

TANGLED

Chapter Eleven

Soph

I closed the front door. It was late. Once again Bax had kept me out all night. If I could, I would be smiling. Bax was carefree, funny, and I knew he was dangerous, but that didn't scare me away.

I walked up the stairs slowly, stopping and taking my heels off halfway. My feet were aching. Bax decided for us to walk through the busy square. I looked at the long red stem rose in my hand.

I thought Bax would be a one night deal. But he was determined the morning after to get my number, and when we weren't together he was always messaging me. I never had to start the messaging with him, it was like he knew when the perfect time was to send a message.

It was dark and I was heading for my room when I noticed Josh's door open. His door was never open. I frowned and for some reason found myself heading for his room. I knew I shouldn't bother him. I knew he wouldn't like me in his room. But for some reason, I felt like something was calling me to go in there.

I knocked on the door softly. "Josh, you ok?"

It was dark, but I could make out a body on the bed. I heard a groan, and I walked to his bed, stepping over the clothes on the

floor. His room was a mess. I dodged the crushed cans and empty bottles.

“Josh, are you ok?”

He groaned. Ok, I was taking that as a no.

“Josh?” I asked softly and moved next to his side of the bed. The curtains were open and the moonlight helped me to make out his figure, which was on the edge of the bed, a hand over his face. I lowered my voice in case he was hungover, “What’s wrong?”

His head turned and he took his hand off his face. “Migraine.” He sounded like he was in a lot of pain.

He used to get migraines when he was under stress. I noticed the bottles of pain relief next to his bedside. I knew Josh. He wouldn’t have had anything for it. Getting the bottles out was all he would have done. And that was a lot for Josh. He hated the medication cause it would linger in his system the next day.

I popped open the bottle and got him a dose out, grabbing an open beer bottle.

“Ok, I’m sorry about the warm beer, but you have to take this regardless.” I took his hand and put the pills in them. He slowly sat up and I saw how gingerly he did it.

He took the beer and through back the pills. I took it off him and headed for the bathroom.

I ran a face cloth under the cold water and headed back to his bedroom, dodging all the crap on the floor.

“You’re back?” He must have spotted me.

“Yeah, you are lucky I haven’t broken my neck in this room.” I got to his side and gently lifted his hand off and placed the towel down.

He sighed. I walked around to the other side of the bed. I had already abandoned my heels and I doubted I’d be able to find them later in this mess.

I laid down on his bed next to him.

“You don’t have to stay, Soph.” He turned and his voice was soft, as if he spoke any louder he’d be in pain.

I took his hand and started to massage it. The hand has trigger points to all over your body, My mum used to always massage my thumb whenever I had a headache; she believed it did something, and she was doctor. But if nothing else, it was relaxing.

“Soph, you can go.”

I just kept massaging his hand. “Stop telling me to leave and go to sleep.” The sooner he went to sleep the sooner he could recover. He knew that too.

He turned on his side to face me. “So how was your date?”

I frowned. I hadn’t told him I was going out with Bax tonight. No one knew about Bax. But when it came down to it, Bax and I weren’t dating. “Um, wasn’t on a date.” I kept massaging his hand. “Sorry I wasn’t home earlier. If I had been, you wouldn’t have

suffered for so long.”

I felt guilty about not being home earlier. I hated the thought of Josh laying here in pain.

“I’m fine.”

“Sure you are.” I sighed and closed my eyes. I don’t know why, but when it came to Josh I felt comfortable. Like I could just do what I want in front of him and he wouldn’t judge. I wouldn’t call it a friendship—it was more than that. Like an unspoken bound of trust.

I turned around, placing my back against his chest while putting his arm around me and having his hand in mine massaging it. I didn’t feel like I was crossing a line. I didn’t even think about what it would mean to share the same bed as him. He didn’t push me away, or take his out of mine. Like I said, we had this unspoken trust between us.

I was so focused on the feel of his hand in mine, and massaging it, that at first I didn’t realize he had slipped his arm under my head. For some reason I felt so relaxed, so calm, and this felt so right. I trusted him as I lay on his arm, and he pulled me back into his chest, as I kept his hand in mine.

I didn’t feel like I was crossing a boundary by falling asleep next to him, in his bed. If anything I felt safe.

So I didn’t fight it when the need for sleep crept up on me. Didn’t think, fuck it, I should go to my room. Nope. I stayed and fell asleep in his bed, on his arm.

JOSH

Sophia was beautiful. I don't think she realized how beautiful she was. She was the type of beautiful that you would do anything for, just to please her. Wasn't just her looks that had you begging to please her. It was her personality.

But right now, I couldn't get over how beautiful she was.

Her flawless skin, her red lips—and it wasn't lipstick; her lips were always red, which stood out against her pale complexion. With all the sunshine here you would think she would tan. But she never did.

My migraine disappeared slowly over the night once she forced me to take pain killers.

That was the other thing about Soph, you couldn't say no to her. Not that she would react badly if you did, you simply didn't say no because you didn't want to disappoint her. Like, whatever she wanted you had to give her, meet her demands.

Again, it wasn't like she demanded much from you. If anything, all she wanted was respect, and that I would and could always give her.

My brother had broken her trust. I also think he broke something inside her. The old Soph would be full of smiles and glowing with happiness. This version of Soph had her hanging out with men like Bax and coming home at all hours.

She wasn't happy. I think the only thing she was doing was

surviving—poorly.

Clearly she wasn't in the right state of mind to make a fucking decision. Cause look where her decisions got her: In my bed, in a dress barely covering her breasts and thighs, showing the back lace that it should be covering.

Her decisions had also led her to Bax. I had hoped she would see it herself. That he wasn't the guy you would waste time on.

I had let them go a week and what was the result? Bax was making excuses to get out of my meetings and Soph was barely home. And when she did come home it was the early hours of the morning. How did I know? Cause I was making an effort to track what she was doing. I was even home by nine at night, which was unheard of because the night is meant to be a biker's best time. Best time on the road. And best time to drink and get laid. And what was I doing? Waiting to see if my brother's teenage ex-girlfriend was home.

I didn't know why I was doing it. Wasn't like I loved her. I didn't love anyone. Nor did I ever see myself loving any one. That just wouldn't happen. I was never giving a girl more than a night again. I was never being forced to be in a relationship with one and I sure as fuck was never getting involved in her life.

So what the hell was I doing with Soph?

She was a friend, right? I didn't do friendships either, so I didn't know the boundaries. Didn't know if stalking her bed time was acceptable. I also didn't know if it was my place to warn her of Bax when she hadn't actually told me about him. So I couldn't just give carefree easy advice on the subject.

She would have to bring him up. And I didn't see her doing that. Ever.

My bedroom door swung open and I was so forced on staring at Soph's flawless and sleeping face I nearly didn't notice my brother come in.

"What the fuck, Joshua!" Kyle hissed at me, his eyes on Soph and then me.

I rolled my eyes. Of course he would make a scene. I saw his eyes run down her, and as if she was mine, I had to cover her. I threw the blanket over her. I should have done that earlier instead of gawking at her perfect figure.

I got up and pushed Kyle out of the room. I didn't want him waking her and he would do that just to be a jerk and get answers on why she was in my room.

"What the hell was that!" Kyle pointed at my bedroom door, which I had just closed before he started his ranting.

His ranting went through my ears. My migraine might be gone but my ears were still sensitive.

"Nothing." I crossed my arms, standing in the way of the door way in case he had the thought to charge in there and demand for Soph to explain what she was doing in there to him.

"She's off limits, you hear me, Joshua? She is off fucking limits!" he roared at me and if Soph wasn't awake I'm sure that would have woken her.

“You and her are finished. What she does is zero of your business.” I uncrossed my arms, and in case he wasn’t getting a message I pushed him backwards away from my bedroom door. “If anyone will be staying away from her, it’s you. You hear me, Kyle? Stay the fuck away from her!”

“She’s my girlfriend!”

He couldn’t be serious? “Last time I checked you have a new one of them, which means Soph isn’t yours anymore.”

He shook his head, not accepting that. “She will always be mine. I know what you think of her. Fuck, I’ve seen how you look at her. But I’m telling you I won’t let it happen.”

He could say what he wanted and do what he wanted. At the end of the day, what happened between me and Soph would be between us. Not that I was planning on anything happening. At the moment we were just friends. She was the first friend I’d had and I wasn’t sure if I was being a good one or letting her down. But still, what happened was between us.

