Summary

Based on the TV Show Sons of Anarchy. This is a Jax and Tara Love Story (focused on them & their kids, not the Club)! Will Tara make a full recovery? Will they be able to rebuild their lives, and truly fall in love again with the person they are now? Or will secrets, lies and misconceptions keep them apart? Spoilers for the S6 Finale, AU after that. Warning: Slow Burn. Rated M for language and adult themes.

Notes

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Author's Note: This is an AU idea I came up with and it's basically me rewriting Season 7 of Sons of Anarchy, with the main focus on Jax (and not the club)! I know it's short, but this is just an intro chapter, to see if anyone is even interested in this kind of story. So review if you like it and want me to continue. Thanks.
Chapter 1

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Author's Note: This is an AU idea I came up with, a rewrite of Jax's story after the Season 6 finale, with the main focus on Jax and Tara(and NOT the club)! I know it's short, but this is just an intro chapter, to see if there's any interest in this kind of story. So please review if you like it and want me to continue. Thanks.

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The pain was unbearable. It was more than he could take.

Jax has had his share of pain. He'd been in more fights than he could count over the years. He's been shot at, he's been beaten, he's been stabbed multiple times.

And he's lost people he'd loved before too. His father John and his younger brother Thomas. He had lost his other brothers too; he'd lost Ope.

And when Opie died, he wasn't sure how he would ever truly recover from that. The pain had nearly crippled him, but everyone was looking to him for answers and he knew he had to go on one way or another, or only more people would get hurt, more lives would be lost.

But now ... now that he was holding the lifeless bloody body of the only woman he'd ever truly loved in his arms, the emotional pain was so real, that it manifested into unimaginable physical pain and all he could do was cry and scream in agony to bring voice to the excruciating torture he was feeling inside.

Images of her flashed through his mind. Beautiful images of their life together, from their childhood until now, and it seemed to fuel the pain like kerosene to fire, knowing that this was the end of it all.

He'd never hear her say his name again. Or have her kiss him, hold him, love him. Confide in him.

Never again would she smile that beautiful smile that could melt his heart. Never again would she share her dreams of a future together far away from here. You, and me and our boys!

She would not be there to see our boys grow into young men. She would not be there to grow old herself.

Never again, would there be a them. Jax and Tara ... never again!

Every part of her being was so intertwined into his, he simply couldn't imagine how this story would end without her in it. Every moment of true happiness he'd ever felt, they were all linked to her. With her was when he truly felt like a man. A husband and a father. With her is when he let himself be vulnerable, because she wouldn't see it as weakness but strength instead.

She was everything to him. She was the key to his hope and happiness.
Now all of that was gone. There was no happily ever after. No saving grace. With Tara gone, there was nothing left.

Jax vaguely registers the arrival of District Attorney Patterson and her goons.

He can hear his own name being spoken but it sounds like a far away echo to him. He's in a daze, hoping it was just a bad dream that he would awake from any moment now, as the tears still stream down his agony stricken face.

Jax can feel a hand on his shoulder, and he stiffens under the touch as he looks up and seems to recognize the man as one of the ATF Agents that accompanied the D.A. on prior occasions.

As if in slow motion, Jax witnesses the man reach for Tara's neck, obviously looking for a pulse and he finds himself paralyzed by the pain and unable to stop the man from doing so.

For a split second, Jax closes his eyes and takes in a shaky breath. He knows he's about to hear the unthinkable confirmed out loud.

Tara Knowles-Teller is dead.

Like a statistic, just another fucking name and check mark on a clipboard at the local morgue.

It's a matter of seconds. It's all happening so fast and Jax opens his eyes, bracing himself for the words that he knows will haunt him for the rest of his miserable life.

"She's got a pulse!"

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Author's Note: Please review! Thank you.
Chapter 2

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Jax is pacing around the small cell like a caged animal. Running his hands through his hair every so often, and rubbing his eyes when they begin to water up once more at the thought of her laying in a pool of her own blood on their kitchen floor.

The tiniest noises outside of the holding cell area are catching his attention. He's constantly staring at the door, hoping that someone will finally step through and tell him what the hell is going on.

But it doesn't really surprise him that no one here is telling him anything, because right now, at this moment, he is not only the suspect on the attack on his own wife, but also their number one suspect in the murder of Sheriff Eli Roosevelt. Hence, the orange jumpsuit they've already made him change into, so they could collect his clothing into evidence, and his solitary confinement behind actual bars, instead of being piled into the glass tank holding area upstairs with offenders of a much lesser charge.

It has been hours since the ambulance had arrived at his house and within minutes she was taken away from him. He can still hear the sirens blaring through the streets of Charming when they rushed her away and possibly out of his life forever.

It is still surreal to him what has happened. He tries to wrack his brain about who could've done that to her. The scene had been so bloody, it had to have been gang related. Nothing else made sense to him.

But as much as he wants to find the people responsible for this, his mind simply won't stay on task. He can't stop thinking about her and whether or not she is even still alive. Whether or not Abel and Thomas still have a mother. Whether or not he still has a wife.

Just then the door opens and officer Candy Eglee steps inside, quietly closing the door behind her. Jax rushes to the bars, and tries to read the expression on the face of the woman standing before him, not sure what to make of the sadness he's seeing there.

"Tell me." He begs, his eyes red rimmed and tired as he clutches the metal bars with all his might.

"She's alive." Candy states with a quiet voice.

Jax releases the breath he has been holding and takes a step back. Stumbling backwards into the cot behind him. He hides his face in his hands when the tears start falling once more. Wiping at his face just a second later, and he turns his attention back to Candy, because her expression is still anything other than hopeful.
What does she know?

"Is she awake? Did she say who did this to her?" He tries to understand, wants to know what it is that Candy isn't telling him.

"I'm sorry." She says and turns her face away from him, trying to compose herself. "I don't have all the details, but ... she's in a coma, Jax, and ... they're saying it doesn't look good."

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Ten days later

Jax sits tightlipped across District Attorney Patterson and listens to her explain that she has no leads concerning Tara's assault. "The evidence has been processed, all the lab work's back and other then the obvious facts, the results gave us nothing. We've talked to family, friends and neighbors, the MC, except Ortiz, he seems to be MIA, and no one can shed any light on who or why Tara was attacked."

It doesn't surprise Jax in the least that nobody is talking to the police. It is their code after all. This attack on a family member of the Club will be handled the same way as any other attack in the past; with retaliation! Revenge!

Him and the Club will find out who is responsible for this and they will be paying with their life!

As if she can read his mind, she adds, "I understand the pain you're in, son, the reason for your silence ... I lost a son. And a nephew. To gang violence. I didn't want any one arrested, I wanted them dead. Heartless cold bullets to the back of the head, just the way they killed my boy. That's a natural reaction. The desire for revenge. It's a part of grieving. The difference is in my world I knew that those violent desires would never become real. In yours, it's a very likely outcome."

Jax remains silent, he understands what she is trying to do, but the rage he feels for whoever did this to his wife overpowers any logic at the moment.

Tyne Patterson knows that with Tara Knowles-Teller in a coma, the deal she'd struck with the couple just ten days ago was off the table once more. She can no longer hold Tara's possible prosecution over Jackson Teller's head. At least not now. "We couldn't tie you to either murder. Parole violation, the gun, it wasn't fired, it was in the house. We're gonna let you go. Your mother is here to see you, she can take you home."

Tyne Patterson stands up and gathers her files on the table, before she turns her attention back to Jax again. Almost bashful, she confesses, "I've been doing this for over twenty years and until today I have never said a word about my personal life to someone on the other side of this table."

This takes Jax by surprise and his curiosity causes him to speak up for the first time, "So why me?"

"Because I needed help to connect with the man who did the right thing ten days ago. Who knows the importance of family. And that more violence will only destroy what's left of his."

She turns to leave then, but is caught off guard when Jax speaks up once more, with the need to clarify something. "I'm not grieving. My wife is not dead."

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Jax quietly pushes the door open and steps wordlessly inside the hospital room. He vaguely takes notice of the nurse that is standing beside her bed, taking notes on a clipboard before she leaves the
room, giving him a chance to be alone with Tara.

He freezes for a long moment at the sight of her. She looks so vulnerable like this, and deep down he knows he's to blame for that. Her head is bandaged up, she has a breathing tube down her throat and all sorts of cables and wires attached to her with machines beeping away in the background.

He quietly steps closer to her. His eyes scanning the machines beside her bed. Those machines might be the ones breathing for her right now, but she is still here. His Tara is still in there. She is still alive!

He leans forward, bending over her and places a small gentle kiss against her forehead, brushing his own hair back again as he stands. He wants to do more, wants to touch her so badly. Wants to scoop her up, wrap her up in his arms, hold her close enough to hear her heartbeat against him and never ever let go of her again.

But he does neither of those things, because he can't. Instead he sits down on the side of her bed and reaches for her hand. With his eyes trained on her face, he desperately hopes for any reaction when he touches her, but there is none.

Her hand seems so small in comparison to his own, but it still feels like her and if he were to close his eyes he could almost pretend that she is simply sleeping, nothing more.

Instead he stares at her, unable to take his eyes off of her. When they'd rushed her into the ambulance and closed the doors, he'd wondered if it would be the last time he'd ever see her alive. So now he simply sits and drinks in the image of her, as painful as the image might be, he'll cherish it and not take it for granted ever again.

"I'm so sorry, babe. I'm so, so sorry." He says, his voice barely rising above a whisper.

Memories of their teenage romance begin to flood his mind. Back then they'd thought that life had dealt them bad cards, but hindsight is 20/20 and he'd give anything ... anything to go back and do things right, do things over! Anything from preventing this, along with everything else Tara has had to endure because of her association with him and the Club. Her words playing on repeat in his mind.

I have sacrificed everything for you!

Jax doesn't know how much time has passed while he's been sitting here by her side, but he knows that it is time for him to go, so he can begin to set his plan in motion.

"I know I made countless promises to you ... and I didn't keep 'em." He can feel his eyes well up with fresh tears once again as he is about to make another promise to Tara. "I failed you. I failed our boys. I failed us, and I promise you that I'm going to fix all that." He raises her hand up to his lips and kisses it gently. "I'll make you proud this time. I promise."

He wipes the tears from his face and quickly stands. "I love you, Tara, more than anything or anyone!" He says, because he finally knows that it's the truth. Then he leans over her once more and places one last kiss to her forehead, before he turns around and leaves the room without looking back.

He has a plan. And there is nothing that will stop him this time from following through with it. He will do this for Tara. He'll finish what she had intended to do. He'll save their boys!

When Jax leaves the room, he turns his attention to Rat-Boy, who he's ordered to stand guard. "You don't let anyone in, do you hear me? No one gets near her unless they're working in this hospital and have a fucking ID to prove so. You got that?"
When Tara wakes up, she can potentially identify her attacker, which means there is a high possibility that the person will come back to finish the job. And he won't let that happen! So finding the man who did this to her isn't just about revenge anymore, it is a necessity to ensure she'll remain unharmed from here on out.

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Gemma sits in the small chapel, alone and in complete silence. The unwavering look of devastation in Jax's eyes is more than she can take.

Every time she looks at him, every time she looks at Abel or little Thomas, the guilt begins to eat her up inside and she fears that it is written all over her face. Feels like the guilt is oozing out of her like pus out of an infected wound.

She has tried her best to pull herself together. Conceal her guilt for grief. She simply has to. As much for self-preservation, as for Abel and Thomas, but it is incredibly hard to keep the guilt from consuming her every thought.

Tara's chance of waking up is slim to none, and her chance of living as a functioning human being is even slimmer. But what if she does wake up? What if Tara wakes up and Jax will find out the horrible truth? It would devastate him even more. It would rip their family apart, and she simply can't let that happen. And even though she knows it is too early to suggest to him to have Tara taken off of life support, she also knows that every day passing with Tara still breathing, is another day she lives in fear that the truth will be revealed and she could lose everything and everyone that matters to her!

Just then, the chapel doors behind her opens and Jax steps inside. He quietly takes a seat beside his mother, but his mind is clearly still focused elsewhere.

Gemma brakes the silence when she reaches for his hand and speaks up, "Where are you at with this, sweetheart?"

Jax slowly shakes his head and swallows the lump in his throat, "I'm not sure, mom." He wipes at his eyes once more. His face filled with anger and self hatred. "This is on me. My wife is lying in that bed, hooked up to those machines because of me, because of who I am, because of what I am. Someone hurt her, 'cause they wanted to hurt me!" He turns to look at his mother, "How ... how am I going to fix this? How can I make this right?"

Gemma frames his face and pulls him close enough to place a kiss on his cheek. "I'm not sure yet, baby, but we'll figure it out together. You're not alone. I'm always here for you, Jackson, no matter what."

"I know." Jax wraps his arms around her and pulls her close. "Thank you, mom."

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Jax and Chibs embrace in the corridor by the hospital chapel. Gemma is already on her way back to the boys.

The rest of the Sons are all scattered around Charming, Stockton and Oakland, working on leads about Tara's assault. The Club has their obvious suspicions, but without any proof and since all their effort has been fruitless this far, Jax decides to go ahead and begins working towards the other part of his plan instead.

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He knocks tentatively on the door, and waits until he hears the familiar voice invite him in before he proceeds to step inside the small office.

Margaret Murphy quickly stands from her spot behind her desk. The look in her eyes is one Jax has been familiar with over the years in this town, it is one of panic and fear. Clearly the close confidant of Tara is not yet convinced that he doesn't have anything to do with the attack on his wife.

"What are you doing here, Mr. Teller?" She says with bravado in her voice that doesn't match the fearful expression displayed on her face.

"I'm here to talk to you." Jax says and without waiting for Margaret to invite him to do so, he takes a seat in the chair opposite hers.

"I'm not sure what I could possibly help you with." She says with obvious reluctance, but sits back down, her eyes trained on the man in front of her.

Jax nods at Chibs and he wordlessly disappears out of the room, closing the door behind him.

Jax clears his throat. "Tara and I reconciled." he starts to explain, "Right before she was attacked. I struck a deal with the District Attorney. I was going to turn myself in for ... for past crimes, if they'd drop all the charges against her. Tara was free to go." He stops and shakes his head at the tragedy of it all. "She went home to begin packing up so she could leave this place."

Margaret nods her head in understanding. She can see the anguish on Jax's face as he recites the events from that day, how he'd found her lifeless body in their home. She realizes that her fears have been unfounded, but she still isn't entirely sure why Jax is telling her all of this.

She leans forward and folds her hands on her desk in front of her, "Why are you telling me this?"

Jax's eyes connect with hers, a hopeful expression directed straight at her, "Tara wanted our boys away from this. Away from this life ... my life. More than anything, she wanted a different path for them and she came so close."

"Yes." Margaret says and nods again, agreeing with everything Jax is saying.

"Tara confided it you. She trusted you. I'm trying ... I need to finish what she started. I need to save our boys ... for her."

She shakes her head, unsure of how she fits into any of this, "I'm sorry, but I don't think I'm the right person for you to talk to."

Jax sits up and leans forward, and brushes his hair back with his hands once again, "She told you everything. She told you what her plan had been. She -"

"Yes, she did." Margaret interrupts him, "But the person that can truly help you with what Tara's wishes were is not me, Mr. Teller. You'll need to talk to her lawyer, Ms. Lowen instead!"

Jax frowns, because he knows that Lowen would be even less inclined to talk to him about anything Tara was concerned, but he'd always been quick to think on his feet and looks hopeful at the woman across from him. "You need to call her then, ask her to meet you here, but don't tell her about me or she's not going to show."

Margaret doesn't bother to ask why that is, but instead reaches for the phone on her desk and after a quick glance at a piece of paper in her desk drawer, she dials the number and waits for the phone to ring.
Ally Lowen knocks on the door to Margaret's office and waits until she hears Margaret's voice telling her to come in, before she opens the door and steps inside. Margaret's standing behind her desk and waves the lawyer inside, greeting her.

"I've got a meeting in thirty minutes, so I can't stay long. What was it you needed to talk to me about?"

Jax appears in the door behind her and Ally, clearly still frightened, takes a few steps further into the room. She looks rather fearful from Margaret back to Jax, who is shutting the door behind him now.

"What is this?" She pleads, clearly confused.

Jax raises his hands in a surrendering gesture, "I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to talk."

She looks back and forth between Margaret and Jax before her eyes settle on him, "Rosen got reassigned to handle the Club from here on out, and I resigned as Tara's lawyer. There's nothing left to talk about, Jax."

"Please." Jax says and gestures to one of the chairs. "Hear me out. It's about Tara."

Ally hesitates and looks to Margaret for guidance, and after the older woman gives her an approving nod, Ally pulls a chair into position and reluctantly sits down.

She folds her hands in her lap and looks back at Jax, waiting for him to start.

Jax pulls a chair out and sits down when Margaret excuses herself and leaves the room.

He isn't really sure where to even start, especially since Lowen is short on time, but he figures the best approach would be to fill her in on the events right before Tara had been attacked.

He needs Lowen to know that he is not behind the attack on his wife. Needs her to know that they'd made up and that Tara had been free and clear.

He just needs Lowen to trust him again. So he fills her in on all of it, on his plan to do right by her by getting their boys out of the life and waits for her response.

Jax can practically see the wheels in her head turning as she is processing everything he has explained to her just now, but he can see she is still reluctant towards him. And frankly he can't really blame her. After all, he had outright threatened her. Scared her half to death in Unser's trailer that night.

Lost in deep thought, she suddenly looks at him and finally speaks up, "The DA is not going to prosecute a mother of two who's currently in a coma, so I'm guessing for now you're no longer turning yourself in for those KG-nines?"

He shakes his head, "That's right, I'm not."

Ally nods, but he can see the reluctance on her face to speak up.

"What?" Jax pries and searches her face for an answer.

She looks dead at him, "Is it possible ... is it possible that someone from the Club -"

"No way." Jax cuts her off and shakes his head in disgust. "They all knew that this is what I wanted."
I made the choice to take the fall so my wife can go free. None of them would-

"What about Ortiz?" She cuts him off this time. "I've heard he's missing. Would he have any reason to attack Tara?"

Jax frowns. Juice has betrayed him and has been missing since the night Tara had been attacked. The thought that he is behind this, has briefly crossed his mind, but he's quickly dismissed it again. He can't imagine Juice doing such a thing to Tara, but it still is strange to hear somebody else mention him and looking at him as a possible suspect.

"He betrayed me and he knew that I had found out about it. He ran, not wanting to face the Club after what he'd done, but still ... I can't picture him doing that to Tara."

"What about Gemma?" Ally questions out loud against her better judgment, before she can censor her own wording.

Jax shrugs his shoulders, not understanding how Gemma fit into the picture, "What about her?"

"Tara's made it perfectly clear that she didn't want her boys around her. She didn't want Gemma in their life at all, so the fact that you were turning yourself in and Tara was about to leave town must've made her angry." Ally knows she's taking a risk with what she was implying.

Jax stands, suddenly enraged by that. "My mother didn't do this. God knows, she's no saint, but she couldn't do something like that."

"Alright." Ally replies rather calmly. "So it was ... retaliation?"

Jax sits back down and sadly nods, "Yes."

"For what?" She asks, but catches herself and quickly raises her hand, "Never mind, don't answer that."

They both are silent for a long moment, until Ally glances at her watch. "I have to get going soon, and quite frankly I'm not really sure how I can help you."

Jax sighs and looks back at his former lawyer, "I'm trying to figure out what Tara would want me to do. There was a distance between us after her arrest ... and I'll take the blame for that, but ... but now." He looked down at his own hands, "I know she wants the boys away from this, but I can't just pack them up and leave. I can't-"

"Leave your Club." Lowen interrupts him.

But Jax surprises her when he shakes his head, "No, you don't understand. When I found her lying in a pool of her own blood, I thought she was dead." Tears begin to prick at his eyes as the moment replays itself in his mind and he doesn't even care that Ally Lowen is there to witness it. "This isn't about the Club anymore. This is about Tara. I can't leave her! I won't leave her!"

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Author's Note: Please review and let me know what you think! Thank you!
Chapter 3

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It has turned out to be a very long day for Jax since he has gotten released from County Jail earlier, and it wasn't over just yet.

Finally being able to see Tara with his own eyes was a feeling he can't describe even if he tries. It soothes his aching soul to know and see for himself that she is alive; yet her injuries fuel his lust to seek revenge for her even more.

After seeking advice from both Margaret Murphy and Ally Lowen, he stopped by her room once more before he left the hospital for good to show his face to the rest of the guys at Scoops. That's where Nero had suddenly appeared unannounced.

Over the last couple of months, Jax has come to know Nero Padilla, and the older man has grown into somewhat of a mentor for him, a voice of reason in the constant chaos that is part of the life.

Yet the ten days Jax has spend behind bars, he's had plenty of time to think - maybe too much time! So when Jax has been wracking his brain, trying to figure out who could've done such a thing to Tara, Nero and his words about Karma had come back to haunt Jax more than he'd like to admit.

'Do you believe in karma, mano? You know, something greater that's moving all the pieces around?

Not today.

I do! I know it! Shit, I feel it every time I see my boy! You ever think, maybe all those bad things that are happening to the mother of your children, just maybe that's because of some heinous thing you did to another child's mother?

I don't know where you're going with this-

Please don't lie to me twice, Jax. I know what happened to Darvany, I know what you had Juice do.

What did Juice do?

Killed an innocent woman, and then you looked at me in the eye and you lied to me about it. You embraced me and called me brother. You think shit like that just gets buried? Just goes away? It don't, mano. It comes back, and when it does ... it makes you pay!'

Deep down Jax doesn't want to believe that Nero and his crew has anything to do with the attack on Tara, but that last conversation with him has definitely planted a seed of doubt. The same doubt that ate at him every time he thought about Juice disappearing that same night. He can't help but wonder if it is just a coincidence, or if all of this is connected somehow.

Then there were the Chinese. Could the assault on Tara have been retaliation for the Sons and Marks assassinating the Chinese to seal the deal with the Irish? Anything was possible, but there were no signs left behind that they'd done it. And without any physical proof, he agreed to the sit-down with
Nero, Alvarez and the Chinese. It was an unavoidable necessity to keep the peace, at least for now.

Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer!

He'd be lying if he said that worrying about Club business wasn't a welcoming distraction at times. He simply has to admit that as much as he wants to focus on finding Tara's attacker and figuring out what to do with their boys, he feels that for the time being his hands are tied behind his back.

He knows Tara wants the boys out of the life, but he simply can't leave her behind in Charming.

That being said, he also knew the moment he'd left Tara's bedside earlier today, he'd have to make a decision. Would he go see the boys and bring them home with him, or would he stay away from them until he knew who was behind her attack. It was either all or nothing!

But now as he pulls Tara's Ford into the driveway of his house with their boys buckled into the backseat, a feeling of doubt begins to overwhelm him. Was Gemma right?

She was glad that he'd come to see them, but feared it was too soon for them to return back to that house?

"Mom!" He'd stopped her mid speech. "Look, this isn't up for discussion. I am taking my sons home!"

But now he suddenly doubts his own decision again. Has he made the right choice to bring the boys home with him tonight?

Jax shuts the car off, glances into the rearview mirror and finds Abel's eyes connecting with his. He could've sworn the kid had fallen asleep on the short drive home, but now he seems wide awake again.

Jax carries a sleeping Thomas in his arms to the front door as Abel runs up rather impatiently ahead of him. The little guy is smiling and seems excited, and it brakes Jax's heart when he realizes that Abel is hoping to find his mother inside. Shit, maybe Gemma was right!

After unlocking the front door, Abel rushes inside the still dark house, his small voice yelling 'mommy' in search for Tara and Jax hurriedly steps in after him, turning the lights on as he follows Abel along. Abel comes to a stop in his parents' bedroom and turns around to his father just as Jax stops in the door and flips the light switch on, the room illuminating around them.

Jax drops the bag he'd slung over his shoulder onto the ground, before he turns his full attention to Abel while still clutching a sleeping Thomas in his other arm.

He kneels down in front of him, his hand running through the boy's short blond hair before it stills on his tiny shoulder. "She's still in the hospital, buddy. She's still sick. Remember?"

Abel nods in understanding, but Jax can see the sadness on his face and the tears that begin to form in his eyes before he pulls his son into a embrace with his one free arm.

This moment, with Abel crying for his mom in his arms, is the reason why he'd contemplated not seeing the boys until he'd sorted everything out. He isn't sure what to say to him, not sure what to do. He knows he's been vague and has tiptoed around the subject of their mother, because as much as Jax refuses to give up on Tara, as much as he'll rip anyone to shreds if they dared saying she might not pull through, he can't muster the courage to promise Abel that she'll be alright. Because what if she isn't going to be alright?
So now here is the next question on Jax's mind. Would it be worse to keep the boys from ever seeing her lying in that hospital bed unconscious? Or would he do more damage if he'd bring them in to see her?

Jax doesn't know the answer and he fears having to make that choice for them as well. And the irony that Tara would know the right thing to do doesn't go unnoticed by him either.

As he thinks about all those things, he wants to cry along with Abel for the unfairness of it all. If anyone should've been hurt like that it should've been him, the leader of the Club, the president ... not her, not the mother of his children.
Not Tara!

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It feels odd to Jax, yet also strangely comforting to get the boys ready for bed without the help of Gemma or anyone else. Taking care of them is one more thing that temporarily takes his mind off of his wife, at least up until the moment when Abel points out his mistakes to him.

"Mommy doesn't do it like that!" Those innocent words coming from Abel's mouth manage to stop Jax dead in his tracks and he finds himself staring back at his son in the bathtub.

After a moment, he manages to utter a reply, "Well, how does mommy do it, little man?" And holds the washcloth out to him.

Abel reaches for it and smiles with confidence in his eyes, because he knows their bath time routine. "Here, daddy, I show you."

X

He's bathed Thomas and put a pull-up diaper on him before changing him into his pajamas for the night, and is now feeding him his bottle. Tara has continued to pump her breast milk for him, but even her frozen supply is beginning to run thin now, and Jax knows the nightly bottle would soon be nothing more than a habit he'd have to break his two year old son from rather sooner than later.

Abel sits on the couch beside them, freshly bathed and dressed in his pajamas as well. And in this moment, the little guy seems almost happy while he is watching cartoons alongside his father and little brother.

Just then the doorbell rings and startles Jax out of his short moment of contentment between him and his sons. Abel looks up at him, but doesn't move from his spot on the couch when Jax gets up to answer the door. He looks down at his other son on his lap and decides to sit Thomas down, allowing him to hold the bottle himself, much to the little boys displeasure.

Jax steps up to the front door, and looks through the peephole. Surprised, he reaches for the doorknob and opens the door for Ally Lowen.

"Hi." She says, and by the look on her face, he can see that the female lawyer is still somewhat hesitant towards him. But despite her fear, she is here, at his house in the dark of night, and that obviously has to mean something.

"Hi." Jax replies perplexed, before he gathers his wits and steps aside, gesturing for her to come in.

She slips past him, but stops short in the hallway when she sees the boys sitting in the living room, "I'm sorry, I probably should've called." She begins to apologize.
Jax closes the door behind him, and shakes his head, "No, it's fine. I was just feeding Thomas his last bottle for the night, then they're both off to bed." He says as he ushers her into the living room and picks up Thomas again, who's clearly tired and has begun to cry in protest out loud.

"Oh. Okay." Ally replies as she looks around for a place to sit.

With Thomas on his hip, Jax takes the brown throw-blanket and blue pillow from the arm chair and tosses it into the baby's playpen that has served more as a toy box as of late, before he gestures with his free hand for her to sit. Jax returns to his seat on the couch and begins to feed Thomas what little is left in his bottle.

Ally glances at Abel, whose eyes are glued to the TV, and a small smile crosses her lips when she sees how hard the little boy is trying to stay awake. But she quickly focuses her attention back on Jax. The criminal with his young son in his arms, something she's never quite pictured before.

"So ..." Jax wonders out loud, as his eyes connect with hers across the small distance, "What brings you here this late?"

Ally leans back in her chair and sits her briefcase down on the floor right beside her. "Maybe ... maybe we should wait until the boys are in bed."

He eyes her warily and raises his eyebrows when he nods in agreement. "Yeah. Maybe we should." But instantaneously his curiosity is peeked tenfold.

What was she willing to share with him now that she hasn't mentioned earlier at the hospital?

X

Jax emerges from Thomas' bedroom and finds Ally standing near the fireplace, looking at the pictures of the boys on the mantle. She turns towards him when he steps into the room, but remains quiet.

"Sorry. Didn't think it'd take that long." He mumbles an apology. "It's their first night back since ..." He pauses and she nods in understanding.

He gestures towards the kitchen, "Do you want a drink? Some water? Coffee? ... I was gonna make me some tea." What he really needs is a whiskey! A double!

"Uhm, yes, a tea would be ... nice."

She follows Jax into the kitchen, bringing her briefcase along, before placing it on the dining room table.

Jax fills the teakettle, places it on the stove and turns the knob to high, before he turns around noting her standing there awkwardly, with her arms crossed while her eyes scan the kitchen for any left behind evidence.

There was none to be found, Gemma or whoever had cleaned the place up, after CSI had left, had done a hell of a job. The kitchen sparkled in a way it hasn't in years, in fact the whole house smelled like a mixture of bleach and lemon, and there is not a trace left of the horrible crime that has occurred here less than two weeks ago.

He swallows the lump in his throat and nods towards the sink, "That's where I found her. On the ground."
Ally looks to the floor by the sink before she meets his eyes, but she doesn't say anything. She simply doesn't know what to say.

"I thought she was dead. I thought I'd lost her." He confesses and turns away reaching for two cups inside the cupboard, just long enough to keep his tears at bay and get his emotions back under control.

He drops a bag of tea in each cup before he suddenly turns back around and faces her.

"Why are you here?" He finally blurts out, clearly having lost his patience of doing this awkward dance with her.

She looks back at the dinner table behind her, "Maybe we should sit."

Jax leans back against the kitchen counter and closes his eyes as he takes in a deep breath. He shakes his head and pinches the bridge of his nose. From the moment he'd left the hospital, he has bottled up his emotions for the sake of everyone around him, - his brothers, his sons, his mother - ... even his enemies. But it was late and he can't keep his frustration at bay any longer.

He thought being released this morning would speed things along, that he would find something his brothers couldn't! But he has gotten nowhere, absolutely nowhere today. Ten days and not a goddamn clue about who has done it.

So now, standing here with Lowen in his kitchen, in the kitchen, he simply can't handle all the small talk any longer. "Maybe we just cut through all the bullshit and you just tell me why you're here?"

The words sounding much harsher than he's intended them to be, and he fears momentarily that she'll take flight, but to his surprise she doesn't.

Instead she turns her back to him, steps over to her briefcase, opens it and retrieves several stacks of papers, stapled together at one corner at the top of the page, before she turns and holds them out for him to take.

Still visibly irritated, Jax steps up beside her and takes them, glancing at pages that he now realized were filled with Tara's handwriting.

"What is this?" He looks over at Ally, before his eyes go back to Tara's words in front of him.

The kettle whistles on the stove and when Jax doesn't make a move, Ally steps over to the stove instead. In that moment, she realizes just how odd her relationship with the Teller family has truly become. Her being here, consulting him, presenting Jax with photocopies of Tara's notes, ... she knew damn well that it was unethical, and that it could possibly cost her her license, but she also knows that Jax needs to see this to understand what she is about to tell him next.

Without taking his eyes off of the papers, Jax pulls out a chair and takes a seat. Ally brings both cups of steaming tea over to the table and sits beside him. She hesitates as she watches his eyes scan the first page, and then the second, but finally decides to explain. "Tara wrote down things that had happened. Things that had put her in danger, put her children in danger. Recalling moments where she'd feared for her life, and for her family."

Jax exhales the breath he'd been holding and drops the stack of papers on the table. Page two and he's already seen enough.

He hides his face in both his hands for a long moment, before he looks back up at the woman sitting beside him and simply shakes his head. He doesn't know what to say, because he knows the shit he's
put her and the boys through is inexcusable.

He remembers everything that has ever happened to them, to her, yet to see it written out like that, in Tara's own words, page after page after page, her describing how terrified she was ... it makes him sick to his stomach.

"When ... when did she write this?" He wonders out loud as he searches Ally's face for an answer.

"At County, when she was locked up." Ally replies, trying her hardest to keep her face as stoic as possible, even when Jax's falls apart.

"Why?" Came the question Ally has dreaded, but at the same time it is also the main reason why she's pushed her fears aside and decided to show up here tonight.

Ally clears her throat, and takes a deep breath before she answers him, "All Tara cared about was getting her boys away from this life. She was worried that, should she be convicted and sent to prison, that Gemma would be the boys' primary caregiver even if you remained free. She tried to ... she wanted Wendy to be the legal guardian, to take the kids and leave Charming, but since you wouldn't sign off on that, she saw no other choice than to file for divorce, Jax."

Jax can't help but ball his hands into fists at the memory of it all, even if just for a brief moment. His face displaying the turmoil he is feeling inside, but he doesn't say anything as he stares off into the distance as if lost in his own thoughts.

"She didn't want to ... but divorcing you, and providing proof of a history of violence, with this." She points a manicured finger at the pages in front of him. "It was her only chance, the only way of getting Wendy granted guardianship against yours and Gemma's will."

Jax sighs out loud, before he finally looks up to meet her eyes, "I didn't think we'd need it." He shakes his head. "I didn't realize how scared she was. I didn't know ..." he tries to excuse his actions but can't find the words to justify them.

In hindsight he knows he should've just signed the damn papers back then. Even if he'd truly believed that she'd walk free, he should've signed them just to ease her troubled mind ... but he hadn't.

A moment of silence passes between them, before Jax finally speaks up. Surprising her with his honest confession, "I'm with my back against the wall here."

He shakes his head, his eyes displaying the sorrow he feels inside. "I took my boys home with me tonight, because I wanted them to know that they're not alone. That their father still loves them, and I guess part of me did it, because I know that Tara doesn't want Gemma to raise them. But what do I do?" He voices the question towards her, but she knows he is not really expecting an answer.

"Besides my obligations towards the Club ... their mother is in a coma, I can't just pack up and leave even if I wanted to. And Wendy, ... I know Wendy was her choice, but she just fucking relapsed for the hundredth time. My mother just shipped her ass off to rehab again." He lowers his head in defeat, he's at a loss.

Ally nods her agreement, she'd heard about Wendy's relapse from Margaret. But that's why she is here, to answer Jax's question from earlier today, about that Tara would want him to do.

She reaches across the table and surprises Jax when she touches his hand to gain his attention once more. "There's a military post about an hour west from here."
Jax looks back at her with confusion written all over his unshaven face, yet he replies knowledgeable, "Yeah, Travis Air Force Base."

"Yes, that's the one." But before Jax can question what that has to do with his current dilemma, Ally goes on to elaborate, "There's single airmen and women with children who are send off to war, sometimes as long as twelve months. It isn't cheap, but there's family's who will take those kids in while the airmen and women are deployed."

"Like Foster care?" Jax realizes where she was going with this. "After everything they've been through, I can't just pawn them off to some strangers."

Ally shakes her head, "It's not like that. It's not foster care. They take great care of them and provide for them in a loving home. And your situation is unique, because they'd just be an hour away. If you wanted to, you could go see them several times a week, spend every weekend with them. But they'd be safe, away from Charming, the Club and Gemma!"

He contemplates everything she's said. "I appreciate it, but I'm gonna have to think about this for a little while." He answers truthfully.

And she nods her head in understanding, "Of course."

X

Author's Note: Still struggling to get the characters down pat, but I'm trying. Lowen's character might seem a bit OOC, but please let me explain her motivation behind her actions in this chapter. I always felt like she cared for Tara on more than just a client basis, maybe because she could identify more with a successful doctor than any of the other criminals she'd defended in the past. So since Jax reached out to her for help, she decided to take the opportunity to help get those babies out of charming alive.
Please leave a review if you liked it and care to read more. I would really appreciate it. Thank you.
A whole week has passed since Jax was released from County, though not much has changed.

Tara is still in a coma after her surgery and remains unresponsive, but so far all her scans reveal ample brain activity, which the doctors all agree is a good sign, so Jax remains hopeful that she'll wake up soon.

Yet the search for her attacker is still leading nowhere. On one hand Jax's blood is boiling with the need for revenge and at times it takes all his willpower to not unleash that wrath on anyone currently in his path.

On the other hand he tries his best to contain that bloodlust for the sake of his boys. Since he's been released he's taken on a more active role in parenting, and is trying his best to stay on the right track for his sons.

It is only 5am and Jax finds himself sitting alone at the table in his kitchen, a hot cup of coffee still steaming before him and the photocopies of Tara's ordeals spread out in front of him.

After Lowen left them with him, he's read them all, some of them more than once, and he'd be lying if he said that reading how scared his wife has been at times wasn't feeding his resolve even more to do right by her this time. For once he wants to keep the promise he's made to her. That he'd fix this and protect their sons in the process of it all. That he'd make her proud.

So with that in mind, he's finally come to a decision. One he knows will probably confuse the boys to some degree, maybe even scare them, but he knows it has to be done. As much as he wants them close, he knows they need distance from the Club and the life that comes with it.

After days of contemplating his options and hours consulting with Margaret Murphy, he's finally made up his mind. The boys will move in with Margaret and her family for the time being. Abel will start the new preschool Tara has enrolled him in several months ago and Thomas will go back to the childcare center at Saint Thomas. Margaret will be their primary guardian, and will ensure that they get to see their mother at least once a day if not more often, but Jax would try his best to be there every night, too. To spend time with them and get them settled and ready for bed.

At least that is the plan Margaret and him have decided on, and today is the day he'd have to explain it all to Abel, since Thomas is still too young to understand. But truth be told, Jax is scared to inflict any more emotional scars on the boys, considering everything they've already had to endure in their short lives. He doesn't want Abel - or Thomas - to think that this arrangement would make them lose their father, too.

As for Margaret Murphy, Jax knows no amount of money can convey the amount of gratitude he feels for the older woman when she graciously offered to take in his two sons for the time being. Not only did he know that Margaret would take great care of his sons, but he also knew that Margaret would make it a point to remind them daily of their mother and only speak of Tara in a good light.
Something he isn't sure his own mother would be able to do.

He wants to believe that Gemma is also grieving and worried about Tara, but he also can't overlook the fact how much she relishes being the main caretaker for his two young sons. That first became clear the moment he decided to take them home with him and the argument that would've ensued had he not put a immediate stop to it.

Gemma has shown up several times, always offering to watch the boys and left obviously annoyed on the few occasions he'd actually turned her down. However the straw that broke the camel's back was last night, after a long dreadful day of handling Club business and yet another dead end concerning Tara's attack, Gemma showed up at the house, unannounced.

She helped him get the boys bathed and settled into bed, which wasn't that unusual, but after the boys had fallen asleep, her suggestion to Jax to 'visit with Colette' and 'let off some steam' was disturbing, even for her standards.

Gemma may have never condoned his cheating ways in the past, but never had she actually suggested it, or had tried to talk him into being with someone other than Tara.

Clearly perplexed by Gemma's suggestion, he was speechless at first and it took him a moment to come to the dreadful realization that his own mother either didn't share his believe in Tara's recovery, or she simply didn't think his wife was worth the wait.

Either one of those revelations had caused Jax's jaw to clench in anger as he confronted his mothers intentions. Gemma had always been smart concerning the choice of her words, but no matter how hard she tried to backtrack and make it sound like she was concerned about his well being, it quickly became clear to him that his mother was ready to pull the plug on her daughter-in-law. On the mother of her grandbabies. On his wife.

Maybe he overreacted, or maybe he let all the deep seeded loathing he felt towards himself, for ever cheating on Tara in the first place, out on his mother instead, but in that moment, he simply snapped.

It was the first time he'd ever thrown Gemma out of the house, but it certainly was a wakeup call as to where his mother stood. The attack on Tara in her own home hadn't changed her mind concerning this life in the least.

Gemma still believed that he should remain at the head of the table and his boys should grow up to follow in his bloody footsteps one day. She didn't want Jax to get out and leave Charming, and ultimately he realized that it meant she didn't want Tara to wake up. Because the two went hand in hand.

Now here he was, dreading having to tell his sons that they'll be living with someone else for a while, and the pain he already envisions on Abel's face twists his stomach into knots.

X

Three months later

Jax pulls into the driveway at the Murphy residence and dismounts his Dyna. He takes the four steps up to the front door in stride and rings the doorbell. He can already hear the familiar voices inside and he can't keep the smile from his face when Abel opens the door for him.

"Daaaaddyyyyyy!" Abel screeches with delight and throws himself in his father's outstretched arms.
Jax picks him up with ease, "How you doing little man?" and steps inside.

Margaret greets him without stopping to set the table for dinner, while her husband continues to bounce a delighted Thomas on his knee, stopping just long enough for Jax to lean down and place a kiss against the fair haired toddlers head in greeting. "Hey baby-boy."

Abel begins to tell his father about the day he had in school, and Jax listens, trying to keep up with the boy's story that in all reality doesn't interest him all that much. He is simply glad that he's made it here in time to eat dinner with them and read them a few bedtime stories before they have to get to bed.

However Jax interest is piqued when Abel mentions his mother.

"We went to see mommy today." Abel says as he begins to pull drawings from his backpack that he wants to show to his father.

"Really?" Jax replies. "Did you talk to her?"

"I did." Abel nods his head as he shoves several pieces of paper into his father's hands to admire. "I told her about my teachers and about my friends in school and when I gave her a kiss on her hand, she moved it."

"What?" Jax asks in surprise, and looks up from his seat on the ground to meet Margaret's eyes across the room. "She moved her hand?"

Margaret nods with a smile on her face, but before she can say anything, Abel continues his story.

"She did, daddy. She squeezed my hand." He says without skipping a beat, as if it is the most normal thing in the world. "I think she's going to wake up."

Jax glances up at Margaret once more and is met with the same hopeful expression that is displayed on his own face. "Yeah, I hope so, too."

X

Several days later

Having your son's trust is a thing to be cherished. Gemma Teller-Morrow has found that out the hard way, since she's lost it three months ago.

Deep down inside she knows she should've kept her mouth shut a bit longer about taking Tara off of life-support, but she feared the younger woman's improvement would reveal the ugly truth and she simply couldn't let that happen, so she'd spoken her mind. Much too soon!

For the past three months, Jax has graciously allowed her to see her grandbabies a few times, but he no longer wants her near their unconscious mother.

Tara is still not even breathing on her own and remains on constant live-support, but with every test she shows more and more signs of improvement, and it scares Gemma enough to throw caution to the wind. She knows she has to act before Tara makes a full recovery and since she's helped Juice get out of town two months ago, she's finally come up with a way that will seem plausible enough.

So she takes one last big breath before the elevator doors open and she rushes outside, down the hallway, around several corners towards Tara's room.
"Rat." Gemma gets the young man's attention, "I just saw Juice, down the hall from here." She fakes concern.

"What? Are you sure?" Comes his confused reply as he quickly reaches for his cell phone.

"Of course I'm sure." She hisses back at him, "You're not gonna catch him with that phone. Aren't you gonna go after him?"

Rat-Boy hesitates for just a split-second, before he heads down the corridor that leads to the elevator.

"He was wearing a dark hoody, and I think he was armed. Hurry." Gemma yells after him.

The moment Rat-Boy is out of sight, Gemma looks around to make sure the coast is clear before she quickly steps inside Tara's hospital room.

She stands frozen by the foot of the bed for a short moment, before she snaps out of it and realizes that now is not the time to get cold feet. It was Tara's life or her own and she isn't ready to leave her family behind just yet.

Gemma pulls on her gloves as she quickly steps around the bed towards the monitors and machines that are keeping her daughter-in-law alive. She'd done her research online, knows just what she has to do, but she has to do so quickly, before Rat shows back up.

"I'm sorry, sweetheart. I really am." And with a quick twist of her wrist, she disconnects the breathing tube from the machine and flees the room, as inconspicuous as she'd entered.

She rushes down the opposite hallway that Rat-Boy has taken off too, making sure to make a show and be seen, asking people if they've seen a man in a dark hoody, to further establish an alibi for herself, all the while further pointing the finger at Juice as the culprit. When she suddenly hears an alarm sound at the nurses' station, and nurses and doctors rush in the direction of Tara's room, and her high heels click away in the hallway when she quickly follows behind the staff in concern.

Gemma gets there just in time to see a nurse usher Rat-Boy back into the hallway and their eyes met for just a fraction of a second, before she forces herself to look away.

She stands frozen in place yet again, the guilt coming on stronger than she's anticipated and suddenly she finds herself unsure if she can really pull this off. Did she really just kill her son's wife?

She swallows away the lump that has formed in her throat and with the most concern stricken voice she can muster, she turns towards the younger man, "What happened?"

"I don't know." He admits, and looks to her for answers.

"Juice." She suddenly replies tragically and she manages to squeeze a tear from her eyes and covers her face with her hands as her chin begins to quiver, "Juice got to her. He did this." She staggars backwards in an Oscar-worthy performance and Rat-Boy rushes to her side to keep her steady on her feet. "That's why he disappeared the night she was attacked ... Oh my god, it was Juice all along." She sobs into the younger man's shoulder, clinging to him for support.

"Jesus Christ ... we need to call Jax." Rat-Boy replies and runs a soothing hand over the older woman's back trying to comfort her, while he digs out his cell-phone to make the call.

X

Author's Note: Can't wait to hear your thoughts on this development. Thanks
Chapter 5

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X

"Jeazous Chrrrisst, Jacky boy." Chibs yells after Jax, who has barely averted getting hit by a car as he races into the hospital parking lot at full speed.

Jax stops his Dyna with the squeak of his tires in front of the hospital doors and dismounts the bike in record speed, leaving the key in his ignition.

He runs, yes, he runs into the door, pushing the automated doors open, when they won't part for him fast enough, dodging people in his path left and right, and continues running for the nearest elevator. Impatiently he's pushing the button at least twenty times and is just about to head for the stairs instead, when Chibs catches up with him just as the elevator doors part with a ding.

"Let's go." He ushers his president into the elevator.

The elevator ride only lasts mere seconds, but those seconds feel like hours to Jax and he can feel the weight of the world lying heavily on his shoulders. Crushing and grinding every fiber of his being into the ground.

'Juice tried to kill Tara!'

Those where the words Rat-Boy had uttered into the phone and right now it is still unclear if Juice has succeeded, or simply hurt Tara's chance of a full recovery even more.

"Tara, she's a fighter. One tough lass." Chibs tries to reassure him with a strong pat on the back, but Jax can't help but feel that same kind of helplessness he'd felt when he'd found her bloodied body on their kitchen floor. This isn't supposed to happen. She isn't supposed to fall victim to one of his enemies, and damn sure not one of his brothers. A husband is supposed to protect his wife, but he's failed to do that once again.

Just then the elevator doors open and Jax rushes through the long corridors, with Chibs right on his heels, until he comes to a screeching halt in front of Tara's hospital room.

Cops and hospital staff is gathered right outside her room, yet without giving it another thought, Jax heads for her door, but is stopped dead in his tracks by two deputies who block his way.

An argument ensues that quickly escalates into a struggle, and Jax looses his cool, "THAT'S MY WIFE IN THERE." He yells loud enough for the entire floor to hear, before he punches one of the deputies square in the jaw.

Chibs and Rat-Boy grab a hold of him and try to get their angry young leader under control before he'll get himself arrested, since one of the cops has proceeded to pull out a pair of handcuffs.

"TARA'S AWAKE!" Rat-Boy yells out in an attempt to get Jax's attention, which undoubtedly works.
Jax stops his struggle against his brothers and the deputies and turns towards the younger prospect, his eyes temporarily filling with hope, "She woke up?"

The deputies seize the opportunity and grab a hold of Jax, ready to put those cuffs on quick. In that moment the door to Tara's room opens, and the newly appointed female Sheriff of Charming appears before them.

"How is she?" Jax pleads with Sheriff Jarry, who gives a nod to her deputies to release him. Neither of them pleased with her decision, but comply none the less.

"She's ... she's okay, considering." Sheriff Jarry replies reluctantly, but with a small smile on her face before her eyes wander towards the taller Scotsman next to Jax.

"I need to see her." He says before he takes a step towards Tara's door again, but Sheriff Jarry holds up her hand, signaling him to stop once more.

"She's being evaluated by her doctor right now, and even though we already questioned her about the night she was attacked, she still has to give an official statement."

Jax pleads with the woman in front of him, a look of desperation in his eyes, "I just need to see for myself that she's alright. Please, I've been waiting for her to come out of this for over three months now."

"I get that, Mr. Teller, and I'm sorry." She tries to reassure him, "It shouldn't take too much longer, I'm sure the doctor will let you know as soon as she's ready to see you."

Jax sighs heavily and his frustration is visible on his face, but he knows that Jarry is right, and that Tara's health is more important than his need to see her.

Chibs smiles broadly at Jax at the good news that Tara is awake and once again places a reassuring hand on Jax's shoulder to guid the younger man away from the door. "Told ya!" He adds and meets Jax's eyes, which are filled with guilt once more.

Jax, Chibs and Rat-Boy watch as the Sheriff huddles with her deputies and one of them takes off down the hall.

Jax knows of the relationship that has developed between his Sergeant-at-Arms and the female hand of the law, and give him a pointed look, which Chibs understood without any words being exchanged.

Chibs approaches Althea and pulls her aside, and Jax watches them curiously from the other side of the hall. It becomes clear that in this instant, Jarry decides to uphold the law over any pull the Scotsman might has on her, because moments later a disgruntled Chibs returns back to Jax's side without any information as to what Tara has already revealed to the Sheriff and her deputies.

After Rat-Boy has quickly filled him in on what has happened, Jax looked around rather confused, "So where is she?"

"She was crying and all upset about Tara, and the fact that Juice could've done such a thing to her. And then she took off." Rat-Boy explains Gemma's absence the best he can.

Chibs notices the confused look on Jax's face before he adds his own two cents, "You told her to stay away, she's just listenin' to ya'."

"If she'd listened to me, she wouldn't've been here in the first place." Jax adds with a hint of
resentment, once more finding his mother an acceptable outlet for the anger he's feeling.

But only a mere second passes before his mind is focused elsewhere and he turns to Chibs once more, "Call the guys, have them spread the word that Juice is back in town and that we want him. Then call Unser and ask him to dig into his old colleagues, find out if they've got any leads on Juice yet."

Chibs listens to every word, then turns down the hallway for some privacy before he begins making the necessary phone calls.

X

Gemma throws her keys on her kitchen table when she practically runs into her house. Without missing a beat, she rushes to her bedroom and begins packing a suitcase. Clothes, jewelry, photographs ... anything she can think of, and of course all the cash that she's started stashing away in her safe months ago, should this dreadful day ever become reality.

In the midst of it all, she tries to keep the tears at bay, but they stream mercilessly down her face and she wipes them away as quickly as they appear. She knows now is not the time to start feeling sorry for herself.

But that's when she breaks down, physically breaks down. Slumped down onto her bed and cries out loud with both her hands covering her grief-stricken face. She is already grieving for the family she is leaving behind. For leaving her son, her grandsons and the only life that has ever had any meaning for her. Another sob escapes her when her thoughts wander to Nero. Nero, that sweet, sweet man that has stood by her through all of this, but not knowing of the terrible things she has done.

She allows herself that brief moment to wallow in her self-inflicted misery, before she stands up, straightens out her clothing and hair, wipes away the remaining tears, grabs her purse and suitcase and heads for the door without a glance back, because she knows it would hurt too much.

Gemma pushes the key into the ignition and starts the car, but before she takes off she dares a quick glance at her phone. Countless missed calls, and she can only imagine Jax desperately trying to make sense of it all, and it breaks her heart all over again. She turns the phone off, puts the car in gear, and begins her way out of Charming.

X

With the help of a nurse, Tara takes a sip of water. Her throat feels scratchy and raw from the breathing tube, her arms feel heavy and still somewhat uncoordinated, her head's throbbing in pain, but her legs just tingle as she stretches and flexes them repeatedly.

Doctor's have talked to her, the police has talked to her, and Jax has made his presence known outside her hospital room, but all she wants is to see her babies. She's been reassured that they are on the way and they'll be here shortly.

She can't wait to wrap her arms around them to hold them close. Kiss their little foreheads and take in their sweet little faces. It warms her heart just to think of it.

Despite the euphoria she feels at the thought of being reunited with her sons, she still feels sick to her stomach thinking about everyone that is surely be accompanying her babies.

Tara knows she should feel some gratitude towards Gemma for taking care of her boys while she's been in the hospital recovering, but her hatred towards her mother-in-law runs too deep these days. Yet even Tara needs to admit, no matter how badly she wants Gemma out of their life, she is still a
better choice as a caregiver than the whores, junkies and porn stars that hung around the Club these
days.

Given the extent of her injuries and the fact that she'd been in a coma for over three months, Tara
knows all too well that she won't be released today, or tomorrow either. She has days of required
physical therapy ahead of her, which means her children will most likely remain in the care of their
psychotic grandmother even longer.

The more she thinks about it, the more her head throbs painfully and a tear streams down her cheek,
because she hates being this helpless, and at the mercy of the Club and Gemma once again.

Tara closes her eyes and tries to relax back into the pillow that is propped up behind her. Why did all
of this have to happen? She was so close to getting away with her boys. So close!

If she could only remember what has happened. If she only knew who'd done this to her!

Just then the Sheriff enters her room again and approaches her bed, and despite the pain Tara opens
her eyes, already anticipating the Sheriff's next words. "He's still asking to see you."

Tara sighs audibly, the reluctance to see Jax written all over her face.

"You know we can protect you, Dr. Knowles." Sheriff Jarry steps closer and places a reassuring
hand atop of Tara's, "If you remember something, if you do remember who did this to you but you
are afraid to tell us ... don't be."

With sad eyes Tara shakes her head, "I already told you ... I wish I knew. The last thing I remember
is leaving the motel room. Everything after that is ... it's just gone."

The Sheriff pulls a chair close and sits down next to Tara's bed, as if she is anticipating this
conversation to last a while longer, "Then why don't you want to see him? You said he made a deal
with the District Attorney to turn himself in and get the charges against you dropped. That sounds to
me like the both of you were on good terms before this happened."

Tara nods her head but immediately regrets moving it, "I'm just ... I'm just confused." A tear rolls
down her cheek and Tara struggles to even lift her hand to wipe it away, which in turn makes her cry
even more.

Sheriff Jarry grabs a tissue and leans forward. "Let me help you." She says as she wipes the tears
from Tara's face.

"Thank you." Tara says embarrassed, willing herself to stop crying. "I guess ... I guess I'm just
scared of what I don't remember."

Jarry furrows her brows looking back at the younger woman questioningly, "You think there's a
possibility Jax did this to you?"

Tara swallows the lump in her throat. "You said that Juice has been missing since the night I was
attacked, and that he was seen here today, making him your main suspect."

"Yes." The Sheriff nods her agreement.

Another tear rolls down Tara's cheek before she blatantly states, "Juice follows my husband's orders.
He's always been loyal to Jax."
Tara can hear the muffled voices of her doctor, the new female sheriff and Jax right outside her door. She feels weak and honestly a little sick to her stomach, but then again that is to be expected of someone who's been through what she's been through. And as a doctor she knows this all too well.

Yet here she is, wondering if she is feeling this way because she knows that he is right outside her door and she'll be face to face with him in a couple of minutes.

Her face grimaces with the onslaught of pain that mere thought revokes in her. Not physical pain, after all they have given her something for that, but this pain she feels is emotional and more powerful than any physical pain she can possibly imagine. Tears starting to fall again.

She's felt this pain before - once! Sadly she can still remember all too well how she felt, when Jax and the guys had found her with her boys in the park, and she'd thought that they were going to kill her.

Tara shakes her head before she hides her tear streaked face in both her hands. She is so confused. So incredibly confused.

Confused about what she knows in her heart to be true, or maybe it is what she wants to be true, and what seems like the logical, the actual truth. She wants nothing more than those last moments in Jax's arms in the motel to be true.

That the love they'd made and the love she'd felt and seen in his eyes to be true. After all it is one of the last things she can remember, and what a beautiful memory it is, but her battered mind will not give her any rest about what has happened after Jax and her had parted ways that late afternoon.

The logical truth that her damaged brain has somehow concocted is telling her that it was all just a ruse. That Jax had played her, had preyed on her, used her only weakness - her love for him and her children - to get what he wanted. Pretending to cut a deal to let her walk free, pretending she'd be free of the Club, free of Charming, and worst of all pretending to care about their boys, just to turn it all around in the end and have a Club member attack her in their own kitchen, their own home.

A loud sob escapes her throat when she sees that scenario play out in her head once again, and the pang she feels in her heart is nearly unbearable.

It is heart versus mind, her emotions the battlefield, blown to bits and pieces.

A knock on the door startles her out of her misery, and she quickly wipes the tears from her eyes and tries to straighten herself out, bracing herself for the worst when she watches as the door slowly opens and none other than Jax silently, almost hesitantly, walks inside.

Their eyes meet and a heavy silence fills the room, neither of them is saying a thing.

Jax just stares at her in awe, his eyes never leaving hers, while he closes the door behind him. He has
wished for this every day over the last three months. Every day he has walked into this room and has wished for nothing more than to find her beautiful eyes staring back into his like they doing were right now.

"Hi." Tara manages to get passed her lips, equally mesmerized and terrified by his presents as tears begin to pool in her red rimmed eyes again.

Jax swallows the lump that has formed in his throat at the fragile sounding tone of her beautiful voice, another something he'd wished to happen, to hear her voice again.

Finally he manages to reply with a simply "Hi" himself, before he quickly has to look away and raises his own hand to wipe the tears from his eyes that have appeared out of nowhere. His body slumps back against the closed door behind him in relief and for a split-second he feels almost lightheaded, thinking his legs were going to give out on him.

Tara is alive and awake and this nightmare is finally over. He feels like the weight of the world has finally been lifted off of his shoulders.

A sigh of relief escapes his lips as he finally finds the strength to look back at her again, before he steps towards her with a smile that expresses all the joy and love he feels rushing though him in this moment.

Tara doesn't know if it is simply the all too familiar pull she's always felt towards him, or if maybe it is the look of pure relief in his eyes as he approaches her, but whatever the reason is, she's decided - at least for the moment - to let her heart drown out the doubt in her head and dares to believe in his love for her.

He sits down on the edge of her bed, hesitating for a split-second whether to touch her or not, but the need to touch her is too strong and he raises his hands up to her face.

Both their eyes are filled with tears, Tara pretends not to notice the slight tremor in his hands when they make contact with her skin, but instead she closes her eyes and with a sigh gives into the warmth of his palms that are framing her face.

"Don't!" Jax demands with a tear strained voice.

Tara opens her eyes and looks somewhat puzzled back at his face, and for the first time since he's walked into the room she notices the dark circles under his eyes and the deep lines that seemed etched into his sweet face, making him seem much older than he actually is.

What happened to you, Jackson?

He gently brushes her hair back from her cheeks and explains, "Don't close your eyes, Tara." He shakes his head slightly at her. "I've been wishing for three goddamn months to walk in here and find you awake, with your eyes open again, ... so please don't close your eyes, babe."

At a loss for words, she simply nods her head and gives him the smallest of smiles which he returns with a smile of his own and leans forward to gently place a kiss against her forehead.

"Abel and Thomas ...?" Tara whispers.

But before she can even finish her question, Jax speaks up. "They're good."

His hands drop from her face and he reaches for both her hands instead, as he tries to make sense of it all, tries to figure out where and how to start. "They're on their way here." He nods firmly as he
adds what he knows she'd want to hear, "They've been safe. I've kept them away from the Club, or ...
Club business."

The tears of relief that once more fill Tara's eyes break his heart. No doubt does he love his boys, but
the love he feels for his sons can't possibly measure up to the love their mother holds for them. Abel
and Thomas are her world now, they are her number one priority and Jax knows he should consider
himself lucky if he still makes the list at all, let alone come in second.

As if on cue, there is a knock at the door and both Jax and Tara turn their heads just in time to see
Margaret slip into the room with Thomas in her arms and Abel by her side. But before the older
woman can even so much as utter a greeting, Abel's excited squeal of "Mommy" echoes off of the
small hospital room as he runs towards Tara's bed, and it naturally brings an instant smile to
everyone's face.

Tara smiles the biggest smile Jax has ever seen on her, and he quickly stands to give Abel room to
get to his mother. Jax reaches for Abel and lifts him onto the bed beside Tara.
"Careful, buddy." He reminds his son, as he watches him swing his arms around Tara's neck.

Tara's thankful that her arms seem to be cooperating when it matters, when she's hugging Abel back,
and relishes in the embrace. "I'm so glad you woke up, Mommy." His voice muffled against her
shoulder.

Tara's eyes look up at Jax, who is now holding Thomas and is walking over towards her, "Me too,
baby, me too."

X

Almost four months later

It's an unusually chilly morning in Charming and yet Jax finds himself glued to the spot in front of
Opie's grave. He silently studies the headstone of his friend, like he's done a million times since his
death.

He doesn't speak out loud, but he's got some things he wants to get off his chest. His mind goes back
to their last conversation in county.

I miss your old man.
Yeah, me, too.
Tara found some letters. Maureen Ashby stuffed them in my gear. They were love letters between
her and my dad. They made it pretty clear that JT wanted to get us out of guns, and Clay didn't want
it. JT predicted that Clay was gonna kill him - specifically that he would sabotage his bike. And he
was right.
Yeah, that's ... that's insane.
Tara told Piney, Ope. She was digging into him for truth. It was when we were inside. When the
cartel shit went down, Piney, he must've threatened Clay with the letters.
So, that's ... that's why Clay killed my old man?
Yeah.
Why didn't you let me kill him? WHY DIDN'T YOU LET ME KILL HIM?
There's a RICO case pending against the Club. Otto gave up Bobby.
How do you know?
Romeo is doing double time. He's cartel and CIA. He put a pin in RICO so we could keep the big
guns and drugs flowing. That pin gets pulled, we all go down.
And Clay doesn't know.
Just me and Bobby. Clay is the only one that Galan will sell big guns to. Romeo needs him alive.
That's it, Ope. That's all the truth. I had to make a choice, brother. Kill Clay or save the Club. You made the wrong choice!

Just moments before he died, Opie had accused Jax of making the wrong choice by choosing the Club and now Jax was here to tell him that he's finally heard him.

I get it now, Ope. It took me a long time to get here, brother, but I'm here. I'm done choosing the Club. I'm done saving the Club. It's time to save myself. I wish I had realized this sooner so I could've saved you, too.

Jax pulls his Sam Crow rings off of his fingers and places them atop Opie's headstone, before touching the stone one last time as if he was patting his old friend on the shoulder, "I'll see you later, Ope."

The gravel crunches under his shoes as he walks over to his old pickup truck and climbs inside.

He plays with his only remaining ring for a second, his wedding band, adjusting it on his finger thinking back on the day Tara had put it there, before he starts the engine and let's it roar once, before putting the truck in gear and finally leaves Ope, the Club and Charming behind him.

X

His lips are pressed on hers, exploring her mouth with his tongue and she'd be lying if it didn't stir up feelings in her that she'd long thought forgotten. The last four months have been all about her own recovery, and rebuilding the bond between her and her sons. Moving on with someone else, starting a new relationship ... or even just sex had quite literally been the last thing on Tara's mind.

But as his hands greedily roam over her body, searching for the zipper in the back of her black skirt, the need for sexual release is suddenly overshadowed by doubt. "Wait ... wait." She mutters against his lips as she gently tries to push him off of her.

He stops in an instant and looks down at her, his usually smooth forehead crunched up in concern, "It's okay if you changed your mind."

She can feel his obvious erection pressing into her thigh and yet admires him for not even attempting to talk her into something she's clearly not ready for just yet, "We don't have to do this, Tara."

She can't bring herself to do it, at least not while every time she closes her eyes and they kiss, Jax's face appears instead.

John pushes himself off of Tara and rolls onto his back.

Tara cuddles into his side, her head partially on his shoulder, partially on her pillow as she begins to button up her dark blue blouse with almost trembling hands. "I'm sorry." She apologizes.

He wraps an arm around her and pulls her closer to him, "Don't be sorry. You said you weren't ready and I pushed. You've got nothing to be sorry for."

Tara closes her eyes and sighs. Why did he have to be so nice, so ... so fucking perfect?

So nothing like ... him!

X

End Note: There's an obvious time jump of four months in here, but I promise it'll all get explained
and make more sense in the next chapters to come. Please leave a review if you like it or even if you didn't. I'm curious what you guys thought.
Chapter 7

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X

Jax merges onto I-5 North and once his truck has reached the speed limit, he sets the cruise control and sighs when he is finally able to lean back and truly relax in his seat.

If traffic remains steady as it is now, he'll be parked outside Tara's place in five hours at the latest.

That thought alone brings a big smile to his unshaven face, despite the fact that he isn't exactly sure where they stand relationship wise. But regardless of their relationship status, he never doubts for even a second that Tara will be anything but thrilled to know that he's finally broken loose from the Club, and would be a permanent part in Thomas' and Abel's life from here on out.

He thought that his emotions would be all over the place today. That somehow the sadness of leaving Charming, his mom, the Club, and with it his father's legacy would somehow overshadow the joy he feels over the possible future he can now truly envision with Tara. But no, it isn't ... it isn't like that at all. He can honestly say that he has no regrets about leaving it all behind him. His only true regret would be the fact that he couldn't leave with his family four months ago.

So sitting all alone in his truck, he is left to his thoughts and it doesn't matter how hard he tries not to, he simply can't help but think about everything that has happened since Tara woke up from her coma. And not for the first time, he wonders if the decisions he's made had been the right ones.

X

Flashback -Four months earlier

Gemma pulled her car into the rest stop and parked in front of the small diner. She checked her face in the rear view mirror, before she grabbed her purse and headed inside.

She had been on the road for a solid four hours, and simply needed a bathroom break, a hot cup of coffee, a bite to eat and noisy-rest-stop-chatter that would hopefully drown out the voices in her head, even if just for a few precious moments.

She seated herself in a booth, deliberately choosing the one that would give her a view of both points of entrance to the diner. Just so she could keep a lookout for Sons and Cops alike.

She had switched the license plates on her car as soon as the possibility had presented itself shortly after leaving Charming. It all had played out like some soap-opera cliché, with Tara waking up the way she did. Surely Tara had confided in Jax by now about what Gemma had done ... who knew, she might've even told the cops.

"Can I get you a coffee or something while you're looking over the menu, darlin?" The younger brunette waitress startled Gemma out of her thoughts.

"Um ... yeah, sure, a coffee." Gemma replied as she gave the woman a once over.
"You got it." She was just about to walk away, but then turned back towards Gemma once more and added, "I almost forgot to mention, our dinner special is meatloaf with mashed potatoes and green beans."

"Thanks." Gemma nodded.

She dug her cell phone out of her purse and stared at it for a long moment, wondering how many times Jax or the Club had tried to call her. It had continued to ring so many times as she was about to leave Charming, that she'd turned it off all together. But now as she looked at it, curiosity got the better of her and she decided to turn it back on.

"Jesus Christ" She mumbled to herself when she realize she had over fifteen missed calls and a handful of texts. Not all from Jax, but Chibs and Rat as well.

And then there was just one simple text from Nero. Short and sweet. 'call me, mama', was all it said, all lower cases.

Two months ago Nero had sold his half of the escort business to Marcus Alvarez, further strengthening the business relations between the Sons and the Mayans. He finally went through with his long time dream and bought his uncles farm in Norco for his son Lucius. With the rift between Jax and her, he had hoped to finally convince her to leave with him. But she just couldn't. She had been too busy holding on to the life she'd once loved, hoping to get it all back, to even really give leaving with Nero any real consideration.

They had talked on the phone a handful of times since then, but most of their conversations had been fruitless, because she simply held onto the hope that Jax would come around real soon, realize the error of his ways, let her wholeheartedly be a part of his life again and reunite her with her beloved grandchildren for good.

As she stared at the text, Gemma wondered for a moment if Nero already knew the ugly truth. Surely Nero was one of the first people Jax had reached out to in an effort to find her.

She didn't know what made her dial his number. Maybe it was the masochist in her or maybe she just wanted to hear his sweet, sweet voice one more time before she needed to disappear, by her own choice or at the hands of the Club.

But she wasn't surprised that he picked up on the second ring, "You're a wanted woman today, mama." He answered almost cheerfully ... too cheerfully to know the whole truth she quickly realized and it peaked her interest.

"Yeah, well, women love to be wanted." She replied teasingly as she nodded and mouthed a silent 'thank you' to the waitress, who'd placed a steaming cup of coffee in front of her.

"Where are you? Jax called me. I heard the good news, Tara is awake. With everything going on, I figured you'd be right there with your familia."

Gemma swallowed, and the thought that Jax might've had called Nero under false pretenses to smoke her out quickly crossed her mind. "I'm sure I'd be the last person Jax or Tara would want at their welcome-back-from-the-dead-party."

Nero remained silent for a moment. "I take it things haven't gotten any better between you and your boy."

Gemma sighed and stirred her coffee, "No, not really."
"Look, Gem, I'm not sure what's going on with you and Jax, but if Juice truly is the person that attacked his wife ... that's some heinous betrayal by a brother. And whether he sees it right now or not, he needs you. He'll need people on his side that he can trust."

Gemma felt like Nero had just twisted a knife in an already infected wound, but she'd be damned if she'd let it show. "So he told you about Juice?"

"Yeah, he did. And with Tara not remembering what happened, that's all he's got to go on right now."

Gemma's eyes widened in surprise at that, "What the hell are you talking about? What do you mean she doesn't remember?"

"You didn't know?" Nero couldn't believe he was the one to break the news to her. "She's got some sort of ... amnesia."

"Oh my god." Gemma exclaimed, suddenly wondering if this meant things could still turn around for her. "I-I didn't know. Jax and I haven't been talking much and ... I gotta go." She began to dig into her purse to retrieve a couple of dollars for her coffee and threw them onto the table.

"Call him, Gem, he wants to know what you saw in the hospital."

"I will. Thank you, Nero."

"Don't be a stranger."

Gemma gathered her things and got out of the booth, just as the waitress reappeared to take her order. "Sorry, sweetheart, but I've got to go." And she quickly slipped out the door.

Back in her car she took a deep breath and dialed Jax's number, who answered on the second ring.

X

Two weeks later

Jax pulled his truck into the driveway, shut off the engine and looked over at Tara whose eyes where fixated on the home they'd previously shared together. But when he saw the fearful expression on Tara's face his own face grimaced with concern for her. They sat in silence for a few minutes, before he said the only thing he could say, "We could sell it, look for a new place." He'd love nothing more than a fresh start with her.

She scoffed and glanced over at him, "Half-sack and Eli died in there ... I almost died in there. Who in their right mind would want to buy this place, when they can get one for the same price over in Charming Heights?" Her words came out sounding much harsher than she had intended them to be and she felt the need to apologize instantaneously. "I'm sorry, Jax." She shook her head. "I just ... So much has happened. I just feel like I don't belong here anymore. I'm not sure I belong anywhere."

"You belong with our sons." Jax replied without skipping a beat and reached for her hand and brought it up to his lips. "You belong with me! And it doesn't matter if it's in this house or another."

Tara smiled touched by his words but not convinced, "Now that I'm better and out of the hospital it's just a matter of time before Patterson sets a new court date."

"And we'll deal with that when that day comes, babe. I'm not backing out. I'll honor the deal I made with her and you'll be free and clear to raise our boys." Jax replied with conviction in his voice.
"And I'm so grateful to you for doing that for me. For everything you've done for me." She replied honestly.

Ally and Margaret had filled her in on everything Jax had done while she'd been lying in that hospital bed. She knew that Jax had moved the boys in with Margaret, had only allowed Gemma a handful of visits with the kids, kept them far away from Club business, yet he'd made sure that he saw them several times a week to spend time with them.

He'd paid her bills for her, continued to make payments on her student loans, and since she was no longer covered after St. Thomas had released her from her contract, Jax had made sure her health insurance never lapsed and remained current so they would continue to give her the best care possible. He'd even paid off the rest of her lawyer bills, Ally's and Mitch's. Her divorce lawyers. The irony in that was not lost on her.

Jax pulled the key from the ignition and looked at her, "Ready to do this?"

Tara took a deep breath, "Yes." And they both got out of the vehicle.

Jax unlocked the front door and pushed it open, stepping aside so that Tara could walk in. Tentatively she took two steps into the kitchen and Jax closed the front door behind them.

Neither of them said a word for a long moment, until Tara stepped further into the kitchen and leaned back against the kitchen counter.

Jax stepped up beside her and searched her face wondering if she remembered anything about that day. "Anything?" He questioned her out loud.

She folded her arms in front of herself and shook her head no, "I'm sorry, Jax. I-I ... I don't know if it's a good or a bad thing that I don't remember it."

An image of the bloody scene momentarily flashed before Jax's eyes and he couldn't help but wonder the same thing. He'd give anything to not remember seeing her like that.

In an attempt to lighten the mood Jax gestured to the pile of dirty dishes in the sink and on the kitchen counter, along with the piles of laundry in several baskets near the laundry room. "Sorry about the mess. Turns out I suck even more at housekeeping than you do."

Tara couldn't help but smile at that remark and playfully elbowed him in the side, "Yeah, I think even at my worst it never looked this bad."

Jax glanced at the clock on the microwave, "Well, we better get to it, if we want to make it to dinner with the boys on time."

She agreed and followed Jax back into the bedroom, where he had put the bags she'd packed for them all those months ago.

"The boy's stuff is already over at Margaret's place." He explained, "So this is mostly your stuff, babe."

"Okay." She nodded and reached for the first couple of bags and Jax did the same, helping her load them up in the back of his truck.

Jax stowed the bags away and Tara waited while he closed the tailgate of the pickup, and they both climbed into the cab of the truck at the same time.
He was about to start the truck when Tara reached for his arm, trying to get his full attention. "You understand why I'm doing this? Why I've decided to stay over at Margaret's place now that I'm out of the hospital, right?"

Jax turned towards her in his seat and nodded, "Yeah. I mean, I get it. You don't want to rip the kids out of the place they've called home for the last three months." He cleared his throat, "I'm not gonna lie and tell you that I don't want you to come home, but I get it, babe."

She turned her head away and looked out her window, taking in their small front yard before she let out the breath she was holding, then looked back at Jax. "I don't even know what that would look like anymore ... me coming home." Her chin quivered as she spoke and tears welled back up in her eyes. "The damage we've done to one another ... I'm not really sure we can come back from that, Jax."

"I love you, Tara." He replied without a doubt in his voice and leaned towards her so he could frame her face with his hands and she let him, his eyes never leaving hers, "And you love me. I don't think there's anything we can't come back from."

Jax leaned in further and kissed her, their first kiss since she awoke from her coma two weeks ago. First soft and tenderly, but when he realized that she wasn't pulling away from him the kiss quickly became more passionate and desperate. When the kiss let up, they sat in silence, forehead to forehead. Jax desperately wanted to believe that this was a new beginning for them, but he simply couldn't shake the sinking feeling that it was the end instead.

X

One week later

Jax pulled up to Margaret Murphy's house just in time to see Tara walk outside. With a surprised look on her face she stepped up to Jax's driver side window, "Something wrong with your bike?"

He shook his head no, "Figured you'd be more comfortable in the truck than on the back of the bike."

Tara raised her eyebrows and smiled an awkward smile, "You're here to pick me up?" She pointed back at her Ford in Margaret's driveway, "You didn't have to. I can -.

"We're going to the same place." Jax cut her off mid sentence and when Tara hesitated as if she still had to think about it, he added, "Come on, babe, just get in. I don't bite." and winked at her.

"Fine." She shrugged her shoulders clearly defeated and made a show of putting her car keys back into her purse, as she quickly walked around the front of his truck and climbed into the passenger seat beside him.

"Sometimes you do." She said sheepishly, while putting her seatbelt on.

Jax glanced over at her with a quizzical look, "Huh?"

"Bite. Sometimes you bite." She teased.

He grinned back at her, holding her gaze for just a second too long, before he replied. "If I remember correctly, you didn't mind."

She immediately regretted her words when she felt the heat rising to her cheeks, but still couldn't hold back the little laugh that escaped her throat, and neither could Jax.
As Jax pulled onto the main road to Stockton an awkward silence filled the cab of his truck. Tara watched him out of the corner of her eye as he seemed to focus all his attention to the road ahead.

"How's your head? Any more headaches?" Jax's question brought her out of her thoughts.

"It's better ... a lot better actually." She answered.

"Good." Jax replied, but then glanced over at her with concern etched in his voice nonetheless, "That's good, right?"

Tara nodded, "Yeah, it is."

Another five minutes passed before Tara decided to speak up, "Do you really think she'll accept the same deal you offered her months ago?"

Jax glanced at her for a long moment, before turning his attention back to the road. "I can't think of a reason why she wouldn't."

"The Club is up to speed on everything." He sighed audibly before he added, "If everything goes as planned, I'll be out in seven ... ten years max, babe." He shot her another look and saw the concern in her eyes. "I'm protected inside. We're on good terms with brown, black and yellow. But if today is the day, I still hope I'll get a couple more hours to spend with the boys ... and you." He gave her another glance.

She smiled almost shyly, "I hope so, too."

Tara thought about what he'd said and took in a ragged breath. "All of this still scares me." She confessed, and for the first time since he'd caught up with her in front of Margaret's house, he realized how nervous she seemed about their meeting with Patterson today. "What if she's done making deals? As horrible as it sounds, but that school shooting is old news by now. And the world believes the Irish that were found dead in that warehouse were the ones to blame. Not sure she'd have much to gain at this point by holding you to your deal. So what if she'll just send me to have my day in court?" Tara wiped at the tears that fell suddenly from her eyes, "I already lost three months ... I can't lose my babies again."

Jax reached for her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze, which in turn made Tara turn her head away, trying to hide the tears that mercilessly kept on coming.

"Hey ... hey!" Jax said with a demanding tone in his voice and looked back and forth between the road and Tara, who finally dared to look up at him through red rimmed eyes. He squeezed her hand once more, "I won't let that happen! Trust me, babe, it will all work out."

"I hope you're right." Tara replied and squeezed his hand in return.

They drove the rest of the way in silence.

X

District Attorney Tyne Patterson was seated stoically behind her desk when Jax and Tara were brought into her office.

"Dr. Knowles. Mr. Teller." She said in greeting and gestured towards the chairs across from her for them to take a seat.

"I have to say I'm glad to see you awake and no longer confined to a hospital bed, Dr. Knowles."
"I appreciate that." Tara smiled politely.

"I hope you're doing well with your recovery?"

Tara nodded, "As well as can be expected, I suppose."

"Good, good." Tyne nodded her head. "Well, let's get to it then. You both are probably wondering why I've set up this meeting with the two of you today?"

"I think we have a pretty good idea." Jax answered and dared a glance at Tara before turning his attention back to the DA.

"Hmmm." Tyne nodded yet again, before she folded her hands on her desk and paused for a long moment as if she was lost in thought.

"This job ..." she started, "... this line of business can truly take its toll on a person. The gangs, the guns, the violence, the blood ... not just men. I've seen my fair share of unspeakable violence involving women and children too. This job can take its toll on a soul. And it doesn't matter how much I tell myself that I'm fighting the good fight by upholding the law, there are still times that ... too many times that justice just doesn't seem served. It doesn't get served because the innocent are used as pawns. And no matter which side of the law you'll find yourself on, that's usually were our experiences are similar."

She focused her attention on Tara. "We use the innocent as pawns, all the while telling ourselves that it's in the name of the greater good. A sacrifice that had to be made ... in my case for the people, the county, the state, the country ..."

She looked up at Jax, "Or in your case for the good of the Club, the charter, the alliances that are necessary to survive this dog eat dog world."

Jax dared a glance at Tara, who sat frozen in place, before he turned his attention back to the DA.

"You can rest assured that today no innocent will have to carry the burden to ensure my Club's wellbeing. I'm here today to honor the agreement we've made over three months ago at the Barnes Motel, in exchange for Tara's freedom. Nothing's changed."

"Actually, Mr. Teller, some things did change." Tyne Patterson replied and sighed as she reached for a manila folder on her desk and opened it, looking through a stack of papers until she found the one she was looking for. "This is my revised statement concerning the Pamela Toric murder investigation. In it you'll find my recommendation as to whether or not you, Dr. Knowles, should be prosecuted for your involvement that ultimately led to her death. It states that after a thorough investigation I've come to the conclusion that you did not provide Mr. Delany with the murder weapon out of free will. Furthermore it explains that after talking with you on numerous occasions it became undoubtedly clear to me that you, Dr. Knowles, with your devout catholic upbringing brought the crucifix with you for personal use, and personal use only. Mr. Delany overpowered you, viciously attacked and murdered Pamela Toric right in front of you and surely would have made you his next victim had the staff not acted as quickly as they did."

"It's all here, signed and processed as of this morning." Tyne held the papers out to Tara so she could see for herself.

Tara looked at Jax, confusion written all over her face, before she reached for the papers and looked over them. It was all true. All charges against her had been dropped.

"I ... I don't understand." She stuttered as Jax took the papers from her to look over them himself.
Both looked utterly confused.

"Over three months ago Galen O'Shay, was found to be the gun source for the KG-9s."

She stood and gestured to the door, "You are free to go." She clarified. Looking from Tara to Jax, "Both of you."

"Just like that?" Jax questioned her as he stood up himself. He was just about to say more, when Tara intervened.

"Jax. Please, let's just go." Tara said and reached for his arm.

Jax looked at her and saw the desperation in her eyes, but he knew there had to be more to this.

"I have to say I am surprised that you're questioning my intentions." Tyne replied with a small amused smile on her face. "After all, an opportunity like this does not often come around."

"If something looks too good to be true, it usually is." Jax countered and he couldn't help himself but immediately let his mind wonder what the DA could possibly have on Sam Crow that his willingness to turn himself in was no longer a consideration.

Tyne Patterson cleared her throat and leaned against her desk, "Let's just say you surprised me, Mr. Teller. And there aren't many people that still have the ability to do just that. I've seen a lot ... In fact, I've seen too much."

She took in a deep breath and sighed, "A gang war was brewing, here and in Oakland. And after the attack on your wife, I predicted the Sons of Anarchy would lead the charge. But that didn't happen and from what I hear, you are to thank for that. I have four months left in this office. Four months before I move on to bigger and better things. So this is me extending an olive branch, Mr. Teller. Reuniting a husband and wife, a mother and her children without the constant loom of impending prosecution. An olive branch to a man who did the right thing for his family. And in hopes that the next four months will be as uneventful as the past four months have been."

X

Jax and Tara climbed back into the cab of his truck, still stunned of what had just happened.

"I can't believe it." Tara spoke up with glee in her voice and smiled broadly at Jax, who didn't look thrilled at all. "Why aren't you happy, Jax? How often, if ... if ever, would someone give you a chance like that?"

"Never." He answered without even having to think about it. He took a long drag from the cigarette he'd just lit, "It doesn't add up. There's got to be a catch. After everything that has happened, she simply doesn't strike me as a person that would let someone like me walk ... out of the goodness of her heart?" He scoffed at the thought. "I don't buy it. She's got to have something on the MC, something big that would make her bold enough to just let me walk out of there." Jax replied concerned, already wondering how he would be able to explain to the Club what had just happened.

Tara didn't have a responds to his obvious concern, but the smile from just a few moments ago had disappeared from her face.

Jax started the truck and lost in his own thoughts began the drive back to Margaret's place.

A couple silent minutes into the ride, Tara simply couldn't bite her tongue any longer and decided to speak her mind. "This is everything we've been hoping for, Jax. The charges against me are dropped,
no charges against you were filed. We're both in the clear now. Ever since I woke up, you've been
telling me that you were earning legit now. That you finally got the Club out of guns."

She reached for his arm to get his full attention for a second, "Don't you get it, Jax. We can leave
now ... together. We can take our boys and get the hell out of here."

"It's not that simple." Jax countered.

"It is that simple!" Tara shook her head in disgust, "Pull over." But when he didn't make a move to
comply, she actually screamed, "PULL OVER, JAX!" and reached for the steering wheel, and Jax
stomped on the breaks and quickly pulled the vehicle off of the road.

"Jesus Christ, Tara." Jax raised his voice, looking over at her bewilderment.

"Jesus Christ?" She mockingly repeated his outburst. With her eyes glued to his she demanded an
explanation, "That's all you've got to say? I want to raise the boys away from here, and I thought you
wanted that too."

He flicked his cigarette out of the window and rubbed both his hands over his weary face. "The
person who did this to you is still out there, Juice is still out there."

She scoffed, "That's what this is about? The DA lets us go ... lets you go because you prevented a
gang war, and didn't go and kill people on some revenge spree, yet somehow you see her pardon as
an insult? In your twisted mind you see that as a failure?"

"I DID FAIL." He yelled at her, losing his cool at last. His face once more contorted with self-
hatred, "I failed you."

Seeing the agony in his eyes, Tara reached for his hand. She shook her head, "You didn't, Jax. You
protected our sons, ... that's the most important thing you could've done and you did that!"

"Yeah." He answers in a sigh, because deep down he still didn't feel like that had been enough.

The fact that he had actually done the right thing for once, and protected his own flesh and blood
shouldn't have been something so noteworthy. It should've been the normal thing to do, what any
sane person would've done under the circumstances. So the fact that Tara considered what he'd done
with such awe and gratitude, made him feel even more like a failure ... like she hadn't expected for
him to step up and do the right thing, hence the 'awe and gratitude', and he didn't like it one bit.

X

Author's Note: Please leave a review if you liked it. I'm curious to hear what you all think. Thanks
for reading my story!
Chapter 8

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Jax pulls his truck into the only empty parking spot across the street from the apartment building. It has taken him much longer than he'd anticipated to get here. There had been an accident on the highway earlier, which caused a traffic jam that stretched on for several miles and hours. It wouldn't have been that big of a deal had he been on the back of his Harley, but in his truck he was stuck in the middle of it all, just like every other sucker around him.

Because of that the drive had been long and exhausting, but as he climbs out of his truck he suddenly feels a surge of energy at the mere thought of being reunited with Tara and his sons.

He drops his cigarette and grinds it into the ground while his eyes scan the row of parked cars and he sighs in relief when he notices Tara's Ford among them. Even though the building looks nothing like he'd pictured in his mind, there is no doubt any more that he had the right address.

Jax waits for a car to pass before he crosses the street, his feet picking up speed with every step. When he reaches the front door he tries to push it open, but isn't really surprised when the door won't budge. His eyes scan the illuminated numbers with their corresponding names next to their individual doorbells and he quickly finds hers.

206 - Knowles.

That's all it said. He knows he really has no right to be upset, but he simply can't help the way he feels. He'd envisioned - or more he had hoped - that her name plate would read Knowles-Teller, and seeing that she'd gone back to her maiden name stung more than he'd like to admit. But then again he couldn't really blame her. Could he?

His finger hover over the button right next to her name, but then he suddenly freezes and lets his hand drop back down to his side. He has envisioned this moment over and over and over on the long drive here, but now that the moment has finally come he wonders how it will all play out after everything that has happened between them. After the way he'd disappointed her again.

She had taken their boys and finally broke free of Charming, yet he had once more broken her heart when he decided to not leave alongside with them. He knew she didn't understand why he did what he did, but despite his decision to stay, they had parted ways on good terms.

He'd called her almost daily after she'd left. And in the beginning he tried to explain everything that was happening with the Club and why he had to stay behind a bit longer, but eventually she simply told him to stop. She'd told him that she simply wouldn't, she just couldn't be part of it anymore. The Club, the life, and his broken promises. If only she'd known the whole truth.

So he did what she'd begged him to do. He still called her whenever he could, but all their conversations revolved around the kids and their new life in Oregon. No more talk of Charming, Gemma or the Club.

Jax laughs inwardly at the irony of it all, he is after all the former president of Sam Crow for Christ
sake and yet here he is now, standing outside her apartment building, scared shitless to ring her
doorbell like the sorry excuse of a man he'd turned out to be.

He had to do better for her. He simply had to.
That last thought strengthens his resolve and without another second to spare he impatiently pushes
the button several times, and unconsciously bites his lower lip as he waits with bated breath for
what's to come.

"Yes?" Comes her tentative voice over the intercom system Jax hasn't even realized was there.
"Tara?" Jax replies in a questioning tone, even though he'd recognize her voice anywhere.
"Jax?" Tara answers clearly surprised.

His eyes light up at the sound of his name from her lips and the worried expression on his face is
quickly replaced by a joyous smile as he replies on an exhale. "Yeah, it's me, babe."

"H-How?" She stutters, clearly caught off guard, but followed just a second later by a "Hold on.",
before the door buzzes loudly, and allows Jax to finally step inside.

He takes two steps at a time up the staircase, turns the corner and stops short when he sees a door
open at the end of the hallway. A beat or two passes before the door opens all the way and a
delighted Abel comes running down the long corridor, yelling "Dadddddyyyy" as Jax scoops the boy
up in his arms.

Jax wraps his arms around his oldest son, closing his eyes to truly relish in the feeling of his tiny arms
wrapping around his neck in return.

"I missed you so much, Abel." Jax mumbles into the boys ear, before he opens his eyes, and finds
Tara standing awkwardly in her doorway, watching the scene play out in front of her.

"Hey." He says, trying to sound casual even though his heart is beating out of his chest as he steps
closer towards her with Abel still in his arms.

"Hey." She replies with a shy smile on her face that doesn't match the nervousness he can clearly see
in her eyes.

A door creaks open somewhere, catching both their attention, before Tara steps back and holding the
door open in a wordless invitation for Jax to step inside.

Jax quickly glances around and takes in the small living room when he hears the door click closed
behind him. Once again her place doesn't look anything like he'd imagined, nothing like he'd hoped.
He'd wanted so much better for her, for his sons. He still does.

Jax turns towards her with Abel still in his arms and is just about to say something, when Abel asks
the question that lingers on Tara's lips. "What are you doing here?"

Out of the mouth of babes!

Jax glances awkwardly from Tara to Abel, while he tries to find the right words that won't lead to a
hundred more by his inquisitive son. "I missed you guys, so I came to see you, and Thomas ..." his
eyes connect with Tara's across the small distance, "... and your mom."

After months of conversations with Abel through the phone and over Skype, Jax knows Abel won't
be satisfied with that answer alone, but before he can think of another thing to add, Abel has already
voiced his next question out loud, "How long are you staying?"

Another awkward glance is shared between a husband and wife, and he can feel Tara's eyes on him as he looks back at Abel before he replies. "How about forever, little man."

"Forever, Daddy?" Abel screeches and his eyes shine with excitement at the news, but when Jax dares a hopeful glance at Tara, he notices that she, unlike his son, doesn't seem thrilled at all.

Despite Tara's disapproving look, Jax answers his son with the same excitement in his voice, "Yeah, buddy, forever."

Tara is just about to say something when a cry echoes through the small apartment, and she quickly steps around him and Abel, and heads for one of the back bedrooms down the hall.

Jax can hear Tara talking to Thomas, trying to soothe him as she walks out into the living room with him.

Jax's eyes light up once more when Thomas stops his sleepy tantrum the instant his little eyes land on the over six feet tall figure standing by the front door.

"Let me give your brother a hug." He says as he lowers Abel to the ground and steps further into the room towards his second son, who's still holding onto his mother's hand for dear life.

"Thomas." He proudly exclaims at the realization that despite the long absence from his life, his youngest son not only recognizes him, but judging by the smile on his face and the outstretched arms, he's more than happy to see him. "Daddy."

Jax engulfs Thomas in his arms, savoring the feel of his boy reciprocating the gesture when his tiny arms wrap around Jax's neck with a big smile on his face!

Tara can't help but smile herself, watching her son and his father reunite.

"Tommy can talk now too." Abel interrupts the reunion.

Jax nods as his eyes scan over the boy in his arms, soaking in the changes he hasn't noticed in the pictures and videos that Tara has send him on a weekly basis. "I know. You're a big boy now, aren't you, Thomas? Your momma told me all about it."

It was true that Tara has kept him informed of every milestone in both his sons' lives. Yet to see for himself how much he'd grown even more in just a few months is still surprising to Jax. Thomas isn't a baby anymore now, at almost three years old, he is barely a toddler, the kid has grown into a boy.

Jax can't shake the pang in his heart at the thought of how much he has missed ... not just over the last couple of months, but even before that.

He'd missed so much when he'd been locked up and even after he got out, the Club life had consumed him so much that it hadn't left him with much time to spend with his kids. More times than not they had been in bed by the time he'd made it home.

As he pulls Thomas closer and places a kiss against his forehead, he makes a silent vow to never be an absent father again.

X

Tara's heeled boots click rhythmically on the pavement with every step she takes towards her car.
She fumbles with her car keys to unlock her door when her eyes fall on the truck parked on the other side of the street. She hesitates for a moment, glancing up at her own apartment window before she turns around on her heels and quickly crosses the street.

She awkwardly stares at the truck, before she leans in closer, trying to peek through the dirty glass of the bed topper.

The truck is in fact loaded with bags and boxes, and the thought begins to sink in that he has really meant what he'd told Abel earlier. Forever? Was he really going to stay for good?

Tara hurries back to her own car, quickly slides into the driver seat, and lowers her head defeated as the tears begin to well up in her eyes. This can't really be happening, can it?

For the first week ... who is she kidding, for the first month she'd hoped and dreamed that he'd show up. That he'd call and tell her he was on his way. That she'd come home from work and he'd be sitting there, waiting for her and begging her for forgiveness ... begging her for one more chance. And she'd fight the urge to run into his arms, make him grovel for a while, but eventually they'd end up ... together ... happily ever after.

She sits up straight and folds down the visor to look in the mirror. Stop it!

She scolds herself as she begins to wipe the mascara tears from her face and tries to make herself look presentable again.

She couldn't go back there, she just can't let herself become that vulnerable again, that weak again.

If he is really here to stay ... good for him ... at least her boys won't grow up without their father, but she just can't be that girl anymore. The one that is lonely and desperate, and forever taking him back, no matter what he's done or how much he's hurt her.

There was a time when she'd truly believed that Jax and her had the kind of love that could conquer it all, come what may. That they had been put in each other's life to make the other one whole, make the other one better. But time and pain and sorrow have proved her to be wrong. Their story isn't a fairytale at all ... hell, this is a drama ... a heartbreaking tragedy with no happy end in sight.

"Shit!" She curses when she realizes that she's been sitting in her parked car for the last ten minutes, so she's fumbling with her keys to finally start the engine.

She'd simply go get some Pizza for dinner, they'd watch a cartoon with the kids, and Jax could help her with getting the boys into bed ... and then ... well, then they'd have time to really talk, and she'd make it crystal clear to him that she has moved on. That he's too late.

She'll tell him how painful it all has been, and how she's finally put the pieces of her heart back together ... the pieces he'd broken, not just once but over and over again ... and she'll tell him that this is all she is willing to give of herself. She'll be the mom and he'll be the dad, and they will co-parent and raise these beautiful babies together from here on out, but that she won't be more than that to him ... no more than a co-parent.

She'll tell him that she's finally met someone she can see herself have a real future with and ... and that he's a good man and even though she hasn't introduced him to the boys yet, she knows he'll make a good father ... no, scratch that, Jax will hate that ... he'll make a good step-father ... yes, yes, a step-father.

And if he met someone ... or maybe he already has met someone ... she'll tell him that she is happy for him ... and that she'll hope he'll choose someone with their sons in mind ... because if some
woman is in his life, that woman would ultimately also be in their sons life and he'll need to make sure she ...

Tears well up once more as the images of him with Ima and Collette flit through her mind.

Furiously wiping her tears away again, she glances at the clock on her dashboard again and forced herself to regain control.

She won't let him do this. He can't just swoop back into her life as if the last year hasn't happened, as if he hasn't broken her heart and every promise he's ever made to her. She is finally free of that life and she'll be damned if she'll let him take her on that downward spiral all over again. No, she won't let him do this ... she won't let him make her feel like that love struck teenager again. She has made a life for herself here and even though it might not look like much to him, it is hers and she is happy ... and he can't just come back and ruin it all for her, for them. Hell no, she won't let him.

X

Author's Note: Please review if you liked it. Thank you.
Chapter 9

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"We got this, momma." Abel exclaims with conviction in his voice and reaches for his little brothers hand, tugging him along, "Come on, Tommy, its bath time."

Neither Jax nor Tara can hold back the chuckle as they watch their two butt naked boys disappear into the bathroom.

Just when Jax is about to turn and follow them, Tara speaks up, "I still use the sensitive skin stuff for Thomas, so -"

"Relax." Jax interrupts her before she can finish her sentence. "Like Abel said, we got this. You just ... go read a book or ... something, while I get these little monsters ready for bed."

"Okay." Tara says, folding her arms in front of herself, unsure of what to do without the nightly task.

Relax? Tara shakes her head to herself. She couldn't relax even if she tried, at least not with a million different things running through her mind. Jax's presence evokes so many feelings in her ... and the inner turmoil she is going through won't let her find any rest.

So instead she tries to busy herself. Picking up the kids' discarded clothes, putting away the leftover pizza, loading the dirty dishes in the dishwasher, wiping down the table and the chairs that are smeared with pizza sauce, the kitchen counter ... she even sweeps and mops the kitchen floor. None of those things stop her mind from working overtime though, but that doesn't stop her from trying.

Next Tara steps into the living room and begins picking up the kids' toys that are scattered around the floor. She is folding up the blanket they had all huddled under while watching Toy Story 2 earlier, when a loud screech followed by hearty laughter from Jax and both the boys catch her attention. She tosses the folded up blanket onto the armchair, before curiosity gets the better of her and she heads into the direction of the joyful noises.

She stops short right outside the ajar bathroom door and leans against the doorframe, listening in on the fun they seem to be having inside.

This she loves. This she misses more than she'd like to admit. The sound of Abel and Thomas laughing and playing with their father ... could there be anything more beautiful, anything more special?

The boys have missed Jax so much, and hearing the joy in her sons' voices now is reason enough for her to come to terms with his unexpected arrival.

Without letting her presence be known, she remains leaning against the bathroom doorframe and continues to listen in on Jax's conversation with his sons. It is so similar to the phone conversations Abel and Jax have been having, except it is face to face and Thomas is trying to get some words in here and there. The delight in both her boys voices as they interact with Jax could truly melt the coldest of hearts. She's sure of it, because it is melting hers after all.
She can feel tears well up in her eyes again, and she raises her hands to cover her mouth to keep herself from sobbing out loud. This is what it could be like if things had been different. This could've been their life if they had gotten out much sooner, ... before the lies and betrayals, the fake dead baby and the cheating, ... before all the heinous things they have done to each other.

But the damage is done and now it is too late for them. Isn't it?

Another round of giggles echoes through the small bathroom and catches her attention once more. She swallows the lump in her throat away, wipes the tears from her eyes and decides that she'll enjoy this small family reunion and make the best of it. So she puts on a brave face, takes in a deep breath and pushes the door open further.

"What's so funny in here?" She asks as she steps inside, carefully stepping around Jax who's kneeling in front of the bathtub. She sits down on the closed toiled seat lid and leans towards the tub.

"Isn't the water cold by now?" She asks before submerging her fingers into the soapy suds to check for herself. "I think it's time to get out ... you already look like tiny little prunes."

Abel laughs, "I'm not a prune." He smacks a bubble so hard with his flattened palm that water goes flying in every direction.

His big brother's antics make Thomas laugh out loud, and both Jax and Tara smirk, but know better than to encourage it.

"Hey, little man, I already told you once, if you flood the bathroom you're gonna have to dry it all up, and you'll miss the bedtime story." He tries to sound serious, yet his voice can't hide the lighthearted tone he's had with both the boys since he has arrived earlier.

Jax reaches inside the soapy water himself and adds, "And your mom's right, the water's cold, so it's time to get out and get ready for bed."

"Nooooooooooo." Protests Abel and even little Thomas shakes his head no before adding, "No, don't wanna go to bed."

"It's way passed your bedtime already." Tara smiles at him and grabs his Spiderman towel, spreading it open and without saying a word Jax picks Thomas up and hold him with outstretched arms over the tub to keep from getting the floor any wetter than it already is.

Tara wraps his towel around him, before taking her youngest son completely into her arm.

She quickly gets Thomas dried up and changed for bed, while Jax helps Abel to get ready.

"I want Dad to read to us." Abel says, demanding further attention from his father.

"Sure." Jax answers, but then shots a look at Tara, "If it's okay with your mom?"

"Of course." Tara answers, nodding her head.

Jax kneels down in front of the boys' bookcase alongside his sons and tries to find a book that both Thomas and Abel can agree on, while Tara watches once more from the sidelines, and she simply can't help but wonder just for the tiniest of moments if it would truly be the worst thing in the world, if she'd give him another chance.

But just as that small speckle of hope for them flits through her mind and heart, Jax stands and walks over to the bed with his sons. Not wanting to get Abel's bed wet, he peels off the wet white t-shirt
he's been wearing, and instantaneously Tara is brought back to the harsh reality she's momentarily tried to suppress, when the reaper on his back seems to mock her from across the room. And for the second time tonight she swallows the lump in her throat, before she closes the kids' room door and walks away.

X

Jax carefully carries Thomas to his toddler bed, trying his best not to wake the sleeping child in his arms.

"Daddy?" Abel speaks up from the other side of the room, but Jax raises a finger to his lips, wordlessly signaling the older boy to not wake his younger sibling.

After Thomas is securely tucked in, Jax turns his attention back to Abel who has patiently waited.

He pulls the blanket up to Abel's chest before brushing his fingers through the boy's short hair one more time, and leans in to whisper, "Sleep tight." Placing a soft kiss against Abel's forehead, he adds, "Don't let the bedbugs bite."

"Will you be here when I wake up?" Abel whispers back as Jax reaches for his discarded t-shirt.

He pauses for a moment, clutching the garment in his hands for a moment, unsure how to respond at first, but after thinking about it he decides to go with the simplest version of the truth. "Your mom and I haven't really talked about that yet, but even if I'm not staying the night, I promise you I won't be far and I'll come by again tomorrow to see you and your brother, okay?"

"Okay." Abel replies, seeming content with his father's answer as he closes his eyes and rolls onto his side to get more comfortable, before he whispers at last, "Maybe you can sleep in mom's bed, then she won't have any more nightmares, daddy."

Abel's last words stop Jax dead in his tracks, and for a moment it actually crosses his mind to press his son for more details, but he doesn't. Instead he turns off the lights, and slowly leaves their room instead.

Jax pauses right outside the boys' bedroom door, leaning against the doorjamb for just a second, exhaling deeply as he tries to come to terms with Abel's last words. The knowledge that Tara suffers from nightmares sadly adds just another layer of guilt to his already burdened conscience.

The list of things that burden him seem endless and if he is being honest with himself, he really has not the faintest idea of how he could fix what he has done ... to them, to her. All he knows is that he didn't come this far to throw the towel in, he didn't fight this hard to walk away from the Club to now walk away from her as well.

So Jax runs a hand over his newest tattoo on his chest, as if somehow the letters of her name can give him the strength he needs to face her, before he pulls his t-shirt back on over his head, and running a rough hand through his unruly long hair.

He takes a deep breath, swiping yet another hand down his face, tugging at the strands of his beard, steadying himself before he gathers his strength, turns and walks into the living room. Straight into the lion's den!

X

Tara sits at the kitchen table, nervously tapping her fingers to an imaginary beat in her head when Jax appears in the doorframe.
She takes in his somewhat disheveled appearance, clearly caused by their rambunctious little boys. If she wasn't so on edge at the moment, she would poke fun at him, probably even laugh at him a little.

"They are a handful." He states as he casually steps further into the room, takes a seat opposite of her and runs a hand through his long hair, pushing it further out of his face.

"Yeah, they are." She nods her head, easily agreeing with him.

A beat or two passes with neither of them saying a word. The silence awkward, and heavy.

But to Jax's surprise Tara is the first to speak up, "I kind of don't know what to say here, Jax?"

Jax leans forward and rests his arms on the table, the uncertain expression on his face matches Tara's, "I know, babe, I know."

Another awkward silence.

"Do you want a drink?" Tara suddenly asks as she gets out of her chair, '"Cause I sure could use one."

Jax flashes her the sweetest of smiles, "Yeah, sure." When she turns away from him it is the first time he gets to really drink in the image of her since he's gotten here earlier today.

She looks incredible. She might've lost a little bit of weight, he notes, but thankfully not too much. The way her backside fills out those jeans makes his fingers itch to slide his hands around her curves, and it takes everything he has to not follow through on that thought..

Tara stands on her tiptoes and opens the cabinet above the stove vent, but when Jax realizes she can't reach the bottle he quickly gets out of his chair, steps up behind her and reaches for it himself.

Brushing against her as he invades her space, one of his hands resting on her waist - not even intentionally but more out of habit - but it doesn't go unnoticed by him just how quickly Tara moves to the side and out of his grasp. Another thing that hasn't gone unnoticed is his missing rings on her hand, yet he still holds out hope that she's just forgotten to put them back on after work. Time will tell.

He glances at the label of the already half empty bottle of whiskey before handing it over to her, and she mumbles a quiet "Thanks" to him, before she begins pouring him and herself a drink.

Both raise their glass to their lips and Jax watches her take that first gulp. In the past she'd always been a bit of a lightweight when it came to hard liquor like this, but as his eyes fall on the half empty bottle once more he wonders if she's build up a tolerance without him.

He can't shake how either scenario concerns him ... the thought of Tara drinking this much whiskey by herself, or Tara having someone over here with her to get drunk with.

Another big sip and Jax decides that he's had enough liquid courage, not wanting to waste another minute tiptoeing around the subject. He puts his glass down on the kitchen counter behind him, and blurts the words out that he's been dying to say since the moment he has arrived, "I'm out, babe. I'm done with Sam Crow."

But Tara scoffs and shakes her head, pausing for effect, "I think I've lost count how many times I've heard you say that to me." before she takes another sip from her drink.

Registering the disbelieve in her voice, he feels the need to not only reassure her, but also to defend himself, "It's not like those times before, Tara. This time it's a done deal. I sold the house ... sold my
share of T-M to Chibs and Bobby and my share of Diosa to the rest of the Club."

He steps right in front of her, not giving her a chance to avoid his penetrating gaze he lifts her defiant chin up to face him. He needs her to understand that he is serious, "I. Am. Done. With. Sam. Crow."

Tara dares to hold his gaze for as long as she can, before tears begin to well up in her eyes. She wipes at them and finally looks away, "And now what?"

"Now we ... we start over?" He says so quietly, and even he can't deny just how ridiculous that notion sounds as soon as the words have left his lips. He knows there's much more to it than that, knows it won't be that easy.

"Right. And we live happily ever after." She replies flippantly with venom and sarcasm in her voice, as she turns back around to give herself a much needed refill.

Jax watches as she raises her filled glass back to her lips again, taking another big gulp, and he's weighing his next words in his mind before saying them out loud, "Look, babe. I'm not delusional. I know that it's not going to be easy. That you and I have a lot to work out. And I didn't show up here expecting you to just let me back into your heart or ... or your bed for that matter, but ... but for the first time we actually have a god damn chance at this."

"We've had a chance fourteen years ago, Jax. We've always had a chance but you didn't take it ... and now ..." She quiets down, "Now we're broken beyond repair."

"Don't say that, Tara." Jax says her name with so much desperation in his voice that it almost breaks her heart all over again. He steps in front of her and frames her face in his hands trying to gain her full attention, "I love you. There's never been a moment when that hasn't been true. And it's always going to be true!"

Tara sobs out loud at his words, because in her mind, in her heart, his words were doing the opposite of what he'd intended them to be, they weren't comforting at all, "The sad thing is that I believe you, but don't you see that is what makes everything that has happened so much worse? That you could do the things you've done to me ... to someone you say you love?" Tears fall freely from her eyes now.

Her words resonate with him and he turns away from her, raising his hands to his face to wipe his own tears away. A deep desperate sigh escapes his lungs as he fights to get his own emotions back under control. He doesn't have an answer for her. He doesn't know why he'd done what he'd done. He knows there is no way he would ever be able to justify his mistakes anymore.

Back when Abel was taken, he'd tried everything he could possibly think of to push her away. He'd yelled and argued and cheated. It broke his own heart doing the things he'd done to her, but in his mind it was all justified because he wanted her out of the life, he wanted something better for her, away from him and the Club ... he didn't want her to end up like Donna.

But now ... after she had taken him back despite all the shit he'd put her through, after waiting for him during his fourteen months stint in Stockton, her hand getting smashed to shreds and getting marched out of their home late at night in goddamn handcuffs ... after all that, he'd gone and betrayed her. And for what?

What was it about Colette that made him risk losing her? He doesn't know the answer himself. And if he couldn't understand it, how or why in the world would she? All he can think to do now is to beg for her forgiveness.
"I fucked up, babe." He turns back around to face her with a pleading look in his red rimmed eyes, "I know how much I've hurt you, and if I could take it all back I would, but I can't." He shakes his head. "All I can do is promise you that it will never happen again. I will never hurt you again."

Tara sighs, wiping the remnants of her tears from her face before she blurts out, "I saw you, ... you know?"

His forehead creases and his eyes narrow in confusion, "Saw me? Saw me where?"

"With her." Tara states simply and fight the urge to cry again.

Jax looks at her with confusion written all over his face. For a moment he wonders if she is talking about the day she'd walked in on Colette and him.

Seeing the confusion in his eyes, Tara explains, "I stopped by Diosa ... on the day I was leaving Charming, shortly after we said our goodbye's over at Margaret's house."

She'd come to Diosa? "What the hell are you talking about? Why were you at Diosa?" He questions her, suddenly a sickening feeling forming in his stomach as he awaits her answer.

Tara folds her arms in front of herself, the pitch of her voice raising again as she fights so hard not to cry, "I was looking for you."

He can feel his heart constrict painfully in his chest and he wonders for a moment if this is what a heart attack feels like, but then the sensation vanishes as quickly as it appeared, allowing him to breathe.

"You were looking for me?" He manages to croak out a response. "Looking for me why?" He can't help but wonder if she had shown up to tell him that she was going to stay, and somehow he'd managed to fuck that up as well.

Tara lowers her gaze to the linoleum tiles of her kitchen floor, embarrassed and ashamed of how stupid she had been to go back there looking for him. "I came to tell you that I'd wait for you. I wanted to tell you in person that we still had a chance."

She sobs, "But then I saw you walk her out the front door, holding her hand ... I saw you kiss her." Tara wipes at the tears the memory brings to her eyes. "Clearly I didn't learn my lesson from the last time when I showed up at one of your whorehouses unannounced."

No, no, no, no! Jax wants to scream. Cold sweat gathering on his skin as fear prickles across his entire being.

Jax steps towards her now, a look of panic in his eyes she can't recall ever seeing before, "Look, babe, I don't know what you think you saw, but nothing happened between me and her. I swear."

"I saw you kiss." Tara throws back at him, trying her best not to raise her voice since the boys are sleeping, even though she wants to scream it at him.

Jax shakes his head and pleads with her, "She might've kissed me ... I don't know, I don't remember, but I swear that nothing else was going on between me and her ... between me and anyone for that matter."

He steps even closer to her, grabbing her by her shoulders, maybe a little too rough and shakes her ever so slightly as if that will help her to see things his way, see that he isn't lying ... not this time, "I haven't been with anyone since that day at the motel ... with you." He searches her eyes for a sign
that she believes him, but sadly finds nothing but doubt reflecting back at him. He can't blame her though. "I swear, Tara, I swear on the life of our sons. You are the last person I've been with."

Tara gazes in his eyes, trying to see if he is telling the truth ... but if she is honest with herself, she isn't sure if she could even tell anymore. Has it all just been a big misunderstanding?

Her mind is telling her no, it is telling her that she saw what she saw, but her heart is pulling her a different way. She lowers her head and closes her eyes in hurt and confusion just as Jax pulls her into his arms. She is too weak, too exhausted to even try to fight him off.

She can feel his heart beating fast against her ear as he cradles her head against his broad chest, "What you saw ... it wasn't what you think it was. You came to tell me that you'd wait for me." He repeats her sentiment, "And now I'm here."

His last words bring yet more tears to form in her eyes, "But I didn't ... wait."

She pushes gently against his chest, enough so she can look up into his eyes, "I met someone."

Jax lets go off her and takes a step back, feeling like he'd just been punched, shaking his head no, wishing that'll make her words untrue. "What do you mean?" He asks as if he couldn't have possibly heard her say what she had just said.

"I'm sorry, Jax." Tara sobs when she sees the disbelief in his eyes, "I thought you were with her ... You kept making all these excuses why you couldn't be here with us, ... I thought we were over."

Jax turns around unable to look at her as his jaw clenches with anger. He realizes the hypocrisy of it all, but at the moment that is no comfort to his heart or his ego. With his back still towards her he hisses into the room, "You're still my wife. We are still married."

His words, and the disdain with which he spoke them, cuts her like a knife and her sadness is quickly replaced with anger. Is he really that self-centered that he can't see how this is nothing like what he'd done to her in the past?

As heartbreaking as everything turns out to be, she will not stand here and defend the consequences caused by his actions. He caused this!

"The only reason we're not divorced is so the DA can't force me to testify against you." She reminds him why the divorce papers were never filed with the court.

Jax turns back around to face her, but doesn't even acknowledge what she's said. "Who is he?"

"Why does it matter?" Tara says with a heaviness to her voice that signals that all the fight has left her body. She is just too emotionally drained to go yet another round with him. Her mind aches, and so does her heart.

"It matters to me." Jax replies, suddenly with a much softer tone to his voice than mere seconds ago.

She shakes her head, signaling him the denial of an answer. She can't do this anymore, not tonight, "It's been a long day for me, Jax ... and I'm sure it's been a long day for you too."

Jax moves closer again, palming her weary face in his hands and to his surprise she lets him, "You and me, we're not over. Not by a long shot."

Tara's chin quivers, but she doesn't reply. She doesn't know what to say. She is feeling more confused than she's ever been.
She needs time to think ... weigh her heart against her mind. She's seen too much, been through too much with him to run back into his arms as if nothing has happened. She's made that mistake in the past and look where it got her. This time, she won't be influenced by pregnancy hormones or the fear of almost having lost Abel, ...no, this time it would be different. This time he'd have to earn her trust back, because she is no longer willing to give it so easily. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.

"Do you have a place to stay tonight?" Tara asks him out of nowhere with her head held high again, completely taking the wind out of his sail with her change of subject.

Jax shakes his head. "No, but I can probably find a hotel or motel somewhere in town." She can practically hear the defeat in his voice.

"I'll find you a pillow and some blankets. You can have the couch." She says as she pushes past him and heads into the living room.

"I appreciate that." Jax answers, and follows after her. Realizing there won't be any more talking this out with her tonight.

X

Jax tosses and turns on the couch, unable to let his mind rest, unable to stop himself from picturing her with some faceless guy. Kissing her, touching her, loving her. Doing all of the things he'd longs to do with her ... do to her. It is torture and he wonders for the first time if this is what it has been like for her. If so than he probably deserves feeling the way that he does.

But regardless how bad it hurts, he's meant everything he's said.

He's fought tooth and nail to keep Sam Crow alive ... keep the Club from getting torn apart by greed or the law.

And now as he is lying in the darkness of Tara's living room, he vows to himself that he'll fight even harder to save his marriage. Something he should've done a lot sooner. He'll fight for her, for them.

He doesn't know how just yet, but he'll find a way to earn her trust again, earn her love again. And he won't stop until he'd win her back.

That other guy. That faceless guy that is fucking her in his mind ... he doesn't stand a goddamn chance.

He's seen nothing like me yet!

X

Author's Note: Please leave me a comment or a review with your thoughts, I'm curious to see who's side most of you are on. Tara or Jax?
Chapter 10

Tara stands barefoot in the kitchen, her grey knee-length robe wrapped tightly around her, as she pulls two large coffee mugs out of the kitchen cabinet above her coffeemaker.

Jax watches her from his position at the kitchen table, he tries not to, but it's been too damn long since they've been intimate and he simply can't keep himself from wondering what she could possibly be wearing underneath the thin material of her robe. Was it a snug pair of pajama shorts and a tank top that she often wore to bed? Or maybe just a bra and panties?

God, how he hates this. Hates that she is so near in the physical sense, yet worlds away from her in her mind and heart.

He doesn't take his eyes off of her as she slowly pours herself and him a cup of coffee. She adds one teaspoon of sugar to her cup and stirs it, before she adds four heaping teaspoons to his cup and stirs that as well. The old familiar task brings a small smile to her face.

Jax is such an oddity of a man. He barely ate any sweets, never looked twice at a piece of pie or chocolate, yet he'd add an insane amount of sugar to his coffee, and could eat a plate full of chocolate chip cookies within a matter of minutes. Was he a contradiction, or just picky?

She turns around and walks the couple of steps over to the table, placing the steaming cup of coffee with the spoon still in the cup in front of Jax, who looks appreciatively up at her and mumbles a "thanks, babe" in her direction.

As she lets her eyes roam across his face for a moment, she can't help but notice the tired expression that is surely matching hers, clearly he's gotten about as much sleep as she had last night.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up." She begins to explain as she takes a seat herself in the chair opposite his. With both elbows resting on the table she slowly raises her steaming cup to her lips with both hands, carefully taking a very small sip to test the temperature. "The only moments I get to myself are early in the morning before the boys wake up, or late at night after they go to bed."

"Don't worry about it." Jax replies, and stirs his coffee some more before he takes a small sip as well. "You didn't wake me, babe, I was already up."

An awkward silence fills the room for several minutes as both just quietly sip their coffee, seemingly lost in their own thoughts, when Jax finally speaks up. "Do you work today?"

Tara nods, "Yeah, I do. Once a month I have to pull ER shifts on weekends."

"Your neighbor watches the boys if you gotta work on weekends, right?" He asks, more to refresh his memory of what Tara has told him in a phone conversation shortly after she'd started her new job here.
She nods again, "Yeah, weekends, night shifts, last minute surgeries. Misses Eloise Young, ... when you come up the stairs, the second door on the right is her place. She's a sweet old lady and she's truly been a lifesaver."

Tara smiles warmly at the thought of the older woman who'd offered her babysitting services and friendship when Tara had first moved into the building. "Honestly, I don't know what I would've done without her here to help out."

Another sip from her drink, "If you want to spend time with the boys though, I can tell her that I won't need-"

"No." Jax interrupts her before she gets to finish her sentence, "I've got some job interviews lined up today, not sure how long that's going to take ... but if I get done while you're still at work, I go get the boys from her, if that's alright?"

Tara nods her agreement in silence, but the expression on her face tells Jax something is definitely bothering her and he can't bite his tongue for long. "What?" he asks at last.

She sighs and avoids his eyes for a brief moment clearly mulling something over in her mind, before she looks back up and is meeting his questioning stare head on, "Forty-three minutes." She states rather bluntly, as if that number is supposed to mean something to him.

But Jax just looks back at her confused, and repeats, "What?"

"I checked my phone last night and that's how long you talked to Abel and Thomas on Thursday afternoon. Forty-three minutes and not once did you think to ask either one of our sons to put me on the phone, to let me know you were coming here the very next day?" She explains with obvious accusation in her voice. "But you did set up job interviews."

"It's not like that." Jax starts, quickly trying to think on how to explain this to her as he runs a hand through his hair as if that movement would buy himself some time. "Look, I didn't want to say anything and then at the last minute something would come up and I'd have to stay longer. I didn't want to make another promise to you that I wasn't sure I could keep." He explains truthfully, and searches her face for confirmation that she understood.

The look in her eyes softens up on hearing his honest reply, "Okay, I get it."

Moments later, Tara pushes her chair back and gets up, stepping up to one of her kitchen drawers and rifles through it until she finally finds what she is looking for.

She dangles two small chrome colored keys in her hand before putting them on the table in front of Jax, a kind yet cautious smile on her face when she says. "Thought you might need these until you find a place of your own." Grabbing her mug of the table she turns, but Jax catches her arm just as she is passing by him, "Tara."

Tara stops and looks at him, and Jax can see the almost terrified expression that flashes through her eyes, and it becomes clear to him right then, that it would do more harm than good if he were to try to continue last night's conversation right now.

He wants, no, he needs to know more about the guy she has been seeing. The not knowing kept him tossing and turning all night and he has a feeling it would continue to drive him insane for the rest of the day as well.

He also wants to forbid her from seeing him again. But as soon as that thought crosses his mind he quickly realizes that saying so our loud would almost be a surefire way to push her further into the
other man's arms. So he bites his tongue.

Instead he lets the hand on her forearm slide down to take her hand, gently raising it to his lips to press a quick kiss against it like he's done a million times before. The feel of her soft skin welcoming and familiar when he meets her eyes and smiles as he thanks her for her hospitality instead. "Thank you."

Tara closes her eyes for a moment, seemingly relieved, before she nods back at him, "Don't mention it. Good luck on the job hunt today." And with that she pulls her hand out of his, leaving him sitting at the table alone, and walks away before he can see the tears that are beginning to well up in her eyes at his gentle gesture.

X

Tara quickly closes the bathroom door behind her and locks it. Normally she'd leave the door wide open when she got in the shower in the mornings, so she'd be able to hear the boys if they got up, but with Jax in the apartment she just doesn't feel comfortable doing that. She is afraid that he could somehow see it as an invite to join her, and that thought alone brings heat to her cheeks, even though she truly wishes it wouldn't.

After putting her coffee down by the sink, she leans back against the closed bathroom door, rubbing the back of her hand where Jax had just kissed her with her other hand. Hating the fact that such a simple and innocent gesture from him can still cause such a primal physical attraction in her. Not only was she doomed to love him forever, but also lust after him as well.

She tries to shake that thought and proceeds to turn the water on in the shower, knowing it will take a minute or two to warm up, and takes a seat on the edge of the bathtub, and let her mind wander once more.

It just doesn't fair that after all this time, after all they've been through, after all he's done to her, he still manages to not only get into her head but under her skin so easily, with just a stupid touch to her hand.

She had done a lot of thinking last night, unable to sleep as tears had streamed down her face, knowing he was right there just on the other side of her bedroom door. And she's come to realize that that despite it all, despite everything they have done to each other she still loves him deeply, but just because she loves him, doesn't mean they were supposed to be together. Maybe they should've never been together to begin with?

She shakes her head at that, denying that last thought to be the truth, because if that were true she wouldn't have those beautiful babies sleeping in the very next room, and at this point in her life she simply doesn't know who she'd be without them.

If it wasn't for her sons she probably would've lost the will to live some time ago. Protecting them and being a good mother has given her more life purpose than any medical school diploma ever could.

X

Jax sits with a clipboard in his lap and a pen in his hand, trying his best to concentrate and fill out all the necessary information on the job application. His hands are steady, his writing legible, but he knows that won't help his cause much in the end.

He's already done this at seven - yes, seven - different repair shops across town, yet instead of the
scheduled interview with the manager, it had always ended with a "We'll call you if we're hiring", even though some had an 'Now hiring' sign right in their front window.

He looks up from the papers in front of him and gives the place a once over. This shop wasn't some kind of chain repair shop like most of the places he'd applied for a job with today. And he can't help but think that this place reminds him of T-M somehow. He twists at the waist, glancing behind him through the window overlooking the shop, noticing that most of the mechanics were tatted up as well, and once more he feels like he could actually fit in here if given the chance.

Jax stares down at the application once more, and finds himself rereading the question about crimes and convictions for the hundredth time. He hasn't lied on the other applications, there simply wouldn't have been a point, because he knows the moment they'd run a background check on him, all his shit would come to light, so might as well bite the bullet and be upfront about it.

Yet as he stares at the papers, he can't help but wonder who in their right mind would actually hire someone like him? Hell, he really couldn't blame them if they wouldn't.

Here, away from Charming, he was no one, a nobody, just a guy with a record. Nobody here gave a shit that he used to be the president of Sam Crow. All people saw when they looked at his application, when they looked at him, was a career criminal. Scum of the earth!

However, Jax has no time to feel sorry for himself, no time to wallow in self-pity over things that he can't change. All he knows is that if he doesn't find a job soon, everything he's done, all the sacrifices he's made for Tara to start over here, for him to get here to join her, it will all have been for nothing, it would all unravel.

Lowen had worked her ass off, getting him a court date to get permission to move out of state while he was technically still on federal release. However he had to comply with the imposed judgment, which, among other things, meant he needed to find a steady job as soon as possible.

So no job meant his ass would get shipped back to Charming, which in turn meant he'd break her heart once again, and he just couldn't let that happen.

Jax chews on the pen for a moment in indecision, getting more frustrated by the second, before he finally puts the pen to paper and once more confesses all the sins he's been convicted of.

When he's done, he looks up from the paper and gives the young woman behind the desk a once over as well. She has a certain timeless beauty about her, with her pale yet perfect complexion and the dark almost black hair, she reminds him of a movie star from the fifties, and if he had to guess he'd say she was a couple years younger than him. That could work in his favor.

Jax waits patiently for her to get off of the phone with a customer, before he stands and approaches her desk.

"Done?" She asks with a cheery tone to her voice and holds out her hand to take the clipboard from him.

"Yeah." Jax replies, handing it over to her and remains standing as she looks over each page to make sure he hasn't missed anything vital, when her eyes linger longer on that last dreadful page, just like he had predicted.

He can practically see the expression on her face change as she reads over his crimes, and having done this same dance seven times already in the last couple of hours, he pretty much knows that if he doesn't speak the fuck up, this wouldn't end any different than before.
"Look, darlin'..." He turns on the Teller charm to the max, before he reaches for her hand to gain her full attention when he adds, "If I could just-

"You're barking up the wrong tree here, Sweetie." She interrupts him before he can even start his sentence as she pulls her hand out of his and chuckles out loud.

"You see that girl right there?" She points a manicured finger behind him in the direction of the shop, turning his attention to the only female mechanic who works there. "You see, I'm with her."

Jax can't help but chuckle himself, a bit embarrassed to say the least, "Well, I guess I can't compete with that."

"Yeah, you can't." The young brunette smirks playfully up at him, "She's working with a whole different set of tools than you." The innuendo obvious in her tone of voice, even without the smirk that's accompanying her words.

Contemplating his options for a moment and since charming his way into an interview was out of the question now, he decides to go with the truth instead. "Look, the thing is ... I'm trying to start over. My wife and my boys live here in town, and I'm trying to make things right with them by earning straight. So I need a job ... any job. I'll take anything. I'll restock parts. Sweep up after closing, ... hell, I'll clean the god damn johns for you, if that'll get me a foot in the door, but I just need someone to give me a break. Please."

He hadn't intended to sound this desperate, but if he was being honest with himself he is just that. Grunt work isn't new to him, he'd done it when Clay and Gemma had given him his first job at T-M, so he had no problem if he'd have to start from the bottom up again as long as it meant he'd be able to stay in Oregon with his family.

She looks him over, and sighs defeated, before she glances back at his application once more, "It says here that you were part owner of a repair shop in Charming, California. Did you bring any documents to prove that? Any references?"

Jax nods and holds up the manila envelope he'd brought along, "I've got everything right here."

"Alright, just sit and give me a minute. I'll see what I can do."

"Great, thanks." He says and sits back down across from her desk, watching her disappear into one of the rooms behind her.

Jax nervously pops his knuckles, and practically jumps out of his chair the moment the door opens and she comes back in to view.

She smiles at him and nods, clearly pleased with herself. "You can go in."

"Thank you." Jax smiles gratefully at her as he rounds her desk.

"Don't thank me yet, you'll still have to convince him." She replies, but then leans in closer as he is just about to walk past her, whispering in his ear."Do not mention football, and admire his die-cast car collection. Good luck, Sweetie."

X

Tara takes a seat on one of the park benches in front of the main entrance to the hospital. The E.R. has been packed today, she's been busy with all kinds of things, from chest pains to broken bones and simple runny noses. She can honestly say she's earned her lunch break today.
Her stomach growls loudly as she unpacks her cold cuts sandwich and takes a hearty bite. She digs her phone out of her bag with her free hand, glancing at the screen, and realizes she's had several missed calls from John.

She sighs, unsure for a moment if she should give him a call back or not.

Obviously he knows of Jax, but that doesn't make it any easier to explain that he is here now, and not just to visit, but supposedly to stay for good.

John is a good man, there seems to be not a mean bone in his body, but Tara still wonders how he'll take the news that her ex, who is legally still her husband, is staying on her couch for the time being. Not to mention that Jax is hell-bent on wanting to give their relationship another try.

After thinking about it for a moment, she decides to just get it over with and dials his number, not at all surprised that he answers on the second ring, "Hey."

"Hey." She replies. "Sorry I missed your calls, I'm working the ER today, and had my phone in my bag."

"I figured. Busy day?"

"Yeah." Tara answers. "No mayor trauma's so far though, but still crazy busy. So, what's up?"

"So I was thinking of you today when I saw this quaint little dinner, some old mom and pop place. The whole place looks like something straight out of 'happy days', jukebox and all. Maybe next date night we could check it out, and catch a movie afterwards if Misses Ellie can watch your boys. What do you think?"

"Sure." She nods even though he obviously can't see her through the phone. She pauses for a moment, hesitating one last time before she decides to follow through and clear the air. "Listen, there's something I need to tell you."

"Sounds serious." He tries to joke and she can practically hear the smile in his voice, but when Tara doesn't reciprocate the joke, doesn't chuckle, he wonders out loud, "Everything okay?"

With the phone wedged between her shoulder and ear, she puts the sandwich in her hand back down on the wax paper it had been wrapped in, packing it away again, because she has suddenly lost her appetite, knowing full well that the news she's about to share will change things for them.

Jax hasn't kept promises in the past, and even Tara has come to accept that she and her boys were truly on their own. So telling John that Jax is here, is simply not a scenario she'd ever pictured happening in her head. And even though she'd met and known John since the first week she'd arrived here, they've only just recently started dating. Actual dates, where he'd pick her up and they'd go do something fun together, and talk ... yeah, they talked a lot.

The best way to get over someone, is to get under someone new! Her friend Christy had spouted this unwelcomed advice at her one afternoon as she yet again poured her heart out about Jax, after a phone call with him.

So yes, on one of those date nights John and her had ended up all over each other in his apartment, but before it went too far she put a stop to it. She stopped because every time she closed her eyes and kissed John, all she saw was Jax, kissing Jax in the back of her mind.

And every time John's hands roamed over her curves, she couldn't help but picture Jax's hands on her instead. It broke her goddamn heart!
Truth be told, she could've so easily gone through with it while a slew of images of her and Jax's sexual encounters played on repeat in the back of her mind, but it just wouldn't have been fair to John.

And she kept hearing Jax's words to her from what seemed like a million years ago now, when he explained how he'd never gotten over her. 'When I'm inside someone, there's only one face I see!'

The sad part about those words of his, though, was the fact that they'd also held true for her. During her and Jax's decade of separation, she'd been with other men, but no matter how hard she had tried to be 'in the moment' with them, or how hard they tried to get her off, she only ever got there when she closed her eyes and pretended she was with Jax instead.

So now, she swore to herself she wouldn't go down that same rabbit hole yet again, she wouldn't do that again. She wouldn't do what she'd done in the past, and use John's body like that, while fantasizing about her bad ass biker husband.

John is a good man, and it simply wouldn't be fair to him. He deserved better than that.

To give John even further credit, he didn't push her ... at all, which was sweet and something Tara had never experienced in any other relationship before, with the exception of maybe Jax.

So she held off on sex with John, penciled in more visits with her psychiatrist instead, and hoped that with time she'd be able to close her eyes, and enjoy the kisses and touches of the sweet man who was actually with her, instead of being bombarded with carnal images of the bad boy that had chattered her heart more times than she could count.

Yet here he was back in town, her husband, promising her that he's changed, that he still loves her and wants nothing more than to get her back.

How is his presence her suppose to help her move on with John?

"Jax is here." She blurts out on a whim, no longer able to keep him in the dark, tired of juggling secrets. She's left that kind of life behind in Charming.

"He is?" John asks, apprehension in his voice. "And what does that mean? Is he just visiting, or ...?"

Tara takes in a deep breath. "Well, he says he's here to stay."

"Do you believe him?"

"I don't know." Tara replies honestly. "He's out job hunting right now. He says he wants to be in the boys' life."

"And yours." John adds, more a statement than a question.

There's a pang of remorse that flashes through her at his words and she can't bring herself to lie to him. He deserves the truth. "Yeah." She sighs again. "He wants to get back together."

The silence on the other end of the phone seems to drag on forever, and Tara begins to hold her breath until John finally speaks up. "Should I be worried?"

Tara contemplates the question in her head, which really is pointless, because she knows the answer to that question like the back of her hand. She just wishes it wasn't true.

Yes! "No, you shouldn't." She lies at last, because right now, in the state of mind she's in, she truly
wishes that lie was in fact the truth. She wishes she could stop loving Jax and figure out a way to move on with John. But lies rarely ever become truths!

X

Author's Note: Any thoughts? If you liked it, please leave me a review. Thanks.
Chapter 11

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Jax unlocks the door to Tara's apartment, quietly steps inside, closes the door behind him again, stepping all the way through to the kitchen and discards the papers and keys in his hands on the kitchen table.

He steps over to the fridge, opens it and reaches for the milk, and just when he is about to place the cold carton up to his mouth to take a drink, he stops himself and pours some into a glass instead. After all, this isn't really his place. Yet!

With his glass of milk in hand, he sits down at the table, sighing audibly and runs a hand through his long hair, brushing it back out of his face. It has been a long day, but in the end being proactive and speaking up has been the right move and he is now the newest employee at Baker's Automotive Repairs.

Jax opens the manila folder and looks over the remaining papers his new employer needs him to fill out over the rest of the weekend. As he glances over the pages it became clear it is just the standard stuff, nothing he needs to worry about tonight.

A small involuntary smile graces his lips thinking of his accomplishment of today, before he takes another sip from his milk, leaving traces of the white substance in his beard before wiping them away with the back of his hand.

Not only has he managed to find a job in less than twenty-four hours after getting to Oregon, but it actually seems like a good fit for him, too. After he'd successfully convinced the owner, Eric Baker, to take a chance on him, he'd been shown around the place and immediately clicked with some of the other mechanics there. And considering this was his first non-Club related job, the starting pay at $20 an hour isn't too shabby either.

Is it enough to raise a family of four on? Definitely not. But it is more than enough to subsidize Tara's income, and help her pay for all the expenses concerning the boys, and for now that is good enough for him. Is simply has to be!

Jax glances at the digital clock on the kitchen stove. It is almost six thirty already. He has texted Tara earlier, before heading back home, but she never replied.

He pulls his phone from his jeans pocket and checks his messages again, but still no word from Tara. She has warned him that a weekend ER shift meant she'd probably be home pretty late tonight, and that the boys would usually end up staying the whole night over at Misses Ellie's place, but with him here now, that obviously wouldn't be the case anymore.

With that thought in mind, Jax pushes the chair back and gets up, tucking his phone back into his pants, before he decides not to wait for Tara anymore and to go get his sons by himself.

X
He knocks firmly on the door and within a few moments the door creaks open and the much older woman looks him over with a sweet smile on her face.

"Jackson?" She asks trying to recall his name. She'd met him this morning when Tara and him had dropped the boys off together. "Right?"

"Yes, ma'am." Jax replies respectfully.

"Come on in, your boys are waiting for you." Misses Ellie steps out of his way and gestures for him to step on inside, which he does.

Abel and Thomas both looks up at him from their position on the carpeted living room floor, where they are working on a oversized puzzle.

"Daddy." Abel shrieks before getting up and running into his father's arms.

"Dad-dy." Thomas says more calmly, with his eyes clued to his father and bigger brother, but not bothering to get up off the floor himself.

"Hey little monsters." Jax replies teasingly as he runs his hand up and down Abel's back while stepping further into the room, with his boy in his arms.

"Sit." Misses Ellie ushers him towards the couch and he wordlessly complies, bouncing an energetic Abel on his left knee.

He hesitates for a moment, feeling completely out of his element, before he looks up at Misses Ellie, "They behaved alright for you?" He assumes that's a normal thing one would ask in his situation.

Misses Ellie nods and takes a seat on the edge of her armchair, kitty-corner from the couch he is sitting on, before she begins to gush about his two sons, "Oh yes, they were sweethearts. We spend the morning baking a cake, colored in some coloring books, then we napped for a bit after lunch, but not too long. We just finished eating dinner..." She glances up at the clock to the left above the TV, "... maybe ten minutes ago. So you don't have to worry about fixing them anything."

"Okay, good." Jax nods, his eyes traveling from her face to Abel's in his lap and back to Thomas', who is still busy with the puzzle on the living room floor.

Sitting here, he feels strangely nervous all of a sudden, and he isn't entirely sure why, or maybe he just doesn't want to admit it to himself yet. And in reality it is almost comical to think, after all the gunfights and time spend behind bars, that this sweet old lady's eyes on him causes his palms to feel a little clammy and his throat to feel dry.

He tries to swallow away the dryness, but to no avail. Jax knows, through phone conversations with Tara, that even though Tara pays Misses Ellie for watching the boys for her, the relationship between the two women runs much, much deeper than that. This isn't just a simple business arrangement like they'd had with Neeta. Tara and his boys have grown to deeply care about Misses Ellie over the last couple of months, and in turn Misses Ellie cares deeply for them as well.

Sitting awkwardly on the couch, under the scrutinizing gaze of Misses Eloise Young, he suddenly can't stop himself from thinking back on the only other time he'd felt this way around anyone. 

Old-man-Knowles

He remembers that once they started dating, Tara's father had liked the idea much at first, because in his eyes, Jax had been the boy that had corrupted his sweet little girl. So his dislike for the hormonal hot tempered teenage heir to the Sam Crow throne had truly been no big surprise. But what had been
a surprise in the end, was that Old-man-Knowles had eventually grown to like him after all, once he’d realized that under all that rough rebellious exterior of Jax, was a kid with a good heart that truly cared about Tara.

