stood, then offered my free hand to Papa. When he took it, I looked at the others, then bowed my head. I hoped they did the same.

I gave them about ten seconds before I started my prayer. I thanked the heavens for bringing my brother and grandfather to me, for letting my brothers in arms see another day, and last I asked the Lord to bless Madison and cover her with his arms. As I said ‘Amen,’ everyone tightened their hold on the other hand before releasing them.

“Now we can eat,” Papa said.

The pans of meat and sides rotated around the table without any disruption. Had it been at Mad Dogs house, by the time the pan with meat would have come to Madison and Janae, they would have been empty.

With plates full, everyone dug in. While enjoying our meal Papa looked over at me and said, “Dexter, I know you had Mathew bring me here.” He eats a spoonful of baked beans before he continues. “Everyone has a bad day, and that one was mine. I’m not going to lie to you, yes, there are days I can’t remember if I let the toilet seat down or brushed my teeth, but when it comes to the business, my mind is still sharp.”

“I know, Papa,” I stated, looking in his eyes. “We would never ask you to give up what you love, but I will ask if you would leave the trapping to Mathew and the boys. Remember how fun it was when you used to take us out to the swamps, trapping without having to worry about the business? I think that you should get back to that. Do it when you feel like it, not because it’s a part of Broussard’s Market. Get back to what made you love to be in the swamps, papa.”

Papa nodded as he closed his eyes. “You’re right, son. Going out to the swamps to me now, is all about the market. Sometimes in a man’s life, he needs to realize when it’s time to turn the airboat over to the next generation.”

Mathew, who is sitting next to Papa on the other side of the table dropped a meatless rib bone on his plate. “Papa, are you sure?”

Papa placed his elbows on the table while smiling at Mathew. “Yeah, I’m sure son. I’ve taught you everything I know, so I have no doubt that you will continue to build the market. I’ll stay inside but my only request is Sunday is reserved for us as family time.”

Mathew chuckled. “Papa you can have any day of the week. If you call me on a Wednesday and say you want to go catfishing, then I will drop whatever I have going on to go with you.”

“Same here,” I added.

“What about your schedule?” Papa questioned, briefly looking over at Mad Dog.

“Don’t worry about that.” I said. “If you need me, we’ll make arrangements for me to be there for you.”

Papa smiled, nodding his head. He didn’t think I sensed it, but I could hear the worry in his voice. I love my Delta Force brothers and my blood family but if they both needed me at the same time, there would be no question on who I would choose.





# Chapter 9

## Madison

I had so much fun hanging out with Dexter and the others, I didn't want the evening to end. Dex and the men were retelling hilarious memories of mishaps they had on setting up security systems. As I sat, engrossed in their stories, it dawned on me to someone looking in from the outside, they would see a group of co-workers talking about their job not knowing that the men sitting at the table were stone cold killers. That fact alone should've had me running to the nearest exit, but I knew there was no other place I would rather be.

At one point, Janae and I went back into the kitchen to refill the pans with more meat. I couldn't help asking her a question that had been lingering on my mind.

"Janae, can I ask you something?" I asked, loading chicken in my pan.

"Sure." She responded, cutting up the slab of ribs.

"I don't want this to sound rude, it's just that I'm curious."

"Okay," she returned.

"What's up with the twins? Can they talk?"

Janae stopped slicing into the meat before laughing.

"Was that wrong of me to ask?" I questioned, embarrassed.

Janae sat the knife down, shaking her head. "No, no. Everybody asks that question. They can talk, they just do it when they're comfortable around new people."

I nodded. "Okay, that makes sense. What are their names?"

Janae smirked, pointing her finger at me. "That I can't tell you. Don't get me wrong, I know their names, but I can't tell you. The only person who calls them by their given names is their adopted mother GeeGee and trust me if you ever hear her say them, you better not repeat them."

I frowned. "Why? Who is this GeeGee woman and why is she the only one that can say their names?" I asked.

Janae started to laugh again. "Let's just say GeeGee is overly protective of her boys, especially those two. Not even Mike or the others say their names, so don't ask Tech because he won't tell you either. As far as

GeeGee, I'm sure you'll meet her in the future, but until then, get used to calling them Thing One and Thing Two."

I shrugged my shoulders, saying, "If you say so."

"Trust me, I do. Now let's finish getting this food out there before the natives get restless," Janae said, picking up the knife to finish cutting the ribs.

We rejoined the men on the patio, the thought about Thing One and Thing Two's names became distant. If they didn't want people to know, then I had to respect that, plus the way Janae was talking about that GeeGee woman being overly protective of them, I didn't want to ruffle anyone's feathers since I was new to the group.

After getting our fill of the barbeque, Janae and I cleared the table, and we began to have a tournament with teams of two for dominos. When it came down to the last two teams, it was me and Dexter against Papa and Mathew. I thought my family was competitive when it came to games like this, but we had nothing on the Broussard men.

We were playing to five hundred and both teams were tied at four hundred and fifty. The game could go either way depending on which domino was laid down. The others stood around the table making side bets on which team was going to win. Most were leaning towards Papa and Mathew, but as they say, 'It's not over till the fat lady sings.'

My daddy taught my siblings and I how to play dominos years ago. He used to say. 'Always calculate what's in your hand and others too.' So, for me it was like playing with amateurs, I just hoped my partner was thinking the same way as me. Looking at the tiles on the table, there were several ways to play to go out. This is the part of the game where you hoped your partner had the right domino to make that happen.

"Come on Dexter it's your turn. Either play or stand your ass up in defeat," Papa goaded, spinning one of his dominos on the table.

All of the tiles on the board left were mostly five spots, except for the lonely double one. I started to sweat a little bit before looking at the two tiles in my hand. I sat back and for once smiled.

When Dex lays the one blank, I knew we had the game, but Papa thought otherwise.

He slammed his blank five on the table and began to gloat. "That's game. It's over. Bow down to the new champions!"

The others began to congratulate him and Mathew on defeating us, but I couldn't let it go on without claiming me and Dexter's crown.

"Wait, wait," I yelled, waving my hands in the air. When they quieted down. I smiled at Papa, saying, "I still have a play."

"No you don't," he argued.

"Yes, I do. Count the tiles," I told him.

He did and when he realized the game was still on he said, "You don't have it. Mathew does."

Picking up the blank five, then turning it so he could see it, I said, "Oh, you mean this one? No, Mathew doesn't have it, I do." Slamming it on the table hard enough to make the other domino's bounce.

"Game locked! We won," Dexter yells, rushing over to me, then lifting me in his arms.

"Well, shit," I heard Venom grumble behind us.

Mad Dog chuckled, saying, "I told you not to bet against family."

"Hell, that's Tech's family, so family is family. I just bet on the wrong ones."

"That you did, now pay up." Mad Dog laughed.

"Well, I'll be," Papa said, still staring at the dominos. "Girl, who taught you how to play like that?"

Giggling, I replied, "My daddy."

"You need to invite him over so he and I can play. He taught you well," Papa stated.

"Thank you and I will let him know."

Venom came over and shook Papa's hand. "Since I just lost all of my money, I'm going to call it a night. It was good seeing you again, Papa."

"You too, Venom and don't worry, you'll get the chance to win your money back," Papa chuckled.

After the other guys shook Papa and Mathew's hand, they went inside the house to fix to-go plates before saying their goodbyes. Mad Dog and Janae were still sitting at the picnic table.

"Tech, do you want us to stick around and help you guys clean up?" Janae asked.

"Thanks Sis, but we got it. I'm not like that one over there," he points to Mad Dog. "who makes his family clean up."

Mad Dog smirked, shrugging his shoulders. "If you eat, you can help clean. Plus, since Janae and I have been married, I haven't had you guys

clean up and you can thank her for that.”

“Thank you, Sis,” Dex told Janae.

“You’re welcome, bro,” she said with a smile.

Papa stood, turning toward Mad Dog and Janae. “You two can go ahead home. Dexter, Mathew, and I can handle it from here.”

“Are you sure?” Mad Dog inquired, glancing towards me.

“Yeah, we’re sure. Go and finish enjoying the rest of the evening. We have a busy day planned tomorrow,” Dexter replied.

Mad Dog stood then helped Janae up. “With that being said, I’ll see you at the office in the morning. It was good catching up with you all and Madison, we hope to see more of you. I think you are what Tech needs to keep him grounded.”

“Same,” I responded, going over to give him and Janae a hug goodbye.

When Janae pulled away, she said, “You have my number, call me anytime.”

“I will,” I told her.

“Thanks for having us and we’ll do this again, maybe at my house as always,” Mad Dog teased.

Tech wrapped his arm around my waist, stating, “I don’t know, Mad Dog. I think after this, some of the guys will want to host our Sunday dinners at their houses.”

He opened his mouth, but Janae spoke first. “And that’s a good idea. I’ve told Michael there’s nothing wrong with doing a rotation at everyone’s house.” Mad Dog rolled his eyes. “For some reason he thinks it has to be at our house every Sunday, but thank you Tech for breaking him from that,”

“You’re welcome,” I said, grinning at Mad Dog.

“Whatever,” he returned. “Come on, Janae. Let’s head home so Tech can begin to clean up.”

He gave Madison a hug, then shook Papa and Mathew’s hand before reaching me.

Mad Dog gripped my hand, then pulled me closer to him to whisper in my ear, “You do know this has shaken up the way we have always done things?”

“I do, but at the same time, some things need to be shaken up,” I replied.

As he moved back with his hand still locked onto mine, Mad Dog whispered, “Indeed.”

I laughed as Janae pried our hands apart. “Mike, get out of your feelings. Shit, I get tired of having these greedy ass men at our house every Sunday and you should too. Yes, you are the leader of Delta Force and Delta Force Security, but during off times you are brothers who should alternate Sunday dinners. Not everyone wants to barbecue every Sunday. One of the guys might want to cook a homemade meal and I for one would appreciate that.”

Mad Dog slowly chuckled. “You’re right, baby.”

“I know I am,” Janae said. “Now, let’s go home. I need to call Nina; you know that baby is ready to make its debut.”

Mad Dog turned to us. “It was good seeing you all. Papa and Mathew, I’ll see you two before you head back to Louisiana. Madison if he gives you any trouble call me, or Janae and we’ll handle him for you.”

“Thank you,” I giggled.

After they said their farewells, Dexter, Papa, Mathew and I were left on the patio. Papa was the first to speak.

“Dexter, you and Mathew clean this shit up. Madison and I are going inside to watch reruns of Swamp People. They need to have me on there to show the people how catching a gators is really done.”

“Yes, sir,” Dexter said as Papa led me inside.

Once in Dexter’s cinema room, I sat in one of the seats as Papa scrolled through the channels until he found what he was looking for. He then came over and sat next to me.

As the screen showed the gator hunters preparing for their next catch, Papa, looking at the screen, said, “You know, Dexter has never introduced us to any woman he has been romantically involved with, so without sounding offensive, why you? What makes you so special to my grandson?”

At first I didn’t know how to respond to his questions. Should I be offended by them, or should I look at them as a grandparent being concerned for his grandson? I choose to go with the latter as I told him of me and Dexter’s history up to what happened with my now ex.

When I finished, Papa eyed me, showing no kind of emotion which made me fidget in my seat. He was probably thinking I was a horrible person for bringing unnecessary trouble to his grandson’s doorstep, but he surprised me with his response.

“Dexter did what was necessary to keep you safe. Obviously, you mean a great deal to him to do so. All I ask is that you do the same for him. I

don't know if he told you about his parents."

I nodded. "He did."

"Then you know he doesn't want to be put in the same type of relationship that they were in. Dexter is a good man and loves those who love him. If you are not that woman who can give him the love he deserves, then I ask that you leave him alone. I won't stand by and watch him go through heartbreak. He deserves so much more than that."

Tears started to swell in my eyes. I'm not sure if it was from how passionately Papa spoke about Dexter, or if it was because he said the words I knew were to be true a long time ago. Since the time Dexter gave me his business card to reach out to him, our conversations have grown from professionalism to more private. I feel like he knows me in and out and vice versa.

As I locked eyes with Papa, I told him, "And so do I. Dexter always told me that I deserved better and for some reason I always knew that it was him he was speaking of but was too afraid to act upon it, if by chance it wasn't him. But after he showed up at the club to save me, I knew then we were on the same page."

Papa squinted his left eye at me. "Then I hope you all keep it that way. If a relationship is going to work, if you have any doubts or concerns, the two of you need to sit down and talk about it. Imagine if you and Dexter would have done that in the beginning? You wouldn't be in the position you are now with your ex and his people."

"You're right." I sighed.

Papa tapped my knee, saying, "I know I am. Did you bring a bag with you?"

"Yes, sir. It's still in Dexter's truck."

"I'm sure you're ready to get some rest so let's go get it, then I'll show you to the guest room down the hall."

He helped me up as he stood. We went outside to grab my suitcase. Like the gentleman he raised Dexter to be, Papa fussed when I reached for the suitcase handle and took hold of it himself instead. Once we were back inside, I stopped Papa as he started to show me to the guest room. He smirked when I told him I already knew which room I would be staying in since I was there the night before.

"Then I guess you know which way to go. I'll see you in the morning, Madison," he said, handing me the suitcase.

I smiled at him, saying, “Thank you Papa and if I get up before you, I’ll start breakfast.”

He chuckled. “See, that’s why I knew there was something special about you.”

I giggled. “Good night, Papa.”

“Indeed,” Papa said as I left, heading to my room.

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# Chapter 10

## Tech

“Why do I have to help you clean up? These were your friends over here, not mine.” Mathew complained.

I walked over to a large upright cabinet and opened the doors. Reaching inside, I took out a garbage bag, then tossed it to him.

“Because, by extension of me, they are your guests too. And...you have known them for years, so why not accommodate them? They would do the same for you.”

Mathew sighed. “I know they will.” He looked at me. “I’m sorry, Dex. These last few days with Papa have taken a toll on me.”

“I’m sure it has, little brother,” I said, walking over to him.

Mathew closed his eyes as he lowered his head. “It’s just hard to see him like that. The strongest person in our lives who has never asked anyone for help is in need of it and doesn’t want to recognize that he does.”

Resting my hand on his shoulder, I said, “I understand where you’re coming from, but we’re talking about Holden Broussard, the most strong willed and craziest SOB you or I have ever known. Although there is no cure for his condition, I for one know he’ll do everything in his power to slow the effects of it from taking over him. In the meantime, we’ll just have to keep encouraging him.”

“Yeah, but what about when we return home, and he wants to go trapping?” Mathew inquired.

Gripping his shoulder, I replied, “Let me handle that. By the time you all go back, Papa will be inclined to work in the office and let you youngsters do the hard work.”

“I hope so,” Mathew returned before I let him go.

After we cleaned off the discarded plates and items, I hosed down the patio as Mathew stacked up the extra chairs and tables. It was dark once we finished and went inside. I thought we would find Madison and Papa in the cinema room, but only Papa was there channel surfing.

“Where’s Madison?” I asked.

Papa raised his hand holding the remote as he kept looking at the television screen, replying, “We got her suitcase from your truck, then she

went to the guest room. Apparently, she's stayed there before." He finally looks in my direction.

I glanced at Mathew when he elbowed me, moving his head from side to side.

"What was that for?" I asked, rubbing my side.

Mathew arched his brow with confusion. "You mean to tell me, you had that beautiful woman stay here, in your house and she slept in the guest room? Shit, if your relationship is like that, then maybe I should throw my hat in the ring."

"Watch yourself little brother," I growled, getting in his face. "I'll let that little error of your words pass this time. So we're clear, just because Madison is sleeping in the guest room doesn't mean she is not my woman because she most definitely is. I will fuck up anyone who thinks otherwise."

"Dexter, leave Mathew alone. I'm sure he was just kidding. Weren't you, Mathew?" Papa said, watching the two of us stare each other down.

"No, Papa I wasn't..." Mathew started.

"Oh, shit," Papa sighed.

Mathew continued, "but now that I know how Dexter truly feels about her, I take back what I said. I will respect his and Madison's relationship. From this moment forth, Madison will be like a sister to me. I'm happy big brother that you have found someone you're willing to fight for. That shows how much you really love her." Mathew held out his hand.

As the tension left my body, I stared at his hand before taking it to pull him into a hug.

"Thank you, little brother," I whispered.

Mathew tapped my back a few times before releasing me. "You're welcome, Dex."

"Now that the two of you have had this touching moment, Dexter, Madison told me about you all's history, you might want to fill Mathew in too."

"What is it?" Mathew questioned.

"Have a seat, Mathew," I said, pointing to the couch.

I was glad Madison told Papa how things between us started. I just don't know how Mathew is going to react to hearing the details.

"And you left that motherfucker breathing?" Mathew seethed, jumping up from his seat. "Her sorry ass ex-boyfriend and that other asshole need to pay for what they did to her. I say round their asses up and we take them to

the swamps. Dex, you know what we do to those who fuck with our family.”

See this is one of the reasons why I have kept things between me and Madison from these two, especially Mathew. He’s just as hot headed as I am. We have that boyish smile and features but underneath all of that lies two killers who would erase all those who threaten us.

“Calm down, Mathew,” I told him. “Mad Dog, the others, and I have this. I just need you all to look after Madison while I am at work. I don’t think Quinton and his people know where my house is located, but just in case, she’ll have the two of you to look out for her while I’m away.”

“Hell yeah, we will.” Mathew said. “Is my palm print still uploaded for entry to the armory room?”

“It is,” I replied.

“That’s all I need to know,” he returned, pacing. “I know you have pictures of them, send them to me, so I’ll know what they look like.”

“I do and I will. Papa please make sure Madison feels at home here,” I told him.

Papa side eyed me, saying, “That girl couldn’t be any more at home here than with her own family. You worry too much *pitit pitit*.” He said in his Creole accent for grandson.

When they left the cinema room to go to the other guest rooms, I set the alarm on the house. As I turned off the lights in the house, making my way to my bedroom, I couldn’t help but to stop at the door of the guest room Madison was sleeping in. The only thing I could hear was the sound of the television coming through the door. Placing my ear to the door, I listened for any movement from her to let me know she was still up, but when I didn’t hear anything, I proceeded on to my room. Hopefully, I’ll see her before I go into the office in the morning.

Well, that thought didn’t go as planned because around three in the morning I got an alert on my private phone. Seven women and children were being transported to the Mexican border. We’ve been waiting on this intel for over a month, and it was now or never to save them.

I hurried up and forwarded the message to Mad Dog, letting him know we needed to meet at the hangar where our cargo jet was located. He will then send the message to the men he selects to join us. How we run things is that everyone is on standby at all times. After Mad Dog chooses the men,

he will send a text to the others to let them know what's going on. They will open Delta Force Security and continue business as usual.

Hopping out of bed, I went to my closet. I placed my palm against the right section of the wall, it slid open to another room that held all my gear and weapons I kept at home.

After changing and grabbing my laptops, I left the room, and was met by Madison coming down the hallway, holding a glass of milk.

"Hey, Dex. Is everything okay?"

I nod. "Yeah, I have to run out for a bit."

Glancing at the laptops, then my pistols in the holsters under my arms, Madison brings her eyes to mine. She smiles, saying, "I see. Well, be careful."

"Thank you," I tell her as I start to walk past her. I stop when Madison gently grabs my forearm.

I'm taken aback when she leans in and softly kisses my cheek.

"I know you don't need it, but that was for good luck," she whispers.

The sincerity in her eyes have me rethinking about going on the mission. I have never felt this way...ever. It's always been about going in doing the mission without thinking of the outcome, but now other than Papa and Mathew, Madison has given me another reason to make it home in one piece.

"I don't know what time I'll be back, but Mathew and Papa will be here to keep you company."

"No problem. I like your family, they are very entertaining, especially Papa. I was up because Skylar called fussing about me not calling to let her know what was going on. She ran into James, and he gave her a cryptic version. She wants to come and lay eyes on me to see for herself that I'm okay. Is it okay if I invite her over?"

Laying my hand over hers, I replied, "I know Skylar is your best friend, but let's wait a few days before she comes here. We don't know if Quinton's people are watching her, okay?"

"Okay," she sadly said.

Squeezing her hand, I tell her, "I know this is a lot for you, being away from your family and friends, but it's necessary to keep you safe."

"I know."

I didn't want to leave her, but forced myself to say, "I have to go."

She removed her hand, taking a step back. "I know."

“I’ll call you when I get a free moment, okay?”

“Okay,” she returned.

Showing the same affection she did towards me; I lean down and kiss her cheek before leaving the house. Once inside of my truck, like any other mission I lowered my head to say a silent prayer that it goes successfully and that the team makes it back without any injuries.

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# Chapter 11

## Tech

“How far are they, Tech?” Mad Dog shouts from the passenger seat of the blacked out SUV we’re riding in. Blade is driving and the twins are sitting in the third row seat behind me.

“We’re five minutes behind them,” I reply, looking at my laptops.

“Dammit Blade, floor this motherfucker. We have a good thirty minutes, give or take before they hit the border,” Mad Dog commands.

Tapping on one of my laptops, I tell Mad Dog, “They’re headed towards some train tracks five minutes away. I’ll have the arm come down to buy us some time.”

“Get on it,” Mad Dog orders.

I do my magic, hacking into the railroad functions to access the controls. Three minutes later we were pulling up behind a rusty old Ford pickup that was following the van. We’ve been doing this long enough to know that the truck is probably tailing them to make sure they arrive at the border without any complications, but the one thing they didn’t count on is for us to show up.

“Thing One and Two, I want the two of you to neutralize the men in the pickup,” Mad Dog instructs. “Blade and Tech, once they have done that, we’ll advance on the van.” He scans all of us. “Clear?”

“Clear” we respond.

We remained quiet as the twins wiggled out of the back passenger windows. It still amazes me to watch the two in action. It’s like they move as one. Each of their steps is calculated and precise. I’ve never seen anything like it.

They crouch down, sneaking up to the driver and passenger side doors. Simultaneously, they stand, shooting the men in the head at close range. They quickly open the doors, then jump inside. That’s our cue for part two.

Mad Dog looked over his shoulder to me. “Tech, Blade let’s go.”

Sitting the laptop on the seat next to me, I nod.

Mad Dog paused for a moment before saying, “Semper Fi.”

“Semper Fi,” I returned as we began to exit the vehicle.

With Blade in front of me, we passed the pickup and stopped a few feet behind the driver’s side of the van. The idiot driver has the window down, tapping the door as he horribly sings along to the song playing through the speakers. It was enough that these women and girls were on their way to a horrific fate but to subject them to this kind of torture is just cruel.

Once we’re in place, Blade takes hold of the driver’s wrist, then yanks it, catching him off guard. The women and girls scream with fright. I open the door to see that Mad Dog has overtaken the passenger, then slits his throat.

“Toss his ass out,” Mad Dog commands as the passenger’s body slides down. He pushes the dead man’s body out of the van, then jumps in the seat.

Never to leave an enemy left breathing to retaliate, I shoot the driver in the head, then Blade drags his lifeless body from the van. I hop in the driver’s seat, turning the wheel to maneuver the van to head back the way they came.

Three hours later we were pulling into an abandoned Greyhound terminal. Luckily, Venom wasn’t here because Agent Vaughn was waiting on us.

“Once again, I would like to thank you all for helping us return these women and girls to their families,” Agent Vaughn says after we get out, then help the captives. I noticed how Thing One and Two were fixated on two of the masked women who ushered the women and girls inside the awaiting bus.

After the last girl is out of the van, Mad Dog focuses on Agent Vaughn, saying, “You know, I’m starting to wonder why me, and my men are putting in all the grunt work while you and yours come out looking like the good guys...or should I say the good girls.”

Agent Vaughn tilted her head toward the vehicle the women and girls were in with her subordinates. She then walked over to Mad Dog and asked, “What does it matter who’s doing the grunt work? At the end of the day we are striving for the same outcome, right?”

“Right,” Mad Dog grumbled.

Agent Vaughn plastered on a smile. “That’s all that matters. Until the next assignment, I wish you and your men nothing but continued success.”

As she starts to walk away, Mad Dog pokes, “And what about Lethal?”



Agent Vaughn stops in her stride. She gathers herself before turning to Mad Dog to say, “Brody, I mean Lethal is a grown man who is capable of taking care of himself.” She might have said the words but the expression on her face couldn’t hide the concern she was trying to hide. She continued on, then got into the vehicle with the others.

“Roger that,” Mad Dog reciprocated as we watched them pull off.

“So, who’s going to tell Lethal?” Mad Dog teased.

