



Devil's Game (Reapers Motorcycle Club Book 3)

By Joanna Wylde

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Editorial Review

Review

“Raw emotion and riveting characters, I fell in love from page one!”—Katy Evans, *New York Times* bestselling author

“A really good bad-boy biker book! Exactly what I’ve been looking to read.”—*Maryse’s Book Blog*

About the Author

Joanna Wylde is the author of *Reaper’s Legacy*. She has also written several erotic romances for Ellora’s Cave and lives in Idaho.

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Titles by Joanna Wylde

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AUTHOR’S NOTE

PROLOGUE

EIGHT YEARS AGO

COEUR D’ALENE, IDAHO

EM

“For fuck’s sake . . . they’re like weasels in heat. I’m gonna puke.”

I nodded, agreeing with my sister one hundred percent.

Barfing was the only reasonable response to this shit.

We stood in our dining room, which connected to the kitchen through a pair of pocket doors. Dad had Mom up on the counter, legs wrapped around his waist, his tongue so far down her throat it should’ve triggered her gag reflex.

“You do realize we’re watching you, right?” Kit asked loudly. Dad pulled away and turned his head to glare at us. Mom winked, but she didn’t have the grace to blush.

“Take another ten minutes to fix your hair or something,” he said. “Then come back down for breakfast.”

Kit growled next to me. She had Dad's temper. I wish I did. I always followed the rules, and it kind of sucked. Kit called me a daddy's girl and maybe she was right. But I just really hated pissing him off.

"It's the first day of school and I don't want to be late," she declared. "You can screw each other any time, but this only happens once a year. I'm hungry."

Dad stepped slowly away from Mom, turning toward us and crossing his arms. His faded tats told a hundred stories, and most of my friends were a little nervous around him. His black leather cut, emblazoned with Reapers MC colors, didn't help. Lucky us—we couldn't have a normal dad who worked at a bank or something.

Nope.

Ours had to be the president of a motorcycle club.

According to my best friend Quinn, Dad was a badass motherfucker, and she was right. I knew no matter what happened, he'd always be there for me. Secretly, I liked the fact that the Reapers would back him up. The sight of Dad's tats and patches made me feel sort of safe, but I'd never admit it. None of that made finding him and my mom practically doing it in the kitchen any less disgusting. I mean, I made sandwiches on that counter. Now where was I supposed to make them?

"For once," Kit said, narrowing her eyes, "would you please act like normal parents and just ignore each other during a meal?"

"Sounds boring," Dad muttered, narrowing his eyes right back. Mom and I locked gazes, and she made a face. I hated this part—Dad and Kit could turn anything into a fight. Mom said they were way too similar, and I agreed. She was the oil that kept our family running smoothly, defusing situations before they got out of hand.

"I don't like being bored," he added. "Go do whatever it is girls do in the bathroom for a while, and then you can come back down. My house, my rules."

I grabbed Kit's arm, tugging her away before she fired back at him. She was only twelve and I was fourteen, but she always stood her ground. Sometimes that was a good thing . . . But she needed to learn to choose her battles.

"Just come upstairs," I hissed at her.

"They're too old to be screwing in the kitchen!"

"We're not screwing," Dad said. "But if we were, that wouldn't be any of your business, either, kiddo."

I dug my fingers into Kit's arm, dragging her out of the dining room and up the stairs. I heard Dad laugh in the background, and Mom gave a little squeal.

"They're so disgusting," Kit said, flopping down on my bed. We had our own rooms, but she spent a lot of time in here because it was bigger. It also had a tree branch we could use to sneak out . . . Not that we ever did, but Kit had big plans for high school.

"I know," I replied. "He's right, though. It's his house."

"At least you aren't stuck in dumbass middle school," she said, sighing heavily. "I can't believe you're going

to be gone! It's not fair."

"Only one more year and you'll be there, too," I said. Figuring I might as well take advantage of the delay, I studied my hair in the mirror on the waterfall vanity Mom had given me when I turned thirteen. It'd been hers growing up. I'd always loved sitting at it as a little girl, putting on her makeup and pretending to be a princess. "And I'm sure it won't be that great. I mean, freshman year is kind of lame."

"Beats the hell out of eighth grade," she said. "But you won't get to do much anyway. Do you really think Dad'll let you go to any dances?"

"Of course he will," I said, even though I had my doubts. Dad could be . . . intense . . . Kit opened her mouth to say something but then snapped it shut as we heard the roar of Harley pipes coming down the drive.

"What the hell?" I asked, going over to the window. Outside, six of the Reapers were pulling up—at seven thirty on a Tuesday . . . Not good. The guys in the club didn't tend to be morning people.

"Shit," Kit muttered. "Something must be going on."

We looked at each other, and I wondered if she had the same sick feeling in the pit of her stomach I did. "Something going on" could mean anything in our world. Dad didn't generally let club business overlap with family life, but I'd seen enough growing up that I couldn't just pretend things were fine and dandy when a third of the brothers showed up without warning.

"I'm going downstairs," Kit said, her voice grim. I shook my head.

"They won't want us around."

"Fuck that."

• • •

We crept down the stairs like junior felons.

I expected to hear hushed voices, to feel the kind of tension in the air that only came when things fell to shit. Instead I heard men laughing and talking in the kitchen. We entered the dining room to find our uncle Duck sitting at the table as my mom brought him a cup of coffee. Dad sat next to him, along with Ruger—the very hot young prospect who'd been with the club about four months. I had to look away before I started babbling or blushing or something.

When I grew up, I was *totally* marrying Ruger.

This was not something I'd be sharing with my father, no matter how much of a daddy's girl I might be. Ruger had graduated from high school a year ago, and Quinn had told me she'd caught him screwing her sister, Nicole, in their living room when her parents were out for the night. I'd pretended to be horrified, but I made her share all the gory details . . . and there were a lot of them. Quinn hadn't run away when she found them. Nope. She stayed hidden and watched the whole thing, which, according to her, wasn't a quickie.

Not even close.

Quinn also said that Ruger had a pierced dick, and that her sister cried for three nights straight because he never called her back afterward. When I was old enough, he'd be calling *me* back. I had big plans for us.

