

Chapter 45

Mason

I slide the magazine into my gun, watching King pull up beside me on his bike. A second later, Falcon and Elliot arrive, popping open the trunk. The spy is bound with rope, blood seeping from a nasty cut on his forehead.

The Iron Serpents have been quiet for a while, but now they're sending spies to infiltrate the clubhouse. This traitor is their latest attempt.

"Let's get this shit over with. I have plans tonight," King says, his voice as cold as the night air.

I want to ask about Alyssa, but I keep my mouth shut. I'll just check on her tomorrow.

I went home the other night, partly because the chair was wrecking my back, but mostly because the jealousy I've been feeling is turning into an ugly, green monster. I couldn't take it anymore. So, I've buried myself in extra work to distract myself, which Gray has been happy to provide. The distraction helps, at least a little. But it doesn't change the fact that Alyssa's return has done something to me that I can't seem to reverse.

We drag the spy into the clubhouse and down to the basement, the air thick with the stench of motor oil and damp concrete. The dim overhead lights flickers, casting long, uneven shadows across the tarp. Falcon and Elliot tie the man up to a chair beneath the tarp while I start filling the basin with water.

Waterboarding is one of King's favorite methods of torture, and as a master of his craft, he will get the answers Gray wants within an hour or so. He always does.

"Now, why did the Iron Serpents send you to spy on us?" King asks, circling the man like a predator hunting its prey.

"I-I don't know," he stammers, trembling with fear.

King crouches in front of him, shaking his head. "This could've been easy, but obviously you want the hard way," he says, then motions for me to bring the basin over.

I roll it into place and grab a towel, draping it over the spy's face and making sure it covers his nose and mouth. He's already shaking, his breath coming out in shallow gasps as he realizes what's coming next.

King nods towards me and I grab the pitcher, pouring cold water over the cloth. The spy trashes against the chair, choking and sputtering. His body jerks with panic as the water seeps into the fabric, drowning him slowly without actually submerging him. Torture doesn't always get reliable information, but I've seen this technique break guys who'd rather be shot than feel like they're suffocating.

He's cracking already, it won't be long.

"So, how's Alyssa and the baby doing?" I ask casually, like we're not in the middle of torturing some sorry bastard that made the mistake of crossing us. He continues to thrash as I pour another splash of water over the cloth. His chest heaves, his muscles tensing, and his muffled gasps and cries sound like a man already halfway to death.

King's expression hardens. "They'd be fine if Gray would leave them the fuck alone."

"What happened?"

"I'm surprised he didn't tell you, or maybe he did, and you just want my

side of it," King says, shooting me a knowing smile.

Gray did tell me his version, but there's always two sides to every story—and somewhere in between is the truth. I'm good at piecing that part together once I've gotten the facts. All I care is that Alyssa's safe, and neither Gray nor King's selfish decisions are putting her in harm's way.

"Gray had us bring her to the house and tried to keep her there. Didn't give a damn about what she wanted, just made the decision for her."

I hold back the urge to ask, "Isn't that what you wanted to do to her, too?"

It gnaws at me, the jealousy, the frustration. I'm standing here, drowning this guy, and all I can think about is her. It's pathetic, really. Watching King torture him with ease while I struggle to keep my own head above water. Maybe that's why I'm pouring the water slower than usual, giving the spy just a few more seconds of air.

I know how it feels to be tortured, how cruel it can be, except this man will be relieved of his suffering soon. I won't.

Lucky bastard.

"Niko and I fought him on that, and I could see it in his eyes that Gray didn't like that shit," he continues, his eyes fixed on the spy's wide, wild eyes that remind me of a trapped animal. His face is quickly changing from pale to purple, but I keep pouring the water. "Now Alyssa's freaked out, thinking we're all going to get hurt because of her. I've got a bad feeling she might try to run. We need to keep a closer eye on her."

I arch a brow. "You mean, like the 'closer eye' Gray wants to keep on her?"

"

King's jaw tightens. "That's different. He wants to control her."

"And you don't?"

It's a bold question, especially given King's mood. I just want him to hear how hypocritical he sounds right now. Someone needs to tell him, and I've given up on Niko at this point. I thought he was on my side, but he's clearly too brainwashed by King to step in and stop King's obsession.

"Unlike with him, she wants my control," he insists. "And she's happier with us. There's no way in hell she'd be happy locked up in his house."

"Remove the cloth," he orders, ending the conversation. I obey, yanking the cloth off the spy's face. He chokes up water, coughing and sputtering as King sits him back down on the floor.

"Now, are you ready to talk?" King asks calmly, a wicked gleam in his eyes that shows just how much he's enjoying this.

The guy's a blubbing mess, but the truth starts spilling out. "The plan was to find out what businesses you're involved in. That's it, that's all Bones wanted."

Bones wanted our clientele list? What for?

"Why?" King snarls.

I don't—" he starts to say.

King tips the chair, threatening to torture him again. And this time, it would be longer.

"H-He wants to take out the Crimson Reapers!" the spy blurts out.

Well, that isn't good. That means lots of blood will be spilled.

An all-out war.

The room thickens with tension, everyone completely aware of how bad shit is going to get in the next couple of months.

"Thanks for your cooperation," King says with cold satisfaction. The spy's eyes widen, the reality of King's words sinking in just seconds before King raises his gun. His mouth opens in one last desperate plea, but it's drowned out by the muted sound of the shot. For a split moment, his face freezes in a mask of terror before his body slumps forward.

"Jesus, King," Falcon mutters. "I thought we were just supposed to get the info and send him on his way."

King smirks darkly, shrugging. "Where's the fun in that? Besides, Bones would've killed him anyway. I probably saved him from more torture, even though the fucker didn't deserve it."

Falcon and Elliot share glances, poorly hiding the fear in their eyes. But they don't need to worry about King hurting them...well, as long as they remain loyal to us and stay away from Alyssa.

"What should we tell Gray?" Elliot asks.

King cracks his neck from side to side. "Sounds like war against the Iron Serpents. I'll handle telling Gray and Niko. Get rid of the body. Now."

He takes off his gloves and tosses them in the garbage to be incinerated. I do the same, wanting to get rid of as much evidence as possible before I return home.

"I'll be at your place in the morning," I say as I follow King out of the clubhouse, leaving Falcon and Elliot behind to clean up. "If Alyssa's up when you get back, tell her I said goodnight."

King glances at me over his shoulder, smirking. "You've got her number. Why don't you tell her yourself?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he jumps on his bike and speeds off.

I watch him disappear into the night before fishing out my phone.

Why haven't I thought of that?

Oh, right. Because I'd say something stupid. Something like how I feel about her. But that would be pointless.

My fingers hover over the keyboard for a long moment. What the hell should I say? A casual 'goodnight' sounds awkward, but I want to say something. I need to hear from her, even if I'll see her in the morning.

I finally type: Just wanted to check on you and Zuri. Good night, little warrior. I'll see you tomorrow.

I stare at the screen for a few seconds, feeling stupid. But it's done now. Sent. She'll see if I delete it, so I'll just leave it out there and hope she doesn't think anything of it.



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