Chuckling, I said, “Since you’re our fearless leader, I nominate you.”

Blade and the Twins laughed as well, holding up their right hands.

Neither one of us wanted to be on the end of Lethal’s wrath when he found out this was a rescue mission that was orchestrated by Agent Vaughn.

Mad Dog smirked as he walked over to our SUV, then got in. I know he’s gearing up for whatever type of outcome to how Venom is going to react. Most don’t know, but Venom has a temper that could rival the devil. Although, it would seem harmless if we did a mission with Agent Vaughn, Lethal will take it as Mad Dog purposely left him out of it. He’ll think that we or Mad Dog were trying to keep him from engaging with Agent Vaughn. Which wasn’t the case.

In dealing with this type of mission, we already know there will always be two leaders, which is Mad Dog and I. The others that come are those Mad Dog selected. On this mission, Mad Dog didn’t know Agent Vaughn was spearheading it.

“You know Lethal is not going to be pleased,” I say, watching our surroundings.

“I know, but what can I do?’ Mad Dog says.

I exhale as he gets inside the SUV. No matter how Lethal felt about this mission, we still had a job to do. At this point, I felt that he could take his grievances about Agent Vaughn up with Mad Dog. *Not my business, I don’t care.*



# Chapter 12

## Tech

When I made it back to the house, it was almost ten-thirty in the morning. After disarming the security system, I walked into the kitchen to find Madison and Papa happily cooking together.

“Those eggs, Madison, you want to sprinkle just a little bit of paprika in them,” Papa shares, handing her the small container of the herb.

I never knew that, so for him to disclose that to her, speaks volumes.

“Yes, sir,” Madison sings, sprinkling some in the eggs.

Admiring the scene in front of me, reality knocked me in the head only...Madison and her family needed my protection as well. Being in my line of work, the enemy will always go for your loved ones because they know your family is a serious weakness. Unlike Quinton or Rang, I had other ideas ready for them.

“Good morning,” I greet.

Madison turns around smiling, “Hey, good morning to you.”

“Morning, Dex,” Papa says, flipping over strips of bacon. “How was your night? Madison told me she saw you before you left and said you had to run out for some emergency alarm repairs.” He slightly tilts his head in my direction, side eyeing me.

I smirk. “Yeah, everything went fine.”

Papa gave me a once over before going back to tend to the bacon. He is one of the only few who knew about Delta Force and that’s because early on when I would return to Louisiana to recuperate from injuries, he started to get suspicious and ask questions. When I was little and would try to hide the shit my parents were doing to me and Mathew, Papa would always tell me, “You can lie to those who don’t know you and they will believe it, but your family, your kin will always know when you’re lying.”

I still stuck to my stories, and when we left the service, Mad Dog formed Delta Force Security. Shortly after, we started carrying out special missions. I knew eventually it would only be a matter of time that Papa was going to get it out of me.

The last time I went home to heal from a gunshot wound to my right shoulder. With my arm in a sling I told Papa and Mathew I dislocated it

from a freak accident at work. As before they seemed to be satisfied with my explanation, but Papa played his part to a tee, even asking if I needed some ice before I laid down. I told him no, stating I had taken some pain medication two hours earlier.

As I drifted off to sleep with a pillow resting under my elbow, I was awakened sometime later in excruciating pain. Papa was straddling my chest and had cut away my t-shirt. His thumb was pressing into the wound. The effect of the pain med was long gone. He had my feet bound and my other arm tied to the headboard. Now, I have a high tolerance for pain, but with him applying pressure, I was biting my tongue to keep from crying out.

“Listen to me boy and listen well. Your little brother might believe the bullshit that you tell us, but I don’t. You’re going to tell me how the hell you got this gunshot wound or else I’m going to see how far my thumb will go in it.”

“Papa, please,” I begged.

First of all, Papa is not a small man. He and I are about the same height, six foot three and he was close to my two hundred and seventy pounds. The respect I have for my grandfather was the only thing that was keeping me from fighting him off of me, but then again, I had to remember Papa wasn’t a clean fighter. He was the dirtiest when it came to it. There was no telling what type of weapons he had hidden around the room if I tried to be combative.

Papa lowered his face closer to mine. “Dexter, do you really think I’m that stupid? I’ve watched you come here countless times with wounds you supposedly got from work, but you and I know otherwise. So, either you tell me the truth, or you and I will become Siamese twins.”

He finally withdrew his thumb as I started to tell him about Delta Force. If it had been an enemy, I would have held out longer, even death, but at the end of the day this was my Papa, who was he going to tell.

“That’s all I need to know, son. Believe me when I say, I didn’t want to do this to you, but I had enough of the lies. If you want to keep Mathew in the dark about you and your comrades, then so be it, but you cannot keep it from me. This family has been through enough.”

“Yes, sir,” I whispered as he got off of me.

“I will keep this between the two of us, but you keep me up to date if you have been injured in these missions of yours.”

Clutching my shoulder, I said, "I will, Papa."

Luckily, since then I haven't received any detrimental injuries and that has kept Papa happy.

"Dexter, go get washed up and I will have a plate waiting on you," Madison says.

"Thank you. Where is Mathew?" I asked.

"He came in a little while ago and said he was going to take a shower. He should be coming shortly," Papa informed.

"Well, I'm going to go do the same. Save me some bacon. Papa you know how Mathew is," I laughed.

I left the kitchen, heading to my bedroom. Mathew steps out of his room as I walk down the hall.

"Morning, big bro," he says.

"Hey, Mathew. Did you sleep well?" I ask, stopping in front of him.

Mathew chuckles, rubbing his chin. "I did after video chatting with Jooi."

I folded my arms over my chest. "Jooi? The same Jooi St. John you've been chasing after since high school?"

Jooi St. John comes from one of the wealthiest Black families in Iberville Parish. Her father is a prominent attorney, and her mother owns a floral boutique. Mathew has had his nose so wide open to the girl since they were freshmen in high school. I wonder what changed her mind about giving him a chance.

"Yes, that Jooi. Only there's no more chasing."

"Congratulations, little brother," I say, holding out my hand to him. Mathew grins wide as he shakes my hand. "How long has this been going on?"

"Well," he starts as he releases my hand. "We've been seeing each other for a year but kept it under wraps until four months ago."

"I see and why was that?" I questioned.

Mathew sighs, replying, "Her family has always wanted her to be married off to a successful businessman, but instead she fell in love with me." He moves in closer to me, then whispers, "And she's pregnant."

"What? Mathew?" I say in a hush tone with disbelief. "Seriously?"

"Yes, brother. You're going to be an uncle. Jooi is four months along," he proudly returns.

"And how does her family feel about that?"

Mathew looks off, answering, "They don't know yet."

"Mathew," I groan.

He holds up his hands. "I know, I know but Joii wanted to wait and tell them. They're just getting used to me being around and trust me it hasn't been easy with their high sidity noses turned up at me. They think because I'm from the swamps, I'm not good enough for Joii, but I am!"

"I know you are brother," I cosign.

"You're damn right I am. I love Joii and she is about to be the mother of my child. I don't give a fuck about how her family feels about me. They're just going to have to get over it because I'm not going anywhere. Joii and I are going to be married and raise our child to not judge others."

Clutching his shoulder, I tell him, "And I know you will. Now, I feel bad for having you bring Papa here. You need to be with your woman."

"You shouldn't feel that way. Joii understood when I told her why we were coming out here. That's how understanding she is. Papa needed this time away."

Stunned, I ran my fingers through my hair. "Be honest with me, Mathew; how bad do you think things are with Papa?"

"Truthfully Dex, I think we're in the early stages. Maybe if we get him to see some doctors, they can prolong the inevitable. We both know Papa is the best in what he does, and I know it pisses him off when he's off his game. The old man is not one to let shit like this hold him back."

"Yeah, I know. I'm going to get him set up to see some doctors here at Baylor. They are supposed to be the best and hopefully they will give us the outcome we are looking for."

"I hope so too," Mathew said.

"Alright, well I'm going to take a quick shower. And Mathew..." I stare at him.

"Yes," he returns.

"Please don't eat all of the bacon," I laugh, continuing on to my room.

Mathew laughs as well, saying, "Then you better hurry up."

"Shut up," I laugh, entering my room.

I quickly disrobed and took a quick shower. After throwing on a pair of boxers, jogging pants, and a t-shirt, I left my room to rejoin the others in the kitchen.

"Really?" Madison asks Papa as I sit down next to her with my plate sitting on the table.

“What are you all talking about?” I ask, reaching for the hot sauce to dash my smothered potatoes.

Papa, sitting at the head of the table takes a sip from his coffee cup, then says, “I was just telling Madison about our lineage. As you know, my great grandmother was French Creole and Black. Our family’s skin was once a golden tan but over the years with others finding the love of their lives, it started to lighten, but we will never forget our origins.”

A surprised Madison looks over at me, then back to Papa. “So, that means Dexter has African heritage as well?”

“Don’t we all?” Papa returns, placing his cup on the table, then picking up a strip of bacon. “If a family comes from the true South, especially Louisiana, nine times out of ten our blood is mixed with every ethnicity. There’s nothing such as pure blood because we’re not.”

Papa laughs, winking at Madison. “Don’t let the fair skin fool you.”

“That’s enough of going down our family tree. Let’s just enjoy this breakfast you and Madison have prepared.”

Papa said a quick prayer before we began to pass the platters of food around.

When we finished breakfast, I was full and tired. The events of last night were starting to take hold. Luckily, I didn’t have to go into the office today. I’m going to take the remainder of the day to catch up on some much needed rest.

Wiping my mouth, I said, “That was delicious. Madison, Papa thank you. I need to lay down for a while to rejuvenate and that meal was the help I needed.” I sat the napkin on the table, then stood. “If you will excuse me, I’m going to catch a few hours of sleep.”

“Please do. You look like you’re ready to fall asleep standing up,” Madison responded, clutching my hand, then letting it go.

“Yeah, big bro. Do what you have to. We’ll be fine,” Mathew said, picking up two more slices of bacon.

I looked at Papa. “We’ll talk more when I get up.”

“Of course,” he said before I left the three of them at the table.

I returned to my room and got comfortable under the sheets and comforter on my California King bed. After using the remote to black out my windows, I turned on the television to put it on rerun seasons of The Andy Griffith Show. Say what you want, but who wouldn’t want to live in a town where the Sheriff didn’t wear a gun and town drunk would voluntarily

turn himself in when he had too much? Shit, just imagine how peaceful things would be in this day and age if cities and towns were like Mayberry. Hell, I could live peacefully installing alarm systems and not have to deal with the bad guys, but unfortunately that is not the world we live in, and it will never be. Until that shit happens, there will always be a need for Delta Force.

Scenes from some of our most horrific missions plague my dreams as I sleep. Like the one of Chains crying out with the dead little girl's body in his arms. I blame myself for not getting to him in time before he was shot since I was the closest. Every time I make a move towards them, a sniper I couldn't see would fire in my direction, keeping me at bay. Once one of our men had taken him out, the damage was already done.

Chains was never the same after that, so it wasn't a surprise to me when he went off the grid. I never told Mad Dog, but I could've done a more thorough search to find him, but I knew my brother had enough, so I let him be. I figured our paths would cross one day.

The next scene switches to a mission we did in Cuba. A drug cartel was holding women to be sold on the black market. We executed our plan down to the wire, but what we didn't expect was to step into the room of the ringleader mutilating a woman. He had cut off her right breast and was in the middle of doing the same to the left. It was as if he was taking pleasure of hearing the woman's screams. Without any remorse I shot him in the head. The woman cried out in pain as the knife sliced against her skin.

"Dexter," a voice calls to me. "Dexter, please wake up." I feel my body shaking.

I slowly open my eyes, adjusting to the lights as the windows are still blackened out.

"There you are," Madison softly says, wiping a warm cloth across my head.

"What...what happened?" I ask, closing my eyes as she runs the cloth over my brow.

"I don't know, but when I was going to the bathroom, I heard you in here calling for someone named Chains. Do you want to talk about it?"

Replaying the events from my dreams that I could remember. There was no way I was going to scare her with my past, so I told her, "No, dreams are just that; dreams." Getting a clear view of her, I ask, "So, you were worried about little old me?"



Madison giggles, replying, “I was, but don’t make me regret it.”

I take hold of her wrists, then roll us over to where I’m on top of her.

Madison shows no sign of fear or anger. I look down to see her breaths are normal and can feel a rapid heart rate as our bodies touch.

“Where are Papa and Mathew?” I ask in a low growl.

“They went to the grocery store,” she replies.

“Good,” I say before pulling her down to me, then kissing her.

Madison moans as our kiss becomes more sensual. This is what I have been waiting on since the day I laid eyes on her. Since the day I wanted to officially make her mine, I’m now given the opportunity to make it legit.

Never missing a beat, Madison straddles me, slowly moving her warm center over my brick hard erection. *Fuck!!*

Madison whispers against my lips, “I think this is something that we both need and should have done a long time ago. If it only happens this one time, I will be forever grateful, because it’s done out of love and not just an end to a release.”

“Never,” I grunt, gripping her hair in my hand, then turning her over onto her back.

Madison giggles as I release her hair, then quickly remove the leggings she had on and her underwear. I wanted her completely naked. I needed skin to skin contact. I hastily removed her t-shirt and bra.

She glared at me lustfully as I crawled off the bed. I looked at her with hungry eyes, if she only knew how hard it was to get up just to take my clothes off. I lowered my boxers and jogging pants, letting my swollen dick sprang free.

Madison’s eyes widen as I use my muscles to make it jump even more as I take off my t-shirt. Once it was removed, I crawled back on the bed.

“Dex, wait. Although I’ve waited forever for this to happen, I never imagined you would be so...”

Positioning my body between her legs, I begin to kiss her delicate brown skin. “And what would you never have imagined?” I ask, nipping at her left breast. I started sucking on her nipple like a hungry baby wanting its next meal.

Madison shivers underneath me. “Shit,” she moans.

It was like my dick had a mind of its own. It found her pussy and inched its way into her wet warmth. Looking up at her, I declare, “Madison, this is

your chance to stop this. This is not just a fuck for me, this is me sealing the commitment with the one woman I want to spend the rest of my life with.”

Tears fall from the side of her eyes as she softly lays her hands on my cheeks, then whispers “I only want you, Dex.”

With her agreeance, I surged forth, burying my dick so far inside of her. We both moan with pleasure. I’ve dreamed about this moment every night, feeling her walls tightening against my dick.

Madison locks her legs behind me, pulling me deeper in. I wanted our first time to be an experience of not only our bodies combining but one neither one of us would ever forget. The way she was gripping my dick threw that shit out the window. We would get the experience, but it’s about to be one hell of a ride.

As I increased the tempo of my strokes, Madison’s head fell back, and she was breathing hard. Pure ecstasy covered her face as I swirled my hips, making sure my pelvis rubbed against her clit.

“Fuck, Dexter,” she cried when I found her g-spot.

I remain silent, continuing to give her what the both of us have wanted for years. Sliding in and out of her walls, we continue to explore each other’s bodies. Nibbling at her throat, I noticed the scar on her shoulder, one that she endured at the hands of that asshole who held her captive all those months. I gave that area special attention with my mouth, leaving a nice hickey so when she looked at it in the mirror, she would remember the pleasure I gave her. She had several others and I planned on doing the same to each one.

As Madison’s nectar coated my dick, she surprised me when she moved to the side, letting my member slide out of her. She smiled, looking at me with playful eyes.

“If you’re going to put your stamp on it, then I think I should be the one to help you do it.”

I had no time to react when she somehow rolled me over onto my back, straddled me and started riding my joystick. My toes curled up as I arched my back and enjoyed being ridden.

Madison rides me as she rakes her fingernails up my sides. When she gets to my hair, she says, “This is what I have been waiting for, Dexter and I know you have too.”

“It is,” I grunt,” clutching her hips.

I begin to fuck her harder from underneath. Madison squeals as she places her palms on my chest, matching my strokes.

“Madison,” I snarl, feeling my balls start to swell.

Madison closes her eyes as she digs her nails into my skin. Normally that shit would have been a no go for me but from the pain and enjoyment I was experiencing, I dare not stop her.

Gripping her hips, I said, “That’s right baby, ride your man.”

That seemed to make her even wetter as she picked up her pace. Madison’s head falls back as she screams out my name. Her nectar gushes from her honey hole, igniting my own release. Reaching up, I cup the back of her neck and pull her down to meet my awaiting lips. Our sweat covered bodies rhythmically move, mixing our cum as one.

As we begin to slow our tempo, Madison’s body relaxes on top of me. Our hearts beat on sync as if we’re sharing the same organ. I wrap my arms around her as she rests her head on my chest.

“Will it always be like this?” her warm breath tickles against my skin.

Kissing the top of her head, I reply, “No, it will be better each time.”

“I love you, Dexter,” she murmurs.

“I love you too, Madison and always will,” I respond, holding her tightly. We laid like that until sleep took over the both of us.

Sometime later, I was awakened to knocking on the bedroom door. Madison was no longer on my chest. I guess during our slumber we ended up on our sides with her laying in front of me. I glanced at the alarm clock. Shit, it was already after seven in the evening.

Carefully I slid out of bed, trying not to wake Madison. I hurried and put my jogging pants on. Grabbing the knob, I twist it, then open the door. Mathew stands on the other side with one of my assault rifles in his hand. The look on his face let me know something was wrong.

“What’s going on?” I ask, stepping in the hallway, pulling the door close behind me.

“I’m not sure, but there has been a car sitting across the street that looks suspicious,” he said.

“Maybe, it’s one of my neighbors or someone there to visit them.”

He nods, but says, “Yeah, I thought that too, but they’ve been there for over two hours now and no one has gotten out.”

“Fuck,” I hiss. “Where’s Papa?”

“He’s in the living room, keeping an eye on the car,” Mathew responds.

Rubbing my neck, I inquired, “Can you see inside the windows to see how many might be inside?”

“No, the tint is dark, and dusk has set in.”

Quickly formulating a plan, I tell Mathew, “Go back in the living room with Papa. See if you can get the license plate number, if not I’ll check my cameras. Don’t do anything until I get there.”

“Alright, Dex but hurry up. I got a weird sense about this, and you know my senses are never wrong,” he said before walking away.

Mathew wasn’t lying about his senses. Nine point five times out of ten if he felt off by someone or a situation, you should trust it. I remember one time we were out pulling lines for gators and halfway through it, Mathew told us it was time to head back to the dock. Papa and I questioned him why and his only answer was, “Nothing good is going to come from these last lines.”

I started to question him why, but Papa stopped me and the next thing I knew he was steering the boat back the way we came. The next morning, there were men from the local Fish and Game department notifying us about two amateur poachers who died on our portion of the swamp. Since then, Papa has always asked him how their day would go and if Mathew said stay in the office, then they would. Not sure how this last one passed him.

Madison is still in la-la land when I go back to the room. Going into my closet, I grab a pair of black jeans and a t-shirt. After throwing them on, I put on a pair of steel-toed work boots. Next I went into my hidden room to grab some things we could use along with my vest, pistols, and wrist computer.

After securing the rooms, I left, rushing to my office. Doing a quick access of the security cameras, I was able to get the license plate of the vehicle just in case Mathew or Papa couldn’t see it. Before making my way to the living room where they’re at, I entered the plate number into a secure database on my wrist computer that could tell me who was the owner of the car.

By the time I reached the living room, I got an alert.



# Chapter 13

## Tech

“Still no movement?” I ask aloud, looking at my phone.

“Nope,” Mathew answers. “They’re just sitting there.”

Opening the information on the car, it said that the black late model Crown Victoria is registered to Phillip White from Gilmer, Texas. Under normal circumstances, I wouldn’t think anything of it, but there was no coincidence that the car is randomly out there and it’s from Madison’s hometown. No, these motherfuckers were here for Madison and me. No doubt Rang must have had my truck’s license plates run. I guess he wasn’t as stupid as I thought. Quinton went crying to Rang about what I did to him. Not only could these assholes be here to retaliate for humiliating them, but for also sending Quinton’s bitch ass to the hospital.

“What do you want us to do, Dex?” Mathew questions.

Looking up from the screen, I tell them, “Papa, you’re going to stay and make sure no one gets in here. When you see the streetlights go out, don’t panic, it’s just me.” He holds up the double barreled shotgun in his hand. It doesn’t surprise me that he and Mathew have my guns. I have them hidden all around the house and know every location.

“Mathew, you and I are about to go armadillo hunting.”

His smile widens, already knowing what we’re about to do. Armadillo hunting has always been something Mathew and I loved to do only this time we’re about to use our concept on humans.

“Are we going to skin them too?” Mathew excitedly asks.

Though it was a good idea, I replied, “Not quite, little brother. Come on. We’re going out the back.”

“I don’t have to tell you boys to be careful because I know you will,” Papa says.

I give him a quick nod before leading Mathew through the house to the patio doors. Once outside, I tell Mathew, “We’re going to go down the alley, then cross the street. We’ll go up its alley to the house those bastards are parked in front of but before we do all of that, I’m going to knock out the streetlights. We’ll only have about a fifteen-minute window to get all of this done, you know the drill, smoke, and choke. Got it?”

“Got it.”

Lifting my wrist, I tap on the computer, pulling up the power grid for my block. After a few seconds of doing what I’m good at, the block goes dark.

“Damn,” Mathew whispers.

I bump his shoulder as we take off into darkness. Less than five minutes later, we jumped the fence into my neighbor’s backyard. Moving along the side of the house, we make it to the front and the car is still there. We creep to the back of the car and huddle down. Digging in my vest, I pull out a small smoke canister. After removing the pin, I slide it into the tail pipe of the car, then over it with my hand.

It doesn’t take long for the smoke to start filling the interior. There was one cough followed by another that sounded different letting us know there were two occupants inside. When they couldn’t take it anymore, the front doors of the Crown Victoria opens. As the men step out coughing and gagging, Mathew rushed the passenger, putting him in a sleeper hold and I locked onto the driver. As they try to fight we kick the doors close. We keep applying pressure as we drag them across the street to my house. Their fight is just about gone when we get them to the backyard to my shed.

Mathew’s guy goes limp first, then mine. After letting their bodies drop, I entered the code to unlock the shed door. We pulled them inside, then bound them into two lawn chairs I had inside. I then taped their mouths in case they regained consciousness before the real party started.

“What now?” Mathew asks.

“I need to make a phone call,” I replied, pulling out my phone. After hitting the speed dial, I put it on speaker.

“Hey, Tech,” Mad Dog greets.

“I need you to get to my house.”

“What’s going on?” he asks.

Sighing, I reply, “I’ll explain when you get here, but I need you to do something else for me.”

“What’s that?”

“Bring your brother-in-law with you,” I return.

“Fuck,” Mad Dog lets out before I end the call.

That was probably the last thing he wanted to hear, but if these men are a part of the South Dallas Boys, then Trappa needed to know. Mad Dog and Trappa’s relationship is hard to explain. They respect each other, but at the

same time, they don't like one another. They keep the peace between the two of them because of their love for Janae.

"Mathew, watch these two while I go in and check on Papa and Madison. If they wake up and start to get reckless, knock their asses back out."

"You already know, big brother."

Stepping out of the shed, the streetlights come back on. If any of my neighbors had cameras aimed in front of their houses, they wouldn't be able to see what we did to the men. But for precautionary measures, I used my wrist computer to wipe out any of their footage.

When I entered the house and went back into the living room to talk to Papa, Madison was sitting on the sofa. She jumped up when her eyes locked with mine.

"Dex, what's going on?" she asks, coming over to me, then locking her arms around me.

I do the same, explaining, "There was a car parked out front. We believe the men inside are connected with Quinton and Rang."

Madison pulls back. "What? But how?"

"Love, nowadays you can look up anyone's license plate and get their information. That was a mistake on my part. I should've decrypted mine. I didn't think Quinton nor Rang had the sense to do so. Obviously, they did. Don't worry, we're going to handle this."

Madison studies me before saying, "I hope you do because I don't want to spend the rest of my life looking over my back. I feel like Quinton wants to strong arm me into being with him or he'll make my life a living hell."

"And neither one will happen," I snap, causing Madison to jump.

Papa grasps my arm, saying, "Dexter, why don't you go back outside with Mathew."

Turning to leave, I somewhat felt bad about how I reacted, but at the same time, I wanted Madison to know as long as I'm around, that motherfucker would never have the opportunity to put her in either type of situation.

Stepping outside the patio doors, I hear, "Tech?"

Closing the door, I respond, "Yeah, it's me."

