

Sins of the Father: A Second Chance Sci-Fi Alien Time Travel Romance (Ravage Riders MC #1)

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#1

A Second Chance Sci-Fi Alien Time Travel Romance

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I was drunk, angry, and spoiling for a fight. The crowded bar was the perfect distraction until all hell broke loose.

She walked in. My world collapsed.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this. I never thought I'd see her again. Rae never should have been there that night . . . but 5 years of regret, loss, and vengeance have waged war inside me.

And the sins of our fathers won't stop me from claiming what's mine: Rae Stenson.

She's my addiction. I need her. Even if I have to lie, cheat, steal, or kill.

But it may not be the past that we have to confront as the real sins of our fathers wreak havoc in Providence, CA where reality and fantasy collide.

Love always deserves a second chance... even if it's a little out of this world.

Prologue – Pete 'Edge'

The blonde's perky tits bounced as she gyrated, her hips swinging seductively to the beat of the rhythmic music. As she swayed, her arms reached high above her platinum head, bent at the elbows as she twirled her fingers in a come-hither gesture. A bold suggestive smile curved her too full lips that were stained bright red from the cheap lipstick she wore. With a seductive look of determination, she sauntered closer, her eyes focused on the man of honor.

Peter saw her obvious approach and groaned inwardly. He wasn't interested. His eyes roamed over her petite frame and lingered for a few seconds before he turned away, dismissing her before she had a chance to speak. Another piece of ass was nothing new. He was sick of the constant flaunt of attention seeking pussy in his face.

If he wasn't so goddamn tired, he might have stood up and gone to his room but nights like this proved he would never escape his life in the MC. No matter how much he gave up, or how much he handed over his soul . . . he was always required to give more.

Fuck Rafe and his bullshit.

"Welcome home."

Rafe, the club's president, sank onto the couch beside him, his smug look of self-righteousness the same as it was a year ago before Pete was arrested. Nothing had changed.

"Thanks," Pete mumbled, his gaze diverted from the blonde with her bouncing tits and fake spray on tan, or the countless others paraded half naked in front of him. These little 'bunnies' or 'puppets' were all the same. Just wanted to be old ladies to a club member, didn't matter which one.

Fuck that shit.

Peter wasn't going to be used.

"You good, Edge?" Edge, the nickname Rafe had given him because Pete was always on edge, ready to snap in rage. He fucking hated it.

"Sure." His leather vest with the Ravage Riders MC skull logo on the back and his name Edge stitched on the front was tossed in his lap.

"Put your leathers on, man. I don't like to see you without your cut." Rafe's amused expression darted from Pete to the perky blonde as she sank into his lap. His hands cupped her breasts and pinched before he yanked her closer and slammed his lips down on hers. "Blow me," he instructed as the girl dropped to her knees and began to unzip his pants.

Pete knew this would happen. Rafe had been giving him shit for years trying to entice him with every slat that walked through the door. Pete didn't care about the public display, it wasn't the issue. You could almost always find some kind of debauchery happening every night at the MC.

The clubhouse was so full of free pussy he was surprised they didn't change the name to Cathouse or some shit. Just how things were. With Rafe as Pres, that was how they would remain.

He ignored the smacking and slurping sounds from the blonde and focused his gaze across the room looking for R.J. His best friend had been scarce tonight. Considering what was happening next to him, he could understand why.

This shit got old fast.

Neither of the guys indulged in this lifestyle when they could help it. Their mutual problem was one that haunted both of their dreams . . . and their past. The same girl.

Rae.

Rage rushed through his veins like sharp poison, stinging and burning within the vessels. Thoughts of her always brought the same reaction. Pete's fist clenched the red plastic cup, once full of beer, in his hand a little too tight. Good thing he already downed it. Why were these cups always fucking red? His patience was wearing thin and he was sick of the constant act around Rafe.

Alcohol was an easy escape and one he sought often.

He was an expert at getting drunk. Ask anyone.

And he had a temper, too.

Pete used to be a different guy, one who gave a shit and cared about doing the right thing. A low, bitter chuckle rumbled in his throat as his best friend's gaze caught his across the room, appearing in the doorway with a frown. R.J. glared in Rafe's direction and ticked his head toward the exit, but Peter mouthed the word 'no.' He wasn't ready to leave quite yet.

There were a few things he needed to settle before he attempted to make all his wrongs right. Not an easy choice for a man whose life was condemned, but vengeance was bittersweet, and he intended to savor the moment once it arrived. For now, he had a plan to enact, which meant taking necessary risks. Right or wrong, he was determined to avenge the wrongs done to him and those he loved. Doing the right thing caused him to lose the only woman who ever meant anything to him.

Rae was gone forever because of his choices . . .

So . . . fuck doing the right thing.

