

Regret and Promise
A Sons of Anarchy Story
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CHAPTER ONE: Eight Years, Part 1

I'm at Frank and Juice's to see baby Leo. Can we meet? D.

Tig looked at the text for a long time. He sat down hard on his couch and just stared at it. Desi. It had to be Desi. A call to his registered cell. He didn't recognize the number, but it was clearly not American. He hadn't seen or spoken to Desi in—what? Almost eight years? Since that debacle with Raven and JoJo.

Jesus.

He hadn't seen her or spoken to her, but he'd thought about her. For a long time after she'd left, he thought he'd simply gone mad with thinking of her. Regretting the loss of her. Knowing what it was he'd lost when she'd run for the last time. Knowing that he would never love another the way he loved her. It was more than a year before he'd felt like he might yet be capable of feeling something more than loss and regret. Self-loathing.

There would always be self-loathing, though. Even when he realized that he was finding some kind of enjoyment in his life again, what he'd done and what he'd lost still beat at the back of his head. He'd done terrible things in his life. They'd all left their marks on him, but he'd learned to live with all of it, and live a life he mostly liked. But he'd never before so badly hurt someone he loved the way he'd loved—and hurt—Desi. He was still haunted by the way their last day together had gone down—his rage and fear, her selfish recklessness. And then what he'd done. He'd forced himself on her. Raped her.

She'd been right to run. She was right to stay away. They had not been right together. She was too willful and independent for life in the clubhouse. He'd tried to force her to become something she was not. He'd literally tried to force her. And she'd run clear off the continent to escape him.

She'd left a cold, gaping hole in his life. Their love was intense and incendiary; he still jacked off to his memory of her after all these years. He still tried—and failed—to replicate what they had with Crow Eaters, and he still imagined it was Desi he was fucking. After all these years.

Neither had attempted contact since the day he'd raped her, the day she'd killed Raven. But here she was, in Charming, asking to see him. He could be close enough to touch her. He could touch her.

Jesus.

His hand shook as he typed out his reply: *When & where?*

-oOo-

Tig knocked on the door. Desi had told him to meet her at a hotel room; that had surprised the shit out of him. The way they'd left things, he would have expected her to want to meet somewhere public, in broad daylight. Not a room—even a suite—with a bed in it.

The door opened, and there she was. Eight years had barely aged her. Her hair was a little longer, less severe, but still that burgundy color that seemed so . . . Desi. Her figure was maybe slightly fuller, but not much. She took care of herself. She wore jeans and a black sleeveless top; her bare arms, entirely covered in ink, were toned as ever. She had a few new wrinkles around her eyes. Laugh lines. Life in Paris had been good to her.

She smiled. "Hi, Tig."

God, he'd missed the sound of her voice. "Hey, doll." They stood there for a second, him still in the hallway, her in the room, the threshold like a barrier between what had been and what now was. She took a step backward, and he stepped through to her side.

He couldn't help himself. He was so close to her. Close enough to touch. After so many years. He reached out and traced the tattoo that ran down the left side of her face, from her temple to her jaw—a delicate, curling vine. She didn't flinch away. Instead, she put her hand over his and pressed it to her face.

He swallowed hard. He wanted to tell her how he'd missed her—how he still missed her—how sorry he was for pushing her to be someone she wasn't, how he wished he'd done so much differently, how the space she'd left inside him was still empty. How much he still loved her. But he couldn't tell her any of that. He didn't want her to run again. So he said, "Why here?"

As if she were surprised that the intense moment they'd just shared had resulted in that question, she laughed with a little burst of air. She let go of his hand, and he dropped it to his side. "Just wanted someplace quiet where we can talk. I didn't tell Frank or Juice I was meeting you. I'm staying with them, actually. But I wanted to see you. I don't know how you feel, but I feel like a lot was left unresolved between us. Maybe closure is a cliché, but when I got off the plane, I felt such a . . . I don't know . . . a weight, I guess. I knew I needed to see you, if you would."

Of course he'd see her. How could she think he wouldn't? He was the one who'd ruined everything. "Baby, I'm so sorry. Damn, what I did . . ." He couldn't finish.

"We both fucked it up, Tig. But let's start a little slower. I had some whiskey brought up earlier, and I thought we'd just get room service dinner and sit here and talk—is that okay?"

He nodded, and she took his hand and led him to the sofa in the main room of the suite. He went docilely, marveling at the feel of her hand in his. He knew that when this meeting was over, when she had her closure and flew back to Paris and out of his life again, he'd be back where he was when she'd left before. Adrift. Floating in a bottle. Lost.

This was a mistake.

But he was here, and he wasn't leaving as long as she'd have him. He cleared his throat. "Looks like Paris has been good to you. Guess you're all set up there."