Mad Dog and Trappa appear from the side of the house. Awkwardly, I stare at them. Did they come together or meet up at the same time? Since they weren't trying to kill each other, I guess that was a good thing.



Approaching, Mad Dog asks, “Tech, we’re here...what the fuck is going on?”

“Look Mad Dog, there was a car parked outside of my house with no movement. I ran the plate, and it came back to someone in Gilmer. That shit is no coincidence.”

Trappa steps forward with all of his brawniness. “So, what the fuck does that have to do with me?”

“Follow me,” I tell them, then walk off towards the shed. Once there, I give them a quick look over my shoulder before opening the door. They follow me inside.

“Shit,” Mad Dog sighs, seeing the two unconscious men bound in the chairs and Mathew standing behind them.

Trappa goes over to them and lifts their heads one by one. “Okay, so you have these two tied up in here, it still doesn’t explain why I’m here. Is it because the three of us are Black?” He faces me. “We all don’t know each other.”

Rolling my shoulders, I say, “I know that, but in this case they were sent here from Gilmer, and they do have a connection with you.”

“And how’s that?” Trappa asks, folding his arms across his wide chest.

“Does the name Rang sound familiar to you?” I question.

Trappa tilts his head to the side, frowning. “Yeah, I know the motherfucker. He came up with us in Oak Cliff. He was a cocky motherfucker who thought he was the shit that is until he tried to screw some old heads out of their money, and they beat the shit out of him. After that, his ass moved out of the city because he knew if they came across him again, they were going to kill him. But that was years ago. Last I heard, he was locked up.”

“Well, he’s out, living in Gilmer,” I inform. “A couple nights ago, I had the pleasure of running into him.”

I proceeded to fill him in about what happened at the club with Madison, Quinton, and Rang. I then told him about the incident at Madison’s apartment.

“Trappa,” I start. “The reason why I asked Mike to bring you is because Rang is saying that he is a leader of the South Dallas Boys. I need to know if he is affiliated with you before I start killing off his men.”

Anger fills Trappa’s face as he says, “Hell no, his ass is not affiliated with me. There’s only one South Dallas Boys and we reside in fucking Oak

Cliff, and only Oak Cliff not no motherfucking Gilmer, Texas. Wake their asses up, I have some questions.”

Mathew was already prepared as he picked up a water bucket and doused it over the first guy’s head. As the guy is jolted awake, Mathew does the same to the other. Their bodies wiggle in the chairs as they try to shake the water from their eyes.

When they’re able to see, the two men frantically stare at me, Mad Dog, and Trappa. Trappa casually walks over to them, moving his hands up and down.

“Calm down fellows. Everything is straight. My people didn’t know you, so they called me over to help sort this out. I’m going to take the tape off your mouths, then you can let them know you weren’t trying to harm them, okay?”

As they nod their heads, I’m wondering where Trappa was going with this. It’s as if his anger has changed to sympathy for these assholes.

“There you go,” Trappa says as he removes the tape. “Now, explain to them why you parked outside of their house.”

“Look man, I don’t know what is up with these crackers, but we were waiting for my girl to get home,” the second one lies.

The first one adds, “Exactly. They filled the car with smoke, then jumped us. Their asses are racist.”

“I got your racist,” I began but stopped when Trappa held up his hand, then turned towards me and Mad Dog.

“It’s okay,” he simply says, smiling then faces the men. “From what I heard; it was just a misunderstanding, correct fellows?”

“Yep,” the first one agrees, smiling back at Trappa.

Before shit could register to them, Trappa had pulled his pistol from the back of his slacks and knocked them both in the face. I think I saw a tooth fly out of the second guy’s mouth. Everything happened so fast, I’m not sure if my eyes caught it all.

“Do you think we’re some fucking idiots?” Trappa snarls as the men groan, spitting out blood. “Either you tell us why you were really here or shits about to get a lot worse.”

The second one puts on a brave face, boasting, “Man, fuck you with your Uncle Tom ass. We South Dallas Boys and if you kill us our brothers are going to kill you.”

Trappa stares at him before letting out a boisterous laugh. “Do you hear this shit? ‘*We South Dallas Boys.*’ Hell, the South Dallas Boys that I know would never find themselves in this type of situation.”

Now the two men start laughing before the first one says, “I highly doubt you would know any of our people. Look at your lame ass.”

With quick reflexes, Trappa grabs his dreadlocks, yanking the man’s neck back, then thrusting the barrel of the pistol in his mouth, causing him to gag.

“You call me lame, but you’re the one deep throating my gun right now. Getting back to the reason why we’re all here, I need for you two to be honest with us and things will go smoothly for you,” he said before pushing the gun deeper in the man’s mouth, then removing it.

The second guy watches his friend cough up more blood, then spews, “Just wait until our leader hears about this shit. All of your asses are dead.”

Trappa picks up one of my shop towels and cleans off his pistol, returning, “And who exactly is your leader?”

The man chuckles, replying, “Your Carlton Banks looking ass has probably never heard of him, but anyway his name is Rang.”

Trappa takes a few more swipes over the gun. “Rang, you say?”

“That’s what the fuck I said,” the man snaps.

Tossing the towel to the side, Trappa digs into his pocket and pulls out a silencer. As he’s screwing it onto the pistol, he asks, “I’ve heard of the name Rang, but tell me...have you heard of Trappa?”

Honestly at this moment, if these men were Caucasian the blood would have drained from their faces. With fear in their eyes, their jaws dropped. You could tell they were very aware of his name.

Guy number one puts on a brave face, saying, “Yeah, we’ve heard of him, but he follows orders from Rang just like the rest of us.”

Mad Dog and I remained silent as Trappa said, “Is that so? I heard Trappa doesn’t take orders from no one.”

“And why is that?” Guy number one asks.

“Because I’m Trappa motherfucker and today is your lucky day. Not only do you get to meet me, but if you don’t come clean, you’ll have the privilege of going out by a true OG. The choice is yours,” Trappa lays out.

Guy number one starts telling everything, “Trappa, we didn’t know these were your people. Rang told us to come and sit on the house. If we

saw the girl, snatch her up and if the white guy got in the way, take him out. That's it."

The other chimes in, "We were only doing what we were ordered. You can understand that?"

"I can, but now I'm wondering why the two of you are telling me all of this since I'm just a soldier like you all. That's what you said?" Trappa asks, pointing his pistol towards guy number one.

"Look, Trappa, if we would have known you were involved in this, we would've declined the job. Us being South Dallas Boys should account for something," Guy number two pleads only to spur Trappa on.

"Motherfucker, neither one of you are South Dallas Boys! Has any one of you ever lived in Dallas?"

They look at each other before the first one replies, "No, but we have family that lives there."

"Not the fucking same," Trappa growls as he shoots him in the thighs, then does the same to other. While they cry out in pain, Trappa goes over to my workstation and picks up my hand held saw.

After starting it, he tells them, "If you think that shit hurts, imagine how this is going to feel."

"Trappa, please," they beg.

Trappa gives them no mercy as he uses the tool to sever their throats.

While the men's bodies slump in the chairs, he swirls around to me. "Just so you know, you may have a personal vendetta against Rang, but for me it's much more."

"I respect that," I say, extending my hand out to him. In Trappa fashion, he looks at it, then shakes it.

Mad Dog reaches for my arm, asking, "Tech, they now know where you live. Maybe you, Madison, Mathew, and Papa should go back to Louisiana until all of this is settled."

"Fuck that!" I counter. "I can keep my family safe here."

Trappa looks as if he wants to argue but keeps his thoughts to himself. I glare at Mad Dog, who says, "And I know you can. All I'm suggesting is while we take care of things here, go and enjoy your swamps. Eat the snakes and gators, or whatever the hell you all eat out there."

I glared at him before stating. "Nobody is going to run me away from my house. You know my house is safer than fucking Fort Knox. Hell, and

with Mathew and Papa here, they only add two more guns to the fight. Plus, after tonight, neither one of them will leave.”

“Damn, right,” Mathew co-signs, stepping to my side. “We’re not going anywhere.”

Seeing that we’re adamant about our decision, Mad Dog says, “Then I guess we better get ready to fight.”

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# Chapter 14

## Tech

Three hours later, I was getting back into bed with Madison. She nestled up against me as I gently wrapped my arms around her. I debated on whether or not to tell her what happened tonight. I don't want to keep her in the dark because I knew deep down she needed to know Rang had sent his men here. At the same time I didn't want to send her into panic mode either. Whether I tell her or not, there will be consequences.

As I lay, listening to Madison's soft breaths, I replay the hours before in the shed.

"Then I guess we better get ready to fight." Mad Dog said. "Tech, call the Things and have them come collect the bodies."

After calling the brothers, we began to come up with a plan. We agreed with Trappa as far as him setting up a meeting with Rang. I've never dealt with his side of life, but I also knew how he felt. I would feel the same way if another faction popped up and was calling themselves Delta Force Security.

By the time the twins arrived, the plan was to meet up with Rang and his people, make sure that pussy Quinton was there, and handle this shit once and for all.

Mathew and I went outside to move our trucks out of the driveway as Mad Dog and Tech stayed behind to help the twins load the corpses into the body bags they brought. Once the trucks were out of the way, I jumped in the van they drove and backed it all the way to the shed.

After getting the bodies in the van, we agreed to meet at the office in the morning. When they left, Mathew and I began to scrub down the shed.

"Dex, you know I will always have your back," Mathew said.

Pouring more bleach on the floor, I replied, "I know, little brother and thank you for it."

Mathew swirls his mop in the bleach before running it over the blood stain close to him. "You don't have to thank me. I did what family is supposed to do for one another." He stops mopping up the blood to look at me. "Dexter, I know I agreed with you earlier because I would never disagree with you in front of others outside of our family, but are you sure

you want to stay here while all of this is going on? I know how you feel about Madison, so I only ask because you do have options.”

Twisting the cap on the bleach bottle, I tell him, “Mathew, as far as I’m concerned, I only have one option and that’s to stay here and protect the ones I love.”

He smiles, saying, “As Papa would say, *‘Spoken like a true Broussard.’*”

“That’s the only way I know,” I laugh as we continue to clean the shed.

Now as I lay with the woman of my heart in my arms, wondering how this supposed meeting with Rang and Quinton is going to go; I’d like to think they would bury the hatchet and let bygones be bygones...but I know otherwise.

When those two men don’t return, Rang would only come stronger with more men. Before that can happen, we’ll be ready for their asses. I went into my office to track down any loose ends I might’ve overlooked on Rang, Quinton, and the rest of their people.

A sigh leaves Madison, pulling me from my thoughts. She takes hold of my hand and brings it up to her lips, then kisses it before placing it against her heart.

“Sleep, Dexter,” she whispers.

I kiss the back of her head, then close my eyes, praying that with Madison close to me I wouldn’t have to worry about having any bad dreams from my past.

When my alarm clock went off the next morning at seven, I found myself alone in bed. Sitting up, I looked around the room and found a Delta Force shirt with tan carpenter pants neatly folded at the end of the bed.

Chuckling, I threw the covers off of me, then got out of bed. Hell, if Madison picked out those items, I wouldn’t have taken offense if she picked out my underwear too. I guess that was a step she wasn’t ready to take just yet. I head to the master bathroom to take a shower.

Forty minutes later, I’m fully dressed and heading to the kitchen. When I reach the entrance, I hear Papa tell Mathew, “Boy, pull that shit back into a ponytail. Madison and I have prepared this meal and we don’t want to see any strands of your hair in it.”

I stand at the entrance to watch the scene in front of me.

Mathew bucked his eyes as he looked at Papa, then me. “Papa, Madison’s hair is just as long as mine and I don’t see hers pulled back into a ponytail.”



“That’s because I’ve cooked with her these last two days and I have not seen a strand of her hair in this kitchen, but your hair on the other hand sheds like a dogs. Thank God it’s thick otherwise you’d be bald headed by now.”

Madison giggles as Mathew grumbles.

“Good morning, Shaggy,” I tease.

“Whatever,” he says, walking past me.

“You could always get a low cut like mine,” I add.

“Never,” he yells from the hallway.

Papa smirks, looking at me. “Never mind your brother, Dex. Madison and I are finishing up. Have a seat.”

On the table was already Papa’s seasoned eggs, bacon, ham, grits, biscuits, and fresh cut fruit. What else could they possibly add to all of this?

“Papa and I put a spin on making chorizo and eggs. I hope you like it,” Madison says, answering my question, sitting next to me.

Honestly, I’ve heard of the chorizo sausage but have never had it. If Papa had his hand in making it, then I’m sure it would be delicious.

After they put the platter on the table, Mathew was coming back in with his hair pulled back in a ponytail.

Like before, we joined hands and Papa said grace over the food. When he was done, we started loading our plates.

The first thing I tried was their chorizo and eggs. Not going to lie, I had to take another bite before I could give them my honest opinion.

“So what do you think,” Madison asks.

“It’s amazing,” I reply, eating another fork full.

Papa takes a sip of his coffee before saying, “Well, I’m glad you like it. It was Madison’s idea for us to add something to an old Spanish favorite. Me personally, I would have been fine with a roll of Jimmy Dean, but it was on the list that she sent us to the store for.”

“Well, I’m glad you got it,” I return, moving on to the other foods.

As we made small talk while eating, I felt I could put off telling Madison about last night, but that shit went out the window when she asked, “So, do any of you want to tell me what happened last night?”

“What are you talking about?” Papa questioned.

Madison innocently glared at him before replying, “Papa, I woke up last night without Dexter in bed with me. I came in the living room to find you,

peeking through the blinds holding a rifle.” She studied every one of us. “I’m not stupid. I know something must have happened.”

Papa and Mathew glance at me, causing Madison to look my way.

“You’re right, something did happen last night,” I say.

“Okay, what was it?” she queries.

“Rang and Quinton sent two men here last night to take you and off me, but things didn’t go as they planned. We had to neutralize them.”

Madison’s eyes widen as she lets what I said sink in. Tears begin to form as she brings her trembling hand up to her mouth. “Oh, my God. How did they find us? Are we safe here, now? What are we going to do?”

I dropped my fork to engulf her in my warmth as her tears started to flow. “You’re safe, love. You’re safe. No one is going to hurt you, ever.”

“But how can you say that, Dexter? They know where you live. Who’s to say there aren’t any more of them waiting outside for us?” she sobs against my chest.

This is why I didn’t want to tell her. I’m sure knowing this is bringing back some of the trauma from her past.

Wiping away the tears from her cheek, I calmly say, “Madison, look at me.” Gliding my fingers under her chin, I slowly lift it. Her beautiful doe eyes stare into mine. “As long as there is breath in my body, I will kill anyone who threatens you to bring harm to you. That is what a real man does for the woman he loves. I love you Madison, you believe me, right?”

Another tear falls as she nods. “I do, Dexter and I love you too.”

Madison closes her eyes as I kiss her forehead. “Then trust me when I say, you’re safe.”

“I do, I’m just sorry that I brought this to your doorstep.”

Studying her, I insist, “There’s nothing for you to be sorry for Madison. You didn’t bring shit to my door, those two assholes did. They started this shit, and you best believe I’m going to finish it.” Looking at Mathew and Papa, I tell them, “I have to go into the office this morning, but while I’m doing that, watch out for her. This isn’t what I planned when I asked you all to come out here, but I’m glad you’re here.”

“Happy to be here,” Papa says. “These people have got my future granddaughter ready to have a mental breakdown, and I can’t have that.” Papa fixates on me. His eyes darken to those of our Creole ancestors. In a baritone voice, Papa declares, “You need to handle this shit.”

As his eyes return to their natural color, I promise, "Papa, I will." Focusing back on Madison, I tell her, "You're in good hands, but you already know that. I'll talk to you soon, but if you need me before that, call me, okay?"

"Okay," she returned.

I gave a quick peck on the lips, then got up from the table. Grabbing the keys to my truck, I rushed out of the house. The office opened at nine, but I was on a mission to get there before the others.

When I made it to the parking lot, I was surprised to see Mad Dog's truck already parked. After grabbing my laptops, I got out, then went to unlock the office door. To my surprise it was already unlocked. Mad Dog was sitting behind the counter when I entered.

"Commander," I greeted.

"Tech," he returned.

Moving further inside, I sat my gear on the counter. Trying to see where his head was this morning, I ask, "After last night, I think we have a solid plan. What do you think?"

Mad Dog continues to type away on the computer before looking up at me. "I think we do, but I just want you to know, the first indication that those men were watching you, you should have called me. I didn't say anything last night but I'm saying it now. Whether we're on a mission or its personal, we never let your comrades walk into a situation that they're not privy to."

Lowering my head because he's right. He should've been the first person I notified.

"I apologize, commander."

Seconds pass before Mad Dog says, "Accepted. Now I'm sure after last night you have acquired more intel on the wanna be South Dallas Boys of Gilmer."

Pulling out a stack of paperwork, I chuckle, saying, "Oh, you just don't know."

As he reads over the documents, the others start to trickle in. Me and the twins sat off to the side as Mad Dog gave the others a rundown on what had been going on. I thought it would have been a good thing for him to tell them but the way they're looking at me, have me thinking otherwise.

Blade is the first to speak, "So, you didn't feel the need to tell the rest of us what was going on?"

Moving my head from side to side, I say, “No, I just thought...”

It’s cut off by Venom. “We’ve been together the last, how many years?” he looks at the others. “Shit, since the day our squad was established, each and every one of us has relied on the next. Whether it’s personal or a mission.” Venom glared at me before saying, “Brother, you forgot that whatever intel you send out, it will be sent to all of us. Other than Mad Dog, the rest of us didn’t say shit. We were waiting for you to call your brothers in arms.”

Yeah, he got me on that. I can’t even argue with him about it.

Lethal clasps my shoulder, saying, “You know we’re here for you brother. Just like with Mad Dog and Janae, your fight is our fight. We’re in this shit together.”

Glancing around at my brothers, I’m thankful for having them in my life. We have been through some shit over the years and we’re still here to support each other.

Placing my hand on Lethal’s shoulder, I give it a squeeze, saying, “You’re right, brother. And I apologize for not calling you all last night. It won’t happen again.”

“Good,” Blade exalts, clapping his hands together. “Now, tell us about those assholes from last night.”

As I get ready to tell them, the door opens, and Trappa walks in.

“Thanks for coming,” I greet.

“No, problem. I’m in this shit now,” he returns. “After I got home last night, I sent a few of my soldiers to Gilmer to see what the streets were saying. They found out that when Rang and Quinton weren’t able to get in touch with those assholes, they knew shit didn’t go the way they planned. I was able to reach out to one of Rang’s relatives that still lives in Oak Cliff and got his phone number. I hit him up this morning and was able to set up a meeting between the two of us to talk about combining his fake ass South Dallas Boys with mine.”

“And when is that going to be?” Mad Dog asks.

“Tonight at ten. He’s supposed to send me the address to the location an hour and a half before we meet. His pussy ass is too scared to come to Oak Cliff,” Trappa replies.

Mad Dog runs his fingers through his hair. “Sounds like a setup. Do you think he may suspect you had any involvement with those pricks from last night?”

Trappa shrugs his shoulders. “He might have since I called him out of the blue after his men went missing, but I think he agreed because he sees this as his opportunity to get rid of me so he can take over.”

“Either way, when he sends you that address, forward it to me, so I can do recon on the spot,” I say. “Normally, we would have more time to scope out a location, but this time we’ll just have to deal with the time constraints.”

“I got you,” Trappa states.

“I have a better idea,” Mad Dog says. “Everyone will meet back here at eight. Trappa we’ll get you fitted with an earpiece and mini camera. When Rang sends you the address, we’ll head out ten minutes before you, that way we can scope out the area before you get there. Tech can find out everything we need on the drive. We’ll be pressed with time but think we can get the job done.”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” Trappa agrees, then digs into his pocket and pulls out a piece of paper. He hands it towards me. “This is the number he called from. Maybe you can do your thing and keep tabs on his ass throughout the day.”

“Appreciate it,” I returned, taking the paper from him.

Trappa smiles. “If you gentlemen will excuse me, I have to go and take care of some business. I’ll see you all back here later.”

Before he turned to leave, a weird expression fell upon his face as he looked over to Lethal. Lethal smirks, staring back at him. Could it be that he’s onto Blade and his little sister, Kayla’s relationship? They’ve done their best to keep it from him, but the way he’s glaring at Blade, I think Trappa has caught on.

After he leaves the office, Mad Dog whips his head towards Blade.

“You and Kayla better get your shit together because Trappa isn’t stupid. He might not have hard facts about the two of you, but he knows something. Either way, I don’t want to get caught up in any bullshit. You all need to get together and let him know what’s going on because I can guarantee if he approaches you first about it, it’s going to be ugly.”

Blade chuckles. “I’m not worried about him. We’ll let him know when we think he needs to know. Kayla is a grown woman who can make her own decisions without consulting her brother. He doesn’t intimidate or scare me. Even if he knows, Trappa will not come in between what Kayla and I have.”

Mad Dog raises his arms, saying, “Be that as it may, but we all know, until Trappa knows the truth, shit is going to hit the fan if he finds out on his own.”

“You let me handle that.” Blade winks at Mad Dog, brushing off his warning.

Mad Dog shakes his head at him, before telling us, “Except for Tech and I, the rest of you will do the orders for today. While you’re out, we will trace the number Trappa gave, and the information Tech has obtained. Maybe we’ll be able to check the hits on the local cellular towers to help us narrow down the radius of where Rang likes to hang out. It might give us an idea of the vicinity to the location he sends to Trappa. By the time you all return, we should have more information. If you have any problems on the sites today, call me. Any questions?”

After they reply, no, Mad Dog tells them, “Great, then we’ll see you all later this afternoon.”

As they left to load up security systems in the work trucks and vans, Mad Dog and I began phase one of recon on Rang, Quinton, and Gilmer, Texas.



# Chapter 15

## Madison

It seems like things have gone from bad to worse literally overnight. I honestly thought Quinton would let shit go after Dexter laid hands on him, but boy was I wrong. He and Rang have taken things to a whole different level. Both are fueled by their egos. Quinton because I finally saw past the façade he was truly hiding, and I didn't want anything to do with him. Plus, the fact Dexter stood up for me and made him look weak. Rang on the other hand, has his ass on his shoulders because I'm probably the only woman who didn't fall for his aggressive advances, and the fact Dexter and his brothers embarrassed him and his men in front of a crowd of spectators. It's sad when some men don't know when to let things go and since Quinton and Rang want to keep shit going, they're about to learn the hard way. I've seen Dexter and his brothers at work firsthand, and I for one know it won't end well for Quinton and the others. They might think that they're some badass gangsters, but they've come across the members of Delta Force.

Like I told Dexter earlier, I knew something was up when I went into the living room and saw Papa looking out the window with a gun in his hand. At first I started to approach him, but then thought otherwise. I didn't know if he might have been dealing with an episode from his condition and didn't want to startle him. When I saw his finger wasn't on the trigger, ready to shoot, I knew he was in his right frame of mind.

I've dealt with many patients like him and when their symptoms begin to get worse, any and every one is the enemy. Which is why there should not be any weapons or anything around that could harm themselves or others. Obviously, Dexter thought his grandfather was okay if he left him like that. So, I assumed there might've been a person trespassing and Dexter and Mathew went outside to confront them, leaving Papa to hold things down on the inside. Knowing the three of them were capable of handling the situation, I tiptoed back to Dexter's room and went back to bed.

I was awake when Dexter returned to bed a few hours later. I could feel the tension in his body. Not knowing what happened, I wanted to put his



mind at ease, so I kissed his hand, brought it to my heart and told him to sleep. That seemed to do the trick because I felt his muscles relax.

This morning, I woke up before him. After taking a shower and getting dressed, I wanted to help him out this morning, so I went into his closet and picked out his work shirt and pants. As much as I wanted to go through his dresser and pick out his underwear, I refrained. It's one thing to see the clothes hanging in a man's closet, but to go through his dresser drawers to me is a little invasive. I wouldn't want anyone to do that to me.

After Dexter left for the office, Papa and Mathew tried to keep my spirits up by telling me about some of the mischief Dexter used to get into when he was growing up. I laughed, but I don't think it caught up with the worry on my face.

Papa reached across the table and grabbed my hand. "*Pitit fi* (granddaughter), I know there are so many things going through your mind, but believe me, Dexter has nothing but your well-being on his." He chuckles, looking over at Mathew, then back at me. "Damn, Delta Force. Do you know why he left you in our care?"