He didn't give a shit anymore.

Time was ticking, his hatred burning deep and simmering low, ready to ignite in a flame of righteous revenge. So much time had passed. Too many years to count.

No more waiting, it had been long enough. Rafe would answer for his crimes.

Five years.

Five long painful years.

An eternity.

But just like the Grim Reaper . . . death was about to seek retribution.

The name of vengeance was Peter 'Edge' Harding.

Part One

"Undeservedly,

You will atone

For the sins of your fathers."

~ Horace

Chapter 1 – Pete 'Edge'

The cool concrete façade of the dimly lit warehouse pressed tightly against my back. The cool temperature soaked through my t-shirt and skin, providing temporary relief from the humid night. I ducked below the dirty glass block windows, sinking directly below to crouch, and paused to catch my breath. The frantic beat of my pulse thrummed in my veins from the sudden burst of adrenaline. Excitement always did this to me. The thrill of the upcoming fight and knowing we held the element of surprise sent a surge of pleasure through my veins. I was like a junkie who needed their next fix.

Maybe I was addicted to the fucked-up life I now led.

Bumpy impressions from the uneven surface ground into my back as I froze, the movement inside slow but intentional as the voices grew louder for several minutes before they faded away completely. I never moved, even when it became uncomfortable. Not until I knew it was safe and wouldn't reveal our position.

I wasn't a pussy. And this most certainly wasn't my first fucking rodeo.

Tonight was all about retribution.

Any chance to give these fuckers a little payback . . . and I was taking it.

The meager light shone through the grimy, cobweb covered planes of glass and cast a pale-yellow light through the gaps as I listened for footsteps or any indication our cover had been blown. Beside me, R.J. checked his Glock and cocked the gun as his fingers tightened over the steel barrel and twitched. When our eyes met, I knew my brother had my back as much as I had his.

That was how family worked . . . and the MC was family.

For life. The RRMC was life. A death sentence without parole.

Once you were in, you stayed. Forever.

This life was all I'd ever have so tonight wasn't a chore, it was my fucking duty.

I glanced behind me to check my six and ticked my chin in Jake's direction. He nodded his head of long dark hair tied into a ponytail and indicated the rear of the building was secure. To his left and

right flank I spotted 'GQ' Luke – the guy was a little too pretty – and the unruly red hair of the Irishman Valan. Ghost was a few feet behind, his skull tattoos covering much of his exposed skin. His skeletal mask completed the look. Crazy fucker.

Beckett and Shane were on back up if needed. Everyone knew the plan.

Moving steadily forward we kept in tight formation, gesturing to one another in the dark. My brothers and I didn't seem to need words to communicate. It was as if I could sense their thoughts and intentions before they ever moved. We'd always been able to control a situation like this, reaching the same goal together without much effort. Like a well-oiled machine or our Harley's, we could perceive each other's plans or meaning without asking. This was vital, an integral part of how we worked as an MC and functioned as one massive strong beast.

I'd never given much thought to how we connect so strongly without effort, but I suppose it was life in the MC, consistently crazy and dangerous, that developed these abilities.

The outdoor lights were dim and worked to our advantage. We knew exactly how many of these motherfuckers were gonna be on watch. Surveillance had given us decent Intel. The first two guards outside didn't see us in time. Valan took out one, his beefy arm around the guy's skinny neck before he could fight. GQ picked off the other as his blade sank into the soft flesh between the bastard's empty ears.

Not a sound disturbed the silence of the night, except for one single grunt quickly extinguished. The lifeless bodies were hidden in the bushes off the edge of the property. Efficient and ruthless, my brothers proved time and again their worth.

We paused to watch for the remaining MC members.

Not ours, of course. These bastards belonged to our rival MC, and they deserved everything coming for them tonight. One in particular, a dark Native American guy, was high on my list of targets.

This shit was personal with him – Akando – a name I wouldn't forget.

"Edge?"

I swiveled in R.J.'s direction and ticked my head toward the door.

"Akando is mine. Everyone else is fair game," I whispered, my words heavy with anticipation.

Only minutes later the next few members exited the warehouse. They didn't get far. There would be no mercy this night. I never heard the death blows that took them out.

I tapped my hand restlessly against my thigh in a flash of nerves. Where was this Akando fucker?

Shots rang out a few minutes later, erupting from one of the warehouse windows, smashed seconds before the gunfire began to spray bullets into the dark night.

It was only a matter of time before they realized their guys weren't coming back inside. Didn't matter. No one in that warehouse was walking away, so the point was moot.

We easily avoided the careless shots being fired and busted through the door, spreading out and clearing the two fucktards by the windows. I shot both before a second thought entered my head,

my brothers right behind me as we entered the warehouse.