“I know what you are involved in. She will never go for a criminal biker!” Kyle hissed at me. How did he know that I was a biker? The criminal bit, well that was old news. But no one knew about the biker side, unless he has been speaking to Dad.

I tilted my head, looking at my brother. We both knew that nothing held Soph back when her heart got involved. But I doubted her heart would ever want me. I was older; I was a criminal, and I didn’t care that I scared nearly every one I met away.

“I’ll do what I want, Kyle. Like I always do.” I pointed a finger at him. “I think you need to learn your new place, which is in her past—not her future.” With that said, and seeing that panicked look on his face, I turned around and slipped back into my bedroom.

Soph had been right when she said she was lucky not to break her neck in my room. It was really bad. I wanted to groan. I hated cleaning. I didn’t care if I lived in a mess. If that meant I didn’t have to clean, that was fine.

But seeing as Soph noticed how bad it was, I knew I would have to bring myself to the boring task of cleaning.

“You’re up.”

My head snapped up and I saw Soph sitting up in the bed, with the blanket over her lap. She was still waking up by the looks of it, which meant maybe my idiot of a brother hadn’t woken her up.

“Yeah. How you feeling?” I moved towards the bed.

“I should be asking you that question.” She turned on the bed. “So how are you feeling?”

That was Soph for you, always cared more about someone else than herself. I smiled. “I’m better. I owe you one.”

“I didn’t do it counting on you paying me back.” She forced a smile. That was the other thing she did now. Force smiles. Her natural smile was never on her face. Or that carefree grin of hers—that was never on her face either.

“I know you didn’t.” I looked down at my side of the bed and spotted a rose. I picked it up and looked at her. “I thought you said it wasn’t a date?” I wouldn’t believe that the Bax I knew would buy her a red rose. In fact, she must have someone else on the cards as well as him.

She looked at the rose. “I thought I had dreamed that bit.”

I arched my eyebrows at her. “So who is he?”

She looked down at her lap. “You wouldn’t approve,” she mumbled, and I started to get a sinking feeling in my stomach. Like she was about to confirm my worst night mare, which was Bax was the one giving her roses and keeping her out all night.

“Try me.” I put the rose down on my bedside table and kept my eyes on her. “You know me, I’ve never judged you.”

She frowned and took a deep breath in and looked like she was weighing up telling me the truth or not. “What do you think of bikers?”

The air disappeared from my lungs. I found my mouth dropping open and I just looked at her like she couldn’t be serious. In that second, that one question threw me completely.

Her frown deepened when she saw my reaction. “Forget I asked.” She went to get up.

“Stop,” I said, putting a hand out like that would stop her from getting up. “How do you know he’s a biker?”

“I sort of put together all the facts. But it’s strange... It’s like he is loyal to it, but at the same time doesn’t have anything to do with them.” She shrugged. “Maybe I’ve read him wrong.”

She hadn’t. She had read him perfectly. He was a biker being forced to have a backseat from a life he loved to live. He loved the drinks, the drugs, and most of all, the women.

“Biker’s go through girls, Soph. You shouldn’t let yourself be used.” Was that crossing a line? I read her expression; she hadn’t taken it the wrong way.

She shrugged again. “I’ve sort of stopped caring. It’s not like he will hurt me. Not after...” She swallowed sharply. “I just mean, like, I’m not in love with him. If his attention stopped, I wouldn’t be heart broken or anything.”

Well, at the very least she didn’t have her heart set on him. That was something. Still, she was dating him, knowing what type of man he wa—the type of man that would never be faithful to a woman.

She deserved to have a man that would always put her first and would always be loyal, respectful, and faithful to her. Bax was only loyal to the club. He didn’t respect anyone—not even the people that ranked above him. And he wasn’t faithful. Just wasn’t in his blood. He was stereotypical biker.

So why the fuck had he set his sights on Soph?

I ran a hand through my hair, feeling slightly confused by the new emotions that were flooding my body.

“I should get out of you bed, and let you rest.” This time Soph did get up, and I didn’t want her leaving.

“You got plans today?” I asked as I watched her readjust her dress. Her dead straight hair was puffing out, giving her a look as if she had been up all night having sex.

“Nope.” She crossed her arms. “Guess you do though. Your phone was going off before.”

I glanced at my phone. It was dead now. My eyes went back to her. God, she was beautiful. “I don’t have plans. Well, apart from cleaning my room.”

She grinned just slightly, but it was a real grin. “Why, because I nearly died in here?”

I nodded my head. Yep. She was the reason I was facing down cleaning.

“Well, seeing as it is my fault you’re going to do something you hate, I’ll help.” She put her hands on her hips. “But I need to change first.”

“You don’t have to help.” That was the last thing I wanted, but at the same time, knowing she would be spending time with me, excited me.

“Just let me change.” Her eyes ran over my bare chest. “And you should get dressed too,” she said that like me being topless was causing her physically harm.

I realized now if she saw my back she would see my tattoo.

Without thinking about it or caring if it was dirty or not, I picked up the first t-shirt my hand landed on and threaded it on.

She frowned slightly at my abrupt behaviour. She gave me another questioning look as she opened the door and left.

That was a close call. How could I forget about my tattoos? If she saw that, she wouldn't be questioning if I was a biker or not.

Chapter Twelve

Soph

When it came to life, I had always seen it as black and white: What you can do and what you can't. What you should feel and what you shouldn't. I never saw the gray area. But now, I did. I saw a hell of a lot of gray. Like my feelings, for example. If I had to say if I was happy or sad, I couldn't say either. But I could say I was broken, which I think went into the gray side of life where there was a hole in my heart and every day I was trying to fill it... and some days, well, some days I let it get bigger.

Being with Kyle was the thing I did best and now it was gone there was a hole in heart, a hole he created. Some days I could cope. Other days I couldn't get out of bed. Then there was a rare day when I felt like myself again. But most of the time I felt like a different person. I think that's what scared me the most—that I was becoming a new person, someone colder, someone less happy, someone who didn't smile and someone who saw the darker side of life and didn't give a fuck.

I was becoming someone I didn't recognize. The hole in my heart was destroying me—well, the old me. The person I was creating

now, I didn't want to be her. Every time I looked in the mirror I just longed to see the happiness I used to feel daily.

I knew the coldness was getting worse when my razor broke in the shower and I couldn't think of one reason not to cut my wrists. I didn't. But for a split second I wanted the relief—to feel something other than numbness.

Sure, Bax brought out a side to me. He made me.... Well, I don't think I can't describe what I felt around him. Wasn't love. Wasn't friendship. Maybe it was a risker side to me? Maybe he brought out my wild side? I guess there wasn't much left of me to get hurt if things did go bad, so why not risk it? That was what I thought every time he called me late at night. I knew it was a booty call, but I went.

Then there were the rare nights when he just wanted to spend time with me. Didn't fucking know why he would want to spend time with me. It sure as hell wasn't my personality. Wasn't like I made great conversation either. I just couldn't. I literally couldn't do it. It was like I was relearning how to be around people. Like all my experiences with Kyle had been wiped. The person I was, wiped. The skills I had, wiped. What was this? Was this the heartbreak that song writers sing about? Was this the type of pain romance novelists attempt to describe?

At the end of the day, I knew one thing for sure: no one could describe this heartbreak unless they had been through it. And if they did experience it, live through it, and survive it, I can guarantee they wouldn't be the same person anymore.

No one could fix this hole in my heart. Hell, it wasn't a hole. There was barely anything left of my heart for it to be considered

an organ.

I think what was worse was Kyle always knew the right words to say. He always knew what to do—usually he knew me better than I knew myself. I'd grown so tired of putting up a front. I wasn't ok. And I was ok with not being ok. I was just hoping one day, somehow, by some miracle I would recover.

Just because I couldn't see it happening didn't mean it wouldn't, right? Miracles happen. It was possible one would happen to me. In the meantime, I just had to get through day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute.

I had to admit, right now I was getting through the day thanks to Josh.

I looked up just as he scratched the back of his neck, glaring down at his couch. I had to admit his expression had my lips twitching up. Nearly a smile. But it wasn't.

“You know, you can't just keep glaring at it. You are going to have to sort out the mess, right?” I said, sitting on his floor, sorting out the clean washing. His mum had just kept putting basket after basket of clean washing in his room but wouldn't put it away. It was fair to say he had been living out of these baskets.

He said his mum cleaned everything that ended up outside his doorway. He looked at me like I was stupid when I asked him if he washed them. His response: “Fuck the washing.” It was enough to get me to nearly smile again.