“Morning,” Duck said, smiling at me. He wouldn’t tell me why they called him Duck, but I always thought he looked more like an old bear. Big and hairy, which would’ve been intimidating if he hadn’t been giving me airplane rides and sneaking me candy for as long as I could remember. “You look beautiful, Em. You’re gonna do great in high school.”

He glanced over at my dad.

“I still can’t believe our girl is old enough for this.”

Ugh. I hated it when they did this, especially in front of Ruger. Everyone seemed to think I was a baby, but I was fourteen now. In less than two years I’d be driving. Well, driving legally. I’d been driving on the property for years . . .

“Appreciate you coming out,” Dad said to the guys. “Em, grab some breakfast. We’re gonna give you a ride to school this morning. I don’t want to be late.”

My mouth dropped open and I heard Kit make a startled, choking noise.

“We?” I whispered, hoping I’d heard wrong.

“All of us,” Dad said, offering me a broad smile that didn’t reach his eyes. “You’re turning into a young woman. I figured it might not be a bad idea to remind those little pricks at your school who your family is. Go ahead and set things straight from the start.”

I actually felt dizzy.

“Daddy, you can’t be serious!” Kit burst out. “If all of you guys show up, you’ll scare the crap out of the boys! How will Em ever get a date that way?”

Dad’s smile turned feral.

“Any boy who can’t handle Em’s family has no business dating her.”

I swallowed. This couldn’t be happening. My mom ran her fingers through his hair, and he pulled her down into his lap. They were always like that—all over each other. Still, Mom usually stood up to him when he got crazy protective. Unlike Dad, she had a clue what it meant to be a teenage girl.

“Mom, I thought you were giving me a ride?” I managed to squeak out. She shook her head sadly.

“Sorry, baby. Your father is set on this,” she said. “I’m driving Kit and he’s taking you, along with your uncle Duck and the brothers.”

“Those little pricks at your school need to know who they’re dealing with if they fuck you over,” Dad added, his voice dark. “I don’t want to make things hard for you, but I’ve been a teenage boy. They think with their cocks, so they need to realize they’ll lose those cocks if they don’t treat you right. Nothing quite like a show of force to put a kid on notice.”

“That’s bullshit, Daddy, and you know it,” Kit said, coming to my defense. Thank God, because I’d lost the ability to think or move. “And it’s sexist! Em can take care of herself. You have no right to humiliate her like this.”

“I have every right,” he replied, and I knew from his tone that it was all over. “I’m your father, and it’s my

job to protect you. Not my goal to embarrass you, Em, but I'll do whatever it takes to keep you safe."

"Nobody wants to hurt me," I managed to say.

He snorted.

"They'll want to fuck you, though."

I felt my cheeks turn bright red and I kept my eyes down, terrified to look at Ruger or any of the others.

"You want me to treat you like an adult?" Dad asked. "Pretty hard when just mentioning sex makes you blush. If you can't talk about it, you sure as shit aren't ready to do it. This way nobody will pressure you to, either. Now grab some cereal if you're planning to eat. We'll be leaving soon."

I felt sick. My high school life was over before it even began, and he wanted me to *eat cereal*?

"I'll just have a granola bar," I muttered, glaring at him. Dad shrugged and I saw his hand slide between my mom's legs.

Ugh. My life sucked.

• • •

I usually love riding with my dad.

There's nothing better than sitting behind him—arms wrapped tight around his waist—as we fly down the highway. Kit may have gotten Dad's temper, but I got his passion for the road. I'd been saving for my own bike since I was six years old, and I saw the pride in his eyes every time I begged him to take me with him.

Today, though . . . For the first time in my life, I hated it.

We pulled up to the school in a roar, me and Dad in the lead, followed by six Reapers (including Ruger, who'd probably slept with half the girls there before he graduated). Dad stopped right out in front, in a no-parking zone, and the brothers all backed their rides in next to his, forming a row of gleaming chrome. Any fantasy I might've had about a quick, quiet entrance on my first day was gone.

One of the teachers—a woman who was probably in her midtwenties—stood out on the lawn looking nervous, but as the guys swung off she didn't ask them to move. Nope, she just gaped at us, which would've been funny if I hadn't been fairly sure I was in one of her classes. I recognized her from the open house. Ruger smirked and swaggered over to her. She blushed brightly.

Shit, was there anyone at this school he hadn't had sex with? Maybe I should rethink those wedding plans.

"Okay, well, thanks for the ride," I told my dad pointedly. "You can go now."

"Show me your locker," he said, obviously determined to smash any chance of happiness I might have during the next four years. I looked up at him and gave it everything I had. The puppy eyes, the little-girl lip bite, a hitch in my breath. Usually I could even squeeze out a tear or two, but that took more prep time.

"Daddy, can you just let me go in on my own?" I asked, my voice a quavering whisper. "You made your point."

He shook his head, ruthless.

“Don’t even try,” he said. “I’ve seen it all before, and compared to your mother, you’re an amateur. I’m coming inside because I want every kid here to understand you belong to the Reapers MC, and they’ll be answering to us if they fuck with you.”

I don’t know why I bothered trying.

Dad was a force of nature—a tidal wave determined to destroy my life. Every eye followed us as we walked through the doors and down the hallway. Quinn caught my gaze and raised her eyebrows dramatically. I shrugged, resigned, and looked for number 1125, which was on the first floor near the boys’ locker room.

The locker room where the football team was starting to wander out after an early-morning practice.

Perfect.

My life was fucking perfect.

I looked up to see Quinn’s brother, Jason, a junior and one of the team’s defensive starters, watching us. I’d always had a crush on him. In fact, I was sort of secretly hoping he’d finally notice me as someone other than his little sister’s annoying friend. Seriously—if I wanted a guy like Ruger to call me back, I’d need some practice, right?

“Reed,” Dad said casually, jerking his chin toward Jason. “Great season last year. How are things looking so far with the team?”

Jason swallowed, eyes darting between us.

“Um, pretty good,” he said. I opened my locker, wishing desperately that I could crawl inside and die. Or at least disappear for the next four years. Sadly, not even a boobless wonder like me could fit in that metal box.