I was a sharpshooter and a damn near perfect shot. The heart or the forehead, the only two places I ever left a bullet. No loose ends. No screw ups.

No second chances.

We kept moving, taking out more targets and searching the interior for any hidden MC members. A large table sat in the middle of the dusty room covered in bricks of coke and hundreds of little dime bags spread across the surface as it was cut for maximum resale. Stupid fuckers. There were other less dangerous ways to earn.

Not that Rafe listened to me or my opinions.

The RRMC club president knew best. Asshole.

“Edge, isn’t this a surprise?”

The voice echoed somewhere close off to my right.

Turning the next corner swiftly, we ended up face to face.

“Akando,” I growled, leveling my gun right at his heart. He wasn’t going out that fast but he didn’t need to know it.

“How’s Rae? I have to admit I jerk off every night thinking of her sweet little cunt.”

Rage pounded my temples, but I wouldn’t give him the satisfaction of a reaction. “My girl is safe. Right where she needs to be.”

He snorted, both of us moving steadily closer to the other. There were only a few feet between us and the air rippled with expectation. Too much space. All I wanted was to smash his skull into the ground. But first, before he died, he needed to feel pain. I wanted to hear his screams. I needed to hear him beg.

Without warning he rushed me, his head connecting with my torso, but I was ready for him. We fell to the ground, the impact hard, but I ignored the jarring of my body against the hard concrete floor and brought my knee sharply up, connecting hard with his jaw.

Dazed, Akando was sprawled on the ground, providing the distraction I was looking for. Seconds later I landed a brutal left hook, followed by another to his right cheek. His head flopped uselessly around on his neck as I yanked it back. Several more hits gave him a busted nose and a black eye before I landed a few choice hits on his rib cage, too.

Spitting blood and holding his side, he moaned, “Edge, I’m sorry.”

“For?” I roared.

“For not killing you sooner!”

Two minutes later he was swaying on his knees before me, my knuckles dripping his blood. I grabbed his head by the hair and forced his gaze up to mine. “You dumb motherfucker. You’ll die for touching my girl. I’ll never let you live after what you did.”

Behind me, I knew the warehouse was secure. My brothers had my six. I was free to torture, maim, and do what I wanted to this asshole.

"I wish I would have raped her now," he sneered.

Wrong answer.

Taking my lighter, I flipped open the lid and smiled cruelly. "Hold him."

For thirty minutes I made good on my promise of torture, burning and slicing his body with my hunting knife, severing fingers until he passed out. Ghost found a bucket of stagnant water and threw it on him until he awakened, sputtering and mumbling curses.

"Any last words, motherfucker?" I asked, ready to end this once and for all.

"You don't know what you've done tonight. Striker will come for you, Edge. You won't survive it."

"Maybe, but you'll never know."

He was suddenly serious, his eyes locking on mine. "Ask Mack about that night. Find out the truth about Ron, your dad, and the RRMC. Get answers, Edge. Don't be a fucking pussy."

"What are you saying?" I yelled, hating how his slurred voice seemed to ring with the truth.

"I'm going to die and I'm ready, but I die knowing what really caused the feud between us. We used to be brother MC's." His head fell forward and he let out a raspy sigh. "There's a lot of shit and lies on both sides."

"Fuck," I whispered, certain he wasn't lying.

I walked away from Akando, suddenly disgusted. Not with myself, but the knowledge that my own reservations and questions about the death of Rae's father and Max's exile were grounded in truth.

"End him," I ordered, leaving the carnage in the room behind as I walked outside into the cool night air.

It seemed only seconds later that my fellow club members emerged. Valan and Ghost retrieved the other bodies and added to the pile indoors. R.J. and Jake carried red gas cans that sloshed as they walked. Once the outside of the building had been doused they led a trail away and steadily closer, within a few yards of where I stood.

With a flick of my cheap gas station lighter, I watched the fire ignite. The moment the cool plastic hit the gasoline and busted wide open the spark traveled fast along the path until it reached the base of the warehouse.

Flames soared high into the blackened sky as the explosion rocked the quiet night, popping sounds and loud noises converging from inside. I ducked and walked away from the blast, certain the fire would blaze high quickly. Far enough away from the inferno, I spun and watched the results of the explosion as another bang set off a loud reverberating boom throughout the area.

Pieces of drywall, glass, and debris filled the air as the evidence of this night was destroyed. Thick black smoke rose from the warehouse and poured into the cool dark night. Flames licked up the

side of the building and engulfed the bodies of our rival MC – Satan’s Outlaws.

Not much of their DNA would remain, but that was the plan.

Enough was left behind to prove a point.

Nobody fucked with the RRMC.

The Ravage Riders liked to send a message when they struck a target. Fuck off or be fucked with. Never ended well for the other guy. I can bear witness to that shit. This night marked at least the hundredth time I had participated in some kind of dangerous and illegal activity in the last year alone.