“This is disgusting,” he muttered, picking up a pair of jeans which were covered in grease that had, by the looks of it, rubbed

off on his shirts underneath them.

Nothing could make me laugh, but his expression was bringing out the humor in me.

“Fuck, look at this!” He dug out something and then showed me a pizza box. “How the fuck did that get underneath all this?”

“I’m going to say you were drunk and hungry at the time that entered your room.” Which was the only explanation on why he would have food in here. He would come back from one his wild parties or fights. I say fights because he was often wearing a black eye, bruised knuckles, or cut lip. But the funny thing was, his attitude seemed to imply he wasn’t on the receiving end of the beating. That was Josh for you. I think he lived to push his body to breaking point with exercise. He used to be like that before prison, always running and always at the gym. I remember he took up mixed martial arts before prison.

I took in his board shoulders and arms I couldn’t wrap my hands around his muscles were that big. Even the muscles running up his neck bulged out. Honestly, I was sorry for any poor bastard that pissed him off because I think Josh could kill them with his bare hands and strength.

If I had to describe Josh as one thing, one word to sum him up, it would be protector. I think that’s why I felt so safe around him. There were other ways to describe josh, like dangerous, a definite violent streak, not emotionally ready for a relationship... even cold hearted. But I think the most frightening thing about him was he was able to tell, with just one look, what you were thinking. Yeah, that scared me the most, and I was trying my best to dodge his glances. I didn’t want him to know about the hole in my heart. I

didn't want anyone to know.

I watched him throw clothes out into the hallway. He was assuming that his mum would pick them up and wash them. For a twenty-something-year-old man, he was relying an awful lot on his mum.

“Well, look at that!” I said with a tiny smile on my face.

“What?” He glanced at me, still holding the pizza box between two fingers, as if it would the old pizza would escape from the box and attack him.

“Your carpet is gray.” I stood up.

He scoffed. “Well, I'm still unsure what color my fucking couch is.”

“Could have a flower pattern.”

He shot me a drop dead look. Like it would be over his dead body that anything with flowers on it would come into his room, which just supported his character: stereotypical alpha male.

“You still haven't told me his name.” Josh threw more clothes into the hallway along with the pizza box.

I frowned. “Whose name?”

He looked up at me with determination in his eyes. “The biker.”

Oh, that. I should have kept my mouth shut. “I don't know if he is a biker or not.”

“How old is he?”

“Old enough to not be interested in me.” And that was the truth.

Josh scoffed and shook his head. “Do you see yourself in the mirror?” He waved an arm at me. “You would have any sane man begging.”

What was he trying to say? That I attract men? How wrong he was. The only man I wanted found another girl more attractive than me. So if I couldn't keep the one man I wanted, how the hell was I meant to keep others interested?

“That's not true,” I said firmly. “If that was the case, I wouldn't be....” I clamped my mouth shut and shook my head. “Men aren't worth a second thought.” And I knew that to be true, yet my mind still would revisit the topic of Kyle often. Even though nothing would change between us, and even though nothing could change our future and what he did to me.

“So you happy to cut this one off then?” Josh said so casually you would think he was talking about the weather and not my sex life.

My mouth dropped open slightly and I found myself stumped by his assumption.

He arched an eyebrow at me, reading my expression. “So is that a yes or a no?”

I looked at him like he couldn't be serious. Finally I shut my mouth and the shock disappeared.

“Actually it’s a no.” I started to collect the empty baskets.

“So you like him?”

“I like having sex with him, yes.” I found myself being honest. What was wrong with a girl using a guy for once? I wasn’t going to be heartbroken if Bax stopped talking to me or suddenly got interested in another girl who showed up at the bar. “Why do you care?” I finally asked, walking towards him. “You use women for sex and don’t say you don’t cause I know your reputation, Josh.”

Even two years ago he was known for being a heartbreaker. The devil with the looks and a hand made to grab hearts out of girl’s chests and destroy them, without feeling one inch of guilt. True to his character, he was the bad boy—the one every girl wanted to try and tame.

I wasn’t stupid; I knew Bax was a bad boy and I wasn’t the dumb blonde who thought she could change him. I accepted Bax for what he was and that was great for sex—but that was it. He wasn’t boyfriend material and he sure as hell wasn’t a man I’d give my heart.

“You aren’t that cold, Soph.” Josh kept his eyes on me as I stood behind the couch in front of him. “You can’t say you can just use a guy for sex and feel nothing.”

I looked at him deadly serious. “If you reckon I can’t do it, why have I been doing it since I met him?” It was true, my heart wasn’t involved. My body was, and that I wouldn’t deny. My body was into Bax—his tattoos, his muscles... yep, my body felt him one hundred percent.

After Kyle left me, I'd been holding onto a memory of him, and I'd been so focused on what we had, being stuck in the past, that I couldn't get over him. He was deep in my veins and I couldn't give Bax my heart even if I wanted to, because I didn't have one. I really needed to let Kyle go, but I didn't know. He was like my own personal drug, and I was going through withdrawal.

I was still holding on to a memory even though he had basically said he was sick of me and wanted nothing to do with me. He basically wanted me to let him go, and I just didn't know how to do it.

Which brought me to where I was now: openly admitting I was using a guy for sex. The old Soph felt too much to ever do that; she lived to please and love and feel. The new Soph... Well, if anything, I learned just how much I'd changed because the new me didn't live for any of those things.

"I don't like this guy. He isn't good for you," Josh said, his dark eyes staring into mine, locking with them until I felt like I couldn't look away even if I wanted to. Fuck. I was scared to blink. "I want you to end it."

I swallowed sharply. Nobody told me what to do anymore. It was the only thing I got from the breakup with Kyle. Nobody told me who to be with, or who not to be with, and no one could be ashamed or disappointed in me if I didn't listen to them. But Josh was standing here like I had to answer to him.

"I don't tell you who you can and can't sleep with." I crossed my arms, feeling like I needed another reason to back up my response.

Josh picked up a packet of smokes and lit one up, looking like he needed to calm down. Why was he getting so worked up over this?

He inhaled sharply, his eyes still locked with mine. “You need to let him go.”

I frowned. “I’m not holding on to Bax.” I wasn’t. I wasn’t clinging to the hopes of being his girlfriend. Hell, I didn’t even expect him to be a friend when he was done with me.

Josh shook his head. “Kyle...” He took the cigarette out of his mouth. “You are still letting him control your decisions. You are letting him turn you into this”—he paused and ran a one hand through his hair while holding his cigarette in the other—“someone else,” he finally settled on a word. “You are better than this, Soph.”

I wasn’t better than anything. I wasn’t letting Kyle control my decisions. If anything, I was just surviving. I was who I was because that was what was left of me after Kyle was done.

“You want to be my friend, right?” I held my head up high, even though I could hear the disappointment in his voice.

Josh didn’t do friendships, so I knew he was going into this one blind. He didn’t know boundaries. He didn’t know what was right and what was wrong. He didn’t know where a friendship stopped being a friendship.

He nodded his head, looking unsure whether he wanted to hear what I had to say.

“Well, if you are my friend, you are meant to be there no matter. No matter how many times I fail or succeed, you are there to support and encourage and help me pick up the pieces if I do fail.” I looked at him a bit harder. “Either way, I’m always meant to be able to count on you. No matter what I do.”

That was a friendship, right? The core values of a friendship. Well, that’s how I saw them. If Josh wanted to be my friend, he had to be there through the good times and the bad.

“So if you can’t be there in the good times and bad times, we don’t have a friendship,” I added. He was staring at me, weighing up what I said. He didn’t know the values of a friendship. He was only doing what he did best and that was protect someone he cared about. I assumed that was why he wanted me to end it with Bax, cause he thought I’d get hurt.

Little did he know I couldn’t get hurt anymore.

He inhaled on the cigarette and, still staring into my eyes, slowly exhaled. “Bax is a bastard, Soph. You will end up hurt.” His eyes hardened and he was looking at me, like I was something special and he wasn’t about to have me ruined by a man that could never love me.

He also said that like he knew Bax. I shook my head. “Clearly you didn’t listen to me when I said through the good and the bad.”

“Why should I support the bad when I can stop it from happening?” He had a solid point. A friend would point out a mistake before I made one but would be there when I made it anyway. “Soph, you deserve better than one-night stands.”

My eyes widened slightly. “How do you know that’s all my relationship with Bax is?” I sure as hell didn’t tell him I was Bax’s favorite booty call. “How do you know he doesn’t hold me higher than that?”