“Glad to hear it,” Dad replied. He leaned over and kissed the top of my head, then spoke so loud his voice practically echoed. “Enjoy high school, princess. You let me know if any of these guys give you shit, got it?”

I nodded, praying for death. Something fast, merciful. Aneurysm? Yeah, that’d do it.

“Just go,” I whispered.

“I’ll see you tonight,” he replied, then turned and sauntered down the hallway, the colors on his back a grim reminder to everyone who saw us that my dad was president of the Reapers motorcycle club.

Quinn came up next to me and leaned against the lockers, eyes wide.

“Wow,” she said. “Nobody’s gonna ask you to homecoming or anything, you get that, right? And you’re never, ever gonna get laid.”

“I know,” I said, miserable. Not that I wanted to get laid—not quite yet.

But it’d be nice to go to homecoming. I sighed.

“I’m gonna die a virgin, Quinn.”

She nodded gravely, eyes full of sympathy.

“I think that’s a given,” she said. “But look on the bright side.”

“What’s that?”

“Nuns don’t have to wear those penguin costumes anymore, so at least you won’t have to buy all new clothes.”

I looked over at Jason, who was staring at me like I’d grown a second head.

My dad was the meanest parent ever.

Ugh.

EIGHT YEARS AGO

STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA

HUNTER

Natalie wiped off her mouth and looked up at me, her beautiful face sly and calculating. I shoved my softening cock back into my pants and zipped up, pushing forward off the brick wall behind the gas station. Nat rose to her feet, giving me a little smile and biting her lip. I think she was going for playful.

It came off desperate.

“So?” she asked. I raised a brow, questioning.

“So what?”

“Um . . . I was wondering if you could hook me up?”

Fucking typical. Rich bitches.

Not that I should be surprised. In Natalie’s world, I’d never be more than a quick fuck with the right connections. That wasn’t a problem. In the end, business is business, and Nat had plenty of money.

“Whatcha lookin’ for?” I asked, hoping she didn’t expect a discount for the blow job. She was okay, but nothing special. She’d been all over me, and who was I to turn down some chick who wanted to suck my cock? Now that she’d swallowed, she’d turned annoying. Before Natalie could answer the question, my phone vibrated.

Kelsey. Shit.

I answered, turning away from Natalie. “Hey, Kels.”

“Jim got laid off at the plant today. You need to get home fast, because he’s drunk and I’m scared.”

My entire body tensed and my vision narrowed. *That cocksucking bastard. If he touches her . . .*

“I’ll be there in a few, okay? Stay calm, Kelsey,” I told my foster sister. “Try and get out of the house and take off for the park. If that doesn’t work, lock yourself in the bathroom. Just hang on—I’m coming for you.”

“Okay,” she whispered, and I heard Jim’s loud, booming voice roar in the background. James Calloway was the foster father from hell, not to mention a complete fucking asshole. I ended the call and glanced over at Natalie, keeping my face blank. I’d learned the hard way to never give away more than I had to.

“I need to get back home,” I told her. “Can I have a ride?”

She smiled, trying to play coy and innocent.

“Of course,” she said, tracing little circles in the dirt with the toe of those fuck-me shoes she always wore. They’d seemed a hell of a lot sexier half an hour ago. “But before we go . . .”

Shit. I didn’t have time for this.

“Give me the fuckin’ keys,” I said shortly, out of patience. She opened her mouth to protest and I narrowed my eyes, letting them go flat and dead. I’d perfected the look over the years and it never failed. She sucked in a quick breath and dug out her keys, handing them off to me. At six foot three, I knew I was a scary fucker.

Terrifying a girl didn’t bother me one bit, either.

I strode around the building to Natalie’s cute little Mustang—a sixteenth-birthday present from Daddy. I slid in and the engine turned over with a roar I might’ve enjoyed at any other time. Natalie jumped into the passenger seat, obviously worried that I’d leave without her.

I would’ve, too, but I didn’t want more attention than necessary. Last time I’d pulled Jim off Kelsey, I promised to kill him if it happened again. Christ, she was only thirteen and had already learned to sleep with a knife. I had a bad feeling things were going to get ugly, and the last thing I needed was a police report about a stolen car.

Five minutes later the Mustang screeched to a halt outside my foster father’s decaying ranch house, which was surrounded by a dying lawn and rusting swing set. His own kids were long gone, and I suspected he’d lose the place without the state payments he got for me and Kels. The social workers hadn’t noticed that his wife, Autumn, had taken off nearly six months ago. Who could blame her? This was only short term for me. But to stay here, rotting for the rest of your life? Fuck no. I’d have run, too.

Usually I didn’t even mind living in his shithole. I liked having my own space. I had the whole basement, although I let Kelsey sleep down there with me. She wasn’t comfortable in her own room upstairs. Too close to Jim. Smart kid.

I jumped out of the car and started toward the house.

“Wait!” Natalie called, following me.

“Yeah?” I asked, not slowing. I heard Jim yell something inside and froze, trying to think. What was the best plan of attack? A loud, clanging noise from next door broke my concentration. That old guy must be out in the garage, working on his bikes again . . .

“You said you’d hook me up?” Nat asked, offering a weak smile. *Jesus, is she still here?* I reached into my pocket, pulled out a baggie, and threw it at her. Hard.

“There,” I said. “Now get in your fuckin’ car and go.”

Her mouth opened and closed like a goldfish, and I seriously wondered why I'd let her wrap it around my dick. Then Kelsey's voice tore through the air again, and my vision went red. Making plans was for pussies—that asshole needed to experience pain. I took off toward the back gate, hoping Natalie was happy enough about her freebies to forget anything she'd seen or heard.

Goddammit.

It was locked.

I boosted myself up and over the tall privacy fence, catching a glimpse of Natalie in the process. She wasn't paying me any attention. Nope, bitch was way too busy scrabbling in the dry grass for her goody bag. Kelsey screamed again. I tore around the house, sliding down through a narrow window into the basement.