His thoughts went back to Tara's dad. James Knowles had been what one would describe as a 'high-functioning alcoholic'. He held down a decent job, was liked well enough within the community of Charming and after his wife passed away he raised Tara on his own the best way he knew how. Sure, just like any other drunk he’d had the occasional bender, but overall he'd been an alright father, considering he was raising a daughter on his own.

As Jax looks back into the older woman's eyes he realizes that besides Tara herself, and Tara's father, he has never in his life sought out the approval of someone who wasn't in some way, shape or form connected to the MC.

Until now!

X

Jax awoke with a jolt. Startled he looks around the dark living room. The only light coming from the TV across from him. The same infomercial still playing out on the screen.

He rubs the sleep from his eyes and groans tiredly as he sits up. While his eyes still adjust to the darkness, he reaches for his phone and glances at the screen. Doing a double take when he sees that it is already past two in the morning.

He leans back against the couch and runs both his hands through his long hair, brushing it back and out of his face, before he rubs at his eyes once again.

He knows Tara said that it would be a long night, but ... damn it is late!

Fuck! Was she with him?

He doesn't want his mind to go there yet again, but he can't stop it no matter how hard he tries.

With this new thought in mind, his hand trembles slightly with suppressed anger as he reaches again for his phone on the coffee table in front of him.

Still no messages from her.

He wants to fling the damn phone across the room, hoping to smash it into pieces against the wall. Who is he kidding, he wants to knock over the table, he wants to destroy the place, but he doesn't. He wants to but he knows he can't. Not without waking the boys or frightening them ... and not without having to explain later on what happened.

If she is really with him, he doesn't want to give her the satisfaction of knowing how much her affair is getting under his skin. He knows he can't react like Friday night when she'd told him for the first time. If their history has taught him anything, he knows he has to be smarter than that, calmer than that to win her back.

Trying to shake the image of her in the throes of passion with another guy, he pats the front pocket of his blue flannel shirt for his pack of smokes.

With still shaking hands he fishes one out, but just as he is about to light it, he remembers that Tara has asked him not to smoke in the apartment. For the boys, she had said.
With her request in mind, he reaches for the baby monitor and his keys on the table and heads for the door.

He lights his cigarette the instant he steps through the front door of the building, and takes a long drag. The nicotine filling his lungs instantly calms him, he closes his eyes, savoring the taste as he begins to busy his mind with wondering what is next for him, now that the job issue has been taken care of.

But once more, the darkness and quietness of the night further driving home the point how late it is, almost two thirty by now and his mind simply keeps going there again.

He imagined even before he left Charming that convincing Tara to give him, give them, another try would be a challenge in itself, but knowing now that she was actually seeing someone else makes it all the more complicated.

He can't deny it, can't suppress the fact that the thought of Tara with another man makes his blood boil, and all he wants to do is find this guy and beat him to a pulp.

Would it accomplish anything? No, he knew it wouldn't. But it would feel good.

Jax doesn't even try to suppress the smirk that creeps onto his unshaven face, as he imagines beating some random man within an inch of his life.

It would undoubtedly feel fucking good!

Just then he is brought out of his deranged thoughts, when he sees Tara pulling her car into her parking spot. His heart speeds up as he watches her gather her things, before she steps out of her car and walks towards him.

He eyes her warily with every step she takes, looking for any tell tale signs ... disheveled hair, buttons haphazardly buttoned, flushed cheeks. He lets go of the breath he hasn't even realized he is holding when he knows all his fears from moments ago have been unfounded.

He knows her. Knows her facial expressions, knows the look in her eyes and from what he can tell she simply looks tired. Tired, as in work tired, not late night fuck tired!

Jax shakes his head to himself, he can't help but marvel at the fact that even after a long tiring weekend shift in the Emergency Room, she still manages to look this enticing to him.

"Hi." She greets him, her voice barely above a whisper, not wanting to wake the entire neighborhood. With a shy smile on her face, she stops a few steps away from him instead of heading on inside. "You're up late." She adds, daring a glance at her wristwatch, before searching his face for an explanation.

"So are you?" His voice equally low, with a smile of his own, giving her another once over before he holds his lit cigarette out to her. Too proud to admit out loud that thoughts of her with him brought him out here in the middle of the night to ease his nerves.

Tara shakes her head, "No, thanks." But places her heavy bag on the ground before she leans back against the railing that leads up the few steps to the front door. "The ER got crazy busy tonight." She offers as explanation before she looks back at him and asks, "The boys 're asleep?"

Jax nods, the baby monitor emitting white noise as he holds it up to show her, before he pushes it back into the back pocket of his jeans.
"You really quit smoking?" Jax questions her, moving himself to lean against the railing directly across from her.

"No." She shakes her head, "I know I should, but I do still have a cigarette every now and then." She says with a heavy tiredness to her voice before she looks back up at him, unable to hold back her curiosity any longer, "So ... how did it go today?"

For a brief second she isn't sure what she wants the answer to be ... him telling her he found a job or him not finding a job.

Jax tries not to smile as broadly as he does, but he simply can't help himself, "I've got a job."

"Really?" Tara says with obvious surprise in her voice, yet a genuine smile on her face a split-second later. "That's ... that's great." She adds, before she forces herself to look away from his beaming face. Her heart is racing, and she folds her arms under her chest as if the physical barrier could somehow keep those feelings of hope from rushing straight to her heart.

Is he really going to stay? Could it really be that easy?

Jax takes another drag, "If you sound any more surprised, I might take offense." He tries to sound serious, but he can't help the grin that graces his face once more.

Tara smirks back before looking at her feet embarrassed and shakes her head, "I-I didn't mean it like that."

Jax raises one eyebrow at her in amusement, enjoying her discomfort as he returns her smirk.

She sighs, holding her hand out and he wordlessly hands his almost finished cigarette over to her. A jolt of electricity shoots through her when their fingertips touch, but she tries her best to pretend she hasn't noticed, all the while watching him out of the corner of her eye, knowing he'd felt the same spark. "I really didn't mean it like that. I'm glad you found a job. It's just ..." Her words dying down on her lips before she takes a long drag, finishing the last of the cigarette before letting it drop to the ground and grinding it out with the tip of her shoes. "I had Margaret, Dr. Namid, and two of my former Attendings from Chicago Presbyterian write me letters of recommendation, and it still took me almost a months to get this job." A petty explanation to mask her true feelings of his newly found employment, how it ignites equal amounts of pure joy and fear within her.

Jax shrugs his shoulders as his face grows more serious when he takes in the suddenly serious expression on hers. "You're comparing apples and oranges, Doc."

Jax lost his train of thought when their eyes meet and pauses, but it only takes him a moment to remember what he was going to say, "There's a huge difference between hiring someone to change the oil on some soccer-mom's minivan, versus hiring someone to crack a dying babies chest open to repair a heart, don't you think?"

Tara sighs and nods in agreement, "I guess you're right." She knows he is right ... there is a big fucking difference, and she actually feels bad for not being able to hide the surprise in her voice better. For not hiding her fear!

She knows he is headstrong, smart, very articulate and his looks are easily comparable to men she'd seen on the cover of GQ magazines, so it shouldn't really be that big of a shock that he's actually managed to find a job as quickly as he has. However, as her heartbeat slows down once more despite his presence, Tara simply can't help but wonder if his connections to the MC has something to do
with his immediate success.

Jax watches her awkwardly for a moment, wondering how he'd ever gotten so lucky to have her, yet has been too stupid to keep her.

He could've told her that he's been to seven places that wouldn't even let him sit down for an actual interview. Could've told her that he's practically begged to scrub their toilets just to get a goddamn foot in the door, but he doesn't tell her any of those things, because then he'd have to admit that without the Club he is a nobody here. He is nothing but a lowlife, a piece of shit criminal.

A okay mechanic with a G.E.D.!

He knows he is not good enough for her, that she deserves much better than him, always has, but he is selfish ... too selfish to let her get away. To let her be happy with anyone other than himself.

"Ready to go to bed?" He wonders out loud as he looks for the right key on his keychain.

Tara nods, picks up her bag and follows him up the couple of steps to the front door.

Jax fumbles with the key for a long minute, trying several times to get it into the lock. He takes a small step back, hoping that the bright almost harsh lighting right above the front door will help, but it doesn't.

Tara waits patiently, her hand tightening around the handle of her heavy bag, but after watching Jax fruitlessly trying to maneuver the key into the lock, she steps around him, closer to the door and puts her bag on the floor.

"Let me try." She whispers and reaches for the keys in his hand. "I can get it in."

"I got it, babe." Jax doesn't let go, still holding onto the key, trying to shimmy it into the lock, when Tara's fingers brush over his knuckles, trying to take the keys from him, and that same spark startling both of them for the second time tonight. A knowing look is shared, one that Tara tries to deny and Jax finally gives in, stepping back just enough to give Tara the room she needs to step all the way in front of him.

Capitulation!

"You had the wrong key." She starts to explain, as she pushes the correct key into the lock in one fluid move. She feels Jax push up against her, craning his neck to look around her, over her shoulder, so close that she can feel his breath on her cheek.

She can't help the way her body reacts to him, although she wishes she could. The goose bumps form instantaneously, first on her arms, then up her neck and down her spine in just a matter of nanoseconds.

Another exhale from him, a hot puff of air, this one she's sure is deliberate, because it's precisely placed against the crook of her neck, where he knows that she likes to be kissed, and the realization of what he's doing hits her like a brick when he presses himself even further against her, his hands now tugging at her waist.

She's just about to turn around, call him out on his obvious attempt to get into her personal space, when she feels it. The small almost tickling feeling on the other side of her neck, the side Jax was not about to press his soft, moist lips against, and she can't help the shrill sounding shriek that involuntarily escapes her mouth now.
Along with the high-pitched scream, Tara jumps and spins around so fast, bumping her forehead hard into his chin. It hurts, but she's too busy freaking out to even acknowledge the pain.

Jax doesn't know what's going on, he's completely caught off guard by her. He catches her, sort of, in his arms, successfully stopping her from falling over her own two feet, or maybe it's her bag that she's nearly tripping over. It's all happening so fast as yet another cry escapes her lips, and in the quiet of the night it's something that you'd hear in an old black and white horror flick.

"Tara." He blurs out. "What -.

Tara cuts him off before he can ask what's wrong. She pulls the hair tie out, her hands frantically brushing through her own hair, brushing imaginary things off of her shoulders, "Get it out, Jax. Get it out." She demands still in a panic.

Realization hits him now, and he can't help but laugh out loud, but he quickly jumps into action, his fingers now disappearing into the brown strands, his eyes trained on her hair, "Hold on, babe. I can't see shit. You have to hold still."

Tara freezes, her body stiff as a board, her eyes pressed shut tightly as if that would do any good, and she begs, "Please, Jax, just get it out of my hair. Please. Hurry."

"Oh shit." He says, as he actually catches a glimpse of the eight legged insect on her head, before successfully brushing it quickly out of her brown strands of hair. "I got it."

"You got it?" Tara repeats and opens her eyes just in time to see Jax brush the spider off of his own arm now, watching it fall to the asphalt beneath them. The insect is quickly trying to scurry away, but Jax stops it with one fast step.

Tara stares at the flattened spider on the ground, an involuntary quiver shakes her small frame, trying to rid herself off the lasting feeling of something still crawling through her hair.

"Thanks." She says with exhaustion in her voice, her chest heaving up and down as she tries to normalize her breathing.

"You're welcome." Jax answers, unable to keep the smile from his lips at the intense feeling of déjà vu that hits him.

Before he knows it, she turns, reaches for the keys still dangling in the lock, opens the door and disappears inside. He picks up her bag that she's simply left behind, trying his best to hold back the chuckle as he falls in step right behind his wife.

X

Tara sits on the edge of the bathtub, while Jax stand beside her, hovering as he looks through her long hair once again. His cheeks were beginning to hurt from the smile that hasn't left his face yet. "Like I said, babe, there's nothing." He whispers, trying not to wake up the kids.

Tara leans further forward, lowering her head so he can better examine the back of her head, her long hair parting on the back of her skull. That's when his smile finally disappears, and he pulls his hands back, scared he might've already run a finger across the scar without even realizing it.

But then he shakes that thought away, he would've felt it. Would've noticed the raised flesh beneath his finger tips. Still, he's frozen, but he's not put off by it, just scared it might still hurt her.

It takes Tara just a moment to realize why he has pulled away, and she sits up straight without
missing a beat. Her hands brushing back her hair, trying to cover the scar, while avoiding his gaze and steeling herself against the tears that threaten to fall from her eyes.

"Tara." He says and in the same instant he dares to step closer again, but she gets up and rushes over to the bathroom sink, examining herself in the mirror of the medicine cabinet, fixing her hair again, swallowing hard, begging her own reflection to not fall apart again in front of him. To not give into the hurt and the pain and the tears.

Jax steps up wordlessly behind her, but she tries her best to ignore his eyes trying to meet hers in the reflection of the mirror. When she feels his fingers running soothingly through her hair again, she loses her will and their eyes finally connect. A stare-down of sorts, neither of them saying a thing, neither of them moving and neither of them looking away ... she refuses to crumble, fights it as long as she can.

And she doesn't crumble, doesn't fall apart, but nonetheless she is the first to look away, trying to escape his penetrating gaze and turns around, assuming he'll move out of her way, but he doesn't. Instead he steps closer, invades her space yet again, causing her to take a step back, her eyes trained on his collarbone, because she knows if she looks in his eyes now, if she looks into that beautiful face of his she will lose the will to walk away.

As she steps back again, trying to evade him, her lower back bumps into the sink and his hands reach for her waist, pinning her in place and she realizes she's trapped.

That thought brings a long forgotten memory back to the forefront of her jumbled mind.

A memory of him and her, both of them so young and inexperienced in the ways of the world. She remembers how he loved her, made love to her, because he wanted her to enjoy it as much as he did.

They lay naked in each other's arms in the afterglow of their lovemaking, he brushed a gentle kiss against her forehead before he spoke, "You know, babe, we can do other stuff, too. Other positions. Whatever you want."

Tara nuzzled her nose into his chest, not even opening her eyes as she replied, her voice so low he could barely make out the words, "Are you saying you don't like what we've been doing, Teller? Do you wanna do other stuff?"

She could feel him shake his head 'no' as a silent chuckle vibrated through his firm chest beneath her, before he actually uttered the words and added, "No. Trust me, I don't mind being on top at all. I kinda like being in charge." He stroked her hair out of her face, trying to get her to look at him, "I just don't want you to ever feel..." He paused, searching for the right word, "Trapped."

Tara raised her head from his chest, just enough to look up at him and meet his eyes, a innocent smile on her young face, "Maybe I like being trapped by you." She teased, not liking the sudden seriousness in his voice, nor the forbidden subject he was hinting at.

Her hand traveled down his abdomen, beginning to stroke him and feeling instant gratification when she felt him getting hard again against the palm of her hand. "Why don't you trap me again, Jackson." She smiled up at him in challenge, and before she knew it, Jax had taken charge yet again when he rolled back on top of her to love her.

She's brought back to reality when she hears him say her name again. "Tara." His voice so low but solemn, laced with lust. "Please look at me, babe." He practically begs and Tara finds herself even more terrified to do just that.
She completely ignores his request, lowers her head, leaning her forehead against his hairy chin. She can't look at him right now, because despite all the pain he's caused her, despite all the logical reasons why they shouldn't be together that were whirling around in her head this very moment, she knows there's still love between them.

Under all the betrayal, the hurt, and the ugliness of the crimes against one another there is still real, deep, undeniable love and she knows if she allows him to push her on this, here and now ... she will falter.

X

Author's Note: I hope you all like this chapter, if you did, please leave a few words. He hasn't even been back in her life for 48 hours yet ... is it too soon for her to give in to his advances? I'm curious to hear what you're thinking.
Chapter 12

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Jax lowers his head now too, leaning against hers, forehead to forehead, nose to nose. The sexual tension between the former lovers suddenly so thick, you could cut it with a knife. Both their chest's are heaving as if they just ran a mile. He tilts his head a bit to the side, leaning in closer and just when his lips are about to brush against hers, Tara pulls her head back, yet still avoiding his gaze when she begs out loud, "Please, don't."

The scared sound of her voice breaks his heart. The sudden longing of holding her instead of kissing her doesn't diminish his desire for her, but it merely gets temporarily overshadowed by his need to protect her. He simply hates that she's so terrified by his advances, but deep down he can't really blame her.

So his hands lose their tight grip on her waist and move up, wrapping around the expanse of her back in a hug, pulling her further into him instead and gently tucking her head under his chin.

However, Tara's still on guard, that's painfully obvious to him with the way she keeps her palms flat against his chest, as if she's still trying to decide whether to push him away or not. But in the end she doesn't resist and she remains frozen in his tight embrace for a long moment.

Jax interrupts the quiet when he wants to know. "Does it still hurt?"

My head ... or my heart?

Tara wonders how to answer that for a second, but in reality she knows what he means, knows what he's asking. The scar itself doesn't hurt, not physically, not anymore, but the emotional pain is a whole other story.

"No, not anymore." She whispers into his chest, hoping the answer will placate him enough to not push this further. She doesn't want to talk about the scar or the attack on her yet again. Doesn't want to think or theorize about the who and why either.

It is pointless all the same, because she still doesn't remember anything.
Another long minute in his arms, and she can feel his fingertips playing with the strands of her hair on her back. Standing here like this with him in the quietness of the night, she could almost forget everything that has happened between them, almost forget everything around them. Temporarily allowing herself to get lost in the moment and being brought back in her mind again to a simpler time, a time when they still truly trusted each other, long before they had broken each other's hearts. Wishful thinking ... it is too late!

"I need you to give me another chance." He suddenly whispers his request against her ear and his left hand reaches for her right one that's still flattened against his chest, holding it in place over his beating heart. "You gotta let me in ... at least enough so I can try to fix this."

Tara nuzzles against him for a second, contemplating his words over in her mind, before she finally has gathered enough strength and willpower to look up into his pleading blue eyes. She needs to get through to him, "I don't think there's anything left to fix, Jackson." She admits her true feelings and with them denying him any hope in the matter. She's sort of in awe of herself, doesn't know where she's found the strength to stand up to him in all his perfection, but she's silently thanking god that she has.

Her words and stern look combined with her use of his given name feels like a sucker punch to the gut, mostly because he knows she only ever called him Jackson If she was trying to drive home a point. And the heartbreaking point she is driving home right now is their unsalvageable marriage.

"I know you've heard that saying about insanity. The one about doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results."

He nods his head, but looks confused back at her for a second, clearly not understanding what she's getting at.

"I'm done being insane, Jax." She says with her head held high again, and somehow she finds the strength to pull her hand out from under his, twist out of his strong arm that's still wrapped around her and pushes past him, heading for the door as if this is all there is left to say on the matter of their relationship.

"Tara, wait." Jax turns and reaches for her, catching her by her hand right before she can walk out of the room. "I promise ..." The words die down on his lips.

The tug on her hand makes her stop and she looks over her shoulder back at him, giving him a quizzical look, a silent challenge to come up with a promise he hasn't made in the past and broken just the same. The list is short.

"I promise this time will be different." He quickly adds the remaining words, thinking that they'll evoke some kind of hope in her. He's wrong.

Tara's still looking back at him, and she's quite proud at herself that so far she's been able to fight back the tears. "It always starts out different, but it always ends the same." She replies and by the look on his face it's clear to see that that is not what he wanted to hear at all.

He steps closer to her again, still holding onto her hand and she gives him the courtesy of turning fully towards him.

He's well aware that this is not only her way of giving him another chance to speak, but she's also giving him her undivided attention, and he knows to better make it count. "I know that you truly think this is it for us. You said last night that we're broken beyond repair and maybe you really believe that there's no coming back from the things we've done, but ... but what if you're wrong,
He steps even closer now, stopping right in front of her, reaching for her other hand as he's holding her steely gaze, "We've been here before, roles reversed and you were the one who said that it makes us better human beings when we're with the person we're supposed to be with."

"Don't do that." She angrily pulls her hands out of his, considering this a low blow, shaking her head at him in disbelief, her eyes suddenly shooting daggers at him, "You don't get to use my own words against me."

"It's the damn truth though." He replies solemnly, without skipping a beat. "You know it was the truth back then and it still is now."

Tara folds her arms in front of her, shaking her head again, "Back then I was still naive enough to think that our love could pull as through, come what may. I don't believe that anymore, Jax." She lies, sort of. Someplace deep down she still does hang onto that hope that true love can heal all wounds, but the problem is that she is no longer willing to put that theory to the test. She just can't - won't - put her heart and soul through all that again, just to be presented with yet another obstacle, another lie or betrayal, or another's warm body in his bed with him.

He's wracking his brain how to reply to that. Had he really broken her to the point that she has not an ounce of hope left for them? He doesn't want that to be true, refuses to let that be true.

"I still believe it!" He blurts out, a strange desperate tone to his voice that not only surprises her, but himself as well. "You're the one, Tara. You always have been and god fucking knows you always will be. Just like I'm the one for you. We've done all this shit before. We let this cruel world break us apart, come between us. And it doesn't matter how many times we've tried to walk away from each other, or tried to make it work with someone else, in the end it always comes back to this, back to us ... we always come back to each other."

She's trying her best to fight back the onslaught of emotions his words evoke in her. She wants to hate this optimistic side of his, wants to debunk every word of love he's spewing at her, but for a moment her heart betrays her and she fails miserably. A moment passes and she can see the hope in his baby blue eyes as they bore into hers, clearly searching for a sign that she feels the same way. She shakes her head at him, steeling herself against the unwelcome feelings trying to weasel their way back into her heart, because isn't this were all their problems stem from? That he's arrogant enough to use her love for him to his advantage? That he truly thinks no matter how badly he fucks up, she'll eventually come back and forgive him?

She can't do this anymore. She won't do this anymore. Someone's heart won't make it out of here unscathed tonight. His or hers! She doesn't want it to be hers again.

She knows her heart can't take it, not again. She's done being his emotional punching bag. Simply done letting her irrational feelings for him rule over what she knows in her head, and somehow she has to make him see it to.

"Maybe I was wrong, and we were never supposed to be together and that's why we were never able to make it work." She replies bitterly and she can see the disbelief in his eyes at her words. A twinge of regret running through her, as if her ugly words are soiling Thomas' existence, yet she won't back down now. Not now when she finally feels like she has the upper hand. "I think you were right all along, when you said I should've gone back to Chicago. The Kohn thing should've been the end!"

She's met with nothing but a stunt silence from him as he runs both his hands across his weary face,
and with a pang in her heart Tara wonders if this will finally be the end.

She feels like she won the fight, but lost the war, because it doesn't feel like a victory at all. No cheers or applause here for her. It feels like the end of their marriage!

She watches him turn away from her, still hiding his face in his hands and the thought that he might be crying almost makes her want to take back all the ugly things she'd said. But she can't bring herself to do that. She won't apologize, won't back down ... she's come too far to let him break her now.

Just when she's about to open her mouth to let him know that she'll head to bed now, he spins back around on her, and the words never make it past her lips when she sees his red rimmed eyes flashing almost angrily at her.

Her words to him from all those months ago come to the forefront of his mind. 'I have sacrificed everything for you!'

He had thought that he could understand the pain and sorrow she must've felt that day, alone and broken at the mercy of him and the Club, but now that he finds himself standing in her shoes, pondering over everything he's sacrificed for her now, the truth behind those words shatter him to the very core and nearly cripple him.

"I did everything you wanted me to do. Everything you asked." He says with both accusation and an uncharacteristic shaky tone to his voice.

The Club, Charming, Gemma - all gone! For you!

The words 'too little too late' come to her mind, but they seem mean and ugly and she can't bring herself to be that cruel to say them out loud, no matter how true they are.

So she contemplates his words to her and quickly realizes the lie in them, "That's not true!"

"I left Sam Crow! For you!" He doesn't miss a beat, his eyes trained on her face, daring her to argue that to be a lie.

"I asked you to leave with me four months ago. I practically begged you to come with us, Jax." Tara folds her arms in front of her. "But when push comes to shove, it always ends the same. You'll always choose the Club over me and the boys."

He shakes his head at that, even though he knows deep down there's some truth to what she's saying, but not this time. "I'm here now." He quips back.

She had to understand the tough choices he's had to make. There had to be a way to make her see that he would've come with her if he'd seen any other way, without burdening her with the truth, so he tells her a partial lie instead. "I'm sorry I couldn't leave with you. I wish I could have, but you have to understand, babe ... the Club needed me."

"I needed you!" She shouts back at him, a finger poking at her own sternum for a moment. Unable to keep the hurt and pain contained any longer, tears begin to well up in her eyes. "I needed you!" She repeats again, this time more quiet and calm, looking away now and wiping at the tears in her eyes.

He's also running his hands over his face, the truth behind those three words almost destroying his resolve to keep fighting her on this. Maybe she is right, maybe they should just try to be the best parents they could be and give each other's hearts a chance to heal.

He sighs and lifts his head to look at her, the apology already on his tongue when he notices the
small figure donning monster truck pajamas appear in the doorframe behind Tara.

"Are you fighting?" Abel asks, his voice sleepy, and the bright lighting makes him squint as his eyes seem to travel back and forth between his father and his mother.

Tara turns away for just a moment, frantically wiping the tears away, not wanting to let Abel see her like this, before she turns back towards him.

"No, baby, we were just talking." Her voice is soft, warm and soothing, so different sounding than the angry and hurt tone in her voice from mere seconds ago, when she'd been shouting at her husband. Tara runs her hand through Abel's blond hair, and can't help but wonder just how much he might've heard. She hates this!

"We didn't mean to wake you up, buddy." Jax adds to further reassure him, and steps closer to them both, running his own hand over Abel's blond strands.

"Is it morning yet?" He asks, still rubbing the sleep from his eyes, the brightness of the room still bothering him.

"No, honey." Tara practically coos and proceeds to scoop their son up into her arms, "It's the middle of the night. It's still dark outside."

"Let's get you back to bed." She says, but turns towards Jax with Abel in her arms, "Give your daddy a good night kiss."

Jax leans in and Abel puckers up in the exaggerated way he often does and kisses his father on the cheek.

"Good night, Abel." Jax runs his hand through the boys hair once more, before Tara turns and carries their son back to his bedroom, a sleepy Abel waving at him over her shoulder.

Jax follows right behind them though, but stops and watches from the doorway as Tara tucks their oldest back into bed and kisses his forehead. The sight strengthening the resolve he'd almost lost mere minutes ago. This is what I'm fighting for.

He steps back and out of the way when she walks back out and quietly closes their bedroom door behind her, trying her best to not wake Thomas up, too. The youngest Teller wouldn't go back to bed this easily.

They both share a rueful glance in the hallway, neither of them liking the idea of Abel overhearing their argument.

He wishes momentarily he could call for a time-out, take a knee, give himself a moment to reassess and actually come up with a thought-out plan, because so far nothing he's said to her seem to make a difference. But he knows he doesn't have that luxury, doesn't have a moment to spare. Not at three o'clock in the morning.

He'll have to think on his feet and hope he doesn't fuck this up any more than he already has.

Jax nods in the direction of the living room, gesturing with his hand for her to go first and she wordlessly complies, walking ahead of him.

Tara doesn't stop in the living room though and instead continues on to the kitchen. Since she is expecting their heated discussion to continue any minute now, she wants to put as many walls as possible between the boys' room and them this time around.
"That felt shitty." She almost whispers, and leans back against the kitchen counter.

"I know." He agrees, taking a seat in one of the chairs at the kitchen table and runs a hand over his face, trying to figure out how or where to even start this conversation yet again.

"I'm not willing -." He starts, but stops abruptly, correcting his own words, "I just can't give up on us, Tara. I won't. Not now." He looks up at her with newfound determination in his eyes reflecting back at her. "There is nothing you could say or do that would make me walk away. I'm here, babe, and I'm not going anywhere."

Tara looks away and lets out a humorless chuckle at the irony of his timing. It is sad, really. In the past she'd spend countless nights wishing and hoping that he'd fight for her the way he is now. Saying the words he'd just said. And now that he is here, doing just that, she's too damaged, too broken inside to allow him to get that close to her again.

From this point forward it's a matter of self-preservation ... she has to make a clean break, no more blurred lines about what they are to each other, if not for her own sake, then for the sake of their children.

Jax watches her expectantly from his seat just a few feet away. "Say something, please." He begs when she still remains silent after a minute.

"What do you want me to say?" She shrugs her shoulders in an annoyed kind of way, "I mean, everything I've been saying to you since you got here Friday afternoon just seems to go in one ear and comes right back out the other. It's obvious you haven't listened to a damn thing I've said." She sighs in frustration and thinks about her next words for a second.

"I've been in love with you for so long." Her sad eyes meet his across the room, and she shakes her head at herself, "Even when I left for college, and then Chicago, I never really stopped." Her chin quivers for a second, and a tear trickles down her cheek, but she's quick to wipe it as quickly as it appeared.

"And then I came back to Charming, and for a while it felt right, you know." She takes a deep shaky breath. "But I honestly don't remember what it feels like to not love you, to not be in love with you. There's just no remnants of the girl I was before I fell for you, but I think I miss her."

Jax feels slightly confused, not entirely sure what she's trying to tell him, but feels the sudden need to clarify that he feels the same way about her. "I've never stopped loving you either. You know that." He adds for good measure.

"So why are you making this so difficult?" He dares to throw the question at her. "After all this time, all the years spend apart, here we are still in love. Still crazy about each other." His heart is pounding in his chest and all he wants to do is throw her over his shoulder, carry her to her bedroom, and show her until the sun comes up just how much he means every goddamn word.

He watches her take another deep breath before taking the few steps towards him, and for a fraction of a second he wonders if she's sharing his idea. Wonders if she's coming to take him by the hand and pull him along into her bedroom with her.

But before he can even finish that thought she settles in the chair right across from him instead, putting an end to his wishful thinking.

Their eyes meet across the kitchen table, and he can see her swallow hard before she opens her lips to talk, "I'm scared. You didn't just break my heart, Jax, you shattered it into a million pieces ... and
now you show up here as if nothing ever happened. Asking me to let you take another swing at it, when I'm still trying to put it back together, still trying to repair the damage you've done to it the last time around."

He gets it.
He doesn't like it, but at least he gets it now. The logic behind her unwavering resistance against the idea of picking up where they'd left off, in the parking lot of the motel. It finally makes sense to him, but that doesn't mean her words aren't breaking his heart as well.

He suddenly can't help but think about the frown on her face when he'd told Abel that he was going to stay, and the words jumble from his tongue past his lips before that little voice inside his head can stop him, "Do you even want me here?" He's not even sure he really wants to hear the truth, but that thought follows a little too late.

His question catches Tara off guard, but she recovers instantaneously. "Of course." She says, before she adds, "The boys are -."

"I'm not asking about the boys." He cuts her off. "I'm asking about you and me. Do you want me here?"

Tara swallows the lump in her throat and stares back at him as the seconds tick by, while she's thinking about how to answer him.

And he'd be lying if he said that the fact that she has to think about it at all, doesn't crush his spirits. He feels a sudden rage building inside of him, feeling like a dumbass to have thought this is what she wanted, but before he can even say anything she finally speaks up.

"And if I say no, you'll just run back to Charming?" She dares to spout a question of her own back at him instead of an answer.

He knows he should probably be offended by her accusation and the way she halfheartedly disguised it as a question, but there's a hint of truth in it.

He loves his sons, he truly does, and he's missed them, but they're not why he's here. Abel and Thomas were not the deciding factor that tipped the scale when he weight his decision to leave Sam Crow or not.
She was!
And if she doesn't want him, then he's not really sure what he's going to do.

He knows just how pathetic he sounds when he reaches across the table and grabs a hold of both her hands.
Not gentle or sweet, but with a hard demanding tug. "Then give me a reason not to."

"The boys -" She tries to start again and again he cuts her off just like before.

"The boys have you. They sure as shit don't need me." He quips back, and he knows his words aren't going to win him any father-of-the-year awards any time soon.

"That's not true." She's just as quick in her rebuttal. "If anyone knows how important it is to have both parents in their life, it's you and me."

He knows there's truth in those words as well, but he'll be damned to admit defeat already.

A long moment passes between them, with neither of them saying a word.
And he hates it, hates the thought that this is how it all could possibly end. He's equal parts furious and confused. He wishes she would've just lied to him, could've lied and just said 'Yes, I want you here', but she didn't and even though he loves her so much, right now he hates her for not fighting for them.

He broods and tries to figure out where to channel all the anger that's coursing through his veins, knowing full well that yelling and shouting at her won't really solve anything at all.

It suddenly becomes crystal clear to him. This wasn't about them, this is all about him, the other guy. The one she's screwing.

The words that come out of his mouth then are hurtful and mean and he doesn't possess the willingness to even try to censor them. "So you just want me here for the boys. Want me to help you raise them, and pick them up from the babysitter if you're working late, or if you're out on a date with your new man." He shoots her a look of disgust before he adds, "Want me here watching them while you're fucking your way through the town."

Tara pulls her hand out of his grip and lunges at him across the table at such a speed, he never even saw it coming. The slap echoing in the room and he can instantly feel the welt the size of her hand form and pulse across his cheek.

She's standing now, towering over him for a brief moment until he stands up, too.

"You -." She raises her voice, but then catches herself, pauses, and if looks could kill he would have already dropped dead to the floor. Her chest is heaving, and she can barely contain the venom in her voice when she starts again, more quietly this time. "You chose Sam Crow, ... and you chose her. I'm barely glued back together now. I make no apologies for how I chose to repair what you broke. So you don't get to call me a whore!"

She starts to head for the door, but Jax steps in her way, blocking her only way out, and she takes a step back again, as if she can't stand to be this close to him right now.

His left cheek feels like it's on fire, and he raises his hand up to his face, running his fingers over the damage. An even deeper sting ensues at his own touch. It's not like it was a right hook or anything, but she sure as shit had laid it on him. And as if the slap has helped clear some of the different noises in his mind, he realizes he had this one coming. He knows he shouldn't have said that.

"Get out of my way, Jax." She demands, and folds her arms again in the way she often does, signaling that her guard is up. She's not sorry, "We're done here."

But Jax doesn't miss a beat and with just one long stride he's on her, like a moth to the flame.

His lips crush onto hers with such a force that she nearly stumbles backwards, losing her footing and no doubt would have fallen had he not grabbed her and pulled her hard against him instead.

A sudden pain shoots through his bottom lip and he pulls back, a look of disbelief in his eyes when he sees her smirking back at him. His hand reaches up, touching his lip and he recognized the red hot substance on the tip of his fingers, even before he swipes his tongue across and tastes the copper. She fucking bit me!

He runs his tongue over the small wound again, keeping the blood from trickling down his beard.

If her love bite was supposed to deter him, no such luck, because it seems to clearly have the opposite effect.
"You wanna play rough, babe?" He asks through gritted teeth, before his lips once more crush powerfully onto hers.

But that's where that thought already stops, because he won't bite her back hard enough to draw blood, and he would never hit her either.

So the only thing he can think of to do is rip her black button-down shirt open with such vigor, that every button pops off, flying every which way across the kitchen floor.

She must've liked that 'cause she finally allows him entrance to her mouth, and he's more than pleased with the way she gasps, when his hands tug her shirt back. He begins to knead her beautiful breasts through the lacy fabric of her bra, his thumbs skillfully teasing her already hardened nipples, causing her to moan against his mouth.

They kiss deeply, tongues dueling for dominance, the metallic taste of blood an odd aphrodisiac.

Jax wraps his hands around the curve of her ass, picks her up with ease and hoists her onto the edge of the kitchen table right beside them. Nudging her thighs apart so he can wedge between them, grinding against her and being instantly rewarded with yet another moan of approval from her.

Meanwhile she's made quick work on the buttons of his flannel shirt, and he drops his hands to his side, straightening his arms to make it easier for her as she's pushing the garment past his broad shoulders and off of him.

The speed with which his hands unbutton and unzip her jeans, not nearly reflect the pressing urgency he feels to finally have her. To be inside of her. Again.

His right hand glides inside her jeans, finding her hot, moist and ready for him.

His fingers skillfully push the already soaked fabric of her panties aside, allowing him to glide said fingers along her wet swollen folds in search for the little nub. God, I want you so bad!

But just as he begins to tease her pleasure point, he can sense her tensing up beneath his hands.

Something happened, there was a shift and she pulls away from his kiss, lowering her head avoiding his confused look. He can literally feel her whole body freeze up and her hands still, clutching the bottom hem of his white t-shirt, no longer exploring beneath it.

"I can't do this." She says, and then has the audacity to actually look up at him.

Considering he's knuckle deep inside her right now, he'd like to shrug her words off as nothing but a sick and cruel joke, a way to get back at him for spouting those hate filled words at her just moments ago. But the look in her moistened eyes tells him that she's serious.

Fuck it!

He decides to ignore her, crushing down on her in a fiery kiss and pumping the full length of two fingers as deeply into her as the awkward angle of his wrist allows, grunting his desire for her into her mouth.

She didn't expect him to do that and finds herself helpless to stop the guttural moan that escapes her lips, then flushing with embarrassment that such a sound could come from her.

She regains her train of thought though, pulls her lips away from his again and pushes hard against his chest, causing him to stumble back now, his hand involuntarily slipping from within her, and
from her jeans.

"I mean it, Jax, you have to stop. I don't want this ... I can't do this."

He looks at her confused, he doesn't understand, but before he can ask her what he did wrong, before the words 'what happened' can even make it past his bloodied swollen lips, she answers the unspoken question for him.

With tears in her eyes, and a quivering chin she explains, "I can't do to him what you did to me." Further driving home the point that she's the good guy here and he's the piece of shit.

It feels like another slap to the face for him, and he stands there dumbfounded staring back at her when the realization hits him that she actually has real feelings for that other guy!

"I'm sorry." She says quietly, her sad eyes meeting his and her words snap him out of his stupor. He steps back towards her and pulls her shirt closed over her chest, but his finger itch to touch her just one more time. He doesn't though. "I'm sorry, too." He says, but unlike her, he's not sorry for what happened just now, he's sorry for the pain he's caused her ... for cheating. Jesus Christ, he'd give just about anything to take it back, to undo it.

He's distraught, heartbroken himself, but he won't let it show. His pride takes over. So does the anger, because ... fuck ... she's still his wife. Tara is his!
He bends down at the waist, picking up his flannel shirt off of the floor and pats the chest pocket, checking if his pack of cigarettes is still in there.

With his flannel shirt in one hand he turns back towards her and cups her chin with his other free hand. Before she has time to react he presses his lips hard against hers one last time, then he pulls away just a little, their faces so close that their noses almost touch when he stares back into her red rimmed eyes. "It's time to break up with him, babe."

He then turns on his heels and walks away, straight out the front door without looking back and when the door falls shut behind him, she falls back onto the kitchen table and sighs, letting out the breath that caught in her throat the moment he cupped her chin.

X

Jax's fingers shake when he's trying to light his cigarette.

He had to get the hell out of there, away from her before he'd end up doing something she didn't want him to. Something they'd both end up regretting.

He shakes his head at himself, wondering how things got so twisted and so fucked up between them, but deep down inside he knows he's the one to blame.

His thoughts are all over the place ... nothing's adding up inside his head. He's burdened with regret. Not in the way he'd kissed or touched her, but ignoring her pleas to take pity on her heart.

'I'm still trying to put it back together, still trying to repair the damage you've done to it the last time around.'

He can practically hear her shaky voice inside his head when she'd said it.

And he'd stomped right through her guard, not only taking a swing at her heart, but he'd knocked the damn thing clear out of the park. A fucking home run!
That, he regrets!

He takes another long drag, vowing to himself he'd figure out a way to fix it.

He knows it's wrong, but he can't resist the urge and raises his right hand up to his nose, closing his eyes when his nostrils fill with the scent of her. She's always smelled like perfection. She still does.

"Jesus Christ." He mutters to himself at his own action, shakes his head, but unable to keep the smile from appearing on his face.

Who the fuck was he kidding? She had him so whipped.

Even if she told him straight to his face that she didn't want him here, he wasn't going anywhere. No way, no how.

He brings his fingers up to his nose and takes yet another whiff, like a junkie, unable to get enough.

She wanted him just as bad though. That's what this smell represents, her wanting him!

She might not have said it out loud, but he considers the fact that she'd let it get this far between them, as her way of giving him a reason to stay.

X

Author's Note: Please review and let me know what you think. Thanks.
Chapter 13

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X

Tara closed her eyes and took in a shaky breath. A single tear rolled down her temple, disappearing into her brown hair, before she had a chance to wipe it away. She covered her face with both hands, trying to stifle the sobs she was no longer able to hold in. She allowed herself another moment to give into the hurt and pain and confusion, brought on once again by her ongoing inner turmoil of her heart versus her mind.

Wiping the last of her tears away, she took a cleansing breath and then quickly sat up. She scooted off of the kitchen table, and stood, but feeling weak in the knees she reached back and braced herself on the table ledge until she found her footing. She quickly zipped and buttoned her jeans closed, before wiping at her teary eyes once more.

Tara hastily disappeared into the bathroom, not wanting to wait around for him to come back, and locked the door behind her. She turned the shower on, stripped out of her clothes and stepped inside before the water had even warmed up. Gasping as the cold water hit her skin, she submerged completely under the stream. The coolness seemed to jolt her out of her stupor, clear her mind and once the water began to warm up she was able to get her breathing under control as well.

While the water cascaded down her body, she couldn't help herself but think back on everything that had happened since Friday afternoon, when Jax appeared at her door as if nothing ever happened. Every moment, every look, every word and every touch replayed in her head on what seemed like an infinite loop.

Here she was, not even forty-eight hours later and he'd already managed to turn everything upside down and twist it up. Her routine, her mind, her heart ... and within the last hour her new relationship with John too.

She wondered temporarily how it was possible to not just loathe someone as she did in this very moment, but also love and lust so wholeheartedly after them in the exact same breath.

It seemed like such a cruel joke to her, for all those emotions to co-exist alongside one another.

X

Tara climbed into bed, her muscles aching with exhaustion, trying her best to fall asleep. Trying to quiet down those voices - his voice- inside her head all the while wishing she could ignore the yearning she felt for him as well.

This wasn't supposed to happen like this. He wasn't supposed to just show up here after months and practically demand from her to take him back.

He couldn't truly believe that it would be that easy, that she would be that easy. Was he really thinking that she'd just been sitting here, waiting and longing for him and that she'd just greet him back in her life with open arms and back in her bed with open legs.
Tara rolled onto her back in frustration. All she wanted was some sleep, she needed some sleep. But she knew sleep would never come, if she couldn't find a way to drown out his words in her head, if she couldn't find a way to deal with the still tingling of her skin where he'd touched her.

I hate him!

She tried to tell herself, and almost wished it would be true, because then she could truly move on from him, and his words, his kiss or his touch wouldn't mean anything to her at all. She'd be able to shrug it off, shrug him off as if nothing had ever happened.

I hate him!

She tried the words out in her head again as she untied her sweatpants and slipped her hand inside, her hand following the same path his hand had taken earlier. She needed to sleep, and this was the only way she'd get any rest tonight. At least that's what she was trying to tell herself to justify her actions.

Tara bit her own lip, trying to suppress the moan forming in the back of her throat, when her own fingers began slipping back and forth over her wet folds, but she imagined they were his fingers instead.

I want him ... so much!

Tara groggily turned onto her left side and tried her best to get comfortable again, absentmindedly adjusting the position of the beige colored pillow under her head, and tugging the comforter all the way up under her chin. She remained like that for a couple more minutes, trying to fall back asleep, but to no avail.

She blinked a few times, trying to adjust to the light that managed to shine through the small slits in her bedroom blinds. Frustrated that she couldn't fall back asleep, she rolled back onto her back, rubbing the sleep from her eyes, before she reached for her cell phone that lay charging on her nightstand beside her.

The time displayed on her cell phone screen read one in the afternoon, and Tara had to do a double take before that actually sunk in and she quickly pushed herself up into a sitting position.

The previous couple of times when she'd had to work the weekend E.R. shift, she'd have the boys spend the night at Misses Ellie's place, and she'd set her alarm for no later than 9am and head on over there to pick them up.

But since Jax had picked the boys up after he'd gotten home from his job hunt yesterday, she hadn't bothered to set an alarm, because she'd assumed she'd be awakened by either Abel, Thomas or the both of them together, demanding juice, breakfast and early morning cartoons like they did pretty much every weekend.

She stood, slipped into her grey robe, before she decided to find out why her apartment, that would normally be filled with giggles or cries of her children, was so oddly quiet. She briefly wondered if maybe Jax had decided to take the boys outside. She could just picture Abel going on and on about the park with the playground just a block from their apartment building.

She wordlessly stepped out of her bedroom door, tying the robe closed around her, passing by the open bathroom door and glancing inside, before she ventured the few steps further into the living room.
Toys were strewn across the carpeted floor, and Tara stepped over and around them like she'd done countless times before, making her way through to the kitchen.

"Christ." She muttered under her breath when she took in the sight in front of her.

Judging by the mess throughout the kitchen, Jax had made lunch. There were pots and pans still sitting on the stove, dirty plates, cups, napkins and silverware still sitting on the table. Macaroni and cheese were smeared across the surface of the table, some had fallen beneath the table as well. She spotted a half eaten chicken nugget on one of the chairs, and red - what she assumed - ketchup stains on the linoleum floor.

At least they ate!

Okay, so they played in the living room, ate lunch and left a mess in the kitchen, Tara wondered to herself. She noted Jax's cell phone and keys sitting on the kitchen counter and as she glanced back into the living room, she also noticed the boys' shoes sitting on the floor and their jackets still hanging on the coat hooks next to the front door.

Since her park theory was out of the question now, she finally managed to put two and two together in her still sleepy mind, turned on her heels to head back into the direction of the bedrooms.

She carefully turned the door knob and pushed the door open, and just like she'd predicted found all three of them fast asleep for an afternoon nap in Abel's twin sized bed.

Jax was lying bare-chested on his back in the middle, a children's book left laying open across his stomach. Left and right of him, neatly tucked in the nook between Jax's strong arms and his torso, with their heads slightly perched up on his chest, were Abel and Thomas.

All three of them were fast asleep and looked downright angelic, and Tara couldn't help but smile at the sight. Her heart just melted and it took everything she had, not to take the few steps into the room, and climb into bed with the most important people in her life.

But for one, there wasn't enough room, and two, she really didn't want to accidentally wake them either, they simply looked too peaceful to disturb.

She reached for the door handle and was just about to back out of the room, pulling the door shut with her, when a floorboard creaked under her shift in weight. Little Thomas stirred in his sleep, moved his body to the right instead, resting his little forehead against Jax's bicep now and in doing so exposed the left side of his father's chest.

That's when she saw it and froze in place. Her name spelled out on his chest in old-english-font, big black letters!

Tara

She was baffled, shaking her head to herself in disbelief.

When had he done this? And most importantly why?

Tara stared at it for another long minute, but when she could feel the tears well up in her eyes, she finally tiptoed out of the room and quietly closed the door behind her.

She wanted to walk over to him and run her fingers across the letters, feel the slightly raised flesh of the newly inked skin beneath her fingertips ... so yeah, she had to get the hell out of there before she did any of those things and made yet a fool of herself again, like she had last night.
She went back to the kitchen, and began cleaning up the mess that Jax and the boys had left behind. Carefully, methodically and most of all very quietly, since she was not ready to face him just yet.

She also thought if she kept herself busy, it would help distract her, but truthfully it didn't help at all.

Her mind kept going back to the tattoo, and the different scenarios whirled around in her head why he'd go and get her name permanently written onto his skin.

Why would he do something so incredibly stupid? Why?

This couldn't possibly just be some sort of ploy to get her back? Some sort of plea for her to take him back, because he had eternally marked himself for her ... with her name! Forever!

Ugh! He couldn't be stupid enough to think that that would work on her? Could he?

But dammit, it did work ... a little at least. Because here she was on her hands and knees, scrubbing dried on ketchup off of the floor and all she could do is picture him in the tattoo parlor.

She could practically hear the buzzing of the ink supplying needle as it penetrated his pale skin, could see the way he'd clench his jaw on the rare occasion when it actually stung.

He'd be sitting there bare-chested, the guy asking him who this Tara was and him proudly answering that she was his old lady.

She could just picture it play out like that, and as much as she tried to fight those feelings that stirred up in her because of it, as much as she wanted to hate it, she didn't ... she simply couldn't.

Her name on his chest ... she loved it!

Her mind went back to a conversation she'd had with him, prior to her getting his Crow tattooed onto her lower back. How she'd naively ask him if he'd get something to represent their bond too, something that told the world he was hers as much as she was his.

But Jax had been quick to explain that it didn't work like that. The reaper on his back meant he belonged to Sam Crow, and the Crow on her back meant she belonged to him.

That was their bond. And that's how it worked.

So naturally, she wondered what had changed his mind and what was it supposed to mean?

How was she supposed to react if he'd walk in here without his shirt on? What was she supposed to do?

It was right there, on his left pec, right in her face and pretending that she didn't see it if he walked in here right now was simply out of the question.

Tara got up off the floor, put the spray cleaner in her hand back under the sink, making sure the child proof lock clicked back in place, and threw the dirty paper towel into the trash can.

She put the last couple of dirty dishes into the dishwasher, put the dishwashing tablet in the little compartment before she shut the machine and turned it on.

She looked around the kitchen one last time, seeing if she'd missed anything that needed cleaning. Her eyes falling onto the pile of black buttons sitting on the kitchen counter, Jax must've picked up off of the floor this morning. Her cheeks flushed when her mind drifted back to last night again.

She needed to clear her mind, get out of the apartment and away from him for a little while, she
needed some time to think and she needed to clear her conscience as well, so she turned and headed back to her bedroom.

Sitting on her unmade bed, she knew what she had to do. Everything that had happened with Jax was just eating at her, and there was nothing she could do about any of it ... with the exception of one thing.

With trembling hands she picked up her phone and texted John, asking him if she could come over to his place to see him today. She knew he'd probably be surprised since in the past she'd always told him that her Sundays were only reserved for spending time with her boys, but she was pretty sure he'd be willing to meet with her even on such short notice.

So without even waiting for his reply, Tara began looking for the right outfit, trying on a few different ones before making a final decision. She fixed her make-up and was just brushing out her hair, still deciding what to do with when her phone buzzed away on her nightstand, indicating that she'd gotten a new message. She quickly picked it up and read John's reply.

'On a Sunday? I feel honored. I'm home, come over any time. Can't wait to see you, honey.'

Tara felt like she was going to be sick. He was so blissfully oblivious about the heartbreak she was about to inflict on him, and she hated herself for it. But the guilt about what had happened, and what almost happened with Jax last night was eating her up inside, and she knew what she had to do.

X

"I want Juice." Thomas babbled out loud, poking at his father's cheek with his little finger in an attempt to not only wake him, but actually gain his attention.

Jax stirred and slowly opened his eyes, sleepily looking from the son on his right to the son on his left.

"I'm thirsty too." Abel said, before climbing out of bed, looking over his shoulder at his younger brother, "Come on, Tommy."

Thomas climbed over his father to get out of bed, and scurried away after Abel, trying to catch up with him.

Jax propped himself up onto one elbow, rubbing the sleep from his eyes with his other hand, "Hold up, boys, don't make more of a mess."

He couldn't help the big yawn when he finally hoisted himself up of the low sitting bed and groggily followed his sons out of the room.

Upon leaving the boys' bedroom, Jax took note of Tara's slightly ajar bedroom door, he tentatively knocked, but after no reply he pushed it further open and peeked inside.

The first thing he noticed was the still lingering smell of her perfume in the air, he loved that smell. It was flowery, sweet even, and it subtly complimented Tara's natural scent ... the complete opposite of his mother's sense-overwhelming choice of fragrance.

He was surprised that her bed was unmade, which was very unlike her, and he also noted the different set of tops and jeans haphazardly thrown onto the bed. The pile of clothing reminiscent of a teenage version of her and the indecisiveness in her choice of outfit at that younger age, made him raise his eyebrows in surprise.
However, his attention was quickly brought back to the boys when he heard the distinct sound of a chair getting dragged across the kitchen floor, and he hurriedly followed the source of the noise into the kitchen.

Jax made it into the kitchen just in time to stop Abel from climbing onto the kitchen counter.

"What do you think you're doing, son?" He grabbed him before he could complete his task.

"I'm getting a cup." Abel replied as if there was nothing to it, and Jax placed the child safely back onto the ground.

Jax pushed the chair back towards the table, taking note that Tara had apparently cleaned up after them while they'd been napping the afternoon away.

He proceeded to get his sons something to drink, and was just about to reach for his phone to call her and find out where she's at, when he noticed the notepad on the table instead.

A message from her scribbled on it. 'Had to run an errand. I'll be back soon. - T'

Frustrated he tossed the notepad back onto the table and ran a hand through his long hair, brushing it out of his face, before mindlessly running his finger over the small scab that had formed on the left side of his lower lip.

He had a pretty good idea just what kind of 'errand' she was running, judging from her indecisiveness of what to wear and the smell of perfume in the air. The thought that she was dressing up for another guy made his blood boil once again.

He watched his boys dipping their chocolate-chip cookies into their milk, and he envied them for the naive innocence they still possessed.

He shook his head to himself, trying to shake away the images of her and that guy from his mind.

What was happening to them, to her and him? There was just no fixing anything as long as there was a third person in the mix. How was he supposed to compete with some guy in the shadows.

Jesus Christ, she wouldn't even tell him his name.

He'd held back as much as he could. Sure, he'd said some hurtful shit last night, but overall he'd tired relentlessly to contain most of his anger to avoid pushing her further away. Further into that guys arms.

Yet every fiber in his being told him to pull her aside, pin her down and make her talk. Find out who this guy was and then handle it the only way he truly knew how. The club way. The Sam Crow way.

The only thing holding him back was the knowledge that 'the club way' had never worked out well when it came to anything concerning Tara.

He needed to talk to her, and had hoped that once she'd wake up, they could put a cartoon on for the boys and try once again to talk everything through. But now she was already gone, and he hated the thought of how they'd left things last night.

X

Jax's head turned when he heard the front door open, and Tara stepped inside. They exchanged an awkward nod in greeting, but neither of them even so much as muttered a 'Hi'.
"Mommy." Abel shrieked excited, but didn't leave his position on the living room floor around the coffee table.

"Mama." Thomas blurted out just as excited as his older brother, and quickly scrambled to his feet to run into his mother's arms.

Tara hugged and kissed the top of Thomas' head, "I missed you guys so much. What're you doing?"

"Coloring." Abel answered and held up his partially colored paper in the air, as if the colored pencils and crayons scattered across the small table weren't a dead giveaway to their current activity.

Thomas pulled his mother further into the room, wanting to show off his art and Tara wordlessly complied.

She knelt on the floor between her boys, shrugging out of her light jacket and took her time admiring all the different pictures her boys had drawn in her absence. A sweet smile on her face that didn't really reach her eyes as she tried to listen to her boys explain all the different things they'd drawn.

She could feel Jax's scrutinizing gaze on her every move, but she refused to meet his eyes.

The moment she'd walked through that door and laid eyes on him, everything she'd thought about on her drive home just now vanished all over again and her mind went back to last night. Not just what had happened in the kitchen, but everything they'd talked about as well.

"Daddy needs to talk to mommy for a minute." Jax startled her out of her thoughts.

She finally looked up at him in surprise.

The boys didn't seem to mind, and Jax stood from his seat on the couch, his eyes never leaving hers.

She nodded, "Okay" got up off the floor, and followed him wordlessly into the kitchen.

Tara leaned against the kitchen counter and folded her arms, trying her best to shake the shirtless image of him with her name on his chest from her mind.

He stood across from her, perched up on the edge of the kitchen table. He scratched the side of his beard, trying to act casual when he asked, "Got all your errands run?"

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled awkwardly back at him, "I guess."

An awkward silence filled the room for a long moment as they both seemed lost in thought. From his position at the table he was able to see the boys in the living room. He looked at them for a couple of seconds before pushing himself off of the table and stepped closer to her, out of view from his sons.

He could see how her shoulders tensed the closer he got, but it didn't deter him. He stopped right in front of her and reached up, his palms and fingers gently circling her upper arms, soothingly sliding up and down in an attempt to get her to relax again. To lose some of that tension that was so apparent between them.

"Babe?" He said looking right at her and she met his questioning stare, before he leaned in even further and whispered, "What is happening to us? What the fuck are we doing, Tara?"

She held his gaze for as long as she could, but when the tears started welling up in her eyes again, she lowered her head and looked away. Her voice so high and breaking as she shook her head and
whispered back, "I don't know."

X

Author's Note: I hope you like this enough to leave me a couple of thoughts. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 14

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X

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They stood like that in complete silence for another long moment, before Jax raised his right hand up to her face, tipping her chin up so she'd look back at him again. "Look, you're probably sick and tired of me saying this, but we need to talk this through. We need to try to figure this out."

"I know." Tara replied, nodding her head in agreement and sidestepped away from him, out of his grasp so she could dare a peek into the living room at their sons.

She folded her arms again and looked back at Jax from her position by the door now, "Not in front of the boys though. I don't want them to see us fight." Her voice so low, it was almost a whisper.

"Who says we're gonna fight?" Jax asked daring a couple steps towards her again.

Tara tilted her head to the side as if she was assessing him, before giving him a pointed look and stating the obvious, "We both know we're gonna fight."

She dared another glance in the living room, her eyes on the kids when she added, "The boys are so happy to have you back, I don't want to ruin that for them."

She sighed deeply and looked back at him, "If I can help it I don't want them to see us arguing."

Jax frowned at that and ran his hand over his face, before looking back at her, raising his eyebrows in question, "Any suggestions? You think Misses Ellie could take them for a little while?"

"Maybe." Tara replied, "I just worked so many late hours in the last two weeks, I feel bad asking her to give up her Sunday too."

"Tomorrow's my first day at work. I'm not sure when I'll get out of there." He tried to explain, the meaning obvious, he didn't want to wait another day.

He stepped up beside her, his eyes shifting from her to Thomas and Abel laughing out loud at something they drew, and he couldn't help but smile at the sound of their laughter. His sons seemingly oblivious to the turmoil their parents were going through, "We could put a cartoon on for them, and at least try."

Tara closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose in obvious frustration before she took in a deep breath, "Let me ... let me call my friend Christy. She might have time to watch them for a little bit."
Jax nodded and watched as Tara stepped into the living room just long enough to get her purse and returned back into the kitchen, fishing her cell phone out along the way, ready to make the call.

X

"Thank you so much" Tara said again, pulling on her Jacket, "You're a lifesaver." She reached for her purse, slinging it over her shoulder.

"We really appreciate this." Jax added as he opened the front door.

"Don't worry about it." Christy said and looked back at Abel and Thomas, both of them busy driving matchbox cars along the floor. "We'll have so much fun. I'll spoil them rotten for you."

"I bet you will." Tara said with relief in her voice that her friend seemed okay with this, "See you later."

Jax started to walk out the door, Tara right behind him and Christy followed, ready to close and lock the door as soon as they left.

"Tara?" Christy said, taking a step out into the hallway, waving her friend back towards her. "I forgot to ask you something." She added as a way to explain.

Tara looked from Christy to Jax, and gave him a nod, "Go ahead, I'll be right out."

Jax nodded and gave Christy one last grateful smile before he disappeared down the staircase, his truck keys jangling in his hand.

Tara took the couple steps back to her apartment door, and tried not to smirk at Christy mouthing the words 'holy fuck' in her direction.

"That's your husband?" Christy whispered when Tara was finally right in front of her, pointing a finger in the direction where Jax had just disappeared to.

"You've seen the picture on my desk, of him holding Abel." Tara whispered back, trying to act like she didn't know what Christy was so worked up about.

"Well, that picture does not do him justice." Christy replied before she added, "I mean, those blue eyes, that smile and that body. He looks like the secret love-child of Chris Hemsworth and Brad Pitt."

Tara tried not to laugh out loud at that, but Christy's face was just too much.

"Listen." Christy glanced at her wristwatch before reaching for Tara's arm, "It's only four pm. Plenty of time to reconcile if you ask me, and if things go well between you two, just give me a call and I'll stay all night."

Tara shook her head and scoffed, "That's not gonna happen."

"It might." Christy replied with a smirk on her lips, her dimples digging deep into her cheeks, "You should see the way he looked at you when you weren't looking."

"It's not that simple." Tara's smile faded, "I've told you some of the things that happened." She'd given her friend the very -very- abridged version of events.

Christy nodded, "I know and you did, but he's here now, for you and your kids."
She let go of Tara's arm and gave her friend a gentle nudge towards the hallway, "So go talk things out, get a bite to eat, a couple of drinks, and get a room somewhere. I can have Jason bring me my toothbrush and a change of clothes. I gotta be at work at nine tomorrow morning, so I can stay until eight thirty at the latest. So go." She ushered Tara even further away from the door. "Go get laid." She giggled, winking back at Tara before stepping back inside and closing the apartment door in Tara's face.

X

Jax pulled his pick-up truck into the empty gravel parking lot and shut the engine off.

Tara dug through her purse, fishing out her cell phone and put it in her pocket. She tried to hide her bag under the bench seat, but realized there was no room.

She looked at Jax, holding up her purse, "Got a place to put this out of sight?"

"Yeah, sure." Jax nodded and grabbed the bag from her, before opening the door and sliding out of his seat.

Tara got out as well and stepped around to his side just in time to see him move some things around to hide her hand bag under the backseat bench instead.

"Thanks." She nodded, pulling a hair tie from her wrist and tries to gather her brown long hair in a loose bun as she watched him close and lock the doors of his truck.

"How do you even know about this place?" Jax looked around. They were outside of town, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. His eyes following the gravel covered trail that clearly let into a heavily wooded area.

"Christy told me about it ... and I went running here a couple of times."

"Out here? Alone?" Jax said as he followed Tara towards the forest ahead, the weeds waist high to the right and left of them. "By yourself?" She could hear the suppressed outrage in his voice as he dug a cigarette out and quickly lit it, shoving his lighter back into his jean pocket.

Tara shrugged, neither stopping nor looking back at him, regretting already that she was stupid enough to let it slip. The annoyance obvious in her own voice now, "Yes, Jax. Alone."

She momentarily considered mentioning that she'd felt safer running through these woods by herself than she'd felt in Charming during the last couple months she'd spent there, but she realizes that that's just adding salt to an open wound, so she bites her tongue instead and ventures on deeper into the forest, with Jax following her every step.

A silent moment passes, but she hears the gravel crunching under every heavy step he takes and she can feel his presents closer to her now, he's obviously walking faster to walk up beside her instead of behind her.

She tries not to smirk at the thought that his pristine white sneakers are probably already covered in a little bit of dirt by now.

The air is a tad more humid here, but still refreshingly cool, and it's dimmer now too that they're surrounded by threes and other foliage. The treetops high above them are touching, natures canopy made of branches and a few remaining leaves that haven't fallen yet, even though they're red and brown already, just dangling in the breeze.
The gravel path they're on grows wider, when he finally reaches her side, and they can comfortably walk side by side now, with even a little room left to spare between them. Just their elbows barely touching every now and then.

He exhales the smoke through the right side of his mouth away from her, flicking the ashes off of his cigarette between his fingers. Turning his head, watching the small glimmer in the ashes hit the wet ground, making sure it goes out all the way, not wanting to leave a fiery inferno behind them.

He looks over at her then, his eyebrows raised and his forehead a row of horizontal lines, when he asks her out loud, a rhetorical question, "You know how many women are kidnapped, raped or murdered on a daily basis?"

He wasn't thinking, that much is obvious, and the moment the words leave his lips he regrets them. Of course she fucking knows. She's lived through every scenario and the thought is making him angry and sick all the same.

And then an involuntary image of Darvany Jennings flashes before his eyes, and the guilt and self-hatred comes on in full force, like a solid punch to his gut. The regret of what he'd done making him sick to his stomach once more. He has to look away from Tara, trying to blink away the image of the woman he had taken and murdered.

A long drag from his cigarette, hoping the nicotine will help with the nauseous feeling that's rising up in him.

Hypocrite! Hypocrite! The voice inside his head is screaming at him, over and over!

Tara rolls her eyes at him and looks away momentarily, completely oblivious to the pained expression that now graces his unshaven face.

"I can handle myself." She says almost flippantly, hoping that he'll drop it and they can move on to the things they really needed to discuss, instead of wasting their time with his ludicrous outrage of her going alone on a run.

She wouldn't have been alone if he'd left Charming with her, she wants to point out, but again, she doesn't.

He wills himself to bury the guilt he's feeling. Trying his best to shake away the thoughts and images in his head and focus all his attention back on the woman by his side instead. Wants to be in the here and now with her!

It takes him a moment to catch on to what she'd said, but he finally gets his wits back and manages to continue their conversation, "Meaning what exactly?" Another drag from his cigarette and he slowly exhales.

"Meaning I know how to defend myself." She looks up at him then and sees the quizzical look he gives her.

She hesitates a moment, before she clears her throat and focuses her attention back to what's in front of her instead, "Right after I moved here I took a self-defense class, and I got a CCL too. A concealed carry license." She explains further.

"I know what a CCL is, Sweetheart." He replies with some amusement in his voice now.

Darvany is forgotten, buried away again in the back of his mind, with his deepest, darkest and most heinous crimes. If he's honest with himself it scares him to death how easily he can push that
darkness in him away and pretend it isn't still there, hiding, lingering beneath the surface.

He steps a few feet in front of her, walking backwards to face her, careful not to trip and looks her up and down, his cigarette hanging loosely from his lip as he raises an eyebrow at her again.

"What?" She asks, stops walking for a moment and puts her hands on her hips, wondering what that scrutinizing look he's giving her is all about.

He raises his hand to take the cigarette that's hanging from his lip, exhaling a cloud of smoke to his left, tilting his head a bit to the side and making a show of looking her up and down again. "Just curious where exactly you're concealing that gun, babe."

She can feel her cheeks flush slightly at the way his eyes linger on her. She folds her arms then and starts walking again, not wanting to like how his attention on her is making her feel.

She manages to smile though, yet trying to hide how flustered she is, "Well, at the moment it's concealed in my purse under the backseat in your truck."

He lets out a chuckle, before grinding out his cigarette and falling back in step beside her.

"You're gonna get me thrown back in jail." He adds, but there's clearly amusement in his voice as he shoves his now empty hands in his pockets.

"For what?" She asks back, her voice also carries a hint of amusement as well.

"Possession of a firearm while on federal release." He says without missing a beat and smiles back at her.

"Right." She dismisses him. He's clearly fucking with her. He's teasing her, she's sure of it.

"The gun's in my truck." He says, and it's obvious that he's enjoying the lightheartedness of the conversation, despite the topic.

"Yeah, but in my purse, somewhere between my little make-up bag, some hair ties and a couple of tampons." Tara replies, smiling herself now. "I'm pretty sure they'll believe that it's mine."

"Besides." she looks up at him then, a knowing look in her eyes, "I'm not buying it. Jackson Teller has never been unarmed a day in his life." It's an exaggeration of course and they both know it.

He shrugs at that, and smiles again, that boyish smile she longs for, the one she'd barely seen since he'd gotten released from Stockton over two years ago. "I'm not armed right now."

"Really?" She says with doubt and she actually has to laugh at that, his smile reminding her of the boy she fell in love with and she's giving him a look that tells him she knows he's full of it.

"I'm serious." He says, still grinning ear to ear and pulling his unzipped black hoody wide open for her to see that there's nothing hiding underneath it.

She already knew he wasn't wearing his gun holster, but that didn't mean he didn't have a gun on him somewhere. Her eyes drifted down to his feet, his ankles to be exact, and she nodded her head in that direction, "What about that gun?"

Jax stopped walking, pulling both pant legs up, exposing his ankles and half of his lower legs, "Nothing there either, babe."

Tara looks confused back at him, disbelieve in her voice when she stops short and grabs his forearm
to get him to stop too, "You really don't have a gun on you?"

"I really don't." He replies earnestly for a moment, before the boyish smile returns to his face, his hands once more pulling his hoody open, "Feel free to frisk me if you want."

She knows he's flirting, but she's too stunned to even acknowledge it.

She draws her eyebrows together now, clearly confused, and shakes her head, "W-Why? I mean, you've never been a stickler for rules and laws ... ever."

He pushes his hands in his jeans again, the look on his face almost abashed when he answers her, "I'm not takin' any chances this time. Not gonna give 'em a reason to ship my ass back to Charming or Stockton."

She nods her head in understanding, but the surprise is still written all over her face. She's speechless, doesn't know what to say to that, and simply follows in step alongside him again. Matching him stride for stride, while she's trying to hide the euphoria she's feeling at this newfound revelation of his.

She lets that happiness wash over her for a long quiet moment, but then the doubt comes rushing back in full force and she resents him for giving her this false hope. She's been lied to one too many times and she'd lost count of the broken promises. She's scared to believe him, scared of being hurt again.

He interrupts her train of thought then, "Last night, you biting my lip. Picked that up in your self-defense class?" He's not even trying to hide the smirk that appears on his face.

"Yeah, sure." She says, not a trace of humor in her voice though. She's no longer in a teasing mood and the way she folds her arms yet again makes that crystal clear.

He can sense the shift in her mood and of course wonders what could've cause it, but for the moment he refrains from actually asking her what's wrong.

They walk side by side with an awkward silence between them again for a couple of minutes.

Jax is the first one to speak up, and as much as he tries to think of how to approach this subject with her yet again, without letting his anger get the best of him, he's not sure that he can hold back.

"We need to talk about the guy you're seeing." There's a sentence he'd never thought he'd be saying to his wife.

Tara lets out a frustrated sigh, "There's nothing left to talk about, Jax."

"Like hell, there isn't." His voice filled with obvious anger now. "There's a guy out there bedding my wife. That shit has to stop!

He's just about to open his mouth to say something else, when Tara beats him to it, "It's over, okay. You got your wish. We broke up."

"What?" Jax asks, that he's surprised is obvious in the tone of his voice and the way he keeps looking over at her.

She can't really tell for sure, since she refuses to look back up at him, but she'd bet her last dollar that
he's smiling.

Tara knows that she owes him no explanation whatsoever, but she's just so incredibly tired of the constant back and forth between them.

She puts her own hands in her pockets now, mimicking him in a way and graving a cigarette to calm her nerves.

She takes one last steadying breath, before she lets it all out. "That's where I went earlier today. To see him. John. And ... and I told him what happened last night between you and me. He got angry, I mean, rightfully so and we broke up."

She doesn't really know why her heart is racing in her chest, but it is, and she feels too nervous to look up at him to see his reaction. Instead her heads down, her eyes are trained on the gravel path in front of her as they continue to walk deeper into the forest.

Jax is the one speechless now, mostly because he hadn't seen this coming at all. Hadn't imagined that she'd actually confess what had happened to the other guy, to John, let alone that it would end things with him.

But fuck if that wasn't the best news he'd heard in god knows how long. It takes everything he has in him to not pull her against him, spin her around like some love-drunk teenager and kiss her 'till she was weak in the knees.

He knows better than to do that though, reaches with his left hand for her right one, literally pulling her hand out of her jean pocket and raises it up to his lips. "Thank you." He whispers before placing a gentle kiss against the back of her hand, and the gesture finally draws her eyes up to meet his.

She knows his 'thank you' is very presumptuous, and for a fraction of a second she considers to point that out to him. But then his eyes meet hers and she sees the hope he feels reflecting back at her, and the need to let him know that she didn't do this for him vanishes in thin air.

She's not sure how, but she manages to pull her eyes away from his and starts walking again, with him falling wordlessly in step right beside her just like before. Their hands drop back down to their sides, yet he's still holding onto her and proceeds to intertwine his fingers around hers.

Tara hesitates for a moment, then decides to return the gesture, wrapping her fingers around his hand. A momentarily feeling of contentment rushes over her, but it doesn't last and is quickly replaced by the sudden need to clarify things, "Him being out of the picture doesn't mean you and me are back together. You know that, right?” Looking up at him, searching his face to read his reaction to her words on his face.

He nods his head, looking down at her. He's neither frowning nor smiling, but there's that twinkle of hope in his blue eyes again when he solemnly replies, "I know, babe. But it's a start.”

She lets his words sink in as they continue to walk on, hand in hand.

She's emotionally drained and exhausted from the burden of the secrets, the lies and the half-truth she's been keeping for what seems like forever.

And he's been so hell-bent on them talking this through, figuring this out, and who knows, maybe he's right, for once. So she decides to do just that, even if it ends up pushing them further apart, at the very least she'll have put all her cards on the table. Every single last one!
"There's something else I need to tell you." She breaks the silence and looks up at him, "A lot actually."

"Okay." He replies and gives her hand a gentle squeeze, encouraging her to continue.

"It's about Otto." She starts off and swallows the lump in her throat.

X

Author's Note: Please let me know what you think and leave me a few words. I appreciate all of your reviews so much and it keeps me motivated to continue with the story. Thank you!
Chapter 15

Tara is emotionally drained and exhausted from the burden of all the secrets, the lies and the half-truth she's been keeping for what seems like forever.

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"It's about Otto." She starts off and swallows the lump in her throat.

"Otto?" Jax raised his eyebrows in confusion as he's looking down at her while they continue walking on ahead.

"Yeah." Tara let out a sigh and nodded. She really wasn't sure where or how to start this whole conversation, but she also knew it needed to happen.
She wanted to clear her conscience, once and for all.

Tara cleared her throat, and began, "I lied to you before."

"Lied about what?" Jax was quick to ask before she could elaborate.

She could feel his eyes on her, but she refused to look up at him. She didn't think she could bring herself to say everything that needed to be said if she looked up at him and saw what these revelations did to him.

So she focused her eyes on the gravel covered trail ahead of them instead, and tried to get it all out in one long breath. "That first time I went up to Stockton, I had told you that I didn't get to see him, but that was a lie. They brought him in and I did get to talk to him. I told him that I was your wife and why I was there. And of course, he was dismissive and angry. I told him that Bobby was free and that it meant his execution date would get stalled. I pretty much told him everything ... everything we had talked about."

"Okay." Jax chimed in before she could say anything else. He didn't understand why she'd kept it a secret. "Why didn't you tell me any of this?"

"I didn't tell you, because - because when I told him the club needed him to retract his statement, he basically asked me to go down on him." Tara blurted the words out fast, because she needed them finally out of her head. She finally let the breath out she'd been holding.

"What?" Jax said and stopped dead in his tracks turning towards her, pulling on her hand so she'd
I obviously didn't do it." Tara quickly added just in case there was any doubt in his mind. She pulled her hand from his and folded her arms in front of her yet again, her eyes downcast. She still couldn't bring herself to look him in the eye.

Jax shook his head. He simply couldn't believe what he'd just heard. "Tara-" He said with sorrow and disbelief in his voice, his hand reaching out to her.

"There's more." She quickly cut him off and took a small step back, out of his reach.

She was trying to get all of this out without falling apart, and she knew the moment he'd touch her or try to comfort her, she'd lose it and break down in tears.

So she cleared her throat once more, "The next time I saw him, I had brought Luann's perfume and ... anyway, long story short, he jacked-off in front of me." She felt nauseous as those last words crossed her lips, but at last they were finally out.

She had planned to give him all the distasteful details, but now that the moment was actually here, she couldn't bring herself to do so. It already sounded bad enough as it was, so she quickly decided to leave it at that.

"Jesus Christ." Jax exhaled and turned away from her now, both hands covering his face.

He stood still like that for a long moment, with his back turned towards her he asked, "Did he ... he didn't touch you?"

"No, he didn't." Tara replied quietly, she was sad that things had happened like they did, but most of all she was embarrassed.

His hands left his face, brushing his hair back, and finally dropped back down to this sides. He turned back around, facing her. There was both anger and sadness in his voice when he said, "You should've told me." He raised his eyebrows at her, clearly wondering what she had to say for herself for keeping this from him all this time.

"I know." Tara replied and finally dared to look up at him.

She could see all the different emotions flittering through his eyes, could see the devastation in them, before he clenched his jaw, as if he was fighting the urge to yell and scream at her.

Against her better judgment she dared to ask, "Are you mad?" She lifted her chin for the verbal blow she figured was about to come her way, "Mad at me?"

"No." Jax shook his head at first, took a deep breath and actually turned away from her again, taking a couple of steps ahead of her. The gesture was obvious, he needed some space to rein in his feelings, his emotions.

But then he stopped and turned towards her once more, "Yeah, I am actually. I'm fucking pissed."

He shook his head again at her, wishing he could shake away everything he'd just learned, "What the hell were you thinking? Going back there after he asked you to suck his dick? That should've been the goddamn end of it. You should've told me!" He repeated again for good measure.

"I know." Tara nodded again, her own sorrow reflecting in her eyes.
"Why?" He blurted out, his frustration getting the better of him, "Why the hell would you go back?"

She wasn't exactly sure what he was accusing her off, but none the less there was some sort of accusation in his tone of voice.

"For you." She spat back at him, before she turned away from him now, trying to get her own feelings under control now and struggling to keep those tears from rising in her eyes. Everything was for him!

"I didn't ask you to do that." Jax stepped closer to her again, his anger flaring up once more, "As a matter of fact, I told you more than once that you didn't need to do it."

Tara took in a deep breath and spun back around, this time with a newfound resolve. She knew she'd made a mistake, but there was more to this little story then just her shortcomings, "You said you couldn't leave Charming because of the RICO case. So I did what I did, because you promised ..." Her voice broke and she burst into tears then, hiding her face in her hands, unable to finish the sentence, but the message was clear.

Jax wiped at his own eyes as the devastating revelation hit him, that she'd go through that sort of humiliation for him. Just so he'd follow through on a promise he'd made, to leave Charming with her once the RICO case was no longer held over their heads.

He grabbed her roughly by her arms, against her will, and pulled her hard against him as his arms wrapped tightly around her back. He couldn't get her close enough.

Tara stopped struggling against him and sobbed into his broad chest. A mixture of guilt, shame and relief shook through the very core of her.

"I'm sorry, babe. I'm so sorry." His admission of guilt, he could barely stomach it.

"Shhhhhhhh." He tried to soothe her, brushing his hand over her hair repeatedly, unintentionally unraveling her lose bun.

He swallowed hard, the feelings of sadness getting replaced by anger once more as he clenched his jaw, "That bastard's lucky he's already dead. I would've made him suffer."

Jax knew he was at fault after all, but the burden of that guilt was hard for him to accept. The list of things he was to blame for was already too long.

It was much easier to direct all his anger at the other man. At Otto. A man he'd once admired and looked up to, for his undying devotion to the club.

Even after Otto ratted, he still held the man in such high regards because no other member had suffered more for the club then Otto himself. And maybe he also sympathized with the older man, because Jax knew that if roles had been reversed, and Tara had been found beaten to death with another club members semen inside of her while he was locked up, serving time for Sam Crow, he probably would've lost his mind too. Would've done the exact same thing.

Luann was everything to Otto, just like Tara was everything to him.

But now? Now all that admiration he'd once felt for Otto Delany was replaced with hot boiling anger, and Jax wished he could've been the one who'd put a bullet in the son of a bitch himself.

Jax held Tara in his strong arms, the tight grip he had on her unwavering, until she finally calmed down and her tears subsided.
She pulled away, and even though he didn't want to, he let go of her.

Jax watched helplessly as Tara turned away from him again, wiping at her eyes, wondering how pathetic she probably looked to him right now. She reached in her jean pocket, pulled out a tissue and wiped at her nose too. She knew the black mascara tears and snot were probably very unflattering.

"Why tell me all of this now?" Jax's voice startled her, it wasn't angry, yet firm. "You thought if you piss me off enough, I'll split? If that's your plan, you're wasting your time, babe. I'm not going anywhere."

She wiped at her nose one last time, before shoving the tissue back into her pocket, spinning around to face him again.

"There's no plan, Jax." She looked up at him through red rimmed eyes. "Not anymore." She adds and sees the confused look that crosses his face.

Her tears have stopped falling now and she actually dares to step towards him with such a force, that it almost causes him to take a step back from her. Almost!

She pokes a finger angrily into his chest, and then the words just stumbled out of her mouth, she's unable to stop them, let alone censor them, "I had a plan. I came here, found a place to live, got the job I wanted, found a good preschool for Abel, got daycare and babysitters lined up too."

"I did all of that by myself, on top of all the physical therapy and actual therapy, because apparently I also suffer from PTSD now too, from a goddamn attack I can't even remember ... and still, after all that, and even after seeing you with her on the day I left Charming, I still waited. For you! Like this pathetic shadow of a woman you've turned me into, I waited for you. Every damn time when your name popped up on my phone I hoped that today would be the day you call to tell me you're done with Sam Crow, and that you are on your way to be with me and the boys. But instead I got the same old excuses from you, story after story about what was going on with the club that was keeping you from being with us, and I finally came to my senses, told you to stop telling me about the club. So I stopped hoping for you to show up and focused all my attention on being the best mother I can be to those babies, and focused on healing myself, trying to find me again, the one I was before you. About three months after I got here I start dating John, and he's a good man, Jax. He's nice and decent and everything a woman could wish for, and that normal life I see for myself seems finally within reach. My kids, my work, my love life, it's all starting to fall into place and I'm so close to finally moving on from you! And the next thing I know, my doorbell rings and there you are. Like nothing ever happen, looking at me with your arrogance and demands." And those beautiful blue eyes! She lets out a humorless chuckle and manages to hold back the tears when she looks up at him, and finds herself suddenly out of words.

Tara's revelations are daunting, and in all reality Jax knows that he should drop to his knees in front of her, throw himself at her mercy, apologize for everything he's done and beg her to forgive him. And maybe he will still do that, just not right this very moment. Not now.

Because right now his ears are ringing with Tara's words about John, and his jaw clenches in anger again. He knows he's being immature, and that his rage towards her now is completely uncalled for, especially after everything he's done, but he can't stop himself even if he tried. "Did Mister-Nice-and-Decent get you wet like I do? Like I did last night?" He hisses.

Tara looks away in disgust and shakes her head at his words, "Of course, that's all you heard. Everything else I said went right over your head."
"I heard you just fine." Jax reassures her with venom in his voice and steps closer to her, "But you didn't answer my question. Does he?"

"I'm not doing this." Tara replies and backs away from him, hating him for what he said and hating herself for how his words make her feel, hoping he doesn't notice the blush rising in her cheeks.

"Doing what?" Jax asks and takes two more steps towards her and reaches for her hands, tugging her towards him.

"This." She hisses at him now, "With you." She struggles and pulls her hands away from him.

He won't let her fight him off that easily though, his hands encircle her waist instead, his fingertips digging into her side, pulling her close against him when he leans down, her hair tickles his face when his lips are just an inch from her ear. The anger seemingly gone from his voice but replaced tenfold with arrogance instead, "We both know he can't get you wet like I do. Can't get you off like I do, babe."

His right hand drops from her waist and grabs her left hand instead. It's all happening so fast that she doesn't even realize what he's doing until it's too late and he presses her hand hard against the length of his erection. "Just like nobody gets me as hard as you do." His hot breath against her neck makes her shiver.

He's so arrogant and cocky, and the feminist in her loathes the way his actions make her feel. How her skin tingles everywhere he touches her, and her cheeks flush in a shade of crimson. How the need for him pools and pulsates painfully between her thighs.

Hates knowing that if he threw her on the ground right now, onto the dirty gravel beneath them, she might put up a bit of a fight, but with John out of the picture now she'd probably give in. She'd watch him with glossed over eyes as he pulls her jeans off of her, and she'd willingly spread her legs for him, watching him climb on top of her in all his perfection.

She'd be loving and hating every minute of it. But nonetheless, she'd let him.

She's not sure how she finds the resolve to do it, but she pulls her hand out of his once more, bracing herself against his chest and pushing him back and away from her.

"Sex was never an issue for us." She manages to say, but then dares to look up at him and meets his lust filled eyes.

She raises her chin in defiance, "It's the sex you have with other women that was the problem."

Jax feels that verbal blow as if it was carried out by her fists. Because she's right!

He stops his advances on her at once, and the arrogant look in his eyes all but disappears, being replaced by guilt instead. "I'm sorry."

He watches her as she turns and walks away from him. Not far, but far enough to let him know she needs some distance, needs a minute, so he gives it to her and remains quietly glued to his spot. His hands disappearing in his pockets as the guilt once more washes over him.

A long minute later, Tara finally speaks up, "In the beginning, we had agreed on full disclosure, but that got lost somewhere and we started lying to each other, keeping things from each other."

Her change in subject surprises him, and for a long moment he's not sure what she wants him to say.
"I know." It's all he manages to croak out in response.

"Ima." She suddenly says and turns back around to face him, still a couple of feet away from him. "We've spend so many hours talking about why you had done what you've done. Talking about the truth behind your actions. And I remember for the first couple of months in Stockton, every time I came to see you, you just kept on apologizing for it. Begging me to forgive you. And I know it's because you were scared I'd run while you were locked up, so you apologized over and over again, until I finally told you that you needed to stop. In order to move on from it, I needed you to stop mentioning it every time we talked."

Jax nodded his head, recalling the events in his mind.

Remembering how scared he had felt, thinking that she'd split, whenever she didn't answer one of his phone calls. Remembering the helplessness he'd felt when she came to visit him and not knowing if it would be the last time he'd get to see her.

But then he also remembered the day she told him to stop apologizing, and that he didn't need to worry, that she wasn't going anywhere.

He felt like he could finally breathe again, after months and months of drowning.

Tara was proud of herself for keeping the tears at bay right now, and if there was any chance at all in them reconciling, she knew she needed to get this off of her chest.

She reached back into her hair, pulling the loosened black hair tie from her brown curls. Fidgeting with the hairpiece for a moment, busying her hands, before she finally gathered the strength again to look back at his guilt ridden face, "I've spend countless hours thinking about what happened with you and Colette. Walking in on you with her, seeing you with her ... it was probably the worst moment in a series of horrible moments."

"Tara." He said with sorrow in his voice, interrupting her, stepping towards her.

But Tara held up her hand, signaling him to stay away and shook her head at him, "Let me finish. Please."

She looked away and cleared her throat, before meeting his eyes once more. "I thought about it and thought about it, and as much as it hurt to see you with her, as much as I hate you for it, I get it. I mean, you had just found out that I had lied to you about being pregnant, lied to you about losing our child, the circumstances of the miscarriage, me blaming your mother for it all. And you found out that I was divorcing you, taking our sons away from you. You probably thought I didn't love you anymore and you thought we were over. So I get it. I mean, I wish you would've waited some, grieved for our marriage for longer than a minute before climbing into bed with someone else, but then again, it's you we're talking about here."

She paused and looked away, fighting the tears and emotions that welled up in her, before she finally had the resolve to continue, "It's just that when I thought about it, all of it, my mind kept going back to that conversation I had with Juice. How he told me about you meeting with Colette, the eagerness with which he scribbled down the address for me, and most of all the knowing look in his eyes. It's like he knew, Jax. He knew I'd find you in bed with her. How could he have known what I'd be walking in on?" Tara looked back up at him then, the guilt palpable on his face and the revelation of what that meant brought fresh tears to her eyes, but she quickly wiped them away.

She needed to hear it from him, needed to know the truth, the whole ugly goddamn truth. "So did you? Sleep with her when we were still together?" Her eyes bore into his and when he didn't deny it right away, but looked away and hid his face in his hands instead, she knew she had just gotten her
Tara turned away from him then, the hurtful sob that escaped her throat tore his heart in two.

He wiped at his own tears and started towards her, "Tara?" Her name like a plea on his lips.

She flinched at the sound of his voice and turned around, her hand up in the air once more, her voice filled with anger now, "Don't. Don't you dare touch me."

He stopped approaching her, and said the only thing he could say, "I'm so sorry, babe."

Tara shook her head and started rambling, her voice angry and hurt filled, "Was it just her, or were there others too? Did you stick your dick in all of 'em? All the whores? Taking the new merchandise you're selling for a test ride." Her face crumbled, more sobs and more tears fell.

"No, baby, no." He pleaded again. "It was just her, one other time." He wanted to reach out for her, wanted to hold her, but he was smart enough not to. Not now.

The silence dragged on for what seemed like forever. The only sound besides Tara's quiet sobs were the trees rustling in the wind around them.

Jax turned away, he couldn't bear to look at her. Couldn't stand to see the hurt he'd inflicted on her.

"Do you love her?" Tara suddenly spoke up and looked back up at him, with black mascara tears running down her cheeks.

He fiercely shook his head, "No. No, babe. Of course not!"

Another sob escaped from her throat at that, before she began to ramble once more, "See, 'cause it would all make sense if you loved her. I mean, if you fell in love with her, and fell out of love with me, then" She stuttered, "T-then it would make sense, because you just wouldn't be able to help yourself, because of all the love you were feeling for her."

Tara held his gaze for a long moment, "So it's okay, you can tell me the truth. You can tell me if that's why you did it. You can tell me you love her."

Jax shook his head at that, his eyes welled up with tears and his chin quivered when he looked at the desperation in her eyes.

A single tear rolled down his cheek and he quickly wiped it away, he barely recognized his own voice when he said, "I love you!"

X

Author's Note: Thank you all for the lovely reviews and private messages. I hope you liked this chapter as much as the last one. If you did, leave a few words for me. Thanks for reading. xoxo
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A single tear rolled down his cheek and he quickly wiped it away, he barely recognized his own voice when he said, "I love you!"

Tara saw the tears in his eyes, along with the helplessness, truth and devastation reflecting back at her.

She was sure the heartbroken look on his face matched hers to a T. But she felt they were for completely different reasons.

She was heartbroken over his betrayal she'd finally found confirmed today, and the pain that went along with it, whereas he was heartbroken that he'd been caught in his betrayal and the consequences that might follow.

So with that thought in her mind, she steeled herself against the feelings his tears evoked in her. She was too devastated herself to allow his sorrow to outweigh her own.

She shook her head, trying to stifle the sobs that began to come on strong again, "I don't understand." Letting out a shuttering breath.

She wiped both hands across her face, wiping away her tears the best she could. The words just flowing out of her mouth, "You say you love me, and not her, then how did this happen? Why would you do this to us? To me? Did you even consider what this would do to me? Or were you just thinking I wouldn't find out? I mean, Juice knew about it. Which means the club knew about it, right? Did Gemma know too?"

"It was a mistake." Jax replied, his voice heavy with regret. His tears had stopped falling, but his eyes were still red rimmed, and his cheeks bright red from the onslaught of emotions. "You don't know how badly I wish I could take it back, choose differently. But I can't. No matter how much I want to undo it, I can't, babe."

"A mistake you wish you could undo? That's your answer? That's not good enough." Tara hissed.

"What else do you want me to say? You want me to drop to my knees and beg, darlin'? Because if that's what it takes, I'll fucking do it?" Jax pleaded with her, daring a step towards her.

And he'd meant it, every word. He was willing to rot in prison for. Hell, he'd take a bullet to the head for her without giving it a second thought.
He was proud and he was arrogant, but in hindsight, after all the damage he'd done to their relationship he'd also grovel for her, on his knees if he had to and beg her to take him back, if he knew that would do the trick.

"I don't want you on your knees. I want you to make me understand, Jackson." She angrily threw back at him. "I'm your wife! You owe me an explanation. You owe me that much. You owe me a reason why you would sleep with someone else. Someone you say means nothing to you."

"There is no reason why, Tara. I fucked up ... bad. I wasn't falling out of love with you. I wasn't in love with her. It was nothing like that. You have to believe me." He tried to explain.

"Then what was it? Where you drunk? High? What?" She searched his face for an answer.

Jax shook his head, "No. None of that."

Tara's tears finally stopped and she wiped at her face again, before her eyes bore into his. Her tone of voice seemingly getting angrier with each word she spoke, "Do you think she's prettier than me? Sexier than me? She's a whore and she's older, so she's obviously more experienced than me, is that it?"

"Tara, stop it." He begged with frustration in his voice.

But Tara continued rambling on, "Or you were just in the mood for a blond again? I mean, there's Wendy, Ima and now Colette." Tara raising a finger and counting along with each name she mentioned. "See the pattern here?" She raised her eyebrows quizzically at him. "Or did she just offer you some kinky shit that you knew I wouldn't do? Was that it?"

"That's enough." Jax hissed back at her and stepped forward, grabbing her by her shoulders before she could get away.

"No, it's not enough." She hissed too, shrugged his hands off of her shoulders, and pushed hard against his chest and he willingly stepped back again. "You owe me an explanation."

"I don't know what you want me to say?" Jax asked with frustration in his voice. "I don't know what you want from me? Look, just tell me what you want, and I swear I'll fucking do it."

Tara shook her head at that and lowered it once more as tears began to prick at her eyes again. She tried so hard not to sob, raising her hands to cover her face.

Jax watched her intently, as if he was actually expecting her to give him a play by play of what to do, a list of her demands he could just check off one by one and all would be good again. Like she held the answers to make their world whole.

Tara wiped away her tears, swallowed the lump in her throat and looked back up at him. Jax wasn't sure what to make of the calmness that suddenly seemed to have crossed her face when she finally spoke up, "I guess I shouldn't really be surprised that you're confused about how this... is supposed to work. And I guess I'm partially to blame for that, for letting you get away with all your bullshit time and again."

She expected him to comment, but he just looked guilty and confused back at her. So she cleared her throat and continued with what she had to say, "The night Abel came home from the hospital, we had that fight, and then Donna died and you ended up spending the night with Wendy, and I called Chicago 'cause I was gonna leave, emotions were running high. Obviously we both thought we were done that night ... and then when it turned out we weren't, and you told me that you'd made a mistake, that you'd slept with Wendy. I forgave you. We started fresh, clean slate and all that."
"That's ancient history, babe." Jax chimed in.

"Is it though?" She asked and raised an eyebrow at him quizzically, "Then you slept with Ima."

Jax frowned, not liking where this was going and interrupted her, "We already talked about that."

"No." Tara shook her head, "We didn't. We talked about how you apologized, but what we didn't talk about was what happened right after the whole Salazar thing."

"I apologized." He reminded her what happened right after. "Before the damn EMT's even took us to the hospital, I was already apologizing to you."

"Alright, I suppose that's true. You did, and with the circumstances, having gotten kidnapped, being pregnant, the joy of having Abel home safe again and you being mere days away from getting send back to prison, I forgave you again, right then and there in that moment."

"The anger I felt about everything that had happened since Abel had been taken didn't really surface until after you went inside, after the shock wore off, and that's when you got scared I'd run and the real apologizing started. But before that, you thought you'd gotten a pass from me. And I suppose eventually you really did."

"What the hell is this, Tara?" He interrupted her again, "You think I don't know what a piece of shit I was to you? Trust me, babe, I know how much I hurt you, and I promise you it will never happen again."

"Then there was Colette." Tara continued, completely ignoring his words and he frowned at the mention of the older woman's name again. "I walked in on you with her. We fought. Then Bobby got shot. Clay died. And then you decided to take the fall for me, make the deal with Patterson. Turn yourself in that same night and before I knew it we were together in bed again."

"It wasn't like those other times, babe, and I know you know it too. After all the shit we'd gone through, we reconnected. It fucking meant something," Jax scoffed, "So if you are implying that was pity sex, because I was getting locked up again, you're full of shit."

Tara shook her head, "No, that's not what I'm saying at all. I'm saying that in that moment, I gave you a pass again. I forgave you."

"I don't understand." Jax shook his head, the aggravation obvious on his face, "Is there a point to all this?"

"The point is that in the past you cheated on me and because of the circumstances, because of everything that was happening to me or us at the same time, I let it slide. I forgave you and we eventually ended up back in each other's arms."

"But look at us now, Jax. Now that you're here, away from Charming. I'm just a doctor, not patching up criminals after hours, and you're just a mechanic, not a member or president of some gang. We're just two people, with two beautiful little boys to raise. And hopefully that means neither one of us, or our children will get kidnapped or threatened with imprisonment ever again. So if we were to get back together, and you'd cheat on me again, there wouldn't be a pass coming your way. There would be no forgiveness left to give."

"I know that." He said with new hope in his eyes.

"Do you?" Tara replied with a questioning tone in her voice and shook her head at him, "'Cause I don't think you do. You can't even tell me what made you break our wedding vows with Colette. I
mean with Wendy and Ima, you at least bothered to explain the how and why. So if you don't know what made you cheat, than how can you be so sure it won't happen again?"

"'Cause I won't let it happen again." He answered with a firm voice, leaving no room for doubt.

"How?" Tara wouldn't let up.

"I just know." Jax quickly replied and stepped closer to her again, his eyes firmly trained on hers.

But Tara shook her head and lowered her eyes to the small space left between them, "I'm sorry, but that's just not good enough for me anymore, Jax. I need to know why you did it? Why you ended up in bed with someone other than me? I need you to tell me why."

"For Christ sake, I can't." Jax blurted out in frustration.

Tara threw her hands up in the air, a gesture of defeat. If he wasn't even willing to try to sort through his feelings, then she was done, done with him. She was giving up. "Then there's really no point in us talking anymore, is there?"

"Meaning what?" Jax raised his eyebrows in question.

"Meaning, we're done." Tara said angrily and started walking away from him. "I want you and all your shit out of the apartment when we get home."

"Jesus Christ." Jax mumbled under his breath, lowered his head and turned away from her, running his hand through his hair in obvious frustration. A moment passed before he turned back toward her, trying to catch up with her retreating form, yelling after her "TARA, WAIT."

Tara continued walking, not responding at all, until Jax caught up with her, grabbed her by her arm and spun her around again to face him.

They stared at each other and Jax opened his mouth to say something, "I'm." was all he muttered, but then froze again before he finally spoke, "I'm trying."

"Trying what?" Tara replied and folded her arms in front of herself.

"Trying to explain ... how it happened." He answered, the look in his eyes softening with regret. "It's just ... it's just that I know there's nothing I can say that'll justify it. I mean, it's not like someone held a gun to my head. What happened, it's all on me, making a horrible choice, one I regretted immediately." Tara sighed, "Go on."

Jax took a deep breath and exhaled, he dug out a cigarette from the front pocket of his flannel shirt, but instead of lighting it up, he simply just twisted and turned it between his fingers and it dawned on Tara then just how nervous he actually was, "We had that fight, about Wendy becoming the guardian for the boys. And I was so pissed that you went and had those papers drawn up. Then Eli showed up, arresting you. I honestly didn't think they'd actually press charges against you, so when they put you in cuffs, I was still mad about the fight, and I just froze. Abel was crying, so I got him out of bed, sat down at the kitchen table and then it all hit me at once what had just happened, and I felt like shit for how it all went down. How I let them walk you out of our house without so much as saying a word to intervene."

"Why are you telling me this?" Tara interrupted him.
Jax frowned, "Because I was in Stockton, checking out the new Escort place, when Lowen called to tell me you didn't want me at your hearing the next morning. Just like you didn't want to see me the entire time you were locked up."

"So you're saying this was my fault?" Tara pointed a finger at herself, her eyebrows raised in disbelief.

Jax shook his head, getting frustrated again, "No, that's not what I'm saying, babe. But I knew that this is how you'd take it. That me explaining the how and why is just gonna sound like lame ass excuses to you. Which they are, because I know there is no justifiable reason why I did what I did. That's why I didn't even wanna start down this goddamn rabbit hole in the first place."

Tara looked away and took a deep cleansing breath, before she looked back up at him, "You're right, I asked for this. I asked you to tell me. Go on, I'll listen."

Jax ran his hand down his face, and exhaled audibly before he spoke up again, "What I'm trying to say is that I was scared. I was scared about our fight. I was scared about those charges against you. For you. For us. For our boys. For not knowing what it meant that you didn't want to see me. All that shit ate at me the whole time you were gone, and all I wanted was you. To see your face, to reassure me and to know that we'll be alright."

"So all that was going through my mind, on top all the other shit with the club that went down. Lyla getting raped and beaten. Hell ... I don't know, I just had a head full of shit I needed to deal with, things I needed to figure out. And she was just there, all calm and collected. The opposite of how I was feeling, 'cause in my head there was a war brewing, noises I couldn't drown out coming at me from all directions. And you know, I could stand here and tell you that she made a move on me, but I'm the one to blame because all I had to say was no, and I didn't. What she did, I mean basically it was just her job. And I just missed you, needed you so much, but you weren't there and she was there. That's all there was to it."

Tara's eyes were filled with fresh tears when she nodded her head, too choked up to even try to speak for a long moment.

"That was it?" She finally managed to get out, her voice breaking as she spoke.

Jax nodded his head, still busying his hands with the cigarette that looked like it was about to fall apart.

"So it happened the night before my hearing?" She asked to clarify and when Jax nodded again, Tara wiped the tears away that began rolling down her face.

"And after?" She further inquired.

"I left. Right away." He answered. "Feeling worse than I did before."

"What about the other time?" She wouldn't let up.

Jax swallowed hard, "That's a different story. I was pissed at you. For what you did. And I wanted to hurt you back." He chuckled humorlessly, "But the real fucked up thing is that when I was with her, you were all I saw. Both times."

"Please, don't." Tara begged him to stop now, shaking her head and looking anywhere but back at him.

"It's the fucking truth though. And that's what you wanted to hear, isn't it? You wanted the truth. So
one minute I'm so pissed at you for lying to me, wanting to leave me, wanting to divorce me, then the
next I'm fantasizing about you, having you, being with you. Retreating in this bubble inside my head
where we're still happy together ... and then you walk in and I see double, for a split second there's
two of you now."

He shakes his head at himself and starts to rip the cigarette into tiny pieces, letting them fall to the
ground by his shoes, one by one. "Trust me, babe, I know just how fucked up that sounds."

Jax shook his head as tears welled up in his eyes again, and he haphazardly rubbed a hand across his
face to wipe them away, "Maybe there's something wrong with me. Maybe I'm just all fucked up."

Wiping at her own tears she didn't have the strength nor the will to tend to his wounds on top of her
own. "Yeah, maybe you are."

It was obvious that that was not what he had expected her to say, she could see that by the look in his
eyes, but Tara didn't care, at least not while she was still processing her own feelings and pain about
everything he'd revealed to her.

They walked side by side, but didn't talk at all on their way back to his truck, nor on the drive back
towards the city.

Neither of them wanting to face the boys in their current state of mind, so words were exchanged
about that and they decided to stop at a small diner to get a bite to eat.

They barely spoke at the diner as well, just sitting across from one another and eating in silence for
the longest time.

Jax was hardly able to take his eyes off of her, more than once wishing he could read her mind,
wondering what exactly was going on in that pretty little head of hers.

Meanwhile Tara tried to avoid looking at him, seemingly focusing her attention elsewhere, but in all
actuality she was just lost in her own thoughts as she absently picked at her food on the plate
in front of her.

He finished his meal in full, while she had barely touched hers.

Suddenly Tara turned her head and actually looked right at him, her voice eerily calm and so low that
it was almost drowned out by the noisy conversations and music playing around them. "Can I ask
you something else? About her?" She took him by surprise.

I guess that answered his question what she has been thinking about this whole time.

"Here?" Jax looked back at her quizzically. "Now? With all these people around?"

Tara looked around for a moment, taking in the other patrons before she focused her attention back at
him, sitting right across from her. "They're all busy talking and eating, and besides, it doesn't have to
get ugly."

She tried to reassure him. "I'm all cried out, so you don't have to worry about that. I'm not gonna
make a scene." She added for good measure, but Jax knew that wasn't necessarily a promise she
could keep. If he said the wrong thing, tears were probably going to flow once again.

But he had to admit that she was right about the other guest, everyone seemed too engrossed into
their own conversations that they probably wouldn't pay any attention to what he or she had to say.
He sighed, not at all thrilled that she wanted to go yet another round, but wanting to appease her he pushed his plate to the side so he could rest his elbows on the table, his hands busy with the thin paper-strip his straw had come in, repeatedly wrapping it absentmindedly around the tip of his index finger.

Wishing for the hundredth time that they wouldn't have picked a non-smoking establishment.

"Alright." he reluctantly agreed, "Fire away, Sweetheart." He met her eyes and gave her the faintest of smiles, not entirely sure if it came across as such.

Tara pushed her own plate away just enough to fold her arms on the table in front of herself, before she looked right back at him, "Earlier you said, that it was just a mistake. That you don't have feelings for her. Then how come you were holding hands with her, kissing her, when I saw you?"

"She kissed me." He rebutted without missing a beat.

Tara shrugged her shoulders at that, yet her voice still calm and low, "It didn't look like you minded. I mean, I didn't see you push her away or anything."

He took a moment to think about his answer this time and leaned forward, resting his forearms all the way on the table now, before shrugging his own shoulders as he was giving his response.

"There was a meeting at Diosa. It was just business." He tried to begin to explain.

He paused for a moment, before starting up again, "Every now and then we'd all meet up, Alvarez, Barosky, her, me, to discuss business, nothing more. And I guess you could say that she's a little handsy. I already told you that I don't love her, but I don't hate her either, so I've honestly never thought nothing of it until Friday night, when you said that you saw us, and I realized how badly that hurt you."

Tara looked away from him as if deep in thought now for a long moment, before she finally turned her attention back to him, "It never occurred to you that flirting around with the woman that you cheated with would make me upset?"

Jax shook his head, "I'm sorry, babe, clearly I wasn't thinking."

"Clearly." Tara repeated, before making an observation, "You like her though!" The tone of her voice made it clear that this wasn't a question, but rather a statement. She was proud of herself for remaining calm and collected, despite the painful topic.

"I guess." He shrugged as he narrowed his eyes on her, "I don't think she's a bad person, Tara. She's just trying to make it in a men's world, working with the only thing she has to offer. But I don't have feelings for her. Truth be told, if it wasn't for us talking about her, she wouldn't even cross my fucking mind, babe. Ever. She means nothing to me. And I have no illusions that I meant anything to her either. As a matter of fact, she's probably rubbing up on Bobby now, since he took over my presidents patch."

That last bit he said and what it implied caught Tara's attention, "You think it was all about your rank within the club that she was after?"

"Yeah, I do." He nodded.

Tara thought about it for a moment, and she'd be lying if she said that it didn't make her angry at the other woman all over again. But she decided to move on. She honestly didn't care who the madam was sleeping with now or her reasons why.
But Tara did have something to say that she simply needed to get off of her chest. "There's just such a double standard for men and women within that life. And I often wondered if the club way of looking at it is just so deeply ingrained in you, that you're not even aware of what's right or wrong anymore."

"Babe?" Jax started to interrupt, but she wouldn't let him.

"I mean, do you even get it at all? Why it upset me seeing you with her again?" Tara searched his face, but before he could even answer she added, "I guess what I'm trying to say is that if it would hurt you, piss you off, don't you think I have a right to feel the same way when roles are reversed? I mean, John and I broke up today, and you've made it pretty clear to me that he's a sore spot for you. It's like you can't even think straight whenever I mention him. So can you humor me and imagine for just a moment, that a couple of months from now you'd see me walking hand in hand with him, and watching me just stand there, letting him kiss me? How would you feel about that? And even if I reassured you that he means nothing to me, would that make it any better somehow?"

Jax's met her eyes head on, and she could see the anger that thought alone provoked in him, before he even opened his mouth to answer her, "You're absolutely right. At the very least I'd probably wanna beat him to a pulp. So, yeah, I get it. You had every right to be pissed, babe. And nothing like that will ever happen again?"

Tara looked somewhat relieved that at the very least it seemed like she'd gotten through to him.

Then Jax brought her back out of her thoughts, "Not that I'd discuss any of it with you while were still in here, but for the sake of full disclosure, is there anything else you wanna know about the club? About what happened? You just gotta ask."

Tara shook her head without even having to think about it, "No, I could care less if I never heard another word about the club."

"You got it, babe." Jax reassured her that he wouldn't bring the topic up again.

X

Jax pulled his truck into his previous parking spot and killed the engine. Both of them got out, Jax waited for her to come around the front of his pick-up and they crossed the street together, heading for the front door of the apartment building.

But when they reached the door, and Jax began fumbling with his keys, Tara reached for his arm to gain his undivided attention and spoke up, "I don't think I'm gonna come in."

Jax let out a soft chuckle, "It's your place, babe."

She smiled softly, her own keys in her hands now, "I think I'm just not feeling up to pretending to be happy mom right now."

"Tara?" He said with concern in his voice.

But she shook her head, "It's fine, really. I'm fine. I just need a little bit to process everything, some alone time. You get that, right?"

Jax nodded, but not liking the thought of them not returning to the boys together.

"So could you tell Christy thank you for me, for watching the boys. And would you mind getting the boys ready for bed on your own tonight?" Tara glanced at her wristwatch, "I'm sure she's made them
dinner by now, so you shouldn't have to worry about cooking something for them."

"I got it, babe. I've dealt with much worse before, can handle two preschoolers on my own."

"Thank you." She replied, and was about to turn to walk to her car, when Jax spoke up, "Where are you gonna go?"

"I don't know. Haven't thought that far ahead yet." She replied honestly. Right now she just wanted to make it to her car.

"You're not going back to that trail in the woods this late?" Jax questioned her with obvious concern etched into his face, "Because gun or no gun, that's not a place to be late at night all on your own."

"I'm not." She reassured him, "You really don't need to worry about me. I was thinking more along the lines of some coffee shop, or someplace like it."

"Okay." Jax nodded, but it was still obvious that he didn't want her to go. But he knew that he'd need some time to think about everything they'd talked about himself, so he understood where she was coming from.

"Okay. See you later." She smiled slightly and with that, Tara turned, and Jax watched her get into her car before he unlocked the front door and quickly stepped inside.

X

Jax was laying passed out on the couch, when his cell phone on the end-table by his feet began to ring. It took him a moment to come to, but when he realized that the ringing was coming from his phone, he quickly sat up. He turned on the lamp on the table and unplugged his phone from the charging cable. He squinted at the screen, saw that the caller ID said that it was Tara calling, so he quickly flipped it open and raised it up to his ear. A sense of dread filled him when he realized that this meant she hadn't come home yet, while he had been fast asleep.

"Everything alright, babe? Where are you?" He asked before she could even get a word in, his voice raspy with sleep.

"Is this Jax?" Said a deep manly voice on the other end of the line, jolting Jax awake instantaneously.

He could feel the old familiar fear course through his veins again, like it had never left. His worst nightmare, the one with her laying on their kitchen floor in a pool of her own blood flashed before his eyes as if it had all just happened yesterday. Followed by a list of club enemies that might've still had it in for him.

"Who are you? How the fuck did you get my wife's phone?" His heart was beating out of his chest, he had a pretty good idea how.

"Easy now. No need to get all pissy with me." Said the man, "This is a courtesy call, my friend. You were listed as the emergency contact on her phone here. My name's Frank, I'm the barkeep over at Old Joe's Tavern on Brunswick Drive. I think I got your wife over here, and she's not looking too good right now."

That initial dread disappeared just as fast as it had appeared, and Jax let out a sigh of relief. But then he couldn't help but worry for another reason, "Is she alright? What happened?"

With the phone wedged between his ear and shoulder, he stood and stepped back into his jeans that he'd discarded on the floor in front of the couch, closing them and buckling up his belt, before
reaching for his t-shirt and hoody he'd thrown across the back of the arm chair.

"She came in here a couple of hours ago. Sat alone at the bar here all night. She hasn't had that much
to drink either to be this out of it, at least not as far as I know. Unless of course she'd already had a
few before she showed up in here. That I wouldn't know anything about. But the reason I'm calling,
there's a couple of fella's over here that I get the impression would like to take her home, so you
might wanna get on over here as soon as possible, son. I'll keep an eye on her until you get here."

Jax tried to process everything he'd just been told, "Old Joe's Tavern, you said? Brunswick Drive?"

"That's it. Hurry on down here."

"I'm on my way." Jax replied and hung up the phone.

X

Author's Note: Thank you for all the reviews. Can't wait to hear what you think of this chapter. xoxo
Chapte 17

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X

Jax tentatively knocked on Misses Ellie's apartment door. He hated having to do this, but leaving the boys alone was as much out of the question as dragging them along with him to a bar to pick up their drunk mother in the middle of the night.

After waiting for a moment there was still no answer, so he knocked louder and harder again, even calling out to her through the closed apartment door, just in case the elderly woman didn't recognize him through the peephole in the door. But still, there was no answer.

Jax rushed back to Tara's apartment and frantically looked for the piece of paper, where Tara had scribbled down some phone numbers for him Saturday morning before she'd left for her weekend shift in the ER. In case of emergencies she'd said, like if Misses Ellie wasn't available and he'd ever need someone to watch the boys while she was at work, or something to that effect. At the time he had barely given the names and numbers so much as a second glance or thought, because what were the odds that that would happen already. Now he wished he would've paid more attention to what she'd said, and where that fucking paper had disappeared to.

Standing in the middle of the living room, he stopped his frantic search and stared helplessly around the room. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, frustrated pushing his long hair out of his face, trying to remember where and when exactly he'd seen that fucking piece of paper last, when it suddenly dawned on him.

He quietly opened the boys' bedroom door and without turning on the light sneaked inside. The light shining into the room from the hallway was enough for him to spot the small pile of coloring-books and papers on the little table near the foot of Thomas' toddler bed. Careful not to wake his sons, he picked up the entire stack and left the room as quietly as he'd entered it and closed their bedroom door behind him.

It took him less than a minute before he finally found what he'd been looking for and reached for his cell phone in his jeans pocket. His fingers couldn't dial the numbers fast enough.

X

Jax clenched his jaw in frustration when he had no choice but to stomp on his breaks again as they approached yet another intersection with a red light. If it was up to him he would've run every goddamn red light in town, but Christy was probably right that getting pulled over right now would only cost them more precious time. And they already felt like they didn't have a minute to spare.

Anxious, he lit up a cigarette and lowered his driver side window. A rush of cold evening air breezed through the cabin of the truck and Christy couldn't help but shiver, despite the jacket she was wearing, giving her yet another reason to throw a dirty look into Jax's direction.

Unbeknownst to him, he was on her shit-list right now, because she couldn't help but wonder what had happened between Tara and him earlier that would lead to this. Her friend drunk off her ass in
some bar by herself. It didn't sound like the Tara she knew.

But as much as she wanted to blame him, she sort of also blamed herself for pushing Tara earlier today to let Jax back into her life. She couldn't help but wonder if that somehow played a part in the current state of events, so there was no way in hell she was going to sit this one out on Tara's couch and let Jax handle it on his own.

When Jax had called her and told her what had happened, she'd rushed over, bringing her fiancée Jason along. So Jason stayed at home with the boys, who were still sound asleep and oblivious to what was going on, while she insisted on tagging along to get Tara.

X

Jax noticed Tara's parked SUV in front of the bar, reassuring him that this was the right place and looked over at Christy who'd seen it too.

They quickly parked and headed inside, not wanting to waste another moment.

The bar was much busier than both Jax and Christy had anticipated considering how late it was on a Sunday night. Some fast paced honky-tonk country song was blaring obnoxiously loud through the speakers of the smoke filled bar.

They both scanned the place for any sign of Tara, when Jax's eyes fell on the barkeeper and he headed straight towards him, with Christy following right behind him.

He had to raise his voice to be heard over the loud music when he told the barkeep who he was and why he was here. The much older, long-bearded man's voice boomed with ease over the loud noise surrounding them, "One of my waitresses took her to the bathroom." He nodded towards the restrooms down the hall to the left of him. Jax and Christy following his gaze, and just when they were about to head that way the man quickly reached beneath his counter and presented Christy with Tara's purse.

Christy and Jax exchanged a quizzical look before she reached for her friend's bag, and his deep voice boomed once more over the music, "She left it on the bar stool, thought I'd better hold onto it before someone get's sticky fingers, if you know what I mean?!!"

"Appreciate that." Jax nodded gratefully before he turned towards Christy and signaled her to follow along.

Christy had Tara's bag draped over her shoulder when she pushed the door to the ladies room open and stepped inside, with Jax right on her heels.

She stopped and turned halfway towards him, putting a hand flat against his chest in an attempt to stop him from entering. "It's the ladies room." She exclaimed in protest.

Jax rolled his eyes at her in obvious annoyance. He simply had no patience to argue with her again right now and stepped further through the door, practically pushing Christy out of the way when his eyes fell on Tara kneeling top-less in just her jeans and bra, on the filthy bathroom floor. "Tara?"

"Hey. You can't be in here." The waitress helping Tara get back on her feet yelled out loud, before stepping in front of her, trying to shield the inebriated woman from his prying eyes when he dared to approach even further. "This is the ladies room. You need to get the hell out, or I'll call the bouncer."

"Jesus, Jax." Christy tried to reason with him to avoid a scene, but to no avail.
Utterly unfazed by the loud protest of every female around him he quickly stepped further into the room. "Babe?" His voice was filled with concern when he reached her side, the smell of vomit now evident in the air.

"Jax?" Tara blinked and looked up at him with glossed over eyes, but before he could reply anything else she practically stumbled once more, straight into his arms.

He held her up against him, with one strong arm wrapped around her waist, and his other hand pulling her upper body against his chest, her bare back feeling cold beneath his hands.

The waitress recognized the name and stopped her protest, "You're her emergency contact, the guy Frank called."

Jax nodded, "Yeah." Without taking his eyes off of Tara.

"He's her husband." Christy offered and saw how the younger woman's eyes flickered to Tara's empty ring finger, a look of confusion crossing her face, so Christy quickly added, "It's a long story." And stepped up to take a closer look at her friend. "Tara?"

"I ... I don't feel so good." Tara mumbled with her cheek against Jax's chest, when Christy pried her eyes open, one by one, trying to examine her the best she could in the dimly lit room.

"What the hell happened to her?" Jax's eyes narrowed accusingly at the young brunette waitress. "Did someone put something in her drink?"

The waitress scoffed at him clearly offended, "She sat at the bar all night. Frank said nobody messed with her drinks, he's sure of it. She might've already had a few though before she showed up here, or maybe she popped something herself."

Jax scoffed and was just about to protest that Tara wasn't like that, when Christy chimed in.

"She's got something in her system." Christy announced with concern.

"Jesus Christ!" Jax sighed in frustration, pulling her closer as he closed his eyes and pressed a kiss against Tara's temple, while Christy reached for Tara's wrist to check her pulse.

"Whatever she took, ... we need to make her throw up, just in case." Christy said, meeting Jax's concerned eyes, but the waitress was quick to interrupt.

"I don't think there's anything left to throw up." She nodded towards Tara's shirt in the sink, "She threw up all over her shirt, then hovered over the John for half an hour letting it all out. She's been dry heaving ever since. Trust me, there's nothing left."

"Her pulse seems alright." Christy capitulated and sighed in frustration herself, "But we still need to get her home."

"Tara? Can you sit up?" Jax turned with Tara in his arms and lifted her just enough to sit her onto the ledge of the bathroom counter, the gesture reminiscent of another time and place. Happier times long forgotten, he noted with regret.

Christy realized what he was trying to do and quickly helped holding her up long enough for Jax to pull his sweatshirt off himself before turning it around to slip it over Tara's head instead.

Christy continued to hold her upright, while Jax helped a mumbling Tara get each arm into the right sleeve, similar how he'd helped his sons into their pajamas just a couple of hours ago.
Just then the waitress stepped back in, handing an empty trash bag to Christy, who took it wordlessly with an appreciating nod.

Her nose wrinkled in disgust at the smell that filled the air once more as she packed Tara's shirt up before knotting the top of the bag closed.

Jax stood between Tara's thighs, one hand on her back, the other on her hip, ready to tug her back to her feet when Tara looked up at him once again through glossy eyes, the hood of her shirt falling back as she snaked her arms up and around his neck, pulling him closer.

"I missed you so much, Jax." Tara slurred her words into the crook of his neck as she slumped forward.

Jax obviously knew she was completely out of it and would probably have no recollection of any of this come tomorrow morning, but that knowledge didn't stop the small spark of hope that her actions and words evoked in him.

"I missed you more." He replied unabashed, trying his best to ignore the look that both Christy and the waitress gave him in the mirror.

"What's your name, darlin'?" He turned to the side with Tara's arms still draped around his neck, and eyed the waitress for a long moment.

The brunette's cheeks flushed under his scrutinizing gaze before she reluctantly answered, "R-Rachel."

With one arm firm around Tara holding her close, he reached into his jean pocket and presented the waitress with a handful of bills, "Appreciate you keeping an eye on her, Rachel."

The waitress hesitated for a moment before she nodded, "You're welcome." and took the money from him, before tucking it away into the pocket of her apron.

Reaching into his pocket once more, he pulled out his truck keys and handed them to Christy, "Ready?"

"Yeah." Christy replied, and held the door open for him to go on ahead.

"Let's get you home, babe." He mumbled reassuringly against her ear as he draped her legs around his waist, curled one arm beneath the curve of her ass and the other across the expanse of her back.

Making their way through the crowded bar, Jax nodded appreciative towards the barkeeper Frank once more, before Christy held the door open, so they could slip outside.

The air was cool and crisp, and he could feel Tara shutter against the cold wind as she nuzzled her face deeper into the crook of his neck, and instinctively he tightened his grip around her.

They were just a few feet away from his truck when Jax heard a couple of guys slurring something behind them.

At first neither Jax nor Christy paid any mind to what they were saying until they followed right behind them and spoke up, "Hey, where do you think you're going with her?"

Jax stopped short when he realized they were talking to him and turned around just enough to get a look at these guys.
"Are you talking to me?" He asked in return, with a calmness in his voice that he wasn't actually feeling at all.

"Hell yeah, I'm talking to you." One of them stopping mere feet in front of Jax, who had now lowered Tara to her feet, whilst still keeping his arms firmly around her, when the guy spoke up again, nodding towards Tara. "She's with us."

"Really?" Jax asked, raising his eyebrows in disbelieve, his voice booming with a humorless chuckle as he tucked Tara protectively closer to his side and shook his head, "I don't fucking think so." This had to be a goddamn joke.

He was just about to say more when Christy beat him to it. "She's his wife, dumbass. So you need to back the hell off."

"Wife?" The guy laughed out loud, and turned around to look at his friends who also started laughing. "Hate to be the one to break the news to you, man, but your wife was rubbing up on me earlier tonight. Guess she's a horny little whore."

"What did you just say?" Jax hissed and practically handed Tara over to Christy, not really giving the other woman a choice in the matter, before he took a step towards the guy that had just insulted Tara, "What did you call her?" His hands already balling into fists.

The guy laughed out loud again, not the least bit intimidated by the fury in Jax's eyes directed at him. "Or maybe you're just not givin' it to her right and she has to get her kicks elsewhere." He added laughing, followed by another good laugh from his friends, before Jax zoomed in on him and threw not one, but three jaw shattering punches in a row.

"STOP IT, JAX!" Christy yelled out loud, trying to get his attention, which worked for a split second.

The guy stumbled backwards, reaching up to his bloody nose and lip, no longer laughing now and was just about to charge back and take a swing at Jax when Rachel, the waitress, appeared outside the bar, interrupting the interaction with a loud demand, "CHARLIE, STOP IT. God damnit." She cursed.

Her words echoed through the parking lot, and stopped the guy from actually taking a swing at Jax. "You don't want Frank to come out here, do you?" Rachel added for good measure.

"JAX, DON'T." Christy pleaded loudly when she realized he was about to seize the opportunity and take another swing at the guy. She readjusted her arm draped around Tara to keep her upright, halfway leaning against the truck, "We really need to get her home, Jax, come on. These assholes aren't worth it."

Jax clenched his jaw as he looked the other man up and down, throwing him a look that could kill, before he stepped backwards towards his truck and his wife.

"Fuckin' pussy." The other man called out after him, spitting blood, but Jax didn't give him another glance as he quickly scooped an unconscious Tara back into his arms. It took every ounce of self-control he possessed to not turn back around and strangle the guy with his two bare hands.

By now Rachel had reached the guy's side and gave him a hard push back towards the entrance of the bar, as she shook her head in disgust at him, "What the hell is wrong with you? You're just begging to get your ass kicked."

She tilted his head to the side to examine the damage Jax's punches had left behind. "You're a
moron, you know that?" And with another push, him and his friends were heading back inside.

Tara was completely passed out when Jax lifted her into the passenger seat of his truck and wordlessly fastened the seatbelt around her.

Christy stood behind him, her arms folded across her chest. She could practically feel the anger radiating off of him, "You know that guy is full of shit, right?"

Jax dared to glance back at her for a moment before he carefully closed the passenger door, fighting the urge to slam it shut with a loud bang.

"Is he?" He asked before turning all the way towards her, his hand gesturing towards the bar behind them, "She came here, wasted, looking to get more wasted."

Even though it was dark out and the parking lot was dimly lit, he could see Christy rolling her eyes at him, "You know her." She exclaimed irritated shaking her head, "Tara's not like that."

"I know she's not, but maybe she was tonight." He replied, clenching his jaw again, "And as pissed as that thought makes me, I can't even fucking blame her, 'cause I did this."

He shook his head at himself and ran both his hands over his weary face, trying to swallow back the hurt and anger that threatened to overwhelm him, "I let her in on some hurtful truth today, so there's a good chance she came here looking to ..." He paused, unable to say the words out loud, "... whatever she came here for, it's because of what I did and this was just her trying to get back at me, trying to hurt me back." And it fucking worked!

"You think she came here to cheat on you? Like what? Some kind of payback?" Christy scoffed and jangled Tara's car keys in her hands as she passed Jax and turned around walking backwards in the direction of Tara's car to keep eye contact with him when she said, "That's ridiculous! If she wanted to cheat on you she wouldn't be doing it here, in this shithole with some scumbag like that guy."

Christy shook her head at him, "Trust me, she's got other options, better options."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Jax asked still emotional and agitated by what had gone down. He was pretty sure Christy was referring to John, which didn't soothe the brewing rage he currently felt coursing through him.

Tired of this ridiculous conversation, Christy looked back at Jax once more, "Let's just get her home, alright?" and slipped quickly behind the wheel of Tara's Ford, pulling the door closed to not give Jax a chance to drag this on any longer.

X

"I'm not some fucking perv, I'm her husband." Jax tried his best not to raise his voice in fear of waking his sons.

"Christy, come on." Jason tucked on her arm, and gave her a look that told her it was time for her to back off.

Jax seized the moment and shut the bathroom door in both their faces, utterly ignoring Christy's continued protests. He was quick to engage the lock with his one free hand, while still holding Tara up with his other arm tightly wrapped around her waist.

He swiftly turned the shower on first, giving the water a chance to heat up, while he carefully, almost methodically undressed her down to nothing but her bra and panties.
Pulling off his simple white t-shirt, he quickly toed out of his white sneakers, unbuckled his belt, and let his jeans pool by his ankles before he stepped out of them.

Tara sleepily mumbled something incoherent against his bare chest, still completely out of it, when he reached behind the shower curtain to check if the water had warmed up enough to step on inside yet.

He felt just a tad bit stupid to leave on his boxer briefs, but Christy's words of protest had hit home hard enough to stop him from completely undressing her and himself.

I get that you've seen every inch of her, Jax, but my ex has seen every inch of me too. That doesn't mean I'd want him seeing me naked now, while I'm unconscious and utterly helpless at that!

Her stinging words echoed through his thoughts as he hoisted Tara carefully over the edge of the bathtub, before stepping under the warm and welcoming stream of water with her head tucked under his chin, and her body pressed flush against his.

Maybe it was the fact that she'd referred to him as Tara's ex that bothered him above all else. To this day he'd never actually seen himself as that, and he hated the thought that anyone thought of him as anything other than her man, her husband.

Skin on skin with his beautiful wife after the longest self-imposed dry spell of his adult life, didn't help him make his case about not being a 'pervert' in the least, when his growing erection painfully strained against the fabric of his briefs as the water cascaded down their bodies.

"Jesus Christ." He cursed to himself, not only in sexual frustration but also utter self-disgust that even Tara's current unconscious state did nothing to diminish the burning desire he felt for her. Making him feel every bit the pervert he'd denied to be out loud mere ten minutes ago.

Get your fucking act together, Teller!
He thought to himself as he looked around the shower for her bottle of shampoo, "Come on, babe, let's get you cleaned up."

X

Frustrated and anxious, Christy rifled through the content of Tara's purse.

Just then Jason stepped into the room.
"What the hell are you doing?" He asked as he pulled up a chair at the kitchen table and watched in confusion, before shaking his head at his fiancée antics. "Giving her husband a big old speech about invasion of privacy and the such, and here you are going through her shit. That's a tad bit hypocritical, don't you think?"

Christy rolled her eyes at him, but then gave him a knowing look when she produced an orange prescription bottle from Tara's bag.

"She's on meds." Jason furrowed his brow, and stood overcome with curiosity, stepping up behind Christy so he could also read what the pharmacy label said, "Clonazepam for anxiety? I didn't know she had anxiety. She always seems so calm and put together."

Christy nodded, "She did when she first got here, but I thought she'd gotten off of her meds a couple weeks back." She narrowed her eyes on the small print, and pointed her finger to the date, "She had this filled Saturday morning, before she started her E.R. shift. The day after Jax got here." She added for good measure and gave Jason a pointed look over her shoulder.
"Shit." Jason replied to that knowing what that could mean and swiftly pushed the other content from Tara's purse aside, making room for Christy to pour Tara's medication onto the table, careful not to lose a single pill in the process.

She made quick work counting each round tablet out loud, with a final count of twenty-eight, letting out the breath she'd been holding with an audible sigh of relief as she slumped back into the chair.

"Twenty-eight." Jason repeated and studied the details of the prescription again, "It's a thirty day fill, so she probably took one sometime Saturday and another one Sunday."

Christy nodded, "Jax said she barely ate a bite at dinner, then she went out and had a couple of drinks." She shook her head, irritated with herself that she hadn't thought about it earlier, "Her being so out of it after just a few drinks ... it all makes sense now."

Jason carefully replaced all the pills back into the bottle, making sure the childproof lid clicked in place, "But she's a doctor herself, she knows that these meds and alcohol don't mix."

Christy nodded yet again, "I know, she should've known ... but she's had a lot to think of, a lot to process since he showed back up in town." She tried to excuse Tara's reckless behavior, but by the look in Jason's eyes she could tell he wasn't really buying into her lame attempt of an excuse either.

X

After their shower, Jax stepped out of her bedroom, waiting patiently while Christy helped Tara change out of her wet underwear into some dry pajamas before both of them gently tucked Tara into bed.

They gathered around the kitchen table and Jason explained that Tara's behavior tonight was most likely the result of mixing her meds with alcohol, but Jax couldn't help but wonder out loud why Tara herself hadn't thought of that before she went and ordered her first drink.

This wasn't something he could let slide and he'd have to bring it up with her tomorrow, when she came to, he decided right then and there.

It was early Monday morning already, Jason and Christy crashed on the couch, and Jax slipped quietly into bed next to Tara. Hoping he'd be able to get at least a couple hours of sleep, knowing he'd be starting his new job at the Baker's garage tomorrow.

He was well aware that he was taking advantage of the situation, but he simply couldn't resist the urge to wrap his arms around her and pull her to his chest.

Her soft even breathing against his skin eased some of the anxiety he himself was feeling now as he thought about everything that had happened since he'd left Charming early Friday morning.

He had no regrets leaving Sam Crow and Gemma behind, but he once more blamed himself for being the cause of Tara's pain.

The sound of her breathing near his ear had almost lulled him to sleep, when Tara shifted, her arms draped around his chest, tugging herself closer to him as if he was her own personal pillow, before she lazily draping one leg around his midsection. Like she used to do a million times before, back when they were still a thing. Back when they were happy.

And if he didn't know any better, he would've bet his last dollar that she knew exactly what she was doing to him when she repeatedly rubbed her thigh along the length of his hardened shaft, that was straining painfully against the grey sweatpants he'd pulled on for no other reason than out of courtesy
for her.

He fought his inner demons, pressing a kiss against her still damp hair and tried his best to find some rest.

"I love you, babe." He quietly whispered into the darkness of her bedroom, not at all surprised when she never uttered a reply.

X

Author's Note: As always I'm very curious what your thoughts are on this new chapter, and would love it if you left me a few words or a review. Thank you for still reading. xoxo, Skater
Chapter 18

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Bang!

The loud noise startled Tara awake.

Wait ... was that the front door?
She wondered momentarily, blinked a few times, trying to adjust her eyes to the light that was streaming through the blinds and groaned loudly into her pillow in pain. She rolled onto her back, her right hand reached for her forehead as if touching it would magically get the throbbing headache to stop ... well ... throbbing.

She blinked some more as her eyes began to focus on the ceiling of her bedroom, trying her best to regain not just all of her senses, but her memories from the night before as well. She drew a complete blank, when a sudden surge of nausea threatened to overwhelm her.

As if her body was on autopilot, she quickly scrambled out of bed, almost stumbling over her own two feet in the process as she hurried out of the room and without so much as a knock stormed into the bathroom, just in time to reach the toilet.

The whole ordeal only lasted a couple of seconds, because there really wasn't anything left in her system to throw up, but she was quick to flush the toilet anyways.

She was in such nauseating agony that she hadn't even noticed that the shower was running and the air in the small room was hot and heavy with steam.

But the sound of the shower curtain sliding partially open made her not only cringe, but also caused her to practically jump out of her skin as she looked up from her kneeling position on the floor and was greeted by none other than her husband, his glowing face peeking out from behind the shower curtain.

"Good morning." He offered a teasing smile in her direction, trying to meet her eyes for a long moment.

She groaned loudly as she sat back against the wall between the toilet and the sink, reaching up above her to pull one of the towels off of the rack to wipe and hide her face in.

Tara let her head bob back against the tiled wall behind her, groaning some more, "Is there something good about it?" She replied wondering once more what she'd done to deserve this.

"That bad, huh?" He asked, trying his best not to laugh at her discomfort as he reached for his own towel to dry himself off. The grin ever present on his face now.

Tara heard the water turn off and the metal rings slide along the shower curtain rod, making her cringe once more at the sound. She didn't need to open her eyes to know that Jax had stepped out of the shower and was probably wrapping his towel around his waist this very moment.
She didn't bother to answer him, but blinked her eyes a couple of times again, before they finally focused on him, standing there soaking wet and towering above her. She couldn't help herself from letting her eyes momentarily linger on his newest tattoo, her name, before they drooped closed again in pain. She was in no condition to acknowledge the tattoo right now, it would have to wait.

"Come on, let's get you back to bed." He held his hand out for her, and even though she hated the smug look on his unshaven face, she took his outstretched hand because she wasn't entirely sure she'd get back on her own two feet without his help.

She groaned as he helped her to her feet, and snaked his arm around her waist, holding her firmly to his side. His glistening wet skin and dripping hair leaving dark water stains on her light colored sweats as he helped her to her bedroom and back in bed.

Tara didn't protest when Jax reappeared with a glass of water and some painkillers, and took them willingly from him. He had slipped on a pair of Jeans and a white t-shirt, his wet towel slung over his shoulder, his hair askew, when he sat down on the edge of the bed beside her, watching her silently take another gulp of the liquid. The old mattress dipping slightly under his weight when he leaned closer to brush the strand of hair that had escaped her bun, gently back behind her ear.

"Where are the boys?" Tara's eyes fluttered open to meet his, her throat still feeling dry even after the sip of water.

Jax wordlessly took the glass of water from her and placed it on the nightstand beside her as she tried her best to keep her eyes open waiting for his answer, despite the piercing pain in her head.

"The boys are fine" He started and Tara blinked to meet his eyes again, "Christy took Abel to preschool, and is dropping Thomas off at the hospital daycare. She called in and told them you caught some kind of stomach bug, with vomiting, a high fever ... the works, so all your appointments are getting rescheduled. She'll also pick the boys up later and bring them home."

Tara nodded trying to process all the information, "Okay." and closed her eyes, her hand reaching up to her head once more, trying to soothe away the pain.

Jax couldn't help himself when he reached out and brushed her hair back once more, his fingers cascading down her cheek. He wanted to touch her, wanted to be allowed to touch her, after being so close to her again last night, "Look, babe. I think you should get some more rest, try to sleep this off. I gotta get to work, can't be late on my first day. I'll try to make it back here on my lunch break to check up on you, okay?"

"Hmmm." Tara halfheartedly agreed and rolled onto her side, trying to get comfortable.

Jax stood, tugging the blanket in around her, the teasing grin from earlier was replaced by a look of concern, "Call me if you need me, alright?"

Tara could hear the worry in his voice and pried her eyes open long enough to look up at him, "I'll be okay."

"Yeah." He nodded in an attempt to convince himself, and checked to make sure her phone on her nightstand had charged over night. He leaned down over her and pressed a gentle kiss against her forehead, before he wordlessly turned and left her room, closing the bedroom door behind him.

X

Tara sat quietly at her kitchen table, clutching a steaming cup of coffee in her hands, daring just the smallest of sips to not burn her tongue on the hot liquid.
She still felt slightly nauseous, but her headache was no longer a piercing sharp pain, it was duller now and she was almost able to pretend it wasn't bothering her anymore. Almost!

For the second day in a row she'd woken up to an eerily quiet apartment, but unlike yesterday when Jax and the boys had been napping, she'd found herself completely alone today.

At first she had been in a panic when she realized that it was Monday, and that she had already missed two appointments. But then she suddenly remembered Jax tucking her back into bed, telling her that her schedule had been cleared and that the boys were taken care of too, and she sighed in relief, collapsing back into bed as that revelation washed over her.

She took a long steaming shower, the water as hot as she could possibly stand and it seemed to have helped her feel a whole lot better instantaneously. But as the nausea began to vanish and the pain in her head began to dull, the fog in her mind also began to clear and with horror some of last night's events came back to her in tiny distorted bits and pieces.

The bar, the drinks, the guy she'd danced with, the spinning bathroom walls ... and Jax!

So here she sat questioning everything that was currently whirling around in her head. Wondering what was actually reality and what was merely the imagination of her still hung-over mind?

That's when she heard the key turn in the lock and her head snapped up from her coffee.

From her position at the table she had a clear view of her apartment door, her heart began to speed up knowing that she'd have to face Jax now with a much clearer mind, a somewhat guilty conscience, and the decision she'd made last night about their future together.