She nodded. "I am. I have a nice café and pâtisserie—which is kind of like a bakery, if you remember. It's doing pretty well. I bought a building very near where we stayed, and I live there. It's a good life. A lot quieter than things were here, but it turned out I was ready for quiet." She reached out and put her hand on his thigh; he felt it like an electric charge. "You? You look great. Almost exactly the same, except for some grey around your temples and in your beard—which looks really good."

Staring at her hand on him, Tig said, "Not much changes for me. Still a Son, still do what we do. Sometimes it's heavy, sometimes it's not. But it's all the same."

"And is that good?"

All at once, Tig couldn't do it. He was more miserable sitting in this hotel room with Desi than he'd been since she'd left. Seeing her like this set everything to a boil inside him. His feelings for her had not cooled. They'd only been in cold storage. If even that. There was nothing that "closure," whatever that was, could do to ease what he'd lost.

"What is it you want, Des? Cuz this is killin' me. Tell me what you want so I can get out of here."

"I'm sorry." Desi scooted closer to him. He could feel the heat of her body mere inches from his. He fixed his gaze on the ink on her arms, unable to meet her eyes. "I'm sorry it hurts you to be here. I . . . didn't expect that, I guess. I just want to tell you that"—she stopped short and took a long breath—"that I'm sorry for all the things that I did that day to put you and your brothers at risk. I was selfish and stupid, and I want you to know that my regret is real. I still feel it, even now. And I'm sorry that I just disappeared. I think it was for the best that we didn't stay together, but I was a coward to leave you like that."

"I hurt you. You were right to run. I was out of control. Bad things happen when I lose control." People died, and died horribly, when he lost control. "I'm so fuckin' sorry." Now he met her eyes, her hazel eyes that shifted colors like a kaleidoscope. "I still love you, Des. Never stopped, never will. You're in my head and my blood." He ran his hand down her firm, silky arm. "I gotta get out of here."

He stood, but she grabbed his hand. "Tig—love, wait." He turned and looked down at her. When she stood, he held her eyes. "I still love you. I want you to know that. What we had was real. It was true. We weren't in the right place, I guess. I don't know if seeing you again helps or hurts, but I want you to know I feel the same way. Leaving you was hard. Maybe the hardest thing."

"We're still not in the right place. I'm where I am; you're where you are. That's not gonna change, right? You don't want a club life?"

“No, I don’t. I can’t be here. I have the life I want—the life I need—in Paris.” She looked away from him then, out the window. Without turning back, she said, softly, “There’s a place for you there if you want it, though. With me.” She turned and looked into his eyes.

He wasn’t even tempted. Their time together in Paris was the highlight of their relationship—it was perfect in every way—and to be with her there again was a regular fantasy, but he could not leave the Sons. He was nothing without the club. “No. My life is here. My life *is* the club.”

She nodded as if he’d said precisely what she’d expected him to say. “So nothing’s changed.”

“Like I said, doll. Not much changes with me. Why don’t we forget dinner, and I’ll just get out of your hair?” He was going to ride straight home and drink himself into a stupor.

“Okay. I’m sorry.”

He laughed, and it tasted bitter on his tongue. “Yeah. Me too.”

She walked him to the door and opened it. As he started to walk through, she put her hand on his arm. She didn’t say anything. She didn’t pull him back or push him away. Her hand simply lay on his forearm, just above his leather cuff. He stared at it. Her nails were polished to match her hair. On her middle finger, she wore a big oval ring with a dark yellow stone in a silver setting. Amber, he guessed.

“Desi.”

“I always loved the way you said my name. Like an incantation.” Her words came to him in a husky whisper.

Fuck it.

He turned fast and took her face in his hands, bringing his lips to hers fiercely. If she stopped him, he’d leave, but if she didn’t—he had to have her, just once more. A fresh memory, a fantasy, to get him through the rest of his years.

But she didn’t stop him. Instead, she clutched his kutte in her fists and pulled him closer, her tongue moving against his with the same animal need he felt. He moved his hands and wrapped her up in his arms, squeezing her tightly to his chest. She moaned and pulled back from the kiss. He would have felt crushing disappointment but for the unbridled desire blazing from her eyes. She was panting.

“This can’t be more than it is, Tig. You’re right. Nothing’s changed.”

“Shut the fuck up, Des,” he growled. Lifting her off her feet, he carried her into the other room of the suite, where the bed was.

CHAPTER TWO: Eight Years, Part 2

It felt utterly fantastic to be in Tig's arms. He was warm and strong, and his passion for her was so powerful it had taste and smell. It had weight. Oh, how she'd missed him.

Desi hadn't lied. She loved her life in Paris. She loved it all: her apartment building, with her quirky tenants who'd become her family; her café, which had achieved the perfect balance of popular spot for locals but not a big draw for tourists; her several playmates and their varied interests; her group of friends and the little *salon* they'd made. She'd lived there so long she thought in French. It was home. She was happy.

But no one had filled her heart like Tig had. Like he still did. The way they'd ended it, the way she'd run, had eaten at her since she'd done it. Regret had settled in before she'd left California, despite what he'd done.