Jim always kept the doors locked and I wasn't allowed a key. Not that it mattered—I'd yet to find a lock I couldn't pick—but right then I didn't have the time. I ran up the stairs and toward Kelsey's room, freezing in the doorway.

She cowered back on the bed, shirt ripped almost to her waist, exposing the little flesh-colored bra I'd had to buy for her. Fuckin' awkwardest shopping trip of my life. A bright red handprint covered her cheek, and blood was seeping from her bottom lip.

Jim loomed over her, sweaty and reeking of booze, shoulders heaving as he took deep breaths. His pants were already loose, hanging off his flabby, narrow hips, and his skinny dick bobbed like a drunken cobra.

"Leave her alone," I said, letting all the hate constantly boiling inside me show. Jim turned toward me and grunted, his red, bloated nose a rotten tomato in the center of his face.

"Or what?"

"You'll die," said a low voice behind me. Then I heard the unmistakable sound of a gun being cocked.

We all froze as our next-door neighbor walked slowly into the room. He held his pistol casually, more like a TV remote than a weapon. An older guy—probably in his midfifties—and so far as I could tell, he spent most of his time out in his garage, tinkering with motorcycles he fixed up and sold.

In fact, I'd been eyeing his latest project, mentally tallying whether I could afford to buy it.

Burke.

That was his name. No idea if it was first or last. He was badass, too, with a long, graying beard and faded tattoos all over his arms. I knew he was part of a motorcycle club called the Devil's Jacks from the patches on the leather vest he always wore. This was the first chance I'd gotten a good look at it. On one shoulder there was a red and white patch with "Burke" over the word "Original." The other shoulder had a diamond that said "1%" on it. Down below was a long line of smaller patches listing names and dates.

His heavily tanned hand didn't waver as he held the gun, his eyes as cold and dead as my own.

"Kelsey, get your ass out of here," I ordered, keeping my voice steady. I really didn't know Burke for shit, and I had no idea what he planned to do . . . But if I got Kels out safe, I honestly didn't give a fuck.

"Do what the kid says."

Kelsey nodded, eyes wide, sliding off the bed and scuttling along the wall to get out.

“Go down to my room and wait,” I told her. “Lock the door and don’t open it for anyone but me.”

Time hung heavy as she disappeared.

“So whatcha gonna do, shoot me?” Jim slurred, his voice belligerent. Not the brightest man at the best of times, but when he got drunk, things really fell apart.

“Depends,” said Burke.

“On what?”

“The kid, here,” he replied, jerking his chin toward me. “You want to shoot this asshole, son?”

I glanced over, startled. His face was cold and serious—Burke wasn’t joking. Shit.

This was real.

“Think hard,” Burke said. “You pull the trigger, you can’t go back. But you won’t have to worry about him rapin’ your sister, either. We can make the body disappear.”

Jim’s eyes darted between us, wild with terror.

“Don’t listen to him,” he whispered. “You’ll go to jail. Death penalty. He’s talking about *murder*.”

“Unlikely,” Burke told him. “Never cared for you, Calloway. In fact, I don’t think one person on earth gives a fuck if you live or die. Your wife is gone, your kids hate you, and according to the papers on your kitchen counter, you got no job. It’ll be like you never existed. Couldn’t happen to a nicer guy.”

“The social workers,” Jim gasped in desperation. “The social workers have to come check on the kids. They’ll notice.”

I couldn’t help myself—I started laughing. I hadn’t seen my social worker in over a year. If it weren’t for the state checks Jim drank up every month, I’d assume they’d lost my file. My foster father’s face reddened in rage, and I saw the exact moment his brain turned off and he forgot about the gun.

“I’ll kill you, you little shit,” he growled. “You think you’re so special but you’re trash. That little slut of yours is trash, too. Two piles of garbage stinking up my house.”

“Probably should decide soon, kid,” Burke muttered. “You wanna take him out or not?”

Did I want to kill him? I thought about Kelsey crying, and the time he’d broken my ribs when I refused to hand over a cut of my sales.

Fuckin’ A.

I *definitely* wanted to take him out.

“Give me the gun,” I said, the words tasting sweet.

Jim lunged toward us and the sudden, crackling echo of a gunshot rang through the room. My foster father screamed and fell to the floor, clutching his shoulder. Bright red blood oozed out between his fingers.

Burke didn't even blink.

He just held his weapon firm, still trained on Jim, and reached around his back to pull a second pistol from his pants. Then he handed it to me.

It fit my hand perfectly.

"You know how to use it?" he asked.

I flipped off the safety and cocked it in answer.

"Finish him off, boy," Burke said, smiling for the first time. Almost like a proud father. "You're already in deep, so you might as well make it count."

I centered the barrel on Jim's chest and fired.

• • •

Looking back, the neighborhood had been exactly what we needed that day—nobody in it gave a fuck about each other, because they didn't give a fuck about themselves. All of us were already dying slowly. When Burke and I sped up the process for my foster father that afternoon, the neighbors didn't even notice.

Nobody complained about the shots.

Nobody bothered calling the cops when I carried a hysterically crying Kelsey next door to Burke's house.

They didn't look outside when a cargo van pulled down the alley to stop behind Jim's place. Ten minutes later it left again, carrying a human-shaped package wrapped in black plastic garbage bags.

Jim ceased to exist. So did me and Kelsey.

The next week, we were living in a different town with new birth certificates, courtesy of Burke's cousin and his old lady. He gave me a hell of a deal on that motorcycle, too. I paid him with the wad of cash I found in Jim's wallet. A year later, I celebrated my eighteenth birthday by becoming an official prospect in the Devil's Jacks MC.

Burke couldn't have been more proud if I were his son by blood.

In a way, I guess I was.

Part One

CHAPTER ONE

FIVE MONTHS AGO

COEUR D'ALENE, IDAHO

HUNTER

“Who the fuck gets a pedicure in February?” Skid asked. “Won’t her feet freeze?”

“You don’t know any women at all, do you?” I asked, cracking open a Mountain Dew. We’d driven all night to get here from Portland. What I really wanted was sleep, but Burke’s orders were clear. Scope out Reese “Picnic” Hayes’s daughter and figure out a plan of action. With all the drama that’d happened between our clubs, Burke insisted now was the perfect time to make a move, maybe even rewrite the future for the Devil’s Jacks.