"Hi." He greeted her with a sweet smile on his face as he stepped inside and closed the front door behind him.

"Hey." Tara replied almost shyly as she watched him enter the kitchen with a big brown paper bag from the deli down the block.

"You look like you're feeling better." Jax said as he eyed her for a long moment before he shrugged out of his jacket, pulled the beanie from his head and began to unpack the food from the paper bag onto the table in front of them.

"I do." Tara nodded in agreement, watching him intently from her seat. She had to admit that it was still odd to see him without his kutte, without his knife hanging from his belt, and wearing shirts and hats that didn't display the reaper.

"Are you hungry, babe? I got you some chicken noodle soup." He said as he placed a sealed plastic bowl in front of her. "It's still hot." He added.

Tara smiled temporarily at his efforts to make her feel better, but then she sighed as she felt her stomach protest at the mere thought of food, "That's ... that's really nice of you, but I don't think I can eat right now. I'm not sure I'd be able to keep it down."

He nodded in understanding as he sat down across from her. "Maybe later." He said.

"Yeah, maybe." She agreed and pushed the bowl to the side before she took another sip from her coffee.

Jax unwrapped his sandwich while barely taking his eyes off of her as he took his first hearty bite.
Tara could feel his eyes on her as she tried to focus on her coffee instead. A long moment passed without either of them speaking, until Tara suddenly looked up to meet his eyes, "You want some coffee? I just made a fresh pot."

"Sure." Jax replied, answering with food in his mouth, which caused both of them to exchange another smile.

Tara quickly got up and poured him a cup the way he liked it, before she placed the hot beverage in front of him.

She sat back down, seizing the opportunity to get a good look at him, noting his weary face, and the exhaustion in his eyes as he steered his coffee a couple more times before he dared to take a small sip.

She wasn't sure what she dreaded more nowadays; these quiet moments between them, when the air around them felt thick and suffocating with doubt and unspoken accusations, or when they actually spoke their mind and didn't hold back, which lately had always ended in tears for the both of them.

Tara glanced at the clock on the oven, wondering when he'd have to head back to work, and quickly decided to take the opportunity to clear the air while she still could. Not just about last night, but about everything. It needed to be done. Quickly, like ripping off a Band-Aid!

"About last night." She started and Jax looked up at her in obvious surprise that she was going there. She shook her head to herself, her cheeks slightly flushing as she tried to explain, clearly embarrassed by her own actions, the few she had a vague recollection of, "I-I'm sorry for ... everything. I really didn't think I had that much to drink."

Jax wiped his mouth with a napkin, and cleared his throat. She almost had expected him to tease her about her behavior, and her hang-over, but instead his face suddenly displaying a seriousness she hadn't anticipated, "I know."

"You know?" Tara cocked her head to the side and looked perplexed, wondering what he meant by that.

He wiped his hands on the napkin now as he met her eyes across the table, noting the confusion directed at him, "The barkeeper said you didn't have that much to drink." He paused for a moment, "You realize that mixing your anxiety meds with bourbon and whiskey is what had you puking out your guts."

Now her cheeks were flaming red and she had to look away from his prying eyes. She took a deep breath and exhaled, and he could practically see the little wheels inside her head turning, before she finally dared to look back up at him. "I didn't ... I just forgot, my mind was spinning with everything we had talked about, ... I mean, it still kinda is. It was just a stupid mistake, Jax. I didn't mean to do that."

Jax let out the breath he'd been holding, clearly relieved by her words, "I was hoping you'd say that." He wasn't sure if he could handle her turning to pills and booze on top of everything else that had already happened between them.

Tara leaned forward now, her arms folded on the table in front of her, "Of course, I would never intentionally ... do that."

He reached across the table and grabbed her hands in his, "Christy said you were off of your meds for a while, but then you refilled them again Saturday after I got here. Why didn't you tell me, babe?"
"I don't know." Tara shrugged as she thought about it for a long moment and swallowed the lump in her throat. "I guess I'm just tired of people thinking that I'm weak."

Jax tugged on her hands to gain her full attention and her eyes focused on him, "You're anything but weak, Tara. You're one of the strongest people I know."

He truly meant it ... she'd stood by him through thick and thin, stayed when others would've bailed.

The memory of finding Tara in Thomas' bedroom late at night after the death threat had been left in her car, after Lyla had split and left Ope, suddenly popped into the forefront of his mind as just one of the many times she'd proven her strength and resolve to him and their life together.

Tara fought the urge to cry at his words. They were sweet, but she didn't really believe they were true anymore. After everything that had happened, she felt weak and helpless most of the time ... that's why she fought so hard to keep her heart protected this time around, because she didn't want to give in and let him destroy what little strength she did have left.

She gathered said strength the best she could and squeezed his hands now as she dared to look right at him, steeling herself against her own words she was already forming in her head before she actually spoke them out loud, "I thought long and hard about everything we've talked about since you got here on Friday, and I really think we should stop while we still have some remnants of respect for one another, while we still care for each other. While there's still some love left. I think here and now is when this should end. This needs to be the end."

Jax's eyes went wide with obvious shock. He had not anticipated her to say what she'd said, hadn't predicated that this was where their conversation was headed. He had honestly believed and hoped that the truth would set them free ... give them a chance to start anew, a fresh start with a slate wiped clean. After all, they had spend the night in each other's arms, and foolishly he'd hoped that had meant something.

He shook his head at her words, his frown deepened as they really began to sink in and his hands holding onto hers for dear life, "You don't really mean that." He felt like he was grasping at straws.

"I do, Jax." She said with a pleading look in her eyes, "Please don't make this any harder than it already is. I'm glad you're here, near the boys. They need you in their life. I want you in their life."

"But you don't want me in yours!" he added angrily as he now pulled his hands away from hers and stood so fast that his chair slid back and hit the wall behind him. He turned away from her and ran his hand down his face. She could see how his whole body tensed in obvious frustration, which he was trying to hold back.

Tara glanced at the clock once more, feeling she was pressed on time she found the resolve she needed to see this through and cleared her throat again.

Her voice steely and unwavering as she rattled out the words as quickly as she could to keep her feelings at bay, "You're welcome to stay with us until you find a place of your own. And we can figure out a schedule with the boys. You can spend as much time with them as you want to. We can even get a lawyer to draw something up if that's what you want."

A deafening silence filled the room for a long moment, until Jax suddenly spoke up. His voice loud and clear as he turned around to face her. His baby blue eyes glinting dangerously as he shook his head at her, "No!"
Tara looked perplexed, "What do mean no?"

He folded his arms in front of his chest, his eyes never leaving hers, "I mean, no, I'm not moving out. I'm not finding my own place. I'm not going anywhere."

Now Tara stood herself, mimicking his stance as she folded her arms as well, "It's my apartment, Jax. Only my name is on the lease. If I want you out, you're out."

He frowned and shook his head at her, and even though she was growing more furious with him by the second, she couldn't help but marvel how much he looked like a grown version of a pouting Abel right now. It would be downright comical if the subject wasn't so heartbreaking.

"I'll crash on the couch until you let me back in your bed, but I'm not moving out, babe." Jax repeated again, his voice eerily calm, but the bitterness was evident in every word.

"You're being ridiculous." Tara shook her head at him in disbelief, "Are you really going to fight me on this? You're gonna make me change the locks?"

He chuckled humorlessly, "You really think a new lock is gonna keep me out? I'll kick in your goddamn door. If I want in, I'll get in!"

"Then I'll call the cops." She replied without giving it much thought, too caught up in this childish argument with him.

"Right." He nodded and let another angry chuckle escape his lips, "Domestic violence ... Jesus Christ, there's something I never thought I'd find on my rap sheet."

He sighed in frustration, "I guess that would do the trick ... that would be my one way ticket back to Charming!" He added bitterly.

A long silence interrupted their childish bickering.

"You know I don't want that." Tara said apologetic. "But you're being really immature right now."

"I'm being immature?" Jax pointed his thumb at himself in disbelief, his eyebrows raised to new heights.

He sighed audibly and took a step towards her, his eyes softening with regret when he sees her take a step back away from him, "I don't think I'm immature for fighting for us, fighting for our marriage, our family."

Tara shook her head and lowered her gaze to the ground as he stepped even closer to her again, "There's no getting back together, no working things out if we only see each other to hand over the kids. We both know the moment I leave, the moment I move out of here, that'll be the end."

"Yeah." Tara agreed, "And it should be." She fought the inner voice that told her to meet him half way.

"No." Jax shook his head at her again, his voice more determined than ever, "I'm not gonna give up on us ... not now, not when we're so close, Tara."

"So close to what? Making each other more miserable? We've tried time and again and it always ends in tears." She was fighting her own tears this very moment.

"Never like this, babe. We've never tried to make it work away from Charming, away from Sam
Crow ... we're so fucking close, baby, don't you see it? Can't you see how close we are to finally being happy?" He pleaded with her, framing her face in his hands, his eyes trained on hers as he watched her resolve begin to crumble beneath his touch.

Tara looked away when the tears began to well up in her eyes. She still loved him, and of course she wanted their happily ever after with him, but the thought of letting him that close once again terrified her to the point that she felt crippled with fear. Her soul would not survive another broken heart by him.

Her voice sounded oddly high pitched and broke on the last word, when she confessed, "I don't trust you anymore. I'm so scared you'll hurt me again."

Jax's heart broke hearing the pain in her voice, his hands brushing back her hair before they framed her face again, "I won't hurt you ... I promise, I'll never hurt you again. Just give me one more chance to prove my love for you. Let me stay, babe, let me earn your trust back ... Let me love you the way you deserve to be loved!"

Tara sniffled and wiped at her face, but still wouldn't answer him. The inner turmoil she was feeling was breaking her heart with every word he spoke.

"I know that earning your trust back won't happen overnight. I'm here for the long haul. I'll crash on the couch. You're calling the shots. I'll follow your lead. You tell me what to do and I'll fucking do it. I don't give a shit if it takes forever ... I'm here, babe!" He pressed a long gentle kiss to her forehead and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her smaller sobbing figure into his chest. "Please, Tara, just give me one more chance? Just one more?"

The silence filled minute felt like hours to Jax as he waited for her response. He wanted to hope for the best, but he braced himself for yet another letdown. He feared the damage he'd done to their relationship was beyond repair.

Tara suddenly pulled back enough to look up at him through red rimmed teary eyes and simply nodded her head. Such a simple gesture but it could mean the world to him if he'd interpreted it right.

"Yeah?" Jax nodded his head, trying to read the expression on her face. A small smile slowly gracing his features.

"Yeah!" Tara sobbed but smiled up at him through the tears that rolled down her face, and Jax fought the urge to press his lips to hers in celebration.

He released the breath he'd been holding and pulled her back into his arms for a long embrace.

"I love you!" He simply whispered into her ear, his own voice heavy with tears of joy now.

"I love you!" Tara replied through tears, hoping she hadn't just made another mistake!

X

Author's Note: I hope you've enjoyed this new chapter. What are your thoughts? Did she give in too soon? Will he prove he's trustworthy? I'd love to hear from you. Thanks for reading.
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They remained like this for a long moment, clinging to each other, wiping their happy tears away. Tara's arms wrapped around Jax's torso, her face nuzzled into the crook of his neck, and his arms just as tightly wrapped around her, holding onto her with everything he had as the reality of what this actually meant began to settle in for them both.

But what did it mean?

"Tara?" His voice was filled with need as his hot breath in her ear made her shiver in anticipation of his lips against her neck, but this was exactly what she couldn't allow to happen. It was too soon to go there, too soon to even think about that.

Just because she caved and decided to give him and their relationship another chance, didn't mean she would just forgive and forget. She didn't trust him with the matters of her heart, and therefore they needed to take this very, very slow. Baby steps!

Tara gently but firmly pushed away from him, her palms flat against his chest, leaving Jax no choice than to loosen his firm hold around her so she could look up at him and meet his pleading eyes.

"There have to be some ground rules, Jax." She said, having found her firm tone of voice once again.

"Ground rules?" Jax repeated with raised eyebrows and a small smile tugging at the corners of his
mouth as he eyed her curiously.

His hands slid around her waist and intertwined behind her, not letting her back away too far from him. "Like what, babe?"

Tara felt awkward standing like this while having this conversation ... a conversation she had not actually planned on having at all. She was supposed to make him see reason that they were no good together, that there was no working this out. At least not as lovers.

Instead he had once again said all the right things at just the right time while looking at her with such heartache and determination in his baby blue eyes that she simply couldn't deny him.

A small part of her felt pathetic for letting him have such control over her once again, yet the other part of her held onto the same hope and faith she'd heard in his voice just moments before, telling her that they could maybe have it all if they just tried. They could be happy!

Tara took a deep breath, trying her best to pick her brain for the appropriate rules a estranged married couple who decided to try to work things out should have. To her own horror she was drawing a blank again, and the way he looked down at her and smiled a little wider with every passing second she didn't reply, didn't help her make her case one bit.

That's when Tara finally averted her eyes from his and pushed against his chest once more, successfully stepping out of his grasp, as she tried to make sense of what she was trying to say, "Let me think." She demanded a moment and some space and air that didn't smell like him!

She needed to distance herself from those welcoming strong arms and skillful caressing hands if she wanted to be able to form a coherent thought at all.

So she backed away some more, but stopped when her buttocks bumped into the table behind her, and folded her arms in front of herself.

"First" She started and wished she knew how to keep her cheeks from reddening at the memory, "What happened here - in this kitchen - Saturday night, that can't happen again." She shook her head along with the words to emphasize how serious she was about this.

Jax cocked his head to the side and grinned back at her, licking his tongue across the tiny scab on his lip, the reminder of her love-bite. He was clearly amused and by the look in his eyes it's obvious he was reliving Saturday nights events in his head this very moment.

But before he even had a chance to utter some smart ass reply, Tara managed to resist his tempting smirk and actually frowned at him, "I'm serious, Jax. I'm not ready to let you get that close to me, and honestly I don't know when I will be. You said you'll let me call the shots, you would follow my lead, well, that means we need to take this really slow."

She shakes her head at him before she adds, "And what if Abel had gotten out of bed again and walked in here while we were ...?" The words die down on her lips, but it's obvious what she means.

He clearly hadn't thought of that, but the thought at what Abel could've possible walked into still didn't completely wipe the smile from his face when he nods at her in agreement, "You're right."

"Also, you can't be parading around here in nothing but a towel." She adds as a vague memory of him fresh out of the shower from this morning flashes before her eyes.

At that he actually lets out a small chuckle and dares to step closer to her once again, invading her personal space, untangling her folded arms when he reaches for her hands and brings them both up
to his lips to press a gentle kiss to the back of each one, before he sheepishly replies, "For the record, I got no problem with you walking around in just a towel ... or nothing for that matter."

It's not his actual words as much as his delivery that cause her to shake her head at him. She has to avert her eyes from him, downcast and despite her best efforts she can't completely contain the smirk that creeps onto her lips for a fraction of a second, no matter how hard she tries, but she quickly catches herself and gives him an annoyed look instead when she finally raises her eyes back up to his.

"Jax." She says with a warning tone of voice and newfound concern in her eyes, shaking her head once more, "Don't do that. This isn't going to work if -"

"If you set boundaries and I ignore them." He huffs as he finishes the sentence for her.

His smile from a second ago replaced by a serious expression as he tugs on her hands to get her to take a step closer to him now. "Look, babe, I get it, and we will figure this out, however long it takes."

Jax gently tugged on her hands again before he pressed one of her palms against his chest, right above his heart, "Just know that if this flawed old heart could talk, it'd say you're the one." He can't contain his own smile now at his cheesy line, but he doesn't care because he means it.

Tara looked up at him, wanting nothing more than to believe him, but this time she needed more from him than just sweet smiles and words of love and devotion. His behavior, his actions would be what could win her over, nothing else will do.

"We don't need ground rules, babe. If I overstep, you put me back in my place, it's as simple as that." He presses another kiss to her hands, his eyes never leaving hers until she nodded her agreement.

"Okay." She replied, hoping that he'd respect the boundaries she would be setting, because she wasn't entirely sure how much willpower she could muster herself to enforce them when temptation would strike again.

Just then, Jax glanced over his shoulder at the clock. "Shit." He cursed. "I gotta get back to work." He framed her face and pressed a kiss to her forehead once more, not letting an opportunity to touch or kiss her slip by.

But just as he pushed passed her to pull on his Jacket, Tara reached out and tugged him back by his shirt. "Wait." She said, and he raised his eyebrows in obvious surprise when he froze under her touch. "What exactly happened last night?"

Jax looked puzzled by her question. "At the bar?" He tried to clarify what she meant.

But Tara shook her head, "No, I mean ... between us? In my bed?" Her cheeks flushed just a little in embarrassment that she couldn't truly remember and this nagging voice in her head insisted that she needed to find out.

Jax eyed her intriguingly for a long moment before he raised his hands up to her shoulders, massaging the stiffness away when he realized that she was holding her breath, and shook his head at her, "Nothing happened, babe. It was late, Christy and Jason crashed on the couch, I bunked with you. We just ... cuddled." He added the last word with a smile which Tara returned when she sighed in obvious relief.

"Besides." Jax simply couldn't resist and added with a smirk, "I've got no doubt you'd remember if more had happened."
"Right." She suppressed the urge to roll her eyes at his cocky innuendo and cleared her throat. But still some things just didn't quite add up in her scrambled mind.

Folding her arms again, not done with her inquisition. "It's just, ... I wasn't wearing any underwear, and my hair was -"

"Babe!" Jax interrupted her before she could finish her sentence, trying his best this time to keep a straight face to make her feel more at ease. "I helped you take a shower, kept both our underwear on. Then Christy changed you out of your wet undies into PJs, I had nothing to do with that. We just went to sleep, that's it."

"And I needed a shower because ...?" She asked, waiting for him to supply the reason.

"'Cause there was puke in your hair." He said and eyed her intently to see if this would ease her worries.

He let his hands drop back down to her waist, tugging her closer to him once more and bit his lip as he tried hard not to smirk before he spoke. "I was a perfect gentleman. Everything was very G-rated, trust me."

"G-rated?" She repeated trying not to scoff at him, and this time couldn't help herself when she rolled her eyes. "I bet."

X

Over the next three weeks they not only found a way to coexist in the same apartment, but also slowly began baby steps in the right direction to rebuild their relationship with each other.

It had proven to be much harder than both of them had anticipated.

For Tara it was hard to let down her guard around him, not ready to give into the constant temptation of his presents in her life.

Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, but expecting different results.

She continued to remind herself of that and that she needed this time around to be different, for it to have a different outcome.

So she vowed to take things slow and not jump back into bed with him like so many times in the past, no matter how sweet the kiss felt that he presses against her forehead every time he left for work, or how nice his arms felt when he wrapped them around her in greeting when he came home every night.

Instead she'd grown to expect the continuous affections from him and braced herself for the feelings his touches evoked.

The pain of his betrayal with the other woman still stung deeply every time she allowed to let her mind go there, but this time she found a way to use that pain to her advantage, to fuel her determination to not let him that close again just yet.

He had to prove himself to her. Prove that this time around he'd be a man of his word. Someone she could really count on and eventually trust again.

But she also saw the efforts he made to be there for her and their sons.
The boys were incredibly happy to have their father in their life again, which in turn made Tara happy that he was here as well. The devotion in his eyes when he helped her care for them, more than he'd ever had before in all the years in Charming, warmed her heart with new love for him.

And Tara had to admit that those were the feelings that proved much harder to push back as she quietly retrieved alone to her bedroom night after night.

The love she'd felt for the teenage rebel over a decade ago was nothing in comparison to the love she felt for the loving and caring father he'd turned into now.

Jax struggled too in his own way, as he was trying to not only find his place in the boys' life again, but Tara's as well.

Over the last few weeks he'd only worked late a couple of times when it couldn't have been avoided, but for the most part he'd rushed home as soon as he could to reclaim his position as the husband and father of their little family.

Being the father that Abel and Thomas deserved came quite naturally to him. His boys adored him and loved him, and it was easy to bring a smile to their little faces by simply being there day after day.

Tara on the other hand was such a different matter altogether.

She was still guarded around him more times than not, and he used everything he had, everything he could think of, to tear down those walls she had build around her that were supposed to be keeping him at arm's length.

Yet Jax remained persistent in his plan to make her fall in love with him again, to make her trust him again.

Whenever he was home, he made it a point to make the most of their time together. He loved the way her eyes lit up whenever they spend time with Abel and Thomas, and at first it seemed to be the only time she'd allow herself to really relax around him.

But lately, after the boys went to bed they would forfeit sleep to just sit and talk about their busy days at work, upcoming things in their life, like Thomas' third birthday, or everything under the moon.

It was during one of those late night conversations that Jax discovered once more just how much he'd missed and loved the sound of Tara's uninhibited laugh, or more precisely how much he loved being the one to get such a carefree sound to escape her luscious lips. After all the tears he'd caused her, making her laugh had quickly become his new high.

But besides his quest to find a way back into her heart, the simple truth was that he wanted her. Every day he ached for her with every fiber of his being.

His body hummed with anticipation of being near her as soon as he put his truck in park outside the apartment building. When he walked through the door, he always sought her out first instead of his sons, needing to wrap his arms around her and pull her close.

Back in Charming, after working hundreds of different angles for the club all day, he'd savored the ride home on the back of his bike. He would be taking the long way home to clear his mind of all the heinous things he'd had to do for the sake of Sam Crow, before he was ready to come home to her.

But now, away from the life, he slowly began to realize how much he'd truly changed in such a short amount of time, when after a long day at the garage he impatiently climbed into the cab of his pick-
up to take the shortest and fastest route home, simply because he didn't want to waste another minute being away from her.

And when he dared to actually think about it, somehow it all came back to Tara almost dying. No matter how he looked at everything that had happened, it always came back to that horrible yet pivotal moment in their lives.

He'd come so close to really losing her that it had once and for all opened his eyes to what really mattered to him. Tara and his boys!

So nobody could really fault him for eventually turning his back on Sam Crow after that night, and for planning his own escape from the life to follow her and his kids after they had already left Charming.

That he would follow her had never even been a question, it had simply been a matter of when he'd leave.

X

Tonight would probably be a late night at the shop, Jax thought to himself as he leaned further over the engine compartment to get a better angle with his wrench. He wordlessly worked the bolt loose enough to unscrew it with his hand as his mind wondered if she'd still be awake by the time he'd make it home tonight.

Jax was pretty much getting along with all of his coworkers, however he'd found himself most comfortable around another reformed gang member named Greg.

So tonight, Greg and him had been sweating away over this piece of crap for hours now, trying to get the motor running again the way it was supposed to, and still had quite a bit of work left to do.

Greg, much to Jax's dismay was one of those guys that liked to kill time by talking. He insisted that it made the time run by quicker and made the work less repetitive.

In the short amount of time that Jax had worked at Baker's Automotive, he'd heard Greg's entire life story, right down to the tragic death of his brother that ultimately made him leave the life behind.

And since Greg had begun to run out of things to talk about, he had been trying get Jax to talk instead.

Reluctantly Jax had shared some details of his life, and if he was being honest bending a brother's ear about how to fix things with the woman in his life was one of the few things he missed about the brotherhood he'd left behind. Ironically, hadn't it been for that brotherhood, he wouldn't have been in hot water with Tara in the first place.

So now he dared to stew over his shortcomings as a husband to the one guy he'd bonded with in this town, in hopes to get some suggestions of how to get back into Tara's good graces, but so far to no avail.

Trina, the only female mechanic in the shop, was also working late, but on a different car in the bay right beside them and at this point she simply couldn't bite her tongue any longer. "Jesus, why don't you just ask her out?" She blurted out in frustration.

Jax's head snapped to the right when he realized that Trina had been listening in on their conversation, "Thought you were listening to music?"
That's when Trina made a show of pulling her headphones from her ears, "My IPod battery ran out over an hour ago, I've had no choice but to listen to you two bitch and moan over your baby-mama-drama."

"She's my wife, not my baby-mama." Jax replied in obvious annoyance as he focused his attention back on the work ahead, but Greg looked over at Trina somewhat intrigued, "What were you sayin'?"

Trina again stopped what she'd been doing and looked over at them both, while Jax tried his best to look disinterested and ignored her. "I said he should ask her out?"

Greg nudged Jax to get his attention as if he wasn't standing a mere foot beside him, "Did you get that? Ask her out?"

Jax shook his head at the idiotic suggestion, and turned to look back at her, "Like I said, she's my wife." He repeated again.

Trina scoffed at him, "And?"

"And we're married." Jax added, wondering why that concept seemed so hard for her to grasp.

"Seriously, dude." Trina gave him a dumbfounded look. "You realize you can still ask her out, take her out on a date even after she said 'I do'!" Then she added, "Putting a ring on her finger shouldn't be the end of romance, you know."

"Shit, man." Greg replied before Jax could think of anything to say, "She's got a point."

Jax shook his head at his own stupidity this time, as he wondered why he hadn't thought of that himself, and looked back at Trina once more, "Since you seem so invested in my affairs, got any date night suggestions?"

At that Trina let out a amused chuckle, but shrugged her shoulders, "I don't know ... maybe try to recreate your first date with her, or something like that."

"Huh." Jax sighed, but couldn't keep the smile from his face, "I'm not sure asking her to the drive thru would do the trick, and besides our first date started out as somewhat of a disaster."

"What happened?" Greg piped in curiously.

Jax smiled again as the memory began to replay in his mind, "Well, for starters, she didn't realize we were on a date until a good twenty minutes into the date."

Trina couldn't help the laugh that escaped her throat at that. "Boy, you must've been one smooth motherfucker." She teased him sarcastically.

Under different circumstances he'd probably taken offense to her teasing, but as his mind was bombarded with the details of their first date he couldn't help but smirk himself. But still, he dared a faux offended look back at Trina, "Hey, I had moves."

"Right." She giggled some more at his expense.

X

Jax quietly stepped into the apartment, making a mental note to remember to oil the front door since it had begun to squeak every time they opened or closed it.
It was pretty late by now, the boys had been asleep for hours and since the entire place was dark, he assumed Tara was asleep as well.

Jax turned on the small lamp on the end table beside the couch before he shrugged out of his Jacket, and toed out of his shoes.

He made his way to the bathroom to quickly clean up before he went to sleep, when he realized that the light in Tara's room was still on. He stopped frozen in place right in front of her door for a long moment, before he dared a quiet knock, rasping his knuckles across the wooden surface.

"Babe?" He whispered, trying not to wake the boys, "Are you still up?"

Tara quickly opened the door, sleepily smiled up at him and whispered as well when she asked, "You just got home?"

"Yeah." He replied as he fought the urge to hug her this time, since his clothes were dirtier tonight than usually and she'd already slipped into her Pajamas.

"So I was thinking, did you wanna go to the movies sometime this weekend?"

Tara furrowed her brow as if in deep thought for a long moment before she replied and shook her head, "I don't think there's any cartoons coming out this month."

Jesus Christ, Jax thought in irony, this was playing out just like the first time he'd asked her out. He couldn't hold back the chuckle that escaped his throat, "No, babe, I didn't mean all of us. I meant just you and me. We get a sitter for the little monsters."

Tara gaped at him for far too long before she actually replied, her voice sweet as sugar when she teasingly asked, "Wait ... are you asking me out on a date?"

"Yeah." Jax clarified, doing his best to ignore the way the idea seemed to amuse her. "It don't even have to be a movie, we can do somethin' else. Whatever you want."

"Okay." She suddenly replied in a much more serious voice. "I'm not sure what's playing, but a movie could be fun."

"Alright." Jax nodded and leaned in to kiss her on her forehead, before they both whispered 'good night' to each other and Tara closed her bedroom door behind her.

Jax smiled as he stepped under the hot stream of water and began to daydream how this movie date with Tara could potentially end. He'd be more than happy if it ended similar to their first one all those years ago.

X

Author's Note: Please let me know what you think. xoxo, Skater

P.S. I know that Jax is much 'sweeter' in the last couple of chapters, but I promise you that he hasn't completely lost his edge yet as you'll see in chapters to come.
Chapter 20

Jax recognized the rumbling sound of the motorcycles pulling into the parking lot outside Baker’s Automotive Repairs, and with mixed emotions headed out towards the parking lot.

The call from Chibs earlier that morning had been unexpected to say the least, but at that point the guys had already been on the road for hours, not leaving Jax with much of a choice in the matter.

The Sons had decided to drop by and visit on their way further north for some club business. Jax didn’t know what that business entailed exactly, and even though he was somewhat curious about what his club was up to these days, he bit his tongue and refrained from asking. He didn't want to risk getting pulled back into it somehow, especially not now when he was finally making some headway with Tara.

The date he’d proposed over three weeks ago had been postponed and rescheduled more times than he could count, because both of them had been hit up with a lot of unexpected overtime.

But now they had finally been able to definitely clear their schedule for this weekend, along with Christy’s offer to not only watch the boys, but keep them overnight at her place, so their date was practically set in stone. Just a couple more days, and he couldn't wait to finally have Tara all to himself again.

That being said, Jax's smile couldn't have been brighter when he saw all the bikes park nicely in a row and one brother after the next came to embrace him in a hug. He'd be lying if he said he didn't miss them. He missed the camaraderie or even the thrill of danger that the life entailed, but at the same time he had no regrets, because he knew he had made the right choice. He finally knew what he loved the most and what he ultimately couldn't live without. And her name was forever tattooed on his chest now. Tara!

Eric Baker, his boss, agreed to let him take a longer lunch break since his friends were in town, with Jax's promise that the truck he’d been working on would be finished before he headed home tonight. So Jax climbed in his truck and the Sons climbed on their Harley’s, heading out to the nearest place to get a bite to eat and reminisce about times long gone.

Unbeknownst to Jax, Tara arrived just in time to see the last bike pull out of the parking lot, following the caravan led by him.

It appeared they hadn't noticed her, and in all honesty she preferred it that way. She quickly parked her car, and was quite surprised how much seeing the familiar bikes and kuttes had actually shook her up.

Hundreds of different thoughts were running through her mind. What where they here for? Why hadn't Jax said that they were coming? What did any of this mean?

She simply couldn't ease her mind, nor shake the sickening feeling that began to form in the pit of her stomach.
She pulled out her phone and contemplated calling Jax, playing dumb, just to see what he'd say. To see if he'd tell the truth about where he was right now and with whom. She wiped a unexpected tear that escaped her eye and shook her head to herself before taking in a deep cleansing breath as she put her phone back into her purse.

No. She shook her head again. She won't do that. If they really wanted this relationship to work, then she needed to work on trusting him again, and this was as good a first step she could think of.

So Tara put her car back in gear, and headed back to the hospital. She'd just share the lunch she'd bought for him with Christy instead, hoping to busy her mind with hospital gossip and work, to keep from imagining the meaning of the club's visit.

X

Jax couldn't help himself from laughing out loud at the stories the guys were sharing with him. From what he'd heard so far, it sounded like the Sons had continued down the path he'd hoped for and laid out for them. No more gun running, and definitely no more drugs.

He knew well enough that that didn't mean it was all peace and quiet now in Charming, but the violence had seized for the most part. They'd been whole for a while now, and Jax was glad to hear it.

"So the doc and you? You managed to patch things up with her? You're all good?" Bobby asked him with his arm draped around Jax's shoulder as they were leaving the diner.

Jax nodded and smiled reassuringly at the older man beside him, "Couldn't be better!" He lied, embarrassed to admit to his brother that Tara hadn't made things easy for him at all.

"Good to hear." Bobby nodded approvingly, and patted Jax's back in a fatherly gesture, before he added. "Well, Charming is sure changing, so who knows, maybe one day you, Tara and your boys find your way home again." 

Jax lit a cigarette, giving Bobby a quizzical look, "Changing how? Another addition to Charming Heights?" He joked.

Bobby settled next to him, lighting up himself as they waited for the rest of the guys to pay their tab and follow them outside, "They're building some kind of amusement-park. Another one of Hale's fucking projects." Bobby shook his head in irritation. "Right outside Charming, in the middle of nowhere, off of I-580."

With the threat running through his veins, Jax knew right away where Bobby was talking about. He choked on the smoke in his lungs, unable to keep from coughing. "You're shitting me. Out there?" He shook his head in disapproval. "It's nothing but fucking hills and rocks and dust out there. It will cost a fortune just to level it all."

"I know." Bobby nodded. "Hale's going overboard with this shit. I mean, come on, he's trying to turn Charming into god damn Disneyland!" He raised his eyebrows to new heights and shook his head in disbelief.

Jax suddenly felt nauseous, but despite the bile rising in his throat, he took another long drag from his cigarette. "So when's that all happening?" He tried to keep his voice from wavering with worry.

Bobby dropped his cigarette to the ground and grinded it out with his boot. "Shit, I think they're already breaking ground this coming Monday, man. Hale isn't wasting any time."
Tara stared at her phone for the hundredth time, rereading the message from Jax that he'd be working late tonight.

She had just finished tucking the boys into bed, and started rinsing the dishes before placing them in the dishwasher, when she heard the front door unlock and Jax quietly stepped inside.

He hung his coat and beanie by the front door, and quickly stepped into the kitchen.

"Hey, babe." He smiled at her as he stepped up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, placing a small kiss against her shoulder. A groan of contentment vibrated in his throat as he relished in the warmth her body emitted. He'd missed her, needed her all day, yet also feared having to talk to her tonight.

"Hey." Tara replied and leaned into him, but immediately wondered if he would mention that the Sons were in town, or if she would have to bring it up. She hated this awkwardness. She had so many questions, but wished he'd bring it up first, so she wouldn't seem like she was interrogating him.

"Boys are asleep?" Jax asked, and Tara nodded.

"I just put them down five minutes ago. If you head in there now, they might still be up."

Jax thought about it for a moment, but decided against it, "Nah, I don't want to get them all riled up again, I'm pretty tired myself." He stepped over to the fridge, and reached for a beer.

"There's a plate of leftovers in there too." Tara nodded towards the fridge, and Jax opened it back up, looking for the food.

Tara watched him out of the corner of her eye, as he unwrapped the plate and put it in the microwave. There was a worried expression on his face, and her stomach twisted once more with the fear of what that might meant for them. She knew him well enough to know that there was something worrying him. It was written all over his face.

The microwave hummed along, and Jax leaned against the kitchen counter, giving Tara a once over as she finished up loading the dishwasher. He folded his arms, contemplating on how he should even begin to bring this up. He knew she would not be happy with him. Truth be told, she'd probably be pissed.

"So, the guys called me this morning, they were heading north and stopped by the shop around lunchtime." He blurted out with the most nonchalant tone to his voice he could muster.

"The guys?" Tara looked over at him, pretending to not know who he meant, before she focused her attention back on closing and starting the dishwasher.

"The Sons." Jax quickly clarified, and gave her a weak smile.

"Oh." Tara tried to sound surprised. She dried her hands on a kitchen rag, before folding the piece of cloth neatly onto the kitchen counter.

Jax impatiently and in an effort to busy his hands, opened the microwave and retrieved his food. Even though he knew it was nowhere near hot, barely lukewarm.
He began to scarf down his food, as he tried to buy himself some time. He'd spent pretty much all day wondering how he'd tell her this, but now that the moment was here, he hated having to do this to her. He knew if he told her the truth, she'd be worried sick. But he wasn't sure if their relationship could take any more lies.

Tara watched him take yet another bite, but impatiently couldn't hold her tongue any longer. "What's going on, Jax?"

Jax looked up at her then, trying to act surprised at the now worried expression that was displayed on her pretty face. But before he could even speak up, Tara beat him to it.

"I can see it on your face." She folded her arms in front of herself and frowned, "What is it? Just spit it out."

Jax swallowed the bite in his mouth and let the fork drop onto the almost empty plate with a clank. He wiped his hands down his face, as if that could somehow erase the worried expression, but it only made it more obvious to Tara how serious this must be. Of course it is, it always is with the Sons.

Tara suddenly spoke again, her voice breaking mid sentence as a tear rolled down her cheek. "You're going back to Charming, right?"

Her trembling voice and tearful eyes finally snapped Jax out of his stupor and he quickly got up and stepped right in front of her, his hands framing her face.

He shakes his head at her no, even thought he says yes, "Yeah, but it's not like that."

"It's not like what, Jackson?" There's now an obvious hint of frustration in her voice. "Sam Crow comes calling, and here we go again ... you choosing them over us." She steps away and turns her back to him, trying to hide the anger and disappointment on her face. "I knew this was gonna happen ... Jesus Christ, I knew it."

Jax spins her around, trying to get her to look at him again. "Babe, it really isn't what you think. This isn't about the Sons, this is about us. You and me!"

There's truth in his eyes and his voice, so she wipes her tears away and stares up at him in utter confusion, "What do you mean?"

Jax swallows the lump in his throat, and pulls her back with him towards the table and chairs. Tara takes the hint and sits in the chair that Jax pulls out for her, and he settles in the chair right across from her. He pushes the plate to the side and reaches across the table. Tara complies wordlessly and reaches out to let him hold her hands. A gesture that seems ages ago now, yet still familiar all the same.

There was no use trying to sugarcoat any of it, so he just began telling her everything he knew. Straight to the point. "Bobby told me that Hale's building some theme park, right outside Charming. They're already breaking ground this coming Monday." Jax cleared his throat. "I know I never told you what I did with the body ... but they're gonna dig right where I buried him. Where I buried Kohn."

Tara's eyes went wide with the realization what that meant, "Oh my god."

In an effort to ease her mind, Jax went on to explain the plan he'd made. After all he hadn't been able to think about anything else all day, and felt the need to share his solution to their problem. He needed her to know that he'd fix this. That this was something he could fix for her, for them.
So he told her, how he was gonna drive back to Charming, dig up Kohn, and pay Skeeter to burn the remains after hours, until there'd be nothing left to bury. It made the most sense not to rebury him, because he didn't want to risk the body being discovered again later on down the road. He'd thought of everything.

He had already talked to his PO and got permission to head back to California for the weekend, of course under the disguise of picking up his bikes. He already talked to Skeeter too, made sure the man was still willing and able to do what needed to be done, all the while keeping Sam Crow out of it altogether.

Tara listened carefully to everything he had to say, waited until he was done before she spoke up. "So you really never told the guys about this? About what we did?"

Jax shook his head, "No, I didn't. And honestly, I'd like to keep it that way."

Tara was in shock, no doubt, and it took her a moment to let it all sink in. But when she was finally able to think straight again, she realized what she had to do. "I have to come with you."

Jax immediately shook his head, dismissing her idea, "No. No way."

"Jax, this is as much my problem as it is yours." She countered.

"If we both get caught with the body.-" He started to object, but Tara quickly cut him off.

"And if you alone get caught with the body, you really think I'll be home free? I'm a doctor, I know how this works. My DNA is all over that man ... Jesus Christ, he's wrapped in my god damn shower curtain." Tara tried to get him to understand how this effected her too.

"I burned his remains for as long as possible, before I buried him. There's probably no DNA trace of you left." Jax tried in turn to still convince her to see it his way.

"Probably no DNA? Probably isn't good enough." She replied. "And besides, we both know you won't be able to dig him up and lift him out of that grave by yourself, not after all this time, not after he's been decomposing for all these years."

Jax shook his head to himself, avoiding her eyes, because he knew there was some truth to what she was saying, but he didn't want her involved. He didn't want her risk getting caught with him. He wanted to keep her safe.

"The two of us can dig faster, than you alone. It will be over faster. Less chance to get caught."

"Why are you doing this, babe?" Jax shook his head, looking right at her this time. Did she not trust him to fix this either? She had to know that he wouldn't let her down this time. "Do you not trust me?"

She reached for his hands again and squeezed them tight, "I just don't want to sit around anymore, waiting and hoping that you or someone else will fix my problems for me ... I'm done sitting on the sidelines of my life, Jax. This is something - one thing - I can do to fix a mistake I made. I need to do this, Jax. Really, this isn't about you or whether I trust you or not with this ... it's about me taking charge, fixing my mistake, and erasing the Kohn-chapter once and for all. I need to be there and see with my own eyes that there is nothing left of him."

Jax closed his eyes and took in a deep breath, contemplating everything she'd just said. He didn't like the idea of her tagging along, and getting her hands dirty yet again - literally. But at the same time he understood her need for closure. He knew he was partially to blame, he should've dug a deeper
grave, somewhere even more secluded. Should've washed the son of a bitch in bleach, clear him of evidence that could be used against either one of them. But he hadn't done any of those things, and as much as he hated to admit it, but she was right. If he got caught with Kohn's corpse, he had no doubt that she'd take the fall too ... even if he confessed to having done the deed alone.

He opened his eyes and looked right at her with a stern expression crossing every feature of his unshaven face, "Alright, but we gotta be smart about this, babe. No mistakes. Let's get rid of that piece of shit for good this time."

X

Author's Note: Please leave a comment if you're still interested and want me to keep working on this. Thanks, xoxo, Skater
Chapter 21

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X

The truck ride to Charming seemed even longer and more dreary than they could have imagined. Sure, under different circumstances they would've probably enjoyed the open road, talked each other's ears off, or sang along loudly and off-key to some '90 songs on the radio. And yes, the radio was on, but no matter how upbeat the song was, nothing was really able to shake either one of them out of their current mood. The occasional conversation consisted only of going once again over every little detail of their plan, and how Abel and Thomas would fare without them there for an entire weekend.

They had left early this morning, dropping the boys off with Christy, who would be dropping Abel off at preschool and Thomas at the hospital daycare when she got to work. Then, after work, she would pick them both up and basically watch them until Jax and Tara got back on Saturday, or Sunday at the latest. In explanation they'd spun a tall tale of some unfinished business concerning the sale of their home, and Jax's share in TM, amongst some other things, that required them both to head back to Charming.

Tara felt guilty about having to lie to her friend, especially now that their friendship had grown back to the way they used to be back in Chicago. From the outside looking in, Tara felt like she'd been nothing but a burden to her friend since she'd arrived in town, but Christy never made her feel that way and it was just one more reason Tara cherished her friendship beyond words. Therefore having to lie to her sucked, but Tara knew she had no other choice. Telling the truth just wasn't an option this time.

By now they were just a couple of miles outside Charming, traffic hadn't been bad and they had made good time. They drove by the entrance of the old dirt road that led to Kohn's grave site, and discovered it had already been barricaded off. To their relief it was nothing that Jax couldn't move to the side long enough for Tara to pull in. Yet at the moment it was still too light outside, so they drove further out in the country, to an old hideout spot they used to frequent as teenagers with their group of friends, to wait for nightfall.

Chain smoking and stretching their legs they quietly stood beside the truck, the obvious worry written all over their faces. Jax held a bottle of water out to Tara, she had barely had anything to eat or drink today, but once more she simply shook her head in a silent refusal and folded her arms in front of herself again between drags from her cigarette.

There was no denying the tension in the air between them was growing more intense with every passing minute. Over the last few days, Tara had busied herself with preparing for their trip, but she did it with a sadness and worry in her eyes that threatened to break Jax's heart. He tried to placate her fears with warm embraces and soft whispers of reassurance that it was all going to work out, but he wasn't fool enough to believe that it would really help ease her worries.

He couldn't help the feeling that he'd let her down once again. He had promised her that the Kohn thing would never come back to haunt them. He'd reassured her that he'd taken care of it, and they were home free. So it wasn't a far stretch for him to assume that she now blamed him somehow, even
if just subconsciously, for this nightmare they'd found themselves in at this moment.

Jax wasn't a religious man by any means. The thought of there being a heaven or hell wasn't one he wanted to ponder on, because if there was such a thing, he knew he'd most likely end up in the latter. So he'd never admit it in a million years, but despite it all, he had on occasion found himself in prayer in the most desperate moments of his life. He'd prayed for his brother Thomas, for his father JT, for Abel, and last but not least for Tara.

He couldn't say for sure that there was a god, nor was he sure that there wasn't. But during his fourteen months stint in Stockton, he'd come to the conclusion that there had to be something, someone, some higher power out there looking out for him, who had purposely put Tara in his path back when they were kids. Even as a young child he'd been destined to be a Son, and he believed now that she was supposed to get him out of it, out of Sam Crow, and after all this time she had finally succeeded. He refused to believe that this one crime she'd committed would end up being their downfall in the end, especially after all the struggles they'd overcome this far.

So sitting on a tree stump in the middle of nowhere, he prayed a silent prayer in his head to this higher power he wasn't sure he actually believed in, but he did it none the less. He did it for her. He needed everything to work out, because if something went wrong tonight, they'd both be charged with capital murder. And he knew it would be the infamous last nail in the coffin of their relationship and their chance of a happily ever after. He had no doubt about that. So, despite feeling like the biggest hypocrite on the face of the earth, he prayed that they'd make it through the night.

Finally darkness began to fall around them. They quickly changed into the change of clothes and shoes they had packed. All black sweatpants, sweatshirt and sneakers, something that wouldn't be spotted easily should they run into trouble and would have to run and disappear in the darkness of the woods. Jax also changed the license plates on his truck, another precaution, before he climbed back into the vehicle with his wife.

With a pounding heart, Tara looked over at Jax, exchanging a weak smile. Jax reached out for her hand and gave her a reassuring squeeze, before he started the truck and finally headed towards Kohn's grave.

X

Jax had reassured her that this was in fact the spot where he'd buried Kohn. He understood where she was coming from when she'd questioned him about the accuracy of the location, considering it had been years and it was dark. He might not remember much about the precise locations of any of his more recent victims, but he swore he'd never forgotten his first. So with the headlights of the truck as their guiding light, they began to dig as fast as they could.

Tara had been right, in more ways than one. The smell was nauseating and the body in such a state of decay that there was no way he'd be able to lift him out on his own ... at least not in one piece. Armed with an oversized tarp, both of them climbed inside the shallow grave. He felt sick at the sight and the smell, his stomach twisting and churning, but he'd be damned if he'd let it show, since Tara seemed to manage to power through it so stoically. They worked silently yet methodically until Kohn's remains were finally on the tarp itself so they could climb back up and hoist him out. Neither wanted to waste any time, and they made quick work, wrapping the tarp tightly around the body, and finally securing it shut with some tape.

The body hoisted further onto the back of Jax's truck, Tara climbed in after and covered him with stacks of old newspapers. So that the outline of a body wasn't the first thing anyone saw, should they get pulled over. While Tara was busy with that, Jax hurriedly filled the grave back in as quickly as he could, before he covered it with some loose underbrush to conceal that the ground had recently been
disturbed.

They gathered up their shovels and tape, before casting one more glance across the crime scene to ensure they didn't leave anything behind. Content with what they saw, they quickly shrugged out of their shoes, clothes and gloves, and threw them into a trash bag onto the back of Jax's truck. The plan was to dispose of that along with Kohn's body, to not leave any evidence behind.

The air was cold against their bare skin, but their minds were so preoccupied with making it out of there that the freezing wind didn't even seem to faze them. Tara climbed in the cab and began to get dressed again, while Jax threw one more tarp over everything they were trying to hide, and finally locked the tailgate and topper shut.

Both awkwardly struggled to shrug into their jeans in the front seat of his truck. Jax couldn't help but let his eyes drift over her pale skin for just a fraction of a second. In any other scenario, he would've said something flirtatious or outrages that would cause her cheeks to flush in that hue of crimson that he thought suited her so well. But if there was ever a worse time for such a thing, this was it, and so he remained silent and quickly slipped his feet into his sneakers and buckled his belt.

Tara pulled her shirt on, smoothing it down over her torso, and reached for the seatbelt, in a hurry to get out of there. Jax pulled his flannel shirt on just as quick but without even bothering to button it, he reached for the gear shift and was just about to put the truck in gear when his eyes caught a glimpse of something in the rearview mirror, still off in the distance behind them.

"Tara." he cried out alarmingly to get her attention, and she quickly turned her head to see what he saw. Her eyes went wide with panic when she recognized the distinct blue and red lights of a sheriff vehicle that was slowly approaching and coming to a stop right behind them.

Jax had been in his fair shares of difficult or dangerous situations over the years, and had usually managed to stay level-headed, and for the most part escaped unharmed. But this was different, because this wasn't about him or Sam Crow, this was about her.

All he cared about right now was keeping Tara safe, so that she could make it out of here to raise their boys into good men. So his heart was beating out of his chest, trying to think of what to do, how to get them both out of this whole. If all else would fail, he knew he'd have to use the gun he'd illegally purchased just yesterday, but that was a last resort. He truly didn't want to add yet another casualty to his already endless list of victims. But he would if he had to, for her.

"Jesus Christ, Jax." Tara looked at him with sheer panic in her eyes, "What are we gonna do?"

To him it seemed like time moved in slow motion for a moment as his eyes drifted from Tara back to the rearview mirror and back to a visibly terrified Tara again, but in hindsight he knew it had only been seconds when he came up with an idea.

"Take your clothes back off, babe. Now!" He demanded, before he shrugged right back out of his own shirt and began to undo his belt and pants again as fast as he could.

Tara looked at him confused for a fraction of a second, but then she suddenly realized what his plan was and quickly pulled her top back up and off over her head.

"Come here." Jax demanded, yet it wasn't lust but crippling fear at the moment that caused his darkening tone of voice.

It wasn't graceful by any means, but he managed to quickly pull her onto his lap and pressed his lips to hers with such force that their teeth bumped together in the most awkward attempt of a kiss.
They both pulled back from each other for just a second, with both their hearts beating out of their chests, eyes connecting and the kiss that followed was anything but clumsy. His hands were on her bare back, fingers temptingly near the clasp of her bra and pulling her even closer into him. Tara had snaked her arms around his neck, as their tongues danced with each other in a passionate kiss. It was a perfect performance. Or was it?

Just then, as predicted, there was a tap against the window and a flashlight shining into their faces, yet the light made it impossible to see the person wielding the instrument.

Both pretended to be caught off guard, when Jax lowered the driver side window, while Tara, still straddling his lap, in faux embarrassment reached for her shirt beside her to hold against her almost bare chest.

"You two, really? I figured it'd be some damn teenagers out here trespassing." The Sheriff's deputy asked with an obvious hint of amusement in her voice.

"Candy?" Jax recognized the voice, but squinted none the less as he was trying to get a look at her face to confirm it was really her.

"Jax Teller and Tara Knowles. Making out in the woods ... just like old times." Candy chuckled. "I didn't know you guys were back in town?"

"We're just here for a couple of days." Tara answered awkwardly, looking at Jax before looking back at Candy. Her cheeks a flaming red. "Picking up Jax's bikes." She added as a way to explain their visit to Charming. The only thing that wasn't a lie.

"Aren't you two getting a little bit too old for this?" Candy wondered out loud.

"Just trying to keep that spark going." Jax added with a charming smirk that could melt any woman's heart. "This used to be our spot." He looked at Tara and smirked some more, before turning his attention back to Candy Eglee. "So when Bobby told us this place was getting leveled, we thought we'd give it one last visit. You know, for old times' sake?"

Candy chuckled again, "I see."

"Everything alright?" A voice of another person rounding the side of the truck echoed through the dark clearing.

Candy finally lowered her flashlight out of Jax's face and turned towards her approaching partner, "Everything's fine. I know them. Just some love birds." She smiled when she turned towards them once more. "You guys gotta find a love-nest somewhere else though, alright? At our age, I'd suggest a soft bed."

X

Tara sat alone in the cab of his truck. She had turned the rearview mirror her way, in an attempt to see what was happening behind her. Jax and Skeeter were in a discussion.

Her heart was still racing uncontrollably, and her hands were shaking, so she folded them into her lap to gain some control. She still couldn't believe what had happened. If it had been anyone other than Candy and her partner that stumbled up on them out there, they'd probably be getting rid of three bodies now instead of just Josh. Either that, or they'd be locked up somewhere, getting booked for murder. She felt sick at the thought of what could've happened earlier, and to her dismay, the night wasn't over yet.
Finally, she felt the slight tug on the truck, and her eyes drifted back to the rearview mirror, when Skeeter and Jax opened the back and pulled Kohn's body free from under the piles of newspapers. Tara couldn't help but take a quick look around, making sure nobody was watching, even though she knew Jax would be doing the same. This was finally the beginning of the end. In a couple of hours there would really be nothing left that could tie Jax or her to Josh's death.

X

Jax had turned the truck around, so they could sit and wait while still keeping an eye on the entrance of the crematorium. They were both surprised when Skeeter said it would take no more than two hours at the most. Neither had done any research on it, but just assumed that it would probably take all night.

They sat quietly in the dark, waiting for Skeeter to let them know it was done, barely speaking out of fear to jinx it somehow so close to this nightmare finally being over.

Finally Skeeter stepped outside, giving them both a thumps up. Jax quickly followed him inside, needing to see with his own eyes that there was nothing left of Kohn, before he handed Skeeter the rest of the agreed on payment.

Jax quietly climbed back into the truck and looked at Tara, nodding his head, "It's done." The heavy burden had been lifted, and both of them felt like they could finally breathe again.

Jax reached for Tara's hand and raised it to his lips, "It's over, babe." And kissed it softly.

Tara nodded and tried her best to smile, but instead tears welled up in her eyes, and she started sobbing uncontrollably.

"Tara?" Jax exclaimed in surprise, as he leaned towards her, tugging on her, pulling her closer. She went limp in the warmth of his arms at first, letting Jax engulf her in his embrace while she sobbed into his shoulder. Jax tried to calm her with whispers in her ear that it was all over, that they made it as he rubbed a soothing hand up and down her back. At first it didn't seem to work, but finally Tara raised her arms and wrapped them tightly around Jax in return, clinging to him as if her life depended on it and her sobs finally began to die down. Her face was still hiding in the crook of his neck when she dared to speak. She tried to catch her breath, alternating between the words and a sob, "I'm ...so ... sorry."

"Sorry for what?" Jax asked, pulling back so he could look at her, trying to read her face.

She shook her head and her chin quivered before she finally managed to speak again, "For being such a bitch the last few days."

"Babe -" Jax started, but Tara cut him off.

"I'm serious. I was just trying to keep it together, but the whole time I was just terrified, you know?" She admitted out loud as she lowered her head against his shoulder once more, trying to get her breathing under control.

"I know. I was too." Jax replied, before he pressed a long kiss against her temple, cherishing her embrace. "But it's really done now, baby, he can never hurt you again."

They remained like that, in each other's arms, for a few minutes longer. When Tara finally loosened her grip on him and straightened up to wipe at her face, Jax couldn't help but smirk just a little. "And here I thought you had nerves-of-steel."
Tara emitted a strange sound, somewhere between a laugh and a sob, before she wiped at her eyes once more. "I was faking it ... all day, the whole time."

X

"Well, shit." Jax cursed as they both climbed back into the cab of the truck. They had thought of everything, except for making a reservation in the motel they had planned to stay the night at, which turned out had no vacancies anymore for the night.

Tara pulled out her phone, and after a quick search and a few phone calls, they realized they were out of luck, unless they wanted to make the over an hour long trip to Stockton.

"Any ideas?" Tara looked at him expectantly.

"We could just crash here, sleep in the truck." Jax suggested.

Tara sighed, not liking that idea at all. "I just feel so ... gross. I need a hot shower. And a bed. I feel like I haven't slept in days."

"Yeah, me too." Jax agreed. "There is one more option, but you're probably not gonna like it."

X

After a phone call to Bobby, Jax pulled his truck into one of the few empty parking spots outside Diosa Norte.

"Jesus Christ, this place is packed." Tara exclaimed. "Are you sure they have an empty room?"

"Bobby said it would be no problem." Jax replied as he shut off the engine and pulled the key from the ignition.

Tara sighed, "But will the sheets be clean?" She teasingly wondered out loud.

Jax carried the overnight bag they'd packed in one hand, holding Tara's hand in the other as they approached the front door. But he suddenly stopped short, tugging on her hand and turned towards Tara. "There's just one thing." He felt embarrassed, but knew he needed to tell her before they headed inside. "I kinda told the guys we're back together."

"Jax." Tara blurted out in surprise and stepped closer to frame his face with her hands, forcing him to look back at her. "I do want you. I just need to be sure it will work this time. I just need a little bit more time to be sure."

He nodded solemnly but remained silent, Tara kissed him softly on the cheek, and reached for his hand, intertwining her fingers with his. A silent agreement of sorts that she'd play along. "Let's go in."

X
The lobby was busy. Alcohol was flowing, seductive music was playing, and scantily clad women and their potential customers were scattered throughout the place.

Tara frowned at the sight, she hadn't imagined she'd ever set foot in this place again. None the less, she couldn't help herself from scanning the room for some familiar faces. There were a few she recognized back from Cara Cara, but to her relief neither Ima nor Colette were here tonight.

Tara wasn't usually the type to feel self-conscious. She might've in her younger teenage years, like most girls do, but not often as an adult, yet right now she felt it tenfold. Because just like she had scanned the room, the girls surrounding her had curiously eyed Jax and her as they'd walked inside. She hated the way they so obviously eyed Jax up and down, giving him a wink and smile, as if his hand wasn't in hers ... as if she didn't even exist anymore. Prior to her departure, when Jax was still president, they wouldn't have dared to do that in her presents ... but that obviously wasn't the case anymore. And Tara hated it. It was just one more instant reminder why she wanted away from this life.

Bobby appeared seemingly out of nowhere to greet them. He seemed so happy to see them both. After a few pleasantries were exchanged, Jax made an excuse about being exhausted, and hungry, having been on the road all day. Bobby took the hint and quickly called someone over to show them to their room for the night. Free of charge, he'd said with a wink and a tuck on his ever-growing beard.

A new girl named Winsome showed them to their room, all the way at the end of a long hallway, away from the hustle and bustle of the coming and goings in the motel lobby. Tara was grateful for that. The less she saw and heard of those girls, the better.

X

Author's Note: Thank you so much for your continued support. I loved all the reviews, comments and private messages I've received. Thank you. xoxo, Skater
Chapter 22

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X

The water was hot, almost too hot for comfort, but Tara embraced the stinging liquid cascading down her body as a welcoming distraction, relishing the feeling of it momentarily drowning out the world around her.

It had been a very long day. Truthfully, it had been a long couple of days. Ever since Sam Crow had invaded their quiet solitude and Jax had told her about Kohn's body possibly being discovered, she'd been worried sick, and had longed for this very moment. The moment this nightmare would be over, and she'd be washing off the last remnants of the day when they'd gotten rid of Joshua Kohn for good.

Yet never in a million years had she anticipated this day to end at Diosa of all places. As much as she hated the sheer existence of this place, it wasn't worth arguing over when Jax had suggested for them to spend the night here, at least not in hindsight of what they had had to do today. And besides, she'd feared his next suggestion would've been Mommy-Dearest, Gemma's place.

She hadn't set foot in the matriarch's home since the day she'd been desperate enough to pull a gun on Chief Unser and Wendy to get her boys out of there. The memory of that day, and Wendy blurting out that she was truly Abel's mother came back to the forefront of her mind, and she felt a rush of anger surge through her as if it had happened just yesterday.

Tara knew that Gemma taking Wendy in like that had been nothing more than another ploy to rile her up, push her out of the family even more, but it still stung despite knowing that. And now, truth be told, she'd rather sleep on the cold hard ground under a bridge somewhere then ask the former queen for a hot shower and a warm bed.

But she didn't want to think about that anymore, but rather try to focus on the good. The nightmare was in fact over. Josh was gone. That was truly all that mattered now.

Josh was nothing more but a pile of dust, and she should've felt relieved, yet she was still shaken up about almost getting caught with his body in the back of their truck. The moment when she'd spotted the blue and red lights behind them, and the panic that crippled her in that moment had been replaying in her mind a few times since then, no matter how hard she tried to forget.

So she definitely needed this moment of solace to let go of today's events. Shake off, or rather wash off all the panic and anxiety that had been haunting her for days. She was well aware that she was taking her sweet time, and that Jax was probably wondering what was taking her so long, but she couldn't help herself. She felt safe in here, for the first time in days. The water soothed her still frayed nerves, and slowly but surely brought a calmness back to her that she'd been missing since the moment she'd seen Sam Crow pull out of the parking lot of Jax's new place of employment.

Tara stepped out of the scolding hot water just long enough to lather her hair and her body with the fruity and flowery smell of her body wash and shampoo, willing the lingering smell of earth and decay to finally vanish from her nostrils.
But when the water was beginning to lose some of that distracting heat, she realized, with a heavy sigh, that it was time to get out. The small bathroom had filled with hot steamy air, obscuring her view, but she honestly didn't mind. She dried off as good as she could considering the humidity in the small bathroom, before wrapping the towel around her.

Wiping at the mirror to take a look at her own reflection, she wasn't really surprised just how exhausted she looked. She was tired, not just sleepy tired, but mentally too, and it showed. Not for the first time today, she wondered how she'd been able to handle all this stress for so many years. She honestly couldn't answer that question, all she knew was that she could never go back to the life again.

X

Jax leaned back in the chair, hung up the phone and absentmindedly slid it across the small table. He watched as the rectangular device stopped sliding just in time to not fall off of the edge and onto the carpeted floor. It was one of those newer smart phones, an IPhone, the kind he'd never dared owning before out of fear it would or could get traced somehow. But Tara had finally convinced him to get it, yet it would still take him a while before he'd remember that he couldn't toss it about like his old and easily replaceable prepaid ones. It was much more fragile, and more expensive too.

He ran a hand through his still wet hair, pushing it back out of his face as small drops of water pearled down his shoulders onto his bare chest and back. When he stared at the phone on the edge of the table, he couldn't help but smile while his mind went back to a couple weeks ago. He could still picture the smirk on Tara's face when she'd teased him for still carrying that old prepaid around.

'Don't you think it's about time to join the twenty-first century, Teller', she'd said one night as he was deleting old messages from his phone. It had taken him by surprise, because he honestly couldn't remember the last time she'd teased him and called him 'Teller' like that. The look on his face must've been something, because she had laughed at him then, thoroughly enjoying herself as she teased him so utterly carefree. He couldn't help but wonder if after today they would find their way back to that carefreeness once more.

The sound of the shower finally turning off brought him back to reality, the here and now. Tara had been in there for what seemed like forever, he noted as he glanced at the clock on the wall on the other side of the room.

He knew after her meltdown outside of the crematorium, she'd tried her best to put on a brave face for him again. And he also knew that she knew that they were truly in the clear now. There was really nothing left this time to tie them to Kohn's disappearance all those years ago.

But he also knew that the fear of getting caught, and the anxiety she felt wasn't as easily to shake after a day like today. So he sat patiently waiting, giving her the time she needed to cope, time to wash that fear and maybe even guilt, along with the dirt and grime down the drain.

He himself still felt some of that adrenaline run through his own veins, so no doubt she felt it too. The burdens that came with the life always fazed him one way or another, but in the end he was able to compartmentalize it somehow. Do what needed to be done for the greater good of the club or his family, and not dare to look back.

But he had to admit, that some of that ruthlessness that he'd embraced so willingly once he was at the head of that table, holding the gavel, had already disappeared in the short amount of time he'd spend up in Oregon. And he also knew that in general that was a good thing. That being away from Charming and Sam Crow, and raising his boys with the woman he loved, slowly but surely turned him back into someone resembling a human-being.
But at the same time it scared him too. He was scared that if push came to shove, would he'd been able to protect her today? Snap back into his more ruthless-self, into the monster that Tara had called him from just a few month ago? He wanted to believe he could've pulled the trigger to protect her, even on someone they knew and had grown up with, like Candy Eglee, but he wasn't so sure!

X

Jax sat up straighter in the chair when the bathroom door finally opened. He leaned forward and rested both his arms on the small table in front of him, playing mindlessly with his lighter in hand, his eyes glued to the crack in the door, waiting for Tara to appear, but a cloud of steam emerged instead.

Tara tucked the towel a little bit tighter around her before she finally stepped into the bedroom, glancing at Jax as she passed by him and reached for the overnight bag on the floor beside the queen size bed.

He watched her as she picked up the bag and put it on the chair opposed to him before she began rifling through it. Her eyes looked tired, her exposed skin was red and blotchy, but her hair was neatly brushed back. Still dripping wet, it looked even longer and almost black in color in the somewhat dimly lit motel room.

"Do you feel any better, babe?" Jax asked with a gentleness to his voice that almost made her want to break down in tears again. She knew he was just trying to make her feel better, but it made her more emotional the way he'd been tiptoeing around her like she was some fragile porcelain doll. And he'd been doing it for days.

"Yeah." She nodded, trying to keep her emotions in check. "A little." She dared looking up at him from the clothes she was pulling out just long enough to acknowledge him and his question.

Jax just nodded in agreement, but he could feel the still lingering anxiety coming off of her in waves. He wished he knew how to take it all away, make her feel at ease, but he just didn't know how.

"You hungry?" He blurted out. "I ordered us some pizza from Giovanni's. Pepperoni, spicy italian sausage, peppers and mushrooms. Your favorite."

Tara feeling her towel loosening as she stood up straight, she quickly clutched her clothes to her chest to keep the towel from falling, letting the lid on the carry-on sized suitcase fall shut on its own.

She had been so consumed with worry that up until now food had been the last thing on her mind, but she suddenly realized just how famished she actually was. Her appetite was coming back. That had to be a good sign, she wondered to herself.

"Thanks." She smiled. "That sounds good, I'm starving, actually." She added as she graced him with a small smile of genuine gratitude this time.

"Me too." He replied and returned the smile as he dared a glance at the clock on the wall once more, "They should be here any minute now."

"Great." Tara replied, rounding the table heading back towards the bathroom when there was a sudden knock at the door.

"That's probably the food now." Jax said out loud standing up from his seat and watched Tara quickly slip inside, closing the bathroom door behind her, before he half-yelled over his shoulder "Come in." and reached quickly for his wallet on the table.

Jax's back was turned as the door quickly opened and closed behind him with a creak. He silently
began counting out the cash for the pizza in his hand. "How much do I owe you?" he asked out loud and looked back over his shoulder at the pizza delivery guy just in time to hear her reply.

"For you, Jax? You know you're free of charge." Colette answered with amusement in her voice, and dared to smile sheepishly at him, giving him a seductive once over as she stepped further into the room towards him.

FUCK! This couldn't be happening.

It only took him a second to gather his wits and realize that this wasn't a nightmare he'd concocted in his sleep-deprived head.

He'd never regarded Colette in an angry manner before. Because unlike Ima, who had viciously dangled their dalliance in Tara's face at the first opportunity, Colette hadn't intentionally tried to hurt Tara, so who was he to put the blame on her for his mistakes.

But now she was here, in their room, dressed in nothing but a satin nighty and high heels, and the thought of what it would do to Tara's already fragile state of mind had his pulse racing and his face growing grim with anger.

"What the hell are you doing here?" He asked in a hushed, yet angry and urgent tone of voice that couldn't be missed. His fist clenched around the dollar bills still in his hand, and he dared a quick glance at the closed bathroom door behind him before he stepped closer towards the unwanted intruder. "You need to leave." He brushed her hands off of him almost violently, taking brisk steps towards her, leaving her no choice but to take a few steps back.

Colette saw how his facial expression had changed the moment his eyes had landed on her, but she didn't understand what she'd done to evoke such fury directed at her. It didn't make sense, but she realized quickly that she must have somehow misread the news of his return to Charming.

Suddenly embarrassed by her wrongful assumptions and her own state of undress, she folded her arms in front of herself, but before she could even utter a reply, Jax practically growled at her through clenched teeth, closing in on her some more, "You need to get the fuck out of here. Right fucking now."

At that Colette's eyes widened with shock and hurt. It wasn't so much his dismissal but the delivery that stung her more than she'd ever admit. But then again, in her profession, this was nothing new to her really. She'd been on the receiving end of changed moods and changed minds by brooding men more times than she could count and she'd inadvertently grown a thick skin for that very reason.

With her head held a little higher, she returned his angry stare with a look of boldness. "I didn't realize I wasn't welcome here" she mumbled, in no mood to argue as she took a step backwards towards the door to leave, giving him a smug once-over as if to say 'your loss', but then she froze when suddenly the door behind Jax opened and to her surprise Tara emerged.

Jax heard the door open behind him, and glanced over his shoulder, but Tara had her eyes trained on Colette instead. He closed his eyes, pinched the bridge of his nose in obvious frustration and mumbled under his breath, "Shit." Taking a few steps away from Colette, as if his mere proximity to her would somehow determine his guilt in her unexpected appearance here. This was what he'd tried to avoid from happening. He knew without a doubt there was no way in hell this was going to end well for anyone involved.

Colette's eyes lit up with obvious surprise when she recognized the brunette as Jax's wife. Her dark hair was longer, and dressed in PJ shorts and a tank top she looked a lot more slender than Colette
remembered from their last encounter. But now it all made perfect sense, she suddenly understood Jax's reaction towards her being here. She clearly hadn't expected his wife to be here with him, or she never would've set foot in his room in the first place.

"What the hell is she doing here?" Tara hissed and looked from Colette to Jax for an answer, her face turning stone cold at the sight of her husband and his whore.

"Babe, it's not what you think." Jax tried to explain, his eyes pleading with her to not jump to conclusions, but to hear him out. Yet even he couldn't deny how ridiculous he sounded once the words had left his mouth.

"Really? Your whore is here, but it's not what I think?" Tara said sarcastically and with her eyebrows raised to new heights looked at him incredulously, before she turned her anger towards the other woman instead. The woman he'd betrayed her with. The woman he'd destroyed her with.

But to Tara's surprise Colette held up her hands apologetically, the universal sign of surrender short of waving a little white flag, obviously aware of her own mistake now. She had her eyes trained on Tara, "Look, honey, I'm sorry. I heard Jax was back in town. I clearly misunderstood. I thought he ..." But the words died down on her tongue as she shifted closer to the door. She almost stuttered, "I'm ... I'm sorry. I'll leave you two alone."

But Tara wasn't about to let her off the hook that easily, "You thought ... what?" She angrily demanded to hear the rest of that sentence. "What were you thinking walking in here, dressed like that?"

"Babe? Come on?" Jax tried to interject, not liking where this was going one bit and desperately needing this encounter to end. Tara turned her attention to him just long enough to shoot him a look of defiance and fury. "Stay out of it, Jax." And if looks alone could kill, he would've dropped dead right then and there.

"I wanna know what she thought." Tara repeated inquisitively, her eyes meeting Jax's sternly, before they drifted back to the blonde Madame just a few steps away from her.

"I don't want any trouble." Colette answered and shifted some more to reach for the doorknob.

"TELL ME!" Tara suddenly yelled, startling Colette and stopping her dead in her tracks, unable to keep her cool any longer.

"I thought he needed me ... wanted me." Colette suddenly blurted out in obvious frustration, and tired of carefully choosing her words around his wife another second longer.

Tara's face grimaced even more in anger and disgust, as her eyes threw daggers at the woman standing across from her. Every word oozed with venom when Tara calmly replied. "I handle all of his needs and wants, honey." And the term of endearment Colette had used on her just moments ago, now sounded every bit like the insult Tara wanted it to be.

Tara's proclamation would've elated Jax had the circumstances been different, but right now it merely evoked a frustrated groan as he ran a hand over his weary face, turning his attention towards the blonde once more. "For Christ sake, Colette, just get the hell out already," he practically growled at her. He knew there was absolutely nothing she could say that would somehow make this end amicably. The longer they talked, the more was said, and it could only end worse.

But Jax's words fell on deaf ears as the blonde was now riled up at well. Colette had tried to keep her cool, knowing she was in the wrong for barging in here like she had, but suddenly Tara's words had
evoked a sense of pride in her she'd long thought forgotten, and she simply couldn't help herself. "That's odd, because he needed and wanted me plenty in the past." Colette dared to look at Jax, before smirking back at Tara, feeling momentarily like she'd suddenly gained the upper hand in this battle.

At those words, Tara simply couldn't stop the image of Jax and her in bed together from clouding her vision with tears again. There was still so much hurt and anger that those memories evoked in her, so many lingering emotions that she hadn't been able to shake no matter how much she'd tried. Seeing her again, here, like this, combined with all the shit she'd gone through today, it made her see red and Tara finally snapped.

It all happened so fast, before either Jax or Colette could even utter another word, or otherwise react, Tara had charged at Colette with the speed of a bullet. Her knuckles connected with Colette's left cheek and the blonde fell to the ground like a sack of potatoes, crying out in pain. Tara dropped to her knees in front of her and drew back once more. Colette raised her hands up in a desperate attempt to fend off the attack, but it was too late.

Another perfectly placed right hook, and the distinct crunch of her nose breaking sounded through the room, along with Colette's strangled cry as blood began pouring down her battered face.

"TARA! Jesus Christ." Jax yelled as two arms encircled Tara's waist and forcefully pulled her up and away from Colette, before she could throw another punch.

"LET GO OF ME!" Tara protested loudly against him, but to no avail, his hold on her was too strong as he practically dragged her away from the scene of the crime.

"Tara, stop." He huffed at her in frustration as she continued to struggle against him, but finally released the tight grip he had on her.

Colette moaned in pain behind them, causing both their heads to turn towards her, but when Tara tried to approach her once more, Jax was quick to step in her way this time, blocking her from doing any more damage than was already done. "Babe, stop it." He nodded his head towards Colette who was trying to get back to her feet, while holding one hand protectively over her bloodied nose. "You got her good."

Colette mumbled something incoherently under her breath, but when she dared to shoot the couple one more look, Jax frowned at her and pointed a dismissive finger towards the door, "Just get the hell out."

The moment the door closed behind Colette, Tara disappeared into the bathroom and angrily slammed the door shut behind her as well.

"Jesus fucking Christ." Jax cursed to himself and stood there dumbstruck for a few seconds, before he decided to follow Tara into the bathroom, bracing himself for the argument he was sure was about to ensue.

"Hey." He said as he stepped through the door, instantly recognizing the small sobs, but still trying to get a look at her face to see if she was really crying. Of course she was!

Just then Tara turned towards him just long enough to let him see her already tear streaked face, "Don't Jax, just get out, alright. Pleeease, just leave me the hell alone right now." To his surprise the anger in her voice had been replaced with sadness and defeat, which he couldn't quite wrap his head around. After all, Colette had just limped out of here, with a bloodied broken nose and hurting pride.
But Jax couldn't help himself. No way in hell was he leaving now and give that anger and sadness some time to fester even more.

He quickly stepped up behind her and reached for her right hand, tugging at it before Tara even knew what he was doing. "Jesus Christ, babe." he shook his head at her in disapproval, and pulled her with him towards the sink, turning the faucet on and carefully rinsed the blood from Tara's bloodied knuckles.

"I said leave me alone." Tara repeated, yet didn't put up a real fight against him either.

Instead she winced in pain as the water hit the open wounds, but avoided his eyes at all cost as she wiped her tears away with her other free hand.

Jax let go of her hand abruptly, and turned around, slamming the toilet lid shut and motioned for her to sit the same instant he uttered the word at her in obvious irritation. "Sit."

Tara looked at him perplexed for a long moment, wondering why he acted like he had a right to be mad at her, and in turn it brought her own anger to bubble quickly back up to the surface. She continued to hold her hand under the stream of cold water, defying his orders for her to take a seat while she gave him a cold shoulder instead. Yet the ability to hold her tongue on the matter merely lasted a handful of seconds.

She shook her head angrily to herself, watching him out of the corner of her eye as he rifled through the medicine cabinet, and the cabinet under the sink, she assumed looking for the first aid kit.

"You don't get to be pissed at me." Tara suddenly hissed in his direction, and in return got his undivided attention, and with it a stone cold stare. "If anyone has a right to be mad here, it's me." And she'd be damned if she'd back down now. "You heard what she said. She provoked me, Jax. I've put up with a lot of shit over the years, but I'll damned if some god damn prostitute is going to stand there and talk to me like that."

Jax slammed the cabinet shut with a bang, if it was supposed to scare her, he was out of luck. First aid kit in hand now, he practically shoved her away from the sink towards the toilet, forcing her to take a seat after all. His jaw ticked with suppressed rage as he did so, and the look he gave her spoke volumes as well. He kneeled down on the floor in front of her and began digging through the first aid kid, not even looking at her when he said, "You seriously think I'm pissed because you hit her?"

"You pulled me off of her." Tara interrupted, stating the obvious and not the least bit intimidated by his behavior or demeanor towards her. Somehow the adrenaline still running through her gave her a bravery she seldom found anymore these days.

Jax shook his head at her and looked up, before he angrily grabbed her right wrist, "I pulled you off of her because of this." Holding her bloodied hand higher and right up to her own face. "Less than twenty-four hours back in Charming, and you already fucked up your hand ... again."

That shut her right up, - temporarily at least - because she knew he was right, but it didn't change the fact that she was still pissed at him too. "It's not broken." She halfheartedly supplied in a weak attempt to justify herself.

Both remained quiet for a long moment, and Jax avoided her eyes as he carefully dabbed the skin that had split open on her knuckles with an alcohol swab, ignoring her wincing at the contact. Followed with a dab of Neosporin on some gauze, gently placed on the open wounds, and then took his sweet time as he carefully wrapped her hand in a bandage.
But as he secured the end of the bandage in place, so it wouldn't come loose, he couldn't hold back any longer. "How many months has it been since you finally got cleared for surgery again?" he asked without taking a breath between words. She knew the question was rhetorical, and he was not expecting an actual answer, but the righteous look he gave her now bothered her just the same.

"I don't need a lecture from you on how to conduct myself in a whorehouse." Tara replied angrily, refusing to let him turn the tables on her. She had every right to be mad, and do what she'd done. "Who the hell do you think you're talking to?" She proudly dared to throw her own rhetorical question in his face in return.

At that, despite the fact that he was still angry, he couldn't help the small smile that formed on his lips at the feistiness in her words. He raised his eyebrows at her as he focused his blue eyes solely on her now, almost making her regret what she'd just said as she tried not to squirm under his scrutiny. Maybe it was time that he clarified what he meant, "I really don't give a shit if you want to beat the holy hell out of her. After that shit she said, be my guest. All I'm saying is be fucking smarter with your choice of weapon, babe."

Again, he had a god damn point.

Tara drew her lips in a straight line and held his gaze for a long moment before she finally conceded and nodded her head in agreement. With that he gently tucked her bandaged hand closer to him and kissed it, before he looked back up at her. His eyes suddenly reflecting a gentleness again when he said, "These hands still got a whole lot of good to do, you know. Got some more babies to save." He reached for her other one and gave that one a gentle kiss as well, before he looked down at them in awe. "Your hands, they're like the yang to my yin, babe. Can't go around fucking them up, because you let someone like her get under your skin."

Jax stood and put the first aid kit back where he'd found it, as another moment of silence hung heavy in the air with Tara still remaining suspiciously quiet.

Jax turned around then, facing her once more as he leaned against the sink behind him and crossed his arms in front of his still bare chest. "Look, I had no idea she'd be here. Maybe I should've asked Bobby when I called him, but honestly she was the last thing on my mind. I'm sorry." He said, sincerely.

Tara closed her eyes, lowered her head and pinched the bridge of her nose with her un-bandaged hand before she let out a sigh, "I know, Jax." She nodded but still didn't look up at him to meet his penetrating gaze. "I know her showing up like this was out of your control, but it doesn't make it hurt any less, you know." The pitch in her voice raising on the last few words gave away the tears that began to form in her eyes once more.

He knew there was really nothing he could say to fix the way this encounter with Colette made her feel. All he could do was trying to lighten the mood, so he gave it his best shot, "You want me to drag her back in here by her hair, so you can finish her off? With the gun this time, of course."

At that Tara couldn't help but look up at him, a sad smile gracing her lips just for a fraction of a second when she replied, "Don't tempt me."

Jax laughed, but Tara tried not to crack another smile at the sound of it.

He smirked, "I could call Skeeter, see if he could give us a discount. You know, maybe some 'buy one, get one half off' kinda-deal."
Tara shook her head, trying to hide the smile on her face with both of her hands. This was sick. This was not funny. Murder wasn't supposed to be funny, but she couldn't help herself. As she tried so hard not to laugh out loud, she couldn't help but wonder if maybe today's events had finally pushed her over the edge herself. Just maybe she was finally losing her god damn mind like the rest of the residence in this poisonous town, when a stifled laugh bubbled from her throat after all.

X

Author's Note: Please review and let me know what you think. Thank you, xoxo
Chapter 23

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X

It felt so good to be able to make her laugh, hear her laugh, especially after the day they've had and this messed up encounter with Colette. There was definitely a truth to the old saying, laughter was indeed the best medicine.

But Tara’s small laugh, that had delighted him so much just now, suddenly began to die down, and with her head still bowed he wasn't able to see the expression on her face change until she suddenly spoke up.

She wasn't crying again, but her voice was undoubtedly strained with emotions, "Just tell me something, Jax. If I ... if I hadn't been here ... if I hadn't insisted on doing this with you, what would've happened?" She suddenly sat up straight and lifted her head to look right at him, wanting to read his facial expression as he answered her question.

"You mean with ...?" But her name died down on his lips, and he simply nodded and waved his hands in the direction of the bedroom, where Colette had limped out of the room less than fifteen minutes ago.

He raised his eyebrows and shook his head, "Nothing, babe! Nothing would've happened. I promise you." Jax solemnly answered and quickly stepped closer to her again, but instead of getting back on his knees in front of her, he simply reached for her hands and pulled her up to stand face to face with him this time, and Tara let him. "You are who I love ... who I want, Tara. And there is nothing, and no one that could ever make me lose sight of that again."

"You say that now, but you've lost sight of it before." Tara replied without missing a beat. "More than once." As much as she loved to hear his confirmations of love, and wanted to believe him, her head refused to give in so easily to her heart. There was always this nagging voice in the back of her mind that told her to keep her guard up, reminding her how much he'd hurt her in the past. Replaying that moment she walked in on him and her.

Jax let out a heavy sigh, and stared into her eyes for a long moment before he finally answered her. His eyes looked sad and troubled, as he gave her hands that still rested in his a little squeeze. "You know that old saying, how you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?"

Tara nodded. Of course she knew it.

"You say that now, but you've lost sight of it before." Tara replied without missing a beat. "More than once." As much as she loved to hear his confirmations of love, and wanted to believe him, her head refused to give in so easily to her heart. There was always this nagging voice in the back of her mind that told her to keep her guard up, reminding her how much he'd hurt her in the past. Replaying that moment she walked in on him and her.

"It's true! When I walked in and found you in our kitchen, I thought I'd lost you. There was so much blood, I thought you were dead."

He stopped speaking, trying his best to not get overwhelmed by the emotions that memory evoked in him. He didn't want to think back too hard on it all, because it still made his heart constrict painfully in his chest every time that bloody image of her flittered through his mind.

"Look, babe. I could've lied when you asked me about Colette before. I could've said that the day you walked in on us was the only time. But I didn't. I know I've hurt you. I know this run-in with her
tonight hurt you. You don't know how much I wish I could undo it all, go back and not make the mistakes I've made, but I simply can't. I told you the truth because I realized that the only way this can work is if we stop pretending and are truthful with each other. No more lies, no more secrets. Full disclosure, a clean slate, that will hopefully sooner rather than later lead to a fresh start.”

Tara held his gaze for a long moment, and what she saw in his blue eyes staring back at her was proof that he really meant what he'd said just now.

A fresh start? The whole truth? Full disclosure? She wasn't so sure he could handle all the things that still burdened her, and probably would burden her for years to come. All the doubt that still plagued her, especially now, that they found themselves back here, back in Charming. The whores! Sam Crow! Gemma!

Tara looked down and pulled her hands out of his as she slowly took a couple of steps away from him. She contemplated how to go about telling him this. He'd tried to pick her brain what seemed like a million times in the past, about what she remembered about the day when she was attacked. The sad truth was that she still had no recollection, but she'd never dared to share her thoughts and opinion on what she believed might've happened.

What is it, babe? Was on the tip of Jax’s tongue, but he didn't say it. Instead he watched her silently, leaned back against the sink, folding his arms in front of himself again. He waited patiently and watched her as she clearly struggled to find the words to share something with him.

"You want full disclosure?" She awkwardly turned back towards him, and crossed her arms in front of herself, mimicking his stance just a few feet away from him.

Jax nodded, "It would be a start."

"There's some stuff I haven't told you." She started, but paused to let out the breath she apparently had been holding. "When I first woke up, and the new sheriff talked to me about what had happened, and asked me what I remembered and all that. When she told me that Juice was their main suspect, I wondered if maybe you were behind it.

"What?" Jax couldn't help the look of shock that crossed his face. He had secretly suspected it, because of how long it had taken for them to allow him to finally see her, but to hear her actually say it and to know that that's what she had thought felt like a stab in his heart. The same feeling that had gutted him when he'd sat down across from her on that fateful day in the park, and he suddenly realized she thought he was going to kill her. It was a feeling unlike any other, second only to the few moments when he'd thought her to be lying dead in his arms.

"I thought maybe you changed your mind after talking to the guys." Tara confessed, somewhat embarrassed that she'd ever thought he would do such a thing to her.

"Jesus Christ, babe." He said and dared a step towards her, his hands reaching out to touch her once more. "What in the world would make you think something like that? I would never ..." He couldn't even say the words out loud, the thought that he could ever physically harm her, or have her harmed, in any way was too outrages, too absurd.

Soothing hands encircled her upper arms, before one reached up to wipe the tear from her cheek that had escaped her eye. Tara wiped at her face herself now, trying to get her breathing under control again, along with her emotions. "Gemma. Just something she'd said."

"Gemma?" Jax repeated in disbelief, and shook his head in denial and irritation. "What did she say?"
"She said you love deep, but hate deeper. Said that you would not let me raise my boys." A tear fell again from her eyes at the memory, and how defeated she had felt when Gemma had said those ugly things to her. "She said it was up to me how that would be explained to Thomas and Abel. That it would be either Mommy moved away, or Mommy passed away." She dared to look up and meet his concerned eyes focused wholeheartedly on her.

"Jesus Christ." Jax cursed out loud and turned away from her angrily. He couldn't even look at her right now. He wasn't angry with Tara, but with his mother, with the things she'd said and the doubt she'd inadvertently placed into Tara's head. But he was also angry with himself. Angry that he'd allowed the rift between them to grow and fester to the point that his mother's heinous words would ever ring true in Tara's mind.

Tara wiped at her face, trying her best not to cry, "I knew you weren't behind it once I saw you. When I saw how relieved you were that I had woken up ... I knew it wasn't you!" She paused and shook her head to herself, brushing her hair back out of her face as if that would also brush away the uneasiness she was feeling. "It just didn't make sense why Juice would go after me, attack me like that. What did I ever do to him for him to want me dead?"

Jax shook his head and closed his eyes in frustration as he took another couple steps away from her. He leaned back against the sink, his hands holding onto the porcelain side as if he needed something to keep him from losing his balance. "That's on me, babe. I made Juice do something for the club ... something I shouldn't have asked of him." Jax shook his head again, his eyes focused on the floor, ashamed to meet her eyes this time when Darvany crossed his mind, "I think it broke him, broke something inside of him. I don't know what made him snap. And if your memory doesn't come back we might never know what happened between you two in that kitchen. But regardless what happened, what he ultimately did to you, was not your fault. It was mine." For dragging you into this life of blood and pain.

Tara could see how much that thought still burdened him. How he couldn't even stand to look at her out of shame and guilt, and for a moment she wondered if she should even tell him what else was on her mind. She contemplated her options for a long moment as they both stood their silently, because she knew that the other possibility would crush him just as much as the idea that Juice had acted alone.

In the end she decided to go through with it and finally tell him. She'd held onto those thoughts for so long, never had told anyone, not Margaret, not Lowen, not Christy ... no one! But she'd realized that if anyone needed to know how she truly felt, what her own suspicions were, it would be Jax.

"Has it ever crossed your mind that Juice didn't act alone?" Tara dared to ask the question that had boggled her mind more times than she'd like to admit.

Jax's eyes snapped up to meet hers, confusion on his face now, "What do you mean?"

Tara pressed her lips together for a few seconds, trying her best to find the right words, "Did you ever think that maybe Sam Crow was behind it? Told Juice to do it? I mean, with me out of the picture, you wouldn't have to give yourself up to Patterson. They wouldn't have lost their President. And no more chance of me ratting either." She blurted the words out so quickly, so fast, that it took Jax a second to comprehend what she'd just said and accused his brothers of.

"No, of course not." Jax suddenly blurted back, a newfound realization sparked in the back of his mind.

The way she'd acted towards his brothers after she'd woken up. How she had avoided TM, the Ice Cream Shop, and Diosa at all cost. It all made sense now.
"Jesus Christ, is that what you think?" He quickly stepped towards her and grabbed her face, forcing her to look up at him. "There's no way, babe. No way. They know how much you mean to me. How it would destroy me if anything happened to you."

Tara swallowed the lump in her throat and nodded in understanding, but just because Jax had no doubts about the loyalty of his former brothers, didn't make her doubt disappear so easily.

Jax couldn't stop himself, he just had to pull her into his arms. "You've been holding onto that all this time? Why the hell didn't you tell me?" He mumbled against her temple as he pulled her even closer into him.

"I can't remember what happened. I was scared. I didn't know who to trust." Tara answer, too emotional to elaborate any more. Even thought he didn't think it possible that Sam Crow was behind the attack on her, she still felt relieved that she'd had the courage to tell him how she felt, what she thought, her fears. It was definitely a much needed step in the right direction for him and her.

"Get dressed." Jax suddenly said and pulled away from her, holding her at arm's length to look into her eyes. If the encounter with Colette hadn't already been reason enough, this was undoubtedly enough to rethink his idea of bringing her here tonight.

"What?" Tara replied, looking up at him confused.

"Let's get the hell out of here, babe."

X

Tara stared at the row of whiskey bottles much too long, contemplating her options. She dared a look over her shoulder at Jax a couple aisles over, wondering what he would think if she'd pick one up. She had no doubt he'd probably remind her of the last time she'd been drinking, but she'd quit taking her anxiety meds cold turkey after that night a couple weeks ago. And right now, she could really really use a drink.

With one last look in Jax's direction, she reached for the cheapest bottle and placed it in the plastic shopping basket in her hand, among the rest of her comfort foods, some chips, candy, chocolates and a small tub of ice-cream.

Seemingly out of nowhere Jax appeared by her side, dropping his own stash of snacks in the basket. When he spotted the whiskey, he reached for it and held it up to her, the look on his face a mixture of doubt and worry, "You think this is a good idea?"

Tara grabbed it back from him and unceremoniously put it back in the basket. "I'm not taking those meds anymore." She huffed, the tone in her voice leaving no doubt that it annoyed her that he'd dared to question her drinking. She began walking down the aisle, touching this and that, pretending her best she couldn't feel his eyes on her with every step she took.

"Since when?" He asked when he'd caught up beside her, taking the heavy basket out of her hand to carry it for her.

"Since we started getting along." She answered honestly, and stopped long enough to look up at him, giving him just the smallest hint of a smile.

He wasn't sure what to say to that, but the genuine smile that formed on his lips, followed with an almost silent chuckle, spoke volumes enough.

He dared a glance in the basket, "Well, babe, are we done, or do you need anything else?"
Tara looked the content over herself, "Well, it's not the pizza I was craving, but it'll do."

X

Jax unlocked the motel room, and held the door open for Tara to step on through ahead of him.

Tara flipped the light on and both gave the room a once-over, after they'd stepped inside. It was small, the furniture and decor were at least a decade past their prime, but none the less, it was clean and most importantly to Tara, it was neither a whorehouse, nor some place Sam Crow frequented.

Jax placed their bags on the floor, "Well, it's not the Ritz, but -"

"It's not bad." Tara interrupted, finishing his sentence, and dropped her purse and their shopping bags on the dresser beside her.

It was late, they were tired and hungry, so they wasted no time to settle in.

Tara had quickly changed back into her Pajamas, and Jax had pulled his grey sweats back on to sleep in as well.

Before too long Tara found herself half sitting, half lying down, with her back against the small wooden footboard of the bed. She adjusted the pillows behind her, trying to sit up more, so she could take a drink from the whiskey bottle Jax had just handed to her, without spilling it all over herself.

The sting in her throat was both expected and familiar, as was the warmth that began to spread through her almost instantly. But the caramel colored liquid wasn't the only thing that made her body heat rise at the moment. She tried not to squirm as Jax's eyes lingered on all the wrong places just a little too long for comfort. She really didn't want to encourage him by letting it show how much it was affecting her.

She had tried to ignore the way Jax was watching her, the way he'd looked her up and down more than once since they'd gotten comfortable in this bed. Sure, it would be so easy to give into those looks, and the smirk that usually followed once she'd caught him looking. It would be so easy to crawl over to him and share the taste of whiskey on her lips with him.

Could she be that girl again, even if just for one night? The one that was careless, carefree and threw caution to the wind. She was ashamed that the thought had even crossed her mind, because she knew that she couldn't, or rather shouldn't, as tempting as it was. As tempting as he was!

This wasn't right, this wasn't how they should finally take that next step in their relationship. Not like this, not after the day they had had, after what they had to do. Maybe it was wishful thinking, but she wanted to believe that when the time was right, she'd know it somehow, that her heart would tell her head that it was alright ... and it simply wasn't right just yet.

Surely, things were better between them, there was no denying that, even despite the encounter with Colette earlier, or maybe because of it.

It was almost like once they'd set foot into this room, all the shit from earlier today just fell away, disappeared and she felt something shift, in the air, or between them, or maybe both. Like a dark stormy cloud that had followed them around had suddenly evaporated into thin air. Like the ordeal with Josh was just now really over. Or like the beating she'd given Colette, as ashamed as she felt now in hindsight and without that rage clouding her mind, it had also broken something free in her. She couldn't really explain it, but it almost resembled something like ... closure.

Who would've thought that some crappy motel on the outskirts of Stockton would be the saving
grace for her sanity.

And then, of course, there were her confessions to Jax about her fears and doubts about Sam Crow's involvement in the attack on her. It somehow lifted a weight off of her shoulders, that she hadn't even realized was there. If she had known to share those things with him would be so liberating, so freeing, she wouldn't have hesitated and done it a whole lot sooner.

Jax sat leaning against the headboard, two pillows behind him to cushion his back from the carved wooden surface, waiting rather patiently for his turn. He stretched out his arm to take the bottle from her, watching her as she wiped her mouth with the back of her un-bandaged hand in a child-like manner.

Tara in turn watched him too as he put the bottle to his lips and slowly raised it. Jax took swig after swig, and she couldn't help her eyes from drifting from his lips to his neck, where his Adam's apple moved with every gulp.

It wasn't long before her eyes drifted even further down, to his Tara tattoo. The one she'd been ignoring since the day she'd first saw it. Well, technically the first time she'd seen it, Jax had been asleep. The second time she'd had a killer hang-over and was in no state of mind to question him about it. And from then on out, it just became this elephant in the room, that she tried her best to ignore, while he tried everything he could think off to make her acknowledge it.

Her cheeks reddened when she realized Jax had stopped drinking and had caught her examining the tattoo on his chest with the same intense scrutiny he'd spend the last twenty minutes examining every inch of her exposed skin. But he didn't say anything, he didn't have to. She could see the amusement of having caught her in the act written all over his unshaven face. He didn't even try not to smirk at her, as he handed the heavy glass bottle back to her once more.

Tara avoided his eyes as she took another sip, and another, and finally another, before she lowered the bottle and clutched it tight with both hands, seemingly lost in her thoughts for a short moment. Maybe this childish game had gone on long enough. Maybe it was time she should drop the silly facade, and ask him about her name on his chest. But just as that thought had crossed her mind, she caught the amused look in his eyes and the smirk on his face, and ... she'll be damned if she brought it up first.

Instead she smirked back at him, holding the bottle back out, waiting for him to take it, which he did. Jax shook his head, but his eyes still sparkled with mischief as he gave her a look of utter disbelief.

He took one quick sip, thenlowered the bottle, wedging it between his thighs to keep it from falling over while he absentmindedly traced the rim of the bottle with his thumb.

But suddenly something snapped in him. Not angrily, but he simply couldn't hold his tongue anymore. His eyes met hers across the bed, "You're really not gonna ask, huh?"

"Ask what?" Tara folded her arms, trying her hardest to not let that smile on her lips turn into a full on smirk. Here we go.

"About the tattoo." Jax blurted out and ran his left hand over the four letters in one quick fluid motion, just to make it clear which tattoo he was referring to, in case that would be her next ridiculous question.

Tara sighed, "What do you want me to say, Jax?" She sort of shrugged her shoulders at him. That I love it?
"I mean, it looks nice." She offered trying to placate him somehow.

She could see the expression on his face change now, some of that amusement was leaving his eyes and was replaced by something else that she couldn't quiet place.

"Right." He replied and suddenly focused his eyes solely on the bottle in front of him. "That's why I did it, because it looks nice." She could hear the almost angry sarcasm in his tone of voice. She knew all too well how every speck of ink on his skin had meaning to him. He had never been someone that would get a tattoo just for looks. So naturally Tara instantly regretted her flippant reply. She truly hadn't meant to upset him.

She could feel her cheeks flush even more when she realized that she'd taken it too far. She nudged his thigh with her foot, trying to get him to look up at her. "So why did you get it?"

He finally looked up at her again as he pulled the bottle up to his lips once more. The expression on his face was still too serious for her liking. "Because I love you, babe." His eyes met hers and they held each other's gaze for a long moment, until Jax looked away, fiddling with the rim of the bottle once more.

She didn't like that the mood, his mood, had taken such a ugly turn all of a sudden, but she knew this time she was to blame.

She wanted to drink and forget all their troubles for just a little while.

Momentarily she felt paralyzed on how to lighten the air between them again. But then she scooted closer to him, and reached for his hand, "I love you too, Jax." It was all she could think of to say, and after all, they were all about telling each other the truth now.

His eyes lifted once more to meet hers, the seriousness left his face altogether and a small smile formed on his lips when he watched her eyes drift back to his tattoo before she quickly added, "And I love the tattoo."

His smile grew brighter at her words, and she could practically see his mood change again right in front of her very eyes.

She chuckled and bit her lip as she sat back into her old spot Indian-style, clutching one of her pillows to her chest.

"What are you laughing at?"

"You." She replied with amusement, "When you were practicing the letters of the alphabet with Abel, and made him spell out the tattoo." She recalled, and couldn't help but chuckle once more at the memory.

Jax laughed too, "Well, shit. You acted like it wasn't even there. I had to do something." He shrugged his shoulders at her nonchalantly, before he added, "But on the upside, he knows how to spell your actual name now, instead of just mom."

"True." Tara replied and pursed her lips at the thought.

A moment of silence fell between them as their chuckles died down and they passed the bottle of liquor back and forth between each other once again.

She smirked at him then, and couldn't bite her tongue any longer, "Honestly, the first time I saw it was when you and the boys were napping. And of course I loved it, but I also thought that it was a
"Presumptuous?" Jax repeated, a bit confused, yet still amused none the less. "How in hell is it presumptuous?" He couldn't stop himself from asking.

"Well ... it's like you were saying." She sat up straight and tried to make her voice sound more masculine, yet failed miserably, "I'm Jackson Teller, I always get the girl, so why not put her name on my chest."

Jax busted out laughing at her failed attempt to sound like him, and Tara couldn't help but laugh along with him.

When his wholehearted laugh finally died down and he got his breathing back under control, he shook his head at her, still grinning ear to ear, "First of, I don't sound anything like that, babe. And second, when have I ever referred to myself in the third person?"

Tara laughed, "Yeah, maybe I suck at impersonations, but you get my point, don't you?"

Jax reached out and tucked on one of her hands, still unable to wipe the smile off of his face, "Doesn't matter if I get the girl or not, 'cause it doesn't change how I feel about her. How much I love her!" He winked at her as he leaned back against his pillows, thoroughly content with himself and what he'd said.

Their eyes connected across the small space between them, and Tara pulled the pillow closer to her chest as if it would serve as an adequate barrier between them. She groaned inwardly, not wanting to give in to the butterflies in her stomach.

Jackson Teller's charm would always be her downfall.

X

Author's Note: I hope you all like this new chapter. If you do, leave me a few words. I'd really appreciate it. Reviews help tremendously on the motivation to write. xoxo, Skater
Chapter 24

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Warning: Lots of cussing in this one, lots of emotions. You've been warned, brace yourselves! ;)

X

The temperature in the room was rising, or at least it felt that way to Tara when she could practically feel her cheeks turning red under his intense stare. This couldn't be happening.

Those eyes, those lips, that wink and smirk and to top it all off that god damn tattoo ... it would be her undoing sooner or later. But if she didn't get her act together fast, here and now, it would be much sooner rather than later. Too soon.

She felt like putty in his hands when he looked at her like this, with that smile that reached his baby-blue eyes. Those eyes giving her that look, speaking volumes without ever uttering a single word, so clearly longing for her. So clearly in love with her.

She still loved him too, so much.

And of course she was attracted to him. What woman wouldn't be? She honestly couldn't remember a time when she hadn't been. Even at their worst, in the heat of an argument, he could manage to ignite a desire in her that she'd never felt with anyone else.

Shit!

"I have to pee." Tara's excuse wasn't graceful, nor was the way she rather hurriedly tried to slip out of bed. It was only half a lie, she needed to use the bathroom, but she also needed to get away from him for a few moments. In order to think straight.

But after barely eating anything all day, combined with the drinks she had in a rather short amount of time, it was no surprise that she swayed as soon as her bare feet hit the carpeted ground. Luckily, she caught her balance just in time, clinging onto the footboard, yet cursing at the fact that she'd almost landed face first on the floor. "Shit."

"Whoa, babe." Jax said concerned and had scurried around the bed to her side in a split-second. She tried to brush him off, holding her hand up to signal for him to back off, that she didn't need any help. She didn't need him any closer.

"I'm fine." She half giggled inadvertently, she couldn't help it. She really should've stopped drinking earlier. "Really, I'm fine." She repeated once more, straightened her spine to show that she could stand at full length. Yet looked thoroughly embarrassed when she took a few unsteady steps contradicting her own words. If this had been a sobriety test, she would've failed miserably.

Not waiting for her to actually fall, he quickly stepped up behind her and reached out for her. One of his hands on each hip to steady her, smiling himself now.
"Sure you are." He said sarcastically, by now his fingers had slipped under the hem of her tank top, wrapping around the bare skin of her waist. Leaving a trail of goose bumps in their path.

Tara had no doubt that he knew exactly what he was doing to her, when he tucked on her and pulled her closer against him. The growing bulge in his sweatpants bumping into her backside with every step they took. What was merely a few feet and should've been a matter of seconds somehow felt much longer in her buzzed state of mind.

Tara dared to glare at him over her shoulder for a fraction of a second, or at least she thought she'd glared but it was hard to be sure by the way he returned the look with yet another smirk as they'd finally reached the bathroom door. "Need me to come in and ... help out?" He whispered against her ear.

Asshole!

She hated when he got this cocky, so full of himself, but what she hated even more was the fact that she couldn't help but smirk herself at the moment, thankful that he couldn't see it. If her cheeks weren't red before, they sure as hell were now, no doubt.

"Thanks, I can take it from here." She said, without looking back at him and disappeared inside the en-suite. She closed the door as quickly as she could, right in Jax's amused face. Secretly grateful that her legs decided to cooperate again just in the nick of time, her fingers reaching for the doorknob, locking the door behind her with a twist of her wrist.

She stood still for a long moment, leaning back against the door and closed her eyes, hoping it might stop the room around her from swaying.

Then dared the few steps over to the toilet. Quickly sat and relieved herself, before sitting back down on the closed toilet lid.

She needed to get her act together. She needed to think straight, somehow trying to get all the thoughts and feelings in the right order again.

She stumbled over to the sink, propped herself up on her elbows for a moment as she washed her hands much longer than needed. Then she rose to full height, propping herself up on her hands this time, to take a long hard look in the mirror. The slightly glazed over eyes, the fire red cheeks ... shit, there was no denying it, she was drunk, or at the very least very, very tipsy already.

Drunk and alone with Jackson, in a motel room of all places. She feared once more this night could potentially end in a disaster. Doing something she'd undoubtedly regret come morning light.

She reached for one of her hair ties in her make-up bag and pulled her hair back in a loose ponytail, a few stands remained free, not having grown out as much yet.

Tara turned the water to cold and began splashing her face a few times. Slowly, deliberate and repeatedly, hoping that would help a bit before she glanced at her reflection once more. She stared at her glistening face, pushing back the strands of wet hair that stuck unsightly to her forehead and down her temple.

Further examining her reflection for a long moment, willing herself to be smart, ... and willing herself to not drink any more tonight. She'd clearly had more than enough.

After a few more splashes of cold water to her face, she reached for a towel and padded her face dry. She knew she couldn't hide in here forever. And how pathetic was it that she felt the need to hide at all ... from her husband, of all people.
But if she was being honest with herself, at this very moment, she didn't just want to hide, she wanted to bolt. Hightail it out of there to not get seduced by the old familiar hold he had on her. It was easier to feel the way she felt about him from afar.

'The minute someone makes you feel uncomfortable, tests your loyalty, little Tara packs her bags and hits the road.'

Whenever she thought about running, his words from years ago came back to haunt her. Taunting her. And inadvertently a little voice would pop inside her head, 'If you do this, you're proving him right.'

It was ridiculous, really. Because in all honesty, those words, his words, weren't even true when he'd spewed them at her in anger at the time. She didn't always run. Had she been pissed at times and walked out before their arguments would get out of hand? Sure, but she'd only ever truly left him once back then, and if memory served her right, he was as much to blame for that as she was.

She was better than this. Smarter than this. After everything she'd been through, she was stronger than to let him intimidate her like this.

After one more look in the small mirror, and one more stern inner dialogue with herself, she'd made a decision. She wouldn't let him get to her, it was as simple as that.

She turned and slowly, with careful steps returned back to the bedroom. Right into the lion's den.

"Are you okay?" Jax asked concerned as she appeared through the door, looking her over.

"Yeah." She nodded, embarrassed, "I might've had a bit too much to drink." Tara confessed the obvious as she took deliberate steps back to her side of the bed. Pure willpower and sheer stubbornness kept her from tripping over her own two feet.

"You barely ate anything too." Jax added as he watched her like a hawk from his spot on the bed, ready to pounce should she start to stumble like she had before.

Tara slid back onto the bed, resuming her old seat across from him. "Yeah, that probably didn't help." She agreed. "But I did eat a whole pint of ice cream by myself." She added, as if that were some sort of consolation.

Jax chuckled at that, "Well, at least it won't hurt when it comes back up in the morning."

Tara shook her head and frowned, "Don't even joke about that. I hate getting sick."

"I know." He said. "I remember."

"Maybe you should try to eat something other than junk. "He leaned over and reached for one of the shopping bags on his nightstand, and pulled out a sandwich. Just plain white bread with ham and cheese. The kind you could find at any given gas station or convenience store.

Tara shook her head, "I don't know."

But he had already ripped the plastic wrapped sandwich open and held one half of it out to her, "Come on, babe. The bread will help soak up some of that alcohol."

Tara gave him a weak smile and reluctantly took the sandwich from him. More to appease him than anything else. She examined it for a long moment, but then slowly picked little pieces off of it and began to eat. "You know that's a myth, right?" She said and looked up to him, not surprised that he'd
already eaten most of his half with just a couple of bites.

"What is?" Jax asked curiously before he shoved the last piece of his sandwich in his mouth, and wiped some remaining crumbs from his beard with the tips of his fingers.

"The whole bread-soaks-up-alcohol thing." She replied before she took her first actual bite. "It's totally made up."

"Really?" Jax looked surprised, and pulled the second sandwich from the bag and opened it.

"Yeah, really." Tara said and smiled at the cheeky expression on his face.

"You learn that in your fancy medical school?" He asked, winking at her and began to eat some more.

She actually had to chuckle at that, and nodded, "Somethin' like that."

X

They continued to talk for a little while longer, prolonging the inevitable. They both should've been downright exhausted, but something was leaving them both restless, even thought they knew they needed to settle down.

Jax glanced at the alarm clock on her nightstand, it was already early Saturday morning. A few more hours and the sun would start coming up again.

"Maybe it's time we get some shut eye, babe. We still got a long day ahead of us tomorrow." Loading up his bikes, and making the long trip home with a trailer in tow. He padded the bed beside him, across from where she was sitting, wordlessly telling her to come on over.

Tara nodded sweetly, but the reluctance was written all over her face.

Jax could feel her hesitation, or maybe he could see the sense of panic in her eyes, he tried to soothe her nerves. "I promise I'll behave."

That actually brought a shy smile to her face, and she couldn't resist. "I've heard that before, Teller."

A small chuckle escaped his throat at that. He pulled back the blanket and sheet, and settled beneath it himself. He watched her, out of the corner of his eye, moving her pillows back to the other side, his side, and settle into bed beside him, leaving a glaringly obvious gap between them.

Jax reached for the table lamp beside him, switched the light off, and turned back over to face Tara, who in turn was facing him as well.

It took a few moments and blinking his eyes a few times until they had adjusted to the darkness of the room, letting Tara's face fully come into view again. To his surprised she had her eyes open too, watching him just the same, and they both couldn't help but smile when they realized it.

She knew she'd spend a night in the same bed with him not too long ago, but she'd been too drunk to remember much, if anything, about it. But now, lying here, she suddenly didn't feel drunk anymore, or maybe it was just her mind playing tricks on her.

"This is weird." Tara suddenly admitted.

"It shouldn't be though." Jax replied and dared to reach out to her, gently brushing a brown soft strand of hair, that threatened to fall in her face, back behind her ear.
Goose bumps formed instantly, traveling down her spine at the slight touch of his hand, which was now lingering on her cheek. Her body was betraying her in the worst way, longing for his touch, longing for him. But she had to be smarter than that. Despite the laughs they had had tonight, there had been plenty of tears earlier too, making it painfully obvious that their relationship wasn't really where it needed to be yet.

She reached up and covered his hand with her own, and held his stare in the darkness for a long silent moment, wishing momentarily she could read his mind. And then instantly glad that she couldn't.

She hated this. This never-ending push and pull she felt towards him. 
She hated how she felt for him. Hated how he made her feel. Hated how he made her want him in spite of everything else.

But also hated how he could bring out the worst in her, how she'd acted earlier today. Hated and ashamed for what she'd done to Colette. And yes, she hated Colette too, but she knew deep down inside that all that anger that she'd directed at the Madame should've been directed at someone else entirely. Him!

He was the cheater here, using one woman to hurt the other.

Maybe this is what was holding her back? Holding them back? 

She'd told him time and again how much he'd hurt her. How she wasn't sure she could ever trust him again. How she still had doubts he could keep his word and remain faithful to her in the future.

But had she ever told him how humiliated she had felt in front of everyone? His brothers, the whores, and Gemma? And how unimaginably angry he had made her?

"I shouldn't have hit her." She suddenly said, her voice almost a whisper, but her heart was beating wildly and loudly in her chest.

This was not at all where he'd hoped this conversation might lead. "Babe, please let's not -"

She cut him off, "I have to say this, Jax." She huffed and suddenly propped herself up, sitting up again. She turned on the table lamp beside her and turned towards him some more.

Jax took the hint and quickly sat up too. He was frowning now, because the last thing he wanted was have another fight or conversation about what had gone down with Colette a few hours ago, but he also knew he didn't really have a choice in the matter.

"I know I shouldn't have." Tara shook her head to emphasize the words. "It's just when I saw her ... that image of you with her popped back into my mind and I got so angry, at her, but mostly at you."

Jax averted his eyes and sighed audibly, running a hand over his face in frustration. If this wasn't a mood killer, he didn't know what was. And here he'd thought they'd made progress today, but apparently it wasn't so. He regretted every second he'd ever spend with Colette and he would undo it without hesitation if he only could, but his hands were tied. There was no turning back time.

Hell, if there was, he'd be nineteen again, every inch of Tara's dad's old station-wagon would be packed with everything they owned. Together on their way to San Diego and with a much brighter future ahead of them. But live was cruel, and do-over's of time-traveling proportions were merely a thing in books, on TV or the big screen. Here, in the real world, he had no choice than to suffer through the consequences of his actions.
He knew that she might never forget what he'd done, but he was hopeful that she'd forgive him one day and they'd be able to really move on from his past mistakes. She simply had to, there was no other way.

Tara rambling on brought him back to reality, "It's just when she said those things, I let all that pent up anger out on her. Don't get me wrong, I hate her ... so much, but she didn't deserve what I did to her, because honestly, it's you who I should be angry with. It's you who's to blame."

Jax looked up then and met her eyes, and gave her a sad smile, because truer words had never been spoken. He was at fault, and fuck did he know it too. "I know, babe. I know." He had singlehandedly destroyed everything they had, everything they once were. Just like Clay had done with Gemma!

His admittance of fault came too easily and unexpected, that momentarily she didn't even know how to respond to that. She had braced herself for a fight, an argument, another long speech of love declarations and regrets, but not this ... not his defeat. So she stared at him in disbelieve, her heart beating out of her chest, unable to find the words now to voice what she was thinking and feeling.

Jax looked away then, running a hand down his weary face, deep in thought. He had no earthly idea how he could ever fix all the thing he'd broken between them.

Since the moment he'd found her barely breathing in their kitchen, he'd been trying to choose the right path. Choose differently in hopes to turn this thing around somehow, getting them away from all the shit that had weight so heavily on him, on them. The things that were trying to tear them apart and away from one another, trying to kill them.

But after all that, after everything he'd done, was he really any closer to getting her back? Really getting her back, not just the bits and pieces she allowed him access to, but all of her?

Could she ever truly forgive him if she continued to hold onto that anger she was talking about? That rage, he'd seen it too, felt it, brewing just beneath the surface, well concealed when she was with their boys, tucked away these days for his benefit too, behind smiles and warm embraces while playing house, but brewing just the same.

He knew all too well what that looked like, felt like. It took everything in him to not slit Clay's throat that day in the hospital. And then he'd felt it every day he had to sit across from the old man at the reaper table. After he'd found out that Clay had killed JT, after he'd tried to have Tara killed, and after he'd killed Piney. And the longer he had to keep the pretense up, the more that boiling hot hatred festered within him. Looking back now, he really had no remorse killing the man that had helped raise him into a man. His only regret was that he hadn't done it sooner.

The crimes he'd committed against her, the breaking of his wedding vows at the very top of that list, seemed marginal at best in the grand scheme of everything that had happened to them. But they weren't marginal to her ... he knew to her, they meant everything.

She'd stoically dealt with the gunrunning, the porn, eventually even the drugs and prostitutes. Always on alert, always on call, patching up his brothers at all hours, day or night. She'd carried a gun for protection, washed his blood stained clothes without batting an eye, humiliated herself with Otto, all for the sake of Sam Crow, and all it got her in the end was a fucked up hand, a possible stint in prison, a cheating husband and a knife in the back of her skull. She had suffered, so much!

He dared a glance in her direction, meeting her eyes with the same curiosity as the day he'd appeared on her doorstep. She had to let go of it, that anger, somehow. Preferably not with a bullet to his neck like he'd done to Clay, but she needed to someway, somehow or their new relationship was
ultimately doomed before it would ever really start. "Maybe you just need to get it out of your system."

"Get what out of my system?" Tara blinked and stared at him in confusion, "What the hell are you talking about?

Jax slipped out of bed, turned and reached for her hand. "Come on." He wasn't really sure what he was doing, but anything was better than this limbo they had found themselves in now. He needed to do something.

He gave her a look she couldn't decipher as he was tucking her along, but curiosity got the better of her and she allowed him to pull her out of bed with him. But before she came fully to a stand, she searched his face for an explanation. "Jax, what is this? What are we doing?"

He stepped right in front of her then, his voice stern and demanding, "Hit me." In his mind, it seemed the most logical thing to do. Allowing her to have a go at him. Really let him have it for all the fucked up shit he's done!

Tara smiled awkwardly, because this had to be some sort of a sick joke. "This isn't funny." She turned back towards the bed, but he grabbed her by her shoulders, forcing her to stand face to face with him again.

"Come on, babe. Just hit me, get it out of your system." He practically demanded of her, not a trace of humor in his voice or eyes. He was serious!

"I'm not gonna hit you." She replied irritated, almost angrily, rubbing her shoulder where he'd grabbed her just a little too hard. But there she stood, dumbstruck and confused in equal measure, folding her arms in front of herself. Was he losing his god damn mind once and for all now?

"Are you crazy?" She couldn't stop the question from slipping out. "I'm not gonna hit you." She repeated again for good measure. "You're being ridiculous."

Jax threw his hands up in frustration, "You got a fuckin' better idea? 'Cause I sure as shit don't."

She scoffed, "Better than this? Anything's better than beating each other up. Have you lost your god damn mind?" She looked at him in suspiciously.

"I said you should hit me. I wasn't gonna hit you back." Jax felt the need to clarify in case there was any confusion on the matter on her part.

"So it's just me beating up on you?" Tara scoffed again, shaking her head at him. He was crazy! "What the fuck is this? Some fifty-shades-of-grey thing? You're getting some sick and twisted pleasure out of this?"

Jax didn't understand the reference, and he honestly didn't give a shit at the moment. "You're pissed at me! You said so yourself. I'm the one to blame for everything!"

She turned her head away from him with a purpose, avoiding to meet his eyes. What the hell was wrong with him? Why was he so hell-bent on pushing her buttons?

"I'm the one who fucked everything up for us. I kept things from you. Kept you at arm's length." He started, his voice held frustration and urgency in it. "You were terrified about going to prison, about what would happen to the boys, but I just brushed you and your concerns off, too busy with Sam Crow to give you the time of day. Give you the help that you needed."
This was supposed to rile her up, get her to let go off all this rage towards him she’d bottled up so deep inside, hidden all the way in the back, somewhere under all the hurt and pain she wasn’t so reluctant to share. But fuck, if it wasn't gutting him just the same as he recalled all the way he'd failed her, failed them.

"Please stop." Tara pleaded, her eyes downcast and her whole body turned away from him now, avoiding his stare and the way he hissed his ugly words in her direction. If his goal was to make her cry again, he was on the right path.

"And when the cops showed to pick you up, I just stand there, like some dumb fuck, letting it happen."

Tara's eyes began to water, and she raised a hand to her face, as if that could somehow hide the way her chin began to tremble. "Why are you doing this?" She cried, still not looking at him.

But Jax was not done just yet, because just tears wasn't what he was after. "And while you're stuck behind bars, I bed the first thing that's willing and able."

At that Tara flinches and turns towards him, her eyes wet with tears but the look she gives him is ice cold and suddenly she hurls herself forward, and pushes against him with both her hands flat against his chest. "Is this what you want?" There's hurt, pain and venom in her voice as she hisses at him through clenched teeth. "Is it?"

Having anticipated her reaction, he barely even moves at first. Just stands there, solid as a rock. But it just infuriates her even more and she pushes him a second time then, and this time it does take him off guard and he actually staggers back a couple of steps. His face a cold hard mask, indifferent is what he's going for.

"I stick my dick into someone else, and that's the best you've got, darlin'?" He dares to mock, but the lock of disgust she throws at him let's him know he just crossed the line.

His words cut her like a knife, ripping something open inside of her and it's like her body suddenly has a mind of his own, when she steps closer towards him again and slaps him open-handed across the face with all the strength she could muster.

Jax actually looks shocked for a split second, which is ironic if you think of it. Wasn't this what he'd wanted? For her to lose her cool, lose control and hit him. Congratulations, you've got your wish!

The palm of her hand stings sharply at first, then begins to throb in pain, and by the welt forming on his cheek she has no doubt his face is hurting just the same. But it doesn't stop her, more the opposite. The way he just stands there and stares at her as if he was a completely different person, it infuriates her even more and she pulls back and hit's him a second time. "Is this what you want, you stupid son of a bitch?" She yells at him through tears, her face contorted in fury and pain, and she starts to sob. But she hits him again, with both hands now, taking turns, left and right. And he just stands there, not even trying to dodge her attack. But then she stops, hiding her face in her hands and sobs uncontrollably.

The mask cracks at that, some emotions are beginning to shine through again behind cold blue eyes as she stands in front of him, her whole body shaking, sobbing out loud. What the fuck has he done?

But before he can even begin to sort his own fucked up feelings out, she pounces on him again. But this time she hits him square in the chest. Her small curled up fists not really doing a whole lot of damage as she goes to town on him. Drumming them against him in utter frustration, his chest as her own personal punching back, and he knows he deserves every last jab she's dishing out for all the
ugly truth he'd spewed at her.

The jabs die down, and her sobs get louder and he finally let's his facade slip completely from his face as he pulls her forcefully into him. She struggles against him at first, but then she breaks down and sobs into his chest uncontrollably.

She seems more fragile and smaller the way she's curled into him, he can't help but think as he rests his chin on her head for a moment, wishing for the million's time he would've made different choices all those months ago, all those years ago. Could've saved both of them a lot of pain and suffering.

But then she suddenly pulls away, wiping angrily at her face and before he knows what's happening she makes a mad dash towards the door. He hadn't counted on that.

Swift fingers unlock the deadbolt, but he catches up with her just as she pulls the door open.

He wraps his arms around her from behind, pulling her back into his chest.

She struggles against him, twisting and turning, trying to elbow her way out of his embrace. "Let go of me, Jax." She manages to hiss at him between more sobs.

"Tara." He's pleading with her now, still behind her. "For Christ's sake, would you stop fighting me." He kicks the door back shut with his foot, the loud bang was sure to wake their neighbors, if their fighting hadn't done so already.

She's not having any of it, and he's not letting up either. Their fight for dominance could almost be comical if it wasn't for the tears in her eyes and the pain and regret in his.

He finally has enough, he didn't want to hurt her - physically - but he's at his wit's end. Grabbing each of her wrists and forcefully crosses her arms over her chest in the shape of an X, tugging her back into him as hard as he could. "Babe, I'm sorry."

"Piece of shit!" is all she manages to say, furious that he dares to hold her hostage like this. Who the fuck did he think he is?

"I am, you're right." He breathes into her ear. She's not making this easy on him as she continues to fight against him. He just needed her to calm down, he'd just have to hold her until she did. Sooner or later she had to realize she didn't stand a fighting chance against the death grip he had on her wrists and would give up. "But you need to calm down." She had to.

He looks over his shoulder, taking a few steps back, dragging her along with him, not leaving her any choice in the matter. He plops down to the ground then, his ass hitting the floor with a thud and a grunt, no free hand to break the fall. He has pulled her down with him and settles with his back against the footboard of the bed. His lips near her temple and he has to fight the urge to kiss her. He shifts and moves, until her ass is settling on the ground between his legs now, while he's still holding her tightly against him. A short moment of peace!

She stills her efforts then and he realizes that she's no longer crying either. And just when he thinks she was calming down and giving in, she bends her legs at the knee, digging her bare heels into the carpet as hard as she could, before she gives it her all. With an unladylike grunt, she's pushing her back into his chest with a jolt that made the bed behind him shake. The headboard banging against the wall. It knocked the wind right out of him, but to her dismay, not long enough for him to let up on her.

Jesus Christ, what she lagged in upper body strength, she sure as shit made up for with her legs. If he wasn't the one on the receiving end of her struggling, he'd be proud of her.
"Let go of me." She demands, she's mad and so frustrated that all her efforts against him seem so god damn fruitless.

"I can't." Jax replies, his voice leaving no room for doubt. No way in hell can he let her leave now, not after all this!

"What the hell is this?" Tara shakes her head not understanding what had happened, how they ended up here. One minute they were in bed, having a moment, or so she thought, and then this!? "Just a few hours ago you said you could never hurt me." She recalls his words.

"I'm not hurting you. I'm just restraining you." He has the nerve to say. He knows his grip on her wrists is tight, but not tight enough that they'd leave a bruise. He wouldn't do that.

"Physically, not, but ..." Tara tries to hold back the fresh tears that a forming in her eyes. "Why the hell did you do this to me?"

An open ended question if he'd ever heard one. There were way too many things he'd done to her to even know where to start, but he's fairly certain that she's not talking about his crimes of the past for once, but about this, what he was doing right now, right here.

But then again, where to begin with this? He's clearing his throat that suddenly seems too tight to breathe, let alone talk or plead with her. "Because I need you to stop hating me, babe." He stops then, foolishly giving her a moment to interject, wants her to deny it, tell him he's crazy, that she doesn't hate him.

And Tara knows it too, knows what he's doing. She doesn't hate him, not even when he deserved it, like right now. But she is furious with him, and if he honestly thinks for one minute that she's in the mood to console him, then he truly was crazy after all.

"So if letting some of that anger out on me helps you do that, then I'll gladly let you have another go at me. We can go for round two right now, if you want?" He's seen it work, time and again. When his brothers had issues with each other, they'd just duke it out. Quite literally, right there in the ring, next to the clubhouse. So he knew his idea wasn't all that farfetched.

He's met with deafening silence from her. He waits, expecting her to join in on this conversation he's trying to have, but nothing.

She's not actively trying to pull away from him anymore, but her muscles are still stiff under his skin, shoulders square and rigid. She's on guard, in case a chance presents itself to break free.

He tries to back pedal in a way, wants her to really understand, "You know all that shit I said, I was just trying to rile you up. Piss you off, trying to get you to let go."

At that she snorts, "Well, you succeeded."

It's not what he wanted her to say, but it's a start. At least she's talking.

"If you hold on to that anger towards me, if you can't let it go and forgive me, we don't stand a chance in hell." He doesn't know what else to say, or rather how to say it. He knows what he means, knows that in his head it all makes sense, but can't find the words. They all get scrambled somehow before they make it to his tongue and he can't form a sentence that even remotely conveys what he wants it to.

"I am letting go of that anger. But it's not one-size-fits-all. Just because this cavemen mentality has worked for you, doesn't mean it'll work for me. There's other ways to deal with things, Jax." She
suddenly answers, her voice a bit calmer again, her words eloquent, as if she'd actually listened and at the very least tried to understand why he has done, what he did.

"Like your way, which is not dealing with them at all. Just shoving 'em all under a rug." He replies, mocking her once more.

He's infuriating with his self-righteousness, accusing her of hiding from her issues. All the while he's the proverbial poster child of compartmentalizing. She isn't like him in that way, at least not anymore, because it had never worked out for her before.

"You know I've been talking to a therapist. I'm dealing with it, but I'm doing it in my own way. But after everything I've been through, it's not going to happen overnight. I'm sorry if I'm not bouncing back as fast as you want me to."

He hears her, truly hears her, but he can't help that he's selfish and downright impatient when it comes to her. Doesn't want to wait until some god damn shrink was done psychoanalyzing her. He just wants her back, wholeheartedly, all of her, now and forever.

There's a long pregnant pause until he finally gets a grip. It's not quite a speech, but it's the gist of it.

"Since the day you almost died, I've been bending over backwards for you. Trying to see things your way, trying to do them your way. Believed that you would pull through and come out of that coma, whole. Cut Gemma out, and anyone else that dared to even suggest you might not. Losing you simply wasn't an option, babe. I wouldn't let it happen." He started to explain where he was coming from. He didn't know any other way to get through to her.

"But here I am now. In this constant state of limbo. This holding pattern of will-she-won't-she let me back in, will she forgive me. I know I hurt you, so much." He moved his lips closer to her ear, strands of her hair tickling his nose. His voice softer now, reassuring her, "I would never do that to you again. Never. But babe, how long are you gonna keep punishing me? How long do you want me to keep punishing myself for things that I can't change? I made mistakes. I wish I could take them back. I'm sorry. And I know that you can't forget what happened, but I hope you can forgive me. You have to forgive me." His voice broke on the last few words, filled with regret and pain and truth.

Tara took a deep breath and let her head fall back against his shoulder. Her eyes closed, fighting back tears too and Jax was so relieved when he felt her whole body finally relax against him. The tension left her arms and so did his grip he had on her. Letting go of her wrists and instead snaked his arms around her torso instead, tucking on her, wanting her even closer. The constant struggle of never getting her close enough. He'd pull her under his skin if he could.

Tara's soft hands encircling his brought a feeling of calmness back in him again. Reluctantly he loosened his hold on her just long enough to brush her hair off of her shoulder, bowing his head, placing soft sweet kisses from her shoulder to the crook of her neck. Loving the way she squirmed for a second when he let his lips linger on a sensitive spot.

Didn't she know how everything around him was meaningless without her? How his bed was too big. Skin too naked without her skin pressed against him.

How his sheer existence was meaningless without her? That if she had died, he would've died too.

"I love you so much." A whisper in her ear.

She twisted in his arms, turning towards him and craning her neck looking back at him. "I love you
"too." She answered, meeting his eyes for the first time since she tried to run away from him.

They held each other's gaze for a long moment, when Tara further turned in his arms, enough that she could reach up, pushing his disheveled hair out of his eyes, framing his face with her hands, tracing his cheeks that were still red from where she'd hit him. A flicker of regret crossing her soft features.

But before she could say or do anything else, Jax spoke up instead, "You have to forgive me, Tara." His look unwavering, pleading with her to give him a sign, he'd take anything at this point, a measly tiny crumb of hope that he stood a fighting chance to really be let back in.

She frowned, fighting back tears that threatened to spill. He frowned too, looking away from her now, his voice heavy with tears of his own and he repeated, "You have to forgive me." It was the crux of it all. Her ability to forgive him.

The tears did spill, his and hers, she let them fall, while he wiped angrily at his eyes. Two sides of the same coin.

Man up, you pussy! His inner voice held no punches.

Tara looked at him then through teary eyes, reaching up, trying to get him to look back at her again, when a loud hard knock at their door interrupted them, startling her.

They both get up then, Tara folding her arms in front of herself, watching Jax curiously peeking through the hole in the door, trying to see who it was at this time of night.

Some guy and a girl, the magnifying glass oddly distorting their features, but either way, he didn't recognize neither of them. He looks back at her, shrugging his shoulder and opens the door.

"Can I help you?" Jax asks, looking from the guy to the girl. He's a mountain of a man, towering over Jax by at least half a foot, long dark beard, muscles and tattoos, the epiphany of a lumberjack. But she's the opposite, a little thing, petite, blond long hair pulled back in a ponytail, nothing to her, just skin and bones, he can tell, even with a blanket tightly wrapped around her.

The look the couple exchanges is subtle, but he catches it nonetheless. And the guy clears his throat, looking back at Jax again, "We just wanted to make sure everything was alright in here."

Jax gives them a look of confusion.

"We heard some fighting." The guy further explains, "Some yellin' and screamin'."

"We're fine." Jax supplies without missing a beat, frowning that someone bore witness to him and her hashing it out like that. Not really embarrassed, more ticked off. "Everything's fine." He's curt with them.

But now the woman pipes up, her voice equally small, matching her figure, "Is she fine though?" She asked. "I wanna make sure she's fine."

He's downright annoyed now and considers slamming the door in their nosy, judgmental faces, but then Tara appears by his side, pulling the door further open so they can see her.
"I'm here. I'm fine." She nods at them appreciatively, her hand reaching for Jax's forearm, sensing he's about to lose his cool.

She can see the lingering doubt in the eyes of the couple before them, so she lays it on a little thicker. "Really, I'm fine." She wraps her arm around Jax's biceps now, giving him a loving look before turning her attention back to them. "We had a stupid fight. We made up. Everything's fine."

The couple exchanged another look, not entirely convinced, but realizing there wasn't a whole lot they could do.

"Alright then." Jax huffs in annoyance, impatiently starting to close the door in their faces.

The guy turns away, ready to leave, but the woman steps closer, her hand on the door, keeping Jax from closing it. She ignores him, acts as if he isn't even there, her eyes on Tara alone. "Listen, honey, if you get in another fight, we're right next door right here, room 8." She points a finger to her left, "You don't have to stay with him."

And with that she turns on her heel, catching up with her man.

Jax shuts the door, looking all kinds of pissed off, pouting even. He'd been looked down on his whole life, but being accused of this, battering his woman, his wife, so blatantly right in his face by some nosy do-gooders really rubbed him the wrong way.

Tara could see the expression on his face, and as much as she tries, she can't stop from smiling, covering her mouth trying not to laugh at him.

"You think this is funny?" Jax tries to sound offended, but it's hard for him to keep a straight face when she's enjoying herself so thoroughly at his expense.

"Well, you kinda deserved it. Those mean things you said." She shrugs her shoulders at him, a weak smile still on her lips, "Karma is a bitch."

He advances on her, wrapping his arms around her, a kiss to her forehead, but he doesn't utter a reply. He knows she's right. He had been loud and mean and ugly. He deserved a whole lot more than just some suspicious looks.

A long moment passes, as they just stand there, holding each other close. He doesn't want to let go, and neither does she. A moment of solace, the quiet peace after the storm.

"I'm trying, Jax." Tara suddenly mumbles against his chest before raising her eyes to meet his. "I'm really trying." She repeats.

He doesn't have to ask what she's talking about. He knows. Knows she's picking up right where they'd left off, with his plea for her to forgive him.

"I know, babe. I know you are." He mumbles against her skin before kissing her forehead once more, pulling her face back to him, tucked neatly under his chin.

X

Author's Note: I hope you all enjoyed this emotional rollercoaster. It was incredibly hard to write, but I hope you enjoyed it and didn't find it too OOC. Please leave me a few words, suggestions, encouragement. Thank you for reading. xoxo, Skater
X

Jax couldn't sleep and rolled onto his back, blinked his eyes a few times until they adjusted to the
dark motel room again. He stared up at the ceiling, wishing he could turn off his thoughts and finally
get some much needed rest. He would've thought the whiskey earlier would have helped a bit ... hell,
or maybe it had helped a bit too much, and now he found himself not only unable to sleep, but also
questioning the way he had provoked her earlier, caused her to break down like that and burst into
tears.

He was so sick and tired of being the cause for all of her pain and tears. All he wanted was to make
her happy, but he wasn't sure if she'd ever truly forgive him again to give their family another
chance, give their happiness another try. And he hated the fact that he had no one to blame for that
but himself.

And when he was done beating himself up over that, his mind went
back to her words of doubt,
about her fear of Sam Crow's involvement in the attack on her. When she'd first mentioned it, he'd
brushed it off immediately, because it had never even crossed his mind that any of his brothers
could've plotted his wife's death. But now, lying here wide awake in the darkness and left to his own
thoughts, he couldn't help but wonder about the fact that if his mother hadn't seen Juice reappear in
the hospital on the same day when Tara's ventilator got disconnected, he never would've suspected
him either.

The idea that Tara had suspected the rest of them from the get-go, and he hadn't even picked up on
that until now made him not only feel stupid and uneasy, but also incredibly naive.

That even now, after he'd finally chosen her and the boys over Sam Crow, he was still too blinded
with false loyalty and brotherhood that he couldn't see what was right in front of him? Was she right?
Was Sam Crow behind it all along? And was that how Juice managed to get away, because he had
someone on the inside helping him?

He turned his head to take a long hard look at her sleeping form beside him. There she was, curled
up on her side and facing away from him, with the blanket tugged up all the way under her chin. He
couldn't see her face, but if he held his own breath, he could hear her rhythmic breathing, and unlike
him she'd finally fallen asleep.

He wanted to get closer to her, wrap himself around her, spooning her and pulling her back tightly to
his bare chest.

But on one hand he wasn't sure how she'd feel about that, and on the other he had no doubt that
being that close to her wouldn't let him find rest any faster either. It would simply make him long for
her even more, and add just another reason why he wouldn't be able to get some sleep.

Jax slowly folded the blanket back, and quietly slipped out of bed, trying his best not to disturb her.
He took slow steps over to the dresser, where his phone lay charging and he turned the screen on just
long enough to see what time it was.
He cursed inwardly at the realization that it was already Saturday morning and he hadn't really slept in days. Yet that didn't deter him as he reached for his sneakers next and quickly slipped them on, not even bothering with any socks. He slipped his arms into his flannel shirt, not bothering with the buttons either, reached for the room key, his pack of smokes and lighter. The room door creaked as he pulled it open and he glanced back at a sleeping Tara once more, making sure she hadn't woken up, before he slipped out of the room.

The fluorescent streetlights that were scattered throughout the motel parking lot and along the street tinted everything in a yellowish hue. Jax exhaled before he put the cigarette to his lips, shielding the flame of his lighter with his hands from the wind and quickly lit it. He closed his eyes in content when his lungs filled with smoke as he took his first long drag, flicking his Zippo closed and tucking it away into the breast pocket of his shirt.

He let his eyes scan the parking lot for a long moment, before he ventured a little further away from the door, stepping between his truck and the sedan that was parked right beside him. Leaning back against the driver door of his truck, his eyes flickered across the expanse of the cheap motel. His eyes took note of the few room windows where the lights were on, and he couldn't help but wonder for a moment if their occupants were just as restless as him or the opposite, already up to start their new day bright and early.

A buzzing noise drew his eyes away from the motel and up the length of the streetlamp a couple parking spots over. He took another drag from his smoke while he watched the moths and other bugs fight for dominance around the flickering light bulbs.

The nicotine definitely proofed to have a more soothing effect on him than the whiskey had had earlier last night. And it also seemed to uncloud his mind of some of the things that had been keeping him awake this long.

Sure, he'd said some hurtful things to her, but in the end he knew she'd needed that release. Needed to let that anger out instead of keeping it all bottled up. His mind went back to the time she'd almost been taken and her hand had been crushed in the process. How he knew he was to blame and he wanted her, no, he needed her to yell and scream at him and let it all go. The way she'd tried to keep it all in back then had disturbed him more than anything she could've screamed in his face instead.

No amount of hours talking to her shrink could ever possibly untwist and unearth all the hurt and pain and resolve it. So this, tonight, it simply had to happen one way or another, sooner or later, in order for them to make any progress in their relationship. And as much as guilt was still eating at him, deep down he knew he was right.

Then his thoughts went back to Sam Crow's involvement on the attempt on her life. And as much as that nagging voice in the back of his mind told him to not be so stupid, so gullible and loyal, he simply couldn't wrap his mind around that idea no matter how hard he tried. It just didn't make sense, especially considering they'd all just voted for Clay to meet the reaper, for all his dealings behind their back, for his betrayal. So surely they wouldn't turn around mere days later and make such a decision behind his back and betray him just the same. They wouldn't ... or would they?

He flicked the ash off of the end of his cigarette, watching the orange ambers disappear in thin air as he lifted it to his lips once more and slowly finished it off.