I've learned that Papa is one of those people who has an infectious laugh where you find yourself laughing when you don't even know what the punchline is.

Snickering, I reply, "I do."

Papa grins wide. "Good because Delta Force is trained to be the men that they are. Yes, Dexter is one of them but before he was Dexter knew how to survive on his own in the bayou, and woodlands. I have always taught my boys how to survive. They went through so much shit with their parents, it's hard for them to open themselves to outsiders. Since Dexter has done that with you, it means that you are much more to him than anyone can describe and believe me that says a lot. Dexter has never brought anyone around us, especially one staying under the same roof, or sleeping in the same bedroom."

Papa picks up his coffee cup and takes a sip, never taking his eyes off of me. The butterflies of embarrassment start to spread their wings in my stomach.

Sitting the cup on the table, Papa says, "Don't fret, child. I know what it's like during the metamorphosis of love. You can only hide it for so long before the wings of love take on a life of themselves."

Laughing, I respond, “I swear Papa you are like an old book of sayings.”

Papa chuckles, returning, “No, I’m just an old man who has been on God’s earth a long time and who has done and seen enough to gain wisdom from both.”

“Well, let me pour up a fresh cup of coffee so I can pick your brain,” I giggle as he and Mathew join in.

I felt much better after talking with Papa. Even with some of the insights Mathew added about relationships, I knew being here with Dexter is where I needed to be. But as Mathew spoke, I wondered if he was giving me his own personal obstacles with the person he wanted to be with or if he was genuinely talking about me and Dexter. His words became so passionate, I took them as encouragement for me and Dexter.

Once we finished eating, I began to clear the table to wash the dishes, but Papa shooed me out of the kitchen, stating he and Mathew would take care of things. I’m not one for scouring pots or pans but since they were so adamant about it, I let them have it.

I went back to Dexter’s room and turned on the television. After finding some white noise in the background, I picked up a laptop he left on the nightstand. There was a post-it note on the top that had the password written on it. I scooted to the back of the headboard until it rested against my back.

I might not be able to physically go into work, but I could log in and check on my patients through the electronic notes entered in by my replacements. It’s not that I didn’t trust my co-workers. I know they will take care of my patients while I’m away. I’m just one of the nurses who really loves her job and wants to make sure my patients are being looked after in the same manner as if I was there.

An hour later, after reviewing the charts, I was relieved that there were no incidents, and everyone was doing fine. I closed the laptop and sat it to the side. Wanting to check in with my parents, I picked up my phone and dialed momma’s cell phone number.

On the fourth ring, momma answers, “Hello”

The commotion in the background.

“Hello, momma. How are you? What’s all that noise?” I question.

“Oh, hey baby. I’m...” she pauses, then says, “I’m alright.”

By the tone of her voice, I instantly knew something was wrong.

“Momma, what’s going on?”

“Madison,” she chokes.

“Momma, momma,” I hysterically yell into the phone.

“Madison,” daddy says. “We’re at Mother Frances in Tyler. James was shot this morning as he left the house on his way to school. It was a drive by, and the police are working on finding out who did it, but we know. Because of what happened, they have security guards posted outside his room. Don’t come home Madison. This is their way to get you back here. Don’t come, do you hear me?”

I feel like my whole world just shattered. It’s one thing to come after me but my family...hell no!

“Madison, Madison,” daddy calls out. “Did you hear what I said?”

“Yes, sir but I’m still coming.” I say, hanging up on him.

Leaping off the bed, I ran out of the room and found Papa and Mathew in the kitchen playing dominos.

“Mathew, I need to use your truck.”

He peers up at me. “Madison, now you know Dexter doesn’t want you going anywhere.”

“I don’t care. I need to use your truck, so either you give me the keys, or I will call an Uber or Janae to come and get me,” I declared.

Papa lays his domino tiles on the table, then asks, “Madison, child what is going on and why do you need to leave in such a rush?”

Fighting back my tears, I tell him, “James, my little brother was shot during a drive by this morning, and I know Quinton and Rang had something to do with it. I just need to get to Tyler.”

“Shit,” Papa says, standing. “Mathew, go start the truck up.”

“Yes, sir,” Mathew returns, jumping up, then leaving out of the house.

Papa walks over to me, then wraps his arms around me. “It’s going to be okay.”

“How can it be, Papa? If James was shot, then neither Quinton nor Rang are willing to let this go anytime soon. Maybe I should just go back to Quinton before anyone else gets hurt.”

Papa grasps my shoulders, pushing me away from him. “The hell you will! I won’t allow it. That’s what they want you to do, and I know from the short time we have spent together, you’re not the type of person to lay down and take shit from anyone.”

He was right. Since the time I was kidnapped years ago, the fright from it has had a hold on me. This shit has become personal on a level no one could monitor.

“The truck is ready,” Mathew said, coming into the kitchen as me and Papa were still staring at one another.

Papa released me. “We’ll do this, but you’ll have to be the one to call Dexter.”

“Fine,” I return, agreeing to anything that would get us on our way to Tyler. I scribbled down the address to the hospital, then gave it to Mathew.

As Papa and I got into Mathew’s truck, Mathew set the alarm before getting in. I guess I wasn’t moving fast enough to call Dexter because Papa hit the speed dial on his cellphone, then put it on speaker before handing it to me.

Dexter answered immediately. “Hey Papa, is everything okay?”

When I didn’t answer right away, Papa turned in his seat to face me. He gave me a look of I need to tell him, now.

Swallowing the lump of despair in my throat. I finally found my voice.

“Hey, Dex. It’s me.”

“Madison? Why are you calling me from Papa’s phone?”

I took a deep breath before telling him about the call I had with daddy.

Seconds passed before he asked, “Where are you now?”

“We’re on our way to Mother Frances in Tyler.”

“Fuck,” he murmurs under his breath. “Madison, give the phone to Papa.”

“Yeah?” Papa says, taking the phone.

“Papa, Mad Dog and I are leaving now. We’ll probably be about twenty minutes behind you all. If you run into any problems before we get there, you and Mathew know what to do.”

“We got this,” Papa returns. “You just hurry your asses up.” He ends the call, then looks back at me. “Don’t worry, everything is going to be fine.”

I gave a weak smile before looking out the window. I still couldn’t believe things had escalated to this. Quinton must be out of his damn mind if he thought I would ever want to have anything to do with him after his. I swore to myself that if Dexter didn’t kill his ass, I was going to.

It took us almost two hours, but we finally made it to the hospital. I was so out of it; I didn’t hear the plan Papa and Mathew had come up with to get me inside of the hospital without no one recognizing me.

Mathew finds a parking space close to the front entrance. He shuts off the engine, then twists in his seat to face me. He reaches into the middle console and pulls out face masks. He then holds one to me.

“Are you good with what Papa and I came up with?” he asks.

I awkwardly shake my head, taking the mask. “I’m sorry, but I wasn’t paying attention. Can you go over it again?”

“Put that on, then,” he says, pointing to the tan cowboy hat on the seat. “the hat. I’m going to go inside and see if they have any available wheelchairs. If those ass hats are around, they’ll expect you to walk in not rolled in. The mask and hat will help cover your face. While I’m there, I’m going to find out James’ room number. Got it?”

“Got it,” I reply, putting the mask on.

“I’ll be right back,” he said as he too put on a mask, then got out of the truck.

“I think this is going to work,” Papa says, donning his own mask.

“I hope so,” I state, grabbing the hat.

Less than ten minutes later, Mathew was coming out with a wheelchair. My nerves were getting the best of me as I constantly looked around the parking lot for Quinton’s vehicle. I side eyed every person who got out of an auto or came out of the hospital. My only hope was that Quinton, and his people didn’t know James was transferred here.

Mathew brings the wheelchair to my side of the truck, then opens the door.

As he helps me out and into the chair, he says, “James is in IUC five. He got out of surgery about an hour ago. The receptionist wouldn’t tell me about his condition, which I can understand with the HIPPA laws and shit. She said visiting hour doesn’t start for another forty-five minutes, but we could wait in the ICU waiting area until then.”

“Okay, that’s probably where momma and daddy are,” I voice as he moves the chair back, then closes the door.

“Well, let’s get going then,” Papa says, shutting his door.

I held my head down as Mathew started to push me towards the hospital. The three of us said nothing as we entered. Once we were in front of patient registration, Mathew turned left, taking us down a hallway. When that one opened up into another, Mathew went left again. After a couple more turns, we were at the ICU waiting room.

I wanted to jump out of the wheelchair when I saw my family sitting together, comforting each other. Daddy looked in our direction but didn't recognize me. He went back to consoling momma and Pilar.

As Mathew pushed me closer to them, momma looked up. At first she seemed confused but when she saw my eyes, she whispered, "Madison."

"It's me, momma," I softly cried, pulling the mask down.

We stood at the same time and hugged each other. Daddy and Pilar stood as well, wrapping their arms around us. I blame myself for all the pain they are feeling right now. I'm sure it's the same heartache they felt when I was missing for those months.

It took a few minutes, but we released each other.

"Madison, I thought I told you not to come," daddy fusses, then glares at Mathew and Papa. "Who are they?"

"Now daddy, you know that wasn't going to happen, and this is Holden and Mathew Broussard, Dexter's grandfather and brother," I reply.

Daddy raises his brow, questioning, "And where is Dexter? I thought he was supposed to be looking after you."

Papa steps forward, removing his mask. "My grandson had to go into the office this morning, but he's on his way here. Rest assured; your daughter is in good hands."

They stare at each other down as if trying to see which one will blink first. Honestly, I didn't have time for this, I just want to know how my baby brother is doing.

"Papa, why don't you and Mathew have a seat, okay?"

"Okay, *Pitit fi*."

As a gesture of respect, Papa extends his hand out to daddy. "It's nice to meet you, Mr. Rowe."

Daddy takes his hand and shakes it. "Same here, Mr. Broussard and it's Jack."

Papa let's daddy's hand go, responding, "Holden."

They give each other a nod before Papa and Mathew go sit in the chairs on the other side of the room.

"Momma, how's James?" I ask.

She takes my hand as we sit in the waiting room chairs. Daddy squats in front of us.

"He got out of surgery about an hour ago. The surgeon came in and said she was able to remove the bullet from his abdomen. They had to repair

damage to his colon, but she said James should be fine once it's healed."

I begin to cry again. Pilar sits next to me and rubs my back.

"Momma, I'm so sorry. All of this is my fault."

She squeezes my hand, saying, "This is not your fault, baby. You can't hold yourself responsible for the actions of cowards."

"But momma, it's me that they're after," I express.

"And it's you we're here to get," I hear from behind us.

Everyone turns around to see two of Quinton's friends, Morocco and Faison standing inside the waiting room with us. What the fuck?

They move their jackets to the side, showing us the guns tucked in their jeans.

Morocco chuckles, saying, "Here I told Faison you were too smart to come, but here you are. Shit, I just lost fifty bucks. I guess you weren't as smart as I thought."

"I want my damn money too," Faison laughs.

"There are cameras in here," I inform, standing.

"Oh, we know. So, if you don't want your family's deaths to be aired on the late night news, then I strongly suggest you come with us," Morocco threatens.

Papa rises from his chair and addresses them. "Sir, my son and I are here to see my dying ailing wife. We don't want to be a part of whatever you all have going on. My dear Susie probably won't make it through the night. Please, let us go to be with her. I don't want to leave this earth without saying goodbye to her. I promise my son and I will not alert the authorities. We just want to be with her when the good Lord calls her home."

Morocco keeps his eyes trained on Papa as Faison whispers something to him. Morocco takes out his cellphone, then snaps a picture of Papa and Mathew.

"If security or the police come in here, I will send this to our men waiting outside. Cameras or not, they won't hesitate to shoot your asses. You're lucky Faison doesn't want to deal with blood on our hands."

"Thank you, sir. Thank you. It won't have to come to that," Papa says as he and Mathew stand, then head towards the door.

Morocco and Faison take their focus off of them and back on us.

"As I was saying, Madison, you need to come with us. Quinton and Rang are expecting you," Morocco says with a smirk. "Your brother has

already been shot, how many more of your family members need to follow in his footsteps before you realize, there is no way out of this.”

As hard as their asses wanted to be, they should have kept an eye on Papa and Mathew. While they kept trying to convince me to go with them, neither were paying attention to what was about to happen.

When Papa and Mathew were behind them, they quickly punched the two in the back of the heads, catching them off guard. They removed their guns, and aimed it at them, changing the dynamics in the room. Not even five seconds later, Dexter and Mad Dog are entering the room.

“What the hell is going on in here?” Dexter asks.

Papa waves the gun at Morocco and Faison. “These two are here to take Madison to those assholes.”

Dexter and Mad Dog charge towards the two but Papa stops them.

“Boys, no. There are cameras in here.”

Dexter scowls at them before raising his wrist. He began to tap away on what looked like a watch but was larger. When he finishes, he snarls, “The video has been erased and the camera is disabled. Now we can beat their asses.”

“No, you won’t,” Papa throws back. “What we need to do now is get these fuckers out of here and find out what they know.” He pokes Morocco in the back with the barrel of the pistol. “Is there really more of you outside and don’t fucking lie?”

Morocco chuckles, “Why don’t you walk out there and find out.”

Faison joins him, adding, “All I know is if our people don’t see us leave out of here, they’ll come looking, so I suggest you let us go.”

Mathew punches him in the side causing Faison to wince. “Shut the fuck up before I hand deliver you to the emergency room.

“Tech, how do you want to do this?” Mad Dog asks.

“Knock their asses out,” he orders Papa and Mathew.

Before Morocco or Faison could fight back, Papa and Mathew flipped the pistols in their hands and used the butt of the guns to hit them in the temples, dropping them to the floor.

“Mathew, help me and Mad Dog get their asses into the chairs. We’re going to prop them up as if they are sleeping,” Dexter directs.

In no time they had Morocco and Faison in the chairs with their legs extended out in front of them crossed. They pulled their hats down over their brow and their hands resting in their laps.



“We need to get the hell out of here in case they do have someone waiting on them,” Mad Dog states.

“I’m not leaving my baby,” momma rushes out.

“Paula’s right, I’m not leaving my boy here by himself,” daddy declares.

Scared for the both of them, I argue, “But daddy what if they send more men up here? You can’t take them on by yourself.”

“Madison’s right, daddy.” Pilar agrees. “We have to come up with something that will keep all of us safe. Obviously, we can’t go back home because of this, but at least James has those armed guards outside his room.”

Dexter walks over to daddy, saying, “Mr. Rowe, if it will make you feel better, I can fix it so James can be put in a private room where you and Mrs. Rowe can stay with him. I can also make him confidential to where no one other than the doctors and nurses taking care of him are the only ones who know that he is here. That should have been done in the first place since he is a gunshot victim. If anyone else tries to look him up, I can have it show that he was transferred out again.”

Everyone turns to Morocco as he begins to groan. Mathew strolls over to him, then pops him again, sending him back to la-la land.

“Whatever you’re going to do, you need to do it now before Sleeping Beauty number two starts to come too,” he said.

Daddy speaks before Dexter. “We own property in the country located between here and home. It’s an old farmhouse sitting on ten acres. The power is on. I go out there twice a month to do some fishing and hunting. You all can go there. The girls know where the spare key is.”

“I’m staying here with you and momma, daddy,” Pilar says.

Daddy shakes his head from side to side. “No, Pi. Go with your sister. Your momma and I will be fine.”

“But, daddy,” she starts to argue.

“No buts Pilar. You’re going with them,” daddy demands.

She quietly weeps as she hugs momma.

I interject. “Pilar, momma and daddy along with James are going to be alright. No one knows about the farmhouse, so we’ll be safe there.”

Dexter digs in his pocket and pulls out his keys. He hands them to Mad Dog. “Can you go with Papa and Mathew and bring my truck around to the back of the hospital. I’ll get the address to the farmhouse from Mr. Rowe

and text it to you. You can then forward it to the guys and Trappa. Tell them to meet us there.”

Mad Dog nods. “We’ll be waiting downstairs.”

Dexter then tells Papa and Mathew, “Give me those assholes guns.”

They hand over the guns before leaving the waiting room with Mad Dog. Dexter uses the end of his shirt to wipe away their fingerprints. Once he’s done, Dexter carefully wraps Morocco’s hand around the butt and trigger of the first pistol before sliding in his waist of his jeans. He then moves on doing the same with Faison.

“Let’s go check on James,” Dexter says once he is done. “I’m sure the guards would love to hear about these two in here with visible weapons showing.”

We left the waiting room with Morocco and Faison still in a slumbering stupor. When we reached James’ room, Dexter pulled one of the guards to the side and whispered something to him. The guard spoke into the walkie on his shoulder. Alarms started to go off with staff and other visitors going into a frenzy. The next thing we heard was that the hospital was going into a Code White, indicating a violent person on the premises.

It didn’t take long to see members of the Tyler police department rushing towards the waiting room in full tactical gear. Less than twenty minutes later, they were dragging Morocco and Faison with their arms behind them in handcuffs being escorted down the hallway. They were screaming their innocence, but having the guns on them, spoke a different story. Plus, I would bet money that the two of them had prior convictions that would add to their bullshit.

One of the members of administration came into James room and spoke to Dexter on the side. After he left, Dexter told us that James’ was being moved two floors up, under an alias. That seemed to calm momma and daddy down. Daddy then gave him the address to the farmhouse, and he sent it to Mad Dog. He and daddy then moved to the other side of the room to speak privately.

Twenty minutes had passed before transport came to take James to his new room. We watched the two nurses as they connected him to the portable monitors.

James’ new room was twice as big as the last. Like Dexter said, there were two recliner chairs that unfolded out to sleepers.

While the nurses were hooking James up, momma embraced Dexter, saying, “Thank you so much, Dexter.”

Dexter hugs her back, saying, “There’s no need to thank me, Mrs. Rowe. Madison is my family which makes all of you family as well. Therefore, I will do whatever needs to be done to keep my family safe.”

“And we thank you for that, son,” daddy tells him.

After saying our goodbyes to momma and daddy, we raced through the hallways to the back elevators. When we got off the elevator on the first floor, we headed for the back exit doors.

When we stepped outside, Mathew’s and Dexter’s truck were waiting on us. Pilar and I got in the back of Dexter’s truck, and he got in the front passenger side. Mad Dog already had the coordinates in the GPS to the farmhouse. He pulled off first, with Mathew following.

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# Chapter 16

## Tech

The only thing that kept me from tearing those pricks head off was Papa. After hearing what they were there to do, I was ready to flip my shit and deal with the consequences later. I'm just glad we got to the hospital when we did. I'm also extremely grateful for Papa and Mathew for handling their asses the way they did. Not to take anything away from Mr. Rowe because I know he was probably weighing his options, but he had the ladies to think about. I'm sure the thought of putting them in more danger is what kept him from reacting. But as a man, a husband, and a father your first instinct is to protect the ones you love. I hope he's not beating himself up over the situation.

As Mad Dog drove along the two-lane rural highway, he and I didn't speak much. We would have our time to go over things when the girls weren't around.

Madison called her parents so she and Pilar could check on them and James. Mrs. Rowe told her that James woke up for a few minutes, then fell back to sleep. They were excited to hear that. Madison told them they would call back later once we made it to the farmhouse.

When we entered a town about twenty miles from the farmhouse, I told Mad Dog to pull into the Walmart located off the highway. The girls were going to need food and essentials.

Once he parked the truck, I pulled out my wallet and removed my credit card. I turn in my seat to hand it to Madison.

"Get whatever you think the both of you will need. Make sure you get a lot of groceries. Papa and Mathew will go inside with you. I need to talk with Mad Dog, then I'll come in and find you, okay?"

"Okay," she replies as Papa opens her door and Mathew does the same on the other side for Pilar.

Papa glances at me. "We'll escort these pretty ladies inside."

"Thank you," I tell him, then say to Madison, "I'll be right behind you."

She smiles, then lets Papa help her out of the truck. After he and Mathew shut the doors, we keep an eye on them until they enter the store.

“So, the guys are going to bring our gear and theirs to the farmhouse. Trappa has agreed to meet us there as well,” Mad Dog informs.

“Good, good. Mr. Rowe said there’s a barn in the back of the property. We can use it as our base. The less the girls hear, the better. The key to the lock is inside. I figure when the guys arrive, we can store our stuff in there until it’s time to leave.”

Mad Dog motions his head up and down as he watches customers enter and leave the store. “Then it’s settled. Go on in the store. I need to call my wife and let her know there’s a possibility I won’t make it home till morning.”

I smirk. “Tell her not to be too hard on you. You’re here as a favor for me.”

He chuckles. “Trust me when I say, I couldn’t ask for a more understanding wife. She knows how we are about our missions, and she encourages it. I hope you’ve found the same in Madison.”

“I believe I have,” I confirmed before getting out and went inside the store.

I found the others in the meat section with two shopping carts, picking out steaks. One was filled with clothing and toiletries and the other with groceries.

Sliding my arm around Madison’s waist, I laugh, “I thought you all were only getting enough for one night, but it looks like you have enough for the rest of the week.”

Madison and Pilar giggle before Madison says, “You said to get whatever we needed. Plus, you can never be over prepared.”

Papa chimes in, “And Madison was telling us they have a pond there stocked with crappie, bluegill, bass, and catfish. You know I’ve got to try it before we leave.”

“Papa you don’t even have your reel and rod,” I tease.

Papa tsks. “Now son, you ought to know me better than that. Mathew and I have ours and my tackle kit on the back of his truck in his toolbox. We’ve already hit the sporting good department and got some red wigglers and Power Bait. I plan on taking some fish back and having a fish fry.”

“Fine, Papa. Are we done?”

Madison answers, “We just need a few more things for breakfast.”

“Okay,” I return, taking hold of the cart closest to Madison.

I wish I could say that after getting the items for breakfast, we were done, but that was not the case. Mathew went back to the front to get another cart to throw in two cases of beer. Papa added more meat after Madison told him there were two deep freezers at the house. He said the least we could do was leave extra meat in the freezers since Mr. Rowe was graciously letting us stay there.

I had to hold in my laughter when we finally made it to the checkout lane. The cashier's eyes almost popped out of her head when she saw the three full carts. She instantly gave us an attitude. Pilar was about to lay in on her, but Mathew walked her out of the store.

Yeah, we could have gone through the self-checkout lines, but we didn't have time for that shit. It would have taken us almost an hour to scan everything. Personally, I'm not fond of the whole self-checkout concept. It makes me feel like I'm doing free work for them. Hell, if I'm not getting a W2, I'm not doing it.

The cashier scanned the last item and read off the total. With sympathy in her eyes, Madison handed over my credit card.

"Dexter, I didn't imagine it would be this much. I can put half on my card," she whispered.

Taking the card from her, I remarked, "You have what you need and that's all that matters."

The cashier seemed to think that was an open door for her to switch her attitude to make googly eyes and openly flirt with me.

"I know if I had a man willing to pay for all of this for me, I'd keep my mouth shut and accept all that he's doing for me. If you need a real one, I get off in an hour."

Why, oh why did she have to say that? Madison's head rotated around like the little girl from the Exorcist. With us standing side by side I couldn't see the expression on her face, but the way the cashier recoiled back, I knew it wasn't good.

"First of all," Madison starts, "If you had a man, you wouldn't be here trying to get at another woman's. Second, don't let the innocent face fool you. I will snatch your ass from behind this barrier and teach you not to disrespect another woman and her man. Finish our transaction before I call your manager over here for your unprofessional behavior."

With an attitude the woman shoots daggers at Madison.

Madison faces me, saying, “It’s funny, how a woman can get mad at another because she got checked for blatantly stepping to that woman’s man.”

“Well, she can get mad all she wants, but you know no woman could ever take your place,” I tell her before placing a delicate kiss on her lips, then inserting the credit card in the reader.

After the transaction is approved, the cashier continues to frown as she collects the receipt, then lays it on the counter.

Madison scrutinizes her as she leans forward. “Girl, you know you’re supposed to hand the receipt to the customer. You’re lucky I don’t want to end up on social media as one of those people who lost their shit in Walmart. Come on, baby.”

Mathew laughs out loud. “I guess my sis told you.” He continues to laugh pushing the first cart towards the exit.

After picking up the receipt, Madison tells her, “Thank you and *you* have a nice day. Hopefully, you’ll be more successful in finding a man. If not, I hope the next girlfriend or wife molly-wops your ass.”

She takes hold of the second cart and I the other. Together we walked out of the store, heading towards the trucks.

Madison grumbled the entire way. As much as I tried to get closer to hear what she was saying, it was like she was speaking a different language I couldn’t decipher.