Leverage with the Reapers would be critical—maybe even make the difference between a successful takeover of our club or a shallow grave if we failed. Leverage this little bitch was supposed to provide us, apparently. I wasn’t entirely sure what the old bastard had planned, but I’d do my part. I always did.

I glanced down at the picture of her taped to the truck’s console, then looked at the storefront again. Pretty girl. According to her Facebook page, she was meeting a friend here this morning. I’d spotted her car as soon as we pulled in. Now we waited. I wanted to study her, maybe trail her a little. Get a sense of who she was before making my move. There were so many different ways to play a woman—I found it never paid to make assumptions.

“I know your sister,” Skid announced out of nowhere.

I gave him a blank look.

“You asked if I know any women. Does she count? ’Cause her toes are cute as hell, but I don’t see her walkin’ around in flip-flops in the snow.”

“Why the fuck are you lookin’ at my sister’s toes, cocksucker?”

“I look at a lot more than her toes.”

“Don’t make me kill you, bro.”

He snorted and shrugged. “You could try.”

I adjusted my sunglasses, deciding to ignore him. The truck windows were tinted, but I’d still taken a few basic precautions to change my appearance. Hipster beanie, which matched the full beard I’d grown for my last job. Long-sleeved shirt that covered my ink. Even if she saw me, all I needed was a quick shave and change to turn into a different man.

The shop door opened and I sat up as two girls stepped out. There she was.

Emmy Lou Hayes.

“That’s our girl,” I said, with a jerk of my chin. She was studying her phone and, sure as shit, she wore flip-flops. Bright pink foam thingies threaded through her toes, separating them, and I wondered how the hell she could even walk. Fuckin’ crazy. At least the sidewalk was mostly clear of snow. Her brown hair sat on top of her head in one of those messy topknot things girls always seem to have, and she wore tight little jeans and a black leather jacket.

Damn, Em was cute. Way cuter than her sister.

Something fell out of her pocket, and she turned away, leaning down to grab it.

“Nice ass,” Skid said. “Very sweet. If you have to fuck her, at least you’ll be able to keep your eyes open, unlike that last bitch you did for the club.”

I snorted, but he raised a good point. Fucking Em had just jumped up a couple notches on my list of possible ways to manipulate her into helping the Jacks. She glanced down at her phone again, waving good-bye to her friend absently.

Then she walked right off the curb and almost fell on her ass.

Her phone flew across the ground and under a car, like something out of a TV show. Em staggered to one side and then the other, somehow managing to stay on her feet, arms flailing. Skid choked back a laugh, but I just watched, mesmerized, as she finally caught herself. That’s when Em looked up and across the parking lot, right into my face. Her expression was startled but fucking gorgeous. She broke into a brilliant smile, offering me a goofy wave.

My cock stiffened and a burst of adrenaline hit me like a punch to the gut. Sticking my dick inside Emmy Hayes had suddenly become a very high priority. It took everything I had not to throw open the truck door and toss the girl over my shoulder before hauling her back home for a long, hard fuck. Instead I sat back and watched.

There’s a reason the club calls me Hunter.

She lifted one leg slightly, pointing at her toes and giving a triumphant thumbs-up in my direction before turning away to search for her phone.

“Christ, there’s something wrong with that chick,” Skid muttered, but I ignored him. Instead I grabbed my phone and dialed Burke, my mind made up.

“Burke, I’m lookin’ at her right now.”

“You got a plan for me?”

“Gettin’ there,” I told him. “But whatever direction we take, Emmy Hayes stays my target. Nobody fucks with her but me.”

“No shit?”

“No shit.”

“Make it work for the club, son, and I could give a fuck. But no matter how much you want the bitch, don’t forget where your loyalties lie. Jacks first. Forever.”

“Jacks first,” I agreed, watching as she dug her phone out of the snow.

This was gonna be fun.

PRESENT DAY

COEUR D’ALENE, IDAHO

EM

“If you don’t make a move on Painter tonight, I will personally charter a plane, fly up there, and kick your ass.”

“Easy for you to say,” I muttered into the phone at my sister. “But you don’t get a vote. I’m still pissed at you for not coming home this summer.”

“Riiight,” she drawled. “Let me see—internship in San Francisco or yet another summer of Dad growling at me . . . Sooo tempting. If you had half a brain, your ass would be down here with me.”

I rolled my eyes.

“It’s not that easy, Kit.”

“Yes,” she replied, her voice sharp. “It *is* that easy. Let me walk you through the conversation. ‘Dad, I’ve decided I want a life. Deal with it.’ Then get in your car and drive south.”

I sighed.

“It’s not that easy for *me*,” I said, looking over at the Reapers clubhouse. The big, isolated former National Guard Armory was fully lit, a beacon in the summer twilight. The trees surrounding it felt familiar, like old friends. I’d played in them as child—hide-and-seek, pixies . . . oh, and motorcycle clubs. We’d played MC a lot.

Pisser about that—now the boys got to play Reapers for real and I still couldn’t land a fucking date.

“I don’t like that disappointed look in Dad’s eyes,” I said, fully aware my voice held a hint of whine. “You know, how they get cold and icy right before he starts punching walls?”

“Jesus, it’s like you’re still in high school,” Kit replied. “So what if he gets pissed off? That’s what he does—he gets pissed, he yells, it’s over. Yell back, for Chrissake.”

“Easy for you to say,” I replied. “You’re the baby. You can get away with anything. He has all these expectations of me.”

“Enough,” she snapped. “I’m not going to listen to you feeling all sorry for yourself all night. I’m the youngest, but *you’re* the fucking baby. Either shit or get off the pot.”

“That’s kind of mean,” I said, frowning.

“No, that’s reality. You’re twenty-two years old and still bitching about Daddy not letting you out to play. You want to be his little-girl doll the rest of your life? Fine. That’s your choice. But if you do, you don’t get to complain about him. Grow a fucking pair already.”

Then she hung up on me.

I sat in the car, stunned. Kit never hung up on me. We talked, we fought, we laughed . . . but she always had my back.