No! He shook his head to himself, they wouldn't have done that. No way!

Just then the room door to his right creaked as it opened and Tara appeared in the doorframe.

"Jax?" She asked, squinting as her eyes adjusted between the dark of the room behind her and the...
light of the parking lot, trying to focus on him.

"Hey." Jax answered and flicked the remnants of his cigarette to the ground, grinding it out as he turned and stepped towards her.

Tara stepped out of the door, rubbing her bare upper arms up and down to warm them in the cold morning air. "What are you doing out here?" She asked, but then jumped in surprise as the door fell shut behind her with a clunk. "Shit." She looked at him alarmed for a second, "Please tell me you have a key."

Jax smiled. "Yeah, I do." He reassured her, as he stepped closer, watching as she rubbed her upper arms again before folding her arms in front of herself.

"You cold?" He asked, but began shrugging out of his shirt before she could even so much as nod.

Tara realized what he was doing and tried to stop him, "You're gonna be cold." She protested in the same moment he stepped up behind her and draped his shirt across her shoulders.

"I'll be fine." He reassured her, and stepped even closer beside her, draping one arm around her shoulders looking down at her quizzically. "Why are you even up?"

"I could ask you the same thing?" She replied, giving him a curious look in return, but then decided to answer him after all. "I turned around. Reached out and realized you weren't there." She sort of explained, a sense of bashfulness in her voice.

"I couldn't sleep." Jax began to explain his reasons, trying his best not to read too much into what she'd just said, fishing out another cigarette and his lighter with his free hand, "Thought some nicotine might help."

He quickly lit his smoke, giving her room to push her arms through the sleeves of his flannel shirt, before he draped his arm around her again. Savoring the feel of her, how she relaxed against him, leaning her head against his shoulder. Maybe he hadn't fucked up as bad last night as he thought!

Jax held the cigarette out to her, a wordless offer. The sleeves of his shirt were too long on her, the hem falling past her hands, and he couldn't help but smile the way she had to push the hem back and up her forearm in order to take the cigarette from him.

There was just something about her wearing his clothes that turned him on. But then again, after the drought he'd found himself in, there wasn't much she did these days that didn't turn him on.

"Thanks." She mumbled under her breath before she took a long, long drag, closing her eyes in content, just like he had earlier and the smile on Jax's lips grew wider as he continued to watch her.

When she held the cigarette back up to him, she caught the look and the smile on his face. "What?"

She asked watching him just as intently now as he had been watching her.

He shook his head, now grinning ear to ear and took a drag of the smoke, before looking back at her for a long moment. "Nothing, babe." But contradicting to his words, he couldn't help but chuckle.

"What's so funny?" She playfully nudged her elbow into his side, intrigued by his mood. "Spit it out."

"I was just thinking back when we first started dating, and I'd ask you if you were hungry and you'd say no, but then you'd end up eating half my fries." He explained, still smiling.
It was true, and Tara couldn't help but smile at the memory herself, but she drew her eyebrows up in curiosity looking back up at him, "What made you think of that?"

He held the cigarette out to her and she took it, before he added, "Well, officially" he air-quoted the word officially, "you quiet smokin', but I somehow go through a pack twice as fast now."

She tried, but couldn't help but chuckle at that, and he chuckled along with her when she handed the smoke back to him, her cheeks reddening a little, "You offered, I didn't ask." She tried to defend herself. "The fries and the smokes." She added and smiled sheepishly back up at him.

"I didn't say I mind, babe." He quipped back without missing a beat. "The fries or the smokes." He added and winked at her.

X

A loud knock at the door startled both of them awake. He detangled his fingers from Tara's, sleepily and sluggish he pulled his other arm out from beneath her pillow too. He tried not to wince at the way it tingled painfully as blood began to flow back into the numbed limb, while he stretched and flexed it repeatedly to regain full mobility.

"What time is it? Tara mumbled and looked back at him over her shoulder, watching him get up as the knocking continued before she rolled exhausted all the way onto her back.

"I don't know." He murmured, leaning back down at her for a moment, kissing her forehead, not really in a rush to get the door.

The window curtains were drawn, but the sliver of sunlight streaming into the room between the fabric indicated the sun was high in the sky, Tara realized as she watched Jax rub the sleep from his eyes while he stumbled to answer the door now, his footsteps loud and heavy on the carpeted floor.

He opened it, squinting at the sun in his eyes as the man who had checked them in the night before gave him a quizzical look, before looking him up and down. Without so much as a greeting, the man hurriedly explained, "Check out was twenty minutes ago. Are you guys staying another night?"

"What?" Jax looked confused for a moment as the words began to sink in, "What time is it?"

The man stuck out his arm with his wrist watch so Jax could see it, pointing at it with his other hand to emphasize the words, "It's eleven twenty, buddy. Like I said, check-out was twenty minutes ago, at eleven. So ..."

"Shit." Jax cursed and dared a glance back at Tara, who by now was sitting up in bed, running a hand through her disheveled hair. They'd overslept big time. He looked back at the smaller man in front of him, "Sorry, man. We overslept. We're not staying another night."

"I'll have to charge you for a late check-out. It's policy." He replied, his lips pulling into a firm straight line.

"Yeah. Sure." Jax nodded, absentmindedly scratching a spot on his bare chest, "We'll be up there in a little bit to pay."

"Well ... Okay then." The man nodded, somewhat taken back by the lack of resistance. He'd been prepared to argue about motel policy, but was pleasantly surprised instead.

"Alright." Jax nodded once more, before turning and closing the door in the man's face.
Tara examined her face in the bathroom mirror, running the pads of her fingers over her cheeks, under her eyes, the bridge of her nose and along her chin, smoothing out her make-up, the lightly tinted powder she'd just applied. She proceeded to curl her eyelashes, then quickly applied her mascara, while she watched Jax's reflection in the mirror, packing their belongings in the bedroom behind her into their overnight bag.

Just when she reached for her lipstick, Jax appeared in the doorway behind her. Their eyes meeting in the mirror, and she could see by the look on his face that something was on his mind.

Tara applied her lipstick, waiting for him to say something. She smacked her lips together, evening out the color, when her eyes met his again, "What?" She couldn't hold her tongue any longer.

"I've been thinking." Jax sighed and folded his arms in front of himself, and she took his cue and turned around, leaning back against the sink as she twisted the lipstick back into its casing before putting the lid back on. "About what?" She searched his face in confusion at the worried vibe she was beginning to get from him.

"I was just thinking, I could go get my bikes by myself. We could just pay for another night, and you could just hang out here. Or I could drop you at Saint Thomas on the way, you could catch up with Margaret if you want. And I'll pick you up when I'm done."

Tara furrowed her brows, "Wait, you don't want me to come?"

"No." He quickly shook his head, when he realized she might be taking his suggestion the wrong way and stepped closer to her, his hands reaching for hers, "I do. I just thought, maybe you'd be more comfortable here than at TM ... around Sam Crow." He searched her face now in return, "And my mother." He added for good measure.

"Right." She replied, and turned away from him to put her lipstick back into her make-up bag, but also in an effort to buy herself some time, at least a few seconds to think.

Did she want to come face to face with the Sons? Or her infuriating mother-in-law for that matter?

No, of course she didn't want to, but at the same time, something had changed since the conversation they'd had last night. She suddenly felt like it wasn't just her against them anymore, she felt like she truly had Jax in her corner now.

And besides, she was no coward.

She took a deep breath and spun back around to face him, trying her best to conceal how nervous she truly was. "I'm fine, Jax. Let's just go get the trailer, get your bikes and get back home to our boys, okay?"

"Okay." Jax nodded in agreement, before he practically reached around her, gathering his few belongings in the bathroom, "Let's get out of here."

X

She tried her best to keep it together, to keep her anxiety at bay and not let it mess with her head. Taking deep cleansing breaths and reassuring herself that everything would be fine. Over and over, like a mantra inside her head.

It came natural for her to scan the familiar lot, not only for the row of bikes of the guys, who to her surprise weren't there at the moment, but also for Gemma's Cadillac, which was there, parked in her
usual spot.

And as if on cue, Gemma appeared in the doorway to the office, hand above her eyes trying to shield herself from the sun to get a better look at who had just pulled in through the gate.

Tara let out the breath she'd been holding when she saw Gemma looking in their direction. Jax had seen her too and quickly snuck a peek back at this wife beside him. Giving Tara a reassuring smile.

He focused his attention back at the task at hand for a moment as he slowed and carefully maneuvered his truck around, back and forth until he finally came to a complete stop. He had no choice but to park at an awkward angle, due to the length added by the trailer he was pulling behind his truck.

After a quick glance towards his mother, who remained leaning against the doorframe, a cigarette in hand now, he turned back towards Tara, reaching for her hand. "You're okay?" He couldn't help the question on his mind from actually slipping out when he looked at her this time.

Tara tried to smile reassuringly, but it didn't come across very convincingly at all. She sighed and looked back at Jax, suddenly more nervous than she'd wanted to present herself today, especially here of all places, "The last thing I ever said to her was a lie." Tara ruefully admitted. "I was trying to get her out of the house, so I told her Bobby was bleeding out. That I needed her help up at the cabin." Tara shook her head, looking away from him.

"Tara." Jax leaned closer, reaching for her, tipping her chin back towards him to get her to look at him. "Look, I know a lot went down between you and my mom, and a lot of that is unresolved shit. But I don't want you getting all worked up over things you can't change, babe."

Tara sighed again, as her eyes drifted back towards her mother-in-law, her eyes glazing over with unshed tears.

"Hey." Jax said, trying to get her full attention once more, meeting her eyes. "You've got nothing to worry about, I promise. I'll handle my mother! I'll talk to her." He said convincingly.

"Okay." Tara nodded, her heartbeat slowing down just a tad at Jax's words of reassurance. He did have her back!

They both opened the door to get out, when Tara's phone suddenly rang, stopping them in their tracks. Tara quickly dug it out of her purse and looked at the screen. "It's the hospital." She said surprised after recognizing the number, her finger hurriedly moving across the screen to answer the call.

"Hello." Tara answered, and Jax waited for a moment, studying her face, making sure it wasn't Jason or Christy calling about the boys.

"Yes, this is her." She nodded at Jax, dismissing him as her conversation with the other person on the line turned towards one of her patients.

Jax climbed out of the truck, closed the door behind him and slowly stepped in the direction of his mother on the other side of the lot.

His eyes drifted across the lot, taking in the finally finished rebuild clubhouse, the empty row of parking, absent the familiar bikes of his former brothers, with the exception of his own two at the very end, still draped with a cover for protection from the elements. Just like he'd left them on the day he'd left town in search of his wife and kids. He'd be lying if he said he hadn't missed taking his Dyna out on the open road, the pressure of the wind against his chest at high speed, the roar of the
engine drowning out everything around him.

But then his eyes drifted back to his mother who'd stubbed out her cigarette and raised her arms as she approached to embrace him.

"Hi baby." She purred into his ear, kissing his cheek. "I expected you much earlier. I missed you so much." She framed his face, before she pulled him into her arms for a long hug, but the fact that he didn't reciprocate her embrace wasn't lost on her. She pulled back enough to get a good look at his face, clearly perplexed by his lack of affection. "What's wrong?" She asked almost nervously, naturally her mind drifted, wondered if her most heinous secret had come back to haunt her for a moment, but the look on Jax's face told her it wasn't so. Sure, it was a look of displeasure, maybe anger even, but it was not a look of murderous vengeance, she noted to herself in relief.

"I need to talk to you." He simply said, his feelings about what Tara had confided in him came bubbling back up to the surface tenfold now that he found himself face to face with his mother.

Gemma took a step away from him, she glanced to her left, taking in the mechanics working in the bays beside the office before her eyes drifting across the lot, past her son's larger frame at her daughter-in-law, who was leaning against Jax's Pick-up with her phone up to her ear, facing the front gate and obviously lost in a conversation and too distracted to even give her any mind at the moment.

She cleared her throat, annoyed in a way, but nonetheless nodded towards the office behind her, "Let's talk in here" she said and stepped inside ahead of him.

Gemma sat down on her office chair, leaning back and crossing her legs at the knee in an attempt to appear more confident than she actually was at the moment. Through narrowed eyes, she watched her son slowly close the office door behind him, before he turned and focused his attention back on her.

"What is this about, Jax?" She dared to ask, not liking being kept in the dark for another moment longer.

"What is this about?" Jax repeated incredulously, and shook his head as a look of disgust crossed his face, his voice too loud and mean for her liking when he said, "It's about mommy moving away, or mommy passing away."

"Ahhh." Gemma nodded and reached for her pack of cigarettes on her desk. "Of course." She said sounding too flippantly, before raising a cigarette to her lips and quickly lighting it, taking her first long drag.

The way she acted only seemed to annoy Jax even more now, "Of course? What the hell is that supposed to mean?" He asked, his eyebrows raised to new heights.

Gemma flicked some ash into the ashtray on her desk before looking back up at him, "You and I just talked on the phone two days ago, and everything was fine." She glared back at him equally annoyed before she continued, "But of course Doctor-Do-Right decides that now is the right time to share that conversation with you, just in time for your visit home."

She stood now, cigarette in one hand, her other free hand pushed into her own back pocket. "She's kept it to herself all this time, but you think it's just a coincidence that she decided to bring it up now? Now that you're back home?" Gemma shook her head, "No, it isn't. Because god forbid you came back here and weren't feeling angry and guilty all over again, and you'd be realizing how much you missed the club, the brotherhood ... and me."
Jax took in and released a sharp breath through his nose, his lips turned downward into an angry scowl, as he raised his voice, "This isn't about Tara or her timing, mom. It's about the fact that you decided to take it upon yourself to threaten the mother of my sons, my wife, in my name." He paused for a moment, trying his best to reign in his anger some, "Do you realized she thought I might be behind the attack on her? That it was me, or the club? Because of the threats you decided to fill her head with!"

"She went behind your back, trying to divorce you, take those boys away from you. Away from us." Gemma tried to justify herself, her voice equally loud and forceful in her devotion. "All I did was point out what could happen. Someone had to set her straight."

"It wasn't your place to set her straight!" He yelled at her furiously, and for a fraction of a second she actually winced having been caught off guard by his loud outburst. "You don't speak for me, or for Sam Crow for that matter."

Jax shook his head and actually turned away from her for a long moment, stepping over to the window that oversaw the lot. His fingers separating the blinds so he could get a better look at Tara, still talking on the phone, and still leaning against his truck.

He was trying his best not to lose his cool any more than he already had, but he also tried to find the right words to get through to her. "I'm not denying that it crushed me when I found out she wanted to divorce me, take the boys. Or that she'd lied about the pregnancy and the miscarriage." He turned back around to face his mother, "And at first I was so hurt, so ... angry that I couldn't even think straight, but it didn't take long for me to understand why she did what she did."

"Jackson." Gemma pleaded appalled, stepping towards him. "She tried to frame me for murdering my unborn grandchild. Broke your heart, making you believe I'd do such a thing."

"And that's something she'll have to live with." Jax quickly interjected. "We all have our own share of mistakes and regrets that we'll have to live with. I know I have more than I can count." He ruefully confessed in a much milder tone now as he searched his mothers face for any sign of understanding.

But instead Gemma shook her head and walked back over to her desk, leaning against it as she hurriedly put out her cigarette in the ashtray, exhaling the last remnants of smoke from her lungs. "So what? I'm just supposed to forgive and forget? Kiss and make up? Like you did when she kidnapped your sons, tried to rat on your club, and on you." She folded her arms in front of herself and shook her head at him again, "It doesn't work that way, Sweetheart."

"But she didn't rat." Jax answered solemnly. "So there's nothing to forgive."

"She would have, if you hadn't caught up with her." Gemma quipped back without missing a beat. "And what then? What would've happened if."

"Not that." Jax interrupted and shook his head at her. "No, mom. Not that." He repeated.

He wouldn't have murdered, nor let his club murder the woman he loved. Leaving his sons to grow up without their mother. His jaw tensed with suppressed rage again at the mere thought of it.

Gemma scoffed at that, slid off of the edge of her desk and took a few deliberate steps towards him, looking him dead in the eye. Her eyebrows raised almost to her hairline, her voice calm and full of conviction, "I know you, son. And I also know that you have a good heart, and that you want to believe that it wouldn't have come to that." She shook her head at him again, "But we both know
that in the end it would've been done. It would have to be done. It's who we are."

"No," Jax contradicted her prediction wholeheartedly, refusing to let any of her words putting doubt in his own convictions. She didn't know him as well as she thought she did. She didn't know what he was capable of or not. "There's no way in hell I would ever lay hands on her, or stand by while someone else did. No matter the reasons."

"Even if she ratted?" Gemma asked again. "Giving that DA enough to charge the club with RICO? Putting all of you behind bars for decades?" She scoffed at him in disbelief. "I know you don't really believe that."

He was beginning to get sick and tired of this conversation. About rehashing their ugly past yet again. The would have, could have of it all.

"Has it ever occurred to you that it was your constant interference, your threats what had pushed her to make a deal in the first place?"

At that Gemma let out a humorless chuckle. "Right!" She agreed sarcastically. "Everything she did, it was allllll my fault. Mine and mine alone." She mocked him, shaking her head at the ridiculousness. "It couldn't have possibly been your between-the-sheets-meetings with the Madame. No, of course not, it was all my doing, it wasn't her finding out about your wandering dick that pushed her over the edge."

Jax closed his eyes in frustration, turning away from her as he pushed his hair back out of his face. The truth in her words hit too close to home for comfort. He'd been blaming himself all along, but to hear his mother taunt him with his shortcomings as a husband was more than he was willing to take.

He took a few steadying breaths, pinching the bridge of his nose, trying his best to not let his mothers words get to him, but it was so much easier said than done.

He was just so exhausted of following her down that bottomless rabbit hole of who's-to-blame-for-what another second longer.

"It doesn't matter." Jax suddenly said, spinning back around to look at her. "It doesn't matter anymore who did what and why. What's done is done." He said, trying his best to sound convincingly, because he himself truly wanted to believe that it could be that simple. To let bygones be bygones. "It's history!"

"It's history!" Gemma repeated, then proceeded to wipe her hands against each other as if she was trying to shake off some dirt or dust. The exaggerated gesture no doubt in correlation with the words that followed along, "So we should just clean our hands of it all, like nothing ever happened ... just chalk it up to good old history?"

"Yeah." Jax nodded, not even acknowledging the undoubtedly sarcastic tone in her voice. "Because this shit between you and Tara, I know how deep it runs, but it has got to stop, mom. She is my wife. She's the mother of my sons. You have to figure out how to put it all behind you."

Gemma shook her head, before looking back up to her son. "Because it worked out so well for me last time?"

"What the hell are you talking about?" Jax looked at her confused.

"I'm talking about her telling me that I'd get my family back, if I helped you bring down Clay. That if I did what you asked me to do, I'd get the key to your house back, and the family that came with it. Her words ... Only to find out that she had already accepted a job offer in Oregon." Gemma looked
heartbroken for the first time since he'd walked into the office with her.

"Jesus." Jax sighed. "You know she was just trying to protect the boys, get them away from all this pain and misery we'd found ourselves drowning in." Jax tried his best to defend Tara's actions.

She shook her head again, and he could tell she was about to argue on the subject some more, but Jax beat her to it and spoke up first. "Not even you can twist and turn the shit that happened to change the truth here, mom. Donna, Luann, you getting raped, Abel being taken, Tara being taken, Lyla getting shot, just to name a few."

"That's just part of -." Gemma started, but Jax interrupted her abruptly.

His voice loud and harsh once more, "Oh c'mon. Please don't give me that bullshit about it being part of the life ... I'm not talking about club members here. It's old ladies, my son, our families getting caught in the aftermath of club decisions. So Tara made a decision of her own, to save our boys and get them the hell away from it all. And if her being brutally attacked and left for dead in our own home isn't reason enough for you to finally see things her way, than you are even more delusional than I thought you were."

At that Gemma remained quiet. Even she now at a loss for words, but Jax wasn't done just yet.

"What if Abel and Thomas had gone home with Tara that evening? What if they would've bore witness to their mother being viciously beaten and stabbed right in front of them? After everything Abel has already endured in his short life, can you imagine what witnessing something like that would do to him? How it would torment him, trying to wrap his little mind around something so horrible? And do you honestly think he would've ever patched into this club, after watching a member of it try to murder his mother?" Jax stopped for a long moment, trying to swallow the lump in his throat before he continued. "And what if Juice had hurt the boys too? Eliminating the witnesses, like he did with Eli."

"He wouldn't have done that." Gemma finally decided to speak, her voice heavy with emotions.

Jax raised his eyebrows, frowning and shook his head, "You don't know that. And I don't know that. Clearly I underestimated him. I had no idea what Juice was capable of, because him going after Tara ... I honestly never saw that coming."

A long pregnant pause stretched out between them. The air heavy with sadness all around. Jax sighed in exhaustion as he took a seat in the chair by the door. Gemma also sat down again, settling back into her office chair once more, her eyes focusing on anything but her son across from her.

Suddenly Gemma broke down in tears. Loud heavy sobs that shook her whole body with each breath she was trying to take.

Jax looked away from her at first, hesitating to comfort her, but eventually broke down and stepped over to her. He took her hands, tugging her to her feet and pulled her tightly into his arms.

"I'm sorry." She sobbed against his chest.

"I know." Jax replied, running his hand up and down her back in a way to comfort her.

They stood like that in a long silent embrace, until Gemma finally began to pull away. She reached for a tissue from the box on her desk, dabbed at her eyes, and wiping away the black mascara tears that had left unflattering streaks down her face.

"Why are you even still here?" Jax finally dared to ask the question that had boggled his mind for far
The question was vague, but Gemma didn't need to ask what he meant by that. She knew he wanted to know why she was still in Charming, but the answer wasn't quite as simple. "Where am I supposed to go, son? You made it pretty clear you don't want me in Abel's or Thomas' life."

Jax shook his head in contradiction, "That's oversimplifying it, don't you think? You burnt those bridges all on your own, mother. With your suggestion for me to give up on Tara, take her off of life-support, pushing me towards Colette. Threatening Margret after I made her guardian of the boys. Refusing to see the harm the club had caused my family, and because of that fighting me every step of the way when I supported Tara to really finally leave for Oregon with my sons." He raised his eyebrows at her, before he added the obviously rhetorical question, "Did I miss anything?"

She was well aware of all the damage she'd done. Her eyes began to water once more, she nodded in understanding, her chin trembling, but she fought through the onslaught of emotions this time, trying to put on a brave face instead.

But the lump in her throat wouldn't allow her to speak just yet, so Jax carried on instead, "I love you. I always will, but after what Tara's been through, I cannot come to her with this. The rift between you two is still too big, and too fresh, it's just too soon. She wants the boys clear of the club, of the life, and as long as you're still part of it all, that means clear of you too. And maybe I'm wrong about this, but I think the fact that you never even tried to reach out to her after she woke up, has a lot to do with it too."

At that Gemma raised her eyes up to meet his again, "You told me to stay away, Jax."

Jax nodded, "I did, but since when has that ever stopped you before?" He asked in all seriousness. "We both know that if you had wanted to try to mend fences with her, you would have found a way. The reason you didn't reach out, was because you still held a grudge. You're still holding a grudge."

Gemma still didn't speak, the words ringing too true and she preferred for her son to continue to believe them. But at the same time she was the only one who truly knew why she'd never reached out to her daughter-in-law. Despite the fact that she loved her grandsons with all her heart, she had been too afraid that any contact with their mother at all, could somehow cause Tara's memories to come back, and inadvertently would out her as the monster she truly was.

Jax found his mother's tongue-tied-ness unusual to say the least, but it didn't stop him from taking advantage of the moment to actually speak his own mind, "I don't regret leaving Charming. I only regret that I didn't do it much sooner. I love her. Tara and the boys make me happy. They make me whole."

He sighed and lowered his head, avoiding her eyes for a moment. "And who knows, maybe with time I can learn to like the man I see in the mirror again too."

He raised his eyes back up to meet hers, "Maybe it's time for you now. To leave Charming, and be with the person that makes you happy. Makes you whole." He smiled at her sympathetically. "I know Norco is even further away from Oregon than Charming, but it's time to move on, mom."

Gemma smiled weakly, and scoffed. "Nero."

She sighed, "It's a nice notion, but that is all it is. I'm afraid that bridge has been burned as well, Sweetheart." She swallowed away the lump in her throat and sighed, "This is home for me, Jax. And besides, the club needs me. Lyla needs me. She's practically running Red-Woody by herself these days, making good money now, but she needs help with those kids. Someone has to take care of Opie's kids."
Lyla pulled her car into the Teller-Morrow lot and slowly came to a stop in the empty parking spot besides Gemma's car. Her eyes drifted back towards the Gate, where Jax's truck, along with a trailer, was parked, and she couldn't believe her eyes when they fell onto a familiar figure.

She quickly got out, and rounded her car, taking quick, yet long strides heading towards Tara. With a genuine smile on her lips, she couldn't stop herself from stating the obvious, "Tara? Oh my god, is that you?"

Tara had first hesitated when she saw her former friend pull into the gate, but now that she saw the expression on Lyla's face, she no longer held back her own smile.

"Hey." Was all Tara had managed to get out before Lyla practically threw herself at her, wrapping her in a tight embrace.

"It's so good to see you." Lyla pulled back and searched her face, "You look ... great." She said.

Tara smiled brightly, "Thanks, you do too." And that was the truth, not just some meaningless pleasantry, but Lyla looked really well. She looked happy, and there was a sparkle in her eyes again, that had been absent since Opie's death.

Lyla of course inquired about her being here, and Tara quickly filled her in on the story Jax and her had concocted. Told her that they were just in town to pick up Jax's bikes, and handle some paperwork, nothing more.

"Where's Jax now?" Lyla looked around the lot, before Tara could answer her.

"He's in the office, with Gemma." Tara explained, before she gave Lyla a curious look, "How is she?"

"Gemma?" Lyla asked, and when Tara nodded, she began to explain. "She's doing good, considering. I think she still misses Nero, misses Jax and the boys of course ... but honestly, she's been helping me a lot with the kids. I know you two haven't gotten along in a long time, but I really don't know what I'd do without her."

Tara nodded, remembering that feeling all too well. That feeling of belonging, of being more than just an old lady when Gemma was truly in your corner. But that seemed like ages ago now.

"Shit." Lyla suddenly blurted out, "I almost forgot I got groceries in the trunk that need to go in the fridge."

"Do you need a hand?" Tara asked in return.

"Please." Lyla replied as she opened the trunk to her car.

X

Tara couldn't believe how much it all looked the same. The layout of the rebuild clubhouse was practically identical to the way it used to be. Everything was in the same place, deliberately no doubt. The bar, the stripper pole, the chapel, the kitchen. The only thing missing were the random pictures that used to clutter the walls in some places, along with the posters of scantily clothed women, the Harley memorabilia and Sam Crow plaques.

Right now all the walls were still bare, with the exception of their rather infamous wall of mug shots
of their members, past and current alike. Getting your mug shot taken had always been a rite of passage amongst the ranks of the club. Displayed rather proudly, it had been the focal point of the large room, but even more so now, Tara thought when the sight of one particular mug shot made her stop dead in her tracks.

There, right next to Opie's, beneath JT's, was Jax's mug shot, the only one hanging upside down, standing out like a sore thumb. And Tara simply couldn't tear her eyes away from it!

"It's weird, right?" Lyla spoke up, her eyes also glued to Jax's picture right in front of them, bringing Tara out of her trance.

She tried to swallow away the sudden dryness in her throat. "Yeah, it is." She replied and nodded, suddenly realizing how heavy the bags of groceries were getting. Her arms were feeling heavy and sore to begin with, she assumed from digging up Kohn's grave the night before.

Lyla started walking towards the kitchen, the rhythmic clicking of her high heels brought Tara further back to reality and she quickly followed along. The two women proceeded to put the groceries away, chatting along, bragging about their kids and catching each other up on their new lives.

Tara had to admit that talking to Lyla came incredibly easy. She knew that it was because they'd both been part of this life that anyone from the outside looking in, just couldn't really grasp and understand. Christy was her closest friend, but despite that, Tara always found herself having to debate what she could or couldn't share with her. She didn't want to lose Christy's friendship, but she knew if she'd truly confided everything in her, losing her could very well be the case.

So they sat, and talked, with a nice hot cup of coffee in front of them, and everything was fine, until Lyla said something that caught Tara by surprise.

"It's too bad Jax couldn't leave right away with you and your boys." Lyla gave Tara a sympathetic smile, stirring a spoonful of sugar into her still steaming coffee. "He looked so miserable when you were gone. And you probably didn't have it any easier on your own either. It's no joke taking care of two kids by yourself." Lyla looked up from her cup and met Tara's eyes. "That stupid DA bitch really rode his ass hard. But I guess in the end it all worked itself out, huh?"

Tara looked back at her perplexed, "What are you talking about? What DA bitch?"

"Shit." Lyla's eyes went wide in alarm, "I'm sorry, I thought you knew."

"Knew what?" Tara pressed.

"Sorry, I ... I shouldn't have said anything." Lyla tried to dismiss her, a sense of panic in her voice now.

"Lyla, tell me, please." Tara didn't like how desperate she sounded, but her heartbeat had picked up at this newfound information, and she wanted to know all of it.

Lyla sighed heavily as she contemplated what to do. "Alright." She finally nodded, glancing behind her, ensuring they were still alone, before she leaned closer towards her brunette friend and began to share the few details she'd overheard. Gossip at its finest!

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Jax stepped into the clubhouse, taking a long hard look around. When he'd left, they had just began to put the sheetrock up. He was astounded to see the progress they'd made in his absence.
His eyes fell to the wall right in front of him, he had anticipated to feel a sense of remorse at the sight of his mug shot being displayed upside down, but now that the moment was here, remorse wasn't what he was feeling. He felt justified in what he had done, even more so now after the drawn out conversation with his mother. He had no regrets in leaving, but feeling just slightly nostalgic when he took in his brother's pictures instead. Being a son hadn't always been hell. They've had plenty of good times too, and those were the memories he'd decided to focus on and hold onto from here on out.

Tara and Lyla stepped out of the kitchen towards him. He greeted Lyla with a hug and a kiss on the cheek, before he turned his attention back to his wife, draping an arm around her shoulder.

"Everything good?" He asked when he couldn't quite decipher the look on Tara's face. Was she still worried about Gemma, he wondered.

Tara and Lyla exchanged a quick glance, before she looked up at him and said, "Actually, can I talk to you alone?"

"Sure." Jax answered, but raised his eyebrows curiously as he also glanced back at Lyla, but the blond wasn't giving anything away either.

Lyla excused herself and headed back into the kitchen, while Jax led Tara down the hallway and around the corridor where his old room used to be. But they never even made it that far, when Jax couldn't wait any longer and asked. "Look, babe, if this is about Gemma -.

"It's not." Tara cut him off harshly and pulled away from him. She turned around to face him instead, folding her arms in front of herself. "Why didn't you tell me about Patterson?"

Jax looked confused, but only for a fraction of a second. Then it dawned on him that Lyla must've spilled the beans. But he asked nonetheless, "Lyla told you?"

"She did." Tara nodded, looking pissed off. "But why the hell didn't you?"

Jax was just about to answer her, when noises coming from the main front room caught them both off guard. There were voices he didn't recognize, laughter and conversation and it was clear that a group of people had just arrived. It was probably some croweaters and hangarounds, if he had to take a wild guess.

He took Tara by her elbow and led her into the room closest to them, which happened to be the weight room, where he used to work out. He closed the door behind him and turned back around to face her. "Look." He started, but then stopped and by the way he sucked in his bottom lip, biting it for a second, it became clear to her that he had no idea what to say or how to explain himself this time. "I'm not sure what Lyla said to you, but -.

Tara was fuming at what she perceived to be the beginning of yet another lie, so she interrupting him again, "It doesn't matter what Lyla said, Jax. I want to know why I had to hear it from her? Why didn't you tell me that the DA changed her mind? That she decided to press you for even more Intel about the IRA?"

"I wanted to tell you." He started again, "I thought about it." That was true, he had thought about.

"But?" Tara tried to coax him to further elaborate, but Jax remained quiet once more.

Tara let out an audible sigh, "When you first said you couldn't go to Oregon with us right away, I was disappointed, but I understood because you said you still had some loose ends to take care of. But then I saw you with Colette on the day I was leaving, and every phone call after that sounded
just like one excuse after another about why you still couldn't be with us, and I went from disappointed to just mad. I was so mad at you. For making me miss you, making our boys miss you." She sniffled, trying not to cry, "I don't think you realize how angry it made me."

"Tara." He pleaded, "I didn't mean to make you feel like that. I didn't want to hurt you at all. I swear."

She swallowed the lump in her throat and stared back up at him, determined to get an explanation from him, "Then why, Jax? Why didn't you tell me the truth, instead of making me think that you were choosing to stay because you wanted to? For the club?"

Jax let out the breath he was holding, and his face grew grim as he thought about why he had done what he'd done. "You were so happy, so relieved when Patterson dropped the charges against you. Against us. We were home free. You started planning our move to Oregon. Then she called me up, going back on her word, like I had predicted she might. Giving me some spiel about it all of a sudden being out of her hands, above her pay grade now, and that she needed more or she would have no choice then to reopen the case against you, charge you all over again. So I did what I had to do, gave her what she wanted, with the help of the club."

Tara's eyes began to tear up again, the emotions going through her were so contradicting in itself. On one hand she was furious that he'd kept her in the dark all this time, that apparently everyone had known except her. But on the other hand she also felt gratitude and love, so much undeniable love, in the purest sense of the word, for him, for what he had done for her!

"I just wish you would've told me." She cried, wiping away a tear that had escaped her eyes.

"I know, and maybe I should have. Maybe things would be different now if I had. But back then, all I could think about was the pain I had already caused you. And I wasn't even sure if I could pull it off, get her the Intel she wanted. All I knew was that I didn't want to burden you with it, be the one to take that happiness away again. So I lied. I lied because I wanted you to keep believing that we still had a damn chance. I'm sorry, babe." Jax shook his head at her apologetically, his eyes trained on hers.

The tears began to fall and Tara looked away, covering her face with both her hands, before she began to wipe them away, trying to get her emotions back in check.

Her chin trembled as she looked back up at Jax just standing there. Ruefully, with that puppy-dog-look in his baby blue eyes that could melt the coldest of hearts. And then it happened, she wasn't even sure how, her feet had carried her the few steps towards him, and before she even realized what she was doing, she'd reached up and grabbed his face, holding him still as her lips crushed onto his.

She poured her heart and soul into that kiss, her hands gripping his hair, pulling him down towards her, holding him in place, before she realized what she was doing and pulled away. She looked up at him puzzled at what had come over her, her eyes wide with the shock of her own actions. "I'm ... I'm sorry." She stuttered. "I shouldn't have -."

But Jax caught her off guard when he'd grabbed her now in return, spun her around at a dizzying speed and pushed her back against the wall. He pressed the length of his own body against hers, successfully trapping her between the wall and himself, leaving his hands free to frame her face before his lips claimed her lips this time.

He kissed her long, and hard, and thoroughly. It was the kind of kiss that you'd see in movies. Forceful, yet still romantic. The kind that seemed to last forever, leaving you dizzy and weak in the
knees.

But just as quickly as he had grabbed her and kissed her, he suddenly stopped. Leaving her stumped and greedy for more.

He pulled back, looking down at her with the most devilish smile on his face she'd ever seen. "Just for the record, babe, I'm not sorry. Not even a little." He said, his voice heavy with lust for her, before he leaned down, to kiss her again.

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Author's Note: I hope you all liked it, and if you did (or didn't), please take a few seconds to leave me a review/comment. I'd really love to hear what you all think of this new development. ;)
Anyways, thanks for sticking with my story.
Chapter 26

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This wasn't supposed to happen!

It was the last thought Tara had, before that thought was pushed back again ... way, way back into the back of her mind and there it disappeared altogether, her mind going blank, and all she could do was feel his body and his lips on hers.

Every nerve in her body began to tingle in all the right places, when Jax stopped framing her face and instead let his hands wander downward, over her curves instead. He did so slowly, as if he was testing out the waters, seeing what she'll let him get away with, how far he could go.

While his lips still claimed hers in a breathtaking kiss, and their tongues dueled for dominance, his hands slid passed her shoulders, and cupped her breasts just long enough to make her nipples stand at attention in anticipation for more, then traveled past her waist, over the wider part of her hips before curling around the curve of her ass.

With a quick tug on her hips he had lifted her feet clear off of the floor, one hand spread wide across the curvature of her butt, the other hand curled beneath her thigh while her legs wrapped around his waist as if on their own free will, her hands grabbing onto his shoulders, while the kiss never let up. He effortlessly carried her over to the small table, before he grinded his hardened manhood against her pelvis in perfectly timed rhythm to bring the most delicious heat to spread through the very core of her.

She failed to suppress the moan rising in her throat, while she'd wrapped her arms around his neck, her hands gripping the fabric of his shirt trying to pull him even closer to her, and in this moment they'd found themselves in, it was easy to forget all their problems ... at least for a few fleeting minutes.

And apparently they'd been so captivated with each other, that neither had even noticed the roaring of the motorcycles that were pulling into the lot just moments ago.

"JACKIE BOY." Chibs' voice was booming somewhere outside the room they were in, from the sound of it he was still further down the hall, but they could hear his heavy footsteps approaching, yet still both decided to ignore it.

Jax continued to kiss her and grind against her until the very last second, when Chibs pushed the door open, leaving him no choice then to finally ease up on her.

She missed his lips on hers the instant he pulled away, and with equal reluctance loosened the grip she had on his shirt, letting her hands slide down his chest.

Jax grinned at Tara as he pulled away, and she looked equally mischievously back up at him, with swollen lips and bedroom eyes that almost did him in, before they both bothered to acknowledge the Scotsman that was practically charging towards them by now.
"Jackson!" Chibs' voice sounded downright gleeful at the sight of his former brother. Jax stepped away from Tara just in time to be engulfed in his friend's tight embrace.

"Good to see you again, VP." Jax replied as he padded his friends back repeatedly, when Chibs' eyes fell on Tara, who had just slid of the table and watched the scene in front of her unfold rather awkwardly, her cheeks flushing slightly when her eyes flickered back to meet Jax's for a brief moment.

She had been nervous since they'd gotten here, but she felt that uneasiness now that the Sons had arrived even more so. Deep down she hated the mistrust she felt towards them, because they'd been a big part of her life too, but she knew their code, had been in the know of too much for her to believe that they weren't capable of what she suspected them of.

Just then, Chibs let go of Jax and stepped towards her, looking her up and down before he winked at her playfully, his accent as thick as ever when he said, "It's been too long, Doc. How've you been?"

Tara nodded, trying to ignore her heart beating out of her chest, "I've been good.", before Chibs reached out and pulled Tara into a hug too.

Jax swallowed hard as he took in the scene, and frowned slightly catching the uneasy expression on Tara's face as she looked passed Chibs' shoulder and met his eyes instead. It took everything he had to fight the urge to intervene. Right then and there, Jax decided he needed to put an end to this, to her suspicions. And maybe even shut down that tiny flicker of doubt of his own as well.

He trusted Chibs and Bobby both with his life, and had no doubt that they would never go after Tara. Then there was Happy, who despite all his serial-killer characteristics was loyal to a fault and wouldn't go against the brotherhood code. He followed the rank structure and would never go against direct orders of his president or VP. Those were the three men he had absolute trust in, but everyone else around that Reaper table was a different story.

Despite everything they'd been through, having been Clay's right hand man for as long as Jax could remember, Tig would always be somewhat of a sore spot to him. He'd killed Donna on Clay's orders alone, not through a club vote. And had repeatedly taken matters into his own hands, because he believed something needed to be done, and was too impatient to wait for the club to take a vote and make a call. There was no denying that Tig had been loyal since Opie's death, but that wasn't guarantee enough that he hadn't suddenly decided to go rogue once again.

And then there was Rat Boy, who had felt like he could be trusted, considering he'd kept his mouth shut after Opie had shot Clay. But now Jax simply couldn't help but still feel some resentment towards him for leaving his post outside Tara's hospital room, and with that had ultimately allowed Juice the chance to go after her for a second time.

And as far as the rest of the new members were concerned, ... well, he simply hadn't known or worked with them long enough to really test where their loyalties truly lied when push came to shove.

But he'd get to the bottom of this, today.

Tara pulled away from Chibs, with the friendliest smile she could muster, considering how she felt. They continued to exchange small talk about how she'd been, how they'd settled in up in Oregon, her new job and how the boys were doing, and Jax instantly stepped up behind her, his hands on her waist first before he wrapped his arms around her torso, placing a small soft kiss against her temple, in hopes to ease some of her fears.
She looked back up at him over her shoulder and smiled gratefully, knowing full well he did it to calm her nerves, which it did. She felt much safer now in his arms.

When Chibs turned back towards the door, suggesting for them all to head out and greet everyone else, Jax stopped him and spoke up, his arms still wrapped around his wife. "We'll be right out, man, I just need a few more minutes with my girl here." Jax faked a suggestive smirk in hopes that Chibs would get the hint.

Chibs didn't know any different and smiled broadly back at the couple, "Of course, Jackie, take your time." Chibs winked at Tara once more and gave Jax an approving slap on the shoulder on his way out, causing Tara's cheeks to slightly flush all over again at the insinuation.

But before Chibs could pull the door closed behind him, Jax stopped him again, his grin all gone, his face serious instead, eyebrows raised, "Hey, you think I can get a couple minutes to run somethin' by your Pres and you?"

Chibs looked back at him puzzled for a second, but then nodded solemnly, "Of course, always."

As soon as Chibs disappeared through the door, Jax stepped away from her to make sure the door was all the way shut, before he spun around to face her.

"I'm gonna get to the bottom of it?" He quickly said, as if Tara could read his mind.

But Tara looked back at him confused, "Bottom of what?"

Jax grabbed her hand, pulling her further into the room again, away from the door. "Your suspicions about Sam Crow." He replied, his face serious as he studied her reaction.

Tara looked at him wide eyed, her voice suddenly low in a whisper. "Last night you said there was no way they could be involved."

Jax nodded and lowered his voice now too, "I know what I said, and I want to believe it too, but I know that you're still suspicious of them. And I can't fucking stand that terrified look in your eyes when Chibs stepped in here. I know it's not him, babe. I trust him, Bobby, and Happy completely, with my life, and without a doubt with yours too. But Tig, Rat, and the new patches, they're a different story."

"But you had Rat guarding my hospital room?" Tara looked confused, implying that he must've trusted him at some point.

"And Juice managed to get to you a second time." Jax replied without missing a beat. "I have to be sure that was just a coincidence, nothing more."

Tara looked uneasy all over again, not sure how to respond to that at first. But then she looked up at him, clearly worried, "What does that look like? I mean, you're just gonna ask them? It can't possibly be that simple."

Jax sighed, and pushed a hand through his hair, thinking for a moment how he would go about approaching them, "I'll just tell 'em straight up that I've been wondering if Juice might've had some help, someone on the inside that also helped him disappear. Someone he conspired with, like you said, to keep me at the head of the table, or to stop you from ratting, or both." He shrugged his shoulders, "I've known these guys for most of my life, babe. I'll be able to tell if they're lying or at the very least if they're trying to hide something from me." But right when those words had left his mouth, he couldn't help his mind from going back to the day Tara had been attacked, and how both Bobby and Chibs had kept him in the dark about what had gone down between the Mayan's and
Mark's crew.

But they wouldn't lie to him about this, he tried to convince himself!

"You don't have to do this, Jax." She stepped right in front of him, her hands at his waist, digging into the fabric of his shirt once more, tugging him closer to her when she looked up at him with pleading eyes, "Let's just load up your bikes, and get the hell out of here, please."

Jax reached out to her now too, his hands slipping under her shirt at her waist, his fingers playfully tugging on the belt loops of her jeans, while his thumbs rubbed back and forth across her bare skin right above, "I don't want you living like this, in constant fear, always looking over your shoulder. Juice is gone, at least for now, but this is something we can do to make sure nobody here helped him and crush some of that fear and doubt and get closer to the truth, babe."

Tara knew there was some truth in what Jax was saying, that confronting the problem, the doubt head on could give her and him some closure, but at the same time it all terrified her so much.

Jax had discovered her gun when she'd let him run his hands over her body, just before Chibs showed up. It was well concealed in a bra holster, undetectable by just looking at her, but the fact that she was packing heat today coming here, yet wasn't last night as they were digging up her ex, spoke volumes to what she feared the most, who she feared more.

So he was pretty sure he already knew the answer, but he simply couldn't bite his tongue, regardless that the question was basically just rhetorical, "You being scared coming here, that's what the hardware is about, right?"

Tara looked up at him, caught off guard for a second, but when he gave her that knowing look, she obviously realized how he knew, "It's just for protection." She let go of him and folded her arms instead, "I told you, I've got a permit."

"I remember." Jax nodded in understanding, but he hated the thought that this place, where he still felt so at ease and at home, was a place that petrified her this much. "I won't let anyone hurt you ever again, you have to believe me." Jax tried to reassure her. "I'll keep you safe, babe. But we need to do this."

He stared in her eyes for a long moment, trying to read the expression on her face as she obviously debated in her head how to respond. He sighed in relief when, after a long moment, she nodded back at him, still somewhat reluctantly, but agreeing nonetheless.

"Okay?" Jax asked, to reassure himself that her nod meant what he thought it did. That she was on board about talking to the guys.

"Yeah." She nodded again.

Jax raised one hand from her waist up to her hair, brushing it out of her face, and tugging a few strands softly behind her ear, all the while giving her a comforting smile.

"So judging by the size, I'm guessing ... a Glock 43?" He questioned her suddenly out of the blue, trying to ease her troubled mind by changing the subject.

"Forty-two, actually." Tara answered, somewhat surprised that he got the make right.

"Let me see. How fast can you draw?" He watched her with genuine curiosity to see just how fast she could pull the gun, if she had to.
Tara didn't reply, but simply reached under her shirt, and pulled the gun free within a split second, and she couldn't help the smug expression that crossed her face when she saw Jax's surprise at her speed.

"Nice." he nodded approvingly, and took the gun from her looking it over for a brief moment before he handed it back to her and asked, "You know how to use it, right?"

Tara nodded again, "Yeah, sure. I've been to the range ... a few times." She wants to point out that she's carried guns in the past, has even fired them too. And that she was the one who put the first bullet in Kohn, to give herself some credit, but then decides that she never wants to mention that name again. He was really gone now, and this time he'd stay gone. "It fires pretty nice, has barely any recoil." She adds instead in a vain attempt to sound like she knew what she was doing.

But Jax could hear the hesitation in her voice, she didn't sound very convincing, and he had to bite back the grin that almost appeared on his lips. "Let's see, take aim at that clock, right in the center, where the hour and minute arms cross." He said, pointing towards the only thing hanging on the wall across the room, before he stepped right behind her, letting that grin he'd tried to hide appear now that she couldn't see it, thoroughly enjoying himself. His girl with a gun ... two of his favorite things!

Tara played along and did as he had instructed her, and with outstretched arms raised the gun. Jax stepped even closer now, practically wrapped himself around her and reached out, his arms parallel to hers, his lips near her ear, as he instructed her on how to adjust the grip she had on the weapon with her right hand and how to quickly flick off the safety with her thumb. Then he showed her how to stabilize and have better control of the gun with her left hand supporting her right, before he told her to raise the gun high enough to look down the barrel to take aim.

"Just like that." He said, and his hands drifted away from her hands holding the gun and down to her hips instead. "Don't shoot though." He quickly felt the need to add. "You don't want to be the first to put new bullet holes in this place."

Tara laughed at that. "Didn't intend to." She replied and lowered the gun again, flicking the safety back in place with ease, before she lifted the front of her shirt just enough to reholster her weapon beneath her bra.

But something about this little gun lesson didn't sit well with her, and she simply couldn't help herself from turning around in his arms to look up at him. "You know it's a bit unnerving that you're showing me how to properly aim, right before you want to go confront the club." She suddenly said in all seriousness, studying his face to see if it had been deliberate. This whole thing with the Sons had her on edge, but she was trying her best to not let it show just how freaked out she was about it. Instead she tried to follow his lead on this, trust him and his judgment in the matter, but it was hard on her either way.

"Shit, my bad, babe." Jax said apologetically and actually cracked a wide toothy smile at that, "That was just very fucked up timing on my part, I swear." He tugged her closer to him again, his fingers intertwining behind her at her lower back, and looked right at her, "I promise, you won't have to shoot anyone today."

"Famous last words!" Tara said rather dryly, but then sighed in relief even so. She wanted to believe him, needed to trust him!

She took another deep breath, twisted out of his arms and reached for her purse she'd put down on one of the weight benches behind her, pulling the straps up onto her shoulder, and looked back up at him to signal she was ready to go. "Let's just get this over with. They're probably all wondering what's taking us so long anyways."
A slow smirk crept on Jax's face at that, "No rush, we still got time." He stepped right back up to her, invading her personal space again when he wrapped his arms around her, locking his hands behind her back once more and looked down at her suggestively, "Wouldn't want them to think I'm some two-pump-chump who's short-changing my old lady."

Tara bit her lip trying not to smirk, but failed miserably, and she just barely managed to not roll her eyes at him too. He'd confessed to her last night that he had the club believing that they were truly back together, and after the way he'd talked to Chibs, they were probably thinking that him and her were screwing.

But she really didn't want to have this conversation right now with him, nor acknowledge his obvious innuendo either. And besides, she wasn't really sure what to say to him, especially considering that the tingling of her skin where he had touched her hadn't even completely dissipated yet. So it was undoubtedly too soon to talk, or possibly have a repeat of what happened.

"Nothing?" Jax asked rather surprised at her silence, still smiling broadly. "Not even some smartass comeback?"

"I'm not sure what to say?" Tara replied, with an almost straight face this time. Almost!

"Tell me something, babe? What would've happened if Chibs hadn't interrupted us?" Jax said suddenly, getting straight to the point, his facial expression matching his much more serious tone of voice now. The cheeky playfulness from seconds ago was all gone now.

"Probably not what you think would've happened or ... what you wanted to have happened." Tara said honestly, she wanted to believe that she wouldn't have let it go much further than it already had.

"What I wanted to happen? You jumped me, Sweetheart, I just reciprocated." Jax tried to get to the bottom of this. He wanted to know what she was thinking, or more precisely what she was feeling. Wanted to know what any of this meant.

"I did not jump you." Tara blurted out. "I kissed you. And what you reciprocated ... not at all the same thing." She said incredulously, trying to take a step back, away from him, out of his arms.

His hands opened, loosening behind her back, but weren't letting her go anywhere just yet. They just slid to her waist instead, holding her tightly in place right in front of him. "Tara." He pleads with her, "Just tell me what that was? What it means?" He sounds desperate, almost frustrated too, and his stare is way too intense for her to handle at the moment. But she was glad all that macho bravado had vanished now.

Tara lowers her gaze, looking away from him and sighs, "You know, there was a time when you were the one who avoided having these relationship talks like the plague." She huffs out with some frustration to her own voice now.

"Yeah, trust me, babe." He nods back at her, a sadness flickered in his eyes, "I'm well aware how the tables have turned on me." He wraps one arm around her to keep her close when he raises his other hand to tip her chin up, so she has no choice but to meet his eyes again. "Tell me." He demands, relentless.

She swallows the lump that catches in her throat when she looks back up into his captivating blue eyes. "The truth is I'm not sure what that was. I was just ... I was just so grateful about what you did for me ... again." She spits the words out like she's confessing to a crime of some sort, and by the look on Jax's face, it's obvious that he doesn't like her answer or the way it was delivered.
"I don't buy that." He replies, as he's trying his best to keep his cool, and it even surprises him how quickly his mood can change from one second to the next when it comes to her and him and their relationship. He had been so hopeful that the kiss had meant more to her than what she had just described.

"Look, I'm not naive. I know that even if I had told you right away what Patterson was doing, why I was staying back in Charming, that we wouldn't have gotten back together like nothing ever happened. Just like I don't expect to be an instant couple now. I'm well aware there's still a lot of shit that's burdening you, hurt I caused that you're still struggling with ... believe me, I see it, babe, I can feel it every day. But at the same time it seems like whenever we're taking one step forward, something happens and we end up taking three fucking steps back again." He stops his tirade for a second, but it's clear by the expression on his face that he isn't done yet, just merely gathering his thoughts.

His voice raises a little when he begins to ramble on some more, "I love you, Tara, and I know that you love me. I also know complete forgiveness is something I haven't earned yet, there's no pardon coming my way any time soon, you made that clear last night. And please don't think I don't know that I'm lucky you're even considering giving us another try, because god knows I was a lousy husband and I put you through hell. ... I love coming home to you, you and me and our boys being a family, but also spending hours just you and me, talking and laughing late at night. At the same time though, I hate watching you disappear into your bedroom, while I fall asleep on the couch alone. I need something here, babe, just a little something to know this is still heading somewhere?"

His words are heartfelt, but also heartbreaking. And she feels all of that heavily on her conscience. Because he's right in more ways than one; she does love him, and she does want him too, but she's also terrified that if she gives in a little, he'll greedily take it all. And even thought her body longs for him, wants him so much sometimes that it physically hurts to walk away from him and lock herself away in her own room late at night, she's still too afraid to give him that much of her so soon. It had always been all or nothing with them. The blurred lines, the messy in-between, the whatever-this-is never worked out well for them, that's why she honestly isn't sure how to give in a little, that won't end up with him taking advantage of her. Because besides her babies, Jax in itself is her only other weakness, her Achilles-heel.

She sighs deeply, lowering her eyes again, raising a hand to her face to shield herself away from him, to hide the emotions on her face from his prying eyes. Her heart is pounding in her chest, because she knows she's probably going to regret this, but she also wants to move forward, just not quite at his speed.

"What if we don't take three steps back again?" She finally dares to look up at him, knowing full well how vague that question was worded, but it's too late because it's already out there. And Jax is already looking back at her confused.

"Babe, what are you saying?" He asks in return, not missing a beat, his voice almost hopeful.

She doesn't really know what she's saying, or rather she just doesn't know how to explain it to him without sounding like a complete idiot. But she gives it her best try, "I'm saying, we kissed, and we should try not to backpedal. You know, it happened." As soon as she closes her mouth, she knows that this was just as vague as the first thing she'd said.

Jax studies her face for a long moment trying to figure out what she's trying to say, the corners of his lips raised just enough to give the hint of a smile.

But before he can say anything, press her for a better explanation, she speaks up, getting tired of this dance around the subject, so she decides to get right down to the nitty-gritty and spells it out for him
in the simplest terms, so he really gets it, "I'm not ready to have sex with you yet, I'm sorry, but you know I'm just not there yet, emotionally." She pauses and sighs deeply, before she carries on, "That being said, maybe I wouldn't be opposed to you kissing me again. You know, whatever happens, happens."

She obviously should've anticipated his reaction, but it still catches her off guard just how quickly his hand curls around the back of her neck and pulls her in even closer, before both his hands frame her face, holding her in place, leaving her no way to escape as his lips crash down onto hers in a scorching kiss.

Jackson Teller was an incredible kisser, always had been, at least as far as she could remember. But it still surprised her that even after all this time and the countless kisses they've shared over the years, he was still able to leave her breathless and make her weak in the knees with the way he held onto her and devoured her mouth with his.

When the kiss lets up, he looks down at her, forehead to forehead, both their hearts beating way too fast, and both trying to get their breathing under control as well. But when he smiles at her, she can't help but smile right back at him too. Maybe a little progress wasn't so bad after all!

"There's just one more thing I want, babe." He says sounding very serious all of a sudden, his hands slipping back down to her hands, squeezing them lightly.

Tara doesn't ask out loud, but rather just looks up at him expectantly, waiting for him to enlighten her with what else he could possibly want from her now.

"Your rings." He starts, solemnly, then clears his throat. "I get why you took them off, but when we get back home, I want you to start wearing them again."

He pauses for a moment, contemplating his next words before he adds, sounding dangerously, "I want every motherfucker out there to know that you're taken. That this -" He grabs her ass rather possessively and pulls her roughly against his groin. "-all of this is mine, and mine alone." His blue eyes piercing her green ones, waiting for her to acknowledge what he'd said, in some way, shape or form.

Tara can feel her cheeks flushing a little, there is just something about him acting this possessively that gets her even more flustered than that kiss from just moments ago. That all too familiar heat pooling needy between her thighs. And as much as she loves it, she also hates it, because it goes against those feminist views she normally wants to identify with, or at the very least likes to pretend to identify with.

A strong independent woman shouldn't like the thought of being anyone's possession or property, and yet with Jax it makes those butterflies in her stomach flutter, her eyes glaze over with lust, and her thighs squeeze together in a vain attempt to lessen the need it makes her feel for him.

Tara doesn't say anything though, but instead pulls her purse in front of her, between him and her, and begins to dig through it, while Jax looks on, undoubtedly a bit puzzled, until she pulls the rings free, and their eyes connect once more.

She's about to slip them on, when Jax stops her. "Let me." He says and reaches for them, taking them from her. He looks at them for a brief moment, before he takes her already outstretched hand in his, holding it steady as he gently places the rings back on her finger, one by one, locking eyes with her throughout the process. It's such a simple gesture, shouldn't hold much meaning after they've been married all this time now, but it strangely doesn't feels so simple at all. And neither does the look they're exchanging, and the smile that begins to spread wide on both their faces.
"I love you, Tara." He says, reaching up to frame her face once again.

"I love you, Jackson." She replies with the same serious tone in her voice.

The deep, soul-consuming kiss that follows reflects those words once more.

X

Author's Note: I hope you gals/guys like it enough to leave me a few comments or reviews. Thank you for reading!
Chapter 27

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X

Jax had his arm draped across Tara's shoulder while they started heading down the hallway towards the main room of the clubhouse.

Even though she felt incredibly nervous about Jax talking to the Sons about Juice and what had happened, she also couldn't deny the momentary feelings of pure joy she felt right now when she dared to look up at the man walking right beside her.

The joyful smile on his face hadn't faded since she had let him put her rings back on her finger, and then there was the kiss that followed, that had caused them to lose track of time again a little.

She knew just by looking at him right now, that she'd made the right decision about them and their relationship after all, about letting him in a little, letting him a bit closer. She could just see it in the way his blue eyes sparkled when he looked down at her, the way he held his chin a bit higher, his chest puffed out a little more, and of course in the way that well-known Teller swagger was more exaggerated now too.

And for a brief moment she was fifteen again, because it reminded her so much of the boy she'd fallen in love with back in High School, way before he'd gotten jaded with the darkness that surrounded the club and the life that came with it. It was nice to see that side of him shine through, even just a little, even just for a moment. It gave her hope!

Once they'd reached the main room, there was hooting and hollering and they were instantly surrounded, by club members and hang-rounds alike. Everyone wanted to say hello, hug and kiss and trying to catch up on how their life outside of Charming had been going. And despite still being incredibly nervous about it all, Tara couldn't deny that small part of her that made her feel welcome here after all this time. Even the girls, or maybe especially the girls, some of whom she didn't even recognize, made her feel welcome to be back in the midst, showing her respect, much unlike the whores had done last night at Diosa.

Tara was used to having to put on a brave face, as a matter of fact she had perfected that brave face over the last couple of years along with having to pretend that the way she was often treated was no skin off her back. But right now, being as nervous as she already felt, it was nice to be treated like she still mattered, and to not have to make use of that particular talent of hers.

They quickly realized that word in Charming still traveled as fast as ever, when Chibs brought up what Candy had told the Sheriff, which in turn had made its way back to him. Everyone got a good chuckle about the fact that their former pres and his old lady had been caught red handed, out in the middle of nowhere, making out like some horny teenagers.

Despite it all being just a big fat lie, Tara's cheeks still flushed when Chibs had relayed the story he'd been told in great detail, and Jax in turn had very convincingly played along, grinning like the cat who ate the canary as he playfully winked at Tara right next to him.
Eventually the laughter and conversation had finally died down a bit, and Jax pulled her close for a moment, whispered in her ear about not worrying too much, softly kissed her on the lips, before he disappeared along with Bobby and Chibs in the room with the reaper table, closing the doors to church behind them.

Oddly enough the girls continued to swarm around Tara like bees around their queen, while the guys took turns playing games on the pool table.

Tara was grateful though when Lyla reappeared and settled in the barstool beside her, striking up another conversation with her, about the kids and school and life in Charming these day, but it still wasn't distraction enough to really take her mind off of what was currently being discussed between Jax and his former brothers.

The blinds in the room were drawn, and it didn't sit well with her that she couldn't even see their facial expressions while she sat here waiting restlessly, like on pins and needles. It didn't help either when the door opened just for a moment, and Chibs ordered all of the Sons to come in and join what was happening inside.

Tara watched all of this, and she could feel her heart begin to race once more, not liking it at all.

And even Lyla couldn't hold her tongue either, "What do you think that's all about?" Her dark-blond eyebrows pulled together, when she looked back at Tara with a quizzical expression.

Tara hesitated for a minute and swallowed back the lump in her throat, but then decided to give Lyla at least part of the truth. Why exactly she decided to do this, she wasn't entirely sure ... maybe she was just tired of lying to Christy so it was refreshing to tell the truth to someone, or maybe she did it because it felt like the right thing to do at the moment. "Jax is still worried, because Juice still hasn't been found. He wanted to see if anyone here had heard anything new, you know?"

Lyla nodded, "Makes sense." She took a long drag from her cigarette savoring the moment, then slowly exhaled before she shook her head and a painful expression crossed her pretty face, "I still can't believe Juice would do something like that."

Tara nodded in return, "I know. Me too."

Lyla looked at her for a long moment, before she decided to ask the question she'd been wondering about since Tara had arrived, "Did any of your memories come back yet? From that day?"

Tara sighed, tying her best once more to seem more at ease than she actually felt, "No." She shook her head. "Not yet." She forced a sad smile on her lips.

Lyla nodded, and took another drag from her cigarette, "Honestly, it's probably for the best. God knows there's a bunch of shit I wish I could forget." Averting her eyes from her brunette friend as she got lost in her own thoughts for a brief moment.

Tara smiled wryly at that, nodded along, and stubbed out the cigarette she'd been smoking, "Yeah, I know what you mean."

X

Gemma tried her best to keep herself busy with work, but no matter how hard she tried, her mind kept going back to her son's words from earlier. She'd been on a war path with Tara ever since she'd found out that her daughter-in-law wanted to take her grandbabies out of Charming and move them all the way to Oregon, after promising her that she'd get her family back if she'd only helped Jax frame Clay.
But now, after all this time, she found herself at war for a whole other reason. Gemma knew she'd made a mistake, not a simple one, no, this was a huge life-altering mistake. She had been high on weed and drunk, her head clouded with misinformation, when she'd attacked Tara in the Teller home in a vicious rage. Only to find out after the fact, that Tara hadn't ratted after all, but instead her son had given himself up to keep the love of his life out from behind bars. So she knew she was at fault, having done what she'd done, but now after all this time she found herself with a brand new dilemma at hand.

Like Jax had said, if she truly wanted to ever be a part of his and her grandsons life's again, she'd have to figure out how to mend the rift that still ran deep between Tara and herself. But there lied the second conundrum she faced, because by trying to get closer again to her daughter-in-law, she ultimately feared the possibility that the younger woman's memories would return and she'd be exposed as the culprit behind the attack that had almost killed her all those months ago.

None of this would be a problem, and her son would most likely still be living here in Charming, if she'd only double checked to make sure she was really dead, instead of leaving her still breathing on that kitchen floor to be found just in the nick of time by none other than Jax himself. That was obviously the second mistake she had made that fateful day, but it was equally as life-altering as the first.

So now Gemma was at a loss. She loved Thomas and Abel more than anything, maybe with the exception of her son Jackson himself. But was she willing to risk her freedom, her life, just for the off chance that Tara would even allow her back into the family fold? And what would that even look like? The occasional visit on Thanksgiving or Christmas, she wondered.

But then again, now that Tara was better and had Jax back under her spell, she had undoubtedly sunken her claws back into him and was surely riding him with as much vigor as her son rode his Harley. So there was a good possibility that Tara would get pregnant again. And if she kept her distance, she'd never even get the chance to meet the newest Teller at all?

And besides, what else did she really have to live for if not for her son and those precious babies of his?

With those thoughts in mind, Gemma pushed the paperwork that sat right in front of her aside, stumped out the last of her cigarette in the ashtray on her desk and exhaled the remaining smoke from her lungs as quickly as she could.

She reached for the gift bags on the floor beside her desk. Once Jax had informed her that they were coming into town, she'd gone and picked a little something up for Abel and Thomas both. And as she stared at the contents of each bag one more time, she quickly decided that a gift for those adorable baby-boys was as good a ice-breaker between their mother and her, as any.

Before she could change her mind again, Gemma hurriedly crossed the TM parking lot, and headed for the clubhouse entrance. She took in one last deep breath, stealing herself for all the mixed emotions that were likely to hit her the moment she'd lay eyes on the woman she'd tried to kill. The woman who her son loved above all else.

She stepped inside, with slow and deliberate steps now, her hands tightening around the strings of the gift bags in her hand, so much so that her long manicured nails were digging into her sweaty palm. Her eyes scanned the room for a brief moment, until they suddenly connected with Tara's. And both women practically froze in place.

A beat or two past, and Gemma swallowed the lump that had formed in her throat, unsure and waited for a reaction from Tara. A sign of some sorts, a flash of recognition, a scream out loud that she was the one that had attacked her.
But when nothing happened, Gemma instead found herself fighting the sudden onslaught of guilt as she took in Tara sitting there at the bar with Lyla. She'd loved her once, deeply, like the daughter she'd never had, ... but now that was all history, all gone, or at least she tried to tell herself that it was.

It simply had to be over if she didn't want the shame and guilt to destroy her from the inside out. It was easier to justify her actions if she still hated the younger woman, so that's what she had decided for herself to keep doing.

Yet at the same time, she was smart enough to play the game she knew she had to play in order to get back into Tara and Jax's good graces, and hopefully be allowed back into the family sooner rather than later.

Her heart was beating out of her chest, and her head rushed with all these different possibilities once more, how this meeting and reconnecting could ultimately be the proverbial end of her. But Gemma refused to play the role of the coward, hiding out in her office, another moment longer.

It had been those same nightmarish thought's that had stopped her over the last several months from reaching out, but it was finally time to push them aside and move forward.

In their conversation earlier, Jax had made it crystal clear that he had no regrets leaving all of this behind, so there was no use in continuing to deny the fact that her son was truly no longer the heir to the Sam Crow throne and she simply had to figure out how to come to terms with it as her world around her crumbled into something she didn't even recognize anymore.

She just couldn't do this any longer, at least not without Jax, without Abel and without Thomas.

With that thought in mind Gemma took a deep breath and forged forward, stepping right up to the bar, face to face with the woman she'd wanted dead, but hadn't succeeded. It was true that Tara had caused her to lose everything that mattered, but it was also true that Tara was the only way to get it all back again. She tried to remind herself of that as she tried to smile graciously at the two younger women.

"Hi Girls." She said, awkwardly, and placed the gift bags onto the lower sitting round table next to the bar, before she let her eyes drift back up to meet Tara's.

"Hi Gemma." Tara replied, equally awkward, as they both sized each other up, like two animals ready to pounce at any given moment if the need arose.

But then it happened, those goddamn feeling she didn't want to feel, but couldn't stop them even if she tried, because her head was just such a fucking mess these days. So utterly torn between love and hate! So she couldn't stop herself from rounding the corner of the bar, and with a trembling chin and watery eyes pulled her daughter-in-law into a tight embrace. "I'm so glad you're okay, Sweetheart." She managed to say, her voice dripping with emotions she couldn't control no matter how hard she tried.

And it was true, but then again, it wasn't true ... she didn't know what she wanted anymore, other than to have her family back. If someone could guarantee her that Tara would never regain those memories, she'd do anything in her power to get their relationship back for the sake of being in her grandbabies life's. But sadly, nobody could possibly make that guarantee.

And Tara on the other hand didn't know how to react, nor what to say. Gemma had always been such an enigma to her, you simply never really knew what to expect from her at any given time. She could be so loving and caring if she wanted to be, but then turn around mere seconds later and be the monster-in-law your nightmares were made of.
So Tara didn't really fully embrace her the same, she was reluctant to say the least, because they hadn't spoken in so long ... and the last conversation they did have, was Tara betraying her and lying to her for the sake of her boys.

But Tara couldn't help but wonder if the fact that she'd almost died had somehow wiped the slate clean for her and that's what this warm embrace was about, but she couldn't be entirely sure.

Gemma pulled back and wiped at her eyes, taking the napkin Lyla was holding out for her, "Thank you, Sweetie." She quickly used it to dab at her face, trying not to smear her mascara or eyeliner in the process to remain looking presentable.

Lyla and Tara exchanged an awkward look, while Gemma had turned away, reaching for the gift bags, and spun back around to face the two younger women once more.

"Jax called a couple days ago, told me you guys were coming, so I got a little something for Abel and Thomas." Gemma said, trying not to snuffle again. "Just a couple books, a shirt and some toy Harleys."

Tara reached out and took the two bags from her, placing them on the bar next to her, peeking inside for a second, "Thank you. I'm sure they'll love it." She tried her best to sound sincere, but truthfully she simply still wasn't sure what to make of this odd exchange with her estranged mother-in-law.

Gemma nodded, a rueful smile on her lips, "How are they? The boys?"

Tara smiled awkwardly, and looked from Lyla back to Gemma for a brief moment, "They're great ... Thomas is pretty much out of diapers now, he just wears a pull-up at night, just in case. He's obsessed with anything that has to do with Superhero's right now ... And um ... Abel loves his preschool, made some friends there, we meet them at a park near our home some times on the weekends. He loves that! He's learning how to read, ... Jax is actually teaching him." Tara started to share some things that came to mind, although she figured that Jax had probably kept Gemma up to date on the boys and what was happening with them in their weekly phone conversations.

Gemma swallowed the lump in her throat, she was missing out on so much. "That's great." She said, not really sure how else to respond without breaking down right here in front of everyone.

Lyla offered Tara another smoke, which she took and Gemma herself lit one up as well, and with it a moment of silence spread amongst the three of them. It was barely noticeable though, since the rest of the girls and hang-arounds were busy chatting it up all around them, nursing their early afternoon drinks and challenged each other for a game of pool.

Gemma's eyes flickered to Tara's hand, noting the slightly bruised and scabbed over cuts on her knuckles, "What happened there?" She pointed at the hand, knowing all too well that the evidence suggested Tara had gotten into some kind of fight.

Tara tried her best to keep her cheeks from flushing at Gemma's observation, as she herself along with Lyla looked down at her now un-bandaged battered hand. Nobody else had bothered to ask, but leave it up to her nosy mother-in-law to do just that. "A whore ran into it." She quickly answered, trying to sound nonchalant about it, which she did, but she instantly regretted her choice of words, and guilt consumed her once more about her actions from the night before that had caused her knuckles to split open in the first place.

It was just something about being in Charming, or around Gemma, that made her act and talk in a way that wasn't really her own. There was this sick and twisted urge she still had to emulate her, in hopes of some sort of approval or maybe just to psych herself up to be able to go head to head with
the matriarch.

But in all honesty, Tara didn't want to be that person anymore. She hadn't liked the person she had had to become in order to survive in this life, and to handle all the shit that came with it.

"Ahhh." Gemma nodded, giving her a knowing look, and Tara hated that she'd let it slip that some prostitute had gotten to her, gotten into her head enough to get into a brawl with her.

Just then, the door to the chapel opened, and Jax stepped out just enough that Tara took notice. "Babe?" He said loud enough for his voice to boom over the music and the noisy conversations all around them, and waived his hand, motioning for her to come on in.

The look on Tara's face could only be described as tense, when she stubbed out her cigarette, excused herself, before she grabbed her purse and quickly headed towards her husband.

Gemma looked to Lyla, her eyebrows raised, "What's going on there?"

Lyla let her eyes flicker from Jax and Tara and back to Gemma again, before she replied, "I'm not sure, but I think it's about Juice."

X

Jax's eyes connected with his mothers for the briefest moment, and he leaned closer to Tara before she even stepped through the door, "Everything good with Gemma?" He hoped his earlier talk with his mother hadn't been a waste of time and smoothed some of that tension between the two women.

Tara nodded, "So far." But gave him an unsure smile. This whole situations had her on edge ... Gemma's unexpected friendliness and now this meeting with Sam Crow.

Jax nodded relieved nonetheless, thankful that his mother hadn't started any more drama for now.

He draped his arm around Tara's waist, his hand on her hip, pulling her further into the room. The newer members, that she wasn't familiar with smiled warmly at her as they stepped by her and Jax on their way out of the room, before Jax reached out and pulled the chapel door shut behind them again.

To her surprise everyone left around the table stood, an obvious show of respect.

"Come on in, and take a seat, Sweetheart." Said Bobby out loud as Tara met his eyes at the head of the table, and he gestured towards one of the empty seats across from him.

Tara tried her best to smile, albeit awkwardly, but was met with genuinely warm and friendly smiles from the guys around the table in return, before Jax lead her down to the end of the table where Piney used to sit.

The clearly respectful and friendly reception didn't diminish her worries at all, but she continued to smile back at them, simply because she didn't know what else to do. At the moment her heart was beating so fast, she thought she might pass out if it weren't for Jax having his arm still around her to keep her steady. She wondered if it showed just how terrified she was, as she tried her best to not have a full fledged panic attack.

Right now, at this very moment, she began to doubt her own sanity. What the hell had she been thinking when she had agreed with Jax to do this in the first place? She must've been out of her goddamn mind.

Tara knew it probably made her look weak or gave away just how fearful she really was, but she
couldn't help herself from looking up at Jax right beside her for reassurance.

"It's alright, babe. Trust me." Jax whispered, his lips right up against her ear, before he nodded reassuringly at her and pulled out a chair for her to take a seat at the reaper table. He himself slipped onto the chair right beside her at the same time as everyone around them settled back into their seats as well.

It seemed odd to even be here, to say the least. To sit at this table, giving her this false sense that she somehow was a part of it all, but at the same time feeling every bit as the outsider she truly was.

Tara shrugged her purse off of her shoulder, and placed it in her lap beneath the table, before she rested her hands on the table itself.

Jax lit a cigarette before he took one of her hands in his, and gave her a reassuring squeeze. She looked over at him then, and when she was met with his sweet blue eyes, it temporarily took some of the uneasiness she was feeling away. His earlier promise that he won't let anyone ever hurt her again echoed through her mind, and to her surprise it stifled some of her anxiety she was feeling.

"Listen, Jax filled us all in." Bobby suddenly spoke again, getting on with the reason why they were all here. "Said he had some concerns about Juice having an accomplice, possibly another member of this club. And we just wanted to bring you in here, reassure you in person, like we have reassured Jax, that without a doubt, no one sitting at this table, still wearing this patch had anything to do with what happened to you." Bobby gestured with his hand around the room, as he spoke those words to her with unwavering conviction in his voice, and her eyes flickered down the table to meet his again.

Jax had told her right after he'd arrived up in Oregon that Bobby had been appointed the new president, so she'd known it for a while now, but it was still somewhat odd to see the older, long bearded man at the head of the table where Clay and later Jax used to sit and reign.

The guys, Jax included, began to fill her in on everything they had talked about. How they had suspected the Chinese to be behind it at first, but that had only turned out to be another dead end. How Sam Crow had even worked alongside new Sheriff Jarry, out of sheer desperation, but still every scenario they've had considered, every lead they'd chased down just came up empty handed.

Tara fought an inner battle to not let her emotions get the best of her, to not let those tears fill her eyes as she took in the apologetic looks of the members around the table staring back at her. She didn't really know what she should say to any of that. For the most part she'd been aware of all their fruitless efforts, because Jax had filled her in after she'd awoken from her coma, when he'd pressed her for anything she might remembered about what had happened at their home the day she'd been attacked.

She wasn't entirely sure what she'd truly expected to get out of this, mostly because she wasn't sure if the truth would or could possibly come to light by simply asking the right questions out loud. It seemed too simple.

But now, as she found herself looking around the room at these mostly burly men she'd known for years and years, she suddenly realized that it was as simple as that. She believed them. Whether or not that was smart on her part was a whole other issue in itself. But right now she could practically feel the emotions still running high amongst the men around her, and that they genuinely cared not only about what had happened to her, but what it had done to Jax as well. And that they were just as pissed off and regretful as Jax was, that the culprit, Juice to be exact, a former member had managed to disappear into thin air, never to be heard of or seen again.

She'd barely spoken since she'd entered the room, and once more she found herself looking over at
Jax for much needed guidance.

Jax squeezed her hand that was still resting in his and cleared his throat. He nodded at his brothers in appreciation before he solemnly said what Tara simply couldn't voice herself, "We truly appreciate everything this club has done for us since Juice tried to destroy our family. I know I've said this before, but it can't be said enough that all of your loyalty you've shown me, us, in the aftermath of Juice's attack meant the world to me."

He glanced over at Tara for a long moment, before he focused his attention back to his former brothers scattered around the table, "When we had suspected the Chinese to be behind it at first, you all were cocked and ready to follow me to hell and back, down a path of destruction, to revenge my old lady. But at the same time, I'm glad all of you helped me to stay level headed enough to realize that the Chinese weren't involved after all ... and I'm sorry that I allowed the revelation about Juice to cloud my mind enough to make me think one of you could've betrayed me along with him. I love you, guys."

Everyone stood, and one by one, Tig, Happy, Rat, Chibs and Bobby came over to embrace Tara and Jax again in a show of solidarity.

Happy, and Rat hugged Tara rather quickly, before they both turned their attention to Jax instead.

But Tig stepped right up to her next, called her 'Doll' and framed her face in a gentle gesture she hadn't anticipated from him at all, before he whispered reassurances to her that honestly made it incredibly hard for her to keep it together and not break down and cry.

Next came Bobby, who pulled her in a bear-hug that nearly crushed her ribs, and also reassured her how much she meant to all of them, how she was a part of this family, always would be a part of it, even now that Jax was no longer a member. He pulled back from the tight embrace and looked right at her, his eyes conveying just how serious he was about all of this, "You remember that conversation you and I shared behind Scoops, darlin'?" And Tara nodded, she remembered it like it was yesterday. And Bobby nodded too, "I meant every word of that." He reached for both her hands now and gave them a reassuring squeeze.

Tara tried to ignore Jax's eyes on her now, it was obvious that he wondered what Bobby was talking about. And she couldn't help but sniffle at that, knowing he was referring to telling her how much Jax needed her, that Jax wouldn't make it without her.

But the tears that threatened to spill were also in part out of shame she still felt about that very day ... it was right after she'd lied about the miscarriage. She'd done it for the right reasons, but it still made her feel guilt stricken every time she thought about it.

Chibs stepped up last, but not least, and also pulled her into a hug at first too, telling her how much she was loved and cherished and reassured her that they wouldn't give up until Juice would be found and be dealt with on her behalf. He proceeded to drape his arm around her shoulder, pulled her closer into his side and turned her towards the rest of the men again, and with his thick accent, the Scotsman pointed his finger at each of his brothers, one by one, and reminded her and everyone else in the room, just how many times she'd stitched or patched them up, himself included when she'd performed CPR on him after the van explosion on the Teller-Morrow lot.

At last, he pointed a finger at Bobby, "If it wasn't for you, our president wouldn't even be here today. If you hadn't dug that slug outta him and stopped him from bleeding out. We're all in your debt, Doc, and don't you forget it." He added and kissed her temple, as silent tears rolled down Tara's face.

Someone had handed her a tissue, which she used to not just dab at her eyes, but wiped at her nose
now too as she was no longer able to keep her emotions at bay. When she looked up from her tissue, Jax met her eyes and pulled her into his side, but turned his attention to the guys in front of him, "We need to get going. I could use a hand loading up those bikes."

"Absolutely." Happy replied and started heading towards the door without uttering another word.

X

They all stepped out into the courtyard, Tara stashed the gift bags from Gemma into Jax's truck, and the guys helped Jax begin to load and strap down the bikes onto the enclosed trailer he had rented for the occasion.

Lyla and Tara were quietly engrossed in conversation, sitting at the picnic tables near the clubhouse entrance, while Gemma stood in the doorframe to her office with Chucky right beside her, but they didn't speak and took it all in silently instead.

With her hip leaned against the doorframe, she lit another smoke and with rueful eyes took in the revolting scene that unfolded right before her very eyes.

There he was, her beautiful baby-boy, her only son laughing and joking around with his former brothers, while they all worked hand in hand to load not just his Dyna onto the trailer, but also JT's vintage '46 Harley Knucklehead as well.

Her eyes drifted over her late husband's most treasured possession and lingered there for a long moment. After the attack on Tara, and the unsuccessful search for who'd done it, Jax had spend plenty of sleepless nights in the garage of his house rebuilding the bike to its former glory for the second time, after it had been nearly destroyed in the clubhouse explosion.

She had no doubt it was due in part for the lack of having his boys at home with him to keep his mind busy, along with his bed being empty and cold night after night without Tara there either. The absence of his family in the home was crushing his spirits, so the garage was where he spend most of his nights instead.

The only sleep he found at all during those long months were when he crashed in utter exhaustion on a chair in Tara's hospital room over night, or when he crawled into Abel's bed at Margaret Murphy's house ... Well, at least that's what she'd been told, since Jax and her had been barely speaking at that time. Regret filled her once more as she thought about that. If she'd only kept her mouth shut back then.

But still, Gemma pursed her lips in disdain as she watched Chibs and Happy push the bike closer towards the trailer. He was really taking the bike along with him, and despite the ache in her heart, there was absolutely nothing she could do about it. JT had left the bike to his oldest son in his will, all those years ago, so the decision was out of her hands.

Gemma watched as they began to tighten down the straps that held the Dyna in place, when Jax stepped to the side just for a second and hastily pulled his long-sleeved shirt up and over his head, without so much as bothering to unbutton it first. The white t-shirt he wore beneath rode up on his lower back in the process, before he could reach back and tug it back down absentmindedly. But it was too late. She had already seen it.

Gemma's eyebrows were already raised to new heights at the realization that the reaper was still adorning her sons back and she quickly dropped her cigarette to the ground and grinded the remnants of it into the grey concrete beneath her high heeled leather boots. She smirked knowingly over at Chucky, who seemed oblivious to what she had just discovered. That there was still hope!
The bikes were finally tied down securely, and the trailer was locked up with a deadbolt as well.

Jax and the guys stepped back into the clubhouse to have a cold drink before it was time for their former president and his old lady to hit the road back to Oregon again.

Jax looked around the big front room, scanning it for Tara, but when he didn't see her, he quickly sought out Lyla instead, "Hey, have you seen Tara?"

Lyla looked back over her shoulder at him and nodded towards the bathroom, "I think she's in the bathroom."

Seemingly content with the answer, he accepted the cold glass of iced tea the blond held out to him and he quickly chucked the drink within a few seconds, before he returned the glass back to the counter of the bar.

Just then, Gemma stepped up beside him and tucked on his arm to get her sons full attention, "I need to talk to you." She said with an urgent sound in her voice.

Jax nodded, but before he could say anything, Gemma nodded towards the hallway that lead down to the gym and the dorm room, and quickly added, "Alone, in private."

"Okay." Jax said and looked quizzically back at her, but fell in step beside her and followed her down the hall.

X

Tara washed her hands and examined her reflection in the mirror above the sink for a long moment. She wiped some smeared mascara away with the pad of her index finger, before she began to dug through her purse and pulled out the little make-up pouch she often carried with her.

She quickly powdered her face, touched up her mascara and lipstick too, before she ran her hands through her hair, trying to fix it again as best as she could without the use of a comb or a brush.

The sound of someone closing the dorm room door caught her attention, and she quickly stepped over to the door to slip on out and let her presence be known before things would get awkward. She turned the knob and was just about to pull the door to the room open all the way, but stopped dead in her tracks instead when she recognized Gemma's and Jax's voice on the other side of the door.

X

Jax closed the door and turned back around.
"What's up?" He said as his gaze followed his mother stepping further into the new, yet familiar room.

"Are you sure this is really what you want?" Gemma turned and folded her arms in front of herself as she studied the expression on her sons face just a few feet away from her.

He had no patience to play some mind games with her, and therefore her cryptic words were already beginning to annoy him. "Look, Tara and I need to get on the road, I don't have time to play guessing games. You got something to say, just get to the point, mom."

Equally annoyed at his quick dismissal of her, she quickly stepped towards him and before he knew what she was doing, she'd yanked his shirt up and slapped her palm flat against his back with a
smacking sound, "I wanna talk about this, the reaper that's still on your back."

Jax groaned in frustration and stepped away from her. "Just don't." He huffed in annoyance, leaned back against the desk, one of the few pieces of furniture in the room, and lowered his head, pinching the bridge of his nose for a long moment as he felt a headache coming on.

"Don't what?" Gemma replied, her voice raised already, there was fury in her eyes as she took in her son critically, "Don't point out that you asked your brothers to take a vote to let you leave this club to be with her? Or don't point out that it turns out that's not really what you want after all?"

At that, Jax quickly looked up and met her icy gaze head on, "It's not like that."

"Then why don't you tell me what it's like?" She paused and shook her head at him in disdain, but before he could utter a response, she was already speaking up again, "You know exactly what they'll be forced to do if they found out that you still haven't blackened that out. So that tells me one of two things, son. You either aren't as happy as you'd like everyone here to believe, playing house up in Oregon with the good doctor, or you're just incredibly stupid and reckless. So which is it, Jackson?"

"Tara and I are fine. I forgot, and I got busy and just haven't gotten around to -" Jax started to explain, but Gemma interrupted.

"Bullshit." She scoffed. "It's a reaper tattoo the size of your back, Sweetheart, you don't just forget it's there." She shook her head again, "Don't you care that you'd leave them no choice then to take a knife or a torch to your back if they found -"

"Enough." Jax yelled, interrupting her in return, he raised his arm and pointed towards the door, "If it bothers you so fucking much, why don't you go and tell 'em? Go on, tell 'em and we can get it taken care of right now before I leave this goddamn shithole for good."

"Don't do that." Gemma replied, looking downright offended by his suggestion, "We both know I'd never rat on you."

Jax let out a humorless chuckle, and scoffed at her, "And we both know the only reason you wouldn't rat is because you don't want me to cover the damn thing up in the first place. That is why we're even having this conversation, isn't it, mom?" Jax wasn't stupid enough to think that his mother had started this little talk out of concern for his well being ... there was always an underlying plan, a point she was trying to make, and he had a pretty good idea what it was this time.

Gemma didn't miss a beat at that and finally got right to the point, "You are a part of this club, Jax. It's in your blood, and it always will be, whether that reaper is still on your back or not."

Her voice less angry, but determined nonetheless. "You're gonna look me in the eye and honestly try telling me that you've simply forgotten to get that taken care of? I don't buy that for a minute."

Jax sighed heavily, "You're right, I didn't forget. It's just been a part of me for so long," he paused, trying to find the right words to explain himself, "... it's not that easily done." He looked up with sad eyes, ashamed by his guilty admission.

Gemma stepped closer to him again, and reached out, framing his face with her manicured hands, "I know it's not easy, it isn't supposed to be easy. The fact that you couldn't bring yourself to get it covered up after everything that happened, it means something? It's a sign, Sweetheart."

She smiled reassuringly back at him and lowered her hands from his face again, "It's been calm here, downright boring ... the club is earning good money with Diosa and Red Woody. TM is thriving with the new contract with Hale. You made all of those things happen, baby, and it's just a damn
shame that you don't get to benefit from any of it. This is your home. The reaper is still on your back and I have no doubt that Bobby would gladly hand that gavel right back to you if you only asked to be let back in." She knew all too well how to play his weaknesses against him.

"Mom." Jax pleaded with her, "I can't."

"Why not, Jax? Can't you at least try to talk to Tara? She's smart, surely she can see that it's not like it used to be here anymore. It's different now that the club is out of guns. Safer." Gemma said with newfound hope in her voice for the first time in a long time, "You accomplished everything you set out to do. Even kept the peace in Stockton and Oakland ... Don't you see how close you are to have it all? Your family and your club?"

Jax stepped away from her and shook his head, "I can't do that to her? She's been through enough ... too much has happened."

"But she came through, ... because of you, and because of this club. The health insurance, that paid for those fancy doctors and those precious machines that were keeping her alive, you paid that with money earned through this club. Everything you did for her, you were able to do because of this club, not in spite of it, Sweetheart. This club is what kept her alive and brought her back to you." Gemma said with conviction in her voice, hoping she could get through to her son. Her heart beating wildly in her chest at the mere thought of getting everything back that she had lost.

"This club is also what almost killed her ... after I had promised her time and again that we'd leave here, but it was too late." He looked up then and met his mother's eyes, "This isn't what she wants. Not for herself, and not for the boys."

"And what about what you want?" Gemma asked incredulously.

"I want her." Jax said without missing a beat. "If I have to choose between the club and the woman that I love, I'm choosing her. I won't make the same mistakes again." He answered her solemnly, despite the obvious irritation he could see beginning to show on her face once more.

"But -" Gemma tried to interject, but Jax cut her off before she could utter another word when he raised his voice in anger once more, "I'm so fucking sick and tired of having the same argument. I've made a choice and I'm sticking to it. I decided to leave, and I'm leaving. End of discussion!"

"Jesus Christ." Gemma cursed under her breath, as she realized once more that she was in a losing battle after all, Tara had taken it all. "I mean, is she really that good? Is that why ATF followed her back here from Chicago, 'cause she's got some magical tricks up her pussy?"

"Watch it." Jax interjected and shot his mother a look that conveyed the anger brewing in his own eyes now at that remark. "I think we're done here."

"Jax!" Gemma pleaded with him, but the look in Jax's eyes had turned stone cold within a split second, and she realized she had clearly taken it too far.

"Don't say another fuckin' word, mom, or I'll promise you, you're gonna regret it." Jax said, his voice was heavy and grim as he threw daggers at her with his eyes, conveying just how furious he was about the way she'd disrespected his wife. "Just go."
Gemma swallowed the sudden lump in her throat, and nodded when she saw the look in his eyes. She knew she'd pushed Jax too far this time, and followed his advice and strutted out the door without looking back or uttering another word.

Jax angrily slammed the door shut after his mother had left the room and sat down onto the sofa, that stood in the same spot where his old bed used to be.

He sighed, let his head drop back and closed his eyes, trying to lose some of that tension he still felt after this confrontation with the woman who had raised him.

But then his head snapped up in obvious surprise when he heard the bathroom door to his left creak as it opened and none other than Tara herself appeared in the doorframe.

His face fell in utter defeat at the sight of her, but he remained seated while he stared back at her from across the room.

"Sorry." Tara said and smiled ruefully. "The other bathroom was occupied, so I came in here." She tried to explain.

A beat or two passed before he decided to ask the obvious, "I'm guessing you heard all that?"

"Most of it." Tara admitted, before she stepped further into the room, and slowly settled onto the couch right beside him. She couldn't help herself from pursing her lips in slight amusement, "Definitely heard the bit about my magical pussy."

Jax scoffed and shook his head, "I'm sorry, babe."

She could hear the sorrow and heaviness in his voice and she simply couldn't help herself from moving closer to him, and resting her head against his shoulder. "It's not your fault, Jax. You don't have to apologize for her."

"It feels like I should though." He quickly replied honestly.

Tara reached up then, her palm on his cheek to get him to look over at her, "Is she right thought ... about the tattoo? Is that why you still have it, because you're not sure?" That still lingering fear had reared its ugly head again, and bubbled back up to stare her right in the face when she'd overheard the discussion between Gemma and him. Here we go ... one step forward, three steps back!

"Babe." Jax reached for her now, snaking his arm around her and his eyes bore into hers, "I'm sure of what I want. You and me and our boys, that's what I want."

"But?" Tara supplied for him to finish his thought, when she couldn't help but feel he'd left something out.

Jax swallowed hard, and a slight frown graced his unshaven face, "But I just need you to give me a minute to let go of the past, and to let go of the reaper."

Tara nodded, but she couldn't shake Gemma's words and if there was any truth behind it, "So what Gemma said -."

"Forget what Gemma said." Jax cut her off before she could finish that thought. "My mom has a tendency to set fires where there's nothing to burn. She's not in my head. The reaper doesn't mean what she thinks it means, I promise." He stared at her until Tara finally nodded that she understood, but even then, Jax could still see that lingering doubt having resurfaced in her eyes. "Everything I've been saying and promising you is the goddamn truth, babe. Nothing's changed, I know what I want,
so please don't let my mom stir shit up again between us, and derail where this thing with us is heading."

She let those words sink in for a long moment as she held his penetrating gaze, and to Jax's relief she finally nodded and said, "Nothing's been derailed." She smiled slightly at her own words.

And Jax smiled right back at her, his hand curled around her neck and pulled her closer to him before his lips crushed against hers in a much needed kiss to reassure him that Gemma's words hadn't left any lingering damage in the progress they had made.

Any doubt was vanished when Tara kissed him back with such a force that all his blood seemingly rushed south in the blink of an eye, as if the two places were connected by just one nerve, mouth straight to dick.

It didn't help when she wrapped her arms around him and fisted her hands in his long hair to hold him even closer, while the kiss continued to grow even more passionately.

Jax's hands traveled down to the curve of her hips, he grunted against her mouth when he hoisted her up and pulled her into his lap to straddle him instead.

The kiss intensified even more when Jax pulled her further against himself at the same moment he began to grind up against her, causing Tara to moan at the sensation that began to spread through her.

But then she pulled away from him, nervously brushed her hair back that had fallen into her face before she braced a hand against Jax's chest, and met his longing eyes, "The kissing, is one thing, ... but I don't know if we should be doing this, Jax ... it just makes it harder." She said in all seriousness.

But Jax's face instantly cracked into a big amused smile at her choice of words and he couldn't help but chuckle before he replied, "It does make things very hard." He bucked his erection up against her for good measure, acting every bit like a teenager half his age.

Tara couldn't help but smirk herself at his obvious pun, then his hands left her hips and framed her face instead before he leaned in to kiss her once more. But right before his lips brushed against hers, he stopped and said, "Don't over think it, babe." He playfully kissed the tip of her nose and pulled back again to look in her eyes, before a mischievous grin spread across his face, "Just consider it foreplay."

X

Author's Note: I hope nobody seems too OOC, and you all enjoy it. Please leave me a few words and let me know what you all think. Thank you.
Chapter 28

Tara stood in front of her mother's grave for a long silent minute, while Jax stood beside her, equally as tongue-tied as she was. She stepped forward then, kneeled down, brushed some leaves and dirt off of the headstone, before she put the flowers she'd brought down on the ground in front of it. She whispered an almost inaudible "I love you, mom", before she quickly stood again and swiped some loose dirt off of her knees.

They'd already stopped by the graves of everyone else that mattered to them, and Tara's mom's grave was the last one they had wanted to visit.

Tara stepped back beside Jax and reached for his hand, intertwined her fingers with his, before she looked back up at him and with just a look and a silent nod, they both turned and began walking back towards the gravel road where Jax had parked his truck.

The drive back to Medford was long, and traffic was grueling, but unlike the gloomy drive down to Charming, they'd talked and laughed out loud for hours as they reminisced about their childhood or sang along to songs from their past on the radio. But regardless of how much fun they've had, and how temporarily all their troubles were forgotten, both were relieved to be back home again soon.

So now Jax slowly backed his truck onto the fenced in lot behind Baker's Automotives, before he climbed out to unhook the trailer to leave there overnight.

In the meantime Tara was on the phone with Christy, who was reassuring her for the hundredth time today, that it would be perfectly fine if the boys spend one more night over there. After all, it was already really late, and the boys had been fast asleep for hours, and there was simply no use in dragging their little butts out of bed in the middle of the night for no good reason.

Tara ended the conversation and hung up the phone, just as Jax climbed out to unhook the trailer to leave there overnight.

"So?" He asked with a quick glance over at her before he turned his attention back at the road ahead of him. "Am I headin' straight home, or are we picking the boys up first?"

"Straight home." Tara answered solemnly, and turned her head the other way, appearing to look at something outside the passenger side window, but she was really just trying to avoid the flirtatious look he undoubtedly was giving her right now.

Her skin began to tingle every time she let her mind wander back to their make-out sessions from earlier today, and Jax had made it known repeatedly that he felt the same way too. It showed in the way he had looked at her throughout the day, with that mischievous, yet heart melting twinkle in his baby blue eyes, and that never-ending smile on his face. The way he touched her every chance he
got, his arm around her shoulder, or draped around her waist as they walked, always reaching over, to take her hand in his in the truck, along the way.

And then of course the kisses he's been giving her at every opportunity. He'd leaned over and kissed her before he got out to pump some gas, and then again when they had stopped to get a bite to eat. He was acting every bit the part of someone madly in love, and truth be told, so was she. But now that they were headed home alone, it made her nervous and made her heart beat out of her chest all over again.

So if she was being honest with herself, she was just a tad bit terrified about what would or could happen, now that they'd find themselves alone, with no kids, no Sam Crow, and no Gemma to interrupt them.

She'd predicted that if she'd give in a little, he'd end up expecting much more, and now she feared she'd been right about that and that she'd have no choice but to tell him all over again to let him know, that despite what he'd called foreplay earlier, she simply wasn't ready yet to take that next step.

Jax pulled the truck into an empty parking spot across the street from their apartment, and they both climbed out at the same time. He carried their overnight bag up to the door, with his arm draped around Tara, while she unlocked the door in silence.

The silence continued when they finally stepped into the apartment itself.

Both of them were tired, not just from the long drive home, but the stressful past week in general, so they got ready to settle down for the night, considering it was already pretty late. After a quick awkward, yet flirtatious talk back and forth, it was decided that Tara could have the bathroom to shower first, and Jax would wait his turn.

X

Tara sat on her bed, looking at her reflection in the mirror as she carefully combed the tangles out of her still damp hair, when there was an almost inaudible knock on her bedroom door.

"Come in." She said, clutching the comb in her hand as she turned her head in the direction of the door that opened, and her heart began to pick up the pace again at the sight of him.

"What's up?" She managed to ask, as Jax stood in the doorway, wearing nothing but a pair of black boxer briefs, and a towel draped around his neck. His hair looked adorably disheveled and was still dripping wet, and if the look on his face was any indication, he knew exactly what he was doing to her showing up looking like that ... but so did she.

He let his eyes wander around the room for a split-second, then looked her up and down, before his eyes finally landed on her face and met her eyes in return, "What time are we picking the boys up? Do I need to set an alarm?"

Tara put the comb down and swiped her hand over her face as she tried to focus on what he'd said, "Um ... no, she said she'd call once they're up, you know, play it by ear. But knowing our sons, it'll probably be pretty early."

"Alright." He nodded, but didn't move to leave. "You're turning in then?" He asked, eyeing her curiously, but with a hint of a smirk tugging at the corners of his lips.

"Yeah." Tara nodded, and bashfully tucked her grey robe closed around her under the scrutinizing look he was giving her, which honestly was such a useless thing to do since he'd seen her wearing a
whole lot less, than she was wearing now, the night before. "You?" She asked in return.

"Yeah." He replied, but then a smirk appeared on his face as he playfully tapped his fingers against the wooden doorframe for a few seconds, "Wanna fool around for a bit?"

Tara tried to look surprised, but honestly, she wasn't. "Jax." She said pleadingly, but when she saw him step further into the room towards her, she quickly got up and stepped towards him before he could even make it to her bed. She raised her hands up to signal him to stop. "Wait."

But Jax reached out and grabbed her by her waist, tugging her closer to him, "Is that a no?" His eyes still sparkled mischievously, but his voice didn't sound quite as playful anymore.

"I'm sorry ... I can't." Tara said, both her hands flat against his bare chest, as if they could ever be enough of an adequate barrier between them. "I really don't think we should."

Jax could see the way her breathing had quickened, the way her eyebrows drew together in worry, along with the slight look of panic in her eyes when he had dared to step towards her.

She wasn't just flustered like he'd first thought, but now he realized she was scared, and it broke his heart to know that he made her feel this way. But in general, for the most part today had been a good day and he truly didn't want to end it now on a sour note.

"Look, babe, you don't have to be scared of me ... not ever." The look on his face grew serious, "You know I'd never do anything you don't want me to do ... or force you into something you don't wanna do."

"I know." Tara nodded at that, but lowered her gaze, avoiding his eyes for a moment. "It's just not quite that simple." She added, her voice wavering when she spoke.

Jax drew his eyebrows together now, and gave her a confused look, his hands leaving her waist and framed her face instead, forcing her to look back up at him, "What do you mean by that?"

Tara sighed at that while she let his reassuring words from moments ago sink in for a moment, "It means that I do want you ... so much, Jax. And it means that I miss being with you ... but I'm trying really fucking hard here to listen to the parts of my brain that still work.

She slightly shook her head at him, her eyes looked up at him worried once more, "I'm scared, because we always tend to fall back into the same patterns, same routine. And right now my brain is practically still screaming at me to not be this stupid again, and to get off ... or rather stay off this merry-go-round of heartbeat. I just feel that us fooling-around like that makes it look to you like there's a blurred line, when in my head it's a definite solid line instead."

"First of, darlin', I happen to be a very patient man, and I'll wait however long it takes for your brain to stop screaming at you." He said and smiled broadly at her, trying his best to ease some of those vertical worry lines that appeared between her eyebrows whenever she was thinking way too hard.

"And second, all you gotta do is speak up, babe. If you don't want me grabbing your ass, or slipping my hand under your shirt ... or any of that stuff, all you gotta do is say 'no' or 'stop' or 'don't do that'. There's nothing blurry about any of those words. And third, if that smart mouth of yours is any indication, seems to me all the parts of your brain are working just fine."

She couldn't help herself from smiling just a little at what he had said and folded her arms in front of herself. His hands dropped back down to her waist, and with her arms folded she had to arch her back a little because he was still trying to hold her too close.
"First of, darlin'." She mimicked his words, and raised her eyebrows at him in amusement, "You are not a patient man, as a matter of fact you are probably the most impatient man I've ever met. Second, ..." She paused for a moment, trying to figure out the best way to word it. "I'm worried I might get caught up in the moment, and then will end up regretting what happened afterwards. And third, we'll see on Wednesday just how well my brain is still working."

He had matched her smile with his own, but at the last of her words the smile suddenly disappeared from his face altogether, "Wait ... what's on Wednesday?"

Tara angled her head to the side just a fraction of an inch and looked up at him, "I'm having a PET scan on Monday morning, and hopefully my doctor can squeeze me in on my lunch break on Wednesday to go over the results." She could see the worry in his eyes, so she quickly added, "It's just a routine check-up, after the kind of injury I've sustained."

"I'll be there, on Wednesday, just let me know what time, alright?" He replied and nodded reassuringly back at her, the previous topic of conversation suddenly all but forgotten.

"It's really nothing." Tara tried to brush it off, "You really don't have to come with me."

"I'll be there." Jax said without missing a beat. "I've already missed most of your check-ups, I ain't missing any more if I can help it."

"Okay." Tara nodded and managed to muster a friendly smile. "It's getting late. We should probably get some sleep."

"Probably." Jax nodded in agreement, but still didn't move to leave. "Is it alright if I kissed you?"

At that Tara actually smiled, before she nodded when she looked back up at him, "Yeah, that would be alright."

That was all she had to say before Jax's hands curled around her neck to hold her in place when he bend down to claim her lips with his. Tara's arms snaked up his chest and wrapped around his neck, holding him in place just the same, when the kiss quickly turned more intense and passionate. A few minutes later, Jax reluctantly pulled back from the kiss, but stood still and leaned his forehead against hers.

His voice sounded raspy with need, but his arms dropped down to his sides when he reluctantly let go of her again, "Sweet dreams, babe." He leaned in and kissed her forehead sweetly before their eyes met one last time.

Tara let her arms drop down as well, she had to fight the urge to pull him back against her again. "Good night."

Jax took her hand as he began to head for the door, and Tara followed along with him. He stepped out of the room, and just when Tara was about to shut the door, he turned back around and smirked right at her, "Hey, and don't be alarmed if you hear any weird noises out here, it's just gonna be me and my hand."

"Nice, Teller, real nice." Tara smirked in return and rolled her eyes at him exaggeratedly, "Thank you very much for putting that image in my head." And folded her arms once more.

He laughed. "You're very welcome." He quickly leaned back in and gave her a peck on the lips, before he pulled back and winked at her as he said, grinning ear to ear now, "It's only fair, since there'll be nothing but images of you in my head."
"Oh lucky me." She replied sarcastically, and proceeded to shut the door in his amused face before this conversation went any further.

"Don't be stupid." She mumbled under her breath to herself before she shrugged out of her grey robe, tossed it over the footboard of her bed and quietly climbed beneath the covers. Cursing him in her head as she struggled to find the rest she so desperately needed.

X

A scream from Tara's bedroom woke Jax up with a start. It only took him a second before he realized that he wasn't dreaming, so he jumped to his feet and bolted into her room, with his heart beating out of his chest at the thought what he might find.

To his relief though, what he found wasn't someone attacking her, but rather Tara trashing, and moaning in obvious distress, with her eyes wide open. And even though he'd flicked on the lights, she literally seemed to look right through him, like he wasn't right there in front of her at all.

"Tara." He quickly leaned over her and reached out, grabbing her rather roughly by her shoulders, trying to shake her awake, "Jesus Christ, babe, wake up. You're having a nightmare."

But Tara cried out once more the moment he'd touched her, and now struggled even more against him, her hands balled into little fists as she struck out erratically around her.

"Wake up. It's just me." Jax wrapped his arms around her then and pulled her roughly against his chest. "It's just a dream, Sweetheart. It's just a dream." One hand spread around the back of her head, pressing her cheek against his shoulder, trying to get her to calm down. "Wake up, baby. Wake up."

She still struggled for another long moment while he continued to talk to her, but it seemed like much longer to him. When she finally seemed to relax against his chest, he dared to pull back and looked down at her. "Hey." He tipped her chin up to get her to look up at him.

Tara blinked and looked utterly dazed and confused, she shook her head as her eyes drifted from Jax's face around the room, "What happened?" She asked, not understanding how she came to be in his arms.

"You were dreaming, baby." Jax tried to explain, his face etched with concern, his right hand reached up and brushed her tousled hair out of her face for her. "You had a nightmare. I woke up 'cause you were screaming ... scared the fucking shit out of me."

Tara swallowed the lump in her throat, and gently braced her hands against his chest, trying to pull away from him, "I'm sorry." Still not really understanding what had happened, but she tried to sound like she did, "I'm okay though. You can let go."

She looked up at him and met his worried look, "Really, baby, I'm fine."

"Well, I'm not." Jax quipped back and pulled her back into his arms when he let out the breath he'd been holding, his heart still pounding wildly in his chest. "Jesus Christ, babe. I thought Juice or ... someone got in here somehow."

She didn't really know what exactly to say to that and just rested her head against his shoulder, allowing him to hold her for a little bit until both their heartbeats began to slow down again, when the contents of her nightmare began to come back to her.

Finally Jax pulled back a little and looked down at her again, "Want me to get you some water or something?"
Tara sighed, smiling gratefully but shook her head, "No, thanks, I'm really fine."

Jax ran his hand slowly up and down her back, trying to soothe her some more, she still looked way too stressed out for his liking, "Wanna talk about the nightmare?"

"No. It's really nothing new." She shook her head at herself in frustration, averting her eyes from his when she lowered her head.

But Jax wouldn't let up. "Well, I'm still kinda new 'round here, babe, so why don't you fill me in?"

Tara hesitated for a moment, still not daring to look up at him when she finally spoke, almost mumbling the words so that Jax could barely make them out, "I'm just dreaming of the attack, it's sort of the same nightmare over and over again."

"You're dreaming of Juice attacking you?" Jax felt the need to clarify that he heard her right.

But to his surprise Tara shook her head at him, "It's not always Juice. I've had the same dream pretty much about every member of the club."

Jax now tipped her chin back up to force her to meet his eyes, before he asked, "Including me?"

"Uh-huh." Tara nodded and tried to sound casually, but she could see the hurt that flashed through his eyes for a second at the thought of it.

"Was it me tonight?" Jax tried not to grit his teeth at the thought, but he couldn't help but wonder if he'd pushed her just a little bit too much these last couple of days to have caused this. He remembered Abel mentioning her having nightmares, but this was the first time since he'd moved in that she had cried out in her sleep.

"No, it wasn't you." Tara quickly reassured him and vehemently shook her head, before she reached up to palm his cheek, "It's really nothing, I swear. My therapist said it's normal after trauma ... these dreams are just my brain trying to fill in the blanks."

Jax sighed, and swiped a hand down his face, cursing under his breath. "Jesus Christ." He could leave Sam Crow, find a job, move in here, be a good father, and a faithful husband, but even after all that, there was still so much shit he couldn't fix no matter what he did.

He couldn't make her trust him, couldn't convince her to let him back in ... and now, after what he'd just witnessed it all made a whole lot more sense, because even though she looked perfectly like her old beautiful self on the outside, the inside of her head was a whole other story.

She was not alright. Not by a long shot.

He knew he probably shouldn't ask the question, but he simply couldn't help himself. Like this masochistic part of him wanted to suffer through this alongside with her. "So who was it this time?"

Tara hesitated again and swallowed the lump in her throat, but she knew Jax wouldn't let up until she answered, so she did, "Gemma." She averted her eyes again, still feeling ashamed for having falsely accused her mother-in-law during the whole fake miscarriage debacle, and this admission just brought all those ugly feelings right back up.

At that Jax simply pulled her back into his arms, running his hand soothingly down her back again trying to console her. "I'm sorry ... I'm so so sorry." He smoothed his other hand down her hair, kissed her temple before he whispered, guilt-stricken, "I wish I fucking knew how to make all this go away. How to fix it."
“I know. Me too.” Tara mumbled in agreement against the crook of his neck. They sat like that for a few moments longer, before Tara finally looked up at him. "I think I'm gonna try to go back to sleep."

"Okay." Jax said and reluctantly released her from his embrace before he stood.

He tucked her in, pulling the blanket up to her chest as if she was a child, and despite everything Tara couldn't help but smile at the sweet gesture.

"Good night, babe." Jax said and leaned down to kiss her on her forehead.

"G'night." Tara replied, and reached up just as he was pulling away and pulled his face back down to hers, placing a soft kiss against his lips instead.

X

Jax tossed and turned on the couch, again unable to find the rest he so desperately needed.

He finally gave in and reached for his phone on the end table beside the couch, using google to ease his worries, but everything he read online about nightmares, night-terrors and the like, only seemed to feed his concern more.

Aggravated he tossed the phone back onto the table, closed his eyes, willing himself to stop thinking about it all, when Tara's bedroom door slowly opened with a creak.

Jax's head snapped up and looked over to see her step into the living room. He was just about to speak, when she beat him to it.

"I can't sleep." Her voice was heavy with emotions, and even though he couldn't really tell in the darkness of the room, he'd bet his last dollar she'd been crying. "I know it sounds weird, but I usually pull the boys in bed with me after a nightmare." She cautiously confessed.

"Come here, babe." Jax propped himself up on his elbow and reached his other hand out to her. Without another word being exchanged she simple stepped towards him, took his hand and let him pull her onto the couch and under his blanket right beside him.

Jax savored the moment, breathing in the scent of her hair, with her face nuzzled in the crook of his neck and her body so comfortably draped across his. Legs tangled with each other, one of his hands pressed against her back and holding her tight, one of her hands flat against his chest while she nestled into his side. Their bodies molded together so effortlessly as if no time had passed.

He waited until her breathing had evened out, and he knew without a doubt that she'd finally fallen asleep in his arms, before he closed his eyes and eventually drifted off to sleep himself. And in spite of the messed up circumstances that lead to this moment, he thought himself lucky to have her lying beside him for the second night in a row. After all, falling asleep in each other's arms was what he wanted to happen for the rest of their lives.

X

Author's Note: I hope you liked it and will leave me a few words. Thank you.
Chapter 29

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A faint ringing echoed through the apartment and Jax blindly patted the side table behind him with his free hand for his phone, until he realized it wasn't his that was making unpleasant the noise.

"Babe." He nudged Tara's forehead with his nose, who was still curled into his side. "It's you. It's probably Christy." He mumbled groggily.

"Probably." Tara groaned while she slowly sat up, then stood and rather sleepily stumbled towards her bedroom to answer the call, while Jax watched after her retrieving form.

Jax sighed as he sat up, swiped both hands down his face rubbing the sleep from his eyes, before he pushed his hands through his disheveled hair. He could hear Tara on the phone, and from the few words he's caught, it was indeed Christy who was calling.

He stood and rifled through the overnight bag they hadn't bothered to unpack the night before, and pulled out a clean pair of underwear, before he shuffled almost listless past Tara's bedroom into the bathroom. He peed and washed his hands before he splashed some water onto his face to fully wake himself up. He then pulled off his grey sweats and black briefs, discarded them into the hamper before he quickly stepped into the clean pair of briefs instead.

On his way back to the living room, he stopped in Tara's doorway for a moment, and when she looked up at him, he made a motion with his fingers to his lips, to signal he was going to have a smoke, to which Tara simply nodded her head before she returned her attention back towards the phone conversation she was having.

Jax got dressed in under a minute, reached for his keys and his cigarettes on the table and was out the door.

Instead of heading downstairs though, he headed for the smoking spot Tara had shown him, that the majority of the residents here used. So he took the staircase up another two levels, hurriedly stepped down the hallway that had been under construction since before he'd gotten here, and stepped through the door that lead outside to the patio area.

It wasn't anything fancy, but it had some lawn chairs to sit in, a table and an ashtray, and most of the concrete floor was covered in a green outdoor carpet with some potted plants scattered here and there, that one of the residents attended to. It was supposed to give the illusion of grass and make it seem more inviting, like a small garden of some sort then just a slap of cold concrete.

Jax sat and shielded his lighter from the wind with his hand when he tried to light his cigarette. He inhaled the fumes, threw the lighter on the table next to his pack of cigarettes and leaned back in his chair, as he took in the view, even thought there wasn't much to see.

He sat in silence, and tried to enjoy the nicotine hitting his system, but pretty much the moment that phone call had woke him up, his mind went back to last night and everything that was going on with Tara. He realized now just how fucking wrong he had been to think that everything would be fine
and work itself out, if he'd only get her to forgive him.

The truth was, that whatever Juice had done to her, had caused way more damage than he had realized. The bodily harm she had suffered through was just the tip of the fucking iceberg, this shit ran way deeper and once more he found himself at a loss.

And if he was completely honest with himself, he knew that deep down he couldn't blame it all on Juice either, because god knows that woman had been put through the ringer over the past couple of years. Long before Juice ever decided to go after her.

There were moments when Jax almost wished Lowen hadn't fucking shared Tara's horror-notes with him, because it still gutted him every time he thought about what she had written. It wasn't so much what she described in those notes, because for the most part he was aware of everything that had happened, what had gutted him was read it in her own words just how terrified and haunted she was during those times.

Another thing that had crushed him was to see it in her own handwriting, but how shaky it was, and every time he read over her words, he couldn't help but wonder if it was because her hand wasn't all the way healed just yet, or if it was because she was terrified in the moments when she was writing those words. Locked up in county while he was busy screwing Colette behind her back. Even if Tara could find it in her heart to ever forgive him for that, he wasn't sure he could ever forgive himself for the things he'd done to her.

He also couldn't help himself but ponder over the fact that to his knowledge she hadn't had any nightmares since he'd first gotten here, but now, after their little trip back to Charming, the nightmare had suddenly reappeared with a vengeance. Surely that wasn't a coincidence.

But then again, over the last few days, he'd also pushed her more. Some might even say he had taken advantage of her moment of weakness when she'd kissed him, had taken that kiss of hers to the next level. So who's to say it was Charming, Gemma or the Club that brought all those demons back up last night ... it could very well have been him who'd simply taken it too far. If he was completely honest, there really wasn't a line she had drawn that he hadn't crossed yet, ... well, with the exception of that pivotal one!

On the upside, it had been so fucking nice to fall asleep with her in his arms. But at what cost?

The heavy metal door creaked when Tara stepped sideways out onto the patio with two steaming mugs in her hands, using her hip and ass to push the door open enough to step through. "Hey."

"Hey." Jax looked up as he replied and smiled at the sight of her.

It never ceased to amaze him just how beautiful she looked, even without a drop of make-up on, like she did right now. He quickly stubbed out the remainder of his smoke, got up out of his chair and reached for the cup of coffee she was holding out to him.

"Thanks, babe." He put the cup of coffee down on the table and pulled the other chair out for her to take a seat right beside him.

"You're welcome." Tara answered, and settled into the chair, pulling her legs up onto the seat to get comfortable.

"It's cold out today." She said as she pulled up the neckline of her oversized sweater, that had slipped down her shoulder, then clutched the mug with both hands before she raised it to her lips and took a small sip.
"Yeah. I think the wind up here is making it worse." He nodded as he looked over at her, and ideas of how he could warm her up began to pop into his head, but he knew there was no time for any of that. And besides, he needed to stop pushing her. "So is it time to go get our little monsters?" Jax shot her a smirk, before he too took a sip of his steaming beverage.

"Yes, they're up. Christy's making them breakfast right now." Tara answered, but then looked over at him cautiously, "But actually, I was thinking, would you be okay if we invited Christy and Jason over?"

Jax raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Today?"

"Yeah." Tara nodded, "They've been so great watching the kids for us this weekend. I thought we could go get some take-out later, maybe play some cards .. you know. And honestly, we've all been so busy, I can't remember the last time I've spend any time with them outside of work."

"Sure, if that's what you want." He answered in agreement, even though he really wasn't feeling like having company today. He'd actually looked forward to the fact that it would be just them and their boys.

He fished a cigarette out of his pack of smokes, and held the pack up to Tara, who pulled one out as well. Tara leaned in and he lit hers first, then he lit his, before they continued their conversation.

Tara had seen the reluctance in his eyes when he'd answered her, but after the last couple of days, she really needed some time to talk out her feelings with someone other than him. For the most part, Christy was a great listener, she was supportive, and most importantly, she never held back calling Tara out on her bullshit. She needed some of that clarity today, because everything was just getting to her.

He was getting to her.

Ever since she'd been stupid enough to kiss him, she'd craved his lips on hers, his arms around her, his touch, even more than she had before, and it terrified her so much. She was like an addict, and he was the drug she wasn't supposed to indulge in. Which was much easier said than done, if she wasn't around him twenty-four seven.

So even though he had already agreed, she continued to further sell him on the idea, "Jason could help you unload the bikes, and you could actually return the trailer today, instead of wasting your lunch break tomorrow to do it."

Jax exhaled and nodded, but stared off into the distance instead of meeting her eyes, "Alright."

She could tell he wasn't thrilled, but they had practically sat on each other since they left for Charming early Friday morning, she needed to get some time away, even if just for one hour to get Christy to put her head on straight again.

Tara took a long drag, and slowly exhaled, as she tried to bring up another thing she'd been thinking about since her conversation with Christy from a few minutes ago. "So Christy's neighbors down the street died on Friday. Some drunk driver plowed through the intersection, they both died at the scene."

"Shit." Jax said and actually looked over at her now. "Were they close?"

Tara shook her head, "No, not really. But they had two little ones, a boy and a girl, and some family members from out of town are gonna take them in now, or at least that's what Christy heard from another neighbor. And ... I guess it just made me think again, about what would happen to the boys
if something would happen to us."

At that Jax shot her a look she couldn't quite decipher, before he looked away and took another drag from his cigarette. "I've got papers on file with Lowen. If anything happened to both of us, Margaret and her husband would get the boys."

Tara shook her head, "I don't think those papers are valid anymore, since I was in a coma at the time and you were acting as my proxy, but now that I'm awake, I'd have to sign off on that. So technically, the boys would be up for grabs if something would happen before we get all of that straightened out."

He looked over at her then, "Then let's get Lowen to write something up again, and we both sign it. Should be easy enough."

"But maybe Margaret isn't the right person anymore." Tara suddenly blurted out.

Jax's eyes met hers, his eyebrows raised to new heights, and he tried to read the expression on her face, "Are you serious?"

Tara shook her head, "Sorry, that came out wrong. I love Margaret, and the boys love her, but we both know if both of us were out of the picture, Gemma would never let her raise those boys in peace. The only reason she stayed away last time, was because you made sure that she would."

Jax sighed in obvious frustration, not liking at all where this conversation was headed. He didn't want to fight, especially not about Gemma. There was simply too much other shit he was currently worried about. "You really wanna do this now, babe?"

"We have to talk about this." Tara said with equal frustration, and leaned forward hastily to stub her cigarette out in the ashtray, before clutching her mug with two hands again, "We can't just keep hoping for the best, it doesn't work like that when you have kids, Jax. Even if we both think that we're gonna live to be a hundred, we still have to prepare for what could happen."

"I know." Jax said and swiped a hand down his face and sighed, "I think this time we can both agree that Wendy isn't the right person for the job either."

"Agreed." Tara nodded. "That was my mistake."

Jax thought about it for a long moment, then said, "What if we still made Margaret their guardian, but allowed Gemma visitation, so she'd at least get to see them. Put it all down in writing, have it filed with the court."

He looked up at Tara and saw the disbelieving look in her eyes, "I know that shit with you and her still runs deep, but despite everything she's said and done, you know that she loves those boys with everything she's got."

Jax knew he was treading on thin ice with this conversation, but when his mind went back to how Gemma had broken down and cried in his arms just yesterday, he knew he had to bring it up. "If both you and I were gone for good, don't they have a right to at least grow up knowing their only living grandparent?"

Tara couldn't believe her ears, but in hindsight she should've seen this coming. Gemma was a master manipulator, so there was no doubt she'd weasel her way back into their lives sooner or later. But her feelings about her mother-in-law hadn't changed one bit, and she knew that she didn't want Gemma to have any part in her babies lives.
But she also knew, she needed to get Jax to see it the same way, "I know she loves them, just like she loves you, but she clearly doesn't love them enough to leave Charming, or leave the club and the life. And let's not forget that she basically wanted me to just disappear, so she could raise my babies to become part of Sam Crow, like she'd done with you. She would use every minute she'd get to spend with them grooming them to prospect and eventually patch in, and you know that."

Jax remained quiet, he knew Tara was right.

But Tara mistook Jax's silence as a sign that he disagreed, so she quickly added, "Let's not forget that she almost killed them, driving drunk and high. And I get that she didn't want to miss out on time with them, I get all of that, Jax, but there were a million different ways she could've handled that situation. She could've had Lyla, even one of the other girls, or one of the prospects drop the boys off at her house, instead of getting behind the wheel herself in the state she was in."

Tara shook her head in disbelief. "And I thought you agreed with me, when we stood there watching them fix Abel's heart because of what she had done? If it hadn't been for you needing her help to get to Clay, we wouldn't even be having this conversation."

"I know." Jax replied, running his hands down his face before he added, "I know you're right, babe ... about everything. I just think, she's so lost ... she could've left Charming, be with Nero in Norco, but instead she's just struggling, she's a mess. And even after everything that has happened, she's still my mom, and I hate to see her like this." He answered truthfully.

The fact that Gemma had managed to make him doubt his decision to still keep her from their boys for even a second, brought all that pent up anger she'd held onto since the day she was arrested right back to the surface. "And I am their mom, Jackson, and I just can't have her back in their lives. Not after everything that happened, after she almost killed Abel, or the way she has treated me, and threatened me. I swear, baby, you don't even know the half of it." She gave Jax a look that reflected just how serious she was about all of this.

"And why is that?" Jax raised his voice slightly, catching her off guard, and looked frustrated all over again. The last thing he wanted to do right now was argue with her, but he needed to say this, "You do realize that most of the shit between you and her could've been avoided or resolved, if you had just talked to me, and had told me everything." There was a long pause, but when Tara didn't speak up, Jax did.

"So what else don't I know that she's done?" He surprised her with a much gentler tone again. "Why don't you tell me now?"

At that, Tara looked up at him apprehensively, but the look in his eyes conveyed that he was dead serious. She thought about the events of the day she'd gotten arrested, Gemma's threat and attack, the one that ultimately lead her to come up with the plan about the miscarriage.

She swallowed the lump it caused in her throat, and pinched the bridge of her nose, wondering where or how to even start. She'd held Gemma's ugly words inside of her for so long now, never
thought in a million years she'd repeat them to anyone out loud. "When I got arrested, earlier that same day, she ... she'd somehow found out that I had accepted the Providence offer up in Oregon. She showed up at my office to confront me about it. We argued. She said if I dared to set foot out of Charming, she'd tell the investigators that it was my idea to bring the crucifix to Otto, that it was my plan for him to kill the nurse with it in order to kill RICO."

"Jesus Christ." Jax cursed out loud interrupting her, and practically flung himself out of his chair, trying his best to contain his anger. He hurriedly stubbed his smoke out, turned back towards her and looked right at her, "That's why you thought she was the one that had ratted you out?"

"Yes." Tara nodded, "But that's not all. Um ... she said she'd get satisfaction out of knowing that I'd be locked up and fists raped every night until the boys were in their twenties. I kinda lost it, grabbed her by the throat, but she punched me in the stomach, then said she hoped I wasn't pregnant. Who in their right mind would want someone like that raising their babies?"

"Why the fuck didn't you tell me any of this?" Jax blurted out, his cheeks suddenly flaming red in anger now.

"I was going to tell you, the night I was arrested. I was going to show you the bruise she'd left behind." She blurted right back at him, "But all you saw was that I was pushing Wendy as a guardian, and I felt like nothing I could've said was going to get through to you." Tara's eyes began to fill with tears, but she fought to keep them at bay. "Before I got a chance to explain to you what had happened, and why I chose Wendy over Gemma, Roosevelt showed up." Tara hid her face in her hands and sobbed, no longer able to keep her emotions under control as all those feelings from that moment came rushing back to her.

Jax wiped at his eyes now too, the guilt he'd already been feeling about that night came on tenfold now that he knew the whole truth. He stepped closer towards her, reached for her, pulling her hands from her face and pulled her up to her feet, before he wrapped his arms around her in a tight embrace.

They stood silently like this for several long minutes, with Jax running a soothing hand up and down her back, just like he had done the night before. Then Jax pulled back, releasing her out of his arms and looked down at her, "Babe. You should've told me."

Tara looked up at him and nodded. "I wasn't sure if you'd even believe me."

"Of course I'd believe you. When have I ever not believed you?" Another pause, while he gently pushed her hair out of her face, as all the puzzle pieces in his head began to click into place.

His mind went back to the notes she'd made about all the horrible things that had happened, yet this encounter with his mother wasn't in the notes, but he'd already figured out why. "That's how you came up with the whole miscarriage idea." He further inquired, his eyes not leaving hers, but he didn't wait for her to answer. "You figured she'd attack you like she had before, except the plan failed because she thought you were actually pregnant, so she held back."

"Yes." Tara answered solemnly, thankful that the tears had stopped falling again. "I'm sorry, Jax." For so so many things.

Jax palmed her face with his hands and leaned forward to kiss her forehead, before he spoke again. "Is there anything else you haven't told me, that you probably should have?"

Tara lowered her head and leaned her forehead against his chest, taking a few seconds to think. "I was the one that beat up Carla on the day of Opie's wake." She ruefully confessed. "Not Gemma,
like everyone just assumed."

"What?" Jax tipped her face up by her chin, trying to look her in the eye. "Why?" His face contorted in confusion, eyebrows drawn together as he tried to read the answer in her eyes.

Tara scoffed, she had so many different reasons why, and yet no earthly idea of how to really explain them, but she'd give it her best shot. "It was just a bad day, you know. I loved Opie. But at the same time I felt so guilty and angry with myself, for being relieved that it wasn't you who had died in county. And it made me feel so horrible inside for even thinking that way. Then Gemma said that Carla was the reason you went down earlier that day, almost got you killed too and I just ... I just lost it. " Tears started streaming down her face again. "So I let all those feelings out on her." Her voice broke painfully on the last word.

Jax really wasn't sure what to say to that, because to this day he still struggled with the thought that his best friend was no longer here with him and a part of their lives.

But he couldn't fault her for feeling the way she was, because as sickening as the thought sounded in his own head, he knew that if he had ever been put into the position to choose between Tara's life, or Ope's, he would've chosen her without a doubt. And yet, that thought provoked the same kind of guilt he knew she'd been feeling all along.

"Come here." He finally said and hugged her tightly against his chest once more. He buried his face in her hair, taking in the faint smell that was left of her shampoo just like he had done last night and tried to remind himself that all of these revelations were a necessary part of healing their relationship. The hidden truths, and unspoken words needed to finally see the light of day.

Tara's voice sounded so small and fragile when she finally dared to speak again, "There's one more thing I've been keeping from you. And it's been eating me up inside, Jax. I've been holding onto this for so long, and the longer I kept it from you, the harder it seemed to reveal it. Then the proof I had was destroyed, and I wasn't sure if you'd even believe me if I told you." She told him truthfully, revealing her worst fears to him.

"What is it, babe?" Jax urged her to tell. "Just tell me."

That's when Tara looked up and framed his face in hers for the first time and looked him right in the eyes, "I need you to promise me thought, that you won't do anything impulsive or stupid, because all of this is in the past now. And like I said, there is no proof anymore." She knew she was about to break his heart in two, but it was time to tell him everything.

He didn't like this one bit, he also didn't like being kept in the dark, but he could tell by her words and by the look in her eyes that whatever she was about to confess to him was clearly a serious matter.

"Alright." He simply nodded his agreement to keep his cool, and Tara dropped her hands from his face and instead reached for his hands, squeezing them for a brief moment before she dared to say what she needed to say. She'd wanted to get this off of her chest for so long. "I read all the letters that Maureen had hidden in your bag, and um ... and some of them suggested that Gemma knew what Clay was going to do." She saw a flicker of confusion quickly being replaced by hurt and then anger in his blue eyes staring back at her.

Jax's jaw clenched as he still tried to process what Tara had just told him. "You said you'd lost the proof?" He suddenly further inquired. 

Tara nodded, "Gemma came to me, told me that it was Ope who'd shot Clay, because Clay had
killed Piney. She also told me that she knew it was Clay who tried to have me abducted, that she'd confronted him about it, and that's why he'd beaten her up. She said that Clay would continue to lash out at anything and anyone until he'd get his hands on those letters. I was scared, Jax, because Clay had come to see me at the hospital the day before and had basically threatened you and me. He'd said that it would be a shame if you and I would never make it out of Charming alive. So I gave Gemma the letters, but instead of delivering them to Clay, she threw out the ones that implicated her and then handed the rest of them over to you instead." Tara searched his face for a reaction, and she could see the anger reflecting back in his eyes.

He pulled his hands out of hers and spun around, facing away from her and Tara watched with a heavy heart as his hands balled into fists by his side for a long silent moment.

She hesitated for a minute, but then found the courage to step forward and right behind him. She placed one hand flat against his broad back, while her other hand curled around his arm from behind, her forehead leaning against his shoulder blade, she could feel how tense his muscles were beneath her touch.

"I'm so sorry, Jax. About everything." She paused for a second, unsure if she should continue with what she wanted to say, but decided to get it off of her chest once and for all, "I didn't want to give those letters to you when you were still inside, because I was afraid you'd kill Clay if you knew, and then not get out after fourteen months. And then when you got out and were so hell-bent on leaving with me, I was afraid those letters would push you back in." She confessed some more guilt she'd been carrying with her all this time. "Piney might still be alive if I hadn't kept those damn letters from you."

"It's not your fault." He suddenly spoke, his voice grim and dark.

Tara didn't know how to respond, she was just so utterly clueless of how to handle him when he was this way. But then again, how would anyone handle the news that their mother might've had taken part in the murder of their father. It was such a heavy cross to bear.

"None of this is your fault, babe." He said, his voice a bit softer again. His hand blindly reached back for her, to pull her into his side instead and she wordlessly complied. "You got caught in the middle, and never should've been put in that spot in the first place."

She wrapped her arms around him and rested her head against his shoulder in relief that he sounded more like himself again.

"I'm done with her. I promise, she'll never get anywhere near our boys again." He said solemnly, starring off into the distance, just a sea of rooftops spread out in front of them. "But you're wrong, there's still proof."

At that Tara looked up at him and drew her eyebrows together in confusion. "What do you mean? I'm sure she's destroyed 'em on that same day."

"I believe you, Tara. I don't want you to think for even a second that I don't believe you, but I have to have proof before I confront her, which means I have to reach out to Maureen and hear it from her myself. That way you won't be caught in the middle again when I call Gemma to tell her why I'm cutting her out of our lives once and for all. If I tell her it was you who told me, she'll twist it around and say that you're just plotting against her again, trying to push her out of the family. But if I can tell her that it was Maureen who told me, there's nothing she can say, because Maureen has nothing to gain by creating a rift between Gemma and I."

He looked down at her then for the first time since he'd pulled her back into his arms, and met her
eyes, searching them for something. "I know my dad was lying and cheating on her, and she had every right to leave him, and be hurt and angry about that. And I also know that sadly I didn't fall far from that unfaithful tree and have hurt you just the same. But never in a million years could I picture you plotting my death because of it. Because you are good person, Tara, and she is just ... not!" He hugged her even closer to his side and gently kissed her forehead again. "I love you so much, babe." He mumbled against her hair.

"I love you too." Tara answered back and reached up, pulling him down towards her to kiss him. First soft and sweet, but then their lips parted and the kiss grew more intense as Jax framed her face with his hands now in return.

Their passionate kiss was suddenly interrupted when Tara's phone in her back pocket started ringing. Tara pulled away, reaching back for her phone, "Shit. That's probably Christy. I told he I'd call her right back after I talked to you." She looked at the screen and saw that it was in fact her friend and shook her head, "I can tell her we can do this another time. We can just go and get the boys."

"Babe, it's fine. Just tell 'em to come over in an hour." Jax reassured her. "Right now, having some company will help both of us take our minds off of all of this for a little while."

"Are you sure?" Tara looked at him quizzically.

"I'm sure." Jax replied and rubbed the pad of his thumb over the worry lines between her eyebrows. "Don't worry so much. We're all good, I promise."

"Okay." Tara nodded, and answered the call.

X

Jason and Jax had made quick work getting the bikes unloaded, and were already back in the truck, on the way to the nearest U-Haul place to return the trailer Jax had rented. Their conversation this far had only consisted of bikes, trucks, sports cars and the like. Jax had tried his best to focus on what they were talking about, but he simply couldn't shake all the other thoughts that continued to roam through his mind.

His mind kept going back to what Tara had finally revealed to him earlier that morning, about Gemma's possible involvement in his father's death. He did believe Tara wholeheartedly, but at the same time he held out hope that Tara might've misread, or misunderstood what had been revealed in those letters.

He meant what he'd told Tara, that he wouldn't let Gemma back into their family, merely for the way she'd threatened and hurt his wife. But he still held out hope that Maureen would tell him that Tara misunderstood, and that his mother wasn't the monster he thought her to be at this very moment.

Jax had already tried to get a hold of Maureen hours ago, and was now rather impatiently awaiting a call back from her.

But Jason suddenly brought him back to reality, when he decided to steer their little chat into a whole other direction.

"So Tara and you seem to get along much better." Jason had phrased it like a statement, but Jax could hear the underlying question.

He nodded, "Yeah, we are."
"That's good." He nodded. "I think having you home and helping her with the boys must be taking some of that pressure off of her, you know. She seems more relaxed at work now too."

He paused for a second, but then added, "I mean, things between her and Seward are still a bit awkward, but they barely consult on the same cases anyways, so."

At that Jax's curiosity was peaked, and looked over at Jason several times, between focusing on the road when he said, "Who the hell is Seward?"

"Shit. I thought you knew about him." Jason looked suddenly uncomfortable, having put his foot in his mouth. "It's the guy she was dating a while back, while you were broken up."

"Wait ... you mean John?" Jax clarified, and was relieved when Jason nodded, glad to know there hadn't been yet another guy in Tara's life.

"Yeah, John. So you do know about him?" Jason asked to confirm.

"I knew she'd been seeing someone, but I had no fucking clue that he worked in the hospital with her." Jax said with obvious agitation in his voice suddenly. He didn't like the fact that Tara had kept that little tidbit from him.

"Well, shit." Jason cursed, wishing he would've kept his big mouth shut. "I thought you knew."

At the same time, Tara and Christy sat on a park bench across town, just a few blocks from the apartment, watching Abel and Thomas amuse themselves on the playground.

It hadn't really warmed up today, and was still as cold as it had been this morning, maybe even colder since the wind had picked up even more, and rain was in the forecast too. So both women and the little boys were bundled up with heavy jackets and gloves against the cold wind.

"You know, it's kind of hard to help you sort all of this out, if I don't know everything." Christy honestly said as she looked over at her friend and studied the tormented look on her face.

"I know." Tara nodded and met her eyes. "It's just, if you knew everything that I've done, you wouldn't look at me the same." She pushed her hands inside the pockets of her coat and leaned back into the park bench behind her, "And if you knew everything he's done, you'd think I'm mental for even considering to take him back."

"You don't know that." Christy replied, "We've all done shit we've regretted afterwards. Who am I to judge either one of you?"

Tara scoffed, and shook her head, as she tried not to let the emotions overwhelm her, "It's just the way Jax grew up, his mom had pretty much planned his whole future out for him. That he'd take over as the leader of the club. But it's all just criminals, outlaws and ... there's just no happy ending in sight for anyone involved in that life."

"But Jax is out now, right? I mean he's here and he chose you over that life." Christy said out loud what Tara had relayed to her several weeks ago, after she'd decided to let him stay.

"So he says. And honestly, he's been so sweet, it's hard not to believe him when he says he's done with Sam Crow, but there's still this lingering doubt about that, because I've heard him say that line one too many times before ... and then there's the fact that he was with someone else."

She sighed in frustration. "But even after all that, he manages to get under my skin so easily. He can
be so possessive, and arrogant, but also so gentle and sweet ... he's like an oxymoron, or is it a paradox?" She wondered out loud. "I miss all those different sides of him, even the aggravating ones ... I just miss being with him. I always felt so safe when we were in bed together, like that was the one place where nothing bad could touch us, you know. Like he was all mine, and I was all his."

