

Chapter 21 (Lachlan): Pat The Fucking Bunny

The next morning, Butcher called church unexpectedly and at such an early hour that we were all dragging our asses until we came into Butcher's sight. Then, as if a switch had been flipped, we all snapped to and became perky-assed bitches ready for whatever he was about to throw at us in church.

"Don't see any point in dragging this out any longer," he started in once we were all in the room. "The location Shadow and Orion have been looking at is rock solid with great potential ROI. So it's time to put opening a new chapter of the Mayhem in Northridge to a vote. Any objections?"

Translation: do any of you want to die this morning?

Typical Butcher. The fucker threw shit out there, didn't tolerate a lot of or any conversation and all the brothers knew it. But he'd never steered us wrong, and everything he suggested had turned out unbelievably well; we were all living extremely good lives because of it. Prez had the magic touch and we all trusted him. So it was no surprise that no one objected when Butcher said he wanted something and was putting it to a vote. It was only on those rare occasions when he asked for discussion that we offered our opinions. Today, given the way the call for a vote was worded, this was a vote in favor of, not a discussion, so nobody had anything to say other than yes.

"We're starting a new chapter, then," Butcher said after the vote.

"Shadow, you're in charge there for now until I decide where I'm going to land."

Mayhem training paid off at that little bomb Butcher had just dropped out there and that was the only reason not one of us reacted. I'd never once considered the possibility of Butcher relocating given that his woman was pregnant and she had strong ties to the area that consisted of her mother, her friends and her business. He might be the only one who didn't realize she was his woman, but she was clearly and visibly under Mayhem protection on his say-so.

"Any of you want to relocate there permanently with Shadow, let me know, otherwise I'll choose who goes. I'll be heading back with him today to negotiate the land, building and business purchases and get familiar with the area. Orion'll be back here tomorrow. Trap's in charge while I'm away."

News, news and more news to me, but before any of us could ask any questions, Butcher rapped his knuckles on the table once and declared, "Done here."

Just that fast, church was over. The brothers got up, talking about the Northridge chapter and who might be moving, who might be staying and who might have the opportunity to become officers in the new chapter. Some were speculating about the types of new business opportunities there might be, some brothers with children were wondering about the schools. Since I'd thought we'd have a few more weeks before the vote, I hadn't put anything formal together for the area, so I'd have to push that up and get the information to the brothers quick.

"When do you want to leave, prez?" I asked him.

"Twenty minutes. Need to talk with Trap and Big D first, then we'll roll."

With a nod, I walked off to my room to pack up the few things I'd brought with me, ready to be heading back to Wyn, needing to lay eyes on her after I'd let her following that intense scene between us. The damage I'd done to her, that all the people in her life had done to her, was incalculable; it had poured out of her with such ferocity that I couldn't understand how she'd held it in that long.

Despite the ugliness and devastation of that evening, somehow it'd given me hope. Instead of throwing me out, she'd let me hold her while she cried when she was so fucking vulnerable and raw. Instead of asking me to leave when her tears had stopped, Wyn had asked me to stay all night. Instead of sending me to sleep on the couch, she'd let me hold her in her bed. Maybe she just couldn't stand the thought of being alone after letting go of all of that pain and any warm body would do, but some wholly unjustified hope rose inside me: maybe, just maybe, she could someday forgive me and trust me again.

I still had a lot of work to do and would probably have to work on myself the rest of my life, but maybe Wyn could see that I wanted to change, that I was seriously trying to change both for myself and for her, to give us a future since I'd fucked up our past. Whether or not Elowyn was willing to give me another chance remained to be seen.

But, God, I was holding out hope.

Exactly twenty minutes later, Butcher and I were leaving the compound, and as we rode, I was trying to figure out why he'd called the vote so suddenly on starting the new chapter, why he was leaving town right now -- and his pregnant girl -- and why he was considering a move here.

We rode fast, each mile behind us taking me one mile closer to Elowyn. I'd promised when I'd let that morning that I'd give her space to process shit, but I was anxious to see her, to see if she was doing OK. Those types of moments could be cleansing, but they could also leave you on the floor writhing in pain.

We pulled into Northridge just after dinner. Orion had been told to head home that morning before we left, so Butcher checked into his room while I waited. I was still trying to puzzle out why he was here with me, but short of outright asking him and miraculously getting an answer, I wouldn't know unless he decided to tell me. We hit a diner for dinner, then had an early night. The next morning, we'd decided to meet at noon when all the stores and shops we were looking at would be open.

Since that let me with some free time, I decided to head to Wyn's store on the pretext of picking up some books she'd ordered for me, but really just to see her. In case Butcher came looking for me, I shot him a quick text.

Heading to Wyn's store to get some books I ordered. Back by noon.

Butcher responded almost immediately: **Wait for me and I'll go with**

"Let's go," Butcher said when he met me by our bikes.

Why did he want to see a coffee shop slash bookstore? Since it wouldn't be worth my life to question him, we got on our bikes without another word and headed for Wyn's store. We parked and walked in, the door chimes announcing us...and I realized it was Thursday morning, which meant those crazy ladies were having their book club again.

All of them turned toward us, and the squealing and excited chatter began almost immediately. Selfies were not going to go over well with Butcher, but I should have known my president would handle it in his way.

"First one to come near me gets shot," Butcher said to them in that deep, scary voice of his. Then he smiled at the ladies, maybe to soften his words, but it had the opposite effect, and the ladies froze in their seats, all giggling and chattering abruptly halted. After what Orion and I went through with them, I didn't think anything would scare these lunatics.

Apparently, all we needed was Butcher's particular brand of charm to save us from being treated like pieces of meat. Elowyn came hurrying over, probably alerted by a combination of the door chimes, Butcher's voice and the sudden cessation of noise.

"Hi, Lachlan," she said quietly and without smiling once she saw who was with me. "Hey, Butcher."

"You got baby books?"

That was why he wanted to come with me?

"Books for learning about babies or for reading to them?"

"Reading to them."

Wyn turned and pointed to some shelves. "Over there on the yellow bookshelf."

Butcher walked away, and Elowyn turned to me. "Butcher's looking at babybooks? Was he abducted by aliens?"

I grinned at her, relieved that she could be making jokes because I wasn't sure how I'd find her when I got back. I'd been afraid I'd be back at the beginning with her. Feeling encouraged by her mood, I stepped closer to my girl.

"You doing OK, Elowyn?"

"I am," she said, and her voice was steady. I almost wished Butcher was here to detect a lie, but she sounded sure and certain, and her eyes met mine directly without darting away.

"Do you feel like having dinner with me, Wyn? You name the night."

"Will Butcher be OK with that?" she teased.

"Yeah." And then because she seemed to be in a good mood, I added, "Or he can always come with us."

"Oh, God, that's not even funny," she said. "Call me tonight and we can talk about a time and place. I do have some things I want to talk to you about."

"Will do," I promised as Butcher came over to us.

"Baby books are shit," Butcher said to Wyn as he pushed two books onto the counter. "Who the fuck wants to pat the fucking bunny? But a few aisles over, I found these."

"These" were a couple of gun safety books for beginners.

I couldn't even look at Wyn as she rang him up and he paid.

"Call you tonight," I told her as we walked out, and I realized I'd forgotten to ask about my books I'd ordered.

Just another excuse to stop by her store the next day.

Hopefully without Butcher.