Shit.

A loud knock on the window nearly gave me a heart attack. I looked up to see my friend Marie standing outside, arms crossed, face expectant. Must be almost time. I climbed out of the car and she caught me up in

a hug.

“You excited?” she asked, eyes shining. “Because you don’t *look* excited. You look like someone stole your last M&M. You know, one of the red ones? I always keep those for the end. They taste best.”

I stared at her.

“You’re weird, you realize that, right?”

She laughed and shrugged.

“I’m okay with it. You didn’t answer the question.”

“I guess I’m excited,” I said, although my little chat with Kit had put a damper on things. “I mean, it’s great that Painter’s getting his patch . . .”

Marie widened her eyes at me and smirked.

“Don’t give me that,” she said. “You’ve got a thing for him. I *know* you’ve got a thing for him, because you tell me all about it whenever you get drunk.”

I shrugged, a smile catching me off guard.

“Okay, so I have a thing for him,” I admitted.

“And he definitely has a thing for you,” Marie replied. “He’s like a puppy whenever he sees you.”

I grunted, my smile fading.

By some miracle, I hadn’t spilled the story of when I’d cornered Painter last month and made him an offer no red-blooded man should’ve been able to refuse . . . An offer he’d shot down without a second thought. In fact, I’d tried to seduce him several times over the past year. A year I’d spent watching him, lusting after him, and thinking about what things might be like between us.

I didn’t get why he wouldn’t sleep with me. I knew the attraction was mutual. Everyone saw it. His eyes followed me around the clubhouse, and when I went out, he menaced anyone who hit on me. Dad wasn’t too hot on the thought of me with any guy, but he’d told me that someday he’d like to see me settled with a Reaper.

“I guess we’ll find out, won’t we?” I asked, grabbing my bag. “Sorry I couldn’t come out to help set up. I had a late appointment and really wanted to get her in. I already canceled on her once, so her nails were way overdue for a fill.”

“No worries,” Marie said, tucking her arm through mine. We started toward the gate to the courtyard, and despite my concerns her mood was contagious. Tonight was a happy night—after more than a year of prospecting, Painter would become the newest full member of the club.

In fact, he probably was already.

I’d just gotten here, but I’d seen this happen my whole life. First the guys would drag him off with some story about this shitty job he needed to do, or tell him he’d fucked up something important. They’d scare the crap out of him, and then when he was just about ready to die from a heart attack, they’d surprise him with

the new patches for his cut.

Those patches marked him as a Reaper, now and forever.

As for us ladies? It was our job to put together the party, and I was sorry to have missed out on that . . . It might be work, but it was laughter and drinking and joking, too. Made me think of my mom—five years ago we'd buried her, and I never missed her more than on nights like tonight. One of my earliest memories was of playing under the tables in our backyard while she set up for a club party. This was a celebration for Painter, but it was also a gathering of my family. They weren't exactly typical . . . They were mine, though, and I loved them.

Tonight that family was getting bigger.

"I really wish Mom was here," I said. Marie smiled at me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders and hugging me tight. Then she dragged me past Banks, the unfortunate prospect left behind to watch the clubhouse, and we walked into the courtyard.

• • •

The guys were late.

It'd been about forty-five minutes—just enough time for me to drink two beers and exchange texts with my friend Liam. I'd never actually met him except online . . . But I knew he wasn't a total serial killer because he was a regular at my friend Cookie's coffee shop in Portland. He posted on her Facebook page all the time.

That's how we'd first started talking, a few months back. He'd comment on one of my posts, then I'd comment on one of his, and then one day he sent me a private message and things took off from there. Now we texted each other all the time. He was funny and interesting and he actually listened to me. Total opposite of Painter, now that I thought of it. It was nice to have a friend who wasn't all tied up in club life—Liam was nice and normal and safe.

ME: Painter isn't here yet. Fingers crossed for me!!!

LIAM: I don't get why you're bothering with this douche. A real man doesn't sit around waiting when he meets the right woman. He makes a plan to claim her ass

ME: Little Neanderthal, ya think? Someone's grumpy tonight

LIAM: Call it like I see it. I'll bet you a hundred bucks he bails on you. Not because you aren't gorgeous, Em, but because he's a fucking pussy. Don't you see what's going on here? He wants to make your dad happy, not you

ME: Whose side are you on?

LIAM: Yours

I frowned down at the phone. I wasn't quite sure what to say to that. Liam didn't like Painter, and he could be kind of a jerk about it. He'd even made a joke once about Dad selling me off for six goats and some aftermarket Harley parts. It hit a little too close to home . . .

That didn't mean he was right about Painter, though.

ME: You don't know everything.

LIAM: Never pretended to. But I do know you deserve better than a guy who ignores you for a year.

ME: He doesn't ignore me. It's complicated. You should see him when we all go out. He's always watching out for me

LIAM: No, he guards you. There's a difference

I frowned. It *was* complicated. Painter had been prospecting, which meant he wasn't exactly free. But Liam didn't know that—I hadn't told him about the club for some reason, although he knew Dad was a biker. I guess I liked having one person in my life who didn't see me as the president's daughter. Hell, in some ways Liam was the only person I could really be myself with. Tonight, though . . .

Tonight he was pissing me off.

Enough.

ME: I have to go

I muted my phone, then shoved it in my pocket. Then I grabbed another beer and wandered toward Marie and the other girls, who were laughing over some story she was telling about her old man, Horse. Good music was playing, and as the alcohol warmed me from the inside out, I felt optimistic, despite Liam. What did he know, anyway?

I fully intended to end the night in Painter's bed.

Or on his bike.

Maybe under a tree?

Hell, I didn't care. Not so long as he finally punched my V card and I got my prize, along with a lovely "thank you" for playing. And yeah, I know it's fucking ridiculous I still had a V card to punch. But Dad wasn't exactly friendly toward my boyfriends. One of his favorite things to do was show them his guns and talk about the types of damage different bullets could do to the human body.

Oh, and then there was that hunting accident. Oops.