All for the club.

We coughed and gagged on the stench, but it wasn’t the fire. The cooked bodies were nasty as fuck.

“Fucking stinks,” Valan muttered.

Ghost howled into the night like a goddamn wolf and I ignored his dumb ass. R.J. chuckled next to me on my left as Jake whistled a lively tune on my right.

My brothers, my most trusted confidants and closest friends. Crazy fuckers.

Family.

I straddled my hog with a deep belly laugh and pulled on my leather gloves, revved the throaty engine, and kicked up the stand before I rode away, smirking at the destruction left behind.

Ride or die baby.

Chapter 2 – Pete ‘Edge’

The mood back at the clubhouse was celebratory. Not one injury or complication. Shit went smooth as silk and that was because I was in charge. Yeah, I might be a cocky fucker, but I had reason to be. There was a rationale behind why Rafe made me Vice Pres once I was a full patch with the RRMC.

I got shit done, and I didn’t fuck it up.

Brothers came home to their old ladies and families. That was important.

As I entered the clubhouse, the jovial atmosphere burned and clawed at my thinly veiled composure. On the surface I was cool and collected, the same Edge that always stalked these halls, without giving any indication of how I truly felt. Caged and backed into a corner, I felt chained to this life but that wasn’t the problem.

I could live with my choices and the RRMC.

My problem centered with Rafe. My asshole Pres.

And the fucker knew it.

Rafe took every opportunity to remind me that I wasn't free, and I owed him. As long as he was club Pres I would constantly look over my shoulder . . .

But the asshole better look over his too because I was only biding my time.

Sooner or later I'd be able to seek justice for his betrayal and lies. Someday I'd get my answers.

That thought brought me back to the warehouse and those last minutes with Akando. He knew something, and I intended to find out exactly what it was. Too many secrets were anchored in my past and for once I just wanted the goddamn truth.

Lost in my anger and frustration, I didn't see Rafe until it was too late. My back was slammed into the wall, just feet from my bedroom in the main hall, conveniently around the corner from the loud and drunken party not far away. Rafe's hands were fisted around the neck of my shirt as he attempted to cut off my airway.

Dumb fucker.

"I heard you were looking for answers again, Edge."

His sneer was unmistakable along with the hatred and loathing in his voice. There was no love lost between us. Our arrangement was born of necessity, not respect. Keep your friends close . . . and your enemies closer.

I smiled lazily, ignoring the urge to cough or choke. Without warning, I leaned forward and headbutted him as hard as I could, right on the nose. He dropped his hands from my shirt but ended up pummeling my gut a few times as we staggered. I blocked one of the hits and swung my fist in a perfectly timed left hook.

Old southpaw.

I'd trained hard to be able to hit like that, with just enough accuracy, speed, and strength to take someone down but not inflict permanent damage. Rafe was a fool to try to take me on now. I'd trained faster and harder than most guys in the MC, and I seemed a natural. Now that I thought about it, I wasn't the only one. Most of my MC brothers were decent boxers. We could brawl with the best and take hits that would knock a normal guy out cold. And we were strong, resilient, tough fighters.

All except Rafe. Maybe if he stayed sober long enough, he could train and clean his act up, but I doubted it. Stupid fucker. I pulled my punch a little, bored already. I wanted to see this asshole get what he deserved but it wasn't the right time.

For now, I had to protect myself.

Rafe laughed and wiped his nose on the sleeve of his shirt, blood coursing down the front as he sniffed. "You're getting better, quicker. Good for you, Edge."

I didn't acknowledge his words but kept my fight stance, ready for more. Don't ever let your guard down. I learned that shit the hard way. Those first few years were brutal teachers and the scars on my body proved my endurance and stamina as well as my ability to adapt.

"No more tonight. You did good kid so go get some pussy and celebrate. We'll pick this up tomorrow."

I didn't doubt this would involve some serious shit later. Rafe didn't like it when I tried to dig into the MC's past and the connection to the Outlaws. Too bad. He didn't have a choice because I was going to do whatever the fuck I wanted anyway. As he walked away, I shook my head. The RRMC needed new leadership. Soon.

"Bro, where you been?"

R.J. clapped his hand on my shoulder, and I smiled, breathing slowly through my nose until I was calm. "Had a little talk with Rafe."

He frowned but didn't ask what it was about. Good. I hated explanations. "Let's get out of here. Ghost wants to see if he can pick up some chicks at the bar. Valan and Jake are getting antsy. They think GQ will snag all the ladies."

I snorted with humor. "He probably will. Pretty fucker."