He scoffed and shook his head, dropping the cigarette in an ashtray.

Whatever he was thinking he was keeping it to himself. He was acting like he knew Bax; like he knew what Bax was capable of and not, which wasn’t possible because Josh might be bad but he wasn’t in Bax’s league. Well, not that I knew of. But as I thought about it more, I began to wonder whether Josh had a double life, one where his criminal past wasn’t the past.

“I should have known you wouldn’t listen,” he muttered to himself and then looked at me defeated. “Guess I’ll just be there when he breaks your heart,” he said with so much honesty and concern.

“Thanks, Josh.” And once again I was wishing I could smile. Because what he was doing—letting me go into a situation that was going to end badly—well, it showed he really was going to support me in the good and bad.

His phone went off on his bedside table and I glanced at it. It had been doing that a lot this morning. I assumed it was some needy girl he was trying to cut off.

“Seems like she won’t give me.” I looked back at him as his phone rang in the background.

He frowned. “What?”

“The girl who hasn’t stopped calling you all morning. I don’t think she is giving up.”

His face was twisted with confusion for a moment, and then it registered what I had said.

“Yeah, I should get this. And you should get out of here. I’m sure cleaning my bedroom wasn’t what you wanted to do on your weekend.” He looked at his phone, which had stopped ringing, and then looked back at me. “Can I ask something of you?” His tone was serious.

I tilted my head, looking at him. “Sure.”

“If he is a biker, don’t go to the clubhouse or club parties,” he said firmly. “Promise me you won’t get involved in that scene?”

I bit my bottom lip. The truth was Bax was trying to get me to go to parties, which I knew had something to do with a biker club. But they weren’t parties at a clubhouse. They were at random houses. I heard him say on the phone to someone he was going to a “supporters house.” It was another thing that had tipped me off to him being in a club.

But the other night, after we had sex, I took in his tattoos with more detail. I don’t know why I hadn’t looked at them or studied them before. But I could see tattoos dedicated to The Devil’s Cut.

I knew that was the local biker club in town. I guess I really was playing with fire being near Bax.

“I won’t get involved in clubhouse parties,” I said it clearly. I

wouldn't be going to a clubhouse. But I would go to a party in general, whether it was a supporter's party or not. Josh didn't seem to pick up on my clarification.

He nodded his head and his phone started ringing again.

"I'll, um, let you get that." I gave him a fake smile and left him in his room, closing the door after me and heading across the hall to my room.

Chapter Thirteen

Soph

Ok, I was beginning to think my life couldn't get any worse; that I had suffered through enough awkwardness for a lifetime. If there was a God, one would think that he'd had enough entertainment from my train wreck of life.

But that didn't seem to be the case tonight.

Louise, Kyle's Mum, who I had to admit I had been giving the cold shoulder since I arrived, asked me to stay in Saturday night. I had plans with Bax, but I couldn't say no to her.

Her and Jed were putting me up, and it would also seem that Jed wanted me to stay in tonight as well. Josh, however, had disappeared sometime that day, and when I saw his empty spot at the table I assumed he wasn't being forced to spend Saturday night here.

Jed Hawkins was many things: a man passionate about this city, a true blue supporter of the Bull Dogs, a family man and I would

say a great dad—to Kyle. It was no secret he had no time for Josh. He had written Josh off years ago. I think even before I came along. But when it came to anything in Kyle's life, he was the golden boy.

I stabbed a carrot as Kayla continued to make small talk with Louise.

Yep, Kyle had been given the order to stay in as well. But he dragged his girlfriend into the family night I was being forced to attend.

I glanced up and I wished I hadn't because my eyes locked with Kyle's, who was staring directly at me.

I wanted to snap at him, but instead I shoved a carrot in my mouth and attempted to keep a lid over my temper and embarrassment.

Just as I went to shove another carrot in my mouth, Louise turned to look at me.

“So, Sophia, how is school going? I bet the universities are hovering,” she said so sweetly, like she still cared about my future, even though my future would not include her son. She should really redirect that question to Kayla, her future daughter-in-law.

As the table went quiet and all eyes were on me, I realized I was going to be forced to answer. I opened my mouth to answer, but an annoying and relentless voice spoke before me.

“I don't know about Soph, but the universities' attention is really intense. I was telling Kyle earlier in the week if I get one more

promotional letter I'll never make a decision." Kayla finished with a fake sigh at the end.

Louise turned to look at me. "Are you having the same problem, Sophia?"

"No, I don't get letters." I looked at Kayla. "I get phone calls." Kayla's eyes narrowed, but I continued, "Kayla is right though, it is intense. And then there are the face-to-face appointments—shoving scholarships down your throat."

"Have you picked a favorite yet, Sophia?" Jed entered the conversation. For some reason they actually still cared where my future was headed.

"I'm thinking overseas. I got a few good offers from aboard."

"You aren't going overseas," Kyle scoffed and shook his head. He spoke as if what I had just said offended him. If anything he should be glad to not be in the same country as me.

"Mum and Dad are encouraging it." I frowned, my eyes on Kyle as he glared at me.

"You wanted to stay in the state. What happened to that plan? What happened to you going to Monash? We both went to their welcoming and put them as our first choice. Hell, we even looked for an apartment there. You had your heart set on Monash!" Kyle's words sprayed over the table at me. He was basically a second away from getting up and screaming it at me.

I had never seen him this angry. I just stared at him, with my mouth slightly open, speechless.

“Um, well that was our plan...” I trailed off, not really sure what to say.

The tension at the table was palpable. Louise and Jed were looking between us, while Kayla’s glare was fixed firmly on Kyle.

“Darn straight it was!” Kyle threw his fork down. “Now all of a sudden you are forgetting about our plans and heading over fucking seas!”

“Kyle, language!” Jed warned.

Was Kyle serious right now? He thought I’d be heading to the same university as him? He thought that I would still be following the plan he and I had set?

I swallowed sharply, gathering my thoughts. “My plans changed when you weren’t in my future anymore.” I looked into his heated eyes. “I’m sure you and Kayla have discussed where you both will be heading next year, and I doubt it is the same plan you had with me.”

I attempted to speak reason, but Kyle reacted like I had thrown gasoline onto an open fire.

“We made a promise, Soph! You and I were heading to Monash! You can’t go back on that now! You do realize that once you set your preferences you can’t change them? Hell, we set our preferences last year!”

“And I changed them the first day back at school.” I shook my head and frowned. “It’s not like my future affects yours anymore!”

At the end of this year, I doubt we will ever see each other again!” It was the truth. I didn’t see our paths crossing again. Not after high school ended and we both relocated.

Kyle got up abruptly. “Take that back now, Sophia! Now!”

“Kyle, calm down,” Louise attempted to intervene.

“Can you hear this bullshit!” Kyle pointed an arm at me. “She is wiping me out of her life!”

I awkwardly looked at Louise, Jed, and then Kyle, my eyes bouncing from one to the other.

“Kyle, you wiped me out of your life,” I reminded him. “Why the hell are you getting upset? We aren’t together. We aren’t friends. And stop looking at me like I have to be loyal to our old plans!” I dropped my knife and fork. I wasn’t hungry anymore. Not that I was to begin with. But I was no longer putting on a show of pretending to eat.

I couldn’t believe how he was acting! It was as if he thought that come next year I would be attending Monash with him. Hell, I think in his twisted mind he saw me sharing an apartment with him. Did he really think I would want to share an apartment with him and his girlfriend? Was he that insane!

“If you set your preferences now, then come three months when they are locked you won’t be able to change them!” Kyle yelled a fact at me I already knew from across the table. “You could change your mind and you’d be locked into heading overseas!”

“What is going to happen in the next three months that would

change my mind?” I stood up, sick of him having the higher ground.

He scoffed. “The election—that is what will happen!” He made that sound like it was obvious.

I glanced at Jed. “How would Jed continuing to be mayor affect my university decision?” I arched my eyebrows at him. He was looking at me like it was obvious why he was getting so upset. But if anything, I was just confused more.

“It will fucking change everything!” he roared. “Don’t you dare lock in your choices!”

My mouth fell open. “On that note, I think I’m going to leave.” I pushed the chair back. I couldn’t believe he was threatening me. I wasn’t going to win this argument; I didn’t even know why we were arguing! Geez, as if come election day my whole world would change!

“Don’t you dare leave Sophia. This conversation isn’t over.” Kyle followed me out of the dining room and yelled at my back.