Tara's eyes welled up with tears again that she quickly swiped away before they could fall. "But then he cheated, and I just don't know what I'm gonna do, if I can't get over that. What am I supposed to do if I can't forgive him?"

Christy scooted closer to Tara and draped her arm around her to comfort her before she spoke her mind, "Of course you will forgive him ... but right now the wound is still too fresh, so you just gotta give it some time. I mean you've missing almost four months while you were in a coma, so it feels like it hasn't been as long ago to you, as it does to him. He was awake through that time you were in the hospital, so he had all that time to think and figure his feelings and his mistakes out. So of course it's going to take you longer to get where he's at. But the main thing is, is that he regrets what he did, and now that we know why he didn't move up here with you, but stayed back in California, it's even more obvious how much he clearly still loves you."

Christy paused for a moment, trying to gather her thoughts before she continued to speak, "You know I wasn't exactly his biggest fan, after that night when he and I picked your drunken drugged-up ass up at that dive bar, because I've never seen you like that ever. But I've gotta admit, he's kinda won me over."

Tara couldn't help herself and scoffed at that, "Yeah, he tends to have that effect on women. It's that unfathomable Teller-Charm. It gets under your skin."

"Oh, is that what it is?" Christy replied sheepishly, and couldn't help but grin over at her friend in obvious amusement, before she added. "Well, and let's not forget about that body though ... I mean, Jesus Christ, you could bounce a quarter off those abs ... and that ass too." She gestured with her hands as if she was squeezing an imaginary butt, which caused Tara and herself to laugh out loud.

They both had a long good chuckle, before Christy continued with her attempt to lift Tara's mood, "Or maybe it's the whole bad boy thing ... Girls go crazy about bad boys, and personally, I blame Marky Mark for that, with his good vibrations and his Calvin Klein ad. At least I'm pretty sure that's when it all started for me." Christy paused as they both let out a chuckle at that.

"Back then he had that bad boy reputation, you know, and I swear those pictures where he grabs his dick ... that was like the closest thing to porn every teenage girl all over the world could get their hands on, yours truly included. I must've spend countless hours just staring at that ad drooling at the mouth. Hormones raging. And you know, now he's like happily married, got a couple of kids ... he's downright domesticated, just like Jax."

It had definitely worked, the smile on her face, and laughter from Tara was proof that Christy and her smart mouth were still the best cure for a moody day like today.

X

Tara was pushing Thomas on the swings when she saw both Jason and Jax walk towards the playground. She raised her hand in a casual wave, and Jax shot her a sweet smile from across the park.

"Hi babe." He said when he came up next to her, draped his arm around her and leaned in and gave her a quick peck on the lips. His eyes drifted over to Christy who nodded at him in greeting, before she returned her attention back to her own man. They stood just a few feet away, watching Abel come down the slide.
"Can I talk to you for a sec, babe?" Jax said, not wanting to wait another minute, but confront her right away about what Jason had revealed to him.

"Of course." Tara quickly replied, assuming he might've heard back from Maureen. She called over to Christy, "Can you keep pushing him for a minute?"

"Sure." Christy answered and walked over to take Tara's place by the swings.

Jax took Tara's hand and they walked a little ways to a nearby tree. Tara's back was turned towards the tree, and Jax placed a hand against the broad trunk right beside her, bracing himself right in front of her. He looked down at her for a long moment, when he reached for her hand again.

"Is everything okay?" Tara asked first, because she couldn't stand the tension in the air another second longer.

"Why didn't you tell me that John works at the hospital with you?" Jax suddenly blurted out. He wasn't happy that he'd found out about that from Jason instead of her, but he tried his best to keep his voice level and not let it show on his face just how much it bothered him.

Tara looked surprised for a moment, but quickly gathered her wits, and realized that Jason must've spilled the beans, "I didn't think it mattered. It's not like I actually work with him very often. And honestly, he's still kinda ticked off that I broke things off with him, so ... you really have nothing to worry about, baby, I swear."

At that Jax raised his eyebrows in surprise himself, "You'd said he got mad after you told him about our make-out session and you broke up ... you never told me that you're the one who broke things off."

Tara averted her eyes for a moment, her lips pursed, trying not to smile, before she looked back up at him, "Because your ego was already inflated enough, Teller. I thought you might burst if you knew I dumped him for you." She could no longer hold back the smile now, and neither could Jax.

He smiled and leaned down, kissing her possessively and deliberately pushed her back against the tree trunk behind her, when his hand left hers and grabbed onto her hip instead, trapping her in place. Claiming her as his!

Tara reached up with her hands, gripping the fabric of his hoody, feeling weak in the knees from the kiss, before she pulled back for a second and looked up at him, "I promise, Jax. You've got nothing to worry about what John is concerned. He's out of the picture."

"Alright." He nodded to reassure her that he understood ... clearly surprising her and surprised himself at the way he'd handled the situation. He didn't let his anger show, and instead asked her flat out what he'd wanted to know, and it was resolved without a fight or more tears from her.

Maybe they'd get the hang of this after all, if they only continued to act like the adults that they were, he thought before he leaned in once more for yet another kiss.

X

Author's Note: I've spend day and night to get this chapter posted asap, so I hope you can take a moment to leave me a comment or a review. It's so motivating to hear from my readers, I really appreciate it so much. Thanks, xoxo
Tara and Christy had walked back to the apartment over half an hour ago, and were hopefully on their way to get some Chinese or Mexican takeout. By the time they had taken off, they hadn't decided yet which one they were gonna get, and neither Jax or Jason cared either way, both of them were hungry enough right now to eat just about anything the girls decided to bring home for them.

The wind had gotten stronger as the day went on, and by now the sun had all but disappeared behind a veil of thick darkened clouds, when Jax finally put his foot down and announced that it was time to go home now, before it started raining and they'd all be soaked down to their skin.

But Abel was having a blast defying his father for a long couple of minutes, being chased around the playground, but with the help of Jason, they'd finally managed to capture the rambunctious four year old, along with his three year old accomplice, in a fit of laughter and giggles.

Jason held Thomas' little hand, and Jax carried Abel bend over his shoulder, while the boy still tried to wiggle free from his father's strong grasp on him. Abel giggled out loud in delight when Jax playfully spanked his behind on the way to the truck. "You're gonna wear yourself out, little monster, if you're keeping this up." Getting him to sleep should be easy tonight.

Jax shook his head at his son's antics but smiled just the same, as memories of his own childhood flooded his mind. He could vividly remember both Gemma and JT chasing after Tommy and him around Charming gardens and the lot at TM more than a time or two.

He'd been little, just like his own sons were now, and honestly if it wasn't for picture albums and a handful of old videotapes that held proof of those joyous days, he probably wouldn't have remembered any of it, considering how young he had been at the time. And now, he thought with a heavy heart how those memories suddenly felt even more bittersweet than they already had before, knowing what their once happy family had turned out to be.

"Mommy and daddy sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" Abel yelled out in a sing-song voice and laughed out loud at his own little song, before he quickly repeated the line once more and laughed again. "Mommy and daddy are sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G!"

"What?" Jax yelped in return, pretending to be offended, and actually pulled his son off of his shoulder and into his arms instead, searching the young boys face, "Who taught you that song?" Jax tickled him as he asked the question.

"Aunt Christy taught me ..." Abel answered with a grin that matched Jax's to a T. "... when you were kissing mommy like this." Abel puckered up his lips and made kissing noises, enjoying the fact that he could tease his father with it, he only stopped long enough to look down at his little brother as they both burst back into fits of giggles.

Jax tickled him some more at that and made him writher in his arms as the boy fought to breathe between laughs and giggles. "Yeah, that sounds like something Aunt Christy would teach ya'." Jax
looked over at Jason just for a fraction of a second, but the other man just shrugged innocently, yet smiled at the exchange between father and his sons.

He finally let up and gave Abel a chance to catch his breath, "First of, that's a girl song. And second, your mom and I weren't even in a tree, we were next to a tree." Jax playfully answered, and Abel laughed out loud once more when his dad stuck his tongue out at him, which Abel quickly reciprocated. "You should sing that song for mommy thought when we get home, I bet she'll love it. Girls like that kind of stuff." Jax mused, he could already picture the look on Tara's face.

"Okay. I will." Abel answered in less of a playful tone, and seemingly winded now hugged his father's neck, making it finally easier for Jax to carry him the rest of the way.

Just when they reached the truck and Jason began to buckle Thomas into his car seat, Abel spoke up once more, before climbing into the vehicle himself. "Daddy?"

"What's up?" Jax replied and held the door to the backseat open for Abel to climb on in, as sounds of thunder suddenly roared in the distance.

"Are you and mommy now married again?" Abel asked looking up at his father with big blue eyes that matched his own, and it suddenly dawned on Jax that the boys hadn't seen Tara and him kiss like that in a very long time.

Sure, they've shown affection towards one another, hugging, holding hands, a kiss on the cheek or cuddling with the boys on the couch watching cartoons. But until this very moment he'd never even considered that his sons were keeping such close taps on what mommy and daddy were or weren't doing, and that passionately kissing their mother would be equaling marriage in the mind of his four year old.

He suddenly realized he hadn't answered him, and quickly spoke up to soothe the worried expression that had crossed Abel's face now. "Of course, little man, your mom and I are still married." Jax pulled Abel's beanie off of his head and ruffled the boys hair up in a playful manner as he grouched down to be eye level with his son.

He couldn't help the overwhelming feeling that he'd failed his kid one way or another by leaving him confused on the matter where their marriage stood. If he knew one thing though, it was that he was utterly unprepared to have this conversation without Tara to back him up. "We've been married this whole time, buddy." Jax sighed, "Listen, Abel, we gotta get outta here before it starts to rain, but I tell you what, tonight before we go to bed, you, Tommy, and mommy and I, we all can talk more about all of this, ... alright?" It was all he could think of to say for now, and at the very least he knew he'd bought himself some time, but deep down, he counted on Tara to know just what to say, because he truly didn't know.

Abel nodded seemingly content with his father's response, and Jax quickly stood, placed the beanie back on Abel's head and stepped out of his way. He reached out though, to help Abel up into the truck, but the blond boy shrugged his father's hand away in protest as he promptly climbed inside the cab, "I can do it by myself, daddy." Abel said and gave Jax a pointed look once he'd managed to settle into his booster seat all by himself.

Jason had already climbed into the passenger seat and him and Jax shared a knowing look when Jax got in, before Jax started up the truck and they sped out of the parking lot.

X

Several hours later, they all sat around the kitchen table with playing cards in hand. Abel sat on
Tara's lap, and Thomas sat on Misses Ellie's knee, who'd come over to join in on the fun and the food, and was now bouncing the youngest Teller up and down to keep him content.

But they weren't playing Hearts, Rummy or Crazy-Eights, instead they'd found themselves in an Uno-battle that the adults seemed to enjoy way more than the two children ever did.

"Uno." Abel shouted, and could barely contain his excitement, while Tara and him watched each player take their turn, hoping to be able to play the last card in their possession and ultimately win the game. Which is what happened, when Abel threw the last card on the table, grinning ear to ear.

Tara squealed in delight and kissed her laughing son on her lap repeatedly on the cheek as she pulled him closer at their triumphant win.

"We are the best, mommy." Abel announced proudly and raised his little fist in the air, giving his little brother across the table a pointed look.

"But even the best have a bedtime, buddy." Jax interrupted the laughter, and Abel looked back at his mother in disappointment, "Not yet. Pleeeeeeaaasssee."

But Tara shook her head at him, since they'd already been giving a heads up that bedtime was quickly approaching. She smiled though when she said, "I've been told by someone, that you and Thomas have been staying up late all weekend." Abel shot an accusatory look at Jason, before he turned his attention back to his mother, "But you've got school tomorrow, and daddy and I have to go back to work too, so we need catch up on some sleep tonight, don't you think?"

"I'm not tired at all. I'm fine." Abel shrugged his shoulders at his mother and looked around the room as the adults surrounding him couldn't help but chuckle at his nonchalant reply.

"Well, I'm not." Tara answered with a straight face, successfully suppressing a smirk, "I'm very tired, your dad's probably tired, and I bet Tommy's tired too."

Abel looked over at his little brother for a second, and when the three year old yawned as if on cue, Abel conceded, yawning himself, "Fine." But the look on his face let everyone know that he was not happy about it.

"I'll get them ready for bed." Jax said and stood, "Come on, boys, say your goodnight's." He waited until both the boys made their rounds, giving every adult a hug before they took their father's hand and left the room.

X

Tara stepped into the bathroom and watched from the doorframe as Jax helped Abel brush his teeth, while Thomas played with one of the toy motorcycles Gemma had gifted to them, waiting his turn as he tried to mimic the sound of a Harley.

Jax looked over his shoulder at Tara, "Everyone left?"

"Yeah." Tara nodded, and leaned down to kiss the top of Tommy's head, brushing her hands through his soft blond hair, and her youngest looked up at her and held up his newest toy in delight, "Look, mommy."

Tara nodded, "I know. It's pretty."

"Motorcycles aren't pretty." Abel interrupted without missing a beat, toothpaste dripping from the side of his mouth, as he looked almost offended from his mom up to his dad right beside him,
"Motorcycles are awesome. Right, daddy?" That's when Tara noticed the other Harley still clutched in Abel's hand as well.

"Right." Jax grinned back at Tara, "Kid's got a point, babe."

"Yeah, yeah." Tara sighed in mock annoyance, yet winked at Jax, "I think there's a little too much testosterone in here for my liking, so I'm gonna pick up a little bit." She pointed her thumb up behind her, in the direction of the living room and kitchen. "Call me, when you're ready for goodnight kisses, alright?"

Abel perched up on a small plastic stool, leaned forward and spit a mouthful of toothpaste into the sink, and glanced back at his mother, "Alright." He then proceeded to use the sleeve of his pajama shirt to wipe his mouth without giving it a second thought.

"Alright." Thomas agreed with whatever Abel had just agreed to, and waved at his mom before she left the room.

X

Cleanup wasn't all that bad today, since they hadn't cooked, and had used mostly plastic plates and silverware to eat. So she only had cups and mugs to put away into the dishwasher, everything else was going into the trash instead.

But as she busied herself, picking up the boys' toys strewn across the apartment, and wiped down the table and kitchen counter, she was already trying to figure out what or how to explain their current relationship to Abel.

Jax had pulled her aside earlier today, and had filled her in on what Abel had asked, and now she found herself wondering what other things might've been boggling his little mind this whole time without Jax or her knowing.

Was her half-way-in, half-way-out indecisiveness playing mind games on their kids? She didn't like the thought of that.

X

Abel and Thomas were both snuggled up in their beds, waiting for their parents to come inside to give them goodnight hugs and kisses, while Tara and Jax huddled in the hallway and spoke in hushed voices, trying to decide on how to approach this. Neither of them really had a plan, so they decided to play it by ear, try to answer any questions Abel might have as honestly as they could, without revealing too much that might lead to yet more confusion or questions in the long run.

By the time they stepped into the room, Thomas had already drifted off to sleep, and Abel was fighting to keep his eyes open too, but won that battle once he saw his mom and dad approach him.

Tara tucked the blanket in around Thomas and kissed his little forehead, before she kneeled down next to Abel's bed, brushing his hair back with her hand, while Jax took a seat on the side of Abel's bed.

Tara glanced up at Jax and hesitated for a second, but then decided to finally bite the bullet and began to speak in a hushed voice to not wake their youngest again, "So your dad said you had some questions about us being married, Sweetie?"

At that, Abel propped himself up on his arms, his attention clearly peaked again, "Daddy said you are still married."
"He's right, we are still married." Tara confirmed, she leaned closer to him, trying to meet the young boys eyes, "Remember your daddy and I got married a while ago."

Abel nodded his head, "Yeah."

"So why, um ... I mean, is there anything you wanted to ask me and your dad about that? You know you can ask us if you're confused or ... well, anything really, honey." Tara sort of stammered, trying to figure out how to get him to open up, yet not wanting to turn something into an issue, if it actually wasn't.

Abel looked up at his dad, before his eyes drifted back to Tara, "Why did daddy not come to our new house with us right away?"

Tara spoke up first, because this was something that had been discussed before, so she knew how to answer this particular question rather confidently. "Remember when we talked about that before, Abel? Daddy stayed in Charming because that was where he worked, that's where his job was, remember?" Her voice was soft and reassuring.

"But now he works here where we are." Abel said, but it didn't sound like a question, but rather himself confirming something he already knew again.

Jax nodded, "That's right. I've got a new job now, right here in town, so that I can be with you guys. So we can all be together again."

"Okay." Abel nodded contently with that answer, and Tara and Jax shared a look of relief, hoping that this was pretty much over now and they hadn't screwed up their kid as much as they'd feared.

But then Abel decided to add something else, and this time he actually pushed himself all the way up into a sitting position, and it dawned on both his parents that he was just getting warmed up, "Aunt Margaret and Uncle Dave are married, Aunt Christy and Uncle Jason are getting married, and Grandma and Grandpa Nero are not married at all."

Tara looked at Jax in confusion, before she looked back at Abel trying to figure out what he was trying to say, "That's right." She paused, hoping once more that this could possibly be the end of it ... but no such luck.

"But everybody sleeps in a big bed." Abel blurted out and looked pointedly at his father before he added, "Nobody sleeps on the couch."

Well, shit!

Tara and Jax looked at each other, neither of them sure how to answer what Abel was obviously implying.

But just in case his parents hadn't caught on, Abel quickly decided to add, his eyes on Jax once more, "Why are you sleeping on the couch, daddy?"

Now that the question was actually voiced out loud, Jax looked over at Tara for help once more, but she'd lowered her gaze, avoiding his eyes, throwing him to the wolves, or the wolf pup in this instant.

Jax cursed to himself inwardly, trying to think of how to answer this, his brain scrambling for the right words to come to him, "You know how sometimes Tommy takes your favorite toy without asking and won't give it back, or he'll scribble over one of your best drawings, and you get mad at him? And you fight?" He started, and now Tara actually looked up at him in alarm, but it was too
late to back pedal.

Abel nodded, and Jax continued, "Well, it's kind of like that. See, I did something bad, that made
your mom mad, so we decided that I should sleep on the couch for a while. That's all, it's nothing to
worry about, son."

Tara shook her head, figuring this would not be that easy, and just like predicted, Abel fired away,
his eyes on his father again, "You and mommy are fighting?"

Tara hurriedly intervened now, clearly regretting to let Jax take the reins on explaining his
shortcomings in the first place.

"No, baby, we're not fighting." She forced a big toothy smile on her face for the sake of their little
boy and ruffled his hair playfully in an attempt to lighten the mood in the room once more, "Weren't
you singing songs about your daddy and I kissing earlier today?"

She gestured to Jax with her hand, "You think I'd be kissing him and he'd be kissing me like that if
we were fighting?" Tara shook her head, as if to answer her own question. "No, of course not. You
wouldn't give your brother hugs and kisses if you were fighting with him, would you?"

"No, never." Abel shook his head and actually smiled again, and Jax looked gratefully back at Tara,
relieved that she'd managed to remedy his mistake in his choice of words.

"So you are not mad at daddy anymore, right?" Abel suddenly asked, and now it was Jax who raised
his eyebrows pointedly at his wife, awaiting the answer almost with the same curiosity as his eldest
son.

For Abel's sake, Tara refrained from rolling her eyes at the stupid expression on Jax's face, but it was
a tall order. She decided to focus on Abel instead, smiled sweetly at him once more and shook her
head, "No, I'm not mad anymore. Everything's okay, I promise."

Her heart sank at the meaning of her own words, hoping she hadn't just made a mistake like Jax had
done just moments before.

All the questions she had asked Christy out loud earlier today came rushing back to her. What if she
couldn't forgive him? What if their relationship was not going to be okay, like she'd just said. What if
nothing worked out and she'd have to admit to Abel that she'd lied to him, and break his little heart,
like her own had been broken? What then?

She hated this. Hated everything that had happened, and hated the fact that they hadn't hidden their
problems with each other from their kids as well as they thought they had. They had been so utterly
naive and downright stupid, thinking the boys wouldn't catch on to what was happening.

But if Abel's questions hadn't been a sucker punch enough, he added one final blow, "So are you
and daddy gonna sleep in the big bed because you're not mad anymore?"

Tara kept her eyes trained on Abel, even though she could practically feel Jax's eyes burning holes
into her. She obviously hesitated on how to answer that question, but again, for Abel's sake she
faked yet another smile and went against her better judgment when she answered him, trying to
sound truthful and lighthearted, even thought she felt neither at the moment, "Of course, baby."

Tara leaned forward, and placed a kiss on Abel's forehead, hoping this was finally the last question
he would ask tonight, because she wasn't sure she could handle much more of this little q and a
session she'd found herself in.
Abel smiled brightly at his mother's response, clearly relieved and in did make Tara feel justified having said what she'd said. Both her son's happiness was her upmost priority, and if that meant she needed to rethink Jax's sleeping arrangement to do away with Abel's worries, then so be it.

Jax finally decided to speak up again, and leaned over Abel, "That's all you wanted to know, right? 'Cause it's getting late." When Abel nodded, Jax pulled back the blanket for Abel to settle back down under again, before he leaned even further down and kissed his son's forehead, just like Tara had done before. "Goodnight, son."

"Goodnight, daddy." Abel answered cheerily, before his eyes landed on Tara once more, "Goodnight, mommy."

"Goodnight, baby." Tara answered and kissed his cheek this time, before she tucked the blanket tighter around him and got up to follow Jax out the door.

Tara closed the door behind her and they both walked all the way into the living room before they suddenly stopped dead in their tracks, and looked at each other in a mixture of regret but also relief.

Tara shook her head at herself and she was about to say something, but Jax beat her to it when he whispered, "I know, babe, that sucked."

"It did." Tara also whispered when she answered, and folded her arms in front of herself, still reeling from what had just gone down in there. She looked up at Jax then, her eyes boring into his with determination, "We have to do better, for them. Whatever is going on with us ... we can't let it touch them, Jax."

"I know." He said again, "Trust me, babe, I know." Jax answered sadly, swiping a hand down his face in worry.

There was a long silent pause between the two of them, before Jax pointed out the obvious elephant in the room now, "So, I can just set my alarm a bit earlier, stash all the bedding from the couch in the linen closet before either one of 'em gets up, and -".

"No." Tara interrupted him and shook her head, "Because sooner or later someone's gonna have a bad dream, wants a drink of water, or needs to go pee in the middle of the night, and they'll find you still sleeping on that couch. And we're right back to square one, with them wondering if we're fighting or not, or if we're still married, and then on top of it all also thinking we're lying to them ... I can't take that chance."

Jax took a few steps over to the arm chair, and sat down on the arm rest, his eyebrows almost raised to his hairline as his mind stewed over what Tara had just said, wanting to make sure he understood what she was actually suggesting, "So what are you sayin'?"

"I guess I'm saying it's time for you to move into the bedroom." She quickly replied, but instantly added, "But this doesn't change anything between us. I mean, what we've talked about last night still applies, Jax. Relationship-wise I'm not there yet, and I need to know that you understand that." Her face was serious, as was the look in her eyes that she was giving him, despite the small smile that began to tug at the corner of his lips now.

Jax's eyes scanned the coffee table for a second, noting the boys' box of crayons as he reached out and grabbed a random one, "So how's this gonna work? Draw a line down the middle of the bed that neither of us crosses?" He smirked, knowing just how ridiculous that suggestion sounded.

Tara shook her head, "No, of course not." She grabbed the crayon right out of his hand and threw it
back on the coffee table beside them, "Don't be ridiculous." But then she paused, trying to find the right words of how this was going to work out between them.

Normally, her heart would be beating out of her chest right now at the mere thought of climbing into that bed with him tonight, but right now, she was honestly just concerned about Thomas and Abel, and what was going on in their little minds. She knew she had no choice than to put her own feelings aside, for their sake.

She folded her arms again then, before she spoke, "It's gonna be just like it was last night, when I couldn't sleep and I came out here." She gestured with her hand towards the couch, where they'd spend the night wrapped up in each other's arms, but without all that sexual tension, because both had still been too shook up from her nightmare.

"Just two consenting adults -" She stopped herself, catching her own mistake of how she'd worded that, but it was too late. Jax was already smirking, holding back a laugh and Tara raised a hand to cover her mouth to hide her own smile, looking away from him, "Fuck, I didn't mean that, I meant the opposite." She tried to retract, "What I meant -".

"Hey, speak for yourself, Knowles. I am very much consenting in any way, shape or form." He interjected and reveled in her obvious embarrassment, and the way her own words managed to make her squirm and even blush.

"You're an ass." Tara quipped back, and finally dared to look back at him, no longer hiding her smile now, "You know exactly what I meant ... what I was trying to say."

Jax stood, stepped right in front of her then, and pulled her against him, locking his hands behind her back, while Tara braced her palms flat against his chest to keep the illusion of some space between them, "Yeah, I know what you meant to say, but you worry way too much, you know that?" He said, no longer smirking and trying to ease the uneasiness that was coming off of her in waves now again, "The way you keep reminding me over and over again about the boundaries you've set, I gotta tell ya', babe, it's starting to make me think, that you think that I don't possess any self-control at all. It takes two to tango, darlin'. So if you don't wanna tango, then neither will I. So stop worrying, alright?"

Their little tender moment was interrupted by Jax's cell phone ringing, and he reluctantly let go off her and reached in his back pocket to retrieve it.

He instantly recognized that the number was from Belfast, and Tara followed him with her eyes as he quickly answered the call and stepped into the kitchen instead.

Tara hesitated to follow him, not entirely sure if he was comfortable with her overhearing the conversation, but as if he could read her mind, he poked his head back into the living room, and waved his free hand in a gesture that told her to come along.

She quickly, but silently stepped into the kitchen with him, but paused, leaning against the doorframe, while he had taken a seat at the table. But then he put the phone on speaker before he laid the device on the table and nodded at Tara once more, wanting her to take a seat too.

"I was wondering if I might ever hear from you again, Jackson." Maureen said with an even heavier Irish accent then Tara had imagined her to sound like. "But I have got to admit, I thought it would've been a lot sooner."

"I got your letters from JT," Jax started, getting straight to the point, but then retracted, "Well, my old lady found them first, but eventually I got them."
There was a moment of silence on the other end, and for a second Jax thought that the call might've already been interrupted, but then Maureen suddenly spoke again. "I'm sorry I took the cowardly way out by hiding them in your bag instead of giving them to you myself."

She cleared her throat, and it was obvious to both Tara and Jax that she was biding her time, and Jax took the opportunity to speak, "Don't worry about it. I understand why you didn't want to do that out in the open." With Clay right there, is what he'd left out of the sentence, but the meaning was the same.

"Aye." Maureen answered, and you could hear her sigh audibly, hesitating again before she decided to speak up, "Forgive me, Jackson, but when I overheard the conversation between you and your ma in my kitchen that day, about you wanting to leave wee Abel be, so he wouldn't grow up in the club, about changing your father's legacy ... I just wanted you to know more about him, about your da. I wanted you to know what I knew."

Tara held her breath as she searched Jax's face, trying to read him to better understand what she'd just heard the other woman say. But Jax's eyes were downcast, avoiding to meet hers at all cost now, and by doing that, by not looking back at her, it told her everything she needed to know. That she had in fact heard Maureen just say that Jax was going to leave Abel behind, and Tara had to fight to keep her emotions in check, not wanting to let him see the tears pool in her eyes.

"I know." Jax replied to Maureen, his voice heavy with emotions of sadness and regret too. The tear-filled memories of that day and of that moment in conversation with Gemma came back to him like a sucker punch to the chest, knocking the wind right out of him. He hadn't realized that Maureen had overheard their conversation, so naturally he hadn't anticipated her to mention it or he never would've put her on speaker for Tara to bear witness and find out this way.

He pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration, and he simply couldn't bring himself right now to look up at the woman he loved sitting across from him. He'd kept this from her all this time, and he knew the time had come to pay the piper, having to explain himself all over again would have all those feelings come back to haunt him once more. But right now, right this moment, he had to push those thoughts aside and get back to why he'd tried to get Maureen on the phone in the first place. To find out the truth about JT, Clay and Gemma.

Tara's chair noisily scraped across the linoleum floor when she pushed it back to stand up, leaving Jax no choice but to finally look up at her. But now she wasn't looking at him as she took the few steps away towards the kitchen counter, where she stilled with her back turned to him. He knew he'd fucked up once more, but the damage was already done and there was no turning back now.

He turned his attention back to the phone in front of him, and carried on with what this call was really about, "Look, my mother got a hold of those letters before I did. The ones she'd turned over to me, the ones I've read, made it sound like JT was in fear for his life. That he suspected Clay would try to kill him. Now my old lady said she'd read letters that also suggested Gemma knew about what Clay was trying to do. That my father thought his wife and his best friend were plotting his death to keep the MC in the gun business." That was all he said, he didn't straight out ask for confirmation, or ask if that was true, he'd simply said his part and now waited for Maureen to hopefully fill in the blanks, or refute some of what he'd said. For the love that he still felt for his mother, despite everything she'd done this far, he'd hoped for the latter to happen.

He could hear the woman on the other line take a sip of something, liquor he presumed, but it could've been a cup of tea, he wouldn't know. He dared another glance at Tara, who was still refusing to turn and look at him, but he could tell she was wiping tears away from her eyes. As much as it broke his heart, he couldn't allow himself to focus on that right now, he needed to hear the truth,
no matter how ugly it might be.

"I'm sorry, Jax, but what your old lady said is true." Jax's heart sank, and he lowered his head and swiped his hand down his face, before wiping away the tears that began to fall from his own eyes now.

"I didn't have the heart to tell you, not that you would've believed me if you'd heard it from my mouth. I thought it best if you heard it from your da himself, in his own words ... it's a painful truth, but it's a truth nonetheless." She sighed once more, "Now you can take my word and the word of your old lady who's read all of what your da has said ... or you can believe your ma, the woman who ended up marrying the man responsible for your da's untimely death. The choice is yours, Jax. I'm sorry." She repeated once more, the sorrow evident in her voice as she spoke.

"Thank you." Jax said and wiped away the tears that fell so freely now that he knew the whole truth. "Tell Trinity -." He choked, not knowing what he wanted Maureen to tell her.

"I'll tell her you're well. And you wish her well." Maureen supplied the words for him, before she quickly elaborated. "She met a nice lad, got married a little while back and moved away with him. She's doing real well for herself, away from all this."

"I'm glad." Jax replied, and he meant it. The circumstances under which he'd found out he had a sister still not only embarrassed him, but also made him feel ashamed, knowing what he knew now, that Tara had been taken by Salazar.

It seemed like every decision he'd made from the moment Abel had been taken, had been the wrong one. He'd been on a downward spiral of self-destruction, or at least that's what he told himself to justify his actions in hindsight.

Then there was a click on the other end of the line, the conversation had come to an end and he could no longer avoid the inevitable confrontation with Tara. He looked over at her, fighting the urge to stand and pull her in his arms.

He was still processing what he'd found out, but deep down he'd already known that Maureen was going to confirm what Tara had said earlier today, because he knew Tara would never accuse Gemma of something like that, unless she truly believed what she'd read. But still, the last remands of hope had been destroyed by Maureen's words, and he'd have to come to terms with it.

And yet, here he was, turning his attention to Tara's heartbreak instead, because it was easier to deal with, easier to fathom then let the truth about his mother really sink in.

"Tara." He finally spoke, turning in his seat towards her, yet remaining seated a few feet away from her, "Please say something."

Tara wiped at her face with both of her hands before she finally spun around, leaning back against the kitchen counter, refusing to look at him still.

"What the hell happened in Belfast, Jax?" She could no longer hold her tongue. "Why would you even consider for a minute to leave Abel behind in ... in a whole other country? What the hell were you thinking?"

"I was in a bad place then. After Donna, after Sack ... I'd pushed you away, because I wanted to keep you safe, wanted something better for you, away from the club and away from me ... I let Abel go for those same reasons." He admitted the ugly truth out loud, and tears in his own eyes began to well up once more. "I'm sorry."
"You're sorry you did it, or you're sorry I found out?" Tara said with contempt in her voice.

Jax huffed, "Both, I guess."

At that, Tara finally looked up and met his eyes, red rimmed as they were, matching her own. "You should've told me. I shouldn't have found out like this, by accident."

"I didn't even know that Maureen knew." Jax weakly replied. "I had no idea she would spring this on you ... on us."

"That's obvious." Tara answered scathingly and swiped both hands down her face, trying to dry her eyes and her tears for good as a long silence stretched out between them.

She shook her head to herself then, because as heartbroken as she felt about the revelation that the boy she'd raised had almost not been brought back to her at all, she knew that this wasn't all about her. She wasn't done talking about this yet, there was more she wanted to know, but it would have to wait. She'd find out the whole truth later, but right now was not the time. Abel was here with her, with them, safe and sound and hopefully peacefully asleep.

But Jax on the other hand, the man she loved, the father of her sons had just gotten the proof he'd sought out to find from Maureen's mouth herself. And she could only imagine how devastated he was feeling, and yet here he was trying to mend fences with her instead. Guilt rushed over her as that thought began to unravel in her mind.

Tara knew he'd hoped that maybe she'd misunderstood what she'd read. And even thought there was no doubt to her about what JT had expressed in those letters, she remained open minded and didn't want to take his last hope away by arguing her point.

But now, as she looked at him, the ugly truth hung heavily in the air between them. The look in his eyes and the expression on his face spoke volumes, and her heart broke for him all over again, just like it had the first time she'd read those letters years ago.

She finally dared to step closer to him, right in front of him, and stepped between his knees, her hands reached down pulling him into her. "I'm so sorry, Jax." Was all she said, their previous argument all but forgotten now as Jax welcomed the embrace and pressed his cheek into her torso, while his hands snaked around her thighs, to eventually hug her lower body half even closer to him. Holding onto her as if she was his lifeline.

She looked down at him, stroked her fingers soothingly through his long blond hair, like she'd done countless times to their children, who both were the spitting image of him. She bend down then, giving him no choice but to loosen the grip he had on her and placed several kisses against the top of his head, before she allowed him to pull her onto his lap and pull her close once more.

Tara curled her arms around his neck, and he rested his head against hers. "What are you thinking?" She dared to question out loud, wishing she could actually read his mind.

Jax sighed loudly, "I don't know, babe ... Now that I know for sure, I don't even know what to do about it." He lifted his head then and looked right at her, waiting for her to look back at him and meet his eyes, "What do I do, Tara? She's my mom, what am I supposed to do?"

Tara sighed, her eyes never leaving his, before she swallowed the lump that had formed in the back of her throat, as the thought occurred to her what he might be considering, "There's really nothing you can do. I mean, it's like you said, she's still your mom. You can't hurt her, Jax ... at least not physically."
She paused for a long moment, while his eyes still remained trained on hers, waiting for her insight on how to handle this ugly truth. "I think you just have to let her go. Make a clean break."

Jax nodded letting Tara's thoughts on the matter settle in his mind, "Yeah."

But Tara could see the anger flash in his eyes now as the reality of it all began to really faze him, and she feared he might do something stupid and irrational after all. "Please promise me that you're not going back to Charming, back to hurt her. It's not worth it. If you do that, it will hurt us too. So please, don't." She said pleadingly. The desperation obvious in her voice. His actions now could potentially destroy everything they'd fought so hard to rebuild between them.

He took a long moment to consider her plea, and the desperate tone of her voice helped him make a decision rather quickly. "I won't."

Jax shook his head, and despite everything, he couldn't help his mind from going back to the conversation they'd had with Abel earlier.

If he'd learned one thing from all of this, it would be that he would try his best from here on out to be a better parent to his kids, and a better partner to Tara ... he'd break the cycle, break this sickening pattern once and for all, and be better than Gemma and JT had been to him, his little brother and each other.

He cleared his throat. "I'm not going anywhere, babe." He sat up straighter once more, and leaned closer towards Tara again, resting his head against hers as they sat in silence for a little while longer.

Tara was the first to pull back, disturbing their moment of solace, and framed his face with her hands as she looked back into his eyes again. "It's getting late, let's go to bed, baby. Together."

Jax wasn't sure he'd be able to find any sleep tonight, but he'd play along and pretend for her benefit. "That sounds nice." He answered truthfully and leaned in for a tender kiss.

X

Author's Note: More revelations? More growth? What did you like? Or what didn't you like? Please let me know your thoughts, I can't wait to hear from you. Thank you for reading. xoxo, Skater
Jax and Tara had gone to bed over an hour ago, both trying to fall asleep, but neither really able to for not so different reasons.

Tara was lying on her side, facing the wall, wishing herself to sleep, but her mind kept going back to Jax's conversation with Maureen and him finally knowing the truth about Gemma, but also the news that Jax had almost left Abel behind with strangers halfway around the world.

She was dying to know the whole truth, and wasn't sure if she could find any rest tonight until Jax explained himself, but at the same time she couldn't help but feel guilty for pressing him on this when she knew he was struggling himself with what he'd just found out about his mom.

Right beside her, Jax was lying flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling of the dark bedroom, wishing he could somehow turn off his mind from reliving every moment, every conversation he'd ever shared with his mom about his father's untimely death.

Everything had been a lie, every tear that ever fell from Gemma's eyes in mourning as she portrayed the grieving widow, every heartfelt speech she'd given him about what a great man his father had been, none of it was true, everything had been nothing but an act ... and it crushed him so deep down in his soul, he couldn't fathom how to deal with it, what to do.

He knew that Tara was right, that nothing good could possibly come from him racing back south to Charming to confront her in person, because truth be told, he wasn't just devastated, he was just about angry enough to strike his own mother, and that in itself scared him enough to know that he needed to stay away.

So now he was listless, again, just like he had been last night after Tara's nightmare had awaken him. It seemed lately, even away from Charming, all their problems and baggage had followed them home, followed them here and continued to haunt them.

Tara caught his attention and he looked her way when she stirred in her sleep and turned around facing him instead. Even in the darkness of the room, he suddenly noticed that her eyes were wide open too, searching his face just like he was searching hers.

"Can't sleep?" Jax was the first to speak, a whisper in the silence of the apartment.

"No." Tara replied tiredly. "You?" She watched curiously as Jax rolled onto his side now to lie face to face with her.

Jax shook his head, "I just keep thinking about Gemma and about the day my dad died, and pretty much everything that happened since."

"That's a lot." Tara replied, and reached out, gently brushing her fingertips through his short beard. "Maybe it was a mistake that I told you." She said with a tinge of regret in her voice.
"No, it wasn't, babe, I'm glad you did." Jax quickly answered, his eyes fixed on hers, "I actually wish you would've told me sooner."

"I know, baby. I'm sorry." Tara apologized, even though she still felt bad having severed that last thread between him and his mother. As much as she hated Gemma, and didn't want her in her or their sons lives anymore, she also knew what it felt like having no one left, no parent left to love, and she hated to inflict such pain on Jax.

There was a long moment of silence that stretched out between them, and Tara pulled her pillow closer to Jax, moving herself closer to him, so she could continue to run her fingers through his beard more comfortably.

Jax reached out too, taking her free hand in one of his, and ran the pad of his thumb across the still remaining small scabs on her knuckles first, before he continued to trace the small incision scars that traveled up her forearm.

The small scars had faded considerably over time, but you could still easily detect them in the different texture they'd left on her skin. As he let his fingertips glide over the slightly raised lines of her flesh, his mind once more went back to who was to blame for all of this ... Clay, along with Gemma as the accomplice. There was simply no escaping that ugly truth tonight, he begrudgingly thought to himself.

Having stared into the darkness of the room for the better part of the last hour, his eyes had adjusted plenty and could easily take in the features of her face, right down to the horizontal lines on her forehead that indicated she had something on her mind.

"What's going on with you? Why can't you sleep?" He dared to ask, but had a pretty good idea why she couldn't get any shut eye tonight either. It was beginning to be a pattern lately.

"You know why." She answered cryptically, but she wasn't lying, he knew what revelation from earlier tonight was still gnawing at her.

He hesitated for another long minute as her eyes bore into his, willing him to speak, which he finally did. "After Abel was taken, what happened with Ima, it was just to push you away, I thought you'd be saver away from me and the club." Jax started to explain, but Tara cut him off.

"I know all that. We've talked about all of that hundreds of times already, Jax." She interjected, sounding impatiently, "What I want to know is what the hell happened in Belfast. Why did you almost leave our son behind?"

Jax sighed, and stilled the movement of his fingers on her arm, gripping her hand tightly in his hand instead. "Kellan Ashby, the priest JT had mentioned in his letters, he had Abel put up for some catholic adoption. The couple that had adopted him had to stay in town for a couple more days, to make sure that it was a good fit and all. We got the address of the hotel they were staying at, and I went there to check it out, and I found them there with Abel. I followed them around town for a couple of hours, watching them with him. They were just normal people, but you could just tell they were decent and good. And they were so happy to have him, it was written all over their faces."

Jax shook his head and wiped at his eyes with his other hand, the emotions of that day came back to him so strongly. "I went to Belfast, because I thought Abel was in danger. I thought Cameron was going to hurt him for what had happened to his own son. But when I saw Abel with that couple and the possible future he could have with someone like them ..." He looked back at Tara and met her eyes in the darkness, "I'd already lost you, pushed you away to keep you save, and I thought it was the right thing to do for Abel too. I thought he could grow up away from all the violence and death,
away from me. So I left him there with them and went back to Maureen's place, to explain to Gemma what I had done, and why I had done it. She was beside herself, of course, and she tried to reason with me. I think she just couldn't believe what was happening, she was furious. And that's when she asked me what I was going to tell my other son, should he wonder what happened to his big brother." Jax paused, and Tara raised her hand up to her mouth to hold back the sob that was threatening to escape. "That's when she told me you were pregnant."

Jax could see the tears in her eyes welling up and rolling across the bridge of her nose and down her cheek, undoubtedly soaking into the pillow beneath her. He pulled her hand up to his lips and kissed it gently as his own tears escaped from his eyes.

His voice was heavy with emotions when he continued to explain what happened next. "Then Kellan showed up, and said that Jimmy would be going after Abel, to use him as leverage to get out of the country. We all rushed back to the hotel, but Abel was already gone, and the couple had been killed. Jimmy needed a hostage, so Kellan agreed to take Abel's place, and that's how we got him back." He concluded the story, and when Tara started to cry out loud, Jax reached for her and pulled her into his arms, kissing her forehead repeatedly, stroking her hair in an attempt to calm her, while he fought with his own emotions, trying to get his own tears to stop falling.

"We almost lost both of them?" Tara mumbled into his bare chest between sobs, and even thought Jax had heard her, he wasn't entirely sure he understood. He pulled back, framing her face to force her to look at him, "What are you talking about?"

Tara's face contorted in pain and heartbreak, but she tried her best to get a grip and swallow the sob that threatened to escape from her lungs, and then she finally blurted out the ugly truth she'd been keeping from him, "When Salazar grabbed me, I was on the way to an abortion clinic."

But to Tara's surprise, Jax looked neither hurt nor shocked by her revelation, instead he looked almost guilty. He gently kissed her forehead once more, before he closed his eyes and leaned in close enough that their noses touched, resting his face against hers. His lips a mere inch from her lips when he practically exhaled the words with his breath, "I knew that, babe."

Now Tara opened her eyes, pulled back and stared back at him with surprise as their eyes met, and only asked, "How?" Gemma couldn't have told him this, because she didn't know. Nobody knew besides Margaret.

Jax swallowed the lump in his throat and replied, "After Salazar let Margaret go, she gave her statement to Eglee. Told her where you guys were headed when Salazar rear ended you. Eglee told Tig. Tig told me."

Tara's heart began to beat faster as the revelation that he'd known this whole time began to sink in. "I'm sorry." She said and searched his face and his eyes for any insight on what he was feeling or thinking about what she'd almost done to their beautiful baby boy.

And as if he could sense her uneasiness, he quickly spoke up. "You've got nothing to be sorry for, babe. I'm the one who fucked everything up between us." Jax reassured her, his voice soft, he ran a hand soothingly down her hair, and met her eyes again, "The way I've hurt you, tried to push you away. Not just with Ima, but with all the ugly shit I'd said, ... the way I treated you, and said that we weren't your family."

He sighed, his eyes full of regret again, "I was such a fucking asshole to you, nobody would've blamed you, ... you had every right for not wanting to have a kid with me." He sighed again after a
long pause, "You could've still done it after I found you, but I'm so glad you kept him though, because I would've never been able to forgive myself for pushing you to that. You and those boys mean everything to me."

"I feel the same way." Tara replied earnestly, the tears fell freely once more while she let Jax's words truly sink in over the next couple of silent minutes between them.

"I don't think I would've gone through with it either way." She hesitated for a moment as her moments in confinement with Salazar and his old lady came back to her like it was yesterday. She contemplated to confide this in him too, because she feared it might add more feelings of guilt to his already burdened conscience. But on second thought she knew that Jax had seen the bruises and bumps she'd sustained in Salazar's captivity, after all, they were the reason they'd gone and gotten the ultrasound to ensure that Thomas was alright. So she said what was on her mind, "When Salazar had me, he knocked me around, and in that moment all I really cared about was our baby, and I knew that I wanted it, that I'd keep it no matter what would've happened with us." She sniffled at the thought, but glad that the tears had finally stopped falling again, as she wiped their lingering wetness from her face.

That's when Jax leaned in and kissed her on the lips, reveling in the feeling of her kissing him back after all this ugly truth having been revealed between them once again. He just couldn't stand another second pondering the past mistakes he'd made and wanted to put it behind them tonight. And this was his way to do so. To hold her in his arms, and feel her arms around him. And to kiss her, and feel her lips parting for him in return.

She was too good for him in every way, he didn't deserve her. He knew that he didn't, but he would fight for her, fight to get her back until his dying breath.

X

Tara awoke, rolled back to her side and blindly reached out for Jax to wrap her arms around him once more, when all her hands found were cold empty sheets and an empty pillow beside her.

She propped herself up on her elbow, temporarily confused as she took in the empty spot beside her and reached for her phone on the nightstand to check the time. It was just past two o'clock in the morning, she realized and in her sleepy mind began to wonder why Jax wasn't here. She reached for the table lamp on her nightstand and flicked it on, and glanced around the room, noting his jeans and shirt he'd flung over the small stool in front of her vanity table were gone, along with his phone and his keys he'd left on his nightstand the night before.

She quickly climbed out of bed, suddenly alarmed, cursing inwardly at how naive she'd been to think that he'd take her advise and not confront Gemma in person. At this time of night, there was probably hardly any traffic, which meant he was probably more than half-way to Charming by now.

She felt so incredibly stupid to not have seen this coming after all. What was he going to do once he came face to face with her, Tara wondered. The seriousness of the situation began to really overcome her and nearly made her break down in tears once more. Why would he do this to them, after everything they've worked through and confided in each other? Why risk it all for some twisted sense of revenge?

If she was lucky, she thought, he'd have at least bothered enough to leave a note on the kitchen table for her. She could already picture it in her mind, some halfhearted explanation about honor, loyalty and retribution, and the unwritten code of his beloved club. The thought of it made her sick to her stomach.
She rushed out of her room, expecting to find him long gone, but as soon as she'd set a foot out of her bedroom door, she could already see the glimmer of light and shadow dancing down the hall, past the living room, emitting from in the kitchen. And in that same instant as she'd seen the faint lighting, she'd also heard his voice, angry, dark and gloomy, she could tell even from afar.

Her heart sank in her chest, for having doubted his word again. He'd told her he wouldn't leave, but she'd not believed him and had jumped to conclusions at the first sign of doubt.

She hesitated now, embarrassed in her own unfound assumptions while she stood silently in the dark hallway, but eventually curiosity overwhelmed her and she quietly headed towards the kitchen, in search of him.

She couldn't help but wonder momentarily who he was talking to at this hour in the middle of the night, but figured it would most likely be one of the guys, Chibs or Bobby to be exact. They were after all his closest confidants outside these walls.

The carpeted floor beneath her bare feet easily concealed the sound of her footsteps, even now in the quietness of the night. She didn't intentionally sneak up on him, she was merely trying not to wake the boys, so it just sort of happened that way, but when she suddenly realized who he was actually talking to, it stopped her dead in her tracks and she held her breath.

"There is no coming back from this, mom. There's nothing you can say that'll convince me otherwise." Jax sounded angry, but Tara could tell he tried his best not to raise his voice too loudly, and she could only assume not to wake her and the kids.

There was a pause, as he obviously listened to Gemma, before he replied, "Look, I've got nothing left to say to you. I am done. We are done. Don't fucking call, don't write or send shit for the kids either. And don't you dare fucking show up here, or I'll make you regret it. Stay clear of my family.” And with that Jax hung up the phone. The only clue was the thud she'd heard, when he'd tossed the cell angrily onto the wooden kitchen table.

Tara hesitated once more, contemplating to take the few steps and round the corner to talk to him, or retrieve back into the bedroom to wait until he'd return. But she couldn't stand the thought of what he was going through, of how he'd tried to deal with it all himself, calling his mother up in the middle of the night to put an end to their relationship once and for all.

So she gathered the courage she needed and stepped into the kitchen. Jax sat at the table with his back towards the door, but when he sensed someone behind him, he quickly turned his head and looked up at her standing there.

"Hey." Tara said, hesitating again, suddenly unsure if she'd made the right choice to confront him when she noted the red rimmed eyes of his, leaving no doubt that the confrontation with his mother had caused him to shed some tears again tonight.

"Hey." Jax replied, before he turned his head back towards the table. He reached for his lighter and flipped it repeatedly with just one hand, before he spoke, "You heard all that?"

"No." She replied honestly, "I just woke up, I only heard the last bit just now." She suddenly found the nerve to step up closer behind him, and placed an encouraging hand on his shoulder and gave him a reassuring squeeze. "Are you okay?" It was a stupid question, she realized the moment the words had left her lips. Of course he wasn’t.

"Not really." He replied and blindly reached up and covered her hand on his shoulder with his own, before he turned to look back at her once more, "I didn't mean to wake you, babe."
"You didn't. I'm not really sure what woke me." She confessed and stepped further around him, settling into the chair right beside him. She reached up to his face, letting her fingers gently dance across his facial hair again, and Jax closed his eyes for a moment, leaned in against her touch, letting the palm of her hand rest against his cheek.

"I woke up and just realized you weren't there. I didn't like it." She added truthfully, and despite it all, when he suddenly opened his eyes and stared back at her, she could see the momentarily glimmer of hope flicker in them at the meaning of her words. But their little moment of intimacy ended right then and there rather abruptly, when Jax turned his head away from her, leaving her slightly confused at what had just happened.

So Tara stood instead, and tugged on his hand for him to stand too, "It's late. Come back to bed with me, Jax."

But Jax hesitated, reluctantly coming to his feet. There was a sadness about him, a heaviness swallowing up the air between them, and he shook his head at her. "I'll be in, in a little bit." He said, and reached out, his hand gripping her waist while he ducked down to kiss her sweetly on the cheek instead of the lips. The distinction wasn't lost on her.

He stepped away from her then, and dug out his cigarettes from his pocket, holding them up for show, before he grabbed his lighter from the table too. "I'm still too riled up after that talk with Gemma. I'm gonna go for a smoke or two. Don't wait up, babe." And with those parting words, he spun around on his heels and headed for the door, which Tara noted was already unchained and unbolted, indicating that this wasn't the first time he'd stepped out to smoke while she'd been blissfully unaware of his restlessness tonight.

As the door fell shut behind him, Tara stood there feeling sad and lost for a long moment. The only comfort she found was that he'd kept his word. He hadn't jumped in his truck and left her and the boys behind, and she had to give him credit for that. Because not confronting Gemma on these revelations face to face was very much against his nature.

So she headed back to her room alone and climbed back into bed, but no matter how hard she tried, and how tired she felt, sleep just wouldn't come. Instead she found herself listening for any sound of him returning back to the apartment.

She'd lost track of time, when she finally heard the distinct sound of their apartment door open and close. She could also hear the click of the deadbolt, when he locked the door, and even heard the clinking sound the chain made as he slid it in place. Then she found herself holding her breath, in an attempt to hear his footsteps approaching the bedroom, but to her disappointment that didn't happen. Instead she heard some cupboards closing in the kitchen, and a chair scraped across the linoleum too, and Tara realized he wasn't coming to bed just yet.

She wished she knew just what to say to him to help ease some of this pain he was feeling. She wanted to be there for him, but she fought the urge to get out of bed and seek him out once more, because clearly he wanted to be alone, or he'd already be in here with her. After all, she'd been the one lecturing him about boundaries since the moment he'd moved in here, so she needed to learn to respect his as well.

Tara let out the breath she was holding and tried to relax back into bed as best as she could, and eventually she even began drifting off to sleep. Yet when she heard the bedroom door slowly creak open and closed again, she suddenly found herself wide awake once more, but remained still out of fear he might leave again if he realized she was still awake after all this time.

She watched him, from her position in the bed as he undressed once again, shrugging out of his shirt.
impatiently, the smell of cigarettes infiltrated the room as he did so, before he rather hastily unbuckled his belt and dropped his jeans in a puddle of denim on the floor beside the bed.

He quietly put his phone on the nightstand, not bothering to plug it in, before he rather cautiously slid under the covers, and she suddenly realized by his careful movement that he was trying his best not to disturb her.

He adjusted the pillow repeatedly under his head, and it seemed that he was still as restless as he'd been before he'd left the apartment to go smoke a while ago.

Tara waited patiently for him to settle down while she remained frozen in place on her side of the bed. She wanted so badly to touch him, reach out and comfort him in some way, but for the first time in a long time she wasn't sure he'd want her to.

So she remained lying there in the dark, trying to listen to him breathe, before she finally couldn't stand this awkwardness another second longer and against her better judgment decided to slide closer to him after all. She slid right behind him, her chest flattened against his back, spooning him, wrapping her arm around him from behind, and placed several silent kisses against the nape of his neck.

To her disappointment she could feel him stiffen under her touch at first. But then he relaxed and reached for her hand, pulling it to his chest, and Tara couldn't help but feel relieved at the simple gesture. "Thought you were asleep." He suddenly said, his voice sounding raspy when he whispered the words.

"I was worried about you." She admitted whispering back, her breath hot against his neck, before she kissed his nape once more. "For some reason I couldn't fall asleep without you."

A beat or two past in silence, before Jax suddenly spoke up. "You're killing me, babe." He said with a twinge of threat to his voice, before he turned around to face her.

She could smell the whiskey on his breath before he even kissed her, but then she could taste it too. He reached for her face, framing it with both his hands, to hold her in place, and when her lips parted for him, his tongue greedily explored her mouth as if this was the first time.

Just moments ago her head had been swimming with all of these different worries, about what he was going through and how she could help him through it all, and now she found herself completely lost in his kiss, and lost in the way his almost naked body felt pressed against hers when he rolled on top of her.

The kiss was scorching, passionate and never let up, not even when he dropped his hands from her face and instead grabbed her waist, holding her body in place now as he pressed her hard into the mattress beneath them. He proceeded to wedge one knee between her legs, unrelenting, not giving her a choice in the matter, before he began to gently rock his thigh against her center, causing the most delicious heat to rise between her thighs and inadvertently caused her to grind her hips up against him in return. Meeting him trust for trust in a tantalizing rhythm.

She couldn't deny just how much she'd truly missed the weight of him on top of her. It was a feeling like no other. His strong broad body hovered over hers, engulfed hers completely, holding her down for him to take, for his pleasure. She was trapped, a notion that had always triggered a sense of panic when she was with anybody else, but with Jax it had always felt the opposite, like this was her safe place. Beneath him was her safe haven, with him using his body as a shield, protecting her with it from any and all outside dangers.
So even right now, when she was not ready to take that next step with him yet, she surprised herself when she realized that it still didn't make her panic to be practically lying helpless underneath him. Because she knew that if she'd ask him to, he'd let go of her without a moment's hesitation. In all the years she'd known and loved him, he'd never done anything against her will when it came to matters of the bedroom.

It shouldn't have surprised her though when he eventually wedged his second knee between her legs and parted her thighs to his liking. He knew exactly what he was doing to her when he began to grind his pelvis into hers instead of just his thigh.

She tried to stifle the moan that escaped her throat, but to no avail. He loved hearing her response out loud instead of just feeling it in her body language, and grunted his own pleasure into her mouth as they continued to kiss. It was almost like he was afraid to stop kissing her, and with it giving her the chance to shoot him down. So his lips never left hers, refusing to let her voice anything but agreement, while her hips rocked headily against his in unison, chasing the same high.

The utter sense of bliss that surged through her when she felt his erection grind against her was immeasurable. She could tell he was fully engorged and hard as a rock, repeatedly causing her breath to catch in her throat as their bodies greedily continued to rock back and forth against each other, yet lacking that crucial pinnacle connection, merely hindered by the few scraps of clothing between them.

And then she felt like an utter hypocrite when she couldn't help but think of how easily that could be remedied if she wanted to. How it would take near to nothing in effort on her part to snare her hand down between them, and tuck the waistband of his briefs down to spring the massive length of him free. It was just barely contained as it was.

And then it would be equally as simple to push the fabric of her sleep shorts aside enough for him to enter her without much of an hindrance.

But no, she had to stop that way of thinking. It had been her who had set this specific boundary, and whether she liked it or not, and despite their current situation, Jax had held true to his word in this regard as well. He hadn't tried to undress her, hadn't groped her breasts or even attempted to slip his hands beneath her clothing, neither north or south of her navel.

This was simply just foreplay, like he'd called it, she tried to remind herself reassuringly.

But then her eyes rolled into the back of her head in unconstrained pleasure, and she gasped another loud moan against Jax's lips when she realized that she wasn't far at all from climaxing this way if he continued with what he was doing to her.

She didn't know how he could tell from just that moan that she was close, but he could, because he finally released her lips from his, and began rather sloppily to kiss down a trail from her mouth down to her ear. His hips continued to snap against hers, meeting her over and over again in just the right spot, merciless, and his lips finally stilled near her ear, his hot breathy pants tingled her skin when he demanded for her to let go, "I want you to come for me, babe."

It was too much, and Tara clutched at his back in a reckless attempt to get him even closer, yet unattainable unless they were undressed. But it didn't take much more, just a few precise strokes more of the full length of him rubbing along her clit and she finally fell over the edge.

Tara couldn't help from panting against his ear and unashamed moaned his name as the long-awaited orgasm ripped through her for what seemed like forever. "Oh Jax."
The sound of her voice and the uncontrollable trembling of her hips left no doubt in him that she'd climaxed while she still moaned beneath him. No longer able to hold back any self-restraint, his hand grabbed a fistful of her hair and angled her face so he could devour her mouth with a scorching kiss again when he started to pick up the pace grinding against her some more.

The added pleasure of his even quicker movement was almost too much for her to handle after she'd already reached her peak once. But before she could reach that high for a second time around, Jax finally reached his climax himself too. His hips lost all their rhythm and instead began to slow their movement and simply jerked against her a few more times when he fell over the edge too. "Tara." He breathed her name completely spend against her lips, before he practically collapsed on top of her.

His face was buried in the crook of her neck, and he panted, trying his best to catch his breath after the release he'd just experienced. He closed his eyes and kissed her moist neck in just the right spot to cause her to squirm in delight underneath him, leaving a salty taste on his lips that he enjoyed far too much. He smiled to himself at the thought of what they had done, too crazy to believe it, like they were sixteen again, and yet too tired to hoist himself up enough to let her see the smile too.

He could feel the dampness of her clothing clinging to her skin and clinging to him too. Not just between her thighs but all over. Her skin looked glossy in the faint moonlight that filtered in through the small slits of the blinds in the window, and he had no doubt that his skin looked just as shiny to her. He could feel the reaper covered in a sheet of sweat, pooling in the hollow of his back.

Clearly they both had worked up quiet a sweat in their pursuit of mutual satisfaction, which to his delight they'd both managed to archive, despite their state of dress and upholding of Tara's set boundaries.

Honestly, he'd never intended to take it this far, he'd simply tried to numb his mind, distract himself with some kisses from everything that wouldn't allow him to find any rest ... but then he realized just how good it felt, and how good it also made her feel, and with those thoughts in mind he was determined to make her come if she'd let him.

He had no idea how much time had passed, all he knew was that it was already Monday morning, and with the satisfaction she'd let him experience, his mind was on her and her alone, and he was no longer able to keep his eyes open for another second longer.

So he began drifting off to sleep, still draped across her, hands gripping her, clinging onto her like some dead weight. But she'd have to either deal with it, or push him off if she wanted him gone, because he wasn't leaving on his own. He just enjoyed this spot to rest his head right above the swell of her breast way too much, along with the way his hips still rested against her opened legs, and the way she began to run her hands through his damp hair over and over again now, all of those things felt so nice, yet combined they were utter perfection.

His last thought before he finally succumbed to sleep was that this was the closest thing to heaven he could imagine, this right here, even with the barrier of clothing still between them. Tara was and always would be his favorite place in the whole fucking world, and he'd never make the mistake again and let her go.

X

Author's Note: I'm so thankful for all your lovely reviews of the last chapter. It's so motivating to read that my story is so well liked. So thank you for that. If you liked this chapter (or didn't), please leave me a few word again, I'm always curious to hear your thoughts. Thanks, Skater
Chapter 32

X

Jax and Tara were both fast asleep. Wrapped up in each other in the most literal meaning of the words. Their legs intertwined, both on their sides with Tara's face nuzzled against Jax's bare chest, his chin on top of her head, arms wrapped tightly around each other. Just by looking at them, nobody would ever suspect that they weren't happily married.

But their peaceful slumber was rudely interrupted by the ringing of Jax's phone that echoed through the still dark bedroom. It wasn't the alarm he'd set to get up in time for work, but it still startled both of them awake just as quickly.

Somehow Jax and her had traded sides throughout the very few hours of sleep they'd actually gotten, so in order to reach his phone, he practically rolled back on top of Tara, pushing her flat on her back while he propped himself up on one elbow hovering right above her, and reached for the phone with his other hand.

He squinted at the phone number that appeared on the screen, but didn't recognize it. All he knew was that it was a local number, so he settled back down onto the mattress besides his wife and pulled a still sleepy Tara back against him, before he finally answered the call and raised the phone up to his ear to answer.

"Yeah." He said, his voice sounding raspy with sleep. "This is him."

Tara blinked to adjust her eyes to the darkness, and looked up then from beside him, suddenly curious who he might be talking to, but Jax's face didn't give anything away and even though she could hear a male voice, she couldn't quite make out what was being said.

"Now?" He suddenly said, and closed his eyes in obvious frustration, out of reflex he nodded, but also answered out loud since the caller obviously couldn't see him, "Yeah, okay. I'll be there as soon as I can." He hung up the phone and tossed it on the empty spot beside him, clearly agitated, and cursed our loud. "Fuck."

Now wide awake, everything about last night came rushing back to him with full force. The talk with Maureen, not only revealing the truth about Gemma but about him almost leaving Abel too, then his middle of the night confrontation with his mother ... and last, but not least, what ended up happening between Tara and him. So much for easing up on her, and not pushing her anymore!

"What's going on?" Tara suddenly spoke, a tad bit alarmed by his angry outburst. "Who was that?"

And propped her head up on her elbow to get a better look at him, her hand flat on his chest right above the letters that spelled out her name.

Jax swiped his hand down his face, and wiped the sleep from his eyes, "That was my fuckin' PO, since I just got back from Charming, he wants me to come in for a piss test right away."

"Okay." Tara said wearily, but couldn't stop herself from asking out loud what instantly popped into her mind. "When you were in the chapel alone with them, did you -".
"No, babe." Jax interrupted her before she could even finish her question. "I ain't gonna piss hot. There's no reason to worry." He paused, sighed looking over at her, and brushed her disheveled hair out of her face, "I just didn't wanna have to run out of here this morning like that, but now I fucking have to." It was the truth. He didn't like the thought of running off right now without a chance to gauge where they were at. If they were good, after last night. But there was no time for any of that now. So he quickly shifted his focus on the here and now once more, "Are you good getting the boys ready on your own?"

Tara nodded, "Yeah, I'll be fine." She almost reminded him that she had plenty of practice being a single parent, but she bit her tongue, not wanting to sour the mood even more. Not after the night they've had.

"Good." Jax replied, and leaned in for a lingering kiss, before he quickly climbed out of bed, to take a fast shower and head on out.

X

Tara and Christy managed to take their lunch break at the same time for once, and were hiding out from their patients and co-workers alike in the back hallway of the hospital basement. It was one of the quietest places you could find in the entire building, other than the morgue, which they avoided for obvious reasons, and the rooftop, which at this time of year was simply too cold, windy, and often rainy, to enjoy their lunch break outside anymore.

So the hallway suited them better, for some much needed quiet time. There were extra gurney's stacked up, and hospital beds lined up against the wall, along with some folded up wheelchairs and extra chairs as well.

Tara sat right across from Christy in one of those chairs, hiding her face in both her hands while she sighed audibly in frustration with herself. She'd had already filled Christy in on what had happened last night between Jax and her, but she was still at a loss on how to really feel about it herself.

"I'm just so confused. I got all these contradicting feelings about what happened. I don't even know what to think." She admitted, no doubt that they'd found themselves completely alone to discuss these matters out loud and out in the open.

Christy shook her head, still chewing the bite of her sandwich, trying her best to figure out what the right thing to say was in this particular situation, but for the moment she kept quiet and thought it might be best to let Tara pour her heart out.

But then Tara spoke up again, "You know, my psychiatrist thinks that the reason I'm holding out on sex with him, is because I'm subconsciously punishing him for cheating." Tara searched Christy's face for a reaction.

At that Christy actually put her sandwich down, and absentmindedly swiped some crumbs off of her blue scrub top, as she inquired further what Dr. Reed had said, "She actually said that? 'Cause she's normally way more cryptic. She kinda sucks that way."

"Not in those exact words." Tara replied agreeing with her friend, and when Christy nodded, Tara added, "But she was definitely implying it." She took a sip from her soda can.

"Well, I call bullshit." Christy suddenly found her voice, having had an opinion about some of this for quite some time, "Because even with John, Medford Memorial's very own tall, dark and handsome version of Mc Dreamy, who's fucking perfect, you couldn't pull the trigger either. Remember? So I think it's just ... um, you know, you've got hurt by men in the past, and yeah,
emotionally it was Jax, but I think it's a general not trusting men thing, not just Jax specific."

Christy studied Tara's face who was clearly letting her words sink in, before she added, "I mean, there was the ex from Chicago who assaulted you, then you got almost kidnapped and got your hand crushed, and the guy from Charming who'd almost killed you, put you in a coma ... Of course that shit will eventually catch up with you, anyone would have a hard time trusting anyone after trauma like that, Sweetie."

Christy gave her a comforting look while a few beats of silence stretched between them. "And yeah, it sucks for Jax that he's taken the brunt for what these other guys did to you, but he's not exactly innocent either. He might've not hurt you physically, but he broke your fucking heart ... bad, so ..." Christy finished, leaving the rest open ended, but the meaning was clear.

But before Tara could even so much as utter a reply, Christy quickly spoke again, "Or maybe I'm wrong, I mean, what the hell do I know? Maybe you are holding back because he cheated, and honestly, that's fine too, there's nothing wrong with any of that. It you need more time, you need more goddamn time and Dr. Reed can just shut her judgmental trap the fuck up."

Tara raised her eyebrows in surprise at Christy's outburst, and Christy finally looked up from her food and met Tara's eyes, "Sorry, I just can't fucking stand Dr. Reed."

"Why are you seeing her again?" Tara suddenly dared to ask in return, at an attempt to cheer her friend up, "Was it anger issues?" Tara smirked.

"Funny." Christy scoffed, but then smirked back at her, before she answered. "I'm not seeing her anymore. I was just stressed about some work stuff, but I think she actually has made things worse for me instead of better. So I quit going back." She looked up suddenly again, "That doesn't mean you should quit seeing her thought, I mean, you had some real shit happening with you, not just stress."

"I know. God knows I need all the help I can get." Tara agreed, only partly joking and let out another heavy sigh, her forehead wrinkled in obvious worry as she looked off into the distance, lost in her thoughts again.

Christy examined the look on Tara's face for another long moment, getting back to the point at hand. "About Jax though, I've seen you guys together, and I think you worry just a bit too much. Like you said, he would never do anything you don't want him to, so the fact that things went as far as they did last night means that at some level you were okay with it, or you would've put a stop to it. Right?" Christy searched Tara's face for any reaction to her insight.

And Tara slightly blushed, a small smile now tugging on her lips. "Yeah, I guess."

"I think you'll know when the right time comes to take that next step, ... and until then, you put on the breaks if it doesn't feel right yet. Sounds like Jax is okay with that, so it's all pretty fucking simple." Christy said, but then simply couldn't help herself and had to add, "But on a side-note, no hands, no toys and clothes still on ... sounds like that man of yours got some mad skills for him to get the both of you off just dry humping. " Christy giggled.

"Christy." Tara said in a warning tone, but couldn't help from letting out a chuckle at that herself, cheeks blushing even more, before she said clarifying, "Trust me, there was nothing dry about it." Tara now boldly admitted. "We were both soaked down to our skin by the time we finally fell asleep."

"The best kind of sex usually ends like that." Christy winked grinning and Tara smiled, nodding in
agreement.

"Yeah." Tara replied wistfully. Last night had been good, but nowhere as good as it had been in the past or could be again if she'd let it truly happen.

Christy was always able to bring a smile to her friend's face with her colorful commentary, and she wasn't done just yet, "Speaking of being dry though, I swear, I dated this guy my freshman year in college ... I could've drawn him a goddamn map and he still wouldn't have found the right spot, if you know what I mean?" Both laughed out loud at that. "And to make matters worse, he'd then ask me how he was in front of his stupid friends."

Christy shook her head, "Needless to say, it didn't last long." Christy made a face to convey her disgust with the guy, which in turn brought on another round of laughter from both of them. "Sounds like Jax at least knows what the hell he's doing between the sheets."

Just then someone cleared their throat loud enough startling them both in surprise as they turned their heads in unison in the direction of the sound.

And there was Jax, slowly approaching them, with that confident Teller-swagger, and even though they couldn't be sure just how much of their conversation he'd overheard, the amused look on his face left no doubt that he'd heard at least some of it. That last sentence for sure.

Tara and Christy shared a look, Christy bit her lip as she tried so hard not to laugh and Tara simply shook her head embarrassed, heat rising across her face, all the way to her ears.

Christy began to wrap her sandwich back up in the wax paper on her lap and quickly gathered all of her stuff, getting to her feet. "Hi Jax." She greeted him sweetly, smiling, and Tara wished the floor beneath her would open up and swallow her whole.

"Hey." Jax nodded at her in greeting, before he came to a stop right beside Tara. "Hi, babe." Still smiling sheepishly at her, gauging her facial expression in return.

"Hi." Tara replied, also looking up at him now, her cheeks flaming, before her eyes drifted back to Christy again.

"Well, I gotta get back to work. Find me later." Christy said winking and leaned down to give Tara a one armed hug with her free hand, clutching her food and bottle of water with her other, before she nodded at Jax once more as she walked passed him towards the long corridor that led to the elevators. "Behave yourselves and keep your clothes on." She blurted over her shoulder, and Tara shook her head once more in embarrassment as Jax now took the seat that Christy had just abandoned.

"I take it you told her ... about last night?" Jax asked out loud, and she cursed him inwardly that he'd actually bring it up right now this way.

Tara bit her lip, trying not to smirk, before she cocked her head to the side, "What gave it away?"

At that, Jax actually let out a laugh, and Tara couldn't help but smile along with him.

"What are you doing here?" Tara suddenly asked, and scrunched her eyebrows together as something began to dawn on her. "And how did you even get down here, this is a restricted area?"

"One of the nurses on your floor said you might be down here, and she swiped her access card for me." He said as if it was the most normal thing in the world.

Now Tara shook her head and frowned as her mind tried to recall all the female nurses on her staff
today, wondering which one of them had fallen victim to the Teller charm.
"Of course." She huffed, a bit annoyed at the thought of him flirting with people in her department,
"Why are you here?"

"Hey." Jax pulled his chair forward, to be closer to her so he could grab both her hands, not liking
how her facial expression and the tone in her voice just changed, "What just happened? Why are you
pissed?"

Tara wanted to roll her eyes at the fact that he clearly never saw anything wrong with his behavior,
but instead she just flat out told him the truth, "I don't like you flirting with people I'm working with,
 alright? That's what's wrong."

"Wait a minute, babe. I didn't flirt with anyone." Jax tried to defend himself. "Was I friendly to find
out where you are? Sure. But I didn't flirt with anyone."

"Oh, really. Some nurse just swiped her card for some random stranger to get access to restricted
hospital areas, without you sweet-talking her?" Tara scoffed, not buying any of this.

He shook his head, "No, she didn't do it for some random stranger, but she did it for her boss'
husband." He swiped a hand down his face in annoyance that he needed to even explain, but he did
it nonetheless. "I told her that I'm your husband, and that you didn't know I was stopping by, that I
was trying to surprise you, and she said she recognized me from the pictures on your desk, so she
was nice enough to help. That's what happened, alright?" Jax tried to explain himself, searching her
face that she believed him and understood.

Tara paused, letting his words sink in and looked away slightly embarrassed, but for a different
reason this time. "Okay ... sorry I ... I guess I jumped to conclusions."

"Apology accepted." He replied, and smiled and rubbed the pads of his thumbs over her hands in
hopes to break the ice again.

Another moment of silence stretched between them, before Tara finally looked up and repeated her
other question to him, "So, why are you here?" She didn't mean for her voice to still sound so biting,
but it did.

Jax cleared his throat, "After last night, I just wanted to make sure that you're okay ... we're okay?"

He searched her face and was relieved when she looked up and met his eyes and nodded, "Yeah,
we're okay." She repeated his words back to him, the tone in her voice more friendly again, but she
still wasn't smiling. "You didn't have to come all the way here for that. You could've just called."

"I know, but on the phone I can't see your face to see if you actually mean it." He replied, and gave
her another smile in hopes to lighten the mood again and it seemed to work.

"You know you can facetime with your new phone, so technically you could see my face if you
wanted to." She corrected him with a hint of a smile tugging on the corner of her lips now.

"Well." He gave her a sweet smile and let go of her hand to reach up to her face, "The phone could
never be as good as the real thing." He framed her face with both his hands now and said, "And I
can't do this through the phone." He leaned forward for a gentle kiss, relishing the feeling of her lips
and the way she returned the kiss.

He eventually pulled back, met her eyes and said earnestly, "I'm sorry if I overstepped last night,
babe ... I didn't mean for it to go as far as it did." He tried to sound regretful, yet it didn't really
convey in the sound of his voice when he spoke.
Tara held his gaze for a moment, trying to find the right words herself now and nodded, "I could've told you to stop if I wasn't comfortable with it." She sort of repeated what Christy had brought to her attention just a little while ago. She could've so easily shut him down last night.

"That's true, you could have." Jax agreed, his face serious again all of a sudden, hesitating for a moment whether or not he should even further elaborate at all, but his guilt pushed him to do it. "After that talk with Maureen, and my mom ... I was just in a bad place, babe, and I tried to steer clear of you for as long as I could, but ... when we kissed, all that shit suddenly disappeared, and all I could think about was kissing you and how good you felt beneath me, against me ... I'm sorry, I know it's fucked up."

"It's okay." Tara answered, her voice so low, almost a whisper, equally serious and then she reached out for him now, picking imaginary lint off of the blue plaid shirt he was wearing in a vain attempt to avoid meeting his eyes, "It was a bad night ... what we did took both our minds off all the bad stuff ... at least for a little while."

She paused for a moment, and dared to look him in the eyes then, brushing his long hair back that had fallen in his face when they'd kissed, "How are you doing today? Did Gemma try to reach out again?" She wondered and couldn't stop herself from asking out loud.

"How did you know?" Jax scoffed, and looked away as he shook his head, "She's been blowing up my phone, well ... until I figured out how to block her." He admitted.

"She's known to be persistent." Tara elaborated, but then changed the subject altogether again, "Look at you though." She teased, hoping to bring a smile back to his face. "Getting all tech-savvy in your old age."

"Who're you calling old, doc?" He said smirking, his eyes twinkling in amusement at the sudden playfulness in Tara's voice, "You do remember that I'm just barely older than you, darlin'?"

Tara let out a small laugh, not bothering to actually reply, and in turn Jax laughed too, and grabbed her by her waist now just a little roughly as he pulled her urgently out of her chair and onto his lap instead, leaving her no choice but to straddle him, "Christ, babe, I love you so goddamn much."

But Tara wasn't fooled this time, and when he tried to tug her closer she pushed back against his chest, to keep eye contact with him, "You didn't answer my other question though."

"Which was?" Jax feigned ignorance as best he could, still smiling.

"I asked how you are today? About your mom?" Tara repeated her earlier question, and the way his smile began to fade away from his face didn't go unnoticed by her.

The change in mood was instant, and he lowered his gaze, averting her eyes and his face grew serious. And even though she was so close to him physically at the moment, she could practically feel him pulling away from her emotionally again.

She framed his face then, forced him to look back at her, "I know that this isn't how you'd normally handle it. Holding back like you are, not confronting Gemma face to face and not turning this into a club thing. " Tara began to explain. "But I'm so thankful that you're trying this my way. I really am, Jax. And you know that you can talk to me about it, ... or not talk at all. But just know, I'm here for you. Always." She tried to reassure him.

"I appreciate that, babe." Jax answered sincerely, his eyes locked on hers, before he wrapped his arms around her, and rested his forehead against hers, closing his eyes and she closed hers too while they remained like that for a long silent moment.
But Jax finally spoke up without looking up. "I won't go after her, I won't hurt her, but I'm not sure I
can ever forgive her either."

"I know." Tara replied, framed his face and actually pulled him even closer, until his chin was resting
on her shoulder, and hers on his, wrapped in each other's arms. "I don't think anyone could forgive
something like that. She has no right to expect you to."

Jax scoffed, but remained wrapped in her arms, turning his head to nuzzle his face into the crook of
Tara's neck, his voice hushed against her skin, "You'd be surprised what she expects of me."

Now Tara tried to pull away, so she could actually look at his face as they were talking again, but he
wouldn't let up on the hold he had on her, so she spoke up like this instead. "What do you mean by
that? What does she expect?"

Jax sighed, holding her close, he didn't want to look at her face, look her in the eye when he's taking
the plunge and finally letting her in on some of the things that Gemma had said, "Last night, at first
she tried to deny everything, of course. Then she finally caved, but she only fessed-up to have gotten
closer with Clay while JT was still alive. She made excuses, blamed it on JT being gone when
Thomas was so sick, and then of course his affair with Maureen, said Clay was there for her through
it all and that's how they got closer. She said she knew Clay was pushing for the president's patch,
said JT had crushed her, so she supported Clay in that too ... But she swore up and down that JT's
suspicions of her was just bullshit. That JT was just using that as an excuse to justify his own
betrayal against her with Maureen and Trinity. She said that she had no idea, denied that she had
anything to do with Clay messing with JT's bike. The accident was so random, but tragic, she'd
never suspected Clay."

He took in a deep breath, sighing before he continued, and now he suddenly pulled away himself, so
he could meet Tara's eyes again. "She's devastated, thinks Maureen twisted me up, making me doubt
her. She's pushing to get close, said she'd even leave Charming, come up here to be near her family
again."

If she hadn't overheard the end of Jax's conversation with Gemma last night, this revelation would've
had her on edge now, with her heart beating out of her chest. But she knew that Jax had shut her
down, cut her off for good.

"So she expects you to forgive her?" Tara answered, getting back to how this whole subject had
even started again.

"Yeah. But even if she was telling the truth about that, she's done enough damage otherwise. I did
confront her again about the way she treated you. How she threatened you, and hurt you, and that I
can't let that stand. I told her I'm done with her."

He sighed, "... and you're right about our sons too, I don't want her around, poisoning the boys'
minds with speeches about the club and their destiny within it, like she'd done with me."

Tara nodded in agreement, relieved that nothing had happened, that Gemma hadn't gotten to him and
changed his mind again. She could see it in his eyes just how serious he was about all of this.
Gemma would be out of their lives for good this time, and without her constant meddling, in time
they'd heal enough to get back to what they'd lost.

"There's something else you should know though, babe." His face was a stone wall suddenly, and it
scared her momentarily if she was being really truthful with herself. "Without the letters, I can't really
prove that she was involved, even with Maureen backing me up."

Tara searched his face trying to figure out what he was trying to say. When the pieces suddenly
began to fall in place she hesitated before she spoke, "So... that's why you're not going after her." She voiced it like a statement, but Jax saw it as the question it actually was.

He nodded, averting her eyes for a split second before they snapped back up to meet hers, "I know this isn't what you want to hear. That you want to believe that I've... grown, but JT wasn't just my father, Tara, nor was he just First-Nine, he was the founder of Sam Crow, and if I had real proof, and I mean more than just the ramblings of a disgruntled side-piece, I'd have to tell the club and I'd have to be there with them when they'd handle... it." Jax searched her eyes, gauging her reaction and not liking the disapproving look that reflected back in them, but then again he'd pretty much expected that it would come to this. His hands slid to her hips almost subconsciously, like on reflex, as if preparing to keep her from running should she try to pull away now in disapproval.

But she didn't pull away, instead, to his surprise, she closed her eyes and leaned in further again, resting her chin on top of his shoulder once more, while her arms remained wrapped around him. She wasn't really sure what to say, but unlike him, she'd never really believed it would be that simple for him to leave the club behind, and the code that came with it. After all, part of her lingering doubt in him stemmed from that very believe, that even now, the club was still very much a part of him, and vice versa. And with that part came the violence, the lies and betrayals.

Her mind went back to an argument they'd shared about this back in Charming, when he'd promised her they'd still be leaving everything behind.
I'm still getting out, Tara. The Deal with the Irish goes down today.
And then what?
Then I put my goddamn family in a car and we drive the hell out of Charming.
Just like that, Jax? Change your clothes, wash off the blood...
Yeah, Tara, just like that. Look... I know it's not going to be an easy shift, I'm not delusional, but I also know you're not clear right now.
I'd argue, I'm the clearest I've ever been.
Trust me, babe...rage feels that way.

It's amazing, and frightening too, just how strong those feelings can come back to you as you're reliving a moment like that, Tara thought to herself as she still quietly clung to Jax for support. She fought back the tears, refusing to cry... she just wanted one goddamn day without spilling tears. If she didn't know any better, she'd wonder herself if she was pregnant again by the mere fact how emotional she'd been as of late.

"Tara..." He started, but before he could say anything else, Tara spoke up, not liking the alarming way he'd spoken her name, her chin quivered, but by the grace of god she managed to keep the wavering from her voice, "It's okay, Jax, I understand."

She wasn't lying, she understood. Had figured, but also feared it wouldn't be an easy shift from the monster he'd become to being the man she'd fallen in love with, but at the very least, with all his confessions since he'd landed on her doorstep, she knew he was really trying this time.

Jax's hands slid back up from her hips, one wrapped around her back, the other disappeared in her hair, pulling her just as tightly against him, as she was clinging to him at the moment. "I hate to disappoint you... I don't want to disappoint you again." He whispered against the crook of her neck.
"I know I'm not who you want me to be... as good as you want me to be. But because of you I'm already better than I was. If you hadn't made it, if I'd really lost you, babe, there'd be nothing left of me. I would've given in... given up, like Ope did." He mournfully confessed, tears welling up in his eyes as he remembered once more the way Opie had practically offered himself up on a silver platter in his place. He made a silent vow to himself, that as long as he had her and his boys, he'd never let it come to that. He'd never again give in to the darkness he knew he had in him still, the one that had
her thinking once that he would've even hurt her.

But just as this thought crossed his mind, he realized his own contradiction in them. Hadn't he just told her he would've hurt his own mother, the woman who'd brought him into this world, if he had tangible prove about the crime she'd committed against the club?

He clung to her, pressed his eyes shut, letting the tears slip passed, and breathed in the scent of her, a combination of her flowery shampoo and the antimicrobial soap she washed up with before surgeries. It was such a strange mixture, but a welcoming and familiar one, one he could seek comfort in.

He had been so sure in his own convictions, they had almost robbed him of all sleep last night, had him confessing them guiltily to her just now, and yet here with her in his arms, he doubted again ... but this doubt, unlike any other, gave hope that he was somehow on the right path after all. The way Tara was not giving up on him was in fact pulling him back from the pit of hell.

And as if on cue, Tara pulled back enough to look at him, for once leaving him no choice in the matter when she framed his face, forcing him to meet her eyes, "I'm still here, and so are you. What happened with Donna, and with Opie, it's not gonna happen to us. I won't let it." The look in her eyes was fierce, comming the resolve she felt about what she'd said.

But Tara wasn't done just yet, she couldn't help herself from adding, "Like you said, there's no proof, other than Maureen's words ... so there's nothing to be done, right?"

"I'm not going anywhere, babe. I'm here, with you. I promise." Jax swore in return, looking just as determined as she had a moment ago. "I won't let anything come between us again."

X

Tara stepped into the bedroom, closing the door behind her, and shrugged out of her grey robe, before she tossed it over the chair by the vanity. Her eyes connected with Jax, who actually was already in bed, sitting up, with a hardcover book in his hand.

He let the book drop in his lap, scooted further down in a laying position and pulled the blanket back for her to climb into bed beside him. Tara slipped under the covers right next to him, snuggled into his side, closing her eyes with a content sigh as her head dropped tiredly to his shoulder.

"Long day, huh?" Jax asked, knowing already the answer since she had gotten home just a little while ago. Long after he'd already put their boys to bed.

"Yeah. Emergency surgery." Tara said in way of explaining, twisting in his arms to face him even more, wrapped her arm across his bare chest without opening her eyes. "Still can't sleep?" She opened her eyes just long enough to ask and hear his response.

Jax looked back at her, "No, honestly I can barely keep my eyes open ... I was just waiting up for you." He closed the book shut without saving his page, tossing it onto the nightstand beside him, and leaned closer to say, "I think we both got some much needed sleep to catch up on."

He softly kissed her lips, sweet and innocent. "Good night, babe."

"Goodnight." Tara mumbled against his chest, "I love you."

She'd said it plenty of times, and he'd never doubted the sincerity behind those three little words when they came from her, because if she didn't mean it, or tried not to mean, she wouldn't say them, like she hadn't after she'd gotten out of county. But it still made his insides turn to mush, like he was the goddamn girl in this equation when she said them to him now, like this, wrapped up in his arms.
It let his mind wander back to better times, much simpler times, when her biggest problem was if she'd ace the driving part of her driver's license test, and if Clay would let him get more hours in at TM, so he'd finally be able to afford the missing parts for his bike he was putting together from scrap. Back then they couldn't wait to grow up, be adults, mostly so they could be done with school, and be with each other and nobody would give them shit about it. Oh what he wouldn't give to go back in time, do things over, better! He would've gotten to this moment of peace with her a whole lot quicker and without this much blood on his hands.

"I love you." He replied, whispering the words against her temple before he placed another kiss there as well. "Always have, always will."

X

Author's Note: Thank you all for those amazing reviews to the last chapter. I'm so glad it was so well received. So here's the new chapter. Not much progress time-wise, but progress nonetheless. I hope you like it as well and if you do, please leave me a few words or a review. Thank you so much.
Chapter 33

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X

It was mid-afternoon on Wednesday, and Jax stood in the main lobby of Medford Memorial in front of the hospital directory, trying to figure out which floor the neurology department was on. It didn't take long before he knew where he had to go and he took quick steps towards the elevator that was just about to close on him, but he made it just in time.

He was just about to step up to the front desk, informing them that he was here to meet his wife for her appointment, when Tara appeared in his line of sight.

"Hey, babe." He said in greeting and kissed her softly on the lips, still relishing in the feel of it every time he kissed her now, after having been denied access to those beautiful lips for far too long.

"You made it." Tara said with a hint of surprise in her voice, momentarily lost in the loving look in his blue eyes that were staring back at her.

"I told you I would." He said, and reached down to take her hand in his, intertwining their fingers as he fell in step beside her while they walked further down the hall. "Might have to work a little late tonight though, to make up the time I'm out of the shop."

"I figured." Tara nodded, and brought them both to a sudden stop in front of a door and raised her free hand to knock.

X

The room was darkened and Tara stood next to the examining table, casually leaning against it with her hip, her arms folded in front of her chest. The lines between her eyebrows appeared more pronounced while her eyes looked over the array of scans that were spread out along the backlit board right in front of her.

She examined the images with such scrutiny, and here and there she'd point out a thing or two to the doctor right beside her, which in turn would spark a quick discussion between the two medical professionals in the room, in some foreign sounding medical lingo that left Jax for the most part in the dark.

Jax stood rather awkwardly a few steps behind his wife, hands buried in his jeans pocket as he also let his eyes flitter across Tara's brain scans with the same scrutiny as she did. But unlike her, he didn't have the faintest idea what he was looking at, or what he was supposed to be looking out for. He was trying to pinpoint anything that would look out of the ordinary as best as he could, but what the fuck did he know about ordinary looking brain scans.

He was no dummy by any means, he knew the workings of almost any kind of engine out there, cars, trucks, motorcycles, of all different kinds of makes and models. He also knew how to disassemble and reassemble just about any gun out there, yet this medical stuff right here was way over his head.

As if the two women could read his thoughts, they suddenly turned their attention back to him. Tara
turned to her side, her hand stretched out towards him and he willingly took it and stepped up right next to her.

"So ...?" Jax said, nodding his head towards the board filled with scans, "How's it looking?" He tried his best to sound casual, to play off the nervousness he felt deep down. She was still so emotionally damaged, he needed her to be okay at least in the physical sense.

"Everything's good." Tara nodded and smiled reassuringly back at him.

Jax let out the breath he'd been holding, and gave her hand in his a squeeze before he turned and placed a kiss against Tara's forehead and sighed in relief. "Thank god, we sure can use some good news for a change."

But Jax couldn't help himself and let his eyes flicker back to the scans on the wall, and even in the darkness of the room, Doctor Reed could see the lingering concern still edged in his eyes.

"Here, let me show you." She said and rifled through an oversized folder on her desk, pulling another scan from the stack within. She held it up towards the board, reading the small identifying information on the top part, before she stepped to the board itself and placed it right next to the last one to the right. Then she reached for a pen looking device on her desk, that turned out to be a laser pointer in disguise, that she quickly flicked on.

A red dot appeared on the scan, and Jax could make out the small print atop that scan that read 'Tara Knowles-Teller' and 'St. Thomas' amongst other numbers, abbreviations and the date, which was from the day she'd gotten attacked.

Doctor Reed proceeded to show him different parts on the scan from St. Thomas, and in turn pointed the little red dot on the corresponding part on the newer scans right beside it. And even to his untrained eyes, he could see the difference clear as night and day from the scan that had been taken on the day she'd been attacked, and the scans that were taken here just two days ago.

His throat suddenly felt dry, at the thought how all of this could've turned out, and he couldn't help but wonder how he was so lucky to have been given another chance with her.

Doctor Reed flipped the main lights back on, turned the backlight behind the scans off again, and turned away from the scans altogether.

"Since you're a colleague, we did this kind of backwards, going over the scans first ..." Doctor Reed admitted out loud, smiling sweetly at both of them, before turning all her attention to Tara. "... but I still have to give you a quick examination, Dr. Knowles, it's protocol."

"Of course." Tara nodded.

"Take a seat, please." The doctor gestured towards the examining table, and Tara climbed atop, taking a seat on the edge.

Jax stood back again, shoved his hands in his jeans pockets once more, hoping they wouldn't find anything else wrong during this examination.

Doctor Reed proceeded to conduct several neurological exams, ending with a small flashlight shining in Tara's eyes, before she finally spoke up, "So overall, how have you been feeling?"

"Fine. I feel fine." Tara replied without missing a beat. Anything that had been going on in her life had really nothing to do with her brain injury, so she didn't feel the need to disclose it.
"Yeah? That's good. So no dizziness, disorientation? Anything like that?" Dr. Reed continued.

Tara shook her head, "No."

"Great. Well, everything looks great, like we already discussed, the scans are excellent." She finally lowered the flashlight and turned it off with a click, "So, what about your memory recall, anything?"

Tara hesitated, "Um ... no, not really." She'd lost track of how many times she'd been asked that question since she's woken up.

"No, huh?" She replied, sounding concerned, before she grabbed Tara's file off of her desk and flipped through a couple of pages for a long moment.

Tara cleared her throat, not liking the concern etched in the woman's features as she read over Tara's file for too long, so she spoke up, "Neuro isn't my field at all, I only did one rotation way back when, but that I'm still not remembering anything ... that's not normal, is it?"

Jax was suddenly on alert at that, noting the concern in Tara's voice now, but remained stoically glued to the spot watching the exchange between the two women.

"Listen, when it comes to the brain, nothing is normal, because no two brain injuries are the same." She began to explain away some of Tara's concern, putting the medical file back onto her desk.

And Jax couldn't bite his tongue now either, "She seems perfectly herself again." It was only partially a lie, he told himself as soon as the words had slipped past his lips, and Tara dared to look over at him for the briefest of moments wondering if he'd really meant that.

"Mr. Teller, would you mind if I talked to Dr. Knowles alone for just a moment, please?" She said in the most friendliest voice she could muster, not wanting to sound like she was kicking him out, even though technically she was.

Jax didn't like it but he nodded, yet before he could even open his mouth to voice his agreement out loud, Tara quickly interjected, "Whatever you have to say, you can say it in front him." Tara's eyes drifted to Jax's again, letting him know that she didn't want him to leave.

"Alright." Doctor Reed agreed, and proceeded with her questions, "Do you want to regain your memory?"

"Yes." Tara answered, not even having to think about it.

"I ask, because some patients fear that when their memory comes back, so will the pain of the trauma, but mercifully that's rarely the case." She eyed Tara critically from her position near her desk.

Tara shook her head, "Oh, no, that's not it. I'm not afraid of that." But the way she answered the question made it clear to both Doctor Reed and Jax that she was afraid of something.

Doctor Reed voiced the obvious question out loud now, "So what are you afraid of?"

"Um ... I guess I just ... I don't know." Tara stuttered before she paused, averting her eyes from both her doctor and Jax, she swallowed the lump in her throat now, trying to think of the right words to answer this, "What I did ..." She started, but then elaborated, "I ... I guess I'm afraid of finding out what I did to deserve what happened." Tears welled up in Tara's eyes, but Doctor Reed had quick reflexes and held a tissue box out to her, and Tara equally quickly took one and wiped them away as fast as they had appeared.
Jax on the other hand felt like he'd just been punched square in the chest at Tara's tearful admission. Not only had she nightmares, and was fearful, but she was also plagued with thoughts of what she'd done wrong to end up in a puddle of her own blood. His jaw ticked with suppressed rage at the thought, and he vowed he'd make Juice suffer, making his end, his last breaths slow and painful, if that piece-of-shit would ever be found.

But for now, he had to push all that rage aside, for her benefit. So he did, and quickly stepped closer to her, "Jesus Christ, babe." He tipped her chin up and towards him, so she'd meet his eyes, "You didn't do anything to deserve what happened to you. Period." It was a fact, there was no point to even further elaborate on the reasons why, because there were none.

Tara nodded her head, and let him take her hand in his once more, but Jax had a feeling she had only agreed this quickly in an effort to placate him, so he wouldn't worry or talk about it another moment longer.

Doctor Reed took in the scene between the couple, appreciating the support Jax was giving his wife. She gave them a moment to gather their composure, before she interrupted them, "I only did one psych rotation myself, so this may be terrible advice. But I think you have to try and fill in the holes, because if you don't at least open yourself up to remembering, I'm afraid you're gonna continue to live in fear of what happened in those moments that you've lost."

X

Jax had Tara in his arms, standing in a dark supply closet further down the corridor, away from the main hallway where nurses and doctors were running about.

She had her head resting against his shoulder, her face almost completely hidden in the crook of his neck, while Jax whispered sweet words of reassurance to her, with his strong arms wrapped tightly around her.

He'd brought up her fear about finding out what she'd done that night again, and in turn, after a few words back and forth, Tara became emotional again too. So here they stood, hidden away from everyone else's prying eyes while Jax tried to make her see reason that there could be nothing in the world she could've possibly done to deserve what Juice had done to her. He hated the thought that she was blaming herself, thinking she'd deserved it someway somehow and he couldn't leave here until he knew she was feeling better.

Tara pulled away, wiping at her red rimmed eyes and used the tissue from her pocket to wipe at her nose as well. Jax looked down at her, waiting for her to look up and meet his eyes so he could gauge how she was.

"I'm fine, really." She said then, trying to sound convincing, brushing it off, because truthfully this issue, these thoughts she had ran so deep, they wouldn't be solved on this late lunch break, hiding out in here, between syringes, catheters, bedpans and the like.

"Bullshit." Jax replied, and shook his head in disagreement. "You're not fine."

"But I have to get back to work, Jax. And so do you." She said earnestly, reminding him that they had obligations. Her hands dropped to the waistband of his jeans, fingers curling playfully through the belt loops in a vain attempt to still her free hands. "I'm okay, I promise." She stood on her tiptoes to give him a quick peck on the lips, not liking how he still looked back at her with that overprotective and worried expression on his face.

But to Tara's surprise, he relented, "Alright." He nodded and kissed her back, soft but quickly like
she had, "But this isn't over, we will have to talk about this some more."

Tara cocked her head to the side just an inch, giving him a cheerless smile, "I'm talking to my shrink about it already ... no need to make it a home session too."

"Fat fucking chance, babe." Jax smiled almost slyly back at her. "We are going to talk about this some more ... at home." He added with emphasis.

"Fine." Tara answered, she gave up trying to convince him otherwise, or he'd never leave her to get back to work.

"Fine." Jax repeated in her exasperated tone of voice, but then grinned at her sheepishly, making sure she knew that he was just teasing her at the moment.

Tara turned towards the door then and Jax followed right behind her as they both tried to slip out inconspicuously. They walked the few steps down the corridor, to the main hallway, that lead to the elevators again. Jax pushed the button, and reached out for Tara's hand, pulling it to his lips and placed a small sweet kiss against her knuckles, and she smiled in return at the sweet gesture that truthfully never got old. She simply loved when he did that.

As they stood waiting for the familiar ding and the elevator doors to open, someone called Tara's name out behind them, and both turned together on cue.

But unlike Jax, Tara recognized the voice instantly and already knew who was calling out for her, and the fact that her husband was about to meet the man she had been dating several months ago made her heartbeat quicken and her palms uncomfortably sweaty, to say the least.

John was quickly approaching the couple, trying to catch Tara before she disappeared into the elevator that had now opened behind them.

"Hey. I was looking for you." He huffed, sounding almost out of breath as he came to a stop in front of Jax and her.

"Hi." Tara replied, and she could practically feel the sudden awkwardness in the air as the two men sized each other up.

She knew that she really had no choice here other than come right out with it, because if she knew one thing, it was that Jax was no fool and he'd be putting two and two together either way, with just one glance at the nametag.

And she was right, because as soon as Jax had turned to see who was calling after his wife, his eyes zeroed automatically in on the embroidered name on the white doctor coat, before he even bothered to give the man himself a second glance.

But now as Doctor John fucking Seward stood in front of him, he had to remind himself that the last thing Tara needed right now, was for him to cause any trouble for her at work. She'd be beyond pissed if he'd stir shit up here and now, so he instead squeezed Tara's hand a little tighter than he probably should have, before he wrapped his arm around her waist from behind and tugged her closer against him.

"Jax, this is Doctor John Seward, he's the Head of Neurology." Tara said unmistakably uncomfortable, looking back over her shoulder, meeting Jax's eyes now to gauge his reaction and was met with an ice cold stare that send chills down her spine, before she and Jax both looked back at John and she said, "John, this is my husband, Jackson Teller." She gestured with her hand to Jax as if it wasn't clear enough, but the truth was that she was simply incredibly nervous.
With a too cheerful grin plastered onto his too handsome face, John stuck out his hand towards Jax to shake, but Jax's eyes merely drifted down to the outstretched hand, before he shoved his own hand back into his jean pocket, while the other remained wrapped tightly around her. Making it glaringly obvious he had no intentions of shaking the man's hand who'd been screwing his wife behind his back. Hell would freeze over first!

The air thickened even more when John awkwardly pulled his hand away again, and even thought she couldn't blame Jax, she found herself wishing for the second time this week she would just be swallowed up into a big black hole beneath her feet, while she watched her husband and her ex look each other over with deadly scrutiny in their eyes for much too long for comfort. And she couldn't help but fear that if she didn't intervene, and quickly, she would undoubtedly get caught in the crossfire.

Tara decided the best approach would be to get right to the point, so her and Jax could be on their merry way again, "What's going on? What do you need?" She had to look up at John, who stood just over six feet tall, matching Jax in height, and waited for his reply.

At Tara's inquiry, John snapped back to the here and now, and handed her the file he'd had in his other hand, which Tara quickly flipped open and began to scan the pages in the same instant John began to fill her in. "Sixteen month old female, car crash, she was just brought into the pit."

"Brain hemorrhage, and arrhythmia." Tara confirmed, not taking her eyes off the files in her hand as she spoke.

"She's getting prepped as we speak. I'm going to fix the bleed first, then you can fix the arrhythmia right after, considering ..." John's words trailed off and he searched her eyes to see if she agreed with his approach as Tara looked further over the medical data in her hand.

"Yes, I agree, the bleed needs to be fixed first." Tara nodded, and closed the folder before she handed the file right back to him, "I'll walk my husband out, then I'll scrub in right after you."

"Alright. You've got some time." John nodded at Tara first, but then turned his attention back to Jax, "Sorry I had to interrupt this mid-day date and borrow your wife for myself for a couple of hours."

Tara briefly closed her eyes trying to suppress her own rage at the choice of John's words. She couldn't believe he'd dare to provoke Jax like this, especially considering that he'd barely spoken to her after they'd broken up, so it made no sense that he'd act like this now. But she also knew that this was not the time nor place to confront him, it would have to wait until after the surgery.

A low rumbling chuckle, that didn't hold a trace of humor in it, escaped Jax's throat right beside her ear before he deliberately slowly placed a kiss against her temple. Instinctively Tara grasped onto his arm that was wrapped around her waist, to ensure it would stay there, knowing that he must be seething at John's inappropriate remark that was clearly meant to get a reaction out of him.

Jax smirked sardonically back at him, his voice dripping with some twisted mixture of hateful amusement, the words delivered intentionally slow, "No problem, man, I will have her out of her scrubs and to myself all night long." He raised her hand back up to his lips for another kiss, his eyes never leaving John's as he did so, before he tugged her along with him back towards the elevator, "Let's go, babe."

She knew there was a part of her that took offence, or at least should've taken offence in the fact that these two men were talking about her like she was some piece of property to be had and fought over. Except there was a small part of her that couldn't help but feel turned on at Jax's display of jealousy and his possessiveness too.
And in all actuality, she also knew things could've gone a hell of a lot worse if Jax hadn't held back like he did, and she couldn't help but be grateful for that as he led her into the elevator without saying another word nor another look back at the man behind them.

After the doors closed, she wanted to say something to him, but the elevator was full with other people, so Tara decided to hold her tongue for now instead.

She saw the way his jaw was set, and the almost painful way his fingers dug into her side while he held her close to him. She dared to look up at him for another moment, noting that he was looking straight ahead as if he intentionally tried to ignore her stare and not meet her eyes. There was no doubt, he was beyond furious.

They exited the elevator into the underground parking garage without speaking, but she gave him credit for still holding her hand as she followed along to wherever he'd parked his truck.

To her surprise they arrived at his Harley Dyna instead. She'd strangely missed the sight of him on a motorcycle way more than she'd ever admit out loud to him, and that's when Tara dared to speak up for the first time, "You rode your bike here?"

It was more of a rhetorical question, since the answer was parked right before her eyes, but Jax answered nonetheless, albeit short, "Yes." That's when he let go off her hand, stepped up to his bike, unlocked his saddlebag and dug out his gloves.

Tara simply couldn't take the silent treatment another minute longer. "Thank you." She said, with a hint of hesitation to her voice.

At that he stopped what he was doing and actually looked over at her, his jaw still set in anger when he growled out the words, "For what?"

Tara folded her arms in front of her chest, "For not making a scene ... " A halfhearted smile appeared on her lips when she added, " ... and for not killing him."

At that he scoffed, one corner of his mouth almost looked like it raised just a tad for a split second as he went back to slipping his hands into his gloves, but he was back to avoiding her eyes and not speaking again, while he busied himself with adjusting the leather around his fingers for the perfect fit.

"He was out of line." Tara added, hoping that would get him to say something back in reply, but when he still remained quiet, she decided it was time to maybe share the last bit of truth she'd kept from him. She hadn't exactly lied, it was more of a lie by omission, when she'd told him that she'd been seeing someone else before he'd come back to her.

She hesitated for a moment, going over the right words to say in her head first before she dared to say them out loud, "There's something I should've told you ... about him."

She could see his chest rise and fall as he took in a deep breath, but finally stilled his hands that were now digging through his saddlebags again. "If it's gonna piss me off even more, you might wanna hold that thought for later, darlin'." His voice was grim sounding, not a trace of humor in it.

She thought about what he'd said, but didn't miss a beat in her reply, "It might piss you off why I didn't tell you right away, but overall I think you'd be less pissed." She watched his facial features intently to judge his reaction to what she'd just said.

But Jax just scoffed again, shaking his head this time, but when he had nothing else to add, it was Tara's turn to snap at him as she walked right up to him and yanked at his arm to get him to stop
what he was doing, "Would you stop digging through that goddamn bag and listen to me for a fucking minute." She glared at him exasperated, but was met with a matching look in his eyes shining back at her. "Please." She added now out of sheer desperation.

Jax leaned back against the seat of his bike now and made a motion with his hand for her to go on, "Go on, spit it out."

"I never slept with him." And there it was, the truth that she'd intentionally kept from him all this time.

"What?" Jax suddenly spoke now, searching her face to read if she was really speaking the truth as he tried to process what she'd just said.

Tara looked up at him, embarrassed to admit it, because she knew she sounded like a broken record by now, but she also knew it needed to be said, "I couldn't bring myself to let it get that far."

"But you made me think that you did." Jax clarified, his eyebrows raised, and still angry, but for a whole other reason now.

"Actually I didn't." Tara said, trying to keep her emotions from displaying on her face like an open book when their conversation in the woods outside of town came back to her, "You kind of jumped to that conclusion all on your own, and I ... well, I didn't correct you."

"Why the hell wouldn't you tell me?" Jax shook his head, and sighed in frustration as he swiped a gloved hand down his face, before he finally looked straight at her, "Why make me think that you fucked around behind my back, when you hadn't?"

Tara paused at that again, trying to get the words lined up in her head before she began to speak, "I've never cheated on you, Jax. Not when we were teenagers, not when we got together again after I came back, and not while you were in Stockton either. Not once. I've never even toyed with idea of being with anyone else, even when I had the opportunities. But you did. And you hurt me so much, and ... I guess I let you go on believing that I've slept with him, because I thought that just this once I could make you feel a fraction of the pain you've caused me."

"So you just wanted to hurt me?" He looked away, disgusted by the thought and shook his head to himself before he finally dared to meet her eyes again, "Do you have any idea what fucked up shit I've pictured in my head?"

At that Tara actually scoffed at him, "I'm sure whatever you imagined couldn't possibly be as fucked up as the things I've actually seen you do with my own eyes." He couldn't guilt trip her with something so ridiculous as what he'd imagined, when she'd actually walked in on him with someone else.

But Tara knew she should've expected this double-standard way of looking at it from him, it was clear when he glared at her still pissed off. "So you kept it to yourself just to fucking hurt me? For payback? Making me think you've been with someone else, but I couldn't have you?" He asked once more as if he still couldn't believe that she'd be capable of such a thing.

But this time Tara turned the tables on him and remained quiet like he had been before, and yes, she was embarrassed to say the least when he put it like that.

After she didn't say anything, Jax suddenly snapped and actually raised his voice at her, the exasperation palpable in his outburst, "F.Y.I., if we were having sex, I'd be bending you over my fucking bike right about now to remind you who your pussy -" He stopped abruptly, as if he
suddenly realized what he was saying, and pinched the bridge of his nose in suppressed rage at himself and her.

Tara could feel the heat rising in her cheeks as his words played out in her mind, and the way it made her feel inside was just as messed up as what he'd just said. On one hand she was repulsed that he'd talk to her like that, but on the other it had turned her on, if such a thing was even possible. But she knew this was beginning to turn ugly and she needed to get out of there before somebody said something they couldn't take back.

She started to take a few slow steps backwards, backing away from him leaning brooding against his bike, his face buried in both hands now.

"I gotta go." And with that, Tara turned on the spot not even given him the chance to speak up. She first took long quick strides, but they quickly turned into a jog, back in the direction of the elevators.

"Tara." Jax called after her, suddenly alarmed by the way she had taken off so quickly. "Wait." He called this time, and started to run after her retrieving form. He couldn't possibly leave things like this and let her take off.

Even with the head start she had, he caught up with her before she even made it to the elevators. "Tara." He called her name again but when she wouldn't stop, he grabbed her by the arm, spinning her around to get her to stop and look at him. His eyes were filled with sorrow, "Babe, I'm sorry. Alright, I'm sorry." He repeated.

She wouldn't meet his eyes, looking purposely away from him, and he couldn't stand it, a guilty conscience crushing him now. His breaths came in pants from having sprinted after her, when he framed her face with his leather clad hands, ready to have this heart to heart. But when a few people stepped out of the elevators and gave them nosy looks, Jax grabbed her arm again instead and pulled her along with him, into the stairwell right next to the elevators.

"I'm such a fucking asshole, I know I shouldn't have said that." He started as soon as they'd stepped through the door. "Please, babe, look at me. I'm sorry."

Tara complied and turned now to face him, folding her arms in front of her chest again, "You're right for once, you are a fucking asshole." She said, her voice stern, leaving no doubt that she'd meant it.

Jax cracked a small smile at that, he simply couldn't help himself and when the corners of Tara's lips curved up just the tiniest bit now too, he took advantage and quickly pulled her into his arms, crushing her hard against his still heaving chest. "I'm sorry, I don't know why I lost my cool like that." He said and pressed a long hard kiss against the top of her head. "I'm so glad you didn't sleep with him, babe."

And that's when her pager went off.

X

"Fuck." Jax cursed to himself when he saw the time as he climbed into the cab of his Pick-up. He had known he'd have to make up the hours he'd lost when he went to her appointment earlier today, but they'd actually gotten swamped right before closing, and now it was so much later than he'd even anticipated. He wondered and hoped she was waiting up for him.

Despite the cold temperatures, he cracked his window open enough to let some fresh air in before he lit his cigarette and put the truck in gear. He savored the taste of the nicotine, but it didn't soothe him enough tonight to keep his mind from going back to earlier today.
He wished more than anything that he could take her pain away, all of it. He'd gladly take it all on, just to spare her. Bring her back to being the woman that met him in the hallway of St. Thomas, smiling so brightly back at him with the good news that Abel was going to make it. Sure, the joy had been short lived once she'd noticed the blood stains on his clothes, but for a brief moment, she and him had been happy. So happy in fact that they'd almost kissed. And now, looking back he wished he would've said fuck it to all the reasons why he'd told himself he shouldn't and should've kissed her that night.

Overall, he wished he hadn't been so tormented at the time, so scared to let her get that close again, knowing what kind of power she could have over him, and what kind of damage she had inflicted the last time around. He was scared to get that hurt again, so he kept her at arm's length, even though he knew from the very moment he'd seen her back in Charming, on the night her father died, that he'd wanted her back more than anything else.

While working late tonight, he'd confided in Greg, telling him some of the shit that had happened. He simply couldn't keep it all bottled up inside, but at the same time he couldn't burden Tara with everything that was eating at him either ... so Greg had fallen victim to him instead.

And after he'd shared, maybe even over-shared, all of the shit Tara had had to endure because of him, old Greg in turn gave him a fucking earful. But in hindsight, it was exactly what he'd needed today. He needed someone to help him screw his fucking head on straight again, really lay it on him and tell it to him straight, and who better to do just that, then some guy that knew what the life was like, yet had no skin in the game concerning Sam Crow, Tara or him.

Greg had said a lot of things to him, but the gist of it was that he'd told Jax he needed to get his shit together once and for all. He'd reminded him that the main fucking goal was Tara getting better, point blank.
So it shouldn't fucking matter how long it took before she'd let him get his dick wet again, or how many exes of hers decided to crawl out of the woodworks and get in his face, he needed to suck it up, swallow his goddamn pride and shut the fuck up about it. Because in the grand scheme of things, none of that shit mattered.

Jax had in turn tried to argue back, that it wasn't quiet as simple. That the Sam Crow way was still so engrained in him, it was practically in his blood. A tiger can't change its stripes!

Greg had called bullshit, and had said "It's not who you are that's holding you back, man, it's who you think you're not."

"Wow, that's deep." Jax had replied in a sarcastic manner, but as he thought about it, really fucking thought about it, Greg's words of wisdom had struck a fucking nerve in him.

Jax took one last long drag from his cigarette as he pulled into his usual parking spot across from their home, and dropped the stub to the ground. He didn't waste any time getting inside, eager to see her, and talk to her, and hold her in his arms too, to make up for the shit show he'd put her through today.

Tara lay sleeping on the couch when Jax stepped inside, but when he closed the door behind him and clicked the deadbolt in place, she stirred and opened her eyes.

"Hey." She said, looking sleepily up at him, folding the blanket back a bit.

"Hi." Jax said, he hung up his jacket on the hooks by the door, before he stepped up to her and leaned down over her for a quick kiss. "Sorry I'm so late, babe. How did the surgery go?"
"Everything went well, at least as far as the surgery goes, but she's still got some hurdles ahead of her." Tara explained, and pushed herself up to a sitting position, watching Jax perch on the edge of the armchair, untying his steel toed work boots he was required to wear at the garage.

"We got swamped at the last minute." He offered in explanation, changing the subject again, as he pulled one boot off after the other, before he stood and leaned in to kiss her again, his hands on her shoulder, "I'm gonna get cleaned up real quick."

He smelled like cigarettes and motor oil, and his hands felt rougher than usually when they touched her bare shoulder. And Tara would never admit it out loud, but that too, was kind of a turn on ... but then again, apparently anything he did turned her on now, even when he yelled and screamed.

"Are you hungry?" Tara asked, trying to shake that thought from her mind, and bit her lip as she watched him begin to unbutton his plaid shirt.

"I'm starving." He answered truthfully. "Boys are asleep?"

"I'll heat you something up. And yes, they are." Tara answered, thankful for the distraction of a task and quickly got to her feet and walked past him into the kitchen.

She quickly fixed him a plate from the leftovers in the fridge, before she placed the plate in the microwave to heat it up.

She went back into the living room and actually couldn't help but smile at the trail of dirty clothes Jax had left behind on his way to take a shower.

Like father, like son, she thought as her mind went back to how many times both Abel and Thomas had done the exact same thing.

So one by one she gathered up his clothes, his button-down shirt, t-shirt, jeans, both socks, and at last she arrived at the open bathroom door, the room foggy with steam, where she found his discarded boxers on the bathmat right in front of the shower.

She disposed of everything in the hamper that stood next to the sink, when her eyes drifted over to the closed shower curtain, the sound of splashing water and the smell of his body wash filling the air around her. But she gathered her wits and decided to suppress the urge to slip out of her own clothes and under the stream of water with him, as soon as that thought had crossed her mind. The time wasn't right just yet. She knew that, or she would've helped him undress and joined him from the beginning.

Or she would've taken him up on his offer to have him bend her over his bike.

Shit! What the hell was wrong with me?

X

"Thanks, babe." Jax said before he took a seat on the couch beside her and wrapped his arm around her, "Food was real good." He padded his stomach a couple of times for show, "If you keep this up, I'm gonna get fat."

Tara curled comfortably into his side, but smirked at his remark, "If Gemma couldn't get you fat, I doubt I could."

Jax chuckled at that, "That's true."

Jax tried to convince himself that the awkwardness he felt was all just in his own head, but he had to know for sure. He turned his head towards her, nudging her forehead with the tip of his nose, "Hey,
you know I'm really sorry ... about earlier, I messed up. But ... I need to know that we're okay, babe."

Tara sat up straighter now and turned towards him more with her whole body, and he sort of mimicked her, so they were practically sitting face to face now on the couch. She braced one hand flat against his chest, their eyes met for a long couple seconds before she leaned in, closed her eyes and kissed him gently on the lips. She remained like that, letting the kiss linger for a long moment, before she parted her lips and allowed him to deepen it.

Jax groaned in pleasure when they kissed passionately for a long couple of minutes, before Tara softly pulled away and Jax tried his best to read the her facial expression.

Noting the somewhat unsure look in his eyes, she answered his question, her voice was low and apologetic, "We're okay ... And I'm sorry too for not telling you right away. I'm sorry I hurt you like that." She paused for a moment, running her hand over his Tara tattoo, then smirked a little embarrassed, "... I guess I just liked the idea of you being the jealous one for a change."

"For a change?" Jax repeated, looking back at her confused. "Tara, I'm always jealous. Because even back in high school I already knew you were out of my league. And you still are, babe."

His sweet words brought a genuine smile to Tara's face, her cheeks flushed a little, and Jax just loved the sight of it.

She lowered her gaze, averting his eyes because she'd never been good at taking a compliment, but Jax tipped her chin back up, his smile was just as sweet as hers when he spoke, "You don't even realize how goddamn beautiful you are, do you? You're perfect. And I can't stand the thought of guys even just looking at you, let alone get their grubby hands on you."

He leaned in and kissed her softly on the lips again, then said, "So you don't need to make me jealous, darlin', 'cause I already am."

X

Author's Note: Thanks for all the wonderful reviews, comments and private messages I've received. It's been so motivating, so I already got inspired to finish this chapter ahead of time. I hope you all like it, and I hope you leave me some words again. Let me know what you all think, please? Thank you.
Chapter 34

Jax and Tara were still settled down on the couch, all wrapped up in each other again, her head against his shoulder, her legs thrown over his thighs, slightly bend at the knee, and in turn his arm wrapped around her with his hand resting on her hip, pulling her closer against him.

The TV was on, and Jax had the remote in his free hand, flipping through the channels, trying to see if anything good, preferably funny, was on at the moment. Tara cuddled against him, with her eyes closed, and if it hadn't been for her fingers continuously playing with his beard, he would've thought she was fast asleep by now.

He dropped the remote beside him, ran a hand from her knee up to her thigh and back again, then softly kissed her forehead, looking down at her for a moment, no longer giving any mind to the show he'd decided on.

Once more he found himself going back to earlier today, and what Dr. Reed had said, about Tara needing to try fill in the holes to regain her memory, and of course he also thought about her tearful admission of having thought she'd provoked Juice to attack her somehow.

His hand left her knee and instead grabbed a hold of her hand that was playing with his beard and gently kissed each knuckle of her fingers, one by one, his eyes trained on her face as he did so.

"Can I ask you something?" He said in a low hushed voice, waiting for her to open her eyes and acknowledge his question.

Tara slowly opened her eyes and looked up at him then, she looked sleepy, but also so utterly at ease at the moment, that he almost considered abandoning questioning her again. But deep down he knew if they didn't talk about this before they crawled into bed tonight, he'd end up just tossing and turning all night again.

"Sure." Tara nodded, lifted her head off of his shoulder and sat up a little so she could keep her eyes trained on him now, curious what he was about to ask, and secretly hoping it wasn't about John. She hadn't had a chance to confront John about what he'd said to Jax, or rather how he had worded it so obviously with the intend to get a rise out of Jax, because there had been another emergency, and he'd rushed off right after his part of the surgery was completed. She'd find him tomorrow and have this talk for sure.

He hesitated for a second, going over the way to word this question just right in his head. "What do you think you might've done to Juice, to provoke him?" He knew there was nothing that would in any way excuse or somehow justify what Juice had done, but he wanted her to answer the question because he needed to understand where all of her fear and doubt was coming from.

Tara took a deep breath and sighed, her eyes grew big and she suddenly looked wide awake again as she thought about how to best answer that. She shrugged her shoulders for a moment, "I'm not sure." She paused, thinking. "Maybe ... maybe I pulled my gun on him, maybe even fired it ... or maybe we argued, or something"
Jax nodded, but it just didn't quite add up, "What would you and Juice have to argue about?"

"Well, for one I didn't like it that you had him watch me the days before." Tara answered honestly, "And I'm sure he told you that I backed over his Harley, you know."

"I'm sorry." Jax answered, not sure what else he could say, knowing full well that he'd treated her badly during that time, having her watched like he did. In hindsight he could see now how that must've made her feel. "But none of that would justify him to go after you like he did."

Tara neither nodded or said anything to that, because she knew he was probably right, but she was struggling with the why of it all, that it came natural to think she must've done something to provoke him, maybe not deserve it, but provoke him nonetheless.

"About what Dr. Reed said, trying to get your memory back. I've got an idea, if you're not too tired yet?" He wondered out loud, waiting for her agreement.

"What kind of idea?" Tara asked, curious about that now too.

"Hold on a sec." Jax said, and lifted her legs off of his lap just long enough so he could slip out from underneath and walked over to the coat closet by the front door.

Some of his personal belongings were still packed away in boxes, which were still scattered in a few different places across the apartment. Some in this closet, some in the linen closet, some under Tara's bed, until he'd get around to unpack them all and really moving in. He scanned the scribbling on the outside of the cardboard box, turning it to the side to find out what it said.

Tara suddenly appeared right beside him, watching him, "What are we looking for?" She asked, watching him examining the next couple of boxes on the shelf up top, too high for her to even reach without a stepstool.

"It will just say 'personal'." Jax answered, realizing that none of these boxes are it, and dropped his arms back to his side, before he turned and closed the closet door again.

"Personal?" Tara repeated, before she said, "I'll go check under my bed, you check the other closet." And with that she disappeared down the hall and slipped into her bedroom, while Jax headed for the linen closet in the hallway next to the bathroom instead, both in pursuit of this one particular box.

When Jax couldn't find it in this closet either, he stepped into the bedroom to help Tara, but stopped short in the doorway when he took in the sight that greeted him, and a grin spread across his face.

There was Tara, on her elbows and knees right next to the bed, ducking her head and upper body down, pushing the bed-skirt up to look and reach for the boxes beneath, and with her pajama shorts barely able to contain her curvy behind, presented him with the most beautiful view.

Jax just stood there, almost dumbstruck and practically salivating at the mouth, when her tank top rode up on her back and the crow tattoo came into view too, rubbing salt in the proverbial wound some more.

All the things he'd like to do with that, do to her, he thought to himself for a split-second, but then quickly reminded himself of the conversation he'd had with Greg earlier tonight.

You need to lay off of her! That was pretty much a direct quote from his friend and coworker, if he recalled.

And he knows Greg's advise is spot on, knows that he needs to give this coming-on-to-her shit some goddamn rest ... give her a minute to get better, figure her feelings out, and let her be the one to make
the first move, ... and he swears he will do all of that, for her, just maybe not right this minute, because this right here is just too fucking good to pass up.

So he steps further into the room with deliberate quiet steps, and before the voice of reason within him can stop him from being stupid, he's already down on his knees right behind her, and within the time span of just a second or two, his hands are roughly gripping at her hips, pulling her towards him, thumbs quickly sliding across the far edges of the crow, like he'd done countless times during sex, and then he draws one hand back and gives her an opened palmed smack against her right cheek.

Tara jerks upward and lets out a shriek, startled at the sudden unexpected touch, and subsequent sting, and hits her head with a loud clank against the bed-frame that holds the mattress up right above her. Jax instinctively backs off now, and Tara mumbles some choice curse words as her face reappears from under the bed, rubbing the spot on her head when she meets Jax's eyes, glaring at him, "What the hell?"

"I'm sorry." Jax answers not very convincingly at all, and has to bite his lip to not let a laugh escape. But he's not at all put off by the look she's giving him and leans in, rubbing his hand across the same spot on her head she's been rubbing, giving it a quick kiss. "I didn't mean to startle you, but your ass looked just so goddamn perfect ... I just couldn't help myself."

She doesn't even know what to say to that, because once more today he's managed to piss her off and turn her on all in the same breath. She shakes her head at him, trying to act mad, but she is about as convincing at it as he was with his apology. And to further discredit herself, she can't stop the heat from rising in her cheeks, nor can she deny the small smile that appeared on her face that she's trying her best to hide, but to no avail.

Seeing the flush rise on her face, and the smile tugging at her lips, he can't help but grin again himself, but that's when Tara actually protests and shoves him hard against the chest, "That wasn't funny, Jax." And yet, she's smiling herself.

She got up off the floor now rather hastily, and stepped aside for him to take her place, "Your box is under there, but you'll have to get it yourself now." She folds her arms in front of her chest again, "I'm not bending over for you again."

"Ever? Or just tonight? He teases her, but when she just looks away from him in annoyance, he relents. "Fine, I'll get it." Jax answered, still grinning and leaned down, much like she had, arms outstretched, reaching beneath the bed.

Now Tara actually had to bring a hand up to cover her mouth, to muffle the laugh at the sight of him with his ass up in the air. Not even the way his muscles flex on his back, seemingly bringing the reaper to life can sour her mood at the moment. And she can't help but wonder if he's pushing his ass up like this on purpose to amuse her, or if this is actually like she'd presented herself to him without even knowing it just moments ago.

The grin on her face is so big, her teeth are showing and she's watching him intently as his upper body appeared back from beneath the bed, pulling the cardboard box along with him. But before he even managed to scramble to his feet, she can't help herself from teasing him just a little too. "FYI, you have no idea how lucky you are that I don't own a strap-on."

Jax twists around, box under his arm and meets her eyes in the same instant he's suddenly registering what she'd just said, but his face turns serious, and so is the look in his eyes when he speaks up, "I've been inside enough to know that that shit ain't funny."
The smile from Tara's face disappeared instantly at the look in his eyes and the humorless tone of his voice, and guilt rushed over her, "I'm sorry ... I - I didn't realize ..." She half stutters as the words die down, and she realizes that they've never talked in detail if something like that has ever happened to him.

But then a big sheepish grin spread across Jax's face, and he started laughing, loud enough that it might wake the boys, and she realized that he had just been messing with her and involuntarily a smile creeps onto her face too now.

"Asshole." She slapped his chest, playfully, but can't stop herself from joining in on the laughter too despite it.

He grinned ear to ear, pride in his eyes that he was able to get one over on her, and said, "You should've seen your face, babe ... that was fucking priceless."

"You're a real piece of work, Teller." Tara mumbled back, still smirking too. "Prison rape is no joke."

"Says the girl that just threatened me with a strap-on." He quipped back without missing a beat, one eyebrow deliberately raised when he smirked back at her once more. "By the way, that shit ain't never gonna happen."

Tara shrugs, "We'll see." And has to bite her lip at the expression that crosses his face for a split second.

He has a big old grin plastered on his face again when he finally lowered the box under his arm to the bed beside them. He started picking at the tape, but Tara grabbed a nail file from her vanity, the medal kind with the pointy tip, and wordlessly holds it out to him instead.

He poked and slid the file along the tape, then hands it back to Tara before he unfolded the flaps to look inside, to make sure he wasn't mistaken and that this was indeed the box he had been looking for.

Tara stepped up beside him, peeking past his arm to see what he could possibly have in there that could help her jog her memory. She watched on while he pulled two shoe sized boxes out, lids askew, and put them aside on the bed without another thought. She's seen these before, knows they hold some of those little journals he'd been keeping around their home back in Charming, and as if on cue Jax grabbed a handful of said journals that had fallen out into the bigger box and neatly places them back where they belonged amongst the others in the shoe sized boxes instead, before he finally replaced the lid on both those boxes.

But then reaches down into the bottom of the big box, and Tara isn't sure what she expected, but is surprised that all he's retrieving now is a couple of manila folders, before he returns the journal boxes, closes the box back up, drops it down to the carpet with a thud, and at last pushes it back under the bed with his foot.

Her eyes flitter up to his and she can see the carefree fun they'd just had moments ago has all but disappear again from his face and his eyes too.

"What is it, Jax?" Tara asked, no longer able to hold her tongue, curiosity eating at her at the way he's acting so secretive.

"Sit with me." Jax said and reached for her hand, pulling her onto the bed with him, both of them settling against the headboard side by side. In all honesty, he'd never intended for her to see these
Yet he still hesitated for a long moment and stared at the two folders in his hand, one last moment of doubt if he was making a mistake here, or not, by showing her these.

"Here." He handed them over to her, having made up his mind, and Tara looked up to search his face again before her eyes flicker back down to his hands and she finally takes them from him.

"What is it?" Tara asked for the second time now, because the reluctance in his eyes has her suddenly reluctant and nervous herself. She can't help but wonder what could possibly be in those files that caused this sudden shift in his mood again.

"It's the ..." He paused and cleared his throat. "It's a copy of the police reports from that night. Reports, crime scene photos, you know, everything they've got." But when Tara still makes no move to even so much as open either one of the two folders, he adds, "Thought it might jog your memory if you looked at these ... you know."

"Right." Tara answered clipped, eyes fixed on the folders in her hand, gathering the courage to actually look at them.

She wondered momentarily where or how he even got his hands on these, but honestly, at this point she's really not all that surprised anymore that he did. Jackson Teller is nothing if not resourceful.

She's not so sure she can do this though, but at the same time she knows Jax is only trying to help. But at what cost, she wondered as she feels her heartbeat quicken, and her palms turned sweaty once more at the thought of what these files might entail. Undoubtedly she's about to discover something she wished she didn't know.

Feeling her understandable reluctance, Jax moved closer to her, draped his arm around her, his hand reassuringly massaging one shoulder to ease some of that tension in her, before he spoke up, "Look, you don't have to do this. You don't have to look at them if you don't want to, babe."

He shook his head to himself, suddenly regretting letting her know that he had these, "I just thought ... I needed to know everything they found, and I thought maybe if you knew too, you wouldn't have to keep wondering what happened, maybe it would even get rid of those fucking nightmares."

Everything he just said, sounds so right and Tara knows it too. She keeps imagining the worst, has nightmares about it because she simply can't remember, and what's in these files is probably the best approach to bring some memories - hell, maybe even all - of them back. So with one last deliberate deep breath, she flips the first folder open and begins to read.

Jax sits by, silently at first, reading along over her shoulder, even though he must've read everything a thousand times already. His eyes flicker to her face, at some of the more gruesome details, gauging her reaction, and ready on a whim to toss the fucking thing across the room should it get to overwhelming to her.

But she keeps on reading, and they continue to work their way through the pages, looking over the pictures of their kitchen that were - to Jax's relief - taken long after she'd been rushed out of there by ambulance. He didn't need an actual picture of that moment, it was already forever burned into his mind and he hopes as time went by, it would eventually fade more and more.

He points some things out to her that he thinks might help her remember or at the least ease her mind about her own actions that night. Like her purse still sitting on the kitchen table, and according to the report nothing of value was missing, including her gun. He flips a couple pages ahead, to show her the report where it says they tested her hands for gunpowder residue, but there had been none. So her
idea that she might've fired at Juice was out of the question.

They examined everything further, both of them in an almost too matter-of-fact kind of manner, in an
blaringly obvious effort to detach themselves from how that night had derailed both of their lives, and
could've scared their boys for years to come.

There's more pictures. Gruesome. Pictures taken at the hospital of her wounds. Not just the ones to
her head, but other bruises on her body too. Jax can't help but cringe at the sight of them, even after
having seen them countless times before, it still gets to him.

Then there's the ones that show all the blood tinted water in the sink, the blood smeared all along the
dishwasher and cabinets, broken dishes scattered all around, and at last a puddle of her blood on the
floor.

But Tara's not even flinching, she's much too invested now, she's somehow able to detach herself
from the reality that this was all her blood, and he can't help but feel a sense of pride at how well
she's handling looking at all of this stuff, because despite his best efforts he still has to fight to keep
the bile from rising in his throat at some of this shit.

Then the next set of pictures are of him, the main suspect found at the scene of the crime. So before
they took all of his clothing into evidence, they photographed him too. There's pictures of him from
all different kinds of angles and now Tara finally loses that brave face she's put on this whole entire
time, at the sight of him from that night.

There's some blood on his clothing, and dried blood on his arm, smeared distasteful over the letters of
his Thomas-tattoo from when he'd held her. But what stands out the most to Tara above all else is his
face. It's what truly devastates her, the haunted expression on his face, the bleakness in his eyes, the
eyes that are still holding tears even as these pictures were being taken.

And her heart aches so much for him when she takes it all in, and she turns her head towards him
then, dropping the folders to her lap and reaches for him, kissing his sweet face and clinging to him
for a long silent moment.

She's been the one that was so viciously attacked, yet now, as she looks at all this evidence, the
pictures of him, she's finally able to see past her own issues and suffering, and feel some of his pain
too. She can't imagine what he must've gone through, can't fathom it if roles had been reversed and
she'd found him like that on their kitchen floor.

And yes, she knows he's told her countless times how he'd thought she was dead at first, or how he
wondered if he'd ever get to see her again, but as that old saying goes - a picture is worth a thousand
words - and it never rang more true to her than right this moment.

Tara sobs just a little, and Jax fights not to join her, instead some silent tears slip from his eyes while
they cling to each other so tightly, so desperately. They remain like that for a little while, letting it all
out before they manage to put themselves together again. One kiss and gentle touch at a time.

But eventually they wipe the tears away, and turn their attention back to the files, even looking
through the second one too, which was about Eli, but naturally contained some stuff that pertained to
her as well.

But as far as regaining her memory was concerned, nothing has happened, at least not yet, but she
was thankful nonetheless that Jax had finally let her see all this, because it does answer some things
she had spend hours upon hours wondering about. Along the few other details that she now knew,
even though she'd never really wondered about.
She knew now that she didn't pull nor fire a gun that afternoon. There were ironed clothes, and an ironing board, yet no iron to be found anywhere in the house, which suggested it was used as a weapon against her and had been taken. She imagined it was the cause for the bruises on her body. What exactly caused the puncture wounds to the back of her neck and head couldn't be determined, all they knew was that it was something rather pointy, but blunt ... not sharp, like a knife. None of the cutlery around the kitchen turned out to be it, so that key evidence had been taken by Juice as well.

The police and the feds didn't know what kind of weapon Juice carried, but Jax did, and he knew that the bullet remnants that had been retrieved from Eli's body were a match to the ammo used in the gun Juice was carrying. Further evidence at Juice's guilt.

Jax didn't know why Juice did what he did, and he feared they may never know the truth why, but nonetheless he decided to share his own thoughts on what he believed had happened that day with Tara, based on all the evidence in these two files spread out before them.

He believed that her and Eli must've been standing in the kitchen when Juice entered the house. He must've fired at Eli, who had his back still turned, first, but before he was able to fire at her, she'd somehow gotten the gun away from him. Maybe she'd thrown something at him, he couldn't be sure, but he pictured that a struggle ensued, maybe even for the upper hand to get to that gun again first, which ended in him hitting her with the iron and ultimately stabbing and trying to drown her instead.

The way the place looked after, he knew she'd put up a hell of a fight, but what ultimately saved her was Juice's negligence in not realizing that she wasn't dead. He was too worried disposing of the weapons, even went so far to wipe some of the blood up, yet left the dirty rag, and in the end he left the biggest piece of evidence behind, by letting her live.

Tara let Jax's theory sink in, seeing that the details from what was in those files seemed to collaborate with what they'd already known after Juice had gone after her for the second time in the hospital.

But now, after yet another disturbing rollercoaster, they were both exhausted, not just physically, but all of this had taken another emotional toll on them.

Jax stashed the files away in the bedroom closet, high up, so that the boys wouldn't accidently find them and be scared by the pictures of the horrific scene that had taken place in the house they used to call home.

He wanted a cigarette so badly, but despite his fiending of some nicotine, he just couldn't bring himself to leave her side right now for long. So instead he hurried when he double checked that the front door was locked and bolted, that the security chain was in place, before he went about the apartment to turn the TV and all the lights off too.

Back in the darkened bedroom, he quickly slipped beneath the blankets right beside her.

She turned around to face him, a little afraid of what tonight's dreams might bring, she reached out to him, her hand on his arm, "Can you hold me, please?"

"Of course." He said and pulled her into his embrace at once, kissing the top of her head again, relishing the scent of her filling his nostrils again.

A beat or two passed silently, before he spoke, "I love you, babe."

"I love you, Jackson." She answered in a whisper against his chest, "... so much."
The next three weeks seemingly went by more quickly, and also less drama filled, which was nice for a change.

He has had to work late on occasion, and so did she. But whenever they were both at home, they were all about spending quality time as a family. Which meant lots of board and card games in the middle of the week, impromptu trips to the ice-cream parlor in town, and even more frequent visits to the playground that the boys loved so much.

About two weeks ago, they'd spend Thanksgiving with Misses Ellie, her daughter. Both of which had also done most of the cooking, since, unlike Jax, Tara had to work for a couple of hours that very morning. But overall, it had been a nice day spend with good food and good people.

A day or two after that, Jax got a long awaited call from Bobby. Back when Sam Crow started Diosa Norte, Jax had used the majority of his own cash to front the starting cost, everything from the renovations, and decorations of the old Elks Lodge, along with the starting pay of some of the girls. But finally, Bobby called, letting him know that the money Sam Crow still owed him was finally washed, and they'd be able to write him a big juicy check outright in the upcoming days. He'd have to pay some taxes on it doing it this way, but Lowen was already consulting with a colleague of hers, who specialized in tax laws and would find a work-around that would be getting him the most bang for his buck, so to speak. Needless to say Jax was elated that he'd finally have some much needed cash on hand again.

Tara and him still hadn't combined their banks accounts again yet, but he'd pretty much been writing her a check every pay period, over the exact amount of his paycheck, since all the household bills were being paid out of her account alone. Rent, utilities, grocery's, Abel's preschool ... you name it, she was paying it.