R.J. laughed as he pulled me from the clubhouse, swinging his fist into my side and we wrestled like we did when we were kids, knocking each other into walls on the way out. Both of us out of breath and grinning like fools, we straddled our hogs. Seconds later the loud heavy roar of our bikes filled the air as we headed to our favorite bar, Crazy Eights.

You'd think it was a hardcore biker bar, but it wasn't. That was why we liked it.

The front doors were made of heavy wood and scraped the rough, uneven floor when you entered. Loud music and the sound of dozens of voices met you instantly as well as the smell. Like a mixture of licorice and fried food. The main focal point was a large rectangular carved bar that wrapped around the room and was shaped like the number eight. Bartenders stood in the two circles, passing out drinks, and taking orders.

A large kitchen sat at the northern end, serving up appetizer type foods like fries and chicken wings. About sixteen pool tables were scattered around the outskirts of the room while wooden tables and chairs hovered in the center. Everything was in multiples of eight. Interesting concept.

No live band tonight but the jukebox was loudly blaring out tunes. A stage had been set up on the far end, but it wasn't large. Entertainment was usually only Thursday through Saturday nights. A dance area, really nothing more than a huge tiled square floor occupied the space in front of the stage, and off to the right was equipment set up for a D.J. Strobe lights dangled from above the dance floor, where it would be lit up as the gyrating bodies pressed close together to the beat of the music.

I could see how this place appealed to both the normal and biker crowd. People were milling about all over the room, shooting pool, drinking beers, smoking cigarettes, and hanging around the jukebox making selections.

I ushered my guys toward the only open pool table which had suddenly cleared just for our use. We never had to ask. When we walked in the door, a pool table would always open up. Yeah, it was part of the biker persona and the culture of fear that kept the locals at a distance, but I didn't give a fuck.

We weren't here to make trouble. The owner was a brother and we kept our promise not to start shit in his bar. I picked up the chalk and decided to break, taking the first game with R.J.

About two hours later we'd drunk enough liquor and beer to kill a person with alcohol poisoning, but I knew my limit, and my brothers'. Leaning against the wall, I tilted my long neck bottle back and gulped a few swigs. I had a nice buzz going, almost enough to make me forget about the shit from earlier tonight.

I wish things hadn't gone to hell about twenty seconds later, but life was like that.

I had the worst fucking luck imaginable.

My eyes flicked about the room, taking in the scene. I was always on alert. It was a hard habit to break, I'd saved my own ass more than a few times by keeping a close eye on my surroundings.

The front doors swung open with force, the heavy wood banging against the solid walls and cracking with a finality that seemed like some rabid harbinger of death. I immediately recognized the guys who entered. Their leathers bore the Satan's Outlaw's emblem.

"Edge . . ." R.J. whispered, ticking his head in their direction so slightly I might have missed it if I wasn't already clued in.

"Chill, let them make the first move."

Ghost was next to me on my right only a few seconds later. R.J. stayed on my left, but I saw his hand hover over his shirt ready to lift and grab his gun at the first sign of trouble. Valan and Jake kept to their game of pool. GQ stayed just slightly to my six, his arms around two hot blondes, one of which had been fondling his junk all night. I swear that fucker gets laid ten times more than any of the rest of us, but I saw him stiffen slightly, so I knew he had seen the Outlaws too. In all outward appearance you'd never know we were ready to rumble, but that was how that shit was supposed to look.

The next five minutes would be forever ingrained in my memory.

The seven members of the Outlaws strode forward with purpose in our direction at the exact same moment the front doors of the bar opened again. I blinked. What I saw next defied logic. My beer halfway to my lips, I froze. In total disbelief and shock, I didn't move a muscle.

Are you shitting me? How is this happening? Where did she come from?

What the fuck was she doing here!?

My girl, my lost love and my deepest regret stood next to a group of girlfriends fully oblivious to my presence or reaction and in total and complete danger.

I hadn't seen her in four years.

"Fuck," I whispered, the beer slipping through my fingers and falling to the floor with a shatter.

R.J. saw her next, his own jaw dropping open and gaping like a fish out of water. "Rae."

I couldn't tear my eyes away from her, that was my first mistake, but it certainly wouldn't be my last. Had I been watching I would have seen the knife that withdrew from my nemesis' hand and his quickened steps. I'd been at odds with Bryce 'Killer' Hutchinson since middle school (yeah, he has a stupid name and nickname). We hated each other, but the roots of that hatred had much more to do with how bad we fucked with each other more than anything else.

He was a dick.

I was shoved to the side as Ghost blocked Bryce's intentional attempt to gut me with his knife. The blade sliced into Ghost's forearm but wasn't deep enough to make him pause. Without hesitating, his elbow met Bryce's chin the same moment I snapped into action. Before I could think it through, the five of us ended up in a brawl with the seven of them.