God, could he not get the hint? We were over. Where I went to study had nothing to do with him.

I walked into the lounge room. At least his parents didn’t insist on me finishing dinner. At the bottom of the stairs, Kyle, still not getting the point, gripped my upper arm and pulled me to a stop. I twisted to look up at him. Rage was painted across his face.

“Are you on drugs or something?” I asked, a hint of concern clear in my voice. “Because you aren’t making sense, Kyle. Your

decisions aren't making sense."

"Drugs." He laughed sickly, shaking his head. "The fucking cause of all my problems."

I frowned. The Kyle I knew didn't do drugs. I had no idea what he meant by that.

His grip loosened and he slowly ran his hand up my arm, across my shoulder, up my neck, until he was cupping my face. He took a noticeable step towards me and into my personal space. I swallowed sharply. God, he was close.

His other hand went to my hip and slowly moved around until it was on my lower back, and then he pushed me into him.

I would love to say my brain was screaming at me to push him away. But instead my mind was blank. Maybe from shock, I don't know. But it wasn't stopping what was happening. As Kyle handled me like I was still his.

"Can you not make any decisions until after the election? Please, tell me you won't lock anything in?" He spoke so softly. His eyes were painted in concern. "I need you to trust me."

I frowned up at him.

He was speaking like his life depended on the election and my decisions between now and then. Like he wanted to freeze me, until that date.

Just as he dipped his head, my brain kicked back in gear. And I

pulled away from him. I pushed his hand off my cheek. How the hell did I let myself get lost in his touch?

“I don’t trust you, Kyle. And I won’t ever be putting my future on hold for you.” I stepped back onto the stairs. I was ready to turn and bolt but hesitated. “You and I are done. There is nothing you can do to get me to trust you again. I will never, ever, let you into my life again.” I finally found myself having a back bone. “We aren’t in a relationship. We aren’t friends. And I’m never planning on that changing.”

“You love me still. You can’t lie to me about that.”

I clamped my mouth shut. Yeah, I still did love him. But one day that love would turn into hate. “We are done,” I said firmly.

“No, we aren’t. We will never be done.”

“I’m seeing someone.”

His eyes widened. “No.” He shook his head. “No fucking way are you dating someone else.”

“I am, Kyle.” I wasn’t going to explain that Bax and I weren’t really dating each other. I didn’t want to ease the worry on Kyle’s face right now as he panicked.

“Who?” his voice went up. “Who is it!” he rudely demanded like I had to tell him.

“No one you know.” I crossed my arms.

“Try me,” he gritted out. “Wouldn’t be my brother, would it?” His

words dipped into sinister and disgust. “I saw you in his bed. I saw you barely wearing a fucking thing, sleeping in his bed!”

That took me by surprise. “No. It’s not Josh.”

“Don’t lie to me!”

“I’m not!”

“You always had a thing for him.”

I gasped. I couldn’t believe he just said that. “You know what, Kyle, you aren’t mine anymore. I don’t answer to you! I have to let you go, and clearly you need to let me go!”

He shook his head. “I still remember our first date. I still remember how that red dress clung to your perfect body. I still remember every date we had after that.” His hand spread across my cheek like he was holding on to me for dear life. “Every night we spent together, every day I spent with you, it’s on repeat in my head. Reliving those memories keeps me going. Hoping.”

“You’re holding onto a memory, Kyle. You’re not mine anymore. You walked out on our relationship. You need to let me go. My love for you is unconditional, but it was you who broke me into pieces.” The sadness I felt every day cracked through my voice and he surely heard it. “I still love you. But those pieces are so small that I can’t be put back together.”

It was the truth; for the first time I wasn’t putting up a front with him.

“Don’t say that, Soph. Don’t say I destroyed you.” His voice

echoed heartbreak and sadness.

Tears swelled up in my eyes. I couldn't stop them if I wanted to. "You are like my own personal drug, and now I'm going through withdrawal. And the only way I am going to survive and get some sort of life back is by letting you go."

He shook his head. "Nope. Not happening. You aren't giving up on me. You have to trust me. You can't give up on me."

The tears fell from my eyes. "You need to let us go, Kyle. You aren't mine anymore, and I'm not yours." How was it possible that he was breaking my heart more right now? I thought he had destroyed it beyond a beating organ.

"I love you, Soph. Please don't walk away from me. I need you." He touched his forehead against mine. "I'll always need you."

I did something I knew I might regret. I reached out for him, my hands running across his shoulders. I didn't know what to say.

"Whoever you are seeing, break it off. Just trust me for three months. Just put your faith in me," he begged, his voice soft, gentle, and pleading. "I've never hurt you."

I felt it hit my core. "Yes you have, Kyle. You've ruined me. You've turned me into this cold, hard, empty woman. You took what made me, me, and you destroyed it." I looked him in the eye, tears swelling and falling just as quick.

"I miss your lipstick on my neck and on my tops. I miss the way you would wrap yourself around me when you slept. I miss you, Soph. I miss everything about you. Every day. And every day I'm

reminded of what I lost. Whenever I look at you, I'm reminded that I lost you." He gazed was fixed on me, and I was sure he was close to crying.

"You changed, Kyle." I took my hand off him and leaned back. "The things you are missing are easily replaced. I'm sure your new girlfriend will kiss you the way I did and love you the way I do and will have traits that you love about her."

"Fuck Kayla," he said. "Don't give up on me, Soph. You told me once you would always be mine and I need you to keep your word."

"What are you hoping to achieve by making me—no, forcing me—to wait for you to change your mind?"

"You said you loved me! You told me all the time. I am counting on that love still being there!"

My face softened, and I felt pity for him. "I will never forget you. But I can't live in the past. I knew from the moment I met you I would love you until the day I died." Time wouldn't change the fact I would always love him. "You will forever be in my heart, Kyle. But I can't stand here and tell you that I am able to hold onto you on the chance you change your mind. Can't you understand that holding onto you will kill me in the end?"

It would kill the new me, the old me, and any version of me I tried to create.

I couldn't hold onto him. It wasn't healthy. But more importantly, why was he asking me to when he had a new girlfriend? One he loved. One he spent all his time with. One he

was making new memories with.

He wiped the tears away from under my eyes with an expression that reached into my chest, and pulled on what was left of my heart. “I love you, Soph. The last thing I want to do is hurt you more.” He leaned in and gently kissed my forehead. “I’ll let you go.”

A dim smile traced my lips. “You already have, Kyle. You just don’t realize it.” Every day he woke up with Kayla, every day they spent together, he was writing over the past him and I had. He was making a future with someone else. And I had to accept that. I just didn’t know how I was going to.

“It’s going to kill me you know.”

I frowned. “What is?”

“Seeing you move on from me.” He gulped like his heart was breaking. “I don’t know if I can see you with another guy. Let alone accept you being with someone that isn’t me.”

“Well, what did you expect to happen when we broke up?”

“I thought I would have fixed it by now.” He looked at me honestly. “I thought by now I would have figured out some way to get you back. Not fucking letting you go.”

He looked like he was in pain, like letting me go would kill him. I ran my hand across his cheek. I hated seeing him in pain. I knew I should be happy seeing him suffer, but I guess the old me wasn’t completely dead.

“If it makes you feel better, he doesn’t compare to you. I think you only get the love of your life once, you know? A one shot, one chance deal. And we just didn’t make it.”

There was a stage where I pictured our life together, right down to grandkids. I knew it was thinking way too far ahead for a high school romance, but I honestly thought we would make it. I thought what we had was unbreakable—was so strong it would see decades out.

He ran his hand down my arm and linked his hand with mine. It felt so natural and I didn’t realize how much I missed it until my hand was back in his.

“I know what you mean, Soph. I fucked us up. Our chance. Our future. I just hope that one day you will understand why I did it.” He squeezed my hand. “I will regret what I did every day for the rest of my life because it cost me you.”

I looked him in the eye. Wasn’t he forgetting something? “But at the same time, it gave you Kayla, and she really loves you.” I sighed. It was hard to admit that. “You can’t regret ending us when it has led you to another woman. One you could very well marry.” I put on a fake smile and pulled my hand from his. “You should go back to the dining room. She will be looking for you.”

He scoffed but didn’t say anything.

I felt like I was missing something, but the more I looked at him the more I didn’t see what it was I was missing.

“I need to change ‘cause my night plans just got wiped,” I said. I had to get out of this house and away from him. That meant I was

heading to my favorite distraction.