She hadn't been back to the U.S. in all that time. Nearly eight years. She'd had no intention of ever coming back, but then Frank had gone and gotten pregnant, and Desi couldn't just sit in Europe and send a gift basket when the little niblet turned up. Frank was her best friend, almost a daughter, and she had to be here for the birth of her first child. Not that Desi was any good with babies. They baffled her, in fact. But she could at least provide moral support and a humorous perspective on the commotion.

She'd stayed away all these years because she was afraid she wouldn't be strong enough to be close to Tig and not be with him—and that had obviously been true. When she'd landed, before she'd even picked up her bags, she knew she would see him if she could. She'd waited almost to the end of her visit, determined to devote her time and attention to the new little family Frank and Juice had made, and then she'd texted Tig. He'd responded quickly.

She'd been terrified. Not of him, but of them. She still was. Tig had always rocked the calm, stalwart command she kept over herself. She broke her own rules with him. Routinely.

She'd told Frank and Juice she was going into Sacramento for a day or two to do some visiting there before she went back to Paris. Not a lie—she'd booked a suite at the Citizen Hotel in Sacramento in which to meet Tig. She'd done it because she couldn't think of a place in or around Charming where they could be sure to have some privacy, and she didn't want anyone to see them together. She didn't want either of them to have to answer inconvenient questions—none but those they might ask each other, anyway.

She'd had no expectation that she might end up lying underneath him on the bed. A hope, maybe—a nervous, ill-conceived hope—but no expectation.

He was so much like the image she'd held fast in her head. A little greyer, a little wearier, but still the raw sex and power that was Tig, in his leather and denim and silver, his wild hair even wilder, his eyes every bit as intensely, spectacularly blue as she remembered.

She'd not had sex with a man in eight years. She had not allowed herself to be overpowered the way he was already overpowering her, carrying her, moving her, holding her firmly under him, in his arms, his mouth heavy and insistent on hers. She'd fought him so much for control, all the time they were together. She was a top, still dominant in all other sexual relationships—all other relationships of any kind—but now she craved his power.

This man was, literally, the only man for her.

She knew she should be thinking through what this meant, what was happening now between them, after they'd just acknowledged that their lives didn't work together any more than they had before. They weren't right for each other, despite the power of their love. It wasn't enough.

But it was there, and it *was* powerful, and what they were doing now wouldn't make their next, inevitable parting easier. This was heartbreak in the making, no matter how blissful it felt right now.

And she didn't fucking care.

He'd already shrugged off his kutte and let it drop to the floor—she'd never seen him just discard it like that—and now his fingers were on the hem of her knit shirt, trying to get it up and off her without taking his lips and tongue from her. It was impossible, of course—the shirt was a pullover—but she went with it as long as she could, not wanting to lose the contact any more than he did. Finally, he pulled away with a savage growl and yanked it over her head. Before he came back, she pulled at his buttons, and they removed his shirt together. He was beautiful. As he tossed the shirt to the floor, she took off her bra.

He grabbed her arms and pinned them on the bed, her wrists just outside her shoulders, and stared down at her. “Desi. Fuck, Desi. Look at you. Jesus, baby. Look at you.” His expression reverent, his eyes searing, he bent down and sucked her breast into his mouth. She remembered the unique sensation of his mouth on her—his lips, his tongue, his teeth, his beard—as vividly as if they'd never parted.

She held his head to her, her fingers tangled in his hair, and wrapped her legs around his waist, grinding against him. He was so hard. His cock felt hot and demanding even through their jeans. Need surged through her, and she moaned.

Tig pulled up, fighting against her hold in his hair, and looked at her. He looked wild and breathless. “Talk to me, Des. What do you want?”

She wanted what they'd had, what was good and strong between them. The way they'd been in Paris, just before they fell apart. She wanted him in Paris. But she'd known he wouldn't come. She understood.

“Des?”

He wanted an answer. She wouldn't tell him what she wanted; she wouldn't hurt him more. "Just this. Tonight. Like we were."

"You think that's enough?"

"I think it will have to do."

He nodded and opened her jeans. She lifted her hips to help when he pulled them down. He stood at the end of the bed, toed off his boots and dropped his own jeans, snagging a condom from his pocket before he let go. They'd both gone commando; the thought made her smile. And good God, he was virile, his chest broad, his abs firm, his big cock hard for her. "You look amazing." She said it on a breath.

His grin was rakish and achingly familiar as he rubbed a hand down his torso and gave his hard belly a slap. "Must be that clean livin'. You're a vision, doll. And you've got new ink." She'd gotten several pieces since they'd last seen each other; now her ink trailed onto her thighs. He knelt between her spread legs and traced a piece very low on her belly. Her heart stumbled at the touch. "What's this?"