Reaching the trucks, Mad Dog was out and helping Papa and Mathew load the bags in the beds of the trucks. Madison continued her rant before leaving the cart at the back of my truck, then getting inside with Pilar.

After loading the last bag, Mad Dog and I got in. He says nothing as he pulls out of the parking lot, letting the GPS guide us the rest of the way to the farmhouse.

Mad Dog and I side eyed each other and held in our laughter as we listened to Madison animatedly tell Pilar what happened with the cashier. By her tone, I could tell she was really pissed from the situation and did a great job in refraining herself from attacking the woman. Pilar on the other hand, felt differently.

“Girl, you’re better than me, because I would have duck walked her ass for talking out the side of her mouth. Females these days are so disrespectful.”



“I can’t afford to lose my nursing license for laying hands on someone. I’m sure she’ll think twice before letting her mouth get her in shit,” Madison said. “I know Dexter and I are solid, so coming out of character wasn’t necessary. We handled it accordingly.”

Pilar snickered, returning, “I get that, but imagine how good it would have felt to put her in her place...physically.”

Madison laughed. “It would have felt amazing.” Her laugh lowered as she said, “But still, that shit would’ve been fun back in the day, but I’m a grown ass woman now. Shit that I used to do back then, can have severe repercussions on me now.”

“You’re right, sis,” Pilar responded.

The rest of the ride was quiet. After exiting the highway and making several turns, we finally made it to the farmhouse.

Fifteen minutes later, Mad Dog was approaching our destination. I stared at the structure in awe. This wasn’t any ordinary farmhouse. It’s a two story cedar cabin with enclosed porches on both levels. It’s filled with large bay windows and a stone fire chimney in the middle of it.

Mad Dog parks in front of it with Mathew doing the same on the left of us. Swiveling in my seat to look at Madison, I ask, “This is what you all call a farmhouse?”

She glances over at Pilar who seems to be amused. “I mean, this is what my parents have called it for as long as I can remember.”

“This is not a farmhouse. This is a modest cabin,” I counter.

She shrugs her shoulders. “Farmhouse, cabin, call it what you want. It’s a shelter against a storm, I guess.”

Madison opens her door then gets out.

Pilar apologetically smiles at me, saying, “Don’t mind Madison. This is the place she came to after what happened. She would never let any of the family come here with her.” She gets out of the truck and joins the others to get the bags as Madison goes up the porch, then pushes a wicker chair to the side and lifts a piece of wood. She removed something and went to the front door, then opened it.

“Did she ever tell you about coming here?” Mad Dog asks.

“No, I thought she was dealing with that shit at home with her family,” I reply, watching as she completely opens the door to the house before coming back to help the others.

Mad Dog removes the keys, then offers them to me. “Not saying that you should do it now, but at some point, the two of you need to have a conversation about this.”

Taking the keys, I tell him, “We will.”

We got out and went to the back of the truck. As we grabbed several bags, two Delta Force Security SUVs and an old school Chevy Capri on rims that I know is Trappa’s arrived.

Madison and Pilar stopped in their tracks as they saw the extra vehicles.

“They’re with us,” I express, walking over to them. “Madison, you know my brothers.”

“I do, but what about the ones in the car?” she questioned.

“That’s Trappa. He’s Janae’s brother. Why don’t the two of you go inside and I’ll explain everything to you later.”

“You do that,” she said. “Come on Pilar, let’s go clean up the kitchen so we can get dinner started.”

“We’ll go with them,” Papa says as he and Mathew come up behind them with bags in their hands.

With that, every man a part of Delta Force was left outside along with Trappa and one of his men I’ve seen before during a meeting with the Greeks.

Trappa introduces us to him. “This is Ramon.” He then points to Mad Dog, telling Ramon, “You remember Nae Nae’s old man, and the rest are his men.”

“What’s up,” Ramon says. We shake his hand before moving towards the stairs.

As we started climbing the stairs onto the porch, I heard the sound of another vehicle approaching. Recognizing the Mustang, I looked over at Mad Dog.

“I meant to tell you that I called Janae and told her to come keep the sisters company. I hope you don’t mind.”

“Not at all. I’m sure Madison would love having her here. Janae can help them to take their minds off what’s going on for a while.”

He grins. “You know she will. I’m going to leave these bags here. I told her to bring an overnight bag in case we have to pull an all-nighter.”

“Go tend to your wife. I’ll come back and get the bags.”

He sat the bags down, then went down the stairs. Janae was opening her door when he reached her car. We continued up the stairs and entered.

Madison met us in the spacious living room. “Guys, the bags with clothes and toiletries you can leave in here. I’ll show you where the kitchen is to take the rest.”

As we started sorting the bags, Janae came in with Mad Dog behind her, carrying her overnight bag.

“Hey, girl, hey,” she greets, surprising Madison.

“Janae, oh my God. I didn’t know you were coming,” Madison excitedly says, going over to hug her.

“Girl, when Mike asked me to come after hearing what happened, I knew I had to come,” Janae returns, hugging her back. “This place is amazing,” she said, releasing Madison, then looking around. “How many bedrooms are in here?”

“Six. Three upstairs and three down here,” Madison replies, smiling. “There’s five of us, so when we all came at the same time, we had a room to ourselves with two extra if family or friends came along.”

“Well, you’re going to have to give me a grand tour,” Janae urges.

“I will, but first I want you to meet my little sister, Pilar. She’s in the kitchen with Papa and Mathew.”

“Lead the way then,” Janae says.

They walk away, chatting and laughing. Looking at the guys, I tell them, “I guess we better follow if we want to find the kitchen.”

After going down a long hallway with family pictures on each wall we entered the huge kitchen with modern stainless steel appliances. Papa and Pilar are standing at the counter holding seasonings in their hands over a mound of ground beef. Mathew is on the other side of them cutting slicing tomatoes.

A breakfast nook is positioned in the right corner next to glass patio doors that lead out to a patio that could run circles around mine. Through the doors you could see the backyard, barn, and the pond. Mr. Rowe must have been here recently because the grass is neatly mowed.

To the left of the kitchen is an open dining room with a table and six chairs. The blinds on the windows surrounding it were pulled up, giving you more view of the backyard.

This is the type of place one would come to clear their heads, not hide out from idiots after them. I can somewhat understand why Madison would come here by herself. From the short time we’ve been here, I can feel the calming effects of it.

“Pilar, I want to introduce you to my friend, Janae. She’s Mad Dog’s wife,” Madison informs.

Pilar sits the seasoning down, then grabs a towel to wipe her hands off. “Janae, it’s good to finally meet you. Madison talked so much about you, she had me wondering if we had another sister out here that our parents didn’t tell us about.”

They laugh, embracing one another.

Leaning back, Janae says, “We may not have the same parents, but we are sisters. Madison became mine the first time I met her and now you are too.”

Pilar giggles. “Good, now I have someone who can be on my side when that one over there thinks she’s right about everything.”

Janae joins in her laughter, responding, “I don’t know about all that. If you’re doing fucked up shit, then I’m going to call you out on it, but other than that, I promise to always have your back, deal?”

“Deal,” Pilar replies.

Janae introduces her to Trappa and the other men. Not sure if anyone else saw it, but I caught on to the way Pilar kept her eyes on Trappa longer than the others. Talk about bad timing.

Taking the bags over to the breakfast nook, I ask, “What do we have going on in here?”

Madison comes to my side, answering, “Papa told me you guys have an appointment this evening.” She knowingly looks into my eyes. “So, we decided to do something quick. Burgers on the indoor grill and fresh cut fries.”

“That sounds good,” Venom bellows. “I’ll take mine medium rare.”

“You’ll take it however I give it to you,” Papa declares. We laugh as Venom looks as if someone burst his balloon.

Pulling Madison closer to me, I whisper in her ear, “Can you get me the key to the barn?”

“Of course,” she said. “I’ll be right back.”

I loosened my hold to let her leave the kitchen. She returned shortly as Pilar and Janae started to remove the items from the bags we brought in. After she gave me the key, Madison went to help the ladies.

“Pilar, can you start putting the dry goods in the pantry while Janae and I put away the meat and vegetables?” Madison asks.

“Sure,” Pilar returns.

Sorting the meat, Madison said, “Anything we don’t use before we leave will have to be taken with us.”

As they start their tasks, I tell the fellows, “Guys, let’s get out of their way and go to the front yard. You too, Mathew.” He gave me a questioning look. I know it’s concerning leaving Papa with the ladies. I smirk. “Papa is going to be fine with these lovely ladies. You know how much he likes to present himself as a ladies man.”

With a ball of ground beef in his hands, Papa declares, “I am the Alpha ladies’ man. Shit, if these beauties weren’t spoken for, I’d have them eating out of my hands.”

“Not with raw meat, Papa,” Madison laughs.

“You know what I mean,” Papa throws back as he continues to roll the meat into a circle.

As Janae and Pilar went to help Papa, I tell Madison, “We’re going to check out the barn. I know Janae won’t come that way, but can you keep Pilar from coming out there?”

“I can,” she replies. “Just make sure this ends tonight. I haven’t been here for almost a year but the memories I have of being here I don’t want tainted for having to be here now.”

Studying her, I knew I needed to get answers for why she came here after her abduction, and why she never told me about it. Why did coming here help with her healing process? There was so much that we needed to discuss but unfortunately it would be put on the back burner while we took care of Quinton and Rang.

I kissed her forehead before leaving the kitchen to meet the others outside. They were all assembled in the yard, talking amongst themselves. Clearing the last step, I tell the Thing One and Thing Two, “Take the vehicles to the back. Back them up to the barn so we can unload.”

The brothers grin before rushing to the SUVs.

“We can walk around to the back,” I say to the others.

While the vehicles began moving in a single file line to the side of the house, the guys started to follow behind.

Tapping Mad Dog’s shoulder, I tell him, “I’ll catch up. I need to grab my laptops and equipment out of the truck.”

“All right,” he said, walking on.

Once I had the laptops, I did a power walk around the house. The SUVs were backed up to the barn with the doors opened. Reaching them, I used

the key and unlocked the door. Mad Dog and I stepped inside. He flicked on the light switch on the right. Lights illuminated all around the barn. Just by looking from the outside, one would never imagine how spacious the barn is on the inside.

Old patio furniture sits in the back along with other various items that's covered. Besides using the barn for storage space, Mr. Rowe has a meat hook that hangs from the ceiling, a table with fishing equipment and tackle boxes on it, I assume he uses it to clean his catch. There's also two four-wheelers, a tractor connected to a bush hog for heavy lawn mowing, and a Zero-turn mower. Different size power saw hung on the wall to the left. Next to them are a variety of axes from a small handheld hatchet to one I think only Paul Bunyan could wield. This place contains everything a man living in the country would need.

I sat the laptops and briefcase on a long wooden table with blood stains. It's probably the one Mr. Rowe uses to cut his game up. Going over to the two large barn doors, I lifted the wooden slat that was keeping them closed from its holders. I sat it to the side, then pushed the heavy doors open.

"Damn," Mathew gasped as they looked inside. The others looked on with awe.

"Damn is right," Blade said, walking past him straight to the axes. No surprise he would be drawn to anything with a blade on it.

"We don't have time for you all to act like kids in a toy store," Mad Dog reprimanded. "Get the SUVs unloaded, so we can start to map shit out."

Putting their fangirl emotions to the side, the guys started to remove our equipment. While they were doing that, I opened the laptops and got to work. The first thing I did was get an approximate location on Rang from the number Trappa gave me earlier.

The man didn't sit still for more than ten minutes. Rang was constantly on the move and I checked to see what Quinton was up to, I put his number in too. Shit came back that the two of them were together. Good, then we could kill two birds with one stone. As a safe measure, I encrypted Trappa's phone so that no one would be able to trace his whereabouts or movements.

Mad Dog comes to my side, asking, "What did you find?"

"They're together. They've been hopping mostly on the east side of town."

Mad Dog moves his head up and down. "Go get suited up. I'll let the others know. Where's the earpiece for Trappa?"

Opening the briefcase, I remove two earpieces. “Luckily, I brought two invisible earpieces for Trappa and Ramon. All we need is the micro camera on Trappa to record everything.”

He waves Trappa over, then says, “Here’s the earpieces for you and Ramon.”

Trappa takes the small devices, then wiggles them around in his hand.

“And you’ll be able to hear and speak to us through these?”

“Yes and you will be able to do the same,” Mad Dog answers.

I get an alert on my phone. Looking at the screen, I see it’s a text message from Madison. “Madison says the food will be ready soon,” I tell the others. I text her back, saying we will head that way soon.

Trappa’s cell phone begins to ring. Other than him, the rest of us remain still as he answers the call. After adjusting my glasses, I start to trace the call.

“Yeah.”

There was laughter from the other end. No doubt from Rang and his people. “Trappa, I didn’t think you would answer.”

“I did, but I thought you were going to text me the address.”

“Yeah, about that, I’m going to have to move the time up to nine. I have some unexpected business I need to take care of around that time. Is that cool with you?” Rang asks.

Everyone stares at the first laptop as I hone in on Rang’s location. He’s at a house in the same area as before. I give Trappa thumbs up.

“That’s cool,” he replies to Rang.

“Bet, I’ll send you the address when we hang up. I’ll have some drinks and Kush ready for us,” Rang said before ending the call.

Five seconds later, Trappa’s cell chimes. He taps the screen, then hands it to me. I type the address into the second laptop. The live view of an old boxing gym appears on the screen. With men standing on the outside and some going in, I guess it’s still open for business or it may be a front for illegal activity.

“I’d say Rang picked the right place because he is going to get his ass beat before he’s sent on to glory,” Trappa says behind me. The feeling was mutual because I plan on doing the same to Quinton’s coward ass.

Looking at his watch, Mad Dog says, “Okay, we’ve got less than five hours to get this plan hashed out. Let’s get to it.”

Over the next three hours, we were able to find different points of entry for us to get closer to the gym without being noticed. The ladies got tired of waiting on us to come in and eat and decided to bring the food and drinks to us. When I asked Madison what Papa was doing, she said after he finished eating, he said he was going to grab his reel and rod along with his tackle box then head to the pond to do some fishing. I shook my head, amused. I was surprised he didn't go sooner. The ladies stayed for another ten minutes before they went back to the house.

While eating, we continued outlining our plan of action. Luckily, it would be nighttime. Where the gym is located, a lot of the old stores are boarded up. Only a handful on either side of the block remain open. I checked their operation hours, and they will be closed during the meet up time.

Gilmer with its population of less than seven thousand only has nineteen police officers and after hacking into the station's schedule, only four will be on duty tonight: one at the station and three on patrol. I already knew what I was going to do to keep them occupied.

With a little over two and a half hours left, we decided it was time to start getting ready. Mad Dog wanted Delta Force to get there an hour before Trappa and Ramon did. This will give us enough time to recon the area.

Trappa asks, "So do you think this is going to work? I know y'all are some tough motherfuckers, but we're about to enter the hood. I'm sure Rang has lookouts on every corner."

Before I could respond the roar of pipes can be heard growing closer from the front.

"What the fuck is that?" Mathew questioned just as the sound of gunfire erupts.

Rang.





# Chapter 17

## Tech

So much for all the planning we did. How the fuck did they find us? I ask myself as we rush around putting on bulletproof vests and strapping on weapons. I encrypted Trappa's cell phone, so how were they able to locate us? I didn't have time to dwell on it as more gunshots went off and the sound of glass breaking. We could hear the ladies screaming from inside.

"Fuck," I yell in despair.

"Pull yourself together Marine," Mad Dog shouts. "Get your shit together! I'm sure Madison knows where her father keeps his hunting rifles. Janae never leaves home without her 9mm."

I take two calming breaths before inhaling deeply. These motherfuckers wanted to bring the war to my families doorsteps, then they're about to learn why Delta Force are known for being ruthless killers to our enemies.

Mathew runs up to my side. "Dexter, Papa is at the pond by himself."

He takes a step back as he looks into darkened eyes he has never seen before. I've kept this part of me from my little brother, but he's about to officially see Tech. Not the nerdy Marine who can find out whatever you need, but the one who isn't hesitant to pull a trigger.

Clutching his shoulder, I tell him, "Go get him. Stay low and bring him back here. I'm trusting you to not let anything happen to that old SOB. You got that?" I shake his shoulder with emphasis.

It takes him a moment, but Mathew replies, "Got it."

I clutched the back of his neck, bringing his forehead against mine. I said a quick prayer before letting him go.

"Mathew, this isn't like the bayou where we know every nook and cranny. This is real life, I know how you are about your gut feelings, so I'm asking that you seriously oblige them now."

My little brother with all his cockiness and bravado, smirked at me. "Shit, this time tomorrow, you, me, and Papa will be out there at the pond catching enough fish to feed everyone. I got him, you just make sure my future sister-in-law and the other ladies are alright."

"I got you," I tell him as he dips low, then exits the barn. Yelling at the others, I ordered, "Cover him!"

Venom and Lethal are the first at the door and exchange gunfire, giving Mathew the opportunity to make his way towards the pond.

The ladies scream as more glass shatters.

Looking over to Mad Dog, I say, “We have to go now. With the windows compromised, it’s only a matter of time they enter the house.”

“I’m with Dr. Technology. We need to move now,” Trappa cosigns, not sure that I like the name he referred to me as because I’m so much more.

Getting his AR-15 ready to let go, Mad Dog says, “We’re still going to play out the plan we had for the gym. Lethal and Venom you two take the roof with the help of the twins getting you secured. The twins will make sure Venom and Blade have the east and west of the house from the back. Once that’s done, they will post up on the front side of the house to keep anyone else from entering. When we make it through the backdoor, Tech and I will alleviate any threat on the inside.”

“And so what do you think me, and Ramon are supposed to do while y’all are playing Captain America?”

“Take out anyone who poses a threat. Just know I haven’t forgotten about your role in all of this. For all I know you could be setting us up.” Mad Dog assures.

“Neither have I,” Trappa returns. “And to keep shit on the up and up, an old model Cadillac will be here later. Please don’t shoot them or else we’ll find ourselves in another war.”

Honestly, I couldn’t even recite half the words they said to each other. I was too focused on how to get to the house without dying.

When I finally saw an opportunity, I crept low onto the manicured lawn. Mad Dog was next to me and as we got closer to the house, our brothers branched off, getting into position, leaving me, Mad Dog, Trappa, and Ramon.

As we crouched down behind the lattice panels of the backyard patio, I turned towards them. “In this life I rarely ask for much. Once I asked if my little brother would overcome the shit that our parents put him through, and that happened. It’s been years that I’ve had to ask for another favor.”

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I continue. “This time I ask that my family, my true family make it back to me in one piece. Mad Dog, Trappa, despite our differences, we still come together to protect those we love. Either way we’re here now and our family needs us. We need to show these motherfuckers what happens when they come for ours.”

Mad Dog and Trappa looked at each other at the same time. As they both smiled, it was like forming an aligning of truce. Shit, not sure if either one was aware, but after the shit that went down with Janae and rescuing her, there was already an alliance formed.

“Move out,” Mad Dog commands. Being second in command I follow his steps as the others disperse into the darkness.

One of Rang’s men run to the right side of the house, rapidly firing his guns. He was taken down by Lethal. I give him a head nod before stepping over the guy’s body. Two more men emerge, blindly firing into the darkness. Mad Dog takes down one and I take the other.

We climbed the stairs to the patio. A man cries out in agony. “Please, stop! You’re killing me!”

No doubt he’s in the company of Blade who is slicing into his flesh like a butcher. *Don’t beg now*, I think to myself. Shit, if anyone of my brothers were in his shoes, we’d take that shit like a man. Instead of falling for whatever bullshit Rang hyped up, he should’ve stayed his ass at home, but now...he’s about to feel what true torture is before Blade ends his life.

Mad Dog and I reach the top of the patio and go to the doors. Carefully sliding them open, we enter. We move towards the front of the house where we hear Pilar screaming. Where is Madison and Janae?

Keeping our guard up, we make our way to the living room. As we’re about to pass the last room on the left, I look inside and see Pilar crouched down, covering her ears. I tap Mad Dog. Lowering my weapon, I enter the room. Pilar’s sitting on the floor in the corner, rocking back and forth, speaking incoherently.

“We need to get her out of here,” I say to Mad Dog.

Mad Dog taps his earpiece. “Venom, Thing One I need you to come and get Pilar. Take her to the barn. We’re in the room closest to the living room.”

“We’re on our way.” Venom said.

Pilar grabbed onto me as I told her, “We have others that will take you to the barn for safety.”

“No, no,” she wailed as Venom and Thing One dashed into the room.

Trying to comfort her, I said, “Pilar, please go with them. They will make sure you are protected.”

Pilar began to fight more. I didn’t want to do it, but I gave the okay to Venom to inject her with a solution that would put her in a slumber state.

As her eyes closed, Thing One picked her up in the bridal position. Venom went to the door and took a peek out to see if the coast was clear.. He looked back at Thing One and gave a nod.

While I silently thanked them as they left the room, I focused more on the gunfire coming from the front of the house.

Before exiting, Mad Dog questioned, “I know you’ve been using that egghead of yours to figure out how they found out we were here. What have you come up with?”

Pushing my glasses up my nose with my index finger, I replied, “Yeah, I’ve thinking about that and what I’ve come up with is neither Delta Force nor Trappa are the culprits.” With that, I checked the hallway, then left. It didn’t take rocket science to figure out who the rat was. Hopefully, the others, mainly Trappa figured it out by now too.

With our guns raised to take down anyone who comes at us, we clear the rest of the hallway. When we rounded the corner into the living room, Mad Dog and I stopped in our tracks.

Janae, using her 9mm, is returning fire from the window on the left. Madison is stationed at the far right window with a Beretta 1301 Tactical shotgun. It had to be one of Mr. Rowe’s hunting guns. It’s obvious she used it before because the recoil impact is not phasing her. Just the sight of her handling the shotgun against our enemies confirmed Madison would fit in with our Delta Force family.

Mad Dog ducked down, scrabbling to Janae as I did the same to get to Madison. When I got close enough to her, she whirled around, pointing the shotgun at me. Once she realized it was me, Madison went back to shooting at the men outside.

Suddenly, the gunfire outside stops. The next thing we hear is Rang yelling out, “Trappa, Trappa, Trappa. I find it funny that you thought you were dealing with some country ass sap who don’t have reach. I’m always one step ahead of shit and I just proved it to you. I know you’re working with those white boys. I’m going to make this easy on you. Bring the girl out and denounce yourself as the leader of the South Dallas Boys or I’ll have to take things a step further.”

Raising up to look out the window, I felt like my soul was snatched from me as I watched Rang drag Papa in front of one of the truck’s headlights. His face is bloody and bruised. Quinton stands on the other side

of Papa, holding a pistol in his good hand. No doubt he tried to put up a fight but where the hell is Mathew?

Frantically tapping the earpiece, I ask, "Where's Mathew? Has anyone seen him?"

"No," Blade answers, only making my heartbeat faster.

As if he knew what I was asking the others, Rang laughs, "Oh, and if you're wondering about that other motherfucker, my men capped his ass." He let out a ghastly laugh.

Speaking into the earpiece again, I order, "Someone go to the pond and look for Mathew, now!"

Not sure which twin spoke but they said, "My brother and I are heading there now."

"Lethal and Blade get in sniper positions," Mad Dog ordered. "Venom, stay with Pilar until the twins return. When they do, make sure you have your weapon loaded with every poisonous bullet you have on you."

"Roger that," he returns.

Trappa and Ramon appear behind us. Unable to control my emotions, I attack Ramon.

"This is your fault," I hissed, hitting him with everything I got.

"What the fuck?" Trappa hisses as he tries to pull me off Ramon. He looked over at Mad Dog. "Get your man off of Ramon."

Mad Dog shakes his head. "Your guy is getting what he deserves."

Trappa lets me go, then walks over to Mad Dog, getting in his face. "What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

Mad Dog glares at him before replying, "Think about it Trappa. None of my men would have alerted Rang our location and I know you wouldn't either. The only one who could have done it is your boy over there who is getting the shit beat out of him."

Trappa keeps his gaze on Mad Dog, but you could tell the wheels in his head were starting to spin.

I finally got off Ramon, leaving him coughing up blood in the fetal position. I gave him one last kick to the stomach before turning to Trappa. Pointing to Ramon. "This motherfucker told Rang and Quinton we were here. He's the only one who could do that."

In a fit of rage, Trappa rushes over to Ramon, pushing the silencer of his pistol into the side of Ramon's head. Ramon holds up his hands as he pleads for his life.