That had only left him with the monthly payments Bobby and Chibs had been sending him when they'd bought his share of TM from him months ago. It wasn't much, but with the few savings he still had, it had been enough to pay for his gas and insurance, for the truck and the bikes, his nicotine addiction and also the odd thing here and there he'd pick up on occasion for Tara or the boys on his way home.

So having money coming his way, big money, was lifting a weight off of his shoulders he hadn't even realized was there, considering everything else that had been going on between them, and not to forget the reappearance of the Kohn problem. But he hadn't told Tara just yet about the windfall that was coming their way, because he wanted to have the check in hand, or even better, deposited in the bank, before he'd share the good news with her. Things concerning the MC went sideways more often than not, so he'd keep his mouth shut until it was a done deal.

He already had some plans for the money though, and hopefully she'd agree. Once he had that cash, he wanted to start looking for a better and bigger place for them. Instead of an apartment, he wanted to find a house with a yard big enough for a swing and a slide, with at least two more bedrooms than this place, so the boys wouldn't have to share a room anymore, and a garage too, so he'd be able to store his bikes at home, instead of having to leave them locked away at Baker's Automotives. He could already envision the look on Tara's face when he'd tell her. She'd love it.

There was nothing that made him happier than to see his wife and boys be happy too. Seeing them smile could almost make him forget all the horrible shit that has happened in their past.
He tried to focus on the good as much as he could, instead of dwelling on the bad, like the truth about Gemma, that still haunted him when he'd let his mind drift there, or the fact that Juice was still at large, and in turn him and his little family were happier than they'd been in a long time.

So everything was going great right now, and they were finally doing better emotionally too.

Tara in particular felt so much more at ease around him, falling asleep comfortably in his arms night after night, and he credited it to the fact that he was not pushing her about sex as he had before.

Sure, they still had the occasional make-out session on the couch after the boys were asleep, some of them quite hot and heavy, but he'd been respectful of her wishes, and in turn he saw such a change in her in just a few weeks time, that it now furthered his resolve to wait it out, and let her be the one to approach him about taking that next step.

It wasn't easy by any means, because every day he wanted her more now than ever, but he knew doing this her way was the right way to go about really fixing what was broken between them.

So overall, they had been happy, but tonight, something was about to change, and it wasn't necessarily for the better, but he didn't know that just yet.

He'd already fed and bathed the boys, and had just gotten done reading to them, ready to tuck them into bed for the night, when he heard the apartment door unlock. It was already past eight thirty by the time she came through the door, but she was glad she'd made it just in the nick of time to at least give their boys a hug and a good night kiss, especially considering the news she was about to share with their father.

She stepped out of the boys' room and followed the smell of food in the air that led her all the way to the kitchen. Jax had picked up some Thai food on his way home earlier, and while Tara was busy tucking in the boys for the night, he'd fixed her a plate and had even heated it up for her already.

"Thank you." She said, giving him a quick kiss on the lips, and looked up at him gratefully when she saw the plate he'd just put on the table for her. Her schedule had changed so much today that she hadn't had a bite to eat all day, and by now she was hungry, to say the least.

"How was your day?" She asked him, before she began to eat.

"Pretty good actually. We got pretty busy for a while, but we all got out of there on time." Jax said, putting the last of the dishes from the sink into the dishwasher and spun around to face her, leaning back against the kitchen counter behind him.

"Yours?" He asked in return, his eyes trained on her now completely, because he could sense there was something off about her tonight.

Tara nodded, "Mine was good too, ... mostly." She added, before she took another bite, and Jax raised his eyebrows curiously, not so much at her words, but more to the tone in her voice.

She continued to eat, taking a few sips of her water too, when the spiciness of the curry was beginning to get to her. But Jax remained quiet, giving her a moment to finish up her plate, before he'd confront her what had her looking so on edge tonight.

A few more bites, and Tara was done. She stood, rinsed the plate in the sink and placed it in the dishwasher herself, ignoring Jax's eyes on her every move, while she proceeded to start the dishwasher now.

But then she turned back towards him, leaning against the counter too, mimicking his stance right beside him, when she finally looked over and met his eyes.
"What's wrong, babe?" He said, not liking the vibe he was getting from her. Why did she seem so nervous?

"I have to tell you something." She started, and reached for his arm, as if she was already trying to comfort him for what she was about to spring on him next. She sighed deeply, and met his eyes straight on, a flash of guilt in her eyes. "There's a medical conference in Boise, and I have to go to represent Medford Memorial."

Jax let the breath out he'd been holding, realizing that this wasn't at all the kind of bad news he'd anticipated. Juggling the kids on his own for a few days he could deal with ... this was nothing!

"Idaho?" He asked, confirming that's the Boise she was talking about, and Tara simply nods.

"When?" Comes his next question, still slightly confused why she was so nervous to tell him about this.

"The day after tomorrow. I'll be gone for five days, filling in last minute for someone else. The hospital already changed the booked flight into my name, it leaves around noon." Tara replied without missing a beat.

"Shit, that's fast." He answered, wondering some more if that's what had her worked up.

"Yeah, I know." She nods yet again, folding her hands in front of her chest, and he can see that flash of guilt in her eyes once more now, while she remains suspiciously quiet.

"It's short notice, but I sense that's not what's got you all twisted up." Jax can't stand this another minute longer. "Babe, just spit it out already?"

"You're right, it's not." She confirmed, and looks now anywhere but at him when she finally adds the bit of news she just knows will probably result in a fight, "Including me, there's a total of five of us going, and one of them is John."

"Jesus Christ." The curse escaped his lips instantly, his voice raised. "You've got to be fucking kiddin' me."

"I wish I was." She replied, even though she knew he'd said it in a rhetorical sense. She dared a look up at him now, her eyes pleading with him to understand, "I've really tried to get out of it, because I know this wouldn't sit right with you."

"Yeah. No shit." He replied, his voice dripping with anger and sarcasm. Now that the ugly news has been revealed, she just wants to reassure him as best as she can that he's got nothing to worry about. She leans into him beside her, places a few sweet kisses against his shoulder, "I know how much you hate this, but you know that you've got nothing to worry about, right?" She wants so much to hear him say that he knows that to be true.

But Jax is pissed, and the more he thinks about it, the more pissed he gets. "So this conference, ... it's at a hotel or some shit? Same hotel all of you are gonna be staying at?"

When she just nods her answer, he wants to punch a wall or something ... the thought of that fucker prancing around his girl nonstop for five uninterrupted days and nights in some fancy fucking hotel has him seeing red.

Deep down he knows she's faithful and loyal to a fault, wouldn't risk what they've been working so hard to get back to. She's smarter than him and wouldn't make his kind of mistakes, but knowing all
of that doesn't help him in the least. He can't help the way he feels, he wish he could, but he just can't.

Jax grabbed his cigarettes and lighter off of the kitchen counter, then reaches for his keys on the kitchen table before he quickly turns and without another word heads for the door.

"Jax." Tara cried after him, "Please don't leave now, not like this."

"Don't wait up." Is all he replied angrily, not looking back before he slips out the apartment door.

X

Author's Note: Thank you for the wonderful outpour of support for this story with all the reviews and private messages I've been receiving. Knowing my readers are eager to read more, helps so much to stay motivated to write. Please continue to let me know what you think. Can't wait to hear from all of you. xoxo, Skater
Chapter 35

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Jax wasn't entirely sure what exactly had brought him back to this particular place. He must've passed at least a handful of bars on this random drive around town, but still ended up back here somehow, at Old Joe's Tavern. The scene of the crime!

But as he stepped further into the smoke filled bar, and let his eyes wander around the place, he knew that deep down he'd hoped to meet that scumbag that had insulted her months ago. There was nothing like beating some shithead to a pulp to let off some much needed steam.

To his dismay, Charlie wasn't here, or at least he couldn't see him. And neither was Frank, the barkeeper from that night, not that that mattered either.

So Jax took a seat at the bar, lit a cigarette and ordered a beer, already regretting having picked this place the more he looked around. It was just too fucking noisy in here, too loud to even hear yourself think, but then again, maybe it was better if he pushed the thinking back a bit until he wasn't this pissed off anymore.

But then, as the nicotine and the second beer slowly began to do some of their magic, he managed to drown out the people and the music, that was playing way too loud, too. And he began to think. Thinking and wondering to himself why he'd flown off the handle like he had and left her behind in that apartment, probably sad, or pissed, or both. She didn't deserve that.

Tara wasn't the problem here, not really. She'd never cheated on him before, and he knew she wasn't going to start now that they were actually trying to work their shit out. In the end, she wanted the same thing he did, be a family again, raise them boys together, grow old together. She wanted all that happily-ever-after stuff, as crazy as it sounded, since they'd started dating at sixteen.

His whole issue with this out-of-town trip was John. When Tara had told him over two months ago that they'd broken things off, he'd been elated, and had barely given that guy another thought since he'd assumed John was out of the picture. But come to find out now that he's been working at the same goddamn place with her, day in and day out. And yes, his specialty was neurology and she was working in neonatal perinatal medicine, but it still ate at him that he probably saw her at least once a day if not more ... and now he'd get to be around her, for five fucking days and nights, putting god knows what kind of ideas in her head.

Just then someone brought him out of his thoughts.
"Is this seat taken?" A woman in her early thirties asked, she had long brown hair and bright red lipstick, giving him the eye.

Jax shook his head, "No, it's not."

"Thanks." She answered, and settled into the barstool beside him, putting her black clutch onto the bar in front of her. With her eyes trained on the barkeeper, she waved her hand at him, trying to get his attention, and when she finally did, she went ahead and ordered a drink.
Jax lit another cigarette, finished off the rest of his beer and nodded at the barkeeper too, ordering another one, before he even noticed her eyes on him.

"Can I borrow a light?" She asked, cigarette in hand, which she quickly raised to her lips once Jax held out his lighter to light it for her. "Thanks." She answered, before taking in another drag.

She eyed him some more, "So what brings you here tonight?"

Jax gave her a side glance, before he exhaled a stream of smoke, and answered sarcastically, "Needed some peace and quiet."

She laughed at the obvious joke, "Well, you definitely landed in the wrong place then." A beat or two past, her eyes still on him, while Jax played absentmindedly with his lighter, his cigarette hanging from his lip. "Aren't you gonna ask me?"

Jax raised his eyebrows at her in confusion for a minute, before he caught on what she was saying, "What brings you here?"

At that she smiled, glad that he was playing along, she took a long drag of her cigarette, dragging out the answer and enjoying to have his undivided attention at the moment, "I guess I'm here, 'cause I'm looking to have a little fun tonight."

He had been too wrapped up in his head with this shit about Tara and that John guy, that it just now dawned on him that this chick was not just flirting a little, but she was coming on to him ... strong.

"Shit, you're not into wasting time, are you?" Jax said with a chuckle. "Sorry, but I'm not the guy for that." He tried to set her straight right of the bat, there was really no need to drag this out any longer. She looked beautiful, and the bar was full with guys that would probably loved to take her up on having some fun.

"Really? You don't like having some fun?" She asked, her eyes meeting his as she leaned in a little more towards him, and placed her hand over his on top of the bar. "You look like the right guy to me." She teased, giving him her best seductive smile.

But Jax pulled his hand out from under hers, and raised it just enough to show off his wedding band, "I'm married." He said, his voice stern, no longer chuckling at her flirtatious act.

She raised her left hand just the same, showing off her sparkling diamond ring, "So am I. And yet we both are here, in this bar, alone ... on a weeknight at that." She added to drive home her point.

"Look, whatever reason you had that made you sit down next to me and strike up this conversation, it's not going to happen, darlin'. You're just wasting your time and your breath on me." Jax replied without missing a beat, he turned towards her just a little, to better meet her eyes. "I'm happily married. And I'm gonna be leaving this bar alone, going home to my smoking-hot wife, having fun with her, and her alone."

But she was relentless, and smiled once more at him, "There's plenty of fun to be had without ever leaving this bar, handsome." She crooned, and winked at him playfully.

"He's not interested. He made that pretty clear, so how about you take the fucking hint." Tara's voice boomed angrily over the loud music, as she was coming to a standstill right next to Jax, who was staring at her with a mixture of pride and guilt in his eyes.

"Who the fuck are you? And how is any of this your business?" Said the pretty brunette, giving Tara a scrutinizing look, from her head down to her high heels.
"I'm his wife, so it is my fucking business." Tara replied faster than Jax could put in his two cents, and the look in her eyes let the other woman know she was beyond pissed off.

Jax couldn't be sure if it had been Tara's words or the I-will-kill-you-look in her eyes that did the trick, but the woman finally took the hint, stubbed out her cigarette in the ashtray, grabbed her clutch and her drink and slid off of the barstool without another word or another look at Jax or Tara.

Tara scoffed, sounding angry when she spoke, "Guess things don't change, the slutty ones still gravitate towards you like some goddamn moths to the fucking flame." Then she spun around on her heels, and headed back for the door, ignoring Jax yelling after her.

"TARA ... Babe, wait." Jax called, before he quickly threw some cash on the bar to cover his tab and hurried after her. "Tara."

But Tara had already slipped out the door, and Jax was just about to follow too, when his eyes landed on Charlie, on the other end of the bar, throwing darts with his fucking buddies. But as much as he had wanted to go a round or two with that asshole earlier tonight, now was no longer the time. He had a pissed off wife to catch up with.

He caught up with Tara just as she was opening the door to her car, that she had parked right across the street from the bar.

"Tara." He said again as he was just a few feet from her, "Where are you going?"

Now she finally stopped long enough to look up at him, "Home, Jax. Now that I know you're not here to get laid, I'm going back home." The tone in her voice was flat, leaving him clueless just how she was feeling, but her eyes gave it away.

The street was dark, except for what little light the neon signs above the bar entrance emitted, along with the poorly working streetlights scattered here and there, but still, he could see the flash of anger in her eyes as clear as day at the moment. "Jesus, babe, you really thought I'd be that fucking stupid? After everything that's happened, you think I'd do that to you again?"

Tara stilled her hand on the car door, looking down towards the ground averting her eyes, "I don't know what to think anymore, Jax, not when everything is going good between us, and then you just fucking leave like you did tonight." He could hear the emotions rising by the sound of her voice now, and they weren't pretty.

"I'm sorry." He said apologetically, and had finally rounded the car to her side, "And I know I'm hard to love ... I know I don't make it easy when I act like this." He tipped her chin up now, forcing her to look up at him. "But I'd never hurt you like that again, never, babe, I promise."

Their eyes remained locked on each other for a long silent moment, before Jax finally spoke again. "You believe me, don't you?"

"I'm trying to." She answered as honestly as she could.

Jax framed her face and kissed her lips, soft and sweet, before he rested his forehead against hers. "I'm sorry I stormed out, alright? Can we just go somewhere ... and talk?"

"Now you wanna talk?" Tara asked rather snarky in return, knowing full well that she was not making any of this easy on him.

"I do." He nodded and pulled away enough to be able to look her in the eyes again, "I'm guessing Misses Ellie's staying with the boys." He wrapped his arms around her waist, locking his hands
behind her back.

Tara nodded, "Yeah."

"Then let's go do something. Let's go someplace quiet, where we can talk." He said with way too much enthusiasm then was necessary, but Tara knew he was just trying to sound more optimistic than he had before he'd stormed out earlier. "Come on, babe?"

"Okay." Tara nodded again.

"Alright, I'll follow you home, so you can drop off your car, and then we go someplace, alone." He confirmed again, still seeing the reluctance in her eyes, but she nodded again.

"I'll see you at home." And with that, Jax let go off her long enough so she could get into her car, he closed the door for her, before he jogged back across the street to his parked truck and took off right after her.

X

They had found another little bar on the other side of town, closer to the apartment actually, and it was a much nicer and more relaxed atmosphere altogether. The music that played was picked by the guests, via a jukebox that was actually hooked up to different speakers across the place, but it wasn't loud and obnoxious like Old Joe's Tavern was.

The place wasn't packed at all, and Jax and Tara settled at a little round table, with just two chairs, off in the corner, having virtually no one close enough to even hear what they were talking about.

"I didn't do anything to deserve the way you acted." Tara finally jumped right into the conversation they'd come here to have. "I knew you wouldn't be happy when I told you, I expected that, but I didn't expect you to run off like you did. This conference, it's part of my job. And as far as John goes, I have no interest in him whatsoever, Jax. If I wanted to be with him, I would still be with him."

"But he's still very much interested in you." Jax countered. "I saw the way he looked at you, and the shit he said to piss me off. He made it pretty fucking clear that he still wants to be with you."

"So?" Tara threw back, "I've lost count how many girls tried to get with you while we were together. So should I've been holding their actions over your head? Should I be pissed at you for how someone else feels about you? Something you have absolutely no control over?"

"No, of course not." Jax replied quickly and shook his head along to his words. "I trust you completely, babe. I just don't fucking trust him."

"I know this is going to sound like I'm defending him, but I swear, up until that day of my appointment, and him meeting you, he hasn't acted at all like he was still interested in me. I know what he said, and how he acted and how that came across to you, and to me too, but I swear, baby, that was the first time since our break up that he'd made it seem like he still cared. I honestly don't know what's going on with him. The way he acted around you wasn't like him."

"You're right, it sounds like you're defending him." Jax quipped back, clearly agitated.

A long moment of silence stretched out between them, while they both nursed their beers.

"Okay." Tara suddenly conceded, and let out a deep breath, "Let's just pretend for the sake of this conversation, that he is still interested in me. Now what? You're gonna be mad at me because I've
gotta go to this conference? I mean, what do you want me to do, Jax?” She searched his face for answers, watching him take another swig from his bud light.

He put the beer down on the table between them, and swiped his hand down his face in an obvious display of frustration. "I'm not gonna be mad, alright? I guess, ... I guess I'm just not used to having competition for you, at least not of this kind."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tara looked at him puzzled.

Jax lit up another smoke, leaned back in his chair a little more comfortable, trying to appear more at ease when he was actually more on edge now that he was about to spill his guts to her. He took a long drag, letting the smoke escaped through his nostrils first, then the remainder through his mouth, "It's like goddamn Hale back in High School all over again."

"Oh my god." Tara sighed in utter frustration. She couldn't believe they were having this conversation again after all these years. "I was never interested in David that way. And you know that, Jax." This was so ridiculous.

"Yeah." Jax nodded, "But I do remember how everyone thought you should've been interested in him, like he was in you. The fucking looks we got, wondering why this perfect all-american-girl would pick the white-trash-biker-boy over the star quarterback of Charming High, with the fucking scholarship options to play for almost any school of his choosing."

"Oh, you meant that same scholarship he lost, when he busted his knee ... and so he ended up back in Charming with the rest of us." Tara corrected the turn of events with a heavy dose of sarcasm in her voice, having a hard time to refrain from rolling her eyes at him at this point. "And let's not forget where he is now."

"My point is, everyone always saw you with me and wondered, What the fuck is she doing with him?"

"That's not true." Tara shook her head, because that truly wasn't how she remembered it.

"Like hell it's not." Jax scoffed in response, and then added. "At least back then in Charming, I eventually prospected, and patched in, and I became someone, I became Sam Crow. And finally the looks we got changed."

"Yes, and you had to wear that cut everywhere we went, because you couldn't let anyone forget even for a second that you were the fucking heir to the Sam Crow throne. So you wore the cut, because it was your calling, while everyone else of us merely had a job." Tara added angrily, thinking back herself now, before she posed the next question, "But what does any of that have to do with John?"

"It has to do with John, because I'm right back there again. You've got this smart, rich, good-looking hot-shot surgeon chasing after you, ... and here I am, just some fucking mechanic." He averted his eyes, staring off into the distance of the bar, taking another drag from his smoke. "Do you really think I don't know that you can do so much better than me, babe?" There, it was out, the truth about his ugly insecurities he's been struggling with every since he's met Dr. John Seward!

Tara was stunned speechless. Confused. Never in a million years had she suspected for Jax to feel insecure about himself ... ever. He was the most arrogant and cocky man she'd ever known, and this was so utterly unlike him, so out of character, that for a moment, she didn't even know what to say to that. It simply seemed so surreal.
"Jax." She finally said trying to get his attention, but he still wouldn't look at her. "I'm sorry if I'm not
the kind of old lady you were hoping for."

At that he suddenly looked over at her, confusion in his eyes now as he tried to understand what she
meant by that. But before he could ask, Tara rambled on.

"I have my own career. I make my own money. So I don't need his or yours for that matter. And I
don't care that you're just a mechanic ... as a matter of fact, I prefer you being just that, if it means
you're not longer Sam Crow. And as far as John goes, I don't love him. It's as simple as that." Tara
stood from her chair and rounded the small table with just a few steps.

Jax watched her from his seat, looking up at her as she stood between his legs looking back down at
him for a long silent moment. Then she made herself comfortable sitting on his lap, curling her arms
around his neck and leaned her forehead against his when Jax wrapped his arms around her in turn.

Tara finally broke the silence when she quietly said, "I'm not going to be dating anyone else for the
rest of my life. I'm not going to love anyone else for the rest of my life. And aside from becoming the
mother of your children, the most important moment for me was when I became your wife, Jackson.
You and our boys are everything I've always wanted. After everything we've been through to get
here, don't you realize how much I love you?"

He couldn't deny how much her declarations of love still made him feel to this day. He didn't deserve
her. She could do so much better than him, but hell would freeze over if he'd ever let her slip through
his fingers again. She was his, and he'd never let her go again! Never!

"I love you too, babe." Jax replied, and after another long silent minute of looking into each other's
eyes, he finally leaned in and kissed her. Long and hard and passionately.

Eventually the kiss let up, and they just sat happily and content wrapped up in one another for a little
while, sharing another cigarette, before Jax realized that the music had stopped playing altogether
and his eyes drifted over to the wall where the Jukebox stood.

He patted Tara's butt playfully, "Get up for a sec." He said and when she did, he quickly stood and
walked over to the machine, his cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth as he looked over the
selection of songs for a few moments.

He pulled some change from his pocket and fed it to the machine, making his selection and turned
around, looking back at her and smiled when he curled his finger repeatedly for her to come on over
to him.

They met halfway when the song started playing and Tara once more wrapped her arms around his
neck, while he wrapped his arms around her back, holding her close as they began to sway to the
music in rhythm.

So far all you could hear was the instrumental part, the singing hadn't started yet, but Tara recognized
the song and lifted her head off of his shoulder just long enough to look back up at him and said,
"Good choice, Teller."

Jax smirked as he moved them to the nearest table so he could stub out his cigarette, and said, "Yeah,
I thought so too."

♫ When the road gets dark
And you can no longer see
Just let my love throw a spark
And have a little faith in me♪

♪ And when the tears you cry
Are all you can believe
Just give these loving arms a try, baby
And have a little faith in me♪

♪ And have a little faith in me
And have a little faith in me
And have a little faith in me
And have a little faith in me♪

♪ When your secret heart
Cannot speak so easily
Come here darlin’
From a whisper start
To have a little faith in me♪

♪ And when your back's against the wall
Just turn around and you, you will see
I will catch you, I will catch your fall, baby
Just have a little faith in me♪

♪ And have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me
Have a little faith in me♪

♪ Well, I've been loving you for such a long time, girl
Expecting nothing in return
Just for you to have a little faith in me
You see time, time is our friend
'Cause for us there is no end
And all you gotta do is have a little faith in me
I said I will hold you up, I will hold you up
Your love gives me strength enough
So have a little faith in me♪

X

The next day Jax showed up at the hospital unannounced during his lunch break, but instead of looking for Tara, he went to the Neurology floor again, in search of John.

He simply couldn't stand the thought of this guy getting to make time with his wife and even though he knew that Tara wouldn't approve, he just had to get some stuff off of his chest.

After a few very insistent words with the receptionist, and a phone call from her to John, the man actually showed up and allowed Jax to follow him into his office so they could have a talk, man-to-man.

"So what is this about?" John asked and settled into his leather chair behind his desk.

This far, Jax had been more than civil since he's arrived here, mostly because he wanted to get his foot in the door, but now that the bastard was looking at him all smug from the other side of his desk,
it took all the willpower he had in him to not reach across and strangle him.

But Jax bit back the anger surging through him as best as he could, "It's about you still being interested in my wife."

John looked surprised, but not really surprised at the subject itself, but more about the fact that Jax was here to talk to him about this.

"Does Tara know you're here?" John asked in response to what Jax had said.

"No, and she really doesn't need to. This is just me telling you to back the fuck off." Jax said, through clenched teeth now. Even he couldn't explain to himself why this guy in front of him had such a deep impact on him, especially after everything Tara had said to him just last night.

"Tara and I have been broken up for a while now. Pretty much since the weekend you showed up here in town. So I'm not exactly sure what your problem is?" John said in a calm and even voice, unlike Jax's from just a few seconds ago.

"Look, you can sit here and pretend you don't know what I'm talking about, but we both know that you wish you could get her back. She might not see it, but I did the last time we spoke, so you can cut the shit. And I'm just here to tell you, that Tara and I are back together, and if you're trying to get between us, you'll regret, man." Jax said suddenly sounding much more restrained than he had when he'd first walked in.

John leaned forward now, and folded his arms in front of him, eyeing Jax with much more scrutiny. "The only pull you have over her is the fact that you're the father of her sons. But sooner or later she'll realize that that's not enough to build a life on anymore. She said you're a good father, it's one thing she's always said, how much you love your sons ... but the fact that she always pointed that out, told me only one thing. That you weren't a good husband, and you still aren't, coming here behind her back."

"You don't know shit about me." Jax spit back angrily all over again.

"I know enough." John replied. "I know that you've lied and cheated, that your gang was the reason she got injured like she did. And I also know that despite everything you've done to her, she just keeps coming back for more. Until the next time she gets hurt because of you. Or murdered." He scoffed and shook his head, "She's a beautiful woman, but she must be some kind of masochist being with you, because god knows she sure as shit doesn't respond to kindness."

Jax rounded the desk and yanked John up by the lapels of his white doctor coat, before he pushed him hard against the wall behind him with a loud thud. "You ever talk about my wife that way again, I'll kill you."

But John didn't seem intimidated at all, he practically grinned back at Jax when he said, "You wanna hit me? Go ahead, man. I'll show everyone just how civilized you are now ... show Tara how civilized you are, the reformed Outlaw."

Jax let go of him then, but he was still seething with anger, "Stay the fuck away from my wife. Or I'll show you exactly what I'm capable off. Outlaw or not."

X

Two days later, Jax and Tara stood in the airport terminal, looking at each other with sad eyes. These next five days were going to be pretty hectic for Jax, having to take care of the boys on his own, on top of going to work three out of the five days. After having the benefits of co-parenting with him,
she could honestly say she didn't envy him having to do this solo for the next couple of days. Thank god for Misses Ellie and Christy helping out too.

They stood right outside the security checkpoint, it was as far as Jax was allowed to follow her.

"I'll text you as soon as I land." Tara reassured him.

"Okay." Jax replied and rested his forehead against hers, wrapping his hands around her waist. "I'll fucking miss you so much, babe. I hate this."

"I know." Tara replied, clinging to him as well. "I'll go by so quick, because we're both gonna be so busy ... time will fly."

"I hope so." Jax nodded, and leaned in now for another kiss that quickly turned passionate.

After a few long minutes, Tara reluctantly pulled away, glancing at her wristwatch, "I gotta go." She said and leaned in for another quick peck against his lips, "I'll be back before you know it. It's just a few days." She tried to remind him.

"I know." He said, he knew he was being ridiculous. "I know we've been through so much worse shit, than being apart for five lousy days, but man, it just feels different now. Now that I have you back."

Tara smiled, "That's so sweet." She kissed him again. "Tell the boys I love them and I miss them, and I'll call tonight. I'll try to call before they're in bed, okay?"

"Alright, babe." Jax hugged her close to him, kissing her temple this time. "Have fun, but not too much." He smiled.

She kissed him on the lips once more, before she finally headed towards the security checkpoint. Jax watched her present her boarding pass and ID, and unpack her laptop and a few other things from her carryon bag, and continued to watch her until he couldn't see her any more.

That's when he was finally headed for the airport exit, because he knew he needed to get back to work, even though he couldn't shake this feeling in his gut, that told him, that something was going to go wrong.

X

Author's Note: Thank you for all the wonderful reviews and PM I've received. I appreciate it so much. I hope you're enjoying this chapter and leave me a few words in form of a comment or a review. Thanks.
Tara finally arrived at her assigned seat on the plane, eager to just sit and close her eyes and try to catch up on a little bit of sleep on this almost three hour flight. She checked her boarding pass once more, glad to see that she had the window seat and quickly settled in, pushing her carryon bag underneath the seat in front of her, before she buckled up and already closed her eyes while everyone around her was still getting situated.

"Just my luck." His voice boomed over the conversations all around them and Tara didn't need to open her eyes to know it was John.

"Excuse me?" She blinked and looked up at him then, catching a glimpse of him as he stowed his carryon bag in the overhead bin. She cursed inwardly, when she realized he was getting ready to sit down right next to her. Awesome!

"I said, it's just my luck." John finally sat down beside her, glancing at his phone one last time, before stowing it in the small pouch beneath the food tray right in front of him.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tara gave him a side eye, hoping that the next five days wouldn't end up being this awkward like the first couple of minutes have already been.

"It means, your husband told me to stay away from you, so of course fate would have it that our seats are right next to one another."

"What are you talking about? When did Jax talk to you?" Tara straightened up in her seat, giving John her full attention now as she eyed him curiously for an answer.

"Yesterday." John answered without missing a beat. "He came by my office." He eyed Tara for a long moment, seeing the disbelive in her eyes. "I guess he didn't tell you." He feigned innocence, but having predicted that the biker wasn't going to fill her in on what had transpired.

"No." Tara shook her head, "He didn't." She looked away from him then, focusing her attention elsewhere, looking out the window as she thought about what John had just revealed to her.

She should've seen this coming, should've expected Jax to take a more active role in this situation. He'd never been good at just sitting on the sidelines and letting the chips fall where they may, although, and maybe that's what frustrated her so much about this, he'd always expected her to do just that.

To sit and wait for him to handle it, for him to come home from a run, for the RICO case to disappear, for the cartel shit to blow over, for things with the club to calm down again, and last but not least for the charges against her to be dropped. But none of those things ever happened with her just idly sitting by either.

So she supposed, another man being interested in her was more than enough cause for Jax to be up and arms, but then again, maybe now that he had a face to face with John, he got it out of his system, and this would be the end of it. Or at least she could hope it would be.
She even thought for a second to apologize on his behalf, in an attempt to put this thing to rest somehow, but then thought better of it. John had been out of line, so Jax would hate it if she apologized for something he'd done in return.

Tara turned to John once more then, "You did kind of provoke him that day you two first met." Her and John had already had this talk the day after their little run-in, but she thought it was worth mentioning again. Jax did have a reason to not like the guy.

John nodded, "I know." He studied her expression for a long moment, and gave her a sad smile, "I guess it was just easier to pretend that we were just on a break, until I saw you with him."

"John." Tara said alarmed by what he was implying, "Please don't make this any more awkward than it already is. I'm back with my husband, end of story." She said with conviction in her voice.

"I know. That's become painfully obvious now." John replied, and buckled his seatbelt now, looking away and pretending to follow along to the flight attendants safety instruction a couple of rows ahead.

Tara sighed, and shifted just a little more towards the window, away from him, before she closed her eyes and tried her best to find some sleep after all, but now it was much harder to do so. Once the plane was actually in the air, she gave up on trying to rest and instead pulled her laptop from her carryon, and for the hundredth times read over all of the notes and talking points for the conference instead to keep her mind from going back to this rivalry between Jax and John.

X

Jax sat at the kitchen table, with Thomas' plate in front of him, cutting up his chicken nuggets into smaller bites, before he put the plate of food back in front of his youngest boy.

Both the boys were hungry, and ate all their food without complaining at all, but then again, there wasn't much to complain about chicken nuggets with macaroni and cheese on the side. It was fast, easy and most important of all it was something Jax knew his sons would devour without pitching a fit. Tara wouldn't be happy that there wasn't a vegetable in sight tonight.

He in turn had picked up a sandwich at the deli down the street for himself, which he was eating just now as he kept an close eye on his sons.

Abel and Thomas were eating rather silently, which wasn't really like them. Usually around dinner time, they were very lively, animated even, especially Abel going on and on about what he'd learned or done in preschool that day. But that wasn't the case today, and it suddenly dawned on him that they were acting kind of off.

"Hey." Jax broke the silence, and was rewarded with both his sons' blue eyes focused on him right away. "What's going on? You two are usually not this quiet, boys?" He tried to ease into the conversation, already suspecting what this was about.

"I'm okay." Abel answered at first, and focused his attention back to his food.

But Thomas held his gaze, and looked very much like he was about to burst into tears, "I want my mommy."

Shit!

"Hey." Jax said again, reaching across the table and took his little chubby hand in his, soothingly running the pad of his thumb over the sticky skin, "You know she's just working out of town, buddy.
She'll be back in a few days."

"So she doesn't have a owie again?" Abel piped up, giving Jax a questioning look of his own now.

"No, of course not." Jax shook his head, suddenly realizing what the boys were thinking. "Why would you think mommy got hurt?"

"Mommy always goes away when she gets owies ... on her hand, on her head." Abel explained and looked over to his brother to confirm.

Jax's heart sank as he listened to Abel explain and Thomas nodding along in agreement. Jesus Christ!

"No, boys. Mommy's fine. I promise." He dropped his sandwich onto his plate and wiped his hands together, brushing off any crumbs before he reached into his back pocket, pulled out his phone and quickly dialed her number. "Look, we're gonna call her up right now, alright?"

Tara answered on the second ring, "Hey. I was just about to call you."

"Hey, babe, the boys wanna talk to you. I'm gonna put you on speaker." Jax said without missing a beat, and changed the phone call to the speaker function instead, not giving her a chance to even reply because he needed his sons to hear her voice this very second.

He looked at the boys, "Come on now, say hi to your mom."

"Hi mommy." The boys crooned in unison, staring at the device that was now laying in the middle of the table.

"Hi boys." Tara greeted back. "I miss you already." She said.

"I miss you." Thomas said and then Abel repeated. "I miss you."

"What are you guys doing?" Tara tried to engage them in a conversation.

"We're eating." Abel said sounding cheerful now, in between bites. "We have chicken nuggets and we have mac and cheese and we have apple juice."

"Really? That sounds delicious, but what about some veggies? No veggies?" Tara inquired.

"No." Thomas shrugged and shook his head, and Abel answered, "Daddy said we didn't need any veggies tonight."

"Hey, that was supposed to stay between us." Jax chimed in now for the first time, acting like he was offended, and the boys giggled at their father's facial expression, all worries from moments ago forgotten.

"Thanks for throwing me under the bus here, sons. Now I'll probably get a spankin' when she gets back." More laughter ensued.

"You wish, Teller." Tara answered teasingly, and joined in on the laughter and exchange between her boys and her man.

Then she listened on as Abel began to recall his day at school and even Thomas managed to get a few words in as well.

Seeing the boys this happy upon hearing their mother's voice brought a smile to Jax's face too, at least temporarily, yet deep down he felt gutted at what had just happened. How his sons had quietly come to expect that mommy not coming home for a while, meant mommy got hurt again.
The phone conversation continued until they were all done eating. Then they hung up just long enough for Tara to call back via facetime, at which point the boys practically hijacked Jax's phone and showed their mom around their room as if she had been gone for months instead of hours.

While the boys were busy talking to Tara, Jax busied himself around the home, doing his best Mister-Mom impression.

He put the leftover food up, cleaned up the kitchen with a lot more detail than was necessary, got a load of laundry started, and he even started picking up the toys the boys had already managed to get out, but he knew that was simply a lost cause while they were still wide awake.

A glance at the clock told him that it was time to get them ready for bed already. He found them in their bedroom, showing off some random matchbox cars to their mom. Holding the small vehicle way too close to the camera that left him with no doubt that Tara couldn't actually see anything like this, maybe just a blur of random colors, but the boys were none the wiser by the enthusiastic tone of her voice when she told them that she liked this particular one the best.

"Hey, hate to be the one to break up the party, boys, but it's about that time again." Jax leaned against the doorframe of their bedroom, arms folded and tried his best to bite back a smirk at the way both his sons stuck their lips out in an exaggerated pout.

His mind went back to a teenage version of their mother, who'd pouted just like that a time or two to get him to do her bidding, and if memory served him right, it had usually worked pretty good on him too.

And even thought Abel wasn't her flesh and blood, right now, looking up at him like this, Jax would've sworn the contrary to be true, because fuck if he didn't look just like her sometimes.

"It is that time, isn't it?" Came Tara's voice through the phone, he knew he could count on her to be backing him up.

"Okay." Abel relented, which was a good thing, since Thomas usually followed suit with his big brother decision.

At this age it was something both Tara and Jax had come to appreciate. Yet both of them had voiced their fear before that once their boys got older, and became hormonal and rebellious teenagers like their parents used to be, Thomas blindly agreeing to Abel's mischief would come back to bite them in the ass big time. It would be the blind leading the blind!

"Alright." Jax loudly clapped his hands a few times, trying to get them motivated to move their little butts, "Let's get this show in the bathtub, boys. Come on. We'll call mom back to tell her goodnight once we're all ready to be tucked into bed, alright?"

The boys agreed, and smacked their lips as they blew some kisses at their mother on the phone, before they handed it back to their father, and started stripping out of their clothes on their way out the door.

Jax finally got a good look at Tara for the first time since she'd called via this video call.

"Hey, babe." He said, smiling at the camera for her.

Tara smiled back, "Hey."

"I gotta get these little ogres ready for bed, alright? I'll call you back in a little bit?" He said, as his eyes flickered up to the corner of the screen, realizing that the phone was about to die on him. "And my battery's about dead anyways, gotta charge it too."
"Okay." Tara said, nodding her head, "I've got some more studying to do anyways. Call me back when you're putting 'em in bed, so I can tell 'em goodnight."

"I will." Jax agreed, and he managed to blow her a kiss too, mimicking his sons, before the battery died and the phone shut off on him.

X

It was just a few minutes past eight when Jax remained quietly standing in the doorframe of his sons' bedroom. Staring back into the darkened room, he stood as if frozen in place while he continued to watch both their little chests rise and fall steadily as deep slumber began to take over.

He was honestly surprised that they'd fallen asleep as quickly as they did tonight, after just one measly bedtime story. He'd anticipated without Tara here they'd make it more difficult than usual, but the opposite was the case.

And under normal circumstances, he wouldn't have found himself standing here, watching them sleep and wouldn't have given any of that so much as a second thought. He would've thought himself lucky, but that wasn't the case at all tonight. He was feeling too guilt ridden at the moment to chalk anything his sons did tonight up to luck or sheer coincidence.

He just couldn't help shake the look on both their faces, or the tears brimming in his youngest sons eyes at the thought that his mother wasn't coming home because she was hurt again. So now Jax wondered, after Tara had told them yesterday she'd be gone for a few days, how much sleep they'd gotten last night, since they were this exhausted right now.

And by extension, he wondered just what exactly had been going on in their little heads this morning when Tara had said her byes to them.

He couldn't really blame them to think the worst, because she had said her byes to them like any other day back at the park on the day Juice had assaulted her too, and the next thing they were told was that mommy was hurt and wasn't coming home to them. Never mind the fact that he'd been getting booked himself and hadn't even been there to deliver that message himself.

Then his mind drifted back even further. On another day they'd spend at a park, with their mother being dragged away from their car fighting, kicking, and screaming for their father, for him to help. And yes, someway, somehow he'd managed to save her that day, but in the aftermath of it all, the boys had seen the agonizing pain on her face and the hot red blood dripping from her hand ... there had been no way to avoid them bearing witness to that.

And today just proved that they could be fairly easily distracted, brought back to the here and now, but deep down they hadn't forgotten any of it yet.

So he could see that in their minds this could be just like that time, and it crushed him to think that the pain and suffering Tara had endured, had spilled on over to both his sons to a much bigger extend than he'd previously assumed.

He thought he'd done everything in his power to keep the ugliness from them, but it was obvious now that this was just one more thing he'd failed them in.

I'm the mother of your sons. You hurt me, you hurt all of us!

The subject matter in which she had said those words to him was another altogether, but still Tara's words from so long ago rang so true in the back of his mind this very moment.
If he would've only listened to her back then, had packed her and those babies up and gotten the hell outta dodge ... so much hurt and pain could've been avoided by all of them.

Tears welled up in his eyes and he was quick to reach up and swipe them away before they could even fall. He silently turned and stepped out of the room now, closing the door behind him before he stepped across the hall into Tara's bedroom instead, closing that door behind him as well.

It suddenly dawned on him that the sick feeling he'd had in his gut might've had nothing to do with Tara, or her trip out of town, but instead it had been about him and his sons all along, and the realization of the pain they struggled with too.

He slowly took a seat on the edge of the bed, and hung his head in defeat. Hunched over, his elbows on his knees, he buried his face in both his hands, trying to get his own emotions back under control, but the tears kept on returning no matter how much he wiped them away.

In quiet moments like these, left to his own self-loathing thoughts about all the pain and suffering Tara and his boys had endured, the damage he'd inflicted on them seemed too much for him to bear ... and maybe even beyond repair, but he'd die trying.

Tara and my boys, Tara and my boys ... back when he was locked up, they were all he could think about, and how he'd do things differently, pull them out of the cesspool of violence and greed. How he'd promised her they wouldn't grow up in this!

Is there anything you love ... so much, you'd protect it no matter the cost? The damage it did to you? Yeah ... yeah, a child.

He found himself thinking back on all those long forgotten - or maybe just suppressed out of guilt - little talks they'd had. And looking back now, knowing what he knew now, it all seemed so clear to him where he'd gone wrong each time.

Too many times he'd found himself with the proverbial fork in the road ahead of him, and it seemed that each and every time he'd chosen the path, at full speed, that ultimately led him further and deeper into the grasp of Sam Crow, further towards becoming the man he'd hated, and in turn pushed him further away from her and his boys and the life they should've had all along.

With the only exception being the moment when he offered himself up to Patterson, willing to do hard time so she, an innocent, could walk free and save their sons.

But his one redeemable act had been shattered, made null and void again, with Juice's action against her later that same day. They'll suffer with this!

Sure, months later he'd struck another deal with Patterson, and she'd eventually left with his sons in tow, but at this point the damage was already done, the carnage too real to ignore any longer.

The tears finally stopped flowing, but he still swiped his hands angrily down his face as if that could also wipe away the guilt that was eating him alive right now. Needless to say it didn't work.

He was out! He'd chosen her and the boys ... had left Sam Crow behind. But had he ... really?

He swallowed the lump in his throat, and slowly came to his feet, before he walked into the bathroom to splash some cold water at his face to find more clarity.

He'd broken free from Charming, Gemma and the club, learned from his numerous past mistakes, sworn never to return again.

He had closed the door to that part of his life behind him ... with the exception of one thing.

With new found determination and more clarity than he'd ever felt before, he quietly stepped back
into the boys' room just long enough to turn on the baby monitor that sat on the highest shelf out of reach for the two.
He then grabbed the corresponding other piece from Tara's nightstand, quickly turned it on and stuffed the device into his back pocket, before he stepped out the front door of their apartment and headed down the hall towards Misses Ellie's place.

X

Jax hastily finished the last of his cigarette, before he flung the remaining filter out the window of his truck, sure it would be extinguished by the wet asphalt beneath, if not by the still falling rain itself.

He didn't waste any time and quickly rolled up the window on his truck, before he opened the door and climbed outside. After a few quick phone calls earlier to some of his co-workers he'd decided on this place right here to do the deed.

His swagger was more distinct then usually as he crossed the street towards the tattoo parlor. He couldn't decide if the bright neon lights in the window made the place seem more legit, or did the complete opposite, but he had it on good authority that this was the most reputable place in town.

A little bell above the door rang up on entering, letting his presence be known and he stepped up to the counter, waiting for someone to come greet him any moment now.

His eyes drifted across the shop, taking it all in, and it struck him just how similar one tattoo parlor seemed to look like the next. As if they all followed the same general decorative guidelines, when it came to tattoo art and piercings alike.

A big burly man finally stepped through the black curtain that separated the front entrance from the back rooms and greeted him at once, his voice was a low and deep rumble that matched his appearance, "How can I help you?"

"I'm here for a tattoo." Jax said sounding sternly.

He stripped the black latex gloves off of his hands and tossed them in the small trashcan behind him, before he turned his attention to the opened calendar notebook on the counter, and began scanning down the page, "You've got an -"

"No, man." Jax interjected, and shook his head, "I ain't got an appointment. But I need this done tonight." He met the man's eyes across the counter from him, hoping the look in his eyes would convey just how serious he was.

The guy scoffed, "Listen, man, we're usually booked up at least a solid week out, sometimes even longer. I've got everyone busy back there right now." He said, trying to sound apologetic, as he started turning pages on the calendar book before him, trying to pinpoint the next available appointment he could offer to him.

"Look, I need this done tonight." Jax repeated again with an even more serious tone to his voice and it caught the man's attention, and he met Jax's eyes once more. "It's not gonna be hard, if you've got an intern, a new kid, someone still learning the trade -.

"Shit." The guy said interrupting Jax now, and tugged absentmindedly on his long beard, eyeing him much more cautiously now. "Are we talking about a blackening out? Man, you don't want that shit done by some new kid, with hands shaking more than the needle itself. That's bad juju." The man said with a knowing look.

"Bad juju, really?" Jax asked, unable to keep the smile from forming on his lips.
"Yeah, man, ... you know, like Karma." The guy further elaborated, looking serious in his convictions.

Jax shook his head, eyebrows raised, "My kid was born ten weeks early, with a fucked up heart and his insides hanging out. My old lady's a doctor, saves babies lives every day, and she's been kidnapped, beaten and almost killed ... let's just say I don't believe in Karma, man. 'Cause if Karma was real, none of that shit would've happened to them, and I'd be buried in a shallow unmarked grave by now instead." Sounding just as serious in his believes in return.

The guy tugged on his beard again, eyeing Jax some more, "Why tonight? You're thinking if you don't get it done now, you might change your mind again? That's what this urgency's about that I'm getting here?"

"No, man." Jax shook his head again, "It's not about me changing my mind, ... it's about regretting not having it done much sooner. And not wanting to wait another fucking minute longer than I have to."

The man nodded in understanding at that, "How big are we talking here?"

Jax turned around, pulling the back of his shirt up to his shoulders, exposing the whole reaper on his back.

"Shit." The man said again, "That's gonna take a while to get all covered up."

"Yeah." Jax nodded now too, "It probably will."

X

Jax stood in Tara's bedroom, his back turned towards the mirror as he looked over his shoulder at his back for a long silent minute. The blackened out reaper was covered in ointment and clear wrap that had been carefully taped down with medical tape to stay in place.

He eyed it, clearly satisfied with the results, before he carefully pulled a clean shirt on over it for the night. He'd known for months that it needed to be done, and now it was.

He still remembered the day he'd gotten the tattoo like it was just yesterday. At the time, getting patched in, it had meant everything to him. He'd thrown himself head first into the club, and when it came down to deciding the size and placement of his club ink, it came only natural to have it on his back, like his cut had seeped into and under his skin permanently. Forever a part of him.

He'd envisioned to be feeling nostalgic in a sense, no one could really blame him, it would only be natural if he did since the ink had been a part of him for such a long, long time. But the fact that he wasn't feeling any of that at all, perplexed even him, yet made it all the more clearer that he'd finally made the right choice.

And just like he'd been so proud to show off the reaper when he'd gotten it right after patching in, now he was just as proud to surprise Tara with this when she'd get back home in a couple of days.

But above all else, he needed his sons to not grow up hating the very thought of him, and this was without a shadow of a doubt a step in the right direction.

They wouldn't know it just yet, they were simply still too young to understand it all, but in time they'd grow older, and just like him they'd learn even more of the ugly truth, and he could only hope they'd forgive him for what he'd done, to their mother and to them, and that this night would be marked as a milestone on his long road to redemption.
Sam Crow was truly behind him now, not just for the sake of his wife and his boys, but his own as well, and those thoughts alone let him fall asleep with a smile on his face tonight.

X

Author's Note: Thanks for all the lovely reviews. The development in this chapter has been a long time coming. I've gotta be honest that I've struggled with the decision to have him blacken out his ink, because it looks just soooo good on him, but for the sake of my story it had to be done. As long as he still had the ink, he still had a foot in the door with Sam Crow, and could be called up on by them if push came to shove. Anyways, I know some of you might not be happy with me right now, but I hope you'll leave me a few words anyways. Let me know what you think, good or bad. Thank you
P.S. If anyone can pull off a blackened out reaper, it's Jackson Teller! ;)}
When his alarm went off, Jax was still pretty tired, but he had no regrets. He called Tara before he even rolled out of bed, wanting to hear her voice, but she didn't answer.

His back was a little sore and achy, but so was the rest of him too, he guessed from sleeping somewhat awkwardly on his stomach and side throughout the night, when his usual sleeping position was flat on his back. He rarely ever slept on his side, usually only if he was curled around Tara, but with her gone he had been draped around her pillow instead to keep off of his back. The pillow however turned out to be a pathetic substitute for her warm and inviting form, but at the very least it smelled like her.

He had to admit that it did feel strange waking up in her bed alone, after they'd shared it now for almost a month. And just like her absence had made the boys think of her being hurt and in the hospital, he had to admit that waking up alone like this had brought him back there too for a moment. Back to how the bed in their home in Charming felt cold and uninviting without her there every night. And he'd end up spending some of his nights at Margaret's house sharing a bed with Abel, or on a chair beside Tara's hospital bed.

It hadn't even been twenty-four hours since she'd left for Idaho, and he was already missing her. Not just saying it, out of habit, but he truly fucking missed her, and then he thought to himself with a smirk just how pussy whipped that made him sound.

But he had to push all of these thoughts aside, because today would be the first full day without her, so he'd set his alarm clock a little earlier, knowing he'd have to get the boys ready all on his own this morning.

He hurried, peeled off the clear wrap from his tattoo and took a quick shower, and already ran into his first problem without her here. He was supposed to apply ointment to his back for another day or two, yet without her, that wasn't going to happen.

He supposed he could've tried to coax Abel into doing it for him, but he knew that it would undoubtedly turn into a longer conversation, about why he'd done what he'd done to the tattoo, which was a talk that he wasn't really ready to have just yet with Abel.

And on top of that, if Abel knew, without a doubt he'd mentioned it to his mom, and as childish as it sounded, he wanted to be the one to either tell or show Tara first. Because unlike the tattoo of her name on his chest, he was positive this would get a reaction out of her right off the bat.

So Jax dried his back as good as he could after the shower, the rubbing of the towel stinging more than he remembered. He glanced down at the cotton towel in his hand, and he could see the pinkish stains left behind on the white fabric, the small specks of blood that told him it would be a little while before his back would be completely healed.

He got dressed, but left his shirt off while the boys were still asleep, giving the blood on his back a
He went about the tasks at hand, getting some clean clothes out of the dryer for the boys to wear, then continued to quickly pack their lunch to take to school and daycare, before he stuck some pop tarts in the toaster for them to have for breakfast.

He pulled his shirt on over his head now, and grabbed his cup of steaming coffee, taking a sip before he opened their bedroom door and woke the sleepy boys from their slumber to start their day.

"Hi, guys." Jax greeted them as he walked into the kitchen, where they were eating their breakfast and drinking their warm chocolate milk.

He glanced at his phone once again, hoping that Tara would’ve called him back by now. He wanted to talk to her before he had to head out. Just as that thought crossed his mind, her name appeared on the screen and the phone began to ring the same instant he pushed the green button to answer.

"Hey babe." Jax greeted her and put the coffee mug down on the table in front of him before he pushed his chair back so he could stand.

"Hey." Tara answered sounding a bit rushed on the other end of the line. "Sorry, I just now saw that you'd called. I was getting ready, had some breakfast."

Jax stepped into the living room, and sat on the armrest of the big oversized chair, his eyes still on the boys in the kitchen, watching them as they were entertaining themselves.

"I was starting to wonder." He admitted, "How did you sleep? Miss me yet?"

"I slept alright ... I guess." Tara answered, but then chuckled a little "And yes ... maybe I miss you a little." She teased. "What about you? Miss me yet?"

"Always." Jax replied, a smirk on his face. "Just a little, huh?" He didn't wait for her reply. "So, we didn't really get to talk much yesterday, with the boys hoggin' the phone. How was your flight and the hotel, everything good?"

"Yeah, I went over my notes on the plane, made time go by quick. The hotel's pretty nice, but I've been busy since I've gotten here, so all work, no fun." Then she admitted, "It's nice to know though that they do seem to miss me when I'm not around." Tara asked in return. "How are my babies doing?"

"Of course, they miss you." Jax answered, but now was not the time to tell her what had been going on with the boys yesterday. He'd fill her in on all of that once she'd be back home with them.

He shook his head to himself as he watched Thomas dip a piece of his pop tart into his milk, then reached his whole little hand in to retrieve the piece that had broken off. "They're doin' fine, eating breakfast right now, makin' a mess ... I didn't realize how big of a mess they make every time they eat, babe."

"Welcome to my world, Teller." She only half joked and he could practically hear the smirk on her lips in the sound of her voice.

There was a moment of silence for a few seconds, before Tara cleared her throat, "So, how come you didn't tell me that you went to see John at the hospital?" She finally dared to ask. It's been on the tip of her tongue since he'd answered her call.

Jax hesitated, he knew she'd probably find out and would ask him about it, but he still found himself unsure of how to answer it. "I should've told you." He finally admitted. "But I needed to set him straight, you get that, don't you?" He answered as truthfully as he could, not liking how his mind
went back to all the things John had said ... especially the shit that was true!

"I guess." Tara replied, "I just wish you would've told me, instead of having to hear it from him, considering I've gotta work with the guy, especially here."

"I'm sorry, babe. You're right." Jax replied, he could understand that. He should've at least told her after the fact. But now it took everything he had in him to refrain from asking if the fucker had been bothering her or not.

"Okay." Tara sighed, and ran a hand through her still wet hair, unsure of where to go from here.

A beat or two of silence followed once more, and Jax was just about to speak up, when he could hear a knock in the background.

"Hold on a sec. There's someone at the door." Tara said, and pressed the phone to her chest as she stepped up to the door to open it, while all Jax could hear was rustling.

Jax crunched his eyebrows together in concentration, reached up with his other hand to cover his other ear to drown out the sound of the boys giggling in the kitchen, and tried to hear the muffled conversation on the phone instead. He tried to keep his cool, but he was pretty damn sure that it was John who she was talking to, and the thought of that guy at her hotel room door just brought his blood to a boil.

He could hear the door falling shut, and Tara spoke up again, "I'm back. Sorry 'bout that."

"Was that him?" Jax snapped, he just couldn't bite back the question, even if he tried.

Tara closed her eyes in frustration, but tried her best to keep her voice level when she spoke, "It was. He was just -."

"He was just asking if you wanted to get breakfast with him. I heard." He wasn't a hundred percent sure, but that was the gist of what he thought he heard John say, and unlike her, Jax wasn't able to keep the emotions from his voice. He was jealous, but most of all, he was pissed. But at least that answered his question about whether or not the guy was still trying to make a move on her or not.

"Jax." Tara pleaded, exasperation in her voice, "I'm just trying to get through this trip and come back to my babies and you as fast as I can. You've got nothing to worry about. How many times have you told me that it was just business?"

He frowned, on one hand he knew she was right, but it didn't ease the way all of this made him feel, because hadn't he reassured Tara that it was just business, with Ima and with Colette too. "I know, babe. But asking you to have breakfast with him doesn't sound like just business ... it sounds like he's trying to make time with you." He sounded angry, even thought he really didn't mean to let his anger out on her.

Tara shook her head to herself, frustrated to be caught in the middle of Jax's and John's turf war, when she'd obviously made her choice in the matter known to both men already.

"I don't know what you want me to do here, Jax? I'm not spending any time with him, unless I have no choice in the matter, like today during the presentations." Tara didn't yell when she spoke, but the frustration in her voice couldn't be missed either way.

Jax's eyes were on their sons as he tried his best to not flip out at the thought of her working side by side with that guy. He took a deep breath, in and out, "I trust you, babe, I just don't trust him."

X
The workday was coming to an end and Jax glanced up at the big oversized clock that hung prominently on the wall overlooking the bays. Just another thirty minutes, and he'd be on his way to pick up Thomas from day care at the hospital, and then Abel from Misses Ellie's place, where he's been since preschool got out earlier.

He tried his best to focus on work today, and for the most part he'd succeeded by keeping busy, but despite it all, his mind kept going back to Tara and John. And not for the first time today he wondered if maybe by confronting John the way he had, he'd furthered the guys resolve to do the complete opposite what he had asked him to do, and pursued Tara every chance he got.

It pissed him off, but he knew getting mad at her wouldn't get him anywhere. This wasn't her fault. If he hadn't cheated, if he hadn't caused the rift, if he would've kept Colette as far away from him as possible after, then Tara would've never started seeing this guy in the first place.

Jax knew, if anyone was to blame for this fucked up situation, it was none other than himself.

Greg finally brought him back to the here and now, when he spoke up, trying to bring him out of his sulkiness "Hey, so why don't you come to my place tonight for dinner, man? You can meet my wife ... the kids get someone to play with? My wife's making lasagna, ... it's real good."

Jax was wiping down his tools with a rag before he put them back in his toolbox, and stopped long enough to look up at his friend, "I don't think I'll be good company tonight, man. There's just too much shit running through my head right now."

Greg wouldn't let up. "And that's why you need to come over. You won't have to worry about fixin' something to eat for the little ones, and our kids will get to play and tire each other out ... come on, Jax."

Jax sighed, wiping some grease off of his hands and threw the rag on top of his tools, when he finally looked up to meet Greg's eyes, "Lasagna, huh?"

"The fucking best you'll ever have." Greg grinned, and slapped Jax on the back. "Six thirty sharp, don't be late. I'll text you our address."

Jax had to admit he was more than a bit surprised when he'd pulled his truck up to Greg's house. He had to double check the address, making sure he hadn't made a mistake. It was a pretty nice house in a even nicer neighborhood.

And Greg's wife, Claire, was a petite looking blonde, who was real pretty without barely any make-up on, in a minimalistic kind of way, and couldn't have been any nicer when she greeted him and his boys at the door and introduced Abel and Thomas to her two boys.

So now, after they've eaten, Claire was keeping an eye on the kids as they played together, while Greg led Jax out to the garage, showing him the bike he'd been working on for the last couple of months.

"Holy shit." Jax marveled in amazement, as he lit his cigarette. "A '65 Panhead EG. She's a beauty." He took a long drag as he walked around the bike, looking at it from all sides.

"That she is." Greg grinned ear to ear as he also pulled a cigarette out himself and raised it to his lips before he lit it.

"Man, my best friend, he had the exact same one sitting in his garage ... same year and everything. Seems like a million years ago now." Jax added wistfully, thinking back on Ope, and how he'd sold
the bike to help finding Abel at the time.

They talked a little while longer about the bike, where he'd found the parts and how much it had set him back, before Greg pulled two old lawn chairs off of the wall and unfolded them, nodding towards one for Jax to take a seat.

Jax lit his second cigarette, and Greg finally spoke up, "So what's been eating you up, man? You've barely said a word at the shop today." He eyed Jax warily before he walked over to the small fridge and pulled two cold beers out for the both of them.

"Hell, I don't even know." Jax answered, shaking his head between drags from his smoke, rubbing his hand down his face. "Seems like every time I think she's better, we're better, some other shit comes up, throwing a wrench in it."

"I thought she's just out of town for work." Greg clarified, not really seeing what the big deal was. He twisted the cap off his beer and handed the other one to Jax. "Ain't that big of a wrench, if you ask me. She'll be back before you know it."

Jax scoffed, and looked back at Greg, meeting his eyes, his eyebrows raised. "Except that guy she was seeing when we were apart, the neuro doctor, he's at the conference with her."

"For real?" Greg sat up straight, looking taken back. "Now that's fucked up. No wonder you're so bend out of shape."

"Tell me about it." Jax replied and took a sip from his beer now, his eyes lingering on the bike in front of him once more, before he turned his attention back to Greg, "So what's the deal with this place?"

Greg shook his head, "What do you mean?"

Jax raised his eyebrows, amused for a moment, glad for the distraction. "Come on, I know what you're making an hour, bro." He gestured with his hands about the place, "This house, this bike ... that wife. When you told me your life story, said you left the life after your brother died, I feel like you left some crucial parts out, man."

Greg shook his head, guilt written all over his face. "When I walked away, I left with nothing ... I had nothing, not even her." He nodded towards the door that led back to the house.

"Then where did all this come from? You won the lottery or some shit?" Jax looked back at him even more confused than before, mostly because he'd thought Greg to be an open book, never shutting up about anything, yet here it seemed he hadn't told the whole story.

"Something like that." Greg took a big swig from his beer, his eyes focused on the bike again, lost in his thoughts for a few seconds, "After my brother died, I was seriously fucked up. I threw myself deeper into this shit. Took too many risks I shouldn't have. We were on a run, I hooked up with some skank. It was just pussy, didn't mean anything. Just something to drown out the pain."

"I get it." Jax said, nodding along, as his own guilt came back tenfold.

"Word got back to Claire though. By the time I got back, she'd already packed up the kids and split. After some diggin' I found out she was staying with my mom, so I showed up there, only to have mom point a saw-off in my face, telling me to stay away." Greg locked eyes with Jax now and raised another cigarette to his mouth.

"Oh shit, your own mom." Jax shook his head.
"She had just lost a son too, was pissed that I was ruining what was left of our family ... so she made sure I knew who's side she was on. That she wanted me out of the life, or out of hers." Greg recalled.

"Shit, my mom ... she pushed me towards the gavel, and when Tara was in a coma, she even pushed me towards other pussy ... but then again, comparing anyone else's mother to mine, that's like comparing apples to a goddamn hand-grenade." He took a drag from his smoke, waiting for Greg to elaborate, because this far none of what he said explained the house and the happy marriage.

"Well, when she refused to even see me, that's when I finally woke up, you know? I mean, it wasn't instant, I struggled for a while, but eventually I knew what I had to do, man. I knew I had to get out if I didn't want to lose her for good too, or miss out on my kids growing up." Greg admitted.

"All the talks we've had, all those days you've talked my fucking ear off and ... this shit, that literally mirrors mine, that's what you leave out." Jax said with a hint of exasperation in his voice.

"This shit's really personal." Greg said defensively.

Jax cracked a smile, "And it's not personal anymore."

"Well, you're at my house, eating my wife's food, and your boys are playing with mine ... thought I can let you in on some more personal shit now." Greg returned the smile with a nod and raised his beer to clink against Jax's, before they both took a drink.

"Still doesn't explain the house though." Jax added questioningly.

"Right." Greg said, realizing how he'd taken this talk off course. "I got out, got a job, fought like hell to at least see my kids ... and eventually we worked our shit out, and she took me back. That was about three years ago, then about a year ago, her grandfather died and left her a bunch of money, real estate and shit. She never even knew him, but she was his only living heir, so ..." He shrugged his shoulders. "This is all hers, man."

Jax exhaled the smoke from the drag he'd just taken and nodded, "How are you with that?” When Greg gave him a confused look, he elaborated. "Tara makes real good money as a doctor, I earned real good with the club, but now ... now I make what you make, which ain't shit."

"Hmmm." Greg nodded and rubbed his hands over his beard as if deep in thought again. "It took some getting used to ... ain't gonna lie. But growing up, my mom always worked, sometimes two jobs ... she had to, because my old man couldn't be counted on for nothing, you know? So on one hand I always thought I'd be different than him, I'd be the one to provide for my family, which was another reason why I stayed in as long as I did ... but really, it ain't like that anymore. This ain't the nineteen-fifties Leave-it-to-beaver, man. Gotta get with the times. Claire's got a good job working as an accountant, I work my gig over at Bakers, we both earn and what's mine is hers, and what's hers is mine. We've been through way too much real shit, to worry about something as trivial as who brings home the most bacon."

Jax nodded as he took in Greg's words of wisdom. It made sense. He'd always pushed Tara towards her job, to keep at it, to not just be a mom, not that there's anything wrong with that, but because he knew deep down that that's what she wanted. So how could he hold some sort of silent grudge because she earned more than him now.

"So what are you gonna do?” Greg asked him out of the blue.

"About what?” Jax looked back at him confused. He wondered momentarily if Greg was talking about the money situation.
"About that guy with your wife in Idaho?" Greg replied without missing a beat.

"Ain't much I can do until they get back." Jax admitted, and ran a weary hand down his face. "I confronted him about staying clear of her before they left ... but I think that did more harm than good, 'cause now he's asking her out to eat and shit, trying to make more time with her beside's the time he's already spending with her because of the conference."

"Fuck." Greg put the empty bottle on the cement floor beside his chair and lit another cigarette. "That's tough. I couldn't deal with that."

"I trust her." Jax added, and nodded as he thought about it. "Everything we've been through. Our marriage, she wouldn't jeopardize it."

"Right." Greg nodded in agreement and thought about it for a minute before he added. "Except, it's not her you gotta worry about, it's him, really. He's putting moves on her, knowing you're not around to put a stop to it ... that shit wouldn't fly with me, man."

At that, Jax clenched his jaw, "Trust me, bro, that shit ain't flying with me either. I'll end that shithead when he's back."

"I wouldn't wait that long." Greg replied, realizing he was probably stirring the pot here. "If that was Claire with her ex rubbing up on her, I'd already be up there."

"I wish I could be." Jax admitted that too. What he wouldn't give to have tagged along with her, and not just because of John, but to just have some alone time with her.

"Then why the hell ain't ya'?" Greg looked at him in confusion, as if this was a no-brainer.

"Well, I gotta work, I got my boys." Jax replied without having to think about it. He knew all the reasons why he didn't go with her by heart.

"Tomorrow's already Friday, we're scheduled to be off this Saturday anyways. Baker's got that crew coming in servicing the lifts and calibrating all the tools and shit. So it's one day you need off. That's fucking easy enough." Greg began to rattle down his solutions to Jax's problems. "The boys, well .... either take 'em with you, or ask one of the babysitter's to watch 'em for you ... Hell, I can talk to Claire, and if she ain't working Saturday, you can put our names down at their daycare and we'll go get them tomorrow and keep 'em for ya' until you get back." Greg reached in his pocket and pulled out his phone. "You said she was in Boise, right?"

"Yeah." Jax nodded, and the idea of going to see Tara in Idaho lifted his spirits, but when Abel and Thomas crossed his mind again, he simply knew it wouldn't all be that simple.

"Four hundred and seventy-some miles, about eight hours if you drive straight through. Nine if you stop to eat and piss and stretch your legs. That ain't bad. You leave here at eight in the morning, you'd be there by five in the afternoon, probably right around the time she'd be done with her conference shit. Can you imagine that motherfuckers face when you show up?" Greg looked up from his phone and grinned when he met Jax's eyes.

But Jax shook his head, he wasn't smiling, "I appreciate you offering to watch my boys, bro, but I can't."

"Why the hell not?" Greg asked confused.

Jax let out a heavy sigh, and leaned further back into the lawn chair, ignoring the sting on his back when he did so. "Yesterday, Abel asked me if his mom wasn't home because she got hurt again.
Both of them spend the rest of the afternoon on the phone with Tara, making sure that she wasn't in a hospital bed somewhere, in a coma again." Jax shook his head. "I can't take off now, god knows what the hell they'd think. I can't do that to them."

"Then be straight with them ... the only reason they'll think shit like that, it's because you leave them in the dark, letting their little minds wonder. Trust me, man, I've been there with my kids too. You gotta tell 'em straight up that you're going to the hotel where their mom is, tell 'em everything's fine, everyone's fine, nobody's hurt or getting hurt, tell 'em you both will be back in a couple days. Just be up front with them. The little one might not understand it all, but the older one, he's what? Five? He'll get it."

"He'll be five in about four months." Jax corrected him.

"That's old enough to get it, and the younger one will be okay if his big brother is. They'll take cue's from each other. That's how my boys are." Greg assumed out loud, before he pushed himself up out of his chair. "Let me go run this by Claire real quick, to see if she's okay with it, alright? And if she is, you call Baker, taking the day off tomorrow, and then we'll talk to your boys, and work all out all of the details" He patted Jax on the shoulder as he passed by him. "This time tomorrow, you'll be with your old lady."

X

Tara gathered all of her paper's from the podium, packing everything away in her bag, when she noticed John out of the corner of her eye approaching. She groaned inwardly, wishing she could click her heels together or wiggle her nose, and magically disappear right in front of him. But no such luck.

"Hey." John said as he stepped up beside her.

"Hey." Tara replied, giving him a reluctant smile before she grabbed her bag and started heading for the stairs on the side, leaving the stage.

John fell in step beside her. "I'm glad I caught you before you disappear into your room again. Let's get some dinner together? They serve a real good steak right here in the hotel restaurant."

Tara stopped short, so sick and tired of having the same conversation with him, she turned towards him in utter frustration. "It's not gonna happen, okay? I'm not eating with you, ... not breakfast, lunch or dinner. I'm not having drinks with you either. I'm sorry the way things ended between us, I really am, John. But it did end. It's been over. So, please, listen to my husband and leave me alone, ... because if you don't, he's going to hurt you."

X

The next morning, Jax was on the road by eight AM. He knew he had a long drive ahead of him, but the thought of seeing Tara, surprising her made it all worth it. He'd been up late last night, planning every last detail, packing not just his own overnight bag, but also the boys' too.

He'd dropped Abel off at preschool a little earlier than usually today, then had dropped Thomas off at daycare in the hospital too, and left the boys' overnight bag with Christy. His next stop had been with his PO for permission to leave the state before he went on his way out of town.

Everything was taken care off. His boss, Eric had given him today off, as long as he promised to make up the missing time by either staying late or working an extra Saturday shift.
He'd talked to the boys, really talked to them, and they actually seemed excited for the opportunity at another play date with the new friends they'd just made the night before, and a sleepover at Christy and Jason's place. The hardest part had been keeping Abel from giving away the surprise when he'd talked to his mother before he went to sleep last night.

So Greg and his wife would be picking up Abel and Thomas today, he'd made sure to put their names on the list at Abel's school as well as Thomas' daycare, so they'd be allowed to do so.

And last but not least, he made sure that Jason and Christy had Greg and Claire's phone number and address, and vice versa, so they could link up later tonight to hand over the kids. It wasn't that he didn't trust Greg and Claire to keep the boys over night, but he just knew that Abel and Thomas were comfortable staying with Jason and Christy, so he didn't want to take any chances by trying something new with both him and Tara out of town.

Looking back on last night's conversation with Greg, this whole thing had started out because of John, but honestly, right now it wasn't even about that anymore. He simply couldn't wait to see her, kiss her, touch her, and tell her that he'd taken the leap and finally gotten rid of the reaper once and for all.

As he merged onto US-97 North, he caught a glimpse of himself in the rearview mirror, surprising him still, it would be a minute until he'd get used to it.

Thinking back to late last night after the boys had been peacefully asleep, staring back at his own image in the bathroom mirror, he had taken another step, not quite as drastic though as the blackened out tattoo, since hair would grow back, but drastically different.

He wasn't entirely sure why he'd done it, maybe it was just wishful thinking on his part, or a vain attempt to turn himself back into the person he'd been back then, but regardless of his reasons, he'd taken the hair clippers and had cut his hair as short as it had been when he'd gotten released from Stockton.

Then this morning he'd even shaved off his beard too, wanting to start out with a clean slate ... clean shaven. He looked like a brand new version of himself. It was cathartic to say the least, and the look on the boys' face, when he woke them, was worth it alone.

But now as he adjusted the beanie on his head and swiped his hand down his face, it still felt odd, to say the least.

He turned on the radio, using the search function to find a station that would come in clearly now that he'd left town, and lowered his window just enough to flick the ash from his cigarette outside between drags.

Then the weather report on the radio caught his attention, and he turned up the volume to hear it better. Tara had mentioned that it had been snowing over in Boise since before her arrival, but now they were saying a goddamn snowstorm was quickly moving in.

Fuck!

It was just his luck, but it didn't deter him in the least, instead he stepped on the gas and sped up, trying to beat the approaching storm that was coming in from the east.

X

Tara groaned inwardly, watching the Television screen in one of the board rooms near the conference hall. This storm was heading their way, and from the looks of it, it was going to be pretty bad.
She turned towards Colleen, one of her co-workers from Medford Memorial that was also attending the conference with her. "Now what?"

Colleen shrugged her shoulders, "Heard they might end the conference early, since a bunch of people already checked out earlier this morning, trying to get the hell out of here before the brunt of the storm hits."

Tara let her eyes drift to the window, taking in the increasing snowfall outside, "Crap, this kind of weather takes me back to med school in Chicago. Winter's up there are the worst."

Just then, the door to the board room opened and one of the head honchos of this conference stepped inside and informed them of the proposed schedule change.

X

Tara paid the cabby, and waited for him to retrieve her small suitcase and carryon bag from the trunk, before she hurriedly stepped inside the airport terminal with her luggage in tow.

She brushed the snow off of her jacket, which wasn't nearly thick enough for this type of weather as she scanned her surroundings.

She made quick work to inquire about the next available flights back to Medford, but after waiting in line for what seemed like forever, it turned out that the weather and snow had already began to take a turn for the worse and because of it, all outgoing flights had been canceled.

Frustrated, but in a rush nonetheless, she got in the shortest of the long lines at the car rental companies on the other side of the building instead. Of course she'd stumbled into John earlier, who had, to the best of her knowledge, returned back to the hotel to sit out the storm in comfort ... which left Tara even more determined to not go back to the hotel if she could help it.

Being stranded with John at the hotel, without the distraction of work to keep him off of her back sounded like a nightmare in itself. So she'd take her chance on the road, trying to outrun, or rather outdrive the storm and with any luck she'd be back with Jackson and her babies by the end of the day.

X

Author's Note: I want to take the chance to thank everyone for their private messages, and reviews they've left for me about this story. Please, if you have anything to say about this chapter, let me know, I always look forward to hear from all of you. It's so motivating, so thank you.
Chapter 38

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X

Jax had been on the road for over six and a half hours, he'd only stopped once to fill up his tank of gas, use the restroom and stretch his legs. He'd bought some snacks for the road, some energy drinks to keep him focused and awake, along with a couple of sandwiches and a big bag of chips that he'd been snacking on every now and again along the way.

About two hours ago, little flurries of snow began to fall, and at the time it had been nothing too concerning, but now as his eyes took in the sign that told him he was just two miles out before the next exit to Drewsey Oregon, it was starting to look pretty fucking bad out there.

For the most part, the highways and mayor roads had been treated decent enough for the oncoming storm to keep on driving, but the snow had been falling so much heavier now, and the temperatures had dropped dramatically too, bringing the wind-chill well below freezing at this point.

Overall, the combination of everything, the snow, the wind, the freezing cold was making it harder to see a whole lot ahead of him, but as long as the roads remained drivable, he was going to stay on and move on ahead.

Through it all, he tried his best to stay optimistic, even when he listened to the dooming outlook of worse weather yet to come the further he ventured east towards Idaho.

X

Clearly, she hadn't planned this all the way through, Tara thought to herself, her eyes glued to the road ahead of her. The snow was making it hard to see and the wind kept pushing the rental car towards the ditch along the road, and she found herself having to steer to the left just to keep the vehicle going straight ahead.

Right about now, dodging John's calls and knocks at the hotel room door didn't sound quite so bad when she could picture herself all bundled up in her warm hotel room bed, raiding the minibar for candy while watching some sitcom or rom-com on the TV instead of dealing with this nightmare on the road.

But she was too far in now to turn back around, leaving her really no choice than to keep on driving. There were only two possible outcomes, she'd either make it all the way home, or if the storm got any worse, she'd have to stop at some motel someplace and wait it out. Just when that thought crossed her mind, her car lost traction on the road and spun out on the slippery surface, presenting her with outcome number three; crashing and freezing to death.

She wasn't even going as fast as the speed limit allowed, but right now it didn't seem to matter as the car began to swerve every which way she didn't want it to go, before it slid off the road and came to a jolting abrupt stop after it slid down into the ditch. Oh shit!

Tara sighed, letting out the breath she'd been holding as she looked around the car first, then her surroundings outside. Thankfully, she hadn't actually hit the tree that leaned toward the car, she
thought in relief as she looked back at it over her shoulder. But a heavy branch hung over the back
off her rental car, and had probably left some scratches on the hood of the trunk, but no actual impact
meant no airbags had gone off, so that was always a plus.

Snow was still falling mercilessly outside, quickly covering the windshield, and that's when Tara
realized the windshield wipers had stopped working and the car had actually shut off on her
altogether. She quickly reached for the key, turning it to start the car back up, and at first it sounded
like the engine would turn over, but then it stalled and nothing else happened. She tried it several
time, but always with the same outcome. Fuck!

Now she actually could feel a wave of panic coming on, and tried to reach for her carryon bag that
had fallen to the floor in front of the passenger seat, some of its contents scattered all over the floor.
But the seatbelt had locked in place and stopped her short from any movement, and she hurriedly
unbuckled herself, before she awkwardly leaned down towards the passenger side of the car to
gather all of the things that had spilled out of her bag.

She finally found her cell phone that had been wedged between the passenger door and seat, and
stared at it as another rush of panic came over her when she realized she had no service whatsoever
in this particular spot. Jesus Christ!

She reached up and massaged her shoulder, where the seatbelt had dug in just a little bit too hard
when she began to lose control of the vehicle. She tried to think back on the little truck stop she'd
passed a few miles back, wondering if she could walk that far. How many miles had it been? Shit,
she really had no idea, it could've been two miles, or maybe fifteen ... ugh!

Tara pulled her fluffy oversized scarf out of the bag and wrapped it around herself, then pulled the
latch that unlocked the hood before she opened her door and fought against the wind to get outside.
She struggled, in her high heeled shoes to keep her footing, all in all she simply wasn't dressed for
this kind of weather, but when she'd gotten dressed for the conference this morning, she hadn't
anticipated this road trip to take place at all.

And then she'd planned to be on a plane several hours ago, which by now would've already landed
safe and sound back in Medford, and before long she would've picked up her boys and be huddled
on the couch with them under a blanket until Jax would get home and joined them too.

The thought of her boys and her man was what kept her fighting against the cold, when she
examined the engine for any obvious problem. As a teenage girl, she'd spend countless hours sitting
on the sidelines at T-M, pretending to be reading a book or doing homework, when she really was
just ogling her hot blond boyfriend, while he worked on cars, bikes and the such. And right now she
wished she'd just paid a little more attention to what he'd been doing, because she didn't have the
faintest idea what she was looking at, or what could possibly be wrong.

Nothing stood out to her, and she feared it was something not engine related at all. The more she
thought about it, the more she came to the conclusion that she'd probably damaged something in the
undercarriage when she slid down into the ditch. Well, at least that's what she figured made the most
sense. But what did she really know?

Tara slammed the hood back shut, and used the sleeve of her jacket to clear the windshield and the
side windows that were facing the road off snow on her way to the back of the car. She tried
repeatedly to open the trunk, so she could get some warmer clothing out of her suitcase, but to no
avail. The branch of the tree that hung just an inch above her car didn't give her enough clearance to
open it. So she aborted that mission as well, and quickly climbed back inside to hide from the cold
wind.
Her whole body shivered, and at this point the interior of the car wasn't that much warmer than the outside anymore, but at least it wasn't windy or snowing in here. She readjusted the big oversized scarf around her head, and rubbed her hands together, hoping the friction would warm them, and wishing she would've brought gloves and a thicker jacket along too.

She checked her cell phone one more time, but there was still no service, so she wedged the device between her thighs to keep it from going too cold, since her battery seemed to be losing power already.

If she was going to freeze to death out here, she had truly no one to blame but herself, and all because of that idiotic idea she had had about surprising Jax by coming back early. Jax and her had been doing so good lately. He was more considerate, and loving, and she felt so much more comfortable around him in return. They had been on a steadfast path to regain their trust in each other, until this damn conference put a screeching halt to it all again.

She cursed herself for being this stupid, downright reckless, for getting onto the road without calling or texting Jax, or at the very least letting Christy in on her plan to head home through the midst of this storm. So now, as that crucial mistake ran through her mind, she really had no other choice then to just sit and wait, hoping and praying that a car or truck would pass by soon, and that she'd spot it quickly enough to get out and get them to stop for her. Which was easier said than done, with the visibility around her declining with every passing minute. She turned her hazard lights on, thankful that they at least still seemed to be working. But she wondered just how visible they were if the car was slowly getting covered in another layer of snow again.

X

Jax had no choice but to slow down some, considering visibility had decreased even more. There had been a sign for a truck stop about ten miles ahead of him, and as much as he hated the idea of not making it all the way to Boise today, he knew that the smart thing to do was probably to make a stop and take shelter until the worst of this storm had passed.

To top it all off, out here in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by forests that seemed to stretch for miles and miles, cell service was spotty at best. And even thought there had never been an issue with either of the boys at preschool or daycare since he'd moved here, he thought how it would be just his luck that something would go wrong while he couldn't be reached and Tara was out of town too.

Or maybe it was just guilt that began to seep into his thoughts, wondering if he'd made a mistake after all, taking off like he had to surprise Tara. The boys seemed fine last night and this morning too. As a matter of fact, they seemed downright excited to be able to hang with their new friends today, but he still couldn't shake the feeling that maybe he should've put his own needs aside for the sake of theirs.

But as he pondered over that, Greg's words came back to him, easing at least some of that guilty conscience again when he remembered him saying that fixing your marriage was a crucial part of ensuring your kids' happiness too. Undoubtedly there was some truth to that!

Jax squinted to focus his eyes more on what was coming up ahead. The snow was mercilessly blasting against his windshield, obscuring the view while his windshield wipers worked overtime. He could see a Chevy truck coming to a dead stop in the oncoming lane up ahead, he noticed the hazard lights were flashing and he lowered his speed even more. Just as he was about to pass, he saw the passenger and the driver of the truck jump out and Jax rolled up to him, coming to a stop and lowered his window before he too turned on his hazard lights, as a precaution in case a vehicle should come up behind him.
"Everything alright?" Jax asked, he had to raise his voice, almost yelling over the sound of the wind blasting around them. After all, he was a mechanic, and maybe he could help with whatever the issue was. One good deed at a time, and maybe one day the good would outnumber all the bad shit he’d done to people.

"Yeah." The guy nodded, pointed to the other side of his truck, where the other guy had disappeared to, "Just checking on that car over there." he explained.

But between the snowy wind and the big green Chevy, the view of the ditch was hidden to him, and he honestly hadn't even noticed that there was a car at all.

He nodded, "Alright." and waved the guy off before he turned off his hazard lights and slowly let his foot off the breaks to let his truck start rolling again.

But as he began to drive off, his eyes flickered to the rearview mirror, watching as the two men helped someone climb out of the snow covered sedan. As for the car, there was nothing he could do, even if there was a mechanical problem, it would require a tow truck to get that thing back out of that deep ditch with all the snow around.

But then his eyes landed on her! He couldn't see her face, but even through the wind and the snow, he would recognize those curves, that body anywhere!

It was just a split-second, and he did a double take, frantically glancing over his shoulder now to get a better look, when his breath caught in his throat and he stomped on the breaks so fast that his truck spun out in the same moment he realized he wasn't just conjuring her up in his mind, he wasn't hallucinating.

Both his hands gripped the wheel and his pick-up truck was almost sideways by the time it finally came to a complete stop. His front end sat in oncoming traffic, while the back of the truck was still in his lane. Shit!

Jax quickly put the truck in reverse, his tires spinning as he straightened out while he backed up closer to the Chevy again, before he pulled off to the right and put the truck in park. He flicked the hazard lights on again, leaving the truck running when he bolted out and took off towards the green Chevy and her.

"TARA!" He yelled at the top of his lungs, as he fought the wind and the snow to get closer to her. "TARA!" He yelled again, and that moment of panic he’d felt disintegrated again when she stopped and turned her head in his direction this time and he could actually see her face. His own head was spinning now with questions though. Why was she here? How did she end up in that car in the ditch? Was she alright?

A few more quick strides and he was by her side, wrapping her in his arms and her smaller form shivered against him, hiding her face in his chest from the cold, "Jesus Christ, babe, you're freezing."

"Hey lady?" One of the guys that had helped her out of the car spoke up, "Are you okay? You know this guy?"

"Yes, ... thank you." Tara still shivered when she glanced back at him and nodded. "He's my husband." She added, before Jax had a chance to chime in.

"Thanks, for helping her." Jax had his arm still wrapped around her, but held one hand out for the guys to shake, "I appreciate that."

Both men took quick turns shaking his hand and nodded at him, before one replied "No problem."
And then they headed back to their own truck without another glance back.

Jax grabbed her bag from her and draped it around his shoulder instead. With his arm wrapped around her, he tried to usher her back to his truck, but she was shivering so much and slipped in her high heeled shoes, that he simply picked her up and carried her the rest of the way.

He let her back down just long enough to open the door and then picked her back up and hoisted her inside. He reached past her shoulder to the backseat, grabbing the blanket he'd kept back there for the boys, shook off some leftover crumbs, then tucked it around her before he dropped her bag by her feet, quickly shut the door with a loud bang and rounded the front of the truck to climb into the driver side.

"Babe?" He said and she opened her eyes to look up at him from beneath the scarf, "Are you hurt?" It just now dawned on him to ask, while he turned the heater on full blast, adjusting the little vents to point in her direction before he turned his attention back to her.

Tara slightly shook her head, "No, just ... cold." She still shivered. "Jax, ... where are my babies?"

"Our babies are fine. They're staying the night with Christy. Don't worry." Jax sighed in relief and leaned over to her, pulling her hands to him and rubbed his bigger hands around hers to warm them, before he raised them up to his lips and blew against them repeatedly, his hot breath warming them almost instantly.

Then he pulled all of her in his arms again, he just couldn't believe she was here. His hands tucked on the blanket, wrapping it more tightly around her while he held her, before he drew back just enough to kiss her.

But startled, he drew back again, mumbling against her lips, "Fuck, your lips are cold."

"I know." She mumbled in reply and leaned closer, pressing her lips to his again, liking the way it warmed not just her lips. Oh, how she'd missed him!

Jax's hands reached up to her face, angling her head just the way he wanted her to deepen the kiss, his palms warm against her cold cheeks.

But before the kiss could turn even more passionate, they were interrupted by a big semi-truck that sped past them, and rather reluctantly Jax came up for air, smirking back at Tara and how her cheeks were already slightly flushing. "We need to get off the road. Out of this fucking storm."

"Yeah." Tara nodded towards the road ahead, "There's a truck stop a couple miles that way."

"Right." Jax nodded, remembering the sign and reached around her to put the seatbelt on for her, so she could stay wrapped up under the blanket. He placed another quick kiss against her lips before he sat back and put his own seatbelt on, not taking any chances with how bad the roads were.

He put the truck in gear and pulled back onto the road, the snow seemed even heavier now than it was before.

"You can barely see anything out there." Tara commented, her eyes glued to the way ahead of them.

"Yeah." Jax nodded, "It's going into white-out, where you can't even see what's right in front of you." He explained, but then turned to look at her for a split-second, "Wanna start telling me how you ended up in this, ... with that car in the ditch?"

Tara cleared her throat, she was beginning to feel much better as she was thawing out, but still decided to give him the abridged version. "The storm hit, conference ended early, but there were no
outgoing flights, so I rented a car."

Jax shook his head. "You thought driving home in this weather, in that piece of shit sedan was a good idea?" There was obvious concern edged in his voice now that he had a moment to think.

"Do not start with me, Jax." Tara said warningly, sounding already frustrated, she was so not in the mood for a lecture from him. But she couldn't stop herself from adding defensively, "It was slim pickings at the car rental place ... and I wanted to get home, to surprise you."

When Jax remained suspiciously quiet now, Tara glanced over at him, "What about you? Care to explain how you ended up here?"

Jax swiped his hand down his face in a fruitless attempt to hide the smile that crept onto his lips, "Took the day off, ... wanted to surprise you too." He dared a glance in her direction now, and when he saw the big smile that was now displayed on her face too, he no longer tried to hide his own.

Tara raised her eyebrows and shook her head mockingly. "So you're lecturing me about driving through the storm, when you were literally driving towards it." She replied sarcastically and smiled even more when he didn't reply right away.

She watched him bite his lip in another vain attempt to not smile even brighter, before he finally said, "Guess when it comes to each other we both got shit for brains, ... all common sense goes right out the damn window."

Tara sighed and nodded along to that statement, then she folded the blanket back a bit, and sat a bit straighter now before she reached over to him, running her fingers along his cheek, "You shaved." Then her eyes flickered up to his beanie, and she pushed it up just enough to reveal some of his shortened hair, "And you cut your hair." She gave him a scrutinizing look now, "Why? I mean, what happened?"

"I'm not sure." Jax shrugged his shoulders, then dared to look back at her, "Guess I just needed a fresh start." He glanced back at her for a quick second again, gauging the look she was giving him, before focusing back on the icy road ahead, "You don't like it?"

"I like it." Tara replied without even having to think about it, and smiled. "It reminds me of the day you proposed to me." But then her hand went back to his jawline again, "But I do miss the beard."

Jax reached up and grabbed her hand, moving her fingers from his hairless chin up to his lips and kissed them, "It'll grow back before you know it." He winked with a smirk, and for a second considered telling her about the reaper too, but then decided he'd much rather show her then tell, so he remained quiet about it for now.

They drove in silence for a couple of minutes, her hand in his as the storm grew even angrier around them.

Tara pushed the blanket down to her waist and actually opened the zipper of her jacket a bit now, and turned the heater down too, feeling much better and definitely warmer already. She reached down and rifled through her bag until she found her cell phone, but when she saw it was completely dead now, she turned her attention back to him, "Is your phone working?"

"It wasn't earlier." Jax reached in the inside pocket of his jacket, pulled it out and handed it to her.

Tara turned on the screen and frowned, "No service."
"It's probably just the storm, babe." Jax tried to placate her, when his eyes flickered to the clock on his dashboard. "It ain't even three thirty yet. The boys are still at school and the daycare, and they got Christy's, Jason's and Misses Ellie's number ... It'll be fine." He gave her a reassuring look and when Tara nodded in agreement he added, "And I'm sure they've got a payphone or something we can use at that truck stop."

"Right." Tara nodded, and handed his phone back to him, before she folded her arms in front of herself.

Another couple of quiet minutes past between them, when Tara said, "Meeting up with you out here ... by chance." She looked over at him and when he looked back at her, she asked. "It's a bit strange, don't you think?"

"Yeah. It is!" Jax nodded, undoubtedly agreeing with her. 'A bit strange' was the understatement of the year. What were the fucking odds?

He suddenly let out a small, almost inaudible chuckle and Tara looked back at him, confused but amused by his little laugh, "What's funny?"

"I was just thinking ..." He looked back over at her, smiling brightly, "... how this reminds me of one of those god-awful chick-flicks you like to watch."

Tara smiled, thinking about what he'd said, "Are you talking about my Hallmark movies? The ones you said you hate, because of the has-been-casting and the oh-so-predictable ending?"

"Yeah, those." Jax agreed, and grinned, "But what I really don't like is that the guy ends up with just a kiss at the very end, no T and A whatsoever, none ... I mean, for Christ sake, throw the guy a bone, and at least give him some head." He looked over at her, a big toothy smile on his face. "Shit, I should get some head just for having to watch him not getting any."

Tara laughed out loud at that, "I think the T and A, the giving head it's all implied ... you know, after the credits roll."

"Yeah. I bet." Jax mockingly agreed, but dared a look back at Tara, who was watching him with scrutiny now and he couldn't stop himself from asking. "What?"

"Well, if this reminds you of that, me being the damsel in distress, you being the poor guy who's not getting any ... are you saying you're not content with just that kiss?" Tara asked, now no longer smiling as soon as the words had left her lips. And suddenly she questioned her own sanity, wondered to herself why she'd said what she did. Why lead him down towards this conversation again?

"Babe." He replied, sounding way too serious all of a sudden, "Look, I'm content with whatever you're content with. The ball's in your court ... it's been in your court since I showed up at your door. You decide if this show stays PG, or ... gets a new rating, alright?" He answered with a string of metaphors and looked back at her for a few seconds, until she nodded in agreement, looking just as serious as he'd sounded.

A beat or two past, and despite the blizzard like conditions, Jax could begin to make out the faint lights of vehicles at the approaching truck stop up ahead. Even in the light of day, they were glowing like Christmas lights way off in the distance, and he glanced back at Tara who was staring lost in her own thoughts out the passenger side window. Penny for your thoughts, babe!

In an attempt to lift the mood again, he smirked and looked back over at her, "But should you feel
the sudden urge to wanna blow me in some show of gratitude for rescuing you from freezing to
death, I'd be a willing recipient. Hell, I'd even reciprocate."

"Teller!" Tara's voice sounded outraged, and she looked back at him now, her mouth agape
pretending to be offended. She shoved him playfully on the shoulder, which resulted in both of them
laughing out loud as the lights and the outline of buildings ahead of them grew even closer.

Another couple of minutes and they finally pulled into the truck stop. There was a gas station, a bar
and grill named rather unoriginally 'Saloon', with 'The Stag Horn Motel' attached right beside it.
They both glanced at the oversized 'Motel' sign, perched high above the lot, and Jax can't help
himself but look at Tara just to gauge her reaction, but she's staring straight ahead, not letting her
feelings show.

It's not even four in the afternoon, so it isn't dark out yet, the snow making it seem even brighter now
that they're no longer surrounded by threes on either side of the two lane road they had been
traveling on.

Jax's eyes flicker to the red lit up 'no vacancy' sign, and he can't hide the frown for a moment, but he
swipes his hand over his face anyways trying to conceal it, when he continues to pull further into the
lot. So much for his pipe dream!

He finds an empty parking spot near the entrance of the bar, and pulls in right beside a parked police
car.

He glances over at Tara for a second, "Ready, babe?"

She nods her head and reaches for the door handle, but then Jax stops from opening his door when
he sees the cops step out of the bar and head towards their car right beside his truck.

Jax shares an unsure look with Tara, but she just smiles at him, slightly shaking her head at his
continued disdain and distrust towards any men in blue, and a moment from long ago comes back to
mind ... Relax, we're civilians!

She leans closer to him, reaching out and framing his face with her hands to pull him in for a kiss,
which he gladly reciprocates. A welcome distraction and by the time they both pull back, the police
car has long disappeared.

They stepped inside the bar, the heat in here is cranked up and in stark contrast to the freezing wind
blowing right outside these doors, and up on looking around they're surprised that the place isn't as
crowded as the full parking lot outside would suggest.

"Hey, folks." A skinny blond with tattoo covered arms greets them as she steps around them, an
empty serving tray under her arm. "Just to let you know, state police were just here. They're closing
the roads."

"I figured, it's pretty bad out there." Jax replies. "Any idea for how long?"

She shrugs, "They said it's a full-on blizzard. Plows can't get through 'till the morning." She starts
clearing some glasses of a nearby table but looks up at them as she continues. "So batten down the
hatches and pull up a stool, 'cause you're probably going to be here all night. I know I will." She
adds the last bit with a unmistakable tiredness to her voice.

Jax and Tara step further into the room, towards the actual bar where the woman has stepped behind
now, and Tara finally pipes up, "Do you got a phone?"
"Oh, yeah." The blond woman nods her head down a hall to the right of her, the left of them, "Pay phone's in back by the can."

Jax starts heading in that direction, when Tara stops at the bar, approaching the woman once more. "Since it looks like we'll be spending the night, do you mind if I give my kids' babysitter the number to here, you know, just in case of an emergency?"

"No, honey." She replies very sweetly and grabs a napkin. "I don't mind." She adds as she quickly scribbles down the number and hands it to Tara.

On the way to the phones, Jax finally fills Tara in that Greg and his wife will have the boys for a play date first, then Christy and Jason will have them the rest of the weekend. So they take turns, he calls Greg up and gives him the number to the bar, and then Tara grabs the phone and calls Christy, leaving the same number with her as well.

Tara disappears in the bathroom, while Jax returns back to the bar, taking a seat on one of the stools. He lazily lets his eyes drift across the 'Happy Thanksgiving' sign that's still hanging on the wall, high above the glasses and liquor bottles, and he has to smirk a little considering it's almost Christmas now.

"Hey, can I get you a drink?" The skinny blond reappeared behind the bar and asks him.

"I'm okay." Jax answers at first, but the barkeeper won't let up.

"Ah, first one's on me. Call it the snowstorm special." She gets two shot glasses out and begins to pour. She nods at Tara who's coming down the hallway towards them, "For you and your wife."

"Oh, we'd love a drink. Thank you." Tara replies as she drapes her bag and jeans over the back of the barstool before she takes a seat right beside him, and Jax does a double take, looking her up and down.

Tara bites her lip, trying not to laugh at the stunt expression on his face, the so obvious over-protectiveness of his that's shining through. She pulls the glittery top, that's easily long enough to pass as a dress, further down on her thighs, still trying to ignore him and his disapproving expression.

"You're welcome. Here you go." The bartender says as she places the two shot glasses in front of them with a smile, before she disappears once again to tend to her other customers.

Jax turns towards her now, "What are you doing?" The look he's giving her speaks volumes and he doesn't need to further explain that he's talking about her change or lack of clothing.

"My jeans are still wet. And it's so warm in here." Tara tries to explain, but Jax clearly isn't amused. He leans in closer to him, flirtatiously looking up at him now while she curls her arm around his bicep, "You're acting like I'm naked or something?" She's still wearing her jacket over it, and she can just picture him lose his shit if she dared to take that off too.

He glances at her, making a obvious show of looking at her long bare legs, "You are showing a lot of skin." Before his eyes drift across the rest of the bar, trying to see if she'd caught anyone else's eye in this little get-up of hers. But he's glad to see that everyone's either too drunk already, too busy making-out, or too engaged in conversation to even bother looking their way. But if he's happy about it, it's not showing on his face.

"I've seen plenty of girls over the years, at the clubhouse and at Diosa, wearing a whole lot less than this, Jax." She replies back with conviction ... she was in no way dressed inappropriately here. As a matter of fact, she wouldn't be sitting here like this, if she hadn't thought she looked kind of cute in it.
Alright, she's got a point, Jax concedes in his mind and he does smile a little now, but his words that follow contradict his facial expression. "And they were all trying to sell something, babe. Their lack of clothing made them a walking billboard, an advertisement. Announcing, I'm for sale!"

"Fine, whatever." She replies now and shrugs her shoulders, sounding every bit like a teenage girl instead of a woman in her early thirties. She's done arguing, but either way she's not going to slip her cold wet jeans on again regardless of what he says, he'll just have to deal with it. And then she adds, with a tad of disappointment in the tone of her voice, "I really thought you'd like it."

"I do like it." Jax now replies, and gives her another once-over, a cocky grin on his lips now. "You do look smokin', babe."

"Then what's the problem?" Tara inquires, searching his face when she asks further, cocking her head mockingly to the side, "Is there a rule against old ladies looking hot? God forbid we give the Croweaters a run for their money."

Now Jax actually chuckles, "Babe, you give those Croweaters a run for their money any day, even in your surgical scrubs."

She smiles at that obvious attempt at a compliment, her cheeks flushing a little, and he places a kiss against her temple, then his lips are near her ear, "Look, the problem is that I don't want some guys getting ideas about you." About what's mine!

His right hand drops down to her leg, fingers seductively caressing the inside of her thigh, "And this top, or dress, whatever it is, it doesn't leave much to the imagination."

Now Tara took a look around the bar, more for show to drive home her point, "Nobody here gives a shit, Jax. So can we just sit here, have some drinks, maybe some food later, and just make the best of being stuck here? And I'll promise as soon as those jeans are dry, I'll put them right back on."

She smiles up at him then, meeting his eyes and he lets out an exasperated sigh, conceding before they both lean in for a kiss. He let those fingertips of his caress her thighs some more, warming her up from the inside out, blood rushing to all the right places.

They stop kissing when the bartender comes back around, so they both finally reach for their shot and drown it at once. Tara scrunches her nose at the strong burning sensation and Jax can't help but grin a bit at the expression on her face. Lightweight!

"You two haven't been married long, have ya'?" The bartender wipes the counter down in front of them, when she asks.

"Why'd you say that?" Jax asks back in return instead of answering the question.

"You still got that newlywed glow going on." She gestures with her hand around them, as if the glow she was referring to was something tangible, something you could see with the naked eye, maybe even touch. Then she folds the rag in her hand into a neat square, while watching the couple share a amused look between them. "And you're still giving each other the fuck-me-eyes! That usually passes after you're married for a while."

At that, they both smirk at each other for a long moment, as if they've just been caught doing something naughty.

And now Jax flat out lies, "Yeah, I guess we're pretty new at it." His eyes flicker from Mandy to Tara, then down to his wedding band. And he wonders if it's really a lie, considering this is the first time they're really trying to make this marriage thing work, away from the Club and Gemma?
"Ahh, thought so." She replies, content that she seemed to have gotten it right. "You're not from around her, are you? I don't remember ever seeing you in here before." She asks next.

"No." Tara replies, shaking her head. "We're originally from California, little town called Charming. But -.

"But we live in Medford now." Jax adds for her, his hand curled around her thigh now.

"Well, my name's Mandy, and this is actually my bar." She gestures with her hands about the place.

"I'm Tara." Tara says and gestures to him beside her, "And this is my husband, Jax." Jax nods his head at her.

She looks at them and repeats, "Tara and Jax, got it." and pours them another shot.

Suddenly she's on a roll to share some of her story while she's busying herself filling two clear pitchers with beer from the tap. "I'm from around here, lived here all my life. Got this bar in the divorce." She chuckles. "Never used to come in here when he ran the place, but now I love it!"

A woman across the room, obviously drunk already, suddenly yells out, slightly slurring, "Hey, Mandy!" Jax turns his head just to get a quick look, but Tara doesn't bother, she just takes the second shot that Mandy has put in front of her, while the woman continues yelling, "Now, how about bringing us some more pitchers, huh?"

Mandy smiles and casually nods towards the woman, "My ex-sister-in-law, Tricia." She picks up the pitchers and rounds the bar, passing by Jax and Tara and stops for a quick moment, looking at Tara, "Listen, honey. You can pick the guy. You just can't pick the family."

Tara and Jax glance at each other, a knowing look in their eyes as Mandy walks away, and Jax reaches for his second shot, drowning it as quickly as the first. Isn't that the truth!

A beat or two passes silently between them, when Jax slides off of his chair, "I'm gonna head over to the motel, and check if they really don't have a room for tonight?"

"Okay." Tara nods, and leans in when he does too, to kiss him before he turns and heads out the door.

Mandy returns and nods at the door that's falling shut, where Jax had just walked out, "I didn't cause any trouble with that comment about family, did I?"

Tara shakes her head, "No, you didn't. He's just checking on a room."

"Don't think he'll have much luck there." Mandy answers and walks away again with two drinks she'd just poured.

X

The rooms have all been taken, so they remain in the bar, but eventually settle at one of the tables in a corner. The lights are dimmed here, it gives it the appearance of a bit more privacy away from the bar, and the chairs are a bit more comfortable too.

They call Greg to make sure he got the boys home without any issues, even talk to them for a moment, but both Abel and Thomas are too busy playing to give their parents the time of day. Tara's a little sad about it, but Jax finds comfort in the fact that the boys seem so happy to have made some good friends to play with.
They order some food and more drinks. Both getting a burger with fries and a couple of beers. And they sit and talk, teasing and laughing, picking at their fries, eating slowly, relaxing and enjoying each other's company and conversation.

Tara sits across from him, she's taken off her high heeled shoes, stretching her legs out, careful to have her dress pulled down as far as it goes, with her bare feet propped up on the chair beside him. And while they talk, Jax absentmindedly rubs his hand up and down her calves, slowly, soothingly, over and over, and she's secretly glad that she took the time to shave that morning.

They sit and talk about everything and nothing, and for the most part keeping the conversation lighthearted. Growing a little restless now as time keeps ticking away, and Jax stubs out his cigarette in the ashtray sitting on the table between them. He exhales the remaining smoke out of the side of his mouth, and smiles at her before he nods towards the small and completely empty dance floor in front of the little stage. "Wanna dance?"

Tara glances over her shoulder, at the dance floor, then at the oversized, more modern looking jukebox near it, before she returns her attention back to Jax and nods, "Yeah, I'd like that."

He stands and holds out his hand for her to take, helping her come to a stand too. She doesn't bother to put her shoes back on, remains barefoot instead, and to top it all off, she now shrugs out of her jacket too, revealing the low-cut bare back to her dress, but it does cover the crow, just barely though. While she does this, her eyes are never leaving his in a silent challenge, daring him to say something as she leaves her jacket draped over the back of her chair, right on top of the jeans that are probably bone dry by now.

But Jax doesn't say anything this time, he just smiles and shakes his head, clearly amused by her defiance, and he sort of chalks her behavior up to alcohol by now ... after all, she's had a couple of shots and some beers too.

They walk together to the jukebox, looking over the digital selection. She's lazily resting her head against him, his arm draped around her neck, while they take their time looking over what seems like an endless list of songs to pick and choose from.


So they begin to dance away another hour under the cliché looking spinning disco ball, slowly and carefully starting with Brian Adam's 'Please forgive me', and followed later by his song named 'Heaven'.

Tara is dancing barefoot, while Jax carefully moves them around the dance floor, barely moving their feet as they wordlessly listen to those old tragic love songs that seemed to be so popular back during their teenage and young adult years. And by miracle he not once steps on her naked toes, while the last beats and words to Bon Jovi's 'Never say goodbye' croon throughout the place.

They'd be lying if they said, it doesn't take them back in time for a moment when these old familiar songs play. Yet truth be told, this wasn't the music Jax had liked, or if he did, he never would've admitted to it back then, but he chose them now because he knew that Tara used to like them, and they had the right beat to slow dance too, so that was another obvious plus.

Looking back though, Jax recalls making love to her to these songs more than they'd ever actually danced to them. He smiles when the memory of a mix-tape he'd made for her comes back to him for a quick moment.
And now, with her in his arms, nothing else on his mind, he actually finds himself listening to the lyrics, taking them in and how heartbreakingly the emotions in them ring true now that he's old enough to appreciate them. He's thinking to himself how fitting some of the words are when Edwin McCain's 'I'll be' ends, and the starting beat to Bon Jovi's 'Lie to me' begins to play instead.

♫
Rumor has it that your daddy's coming down
He's gonna pay the rent
Tell me babe, is this as good as life is gonna get
It feels like there is a stranger standing in these shoes
But, I know I can't lose me, 'cause then I'd be losing you ♫

♫
I know I promised, baby
I would be the one to make our dreams come true
I ain't too proud of all the struggles
And the hard times we've been through
When this cold world comes between us
Please tell me you'll be brave
'Cause I can realize the danger when forgiveness fades away ♫

♫
If you don't love me, lie to me
'Cause, baby, you're the one thing I believe
Let it all fall down around us, if that's what's meant to be
Right now if you don't love me, baby, lie to me ♫

♫
Pour another cup of coffee, babe, I got something to say to you
But I ain't got the winning ticket
Not the one that's gonna pull us through
No one said it'd be easy, let your old man take you home
But know if you walk out on me
That, darling, I'd be gone ♫

♫
If you don't love me, lie to me
'Cause, baby, you're the one thing I believe
Let it all fall down around us, if that's what's meant to be
Right now if you can't love me, baby, lie to me
Baby, I can take it ♫

♫
It's a bitch, that life's a roller coaster ride
The ups and downs will make you scream sometimes
It's hard believing that the thrill is gone
But we got to go around again, so let's hold on ♫

♫
If you don't love me, lie to me
'Cause, baby, you're the one thing I believe
Let it all fall down around us, if that's what's meant to be
Right now if you can't love me, baby, lie to me, lie to me
Baby I can take it
Go on, lie to me
Baby, I can take it
C'mon, lie to me ♫

Jax's right hand has been splayed out across Tara's back pretty much the entire time they've been
dancing tonight, he wants to but refrains from grabbing her ass, just let's his hand slip as low as her
crow. His other hand has been holding one of her hands against his chest, right by his heart, while
they gazed at each other every now and then, getting lost in each other's eyes like some love-drunk
teenagers.

He remembers reading somewhere once that dancing was one of the most powerful aphrodisiacs
that wasn't a controlled substance, and right now, he couldn't agree more. Over the last hour, the sexual
tension between them has risen with every look and every touch and every step.

Throughout the dance, they've kissed, or rather brushed their lips over the other's lips and skin ever
so softly, leaving goose bumps in their path. Her breath caught in her throat every time Jax pulled her
even closer against him. And a few times his lips are near her ear, humming or even singing along to
the song in a low whisper, causing her heartbeat to quicken each time.

But right now, as the last couple of beats of the song is playing out, Jax's lips are on Tara's neck, she
can feel his warm breath while he's placing sweet sizzling kisses against her delicate creamy skin
there. And Tara actually has her eyes closed, lost in the moment, her heart beating wildly in her chest
at the sensation his lips leave on her skin and the need for him that's pooling in her core.

Then the song completely stops, and when no other one starts to play they realize it's the last one
they'd paid for. Jax stops kissing her neck and meets her eyes, lust and need flashing back at her
behind blue orbs, before he takes her by the hand and leads her back to their table off to the side.

But this time, she doesn't sit across from him, instead he pulls her onto his lap, before their mouths
greedily find each other, getting lost in a scorching kiss. Her hands clinging to the fabric of his shirt,
pulling and tugging on it, wanting him even closer, until she simply wraps her arms around his neck
instead. If she was wearing her jeans right now instead of this short dress, she'd probably be
straddling him by now, but dressed like this it seems inappropriate to say the least.

As for Jax, his hands are wrapped around her, holding onto her hips, and It takes all the will power
he can muster to not let a hand slip lower, beneath the hem of her dress, to not let his fingers travel
along her bare skin between her thighs. But he knows he can't do that here, not here out in the open,
in public ... at least that's what he keeps telling himself, when he reaches up and frames her face
instead. A mere attempt to busy his greedy hands otherwise, when he angles her face so he can kiss
her more passionately, allowing his tongue to explore her mouth more deeply.

They're too consumed by each other that they don't even register the sound of someone loudly and
repeatedly clearing their throat nearby, until that person actually speaks up.

"Excuse me, Lovebirds." Mandy says out loud now, trying to get their attention, but there's a hint of
amusement in her voice.

They reluctantly pull away from each other, lips slightly swollen from kissing, and turn their heads in
Mandy's direction, just now realizing that someone has turned some more music on again, some
country ballad playing in the background.

Then a quick flash of panic crosses Tara's face, when she thinks that this is about their boys. That
something has happened, and someone has called about Abel and Thomas. But before she can even
say anything, Mandy speaks up.

"You two were interested in a room, right?" Mandy asks, looking from Jax to Tara and back again.

"Yeah." Jax nods when the words register with him, "Definitely." And Mandy can't help but smirk a
little at the way his eyes flicker to Tara's for a fraction of a second after he'd already answered, as if
to look for her approval after the fact. How cute!

"Well, it's your lucky day." Mandy replies short.

"I thought they were all booked up." Tara can't help but ask, wondering out loud, and a little scared at the implication of having a room to disappear to now.

"They had a room with a broken heater, but the handyman was able to fix it." Mandy explains. "He's clearing out of there right now. It'll probably be about fifteen, maybe twenty minutes. I'll let the manager know to hold it for you." She points her thumb over her shoulder in the general direction of the motel, before she spins on her heels and walks back to the bar.

The spell they had been under was broken now, but that lasts only for a moment until they look back at each other, almost sheepishly, with heavy lidded bedroom eyes, and flushing cheeks. Their lips drawn to each others like magnets once more, lost in yet another scorching, forceful kiss.

Tara's hands are slowly slipping from behind Jax's neck down his chest, he's wearing one of his blue plaid shirts, her personal favorite because it matches his eyes, and she can't help herself but begin to playfully unbutton it. He's just too overdressed for how warm it is in here, wearing this shirt, but she's surprised to realize after the first button that he's not wearing his usual white t-shirt underneath.

And for all his protesting earlier, he surely has taken a liking to her dress now, and the way it's allowing him to run his hands over the bare skin on her back, her arms, and her legs too, making her shiver in delight when he does so intentionally slow.

So now she longs to do some of the same to him. Wants to feel some of his bare skin beneath her own roaming hands. And preferably now, right here, sort of out in the open where she still considers it save, in a public place, before they get to the room where every touch becomes so much more complicated.

She finally gets the last button on his shirt undone. With the way she's sitting on his lap, she's pretty much obscuring the view from any potential onlookers, which makes it all the more exciting that nobody knows what she's doing. They're still kissing when she slowly slips her hands beneath and over his bare chest, his nipples. Deliberately taking her time, letting her fingertips slide across his skin as lightly as a feather, enjoying the way it coaxes a small moaning sound from him against her lips.

She's encouraged by the way he kisses her even more passionately now, and she gently glides her hands down his chest, over his abdomen, tracing the defined lines of his six pack and stops at the waistband of his boxer briefs, before she teasingly slips just her fingertips inside, without exploring much further.

At that Jax pulls back from the kiss rather abruptly, not enough that she can look him in the eyes, but just enough that their lips part and he can speak. His breathing is just as labored as hers, and his voice sounds almost rough, lazed with lust, "If you keep this up, babe, we won't make it to the room."

It's a warning, no doubt, and his lips are back on hers, devouring her mouth before she can even try to decide how far she's willing to take this tonight ... not just out here, but also in the room.

And the fact that that thought even crosses her mind in the heat of the moment, pretty much already tells her what she needs to know. So her fingers slip from his waistband again, and her hands instead just slide around his waist, towards his back so she can just pull him closer. Hug him, hold him against her instead of driving him insane, like he was doing with her.

But then she stops completely, her hands flat against his back, not sure what it is exactly what she's
feeling under the palm of her hands. His skin here feels unusually rough, harsh beneath her touch, almost like sandpaper, actually more like he's covered in scabs all over. She quickly pulls away from the kiss and looks back at him, meeting his eyes, and she's sure that his confused expression matches hers to a T.

"What happened to your back?" She asks, too dazed and maybe a little bit too tipsy to make sense of it, before her hands leave his back and start tugging on his shirt, to get a look for herself.

But Jax grabs her hands, putting a stop to it. "It's nothing, babe." He says, not meeting her eyes now, still sounding gruff, like he'd had one too many whiskeys, but she knows he hasn't had any.

This isn't how he wanted to show her, how he wanted her to find out.

"Bullshit." Tara quips back, and forcefully yanks her hands out of his, lifts the back of his shirt, twisting her body around his to peek beneath it before he has a chance to stop her.

"Jax." She says his name, not believing her own eyes. This can't be real!

But even in the dimly lit room there is no doubt and she can see as clear as day that the reaper is gone. Disappeared. Covered up. Blackened out. And the implications of all that hits her like a ton of bricks, knocking the wind out of her. She sits back up just as quick and stares back at him, and this time he does meet her eyes.

She has so many things clouding her mind right now, but she asks the most obvious first, she's got to start somewhere. "When did you do this?"

"The first night you were gone." He replies sounding rather solemnly, trying to gauge her reaction. She hesitates, a sudden lump in her throat that she tries to swallow away, but it's hard and her voice takes on this very high pitched tone when she asks, "Does this mean?" Tears are already pooling in her eyes, and spill the moment when he nods along with his reply.

"Yeah. I'm done with Sam Crow!" He says, then she starts to cry and he pulls her in his arms smiling now. "Those are happy tears, right? He mumbles against her temple. "Or are you crying 'cause it looks like shit?"

A sound somewhere between a laugh and a sob escape her throat, before she nods her head. "Happy tears." She confirms. "I love it." She adds, her voice still sounding unusually high as she continues to cry.

"I told you I was out." He reminds her, but truthfully he can't blame her for not taking him by his word months ago. He's broken too many promises in the past, how was she to know he really meant it this time.

But she nods her head, "I know, you did." She allows him this moment of "I-told-you-so," and won't dwell on the many times he's said it and didn't follow through. Her heart is so full of love for him right now, but it's also sad because she can't remember the last time she truly felt this way.

"Your room is ready." Mandy has stepped up out of nowhere to inform them, and disappears again just as quick.

They share a long look as Jax begins to button his shirt back up, neither of them really sure what comes next, what will happen next.

The thought of sharing a room, or more precisely a bed, after all this made Tara nervous, and even Jax was a bit anxious. Mostly because he wasn't sure where Tara stood at this point, where her head
was at. Was the reaper being gone enough to have her trust him again?
He didn't know and the last thing he wanted to do was sabotage the progress they'd made because he couldn't control his urges.

X

All bundled up again against the cold wind and snow, after paying their tab at the bar, they venture outside.

He grabs his duffle bag from the backseat of his truck on the way to the front office to check in and pick up their room key.

They step quietly into the room, noting that it still feels cold, but the buzzing of the heater lets them know it's working and will surely warm the room up soon enough.

Jax puts his bag on the ground, and Tara does the same with hers, watching him close and lock the door behind him before he turns and steps back into the room. They stand rather awkwardly facing each other now, and for a moment neither is sure what to say, or if to say anything at all. Isn't this the part where they're supposed to be all over each other?

He watches her fold her arms in front of herself, and it's pretty much her way of starting a lecture or building a wall of some sorts around herself again. He knows this, and he wants, no, he needs to put a stop to it, because he wants and needs her ... needs her to let him back in! So on a whim he decided to let it all out, tell it like it is, again ... after all, in the past, his most poignant speeches have never been planned out before hand, and neither is this one.

"Look, I know you deserved better -". He starts but Tara is quick to interject.

"Jax." She says, but he interrupts her in return.

"Just let me say this, babe. I swear it'll just take a minute." He's pleading with her and when she nods, he leans back against the edge of the dresser, bracing his hands to the left and right of him, the look in his eyes a mixture of regret and determination directed at her, "You deserved better than what you got with me, Tara. And when I first showed up and you told me you met someone, moved on, I wish I could be the kind of man that's humble enough, mature enough to say Congratulations, or comment what a great guy he is, what a lucky guy he is, and that I hope you'll both be very happy. But how do you look at the woman you love and tell yourself it's time to walk away? I can't. I won't."

Jax shakes his head along to the words, "That will never happen. 'Cause it would just be another lie. And I'm not gonna lie to you anymore. This thing of ours, our marriage ... I know what I've done. I broke your heart a thousand different ways, and, god, I am so sorry for that. But something changed now. Me. I know how to love you now. That man you always wanted me to be - I am that man! And I can be a husband now, and I can be a father. And I can give you everything that we were always meant to have if you just let me."

He can see the tears welling up in her eyes at his words and it gives him the courage, or maybe it's desperation, to take the few steps towards her and frame her face, looking down at her. "I need you more than you need me, trust me, I know that! But no one could possibly ever love anyone as much as I love you, babe."

He brushes her long brown hair out of her face before he reaches down and grabs her hands tightly in his, raising them to place a kiss against both. "It's you and me, Tara. That's how it's supposed to be. You know that. It's Abel and Thomas and you ... and me." He leans down now and kisses her,
his lips brushing softly, sweetly against hers. Then his hands are reaching back up to frame her face once more, and to wipe the tears from her cheeks that have spilled now, when he pulls back again from the kiss, his eyes searching hers, waiting for her to react, ... say something, or do something.

Tara wipes at her eyes, before she looks back up at him, giving him her full attention. She smiles through the tears, letting out the breath she'd been holding, embarrassed by how much he gets to her, trying to play it off, "Wow, that was some speech."

She suddenly feels so incredibly nervous to be this close to him. She loves him so much, and everything he's said it's everything she's always wanted to hear. And her heart is beating out of her chest, while she's trying to figure out what to say in return now. "My speech was a lot shorter." She adds, trying to attempt to sound lighthearted when she asks. "Wanna hear it?"

Jax nods his head in agreement, but she can see the insecurity in his eyes reflecting back at her, because he has no clue what she's about to say, and she realizes that her badass biker, cocky Jackson Teller is just as scared and nervous as she is.

But then her heart is in her throat now, and for a moment she's not sure she can actually get the words past her lips, because she knows they'll change ... everything.

Tara's heart is beating so fast that it makes her breathing sound almost labored. She summons every ounce of courage she possesses, and bites her lip, trying her best to channel her inner seductress, when she lets her hands glide down his chest.

She keeps eye contact with him and she knows he's still waiting for her to speak. But when her hands reach beneath his jacket, and start tugging to loosen his belt, his eyes cast down for a fraction of a second to see what she's doing, but then he quickly looks back up at her, blue eyes shining back at her and a sweet smile spreads on his face when the realization hits him what is happening in the same instant when Tara finally says, "Love me, Jackson!"

X

Author's Note: Sorry for the longer wait, but this chapter gave me a hard time for some reason. It's my longest chapter yet, so I hope you enjoy it and appreciate it enough to leave a few words with your thoughts about it. Thank you so much for continuing to read my story. xoxo, Skater

P.S. If you want a sort of visual for this chapter, as to what Jax and Tara are wearing, what the bar looks like, the snowstorm, the motel room even ... then look up images/clips from the movie 'Deadfall'. The look of that movie heavily inspired this chapter.
Chapter 39

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X

Warning: Smut!

X

"Love me, Jackson!"

It feels like it's been forever since she'd said those beautiful words to him, but it only takes him a split-second to react to them.

His lips greedily crush onto hers while his hands unwrap the scarf from around her, letting it carelessly fall away, then almost frantically yanks off her jacket, slipping it off of her arms and by doing so leaving her no choice then to abandon her mission to undo his belt.

Instead she begins to unbutton his jacket now, and he's helping her, before dropping his arms to his side, so she can slip it off of him more easily. Then they both try to unbutton his blue plaid shirt, hurriedly, and looking at one another smiling when they both reach for the same button repeatedly, probably getting more in each other's way than making actual progress like that.

But eventually they archive their mutual goal, his shirt hits the floor and Tara's hands reach out to his bare chest, fingertips gliding over his naked skin, the tattoos on his chest, before her arms are wrapping around him, pulling him closer, her lips leave his lips and travel down his throat now, kissing and teasing away, and then her hands finally drop back down to finish their work on his belt and jeans.

At the same time, Jax has slowly been caressing her breasts over the silver paillette covered fabric of her dress, kneading and enjoying the fullness of them against his hands. Then he lets his hands travel down and curve around her hips, and even further cupping her ass, before he abruptly pulls her closer to him when she apparently nibbled at a particularly sensitive spot along the crook of his neck.

She's finally managed to open the belt, and was just about to reach for the button on his jeans, when Jax suddenly picks her up, leaving her no choice then to part her legs for him when he lifts her thighs around his waist, putting a sudden halt to all her efforts to further undress him once again.

She wraps her arms around his neck instead, clinging onto him, their eyes meet now, locked on each other, chest heaving with labored breathing, before their lips meet in a scorching kiss while he slowly carries her the few feet over towards the queen sized bed.

Jax has his left arm wrapped tightly around her waist, holding her securely against him, he breaks up the kiss then, while the other hand that was beneath her ass reaches out for the bedspread, yanking it up and off of the bed in one fast, rather impatient and almost violent manner.

His lips are back on hers when he slowly crawls onto the bed with her clinging to him, one arm still firmly around her while he braces himself with the other one, the mattress slightly dipping down beneath their combined weight but neither seem to give a damn when he gently lays her down and
pulls away from the kiss again to look at her for a long moment. Like a present he can't wait to unwrap!

His arms are to the left and right of her, bracing himself, hovering over her, and his eyes taking all of her in. The heaving ragged breathing of hers, those red lips, swollen from kissing him all night and just begging to be kissed some more, and those bedroom eyes finally matching the greedy look of his own, while her hands are gently reaching up to him, palms pressed flat against his bare chest.

And God only knows why he has suddenly decided to take his sweet time now, when he's longed and waited for this moment for so long, ... practically since she was loaded back into that ambulance the night she'd almost died.

Tara tries to pull him closer again, but instead he pulls away and sits back on his haunches, smirking back at her when he sees the disappointment that flashes in her eyes, before he takes one of her legs, bends it further at the knee, unzipping the small zipper on her black high heeled shoe, then slowly pulls it off, and tossing it aside. Then he moves on to the next, doing the same, never breaking eye contact with her, making a show of the way he tosses it over his shoulder with a smile, kissing the top of her bare foot now and causing a small chuckle to escape from Tara's throat because of it.

But then the look in his eyes turns more serious again when he begins to push and tug her long top further up, passed the waistband of her jeans, leaving a small gap of naked skin between the two garments and leans forward just enough to kiss her there now, while he takes his time to unbutton and unzip her jeans, letting his hands trail over her bare skin as well.

Tara arches against him, wanting more contact, biting her lip to suppress a moan, her eyes are closed now and her hands run through his short cropped hair, temporarily missing the longer strands that were easier to grasp onto during moments like these, when he was kissing his way down below her belly button.

She wasn't sure what was driving her more insane at the moment, his hands and lips on her skin, or the way he was so obviously drawing it out to undress her now. And she can't help but wonder for a moment if this is his version of payback for holding out on him for as long as she did. Damn him and his sudden self-control!

Tara's ready to take matters into her own hands when she reaches down, trying to take her own clothing off, but again, he stops her, shaking his head no. "I'll do it, babe." He says and she can finally feel him tugging on the waistband of her jeans, and she's looking down towards him, meeting his blue eyes that seem much darker in this lighting, and he smirks like the devil himself when she arches up just enough for him to pull the stretchy fabric of denim down her hips.

He sits back once more, and Tara's propped up on her arms now, watching him as he slowly pulls the stretchy material of her skinny jeans passed her feet and off of her legs, one long leg at a time, and again, he's doing so deliberately slow, before he tosses the garment aside near the foot of the bed.

He's still looking right at her when he holds out his hand to her now, and she takes it, so he can pull her up to a sitting position. He frames her face for a moment, kissing her hard and thoroughly, before his hands move down her shoulders, gliding all the way down her arms to her hands on his chest, and lifts them slowly up over her head.

Tara is only too happy to oblige to this, her heart's beating out of her chest, leaving her arms raised up in the air even when he drops his own hands back down, because she has a pretty good idea what he's going to do next. And she's right when he grabs a hold of the hem of her long stretchy top and slowly begins to pull the piece of clothing off of her. It's a small miracle in itself that none of the
hundreds of tiny pieces of paillette are getting caught in her hair in the process, just merely pull a little on a strand here and there when he pulls it over her head.

He drops the shimmery top somewhere on the bed beside them, his eyes focused solely on her bare breast now, and it's Tara's turn to smirk back at him and the look of longing in his eyes, hoping this will move things along now, when he drinks in the image of her in nothing but her black lacy panties.

She reaches out now, for the fly of his jeans, but once more before she can even so much as undo the top button, he has her pressed back down on the bed, flat on her back while he practically crawls back between her legs and right on top of her.

His lips first find hers, kissing her passionately while his hands take turns caressing each breast, flicking his thumb over her nipple, teasing the already hard nubs over and over, his pelvis grinding against hers, enticing the already pooling need for him some more, all the while Tara's practically clawing at his back, trying to get him even closer.

She finally tries to reach between them, a desperate attempt to undo his fly, not liking the fact that he's still wearing way too much clothing at the moment, especially in comparison to herself.

But Jax won't let her, he puts a stop to all of her efforts again when he grips both her wrists, and with one hand pins them above her head instead. His face hovers right above hers, blue eyes boring into her green ones, their lips almost close enough to touch when he speaks, sounding raspy with need himself, "Not yet, babe."

The sheer strength of him, that he can hold both her arms down with just one hand, it frustrates her and turns her on all in the same breath. Tara hastily lifts her head just to let her teeth nip at his plump bottom lip, and then he leans down and kisses her, tongue's quickly dueling for dominance, and her arms struggling against his grip for a moment, before she gives up the fruitless fight and surrenders to him again instead. They kiss like this for a long moment, deep and passionately, his erection straining against his jeans and she can feel it against her with every thrust of his still fully clothed hips.

"Jax." She lets out a strangled moan against his lips now, a pleading for him to do more, and he has to admit that he loves the lust filled sound in the way she'd said his name, but he won't give in to her just yet.

"Shhhhhhh..." He shushes her, pulling away from the kiss now and actually lets go of her arms still pinned above her head when he begins to kiss his way down now. His hand is gripping her hair now, angling her head back a little so he can place kisses along her jaw, and down her throat, his light blond five o'clock shadow isn't visible, but it's there and she can feel it scratching deliciously against her skin. And Tara's biting her lip again, trying not to moan, and for a moment he wants to remind her that there's no kids across the hall, no reason to hold back, but at the same time it turns him on to watch her struggle too. He looks at it almost like an unspoken challenge now to get her to lose all control here tonight.

So he's taking his time, placing deliberate kisses to all those spots that he knows drive her crazy, and he's enjoying the way her body squirms under him in delight. Then he moves on to her breasts, taking his time there as well, giving each one, each nipple his undivided attention, with his hands and his lips, and the way Tara arches her back for more, her hands on the back of his head, guiding him, makes him even harder than he already was.

But Jax doesn't stop there, instead he crawls further down her body, placing deliberate slow kisses along the way, along her ribcage, her navel, the curve of her hips and even further south, loving the way it tickles but also clearly arouses her.
He's placing kisses on the inside of her willingly parted thighs, and along the hem of her lacy black panties, before he teasingly starts to work the fabric just a little bit further over while placing more kisses along the way, loving the sharp intake of air from her when he does so.

He can smell her, feel the dampness and heat coming off of her now, even taste her a little, when he lets his lips glide across the lace, kissing her there through the black see-through cloth, and he's silently patting himself on the back in admiration over his own self-control, because his dick is so solid, so rock hard, it's downright fucking painful at this point.

He had to slow things down though, he just had to, because he knows that if it was up to her they'd probably be done in two minutes flat, and he just can't have that, tonight a goddamn quickie just won't do. Who knows why he feels that way, ... maybe it's his ego, or some other underlying sense of macho pride, but he's determined to pull out all the stops when he finally gets to claim her pussy as his again.

It would be a totally different story if he was still a damn bachelor, and this was anyone but her. If she was just some random girl, this would've already been over and done with in a bathroom stall at the bar hours ago.

But it isn't just some random, meaningless fuck, it's her, it's his old lady, it's Tara. And hell, maybe being away from the Club, being solely around her has somehow turned him into some kind of romantic pussy. All he knows is that really getting back together with her, after everything that has happened, it fucking means something, it means everything, and he wants this to be a memorable night, for them ... for her! Doesn't want to just fuck her, wants to love her ... worship her!

So he suddenly pulls back again, and sits back up on his haunches once more, leaving her looking up at him in a needy daze, her skin suddenly cold where his hands had been and his lips have left a wet trail all over.

He continues to slide further back and steps off of the bed completely. She gives him a dazed and puzzled look, but he doesn't give her enough time to even question him out loud, because he's too quick when he reaches out to her bare legs, his strong hands encircling her calves right beneath the knee, and with one strong, hard tug he pulls her curvy ass right to the edge of the bed, right back against the denim of his jeans.

Jax meets her eyes, seeing the undeniable lust, but also the anticipation for what's to come next reflecting back at him, her thighs parted, she's wholeheartedly at his will. Then his eyes travel down her body and he swears he hears her gasp when he reaches for her panties, slowly hooking his fingers under the fabric, before he begins to pull them off of her, painstakingly slow. And when Tara's lifting her butt off of the bed to help his task along, it's Jax's turn to bite back a groan at the sight of her.

He takes his time, her legs no longer parted open, but pressed together to make it easier when he bends them at the knee, propping her feet flat against his chest, to free her completely off of her last piece of clothing.

He doesn't care if it makes him some kind of pervert, but he just can't resist the urge to raise the tiny black piece of cloth in his hand up to his nose, smelling it, and loving the way it makes her cheeks turn a even deeper shade of red when he does so.

And then he reaches for her knees, his hands slowly parting her legs again, his eyes travel down, and finally land on her neatly trimmed dark curls surrounding her pink moist folds ... and here is where he almost loses it, the self-control he'd been so fucking proud of.
Before he knows what's happening, Tara has hooked her legs around his waist now, trying to lure him closer, he swallows the dryness in his throat away and his hands twitch for a moment as he so clearly thinks about giving in, thinks about undoing his pants and finally taking her right here and now.

But then the old quote that started this whole idea of drawing it out comes back to mind, 'Anticipation makes pleasure more intense', and he clenches his jaw but continues with his previous plan instead.

He doesn't waste another moment to his thoughts though, grabs a firm hold of both her thighs when he gets down on his knees in front of the bed, right in front of her and where her legs part. He places kisses along the inside of her creamy white thighs, taking turns on each one before he drapes her legs across his shoulders and dives right in, making her writhe.

Tara bites her lip so hard she almost draws blood, but a moan escapes anyways and she grips the sheets she's lying on with both her hands, fistfuls of it, her knuckles turning as white as the sheets she's holding onto, and she's arching her hips up against him, while he's pleasuring her with his mouth. The slow yet skillful ebb and flow of his lips and tongue against her is already driving her insane.

She wants so much more than just this, she wants all of him, inside her, but she also realized he won't allow that just yet, so she decides to just give in to what he's willing to give and surrenders completely to his touch, his mouth, and the feelings and emotions he evokes.

He doesn't have to reacquaint himself with this part of her, he could never forget it. He knows her inside out, knows just how she tastes, knows every little part of her, knows just what to do to drive her wild and send her over the edge, and right now he's using all of this knowledge to do just that.

And he's undoubtedly getting his share of enjoyment out of this too. The way he's eating her, folding her lips open with his fingers for more contact, devouring her, loving the smell and taste of her, so warm and juicy. It makes his dick throb in anticipation when he's feeling just how wet she is for him, how ready she is to take all of him, how her juices are practically dripping off of his chin. It makes the muscles on his stomach tighten painfully, almost spasm alongside his dick when he can't help but image how that first thrust inside of her is going to feel after such a long time, and every subsequent one after that.

He's greedily swallowing the essence of her, loves watching her writher the way she does, listening to her panting and even moan now that she's getting closer with every flick of his tongue against her clit.

And Jax also knows that it's all about timing, knowing just when to make your last move. Not when you're ready, but when she is. That beat of anticipation. He's done this to her enough times that she knows what's coming next too. When every nerve ending is crackling. And she's so ready for it ... that moment when he makes her feel most alive!

It's then that he suckles her whole clit into his mouth, hard but rhythmically while he also thrusts his chin against her, the stubble there doing its own thing. He's looking at her, his eyes taking in her beautiful face and the emotions his actions cause. He's watching her try so hard not to moan, but she's losing that battle tonight. 

His eyes sparkle with pride when a loud moan escapes her lips, more than once as she begins to climax. Every muscle in her body is tensing up, he can feel her pussy clenching under his face while his mouth is still working her over. Her whole core is vibrating against him, her stomach muscles pulled taut and more defined, and she would've almost twisted out from under him, or clamped her legs shut around him, if he hadn't had his arms already curled around her thighs, pulling them open,
pushing her hips back down into the mattress, using all his strength, holding her firmly in place for him to keep enjoying her and forcing her to ride out this orgasm to its full extent.

It seems like it's lasting forever when she moans and withers against him, but in reality it isn't all that long at all. Jax lets up on her, releasing her clit and she starts to relax, little by little. Her eyes are still pressed shut, her hands still gripping the sheets beside her, and she can feel her core throbbing, pulsating between her legs still in the aftermath of it all.

She feels Jax loosen his tight grip on her, actually feels his body heat retreating from her altogether, her knees falling closed without him wedged between, but for a moment she can barely register what he's doing. She's too dazed still, she hasn't been this high on dopamine in a long time, hasn't felt this kind of spend in forever. But then she hears him groan and she opens her eyes, her pupils still slightly dilated in euphoria. Their eyes meet again, she sees him watching her now, and she can't help but spread her legs for him a little again ... a wordless invite to finish what he started.

Jax is toeing off his shoes in record speed now, reaching down and pulling off his socks, and now he's hastily tugging his jeans and boxer briefs down. He's barely managed to step out of them before he climbs back on top of her completely naked this time, hovering above her on his knees and arms. He can't remember ever wanting her more than he does right now.

He's kissing her passionately, sharing the taste of her that still lingers on his tongue with her, and he manages to reach around her, wedge his forearm between the mattress and her back and with one strong maneuver, he's pulled her up against him and moved them both back into the middle of the bed instead. The cheap worn mattress dipping down under their weight again.

He lowers himself down, his hard cock pressing against her thigh, the full length of him against her, and Tara loves the weight of him on top of her, always has. Not that she minds other positions, she really doesn't, they all have their time and place, but doing it missionary style was always her favorite with Jax.

The way he moves above her, looks at her when he's moving inside of her, caresses her, and angles his hips just so to hit her core just right with every thrust, that she can come undone just like that, just lying beneath him ... with no toys or other tricks up his sleeve, and she just can't help but love it!

And what's not to love when he's looking at her like he is now, like this, now that he's pulling away from the kiss and is meeting her eyes again. She reaches up, her fingers trailing the stubble of his jaw, her core clenching at the way his hips move even just the tiniest bit, anticipating the moment when he enters her.

He dips his head down, just enough to kiss the tip of her nose, and it's the sweetest thing he could do amidst all the raw sexual tension that's surrounding them at the moment. He smiles at her so brightly, biting his own lip when she smiles back at him just as happy. His voice sounds so raspy still, needy for her when he finally speaks, "Say it again, Tara."

Tara swallows the lump away, she knows what he wants to hear. "Love me, Jackson!"

And before the last sound of his name even leaves her mouth, he's already lifted his hips off of her enough so he can reach between them, guiding himself to her opening, still slick, warm and hungry for him, and then he enters her in the same instant Tara hikes up her thighs even higher around his waist, allowing him to thrust into her to the hilt. They both moan out in pleasure at the sensation.