His fingers moved over the tat, just inside her hip, right above her pubic bone. A black anarchy symbol on a jagged swath striped orange and black, like a tiger. She shrugged. "Just a remembrance."

"Baby, that's me, isn't it? That's my ink."

"No, love. It's mine. It's a remembrance, not a brand." She knew he was not persuaded otherwise, and she found she didn't really care. He could think of it as his mark if he wanted. It was a remembrance of him, and of them, after all.

"Jesus." He bent down and kissed it; she felt his tongue laving her skin. Her hips rose of their own volition, and he laughed against her tender skin. Grabbing her ass roughly, he pressed his mouth between her legs. "Oh, damn, I missed the sweet taste of your pussy." He proceeded to taste her. Vigorously. Expertly. Arching her back, she ground hard against his face and clamped his head between her thighs. He bit down on her clit, and she cried out.

She was wrong—she couldn't just lie here and let him have his way. She needed the fight with him, the wrangling for control. She wanted his power, but she didn't want to simply give him hers to get it. She wanted what they'd had.

Abruptly shifting to sit up, she snagged her fingers in his hair and yanked him away. His look was muzzy and confused at first, his azure eyes unfocused. When they homed in on hers, though, he laughed. She loved the sound—full of mischief and delight. As somber and sad as he'd been when he'd arrived, all that was gone now, set aside. He was in the moment.

Tig. A man simple in his complexity. God, she loved him.

“Still need to fight me, huh? Not much changes with you, either.” He moved up over her, and she flipped them. On his back with her looming over him now, he laughed again. “I never could figure out how you do that. I’m a lot bigger than you.”

Desi just raised her eyebrows and gave him mischief right back in her own grin. It felt so incomparably good to be light and relaxed with him. As often as she recalled her memories of him during these years, she’d forgotten how playful he could be. The loss and regret that tinged her memories had blurred away that lightness. But now she remembered.

Straddling him, she wrapped her hands around his leather cuffs and pulled his hands over his head. With a twinkle in his eye and a teasing wrinkle of his nose, he let her. “You look great on me, baby. Damn. Your tits look so good. I can’t believe you’re—”

She dropped her head to his and bit his nose to stop him. Letting a little smile play on her lips, she scolded, “You’re not actually going to bring age into this bed, are you? Because that would be profoundly stupid, love.”

“Wouldn’t’ve thought you’d be the kind of broad afraid of a number.” He wrinkled his nose again, this time as if working off the sting of her nip.

“I’m not. But let’s just be ageless right now, okay? You and me. Eternal.”

Tig’s expression lost its mischief. “I like that.”

“So do I.” Still holding his hands above his head, she leaned down and kissed him.

As the kiss deepened and gained a desperate edge, he fought her hold until he broke it, and he wrapped his arms around her. She felt his hands in her hair, holding her to him, his grip almost brutally intense.

He tore his mouth away with a groan and tipped his head back as if trying to find strength elsewhere in the room. “I need to fuck you, Des.”

“I want more than that. I don’t want you to fuck me and leave.”

He jerked a little, like he was surprised. “We startin’ up again here, baby?”

How she wished that were possible. With a slow shake of her head, she whispered, “We can’t. You know we can’t. But I want you to stay tonight.”

Letting go with one hand the grip he still had in her hair, he traced the vine on her face. “We’re so fucked up. Yeah, I’ll stay.” He pulled her down to lie on his chest, kissing her deeply. “I still need to fuck you.”

No, not yet. They had this one night. She sat back and slid down his legs, resisting his grasping hands, folding over to take his solid, heavy length into her mouth for a leisurely suck. He groaned again, the sound thundering up from his belly.

“You will, love. More than once, I hope. But not yet.”

His eyes greedy on hers, he rasped. “Baby, do you want to play? You have toys?”

She had not planned for this. She had not planned for her trip to the States to be anything but a visit with Frank and Juice, staying in their house. She had not brought toys. Her favorite vibrator, but that was still with the stuff she’d left in the Ortiz guest room.

“No toys, Tig. Sorry. But that doesn’t mean we can’t play a little.”

He wiggled his brows at her and raised his arms over his head. “Have your way with me, doll.”

Seeing him lying there stretched out before her, giving himself over to her, Desi felt the thrill rushing through her veins. “Yeah?”

“You bet. I get my turn next, though. You good with that?”

“You know what? I am.”

The sound Tig made then could only be called a purr. For feline emphasis, he made an indolent, satisfied stretch, and his cock bobbed. “Then let’s get to it.”

She smiled and slid the rest of the way off the bed, standing at his feet. He had good feet, strong, smooth, and straight. Taking one in her hands, she caressed it, massaging the arch until he groaned quietly. Stopping to gain his attention, she shook her head. “Quiet and still, love.”

Then she kissed the knob of his ankle. She kissed up the inside of his leg, letting her tongue linger and taste, her hands softly massaging, delighting in the tingle as the hair covering his legs lightly sanded her palms. As she passed his knee and moved farther up his thigh, she could feel the thrumming tension under his skin. He knew the game, but he’d always had trouble with the rules.