I couldn't stand here and go over things we couldn't change. Him and I were over. No amount of him saying how much he missed me, or longed for me back, was going to change that. It wasn't like he was going to break up with Kayla and get back together with me. He didn't love me or miss me that much. The future we had planned, well, he didn't want it so badly that he was willing to break up with the girl that filled his every sex fantasy.

"Have a good night, Kyle." I wasn't sure what else to say.

"You going to him?" he said bitterly, stuffing his hands in his jeans pocket. "I'm just meant to let you change and go out with a guy that isn't me?"

Who the hell did he think he was! "Kyle. You ended us! So yes, you are meant to let me change and go and spend the night with another man. That's how a breakup works. You don't see me getting upset with you every time you and Kayla shut your bedroom door."

He ran both his hands through his hair, looking frustrated. "Fucking unbelievable," he muttered under his breath. I don't think I was meant to hear it. "This isn't meant to be happening. I thought what we had would last longer. I didn't see you moving on so soon."

I didn't know what to say, and I could only think of one way to end the conversation. So I did it. I turned around and walked up the stairs, leaving Kyle at the bottom with a look on his face like it had just hit him: he'd lost me.

Chapter Fourteen

Soph

“Soph?”

I felt a kiss on my shoulder.

“Soph?” Bax whispered in my ear and his hand ran down my side.

I groaned but kept my eyes shut as his hands explored my body.

“Come on, darling, you need to wake up.” He kissed my earlobe.

“Why?” I complained. His bed was so comfy. It was like a giant cloud that your body just sunk into to. I loved Bax’s bed.

“It’s eight thirty,” he whispered as he kissed my cheek.

“Still not seeing the importance,” I groaned and kept my eyes shut. I loved the way his hand ran down my side.

As he gripped my hip, pulling me back towards him, I was forced to open my eyes. My hand automatically went out and ran down his jawline. He had a small smirk on his face as he looked down at me. We had done something we never did and that was spend more than one night together. I thought he would kick me out the door come Sunday morning, instead I woke up to him making me breakfast and kissing me.

His good morning kiss yesterday really got to my head. To the point I was forcing him not to break it.

I tilted my head, looking up at him, and wondered he was thinking. I didn't know how to explain that look. I didn't care that I was naked under this sheet. I didn't care that he could see my complete naked body if he wanted too. But his eyes weren't exploring my body; they were locked with mine eyes. And again, that look was still on his face, a smirk to go with it.

He moved his head down and kissed my collar bone. "I want to spend all day in this bed with you." He continued to kiss along my collarbone. "Take you over and over." He started to kiss up my neck, and my body was filled with tingles and my neck arched. "All day just you and me." He kissed the corner of my lips.

"I like the sounds of that." I linked my arms around his neck. "But I'm sure you have more important things to do than be with me." I brushed my lips against his.

His smirk got bigger. "I don't but you do."

I frowned. "No I don't."

He laughed softly and dropped his mouth to my ear. "School starts in twenty minutes, darling."

My eyes went wide and his laugh became harder as I scrambled off the bed and started searching for clothes.

"Why did you let me sleep in!" I asked as I searched the floor. Bax was always awake before me. How the hell did I forget it was a Monday? I swear sometimes he just woke up earlier to stare at me because every time I woke up, I would be tucked under his arm and he always had a smile on his face, like me waking up had

made his day.

Bax got up and dressed. He still had a large smirk on his face as he watched me pull my jeans on. I found my top and groaned.

“What’s wrong, darling?” he asked as he lit up a cigarette.

“This.” I showed him the stained top. “I can’t wear this to school!” I doubted that even stain remover would save this white top.

He opened his draw and threw a top at me. “As much as I would love to see you walk around in your bra all day I don’t want any other man seeing it.” He gave me a wink.

I threaded the long sleeve top on and used my hair tie to gather the top at the back so it fitter my body better, showing of some of my figure.

“Shit.” I cursed just as I remembered my car had a flat. My head was still on the conversation I had had with Kyle and not on the road. So I popped a tyre.

“Guessing you just remembered your car is out of action?”

My head snapped to Bax. “What are you a mind reader this morning?”

“Come on, darling, I’ll give you a lift.”

I picked up my handbag. “Your reputation could be ruined if you’re seen dropping me off.”

He laughed. “If anything being seen with you adds to my reputation.” He wrapped his arms around me as soon as I was in distance. His mouth went to my ear. “Being seen with you is every guy's wet dream.”

I rolled my eyes. “No it's not.”

He shrugged his shoulders just as he let go of me and I put my shoes on. He leaned against the foyer wall, watching me. “How not? Every guy's dream is to get a girl like you in their bed.”

I wanted to laugh. “Bax, you have an endless list of girls in your phone and on the nights we aren't together you are with one of them. So don't act like I'm special, cause I'm not. And I'm ok with that.”

His eyes narrowed on me. “You think on the nights we aren't together I'm with other women?”

“Yep.” I put my hands on my hips. “And that's fine cause we are just having causal sex.” Like I expected, I wasn't heartbroken by the thought of him with another woman. If anything I was used the idea.

“What do I do on nights we aren't together?” He crossed his arms, looking pissed off.

“How the hell am I meant to know?” I didn't know the answer to his question and I really had to get moving for school.

“On nights we aren't together, I'm messaging you, calling you. Have I mentioned another woman?”

Well, when he put it like that... no, he hadn't. "Bax, what are you trying to tell me? You and I both agreed this was sex and nothing else." We didn't do feelings. We didn't do love. And this time last week we didn't spend more than a night or a day together. "You and I aren't a couple. I don't expect you to stop your lifestyle for me. Have sex with whoever you want. Hell, if you meet a girl you want more than a causal fling with, you can end what we have."

I was being reasonable, wasn't I? I was giving him what most guys wanted. So I didn't understand why his expression hardened.

"What if I have met this girl I want more than a causal fling with, but she is the one not wanting more?"

I frowned. "Then I would say that girl is an idiot. You are a great guy, Bax. If she sees what I see, she wouldn't be turning you down."

For some reason what I said made him smile. "Maybe hope isn't lost after all." He looked at me, and again I was stumped on how to explain his expression. It was like he was hoping for me to change my mind about him or something. But our casual fling showed me, Bax couldn't do a relationship.

He reminded me of Josh in some ways—an outlaw that couldn't be tamed. No girl or woman could get an outlaw to truly love them because they were free spirits. I didn't know what Josh got up to, but I would take a stab and say that car he was working on in the shed wasn't legal and he hadn't bought it.

I also assumed he hadn't left his criminal side in prison and learned from his mistake, not that I knew what got him in prison to begin with. Nevertheless, if I had to compare Josh and Bax,

Josh would win on who was the worst.

Bax might be a bad boy, but he wasn't deadly dangerous like Josh. Him and Josh weren't even in the same league. I knew where I stood with Bax: just a causal fling. But with Josh, well, with him I was starting a friendship, and for some stupid reason, I had feelings for Josh.

And I still wasn't sure what that meant. But I knew I had to put a stop to those feelings. I wasn't going back to the girl that felt everything for everyone and lived on the thought that fairytales happened. My eyes were open now and I wasn't going to close them and fall back in love with anyone.

Bax's car said a lot about him. I nearly smiled when I first saw it because it just screamed everything about him. It was America muscle—shiny black and a beast on the road. It was loud and dominating, and it scared other drivers off the road.

In fact, two cars had pulled over to get out of his way on the way to school. When it came to everything that Bax did, he didn't do what was expected of him. Like respect the road laws, or speed limit.

He sped to the school and double parked out the front, ignored the other cars that had their blinkers on looking for a space. His loud engine was roaring when he came to a stop. His eyes went off the road and he took the car out of gear.

“Do you want me to pick you up?” He had a smile on his face. But I didn't expect that of him.

“Nope. All good. Thanks for dropping me off.”

His hand ran up my thigh. “You busy tonight?”

“Bax, if we spend tonight together that would be three in a row, and you and I only ever do one night.” I arched my eyebrows at him. “I know you have a life that doesn’t involve me.”

He was glaring out my window, and when I turned to see what had his attention and my expression dropped. Of course Kyle would be out the front, and was standing there, glaring at us.

I wished Bax’s car had tinted windows right now—illegal tint, the one you can’t see through.

I looked back at Bax and sighed. “Ignore him. He’s an ex-boyfriend.”

Bax looked at back me. “So you do do relationships?”

“Yeah, once. And never again.”

“Because of that jerk?”