Talk about dick size was as old as time, the misfortune of it usually reserved for the not so well endowed, but Jax knew there was a downfall at the other end of the spectrum as well. Size mattered, but he'd been blessed with a too good size, thick and long, and he'd learned the hard way, no pun
intended, that with other women, he had to hold back some, not sure if they could handle it, and not wanting to hurt them.

But things were different with Tara, maybe it was because they'd been each other's first, learned how to love and fuck with one another, but despite his bigger size, she's always been able to take all of him, filling her with all of him, and because of that it is him now that's gripping the sheet in his hand right above her head.

"Jesus, I missed this so much, babe." He rasps out the words against her ear when his hips start to move, and Tara can't help but let her hips move against him as well. Meeting him thrust for thrust, increasing the friction between them more and more every time they connect. The bed frame squeaking almost obscenely loud with every move, but neither of them seems to care at the moment.

He loves her, makes love to her, so thoroughly, all of her, slowly pulling out of her almost completely to his tip, but entering her again more forcefully, causing the most delicious sensation in the very core of her. He's meeting her stride for stride, while they kiss, and touch, smile, groan and moan, never losing any rhythm on their pursuit to a shared orgasm.

Until suddenly Jax slows down, his hips coming to a complete standstill, his hand has her hip in a vice-like-grip and pressing her hard into the mattress trying to still her rocking motion as well. "Fuck, wait!" He curses against her temple, and Tara can't help but smile a little, glad he can't see her face right now with it buried in the crook of his neck, because she knows what he's trying to do.

She wants to tell him it's okay if he's already there, she's actually really close again too, and let's not forget that she's already come once, but she knows saying so is just a waste of time, knows there's no talking to this man when it comes to this particular subject. He won't allow himself to climax until she does too, so she keeps her mouth shut, allowing him a moment to compose himself.

He lets out a sigh, and sloppily kisses her earlobe, her jawline, trailing kisses down to her neck, and she writhes against him, after all, he's still buried so deeply inside of her, it's driving her insane with longing, impossible not to move, but he still won't let her, won't allow it. This part of the act is always on his terms, and if she's completely honest with herself, she's woman enough to admit that it's a big piece of the attraction to him, an element of what makes the sex so great, him taking charge.

By no means does that mean she wants to be dominated in a sex dungeon some place, doesn't want to be whipped and chained or get's sexual pleasure from being punished. None of that sounds arousing to her.

But with Jax, well, she would never admit it to him out loud, because it's all a part of their dynamic, but she does like it when he's in charge, when he controls the moves, when he takes her excruciatingly hard, ... or holds her down and takes her heartbreakingly slow. Either way, he seems to know every part of her so well, and what she likes, and what she's able to handle, and she can't think of a time when it's been anything but pleasurable with him.

Jax slowly starts to move inside of her again now, leisurely rocking against her, in and out, losing the bruising grip he has on her, letting her move as well as long as she matches his slower pace. They continue like this for a long time, devouring each other, loving each other, kissing each other, while deft fingertips are teasing each other's skin in all the right places.

She frames his face, pulling his lips to hers, tongues dueling again and she can't help but moan his name into his mouth at the way he's pushing her closer to her second climax with every deep and tempting thrust.

Not much longer, and she's there again, at the brink of falling over the edge, she can feel the
sensation building in the pit of her stomach, rolling over her until there's no turning back. She lets out a loud moan, can't stop herself, eyes rolling in the back of her head, letting go so unashamed, when her walls begin to quiver around the length of him, squeezing him, hoping he'll join her in this orgasm.

Jax lets out a satisfied grunt against her ear, and kisses her bruisingly hard before he picks up the pace tremendously, knowing he's satisfied her for a second time he's chasing his own ecstasy at neck breaking speed now, but he doesn't doubt that she's enjoying this too.

He thrusts into her faster and harder, and she's so incredibly wet where they're joined that their bodies slapping together is making the most indecent, sexually explicit sound she's ever heard, especially when it's mixed with their grunts and moans of shameless pleasure.

She came already, in a way she still is, his thrusts prolonging it, making her climax even better if that's even possible, and then he joins her, his hips moving less fast, more erratic now, until he's just at random bucking against her when he finally spills all of him inside of her.

His body stills against hers, collapsing on top of her, just barely able to brace himself enough to not crush her beneath him while he's panting against her temple, trying to get his breathing back under control and hers is just as labored and erratic as his.

"That was ..." He huffs against her glistening skin near her hairline, trying to think of the right word, but he fails to think of one. "Jesus Christ, babe, what the fuck was that?"

Tara's smiling contently, her arms wrapped around him, her legs still too. She can't really form a coherent thought while he's still buried inside her, her core still throbbing in the aftershocks of her climax. But it's what he does, he likes to stay in her, never pulls out in a hurry and rolls off of her, lingers instead and it's just another thing about him, about them that she loves so much.

But when she doesn't answer his question, he pushes himself up a bit, bracing himself on his arm so he can look her in the eye. He kisses her lips, soft and sweet, and cracks the most adorable smile, but then crushes their romantic moment when he lets out a small chuckle and says, "I think I might've pulled a muscle ... or something."

Tara nuzzles her nose against the tip of his, a teasing smile on her face now, "I wouldn't be surprised, Teller."

He wants to tease her back, but he can't, he's too love-struck, too euphoric to come up with anything witty to say back. Instead he just ducks his head down, using his hands to cup her breast and kiss the rosy buds again, still hard and erect from all that friction between them.

Then he looks back up at her, pushing her dark brown hair off of her forehead before he focuses back on her eyes. "This is real, right?" He asks, wondering if this is too good to be true, searching her face for a second before he adds, "I mean, I'm not gonna wake up in my truck stuck in a ditch on the side of the road, a big fucking bump on my head and realizing I dreamed this whole thing up."

"It's real." Tara reassures him, all earnestly, loving when he's like this ... all tender and full of love in his eyes.

"Good." He finally replies after a long pause, kissing her again, long and tenderly, devouring her mouth and letting her devour his.

But suddenly he groans against her lips, and Tara can already feel where this is heading, because she can feel him. He pulls away from the kiss to speak, "Ready for another round?"
"Always." Tara replies and can't help but let out a little shriek when he catches her off guard flipping them over. Leaving her on top now, straddling him, but he sits up himself, scooting closer to the edge of the bed again so effortlessly even with her on top.

She grips his shoulders for leverage, leaning in and kisses him passionately, grinding against him already. He's beginning to rock his hips up and thrusting inside of her, and then he grips her hips with both hands too, controlling her rhythm, but also helping her move further up along his shaft before he thrusts her down again. They do this again and again and again, rocking against each other until they climax together, professing their love not just in words but in each touch, and in these moments, before they eventually drift off to sleep in each other's arms, with nothing but each other on their minds for once.

Just love ... he loves her, and she loves him!

X

Author's Note: Since it's their first love scene in 39 chapters, I included as many trashy-romance-novel-clichés I could think of. Hope you liked the outcome, it took a bit longer to finish, sorry for that. Is it too much? Too raunchy, or too mushy? Please let me know what you think. Thank you.
Chapter 40

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Warning: Smut!

Jax startles awake, lifting his head off of the pillow in a momentary state of panic, but instantly relaxes back down when he realizes Tara's still right here with him. Tucked naked and slick against his side, his left arm wrapped around her, her head on his shoulder, her arm on his chest, and one of her legs carelessly, but comfortably draped across him. All naked skin on more naked skin!

He swipes his right hand down his face and lets out a little sigh of relief. It wasn't just a dream!

He smells the top of her head, her brown hair, and it smells more like her perfume than her shampoo, and for a moment he can't stop himself from thinking back to the time she was in a coma at St. Thomas.

Him sitting alone on the edge of the bed in their bedroom at night, the house empty and too quiet to keep him from overanalyzing all his fucked up life's choices in his head once more. And how in the loneliest moments he'd reach for her perfume that was still sitting on the dresser untouched, the same one she was wearing now, but had forgotten to pack it the night she'd decided to leave him in a hurry.

And in a vain attempt to feel her here, to not feel so goddamn lonely, he'd gone so far as to spray it on her pillow, sometimes even on his own, to pretend she was still around just for a little while, just so he could finally close his eyes and drift off to sleep. But because of it, because of that perfume, the smell lingered and worked too well, and too often he had sleepily swept his hand across her side of their bed, or rolled over towards her forgetting for a moment what had happened, a split-second of contentment, only to find her spot painfully empty and his heart being crushed when the cruel reality of it all would come rushing back to him all at once. All of his failures as a husband, the lies and the cheating, the countless broken promises, and how he hadn't protected her like he should have.

He vows to himself that he'll never fail her again, never break another promise to her, will never let her get hurt again, especially not by his own doing.

And he's so thankful that they really stand a chance now to leave all of that behind them, can't imagine ever going back to a place where they don't wake up together like this. Loving and holding one another. He sees a real future now as clear as day!

Jax looks at her then, a long hard look, yet smiles when he's taking in all those little features of her pretty face that he loves so much. He loves how she looks so content and worry free in her sleep at the moment, and he has to resist the urge to kiss her, doesn't want to wake her just yet, considering neither of them has barely gotten any real sleep at all.

He's not entirely sure if sleep-fucking is an actual term, but it is what best describes how they've spend the majority of their first night back together.
Falling asleep just to end up climbing back on top of one another, trying to get closer again, sleepily grinding until their bodies are reconnected, making love only half-awake, or half-asleep, however you want to look at it. Finding each other in the darkness, clumsily wrapped up in tangled sheets, her long hair getting caught in the stubble on his chin, and their bodies moving and shifting almost like on auto-pilot, knowing just what to do, until they can't tell where one body ends and the other begins.

No words exchanged, no drowsy whispered declarations of love, but it's all there anyways, being said in every caress, every touch, every thrust, every moan ... in their greedy hands, nimble fingers, lips seeking lips, tangled limbs and their bodies gently, almost dreamily, rocking against one another over and over until they'd both climax again.

Then drifting off to sleep once more, on or still in one another, clinging to the other person, stomach pressed to stomach, to eventually rouse just enough to start it all anew. This unrelenting feeling of never getting enough ... an obvious, yet measty attempt to make up for lost time! Or maybe it isn't that at all, maybe it's just their way of leaving all their crimes against one another behind, hiding them, burying them under a copious amount of love-making!

But whatever their reasons, right now, as he looks at her, he can't help but feel so utterly blissful, like butterflies in his stomach doing flips, there's this rush of euphoria at the knowledge that he managed to really get her back. She's his, all his, body and soul, to touch and kiss and love, and it's goddamn ridiculous how equal parts happy and also lucky that thought makes him feel. Like the outlaw in him just got away with the heist of the fucking century! An immeasurable treasure he doesn't deserve ... her!

He just can't help himself, has to reach over and take her hand that's resting flat against his chest in his, bringing it up to his lips to press a sweet kiss against her fingers. He has no idea what time it is, all he knows is that it's already light out, a little at least, that much he can tell even through the drawn curtains of their motel room window, but he still decides to close his eyes again, yawning widely, trying to get some more sleep after all. But before he dozes off and goes back to sleep again, a small smile creeps on his face when he thinks about how she has thoroughly worn him out last night, and how downright satisfied he feels about that too.

X

A couple hours later they're both woken up by the ringing of a phone. Groggily and in a haze they both blink their eyes awake, looking around perplexed for a moment, until Tara suddenly sits up in a panic beside him, realizing that it's neither of their cell-phones, but that it's the phone in the room itself that's ringing off the hook.

"Oh shit." She curses as the events from last night slowly start to come back to her, and she practically climbs on top of Jax, straddling him, ignoring the delicious ache between her legs as she's leaning over his shoulder, one palm flat against his chest bracing herself, while she reaches out with her other hand for the black corded phone ringing on the nightstand on his side of the bed.

"Yes." She huffs into the phone as soon as the receiver is up to her ear, pausing for a moment to hear who's on the other end of the line, before she replies, "Christy, oh my god, I'm so sorry." A flash of guilt crosses her face when she meets Jax's eyes now, but he looks utterly unfazed by the fact that in last night's haze, they've completely forgotten about their children.

There's not a trace of guilt in his eyes, because he's more enthralled at the moment with her bare bouncing breasts right in front of him. But Tara carries on with the conversation, trying her best to ignore his hands gliding over her and caressing her skin while she's explaining how they'd gotten to the motel room pretty late last night and how she'd simply forgotten to call her and give her this
number and so on and so on...

The phone call carries on and even though Jax can't hear what Christy is saying, several things are fairly obvious to figure out just based on Tara's rather longwinded replies alone.

One, Christy got the number to the motel from Mandy, the barkeep.
Two, the boys had fun at Greg's, they won't shut up about it, and are having fun at Christy's now, and are still not interested to talk to their parents for longer than a few measly seconds.
And three, Christy isn't mad that she didn't have the number and is teasing Tara into spilling the beans about what could've possibly made her so forgetful last night.

As for Jax, he just seems a tad bit amused by Tara's attempt to not let Christy in just yet what has happened between them. And that fact in itself makes him want to continue teasing her even more, finding his own amusement by the way he's making Tara squirm while she's trying so hard to carry on this phone conversation instead.

But either way, his hands have reached up to hold her by her waist, while he has adjusted his position beneath her, sitting up and scooting back against the headboard and pulling her along with him. Then he leans forward, angling his head to the side so he can nip and kiss away at her neck, while she's twisting and shrugging her shoulders to give him the least amount of access. But Jax is undeterred by any of that, fighting her every step of the way, and his hands are cupping her breasts now too, his big callused thumbs flicking over her already hardened nipples repeatedly in his ongoing pursuit to tease her so obviously deliberate right now.

And it's distracting her, he can tell by the way Tara's agreeing with whatever Christy is going on and on about, nodding and saying 'Uh-huh' several times, all while she's playfully swatting his hands away from her nipples repeatedly, trying not to giggle at the faux offended look he's giving her each time. She's just not cut out for this particular kind of multitasking ... can't carry on a conversation about their boys, while he's role-playing some modern day version of Casanova!

And it's as if Jax can sense what she's thinking, or maybe he's just losing his own patience, he suddenly holds out his hand, giving her a nod and makes a gesture with his outstretched hand that says 'gimme me'.

Tara doesn't comply though, unsure what exactly he's going to say, but he grabs the receiver out of her hand anyways, pulling it up to his own ear now against her protesting, stretching the curled black cable out with his other hand.

"Christy?" He says, "Hey, it's Jax. How are my boys?" A beat passes and Tara searches his face, waiting to see where he's taking this conversation. "Look, we're not sure yet how the roads are this morning, but we still gotta get Tara's rental car towed, so there's a chance we might be stuck here another day. Are you still okay with keeping the little monsters until tomorrow night?" Tara's eyes flash with surprise, but also a hint of something else, mischief perhaps.

"I appreciate that." He answers in reply to Christy's obvious agreement. "I'll owe you one." He adds for good measure and gives Tara a smile that's bright enough to light up the darkened room. Then he nods his head, like she had earlier, even though Christy clearly can't see him, "I don't kiss and tell, darlin', but I'm sure Tara will fill you all in when we're back." He winks at Tara and gives her a sly smile at Christy's amusing intrusiveness. "Alright, thanks, darlin'. Talk to you later." And with that he leans over and hangs up the phone before he quickly turns all his attention back on her without missing a beat.

"Where were we, babe?" He asks with an almost sleazy looking grin, both his hands have reached around her and are cupping her ass now, pulling her closer against his groin, and his anew growing erection.
Tara feigns innocence, "I think we were sleeping." She braces her hand against his shoulder this time, making a move to leave his lap, but before she gets anywhere, he's already flipped them over once again. Leaving her trapped naked beneath his heavier form, leering down at her for a moment, but then the look in his eyes gets all caring and loving again when he notices the sudden change in the expression on her face.

He gently brushes her hair back, looking down at her concerned now, his voice suddenly serious again when he asks, "What's wrong?"

Tara sighs, and looks away for a second, embarrassed by something. What that is becomes clear the moment she answers him. "I can't believe I forgot about the boys."

"Tara." He says her name like a plea, wanting her full attention, "We both had a little too much to drink, and -.

"No ... we didn't." She replies, cutting him off mid sentence, because she knows she wasn't drunk. A little bit tipsy? Yeah, maybe! But not drunk, so she really can't let him blame her actions on the alcohol they've consumed.

He concedes after a quiet moment, nodding, "You're right." He really can't argue with her on that, the beers and the shots weren't the problem, they'd been stretched out over too many hours to have had much of an effect on either of them, but he finishes the rest of his sentence now, which still rung true. "We just got caught up in the moment, got carried away ... but I think we both knew deep down that the boys are in good hands. If they'd been with anyone else, we would've remembered to call and check in." He leans in to place a quick sweet kiss against her lips, "You're a real good mom, Tara. The boys have no idea how lucky they are to have you!"

He can see the tears beginning to pool in her eyes and her chin starting to quiver at his words, and he quickly decides to turn this back around, "Hey, I didn't say that to make you cry, babe." He brushes his knuckles across her cheek, before all seriousness leaves his face again and he cracks a toothy grin her way instead, "I'm just trying to get laid here, you know?" He bucks his hips teasingly against hers too, and he knows it worked when Tara playfully slaps him on the shoulder, and even though a tear slipped free and is rolling down from the corner of her eye, she's smiling now back up at him again too.

He wipes the tears away for her, leans down and kisses her. Several sweet little innocent kisses, until her lips part for him, allowing his tongue entrance and he kisses her hard and passionately, while she wraps her arms and legs around him, pulling him closer against her again.

And not unlike all throughout the night, their bodies reconnect once more, they get carried away in a tangle of limps and tender touches and greedy kisses, until they end up rocking and thrusting against each other, making love for the umpteenth time!

X

Tara's lying lazily in bed, a dreamy look on her face, stretching her long limps out for a moment, eyes droopy in the aftermath of yet another orgasm, when Jax steps out of the bathroom and climbs right back in bed with her in all his unabashed naked glory.

He settles down right beside her, snakes his arm in the hollow between her head and shoulder, turns to his side himself, his other hand gripping her hip, pulling her curvy behind slick back against his groin, and her back against his chest. He sweeps her long hair away, so he can kiss her neck, before his hand goes to rest flat against her stomach to hold her firmly against him, her own hands resting on top of his, holding on to him, fingers intertwining.
He places a few sweet kisses against the crook of her neck, his stubble scratching her lightly, but she actually likes the feel of it, letting out a small sigh of contentment as they both close their eyes and are cuddling against each other like this for a long silent moment.

But before they drift off to sleep again, Tara suddenly speaks up. "I should probably call the rental company." She mumbles, interrupting their romantic moment with the unpleasantries that tend to come with real life. "I need to figure out how I'll get my suitcase back too."

He's pretty tired, comfortable too, and even a little turned on again already by the way she's nestled against him, but he knows she's right and that it's time to get back to reality. They can't stay in this little bubble they've created forever, there's things that need taken care of.

They need to find out how the roads are, call the rental car place, find their phones and charge them, see if this room is even available another night, etcetera, etcetera ...all that pesky yet necessary stuff you've got no choice than to handle when you're an adult.

"I'll call them for you, babe. Right now." He says and gives her butt cheek a little smack, urging her on to move. "You got the papers?" He asks, kissing her neck one last time before he's pushing himself up in a sitting position already. Maybe if they get everything taken care of early on, they can still salvage the rest of the day, spending it in bed, sleeping and fucking without a worry in the world for once.

He watches her scoot to the edge of the bed, already missing her body heat against him, with her back turned to him when she's wrapping the sheet around her in a show of modesty that under the current circumstances makes him want to laugh out loud at her. But he just bites his lip instead, trying his best to contain the chuckle that threatens to spill from his throat, after all, this is all part of her charm.

This is just how she is, always has been. Everything has it's time and place, nakedness has its time and place, and even though he's been allowed to see and touch every part of her since last night, she isn't about to bend over naked in front of him while she's digging through her carryon bag in search of her rental car agreement ... that much is clear.

And honestly, that's perfectly alright with him, he thinks to himself with a lingering smirk still watching her from his seat on the bed. He'll just make her bend over naked for him later, as a matter of fact he can think of all sorts of compromising positions he'd like to put her in without that sheet wrapped around her, later of course, after everything's been taken care of.

She returns back to bed, the sheet still wrapped around her looking like some roman goddess, with a few folded up pieces of paper and her drivers license in her hand that she quickly hands over to him. He takes everything from her, but then puts it on the nightstand beside him. "Come here." He demands, patting the spot right beside him, before he adds. "I want some of that." Tugging on the sheet to get her to come closer again, and she wordlessly complies, unwrapping herself from the sheet again and sits down with her back against the headboard right beside him. Allowing him to pull some of the sheet over himself too, up to his waist at least, while she rest her head against his shoulder sleepily again.

He reaches for a cigarette from the pack on the nightstand beside him and quickly lights one up, taking a few long drags, before letting the cigarette hang from the corner of his mouth. Then he puts the paperwork in his lap in front of him, looking it over for a few minutes, before he reaches for the phone, dialing the 1-800-number they'd provided her with at the time of check-out.

She watches and listens in on him, and she likes this side of him, the one that handles stuff for her,
especially this kind of crap that she knows nothing about and honestly hates to deal with herself. She has to get on the phone herself for just a moment, because the rental car was in her name after all, but after that he takes over completely.

He's so confident when he talks, she knows it's because this falls into the realm of his expertise too. It's not all outlaw stuff, guns and violence and prison etiquette that he has a vast knowledge of. He started working at T-M when he was just fifteen years old, then due to JT's will even became part owner on the day he'd turned eighteen, and therefore they can't pull one over on him, like they surely would have on her.

He knows just what to say, knows how these contracts work, knows the lingo, and what's covered in the insurance and what's not covered. But still, she silently thanks god for her own foresight to get the slightly more expensive coverage when they'd offered it to her because of the impending storm at the time!

And sure enough, before he hangs up, it's all been handled at no extra cost to her. How exactly that all works, she's not sure, all she knows is that by tomorrow the roads should be cleared enough, the tow truck will be here first thing tomorrow morning, and they'll meet them right here in this truck stop parking lot, so she can get her suitcase before they tow the car off to the nearest authorized repair shop.

"Thank you." She purrs against his ear, and places a few little kisses against his shoulder, clutching the sheet to her bare breasts, but he leans in for more, and so does she, meeting in the middle for another little kiss.

He flicks the ash off of the tip from his second cigarette into the ashtray beside him, before he holds it out to her to take. Tara takes it and raises it up to her lips, he watches her a little curiously, smiling at her when she takes a drag. She slowly exhales away from him, before she turns back to face him, handing him the cigarette back. "What?" She finally asks, raising her eyebrows and smiling a little herself at the amused look displayed on his face.

"I was just thinking about the first time you and I shared a smoke. Remember?" He takes a drag now too, before flicking more ash off of the end, and looks back at her, waiting for her reply.

"Yeah..." She replies nodding when the memory of it comes back to her like it was yesterday, and she meets his eyes, smiling through her next words. "You said I had a very sexy mouth. Made me blush."

He laughs at that, as if he's just now realizing how cheesy that line was, but still he adds, "You did though, ... and still do."

She rests her head against his shoulder again in absolute happiness, continues to reminisce about the start of their high school relationship, "You know, I only smoked to impress you." She confessed for the first time, holding her hand out and he hands the smoke back to her again.

"Figures." He says with an all of a sudden more serious tone to his voice. "I knew you had the hots for me right from the start, babe."

But he can't hold out for long and cracks a smirk, unable to stay serious another second longer when he sees the disbelieving look she's giving him before she rolls her eyes at him. He curls his arm around her neck, pulls her closer and kisses her again, more passionately this time, instead of just another quick peck.

He groans against her mouth, longing for more of her again, before he forces himself to pull away,
meeting her eyes, raising his eyebrows in disbelief at the both of them, "This is crazy, babe."

"I know." Tara nods her head in agreement, feeling that same kind of heat surge back down to her core.

She hands the cigarette back to him, that same look of longing in her eyes again too, but she forces herself away from his warm body and inviting muscles. "Let's get out of this bed, take a shower, get dressed ..." She scoots and swings her legs off of her side of the bed, pulling the sheet along with her for just a second as she continues to ramble on. "... make sure we even have a room tonight, maybe get a bite to eat too." She stretches her arms up over her head for a moment, long and languid, trying to get some blood flowing to other places than just between her thighs, before she glances back at him over her shoulder, watching him finish off the last bit of the cigarette. "Are you hungry?" Anything to distract from this magnet-like-pull she's feeling towards him. This just isn't normal!

Now that she mentions it, he can almost hear his stomach growl, "Yeah, I'm starving." He stubs the cigarette out in the ashtray and gets out of bed himself, following her lead for a change.

Tara leaves the sheet in a crumpled heap near the foot of the bed on her side, and steps naked into the bathroom, just a few steps ahead of him. She turns the water in the shower on, waiting for it to turn hot enough to step under, while he steps up behind her, both his arms encircling her torso and pulling her slick back against him again. Then he's brushing her hair aside, off of her shoulder, and begins to kiss a trail from her shoulder over to the crook of her neck.

She closes her eyes and tilts her head to the side, giving him easier access that way, and he takes the hint and starts to nip and kiss all of the right spots. She arches her back just a little, seductively pushing her curvy behind harder against him.

He rocks his hips against her in return and lets out a little approving grunt against her neck, his breath hot against her skin, letting her know that he likes that, before he raises his hands to teasingly caress her breasts at the same time. So much for getting out of bed and taking care of things!

Tara forces herself to open her eyes and stretches out her hand, testing the water temperature, before she pulls his hand off of her chest and quickly tugs him into the shower stall along with her. She spins around and is back in his arms, face to face now, perched up on her tippy-toes, kissing him again.

Jax runs his rough hands slowly down her already slick back, before he cups her shapely ass with both hands, pulling her snug against him, his tongue dueling with hers in a passionate kiss at the same time as the hot water pounds mercilessly down on them both. They continue to just stand like this for a few long moments, heart beating out of their chests, ragged breathing, until Jax finally snaps. Not able to wait another second longer, he suddenly grabs her and presses her back hard against the white bathroom tiles right behind her, trapping her in place between him and the wall.

Tara gasps out in shock when her back connects with the cold surface of the wall, but all that is quickly forgotten when Jax expertly hikes up both her legs around his waist in one quick move, hoisting her further up against the wall of the shower stall, standing or rather wedging himself between her wide open thighs.

Tara wraps her arms around his neck, desperately clinging to him, holding on with every ounce of strength she has left, which isn't much considering they've been at this since late last night. She's so utterly lost in the scorching kiss that's sending different nerves ablaze all over, while he starts to grind his hips almost lazily, slowly against hers a couple of times.

But then Jax suddenly jolts her up a little higher, adjusting his grip on her slippery thighs, but never
breaking the kiss when Tara's the one finally reaching between them, trying to snake her hand down the front of them. He pulls his hips away just enough so she can encircle and direct him in the right position, before she pulls her hand away, clinging to his neck again and he surges forward, slipping into her in one quick hard thrust, filling her completely while they both moan out in unison. They quickly find their perfect rhythm again, loving each other until the water starts to lose some of that warmth and they succumb to yet another mind-blowing orgasm.

X

Tara's honestly feeling a little weak in the knees when she's wrapping the towel tightly around her, carefully tucking the hem of it in right above her breast bone so it will stay in place. She wipes her hand across the steamed up mirror right above the sink to get a look at herself. God, she's looking like such a mess, she thinks to herself, yet can't help but smile at her own reflection just a little too. Her usually pale skin looks very pinkish right now, and she's sure it's not just the remaining flush from this latest climax, but the heat of the water and Jax's beard stubble surely has something to do with it too. And then there was her long brown hair ... oh god, her hair!

She spreads her fingers and tries to run her hands through her tangled wet mess, but it's almost impossible to do so, getting caught in knot after knot. It's wet, hanging down lifeless in unflattering clumpy strands, and in the way it is practically matted on the back of her head from the constant friction against the sheets there is simply no denying the glaringly obvious, a blind man could see what she's been up to ... she looks like she's been thoroughly fucked!

Nonetheless, she reaches for the blow-dryer that's mounted on the wall, thankful that this little outdated motel at least still has this commodity available to her. She bends over, flipping her hair over upside down and begins to dry it with the device as good as she can.

Once it's almost completely dry, she tries to untangle it once more with her hands, making it look presentable as best as she can, since Jax didn't bother to pack a hairbrush and hers was packed away in the trunk of her rental car in a ditch somewhere.

Even though the bathroom fan is running obnoxiously loud, she can hear there's a knock on the motel room door, and then she can hear Jax talking to someone, but she can't make out the words and since she's dressed in nothing but a towel, she decides to stay put until the coast is clear again, examining herself a little more in the mirror while she waits.

As she stands still, waiting for a moment, she suddenly becomes aware of something liquid-like running down the inside of her thighs. She's got a pretty good idea what it is, but lifts the front of her towel just enough to take a peek anyways. She was right with her assumption, but she's not sure why it wasn't until this moment that a sudden realization hits her like a ton of bricks. But then she can hear the front door to the motel room fall shut again, and she quickly reaches for a handful of toilet paper to wipe herself clean, before she discards it into the trashcan beside the toilet.

She finally opens the bathroom door, careful to just glance into the room first, making sure it's just Jax in there alone, before she completely steps in, clutching her towel as if it might fall off of her any second.

Jax is just standing there, leaning against the dresser across from the bed, looking up and smiling at her for a second, before he returns his full attention again to his cell phone and the charger he's fumbling with. He's already fully dressed, shoes and all, ready to go except for his jacket, so she's starting to look around the floor in search for her clothes now too.

Tara's grateful to see that Jax had already picked them up for her and had draped them over the back
of one of the wooden chairs, along with her black shoes sitting neatly right below as well. She grabs them all, stepping back towards the bed, and takes a seat to get dressed, lost in her own thoughts.

"Are you alright?" Jax asks her out of the blue, catching her off guard. She's not entirely sure why he's asking, but she can't help but wonder if the look on her face was what was giving her away.

She tries to smile again for his benefit, not sure though if it comes across as genuine, but for a moment she's still tempted to just lie and answer 'yes', because despite his question he still looks so stupidly happy at the moment, and the last thing she wants to do right now is somehow sour the mood.

Then right in that exact moment she realizes that her stack of clothing doesn't contain her panties, and she needs her panties for very obvious reasons, so she answers with a question of her own instead, hoping he won't notice the slight. "Um ... have you seen my panties?"

Jax looks perplexed for just a second, before a row of horizontal lines appear on his forehead when his eyes narrow on her a little and it's obvious that she hasn't fooled him in the least. He has clearly caught on to that not so subtle change in her, but she's thankful that he's not pushing her on it right now and instead just answers her question. "Sorry, babe, I haven't. But I can help you look." He offers and before she can even say anything in reply, he has already put his phone aside and is crouching down on his knees, looking under the bed in search for the little piece of black cloth.

"They gotta be here somewhere, because I vividly remember taking them off of you." He adds for good measure and shoots her a sly grin from the other side of the bed when he comes to a stand again.

Tara returns a little smile at his remark, while she's actively searching now too, moving the blanket and the sheet on the bed around, reaching her hand into the space between headboard and mattress, feeling her way along to see if it might've gotten stuck in there somehow, while Jax starts the same process on the other side of the bed, their empty hands meeting near the middle.

Then something catches Jax's eyes, and a big smirk crosses his unshaven face when he reaches behind the headboard and produces the stretchy lacy garment. "Found 'em." He says, twirling it around on one finger like a little flag before he tosses it over to her.

Apparently it had somehow ended up sitting on top of one of the pillows Jax had wedged in there last night in an attempt to keep the wooden headboard from banging the wall when they made love.

"Thanks." Tara replies with a genuinely grateful smile and quickly turns to sit, pulling the undergarment up her legs to put them on. The lacy-see-through crotch part is downright rigid from how wet she'd been down there last night. She's gotta admit she's a bit grossed out by it, and it suddenly dawns on her that she can't even remember the last time she'd been in a walk-of-shame-type situation, where she'd have no other choice then to be getting dressed in the same dirty panties the next morning.

She puts those thoughts back out off her mind, slips on her jeans, and is just about to pull that paillette covered top on too, when Jax's voice startles her from somewhere behind her. "I've got some warmer shirts than that for you, babe." Right, it's so cozy warm in here, that it's easy to forget how cold it is out there. Yes she can't help but wonder if it's less her warmth he's truly concerned with, or rather the amount of skin and cleavage it reveals.

She stops dead in her tracks, clutching the garment to her bare breasts, while she follows him over to where his green military duffle bag is sitting on the other wooden chair. He starts to rifle through it, pulls a handful of shirts out for her, handing them all to her to pick and choose from, but then tries to
retract one, which happens to be the one that she'd just decided on. "I was wearing that one last night." He tries to explain. She remembers, it's her favorite.

"I know." She replies before she raises the shirt up to her nose, giving it a good sniff test, kind of expecting it to smell like the bar, like a mixture of greasy food, alcohol and cigarettes, but she's pleasantly surprised that it instead just smells like him, and she loves it.

"This will work." She answers with a sheepish smile on her lips now. She can see that he's a little amused too by the fact that she would pick his dirty shirt over the other clean ones, but she's trying her best to ignore the way he's raised his eyebrows at her, or the way the corners of lips are just slightly tugging upward.

"You wouldn't happen to have an extra bra in there too?" She asks, smiling again and already slipping her arms in the shirt, not actually waiting for his reply to her obvious attempt to lighten the mood some more again, to throw him off her scent.

"Shit." He snaps his fingers in a faux show of distress, like he just remembered something very important. "I knew I was forgetting something." He blurts out playing along, enjoying her little joke, before he adds. "Forgot my damn tampons too."

Tara lets out a little laugh at that, and begins buttoning up her shirt, all the while her mind going back to the fact that she herself might not be in need for tampons again for the next nine months or so.

"I think they sell those at the gas station, so you're in luck, Teller." She carries on with their banter, still trying to hide her feelings, before she says in a suddenly more serious tone of voice again. "Seriously though, I do need a few other things myself."

"Like what?" He inquires, semi-folding the other shirts back up before he stashes them into the bag again.

She's leaning back against the little round table behind her, trying to fix the collar on her shirt, and folding the too long sleeves over a little, while she meets his eyes again. "I could use a hairbrush, deodorant, a toothbrush, a razor, um ... a phone charger too." She rambles out the items on the list she's made up inside her head. A bra would be nice, clean underwear too, but doesn't say those things out loud. She's a little frustrated with herself that everything she needs is in her suitcase, stuck in the damn trunk of that goddamn rental car.

Jax dives his hand right back into his duffle bag, rifling through it again, until he produces his personal hygiene bag, all black leather with the Harley Davidson emblem on it. He quickly unzips it, looking through it for a moment as well, before he pulls out a toothbrush, still wrapped up in the original packaging, and unceremoniously hands it to her, along with a half empty tube of toothpaste. "And you can use my charger too, my deodorant, whatever you need ... you're my old lady, so what's mine is yours." He says sincerely, catching her eye.

"Thank you." She answers clearly touched by his choice of words, leans in and kisses his cheek.

"You're welcome." He answers, pulling out his own toothbrush before he follows her along into the bathroom to brush his teeth too.

They brush their teeth side by side in an awkward silence for several minutes, but even now he can't keep his hands off of her, has to touch her, have his hand resting on her lower back while they're standing in front of the little sink.

He's gurgling a mouthful of water before he spits it into the sink, then they're both rinsing their
toothbrushes off, before wiping their mouths dry with a towel, glancing at each other every now and then but neither one is saying a word. The banter all but vanished as if it never happened in the first place!

Tara's got her little make-up bag in her hand now, and starts rifling through it, trying to ignore his penetrating gaze she can feel on her, and the way it's making her nervous despite her best effort.

He watches her apply some mascara to her eyes, waiting and wishing she'd just spill the beans on her own, come on out and tell him what's suddenly bothering her. She was so happy earlier, he doesn't understand what happened. So he waits, holding back for as long as he can, until he just can't bite his tongue any longer and gets right to the point. "What's on your mind, babe?"

She stops applying the mascara, and looks over at him with raised eyebrows, holding the little wand as if frozen in place in the air. "What do you mean?"

Jax shakes his head at her, folding his arms across his chest and leans against the doorframe that leads to the bedroom behind him, trying to come off as more casual then he feels right now. "Look, I can tell something's up. So just ... tell me." He urges her on, can't stand the thought that she's keeping something that's bothering her from him already. He wonders for a second if it's the excessive amount of sex they've been having that is starting to get to her. But that's an easy fix, he's got no problem with laying off of her for the rest of the weekend, if that's what it takes to ease her mind again.

She turns to look at her reflection in the mirror, focusing back on her eye make-up once more, finishing up in a hurry, before she closes the mascara and turns to look back at him now to give him her undivided attention. She's resting her hip against the sink beside her, for a second her fingers are fiddling nervously with the last couple of buttons on her shirt, well, technically his shirt, before she folds her arms in front of her chest too, mimicking his stance almost to a T.

She hesitates for a moment, going over the words in her head, but finally just comes right out with it, wording it as simply as she can that get's straight to the point of the issue at hand. "I'm not on any birth control." She searches his face, waiting for some kind of a reaction from him, but unsure what to make with the one she's receiving, because at first his face is like a blank slate.

In her head this is still such a touchy subject, because the fake baby and fake miscarriage still cripples her with tremendous guilt every time she lets her mind go there, so she can't even begin to imagine how it must make him feel, having been on the receiving end of that horrendous lie.

Jax hadn't known for sure if she was or wasn't taking something, and quite frankly, deep down he'd hoped for the latter, because the thought of having another kid with her elates him. But still his eyebrows scrunch together while he's letting her words and the meaning sink in, trying to read between the lines and what's got her all worked up about it. They're married for Christ's sake, so he's left a bit puzzled, because he can't find the problem in what she'd just said, so he simply inquires further, raising his eyebrows in curiosity. "And ...?" He says, leaving the rest open ended for her to fill in and elaborate as she pleases.

Tara looks just as perplexed as he does, maybe even more so when she's shaking her head a little and repeats the same words again, more emphasis on the word 'not' this time. "I'm not on any birth control."

"Yeah, I got that." Jax replies almost flippantly, without missing a beat. "But why are you telling me that?" His turn to be blunt with her, coming right out with what he doesn't get, doesn't understand.

"I'm telling you because ..." She starts to say in reply, but then the words trail off and she averts her
eyes for a moment, trying to think of another way to say this, a better way to put this. She swallows the newly formed lump in her throat away and looks back up at him when she says, "I was just wondering if you have an opinion on that, you know? Whether or not we should start using protection?" The tone in her voice sounds very unsure, but the words she used can't possibly be any more clearer than that.

He looks a bit confused again, and quickly shakes his head at the notion, "Why the hell would we do that?" But before Tara has even a chance to reply, he adds, "Besides, it's a little late at this point, don't you think?" He looks a little smug the way he raises his eyebrows at her, a hint of amusement sparkling in his eyes back at her, gauging her reaction.

"Yeah, I suppose that's true." She agrees, the hint of an embarrassed smile tugging up the corners of her lips too as she thinks about it, looking away from him again for a second. He's got a valid point there, they have been going at it like rabbits.

"Do you want another baby?" He suddenly blurts the question out rather bluntly, but with it addressing the elephant in the room between them.

Tara's heart is speeding up, she can practically feel the blood pumping faster through her veins when she hears him ask the question that's been hanging in the air between them. It hits her like a punch to the gut at first, but secretly she's so glad he's the one to say it, to ask her, because there is no way in hell that she could bring herself to ask him.

Because it seems downright cruel, maybe evil even, for her to ask him such a thing after what she'd done. She can't look him in the eye now as the memory of it all comes rushing back to her. The look of devastation in his eyes when Margaret had shown him to her office, where she sat covered in blood stains ready for the final act. The way he clung to her hand, not wanting to leave her when the nurse tried to usher him out of the exam room. At the time she thought this was her only way to get her boys out, but in hindsight it all looks so glaringly wrong on so many different levels. How could she have hurt him like this?

She swallows hard, trying to moisten her dry throat when she realizes that she hasn't answered him yet. Do you want another baby? Back then she really didn't, it was hard enough to worry and protect the two babies she already had, but things were so very different now. She survived and he was out, and they were all happy and safe now.

She already nods her head before the word even slip out of her mouth, "Yeah." She raises her head now and meets his eyes again, nodding again, then cocking her head to the side a little in the way that she does, with just the hint of a smile. "I mean, yes, I do ... eventually." She adds that last word with a bit of hesitation, but refrains from saying what she really means. That getting pregnant right away might be a bit hasty considering they’ve really gotten back together just last night.

Yet even as that thought runs through her mind, she's painfully aware of the fact that she's smack in the middle of her most fertile days at the moment, which she realizes now is what's partly to blame for her current amplified libido.

But she also realizes that all this concern of hers comes just a little too late, because not only had she forgotten about Abel and Thomas in the lusty daze that was last night, but apparently any future offspring, or rather the prevention of such had completely slipped her mind too.

She's done the math in her head just a short while ago, knows how many days it's been since she's had her last period, and based on that, there's a very good chance she could already be knocked up this very moment. But then again, there's no reason for him to know that, because it's mere speculation on her part at this point.
"Me too, babe." He surprises her when he answers the question she couldn't bring herself to actually word out loud, and he does so with a happy smile on his lips.

He unfolds his arms, and steps towards her, reaching out for her hands, his thumbs rubbing soothingly over the back of her fingers, then the back of her hands too.

Jax looks right at her then, pursing his lips a little and as if he's finally figured out why this subject has her so worked up, he adds, "I still want that little girl, you know? Strong and beautiful like you!"

Tears prick at her eyes now and she quickly looks away from him, pulling her hand out of his to wipe at her face instead. Jesus Christ, she's so ashamed!

"Tara!" Jax says her name like a prayer, and reaches back out for her, framing her face this time to force her to look back up at him, won't allow her to look away. "It's alright." He reassures her that there's not a trace of anger left in him about what she's done. "All that shit's in the past, babe!"

He can see the guilt, the shame and hurt reflecting back at him in her green eyes, so he wants to make something perfectly clear, in case it wasn't clear before. "I forgive you!" He suddenly says, the look in his eyes matching the serious tone to his voice.

"Really?" Tara asks, her voice an octave higher again, on the brink of tears still. "Just like that?" She asks with such hesitance in her voice that it breaks his heart.

"Yeah, really." Jax reassures her nodding his head. They've both done so much damage to one another, it's time to let it go, move on. "Let's leave all of our sins in the past, start over, start fresh with a clean slate." He leans in and presses a sweet kiss against her lips for a long moment, before he pulls away again and looks right back at her, his blue eyes connecting with her green ones when he says, "I love you, babe."

Tara smiles softly, clearly still a little unsure if being forgiven could possibly be as simply as this, but she's holding his gaze, trying to appear as brave as he believes her to be when she answers him. "I love you too, Jackson."

She wraps her arms around him, and he pulls her into his arms as well, clinging to each other for a long silent moment. In love and finally back to the unadulterated bliss again they'd found themselves in since last night.

X

Author's Note: Thank you for the amazing response to my last chapter. I've fretted over it for a while, unsure about how well it would be received since I'm not used to writing sex scenes. But I was glad you all liked it, and in a way it made this chapter flow more easier again. So I hope you like this one too, and will leave me a few words. Thank you.
They blissfully continue to cling to each other. The echoes of their love declarations still lingering around them, while they just remain standing there, body's pressed against each other for a long silent moment even as the air in the room is beginning to grow heavy with desire all over again.

Tara pulls away just enough to look up at him, to meet his eyes and that is all it takes for Jax to frame her face in his hands again and place yet another scorching kiss against those perfect plump lips of hers, and she returns the kiss with just as much urgency, with her hands flat on his back drawing him closer into her.

His hands travel down to the small of her waist and he firmly grabs onto her, lifting her onto the edge of the bathroom counter with such ease as if she doesn't weigh a thing, and she can't help the little moan that escapes against his open mouth when he wedges himself between her thighs again. Jesus Christ!

She'd be lying if she said she wasn't just as turned on as him all over again at the moment, but still she's the one that manages to pry her lips away from his, bracing her hands flat against his chest to create some illusion of distance again, when there really isn't any.

"Jax." She huffs breathlessly against his ear, when his freed lips now shamelessly begin to travel across the skin on her neck instead. "I thought we were leaving." She tries to add as a halfhearted excuse, but judging by the breathy rasp to her own voice, she doesn't sound all that convincing to herself either, never mind the way her arms are suddenly wrapped around his neck again as if by their own accord.

Jax kisses and nips at her ear, his teeth gracing her earlobe before he blows some air against her wet kissed skin, making her shutter a little against him at the prickly sensation it causes.

"I'll make it fast." He rasps out the words against her ear, and even though he's now shamelessly begin to travel across the skin on her neck instead. "I thought we were leaving." She tries to add as a halfhearted excuse, but judging by the breathy rasp to her own voice, she doesn't sound all that convincing to herself either, never mind the way her arms are suddenly wrapped around his neck again as if by their own accord.

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She has one hand curled around the back of his head, guiding him where she wants his lips to stay, when she can't help but let out a soft little chuckle. "Liar ... you couldn't make it fast even if you tried."

She's telling the truth, after all the sex they've been having, he's a bit desensitized by now, making him last longer each time without even consciously trying to hold back anymore. Tara on the other hand seems to be having almost the opposite problem, she's feeling kind of over stimulated at this point and will probably climax more than once before he's even getting close.
"We'll see." Is all Jax utters in a lust filled voice in reply, completely undeterred by what she said, and reaches between them with just one hand, undoing the button of her jeans with a quick flick of his skilled long fingers.

His lips are back on hers, kissing her feverishly when he suddenly grips her by her hips and slips her ass off of the edge of the little bathroom counter again. He pulls away from the kiss, his hands stilling on her waist, pausing everything he's been doing to her for a moment, leaving her breathless, chest heaving, and a bit confused and needy looking up at him.

But then he surprises her when he reaches up, and tenderly runs his knuckles over her cheekbone, with his eyes locked on hers again, and his voice's sounding dark and hungry with need when he suddenly says, "I wanna be a little rough with you, babe."

Tara swallows the sudden lump in her throat when she notices the dangerous glint in his eyes reflecting back at hers ... and oh, what that look combined with his words do to her body! There's goose bumps forming all over, the little peach fuzz on the back of her neck is standing up, her nipples suddenly puckered, her core is throbbing with want for him, muscles pulled so taut she fears they might snap and every nerve ending in her body crackling with anticipation of what's to come.

She bats her eyes at him in the most innocent way she can muster, yet her cheeks are already flushing, and one corner of her lips is pulling upward in a little devilish smirk that completely contradicts the look she's giving him when she answers him.

"I'm all yours, Jackson." The words in itself sound harmless enough, yet in the current context they take on a whole other meaning, because they're basically her way of giving him permission to do what he wants with her, and if he wasn't hard as a rock already, those words from her just now would've definitely done the trick.

And of course Jax can't help the little smirk that appears on his lips now too, nor the little crinkles that are forming at the corner of his eyes when he narrows them a bit in obvious amusement and mischief. He just loves those contradicting sides of hers, the reserved yet smart innocence she has about her that she usually presents as a front to the rest of the world, which is inadvertently intertwined with the lust and thrill-seeking and rebellious side of hers that she tends to only let shine through to him, or with him around.

"Give me a kiss." He demands and she complies without hesitation, leaning up while he leans down and their lips crush against each other before both open their mouths to let the kiss turn more passionate again too.

Jax doesn't waste another second though, and promptly jerks her jeans down over her curvy hips, just low enough to expose her ass, then he abruptly pulls away from the kiss and meets her eyes for just a fraction of a second when he commands her in a gruff sounding voice to turn around now, but before Tara can even process what he just said, he has her already spun around and hastily bend over the counter and the sink in front of her.

Tara's breathing heavily in anticipation of what's to come, bracing herself with one hand on the counter, the other flat against the mirror where she's still watching him standing right behind her.

And it's all happening at a dizzying speed, it's merely taking him seconds really, as he's quickly undoing his belt, pushes down his jeans and briefs just enough to let his dick spring free, and then hooks his left thumb into her panties, the seam breaking with a snapping sound as he's pulling them aside impatiently and rough. Next he practically kicks her feet wider apart, positions himself just right and surges forward, thrusting all the way into her at once, letting out a grunt like sound when he does.
so that mingles in the air with her moans when he begins to move.

Tara's letting out the smallest of moans while she's watching him in the mirror, his eyes downcast and from her point of view she's pretty sure he's staring at the junction where they're connecting, watching himself slip in and out of her. But then he suddenly flicks the hem of her shirt up, off of her lower back to expose the crow, she can see and feel him trace the outline of the tattoo with his hand for a moment, and how his eyes zero in on it now instead, before he grabs a hold of both her hips and speeds up his powerful thrusts even more.

Then his eyes flicker up to the mirror, meeting hers in the reflection and he shoots her a satisfied little grin before he quickly shifts his focus back on the crow again, and at this point Tara finally closes her eyes and lowers her head in complete and utter surrender to him.

She's still bracing herself with her hands against the earth shattering movement of his hips, but is letting go in every other sense, letting herself be consumed by the feeling of him taking her like this, with fast and hard thrusts, that obscene sound of his skin connecting with her skin echoing through the small bathroom, and it's quickly proven to be enough for her to slowly fall over the edge for the first time.

They continue their love-making for a while longer, and Tara honestly doesn't know where he's even finding the strength or the stamina to keep at it like he does, pounding into her without losing neither speed nor rhythm. She has been feeling her second orgasm slowly building up for a while, and it's finally approaching its peak now, but at the same time she's feeling completely spent, almost thankful to be bend over the counter, because her arms feel too heavy, and she's so weak in the knees right now, she doesn't think she'd have the strength to keep up with him otherwise.

And as if on cue, that's when Jax grips her hips even harder, so hard in fact that she's sure she'll have two hand sized bruises appear by tomorrow morning, but in a sick and twisted way she loves that she can make him lose control like this, so lost in the moment that he's unable to control his own strength any more, and it also tells her that this time he's almost there to fall over the edge along with her too.

Her suspicions are confirmed when suddenly his hands leave her hips altogether and he yanks her upper body hard up against his instead. Her back is pressed firmly against his chest, one of his arms wrapped across her front in a vice-like-grip, holding her to him, molding himself against her while he's holding her in place, at the same time as the other hand quickly slips down her stomach to find and tease that sweet spot between her legs instead.

His lips are on her neck again, teasing her and kissing her between hot breathy pants, and before she knows it her core clutches and throbs around him, milking him, and she finally comes along with him, his hips jerking against her plump ass, spilling himself inside of her, when they both moan out loud in the moment of joint sexual release.

"Babe." Jax practically moans his pet name for her against her ear, still clinging to her, still lodged inside of her, but then he suddenly staggers back, still holding on to her, before he quickly reaches out and grips the edge of the counter and sink to steady himself, along with her, instead, before they almost toppled over together.

Tara watches him in the mirror, but quickly twists her head around towards him, to actually look at him face to face, concern edged in her facial features as well as her voice when she speaks up, "Are you okay?"

At that he actually lets out a little laugh now, a big happy smile on his face, blue eyes shining contently when he leans down and kisses her sloppily against her lips, still trying to catch his breath between the words when he answers her. "I'm fine ... I just ... just got a little lightheaded for a
Tara gives him a scolding look. "No more sex until you ate something. Doctor's orders." She adds that last part with a hint of a smile gracing her lips again, unable to keep the pretense up that she could possibly be mad at him right now, after the way he just made her feel.

"Yes, ma'am." Jax simply agrees and is looking sheepishly back at her before he leans in for another long lingering kiss.

X

Tara pulls the scarf tighter around her neck when the cold wind sends chills through her in the instant they leave the warmth of their motel room. The sudden coldness makes the way her body aches all the more noticeable to her, and she doesn't just mean the delicious soreness she can feel between her legs, but her body as a whole. Muscles feel heavy and sore now, and she's not sure if it's lack of sleep, lack of sustenance, or just the fact that she hasn't used some of those muscles since that last time she's made real love to Jax almost a whole year ago on the day she was almost murdered.

She watches Jax, as he pulls the motel room door closed behind them, giving it a quick jolt to ensure it has locked in place before he turns his attention back to her. Without another word, but with an unflustered little smile on his face he simply reaches for her hand, intertwining his fingers with hers and pulls her along beside him towards the little gas station with the attached diner on the other end of the truck stop lot.

Jax holds the door open for her to walk inside ahead of him and both embrace the warmth once more as their eyes start to scan around the small convenience store they enter through. There's all kinds of goodies to choose from, and Tara's already making a mental note of things to remember to pick up before they head back to their room later.

Jax reaches for her hand once more, and they walk on through, zigzagging their way through the little aisles to avoid other customers and follow the path of least resistance towards the other side of the building where the diner is located at.

His arm is curled around her shoulder, pulling her closer so he can kiss her lips several times, a happy blissful smile on both their faces while they're waiting in line to be shown to an empty table by one of the waitresses on staff.

They finally settle into a booth, shrugging out of their jackets, Tara taking off her scarf too, sitting across from each other and sharing looks between looking over the menu. Carrying on small talk about how the smell of food in the air is making both their stomachs growl, or about what sounds good and what doesn't on the menu, before the waitress shows back up and swiftly begins to take their orders.

It's already past noon by now, but the diner serves breakfast all day, so Tara just orders an omelet, with a side of bacon and a piece of toast, while Jax goes all out and orders himself some sort of breakfast platter that's meant for two to share and comes with all the fixings.

And Tara lets out a little chuckle when the waitress comes back to double check the order with him, but when she disappears, he looks over at Tara and smirks, before he says in his defense. "You said I needed to eat."

"I did." She nods her head in agreement at first, but then purses her lips trying to contain the smirk that's forming.
"I'm just following Doctor's orders here, and besides, I gotta get my strength back up for later too." Jax continues to tease with amusement shining in his blue eyes, loving the playful banter with her and he can't stop himself from adding. "What can I say, babe, ... you are wearing me out, letting me do all the work."

Tara scoffs at that, but it's all in good humor when she shakes her head at him and the comment he made, before she goes on the defense herself this time. "You know I've tried countless times to take the lead and do 'all the work' as you've put it, only for you, Mister-Control-Freak, to intervene and take over again."

"I know, you're right." Jax smirks when he replies, nodding in complete agreement with what she's just said, before he's letting out a little chuckle, bites his lip and reaches across the small table to hold her hand in his, and the look he's giving her now is one of pure contentment and joy, with just a tad bit of smugness mixed in. "I admit that I like being in control, but I think you like it too, don't you?" He gestures with his hand between them, pointing back and forth between her and him, when he adds, "It's our thing, it's how we work, babe, it's our dynamic."

"I guess that's true." Tara replies, a little sparkle in her eyes when she looks back at him from the other side of the table while reminiscent thoughts of their most recent sexual encounter flicker through her mind, and it makes her blush just a little.

Just then the waitress suddenly appears with their coffees, placing the hot steaming cups on the table in front of them, before she disappears again just as fast.

They both start to add some sugar to their cups and stir them, while their eyes meet repeatedly and Jax suddenly blurts out. "Maybe I'll let you take the reins next time."

Tara scoffs again at first, but then there's a little smirk on her lips when she replies. "I've heard that before, Teller ... and yet somehow it always goes back to you being the one in control."

"I just can't help myself with you." He replies, his baby blue eyes still sparkling mischievously when they connect with hers all over again, but his voice sounds entirely serious this time, and it's giving her that notorious butterflies-in-your-stomach feeling again, that he's been giving her since high school.

X

After they ate and paid their bill, they walk aimlessly around the little convenient store, doing a little shopping, but also trying to kill some time while remaining fully clothed for a change.

Tara's carrying a little shopping basket around, has half of it filled already with all sorts of junk food, from chips to sodas to cookies, and of course the little necessities she'd been dying to get her hands on too. She's got a grey beanie, to keep her head warm, a deodorant, a razor, a hairbrush, conditioner, some pretty smelling lotion, and some leave-in-conditioner too, most of these things she's planning on using right away when they get back to the room, to make herself feel more presentable again, and to tame that birds nest on her head, formerly known as her hair.

Suddenly Jax appears and steps up behind her, pressing a quick little peck against her cheek, hiding both his hands behind his back when she turns around towards him and he speaks up. "Pick a side, babe."

Tara's intrigued, putting the basket on the ground near her feet, hesitating only for a split-second in her decision to choose. "This one." She says, nods and points to his right arm, and he presents her with a matching bra and panty set, both of which she's in desperate need of.
It isn't particularly cute or pretty, has a logo plastered all over it that she doesn't recognize at first, but it is her size, so she takes it from him and gives it a once over. Then her eyes flicker up at him in question, because neither he or she has ever cared much about football in the past.

"Seattle Seahawks? Really?" She asks out loud and raises her eyebrows in amusement at him. "What's in your other hand?" She suddenly remembers to ask, and he presents her with yet another bra and panty set, this one with the Oregon Ducks logo on it instead.

"So, what do you think?" Jax asks, biting back the smirk caused by the less than thrilled expression currently on her face.

"These are my only options?" She reconfirms, her green eyes looking up at him in question again. Not only were they not very pretty, but kind of pricey too considering she didn't even like them.

"Beggars can't be choosers, Sweetheart. I've looked through every single isle in this joint, this is all they've got. It's either Ducks, Hawks or going commando? For the record, I'm fine with the latter." He cracks a little grin in her direction.

Tara sighs, ignoring his little joke altogether and puts both sets in the shopping basket sitting on the ground, before she picks it back up. "I guess I'll take both."

"We're leaving tomorrow morning." Jax reminds her, taking the basket out of her hand to carry it for her, draping his other arm around her as they slowly start walking down the aisle together, still looking around at stuff they might want for the long ride home tomorrow.

"I know." She nods in reply, but she's not daft, realizing what he's getting at. "One set's for today, the other one's for tomorrow."

He places a sloppy wet kiss right smack against her ear and between an outraged little gasp and giggles, she's trying to squirm away from him, but he's tugging her even closer to him, trying to annoy her a little, get a little rise out of her all the while grinning like a Cheshire cat when he says, "You won't need any for today." He lets go of her just long enough to tug playfully on her clothes to emphasis his meaning when he adds, "'Cause I'll get you right back out of these when we're in the room again." Then curls his arm right back around her neck, his hand hanging lazily off of her shoulder.

"Oh really?" Tara feigns disbelieve and wipes the wetness from her ear, giving him a little shove with her elbow too, then smiles up at him with the hint of some unspoken challenge, daring him to do his kiss version of a 'wet-willy' to her again.

But Jax isn't even acknowledging that she's expressing some doubt about his ability to charm her pants back off of her, when he simply adds, "You and I are gonna ride the rest of the day and night out in the buff, au naturel, until it's time to hit the road tomorrow."

"What about dinner?" Tara asks, keeping her voice level, but her eyes are twinkling, giving away the fact that she's thoroughly enjoying this exchange just as much as he is. "Aren't we gonna eat dinner?"

He's so stuffed after eating every last bite of that breakfast platter, just because Tara bet him that he couldn't. So he can't believe she's already thinking about their next meal again. "Good god, woman, how can you even think about food right now? I literally just fed you?" He teases her back in faux outrage.

Tara nudges her hips against him while they're walking, trying to get him off-kilter, "I mean later, smart-ass, as in tonight. I realize you just ate enough for two, but you should definitely eat something
again, you know, keep your blood sugar up. We wouldn't want another little episode like earlier in the bathroom to happen, when you got lightheaded, almost took the both of us down in a very, very compromising state." She gives him a pointed look.

"Fine." He concedes without any further argument, because he doesn't feel too manly about the fact that he almost passed out after sex, so she won't hear him argue with her about it.

A few silent moments pass between them as they're looking around the store. "Hey, babe, would you like to have dinner with me later?" He suddenly asks her in a very serious tone of voice.

"Yes, I would love to, thanks for asking." Tara answers in reply sounding just as serious, but then she has to hold back the laugh that's threatening to spill from her lips, when he adds. "I guess buying you dinner is the right thing to do considering you're letting me back in your pants."

Tara smirks up at him but is ignoring his words, and instead is finally bringing the conversation back to the starting point when she says, "Okay then, so we agree that I'll need clean underwear for our dinner date, hence, I'm buying both sets."

"Well played, Knowles, well played."

X

They eventually return back to the room, and Tara disappears into the bathroom with a bag full of things she'd just bought, and when Jax smirks at her and tries to follow her she banishes him to the bedroom with orders to 'cool it, Teller' and watch some TV - anything but porn - for a little bit and let her do her own girly-things in here. She even goes as far as to lock the door behind her, so she can be sure she won't be interrupted five minutes from now.

She takes another shower without him, taking her time working the conditioner into her hair and letting it just sit to do it's magic, while she proceeds to carefully shave her legs and under her arms too.

Once out of the shower, she now uses some of the leave-in-conditioner before she blow dries and brushes her long brown hair out again, much more pleased with the outcome this time around. She applies some of the nice smelling body lotion she's bought, letting it dry and soak into her skin a little while she brushes her teeth again.

Tara's snapping the tags off of her new underwear, quickly putting them on, and despite that she's not happy with the design, she's still glad to find that they fit her perfectly. She gets dressed all the way again, shoes and all, powders her nose, even applies a little lipstick and mascara and in the end is actually feeling happy with the way she looks, when she catches one last glance of herself in the mirror before she opens the bathroom door and steps into the bedroom with Jax again.

"Hey." He says looking up at her from his spot on the bed, remote control in hand, muting the sound of the sitcom he'd been watching, before he quickly puts the remote aside. "Are you done doing your girly stuff?"

Tara simply nods her head in reply when she sits down on the foot of the bed, near his feet, letting her fingers run across his toes over the socks he's wearing, smirking a little when he suddenly jerks his foot away, clearly she's found a ticklish spot.

She has to admit, she figured he'd be passed out in a deep slumber by now considering neither of them got a whole lot of sleep last night, but finds it actually really sweet that he's just been laying here, staying awake and waiting for her to reappear.
"So ... how do they fit?" He inquires, undoubtedly he's talking about the underwear, and smiles a little when she answers with a smile of her own. "Perfect."

"Good." He replies, before they look at each other for a long quiet moment until he suddenly sits up, leans forward and pulls her feet into his lap, taking off her shoes, one by one and tosses them to the floor right beside the bed.

Then he reaches out and grabs her hand. "Come here." He says with a demanding tone of voice, tugging on her hand, pulling her towards him, not letting up until she's back where he wants her, back in his arms, laying down right beside him, snuggled into her spot, with her head on his left shoulder and her hand playing with the barely-there-stubble on his chin.

"You smell nice. Like a girl!" Jax says, kisses her forehead and closes his eyes for just a couple of seconds, relishing in the feeling of being completely content, at peace with her right now, right here. But then his left hand that's wrapped around her reaches down, gently caressing the curve of her plump behind. "Hmm." He hums, before he mumbles against her hair, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking, babe?"

"Probably not." Tara replies rather dryly, but immediately has to smirk when his chest quakes as he's laughing out loud in response to her answer.

"Ouch!" He sort of yelps next, trying to imply that his feelings got hurt, but he's still chuckling a little and she's chuckling now too, looking over at him so their eyes can meet in obvious banter again.

He takes a deep breath, no longer chuckling, eyes trained on hers, but still clearly amused, if the big grin on his face is any indication, when he says. "Well, what are you thinking?"

"I'm thinking we should call our babies?" Tara says earnestly, her eyes never leaving his. "You're right." He nods, his eyebrows raised, and he lets out another little laugh before he adds, "That was definitely not what I was thinking when I was cupping a feel."

But he reaches for his cell phone on the nightstand beside him, it's fully charged now, but still has no reception and he hands it to Tara to find the number. He then pulls the corded phone on the mattress beside him, doing so rather awkwardly, since he remains laying down, and starts dialing when Tara reads Christy's number back to him.

They finally get to talk to both Abel and Thomas for a little while, each one of them taking turns talking, pretty much repeating the same stories over again when they tell them about the snowstorm, and being snowed in, etcetera, etcetera, of course leaving out the juicy parts for their boys. And in turn, both Tara and him are told about everything they did at Greg's house yesterday, and what they've been up to so far today with Christy and Jason, some of which was described in way too great detail by an overzealous Abel.

X

Jax and Tara are outside, off to the side of the parking lot, near the oversized motel sign, standing in what would normally be a grassy field, yet it is covered in a deep blanket of snow right now instead.

They're trying to build a snowman. His hands are freezing by now, because he lets her use his brown gloves, but he loves the way they look too big on her smaller hands. They're piling on the snow, then packing it down, trying their best to make the tall heap of snow resemble a snowman.

"I'll go find some sticks and rocks." Jax says and pushes his hands into the pockets of his jacket to warm them up a little while he walks off to the side, where he finds a few skinny branches on a
leftover tree stump, breaks them off and returns back to Tara side. He kicks his boots around on the snowy ground, hoping to find some rocks, or gravel, they can use for the eyes and mouth, happy when he does find just enough to complete their little project.

They work together to finish up the snowman, attaching the branches as arms, rocks as eyes and more little rocks arranged in an upward curved line to represent a smile. Last but not least, Jax puts a cigarette in place of the nose, and Tara scoffs at him, but he simply replies, "Sorry, babe, I'm fresh out of carrots."

They use Jax's phone to take several pictures of the snowman, even do a short selfie-type-video in which they both appear with the damn thing. They do all of that just to prove to Abel and Thomas that they did what they had promised them they would do in their phone conversation earlier. Abel's pleading still ringing in his ear. You have to build a snowman, daddy, you and mommy together, you have to do it!

After the pictures and video, they somehow end up in a snowball fight, but neither of them will admit being the instigator. Jax blames her for throwing the first ball, but she blames him for shoving a handful of snow under the front of her shirt first. So a fight ensues, with loud child like laughter and high-pitched shrieks from Tara, chasing after each other with snowballs in their hands, until they are both freezing cold, and eventually cease fire, coming to a truce when Jax promises her that she'll enjoy his ways of warming her back up.

X

Jax is laying flat on his front, stark naked, head turned to the side, eyes closed, humming out little sounds of contentment when Tara runs her fingers across the few un-tattooed parts of the skin on his back, while she's still marveled that he really did this for her, went through with it and left Sam Crow.

She leans over him, over his back, strands of her long hair tickling his skin when she places a few sweet kisses against his blackened out tattoo, before she lies down right beside him again on her side, facing him, running her hand over his short cropped hair for a second, watching him drift off to sleep.

But before Jax can fall into a deep sleep, Tara speaks up, awakening him again. "Baby?"

"Hmm?" He replies merely with a sound instead of an actual word, his eyes still shut closed as well.

Her fingers are now trailing his stubbly chin again, and she finally brings voice to the question that's popped into her mind just a few moments ago. "So ... am I suppose to have my crow covered up too?"

"What?" His eyes fly open at once, zeroing in on her face that's just a few inches away from his, wondering if he's actually heard her right.

"My tattoo, am I suppose to blacken it out too?" She rephrases her question.

"No." He shakes his head a little without lifting it off of the mattress, his voice sounding serious. "You don't." No way in hell will he let her get rid of that crow, his crow.

"But you said that it means I belong to a Club member, that I'm the Old Lady of a Club member, which I'm not anymore." She furrows her brows as a sign of confusion, because logic tells her it should be removed or covered up just like his.

Jax swipes his hand down his face, trying to think of what to say. "Your tattoo, it's a show of
solidarity, show of commitment to your man, to me." As soon as the words leave his lips, he already knows he worded it wrong, and this won't placate her.

Since his answer obviously sucked, he expects her to basically voice the same question again, but is surprised when she takes this little talk into another direction instead.

Tara realizes the irony of her next question, because she herself had kept that crow on her back during their eleven years long split, because at the time it was the one thing in her life that would keep her forever connected to him. So who was she to judge Wendy now? Could she really blame another woman for still being in love with this amazing man? But still, she can't stop herself from asking. "So Wendy still having her crow, that's because she's still committed to you?"

Jax almost wants to laugh at that notion, because to the best of his knowledge the only thing Wendy's ever been truly committed to is crank.

He lets out a heavy sigh, he is incredibly tired, but he still pushes himself up so he can roll onto his side to face her completely. And now that Wendy is being brought into the conversation, he suddenly wonders if it might just be the right time for him to come all the way clean, after all this conversation has been a long time coming. "Look, don't worry about Wendy. I honestly could've cared less when she got it, and care even less why she's still keeping it."

He reaches out to her, brushing her hair out of her face, before he's running his hand from her arm down to her waist, and leaves it there, in the dip of her curves. He's hesitating now since he knows he's about to be treading on thin ice here, trying to think of the right way to put it. "You've gotta trust me on this, Wendy's and your crow are not the same, because Wendy and you never meant the same to me."

He can see the puzzled look in her eyes, but also the realization of something he's said, and it's clear to him that she's catching on.

And just like he suspects, she won't drop it at that, and searches his face when she inquires even further. "What does that mean, her crow and mine aren't the same?"

"You've seen your crow." He states rather matter-of-factly. "The tattoo artist showed it to you before he got started. And I took a Polaroid right after." He reminds her of the day she got the tattoo, before he adds, "It's not the same, it's not identical to Wendy's, it's not identical to anyone else's either." He bites his lip, waiting for her to process that little bit of information, however vague he's still making it sound.

"Will you cut the crap and just tell me how come I've never noticed that it's different? And what exactly makes it different from the rest?"

"Hold up, just give me a second, babe." He says and pushes himself up high enough so he can look around the room and find his jeans. He quickly gets up out of bed and picks them off of the floor, reaching in his pocket for his phone.

Tara's propped up on her elbow, watching him climb back in bed beside her. "What are you doing?" She can't help but ask, getting impatient, wishing he'd just come out and tell her already.

"Lay down on your stomach." He instructs her, and when she gives him a puzzled look at first, he hold up his phone again, as a way of explanation. "I'm taking another picture so you can see it for yourself."

Tara complies and lays back down, allowing him to pull the sheet off of her, exposing all of the crow
so he can take a quick couple of pictures, which he does, and Tara sits up, pulling the sheet up over her bare breast again and waits.

He looks at the pictures he just took for a long moment, ignoring Tara's stare burning a hole through him with impatience, while he uses his fingers on the touch screen to zoom in, zero in on what he needs to show her. And even taking into consideration how old the tattoo already is, it's still so much clearer to see in a picture like this, with the HD resolution, instead of those crappy Polaroid or 35mm film they used way back when. But then he zooms back out, curious to see if she can spot the difference herself. After all, she's never gotten a really good close up look of the tattoo, considering where it is positioned.

"Jesus Christ, Jackson." She suddenly hisses in his direction. "You've had years to stare at the damn thing, can I get a look now?"

"Of course." He replies, but still lets out a little chuckle when he meets her eyes and sits back down beside her, "Here." He hands her the phone, but looks over her shoulder watching her take a closer look.

She glares at the screen, not zoomed in yet, when she huffs, "This would be much easier if I had a side by side comparison." Her mind goes to those 'find the difference' picture-games that Abel loves to do in his coloring books, but the boy has the advantage of two images right next to one another with the difference in them glaringly obvious, like night and day.

"You can't miss it, babe. And really, once you see it, you can't believe you've missed it all this time." Jax explains, pulling a cigarette out of the pack on his nightstands, lighting it and taking a drag without taken his eyes off of her face for even a second, wondering if he can pinpoint the moment when she finally sees it. And he's already preparing himself mentally for a bit of a fight, when she finally does.

"That's easy for you to say, I've only ever seen it in crappy resolution photos or with my back turned towards the mirror, craning my neck over my shoulder, not the best way to get a -" She suddenly stops her sentence mid-speech, and from the stunt expression on her face it's clear she's finally found the difference.

He's pursing his lips, trying so very hard to not let that grin slip on his face and takes another drag, but he's failing when she finally turns to look at him and says, completely stunt. "I can't believe you did this. You sneaky son of a bitch!" She says, sounding outraged and slaps him hard against his shoulder, and even though he's expected it, it still jolts him a bit, but other than that there's no real damage done.

Her eyes go back to the picture on the phone screen in her hand, staring at it some more, like she still can't believe this is real. Right there, on the tiny claw of the crow, holding the arrows, are three little capitalized letters right next to one another, J N T, standing for Jackson Nathaniel Teller.

"The tattoo artist showed it to you before he got started on you, babe." Jax says in defense, way too much amusement in his tone of voice and displayed on his face for Tara's liking.

She scoffs at him. "Yeah, he did, but he forgot to mention that my jerk of a boyfriend decided to add his initials to it, branding me like a piece of cattle."

He runs his hand over his Tara tattoo and replies in defense. "I've got your name right here on my chest too."

"But that was by your choice. Not me doing it behind your back." Tara answers him without missing
a beat, and Jax has got to admit that he's having a hard time reading her right now, can't quite figure out if she's really mad, or just toying with him a bit, making him sweat, and he's obviously hoping for the latter.

And that's his cue to turn up the charm if he wants to salvage the rest of the day and night with her, so he leans closer to her, draping his arm around her shoulder. "Come on now, babe, you remember that day you got tattooed up as well as I do. We were fucking crazy about each other, couldn't keep our hands off each other. So can you honestly say that you wouldn't have gotten the tattoo if you'd seen my initials before he got started?" He's using his low and earnest sounding tone of voice, and gives her the most innocent look he can muster, nudging her shoulder with his own for a moment.

She doesn't actually answer him, just clicks the screen on his phone off and meets his eyes when she hands it back to him and says, "You should've told me. That was kind of an asshole move."

"You're right." He agrees, but he wouldn't take it back either way, even if he could. "I just couldn't stand the thought that if you left me, that you'd just recycle my crow if you hooked up with someone else from Sam Crow. Like some of the other Old Ladies did, even my mom, after JT died and she hooked up with Clay." He tried to explain his insecure reasoning's behind it all and leans his forehead against hers. "Can you forgive me, Tara?" He waits for her answer that's taking a little bit longer than he thought it would.

"Yeah, I do." She eventually says, because she knows that in the grand scheme of things, his barely noticeable initials on her back seem downright trivial. Finally she even lets a little smile appear on her lips when she adds. "I still can't believe you did that though." And then she shakes her head. "And what in the world would ever make you think I'd hook up with someone else from the Club, like some Croweater."

"Not like some Croweater." He's quick to correct her. "I didn't mean to make it sound like that, sorry, that's not what I meant, babe. I was ... I was still a kid, an insecure kid at that, who was just so fucking afraid to lose you to someone else." He finally admits everything out loud what had been going through his head way back then.

Tara finally allows herself to relax against him again, letting him tug her closer in his arms when she looks up at him, and gives him a sweet little kiss against his lips before she says, "You'll never lose me ever again, baby, I promise!"

X

Author's Note: Sorry it took longer for this update. Had a hard time with this chapter, not really sure why. I hope the hard work paid off and you all like it enough to leave me a few words. Thank you so much in advance.
Chapter 42

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The motel room has been paid for, her rental car and suitcase has been retrieved, and Jax has just finished topping off the gas in his truck, when he sees Tara exit the gas station across the lot, walking towards him with a shopping bag containing some snacks for the road, and two steaming cups of coffee-to-go in her hands.

Jax rounds the truck to her side, opens and holds the door for her, taking one of the coffee cups from her and stealing a quick kiss, before he watches and waits for her to climb inside, so he can shut the door for her.

They quickly get back on the road towards home, the pavement right in front of them nothing but a brown sludgy looking mess, but the trees, hills and landscape they're passing by looks beautiful, downright stunning. The way everything is still covered in a thick blanket of snow, with icicles hanging off of the trees, shimmering and glistening in the sunlight, making them feel like they're passing through some kind of winter-wonderland.

And then there's the two of them, with this intensely passionate look in their eyes, only reserved for one another every time their eyes meet, coupled with that content little smile that seems to be permanently edged onto both their faces, hinting at yet another wonder in itself; their reconciliation, the salvage and rekindling of their relationship and marriage, the start of their long overdue happily-ever-after.

Jax takes a couple of sips from his coffee, before he puts it down again, just so he can reach over and keep holding her hand while he's driving, his thumb absentmindedly caressing her fingers, tracing over the stone settings of the ring he'd proposed with. He raises her hand up to his lips for just a moment to place a few sweet kisses there, taking his eyes off of the road just for a matter of seconds to shoot her a wink and blow her a kiss too, loving the way it makes her smile brighter in return.

His forehead wrinkles with horizontal lines as he tries to think about the last time he's felt this happy. The moment when Eglee had told him she had survived pops in his mind, then there's the day she finally woke up from her coma, finally marrying her ... if he thinks about it there's plenty of little moments here and there that could almost have the potential to qualify, but somehow each and every one of them ends up falling short because they had something going on alongside with them that tainted it all, most of which was pain and suffering, incarceration, the ins and outs of the life, of being part of the club.

"I can't remember the last time I've been this happy." He says suddenly. This moment right here and now, was definitely one of a kind, and the only thing he can think of that will make this even better is reuniting with their sons, Abel and Thomas, and be a real family again, ... and Jax was hoping that soon they could even be adding another Teller to their little family.

"I know, me too." Tara replies, smiling just as sweetly back at him and giving his hand a little squeeze too, before she leans forward and turns the radio up, because she likes the song that's beginning to play.
The drive home is long, but neither of them seems to mind. They stop occasionally along the way, for a much needed bathroom break, and to get some more coffee too, to help them stay awake. Tara even offers to drive for a while, but Jax won't hear of it, which honestly doesn't surprise her much at all.

They tease and laugh together, have long conversations about nothing and everything, listen to the radio and sing along to the songs they know, sometimes painfully off key, which only leads to more laughter shared between them again.

Overall, they have the best time together, because now that they've defined their relationship again, there's an easiness about them, a powerful carefree feeling they probably haven't truly felt like this since they were kids. And then of course there's also a sense of unity again between them too, the connection they'd lost a while back was finally forged again, stronger than ever, a real foundation to build a life and future together on, no longer just a faraway dream, but something solid and obtainable now, something real that nothing or no one could break this time around.

X

Tara's watching from the door while Jax tucks the blanket around Thomas a little tighter, and gives him a kiss on the forehead, before he turns and follows her out into the hallway, carefully closing the door behind them to not wake their finally asleep boys again.

They stand frozen in place for a moment and look at each other with intensity, a little smile tugging the corner of their lips upward, when Jax finally steps closer to her, closing the gap between them, frames her face with both his hands and kisses her long and passionately.

Tara's hands are wrapped around him, bringing him even closer to her, but have now worked their way between them, tugging open his belt, when Jax breaks the kiss and smirks at her, "Wanna start by christening your bedroom first, babe?"

"It's our bedroom." She replies, smirking back up at him, her fingers curling into the waistband of his jeans, both her hands grabbing a hold of him that way and pulling him along as she walks backwards into their room, her eyes never leaving his. The smirk on his face says it all, how much he loves the fact that she wants him just as much as he wants her.

Jax is quick to close and lock their bedroom door behind him, before they both fall into bed wrapped around one another, kissing, giggling and rolling around while they're trying to undress each other this way, while laying down. But eventually their mutual mission is accomplished, and they're both naked and ready to make love for the first time in their home, since he's shown up on her doorstep all those many months ago.

They love each other, make love, slow and fast, gentle and hard, kissing and tasting each other, hands roaming over the other's body, hard and demanding one moment, then softly caressing each other the next.

Their body's relentlessly grinding and thrusting, with this insatiable hunger and need to get closer and deeper, until they finally reach that mutual high once again and fall over that edge together. Pulling back from the kiss just to bring voice to their blinding pleasure, both of them letting out a moan, when Tara's core is fluttering around him while he's spilling himself deep inside of her.

He braces himself on his arm a little more, so he can pull back enough to look at her and meet her eyes. He's spend and very tired, but smiles back at her, because he's also so happy and satisfied too, but Tara's the one that reaches up and frames his face to pull him back in for yet another long lingering kiss. This is bliss, this is happiness. How they ever lost sight of this in the past, neither of
them knows, all they know is that they'll never let that happen again.

Eventually he pulls away and out of her, rolls to the side and tugs her along with him, holding her close against him, kissing her yet some more, while they cuddle, professing their love, only with actual words this time too.

"Let me make sure the front door is locked." He suddenly says, after they'd almost drifted off to sleep already. He pulls his arm out from under her, and sits, looking around the room for his clothes, finding his boxers somewhere in the tangled sheets and pulls them on quick, nothing else. "Need anything?" He asks and looks back at her over his shoulder, drinks in the image of her laying there, hugging his pillow to her bare breasts now instead of him, all sleepy eyed, satiated and flushed cheeks. All his!

"Hmm." She mumbles and opens her eyes just long enough to answer him, "A glass of water would be nice, ... please."

"A glass of water for the lady, coming right up." He says playfully and leans down to give her yet another quick kiss, before he gets up and leaves the room.

Tara sighs contently when she watches him leave the bedroom, then yawns, closing her eyes and rolls onto her back, stretching for a moment, before she opens her eyes again and glances over at the alarm clock on her side of the bed, and is surprised to see that it's just a few minutes past nine thirty.

After they'd gotten home they'd spend all their time with the boys, playing, coloring and laughing. She couldn't even pry herself away from their happy family time to even really cook, just threw a frozen lasagna Misses Ellie had made for a her a while back in the oven instead, leaving the house in a state of disarray tonight.

Because of that she really feels like she should get up and pick up the house a little, at the very least load the dishwasher and wipe down the kitchen, but all those thoughts are forgotten again when Jax walks back in smiling at her, her phone and her charger in one hand, a tall glass of water in the other.

"Thought you might need to charge that." He walks around to her side of the bed, hands her the water before bends down and plugs in her charger and phone for her, leaving it on the nightstand beside her.

"Thank you." Tara replies sweetly, loving how thoughtful he's being, and takes a drink from the water he'd brought for her.

He then rifles through his duffle bag he'd brought into the bedroom earlier, right after they'd gotten home, pulls out his charger, then fishes his phone from his jeans at the foot of the bed and plugs it in on his side. The screen lights up for a second up on plugging it in, and he can see that he has two missed calls from Bobby, and a voicemail too, but he doesn't hesitate, not even for a split-second, simply turns the screen right off again. Bobby will have to wait, he'll reach out tomorrow or the day after, because the Club was no longer his priority. With that thought in mind, he quickly settles back into bed beside her, stealing his pillow back from her in the process and pulling her back into his arms again as well. Tara and his boys are his priority now!

She cuddles right back into his side, into her spot, with her head on his shoulder, and Jax presses a kiss against her forehead, then pulls the sheet and blanket up and over them, he's reaching for the lamp on his nightstand and turns it off, pressing yet one more kiss against the top of her head this time. "It's so good to be home."

Tara knows he doesn't just mean the physical location, as in being back in this town, or back in their
apartment, but there's a much deeper meaning to his words, and she can feel it too, can relate to what he's saying. "I know, it's nice." Tara replies, nuzzling against his neck, kissing him there for a second, and reaches up to let her fingers run along his stubbly jaw just once more, before she drops her hand to his chest again, drapes one leg over his to get more comfortable, and then they both happily drift off to sleep within just a matter of minutes.

X

Tara rinses the last of the conditioner out of her hair, or at least she's trying to while Jax steps up behind her and wraps his arms around her midsection, stealing some of her water in the process.

He brushes her wet sticky strands off of her shoulders and neck with his hand, so he can nibble properly on her skin there, placing teasing little kisses that make her want to squirm away and out of this arms, but he won't let her, holding her close. "Hmm." He murmurs against her skin. "I wouldn't mind being woken up by you like today every morning from now on."

"I'll keep that in mind." Tara returns the grin that's now on his face with one of her own, but then encircles his wrist to stop his hand from slipping down between her legs again. "As much as I want to too, but we really can't, baby." She says and twists around enough to give him a real quick kiss against his lips. "We don't have time for round two, we've gotta get ready for work, and get the boys up too."

"I know, I know. It's back to reality." Jax says with a heavy sigh, then gives her ass a little appreciative smack. "But tonight, this is all mine again."

X

"I want to know all the dirty little details." Christy says, looking sheepish, sitting cross-legged in the chair on the other side of Tara's desk, picking absentmindedly at her salad.

Tara's pouring the little to-go cup of dressing over her salad and looks up at Christy for just a split-second, cheeks blushing slightly when she simply says. "We made love."

Christy scoffs, rolling her eyes, before she adds, "Yeah, I got that. I want to know where, when, how, who."

"Who?" Tara repeats, and smirks in amusement. "There was just him and I, we're not into some ménage à trois thing." She clarifies without missing a beat.

"I meant who initiated it, duh." Christy replies, giving her friend yet another amused little wink.

"I meant who initiated it, duh." Christy replies, giving her friend yet another amused little wink.

Tara sighs, picking at her salad without actually taking a bite, a little wistful smile on her lips now when she reflects back on the weekend. "I'm not even sure. There was just this electricity between us when we were dancing and kissing in the bar, like we both just knew it was going to happen once we got to the room, you know."

"And?" Christy pries some more, hoping for more details.

"And ... it was amazing, like ... like coming home to each other, honestly some of the best sex we've ever had." Tara replies, and finally takes a small bite from her food, swallowing it before she adds, "And probably the most sex we've ever had in a forty-eight hours time span too."

Christy smiles brightly, giving her friend a look of shared joy. "That's all I'm gonna get out of you, isn't it?" Tara just nods her head, giving her a smirk in reply, so Christy adds. "Figures ... well, you were long overdue in that department, so I'm happy for you. There just isn't a toy in this world that
can make up for the solid weight of a real man on top of you. Especially if that man looks like your husband."

"I agree." Tara says, much to Christy's surprise and they both have a good laugh about it.

The laughter eventually dies down and they actually sit and eat quietly for a few minutes, before Tara suddenly stops eating again and looks at Christy for a minute, contemplating if she should tell her friend this, or not.

"What?" Christy finally caught on to Tara's look of indecisiveness. "What is it?"

Tara clears her throat, and says, "We haven't been using any protection?"

"Oh shit." Christy blurts out before she can think of censoring it, then adds, "I mean, ... you could be ... preggers."

"Yeah." Tara nods in agreement, "And just two days ago that thought had me almost freaking out a little, and now I'm kind of hoping I am, or will be." Tara admits out loud for the first time. "Is that weird, that we go from not-being-together to let's-have-a-baby?"

"Hmm." Christy ponders over that thought, "If it's what you want, then no, it's not weird." She looks up from her food and meets Tara's eyes. "It is what you want, both of you I mean, right?"

"Yeah." Tara nods, a little smiling again, "I do want another baby with him. And he keeps saying he wants a little girl, but I honestly wouldn't mind having another little boy. I just love my boys so much."

A moment of quiet stretches out between them, as they both think about what Tara has just revealed to her, until Christy suddenly lets out a little chuckle, "Can you imagine Jax with a little girl though?"

She looks up to meet Tara's eyes, an amused sparkle reflecting back at her best friend. "I mean, he's really good with the boys, how he plays with them, and all that roughhousing they do, but what the fuck is he actually gonna do if he gets his wish? Can you picture him playing with Barbie or baby dolls? Or sitting down on a Saturday morning rewatching Frozen or Sleeping beauty with her for the hundreth time?" They both chuckle as those images play out in their minds for a moment, before Christy adds. "I guess if he grows his hair back out, she could brush it and braid it for him. So yeah, you should definitely have a girl, 'cause I would pay good money to see that."

X

The next two weeks came and went without a worry in the world, both of them got back to their normal working and family life routines too, and it couldn't have been any better if they'd dreamed it up. Everything about their family dynamic had finally clicked into place, and their relationship as husband and wife was thriving to new heights as well. Their blissfulness with each other was catching on and spreading like a wildfire, spilling over onto their boys, making them just as happy that mom and dad seemed so carefree with each other now.

As part of getting their shared lives in order, they also combined their finances into one account again, and with it, it finally gave Jax some insight in their financial situation, which was actually so much better than he'd anticipated.

It turned out that Tara's stroke of genius to rent this cheap two bedroom apartment, instead of renting a spacious house with a garage and a yard when she first got into town, had allowed her to not only put some of her money aside, but pretty much every penny he'd ever given her each and every month.
Jax wasn't fooled though, looking over her income and her expenses, he easily figured out why she'd done it. The truth was in the numbers, and he could see without her telling him outright that she'd set herself up to still make ends meet, even if the money he'd been sending her from Charming should ever stop coming.

Truthfully, at first it stung more than a little to know she'd ever doubted he'd continue to support her and his sons, but after all his other broken promises to her, he couldn't really blame her for being cautious. And as much as he still loved his former brothers, he himself had to admit that most of them sadly couldn't be counted on to continue to support their former significant others nor their offspring financially. He hated to admit it, but the general mindset around the clubhouse was more of the 'out of sight, out of mind' variety.

But for the sake of what they had now, he put his bruised ego aside, let it slide instead and never said a single word about it to her. She was just being smart, protecting her new life with their boys here, putting all her faith in the only person she felt she could count on at that time, herself! And knowing that only makes him more resolved to never give her a reason to doubt him and his devotion to her and their family again.

So now, with the money she has saved along with the checks he had just received from Charming, they'd easily have enough to not only buy a decent home outright, but would still have plenty of money left over to hold onto for a - very- rainy day, quite a nest-egg so to speak.

It was Christmas eve tonight already and back in Charming, everything about this holiday, or any holiday really, would've landed on Tara's shoulders alone, but this year, for the first time was very different. With no club calling and demanding Jax's presents at all hours of the day and night, and since neither of them were particularly religious either, it was all just about making it a fun memory for their boys.

And while anyone else seemed stressed to the max this time of year, for Tara and Jax it seems to have had the opposite effect. They didn't go overboard with decorations, but just really enjoyed picking out and setting up a tree together with the boys. Wish lists were made for Santa Claus, Christmas cookies were backed, and they'd all spend evenings cuddled up on the couch, watching holiday movies with the boys too.

For the first time in forever they were doing something normal families did around this time of year. Like tonight, they were busy with the last minute wrapping of presents for their excited little boys to put under the tree, or sharing a few of the cookies and the milk the boys had left out, so they'd really think Santa had stopped by for them, just to name a few.

Jax was sitting on the bed, still wrapping up the last of the gifts for their sons, when Tara quietly steps into the room. She closes the door and locks it again behind her, wanting to make sure the boys won't get out of bed again, come in and catch them both red handed with their presents, because it would ultimately ruining the surprise.

"Hey?" Jax suddenly says, and holds up a box of scented candles. "I'm guessing this ain't for the boys?"

"They're for Misses Ellie." Tara replies, and steps closer, sitting down across from him on the bed, hiding an envelope behind her back that Jax hasn't noticed yet. She watches him quietly, letting him finish his task, before she finally says. "I know we said no gifts, but I've got a little something for you anyways?" A small, almost shy, smile tugging on the corner of her lips.

Jax looks up then from the gift for Misses Ellie that he just finished wrapping, running his thumb over the last piece of tape, and puts it on the nightstand, so it doesn't get mixed in with the boys gifts,
and there's a smirk on his lips when he replies. "Good, 'cause I got a little something for you too."

"You do?" Tara asks in surprise, so much for their agreement to only get gifts for their kids, and not for one another.

"Yeah." He nods, and leans over, pulling the top drawer on his nightstand open and retrieves a plain white envelop, looking very similar to the one she's hiding herself.

"Funny." Tara says, smiling when she produces the envelope from behind her back too. "Looks like we both had the same person wrapping these." She attempts a little joke, likes the way he chuckles a little for her benefit.

"What's that saying? It's the thought that counts." Jax replies while he gets up from his spot near the headboard, settles back down right next to her near the foot of the bed instead, and drapes his arm around her back, before they exchange envelopes. "You first, babe." Jax says, he can't wait to see the look on her face, barely able to hold back the smile.

"Alright." Tara replies, and carefully starts to open it, giving him a quick puzzled glance when she pulls the two checks out, before her eyes actually realize the amount they're written out for. "Oh my god." She gasps, looking back at him with a stunned expression, meeting his blue eyes sparkling with pride, his face split in two by a smug, yet proud grin.

"Wow." She says, finding herself almost speechless at first, but then she looks over at him and his satisfied expression again. "That's a lot of money, Jax." She doesn't know what else to say really, and is thankful that Jax starts explaining on his own, without her having to actually voice the questions running through her mind out loud.

He points to the check with the much larger amount first, "That's from the sale of Diosa, after taxes. Lowen's sending me the paperwork." He adds that last part for clarification. Then he points to the other one, "And that's from the sale of the house, minus what we still owed on the mortgage, but we'll still owe taxes on that profit. It's legit, ready to be spend, all yours."

"I don't know what to say, Jax." Tara shakes her head, still baffled by the fact that he'd managed to make this much of a profit from not only selling his share of Diosa, but also their old home as well. But then his words come back and she corrects him, "Ours, not mine, it's ours!" She repeats again, before she marvels some more, never having held checks worth this much in her hands, "It's amazing. I'm so proud of you." She adds truthfully, because she is truly amazed and proud, before she leans into him, raising one hand up to palm his bearded cheek, giving him a sweet kiss, and a genuinely happy smile on her face when their eyes meet after.

"I thought you'd like that. I just wanted you to know that what's mine is yours, every last penny." Jax says, when he pulls her closer to him until their lips meet again, kissing her passionately for a few long moments.

When the kiss eventually lets up, he brushes her hair back out of her eyes, "I was thinking we could start looking at a bigger place, get each boy their own room, maybe a house with a yard?" He searches her eyes for some sign of agreement from her, happy when she simply nods her head with him, and smiles, so he adds. "We might even have enough to pay the rest of your student loans off at once, that way you'd save a shitload in interest alone." He'd just recently thought about those student loans from medical school she was still making payments on.

"Yeah, maybe." Tara vaguely agrees, and smiles at him gratefully, not only is she feeling immensely proud of him that he managed to walk away from the club with that kind of cash, but she's beyond touched that he wants to spend it on her like that. She won't argue with him about the fact that she
can't let him do that for her, at least not right now, not in this moment, because he looks so happy about the fact that it's a possibility.

So instead, her chin trembles a little when she gets slightly emotional about this caring and providing side of him, and she actually wipes a tear away when she says, "Thank you ..." She pauses, wiping at her watery eyes some more, before she lets out an awkward mixture between a sob and a little laugh, a tinge of embarrassment in her voice now at her own gift for him. "Well, shit, ... my present for you can never top this."

He looks and turns over the envelope in his hand for a second, his curiosity peaked now what this could possibly hold inside for him, "It'll top it if this contains some nude pics of you, just for me." He teases with a sly smirk and wink at her. "Could never put a price tag on something like that."

She lets out a chuckle while she shakes her head, "Sorry to disappoint, but it's nothing that scandalous, Teller." She shakes her head again, and he can sense that same twinge of embarrassment in her voice once again when she adds, "It's nothing, really ... cost me next to nothing, just a couple bucks in court fees."

"Court fees?" Jax's eyebrows are raised to new heights now, having not the faintest idea what it could possibly be. He meets her eyes, giving her one last quizzical look, before he quickly rips the envelope open and starts to read over the paperwork that had been held within.

Tara's facing him, biting her lips as she studies his expression, follows his eyes movement as they scan over the papers while he reads, and she can't bite back the smile on her own face when he finally realizes what he's looking at. His smile's suddenly so bright and big, it could light up the dead of night, but what she didn't expect is the way his eyes glisten suddenly when he looks back at her now, shaking his head, not just surprised, but clearly very choked up.

He wipes at his eyes, knows his voice will break if he even tries to attempt to say something, so he just hastily curls his hand around the back of her neck and pulls her in for a long and almost bruising kiss instead. Trying to convey in this kiss just how much this means to him.

He lets out a gasp, like he's coming up for air, when he finally pulls back from the kiss, and wipes at his eyes again, a little embarrassed himself now, glancing at the paper once more before he folds it back up as neatly as it had been, looking over at her. "Not even a hyphen this time, just 'Teller', huh?"

Tara shrugs, emotional herself, because he was. "I wanted the same last name as my babies and my man, my husband." Her voice breaks on the word 'husband' and she quickly wipes a tear away that's rolling down her cheek.

"This is ..." He starts, waving the folded up paper around, but then hides his face in his other hand, and she can see his chin tremble, trying to get his bearings back. "Fuck." He suddenly curses, "You really got me good." He says, fighting to keep his voice level, but barely able to succeed.

She knew her gift had meaning, or at least it did for her, but she hadn't quite expected his response to be this emotional. So she tries to lighten the mood with a crack at a joke. Her voice high pitched when she tries to ask, "So ... better than nudie pics?"

This finally breaks the ice and gets a little laugh out of him, and he sniffs while he uses the palms of his hands to wipe the tears away once and for all, glancing over at her, smiling, and nodding. "Yeah, so much better than nudie pics, Misses Tara Grace Teller." But then he cracks another teary smile, and corrects himself, "Doctor Tara Grace Teller."
"This ..." He tries again, finally glad that he got his voice back, and slightly shaking the folded up papers in front of her for emphasis, "This is priceless, babe, and next to our babies, and future babies, it's the best fucking present you could've given me." He leans in once more and kisses her more sweetly this time, "I love you so much."

Tara leaning her forehead against his, running her hand over his short hair for just a moment, before she frames his face and meets his eyes, "I love you too."

They both embrace in a hug, clinging needy to each other for a long moment, basking in this moment of happiness together, when Tara's the first to mumble against his ear. "Merry Christmas, baby."

Jax clears his throat, placing a sweet kiss against her cheek, he can't resist, "Merry Christmas, Misses Teller."

X

Author Note: Thank you for all the private messages and encouraging reviews. It means so much to know that my story is so well liked. So what do you all think about this chapter? Too cheesy? Please let me know, I'm interested to hear your thoughts. Thank you.
Tara was loading the last of the dirty dishes into the dishwasher, before turning the machine on. She quickly wipes down the water splatter around the sink, puts the dishrag down and turns around, leaning back casually against the kitchen counter. Her eyes are on her husband now, who's helping her clean up the mess their boys left behind after dinner, wiping down the table and the chairs. She folds her arms and glances over her shoulder at the time on the microwave, noting that it was just a few minutes past seven pm. She was planning to talk to Jax after their boys were asleep in bed, so they could do all this without interruptions, but now she's not sure she can possibly stand to wait another minute, let alone another hour, because she feels like she's been keeping this secret from him for too long already.

She takes a deep breath, thinking about it one last time, before she decides to just blurt out the words to him, and play it by ear from there. "I'm late, Jax."

Jax doesn't even look up from what he's doing when he replies, "Late for what, babe? You just got home thirty minutes ago."

But then there's a moment of déjà vu rushing through him, it only takes a split-second before he abruptly stops wiping down the table and turns to look at her in the instant her words sink in and he realizes what she actually meant.

He's searching her face now, noting the little smile that's tugging on the corners of her lips when she takes in the puzzled expression on his face, "How late are we talking here, a day or two?"

"A week." Tara admits, looking a little guilty by her admission.

"A week?" Jax repeats her words back to her clearly stunned, a disbelieving expression on his face now when he carelessly tosses the moist rag onto the table, wipes his hand down the side of his jeans to dry it while he takes the few steps over to her.

He reaches out for her, his hands caressing her shoulders, then slipping down to her arms when he's searching her eyes for more insight, a little smile on his face now when he finally says. "So you've known since right after Christmas, you've known for a whole week and didn't say anything?"

"Let's not jump the gun, 'cause I really don't know anything yet." Tara clarifies as she's reaching out for him now too, her hands slipping under the hem of his dark blue sweatshirt, fingers hooking around the belt loops of his jeans, pulling him close when she gives him a shy little smile of her own. "I just didn't wanna be the girl that cried wolf after just a minute."

He knows why she's still being cautious, because even if he has forgiven her, she hasn't forgiven herself quite yet. But he still can't help but smirk down at her at the possibility, "A week is a far cry from just a minute." His eyes flicker to the time on the microwave, before they return to connect with hers again. "Want me to go to the store, pick up a test?"
"No." She shakes her head, and twists around to the side just enough to reach into her purse sitting on the kitchen counter, pulling the test out she'd already picked up on her way home from work. "I already got one."

"Then what the hell are we still waiting for, babe?" He looks at her dumbfounded, then grabs her hand and pulls her along with him.

He stops to make sure the front door is locked and the chain is in place, since as of late Thomas has taken it upon himself to visit Misses Ellie down the hall on his own without telling anyone. Then they slip past their boys sitting on the couch, who are too preoccupied watching SpongeBob at the moment, and hurry into the bathroom.

Jax leans back against the sink, unfolding and glancing over the pamphlet that came with the test, while Tara unbuttons her jeans, quickly takes a seat on the toilet and proceeds to pee on the pregnancy test Jax has handed to her.

She puts the test down on the edge of the sink, cleans herself, pulls her pants back up and flushes the toilet, while Jax already looks down at the test, impatiently waiting for anything to happen, but nothing's happening just yet.

"How long does it say it takes?" Tara nods towards the instructions still in his hands, a nervous expression suddenly on her face while she turns to wash her hands.

"Two minutes." Jax confirms, pries his eyes away from the test itself, and pulls his phone out of his jeans pocket to set a timer real quick instead. It seems crazy that in a matter of two minutes their whole life could change.

"Let's wait over here." Tara tugs on Jax to follow her over to the door, where they won't be tempted to glance down at the test every couple of seconds, and drive themselves crazy. And at first he only reluctantly complies, but then his hands slip around her waist, his eyes meet hers, and he's smiling sweetly down at her as if the test being positive was a sure thing, already a done deal.

"You know, I could be late for a number of reasons." Tara can't help herself, not wanting to get her hopes up this easily, after all she's already in her mid-thirties, and as a doctor she's come across plenty of cases with couples who've tried for years and never gotten pregnant. So even though she's been feeling a little bit nauseous and had been having some odd migraine here and there, she starts to rattle off other explanations for the sudden lack of her period, "Could be a hormonal imbalance, could be a -.

"Hormonal imbalance my ass." Jax interrupts her scoffing at first, but then is outright smirking back at her just a moment later, amused by her search for another explanation, when in his mind there's clearly only one. "Babe, ... I've been working you over day and night, even forgone that blow job you offered the other day to not waste any Teller-Juice ..." He suddenly pauses, looking rather smugly back at her now. "Come to think of it, if the test is positive, I might cash in that rain-check for the blow job tonight, give your womb some much needed rest."

He grins and she playfully backhands him square into the chest, and gives him a disbelieving look when she repeats his word, "My womb, really?" They both laugh out loud at that, although Jax admittedly thought she'd comment on the Teller-Juice bit instead.

Then Jax curls one hand around the back of her head, his fingers disappearing in her long chocolate brown strands, holding her in place when he leans down to press his lips to hers. The kiss turns passionate and needy pretty much right from the start, a momentary distraction, but they're interrupted when the alarm on his phone chimes off, letting them know that the two minutes are
already up.

Their eyes meet hopefully for a quick second after they pull away from the kiss, before they take the few steps over to the bathroom sink together, and glance down at the test, noting the unmistakable two lines that indicate it's positive. She's really pregnant!

Jax smiles sweetly at her and picks the test up, giving it a closer look even though the result is glaringly obvious, and wraps his other arm around Tara, pulling her to him, a sweet kiss against her forehead, "I'm so happy right now, Tara."

"Me too, Jackson." She replies, looking back at him, taking the test from his hand to look at it up close herself.

He shakes his head to himself for a moment, the expression on his face suddenly serious, all the jokes cast aside while he's fighting back the emotions that threaten to overwhelm him now. Then he turns all the way towards her, wraps his arms around her waist and holds her to him, pulling her so tightly and lifting her that her feet actually come off of the ground, his face buried in the side of her neck when he mumbles, "I don't deserve you, I don't deserve how fucking happy you make me, babe."

Tara clings to him just as tightly, she thought the bliss they've experienced since they've truly reconnected couldn't possibly reach a greater high, but she couldn't have been more wrong.

A tear slips from the corner of her eye and rolls down her cheek, dripping onto his shoulder and disappearing in the dark fabric of his shirt, when she lets herself envision the future they have ahead of them now. Happily married, committed to each other and this new life they've build here, with two beautiful boys and another little one on the way, and most importantly without the doom of the club looming over every aspect of it! At this moment, she felt all those dreams her nineteen year old self had given up on all those many years ago, were now coming true after all!

X

About one month later ...

Tara takes the few steps up and walks into Baker's Automotive Repairs, greeting the familiar face of the pretty receptionist Emma with just a simple but friendly nod, which the slightly younger woman returns with just a nod and smile of her own, since she's currently in the middle of a phone conversation with a customer. But she still takes the time to point towards the bays, letting Tara know Jax is working on a vehicle on the floor and not in the back stocking parts at the moment.

Tara turns towards the big glass window overlooking the garage bays, when her eyes land on Jax bend over the engine compartment of a grey four door sedan, with his back partially turned towards her. But when Greg happens to look up towards the front office and sees her waving, he quickly taps Jax on the shoulder, and nods in her direction, telling him that someone's here to see him.

Jax turns and looks up, smiles sweetly when he sees Tara raise her hand in a shy wave at him, and he practically shoves his wrench into Greg's hand, telling him to finish what he's been working on, before he makes his way towards the front office to greet her in person, swiping some of the grime on his hands down the overall he's wearing while he walks.

"Hey, babe." He smiles, genuinely happy to see her, leans in to kiss her, but doesn't touch her with his stained black hands.

"Hi." Tara answers just as sweetly when she pulls back from the kiss. "I gotta talk to you. I tried calling, but it kept going straight to voice mail." She sort of whispers, not wanting to interrupt
Emma's phone call.

"Sorry, I dropped my phone this morning, busted it, can't even get it to turn back on." He explains, then nods to the door that leads towards the bays. "Let's go talk in the break-room." Jax adds, opens and holds the door to the garage for her, throwing a nod over his shoulder back at Emma who's still on the phone, before he follows along behind Tara.

Jax pulls the door to the break-room closed behind them, trying to drown out the general loud noises from the garage so they can actually carry on a conversation without having to raise their voices.

"Everything alright?" He asks immediately now that they're alone, and steps over to the sink, starts the hot water and pumps a generous amount of the grainy heavy duty hand cleaner from the gallon sized orange container into his palms, trying to wash away the greasy grime from his hands, before he glances back at her over his shoulder awaiting her answer.

"Did Gemma try to call you? Or anyone from the club?" Tara asks with a hint of hesitation, setting her purse on one of the chairs, but remains standing herself, leaning against the kitchen counter behind her instead.

Jax's eyebrows furrow in confusion. "No." He shakes his head, "Well, for one, I blocked her number a while back, and like I said, my phone's busted." He turns the water off, reaches for the towel to dry his hands before he spins around to face her all the way, searching her face for a reason behind her questions. "Why? What's going on?"

Tara lets out a sigh, "Margaret called me, said Gemma called her at St. Thomas, desperately trying to figure out how to get a hold of me. It's about her dad, your grandpa Nate."

"What about him? Is he alright?" Jax asks, unzipping the top part of his work coveralls, before he slips his arms out, but then ties and knots the long sleeves in the front of his waist, so the garment doesn't fall off of his hips.

He listens to Tara explain what happened, while he walks over to the fridge, pulling two chilled water bottles out and hands one to her which she takes, before he opens and takes a sip from his own. "I guess your mom is over there, wanting to visit with him, but they won't let her 'cause she's not on the allowed visitors list, and I'm still listed as his key conservator."

"Oh shit." He responds at first, but then there's a little smug grin that appears on his lips before he adds, "Bet my mom's fuming, ready to blow a gasket." He suppresses the urge to laugh at the thought though, and instead asks, "So now what?"

"Now I gotta drive all the way over there, straighten everything out." Tara replies, knowing already he won't be happy about that, and truthfully she isn't happy about it either, but knows it needs to get done.

"No. No way." Jax shakes his head right away. "Can't you just call 'em? Handle it over the phone?" He questions the first thought that pops into his mind out loud.

"Trust me, I tried, baby. I talked to the receptionist at Saint Paul's, and some guy in charge, told them I could fax or email a copy of my driver's license, proof that it's really me, but because I moved out of state, my address, phone numbers and place of work changed, and on top of that I changed my name too, they won't allow me to do anything over the phone. I gotta go up there in person with all the paperwork, so I can take myself out of the equation, and make your mom his conservator instead." She explains as best as she can, but the expression on his face speaks volumes. He does not want her meeting up with his mother on her own.
"I don't want you going alone, but I can't get out of here today, Baker's out of the office, which means I've gotta get the inventory done myself, get the part orders to Emma by three this afternoon."

He shakes his head at her as he rattles down his to-do-list, throws a nod in the direction of the door that leads back out to the garage, "And you've seen that every bay's full, got a bunch of walk-ins this morning, appointments lined up all day too. I can't." He shakes his head again for emphasis.

"It's just an hour and a half drive to get to Worden from here. Three hours total to get there and back, maybe add thirty or forty minutes to get the paperwork straightened out, so ... so if I leave now, I could be back home and have dinner ready, before you even get off work at five." Tara tries to reason with him, because as much as she doesn't want to see Gemma either, she honestly just wants to get this taken care of, wants to get this over with and sever the last remaining ties to her mother-in-law for good. "You know the longer she's gotta wait, the more pissed off she's going to be."

"Fuck her!" Jax blurts out even to Tara's surprise, his face suddenly distorted in real anger when he rambles on. "None of that shit would've even happened if it wasn't for her."

Tara looks at him confused for just a second but he's quick to explain what he means, sounding angrier with each word that's rolling off of his tongue, because since he's cut ties with his mother, he's had plenty of time to think about Gemma's actions of the past. "The club had Zobelle fucking cornered, so if she would've just stayed put with you, like she was told, instead of going after Zobelle's daughter herself, then that ATF bitch would've never framed her for Edmond's murder, which means Cameron wouldn't have taken Abel, Sack would still be alive, she wouldn't have had to go on the lamb, my grandpa's caretaker wouldn't be dead, and he wouldn't be in a fucking home with you as his conservator in the first place."

He meets Tara's eyes and nods his head at her, a knowing look in his eyes and Tara swallows the lump in her throat at what he's not saying out loud but is merely wordlessly implying, his guilty and heartbroken expression speaking volumes loud and clear. After all that wreckage, I pushed you away with Ima, left for Belfast without you, Salazar taking you, almost killing you, and Thomas along with you. "Everything that happened was a ripple effect of her fucking actions, so I don't give a shit if she's pissed that she has to wait around for you."

"You're right." Tara replies nodding her head, meeting his sorrowful eyes with matching ones of her own at all the horrible outfall of Gemma's actions. "But I just ... I need to do this, Jax. I need to cut the last ties that I have with your mother, get it over with and leave it in the past. And I'm not here ... I mean, I didn't come here asking for your permission to let me go, baby, but that being said, I don't like the thought of you being pissed and us fighting, because I'm going to go either." She's searching his face for a reaction, not liking the scowl that still lingers as he swipes both his hands down his unshaven face when he's glaring at her with steely blue eyes.

Tara was suppose to have a day off today, spend it with Thomas, and Jax knows that, so she quickly adds, "Misses Ellie's watching Thomas, she'll get Abel from school later too, and she'll keep them until one of us get's home." In case his next point of argument would be about 'who's got the boys'.

He sighs heavily, shaking his head to himself for a long moment averting her eyes now, but then finally looks up at her and meets her eyes once more when he steps closer, right in front of her and reaches out, taking both her hands in his. "Don't get into it with her."

"Okay, I will." Tara agrees, smiling gratefully at him.

But Jax isn't done just yet. "If she brings up JT, or the letters, won't leave you alone about it, just stick to the story that I already sold her. That I called to check on Trinity, Maureen asked if I got the
letters, and during the conversation she told me about Gemma's involvement in JT's death. Maureen is the one that sold her out. You had nothing to do with it, you merely confirmed it when I continued to press you about what Maureen had said, that's it. Promise me, babe."

Tara nods her head, "I promise. I'll avoid talking or arguing with her, you won't have to worry. Besides, I don't think she'd be stupid enough to start a fight in your grandpa's nursing home. I mean, he's all she's got left at this point, I don't think she'd risk getting booted out of there."

Jax scoffs for a moment, he's not sure what his mother would still risk at this point. "Just be careful."

He frames her face now and kisses her sweetly, before he pulls back once more, meeting her eyes with a peculiar smirk on his face now, when he asks out loud rhetorically. "What happened to the good old days when wives not obeying their husbands was punishable by law?"

Tara rolls her eyes at him, and purses her lips, barely able to contain the smirk of her own now as she's wrapping her arms around his neck, and replies with a heavy dose of sarcasm, "Right, the Teller's, law-abiding citizens extraordinaire."

He chuckles at that, "Touché!" But then smirks once more, one hand lightly patting her ass when he says, "Maybe I'll just have to bend you over my knees when you get back tonight, take the law into my own hands, Misses Teller."

Tara laughs out loud at that, "I'd like to see you try, Mister Teller." She teases him back just the same.

"Don't tempt me, babe." He's smiling so brightly now at their playful banter and leans down and kisses her deeply once more, before he releases her from the kiss just to further instruct her with a more serious tone of voice again after all. "Keep me posted, when you get there, when you leave, just text Greg, alright? And I'll stop at the store after work, and I'll text you when I've got a working phone again, okay?"

"Yeah, okay." Tara agrees, running her thumb across his bearded chin as she smiles up at him. "Can we agree now that protective phone cases aren't just for pussies, and will you - for the love of god - get one this time, please?"

"Fine." He concedes rather easily, because the phone and his previous lack of a case was the least of his worries at the moment.

"Will you walk me out to my car?" She asks sweetly next.

"Of course." He replies, and waits until she grabs her purse from the chair again, then reaches down for her hand, placing a quick kiss to it, before they walk hand in hand out to the parking lot together.

The next cars that are about to get serviced are being pulled into the bays, and because of that two of the big garage doors just happen to be open while he's framing her face with both his hands and kisses her passionately for a long couple of minutes, standing still beside her open car door. His coworkers begin to whistle, hollering loudly and teasingly at the sight, Tara's blushing a little, while Jax merely smirks and flips them off, before he holds her driver's door open for her until she slips inside.

"Drive carefully, please." He urges her once more. "And for the record, I don't like this at all." His face is suddenly grim again.

She reaches up from her seated position in the car, palming his cheek while he's leaning down to kiss her once more, "I know, don't worry, I'll be back before you even know I was gone, I promise."
Other than the mild case of nausea and her occasional headache here and there, the drive east to Nate's nursing home on the outskirts of Worden Oregon is rather uneventful, and as promised, Tara sends a text to Greg as soon as she gets there, while she's still sitting in the car, so he can pass it on to Jax that she's arrived without incident, safe and sound.

To say that Gemma is not happy about how everything has played out is an understatement, but Tara knows her mother-in-law enough to expect no less, and tries her best to follow Jax's advise to not engage in an argument that she knows will ultimately lead nowhere good for either one of them. She matches Gemma's smartass remarks with curt but to the point answers, and goes on about the task she's come here to accomplish, not willing to engage in a hypothetical pissing contest.

So instead of arguing, Tara is just focusing on filling out the necessary paperwork to transfer the conservatorship over to Gemma instead. She sighs in relief when the receptionist gives her an approving nod and hands all the necessary paperwork she'd had to bring back to her, which Tara quickly stows away into her purse, so she can finally get back on the road to head on home.

Her final goodbye's from Gemma are even more awkward then the nonexistent greeting they exchanged up on her arrival. It very much feels like the rift between the two women runs even deeper than ever before, now that Jax has cut his mother off completely by severing all ties with the woman who'd raised him.

So neither woman even bother's with a faux farewell or other words in place of a proper send-off, they merely part ways in the most literal sense of the word, grabbing their purses off of the counter and turning on their heels, as if they'd never known or even loved each other in the past.

But ultimately it's Tara that glances back over her shoulder one last time, listening in as the receptionist informs Gemma that her father Nate is in room eleven, down the hall to the left of the reception desk, and Tara can't help but freezes in place while she's watching Gemma's retreating form, until she rounds the corner and is finally out of sight for good. Good riddance!

Tara can feel another bout of nausea coming on, and hurries out of the building to get to her car, where she has a open box of saltine crackers sitting readily available on the passenger seat. Damn you, morning sickness, ... and damn you, Jackson Teller!

She quickly settles into the driver's seat of her car, leans back and closes her eyes for a long moment, letting the worst of the sickening feeling subside. She finally reaches over to her box of crackers and slowly eats one or two, before she's chasing the dry crumbs in her mouth with a sip from her water bottle to help it all go down a little easier.

Her fingertips are massaging her temple, a vain attempt to ease some of that migraine like headache she's been dealing with these last couple of days. The blinding pain seems to randomly come and go at its own will, and doesn't really leave her much of a choice other than to power through it and deal with it, since it tends to rear its ugly head at the most inconvenient times imaginable, like the other day smack in the middle of her performing a surgery.

When the worst of the pain subsides once more, Tara fishes her phone out of her purse and quickly shoots Greg another text for him to pass along to Jax, letting him know that everything's been taken care of, and she's getting back on the road home right this minute.

She connects her phone to the charger, pulls up the maps app to help her steer this car back in the right direction, before she finally buckles up and begins to pull out of the parking lot.
Then, just barely catching it out of the corner of her eyes when she glances in her right side rearview mirror, she sees Gemma one last time, pushing her father Nate in a wheelchair on the sidewalk out front of the building, and it's then that the searing pain in her head comes back with a vengeance she's never experienced before.

Tara stomps on her breaks and brings her car to an abrupt stop, having already pulled halfway out onto the main road, but she can't help it since she can't help but press her eyes shut, finds herself with no other choice. She can hear a car honking loudly in protest, barely able to swerve around the front of her car to avoid a collision, but Tara's in way too much pain to give it the proper acknowledgement of shock.

She lets go off the steering wheel instead, grabs desperately up to her own head as if that could somehow help ease some of the crippling pain and lets out a cry to bring voice to the agony she's feeling, when her memories from that fateful night of her attack come back to her all at once. Gone one moment, then there the next, all in a matter of nanoseconds.

Another car honks loudly, comes to a screeching halt right before it almost plows into Tara's drivers side, and that's the moment when Tara finally comes back to, tears streaming down her face when she glances in the rearview mirror one last time, seeing a stunt Gemma that has obviously recognized her car and seen her two almost collisions unfold in front of her very eyes.

But Tara knows now what her mother-in-law has done, she knows the whole ugly truth now, as unbelievable and painful it may seem, so she finally manages to gather her wits, shifts the gear back in drive and peels out of the parking lot to speed away.

X

Tara ends up parked outside the nearest police station she can find with the help of her GPS, but instead of going inside and reporting the crime she's finally regained a memory of, she's been sitting here for god knows how long, helplessly crying, struggling through her inner turmoil and at a loss of what to do now.

She's sick to her stomach, literally, had to open the door already and threw up on the pavement right beside her car.

She's also clutching her phone, ringer and volume turned off, yet unable to keep from checking the screen, to see the countless messages and phone calls she's ignored this far, the first few from Greg, or rather Jax via Greg's phone, but a while ago from Jax's number too, clearly he's gone and gotten another phone already.

If his messages are any indication, he's desperate to hear from her, that much is clear. And she feels so bad, so guilty and ashamed, because she can only imagine what Jax must be thinking right now, probably worried sick about her, wondering where she was, why she wasn't reaching out, and what has happened to her.

But at the same time she knows she can't talk to him, she just can't, at least not right now. Not when she's so clearly at a loss of what to do, of how to handle this. Her head hurts from trying to figure it all out, what to do so the least amount of pain will be inflicted.

She's not scared of Gemma, that's not even a real concern right now, but she's scared of the consequences of the truth coming to light. The consequences to their newly found happy life and future, and what it will mean for them as a couple, as husband and wife, as parents, and as a family.

What will he do if she tells him the truth? Would he even believe her that the memory just
miraculously came back to her? Or would he maybe doubt her after all, because the idea of Gemma being the one was too outrageous, too cruel to be true? If she wouldn't remember it now as clear as day, she wouldn't believe it herself, so how could he?

But what if he did believe her? Would he follow through on his promise to end the person who's done this to her? And could she even let him do such a thing? Stand by in the name of revenge and let him murder his own mother? How could he come back from something like that? How could they come back as a couple?

Or what will the police do should she decide to finally walk inside and tell them first instead? Could it be as simple as making a report? Would her testimony be enough? Would they rush over to the nursing home with sirens blazing and arrest her on the spot? Or would there be an investigation first?

And then what? Would Gemma get out on bail? Back to square one to be hunted by her own son, or forever on the run, leaving not just Gemma, but her herself to live a life that would require constant looks over her shoulder and living in fear?

More than anything she wishes she'd know what to do right now, but she just doesn't, because every way she spins or twists this, it somehow all ends the same, in heartbreak!

She knows that this will crush him, it'll break Jax's heart. There is no pretty other side!

X

This is one of those times that Jax wishes he was more tech savvy, and right now as he's practically pacing around the apartment waiting for Jason to show up, he vows to himself that he'll pay more mind about that stuff from here on out. He's smart enough to grasp it, that wasn't the problem, he's just never had much interest in that sort of thing, which he regrets so deeply this very moment.

The doorbell rings, and he's quickly buzzing their mutual friend inside, pulling the door to the apartment open impatiently, waiting for Jason to make it up the stairs.

Jason has already shrugged of his jacket before he's rounded the corner of the staircase, and after a mere 'hey' in greeting, he quickly follows Jax inside, closing the apartment door behind them with a bang, heading straight for Tara's laptop already running on the kitchen table.

Jax has explained the situation to Jason in detail on the phone already. How Tara's not answering her phone, has not been replying to calls or texts for the last couple of hours. How the nursing home says she left hours ago, and that the older Misses Teller stayed behind with her father, eliminating Gemma as a possible culprit of sorts. In his desperation he's even gone so far as to call the police, but she hasn't been missing long enough to file a report, nor have there been any reports of accidents involving the make and model of her car either in the greater area between Medford and Worden.

But then he'd remembered something from the night they'd had the fight about her going to that medical conference in Boise with John. How later that night he'd asked how she'd managed to find him so quickly, in Old Joe's Tavern, a bar clear across the other side of town, and she'd slyly admitted that she'd used an app to track the location of his phone. Which in turn had led to a whole other discussion then about why he'd stuck it out with those old yet reliable prepays for as long as he had, because getting tracked down that easily wouldn't fly in the outlaw kind of life.

So now, here was Jason to the rescue, who after just a few keystrokes on her laptop managed to find which email address Tara was using for her iTunes account. And after fruitlessly trying out several different combinations of the boys' names, initials and birthdates, they gave it a try with a few variants of Jax's name, initials and date of birth, until finally they'd cracked her password as well,
they were in!

Jax's heart was beating out of his chest, when the so adequately named 'find iPhone' app on Jason's phone zeroes in on her location before his very eyes. Jason zooms in closer, changing the settings around until it not only reveals the closest nearby street to her location, but that she was apparently right by the Klamath Falls Police Department. The one he'd called just a little while ago to ask if there had been any accidents in the area.

"What the hell?" Jax curses under his breath, not really finding a logical explanation why her phone would be at this police station now, yet no one was answering it.

Had she been a victim of a crime of some sorts? Her phone brought to the station in a evidence bag? Had Juice been stalking her, followed her out east, waiting for the opportunity to finish her off? Or had someone else targeted her, because of her ties to the MC and him?

He can't stomach the thought of something else having happened to her yet again. His mind of course goes to the baby too, hoping and praying that they were both alright, and found whole. How could he have been so reckless and let her leave on her own? He had a bad feeling about it, but didn't push her on it because he didn't want to upset their newfound happiness by starting a fight about her staying put.

"Maybe her phone was lost, or stolen, and someone turned it into the police." Jason tries to offer, but the not so well thought out suggestion does nothing to ease Jax's worried mind.

"She'd still have made it home by now." Jax replies without missing a beat.

"Right." Jason agrees, a lost or stolen phone wouldn't have derailed her return trip by much.

Jax quickly grabs the keys to his truck from the table now, meeting Jason's eyes. "The boys are still with Misses Ellie, they're gonna ask where I am, and where their mom is." The latter the reason why he couldn't bring himself to pick them up already, because he couldn't lie nor break their hearts with the truth that he didn't have the faintest idea what has happened to her. How could he tell his boys that he didn't know where their mother was?

Jason just shrugs, "I'll tell them you had someplace to go, that I'm not sure where, but not to worry, because you'll be back, ... how's that sound?"

"Yeah." Jax nods, because it's the best available answer to placate those boys, for now at least, until he knew more.

"Go. Find her." Jason urges him on, knows he's feeling the guilt of leaving his boys in the dark like this. "I'll check in with Christy once she's done with her surgery, see if Tara's called her at all. And I'll call the local station here again, see if they can reach out to Klamath Falls PD and maybe find out something they wouldn't -.

Jason's words are cut short when Jax's phone rings, the number showing on the display isn't one he recognizes, but he does recognize the 541 area code for Klamath Falls, and quickly answers it with an rather impatient sounding. "Yeah?"

"Is this Jackson Teller?" There's a unfamiliar female voice asking on the other end of the line.

"Yes, it is. Who's this?" Jax asks, his heart in his throat, closing his eyes, bracing himself already for the horrible news that he fears he's about to hear. Please god, don't let anything have happened to her!
"Mister Teller, my name is deputy Reid, I'm with the Klamath Falls Police Department, and we have your wife, Misses Tara Teller, here with us, and we'd appreciate you coming in for questioning?" The unknown voice rattles off rather quickly, and even though he's completely baffled by what's going on, why Tara's at the station, or why he needs to come in, but then he's also so utterly relieved too, because if she was hurt or worse, she'd be at a hospital instead.

But still, he can't stop himself from asking, "Is she alright? Did something happen to her? I've been worried sick, she's been missing for hours, and she's ..." He hesitates for a second, but then blurs it out after all. "She's pregnant. Can I ... can I talk to her?" He's trying to ignore the stunt expression on Jason's face. Tara and him had agreed to keep the news about the baby under wraps for now until she was a little further along, not even Christy was in the know.

"I'm sorry, she's giving her statement right now. She's not physically hurt, but she is very distraught, and it would be very helpful if you were here."

"Yeah, alright." Jax tries to make sense of it all, but can't no matter how hard he tries. "I'm all the way in Medford, I'll be there as soon as I can. But ... does she need a lawyer? Is she being charged with something? Or is this about Juan Ortiz? I mean, Jesus Christ, can you tell me anything about what's going on with my wife?"

"Your wife is not being charged with anything, and neither are you. She's here voluntarily, and we would just like to follow up with you about what happened, anything you could possibly add to her statement? But that's all the information I can give over the phone right now. I'm sorry."

"Okay." Jax lets out the breath he's been holding, shaking his head in confusion, so glad to know she's alright, but still so utterly lost and wondering what the holy fuck is going on. "I'll leave right now."

X

Author's Note: First off, thank you for the awesome reviews and private messages. It's so encouraging to keep writing. As for this chapter, it's been a long time coming ... 43 chapters to be exact, and Tara finally remembers. What is your thoughts on this? And she's also pregnant again, hope some of you are happy to hear that too. Please leave me a few words, let me know your thoughts. I can't wait to hear from you, thank you.
Chapter 44

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Jax is speeding down the interstate towards Klamath Falls, too lost in his thoughts to barely even register anything around him. He's just going through the motions, driving like on autopilot. The cautious side of him who'd normally take notice of little details is taking a backseat now to his urgent need to be reunited with his wife, as he pushes his Dodge Ram pickup to its limits.

There are a million little things running through his mind as he drives, countless scenarios that might've led up to this, but still none of them add up to much. Why was Tara even at the police station? Voluntarily, at that. What statement did she give, that they wanted him to elaborate on? What the hell happened? Why hadn't she called him? Nothing made sense to him.

And on top of that, he's been fighting the urge to call Bobby or Chibs the whole ride there. In times of doubt, confusion and worry, the need to reach out to his former brothers was still like second nature to him. It was true what they said, old habits die hard, but he fights it, stays on task instead, getting to Tara as fast as he can is the only thing that matters for now.

He's decided he'll find out what is going on first, before setting unnecessary fires that would later on need to be extinguished once again. He'll probably always hold love for Sam Crow in his heart, it's in his DNA, but he needs to figure out how to live without them at his beck and call, if he really wants to make things work with Tara, the boys and their newest little Teller on the way.

It's still winter, and it started getting dark hours ago, but by the time Jax pulls his truck into an empty spot in the police station parking lot, it's so dark out that it already feels like the dead of night. He quickly gets out and starts heading towards the entrance, but Tara's Ford catches his eye just a few rows ahead of him, and he can't help but stop there instead.

He touches the hood to check if it's still warm, it's more of a reflex really, because it's been hours and so he already knows it won't be, and it isn't. He tries to open the door next, but is not surprised when it's locked either, so he leans in towards the window, trying to at least look inside the car, yet it's hard to see anything with just the streetlamps of the parking lot overhead, creating an obscuring glare on the window.

He's not even sure what he's looking for, maybe a sign of a struggle, a glimpse or idea of how she ended up here, or maybe he's just stalling now that the moment of truth is finally here. But he suddenly snaps out of it, realizes how pointless it all is, because Tara is just beyond these doors along with all the answers to his questions, and so he starts to head back towards the entrance of the police station instead with the same urgency in his step when he'd first arrived here.

X

Jax is brought into an interrogation room, the typical kind, with an cold and empty atmosphere, a table with a couple of chairs, the kind of room with the two way-mirror, where some higher-up-the-ranks is undoubtedly listening in on everything being said.
He's noncompliant, it's in his nature to be on the offense, he came here for Tara, to see her and take her home, nothing else, and it takes every ounce of self-restrain he posses to not lose his cool all together when his repeated requests to see his wife seems to be falling on deaf ears all around.

He's uncharacteristically nervous, feeling off-kilter, out of his element, not liking to be left in the dark, not liking to feel this unsure of the situation he's in, the not knowing what is going on, what is coming next. The only solace he finds is in the fact that nobody's read him his rights or has thrown cuffs on him, which in his experience was a rather good sign.

But still, he paces the room like a caged animal, catching his own unnerving reflection in the fucking mirror time and again. Twisting and turning his wedding band over and over, thinking about the woman who'd pushed that ring onto his finger nearly two years ago, hoping that soon this newest nightmare he's found himself in will come to an end.

After being left to himself, and his own thoughts again for a while, deputy Reid, the woman who'd actually called him, finally steps into the room, giving him a assessing look for a long second, before she reaches out to shake his hand. "I'm deputy Reid. We spoke earlier on the phone."

Jax sighs deeply, giving the woman an assessing look of his own, before he finally reaches out and shakes her hand. "I want to see my wife. You said that she isn't being charged with anything, so why can't I see her?"

"She's on her way right now, Mr. Teller." The female deputy replies, gesturing to one of the chairs by the table, "Why don't you have a seat."

He doesn't want to take a goddamn seat, he's so sick and tired of this, knows they've got nothing to hold him on. But on the other hand he's so fucking desperate to see Tara, that sitting down seems like such a small gesture of compliance that he's willing to give in just this once, so he does finally take a seat. But again he begins to twist his wedding ring around his finger, and even he's beginning to realize that it's starting to become a nervous tick.

Another silent five minutes later, and the door behind deputy Reid finally opens, Tara reluctantly steps into the room, and into his line of view.

Despite seeing her red-rimmed eyes that lets him know she's been crying, a flash of relief washes over his face upon seeing her unharmed and not in cuffs, and the chair he's been sitting in scratches over the cold tiled floor with an unpleasant screeching sound, like nails on a chalkboard, when he quickly comes to a stand and steps towards her to pull her into his arms.

"Jesus Christ, babe." He mumbles against her ear before he takes in a deep breath, sighs heavily when he finally exhales, yet pulls her even closer against him, one strong arm wrapped around her back, the other hand disappearing in her long brown hair, holding her whole body securely against his.

Tara's clinging to him just as tightly now that she's finally come face to face with him, and because of that all the emotions are getting to her again, leaving her all chocked up at the realization that she'll have to tell him now why she's here, why they're both here, and momentarily it scares her more than anything.

Eventually it's Jax that pulls back from the tight embrace, brushing her hair back as he's searching her face now with so many unanswered questions in his eyes. "You had me worried sick, I thought something happened to you."

He almost wants to jolt her now, to further drive home the frustration and fear he'd felt when he
didn't hear back from her, but then he runs the pads of his thumbs under her eyes, wiping away her tears first, before he just scolds her instead, "You can't do that shit to me, babe, you can't just disappear and not answer your goddamn phone. I didn't even know what to tell the boys."

"I know." She starts, guilt rushing through her once more at the mentioning of their babies, and then her voice breaks, when she adds, "I'm so sorry."

And it's the tone of her voice that almost breaks Jax's heart in two, but it's also what's finally snapping him out of his mixed emotions of relief and anger, and brings him back to the issue at hand again. "What the fuck happened? Did someone try to hurt you? Did Juice come after you? Why are we here, babe?" He starts rattling question after question out without so much as taking a breath.

Tara dares a glance back at the female deputy behind her, the woman takes the hint and finally excuses herself. "I'll give you two the room, take as long as you need."

Deputy Reid's met with a confused look from Jax, that is quickly again aimed at his wife once the deputy leaves and the couple finds themselves completely alone in the room. "What the hell is going on?"

"Maybe we should sit?" Tara suggests, her voice sounding unsure, still she tries to take a few steps back, out of his grasp, but Jax won't let her, reaches for her hands and pulls her right back in front of him. His face contoured in pained and worried confusion. "Babe, whatever it is, just tell me."

Tara takes a deep breath, squeezing his hands in return for a moment, and tries to appear stoic when she looks back up at him, swallowing the lump in her throat away before she finally says, "I remember who tried to kill me. I finally remember what happened, and ... it wasn't Juice." Her voice breaks again on that last part.

Jax's eyes go wide, but his eyebrows are scrunched together in confusion, waiting for her to elaborate. "What do you mean it wasn't Juice? Who ... who was it?" He knows it couldn't have been one of his brothers, they'd all been at Scoops with him, but instead names and faces of both enemies and allies of the MC flash through his mind in a matter of a split-second.

His eyes flicker to the two-way mirror for just a second too, and he has no doubt that there's still someone listening in on them, but he honestly doesn't even give a damn anymore who's going to overhear. He just needs to know who'd tried to kill her, who tried to take the most important person away from him, before his heart bursts out of his chest. "Babe, please, just tell me." He's pleading with her now, his eyes solely trained on hers again, everything around them just disappears.

Tara knows this will break his heart, shatter it, for a second she's not sure if she can do it, and is suddenly regretting her request to the cops to tell her husband herself, but she just can't picture him finding out by some goddamn stranger either. She knows she has to be the one to tell him, as heartbreaking as it is.

Her chin trembles, and she pulls both her hands out of his to raise them up to her face, wiping at the fresh tears that spring from her eyes now, but Jax's hands raise up to her face as well, framing it, forcing her to raise her head, and look up at him and let her eyes meet his. So she does, manages to get those tears to stop streaming down her face, and meet his icy blue gaze head on, but her voice still breaks when she finally reveals the horrible truth to him and says. "It was your mom, it was Gemma who attacked me."

His eyes go wide once more with shock and disbelieve, and he stares back at her like frozen in place for a moment as if he's merely just dreamed up what she'd said, and instead he's still waiting and looking back at her expectantly for her to reveal the real culprit to him any second now, because he
cannot have possibly heard her right. This can't be true!

But Tara's looking up just as expectantly, fresh tears welling up in her eyes again when she reaches up and frames his face now in turn for just a second, before she throws her arms around his neck and pulls him back into her embrace, whispering into the crook of his neck, her voice on the brink of breaking again, "I'm sorry."

And it's in that moment that Jax finally realizes that Tara's really said and meant what he'd heard, and for the first time tonight, his own eyes begin to fill with tears now when he wraps his arms around his wife and pulls her into him with such force and need, that it knocks the wind out of her and nearly takes her breath away.

They cling desperately to one another, as if they're each other's lifeline, and in a sense they are. Now that Jax knows the ugly truth, knows that it was his own mother that almost took Tara from him for good, he doesn't just want to hold her, but he needs to hold her in his arms. He needs to feel her hot breath against his skin, needs to feel his arms wrapped around her and hers around him, needs to breath in her scent, fill his nostrils and his lungs with it. He needs to know that his mother didn't succeed in taking Tara from him, like she had with his father.

Jax buries his face into the crook of her neck, eyes burning with hot tears that stream mercilessly down his face, disappearing as wet stains in the black fabric of Tara's coat, his chest shakes uncontrollably against hers when he cries, but he manages to stifle the sobs, or at least forces them to come out silent when they manage to escape from his throat.

And Tara cries too, for him and with him, because she knows that despite all the horrible things Gemma has done over the years, she's still his mother, and it still breaks his heart!

They remain like this for a long while, clutching to each other for comfort and support, until Jax finally breaks away, reluctantly, but still, he does. His eyes meet hers, they're so sad and sorrowful, he's at a loss for words for just a moment and he lightly shakes his head at her in disbelief that his mother could've done such a thing. "I'm so sorry she did that to you." He finally says and swallows the lump in his throat away, both his hands palming her face again. "I should've stayed with you that day. Should've fucking been there to protect you, babe, I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault." Tara answers without having to think about it, because now she knows that it truly wasn't.

But Jax shakes his head again, and actually takes a step back, away from her now. "Like hell it's not." He says with a heavy dose of sarcasm, and looks down at his own hands, twisting his ring once more. His mother, his responsibility!

Tara won't let him pull away from her now, let this guilt eat him up, and she reaches up, grabbing his face again rather forcefully, leaving him no choice then to meet her eyes, and for the first time since they've come face to face in here, there isn't the slightest hint of hesitation in her voice when she says, "It's her fault, and hers alone. She did this. Not the club, and not you."

Her eyes bore into his, not letting up until he finally nods his head, he's hesitant about it, but he nods and leans down the same instant Tara leans up to place a sweet kiss against each other's lips, before they stand still once more, forehead to forehead, holding each other's hands.

Jax finally breaks the silence, pulling back to meet her eyes again, "Did they arrest her?"

