

Chapter 1 (Elowyn): I Can Tell

by GroveltoHEA

I knew what I was signing up for. He'd never made any secret of it, but at the time, the tradeo seemed...distant. Unlikely. Lachlan couldn't get enough of me, so I could never imagine he'd go somewhere else when he had me waiting at home, ready and willing to give him whatever he wanted.

But he'd warned me. In a vague way. "Sometimes I'll stay at the club. You don't ask me about those nights, or what goes on or what I've done or who I spent time with. But I'll always be careful and I'll always come home to you. It's just the way the biker life is. You have to be OK with it. You have to know that you're the one I love, you're the one I made my ol' lady and nothing else matters."

Considering the crappy family I came from, the poverty I'd lived in, the scrounging for food I'd done, the lack of stability I'd experienced, the dead-end jobs I'd worked since I was fourteen -- his offer sounded good. I'd seen the horrors my mom had put up with right in front of her, and his vague warnings didn't seem real. He'd bought us an adorable three-bedroom house and handed me his credit card and told me to make it our home. Then he'd given me a leather cut proclaiming me to be his property, he took me for rides on his bike and urged me to use the card for things I wanted. But I rarely did. I was happy with what we already had.

Then, right after our first anniversary, things had started to change. Lachlan started spending the occasional night at the club after parties I wasn't invited to. I'd get a text telling me he was staying at the clubhouse and he'd see me in the morning.

After the first couple of times he didn't come home, I began to panic, worrying he'd tire of me and set me aside. My pride hadn't yet kicked in. So I got a job two towns over in a place no one from the club would ever go to, during the hours he'd be at work. I told them I couldn't work weekends and never past five. But I was a solid, dependable worker, happy to come in at eight and get the store ready for opening. Soon, I was an assistant store manager and making some good money and I saved every penny. I'd opened a bank account at a credit union in this town that wasn't affiliated in any way with the bank where Lachlan and I had our accounts.

My man did work hard for the club, and he was gone from seven in the morning until at least six at night and he made more than enough for the two of us. I was frugal with his money, budget conscious with the meals I made and only rarely bought myself new clothes. Lachlan was still sweet with me, still caring, still took me out, but I was putting up walls in anticipation of him leaving me.

Two years went by, then three, then four, and now five years had passed. Every year, he'd slowly been spending more nights at the clubhouse so now he was gone once a month, sometimes twice. On those occasions I went to the club in the last year, I noticed one of the club girls giving me looks, then giving my man looks and I figured out they had something going. A couple of times, I'd noticed his eyes straying to her and I didn't like the looks between them. The arrangement I'd agreed to before I became his old lady was no longer working for me. I wanted to be someone's only

As if the universe was sending me a message, I'd recently been offered a store manager position in another state and accepted the promotion. Lachlan was leaving for a club run and would be gone for a week, and the timing was perfect. I was afraid I'd have to take over while he was at work, which would make being discovered riskier. I bought a nice used car with some of the money I'd saved, and told them to have it detailed and delivered to my house the next morning, and for a small fee, they agreed.

The night before he left for his trip, he pulled me to him in bed and for the first time ever, I refused him.

"Is your girlfriend going on the trip with you?" I asked quietly.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he'd asked me, his voice impatient. "Only club brothers are going."

"I'm sure she'll be lonely with you gone for a week."

"What the fuck's gotten into you?" he demanded. I was heading into territory I wasn't allowed in and he didn't like it.

"I want more," I said simply. "What we have? The lies, the nights at the club with...well, it's not enough. I thought I could put up with it, but every night you spend away from me...it's killing me."

"You know I love you," he said, as if that was it. End of conversation. He didn't want to discuss it, so it was a forbidden subject.

"I don't like your version of love," I whispered and turned my back to him.

"You knew what to expect from the start. I was straight with you. Just remember, you're the one I love and live with," he said, then pressed a kiss to my shoulder. "Sweetheart, we'll talk when I get back, OK?"

"OK," I said. The one and only lie I ever told him. I wouldn't be here when he got back.

Early the next morning, Lachlan left and I followed him to the clubhouse, parking on the street, and watched. Sure enough, she came running out and kissed him goodbye like I'd refused to do. I'd turned my head and his lips hit my cheek, then he'd sighed in annoyance at me. But when I saw her jump into his arms, I knew leaving was the right thing. Sometimes you hurt so much, it doesn't even hurt anymore. It's just a part of you that you accept. Trading stability for my dignity and self-respect made me sick, especially since I'd let it go on so long.

After the brothers rode off, I drove home. My car was being delivered in two hours and I had clothes to pack. Once the three large suitcases I'd bought and hidden in my trunk were filled with my clothes, I put all of my shoes into two small storage bins and snapped the lids on. I carried them out to the garage, ready to load the minute my car was delivered.

Back inside the house, I tidied up, made the bed, and put the dishes in the sink in the dishwasher. I'd put my phone on the counter to leave behind with some other things, but then it buzzed with a text.

Already had to stop because one of the brothers didn't have a full tank. Didn't like the way we left things this morning between us. You know I love you and only you.

In reply, I sent Lachlan the picture I'd taken this morning of his girlfriend in his arms, their lips locked and her legs around his waist.

Yeah, I can tell.

Three hours later, I was on the road, leaving the state and my life for the last five years behind.