I rolled my eyes. “I have to go.” My hand fell on the door handle. “Thanks for dropping me off.” And I got out, leaving Bax glaring at Kyle.

I walked away from the car. Kyle’s eyes were on me and I knew he was going to give me a spray, even though he had no right to give me one. Maybe I should just walk past him and ignore him. I decided to try that.

He didn't deserve my attention. I was so set on ignoring him I jumped when an arm wrapped around my waist. I glanced down, recognized the tattoos, and as I relaxed back into his chest, I slowly turned around.

"You forgot something." Bax smiled down at me. It was cheeky smile and I saw his eyes glance at Kyle. When he looked me back in the eye, it was like he had something to prove.

"What?" I frowned. And then his lips were on mine. He pushed me firmly into his chest and held me there as he kissed me.

I was breathless when he pulled back. His hands were still on my lower back, holding me tight to his chest.

"I'll message you." He looked rather pleased with himself. And as he let go of me he shot a glare in Kyle's direction.

I was breathless and my fingers touched my lips—they were tingling.

"So that's your boyfriend?"

I slowly turned around. I really didn't feel like facing him. Kyle's eyes were heated and the look on his face, well, it was enough to have me take a step back. I heard Bax's car pull away, and as it disappeared in the distance, I wished he was back here, standing behind me because Kyle's face was scaring me.

Kyle looked at my top and shook his head in disgust, pointing a finger at me. "Stay the fuck away from my brother." He spat the words at me like they were bitter and sour.

“What does Josh have to do with anything?” I sure as hell didn’t know how Josh just entered this conversation. I was expecting Kyle to be spraying me about the man that had just claimed me in front of him, not bringing up Josh.

“I’m not fucking stupid, Sophia! Your top says it all!” With that said he spun around and stormed off.

For the first time this morning I glanced down at my top. It said The Devil’s Cut and had a logo in the middle.

My frown deepened. Why would Bax’s biker club have anything to do with Josh?

If anything it just proved to me that Bax was involved with them. It dawned on me I was going to have to spend the day walking around promoting an outlaw motor cycle club.

I sighed, wondering if he did it on purpose. I doubt he even glanced at the top he handed to me. I pulled my phone out of my jeans pocket, bringing up his number.

Did u notice what top u gave me? I sent.

My phone buzzed in my hand and I unlocked it.

Wanted everyone to no who protects u.

My mouth fell open and I let out a sharp breath. I was not protected by anyone. I sure as hell wasn’t protected by a motor cycle club.

I don't need protecting.

And I didn't. I didn't need protecting from anything. Wasn't like I was one of those girls that attracted trouble or anything.

I started to walk through the school gates and my phone went off my hand again.

Ur right, cause I'll be doing it personally. But in case I fail, the club won't.

I stared down at the phone, frozen at the entrance. Suddenly I had a feeling Bax wasn't looking at me as a causal fuck anymore. He wouldn't want to personal protect a causal woman he is having sex with, would he?

I didn't know the answer. And I didn't know what to write back, so I locked the phone. But his message kept running through my mind again.

I glared at my English teacher as he explained yet another poem, twisting it and turning it from a romance piece into a suicide note.

How the fuck can you go from romance to a poem about death? I sure as hell didn't see it and I was trying my best to give him my attention while the voice that was born to grate on my nerves spoke right behind me.

"Babe, I'm telling you this poem fits us perfectly," Kayla said so sweetly.

Was she even listening to the teacher? He was saying it was a death letter and she was comparing it to their romance?

I leaned back in my chair, crossing my arms. Last class of the day and it was dragging.

“Babe, how about we skip studying tonight and head to the coast for a few hours?” Kyle’s voice shocked me.

I had not heard him once speak to her like that. He normally ignored her or grunted. And he never made plans with her.

“Really?” Kayla’s voice went up.

Looks like I wasn’t the only one to notice the relationship had been one-sided. The coast. That was where he would take me when he wanted to spend alone time. Just me and him. No distractions.

“Yeah, of course, babe. Some you and me time sounds perfect.” Kyle’s voice was honest and sweet. And I felt automatically disgusted.

Was he doing that on purpose? To make me jealous and piss me off? Well, it had fucking worked.

I immediately entered a dirty mood, and I wasn’t just jealous—I was seeing red. How could he take her to our place? To our getaway!

Everything he had said the other night was nothing but a lie.

Why the hell did I even give him a second of my time? Well, I wouldn’t do it again.

I made a decision right then and there to never again let Kyle fool me with fake love.

I pulled out my phone. I knew one way to get under his skin: do something he told me not to. Suddenly I felt like a rebel. And I had something to prove. I checked the teacher was at the front, explaining his stupid poem to the front of the class. Yep, his attention wasn't on me. So I pressed dial.

I listened to it ring and I hoped this plan was going to work. If he didn't answer, the plan of pissing Kyle off like he had pissed me off would fail.

Just as I thought he wasn't going to answer. Josh barked a very unfriendly hello into the phone and my lips twitched up at hearing his voice.

“Hey, Josh.” I put a fake smile on my face. I said it loud enough so big ears Kyle could hear my conversation. He wanted to make me jealous. Well, I could make him jealous. He was the one who had got the idea in his head that I was with Josh. Well, I was going to use that against him.

“Soph?”

“Yep, it's me. I have a favor to ask.”

Josh went quiet for a minute and the noise in the background quietened.

“You hurt?”

“Nope.”

“Did that fucker of man you seeing cross a line? cause I’m telling you, Soph, I’ll take care of it.”

A small smile twitched across my lips, which was real, and then I made my fake one lit up.

“It isn’t anything like that. I was hoping you could pick me up. My car is out of action.”

“Guessing you don’t want to car ride with Kyle and his woman.”

I scoffed. “I would rather walk on hot stones than get in a car with Kyle and his slut of a girlfriend,” I said, loud enough for them to hear. I heard Kayla scoff.

“They’re around aren’t they?” If Josh was standing in front of me, he would have a smirk on his face, and I suspect a look that told me he was proud of me. I wasn’t the type of person to bad mouth anyone. “You really want to piss him off?”

My eyes lit up with delight. “Yes I do.” Would Josh help me get back at Kyle? My hopes sky rocketed at the thought. Josh was always cleverer than me.

“Repeat the following back to me. I didn’t realize your shower was so small with two in it.”

I wanted to grin because that was going to eat Kyle up. “I didn’t realize your shower was so small with two in it.”

“Now say, I love your back tattoo, but I really love what it stands for.”

I frowned for a second—I didn't know Josh had any tattoos—but then quickly plastered a fake smile on and even forced a blush. "I love your back tattoo, but I really love what it stands for."

"I think that will do, baby girl. Well done. You have successfully pissed him off," Josh said with a tone of pride through his voice. "I'll pick you up in half an hour."

"Actually can you head to me now? I really want to escape." I wasn't putting on a show now. I was serious. And Josh would have known that by the way my voice wasn't as light.

"Ok. I'm coming."

"Thank you, Josh. I'll see you soon." I took the phone from my ear and hung up.

I gathered my books up.

"You're dating Josh!"

I rolled my eyes. Should have expected her to have questions. I slowly turned around and kept my fake smile on. I looked at Kayla, for once seeing her in her true light with a heavy makeup facade and her knock-off designer perfume hanging in the air.

"What can I say?" I glanced at Kyle, who was glaring at me. "I like them bad." I picked up my books and stood up. "You know, Kayla, if I was you, I would get a vibrator to make up for the times Kyle leaves you wanting." I shrugged. "I don't have that problem anymore. I found out a boy has sex with you, but a man... he pleases you." I shot her a final smile. "Just a tip."

And with all that said, I turned around and walked away from Kyle, not feeling even slightly bad for what I did. Payback was a bitch, right? And he had just been slapped with a cold reality check. The old Soph wouldn't have had the guts to do that—fight fire with fire.

It was the first time I fought dirty. And I had to say, it felt good.

Chapter Fifteen

Soph

I kept wondering why people were staring at me as I walked down the hall and cut through the canteen. When I came to a stop out the front of the school gates, I ran a hand through my hair. I hadn't exactly got ready this morning. I'm sure it showed how I spent my weekend—in bed with a man.

“Didn't take you as a supporter.”

I frowned and looked to my right. A guy I had never seen before was speaking to me. I had no idea what he was talking about so I turned my head back and waited for Josh.

“You know, you have been the news of the school,” he continued.