But Tara shakes her head in reply, "No, they went to your grandpa's nursing home, but she managed to get away, somehow, on foot. They impounded her caddy though."
"Jesus Christ." Jax curses, and swipes his hand down his face, trying to wipe the last remnants of his tears away, and with it the sorrow is suddenly replaced with anger, his jaw pulled tight in suppressed fury when he meets her eyes now that the implications of it all really begin to hit him.

But before he can say or ask anything else, Tara speaks up. "They want to go over your statement with you, about everything you remember from that night."

Jax shakes his head, the annoyance palpable on his face. "What's the goddamn point? Clearly I had no fucking clue what my mother was up to."

"It's just ..." Tara fumbles with the right words at first, suddenly feeling a little flustered now that she realizes that he has taking her account on what happened at face value without question. She has of course hoped for that, but there was a small part of her that has been afraid he might not believe her. "Once ... I mean, if they find her, it's gonna be her word against mine, Jax, and they're just trying to establish a timeline, anything that might back up what I remember. So they need a statement from you, ... please?"

"Yeah, ... okay." Jax nods now in agreement when he takes in the pleading expression in Tara's eyes. "But who they should be talking to is Unser. He said she was with him that night." Jax adds, a flash of anger in his eyes once more, at the realization that the older man has been lying to him all this time, while he'd been pretending wanting to help Jax find the person who'd done it.

Tara's eyebrows furrowed suddenly, "You think he lied for her?"

"Wouldn't be the first time." Jax states matter-of-factly, then scoffs, "She knows he loves her, I'm sure she's made it worth his while." What he's implying is crystal clear, but still, Tara can't fathom Wayne going along with that.

"I'll go get the deputy back in here, okay?" Tara searches his face, his eyes to ensure he's really okay with that, and Jax nods his head again in reply, but then grabs her by her arm before she can slip out the door. He pulls her closer to him once more, and he lowers his voice now to an almost whisper when he leans in to talk to her. "Gemma knows where we live, babe. Jason's with the boys, you need to call him, fill him in, make sure he knows to keep the door locked and his eyes open."

There's a sudden flash of panic appearing in Tara's eyes now, "You think she'd try to get to the boys?"

Jax shakes his head, "I really don't know, ... but where is she gonna run to now that the truth is out? Nobody's more dangerous than someone who's got nothing left to lose."

X

Jax remains in the interview room and gives his statement, while Tara makes several calls, making sure everyone knows what's going on, and are keeping her babies safe, and an eye out for crazy murderous grandma.

She paces around the waiting room, or maybe it's the break room, she's not sure. But unlike the interrogation rooms, this place right here is nice and inviting, with comfortable seating, stacks of magazines to read through, a small kitchen to help yourself to some coffee or tea, and a flat screen TV mounted in one corner of the room, playing some old black and white sitcom in the background.

She jumps, startled when the door finally opens and Jax steps inside. Their eyes meet across the room. "Ready, babe?" He asks and she nods, trying to read the expression on his face, and to her relief its one of love and affection towards her.
She doesn't say anything else, and neither does he when he grabs her coat from the armchair and holds it up and open for her to quickly slip her arms inside. She grabs her purse again, and spins around to face him, ready to follow him out the door, but he stops and tugs her coat closed for her, buttoning two, then three buttons for her.

Next he reaches down for her hand, raises it up to his lips for a kiss, before they wordlessly make their way through the maze of desks, and police staff, to head towards the front door. And Tara finds herself fighting back tears once more, not just at his sweet gestures, but at the thought that she'd ever doubted he'd believe her in the first place.

But to Tara's surprise Jax stops at the front desk, informs the officer or deputy on duty that they'll be leaving her car behind for the night, to make sure they don't end up towing it. For just a moment Tara wants to speak up, argue that she can drive herself home just fine, but deep down she knows there's no use, knows she won't convince Jax otherwise if his mind's already made up, which clearly it was.

So she remains quiet, not really all that surprised that Jax knows the license plate number of her car by heart, when he relays it back to the uniformed man behind the desk, even though she herself couldn't recount it if someone put a gun to her head.

He holds the door open for her to step through first, but falls hurriedly back in step right beside her as they head down the few steps towards the parking lot. He quickly lights a cigarette now, before he grabs her hand in his again, but when they walk right past her car, Tara finally speaks up. "There's some stuff I need out of there. My gun for one."

Jax stops short at that, giving her a quizzical look, "You left your gun in your car?"

"Didn't think it'd be smart to walk inside a police station with a loaded weapon." She replies, giving him a pointed look.

"You've got your keys?" He asks, before he tries his best to exhale a cloud of smoke away from her, while he waits for her to fish them out of her purse.

She unlocks the car with the push of a button, and Jax steps up beside the car with her, holding the door open for her while she gets her gun out of the glove box, stashes it back in her purse, then grabs a few other random things, like her sunglasses, her bottle of water and her box of crackers.

Jax grabs her by her upper arm, trying to help her get out of the car with her hands full, and after coming to a stand, she nods towards the trunk, "I need my medical bag too, gotta update some patient files, it's in the trunk."

He pulls it from the trunk for her, closing the hatchback again with more vigor than necessary before he's falling back in step beside her as he carries it over to his truck now. But it does take some self-restraint to bite his tongue and not point out that he thinks she's got too much shit in here, that it's too heavy for her to be lugging around now that she's pregnant. He'll bring it up later with her, now's not really the time, there's more pressing things at hand that could be harmful to her. Mommy dearest at the top of his list!

He opens her door for her, sets her oversized leather bag on the floor right behind her seat, then holds her steady by her elbow helping her climb inside. "Thanks." Tara replies at his attentiveness, watching him grinding the last bit of his cigarette into the wet pavement by his feet, before his eyes come back up to meet hers. He nods towards a empty row of parking spots all the way at the edge of the lot, "I'm gonna move your car over there, that way it'll be easier for the tow truck to load it."

"Tow truck?" Tara asks in surprise.
"I'll make some calls tomorrow, hire someone to bring your car home." He answers as if it's the most logical thing to do.

And finally, Tara decides to speak up after all, because there's no reason to waste money on this. "I'm okay to drive myself home, Jax?"

"No." He answers short, shaking his head. "She's still out there, Tara." He adds with finality, and is taking a step back, ready to shut the door for her, when she interjects by speaking up before he can actually close the door.

Asking a question in reply, "What could she possibly do to me while I'm following you home? I mean, you think she's waiting me out on an overpass over the interstate? Your mom's a lot of things, but a sharpshooter isn't one of 'em." She's being ridiculously rhetorical, of course, but really, what could Gemma do if she was simply following Jax's truck home in her own car.

"Tara." Jax actually snaps at her now, pinching the bridge of his nose, he has absolutely no patience for her questioning his decision, but he instantly regrets his tone of voice when she's startled by his sudden harsh outburst in the form of her name.

He steps closer again, reaches out for her hand, running the pad of his thumb over her knuckles, his tone soft and downright sweet again now when he looks up to meet her eyes, "I'm sorry. But ... look, babe, at this point, who the fuck knows what she's capable of ... all I know is I won't let you out of my sight until we're home, where you're safe, until she's either locked up or dead. Please don't fight me on this."

"Okay, I won't." Tara nods her head in agreement.

Jax smiles gratefully at her, glad she agrees and reaches into his pocket, pulling out his keys, before he steps up onto the foot rails on the side of his truck, bracing himself on the dashboard with one hand, so he can lean over her, lean past her, push the key into the ignition and start the truck and with it the heater for her. "It's fucking freezing out here." He adds in way of explanation, and gives her a quick kiss on the forehead in passing before he climbs back down, steps back and shuts the door for her as well.

Tara watches him quickly light another cigarette, and just as quickly raise his phone up to his ear, undoubtedly calling Chibs, Bobby or someone else from the club. Fresh tears begin to prick at her eyes at the realization that despite his sweet and caring demeanor towards her, he's already beginning to shut her out too. That much is clear in the way he's waited to make this call until she was stowed away in here and out of earshot of whatever plans he was already making with his brothers now.

Her thoughts are going haywire, as she's watching him take his time to move her car across the parking lot while he's still talking on his phone. She's grateful he believes her, can appreciate the fact that he hasn't shown even a moment of doubt in what she'd confided in him. But Tara's also scared, because she knows this will drive him insane, this will utterly consume him until Gemma is either behind bars or dead, like he'd said, and she already fears that he prefers the latter to be the case.

Tara wipes at the tear that slips from her eyes, her eyes still trained on him across the parking lot. She knows that if he ends up being the one pulling the trigger on his own mother, it will destroy him, and everything that they've build again together right along with him.

She folds down the sun visor, flips open the little mirror that also illuminates a little light right beside it, and takes her eyes off of Jax now to give herself a good look in the mirror. Time to take the gloves off!
She wipes at her eyes, trying to clear away some of the mascara smudges brought on by her tears, then pinches her cheeks to bring a little flush to them, to offset her more than usual pale complexion.

She glances back at Jax, finding him still engrossed in conversation on his phone, leaning against the hood of her car as he’s lighting up his third cigarette. So she quickly pulls some breath mints, her perfume and her little make-up bag out of her purse. She pops two mints at a time, spraying just a tiny bit of perfume onto the pulse points on her wrists, and hurriedly tries her best to make herself look a little more presentable again with the help of her make-up.

She only has an hour and a half long car ride home to convince him that they were in this together, that he needs to take her thoughts on this into account, because she's got a feeling that by the time they get back home, someone from Rogue River will already be waiting to watch over her, to keep her in line, so he can run off in hunt of his own mother, and let's just say she's ready to play dirty if she has to.

Taking a page out of Gemma's own playbook, when the memory of an conversation with the former matriarch comes back to her. Tara can still remember so vividly how Gemma had made fun of Jax's and her young love, dooming it from the start when Jax had started prospecting for the club.

'You really think that as long as you two love each other, it'll all work out, that it's just you and Jax against the world? But, sweetheart, you've got to realize it's not really that simple. For an old lady to make it in this life, she's got to be harder than the men, ready to do the things they won't. There are a few that have that in them, myself included. My question is, are you that kind of woman, Tara? Because, little girl, if you're not, then you'll never be more than a token, something that can be threatened, hurt or otherwise messed with, just to keep your man in line.'

She won't be that anymore, she's not just a token, from here on out she'll do whatever she has to do to keep her family intact, and to keep Jax from letting that old darkness in again, least of all on Gemma's doing.

The lights on her car flash when Jax finally locks it and starts heading her way again, enjoying the last bit of his third smoke, and Tara quickly hides her makeup back in her purse, and folds the mirror and visor up again too.

She hurries to unbutton her coat, shrugs out of it too, it's not that ludicrous since the cab of the truck has warmed up plenty while she's been waiting for him. She tugs down the v-neck of her shirt to show off a little more cleavage too, and runs her hands through her hair, trying to make it look more appealing as well.

Maybe it makes her a horrible person to even think of Jax as being this shallow, but she's grasping at straws here, she has no real choice here, no other leverage than appeal to his only weakness, his love and attraction to her.

And if this is how Gemma convinced the former Chief of Charming PD to provide her with an alibi for the night of the attack on her, then it was only fair to fight fire with fire. Wasn't it?

Jax finally opens the door and climbs inside the warm vehicle, giving her a sweet smile when he hands her car keys back to her, and Tara returns the smile with one of her own, watching him follow suit as he shrugs out of his jacket too, tossing it over his shoulder onto the backseat.

"Who were you talking to?" She tries the most direct approach, hoping that maybe she's wrong and he won't shut her out after all.

He starts to pull the truck onto the main road, glancing over at her just for a second, before he
answers with his eyes back on the road ahead of them, "The club, I filled 'em in on everything, told them what really happened. They'll keep an eye out for her, ask around, and put the word out that I'm looking for her."

His eyes drift back to her again for just a second, "You should buckle up, roads are wet."

"Right." Tara agrees, but surprises him when she slides over into the middle seat, right beside him and buckles herself in there instead.

Jax gives her a curious look, raising his eyebrows, but before he can say anything out loud, Tara says, "Less likely to take sniper fire in the middle, don't you think?" She bites her lip, trying not to smirk.

He on the other hand can't help but smirk, when he looks back at her again, and replies, "Smartass."

She leans closer to him, her right hand reaching across his chest and shoulder, pulling his seatbelt in place for him, and is met yet again with a curious look from him in return, which she matches with a look of her own. "You said the roads are wet." She explains out loud, "I'm not the only precious cargo in here."

"I'd argue, you carry the most precious cargo all on your own, babe." He replies, his hand slipping from the steering wheel down to her still very flat stomach, before he asks, "How is she?"

"He ..." Tara starts, her hand quickly covering his, "... has thoroughly enjoyed making me queasy today."

Jax simply shakes his head at that, won't argue with her about the sex of the kid though, at least not now, because he's got other shit on his mind, but he lets his hand slip from her stomach down to her lap, his palm and fingers slipping between her legs and curving casually around her thigh, giving the fleshy part a affectionate little squeeze before his hand rests there in place.

In turn she curls her arm around his bicep, placing a quick kiss against his shoulder, before she's resting her head against it, leaning into his side. And it's not all for show, she loves the feel of his muscles under the sleeve of his shirt, feels safe and secure right next to him like this, resting her head against him.

None of this is fake, she loves him, wants him, needs him, she just might be laying it on a little thicker than usually right now, but every touch, every emotion it invokes in either one of them, is very real, and so are her words. "I'm sorry I didn't call you right away ... but I was just so scared."

"Scared of what?" Jax asks before she can elaborate.

"A lot of things." She starts, glancing up at him, catching his eyes when he turns his head to look at her in turn for just a second. "I was scared that you wouldn't believe me. Scared if you would. Scared what will happen next."

"Jesus Christ, of course I'd believe you." He replies, interrupting her.

And she turns her head towards him, kissing his shoulder affectionately again before she replies. "I don't want what Gemma did to come between us now, baby, I don't want her ruining how happy we've been, how happy we still should be."

"It's hard to be happy, knowing she's out there somewhere, just biding her time." Jax replies rather dryly, pulling the truck to a stop at a red light.
That's when Tara reaches up, palming his left cheek with her right hand, forcing him to turn and look at her. "Just don't shut me out, please?"

"I'm not." He replies without missing a beat, meeting the sudden fierceness in her eyes with his own.

"If you're not, then why make that phone call so I couldn't hear it, because it feels like you're already trying to keep things from me?" She brazenly dares to confront him, this sudden burst of honesty slipping from her tongue hasn't been part of her initial plan on how to win him over, but it's too late, the words are out, and now she can feel part of him pulling away, not physically, but emotionally, and it hurts.

Jax's suddenly tight-lipped, averts his eyes, or at least tries to, but Tara won't let him, palming his cheek again, "Look at me."

And he does look back at her now, but with sad eyes, and when he still won't say anything, she adds, "Whatever you've got going on already, whatever plan or strategy you and the club have already set in motion to smoke her out, I want in. I wanna be a part of whatever it is you're doing, I can handle it. But if you shut me out again, let her come between us, we won't come back from it this time." Tara shakes her head, and swallows the lump in her throat, before she adds with a steely expression and finality in her voice, leaving no doubt in her meaning. "Either I'm part of what you're doing, or I'm not. Either we're together, Jax ... or we're not."

X

Author's Note: Sorry for the longer wait, it was hard to get the feelings and emotions of this chapter right, I hope they come across the way I've intended them too. Please leave me a few words, can't wait to hear what you think. Thank you.
Their eyes are intensely trained on each other now, but before Jax can utter a reply, the car behind them is honking, and they suddenly realize that the traffic light has turned green again. Jax turns his attention back to the road, and quickly starts driving, momentarily relieved at the fact that he can take a couple seconds longer to think about what Tara has said.

And then to Tara's obvious surprise, yet relief, he pulls off of the road, brings the truck to a stop again in the empty parking lot of what used to be a small mom and pop convenience store, that now held a oversized 'out-of-business' sign in the front window.

"Of course we are together, Tara, that goes without saying." Jax grimly replies suddenly, before he even turns to meet her eyes in the same instant he puts the truck in park, the vehicle jerking when he's letting his foot off of the break. "But I don't like you giving me ultimatums." He adds just as grimly.

Tara scoffs at that, shaking her head, "I don't like it either, Jax, but at least I'm giving you a choice here, unlike what you're giving me. I feel like I'm with my back against the wall. Alone again. Your way or the highway, right?" Her voice is raising, yet at the brink of breaking again too, filled with emotions that are threatening to spill over. "This happens every time, everything is going alright for a while, and then something bad happens, and you ... you shut down and ... you shut me out."

"Jesus Christ, she tried to kill you." Jax suddenly yells out furious, before he hides his face in both his hands, sighing in frustration while he's trying his best to reign in his temper again, to not let all this boiling anger he's feeling towards Gemma spill out and over onto Tara instead.

But Tara can't just let it be, too much is at stake here, so she speaks up again before he has a chance to say more, "So what, was it all just a lie?" She says with a high pitched sound to her voice, still fighting the tears, but finally daring to look over at him again.

"Was what a lie?" Jax meets her eyes now, eyebrows drawn together in confusion.

She shakes her head slightly, raises her hand, gesturing to him and then herself, then back and forth for added emphasis. "You, me, us, this?" She stammers out the words along to her hand movement. "You following me up here, to start over together. Did I have it right when you first showed up? ... It's all just another lie, another broken promise, it's all just bullshit, right?"

"No, babe!" Jax cries out in reply, his eyes sorrowful when they try to hold her gaze. "Of course not." He adds, shaking his head at what she was implying, and Tara's surprised when she sees tears filling his eyes now as well when he adds, "You and me and our boys ... and this baby, that's all I want."

He swipes his hands over his face once more, then leans forward, draping his left arm across the steering wheel, while he wipes at his eyes with the other hand, too chocked up to speak for a moment, trying to get his composure back. Doesn't she know that they mean everything to him?
Maybe it's odd to look at it like this, but to Tara his tears are a good sign, like some sort of proof that the man she loves is still in there, not all is lost. That she's managed to crack his hard shell after all.

"I'm sorry, but that's not good enough." She takes in a shaky breath, her words equally shaky when she speaks. "I'm not going in for another round of this." She pauses, and he looks up and over at her, meeting her eyes that are brimming with new tears just in time for her to add, "I won't do it. Either you let me in, or I'm out."

Tara sits back now, folding her arms in front of herself, face forward, sullen, yet fighting back tears. She's feeling devastated inside, because she's fearing this might just be the end of everything .. the end of them, but at the same time, she won't let him push her away anymore, keep her at arm's length. In or out! All or nothing!

Jax sits back too, his shoulders stiff with tension, his head turned towards his window, he can't stand to look at her while he's trying so hard to sort out his thoughts and emotions in his head, so they'll make sense when he finally speaks.

Can't she see that he's just trying to protect her? That he's just trying to keep the ugliness of what's to come away from her, and carry the burden of it all on his own.

He finally dares to look back at her, noting the tense set of her jaw, how she can't even look at him, or rather refuses to look at him. The rift between them palpable in the air, and he can't stand the thought that that's what this is leading to.

So he unbuckles his seatbelt to be able to lean past her, invading her space when he reaches for the glove box on the passenger side of the truck. He opens it, hesitating just for a split-second before he pulls the stack of five small journals he used to write in all the time, for Abel and Thomas, out.

He sits back again, his voice almost sounding horse, raspy with emotions when he speaks up, nodding at her when he holds the journals out for her to take. "Here."

Her eyes meeting his in an unspoken question, but Jax just nods his head at her again, his eyes trained on her. So she takes them, lays them into her lap, fanning them out, and thanks to the streetlight, the city lights all around them, she can see well enough to read her name scribbled on the front of these journals.

"You wrote these ... to me?" She asks hesitantly, looking back at him, and swallowing away the lump in her throat the instant he nods his head once more at her.

He reaches over, runs his fingers over them for a long stretched out moment, as if he's contemplating whether or not to snatch them back, until his eyes flicker back up to meet hers, and he tries to explain. "I wrote these in the hospital, sitting by your bedside, praying and hoping for you to wake up."

Tara can't help but smile at the thought of him writing all of this to her, filling all of these pages for her, but Jax catches her expression, and is quick to clear something up, shaking his head, "They're not exactly love letters, babe. I mean, some of it is, but most of it is me trying to figure out what to do with myself. The guilt I felt for what happened to you. The unquenchable need for revenge, without knowing who was to blame, besides myself."

He sighs, facing away from her now, steepling his fingertips together, lowering his head in shame. "I wrote these for you, because I wanted you to know ... I wanted to explain my side, in case I'd die, or end up back in prison, trying to find the person who did this to you."
Tara wipes a tear that falls, before she hesitantly dares to open a journal to a random page and starts to read. She has to squint to focus her eyes on his handwriting in the dark interior of the truck, but Jax flicks a light on inside the cab, trying to make it easier for her, before he holds up his pack of smokes in way of explaining why he's slipping out of the truck a moment later.

'Real loss is only possible when you love something more than you love yourself. And I get that now, and I think that's what scares me the most. I'm scared because you and our boys mean more to me than anything else. You are everything I think about, everything I need, everything I want. I'm not going to lie, I used to get a high out of uncertainty, now, sitting here, it scares me to death. What if you don't wake up? What if you don't come back to me? You have to come back to me, Tara! I mean, what's the point in worrying about a future, when you don't have one? Without you, babe, I don't have one.'

She's almost glad he left the truck, because she can't stand to look at him, the emotions too raw within her as she ponders over the lines she has just read. She's always known that he has a way with words, and she fears these words will break her resolve, that she'll break down and give in like she's done a million times before. But she can't help herself, curiosity wins out, so instead she flips through the pages, stopping at chance and begins to read some more.

'They say let he who is without sin cast the first stone. And to be without sin requires absolute forgiveness. But when your memories are freshly opened wounds, forgiveness is the most unnatural of human emotions. Over time, we all commit acts with intentions, either good or bad, which will require their own forgiveness, or retribution. In its purest form, an act of retribution provides symmetry, the rendering of payment for crimes against the innocent. But the danger of retaliation lies in furthering the cycle of violence. Still, it's a risk that must be met when the greater offense is to allow the guilty to go unpunished. Justice, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Some see an innocent victim. Other's see evil incarnate getting exactly what they deserve.'

She puts the journal down, presses her eyes shut for a long moment, before finally glancing over to him, his back's turned towards her, leaning against the driver door of the truck, so she pulls another one open instead, and starts to read.

'JT wrote in his manuscript about how the value of life can be directly measured by our will to endure. He references his time in prison, that we have a remarkable ability to resist fatigue, to withstand pain, to keep fighting, as long as we don't lose sight of what we're fighting for. And as I sit here, watching you bound to this hospital bed, these machines keeping you alive while keeping you a prisoner at the same time, I want you to think of this. I hope you remember what my father wrote. I want you to not lose sight of what you're fighting for. The life you've dreamed of, away from Charming, away from Sam Crow, just you and me and our boys. That's what you need to hold onto, that's what you need to keep fighting for, babe. That's what will bring you back to me.'

Tara reaches for another journal, flipping through the pages faster now. There's a shift in her, a change, instead of feeling empathy for what he had been going through when he wrote this, she feels anger start to rise in her now the more she reads.

'People are fond of saying that you can't un-ring a bell, and while that may be true, you can certainly smother its ring under the dull roar of conjecture, lies, and make-believe. But, some words ring out like church bells, rising above the dim, calling us to the truth. I hear your words now, over and over in my head, like an unrelenting bell ringing in my ears, finally waking me up, opening my eyes. I hear all the times you expressed your fears to me, the warnings of what you think will happen if we don't pack up our boys and just get the hell out of here. I didn't listen then, but I'm listening now. Couldn't stop the bells from ringing in painful truth, even if I tried. It's all so clear now that you were right, and I was wrong. I'm so sorry!'
Tara closes the journal abruptly, having read enough, she reaches over towards the door, knocking on the window to get his attention.

He quickly turns, seeing her wave for him to come back inside, so he's tossing what little is left of the cigarette to the wet ground, before he pulls the door open and climbs back in. A wave of cold winter air rushing into the cabin of the vehicle with him, making her shutter, before he closes the door behind him, turning the heater back up the instant he's seated to warm himself as much as her.

"What is this supposed to be, Jax?" Tara spews, tossing the stack of journals at him, trying her best to constrain the anger she's feeling still rising inside of her.

To say that Jax looks surprised by her reaction, is an understatement, but before he can even reply, Tara speaks up, gesturing towards the little booklets he's gathered in his hands now. "You've got some interesting quotes in there, and the way you're elaborating on them sounds very deep." She frowns, eyes furiously looking back at him, before she adds. "But you're not the only one well-read in this relationship, I know some, too. There's that old saying about those who cannot remember the past being condemned to repeat it. But those of us who refuse to forget the past are condemned to relive it."

"Tara." He starts, tries to chime in, guilt written all over his face, but she's quick to interrupt him again.

"I'm not finished." She almost hisses at him. "How about this quote, 'Instead of writing about it, he should've done something. He should've taken me and Thomas and gotten the hell out of Charming'. Any of that ring a bell?"

Tara shakes her head, tears welling up in her eyes. "You can say you're sorry a million times, say that you love me as much as you want, write a goddamn novel about your feelings, but if you're not going to prove that the things you say are true, then it would be better to never have said or written them at all. Because if you can't show it, your words don't mean shit, Jax. They're just words, lacking truth, and any meaning behind them. They're just more lies. And I'm sorry if this hurts your feelings, if this isn't the reaction you've hoped I'd have after reading some of what you wrote, but this is the real truth!"

She reaches out, snatches the journals from him again, practically waving them in his face. "If you really meant what you wrote in here, then fucking prove it to me. Let me in, don't keep shutting me out."

"When I wrote all of this, I kept playing back a thousand memories of us in my mind, babe, thinking about everything we've been through, everything you've been through because of me. I hate that I failed you, too many fucking times to count. The last thing I want to do is lose you now!" Jax says, finally having found his voice again, even though she's right about not having expected this reaction from her. "I love you, Tara. And it's because I love you, that I'm willing to do whatever it takes to protect you from her. And I'm not gonna give up until her murderous ass is gone for good. There is no other way this is gonna end!" He lowers his head in shame, can't look at her now, when he adds, "I have to do this my way. I have to ..." His voice breaks and stops, wiping at his eyes again.

"You have to what?" Tara asks, trying to figure out the rest of that sentence, her chin quivering for a moment, when she adds, "Kill her?" He's neither shaking his head or nodding, just averts his eyes, but it's still clear that she's right, that this is where all of this is heading. That he wants to kill his own mother, for her.

So Tara shakes her head instead, taking a deep breath, trying to get herself back under control, steeling herself for this ongoing battle with him. "Before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig
two graves. It's a quote from Confucius, and god if it isn't the truth, because if you do this ... " Her voice breaks at that, and she struggles to take in a breath, before she adds in a shaky voice. "If you do this, if you go after her to kill her, it'll be the end of you, too. Can't you see that?"

Jax shakes his head, still not looking at her for a long moment, before he finally turns in his seat, enough to face her, to meet her eyes. He swipes his hand down his face again, fingers scratching over his bearded chin in uncertainty for a second. "This is what I know to do, Tara, this is who I am."

"This isn't about who you think you are, it's who you think you're not. I know that there's still days when you look in the mirror, and hate what you see. I have those days as well. I'm not just some innocent bystander, god knows I've got enough blood on my own hands, too, Jax. But ... you've got it all wrong, you're not your father, you're not Clay, and you're not your mother either. It's true that our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but you still have free will to choose who you are, or who you ultimately want to become. Don't ever let the place where you started dictate where you finish. You want to be a good father, a good husband, then break the fucking cycle, Jackson, make that choice once and for all, and commit to it, come what may. Don't allow Gemma to do any more damage to us, by allowing her to drag you down with her."

Jax remains quiet, but the expression on his face, in his eyes lets Tara know he's listening, he hears her, letting her words sink in. She wipes at her eyes, wiping away the tears that are falling so freely now, "You know, I sat in that parking lot of the police station for hours, ... just crying for hours, not knowing which way to turn, what the right thing to do is. And you know what ultimately made me walk into that station?"

Their eyes are still locked on each other, but she doesn't wait for him to respond, but rather continues telling her story, "It was something Gemma said to me, on that day we found that death threat in the front seat of my car. I said to her that normal people call the cops when their lives are threatened, and she said, 'you don't have a normal life, you have this one'. When I remembered her saying that, it's when I finally pulled myself together enough to walk inside. I'm done doing things her way, the Sam Crow way. Because this is the life I have now, this is the life I want to keep, with you, Jackson."

She reaches out, palms his cheek, trying to smile at him through the tears. "I know what you're doing ... pushing me away, because going through this while keeping me close hurts too much. I know what that's like. How it hurts to smile. How you want to hurt yourself on the outside, to try to kill or at the very least dull the pain on the inside. I've been there. But, Jax, numbing the pain this way, even for a little while, don't you know it will make it so much worse when you finally allow yourself to feel it?"

He reaches up, covers her hand on his cheek with his own, but scoffs, and to her surprise he admits, "I would do just about anything right now to feel nothing, babe. To make it all stop." He looks away, shakes his head to himself when he asks her out loud. "How do I come back from this? The damage she did ... the hurt she inflicted to you, and to the boys when she almost took you from them."

"I don't know." Tara shakes her head, a weak smile on her lips, that doesn't show in her eyes at all. "I wish I knew. I don't have all the answers, but I do know that a son killing his mother, that's a wound that's too deep to heal, baby. It will kill you right along with her."

Jax's chin is quivering now, no longer able to meet her eyes, instead looking away, anywhere but at her, when he swallows the lump in his throat and makes his second admission. "I know."

He takes in a deep, yet shaky breath, fighting through the tears that are beginning to well up in his eyes. "That's the part that hurts the most about all this, babe." He pauses then, his face contours in pain and loathing all the same, chin quivering more and more with each passing nanosecond ticking
by. "I mean, after everything she did, my father's death, what she did to you, all the lies, all the
wreckage ... I still love her." He finally looks up and meets her eyes now, tears streaming down his
face along with a humorless chuckle escaping his throat, because he can't make sense of his own
words, even as they leave his lips. He must be crazy. "You know? She's my mom."

He swipes his hand down his face, covering his eyes, his face, a mix between trying to hide his tears,
and wanting to shield her from the pain he's feeling. But his voice breaks, the pain unmistakable in
the sound, instantly causing Tara's tears to fall too, when he asks through his own. "How could she
do this to you?" He cries, no longer holding back, another pause and he finally dares to meet her
eyes, "How could she do this to you, babe?"

Tara swiftly unbuckles her seatbelt in one fluid motion as she wraps both her arms around his neck,
pulling him close to her, against her to comfort him like she had when she'd first told him the truth
earlier at the police station.

And unlike earlier, at first she can feel him stiffen under her touch, fighting it, fighting the emotions
that her embrace evoke even further in him, but at last he wraps his arms around her as well, pulling
her against him, chest to chest, holding her close, his body shaking once more as he starts to cry in
her arms. She's crying, too, no way to avoid that, but she's fighting with everything she's got to not
fall apart on the account that he already was, tries to be the one comforting him for a change, now
that he's finally let her in.

He cries in her arms for merely a few long minutes, yet it feels much longer to him. He finally takes
in a deep breath, several actually, before he's slightly pulling away and meets her eyes, letting her
wipe at his tears, before he returns the favor and swipes the pads of his thumbs beneath her eyes as
well.

His face is red and blotchy from the emotional outburst, his eyes red rimmed and still watery, when
he shakes his head to himself, almost ashamed at his actions, to let himself appear this weak in front
of her, when he asks her wearily. "More than you wanted to hear?"

"No." She answers without hesitation and shakes her head, reaching up to run her fingertips across
his chin, along his jawline, playing with his beard. A familiar and comforting gesture long overdue
tonight. "I'm so glad you told me. I want to hear it all. I promise you there is nothing I can't handle,
as long as you don't shut me out and we're in this together."

She smiles a sad smile, fighting back her own tears again, when she adds. "And let me say it again,
just in case it isn't clear to you. You are nothing like them, nothing like Clay, nothing like her. And if
you ever doubt that, you just need to turn around and ask me, okay?"

"Yeah? Are you gonna be there?" He asks without missing a beat, and his meaning is clear. He's
talking about her threat from earlier.

"As long as you let me in, I'll be there, I'm not going anywhere. Not without you!" She replies, her
voice firm, her expression steely, leaving no doubt that she means what she says, before she adds.
"But you need to understand that I can't just sit at home hiding. Cameron, Salazar, Gemma ... if the
past has shown me anything, it's that I'm safest when I'm with you, not away from you. That day in
the park, I would've been taken if anyone other than you had been there with me. You know that's
the truth."

Jax swallows the lump in his throat, his face solemn when he's meeting her determined gaze and
nods his head at her in agreement, before he pulls her back into his arms once more. He takes in
another deep breath, closing his eyes when he sighs in relief as he exhales, placing a kiss against her
soft brown hair.
But it's Tara that pulls away now a few moments later, just enough to meet his blue eyes again, unable to keep the worried expression from showing on her face. "We have to talk about Gemma ... For once, the law is on our side, let's use that to our advantage, let's be smart about this. Violence is only one way to take someone down, Jax. Brains before bullets!" She's rattling out the words, practically begging him, it's evident in the desperate tone of her voice.

Her words are followed by a sudden downpour outside, rain beating down on the roof and the hood of the truck, for a second capturing both their attention when their eyes drift away from one another and instead taking in their surrounding outside.

But the distraction of the rain doesn't hold their attention for long, before their eyes connect again, and Tara's heart is almost beating as loudly as the rain drops hitting the vehicle while she awaits Jax's response, hoping for his agreement to do this differently, to do this right for once.

He frames her face with his hands now, leans his forehead against hers, closing his eyes in deep thought for a long moment, before he finally pulls away to look at her and nods his head, "Yeah, okay."

Tara still searches his eyes for confirmation, her voice unsure and high pitched when she asks, "Really? You mean that?"

Jax nods his head again, his eyes fixated on hers when he replies, "Yeah, I do."

Tara's lips crash onto his the instant that the words have left his. It's a forceful, yet quick little kiss, but it's followed by another, and another, and yet another. Each little kiss lasting longer than the one before.

And then their lips part, allowing each other entrance, much more forceful, downright needy now, when the kiss turns deep and passionate in just the blink of an eye, along with their roaming hands, tugging and pulling on each other to get closer as well.

But when Tara's hands slide down from around his neck and start working his belt open, Jax can't help but pull away from her in obvious surprise, searching her eyes to reaffirm himself about what she's suggesting.

His unspoken question is answered when she doesn't stop, just meets his eyes for a second while she's still making quick work undoing his belt, before skillful fingers begin undoing his fly now.

Without a second to waste, he's reaching down for her leg, unzipping her brown leather boot, pulling it off in one smooth motion before he tosses it to the floor of the passenger side, followed by her sock too.

Now it's his turn to reach beneath the hem of her shirt, working the button and zipper of her tight fitting jeans open. He leaves her no choice then to let her hand slip from within his jeans, abandoning her mission of stroking his already hard shaft, when he pushes her back onto the seat, laying down, so he can pull her jeans down passed her hips.

Tara's eyes are filled with need, and so is the sound of her voice when she asks, "Do you remember when we first moved in together, what you'd say when we used to argue?"

He knows exactly what she's getting at, what she's talking about, but he wants to hear her say it. Wants to hear the words come from her lips. And he's too impatient to bother with the other leg, just pulls the stretchy denim fabric off one leg, just enough to get to what he wants, what he needs, while he answers her in a raspy tone of voice. "No, why don't you remind me?"
But he climbs between her legs and his lips crush onto hers before she can answer, there's the distinct snapping sound of fabric ripping when he's pushing her panties aside, stretches it too far, all the while she's hurriedly pushing his pants and boxers past his hips, just enough to free his cock. Both of them almost frantic in the way they need to connect with one another on this more primal level now.

He breaks the kiss, braces himself on one arm, and reaches between them, lifting his hips just enough to position himself at her entrance, when she answers between ragged breaths, "You'd say, 'Let's just fuck it out, babe'." And then she gasps, and moans when he fills her in one fluid motion, filling her to the hilt, before he rocks his hips back and does it again, and again and again.

X

Author's Note: Sorry for the long wait, life's been busy and the words have not been flowing as easily as I had hoped when I do find the time to write. Thank you all for all the wonderful reviews. I can't wait to hear what you think of this chapter. Please leave me a few words, the good, the bad, I don't care, just want to know what you think and if you like where our couple is headed relationship-wise. Thank you.

P.S. I can't take credit for everything that Jax wrote in those journals, since a lot of it was inspired by quotes I read online some time ago, that I just weaved around to make it fit this story.
Jax just finished closing his fly and buckling up his belt again when he glances over at Tara, watching her as she arches up off of the seat for just a second so she can pull her jeans back up over her ass and hips. He playfully winks at her when she catches his eyes, bringing a little smirk to her face, and her cheeks still slightly blushing some more again, too.

But then Jax catches a glimpse of flashing lights in the rearview mirror, no sirens, just lights, but it still makes him turn his head now, looking back over his shoulder at the approaching vehicles, that seem to be heading towards them.

Tara slips her foot inside her leather boot, and quickly pulls the zipper all the way up, then sits up straight again, and looks over at him, just in time to catch how the slightly worried expression on his face changes again to one of relief, when the police cars with their flashing lights continue on down the main road, speeding past the entrance to the parking lot they've stopped at.

"Thought they might be coming for us?" She asks with obvious amusement in her voice, smirking again at the thought. "For what? Lewd acts?"

"We were going at it in this well-lit parking lot, right along this main four-lane road ..." He raises his eyebrows at her when he answers while looking over at her, meeting her eyes, loving the smirk on her face that's matching his own now again at his words. "... rocking the shit out the shocks, babe."

"Some assholes call the cops for a lot less." He adds, before he can't help himself from leaning further towards her, cupping her chin with just one hand to give her another proper kiss, while she in turn frames his face in both her hands.

The kiss deepens instantly, but it's no longer needy, or hurried, instead it's rather soft, and sweet, and sincere. But then they seem to pull away from it at the same time, looking back at one another for a long silent filled moment again. There are so many unanswered questions in both their eyes, yet neither of them seems to know where to even start from here.

Jax engulfs her in his arms now, pulling her hard against him, and she wraps her arms around his neck, clinging to him again, too, for yet another long moment. How easy life would be if they could just stay like this? Just the two of them, and their boys, wrapped around each other, drowning everything and everyone else out around them. But today proved once more that life was anything but easy, at least not for the Teller's.

Jax places a lingering kiss against the side of her head, near her temple, before he rather reluctantly lets go of her again. Pulling back, meeting her eyes once more, and voices the most obvious out loud instead, when he says, "We should probably head out." And she nods her head in agreement.

They quickly buckle up, and Jax pulls the truck back onto the main road, when he says, "You checked up on the boys?" Back to the grueling reality! The threat that was grandma!

Tara nods her head again, before she answers, "Yes. They're fine. Christy came by, they took them
back to their place instead though, just to be safe."

She can see a moment of worry etch into the features of his face, but before he can voice his concern out loud, she speaks up. "Don't worry. They drove around the block for at least ten extra minutes, making sure nobody is following them. She said Jason acted very 'Ethan-Hunt-meets-Jason-Bourne'-ish." Despite their situation, Tara can't help the little smile grace her lips when she relays Christy's description of Jason to him.

"Ethan who?" Jax looks back at her confused for a second though, not getting the joke, until she replies. "You know, Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible."

He nods, smirking a little in return for just a second now too, but it doesn't last. The smirk falters and his face grows more serious again right after, when he's reaching into his jean pocket to retrieve his phone.

His eyes flicker back and forth between the road ahead and the screen, when he's quickly punching in the four digit pass code, before he's holding it out for her to take. "I need you to unblock her number."

Tara takes it from him, but looks back at him somewhat curious. "You think she's gonna try to reach out?" She asks as she starts to scroll through the settings on his phone.

"Hell, ... I don't know." He huffs and sighs at first, waiting and glancing at her out of the corner of his eye. "But just in case she does, I want that call to go through."

It takes her a moment, she's never actually unblocked anyone before, but she eventually figures it out, and meets Jax's eyes for just a split-second, when she hands the phone back to him. "Done."

Jax takes the phone from her, sighing deeply as he goes straight to her contact information and momentarily even contemplates calling her, his finger hovering over that call button in indecision. But he's not sure he could keep the angry tone from his voice, and since he wants to lure her in, he chooses to send her a text message instead.

All it reads is 'We should talk', it's short, but straight to the point, yet leaving some room for interpretation on her part, and he prefers it that way.

He wants his mother to wonder how much he really knows, how much Tara remembers and has actually shared with him. He wants her doubting, unsure, and second-guessing her every thought, and every corresponding move she makes.

So they drive on in silence, heading south on I-97, with Tara resting her head against his shoulder again, clinging to him with her arm wrapped around his, just like before, while his hand is resting rather casually on her thigh once more, too, before he curls it back around the curve of it, and leaves it there.

The radio is turned down enough that it's barely audible over the roar of the engine, the wind and the still ongoing rain that is splattering against the windshield, but still, the cabin of the truck seems quiet, because they're not talking. And even thought there is so much left to say, neither of them is quite sure yet where to start, not out loud, not with words, anyways.

But regardless of the quiet, things are still being said, between the lines, or rather between the touches, like the way he's grabbing and tugging her thigh closer against the side of his. It's his wordless way of saying that he wants her even nearer to him than she already is, but not in a sexual way at all, or at least that's not how Tara's perceiving it right now. His need to just be closer, in
physical contact with her, very much mirrors her own, and she finds his constant hand on her is rather sweet, comforting and reassuring at the moment, undoubtedly conveying the things they're not saying out loud just yet. We're in this together!

Jax steps on the gas, speeding up when he merges the truck over into the left lane, to pass the SUV that's going almost five under the speed limit, when Tara catches sight of the sign up ahead, letting her know that their exit is coming up on the right.

But when Jax carries on in the left lane instead, bypassing yet another car, she points out the approaching exit to him, or rather the sign that reads 'State route 66/State route 140, Lakeview/Medford, exit right'. "That's our exit, baby."

"We're not going home just yet." He replies, sounding unintentionally cryptic, but keeping his focus on the road ahead, utterly ignorant to the curious expression that appears on Tara's face.

And of course Tara's mind races, but only for a second, before she remembers that I-97 South will take you straight into Northern Cali, and so the pieces start to click into place now, or at least so she thinks, but she still voices her obvious question out loud. "So where are we going?"

"Shit, sorry." Jax actually replies now, looking back at her apologetically when he realizes that he was so caught up in his own train of thoughts, that he'd left her hanging without further explanation, so he quickly elaborates. "Back to Worden. I just wanna check out my grandpa's old place, see if she might be hiding out there."

"Yeah, okay." Tara nods her head in agreement, relieved that Charming wasn't his intended destination after all, considering that he still wasn't allowed to leave the state without permission. But then she feels the need to explain, or rather clear something up for him. "But you know how earlier today you said that if the caretaker hadn't died, Nate wouldn't even be in that nursing home?"

He glances at her again, nodding his head, so Tara continues. "Well, that's not exactly true. You see, your grandma had already set everything up before she died. She'd sold the house, and set up a trust fund from the sale to pay for your grandpa's nursing home. What I mean is, ... that there is probably someone else living in that house now."

"Hmm ... right." He replies, his hand leaving her thighs as he tugs on the hairs of his short beard in thought for just a moment, before he drops it back down to her lap, and shrugs his shoulder when he sighs. "It's only a ten minute drive from here, we might as well check it out."

He glances at her, searching her eyes, relieved to see her nodding in agreement, before he focuses back on the road ahead.

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Jax rifles through one of the toolboxes he keeps in the back of his truck, finding the flashlight, and some other things he is looking for, while Tara's scanning their surroundings rather cautiously.

It's so cold out that she tightens her wool winter coat around her, actually buttoning it all the way up now, even tucking her long hair into the back of it, before she pulls the hood up over her head, to shield herself a little more from the still sprinkling rain.

She glances over at Jax, catching him shove a crowbar through one of the belt loops of his jeans, and clutching something else in his hand, she can't make out what though just yet. He closes the tailgate and topper on his truck, flicks the heavy-duty flashlight on, and holds the other item out to her now, for her to take.
Tara glances down at the set of black leather gloves in his hand, they're his, a second pair, and will surely be too big on her much smaller hands, but he insists, pulling her hands free from the pockets of her coat when she hesitates, and starts to put them on for her. "It's so dark out here, you should wear these in case you trip or something, don't want you to cut up your hands, babe."

He then stretches his free gloved hand out for her to take, which she does, before she falls into step right beside him as they start to make their way through the foliage.

They have slowly driven by the former Madock residence twice, before finding and pulling down this dirt road that ran between property lines. It's dark out, not a streetlamp within sight way out here, and with the way the road curves, coupled with the heavy underbrush and threes all around, this was undoubtedly the perfect location to park and leave their truck without being spotted by the comings and goings of the neighborhood. Not that there would be a whole lot of 'comings-and-goings' this late at night to begin with.

The bad part about parking way out here however, is that they now have a good ten to fifteen minute walk ahead of them, which in itself doesn't sound all that bad, if their walk would be along the paved road, but since they don't want to risk being seen and drawing unwanted attention to themselves, going that way was out of the question.

So instead they have to tread through this uneven terrain, in the cold wind, with it still slightly sprinkling, and in the dark, no less, finding their way through the overgrown landscape that skirts around the entirety of the property.

They walk silently, carefully looking about, still holding hands, with their arms outstretched though, because Jax insists on staying a step ahead of her, to make sure she won't trip or fall over something that isn't visible ahead in the darkness of night.

At last they finally reach the white wooden rail fence that encloses the garden and yard that surrounds the house itself, and Jax climbs across it, before quickly giving Tara a hand to do the same.

The house is dark, and from the looks of it, judging by the unkempt landscape, it's seemingly abandoned, at least so it seemed when they drove by earlier, and even more so now from where they stand on the far end of what was once a beautiful, lush garden, but is no more. This time of year, it's no surprise that the flowers aren't in bloom, but even in the darkness it's clear that no one has tended to the garden since Nate has left the home.

Tara takes a deep breath, unprepared at the onslaught of emotions that she hasn't anticipated being here again would bring back up to the surface. The last time she has been here, Abel had been kidnapped, Gemma was on the lamb, she was pregnant with Thomas, and to say her relationship with Jax was strained under the weight of it all would be an understatement.

So much of it has changed since then, and she means not just their circumstances, but them, the people themselves have changed. Back then she'd felt so close to Gemma, and so far away from Jax, and the ride from then to here had been long and grueling, with its fair share of ups and downs, to say the least.

But tonight, after everything they've shared with each other today, she can honestly say she feels closer to Jax, more connected with him, than she probably ever has, and coincidently in turn the rift with Gemma is deeper than ever before, too.

Yet still, she feels like such a fool now to have waited this long to even ask the most obvious question out loud. Maybe it's because Gemma actually being here seemed like such an abstract idea when she'd still assumed that the house would be occupied by a whole other family by now.
Seeing that that wasn't the case at all, the property in disarray like this, and considering where they're standing now, it's painfully clear that she can't put this off another second longer. The sudden urgency of the situation forces it out of her, leaving her no other choice than to finally speak up.

She's brought out of her thoughts when Jax pulls on her hand, trying to tug her along towards the house now, but she digs her heels in, standing still, tugging on his hand in return, forcing him to turn back around towards her. Of course she's met with a confused look from him, but she's quickly whispering what's on her mind, before he can even ask. "Shouldn't we talk about this? What happens if she really is here, Jax? I mean, what are we doing?"

It's so dark out, especially with the rain clouds overhead shrouding even what little light the moon could provide, but still, somehow her eyes have adjusted to the darkness enough that she can see the grim look that slips onto his face as he contemplates her question and how to answer her.

Then he suddenly seems nervous, when he glances back over his shoulder towards the house for a quick second, before he steps closer towards Tara again, reaching past her shoulder and gripping the white fence post as if he needs something to steady or ground himself with. He slowly shakes his head at her, swallowing the lump in his throat, when he ruefully admits in a whisper of his own, "I don't know."

It's not what she wants to hear, but she has sort of expected it. He has been so hell-bent on revenge for such a long, long time, has build up the moment in his head when he'd get to dish out his or rather the Club's sense of justice against whoever almost killed her, that now that she has convinced him to handle it otherwise, he seems at a loss about what to do next. Where to go from here, literally.

"Well, I do." Tara whispers without wavering to her voice, even though she's not sure at all either what to do, when she reaches out and grasps onto him by the fabric of his jacket. But she can't let him know that she's unsure, too, one of them has to be the stronger one here, the more level headed one, and because deep down he's still too wounded by the fact that his own mother is the 'bad guy' in this scenario, that Tara knows this time the stronger one has to be her.

And because of that, she knows she has to force him to stick to his reassurances from earlier tonight. She reaches up, framing his face with both her hands, and meets his dark-blue gaze head on when she whispers again, "Retaliation is what she expects, but we have to be smarter than her, Jax. That means we can't hurt her, we just have to stall her, until the cops get here to take her in. She won't see that coming."

He takes in a deep breath through his nose, letting her words sink in, make sense of them, when he finally nods his head at her, and whispers back, "Yeah, okay, that's what we'll do ..." he glances back towards the house, before he focuses back on Tara. "... if she's even here."

They slowly find their way through the garden, approaching the side of the house, careful with each step they take, to not let their presence be known. They round the building, head to the front of the house first, and just like earlier when they've driven by, there's still no cars in the driveway, none of the outside light that are scattered across the front of the property are on either. Everything out here is just as dark as the inside of the house seems to be.

It's surely a risk, drawing attention to themselves, but Jax won't leave here until he knows for a fact that Gemma isn't here, so he throws caution to the wind and presses his face up to the glass of one of the windows, tries to see inside, but to no avail. He can't see anything, not like this, it's simply too dark, so against his better judgment, he uses his flashlight to shine inside, not just one window, but a few, near the far back end of the house, what used to be the bedrooms.

And even though Gemma is nowhere to be seen, both his and Tara's suspicions are confirmed now, when there's quite literally nothing to see but stark empty rooms. The house is in fact empty, and
abandoned.

He flicks the flashlight back off, handing it to Tara behind him, before he now tries to open one window after the next, wanting to take a closer look inside, but neither of them is truly surprised that they’re all locked.

They quietly round the house all the way back to the other side, trudging through the muck and the mud brought on by all the recent rain, back to the garden, near the back porch that leads into the kitchen. Jax now pulls the crowbar out, already anticipating the back door being locked as well, and ready to pry his way inside if he has to, when Tara suddenly grabs a hold of the back of his jacket with both her hands, and yanks at him hard, pulling him back into the shadows of the dying shrubs surrounding them.

She’s caught him so much off guard, that he almost stumbles back onto her, but catches his footing just in time. He turns his head, his eyes searching her face for an explanation, the question a whisper already on the tip of his tongue, when Tara simply nods back towards the house. Conveying with her eyes that there's something or rather someone there.

His eyes slowly scan from the single door, to the kitchen window, and over to the double sliding doors that lead inside from the porch, but he doesn't see anything, it's pitch-black inside as far as he can tell. He turns back towards Tara, mouthing the word "What?" to her, when she once more nudges her head towards the house, but helping him what exactly to focus on when she points towards the sliding glass doors of the porch.

His eyes are fixed on the doors, squinting and holding his breath as he waits and tries to find whatever it is that has caught Tara's eyes, when he suddenly sees it too. The bright red glimmer of the end of a cigarette, as someone's taking a drag from it, and for a moment all time seems to be standing still when he exhales the breath he's been holding.

Jax knows that the odds of it being anyone other than his mother are slim to none, and so his heart suddenly drops, his throat seems to close up on him, when he's realizing the moment of truth has actually arrived, and so much sooner than he'd thought it would. She's really here!

"Jax!" Tara whispering his name right behind him brings him back out of his dark thoughts, when he dares to take his eyes off of the house and turns back towards his wife, who's now looking back at him with a slightly panicked expression on her face.

That's when he really snaps out of it, drapes his arm around Tara, his fingers digging into her side, when he drags her along with him, further into the garden, to the farthest point away from the house.

They finally come to a stop at the fence, Tara quickly digs her phone out of her pocket, ready to make that call to the police when Jax grabs the device right out of her hands, and whispers, "Wait."

Tara searches his face for any sign of trouble, sounding desperate when she can't help herself but remind him again, "We agreed this is what we would do."

"Just let me think for a second." He answers, sighing deeply as his eyes flicker back towards the house, even thought the back porch and its glass doors aren't even visible anymore from where they are standing now.

Tara obviously misconstrues his hesitance to call the cops for a sign that he's changed his mind on her yet again, so she not only feels desperate, but also justified to hold him up to the promises that he’s made, not just tonight, but some of them long ago.
"Please look at me." She starts, still whispering, and when he does in fact meet her eyes again, she reaches for his free hand, pressing it hard against her stomach, and even though she isn't showing yet at all, the meaning to him is crystal clear when she begins to speak. "After Thomas was born, you promised me that you'd never miss anything like this again. You promised! We have to do this the right way, Jax, or we risk losing everything."

She's searching his eyes, his face for a sign that he agrees, and is relieved when she finds just that. "I know, and I haven't changed my mind, I swear. I'm just thinking about how all of this looks."

"How what looks?" Tara asks in confusion.

"Us, being here, for one. With a crowbar and a gun." He starts explaining. "Then our truck being parked way out there, hidden away." It's his turn now to search her eyes, trying to see if she understands what he's trying to say, before he adds, "At the station, you said it will be your word against hers, and all this kind of makes us look a little -.

"Suspicious." Tara supplies, before he can finish his thought out loud.

"Yeah, definitely." Jax nods his head at her in agreement. "If we're really gonna do this by the book, then let's make sure we dot our i's and cross all our t's this time. There's no room for mistakes here."

Tara sighs, taking a moment to think for just a second, and Jax is just about to speak again, but once more she beats him to it. "Okay, I think the closer we stick to the truth, the better. So why don't you go back to the truck, and bring it over here, while I stay here and make sure she doesn't leave. And then -.

"Fuck no." Jax practically snaps at her for even suggesting that, "She tried to kill you, Tara, twice! Not a chance in hell I'll leave you here alone with her. That's not gonna happen, babe." He lets out a frustrated sigh, not really liking the alternative either though, but still he explains the plan. "We both go back to the truck, pull it into the driveway here, you call the cops, tell 'em we had a hunch she might be hiding out here, and if she tries to split before the cops show up, then I'll go after her, stop her from leaving."

"But what if she runs in the meantime? While the both of us walk back to the truck?" Tara voices the same concern that's going through his own mind at the moment.

"It's a risk we'll have to take. It's raining, it's late ... where else is she gonna go for the night?" He supplies, and already reaches out for her again, ready to help her climb back over the fence, so they can get back to where they've come from.

"No, wait." Tara shrugs his hands off of her, standing her ground. "Let's not risk it. I'll go back to the truck alone, you stay and make sure she doesn't leave. It makes more sense, Jax." She adds that last part, pleading with him again to see things her way.

"Look, babe -." He begins his rebuttal, but Tara quickly shuts him down, pulling her phone right back out of his hand, and holds it up for show. "I saved the location of the truck on here, all I have to do is follow it back. It makes no sense for both of us to leave." She nods at him. "I can do this."

"I know." Jax replies, and swipes a gloved hand down his glistening face, wiping some of the drizzle of the rain out of his eyes, before glancing back at the house once more in deep thought.

At last, he reaches into the pocket of his jacket, pulls out her gun and his truck keys for her to take, which she quickly stashes away in the pocket of her coat now. Without further ado, he climbs the fence to the other side, waits for her to climb to the top, then reaches for her, pulling her down and
back into his arms, lowering her safely back to the ground right in front of him.

He pulls the crowbar from his belt again, handing that to her as well, before he frames her face with both his hands, wiping some rain drizzle off of her checks with the pads of his thumbs, before he leans down and kisses her, long and hard.

He pulls away from the kiss, meets her eyes with a reassuring smile, but just a split-second later, he starts instructing her, not missing a beat, when he flicks the flashlight back on for her. "Be careful, watch your step and text me when you're back at the truck, so I know you're safe and on your way."

"Okay, I will." She nods, leaning up to place another quick kiss against his lips. "Please don't do anything stupid." She pleads, meeting his eyes. "Don't let her bait you."

"I'll all be alright, I promise." He reaches for her hand, can't help but smile a little at the way his gloves dwarfs her hands, but he still raises it up to his lips and kisses it. "It's almost over, babe."

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It's barely ten minutes later, when Jax's phone vibrates against his chest, in the inside pocket of his jacket. He takes his eyes off of the back door, or more accurately off of the glimmer of the cigarette his chain-smoking mother is holding, just long enough to check the message, and just like he'd hoped, it is in fact Tara, letting him know that she's on her way now.

Just a few more minutes, and she'll pull up to the front of the house, she'll call the cops, and soon thereafter, all of this will be no more than a distant ... nightmare!

He'd be telling a big fat lie, if he said that his hands weren't itching to storm inside and do what he'd sworn he'd do to the person who'd tried to kill the woman that he loved, the mother of his children, his wife.

But as per usual, Tara was the voice of reason, so this hatred that has been festering within him, the kind he could feel pumping through his veins, like a life form, an organism in itself, ... well, it needs to be directed elsewhere, or at the very least directed differently.

He lets out the breath he'd been holding, when he can hear the truck pull into the driveway, the faint glow of the headlights visible. For a brief moment it makes the house appear more like a big cardboard outline than an actual building, from his vantage point in the backyard garden.

The glimmer inside disappears, the room goes back to blackness, and Jax has no doubt that his mother is probably looking out a window to see just who has pulled up. With the headlights still shining, she won't even realize that it's Tara behind the wheel of his pickup, she'll undoubtedly believe it's him that has come to confront her.

The phone he's still clutching in his hand vibrates once more, and he glances down at it, reads the message from Tara that lets him know she's called the cops, and they are on their way.

Just then, he can make out the faint, yet distinct sound of the glass door sliding open, and a split-second later he can actually see the shadowy outline of his mother step out onto the porch, in a sudden rush to hightail it out of here, no doubt.

"You are not getting away this time, mom." His grim sounding voice booms through the darkness of night, causing her to stop dead in her tracks at the sound, just when Jax steps out from behind the shrub he's been hiding behind. "So save us both the embarrassment, ... don't make me chase after you like the vile bitch that you are." His cutting words leaving no doubt anymore to what Tara has revealed to him, and whether or not he's believed her.
He can hear her take in a shaky breath as she backs away from his approaching form, back towards the house. She slowly takes a seat on the concrete step of the porch, not saying a word in reply as she lowers her head in utter surrender.

Jax swallows away the sudden lump in his throat, and unlike Gemma, he actually catches sight of Tara, who has rounded the house to the backyard once again.

Tara meets his eyes for just a second, giving him a reassuring nod, yet remains glued to the spot, but watching with trepidation as the impending confrontation between mother and son unfolds before her very eyes.

She knows he needs this moment with her, needs to hear it from Gemma's mouth. But Tara wonders for just a moment if he'll actually get what he wants, or if her mother-in-law will try to spin the truth some more, one last-ditch effort to win him over to her side. It honestly wouldn't surprise her if that was the case.

But then Gemma blows that theory right out of the water when she suddenly speaks up, and asks, "Who else knows?"

Jax shoves his hands in the pockets of his jeans, once more swallowing away to clear his throat before he can answer, "The Club, ... and Nero."

"He had no idea." Gemma replies, meeting Jax's eyes when he comes to stand just a few feet in front of her.

"I know." He nods in return.

"He's a good man, Jax, you should try to keep in touch with him." She suggests, sounding sincere.

Jax doesn't know how to respond, because on one hand, he knows Nero is a good man, but on the other, she's the last person he wants to take any more advise from. All his life he has let his mother sway him, like a constant little voice inside his head, telling him what to do, how to act, how to react, and what to become ... but after what he's learned tonight, he's done letting her, or anyone else from the MC putting thoughts or doubts inside his head.

And now he knows just what he has to do, "Do you still have a copy of JT's manuscript?"

The expression on his mothers face shows her surprise, but still she answers him without missing a beat. The tone in her voice still as even and unaltering as when she first started to speak. "Yes." She nods. "It's in the storage locker. With yours and your brother's birth certificates, and death papers."

Jax nods, "Okay."

Suddenly she becomes more brazen, actually scrambles back up to her feet to be at least at eye level with him when she says. "I love Tara very much -."

"Don't." Jax cuts her off, shaking his head at her.

"This is not an excuse. I'm not defending myself." She scoffs. "I barely remember what happened that night."

Jax's chin trembles slightly, looking back at her, meeting her eyes when he swallows once more before he asks, "But it happened?"

Gemma nods her head, "Yes. It did."
There are tears forming in his eyes now, because even though he's believed Tara, never doubted her even for a second, hearing the truth from his mother herself still rips the wound right back open, gutting him all over again. He finds himself reliving every turmoil, every fear, every doubt, and self-loathing he's lived with since he's found Tara near the brink of death in their family home.

Then Gemma adds, "I know there's no apology that can touch what you're feeling, Jackson."

Jax doesn't say anything, just meets her eyes, fighting back the onslaught of emotions that are rushing through him, during this moment of silence between them.

But then Gemma suddenly says with resignation in her voice. "Where do you want me?"

Tara takes in a sharp breath at that, because the meaning is crystal clear, and her eyes flicker back towards Jax, relieved when he replies. "Just stay right where you are. Sit, ... if you want." He adds, looking back at Tara when the faint sound of approaching sirens begin to pierce through the dead of night.

The sound is growing louder and louder as the seconds tick by, and Gemma suddenly realizes why, despite his stone cold demeanor towards her, Jax still hasn't pulled his gun on her yet.

And it seems so strange that believing she was going to die, that her own son was going to kill her, didn't alarm her in the way that the approaching police now seems to do. She suddenly finds her much more fierce sounding voice again, staring at Jax in utter disbelieve and sheer panic, when she says. "What did you do?"

Dark blue orbs are looking back at her with a hint of satisfaction he hasn't actually anticipated to feel, when they can now hear the blaring sound of the sirens clearly pulling into the driveway on the other side of the house.

He looks over at Tara, nodding at her, and stretches his hand out towards her, leaving it hovering right there in the air until she quickly steps out of the shadows and appears by his side, taking his hand at first, but then allowing him to pull her all the way into his arms, before he's meeting his mother's disbelieving eyes once more, and finally answers her. "I did what needed to be done, mom."

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Author's Note: It goes without saying that I'm sorry for the long time span between updates. It's lack of time for the most part that's to blame, and the fact that I'm not truly happy with the way this chapter has turned out. But I'm done 'patching it up', or I'll drive myself crazy. I hope it's well-received, and doesn't disappoint. Please leave me a few words with your thoughts. Thank you.

P.S. It's clear I left some of the actual dialogue from the show in there, mostly because I liked it just too much to try to change a whole lot about it. I hope no one's bothered by that.
Chapter 47

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When the police round the house, Jax and Tara simply step back and out of their way, to allow the lawmen to do their thing.

He still has his arm wrapped around her, holding her to him in a show of protectiveness and solidarity, but their faces are blank masks now. They're just staring as the scene unfolds before them, like silent bystanders, unattached onlookers as Gemma is quickly surrounded, then put into handcuffs while being read her rights and taken into custody at last.

Gemma on the other hand has never looked more furious than she does this instant, yet she seems almost out of character when she doesn't even smart-off, doesn't protest, doesn't put up a fight, neither verbally or physically. For once, the matriarch is simply stunned into silence and surrender, not just pissed off, but undoubtedly heartbroken and hurt by what she considers an unimaginable betrayal by her own flesh and blood.

However, the deadly glare she directs at none other than Tara when the deputy starts to drag her away with a firm grip on her upper arm isn't missed by anyone, least of all Jax, and neither is the way his arm drops from around Tara when he quickly takes a step forward to shield his wife from it, and from her. His hand's blindly reaching back, grabbing a hold of Tara, securing her behind his larger frame, as if he fears his mother might manage to make a break for it, handcuffs and all, and will try to attack her after all.

His eyes then connect with Gemma's, the almost disinterested look on his face from just moments ago is now replaced with one of loathing and fierce determination instead, and coupled with the physical gesture of guarding Tara with his own body, the message he's conveying is loud and clear without having to utter a single word; You'll have to come through me to get to her!

After Gemma is taken away, they both give their statements, and not long after that, they finally find themselves back in their truck, on their way back home.

Despite the fact that his mother's been caught within hours of Tara regaining her memories of that night, and was behind bars now, the mood between them is rather gloomy. They're still sitting side by side, holding hands, seeking comfort in each other's touch, the worst behind them - quite literally - in the rearview mirror, but the reality of it all is weighing heavily on their minds, and thickening the air around them with sadness. There are no triumphant outbursts or smiles plastered on either of their faces, not tonight, everything that happened, what Gemma did, it simply still hurts too much.

Were they relieved? Yes, of course, they were undoubtedly relieved, that goes without saying. But the fact of the matter remains that it had been Gemma, Jax's own fucking mother, who had attacked Tara and assaulted her so brutally, so ... viciously, that it had nearly resulted in her untimely death.

Regardless of the anger both already felt towards her, especially after knowing about her involvement in JT's death, helping Clay was one thing though, this newest development was something else, and trumps everything they'd thought her capable of, and it's a hard pill to swallow
for the both of them.

The knowledge of that guts him to the core, he can't help but blame himself for it, because he's lost count how many times Tara has expressed concern about the part Gemma played in their relationship, their family dynamic, but he just couldn't see it. He didn't see it!

Deep down he'd thought that despite her overbearing nature, her meddling, her ... obvious flaws, his mother loved her family more than anything, and he'd foolishly assumed that as his Old Lady, his wife and mother of his children, that if push came to shove Tara would've been included in that family equation as well.

So time and again Jax had turned a blind eye to his mother's antics, to him they were just a pestering distraction to the things that really mattered, like Club business, but right now, looking back, he can't help but wonder how he could have been so blind for all these years? He didn't see this coming. Even at her worst, Jax never could've imagined his mother capable of something like ... this! He knew better now, he knew now without a doubt that his assumption had been wrong, with near deadly consequences!

The hour and a half long car ride home seems to drag on at first, but when he manages to shake himself free of his self-loathing thoughts long enough to make some necessary phone calls, time seems to speed up and fly by rather quickly again.

And to Tara's obvious surprise, Jax's first call isn't to the Club, but he's calling none other than Ally Lowen instead.

He has his phone sitting in one of the cup holders that pull out like a drawer on his dashboard, the call on speaker phone, and if the slightly raspy sound of her voice is any indication when she answers, it's obvious that she'd already been fast asleep, which shouldn't have really been a surprise at this time of night.

It takes the lawyer a couple seconds to not only fully wake up, but also wrap her mind around and really grasp the ugly truth that both Jax and Tara begin to relay back to her. And it's now that Jax hears Tara's accounts for the first time in greater detail as well, when she recalls everything she now remembers from that day to Ally out loud.

He struggles to contain the newly rising anger that bursts through him all over again, he can feel it seeping into every cell of his body, when he's reliving the assault on her through Tara's very emotionally charged words.

But there is something admirable about the way Jax can keep his thumb gently caressing her hand to try to comfort her while she's talking, yet the knuckles on his left hand are turning white when he grips the steering wheel with all his strength, his jaw tight, turning away from her as he's clenching his teeth in disdain, just to keep himself from punching his fist through his own fucking window mid-drive.

Deep down he knows that calling the cops was the right thing to do, for the sake of what they have now, for her, for their boys, for their expanding little family, but ... but in this very moment, he can't stop the dark thoughts about wanting to end her himself from creeping back to the forefront of his mind.

The man who he used to be, the man capable of such things, he will always be a part of him, a part of the man he is now, there simply was no escaping that truth either tonight!

And it all brings him back to the reason why he'd called Ally Lowen in the first place, because after Gemma was put in handcuffs, finally brought away and out of his sight. Sudden questions arose that
in the heat of the moment hadn't even crossed his mind.

So he didn't call the Club, but called Ally instead, knowing she'd be the one that could give him answers to the questions and worries that now boggled his mind. Like what will happen now?

Ally begins to explain the procedural stuff that will most like happen in the weeks, or months to come, and even though he knows most of this, he just needs to hear it said out loud, to reassure himself that this was in fact the right move.

So she starts by pointing out that it's already late Friday night, courts were closed for the weekend, so Gemma would remain locked up in Oregon until the coming week.

On Monday or Tuesday a request for extradition to California, San Joaquin county to be exact, since that's where the crime had occurred, would be filed.

Between approval and execution of said extradition, it could still take days, maybe even another week before Gemma would finally be brought home and allowed a bail hearing.

Then there were several things to consider, whether or not Gemma will be granted bail. For starters, there is the restraining order Tara had filed after the miscarriage, it has technically never been revoked, and was therefore still in place when the assault took place.

Another factor is Gemma's previous record of evading arrests and imprisonment, she has proven to be a known flight risk. And last, but not least is the fact that she is now also the prime suspect in the murder of Sheriff Eli Roosevelt, the former head of the Son Joaquin Sheriff's department.

Ally Lowen is by no means a fortune teller, but when Jax flat out asks her what she thinks is going to happen, not just client to lawyer, but friend to friend, she finally admits that she highly doubts the former queen of Sam Crow would find a judge willing to grand her bail, and would most likely be ordered to remain in the custody of the state until the actual trial, which could be months from now.

She's steadfast in her reassurances, and it does begin to ease some of the tension Tara and he is feeling, knowing that Gemma won't get a chance to make yet another run for it, or worse, come after Tara once more.

But as Tara's lawyer, she has a job to do here, and despite the rather uncomfortable and at one time volatile subject, she can't in good conscience overlook the incident of the miscarriage and what could possibly be the outfall from it, if they left it undiscussed and remained unprepared for it.

When the supposedly first assault in Tara's office would get mentioned, Gemma would undoubtedly deny all the allegations, would say that there never was a baby and therefore no miscarriage for that matter, that Tara had lied and falsified medical documents, and if she could produce some proof of that, she could create doubt in the validity of Tara's statement, and with it put into question whether or not Tara is telling the truth this time around.

Tara swallows the lump in her throat when she listens to Ally explain all of that to them, and with a guilty look in her eyes, she lowers her gaze to their conjoined hands that were still casually resting on her thigh, while her heart begins to pound heavily against her rip cage. She doesn't know what to say, how to respond to what Ally wants to discuss, because the mere thought of her horrible crime against Gemma - and Jax - getting brought up in court, wants her to hide away from the world in shame.

"Gemma can't prove shit!" Jax startles her out of her guilt when he speaks up confidently in her place, and without even a second of hesitation he further explains. "As far as medical and public records go, Tara was pregnant, the assault happened, the miscarriage happened, and with that, the goddamn restraining order still stands. I'll gladly take the fucking stand to attest to what my wife
suffered through by the hands of my mother. So Gemma can try to twist and turn shit all she wants, but those are the facts, that she can’t prove to be untrue." He glances over at Tara for just a second then, gives her a reassuring nod accompanied with a small smile, before he raises their intertwined hands up to his lips, so he can kiss her knuckles as his eyes focus back on the stretch of highway ahead of them.

Jesus Christ, what has she done to deserve this kind of love and devotion from him? Tara honestly doesn’t know, all she does know is that her heart is overflowing with gratitude and love for him in return, but she still can’t bring herself to chime in or comment on the matter, her guilty conscience just won’t let her. What was there really left to say anyways? Jax has pretty much said it all.

"What about Wendy Case?" Ally asks with some concern notable in her voice. "I've heard through the grapevine that after her relapse, Gemma and her have grown quite close again. How much does she know?" The question undoubtedly meant for Tara this time.

"She's just a weak junkie." Jax answers again before Tara can even form a thought. "That's all she'll ever be. She has no actual proof either, and her word ain't worth ... anything." Jax tries to reassure Lowen, as much as Tara when he dares a glance at her and sees the slight concern in her eyes, his thumb still rubbing back and forth over her hand that's clutching his.

And it’s in that moment that Tara finally finds her voice, albeit a little timid at first. "Wendy ..." She shakes her head along to her words, more out of habit, since Lowen obviously can't see her. "Wendy didn't know any details, ... and neither did Wayne for that matter, the only one who did is Margaret."

"Margaret won't say anything." Jax adds on, and Tara agrees with a nod.

Shortly after that, they end the call, with an agreement to talk again Monday, or Tuesday at the latest, and let Ally get back to sleep.

Jax's next call is to the Club, this conversation is also on speaker, mostly because he's trying to prove to Tara that he's not keeping anything else from her this time. But still, he tries to keep the call short and to the point, just to inform them to call off the search, put out the word that Gemma's been caught and arrested.

But before Jax can end the conversation with Bobby, the older man chimes up, because some vital things have been left unsaid. "What are we doing here, brother? Do we ... do we try to arrange protection for her, at least 'til you figure out how you wanna handle this, or ...?" The words die down, leaving the rest open for Jax to fill in the blanks.

Tara can't help but raise her eyes to Jax's face, he's intently watching the road ahead and all she's really getting is a shadowed view of his profile from her seat right beside him, but despite the darkness she's still able to see the way his forehead wrinkles and his eyebrows draw together in thought for just a second at Bobby's words.

"Nothing." He answers with resolution in his voice just a breath later, shaking his head again, and gives Tara's hand a little squeeze while looking over at her for just a split-second, before returning his eyes back on the road. "We do nothing. She's on her own. So ... just let it play out."

Upon hearing his answer, Tara lets out a silent sigh of relief right beside him, bringing their intertwined hands up to her lips now, so she can place a kiss against his hand for a change, because he's trying here. He's trying so hard to do this her way, and she's so immensely grateful for it.

"Hmm, yeah." They can hear Bobby clear his throat on the other end of the line, as if he's about to say something else, but then there's a sudden pause instead, and Jax actually wonders if the call got
dropped, due to bad reception.

He speaks up then, to see if the call was still connected. "Bobby? You still there?"

"I am." He replies, interrupting the silence with his thoughtful sounding voice. "Gemma was an Old Lady longer than you've been a Son, Jax." He adds, "She knows ... a lot!"

It takes Tara a second to grasp what Bobby was getting at, but Jax caught the meaning instantaneously, and lets out a sigh before he utters a response. "I don't think she'd rat." But even after the words leave his mouth, he has to acknowledge to himself that he really doesn't know anymore what his mother is capable of. She'd fooled him for far too long!

He doesn't want to sound like he's defending her by any means, but he still can't help but add, "Besides, if they charge her with Eli's murder, too, there's no way they would let her cut a deal."

"You're right." Bobby acknowledges the truth behind Jax's words, yet can't help but point out the obvious. "But you and I both know that the bullets they found match Juice's gun, not one of your mom's smaller sized calibers."

"Yeah, but they don't know that." Jax replies without missing a beat.

"Guess I'll have to take it to the table." Bobby says in response, but is surprised when he doesn't get a reply from Jax as quickly as he thought he would.

Instead a moment of silence stretches on between them, as Jax thinks about just what to say, while he can feel Tara's scrutinizing gaze fixated on him and his reaction.

He made a promise to Tara, but technically this right here has nothing to do with either him or her, so he swallows the lump in his throat, before he quickly adds, "That's Club business, which I'm no longer a part of, so ... your call, pres, your vote, just ... just leave me out of it."

"Yeah, you're right." Bobby replies sounding solemnly, as if this is the very moment it really hits him that Jax is truly gone, and not coming back.

They finally end the call.

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Jax locks the front door to their apartment behind them, while Tara shrugs out of her coat to hang it on the hook near the entrance, and Jax follows suit.

She takes the couple steps further into their home, leaving her purse in the armchair she passes by on her way into the kitchen. She's wondering if there's anything she can busy herself with enough to get out of the torturous thoughts inside her head, when her eyes are falling on the empty sink, and she realizes that Jason or Christy must've loaded the dishwasher for her before they left with the boys earlier tonight.

Besides that, everything else looks the same, everything is the same, but still Tara leans back against the kitchen counter and folds her arms in front of herself, frozen in place, because nothing is really the same anymore now.

This revelation about Gemma, that her returning memories brought forth, it changes their world, their family. Logically you'd think it shouldn't have such a profound impact, considering Gemma hadn't been an active part of their lives for quite some time now, but somehow it still is, because the sadness of the truth somehow weighs everything down. It changes everything. How can they move on from
Tara's so lost in her own thoughts that she hasn't even noticed Jax has followed her into the kitchen and has stopped to lean against the table right across from her, his hands braced on either side of him, taking in her tense shoulders, stiff posture and the far away, almost haunted expression on her face, with a worried gaze of his own.

He can't help but wonder if she's reliving yet again what took place in their home in Charming, or if this is about what Bobby had said about possibly taking a vote to determine Gemma's fate.

He hesitates for a moment, but it's already late, and if there's one thing he doesn't want to happen, it's them going to bed without sorting the rest of this nightmare out once and for all. They had started out on opposite sides tonight, then worked their shit out long enough to find her and get her locked up, yet he can't help but shake this feeling that they're now on different pages all over again. So he takes a stab in the dark, trying to get to the bottom of this.

"Look, asking the Club for help finding her is one thing, and considering I'm patched out, they could've just as easily turned me down. But now that she's going inside, this vote doesn't have anything to do with me, it's not my Club anymore. They don't owe me anything, Tara, so I don't get to have a say in -." "I know." Tara cuts him off, meeting his steely blue gaze across the small distance, nodding her head. "I know." She repeats again for good measure, and the look in her eyes is now softening when she takes in his puzzled but also worried expression. She tries to reassure him. "What the Club does now, it's ... it's on them. It's out of your hands."

"Out of our hands." Jax corrects her, his not so subtle reminder that they were making decisions as a team now.

Tara nods in reply, and Jax pushes himself off of the edge of the table, their eyes still locked on each other's when he takes the few steps over towards her and reaches out for her, rubbing his hands soothingly up and down her upper arms, hoping it will loosen some of that tension in her, "If that's not it, then what is it? What are you thinking about?"

"I wish I didn't ..." She stops, wiping at the tears that are forming in her eyes again and gulps, lowering her gaze for just a second before her eyes shoot back up to connect with his anew, and she finally admits what's plaguing her now. "I wish I didn't remember." Her voice breaks on the last word and the tears actually pearl down her cheeks, before Jax pulls her into his embrace, but shaking his head at the thought that she'd rather still be in the dark about who'd hurt her than having to face this.

Her voice is sounding high-pitched, but also muffled against his chest, "We were finally happy, but ... but now everything is fucked up again."

"That's not true." Jax interjects, holding her close and stroking her hair to calm and comfort her. He wishes he could take her pain away, she's been through too damn much already, and he's overtaken by the need to find a way to not let Gemma destroy what they've fought so hard to build here for themselves. "Everything we have right now, us being together and raising our boys, and this new baby, our family, ... she almost destroyed that, almost took that from us, so I'll be damned if we waste another fucking minute in misery, because of the shit she pulled."

She sighs against his chest. "And how do we do that? What does that look like?" Tara sniffs, still relying on his embrace to keep her upright.
"The best revenge is being happy." Jax replies genuinely, and he could swear he's read that quote somewhere before. "So that's what we'll do. This won't hold us back. We keep on looking for a bigger place, get ready for our baby girl, celebrate our oldest turning five ... we carry on, babe, live our lives, focus on the things that make us happy, make us whole! We'll show her up, by proving her wrong when our story turns out to be the greatest love story Charming has ever fucking seen."

Tara tightens her arms around him at his sweet words, her tears stop falling and a little smile appears on her face when she lets herself believe that it could truly be this simple to move past this nightmare.

He sweetly kisses the top of Tara's head, pulling her just a little bit tighter against him, before his face contours in anger once more. "As for Gemma, she can rot in prison for the rest of her life, or maybe Sam Crow will take her out, and she'll rot in hell instead, ... I honestly don't give a shit. I'm just done with her. Fuck her!"

Jax is leaning back a bit while he's gently pushing her away from his chest, so he can reach for her face, framing it with both his hands, and meet her still teary looking eyes. "I love you, Tara. I'm so happy being with you, and there's nothing in this world that could ever change the way I feel about you, least of all her!"

"I feel the same way, Jackson. I love you so much." Tara replies, before she reaches up and frames his face in return, pulling him down so she can kiss him.

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Author's Note: This chapter's not as long as usually, but it has some important factors that needed to get mentioned. Can't wait to hear what you think, so please leave me a comment or a review. Thank you!
Chapter 48

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Warning: Smut!

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The kitchen table is left askew, and not one, but two chairs left knocked over on the linoleum floor right beside it. At first one might suspect a fight had taken place, but then the trail of discarded shoes and clothes that leads from the kitchen all the way to their bedroom tells a whole other story, and it doesn't require much imagination to figure out what is really happening.

Jax can't help but groan headily against her lips when he picks her up, his greedy hands tugging her thighs open in the process, wrapping her beautiful legs around his waist, just to carry her the last couple of steps towards their bed.

The scorching kiss they share never lets up either while he does that, not even as they both tumble onto the mattress in a needy frenzy of impatient hands, that are trying to free each other of the last pieces of clothing that were still separating them from one another.

Neither can really explain where the sudden urgency to reconnect like this stems from, but it's there with them, driving them on. They just know that they need this now, need to get lost in one another, like needing oxygen to keep on breathing.

And even though it's not, to them it feels very much like a tangible thing, coursing through their veins, in every heartbeat pounding inside their chests, drumming like a deafening beat in their ears, and drowning out the rest of the world around them with an unquenchable desire for their bodies to melt into each other.

Their two broken halves mended together into one being, into something healthy and whole, something still alive!

He untangles their legs and pulls back enough to pull her panties down her thighs and past her knees, while Tara's busy tugging his boxer briefs off of him as well.

While he tries to just pull her naked form against his, it's she who's impatiently reaching between them instead, positioning him at her opening while wrapping her legs back around his waist again, too. And then she throws her head back gasping when he enters her with a powerful thrust of his hips, while another groan escapes from his lips as well.

But unlike the first couple of thrusts that pounded hard against her core, he's beginning to drastically change his pace, using slow yet deep strokes to drive her crazy instead. Almost pulling out of her completely, just to thrust back in to the hilt, and loving the sound of the small throaty moans that escape her with each snap of his hips, encouraging him even more to keep going just like this, slow yet deep.

He keeps kissing her, very gently, very slowly, stroking her lips with his, before he finally lets his
mouth travel from hers down to her jawline, then even further down to her throat, lingering there in
the crook of her neck, knowingly teasing the spot that's made her putty in his hands since they were
just sixteen years old.

And while his mouth continues to explore her sensitive skin, he's also bracing himself on one arm, to
not completely smoother her under his weight, but also to leave room to caress and knead her breasts
alternately with his hand, letting his thumb flick repeatedly over her puckered nipples, loving how it
makes her grind her hips in rhythm with his, and her fingers clawing at his hips urging him closer
and deeper.

He knows every inch of her, knows her inside out, knows just where to kiss and where to let his
mouth or his hands roam, and what will undoubtedly drive her insane with desire for more, and so
it's really no surprise when Tara begins to writhe beneath him, cries out his name and claws at his
back in shameless desire.

He knows that she's close, he can tell it in the way she moves, the way she moans, so lost in the
feeling of them, so he picks up the pace and snaps his hips faster and harder against her, in pursuit of
his own release now, too.

Tara moans his name out loud in pleasure when he pounds into her roughly and at neck breaking
speed. Keeping his weight off of her is no longer a concern now, instead he has his arm wrapped
across her back, his hand gripping her hard by the shoulder to give himself the leverage he needs to
grind into her even deeper.

His breath is hot and sharp against her skin, when all his ministrations finally make her reach her
breaking point and the walls of her pussy begin to tighten and pulsate around the length of him as she
climaxes. And feeling her tightening and milking his hard throbbing cock while it's still rocking in
and out of her, is the last push he needs to come undone himself.

"Tara, ... Jesus Christ, Tara ..." He rasps her name out, moaning at how incredible she makes him
feel. Thrusting into her just a few more times, hard and fast, mercilessly, before he spills all of him
deep within her, his hips shuddering beyond his control against her in blissful release while he lets
out a guttural sounding grunt of satisfaction against her ear.

He collapses utterly spent against her, clinging to her, his heart beating violently against his rib cage,
his skin glistening with sweat, the salty liquid pooling in the hollow of his tattooed back, while he's
trying to get his breathing back under control.

He places a quick kiss against her temple, in a twisted way enjoying the salty taste of her own
perspiration on his lips. Tara wants more though, turns her face up towards his, her needy green eyes
meet his blue ones, sees the love he has for her reflecting back at her when she leans in even closer.
They can't help but smile, even letting out a little chuckle, when the tips of their noses keep brushing
against each other as they try to decide on the right angle to turn, but then closing their eyes when
their lips do finally touch again, slow and sweet, brushing against each other again and again for a
little while longer.

At last Jax rolls over onto his side, pulling out of her, yet pulling the length of her body back against
his right after, still holding her close, his nose disappearing in her brown hair that's fanning out
against the pillow, his eyes closing in contentment as he inhales her scent, his arms wrapped tightly
around her, same as hers that are wrapped just as tightly around him.

They remain like this for a long moment, letting their breathing normalize again, their bodies cool
down from the heated encounter, in complete silence.
It's very late, the middle of the night already, the apartment, their bedroom, everything's quiet, almost too quiet if not for their breathing. And at first it seems like neither one of them wants to be the first to speak and break the spell they're still under, or try to make sense of the way their darkest moments always makes them end right back here, naked and spent in each other's arms.

But at last Jax shifts back, releasing the tight hold he has on her, adjusting his pillow beneath his head, and she's doing the same, both getting comfortable beside each other, reaching out blindly, finding the sheet and pulling it up and over them, over her bare breasts.

Then they just lay there face to face, the tips of their noses a mere inch apart, close enough to feel the other's breath, looking right at each other, when she can sense a sudden change in him. Like a switch got flipped, and the light in his eyes got turned off, replaced by darkness instead.

The events of today all come rushing back to him, all the horrible truths that they have suddenly come face to face with today, the realization of what he was truly getting groomed for and raised into, of who his mother really is, and to him it also means to realize who that really makes him. What that makes him!

He can't shake the self-loathing thoughts that seem to be bombarding him now all at once. So many heinous things he's done, so many moments of things he regrets, and what's even scarier, the moments a decent human being should regret but he's realized he doesn't.

All of which will probably haunt him for as long as he lives, and who knows, maybe even beyond that, because maybe there is a god, a afterlife, and maybe that means he'll be haunted even in death. It certainly wouldn't surprise him.

He wishes he had more insight into his own internal struggles, so that he could explain or understand, how or why this sudden change in his mood, his feelings, his outlook has happened.

The self-loathing is nothing new to him, it's become second-nature, he lives with that every day, trying to juggle it around his new life here, or on his worst days, trying to bury it, smoother it and just ignore it. But right now it's staring right at him, taunting him, daring him to come out and play.

Has he just been kidding himself, kidding her, with the notion that they can just move past this, like they have - at least tried to - with everything else?
'Just like that, Jax? Change your clothes, wash off the blood ... - Yeah, Tara, just like that.'

Maybe this is what always needed to happen? Maybe this revelation about what Gemma has done, is the proverbial last nail in the coffin? But whose? Gemma's reign? The Club's pull? Tara's sanity? His demons? Who the fuck knows?

It's like he went from happy and moving forward with her quite literally just moments ago, to this darkness deep within suddenly clawing at him, first tugging, then pulling on him, but at last he finds himself being catapulted to the polar opposite end of the spectrum, with everything evil and dark and twisted within him screaming inside his head to be let out ... to be confronted head on, and to either prove or disprove what they can truly overcome.

Like a voice in his head, daring him to show his true self to her, just to settle the nagging question once and for all. For Tara to realize he's not that different from the woman who tried to kill her after all.

And out of all the moments, strangely he suddenly hears Alice's mean and hateful words again. At the time they were directed towards Venus, but he can hear it now again, clear as day as if he was right back in that moment, and as if they were directed at him instead.
'You don't deserve a son. I had a son once. Then he forgot who he was, deserted his family. Turned into a freak of the fringe. You go ahead. You tell that sweet boy all about his daddy. How much you love him, want the best for him. It won't matter, because when he finds out what you are, he's gonna grow up hating you. Hating your lies. Hating the life you forced him into. And hating himself. This boy's gonna blow his brains out before his balls completely drop. Not 'cause of me, or his dead mama ... but because of you. The awful thing that turned out to be his father.'

But besides Alice's words, it's only natural that some moments concerning the woman staring back at him with so much worry in her eyes, are also screaming out at him.

'No, it's not okay. Nothing is okay. Like the last few weeks, I ... I tried to follow your lead, you know, find some kind of ... compartment to put all this stuff in, but I just ... I can't. I don't sleep. I'm more scared now than I ever was. I'm scared of getting caught, I'm scared of not getting caught. We got away with murder. What does that make me?'

'You know why I run away from shit all the time? 'Cause I don't trust anyone. If I'm gonna stay, I need to know the truth. - I tell you the truth - Not just what you think I can handle, I need all of it. It's the only way I'll know if I can do this.'

'You know it would kill me if I knew you were sleeping with other women.'

'Get off of me. You stupid piece of shit.'

'Stay away from me. - What are you doing with that? - Look what you did to me. Oh god, what's happening to me? What happened to me?'

'What are you gonna do? - I just need to talk to you. I know you think you need to do this, but I can't let you. You know that. - Please don't ... hurt me in front of the kids. - That's not what I want. - But that's all there is. There is no other ... ending. I ... I've sacrificed everything for you. I tried to see what you see, how you see it, but I can't. All I see are the lies, and the violence, ... and how it's changed you, turned you into a monster.'

'Trying to figure out how I fit into all this? - What do you mean? - The violence, the porn, the other girls, your mother. I try to rationalize, but I ... It's not normal. - What's normal? - I can't ... I can't shake this feeling that something bad is gonna happen ... to him. To us. I just don't know how to live with that. I'm trying to find my place here, Jax.'

The look in Jax's eyes can only be described as sad and lost, even though he tries so hard to smile as his hand reaches out and brushes the hair back that's threatening to fall in her face, leaving his hand there to caress her cheek, his knuckles trailing her protruding cheekbone, and then he swallows away the lump that has formed in his throat, before he leaves his hand to still on the curve of her hip.

"I'm sorry." He suddenly says, completely taking her by surprise.

Tara furrows her brows, a look of puzzlement in her eyes when she replies, "For what?"

"For ... everything." He sighs answering with a mixture of exasperation and exhaustion evident in his grave sounding voice, before he adds, raising his own brows in clarity, "For what I am, for who I've always been, ... for pulling you into this, ... for making you fall in love with someone like me." Her small sad voice from years ago echoing loudly inside his head ... 'If I could stop, I would!'

She's looking back at him with concern edged into her facial features, her body's tensing up while she's still stewing over every word he's just said, and the defeated way with which he's said them, but as the last part of his sentence manages to claim it's place inside her mind, she actually relaxes again,
even manages the smallest hint of a smile when she only responds to that last part, and the ridiculousness of it. "You didn't make me fall in love with you, Jax." She can't help but shake her head at the notion that he might actually thinks he's got that kind of power, "You can't make someone fall in love with you, it doesn't ... love doesn't work like that."

She can't stop her hand from reaching out and palming his cheek even if she tried, nor can she stop her fingers from trailing over his beard trying to comfort him either.

She's not liking the darkening in his eyes, so she moves just a little bit closer, nearly closing the already small gap between them again, her naked legs intertwining with his beneath the sheet, waiting and wishing he would say something else, either agree with her, argue with her, or at least try to elaborate on what is so obviously worrying him now.

She needs him to actually say it, speak up, even though she's pretty fucking sure it's about Gemma again somehow. But when he doesn't do what she wants, when he doesn't speak up quick enough, she does, finding herself pleading with him again. "No more secrets, remember? Please just ... just talk to me."

He searches her face, noting the way she looks at him, so full of hope and believe that they can work through anything, come what may, if they can only find the right words and be honest.

And again he questions his own sanity. He must be going crazy, when he wonders again where all his own hope and believe in their happily-ever-after has vanished to, the one he'd assured her of right before they started tearing each other's clothes off as they stumbled love-and-lust-drunk back towards this bedroom.

Why were the voices inside his head pulling him in such a different direction now?

Why, out of all people, did first Alice and now Venus come to his mind. How she'd been afraid to be honest, afraid to tell her son the whole truth, not knowing how he would receive it, and too scared to lose him.
'I'm afraid my lineage suggests something else, Jackson. My family ... we judge and we hate. And when we have scorched every earth and we're all used up ... we die ... miserably. I had to be reborn to escape that doom. I just hope something comes along to liberate my son from that fate.'

There is no doubt in his mind that Tara is in fact that something that has saved his sons from their fate. But could she also be what will ultimately be saving him? Once upon a time he himself believed as much.
'I realize you being with me is not some kind of accident. It sounds crazy, but I think you were put into my life to get me out, Tara. Fifteen years ago. And now.'

And her words from earlier tonight in the truck come back to him again at that memory.
'I promise you there is nothing I can't handle, as long as you don't shut me out and we're in this together.'

Is he willing to truly put that theory to the test? Can it really be that easy? After everything Tara's already endured, is there enough strength left in her to not just save herself, but pull them both back from the edge of the cliff?

Can she save him, especially now that he finds himself barely hanging on with just one hand, that hand slipping while he's dangling over the abyss of his sins ... if he can't save himself anymore, can she pull him back up? Or catch him at the last minute in freefall before he loses the last shreds that are left of his soul?
"I still want her dead!" He suddenly blurts out just one of the many things on his mind, but before Tara can even properly react, he adds just as quickly. "I won't ... hurt her. I made you a promise, and I'm keeping it, but that doesn't mean that the urge to do it isn't still there."

She nods her head at him in understanding, but the look in his eyes is telling her there's much more, she can sense the burden of it, so she remains quiet, waits for him to speak and get it all out before he loses his nerve.

Jax watches her in turn, waits for just a moment for her to speak up, but when nothing comes past her lips after she nods her head, he finally gathers the courage to just let it all out, let the chips fall ... has to let her in on the last bits of truth he hasn't shared with her yet. "You said that I'm not like them, but I think you're wrong ... I think I am just like them. I know it ... I feel it!" The monster you feared is still here, right fucking here in front of you!

Tara looks perplexed, maybe even shocked, but she doesn't speak, even though he pauses as if he wants her to, averting his eyes when he's propping himself up suddenly, adjusting his pillow behind him so he can sit up comfortably against the headboard of their bed. As if he needs to be upright in order to say what he has left to say, left to confess.

Realizing that this is a much longer, much deeper conversation, Tara does the same, sitting up right beside him, pulling and propping her pillows up behind her for comfort.

"What makes you say that? What's going on?" She finally asks in reply, and clutches the sheet to her chest, her sense of modesty shining through once more at the oddest moments, and then she settles in her spot, turned halfway towards him waiting for his response, mimicking the way he's turned towards her, both sitting at an angle so they can look right at one another without having to awkwardly crane their necks the entire time.

Jax clears his throat, the look in his eyes and the expression on his face uncharacteristically nervous and Tara herself suddenly realizes that that thought does in fact scare her. A lot!

Her heartbeat quickens in fear of the unknown, because at this point, after everything they've confided in each other, after everything he's already ruefully confessed to her, what could there possibly be left for him to divulge that has him, Jackson Teller, nervous about her reaction, or her impression of him.

He swipes his hand down his face, rubbing at his eyes, taking in a deep breath while trying to straighten out his thoughts, put them into something resembling an order. He knows exactly what all he's left to confess, he just doesn't know where to begin.

Should he work his way up from least bad to worst? Or maybe in chronological order? Or just start at random?

"There's a darkness in me, babe, and I think it's been there all along. Even before I prospected, or became a full patch. Like it's ingrained in me, a part of me, in my DNA." On a whim he has decided to start at the very beginning, surprising himself a bit with his own choice, but it's the first thing that comes to mind.

"Michael Dunley ..." He meets her eyes then, trying to gauge her reaction when he mentions the name of the man neither of them has dared to speak about in god-knows-how-long. "After he was caught, I was so angry when the Club turned him over to Charming PD, I just couldn't understand it, ... I was just sixteen, still a fucking kid, but ... I know it sounds crazy, but I think somehow I already loved you that night, 'cause after what he did to you, ... what he tried to do to you, I just wanted to protect you at all cost, ... and I just wanted him dead, Tara. I still remember how relieved I felt when Unser sought us out, told us that Dunley was dead!"
Tara sighs, shaking her head at the thoughts going through her mind. "Jesus Christ, just hearing you say his name gives me chills. I haven't thought of him in forever, but ... but if that is what you think makes you just like them, then I guess I'm also just like them, ... because god knows how much I wanted that horrible man dead, too."

"I lied to you about Kohn." He suddenly says next, not leaving her any more time to ponder on Michael Dunley's demise. His eyes still trained on hers, unwavering, determined to catch even the smallest glimmer of doubt or disgust in her eyes, should any show.

Tara's staring back at him confused instead, wondering what he possibly could've lied to her about in relation to Joshua. "What are you talking about?"

"I wanted Kohn dead from the first fucking moment you told me about him. It took every ounce of self restrained I possessed to ram my knife just into his car, instead of his gut." He starts, but pauses to take a deep breath before he continues. "That night when I shot him, I told you if you called it in, you wouldn't get in trouble, he would, that he would do some time, but then he'd be out and probably come after you again."

Tara nods her head, that moment will be etched into her mind forever, she couldn't forget it even if she tried. As a matter of fact, she could probably quote Jax's exact words back to him right now, right along with her own panicky response from all those years ago, verbatim.

"I lied." He admits, interrupting her thoughts of that terrifying night. "He was a goddamn Fed, ... would've gotten locked up right alongside criminals he put in there. He would've been a dead-man-walking, no way he would've made it out alive again."

He shakes his head to himself, for the first time averting his eyes for a second before he finds the courage to look back at her again when he adds. "But that wasn't good enough for me. I wanted him dead, right then and there. So I said what I said, I lied, 'cause ... I guess I wanted to get your approval to kill him. I wanted you to want him dead, too." He stares at her, tries to decipher what she's thinking, but can't read her facial expression.

Tara is speechless again after Jax's latest admission, but she's not angry, not really. Mostly because she wished she would've had the guts to do it herself, the first time, back in Chicago, to stop him before he did what he'd done to her.

But as she looks back at him, meeting Jax's questioning eyes, she wonders suddenly why he's doing this. Fear creeping into her mind at the thought that he'll keep going until he proves himself to be just as fucked up as his mother in her eyes. Like he wants to keep provoking her, wants her to get mad at him, wants to be punished for crimes of the past, ... an act of self-sabotage, not just himself, but certainly sabotaging them and their relationship as well.

But why all of a sudden? Why now, after the long-winded speech he's given her, about not letting Gemma get between them, not letting her ruin their happiness. She just doesn't understand his motives. Was he pulling away from her yet again, trying to push her away in the process to make it easier on himself?

Jax realizes he's not going to get a response out of Tara, at least not yet, so he decides to carry on, unburdening his next crime, which up until now, only he himself was privy to. "I didn't' kill Salazar in self-defense. He didn't hurt me with an ax."

"But your arm?" Tara now interjected, unable to stop herself from speaking up.

"Unser and the Club wanted Salazar alive, to rat out Hale, stop Sanwa Sheriffs taking over
Charming PD. And that's what I told him when I caught up with him and had him cornered. I convinced him I would let him live if he agreed to rat out Hale, but the moment he put down the ax in surrender, I stabbed him with his knife, then cut my own arm with the ax to make it look like self-defense."

"Jesus Christ." Tara sighs, searching his eyes in disbelieve yet again.

But Jax remains unaffected, carries on with his story, his voice firm and without waver. "That piece of shit hurt you, would've killed you, ... there was no way in hell I would let him walk out of there alive. He needed to die, and I needed to be the one that killed him! ... I've never told anyone about this, until now."

He's been on a roll, confessing his crimes, but now for the first time Jax hesitates to begin what he's decided to share with her next. And it's almost strange how the tales of murdering men seem to slip so easily from his tongue, yet this he's actually scared to tell her about.

He knows he needs to give her more of the back story this time, to use what happened as some form of justification for what came next. "When we were in Belfast, to get Abel back we had to get to Jimmy, in the process found out two members of the Club, of SAMBEL, were working with him. We had to torture one, ended up killing both in the end. One of them was Keith McGee, he was First-9, and also stepfather to Trinity, I think he had raised her for most of her life. It was a hard day, and even after what we did, I still didn't feel any closer to getting Abel back. Tig and Piney kept the fact that Salazar had taken you to themselves, didn't want to burden me with more. I didn't know about Thomas yet either. I figured, and feared, that by the time I got back to Charming, you'd be long gone, back to work in Chicago. You have to believe me that I really thought that, or I would've never even considered leaving Abel behind, too."

He pauses, swallowing away yet another lump that has formed in his throat, before he takes the plunge, and blurts it out. "Trinity was upset about McGee, and out of the blue she kissed me."

He can see the confusion and then the twisted horror, but also the flash of hurt flitter through Tara's eyes now, but she remains quiet, leaves it to him to carry on and explain. "I pulled away at first, but then I just thought ... I just thought of you. I went to that place inside my head, where I thought I'd already lost the real you, and can easily justify conjuring up an illusion of you to make myself feel better again."

"Trinity? As in your sister?" Tara now speaks up in disbelieve, needing to clarify what he's just said, while shaking her head at him, but still unable to keep the hurt from showing on her face either.

"It never went beyond a kiss." He quickly adds. "Gemma and Maureen intervened, pulled us aside, gave each of us a lesson about our intertwining family trees." He feels so ashamed ... to this day, he's also never told a single soul about this either, until now.

Tara lowers her head, hiding her face in her hands for a long moment while she's trying to sort out her own feelings about this. He kissed his own sister, almost slept with her, while thinking of me. And here she thought the Teller's couldn't possibly get anymore fucked up, yet clearly she was wrong.

"I'm sorry." He suddenly says, at a loss of what else to say at this point. He's still mortified, even now after all this time, for more than one reason. Hurting her like this, and almost screwing his own sister.

"I know you are." Tara replies, because she does believe him. She hears the sincerity in his voice, knows that he means it!
But still it hurts to know that had it been anyone other than his sister, he could have, and he would have ... She's secretly thankful he hasn't reached out to touch her, because she wouldn't be able to stop herself from flinching away at this very moment.

She wipes her hands down her face again, almost wishing she had the luxury of being allowed to behave like a child, so she could pull the entire sheet over her head instead, hide away from him and the rest of the world completely, while she's trying to get a grip on her own emotions again. But sadly she's not a child, and instead needs to pull herself together more quickly.

"There's more." He speaks up, hoping to gain her full attention again. "On that day, after we had that argument because Ima had spend the night at the clubhouse. When I told you that I had some Club shit to handle that night, while you were stitching up Juice at our place, I actually went to see her instead."

Still reeling from the revelation about Trinity, his unfortunate choice of words has Tara completely misconstruing what he's saying to her now, her mind immediately picturing the worst case scenario, her eyes wide in shock, before instantly welling up with burning tears. And then a sudden wave of nausea threatens to overwhelm her, too, because of what she thinks he's actually confessing to.

Jax is still hanging his head in shame, not even realizing what he's said or rather how it sounded to her, but when Tara's scrambling out of bed and jumping to her feet, he snaps out of his stupor. She's crying as she's yanking the sheet with her, wrapping it around her naked self in a haste to leave the room. "Shit, no, babe. That's not what I meant." He yells out in alarm when his clouded mind catches up now, charging after her, stark naked, reaching out, trying to grab her as she hisses at him over her shoulder on her way to the bathroom. "Don't you fucking touch me."

"Nothing happened, I promise." He ignores her plea to not be touched and grabs a hold of both her arms from behind, stopping her just in time before she can slam the bathroom door in his face and lock herself away from him.

Her struggles are completely fruitless against his much stronger physique, and he's yanking her harshly back towards him. "I didn't fuck her, I swear, babe, I didn't, I just ... I hurt her, Tara." He explains the same instant he wraps his arms tightly around her from behind, trapping her in place when he's pulling her back against his chest, his lips right by her ear, forcing her to hear him out when he's mumbling out a string of apologies. "Don't cry, baby, please. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry ... I didn't think that you would think ... Jesus Christ, please don't cry, I'm sorry ... so so sorry."

Tara stops struggling against him now when she allows herself to listen to him, making sense of his words and realizes that it was all just a horrible misunderstanding. She's still crying though, unable to stop the tears from falling on command, going limp in his arms even though the nausea's subsiding, probably would be collapsing to the floor if it weren't for him holding her up like he is.

And he wonders how he could've ever done such a thing to her in the past? Cheating on her with these whores ... What the hell had he been thinking? Obviously he hadn't been thinking at all ... too far gone inside his twisted mind at the time!

"Jesus Christ, Jax." She suddenly says, her voice so high-pitched, and squeaky, sounding nothing like herself. "You hurt her? What do you mean? Hurt her how?" Tara presses her eyes shut at the possibilities of what he might've done to Ima, and can't escape the vision of Wendy that appears for a second in her mind instead, storming into her office, distraught and outraged, pulling back the fabric of her shirt to reveal the bruise where he'd injected her with crank just the night before.
Since he's hugging her from behind, he can't actually see her face, but the sound of her voice, the tears and emotions he can hear when she just spoke, crush him, humbling him so deeply. He clears his throat, "Look, babe. Just let me explain." Then cautiously begins to release the strong hold he's still got around her. "Let's go sit back down, and I'll tell you." He's glad that she isn't pulling away from him right away either, clearly calmed down again she instead holds onto his hands still, steadying herself against him.

"Yeah. Okay." She actually agrees, no longer crying and sounding almost like her old self again, much to Jax's obvious relief.

He drapes his arm around her, pulling her into his side now, pressing a kiss to her hair, she's wiping at her face, and then they find their way out of the bathroom together.

As if the same thought has crossed both their minds in the exact moment, they separately reach down for some of the discarded pieces of clothes littering the floor.

Jax quickly pulls on his pair of jeans, going commando, not bothering to find his underwear in the bedroom, and can't help but smile when he catches sight of her simply pulling his t-shirt over her head, dropping the sheet she'd wrapped herself in down to her waist.

Despite their current discussion, he can't help but admire how his shirt fits on her. He'll never get tired of how beautiful she looks just like this, loves when she's wearing his things and is drinking in the image of her. And for a moment he even allows his mind look forward to the future, and how he can't wait until she's really starting to show, and that belly's starting to grow too big for her own clothes, so she'll hopefully end up in his stuff even more frequently.

She steps towards the couch and Jax's hand is reassuringly squeezing her shoulder while he's following right behind her. They both sit, Tara tucking the sheet around her lower half like a skirt now before she sits, then pulling her legs up onto the couch, sitting cross-legged at an angle, to partially face him again, when he sits down right next to her, pulling one foot onto the couch as well to sit more comfortably and also leaning towards her. He can't help but reach out and palm her cheek for just a moment, before he drops his hand again in his own lap, twisting his ring around his finger when he tries to think of how to start this conversation up again.

She frowns at him for just a moment, before she can manage to slip a non-judgmental expression back onto her face for his benefit. "What happened, Jax? Why did you hurt her? How did you hurt her?" Tara speaks up with her questions, no longer able to hold her tongue, hoping this will urge him on to start explaining, and pick their conversation right back up where they'd left off, before the ugly misunderstanding and her subsequent meltdown.

He revisits the pivotal words in her questions in his mind before he answers. 'What happened? Why? How?' And he formulates his answer around those words, "What happened is that she pulled a gun in my clubhouse, with you right there, and with Thomas, our baby boy right there, too."

He swallows away the lump in his throat. "Look, if it had only been about her being there and it upsetting you, then I would've just sought her out, would've told her to stay clear of the Club, and my family, and that would've been the end of it."

He shakes his head to himself, "But that's not what happened, because she did pull a gun, and lets be real here, if a man had pulled some shit like that, he would've never made it off of the lot without getting his fucking ass beat. So yeah ... I went to the studio that night, implied I was jealous that she'd been with Ope, knowing she'd be too stupid, too full of herself to even suspect I could be there for ulterior reasons. She leads me back to her dressing room, I locked the door behind us, and I hurt her. Threw her face first against a table, broke her damn nose, and told her to never parade her pussy
around you or my Club ever again."

He pauses to search Tara's eyes, tries to read the expression in them, not sure though how she feels about his actions. "And I'm sorry if what I did disappoints you or disgusts you, but I would do it again. If she'd been a man, I would've hurt her way worse, so this was me already cutting her some slack just because she isn't swinging a dick between her legs."

But when Tara just stares back at him with a bleak look in her eyes, he can't stand it. "Please, say something, babe."

She wipes both her hands over her face once more, before she shakes her head when she ruefully admits. "I guess I should feel disgusted, or ... appalled, or something like that, but I think that maybe my hate for her overshadows what I should think or feel. So ... what the hell does that say about me, Jax?"

But she doesn't even really give him a chance to answer her or elaborate on the whole issue, because she beats him to it. "All this truth, these secrets you so suddenly want to share, ... I can't figure out why you're doing this now. For a moment I thought maybe you're trying to push me away again, but then you chased after me when I misunderstood, so I don't think that's it ... but I'm really confused."

"I'm not trying to push you away, babe, not at all." He clarifies, jumping right in before she can say anything else, because the thought that she would think that scares him to death. "I'm honestly not sure what's going on with me, ... maybe I'm just scared that I am like her, or maybe I'm freaking out for other reasons ... I'm not sure. All I know is that I'm going through something ... something I can't explain. But I'm not pushing you away. Losing you is the last thing I want."

Suddenly there are tears pricking at his eyes out of nowhere, and he's overcome with yet more emotions when he says. "Please don't leave me."

"Oh my god, Jackson." Tara says without having to even think about it, rushing forward and wrapping her arms around his neck, pulling him against her, fighting her own tears when she sees him getting this emotional now. "Of course not. I'm here. And ... whatever this is, whatever brought all this shit to the surface ... we'll deal with it. Together."

He hides his face in the crook of her neck, fighting back the tears, his voice strained with emotions when he says. "There's even more I haven't told you yet, Tara. I don't even know why ... I just know that I need to get it off of my chest! Maybe I'm going crazy, losing my fucking mind? Or maybe I need your absolution to move on, I don't know. But I do know that I can't do this without you, babe."

Tara sighs, pulling back so she can look him in the eyes instead now, framing his face with both her hands to reassure him. "I'm not going anywhere. I love you." And before he can even reply with an 'I love you' of his own, she's already pressing her lips against his, catching him off guard when she puts everything she has into that kiss, to drive out the fear and doubt he's struggling with.

X

Author's Note: Somewhat of an emotional rollercoaster in this chapter. The whole Gemma thing is bringing Jax's secrets to the surface. What do you all think? Can't wait to hear from you. Thanks for reading.

P.S. In case anyone is wondering who Michael Dunley is, ... he's a character from my prequel story called 'The night everything changed' ... you should go check it out.
They kiss softly, but deeply for a long moment, but unlike before, it doesn't end up in another love-making session. Instead Jax slowly pulls away this time, holding her hands in his, closing his eyes, lowering his head for just a moment, and sighing deeply as he seems to be gathering his thoughts before allowing himself to meet Tara's eyes again with another intense gaze just seconds later.

Tara can see that there's more he needs to say, more that he wants to unburden onto her, but he seems to struggle again with how to continue. And even though his sudden need to let it all out frightened her just moments before, now that he's reassured her that this isn't about him pushing her away somehow, she's trying her hardest to encourage him to go on.

And even though it's been a long, grueling and emotionally charged day and evening, she's not sure she could find any rest right now, even if she tried. There is simply still too much turmoil reflecting back at her in those steel blue eyes of his, so she wants him to go on, wants him to let it all go, so that they can leave it all behind them, in the past, where it belongs.

She straightens herself up, visibly squaring her shoulders, raising her own chin the same instant she raises one of her hands once more to his chin, letting her fingers trail across the coarse hair of his blond beard in a comforting gesture, when she confronts him. "What else do you need to tell me, Jax? I can take it."

He sighs again, a deep slow inhale that makes his naked chest puff out before he lets it deflate again on the subsequent exhale, his eyes firmly fixed on hers the entire time as he does so, as if searching for confirmation that she's really strong enough to handle what else he's got to confess.

Whatever he finds in the depth of her emerald eyes seems to persuade him, and so he finally starts to speak. First slowly and hesitant, sounding more than a little unsure, but his resolve seems to strengthen with every word that slips past his lips, and even more after every encouraging nod of understanding from Tara along the way.

She can't help but notice how his eyes are filled with so many different emotions as he speaks. There's hurt, grief, anger, pride, shame and confusion, amongst others, seemingly ever-changing from one sentence to the next, one rueful confession to the next.

He reveals so many things to her, things he is or rather was afraid to tell her, for many different and some very complex reasons. Almost all of these crimes have directly to do with Club business, it's no longer about him and her per se, it's not about other women that have come between them, nor is it about men he killed to protect her. And even though Jax acts as if the worst is yet to come, Tara truthfully feels the worst has already been told.

Some tales he tells are running deep, some more meaningful than others, some even his brothers
don't know about, some very hard for Tara to process, and some not all that hard to understand at all. It's a lot to take in by any means, but Tara's doesn't avert her gaze from his, doesn't shy away from the truths he's sharing with her, nor does she let her emotions get the best of her. She puts her bravest face on for his sake, and listens without letting judgment shine through in her features, because she can tell how much he struggles with everything that has happened today, and how much he needs her support right now.

Amongst the many, many things he shares with her, he finally recalls the true circumstances around Opie's death. Something he's kept from her all this time, out of fear how she'd react if she knew that he was about to offer himself up on a silver platter, right after marrying her no less, all for the sake of the Club. And had Opie not intervened by punching that guard, she would've been the grieving widow, Abel and Thomas left behind without a father, and she would've been burying him in the days to follow, instead of Lyla and Opie's kids mourning the loss of Opie.

Needless to say, Tara cries upon hearing and processing those news, all the more grateful for what Opie had done, and once more relieved that Jax is still alive and here with her, yet deeply ashamed for feeling the way that she does all the same. Knowing Opie died the way he did, makes it downright cruel to feel relieved that Jax didn't die.

He carries on, confesses to tracking down the guard who'd orchestrated the tragedy with the help of Pope, and not only relays to her how he'd murdered him to revenge Opie with unhinged brutality, but that his wife died by the hands of Tig, too. 'Collateral damage', he'd called it. Maybe it should scare her, but it doesn't, when there's no remorse in his eyes nor in his voice while he relays that fateful day back to her.

And then, last but not least by any means, he recalls the events surrounding that horrible school shooting, Nero's crew's involvement, and ultimately Darvany's death.

He tells her the whole truth, things that he's never told a soul out loud, not even the Club. Surely, he isn't naive enough to believe that Tig and Chibs haven't suspected him in having a hand in Darvany's death, they had undoubtedly given him curious glances more times than he can count, but neither one of his brother's ever outright confronted him about it. Juice, having done the deed following his orders, and Nero, were the only ones that knew, at least to the best of his knowledge.

And now Tara knows, too. That he'd singlehandedly ordered the murder of an innocent woman, a woman who'd just lost her own child less than twenty-four hours prior.

He watches her wearily, cautiously, trying to gauge her reaction. His heart is beating out of his chest, as his own guilty conscience weighs heavily on him.

Initially, he hadn't felt guilty at all when he'd made the call, he'd successfully convinced himself that it was justified. With Tara's looming prosecution, on top of keeping the heat off of the Club when they were in the middle of finally getting out of guns, too much was at stake already. So it was in the best interest of the club, the best interest of their family, at the time it was the easiest and quickest solution to the problem at hand, so he did what he thought was right without second guessing himself.

But that all changed not too long after, once Nero confronted him about it, and let him in on the fact that Darvany had more kids, that there were two motherless children now forever wondering what had happened, and that's when the guilt of his actions slowly began to rear its ugly head. But there was no use, what happened, happened, there was no turning back, what's done is done. So he tried to squash it down, the guilt. Bury it deep and hide from it, returned home to Tara that night, and unsuccessfully tried to distract himself by making love to her. The guilt of his actions from that
day, combined with his guilt over his infidelity while she'd been incarcerated, haunted him and made him feel further away from her than ever before, and he'd no one to blame but himself.

The way Donna had died by Tig's hand, all because Clay had been too impatient to wait, truly confirm Opie's guilt, and bring it to the table for a vote. Or the way he'd put the hit out on Tara, just because of the fact that she knew something that could affect him and the Club, just like Darvany knew something, ... well, in hindsight, Jax knew now that the way he'd taken on the role of jury, judge and executioner, felt all too familiar and so very wrong.

The parallels between Clay and himself were clear as day, at least now that he is able to look back and really contemplate his rash decisions of that fateful day. And as he stares back into Tara's eyes, wordlessly pleading with her to say something, he can't help but think back on something she'd said that night, right before she'd gotten arrested.

'We both know, if we stay here, we'll end up like the two people we hate the most!'

Jesus Christ ... wasn't that the truth? He had in fact truly become the man he hated!

And as for Tara, the length to which she'd gone - the faked miscarriage and out of the blue filing for divorce - it was a page straight out of Gemma playbook, if he'd ever seen one! At first he'd been angry, too blindsided by her actions, too filled with hurt and rage at the time, leaving him too blind to see what was right in front of him. But it didn't take him long to recognize the errors of his own ways, to realize who was truly to blame.

'I understand why you did everything you did. I'm sorry being with me, took you to that place.'

Jax knew the gavel had in fact corrupted him, like Opie had said, and that he'd succumbed to his own worst nature, and it was his doing, his actions, or rather lack of actions regarding the promises he'd made to her, that ultimately left Tara no choice than to succumb to hers as well. She had to play dirty, to beat him, and Gemma, at their own dirty game! He knows that, which is the reason he was able to forgive her so easily for what she had done. He knows that he's the one to blame for it all!

"It's okay." Tara's eerily even sounding voice startles him out of his self-loathing thoughts once more. She grabs a hold of his hand, clutching it hard in her much smaller ones and raises it up to her lips for a kiss, mirroring the way he so often does to her. "It's over, it's in the past. No amount of guilt can change what happened. There's plenty of things I wish I could do over, wish I had done differently, too."

"You said to me once that we're better human being's, when we're with the person we're supposed to be with. Do you still believe that?" He suddenly asks out loud, and if the look in her eyes is any indication, she's clearly surprised at the change in subject once more. But he can't help himself questioning it, because he knows that being with him had changed her. It's like that old saying goes, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger', and that might very well be true when it comes to him and her, but it has also hardened her as well, made her suspicious, and brought a darker side out in her. It scares him to death that being with him could do that to her again.

Tara ponders over his question for just a split-second before she nods, and gives him a small, yet reassuring smile, her voice full of conviction when she says. "Yes, I do."

But without missing a beat she goes on to elaborate, as if she can already sense his doubt he's about to share with her about that notion. "But I think just living under the same roof, does not constitute 'being with someone', Jax. While we might've shared a bed, and a home, we still ended up going down a wrong path and we weren't the best versions of ourselves, because we weren't really with each other anymore. We straight up lied to each other at times, or kept things from each other, which were basically lies by omission, and it caused us to drift apart, and that's why we ended up how we did. If we had just been open with each other, and talked everything out like we are now, than we
wouldn't have ended up more ruthless and on opposite sides." Her voice doesn't waver when she talks, holding Jax's undivided attention.

She searches his eyes for a sign that he agrees with her, but all she finds is deeply embedded guilt reflecting back at her, so she carries on. "But we know better now, don't we? I mean, I do. Just think about everything we've shared with each other since you've moved here, and how it has changed us, made us stronger and brought us so much closer again ... isn't that proof enough to know that being with each other makes us better people?"

Jax slowly nods his head at that, his eyes still locked on hers when he seems to agree on a sigh. "Yeah, I guess."

But then he pulls his gaze away from hers, the intensity having become too much. Pulling his hand out of her grasp and swipes both his hands down his face, closes his eyes, steeples his hands against his bowed head in deep thought, and that familiar gesture of his makes it apparent to Tara that he's still struggling with it all. Her words haven't fully convinced him just yet, that much is crystal clear.

She lets him have a moment to sit in silence and let the heaviness of his stories and confessions, along with what she has just said, settle between them. During that pause she tries to think of how to word what she wants to say next, sighing heavily before she carries on with yet another speech to reassure him. "Maybe it's true that it didn't faze you when you did those horrible things, nor did it faze you right after, but something obviously must've changed. I mean, it's clearly eating at you now, because if it wasn't, we would not be sitting here in the dead of night, having this conversation."

At that, his head snaps back up just as his eyes suddenly open to meet hers, because fuck if she hasn't just hit the nail on the head. He isn't the same guy, he's feeling guilty and remorseful, and he wants to figure out a way to be a better person, someone his boys can look up to one day, someone he himself doesn't loathe when he looks in the mirror.

Once more he finds himself marveling at how much smarter and stronger she is than him. That thought even manages to twist the corners of his lips slightly upward, almost enough for it to count as a hint of a smile. What the fuck did I do to deserve her?

Tara holds his gaze, then clears her throat when something else suddenly comes to mind, and now she feels an overwhelming urge to share some truths with him as well. It isn't just all black and white, good or bad. There's a whole lot of grey in between. "You know, you talked about that darkness, or whatever, in you, but I don't think it's all bad."

"What do you mean?" Jax can't stop himself from interrupting her with the question, his eyebrows raising in curiosity.

She'd honestly not intended to bring up Joshua Kohn ever again. After their last trip back to Charming to get rid of him once and for all, she'd told herself they'd never speak of him again, but that vow is shot to hell now since Jax has already mentioned him earlier tonight.

So she swallows the lump that has formed out of nowhere and clears her throat for a second time before she speaks. "You remember that day Kohn stabbed you with those scissors at Floyd's?" It feels like a million years ago now.

Jax furrows his brows, looking perplexed at where she was going with this now, but nods nonetheless to let her know that he remembers. "Yeah, what about it?"

"That night, you asked me if I came back because I knew that you'd hurt him for me, and I swear I meant it when I said that I didn't know if he was going to follow me to Charming ... but I have to
admit that when I ran into you when my father was dying, for the first time in a long time I felt safe. I mean, my dad was dying and I was so heartbroken, but at least for just a little while I completely forgot to worry about Josh, because ..." She gestures to him with both her hands. "You were right there, helping me and just being there ... and I think maybe you were right, maybe I felt that way, because deep down, a part of me knew that you would do whatever it takes to protect me."

She looks away from him now for the first time in what seems like hours, shaking her head to herself and even though her chin quivers for a second, she wills herself to not start crying, before finding the strength to continue. "That night when I shot Kohn, and then I called you and ... and you shot him, too ... that night, in an instant we knew the worst thing about each other, I mean, we'd just killed a man together, but instead of being repulsed by what we'd done, it drew us closer, it pulled us together somehow."

Jax nods again in agreement, because everything she'd just said is the truth. The fact that he'd shot a man dead right in front of her hadn't scared her off. Sure, she'd screamed, and it had freaked her out for a long moment, it had freaked him out, too, but it hadn't repulsed her, hadn't made her think any less of him, nor had it made her fear him.

No, it was like she'd said, it had brought them closer, so much so, that they'd finally said 'fuck it' to that last shred of willpower that had been keeping them apart since her move back to town, and they had torn each other's clothes off in an overwhelming urge to finally make love and reconnect.

Tara hides her face behind her hands for a moment and sighs, before she looks back at him once more. "I guess, there's a bunch of other examples I could give you, to explain myself, but you already know most of them... And there's really just one more thing I need to tell you, that I haven't told you yet." Her words bring Jax back to the here and now, and he raises his eyebrows ever so slightly, letting her know she's got his attention still.

She presses her lips together for just a second, glad to have her composure back under control, before she starts telling him the next story. "You know how John pursued me at the conference in Boise?"

Jax nods, frowning already, even though he's not sure where she's going with this.

She continues. "Well, after you and I got back together that weekend, later that following week I went to see him in his office, and -.

"Babe?" Jax interrupts her abruptly. "You said he didn't bother you anymore after you got back?"

He can feel the anger rising in him at the thought of that guy, all the tiredness he was starting to feel moments ago is suddenly vanishing again and he finds himself feeling wide awake.

Tara shakes her head. "Not exactly. Just let me finish my story, hear me out."

"And what?" Jax prompts for her to finish what she was going to say, barely able to contain his curiosity at how it all played out, wondering what John might've done.

"And I basically threatened his life." She admits, not proud with herself, yet not particularly guilty
looking either. "I pretty much told him that after you're done with him, he'd just be another missing person on the six o'clock news, never to be seen again."

Normally this would've amused him, but he's still reeling from the fact that John has still been harassing her, and that she didn't tell him, yet when Tara scoots closer and settles into his lap now, closing the gap between them, and reaches up to frame his face in both her hands again, the anger begins to dissipate immediately. "I think what I'm trying to say is, that I know that there's some darkness in there, but I'm okay with it. I've subconsciously counted on it with Kohn, and ever since then I've used it to my advantage. I mean, I've threatened people in the past, even your mom, because I know exactly what you're capable of when it comes to protecting me. I guess it would be hypocritical of me to say that that part of you is all bad, when I've used it time and again to keep people in line."

They rest their foreheads against each other, with their eyes closed as a moment of silence stretches on between them, before Tara raises her head again to be able to meet his eyes. "And honestly, if it was anyone other than Gemma, if it had been Juice who had attacked me, I wouldn't fault you for wanting to go after him, for killing him. But she's your mom, Jax, neither you or I would be able to compartmentalize that fact, no matter how hard we try. We wouldn't come back from that. You get that, right?"

She searches his eyes for agreement again, and is relieved to see him nodding his head as he answers her. "Yeah, I know." He pauses for a long moment, still stewing over all she's said.

And she can see that there's something still on his mind, that even now he's still struggling with what he confessed. "What is it, Jax?"

"It's okay." He shakes his head, trying to pretend it's nothing, almost like he's embarrassed now that he's still working through it.

"Don't do that. Don't brush me off, don't brush it off ... I want to know every single thing that's happening in that brain of yours?"

He sighs, his eyes full of doubt and sadness. "I'm just thinking it can't really be that simple. You can't really be that ... forgiving. It's too good to be true."

"Jax?" She starts to plead with him, reaching out to him, wishing more than anything she could make him see what's in her heart. How none of this old stuff matters.

But he interrupts before she can think of what else to say. "I mean, how is that all this stuff I've done, all these things I've done, all these regrets, they're just? Gone?"

"Not gone. Just in the past." She tries to reassure him.

"Exactly, which means it's still hanging around. Just waiting to ... I don't know ... It's like raindrops in a barrel, you know? And it's right there at the top, all that pain, and all it takes is just one more drop and ..." His voice trails off, too scared to finish that thought out loud. How much more can the two of them endure before it proves to be too much?

"I know, baby, yes. We've both made mistakes. We've hurt each other. We have our past. But sometimes ... once in your life, somebody gets under your skin ... into your bloodstream. And with that someone, it doesn't seem to matter how much you've failed each other. We must choose each other. And I choose you exactly the way you are. And if I'm being honest, it's almost scary to me how much I love you, and how much I will probably always love you, no matter what."
Jax can't help himself but to pull her into a kiss. Loving the feel of her lips against his, the sincere emotions in the contact. And in that moment, he finally gets it. He understands that if Tara can forgive him, then he needs to figure out a way to forgive himself, too.

And now he can't hold his tongue any longer. "Now tell me what happened with John?" And for the first time in a while, he actually smirks a little before he adds. "Did he finally back off, or do I have to follow through on your threat and make him disappear?"

Despite Jax's amused expression, Tara doesn't smile when she starts to explain. "Turns out that he's sick, well, he was sick. Grade 1 Meningioma. A tumor in his frontal lobe. The part of the brain that is responsible for making plans, judgments, decision-making, and ... well, also impulse control. He basically hasn't been of sound mind for while, you know? Which makes sense now, considering how he started acting so out-of-character, out of the blue."

"Shit." Jax actually curses out loud now, his anger towards the other man completely evaporated already as he searches Tara's face for more insight. "How bad is it? I mean, is it cancer?"

Tara shakes her head though, letting out a little relieved sigh. "No, it was benign, and they got it all out, so he should be fine. He found out shortly after I confronted him, so needless to say, he wasn't thinking straight before that, Jax, and he hasn't been a problem since. I swear."

"Okay." Jax replies.

Their eyes are locked on each other for another silence filled moment, before they both reach out, framing each other's face and lean in for yet another kiss. Their lips tenderly brush against each other. It's soft, unhurried and rather sweet.

When they finally pull away, Tara suddenly can't help but yawn, raising her hand to cover her wide open mouth, and Jax mimics her just seconds later, yawning just as widely.

"It's late." Tara says sleepily. "We should try to get some sleep."

"Technically, it's early." Jax tries to lighten the mood. "Couple more hours and the sun will be up again."

"Yeah." Tara agrees, climbing off of his lap and tugging on his hand to get him up off the sofa with her. "You know who else is going to be up, and getting dropped off by Christy? Our boys." She states matter-of-factly, as much as she loves and misses them, she's already dreading having to entertain them in such a sleep deprived state.

"Shit, yeah." Jax realizes that now as he goes from room to room, switching off all the lights, while Tara finds both their phones and plugs them in to charge, knowing Christy will try to call before she drops by with Abel and Thomas.

Jax leaves his jeans again in a puddle on the bedroom floor, climbs into bed beside her, but then pulls an already comfortable Tara back up into a sitting position.

"Jax, what are you doing?" She starts to protest, suddenly all energy seemingly drained from her, allowing him to manhandle her like a puppet or a doll.

"Getting you out of this shirt." He replies in the same instant as he pulls the fabric over her head and tosses the garment carelessly across the room a mere second later.

Tara smiles, but still there's a hint of disbelieve in her voice when she slumps back into the mattress completely naked again, and Jax twist away to turn the lamp off on his nightstand. "You cannot be
serious, Teller. You realize we had sex three times in the last twenty-four hours."

She counts along on her hand, raising one finger along to each mentioned account. "We did it right before you got up to get ready for work yesterday morning. Then in your truck, and then again when we got home a while ago."

The room is pitch black now as Jax nuzzles his face playfully into the crook of her neck, making her squeal and try to fight him off, before he pulls away on his own, his face hovering right above hers as he's meeting her eyes in the darkness, feigning innocence. "Who said anything about sex?"

"You just undressed me." Tara points out, pulling down the sheet to expose her bare breasts to proof her point.

But before he replies, he gives each of her nipples a quick peck, then rolls back onto his back and pulls her body flush against him. Her head on his shoulder, her hand resting on his chest, and her leg draped across his. "I just like you naked, babe, that's all."

Without another word, they both seem to be drifting off to sleep. Their life is still upside down in some ways, because the truth still hurt, and will continue to hurt for a long time to come, but right now, in their little apartment, in their bedroom, and in each other's arms, they truly have each other to lean on. And that in itself is a victory they never quite experienced before like in this very moment.

Gemma tried to come between them more times than they can count, but in the end she hasn't succeeded, and right now that is all that they try to come to terms with. Try to focus on the fact that their love has prevailed over her hatred.

Tara has her cheek nestled against him, the steady sound of his heart beating in her ear is almost lulling her to sleep, when she can't help herself and suddenly speaks up one more time. "Jax?"

"Hmmm?" He murmurs sleepily in reply, his head tilted towards hers, his cheek resting against the top of her head, his arm tightening more around her.

"I love you." Tara finally replies after finding her voice again, holding onto him just as tight.

"And I love you." Jax says sounding just as serious as she did, pressing a kiss against her hair again, and not long after, they both finally fall asleep in each other's arms.

X

A few days later

Jax follows Tara into her office at the hospital, stepping out of the way so she can close the door behind him, as he pulls the sonogram picture back out of the inside pocket of his jacket to study it some more.

He makes himself comfortable in the chair across from hers, but grabs her hand, tugging her to him, before she can round her desk and sit in her usual seat.

Instead he pulls her onto his lap, holding her close, while still staring at the printed out sonogram picture they'd just gotten during Tara's first pregnancy check-up.

They're both tremendously relieved to hear that everything looks good, the baby looks healthy, right on track, with a strong and steady heartbeat.

He narrows his eyes a little, scrutinizing the somewhat grainy image in an almost comical way,
before he says, "I think we might be in trouble."

Tara narrows her eyes now at the picture, too, before she meets his eyes in question. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, just from this angle ..." He holds the image a little closer to Tara's face, pointing at it with his other hand that's resting on her shoulder. "Don't you think it bears a striking resemblance to those creatures from Alien?"

She smirks when her eyes meet his again now, and he's grinning ear to ear, clearly amused by his own little joke. "This is exactly what it's supposed to look like, Jax."

"Alright, ... you're the doc. Just don't come running to me when it busts out of your ribcage." He continues to joke.

She can't help herself from cupping his bearded cheek with the palm of her hand, drawing his attention back to her face. Relieved to see him so carefree and seemingly happy again. Not wanting to sour the mood, she plays along, her tone teasing when she replies. "I'm so glad you're having fun with all this, Teller."

They smile contently at each other for a long silent moment, but just like that his voice sounds serious again, his facial expression matching, when he sighs and admits something she's barely ever heard him say. "Honestly, I might just be a little scared."

Now it's Tara's turn to try to lighten the mood again, when she replies sarcastically, still smiling just the same. "Wow, that's just what every little girl dreams her Prince Charming will say."

But when she takes in the worry lines that are suddenly forming between his eyes, her bright smile dulls, too, yet she tries to comfort him by way of confessing. "FYI, I might be a little scared, too."

But then she ponders about it, her eyes locked on his while she thinks. "Maybe scared isn't the right word, ... more like anxious, you know? I just don't want any more bad stuff to happen."

"Yeah, me too." Jax scoffs, his eyes flicker back to the picture for just a second, but then he turns his full attention back to Tara again. "And I was just thinking, do you remember the other day, when I said that you and I should really start looking for a house?"

"Mm-Hmm" Tara nods.

"Well, babe." He raises his eyebrows almost up to his hairline in an overly dramatic expression. "I really think we should start looking for a house." He waves the picture in front of her face to draw her attention back to the first image of their unborn child. "'Cause shit just got real."

Tara sighs relieved again, can't help but smile a little at the way he's acting, and stands up to pull her phone from her purse on her desk, turning it around to show Jax the time. "We still have a little bit of time before we gotta get back to work. We could check some online listings, if you want?"

Tara quickly rounds her desk, sits down and opens her screen and starts up her laptop.

At the same time, he tucks the picture back into his jacket pocket, but instead of pulling his chair up beside hers, he hurriedly takes the few steps over to the door and locks it with a quick twist of his wrist. Even wiggles the handle to make sure it is in fact securely locked.

Tara takes notice of what he just did, her eyes travel from his hand on the doorknob up to his face that's already displaying a cocky smirk now as he swaggers back towards her. Eyeing her like she's his prey with every approaching step.
"What are you doing?" She manages to ask, even though she already knows when he reaches past her and closes the screen on her laptop again, before he moves the device out of the way and off to the side.

"Jax?" She tries again in the same instant he swivels her chair in his direction, caging her in with one broad hand on each armrest to the left and right of her.

"What do you think I'm doing, Dr. Teller?" He asks rhetorically in return, his voice dark, husky and seductive, but before Tara has a chance to form a word, he picks her up as if she doesn't weigh a thing. Just that action alone seems to make her blush, feeling her body heat in response in all the right places, and her heart might've just skipped a beat, too.

Yet Tara can't help but let out a disbelieving laugh when he proceeds to sit her down on the edge of her desk, his hands roaming over her body, cupping her breasts through her shirt, while he very slowly starts to kiss a trail from behind her ear down towards her collarbone.

She bites her lip to suppress the moan that's forming in her throat already, and then tries to protest, although she's not sounding very convincingly at all. "I thought you wanted to look for a house?"

He mumbles against her skin between kisses. "We can do that after work while the kids are still up and playing ..." He unbuttons and unzips her jeans for her, twisting his wrist in an awkward angle as he slides his hand down into the front of her pants. Tara lets out a moan, before he adds with a satisfied smirk. "This we can't do until they're fast asleep." He points out very matter-of-factly. "So I'm just making logical use of our limited alone time in your office."

Tara reaches for his face, pulling his lips up to meet hers in a heady kiss, before she replies breathily between kisses. "I can't argue with that logic."

Then she surprises him when she pushes back against his chest, and at first he thinks she's changed her mind when she says. "Seriously though, we don't have much time."

But her meaning becomes clear when she slips off of the desk enough to push her own jeans, along with her panties, past her hips and down to her thighs, so he hurries to undo his own belt and jeans standing mere inches away from her.

Their eyes locked on each other in a hungry gaze, before Tara spins around and bends over her desk for him, moving a few things out of the way, not just to make herself more comfortable, but also to be able to reach to the other edge of the desk above her head, to have something to hold on to.

"Jesus Christ." Jax curses at the sight in front of him. "I fucking love these curves of yours, babe!" He rasps, while running his hands appreciatively across her skin, from her still smaller waist around the curve of her firm behind, before flicking her shirt up enough to also get a good look at her crow tattoo.

"I know." She replies in a murmur, her cheeks flaming in anticipation, but she doesn't have to wait long.

Jax quickly steps up behind her positioning himself, one large hand firmly gripping her hip, the other reaching forward and gripping her long hair, before he lets his hips surge forward, filling her in one fluid stroke and ultimately makes her bite back the moan that threatens to spill from her mouth.

X

Author's Note: I apologize for how long it took to get this update posted. As I've already mentioned in my other story, I've been strapped for time, and when I did find time, the words didn't cooperate
like I wanted them, too. I'm not completely happy with how this chapter turned out, but it's been so long since I've updated, I decided to stop 'messing around' with it, bite the bullet and post it as is. So please, let me know what you think? I can't wait to hear from all of you, I'm always curious to get your take on it. Thanks for sticking with my story, and again, sorry it took so long!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!