She got within inches of his balls and crossed over the top of his thigh to his hip, working her way up on the outside now, allowing her breasts to move as they would over his pulsing cock. He inhaled audibly, and she stopped and gave him a warning glance.

The look in his eyes, though, gave her real pause, and she sat back on her knees, between his legs. “This okay, love? I remember your word. Use it if you need it.”

He nodded. “Pope. I need you to stop. Pope. It hurts.”

Desi was shocked. All the things they'd done in the past, he'd never used his safe word. Not once. And she was being gentle now. She couldn't think how she'd hurt him. "Tig?" He blinked, twice, quickly, and she knew. "Oh, love."

"I fuckin' miss you. I can't believe I'm saying this. You're right here. Fuck, we're skin to skin, Des, and I don't know if I can do this. Not and lose you again. I want you so bad. One night's not enough. Or it's too much. I don't know. I can't think."

Desi climbed over his leg and sat up at the head of the bed, crossing her legs and facing him. Tig sat up, too, and leaned against the headboard. It was a nice suite, and the headboard was a towering thing upholstered in real suede. He looked almost small against it.

"Do you need to go?" God, she didn't want him to go. She wanted this night, as painful as it would be when it ended.

But he shook his head and grabbed her hand where it rested on her knee. "No. I should. I should get the fuck out of here and go get shitfaced. But I want what I can get of you. I just—fuck, my *head*. The way you fuck with my head, baby. You always have." He turned her hand in his and traced a circle on her palm, over and over. "Dammit."

"What are we going to do, Tig?"

He was quiet, watching his thumb circle her palm for so long her hand went numb, and she thought perhaps he'd just shut completely down. But still she waited, unwilling to break the stasis of the moment, afraid he'd leave if she did.

Finally, he broke it, pulling her hand up to his mouth and kissing her palm. He looked up. The lightheartedness that had first gleamed in his eyes when they'd come to bed was gone. "I don't want to play."

The disappointment flattened her, but she understood. "Okay. Do you want to talk instead?"

"Not what I'm sayin', Des. We can talk later—I think we need to." He grabbed her without warning and put her down on the bed, lying on her. "What I want now's not play." He kissed her, hard, pushing her mouth open, not giving her a chance to answer.

She understood this, too. Not play. Play was for a different time, a time probably lost in the past. This night was for need. She gave over to him, spreading wide beneath him, her arms on his back, her hands hooked over his shoulders. With her surrender, he released her mouth and grabbed the condom from the corner of the bed.

Kneeling between her legs, he rolled it on without looking, his eyes focused on her body. "There's nobody like you, baby. You are fucking irreplaceable." Their eyes locked. He dropped to one hand, hooking her left leg on his shoulder with the other, then guiding himself into her.

Oh, *damn*. For all her memories, she'd forgotten this. How he filled her. No apparatus or scenario her favorite Paris sex shop offered could possibly replicate the experience of this man's cock inside her. She flexed under him, driving him deeper, and moaned. When the sound was inadequate to express the profound satisfaction she felt in this moment, she tipped her head back, closed her eyes, and moaned again, bringing this one up from her diaphragm.

When he was fully seated, deep inside her, he held still, and she opened her eyes. He said only, "Desi."

She had no words to express the way her name on his tongue made her feel. There was love, reverence, desire—every conceivable emotion she could possibly want him to feel for her, he expressed in those two tiny syllables. She had no words for it. But she had these: "I love you."

He smiled. Not his mischievous, rakish grin, but a weary, heartsick smile that cut at her. "I love you, baby. I'm gonna die loving you as much as I ever did. Won't matter if I die tomorrow or when I'm 95. Won't matter if I never see you again."

He moved then, slowly, each thrust steady and deep, striking home and holding as if he could stay there, then sliding back, reluctantly. She curled her free leg around his waist and kept him as close as she could.

When she came, melancholy pleasure exploding from every reach of her body, she cried. By the time he came, his forehead pressed to hers and his face a rictus of strain, she was sobbing. Releasing her leg from between them, he kissed her tears and dropped his head to her shoulder. She clutched him tight. She couldn't stop.

-oOo-

They were eventually able to collect themselves. When Desi came out of the bathroom, Tig was up, his jeans back on, and his dark blue shirt in his hands. She walked up and took it from him, pulling it over her own shoulders. "You mind?"

He grinned. "Not at all. Looks better on you."

She buttoned a few buttons. "You want something to eat?"

"Sure." Heading into the main room, Tig went to the desk, where the unopened bottle of Jack Daniels was sitting. He broke the seal and poured two glasses.

The room service menu was on the desk, too, so Desi walked up behind him and, one hand on his back, reached around him for the little binder. She glanced at his face; his eyes were closed. When she took her hand from his back, he looked at her, that sad smile lifting the corners of his mouth.