I groaned. Why couldn't I be left alone? I turned to face him, as much as I didn't want to. “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“Come on, you are out of school uniform. That brings attention. But that top...” He stepped towards me, and I noticed that he was

also out of uniform, with ripped jeans, a loose t-shirt, and piercing everywhere. Why was he judging me on being out of the uniform when, from one glance at him, I was positive he didn't even own one.

Finally his words registered. "What am I putting on display?" Tilting my head, I turned around completely and stepped towards him, really interesting in the answer.

He nodded his head to my top. "You are a supporter of The Devil's Cut. One look at you and everyone knows you aren't club property. So you must be dating someone in the club—and high enough up that you aren't looked at as just another girl. Someone's claiming you."

I think all expression was wiped from my face. Was that why everyone was staring at me today? Because they thought I was dating a Devil Cut member and that Bax had claimed me? I didn't realize wearing something with their name on it made you a supporter. I didn't know that this top was screaming, "I'm taken by a Devils Cut member."

There was a beep behind me, and I glanced over my shoulder, seeing Josh in the car, waiting.

The guy laughed and I looked back at him.

"What?" I asked. This explained why every male I went near today did a double take and then backed away like I was toxic. I let out a frustrated groan when the guy didn't stop laughing. "What the hell is so funny!" I yelled at him.

He nodded his head to Josh's car, his laughter stopping. "I see

you've gone to the top of the food chain."

What the hell did that mean?

He was mad. Insane. I was talking to an insane person. With that, I spun around and headed for the car. It wasn't like I was in a great mood all day. But my mood was really foul now. Did Bax know what he was doing with his little stunt? That I had spent the day walking around not just assumed to be a supporter of him and his club but also his woman.

I was nobody's woman.

I opened the door roughly and got in, throwing my handbag on the floor and slamming the door shut.

"Ok, who pissed you off?" Josh's eyes were on me.

"I'm not pissed off. I'm furious." I turned to look at him. "Can I hire you to kill someone?"

He broke out laughing. "I'm not killing my brother." He pulled out onto the road. "Anyway, who said I'm a violent person?"

"I've known you long enough to know your character." I turned and looked him in the eyes. "And you, Josh, are a hot head."

His laughter continued and he shook his head. "Apart from wanting to kill my brother, how was your day?" he said easily.

I crossed my arms and glared out the window. I did not want to repeat how my day was. It was crap. Not only did I have to suffer through school, but I also walked around basically yelling to the

world that I was claimed by a Devil's Cut member.

I was going to punish Bax for this.

“Come on, what's up?” Josh nudged my arm. “Furious doesn't suit you.”

I rolled my eyes and kept glaring out the window.

“Well, if you aren't going to tell me how was school, how was your weekend? Haven't seen you since you disappeared.”

I sighed and realized I couldn't be rude. He did stop what he was doing to pick me up.

“My weekend was great. until this morning.”

“Ok, now we are getting somewhere. What happened this morning?”

I didn't need to nut down and figure out why I was in a bad mood. It was all thanks to Bax.

Josh reached over and put a hand on my thigh, which caused me to look at him. “Soph, what happened this morning?” His words were gentle, kind, and sweet—all things you wouldn't think Josh could be if you glanced at him. Hell, you wouldn't even take a second glance at him, the first would tell you he was dangerous, and if you stared he was likely to break something in your body.

“Doesn't matter,” I finally said. I didn't know how to explain my situation. Josh was in a world much darker than mine. Probably darker than Bax's as well. Josh didn't need to hear my complaints,

or worry about how my day was. I'm sure he much more important things to worry about.

“Soph, just tell me what happened.” He wasn't giving up.

I didn't know where to start. So I started at the beginning. “I spent the weekend with this guy.” Who I thought was alright until about ten minutes ago. “Anyway, my day started shit. I slept in and my top was stained, so I borrowed one of his. Didn't think much of it. Then school was school... and...”

My words dried up.

“And?” Josh said.

I didn't say anything. My temper was going up thinking about it.

Josh gave my thigh a squeeze and I sighed. I didn't know how to say it, so I just showed him. Hell, he would notice when I got out of the car anyway.

I unstrapped my seat belt and turned, “What does this tell you?” I said, putting my shirt on display.

Josh's eyes glanced from the road to me and then he did a double take. His expression dropped and I saw his knuckles slowly turn white as he gripped the steering wheel tighter.

“Did you pick that top?” Josh's words were coming out ridged and forced, like he was controlling what he was really thinking. I was guessing that whatever he was thinking was on the line of disgust.

“No, he gave it to me.” I turned back around and strapped in. “All day I’ve walked around wearing it, not having a clue what it was telling people. How I could I not know that wearing a top like this says something?”

I was frustrated with myself. I was pissed off at Kyle. And I wanted to wrap my hands around Bax’s neck for doing this to me.

Josh’s eyes narrowed and he shook his head, looking nearly as furious as how I felt.

“All day I’ve been wearing this! I can’t believe Bax would do that to me! We have a causal fling. Nothing else. And he goes and basically puts a claim on me! Somehow he managed to tell the whole world I was dating a member of the Devils Cut. And I’m not even!” As soon as one word escaped, I just kept blurting words out. My frustration was getting the best of me.

“You sure about that?”

My head flung to the side to look at Josh. “What do you mean?”

“You sure you aren’t dating him?” Josh said again, confirming where I thought he was taking this conversation.

He pulled up out the front of his house and I shook my head in disbelief. My eyes locked with his and the anger I was feeling towards Bax was all redirected at Josh for asking that question.

I got out of the car and headed for the house.

I couldn’t give a fuck if he followed me or not.

“Soph!” He got out and called after me.

He could go get fucked. Everyone could go get fucked.

I heard him getting closer as I reached into my handbag, feeling for the spare key Louise gave me. Of course this would be the moment I couldn't find anything inside.

Josh stood behind me. “Soph, come on, it's a reasonable question.”

Oh, he did not just say that! I flung around, giving up on finding the keys, and I shoved him back. “How dare you! How dare you assume I'm some stupid girl who doesn't know if she is in a relationship or not!” My rage was coming out.

His hands landed on my shoulders. “Soph, calm down,” he said like it was an order. Who was he to give anyone orders!

“No. You can fuck off because you're a male and I'm finished with males!” I spun back and started searching my handbag again.

Bax could piss off. Kyle could go jump off a cliff into shark infested waters. And Josh, well, he can take those assumptions and apply them to a girl who was going to be more than a friend to him.

Josh reached around me and put his key in the door, unlocking it.

I was quick to push it open and bolt, but he wrapped a hand around my upper arm as soon as we entered and pushed the door closed.

“Come here, Soph.” He was being kind and gentle and sweet again, even though I had just told him to fuck off. Did he miss the part where I said I was finished with all males?

He took my handbag off my shoulder and dumped it in the foyer floor, and then his hands went behind my back and he undid the hair tie, which was holding the t-shirt. Then his hands went under the top and my eyes went wide. What was he doing? He slowly pulled the top up and then gripped it, gently taking it off me.

I threaded my arms out of it, and then the realization that I was standing just in a bra in front of Josh hit me. I should have scrambling away. I should be panicked. I shouldn't have felt calm and confident, like I was comfortable with him seeing my body. I never have been ashamed of my body, but I was always nervous showing it.

But that didn't happen in front of Josh. This was the second time I felt those two things in front of him: calm and confident.

His eyes ran down me; I think it was only naturally for them to.

He inhaled sharply and then, as if he was forcing himself, he looked me in the eye.

“The shirt was the problem. The shirt is going. Problem solved.” He gave me a reassuring smile. “Maybe next time don't let your boyfriend dress you.”

I bit my bottom lip for a second and then looked up at him, meeting his eyes. “Bax isn’t my boyfriend. I am never being in a relationship again. Ever.” My heart was locked up—what was left of it—and I wasn’t willing or prepared to ever risk what I had left.

Josh kept staring into my eyes. “Soph, you can’t wipe every guy off, just because Kyle was a dick.” Josh dropped the shirt on the ground and his hands landed on my hips and he frowned. Then his eyes did ran down my body, like he was inspecting it. “You still not eating?”

Suddenly I wished I was still wearing that stupid shirt. I crossed my arms and took a step away from him, his hands falling off my hips.

“Thanks, Josh.” I forced him a smile and turned around and headed for the stairs.

I left him standing down there. Not answering his question. Truth was, I wasn’t eating. And I really didn’t see the problem anymore. I was still surviving. My body was still working. And when it really wanted food, I would eat.

I closed my bedroom door. It was just Monday, and I already knew it was going to be one long ass week.