I always liked low odds. Maybe I was just the underdog, but I liked proving people wrong, and I enjoyed shocking them when they found out how strong and fast I was, like in the ring. Boxing had lots of perks. Not many fucked with me once they saw I could kick some serious ass, even less when they found out I was a member of the RRM. Toss in the fact that I was smart and educated, I was lethal.

Right in the thick of things, throwing kicks and punches, I noticed Bryce recognize Rae and a devilish smile curved his lips. Only a second later my eyes met her startled brown irises, wide with shock.

Baby.

With that one look, so intense and heated, I knew I still owned her heart.

Tonight, she'd know she still owned mine, too.

Bryce broke free of Jake's hold and ran in her direction. I wasn't sure how I made it to her before he did, but my only thought was that I had to reach her first. I moved so fast I hardly registered the motion. There was something odd about the way my body jolted forward, but I didn't pay much attention to it. In a split-second decision, I tackled Bryce to the floor, raising my fist and punching him as hard as I could hoping to knock him out.

While we grappled on the floor, the entire bar erupted in chaos.

Fights were breaking out all over as my brothers tried not to involve any citizens, but it was near impossible. The Outlaws were brutal, using more than fists and heavily booted feet in their attacks. I witnessed several sharp blades flying through the air. I heard a grunt and then a scream and lifted my eyes as one of the Outlaws grabbed Rae, a blade pressed to her slender throat.

I couldn't really say what happened next.

I think I roared like a wild fucking animal and shoved through bodies, using every ounce of strength I possessed to reach her, charging like a goddamn bull. Her frightened whimper increased my rage, and I felt the wild beast inside me thirst for fucking blood.

I saw red.

Nobody was going to hurt my old lady.

The next thing I knew I was on the ground, the stupid fucker beneath me as I let loose. Rae was huddled with her friends, crying, and calling my name but I couldn't stop.

"Pete!" Fuck, she was the only one that called me by my real name anymore. It nearly brought me back from the . . . edge, but screw this shit. She was the most important person in my life.

I had to save her. I had to make sure this fucker didn't go after her again. I had to –

“Edge!”

Jake and R.J. yanked me off the guy as I dripped his blood from my knuckles and heaved, my chest tight with the lack of oxygen. It was a wonder I didn't have a fucking heart attack. Pumped full of adrenaline and seething anger, I was a ticking time bomb. I fought them off, cursing and shouting, trying to run for Rae. Her doe-like brown eyes were like smooth melted chocolate and seriously frightened . . .

Of me.

Fuck!

The front doors burst open and cops filed into the bar, guns drawn. Someone must have called. No doubt the presence of two rival MC's amped shit up a bit. I was shoved to the ground with the rest of my brothers and the Outlaw MC members, as well as several rowdy citizens. Cuffed and trying to crane my head around to find my girl, I nearly panicked.

I couldn't find her.

Where the fuck was Rae?

It wasn't until I was shoved roughly into the back of a squad car that I caught a glimpse of her. Rae's slim frame was illuminated in the dark, misty night by blue and red flashing lights. The rain had soaked her to the bone, and she was wrapped in a blanket, near a few of her friends, crying and trembling, shaking her head at an officer as he indicated she should get in the waiting ambulance.

For a few brief seconds our eyes met . . .

And all I saw was her face pinched in pain.

My heart nearly stopped.

The words 'I love you' died on my tongue as I whispered her name and she turned away, the tears glistening on her pale cheeks. I knew at that moment that nothing I could say or do would change the way she thought of me. Her gaze spoke the words even if she never voiced them aloud.

Monster.

She was right.

I was a fucking monster, a demon, a broken man with nothing left to lose.

And now I knew I was every bit the haunted and dangerous criminal I had become.

Edge.

My name and my fate.

That was where I lived and played, where I was dumped and broken, where I'd continue to stay until this life finally claimed me . . . and only then would I be free.

Five years earlier . . .

Chapter 3 – Rae

I highly disliked high school boys. They were utterly awful, completely disgusting, and totally ridiculous. In that order. Their immaturity and tendency to flaunt their bodily functions sickened me. If I had a choice, I would go to an all-girls school. Of course, I didn't. My dear mother would never stoop to actually paying for my education. That might deter her funds from worthy expenditures; my scholarly needs held lower rank than her luxury lifestyle. And so, I resided in the public school education system, doomed to spend the rest of my high school days watching Peter Harding and his friends belch the pledge of allegiance.

I sighed inwardly, trying not to watch, and yet boredom couldn't tear my eyes away. It was truly a shame. Peter had such potential. He was cute, in that boy next door kind of way. Soft dark curls that hung over his forehead and warm hazel eyes with flecks of amber and green. I actually had a crush on him in junior high. Shhh, don't tell anyone. Especially him. His mouth was as big as his propensity to embarrass the fairer sex.