She opened the menu. "They have a short ribs."

“You know me well, doll.” He handed her a glass.

She ordered for them both.

While they waited for room service, they shared the whiskey and sat quietly together, neither of them ready to talk. Desi turned on the TV, hoping to lift the weight of silence from the room. She found an old Steve McQueen movie, and they watched it, chatting aimlessly, through dinner.

When the movie was over and the dinner cart had been removed, Tig pulled her to the little sofa. “We gotta talk, Des.”

She didn’t know what good talking could do. They’d said what needed to be said—they were thousands of miles apart, literally and figuratively, and what they felt for each other could not bridge that distance. The waters between them churned with menace. They’d found that out the hard way.

But he pulled her close and tucked her under his arm. “I need you in my life, baby. I just do.”

“Tig . . .”

“Listen. Just listen. I know. You won’t come to me, I won’t go to you. I know we can’t be together. But I need to know you’re okay. I need to hear your voice. I need to be able to know what’s going on with you. If you and Frank can stay connected like that, why not us, too?”

Surprised, she pulled away so she could face him. “You want to video chat?”

“I don’t know what that is. I’m just talkin’ about the phone.” He laughed a little. “I just want to be able to call you sometimes.”

“Is that enough?”

He shook his head. “No. But like I said—I’ll take what I can get of you.”

-oOo-

They slept little that night, making the most of the slight slice of time they had. As check-out time neared the next morning, Tig shrugged his kutte over slumped shoulders. Desi walked him to the door, as she had the previous evening. When she reached for the handle, he grabbed her hand and pulled her close.

“You break my heart, Des.”

She fed her fingers into his wild hair. “Mine, too.” Pulling him down, she kissed him, trying to fill him with her love.

He wrenched himself away and pressed his lips to her forehead. “Okay. I’m goin’.”

He turned and opened the door. Desi kept his hand until he was out of reach. "Call me."

Without turning around, he said, "You know I will."

She watched until he turned the corner at the end of the hall.

CHAPTER 3: Fifteen Years

Desi had gone grey. Tig had known this; she'd told him, but it was still a shock to see her in person without her signature burgundy hair.

She looked amazing, and the grey was beautiful, a soft, almost creamy color. She was wearing it again in the short style she'd had when they'd met. She was gorgeous as ever. Then she turned fully toward him, saw him, and smiled her perfect lopsided smile. His old lady. He hadn't laid eyes on her in more than seven years, but she was his.

She came straight to him, and he pulled her close. "Aw, Desi. Fuck, I missed you." He kissed her, and they stood there in the middle of the terminal and made out like teenagers. He had the biggest hard-on he'd had in awhile. He never had trouble getting it up, but he'd come to terms with the reality that his days of an erection like tempered steel were mostly in the past. But not today, not for Desi. He moved his hands to her hips and ground against her, letting her feel it.

She laughed against his mouth and tipped her head back to look at him. "We might cause a stir if we get busy right here next to the gift shop, love."

"Baby, after all this time, don't think I care." He tried to bring her closer again, but she put her hands up on his shoulders and held him off.

"I feel strange, being so happy right now. I'm here for Frank."

Juice had died a few weeks earlier, smeared on I-5 on his way home from a run to SoCal. Frank had been a zombie since. She hadn't called Desi. Fuck, with everything going on around SAMCRO—Viv dying, Hap bailing, then Juice, and Freddy, too, who'd been on the run with him and was in a coma now—Tig himself had gone weeks without talking to Des. In the seven or so years since they'd last seen each other, they'd spoken on the phone once a month or so, with rare exceptions. When she'd called a few days ago wondering what was up with him, he realized that no one had told her about Juice. She got here as quickly as she could.

A stripe of her old burgundy color swept back from her temple, and Tig brushed his fingers through it. "Frank doesn't know you're here, Des. You're mine first. I got us a room."

She studied him, the smile never leaving her face. "Okay. But I need to follow you. I've rented a car. And I have luggage."

Fuck that. He was getting her on the back of his goddamn bike. "Nope. I'll bring you back for all that. I want you riding with me."

"Making demands, Tig?" He could tell by the light in her eyes that she wasn't pissed.

"I am. Gonna fight me?"

“Nope. Let’s go.” She slid her arm around his waist, and, hooking his hand over her shoulder, he walked her out to his bike.

-oOo-

They were naked and in bed in the motel near the airport within scant minutes of entering the room. Tig had tried to walk her backwards to the bed, but she’d ducked him and managed to back him there instead, pushing him brusquely when his legs hit the mattress.

It wasn’t the kind of room Desi would have taken, but he didn’t have the scratch she did. And this one had everything they needed—privacy, a horizontal surface, and Desi’s still-beautiful naked body straddling his hips. Goddamn, those inked tits. He took them in his hands, and they were warm and firm and perfect. “Baby, do you know how beautiful you are to me?”