“Come on, Trappa. You know me. I’ve been down with you since you took over.”

“You sure have, but being in this life for so long, I know people and their way of thinking changes over time. Be a man and look me in the eyes and prove to me you weren’t the one to tip Rang and his people off. Hell, I’ll probably have some sympathy for you. Shit, we’ve been boys for way too long,” Trappa says, taking the gun away.

Ramon sits up, using the end of his shirt to wipe away the blood from his nose. “On the real, Trap after the shit that happened at the club with Rang, Quinton, and that one over there.” He points at me. “They reached out to me to see if I knew who the white boy was.”

“But why would they reach out to you?” Trappa quizzes.

Ramon sighs, closing his eyes. “Because Rang is my second cousin on my momma’s side. You of all people talk about family ties and what was I supposed to do? I told you how my family had turned their backs on me because of the shit I did when I was younger. I thought this would be a way for me to get back into their good graces.”

Trappa backhands the shit out of him. “South Dallas Boys was your fucking family. By doing this, you turned your back on us. You’ve never had any type of interaction with this motherfucker but the one time you want to show some loyalty to your fucked up family and throw mines under the bus?”

With blood spewing from his mouth, Ramon continues to prove his side, “Fucked up or not, they are still my family.”

With sorrowful eyes, Trappa tells him, “Then they will all come together at your funeral.” A single shot to Ramon’s head gives him eternal sleep. I don’t know if he’ll find salvation on the other side, but I hope he’s learned his lesson on this one.

“Trappa, don’t keep me waiting. The more time passes, the faster this old man’s life counts down,” Rang announces.

“Don’t trade that girl’s life for mine, Dexter,” Papa yells. “I’ve spent enough time on this earth.”

Quinton punches him in his side. Papa winces as he leans to the side. “Shut the fuck up old man before I drop your ass.”

Filled with more rage, I start towards the door. Mad Dog cuts me off, explaining, “If you go out there alone, they will definitely kill him and you too. Don’t do this, brother.”

“Papa can’t take no more. Look at him!” I seethe, trying to get around him.

“I know, but we have to use our heads. If not, he’s sure as shit not going to make it.”

I begin to pace the floor. He’s right. If I let my emotions take over, they’re going to kill Papa before we have the opportunity to save him.

“Fine,” I said, halting my steps.

Mad Dog grips my shoulder. “Good. Janae and I will stay here while you and Trappa walk Madison out.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Janae responds. “You and I both know they will kill them on sight.”

“And that will never happen,” he assures her.

Through the earpiece, one of the Twins informs, “We have Mathew at the barn. He has a gunshot wound to his lower left side under the vest. Venom is seeing him now. He’s going to stay with Mathew and Pilar. My brother and I are heading out to come at them from the rear.”

“Is the wound life threatening?” I question with concern.

There’s a pause before the Twin replies, “Venom said he doesn’t think so, but he’s lost a lot of blood.”

I slump over with my hands on my knees. Taking deep breaths through my nose and exhaling from my mouth, I try to push down the ball of anxiety in my throat. Madison gently rubs my back.

“Roger that,” Mad Dog says. “Twins, find your positions and be careful. Venom, do everything in your power to help that young man.”

“On it, Commander,” Venom returns.

Looking up to a grief stricken Madison, “We all have our theories of the way we want this night to end. Just tell me how you want it to be resolved and I will do whatever you say.”

With a tear stained face, Madison replies, “Your family or mine shouldn’t have to go through this. James has been shot, now Mathew and Papa have been assaulted. Delta Force has saved me twice and I trust you all will do the same this time.”

Standing erect, I run the back of my hand along her cheek. “I don’t care if it was a million times, I will always save you, Madison.”

She presses her palm against my cheek. “I know you will.”

“If we’re going to pull this off,” Mad Dog grunted. “We need to do it now.”



He takes his t-shirt off, then removes his bullet proof vest. As he hands it to me, Janae grabs an old flannel shirt that's hanging on the coat rack. Once I got the vest secured on Madison, Janae helped her get the flannel on. I could kick myself for not telling the Twins to bring our bullet proof body suits. If I had, it would have prevented Mathew from getting shot.

"This is daddy's favorite shirt. He likes to wear it when he's working in the yard," Madison whispers, buttoning the shirt up.

"And we're going to make sure it continues to be his favorite," I say before kissing her.

Mad Dog comes up next to us. "The Twins, Lethal, and Blade should be in position by now. Tech, when you and Trappa step out, make sure Madison stays behind the two of you at all times. Janae and I will cover you on this end."

"I already planned on doing that," I return, checking to make sure my gun is ready. Sliding it into the back of my pants, "They will never get within ten feet of her." Turning to Trappa, I ask, "You ready?"

"I stay ready," he said, unscrewing the silencer from his pistol. "I want those motherfuckers to hear my shots when I kill their asses."

Grasping Madison's hips, I say, "Always stay behind us. We're your first line of defense, okay?"

"Okay," Madison replies.

Trappa and I walk over to the front door. I glance at him one last time before opening the door. The brightness from the headlights momentarily blind me, but I blink to adjust. Trappa does the same and once we're acclimated, we proceed forward, stopping about twenty feet in front of them.

Rang laughs. "Here's the big, bad Trappa. I bet you never thought your legacy would die here," he taunts.

Trappa squared his shoulders, responding, "My rein legacy over the South Dallas Boys won't end tonight. That I can guarantee."

Rang and Quinton look at each other before laughing. Composing himself, Rang says, "Yeah, okay but right now if you want this old man to continue breathing, you'll release the girl to us."

"And if we don't?" I angrily ask.

Rang hunches his shoulders looking around to his men. When his beady eyes land back on me, he replies, "Then the old man dies along with the rest of you."

While he, Quinton, and his men laugh at our expense, I hit my earpiece to signal for the others to get ready. Shits about to get messy.

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# Chapter 18

## Madison

Not even after enduring the time I was kidnapped could prepare me for the shit I was witnessing. Quinton with all of his charm and good looks could get any woman he desired. Why was his sights set on me?

“You all blocking my merchandise,” he says to Dexter and Trappa. “I spent too much time grooming her. From her past, and yeah I know about that shit, she’ll fit into her new reality perfectly.”

So, this asshole was going to try and use my past to make money?! Oh, hell no. Glaring at Quinton between Dexter and Trappa, I yell, “You conniving son of bitch. If you think I will be a part of you selling women and young girls to the highest bidder, then you’ve lost your damn mind.”

My outburst triggered an attack I wasn’t ready for. Quinton smirked, raising his pistol at us. As shots started letting off, Dexter snatched my arm and pulled me behind Trappa’s car. Janae and Mad Dog were at the busted glass windows, shooting at anyone that got close.

The men around Rang and Quinton began to fall like a domino maze leaving only Quinton and Rang holding onto Papa.

“It’s only the two of you left, so let him go,” Dexter shouts.

Rang looks around at his fallen men before responding, “Yeah, I don’t think that’s going to happen. The old man is our incentive to get out of here.”

As he and Quinton start to back away, red dots appear on their chests just like at the club.

Dexter steps forward. “You already know what that means, so if you want to live, then you’ll let him go.”

Rang and Quinton exchange words between each other before releasing Papa.

Lethal and Blade appear out of nowhere and assist Papa over to us.

“Take Papa to the barn, so Venom can check him out,” Dexter tells Lethal.

“You’ve got the old man back, now let us go,” Rang shouts. “Fuck, you got this.”

“Naw, this shit isn’t over,” Trappa returns as the Twins come up from behind, ambushing Rang and Quinton. They drop their weapons when they feel the cold steel of the Twins guns at the back of their heads.

The Twins push them towards us as Janae and Mad Dog come out the house.

Even with being out maneuvered Rang keeps his cocky demeanor. “So, what are you going to do now Big Bad Trappa. Shit, I didn’t see my cousin come out with you, so I guess you caught on that he was helping us.” He sniffs, then spits on the ground. “That boy was so hungry to get back into our family’s good graces, he didn’t give a second thought about betraying you. Now he’s gone.” He laughs hysterically.

Rang’s amusement dies when Trappa casually walks in front of him. “I remember you saying my leadership over the South Dallas Boys would end tonight.”

“The night is not over yet,” Rang hisses with an angered expression.

Trappa frowns at him before a slow smile spreads across his face. “It’s funny when motherfuckers don’t realize that they’ve lost the battle. I guess I’m just going to have to show you.”

Trappa hits him with a right hook to his face. Rang’s head whips to the side as he drops down to one knee.

“You could never take my place motherfucker,” Trappa growls, taking hold of Rang’s head and knees it hard. Blood spews from his nose as he falls onto his back. “I am Trappa,” he continues as he starts stomping on Rang’s head. “And until I feel like giving someone my reign, I’m going to kill every one of you motherfuckers that come after me.”

I look away when Rang’s skull collapses under Trappa’s vicious assault. He grunts with every blow. When the stomping stops, I turn my head to see Trappa panting hard, standing over Rang’s lifeless body. Quinton doubles over, puking his brains out.

“Not too much of a tough guy anymore, huh Quinton?” Dexter taunts.

Quinton rises using the back of his hand to wipe his mouth. “Man look, I promise if you let me walk away from here, you won’t ever have to worry about me fucking with Madison anymore. Shit, I’ll even leave the state.”

“Do you think I’m fucking stupid?” Dexter snarls. “I gave you two warnings to leave her alone, and here you are. I don’t trust anything that comes out of your mouth.”

Squaring his shoulders, Quinton asks, “So, what are you going to do? Bust my head open like he did Rang?”

Dexter slowly moves his head from side to side. “No, I’m going to make you suffer more.”

He takes his glasses off, then hands them to me. He drops his gun, rushes towards Quinton, pulling the knives from the sheaths on his side. Quinton goes for his gun but is not quick enough. Dexter reaches him and starts slicing. Quinton begs for mercy as he stumbles back, trying to get away, but his pleas fall on deaf ears as Dexter spins with each knife cutting him in a new spot every time. Even if Quinton’s other arm was useful, I don’t think it would have helped because Dexter is too swift for him.

As Quinton starts to drop to the ground, Dexter goes from slicing to stabbing. Quinton’s clothes are soaked with blood and there is some starting to drain from his mouth.

Dexter stops, breathing heavily as he peers at a groveling Quinton who pleads, “Please, no more.”

Dexter places one leg over his body, then crouches down. “I think you’ve suffered enough, but not as much as you’re going to have in Hell.” He swipes the blade of his knife across Quinton’s neck. As Dexter rises, Quinton grasps his neck with his hand, trying to stop the blood leaving his body. A sigh of relief escapes me, thinking Quinton and Rang got what they deserved.

“Janae, will you take Madison to the barn to check on Mathew and Papa?” Mad Dog suggests.

“Okay,” she says, tucking her pistol in the front of her jeans.

“What about the bodies?” I ask, staring at all the carnage of dead men sprawled around the front yard.

Dexter comes over to me and takes my hands in his. “We’ll take care of that. Just go make sure our family is alright.” He squeezes my hands with a reassuring smile.

“Come on, sis,” Janae says, wrapping her arm around my shoulders.

I grip his hands, before letting them go. As Janae and I walk to the back of the house, she says, “Don’t worry about the shit back there. Trust me when I say, the yard will be cleaned up before the sun rises.”

Exhaling, I return, “I know, I guess my other concern is the house. I’m dreading how my parents are going to react when they find out it’s been shot up.”

“I wouldn’t worry too much about that either. I’m sure the fellows will work together on fixing everything.”

Walking up to the barn, I say, “I’m going to try not to worry about it. Right now, I just want to see how Pilar, Papa, and Mathew are doing.”

Entering, Pilar rushes over to me. I embrace her as she sobs. “It’s over,” I say, rubbing her back.

“I thought they were going to kill all of us,” she whimpers.

My heart shatters because I know exactly how she’s feeling. It’s terrifying not knowing if you’re going to make it from one minute to the next. I never wanted either one of my siblings to experience this type of fear, but both are affected. Pilar is going to need therapy after this.

“It’s okay little sis, we were in good hands. How is Mathew and Papa?” I ask, looking over to where Papa’s sitting with a cold pack pressed against his forehead next to Mathew who’s laying on one of daddy’s summer cots with an IV in his arm, running fluids and antibiotics into his vein.

“Don’t fret over me. I’ve been hit harder by smaller men,” Papa jokes. “As for Mathew, Venom said he’s going to make a full recovery. He was able to stabilize the bleeding and patch my boy up.

I left Pilar to go to check on the both of them. Call it the nurse in me, but I wanted to get a look at them myself. After examining their wounds, I tell Venom, “You did a great job. How did you learn to do all of that?”

“I was a medic in the Marines,” he replies with a wink.

Well, that made sense. With the type of missions they go on, if one of them got hurt, why run to the nearest emergency room when you had a medic on your team?

Venom points to Papa. “I still want to keep an eye on the youngster over there. He said they struck him in the head a few times. He’s not showing any signs of a concussion, but at his age the blows might have residual effects.”

“I agree,” I return. I remember Dexter telling me about Papa and his spells. I hope this doesn’t make them worse.

Over the next three hours, Venom and I looked after Papa and Mathew in our makeshift infirmary. Venom had pulled down another cot and got it set up for Pilar. After I got one of our sleeping bags we use for camping out of its sheath, I spread it over the cot. Pilar laid on it and was fast asleep within minutes.

Janae went to the house to get us some food and water. When she returned, I wanted to ask if she spoke with Mad Dog or Tech, but I didn't. The less I knew about what was going on during that time, the better. I've seen enough shit tonight that I'm going to have to take to my grave, and that was enough. When Dexter's ready, he'll come for me. Until then, I'll remain in the barn with the others.

Sometime in the wee hours of the morning, I was awakened by someone gently shaking me.

"Madison, sweetheart, wake up," Dexter's deep voice softly said.

I leaned forward, rubbing my eyes. As I opened them, I looked down at the old lawn chair I was sitting in, then glanced around. Damn, I thought everything that happened was just a nightmare, but sadly it wasn't because I'm still in the barn. I guess after I took a seat in the chair, exhaustion took over.

Pilar was still asleep on her cot. Looking at the other side of the barn, Mathew's cot is empty, and Papa isn't next to it.. Thinking the worst, I hopped up from the chair, shouting, "Where are they? Where's Papa and Mathew?"

My hysterics awaken Pilar. Dexter engulfs me in his large arms from behind.

"What happened to Papa and Mathew, Dexter?" I begin to cry.

"They're fine, Madison. They're fine," he replies.

"Then where are they? Are they in the house?"

As he loosens his hold, I spin around to face him.

"I sent them to Baylor in Dallas. The wife of one of our friends, O'Rourke, is an Orthopedic Surgeon there. Mad Dog called to see if she could have one of the attending physicians admit them so they could have more tests and scans done. Although Venom is damn good at what he does, unfortunately he doesn't have the equipment to do an on-site CT scan, X-rays, and such."

I shake my head. "Okay, okay but who went with them? Did an ambulance come?"

"No, Venom and Lethal took them in the SUV with Venom's medical supplies."

That made me feel better, but wished they would have woken me up. I would have liked to have seen them before they left.



“I was coming to get you and Pilar. I’m sure you would like to sleep in your own beds than out here. The front of the house had the most impact, but the bedrooms are intact,” Dexter says.

“I’m not going back in that house,” Pilar shrieks. Shit, I was hoping this wouldn’t happen.

Trying to appeal to her, I insist, “Pilar, you can’t stay out here by yourself. Momma and Daddy wouldn’t like that.”

She folds her arms under her breasts, rolling her eyes before mockingly saying, “And I’m sure they wouldn’t like their house getting shot up, but it fucking happened, didn’t it?”

Her words hit me like a ton of bricks. I know Pilar is scared but that shit cut to the bone. Doesn’t she know I’m already blaming myself for everything that has happened?

Pilar sees the hurt in my eyes and drops her arms.

“That wasn’t cool, Pilar,” Dexter interjects. “What happened here tonight was not your sister’s fault. She had nothing to do with those assholes knowing where we were.”

As tears begin to stream down her cheeks, Pilar says, “I know and I’m sorry, Madison. I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. I’m not trying to be a brat, I’m just scared. What if they come back?”

Leaving Dexter, I go comfort my little sister. Moments later, Dexter has his hands resting on our shoulders. “Pilar, none of them will ever show their faces around here ever again. You have nothing to be afraid of. An extra bonus, the rest of the guys are going to stay here tonight. How does that sound?”

I added, “And if it will make you feel better, I’ll sleep in your room with you like I used to when it would storm badly outside, and you were afraid of the thunder.”

“Okay,” she agreed, wiping her face off on daddy’s flannel. Brat.

When we stepped outside the barn both Delta Force Security SUVs were gone. I didn’t bring it up to Dexter because I’m sure he would fill me in on whatever details he wanted me to know later. After he locked the doors we headed towards the house.

After entering through the patio door, Dexter made sure they were locked as well. We found Janae, Mad Dog, and Trappa in the living room. Trappa was putting all the shot up furniture in a pile while Janae and Mad Dog were sweeping up shards of glass. Family pictures that once displayed

proudly on the walls hung crooked with bullet holes in them or were laying on the floor.

This was a lot to take in, so I told Pilar, “Go grab our bags with the clothes and toiletries. Take them to your room and run yourself a nice calming bubble bath.”

“You’re still coming, right?”

“I am, and if you fall asleep before I get there, I’ll wake you up, so you know I’m with you.”

“Okay,” she returns before giving me a hug, then one to Dexter. “Thank you, big brother.”

“You’re welcome, little sis.” As he pulls back, he tells her, “Don’t tell Mathew, but I always wished I had a little sister other than a little brother.”

That makes her giggle. “Now, I got something to blackmail you with.”

As she leaves his embrace to hug Janae, Dexter throws his hands up. “Wait, I thought we were just having a moment there?”

Pilar hugs Mad Dog, then Trappa before replying, “And we did, but if Madison didn’t tell you, I’m the Bone Collector. I will store your secrets to use later on for my advantage.”

The room grew silent, no doubt the guys were wondering if she would use what she recently found out about them.

Pilar becomes serious as she looks on at their questioning expressions. “Let me make this clear, I would never tell anyone what I witnessed tonight. You all have proven to be my brothers and I would never disclose anything about Delta Force. Now when it comes to tea about personal stuff, just know my ears are always open.”

Snickering, I tell her, “Pilar, get our stuff and I’ll be in when we’re done here.” She gathers the bags, then leaves for her room.

“I like her,” Trappa chuckles. “She reminds me of Kayla. Doesn’t she, Janae?”

“A little but Kayla’s more mouthy,” Janae replies, returning to sweeping the glass.

“True,” Trappa returns.

Strolling over to the window, I’m stunned to see the yard empty of the dead bodies, the vehicles Rang, and his men drove up in. The other Delta Force SUV is missing as well. Dexter, Janae and Trappa’s vehicles are the only ones out there. No need to ask where the other men were. No doubt

they were gone to dispose of the bodies and vehicles. Blade is out there power washing the blood from the yard.

“Madison,” Dexter calls. I turn to face him. “Tomorrow, I want you, Pilar, and Janae to use my truck and visit with your parents and James at the hospital. While you all are there, me and the guys are going to start working on getting this place back in order.”

“Okay, we’ll bring some food back when we return.” I responded.

Dexter and I began to help the others with the cleanup. By the time we had the living room cleaned up, the Delta Force SUV was pulling up to the house.

“It’s the Twins and Blade,” Mad Dog announces before sweeping up the last pile of glass.

Exhausted from everything, I tell Dexter, “I’m going to go take a shower and join Pilar.”

“Okay,” he says, rubbing my back. “We probably have a few more hours before the sun comes up. The guys and I will stay out here. The Twins should have brought some plastic back for us to cover the windows.”

“Everybody has been so helpful. I’m really grateful to have you all here.”

“That’s what family is for,” he whispers, placing his finger under my chin, then brings his soft lips to mine.

I smile when he lifts his head. “I wish you could hold me tonight, but Pilar needs me.”

He hums, gushing. “I wish I could too, but I understand. Plus, I’m looking forward to holding you in my arms every night I can.”

“Me too,” I agree. “Let me show Janae which room she can sleep in. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Dexter gives me a goodnight kiss, then says, “I love you, Madison.”

“I love you too, Dex.”



# Chapter 19

## Tech

This past week has been hectic to say the least. The next morning after the shootout, the guys and I got up before the ladies and did an assessment on what materials we were going to need. Mad Dog rescheduled our security appointments for the rest of the week so we could work on the cabin. After looking up the closest Home Depot, we left. A few hours later, we returned with the SUV and my truck packed down, pulling rental trailers with everything from replacement windows to spackle and paint. We had a big job ahead of us so we made sure to get everything we would need and then some.

Before we could start unloading everything, Madison came out and told us to come eat some breakfast. She was like a cook ringing the bell for chow to the herders on a cattle drive. The last thing anyone had eaten were the burgers and sides they cooked with Papa the night before, so we were starving.

Speaking of Papa, I called Venom earlier while we were at the store to check on him and Mathew. Venom said their scan results came back negative of any damages. The doctor wanted to keep Mathew another day, but of course my thick headed little brother shut that shit down once he found out Papa was going to be released. When I asked Venom his opinion on the matter, he said as long as Mathew takes the antibiotics, pain medication the doctor prescribed, and take it easy, he would be fine. I only agreed to it because he will be with us and if he had any issues, at least we would have Venom and Madison here to take care of him. Venom said they would be on their way once the doctor brings their discharge papers.

I relayed the news to Madison as I made my plate. She was excited to hear it, saying, “Oh, they both will do what the doctor said or else I will turn into Nurse Ratched on their asses.”

Everyone laughed.

“I know you will,” I chuckled.

She giggled, then said, “Since you guys are back, we’re going to go to hospital now. I talked to momma, and she said James is up.”

“That’s good!”

“Yes, and just like Mathew, he’s ready to go home but you know momma and daddy aren’t going to let that happen.”

“True, plus his gunshot was more severe than Mathew’s,” I said, then another thought hit me. I had to make sure Madison and I were on the same page. “Madison, you know I would never tell you to lie to your parents, but can you not tell them about what happened last night.”

She began to argue but I stopped her. “Just hear me out.”

“Yeah, but I don’t know Dexter.”

Sitting my plate on the table, I said, “I know your father will be able to understand what we did, but your mom; I don’t think she will. I’m willing to tell Mr. Rowe what happened just like I told him about the night at the club, but I think it would be best not to tell Mrs. Rowe. After I tell him, and he wants your mom to know then we will do so.”

“So, what am I supposed to tell them when they ask how things are going?” she questioned.

“Just let them know everything is good, but when you get a chance, pull your father to the side and tell him I said, ‘Respect human dignity, respect others.’ He’ll know what it means.”

Confused, Madison asked, “But what does that mean?”

Swatting her left butt cheek, I replied, “You have to be a Marine to understand.”

She rubbed the spot, grinning. “Fine, but we need to talk to Pilar then. She needs to be on the same page as us.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” I said, abandoning my plate so we could take Pilar into the living room to talk privately.

To my surprise, she was on board with my idea.

“Momma and daddy are already stressed about James and the bullshit. We don’t need to add more onto it. I witnessed the shit, and it had me on edge. I can only imagine how they would react hearing about it.” With that, we agreed that if their parents inquired about the cabin, Madison would be the one to answer.

Before they left, I gave Madison my credit card and said for them to stop at one of the furniture stores to find similar furniture to replace the ones that were shot up. If they couldn’t and had to purchase a different style, then we could spin it and say we wanted to surprise them with an early anniversary gift since theirs was two months away.

They left in Janae's Mustang not too long after. While we were eating, we heard the front door open, then close. With everyone still on high alert, we brandished our weapons and crept to the living room.

I was the first to enter to see Papa, Mathew, Venom, and Lethal standing there.

Papa scowled, saying, "Boy, put that peashooter up before you hurt yourself."

I laughed putting my pistol away before dashing over to them. I hugged Papa first, lifting him off the ground.

"Put me down before you mess me up even worse and I end up back in the hospital," he cackled. "Did anyone pull my fish basket from the water? There were at least three large bluegill and two largemouth bass in it."

With my heart filled with joy, I sat him on his feet, then let him go. "No, Papa. No one was thinking about your fish basket at the time."

"Damn turtles or snakes have probably eaten them up by now."

I waved him off, turning to Mathew. When I tried to embrace him the same way, he held out his hand, stopping me.