"Rae," he belched my name.

I rolled my eyes.

"Rae." He repeated my name again when I didn't acknowledge him, but at least he stopped belching. Small miracles.

"What Peter?" I tried not to sound annoyed. It didn't work.

His eyebrow rose in humor. "Do I irritate you?"

Oh no, I was not encouraging this line of conversation. Devious little . . .

I shrugged.

"Hey, what are you doing this Friday night?"

Nothing, at least not with you. I turned in his direction and smiled. "Wherever you are sure to be absent, that's where I'll be."

He pretended to look hurt, placing a hand over his heart in mock injury. I rolled my eyes again.

This was a common occurrence in his presence.

"Rae, there's a kick-ass party at Devon's Friday night. You should go. With me," emphasized, in case I wasn't sure.

I stared straight into his eyes, acting like I was considering it. Then I shook my head. "Absolutely not."

This time he seemed genuinely disappointed. "Why not?"

Did he really have no idea? "Because if I wanted to take a child with me, I would bring my baby sister."

His friends let out whoops of laughter.

"Harsh," Jake observed, clapping Peter on the back. R.J. was watching our interaction, his face curious. Beckett smirked from the back row.

Peter wasn't deterred. "Come on, Rae. You know you've been in love with me since the sixth grade."

I laughed so hard that my sides ached. Is that what he thought? Seriously? He looked a little indignant with my continued humor.

"Are you sure it isn't the other way around?" I asked between giggles.

The brief flash of shock and then hurt was quickly covered up with a lazy smile. "Yeah, sure babe. You know I'm irresistible."

His friends laughed but Peter's eyes told a different story.

I was dead on.

His feelings were as transparent as his inability to think for himself. His friends dictated his every word and behavior. Always a show. Another reason Peter was not the guy for me.

"Yeah, Peter. Your rendition of the pledge makes me weak at the knees."

More laughter. Peter's eyes narrowed. Crap. What was he going to do now?

"Rae, come with me Friday," he leaned forward so only I could hear him. "Please, baby?"

I turned to face him, surprised by the endearment. What was he playing at? Was this some kind of joke?

"Peter . . ." his hand settled gently on mine, "I can't."

"Why not?"

"I have to shampoo my hair or something."

Half the room erupted in laughter. Great, we had an audience.

"I won't take no for an answer. I'll pick you up at seven so we can go for pizza first."

He leaned closer as the bell rang, not budging. Kids jumped up from their seats, but the two of us remained, his body pressing nearer to mine. "Think about it. I promise you won't regret it."

As our eyes locked on one another the rest of the class gathered their books and bags, leaving the room as quickly as possible.

We were alone now, even the teacher had left for lunch.

I sighed, "Peter."

He pulled me up, placed his palms softly on my cheeks, and lowered his lips to mine. I was so shocked I didn't move. Did he just kiss me?

"Rae," he leaned back, "you're the only girl for me."

I met his eyes, unable to look away. "Why?"

He smiled. "You know why."

I shook my head. What was happening? I loathed him. Right?

He grinned, like a damn fool. "Maybe I should kiss you again. It makes you speechless . . ."

I arched an eyebrow, pushing against his chest, but he remained in place, holding me in his strong arms. "Peter . . . please," I whispered.

His head lowered until his mouth was hovering above mine. "Stop fighting me, Rae. Don't you tire of the same old games?"

Huh. That was profound, even for him. And the answer was yes. I nodded.

"Then give in, just once. Say you'll come with me Friday."

"Ok," I acquiesced. "One chance. Don't screw it up."

He laughed and squeezed me in a tight hug. "I won't. But be careful, Rae." At my confusion, he grinned. "You might fall in love with me."

Good God. He was ridiculous. See my point?

"Peter!" I shouted, punching him playfully on the arm. "You –"

I never uttered another word. He kissed me again and left, winking before he turned the corner.

"Rae! Hey Rae, where are you?"

My best friend Hayley was calling to me from the hallway, her voice echoing in the now empty concrete hall. I grabbed my backpack and headed toward the sound of her voice, completely baffled by Peter's sudden change in behavior. We had been at odds the entire school year. Not a single day went by without him teasing and my sarcastic remarks. Was that what he liked? I shook my head. Silly boy.

"What's up, Rae? You seem a little distracted."

"Sorry, Hay." I took a deep breath and tried to process the last few minutes. "Peter just asked me out and . . . he kissed me."

Her eyes widened. Clearly, she didn't see it coming either. "He kissed you?"

I nodded.

She squealed like a little pot belly pig. "How did the kiss feel? Did you like it? Do you like him?"

"Wait a sec," I giggled, raising my hands. "It was soft and sweet. And I'm actually totally disgusted by him, at least I thought I was until five minutes ago. I have no idea now."