She smiled and traced the ink over his heart: her name, in script. He’d gotten it done after her last visit. “What’s this, love?”

“You know what it is.”

Saying no more about it, she bent down and kissed the ink tenderly, then slid farther to suck at his nipple. Why did her mouth feel so much different, so much *better* on him than any other woman’s? Her touch made his whole body vibrate with a low, steady current. His cock swelled and hardened even more; he felt feverish. “Desi. I need to feel you.” The words caught in his throat and came out in a groan.

Moving her body up his so that he could feel the swell of her tits slide against his chest, she tucked into the crook of his shoulder and bit his neck, drawing the skin sharply between her teeth. She was leaving a mark. Kinda hurt. He loved it. She pulled back, his skin leaving her mouth with a wet pop, and looked down into his eyes. “You taste so good, love. I think I want to taste some more.”

The past seven years of phone sex had been immeasurably more satisfying and fulfilling than the eight previous years of no contact at all, but seven years of phone sex had given Tig a powerful need to be inside her. “Des, you know I can’t play yet.”

She smirked. “Just a taste. Then I want to ride you like a pony.”

Goddamn, he loved this woman. He winked and stretched out. “Be gentle.”

“We’ll see.” She scooted down his legs, folded over on herself, a one-woman advertisement for the benefits of lifelong health and fitness, and took him into her mouth, sucking deep. He’d thought he was as hard as he could get. He’d been wrong.

“Jesus, baby. Jesus fuck, you feel good.”

Sitting up and releasing him with another wet pop, Desi moved up to his hips again and grabbed him at his base. She sank down on him, and then he was bare in her. Oh damn, oh damn, he was bare in her, and she was snug and hot and like wet silk wrapped around him. He tried to sit up, but she pushed him back flat on the bed. Her hands on his shoulders, she started to flex, very slowly, drawing him in and out of her with such exquisite control, Tig thought he was going to crawl out of his skin. He grabbed her hips and tried to push up into her, but she anticipated him and came up with him, not letting him get as deep as he wanted. He groaned, but his frustration was rooted in heart-pounding pleasure. “Dammit, Des. I need it.”

“Easy, love.” She kissed him, lingering, her lips and tongue driving him to distraction. Then she sat back, her hands on his belly, and got to riding. She pushed down on him until he was sure there was no deeper he could be, and then she rolled her hips, slowly, back and forth, side to side. Christ, he felt all of her. He curled his fingers into her hips, not to hold her still but to feel the way she moved, the muscles under her skin firmly rippling.

His eyes had been locked at the juncture of their bodies, watching with worshipful fascination his body sliding wetly into hers, but then she murmured, “Oh, fuck, Tig,” and her hands clawed at his waist. He looked up at her face and saw that she was close. Though her movements continued to be controlled and steady, she was bringing them both inexorably up. And she was going to get there first.

He wanted to do it. He wanted to make her come. Not just his body, but his intent. He sat up and rolled them. She gasped loudly, her eyes flying open, and he exulted inwardly that he’d managed to catch her unawares. Not so easy with his old lady.

“My turn, baby.” He reseated himself inside her and got moving. He drove into her, moving fast and deep, propped on his elbows over her. She drew her legs up alongside his hips and curled her hands around his biceps, her fingernails digging into the meat of his arms. Kinda hurt. He loved it.

“Oh, God, Tig. Oh, God, oh fuck. *Yes*. Oh, that’s good, it’s so *good*.” Her eyes were closed, her brows drawn together.

“Open your eyes, Des. I want to watch. I want to see it.” She did as he asked, and he saw it before he felt it, the ecstasy he’d brought on her making her eyes catch fire, and then she was spasming around him, her head tipped back, tensing the muscles in her throat. Still thrusting into her and feeling his own release spooling out from his belly, he bent down and latched onto her throat, biting down. He didn’t let go until he’d spilled inside her.

Spent, he pulled out and dropped to her side, panting. “Fuck, baby. You’re gonna kill me.”

With a laugh—he loved that husky sound—she turned to her side. “Oh, I think you can take it.”

Grinning smugly, he folded an arm under his head. With the other hand, he reached out and traced the vine on her face. She was giving him a look he couldn’t read. “What’s going on in that head of yours?”

Lifting up onto her elbow, she squinted at him a little, like she was trying to figure him out. “Have you thought more about retiring?”

This was something she’d started bringing up more often in the past year or two. She wanted him in Paris. She thought he was too old to be riding outlaw, and she didn’t varnish her opinion. She put it right out there: he was too old for his life. Didn’t do much for his ego.

“And do what, Des? Sit on a park bench and feed pigeons? Maybe wear one of those little French caps? I ain’t that old, baby.”

“No, you’re not. You’re strong and virile, and sexy as sin. Wouldn’t you rather spend the next twenty or thirty years fucking me? With toys and playmates?”