For some reason, the men of Coeur d'Alene started avoiding me after *that* one. Now the closest I got to flirting was chatting with Liam, which was pretty pathetic when you considered he lived nearly four hundred miles away.

Tonight, I told myself. Tonight everything changes.

• • •

The men still weren't back after another half hour, but I didn't just stand around waiting for Painter. Hanging out with my friends kicked ass. Most of them were old ladies, meaning they were attached in some way to one of the guys in the club. Some were like me, though . . . adrift. Maggs, for one. Her man was in prison, so she was on her own.

There weren't any kids at the Armory because things would probably get crazy fast. I could already see a

few women clumped on the other side of the courtyard just waiting for the wild times to start. Hangaround types, club sluts, sweetbutts. Some were strippers from The Line, the club's titty bar (and yes, that's what they called it, so don't blame me!), and others were girls who just weren't into settling down. They all had one thing in common, though—they were disposable. I'd grown up with them in the background, and in the past few years I'd woken up to find more than one in our kitchen making breakfast.

Dad was kind of a slut himself these days.

Their group didn't usually mix with ours and we liked it that way. I knew my dad never cheated on my mom, and I knew some of the guys—Marie's man, Horse, for example—could keep it in their pants. But others slept around. We all saw it. I never quite understood why a woman would put up with that, but I figured that other people's relationships weren't really my business.

Now we heard the thunder of bikes pulling up outside and the brothers started coming in. Dad was first, and I saw him glancing around until his eyes found me. His hard face broke into a smile, the same ice-blue eyes I'd inherited from him flashing with pride. The rest of the guys followed him, and then hoots and whistles rang out as Painter walked in, grinning like crazy.

God, he was cute. Short, spiky blond hair, sharp cheekbones . . . His body was lean but strong, and at six feet tall he had a good five inches on me. Didn't hurt that he'd taken off his shirt, wearing his cut over his bare chest.

Yum.

I'd had my arms wrapped tight around that chest more than once when he'd given me a ride home, although it never went past that. *It's a matter of respect for my dad*, I reminded myself. He was the president of the club and Painter knew better than to mess around with me if he wasn't serious. To be fair, prospects didn't really have the time to be serious about anyone.

At least that's what I'd been telling myself.

Prospects were too busy running errands, guarding bikes, and whatever other nasty or degrading jobs the members could think of. All that had changed now. This party was for Painter—he'd earned some fun, and the guys would make sure he got it. I had my own special congratulations to offer, although it might take a few hours to get him alone. I would, though. I was determined.

Tonight was our night.

"How goes it, Emmy Lou?" asked Duck, coming up and pulling me in for a hug. I crinkled my nose. I hated that old nickname, but it was damned hard to get rid of one once it stuck.

"Good," I said. "You got a beer yet? Want me to grab you one?"

"Sure, sweetheart," he muttered, looking across the yard. I saw his eye catch on one of the girls. "Who's that? She with your dad, or just here to party?"

He nodded toward a blonde who'd wrapped herself around my father. My eyes widened. Holy shit, I'd gone to high school with that bitch. In fact, she'd been a fucking freshman when I was a senior. Disgusting. I shrugged, feeling a sense of inevitability about the situation.

"Hell if I know," I muttered. "I stopped keeping track of his whores."

My tone came out uglier than I'd intended, and Duck gave me a sharp look.

"Sounding a little bitter there, Emmy Lou," Duck said. "You aren't in the mood to have fun, maybe you should go home. This isn't a family party and Picnic's free to screw whoever he wants. Not your job to judge."

I sighed, knowing he was right. Dad was definitely free—to the best of my knowledge, he hadn't even had a steady hookup since Mom died. I wasn't in charge of his social life and if I was going to be uptight about sex, I was in the wrong place. I looked over to see two blondes with long legs, short shorts, and cutoff tops wrapping themselves around Painter, taking turns giving him congratulatory kisses.

Oh hell no.

I wasn't leaving him alone with those hos. Tonight was do or die—he'd be mine or I'd be done with him. If I stayed, I might end up in Painter's bed. I might not. But if I left? One of them would be sleeping there for sure.

"What he does is up to him," I muttered. I left Duck to grab a couple of cups, filling one for each of us. I brought it back to him and then stood and watched the crowd.

Everywhere I looked there were couples.

Marie and Horse, Bam Bam and Dancer . . . Ruger and his random skank of the week.

"Holy shit," I burst out, almost spewing my beer.

"What?" Duck asked.

"That's my teacher from cosmetology school over there with Ruger," I muttered. "Oh, she is such a cunt. She failed me three times in a row just because Dad didn't call her back after he fucked her."

Duck snorted out a laugh.

"Good thing you're all graduated, because Ruger won't be calling her back, either."

And just like that, my good mood was back. *Go Ruger!*

"I'm gonna congratulate Painter," I said.

"Have at it," Duck said. "But remember—this is his time to cut loose."

"I know," I replied. "Maybe I can help him celebrate."

Duck's expression clouded.

"Emmy Lou, tonight isn't the night."

"It's never the night," I said, shrugging. Then I chugged my beer. "Don't worry, Duck. You've always taken good care of me, but I've got it covered. I'm an adult."

"Yeah, I know," Duck replied. "I guess when I look at you, I still see you with pigtails and a doll."

I rolled my eyes. Then I tossed my cup in the garbage and headed over to the newest Reaper.

• • •

Painter stood next to the bonfire, the two girls still hanging off him. I ignored them completely, because they were just club sluts and I was the president's daughter. They didn't rank compared to me and we all knew it. Painter gave me a slow smile as I walked up, and from the glassy look in his eyes I knew he was already well on his way to shitfaced.

"Hey, Em," he said, reaching out and pulling me into his arms for a hug. Oh, he smelled good. Kind of woodsy and smoky, with an underlying scent of motor oil from the shop. His arms were hard and roped with muscle around me, and his body was hard, too.

Hellfire.

Painter's *dick* was hard. I thought it was my imagination at first. Then he pulled me closer and I felt it again—bigger. Yeah, I know. V card. Little Miss Innocent. But just because I'd never done the deed all the way didn't mean I was ignorant. I knew damned well when a guy's cock was poking my stomach.