She laughed lightly. "Boys are so confusing."

"Right?"

The rest of lunch we discussed the pros and cons of dating Peter. The list was evenly matched, much to my surprise. For the first time, I considered what it would be like to spend actual time with him, time that counted. The thought didn't repulse me as much as I assumed it would.

Boy, was I fickle or what?

Peter shared most of my class schedule so although I didn't see him at lunch, I saw him right after in chemistry. He sauntered in, making jokes with his buddies. Funny, but I never noticed before how the guys followed him or how they seemed to admire his ability to control a room when he entered it. I always thought of him as a follower, but now I saw he was actually the leader of their little trio. Beckett and Shane seemed to follow the other three most of the time.

This was weird. How did a simple kiss make me see him so differently?

Peter's eyes sought me out almost immediately and he winked. Great. Was he going to make a scene? "Hi, Rae." He took his normal seat next to mine.

"Hi," I responded, then turned my back to him on purpose, to talk to Hayley.

I felt an arm drape across the back of my seat. What was he doing?

Hayley giggled. "Um, Rae." I didn't dare turn around. "Peter wants you."

She could hardly hide her laugh but did so behind a strained cough. I narrowed my eyes at her. Slowly I turned around, meeting Peter's confident grin. Did he think we were a couple now or something?

"What do you want, Peter?" I asked, wary of his agenda.

"Rae," he pretended innocence, "I'm just saying hello. Calm down."

Oh, he was so irritating. I frowned. What did I get myself into now?

The chemistry lecture started and I had a reason to ignore him, as difficult as it proved to be. He paid no attention to the teacher, his eyes darting to my face often. The more he stared, the angrier I became. By the end of the day, I was ready to rescind my offer to give him a chance.

"Rae." I heard a roar – the pretty purr – of Peter's olive-green Nova. "Hop in. I'll give you a ride."

I shook my head, unable to speak in my frustration.

"Please, Rae?"

I started walking faster and turned the corner. Avoiding him proved impossible. He followed me until I walked up my driveway, which was sweet if I hadn't been so aggravated with him.

"Bye, Rae!"

Ridiculous, headstrong boy. I refused to answer him and let myself in the front door, resisting the

urge to glance back over my shoulder.

Chapter 4 – Rae

The house was quiet and empty, as usual. Mom wouldn't be off work until five. My glorious stepdad – insert heavy sarcasm here – would be home late as usual. Not until after seven. I had the house to myself for a couple of hours until mom came in the door with my little sister Leah, around six.

I tossed my backpack in my room and flopped down on my cherry striped bedspread. A gentle rumble filled the air as my cat Felix, a Calico, wrapped his furry body around my legs.

"Hi Fee, Fee," I greeted him, picking his fat body up and nuzzling him against my cheek. "Did you have a good day?"

He purred loudly in response.

"I had an interesting one, too. You boys are so exasperating."

I set him down and headed downstairs, sliding the glass door shut behind me. This was my favorite spot, my big backyard. As a child, when my dad was still alive, he built a huge wooden treehouse in the large California redwood trees that bordered our property. Even now, I still go there in the afternoons, surrounded by my magazines and favorite drawings from childhood. It was a happy place. Serene and innocent. Memories of my father and his gentle kindness seeped into the wood and took over. It was an unspoken rule that no one followed me here. Not even my mother, or especially her new husband.

I climbed up the wooden boards toward the top and opened the trap door. Slipping inside, I shut it with a small click. Inhaling, it was almost as if my father's essence lived in this room and for just a moment I could still see his smiling face and smell his aftershave. Maybe that was why I came here, each day was a couple of seconds of nostalgic memory, and I clung to those precious fleeting moments like a lifeline.

Spreading a blanket on the floor, I leaned back and pulled my cell phone out of my pocket, inserted the earbuds, cranked Halestorm and bobbed my head to Mayhem.

A small scraping sound awakened me a short time later as Peter's head popped up through my floor. He smiled softly as he pulled himself through the gap to lay next to my side, staring up at the ceiling. *

SEMI-FINALIST Romance 2018 Kindle Book Awards

RIDE OR DIE *baby* . . .

I was drunk, angry, and spoiling for a fight. The crowded bar was the perfect distraction until all hell broke loose.

She walked in. My world collapsed.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this. I never thought I'd see her again. Rae never should have been there that night . . . but 5 years of regret, loss, and

vengeance have waged war inside me, and the sins of our fathers won't stop me from claiming what's mine: **Rae Stenson.**

She's my addiction. I need her. Even if I have to lie, cheat, steal, or kill.

But it may not be the past that we have to confront as the real sins of our fathers wreak havoc in Providence, CA where reality and fantasy collide.

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