"Nope, we're not about to do that big bro. I damn near begged the doctor to let me go and if you hug me like that, then I promise one of us will be back in the sterile box and it won't be me."

Laughing harder, I extended my hand to him. Mathew took it, and I pulled him into a semi hug to protect his wound.

"I'm so sorry, brother," I whispered.

He pulled back, asking, "Why? I'm not. I knew the consequences when I ran off to get Papa. My only regret is that they got the jump on me."

"I bet that shit won't happen again," Papa vocalized.

"Hell no," Mathew declared.

We took them into the kitchen so they could have some of the bountiful breakfast the ladies had prepared.

After we had our fill, we went back into the living room. Venom brought in the two lawn chairs from the porch for Papa and Mathew to sit in. I didn't notice the bullet holes in them before, so they're going to have to replace them as well.

We split into three teams. One working on the outside of the cabin, fixing the bullet holes. One taking out the broken window frames, and the last sanding the walls, then using the spackle to fill in the holes before sanding the walls again to repaint.

Less than five hours later, the girls were coming up the driveway. We were all outside taking a break on the porch. A red Toyota Corolla followed behind them that made the hairs on the back of my neck rise. The other fellows must have felt the same way because their eyes watched the car like vultures, ready to strike.

As the cars parked, Madison hopped out of the red car first. “This is my best friend Skylar’s car. She called while we were on our way to the hospital and met us up there. I told her about the vandalism to the cabin and she insisted on coming back and helping with the cleanup.”

She tilted her head to the side indicating for me to play along with the story she told. The driver’s side door opens, and a stunning brown skin woman gets out. Janae and Pilar got out of her car and went to her trunk.

“Damn,” Trappa murmured behind me.

Skylar waved, after closing the car door. “Hi, guys. Hope you don’t mind another hand. I used to spend weekends up here with Madison and her family, so this place is like a home away from home for me. I can’t imagine why anyone would want to try and destroy it, but the way the world is today, I’m not surprised.”

“The more the merrier,” Trappa said, stepping forward.

Skylar studied him before saying to Madison, “Let’s get the food out of the trunk.”

“We’ll help you,” Trappa said, making a beeline towards them.

I looked over my shoulder to Mad Dog who just shrugged his shoulders. Seemed like Trappa had his sights on Skylar.

Laughing to myself, I went to Madison, slid my arm around her waist, then kissed her temple. Lowering my head, I whispered in her ear, “Thanks for the heads up.”

“Of course. Skylar would freak out if she knew the truth.”

“I’m sure.”

Looking around the yard, Madison praised, “You guys did a great job out here.”

“We’ve been nonstop since breakfast. The walls have been sanded and spackled. We got about another thirty minutes before starting to repaint the walls. The old furniture had been thrown into a burn pile your dad had in the back yard. The windows have been removed but the lawn chairs on the porch need to be replaced.”



Madison informed, “You guys have been putting in some work. While we couldn’t find the same furniture my parents had because it’s centuries old.” Her eyes rolled. “We found a similar pattern, so Pilar and I ordered express delivery. They will be arriving tomorrow around noon.”

“The living room will be ready by then,” I said. “Come on, let’s help the others.”

When the furniture arrived, the hard wood floors had been cleaned and re-stained. The new accents the ladies had picked out were hanging up along with the Rowe’s family pictures in new frames. There was still more work to do, and we were all committed to getting it done.

With the threat gone, everyone started going back home that Wednesday and returning the following days to help out. Mathew, Papa, and Pilar were the only ones to continue to stay at the cabin with us. Since Mathew was still under the watchful eye of Madison, Papa drove Pilar home to retrieve more clothes. While there she packed some of her parents and James’ clothes and toiletries as well.

Madison and Janae had scrubbed the rooms in the cabin down with so many cleaners, we had to open the windows to let out the toxic fumes.

Mad Dog and I found it funny how Trappa somehow strategically placed himself on the same clean-up crew as Skylar. Skylar must have caught on because when the assignments were doled out and she was on the same one as Trappa, she requested to be reassigned to another task.

At first, Janae in her defensive sister mode thought Skylar was being petty, but after we told her our thoughts on what was going on between the two, she took a step back, saying, “You know what? I think she is just what he needs. Skylar doesn’t hold her tongue and she’s not going to put up with any bullshit. My brother may be a successful man of the streets and businessman, but that shit doesn’t mean anything if you don’t have the right one by your side to help you calm that savage beast inside. Isn’t that right, baby?” She looked at Mad Dog.

He winked at her, replying, “One-hundred percent baby.”

Now we’ve finally made it to Friday and the house was ninety-nine point nine percent back to normal. The new windows have been installed, the walls look like new, and the furniture is in place. The only thing left for me to do was install the security system Mad Dog brought from the office which I planned to do before Mr. and Mrs. Rowe along with James came

out later that day for the celebratory cookout we planned for his release from the hospital.

As Madison and I lay in her bed at the cabin this morning, the sun begins to rise. My mind was on the conversation I was going to have with Mr. Rowe. I was worried how he's going to react. Once he found out what happened, would he try to forbid Madison and I from being together? I would never let him or anyone else stop me from being with the woman I love. I only hope it doesn't come to that.

"What has you in deep thought early this morning?" Madison yawned, snuggling closer to me.

"What makes you think that?" I ask, loving the feel of her warm body next to mine.

"Because, I've been rubbing my thigh up and down your leg for the last five minutes and you haven't seemed to notice."

Damn, I guess I was out of it.

"I'm sorry, love. I was just thinking about the talk your dad and I are going to have."

Madison kissed my chest, saying, "I'm sure it will be fine. Daddy told you to protect me and you did. Plus, you guys fixed the place up and it looks just as amazing as before."

Her words bring back something Pilar said when we first came to the cabin about Madison coming here after being kidnapped. We've been so busy lately, I forgot to bring up the subject.

"Madison, why didn't you tell me you used to come here after the shit with Bryan? Was this a place of healing for you?"

She sighs, replying, "It was and still is. You didn't know I was here, but you were here with me."

Confused, I say, "I don't understand."

"Most of the times I called you back then Dexter, I was here. In the beginning, I loved being back with my family but after a while I started feeling overwhelmed. Momma and Daddy would look at me with pity and try to talk to me about what happened, but I was too embarrassed and ashamed to tell them. I was in my own headspace, dealing with everything alone until one day daddy suggested I come up here and relax by myself. I took his advice and did. The first few days were great. Being out here surrounded by the tranquility of this place and the solitude was working, but

then one morning I woke up from having a horrible nightmare, crying with my body trembling.”

I felt the wetness of her tears on my chest as she sniffed.

“I didn’t want to worry my parents or Skylar by calling them. So I sat up in my bed, rocking back and forth with my arms wrapped around my legs. I don’t know how long I was like that, but then your face popped in my head. I remembered I had your card in my wallet, so I went and got it. My hand shook as I dialed your number, but when you answered and I heard your soothing voice, it put me at ease.”

“I remember that call,” I say, holding her tighter.

“You asked me what was wrong, and I don’t know why it was easier to talk and not my family, but I poured my soul out. You didn’t say anything, just listened with no judgment. I know that was the Psychologist in you, but I needed that at the time. I stayed out here for about two weeks. Self-healing and talking with you.” She sighs. “But then, you tossed me to someone else.”

“I didn’t toss you, Madison,” I debated.

She snickers. “I know, Dexter. You *referred* me to someone else and don’t get me wrong, I truly understand why, but that didn’t stop our connection.”

“No it didn’t, and I’m glad,” I confess.

“Me too. With the help of you and Mr. Ruiz, I was able to finally open up with my family and reconnect with them. Although I still didn’t feel comfortable going in depth about what Bryan did to me, I was more at ease expressing my feelings.”

I kiss the top of her head. “I’m happy we could be there for you.” Rolling her onto her back, I nibble her neck. “Now that I have my answer to that, let’s get back to you teasing me earlier.”

Madison gives a mischievous smile as I maneuver between her legs, then sit up on my knees.

“I don’t think you’ll be needing these,” I tease, taking hold of the sides of her boy shorts. Madison lifts her hips as I begin to slide them down her toned legs. Once I have them off, I toss them to the side. While removing my boxers, Madison takes off her tank top.

Taking hold of my brick hard dick and I start stroking it from the base to the swollen head as Madison bends her knees, then let her legs fall apart while kneading her breasts. She is the most beautiful sight I had ever seen.

“Play with my pretty pussy,” I commanded.

Keeping her eyes locked with mine, Madison slowly skims her right hand over her torso down to her glistening honeypot. She moans, spreading her nether lips, giving me a clear view of her inviting pussy. I grunt, squeezing the head of my dick before slightly increasing my strokes.

Madison teases her engorged clit before moving down her leaking entrance. She gasps, inserting one finger, then another. She caught the tempo of me jerking myself off and began finger fucking herself as if her fingers were my dick. It’s so erotic to see the both of us getting off as if I were buried balls deep inside of her.

Sweat beads are starting to form on my forehead. I could go a little while longer but when Madison closed her eyes, whispering my name, I knew she was close. I need to be inside her, now.

Madison opens her eyes when I remove her hand from my treasure. I let my dick go so I can grip her waist to pull her closer to me. I slide my arm under her right knee. Grabbing my dick again, I move the head up and down her wet slit before stopping at the opening to my heaven.

“I love you, Madison.”

“I love you, Dexter.”

I thrust hard into her causing both of us to moan with pleasure.

“Mine,” I growl, lifting her other knee.

Madison fists the sheets as I go as deep as our bodies will allow. I look down at my dick moving in and out of her. I love seeing that shit. My dick coated with her juices, giving her the delight no one else ever will.

“Dexter, please I need to cum,” Madison pleads, wanting more.

Who am I to deny my woman what she was asking for? Replacing my arms with my hands, I push her legs back as far as they would go as I ramming into her. Damn if that shit doesn’t feel good. The sound of our skin slapping together echoes around the room like an erotic lullaby.

The next thing I feel is Madison’s pussy walls clamping down on my dick like a fucking snapping turtle. That shit sent me over the edge so fast, it’s a possibility I might have momentarily blanked out or died. Either way when I gain my senses, I’m shooting my load deep into the crevices of her womb.

“Fuck, fuck,” she cries, writhing underneath me.

I thought I was screaming the same words, but realized my mouth was open and nothing was coming out. When the last of my seed leaves me, I

abruptly stop. Madison and I stare at each other before we break into a fit of laughter.

“Are you alright? I wasn’t too rough?” I ask with concern.

“You were just what I needed, baby.” She replies.

Knowing she was okay, I flop down on the bed, then pull her next to me. We spend the next thirty minutes or so talking about the cookout.

By nine o’clock, we were out of bed, cleaned up, and ready to get the day started. We found Pilar and Mathew in the kitchen prepping meats for later.

“If you want breakfast, then I suggest you eat some cereal,” Pilar says, seasoning some chicken leg quarters.

“I’ll just have some coffee,” Madison returns. “Dexter, would you like some?”

“Yes, please.”

I nudged Mathew, inquiring, “Where’s the old man?”

As he put seasoned pork chops in a marinating bag, he replies, “He wanted to get in some early morning fishing, so he went down to the pond. He’s been there about forty-five minutes now.”

Madison hands me a coffee cup. “I’m gonna run down there and see what he’s caught, then I’ll be back to install the security system.”

There’s a knock on the front door.

“That must be Janae and the guys,” Madison says. “I’ll go let them in.”

I steal a kiss before leaving out the patio doors. The warmth of the sun tingles my skin as I step into the backyard. It’s a beautiful day for a barbeque. I hum, walking down to the deck where Papa’s wearing his favorite angler’s hat with his back to me, sitting in a fisherman’s chair.

Smiling, I step onto the deck. “Have you caught all the fish, old man?”

I laugh when he doesn’t answer. “So, I’ll take that as you didn’t catch shit.”

Papa still doesn’t say anything. The humor drains from me when I move in front of him and see that the left side of his face has drooped, and his eyes are closed. The coffee cup falls from my hand as I rush to him.

“Papa,” I yell, shaking his shoulders.

His eyes slowly open. “Dexter,” he slurs.

I immediately picked him up and ran towards the house. “Madison! Mathew! Help!”

Madison and Janae storm out the doors along with Pilar. Mathew and the others follow.

“We need to get Papa to the hospital now!” I shout, continuing to the front yard. “Mathew, bring me my keys.”

By the time I make it to the truck, Mathew’s there with the doors open. I carefully lay Papa on the back seat.

Venom takes one look at Papa, saying, “This is not good.” He and Madison begin to check his vitals.

“Dexter what’s wrong with Papa?” Mathew asks with worry.

“I don’t know but I think he’s had a stroke,” I state.

“Fuck,” Mathew yells out in anguish.

“We gotta go now. Get in the truck, Mathew.”

“I’m coming with you,” Madison says, coming around to the back passenger door on the driver’s side. She lifts Papa’s head, then gets in, resting his head on her lap.

Mad Dog comes to me, asking, “Where are you going to take him?”

Taking my glasses off to wipe away the tears that were threatening to fall from my eyes, I reply “The closest hospital is the one in Tyler where James is getting discharged today.”

“Mother Frances, right?”

“Yeah”

“Alright, you all go ahead. We’ll lock up here and follow.”

“Thanks, brother.”

Mad Dog grips my shoulder. “He’s going to be fine, Dexter. That old man is tough as nails.”

We rarely called each other by our names, but to hear him say mine brought comfort. I nod, then get in the truck. Once I had it started, I left a trail of dust behind us as I sped away.

I’m sure I broke dozens of laws while driving to the hospital. Whatever the speed limit was, I did twenty miles over it if not more. If a state trooper would have gotten behind me, I wasn’t going to stop. Their asses would’ve had to follow me to the hospital. Time was of the essence, and I didn’t have any to spare.

Remembering Administrator Collins who I dealt with getting James into a secured room, I called him, praying he was working that day. My prayers were answered because he answered on the third ring. I immediately told him what was going on with Papa. He asked for Papa’s information, then

told me to bring Papa straight to the emergency room and he would have staff waiting for us. I thanked him, making a mental note to donate a sizable donation to the hospital.

Fifteen minutes later, I was slamming on the brakes in front of the emergency room. Mathew and I jumped out and ran inside. After telling the admissions clerk who I was and that Administrator Collins was expecting us, she pressed a button that sent four nurses and two doctors out of the ER secured doors.

The first doctor approaches me “I’m Dr. Bowers. How long has he been like this?”

Following behind the nurses who were pushing a stretcher to the truck, I replied, “I don’t know. My brother said he went fishing forty-five minutes prior to me finding him. It took us less than twenty minutes to get here.”

“Good, good,” Dr. Bowers says. “If he’s had a stroke, then we’re still within the window.”

The nurses attentively remove Papa from the truck and onto the stretcher.

“We’re going to take him straight to the MRI table. While there his lab work will be drawn. You and your family can wait in the waiting room. I’ll come talk to you once he’s back in the ER,” Dr. Bowers informs.

“Thank you,” I told him, extending my hand.

“No need to thank me. I’m just happy you brought him in when you did,” he returns, shaking my hand.

As they push Papa away, Mathew says, “Dexter, you and Madison find some seats. I’m going to park the truck.”

“Okay.” I take Madison’s hand in mine, going back into the ER.

We find empty chairs in the far right corner. Luckily, there aren’t that many people in the waiting room, so there’s plenty of seats available for the others when they arrive.

As Madison and I sit in the chairs, I break. “I can’t have him taken away from me, Madison. After the shit with my parents, Papa is the only one whoever gave a shit about me and Mathew. He has to make it through this.”

“Baby,” she whispers. “You won’t lose him. Papa has too many years left on this earth.”

“I hope you’re right,” I responded as Mathew came in with the Delta Force crew, Janae and Pilar.

“What did they say?” Mathew quickly asks.

“He’s getting an MRI now and lab work,” I reply. “All we can do now is wait for the doctor to let us know the results.”

Mathew flops down in one of the vacant seats, talking to himself. I felt his heartache.

“Let me go talk to Mathew,” I tell Madison. She gives an encouraging smile as she squeezes my hand before I release hers.

I go over to Mathew. “You and I need to have a talk.”

Throwing his hands up, Mathew sighs, “What is there to talk about? Papa is going to leave us just like our sperm donor and incubator. When he’s gone, who’s going to continue his legacy?” His eyes bore into me as he slapped his chest. “Me, that’s who. You moved to Dallas without a care, but it has been me who has looked out for his welfare.”

Tilting my head back, I ask, “What do you mean, Mathew? I have always looked out for you and Papa. I come home every chance I get.”

With tears in his eyes, Mathew replies, “That’s what I’m talking about. *You* come home when it suits you, but I’m the one that’s with him every damn day. That man in there is the only parent I have and if I lose him, who do I have left?”

I kept my composure although my legs wanted to collapse under me. I understood how Mathew was feeling. We’re both close to Papa, but Papa raised Mathew, so they had a stronger bond. Mathew never once cried for our parents because he knew he was safe with Papa. So, to lose him would be like losing his father. When Dr. Bowers came out, I didn’t give a shit he said. If it was about money, then I was willing to pay whatever price to keep Papa on this side of the earth with us.

Sitting in the chair next to Mathew, I declare, “You got me little brother.” I pull him into a hug as we both silently weep.

When the third hour came, we were already doing our prayers in the waiting room. James had been discharged. He and his parents had come to join the rest of us.

Not too long after, Dr. Bowers and another doctor came into the waiting room.

He came straight over to me. “Mr. Broussard, can I speak to you in private?”

“If it concerns my grandfather, then they need to know too.” I replied, standing.



He smiled. “Very well. First, let me introduce you to Dr. Mindel, he’s a neurologist here.”

“Nice to meet you,” I said, shaking his hand.

“You as well,” Dr. Mindel returned.

Dr. Bowers continued. “It appears that your grandfather had a TIA, Transient Ischemic Attack. It’s what we refer to as a mini stroke which is why Dr. Mindel is here.”

Dr. Mindel took over, stating, “It’s a good thing you brought your grandfather in when you did. After figuring out his diagnosis, we were able to treat him with antiplatelet medications to reduce the platelets in his brain from sticking together to form a blood clot, which would’ve had an even worse outcome. Your grandfather will recover from this, but I suggest he has someone with him at all times. In situations like this there have been patients who had a full on stroke months later. Not saying this will happen to your grandfather, but there’s still a chance for it to happen. We’re going to keep him a few more days for observation before we release him.”

“When can we see him?” I inquired.

Dr. Bowers replied, “We’re waiting on a room assignment for him in the ICU. I will have one of the nurses let you know when we have a room number. It shouldn’t be long.”

“Thank you,” I expressed to Dr. Bowers and Mindel.

As they walked away, Madison grabbed my hand. “I told you baby he would be okay.”

“Yes, you did,” I said, hugging her before reaching out to pull Mathew into a three-way hug.

I had prayed many times in my life, but that day I think I might’ve overloaded the Savior, but it seemed he heard my prayers and gifted Papa more time with us. For that, I am truly thankful.



# Chapter 20

## Madison

Papa was released from the hospital two days after being admitted. I was with Dexter and Mathew when Dr. Mindel discharged him. I wanted to hear what his aftercare would be. I told Dexter I will stay at his house to make sure Papa was doing what he needed to get better.

When Papa was back at Dexter's, let's just say he wasn't one of my best patients. As a man who never relied on anyone for help, he had a hard time adjusting. Yes, he was able to function without assistance, but we didn't want to take any chances of him falling or harming himself that would lead to him having a full on stroke.

He finally got on board that we were only trying to help him. Personally, I think he started to take advantage of it, calling one of us to come change the TV channel or bring him something from the kitchen.

On the third day, I told Dexter and Mathew to ignore his requests. Papa needed some tough love, and he was about to get it.

The three of us were in the kitchen when we heard Papa start shouting from the cinema room.

"I need a cup of coffee."

I gestured for Dexter and Mathew to remain silent.

"Coffee," Papa yelled out again.

We still kept quiet. Seconds later, he was entering the kitchen.

"Didn't you all hear me?"

"We did," I replied.

"So, why didn't anyone bring my coffee?"

Dexter was about to answer him, but I nudged him. Picking up a slice of crispy bacon, I took a bite, then answered, "Because, if you can walk all the way back here, then you can get your own cup of coffee and breakfast."

At that moment, Papa probably wanted to outcast me from the Broussard family, but that wasn't going to happen.

He grumbled coming into the kitchen, then going over to the coffee maker. He poured a cup for himself. "I know what you all are doing."

"And what is that, Papa?" Mathew challenged.

Papa fumbled with his hands, replying, "I know I was milking the situation, but as a man who has worked damn near every day of his life, it was nice to sit back and have others do for me."

"We get it, Papa," Dexter said. "But we don't want you to get comfortable relying on us to do everything for you. Dr. Mindel said you could go back to doing your everyday things within reason."

Papa looked at the floor as he admitted, "Truth be told, I'm afraid. That was the scariest shit I have ever experienced. I would rather have my arm bitten off by a gator than go through that again, but to know the next time could be worse frightens the hell out of me."

Seeing the tears in this strong willed man's eyes, plus finding out how the TIA had affected him not just physically but mentally, brought tears to my eyes. I had to go over and hug him.

"We are here for you, Papa. Just know we are willing to do whatever to ensure that doesn't happen."

Papa shook his head, saying, "I know, I know. I have been an ass with my recovery, but you have to look at it from my side. I was once this outgoing man doing what he loves, to a man who needs to depend on others. I don't want to be a burden."

Dexter draped his arm over Papa's shoulder. "Papa, you could never be a burden to any one of us. We are here because we love you."

"And I love you all too. I'm sorry for being difficult."

Grinning, I said, "No need to apologize. Let's just move forward from here."

After that little intervention, the old Papa came back to us. His first request was to go back to the cabin so he could do some fishing. Since we didn't get the chance to have the cookout for James' release, Dexter and I thought it would be a good idea to do one for him and Papa.

I called daddy to see if we could all meet there that Saturday. Of course, he was on board. Dexter called Mad Dog to spread the word to the others. There was no need for us to buy any meat because the food is still at the cabin. Janae and Mad Dog stored it in the freezers before coming to the hospital. We only needed to get fresh ingredients for the sides.

As we sat in the kitchen, making a list of what we were going to need, Mathew announced, "I'm going home to check on the business. I'll be back Saturday for the cookout."

“Are you sure?” Dexter asked. “Couldn’t you make a call to the General Manager to see how things are going?”

“I could, but I want to see for myself,” Mathew replied.

Dexter sat back in his chair. “So, when do you plan on leaving?”

Mathew avoided eye contact with Dexter as he answered, “Probably within the next hour. I want to get there before dark.”

Dexter and Papa gawked at him before Papa said, “Yeah, that’s a good time to leave. Those highways can get tricky in the dark. It’s best to make the drive during the daytime.”

“Papa’s right. I’ll make you some sandwiches for the road,” Dexter added.

Somehow I felt like they were having a conversation within a conversation that I wasn’t in on, but I let it go.

With a small cooler packed with food Dexter and I prepared with drinks, Mathew was ready to hit the road forty-five minutes later. He embraced us before getting into his truck and pulling off. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but I felt like Mathew was trying to get home to check on more than just the business.

Papa, Dexter, and I arrived at the cabin early this Friday morning to pull the meat out of the freezers to start defrosting and to dust the cabin down. We were surprised an hour later, when momma, daddy, Pilar, and James arrived.

We came out on the porch as they started getting out of the Chrysler.

“And we thought we would get here the day before to surprise you all,” momma laughs.

“It is definitely a surprise,” Dexter says, going down the stairs, then taking the items from her hands as he kissed her cheek. “Hello, Mrs. Rowe.”

Momma swats his arm. “Boy, I already told you to call me either momma or Paula. When you call me Mrs. Rowe, I have flashbacks to my mother-in-law.” She rolled her eyes.

“Yes, ma’am,” Dexter returns, stifling his laughter.

“Holden, how have you been?” daddy asks, walking over to Papa and shaking his hand.

“With a little tough love from my boys and your daughter, I’m doing well.”

Daddy chuckles. “I completely understand. Madison means well but once I had the flu and you would have thought I contracted Ebola from the way she kept the others away from me.”

Papa grins. “All I can say is, I’m so happy we have a caring nurse in our family.”

“Indeed,” daddy agrees. “Are you ready to do some fishing?”

“Got my gear on the back of the truck,” Papa answers.

“How about we go see what’s biting today?”

“Sounds good to me,” Papa says, going to the back of the truck and retrieving his rod and reel and tackle box. “Dexter, you should come with us.” He arched his brow.