Then he let me go and I stepped back, thankful that the sun had set because I knew my face had to be flushed. Painter looked down at me, and something almost magical hung between us. He stared at me like I was the most beautiful girl on earth, the woman he planned to claim as his own.

My dad walked up and slapped his back.

"Congratulations, son," he said. "Proud of you."

Just like that, Painter dropped his arms and turned away, apparently oblivious to our magic. Dad was well and truly cock-blocking me, and it was bullshit.

Wait, did it count as a cock-block if you didn't have a cock?

"You have fun tonight," Dad was telling him. "Tomorrow you rest and recover, because after that we've got work for you."

Painter nodded, running a hand through his hair. One of the blondes who'd been hanging off him attached herself to my dad, and the other oozed back up to Painter right in front of me. I wanted him to tell her to fuck off. Maybe rip out some of that bleached hair. Instead he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her in for a hard kiss.

Damn it.

Dad's eyes flicked toward me, assessing.

I turned and walked away.

Fuck that shit. I had my pride.

• • •

Two hours later I was well and truly drunk.

Maggs and I sat in the old tree house that attached to the children's play structure with a rope bridge. I'd barely made it over the swaying net and wasn't entirely sure I'd be able to get back down without help.

“Life is short,” Maggs said suddenly. Her face was sad.

“You thinking about Bolt?” I asked. She nodded.

“Yup,” she said. “I think about him every day, but particularly at parties like this. I’m tired of watching everyone else have fun with nothing at home for me but my magic bullet.”

I snorted out a little laugh, then forced it down because it wasn’t exactly appropriate. I couldn’t help it, though.

“Buzzzzzzzz . . .” I hummed with drunken precision. “You go through a lot of batteries? I know I do. Can you make it walk across a table if you turn it on high enough?”

Maggs started giggling, her momentary sadness gone, and then we were both laughing. In fact, we laughed so hard that Maggs rolled off the edge of the platform, falling to the ground with a thud.

“Maggs!” I yelled, jumping up so fast I almost went over myself. “Maggs, are you okay?”

She moaned and turned over, looking up at me with a startled expression on her face. Then she started giggling again. Ruger and Bam Bam had been sitting near the fire, and Ruger jumped up so fast he dumped the chick on his lap off into the dirt.

I couldn’t help it. I burst out cackling so hard my stomach hurt. It wasn’t appropriate, I knew that. Maggs could’ve broken her neck. But the look on her face and the sight of Ruger’s ‘ho—my former teacher—on the ground were just too funny.

“Okay,” I heard a deep voice say, and looked down to see my dad. “Looks like someone needs to head home.”

He reached up for me and I jumped down into his arms, just like I had when I was a little girl. Dad caught me easily, still as strong now as he’d been ten years ago. Of course, he was only forty-two, way younger than most of my friends’ parents.

“Emmy Lou, you’re drunk off your ass,” he told me.

“No shit,” I replied brightly. “I’m having fun.”

“Yeah, but it’s about time for you to go home.”

“Are you serious?” I asked. “Dad, I think it’s great that you’re always watching out for me, but I’m not a little kid. There’s nothing wrong with me sticking around.”

His face softened.

“Sweetheart, this is Painter’s night,” he said. “His time to celebrate and be free. You shouldn’t be here.”

“You’re talking about him fucking whores, right?” I asked. Dad stiffened.

“It’s none of your business, Em,” he replied. “He doesn’t owe you anything.”

“I’m aware,” I said grimly.

Dad sighed.

“Banks will give you a ride,” he said. “You don’t have to leave right this minute, but I want you to stop drinking now and start saying your good-byes. Got me?”

“Yes,” I said, and thought about Kit. “You know, I don’t have to do everything you say.”

That caught him off guard—I saw it in his eyes.

“No, you don’t,” he admitted, shocking me. “But you have to do what the club president says on club property. Painter’s a Reaper now. You’re my daughter, but he’s my brother—and tonight is about the brothers.”

I wanted to flip him off. Instead I nodded and quietly pulled away from him. He knew I wasn’t happy but didn’t push. I looked around, finding Maggs still sitting under the tree. Ruger was crouched down next to her, showing her something on his phone. I wandered over to join them.

“This is him,” Ruger was saying, flashing a picture. I looked down to see a shot of Ruger, a little boy, and a pretty woman I didn’t recognize.

“Your nephew?” I asked. “He’s cute.”

“Fuckin’ adorable,” Ruger replied. “That’s Sophie—his mom—next to him. They’re in Seattle, I need to get over there and check out their new place soon. I saw them earlier this summer but I didn’t get much time.”

Something in his tone caught me—Ruger sounded almost . . . wistful? No, that wasn’t right. Ruger was many things, but never sweet or longing. He’d always taken what he wanted because he could. I leaned over for a closer look and nearly fell on my ass.

Dad was right—I really was pretty drunk.

“Maggs, I’m heading home,” I said. “You okay here? Wanna take in a movie or something?”

“I think I’ll stick around,” she replied. “It’s good people-watching. Dancer’s got a sitter for the night and she’s lit up like a firecracker, so things could get fun.”

I laughed. Dancer lit up was something worth seeing, no question. I waved at them vaguely, then wandered around saying good-bye to a few key people.

The one person I didn’t see was Painter.

I grabbed my stuff and ducked into the building for a quick pee before leaving. Painter was there in the hallway, leaning against the wall and looking at his phone. This time there weren’t any skanks or parents to get in the way. Perfect. I walked over to him and put my hand on his bare chest.

“Hey,” I said, looking up at him. His eyes flared, and I saw desire in his face. He wanted me.

“Hey,” he said back.

I dragged a finger down the center of his chest slowly, all the way to his stomach. Then I spread my fingers out, brushing the top of his jeans. His breath hissed.

“So are we doing this or not?” I asked him bluntly. “Because I’m tired of waiting.”

His eyes darkened and he leaned forward, kissing me very softly on the forehead. A sweet kiss. The kind of kiss you give a little girl at bedtime. Something inside me broke. I’d have said it was my heart, but I didn’t feel sad.

Nope. I was fucking pissed.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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