“Okay,” Dexter says. He winks at me before joining them. I’m sure Papa wanted him to come along to tell daddy what happened. With everything that had been going on, Dexter hasn’t had the time to have that conversation with daddy. I hope it goes well.

As they start to walk to the back of the cabin, momma says, “Well, we won’t see them until it’s time to eat lunch and maybe not even then.”

Waiting for momma to open the trunk so we can start to remove the items in there, and I notice Pilar staring at the cabin.

Closing the distance between us, I take her aside from the others and whisper, “Are you alright?”

“I am. It’s just, I haven’t been back here since...you know.”

“I do.”

“But since I’ve started seeing Dr. Ruiz, I learned to not let my fears overcome me. Yes, that was a hellish night, but we all made it out alive and that gives me comfort every day. I think being here is a big step for me.”

Grasping her hands, I tell her, “I think so too. And if you feel uncomfortable sleeping in the cabin tonight, we can set up a tent in the backyard like when we were younger and campout.”

Her face brightens up at the idea. “Really?”

“Yes, really.” I counter, shaking my head closer to hers.

“Thank you, sis.”

I couldn’t help the giggle that leaves me as Pilar gives me a huge hug.

“You girls come over here and help us,” momma shouts.

“Yes, ma’am” we say at the same time.

After grabbing grocery bags, we walk to the cabin, laughing about the time James was sprayed by a skunk while out hunting with daddy. It took

three baths in tomato juice to remove the funk from him. As we climb the stairs, it hits me. Momma doesn't know about the changes we did in the cabin. Thinking quickly on my feet, I spin around and say, "Momma, we have a surprise for you."

A skeptical look appears on her face. "A surprise?"

Pilar caught on to what I'm doing and added, "Yes, a surprise. I think you're going to love it."

"So, you know about this surprise?" Momma questions her.

Pilar smiles. "I do."

Momma looks over at James, asking, "You know about it too?"

"No, I don't but can you two hurry up and tell her. These bags are heavy," he says, eyeballing me and Pilar.

"Fine" I open the screen door, letting momma go in first.

"Oh, my," momma gushes, looking around at the new furniture.

"When we were here the last time with the others, we decided to repaint the walls and replace the old furniture. I hope you like it." I explain, hoping that she did.

Momma sits the bags on the floor, then walks over to the new couch. Running her hand along the fabric, she says, "I love it."

Thank God because I didn't know how she was going to react.

"I have been wanting to do this for the longest, thank you," she said with tears in her eyes.

Picking up her bags, I tell her, "We'll take these to the kitchen while you get a closer look around."

The day turned out to be a great one, having that time with my family. Dexter came back to the cabin an hour later as we finished removing the last of the meat from the freezers. I asked him if daddy and Papa had caught anything. He chuckles, saying he was sent there to pass along a message to us that we will be having a fish fry outside later. I was excited. There's nothing like eating fresh fish, a tossed salad, French fries, and homemade coleslaw.

"James, they want you and I to come join in the fun," Dexter said.

"You're dad left the barn open so you can get your gear. I just need to get mine from my truck."

"Let me go show those old timers how to really catch some fish," James laughed, going out the patio doors.

“I’m going to tell your daddy what you called him,” momma shouted, causing us to laugh. “My husband isn’t an old timer, he can still...”

I interrupted her, waving my hands. “Nope, nope. We don’t want to hear that.”

Momma frowned. “What? Girl, you better hope that when Dexter is your daddy’s age he still has his stamina.”

I didn’t know whether I should laugh or be mortified by what she said. I stared at her with my eyes bugged out as she, Pilar, and even Dexter had a hoot. I clutched Dexter’s hand and dragged him to the living room.

“Madison, stop,” he laughed.

Letting his hand go, I argued, “I can’t believe you thought that was funny. I don’t want to hear anything about my daddy’s *stamina*. I can’t believe she said that. That’s just nasty.”

Still amused, Dexter gripped my hips and drew me closer to him. “Maybe so, but just know I will forever have more than enough stamina for you, and I don’t care how old I get.”

I giggled as he waggled his eyebrows at me.

“You’re such a perv.”

“A perv for you and only you,” he said before hitting me with the most sensual kiss. I swear if momma and Pilar weren’t in the cabin, I would have jumped his ass and blessed the new furniture.

When Dexter finally released my lips, I swore the room was spinning. Him swatting my ass, then palming it, stopped all of that.

“I’m going to hang with the guys and you’re going to spend time with your mother and sister,” he instructed.

With my mind clear of the lustful delirium he put it in, I asked, “Did you tell my daddy about that night.”

“I did,” he replied.

“How did he take it?”

“I’m still here, so I would say it went well. We’ll talk about it later, okay?”

“Okay”

I kissed him again before unlocking the screen door, then exiting. I stood there, thinking this man has been there for me, my family and had proven that he would do whatever it took to keep us safe. Yes, I could admit not only was I in love with Dexter Broussard, but I loved the man. He came into my life during a messed up circumstance and has faithfully remained.



He was the one God created for me and I wouldn't give him up for anyone without a fight.

Later when the guys came to the backyard with their freshly cleaned catch me, momma, and Pilar had the salad, coleslaw, and fries ready. Of course, the fries wouldn't be cooked until we started cooking the fish. Daddy always taught us that you fry a round of fish, then fries. We've been doing that for as long as I can remember.

Daddy and James brought the propane fryer from the barn and started it up. Once the large cast iron skillet was on it, momma poured in the right amount of cooking oil. When the temperature was right, momma began to fill the skillet with the battered bluegill, crappie, and bass.

As the bright blue skies darkened to night, daddy and Papa put wood into the fire pit. When the last of the fish and fries were done, we all sat around the pit enjoying our meal and the fellowship with each other. It was amazing to see two families of different backgrounds commune as one.

When we had our fill, everyone agreed it was time to retire for the next day when the others would arrive. I was overjoyed when Pilar announced she was going to bed in her room. I love my little sister, but I was dreading sleeping in that tent, getting eaten by mosquitoes, but I would have endured it for her.

Although my parents were aware of me and Dexter's relationship, we thought it would be best if he stayed in the guest room with Papa. Plus, I knew after that kiss earlier, we would have been humping like rabbits and the last thing I wanted to hear the next morning was momma talking about his stamina.



# Epilogue

## Tech

The next morning after having to endure sleeping in a bed with Papa snoring like a bear compared to my soundless Madison, I was ready to get out of the bed.

After getting dressed, I went into the kitchen and found Madison, and her family. Excuse me, my family.

“Good morning, Dexter,” Madison greeted as she came to me and gave me a welcoming good morning kiss and a cup of coffee.

“Good morning, love,” I returned.

“I spoke to Janae earlier and she, Mad Dog and the others should be arriving by ten. Have you spoken to Mathew?”

Taking the cup from her, I replied, “No, but he’ll be here.”

“Dexter, breakfast is ready, so get you a plate,” Momma Paula said.

After hearing that, Madison and I picked up plates and started to fill them with the bounty Momma Paula made. Thirty minutes after we sat at the table and started to eat, Papa entered.

“You couldn’t wake me up?” he directed at me.

Wiping my mouth with a napkin, I replied, “I could have but you were sleeping so soundly, I didn’t want to wake you.”

“Bullshit,” he grumbled, making his way to the coffee maker. He poured a cup, then took a sip. That seemed to take the edge off.

“So, what do we need to do before everyone else shows up?” he asked.

Madison replied, “Not much. The meat is ready to go on the grill, the only thing left to do is the sides. The only thing left is for you all to get the yard games assembled.”

Before either of us could add, the sound of horns honking in the front yard grabbed our attention. I went ahead of the others to the living room. Looking out the windows, I saw Mad Dog’s truck, one of Delta Forces SUVs and Trappa car parked outside. I laughed, opening the front door, then the screen door.

“That’s how you make your presence known,” I yelled as they started getting out of the vehicles and the others joined me on the porch.

“We wanted to make our presence known,” Mad Dog jokes, closing the door to his truck as the others get out.

As Janae opened the front passenger door and got out, the second passenger door opened with Kayla, her and Trappa’s younger sister exiting.

“As long as it isn’t sirens, I don’t have a problem with the honking,” Momma Paula said.

“Exactly, Mrs. Rowe,” Janae agreed before pulling Kayla towards the cabin. Blade watched Kayla’s every move. “This is our little sister, Kayla.” Janae introduced her to Madison and the family.

“It’s nice to meet you all,” Kayla greeted.

“Nice to meet you too, Kayla,” Momma Paula responded. “You all come on inside, we were just sitting down for breakfast. If you’re hungry, we have plenty.”

Blade, Lethal, and the Twins went to the back of the SUV and returned carrying two large coolers. When they started making their way to the cabin, I smiled when I saw Mathew’s truck turn onto the driveway. At least he didn’t ride in horn a blazing like the fellows. He parks the truck and gets out.

“Hey everybody,” he said, going around to the passenger side. He opens the door and helps a young pretty brown skinned woman out. I immediately knew she was Jooi.

“Everyone, I’d like to introduce you to my fiancé, Jooi St John.” He proudly announced.

“Welcome, Jooi. You’re among family here.”

“Thank you,” Jooi graciously accepted.

After everyone welcomed Jooi, we made it into the cabin. With everyone in the kitchen, I think we did more talking than eating. Skylar finally made it, coming in with desserts. I nudged Mike to check out the way Trappa was staring her down. I hoped with her being here, it would keep him distracted from his speculations about Kayla and Blade.

The guys and I left the ladies in the kitchen to get Mr. Rowe’s five hundred and twenty inch plus started. Admiring the grill, I knew we would have the meat done in record time. But as a true grill master, you want the cuts to cook at their own time to give you savory meat. Nothing dry or under cooked.

While Mr. Rowe explained the features of the grill to Papa, James led us to the barn to get the yard games. In no time we had the volleyball net up,

the cornhole game, and horseshoes ready for play. Next, we set up four long tables with chairs. Pilar and Kayla came out and put tablecloths on them.

All in all, the day turned perfect. Everyone enjoyed the food and games. It was like having a family reunion. When the sun started to go down, I lit up the firepit for us to sit around, plus to keep the mosquitoes away.

I don't know how he did it, but Trappa convinced Skylar to take a walk down to the barn with him. It didn't go unnoticed after they left, Kayla said she needed to use the bathroom and Blade suddenly forgot his phone in the SUV.

"Is there something I should know about those two?" Madison whispered in my ear as she sat on my lap.

I took a swig of my beer, then replied, "Trust me, the less you know about that situation, the better."

Everybody was ecstatic to hear about Joii being pregnant. She and Mathew are planning on getting married before the baby is born, which made the ladies really happy, offering to help with the planning. I was proud of Mathew. He didn't let Joii's family come in between them. You could tell by the way he and Joii interacted with one another, they were happily in love.

When the night grew late, Momma Paula told everyone no one would be leaving since we had all been drinking. She said the girls along with Mr. Rowe and Papa could sleep in the cabin while the rest of us put up tents.

"I love all of you, but none of y'all are sleeping on my new living room furniture," she said, snickering.

You know Papa turned down her offer, stating he sleep out here with us so the girls could have the room he and I slept in the night before. Delta Force didn't have a problem with sleeping outside and neither did Mathew or James. We're used to it, but I didn't think Trappa had ever been camping before. He was about to have his first experience.

Around ten-thirty, Momma Paula and Mr. Rowe called it a night. The ladies stayed to help us set up the two large tents that slept five persons each. We put two cots in one of them for James and Papa to sleep on. Although they said they were fine to sleep in the sleeping bags, Madison and Venom didn't think it would be a good idea since they were still healing.

The ladies stayed another hour before they decided to go inside and have an impromptu pajama party. I was sure their topics of conversation

was going to be about Kayla and Blade and what happened down at the pond with Skylar and Trappa.

With my hand intertwined with hers, I walked Madison to the patio. Stopping at the steps, we faced each other.

“I had so much fun today,” Madison beamed.

“I did too,” I said, loving that she had a good time.

“We all need to get together like this again. I’m thinking we should come here at least once a month. You guys would love it here in the Fall when the leaves start changing. The colors are so beautiful.”

“Whatever you want, babe, but before we do that, I want to have you all to myself here. Yes, I’m being selfish but that’s what I want.”

“I want that too,” she smiled. “I would love to personally show you how the cabin became my sanctuary without the others.”

Leaning down, I softly kissed her. Madison wrapped her arms around my neck as the kiss turned sensual. The only reason we stopped was the ladies cheering us on. Madison giggled as she looked at them.

“I guess it’s time for you to go inside,” I chuckled.

“I guess so,” she laughed.

I kissed her again before she removed her arms and went up the stairs.

“I love you,” I said as she was about to go through the patio door.

Madison looked over her shoulder, smiling. “I love you too.” She winked, then disappeared in the cabin.

I stood there for a few moments before going back to the firepit where the guys were sitting. I already knew what was coming.

James made the sound of a whip. The others found it funny, hell I did too. If they thought I was whipped, then damn it I was. They teased me and I took that shit. It was all in fun, and I wasn’t offended at all.

After another hour of drinking a few more beers, it was time for us to turn in. I found it funny that Trappa made sure he and Blade were in the same tent. I guess that was his way of keeping an eye on him, but he didn’t know Blade is very crafty and could sneak out of any situation without anyone knowing.

I got comfortable in my sleeping bag in the tent with Papa and James. Mad Dog, Venom, and Mathew joined us. I fell asleep thinking about my future with Madison. There were visions of a grand wedding, followed by us having children. Our life together would be good. It was nice to have those images instead of the dreadful ones of our missions.

The next morning we woke to the smell of honey cured bacon. One by one we trickled out of the tents. Momma Paula, Mr. Rowe and the ladies were on the patio. He had a large griddle on top of the grill. On it was bacon, hash browns, and scrambled eggs.

“Coffee, decaf, regular, and orange juice is on the table over there,” Momma Paula informed, pointing to the table where they sat. We went straight to the table, needing the regular coffee for the caffeine. The Twins by passed the coffee and opted for the orange juice.

“You two don’t want any coffee?” Momma Paula inquired.

Thing One replied, “Our GeeGee said too much caffeine makes us hyper.”

Momma Paula frowned. “So, drink the decaf then.”

Thing Two responded, “Drinking the decaf will only make us want to have the regular, so we’ll stick with the orange juice.”

Dumbfounded, Momma Paula looked at me. “I’d like to meet this GeeGee.”

“You will,” I promised.

After we ate breakfast, the guys and I removed the cots and sleeping bags from the tents before taking down the tents. Once we put them back in the barn along with the tables and games, we helped Mr. Rowe clean the grill. He put the cover over it, and we went inside.

Everyone was in the living room, expressing how they had a good time. I had one more task to do before I could leave.

Going over to Madison, I told her, “I still need to set up the security system. It won’t take me long.”

She nodded.

I started to get to work when my Delta Force brothers joined me.

“You’ll get this done faster with our help,” Mad Dog declared as Blade, Lethal, Venom, and the Twins stood behind him.

I didn’t object and in less than two hours we had security cameras on the barn, in the front and back of the cabin. Sensors were placed to alert Mr. Rowe when someone pulled up on the property.

When we finished, Mr. Rowe thanked us for securing the cabin. He had thought about having it done years ago, but never got around to doing it. Now he had it done free of charge.

The leftovers from the night before were divided between us and there was a lot. I had enough to feed me, Papa, Mathew, Jiii and Madison for the

next three days. At least that's how I saw it, but Madison floored me when she said.

"I'm going home with my family."

I wanted to protest and demand that she needed to be with me, but I understood her position. Since that night at the club, she has been with me, not able to personally deal with the aftermath with her family. So, instead, I said, "Call me when you get there."

"I will," she replied, kissing my cheek.

A month has passed, and a lot has changed in both me and Madison's lives. After she went home with her parents, Madison stayed almost a week with them. We kept in touch with calls, texts, and facetime. To say that I missed her tremendously was an understatement. It took everything inside of me to not to go to Gilmer to see her, I didn't because she needed that time with her family.

I kept busy with work and spending time with Papa, Mathew, and Jooi. I had gotten so used to them being around, I was disappointed when Papa said at dinner that Thursday night, they would be going back to Iberville the next day. I tried to argue that Papa should stay with me, but Mathew said Jooi was moving in with them, so someone would always be with Papa.

"Dexter, I know you want what's best for me and going home is that. While I love being here with you, the bayou is all I know and where I belong. We'll be back to visit, and you know you and Madison are welcome to come anytime. I'll be fine, son," Papa said, gripping my hand.

I masked my sadness with a smile and nod. Although I tried to ignore it, I knew that day was coming.

After dinner, I called Madison to let her know about them leaving. She was on the way to her parents' house and said she would come first thing in the morning. She didn't want them to leave without saying goodbye. We talked for a little while longer before ending the call. I went to bed that night happy as hell, I was going to see my lady love.

I was up early the next morning to cook breakfast for everyone while I anticipated Madison's arrival. By the time I was setting the table, the doorbell rang. You would have thought the kitchen was on fire by the way I jetted out of there. When I reached the living room, Mathew was just about to open the door.

"Stop," I yelled.



He looked at me with a shit eating grin on his face as he continued to reach for the door.

“Mathew Broussard I will beat your ass if you open that damn door,” I threatened.

“I’m just messing with you, Dex. Calm down, damn,” he laughed as I pushed him to the side.

Grabbing the knob, I swung the door open. There she stood, looking as beautiful as ever.

“Hello, king of my heart,” she smiled.

“Hello, queen of mine,” I returned, scooping her in a hug. She smelled like heaven.

She giggled. “Dexter, put me down.”

“Madison, it’s been almost a week since I’ve seen you, let me enjoy this moment.”

She cupped my cheeks, then gave me a kiss that expressed how much she had missed me too.

“Damn it, Dexter put that girl down,” Papa fussed, coming into the room with Joii. “I’d like to hug my granddaughter too.

I reluctantly sat Madison on her feet, then let her go so the others could have their turn. When they were done, we went into the kitchen. As we sat at the table, I looked around at my family, the people who I would give my life for. I was truly blessed.

After breakfast, Mathew said it was time for them to hit the road. He and I gathered their bags, loaded them in his truck. We stood in the front yard, saying our farewells. Papa hugged Madison, saying, “I want you and Dexter to come see me soon.”

“I promise we will, Papa,” she said.

He let her go, then tapped her nose with the tip of his finger. “Tell Jack, he owes me a domino game.”

“Will do,” Madison snickered.

Papa then addressed me. “Continue to be good to her and she will be good to you in return. I better be hearing about an engagement soon. Now, give your old man a hug.”

I smirked, embracing him. “I love you, Papa.”

“I love you too, son.”

As we drew back from one another, there was no hiding the tears on our cheeks.

“I love you too, but I’m not crying over your ass,” Mathew poked, making us laugh.

I reached out and pulled him into the hug with us.

“I love you too, little brother.”

After saying our goodbyes, Papa, Mathew, and Jooi got in his truck. As they backed out the driveway, Madison and I waved them off. Mathew honked his horn as he drove away.

“Dexter, I have a surprise for you,” Madison said as I watched the truck get smaller and smaller.

“What’s that?” I asked, finally looking at her.

She ran her fingers through my hair. “I need you to go pack a bag.”

“And why do I need to pack a bag?”

“Because I know you’re going to be sad because they left, and I don’t want you to be like that all weekend. So, we’re going to the cabin for the weekend.”

“We are?” I asked, clutching her hips.

“We are.” She replied.

“By ourselves?”

“By ourselves.” She echoed, snickering. “So, come on so we can pack your bag.” Madison took my hand and led me to the house.

That weekend was amazing. It was nice to have Madison all to myself. She knew what I needed, and it was her. When we weren’t fucking each other’s brains out, we would have breakfast on the patio, then go fishing or riding on the four-wheelers. Madison took me on a trail in the woods that led to the juiciest wild apple tree. It was simple things like that meant the most to me.

On our last night at the cabin, we sat around the fire pit. I didn’t want our time there to end or for her to go back to Gilmer. I wanted Madison to be with me everyday and night. That week without her proved that. So, as we sat cuddled up on the lawn lounge, I whispered, “Move in with me.”

Madison sat up, then looked down at me. “What?”

“I said, move in with me,” I repeated.

She blinked. “Are you sure? That’s a big step, Dexter.”

I sat up, caressing her arms. “I’m sure. I love you, Madison. When I open my eyes in the morning, I want you to be the first thing I see. When I go to bed each night, I want you in my arms. And if that’s not enough to convince you, then maybe this will.”

I dug in my jean pocket and pulled out a diamond wedding ring. I bought it last week while we were apart. I knew one day I would ask her, but after she suggested we come to the cabin, I knew it would be the perfect place to ask her.

Madison gasps.

“Madison Rowe, will you marry me? I don’t want to spend another day without you,” I professed.

She nodded her head up and down, as she cried, “Yes, Dexter, yes.”

After I took her left hand, then slid the ring on her finger, I seized her lips, lovingly kissing her. I’m sure we gave any animals that were around a show as we made love under the stars.

The next morning, we facetimed Papa, Mathew, and Joii with the good news. Papa was so overjoyed he started dancing. Mathew and Joii proposed that we have a double wedding, but I declined, not wanting anything to take away from Madison’s big day. Plus we still needed to set a date.

Once we got off the phone with them, we gathered our things to leave. Instead of going back to Dallas, we drove to Gilmer to personally tell her family. On the ride there, Madison informed the agency she worked for had a branch in Dallas that she could transfer to. She would go on Monday to get the paperwork started. Since she would be moving in with me, I told her I would pay whatever penalty it was going to cost to break her lease.

We continued making plans as I parked my truck in front of her parents’ house. I raised her hand, then kissed it before getting out. After I helped her out, we were all smiles as we walked to the house.

Fifteen minutes later, Momma Paula, Pilar, and Madison were jumping up and down with glee after she showed them the ring. Mr. Rowe and James shook my hand, congratulating me.

“Well done, son,” Mr. Rowe said.

You see, that day at the cabin when I joined him and Papa at the pond, I told him what happened when Quinton and Rang came there. He was pissed at first, but luckily Papa was there to calm him down. He wasn’t mad about me not telling him sooner, he was mad at the fact he wasn’t there to kill their asses himself. I told him how we all pitched in to fix the repairs. He thanked me for that, but I told him it wasn’t necessary. Before we concluded our conversation, I confessed my love for his daughter and asked for his blessing to marry her.

“You have proved you will always put her safety first. I know you love Madison, Dexter so, yes you have my blessing to marry her.” I shook his hand before leaving him and Papa to fish.

After finding out about the engagement, Momma Paula insisted we stay to have dinner with them. We finally left around four, going to Madison’s apartment to pick up more of her stuff.

“Dexter, are you ready?” Madison calls, pulling me from memory lane.

“Yes,” I reply as she comes into the kitchen.

I pour coffee into our Yeti cups, then put the tops on them. Madison comes over and pats my ass as she picks up her cup. She takes a sip, then says, “Good, let’s hit the road. I want to make it to the cabin before the others.”

Grabbing my cup, I tell her, “I do too, so I can have my way with you before you spend the majority of the weekend with the ladies discussing wedding details.”

She rolls her eyes. “Well, that is one of the reasons why we’re all going up there. Plus, you’ll be with the guys fishing, drinking, and having a wang-dang-doodle.”

She walks out of the kitchen, laughing. I follow behind her, saying, “I’d rather wang-dang-doodle with you.”

Madison seductively smiles at me. “Then I guess you better drive fast to get us there.” She winks at me before slipping her purse strap over her shoulder, then opens the front door and steps out.

I dashed over to the door. Thank God I had already put our bags in the truck, I thought to myself as I set the alarm, then exit. Madison’s already in the truck. She blows me a kiss and I pretend to catch it.

Who would have known this nerdy country boy would fall in love with the most beautiful creature to grace this earth? What was supposed to be any other mission, turned into me meeting my forever. I thank God for sending me to her when she needed me the most. Now, I needed her just as much. I plan on showering her love for the rest of our lives and if anyone tries to disrupt what we built, I will have no mercy for them. I am Dexter ‘Tech’ Broussard, and I can make your life disappear with one stroke of my keyboard.

**The End**

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# About The Author



Sonja B. is a Bestselling Author of Interracial Romance with an extreme passion and talent for gifting us with remarkable stories.

She is a wife, mother, and daughter who enjoys spending time with her family. She is an avid reader and when she's not cooking, traveling, or shopping you can find her enjoying a good paranormal romance story. Her writing career was born from her love of paranormal romances. Her

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