He sure as hell wanted that. But no. “You know I want to be with you, Desi. But we can’t fuck 24/7. You have a life there. I wouldn’t know what to do with myself. I’m a Son. Without that, I’ll just dry up.”

She opened her mouth to retort again, and he grabbed her arm. “Shut up, Des. We got three weeks. We gotta make the most of it. I don’t want to fight.”

She looked frustrated at first, but she didn’t say more. Then her expression softened, and she pushed her fingers into his hair. “I love you.”

Her brought her snug to his chest. “Back atcha, doll.”

-oOo-

He spent a good portion of the next three weeks at Frank’s house. Frank had been well shocked the first night he was there, and it was good to see. Any reaction was good to see. She’d barely been present in her own skin since Juice died, and everybody was worried that she was going to crack, the way she’d done years ago, when she and Juice were first starting out. She’d tried to kill herself then and had almost succeeded. Now, though, she had kids to think about.

Having Desi around seemed to help her, too, though she was still sad and distracted. Of course she was. He tried to imagine what the world would be like if Desi weren’t in it, even though they were apart so much. It hurt think of it. If they’d had twenty years to build a life together, the way Frank and Juice had, to have their worlds so tightly woven together—well, it had to feel like being bisected. Poor little thing.

It looked like things were heating up with the club again, after five years of good peace. They were getting back into bed with the IRA. It made Tig tired to think of it. He’d come to Frank’s house after Church, where they’d talked specifics about the new deal, and he’d just pulled Desi into the guest room and stayed there with her the rest of the day, not caring what Frank or her kids thought. After that, making the most of the little bit of calm left before the new storm, he’d

camped out there in the country, hanging out with Desi, and Frank, and somber little Leo, who was his favorite kid, and feisty baby Nora. It felt a bit like family.

Desi was teaching Frank how to cook, and Leo and Tig spent several afternoons at the kitchen table sampling her efforts. He watched Desi and Frank together and got an insight he'd never had into both women, through the familial ease of their relationship. He saw Desi love. Not the fiery love she had for him, but a calm, stabilizing love for Frank. Nurturing. She seemed always to know exactly what Frank needed. As Desi's visit drew toward its end, Frank was finding the ground she needed to build a life without Juice.

It made Tig love Desi all the more.

During their times alone, they explored each other fully, the way they'd done when they were together. This time, Desi had brought her toys. On their last night together, she handed him the restraints and asked if he wanted to bind her. Knowing what she gave him even to offer, he'd almost cried. But he no longer had a need to best her. Seeing in her eyes that it was something she was offering to him, not something she wanted for herself, he'd set them aside and made love to her instead.

They said goodbye in Frank's driveway; Desi didn't him to go with her to the airport. As she got into the sleek black Audi coupe she'd rented—count on Des to make a statement behind the wheel—she looked up at him. “I'm keeping a light on for you in my life. When you're ready.” He just smiled and closed the car door. The he stood and watched until she was out of sight.

She broke his heart.

-oOo-

A few months later, Tig dropped wearily onto his sofa, not caring about the dust and grime and blood that coated him. A firefight with the Mayans on a highway, in broad daylight. Somebody had given up SAMCRO, and they were at war. Over the goddamn Irish guns.

Hap was in the hospital, unconscious. He knew his old friend would rather not wake up. He'd had a terrible run since Viv got sick, and he'd rather follow her than be stuck here without her. Hap was a man weary of his life.

Tig understood.

He was tired. All the way to his marrow, he was tired. All he could think while bullets were whizzing past him, turning up little dust devils at his feet, was that he didn't want to die in a bloody pile. For most of his life, that was the way he'd hoped he'd go—gun in his hand, boots on his feet, kutte on his back. No more. Now the thought just made him tired.

He called Des, but got her voice mail. He didn't usually leave a message, but this time, he did. “Don't turn that light out, baby. I'm done here. Got to figure out my exit, but I'm done. I want to spend the next 20 or 30 years fucking you. Toys and playmates optional.”

Before he ended the message, he added. “That’s my promise. I’m coming to you.”

CHAPTER 4: Eternal

“Monseieur Trager, nous devrions prendre Madame Trager dans la maison maintenant.”

Jeanne spoke clearly and made sure to get Tig’s attention first; she knew his hearing wasn’t so great. She was a good girl, took good care of them. Great tits, too. Grade A Prime. And her ass—nice. Sometimes, he’d drop something and position himself just right so he could get a load of the front and the back when she bent down to pick it up. He was pretty sure she was onto him, though.

Just because he was past 90 didn’t mean he couldn’t appreciate a nice rack and a tight ass.

Time was, he and Des would have appreciated her together. But Des didn’t really know Jeanne was around. Or she did, but she wasn’t quite sure who she was. She wasn’t quite sure about a lot of things anymore. Nastily ironic that it was Des, ten years younger than he, and so much the thinker, so careful about her body and her mind, who was losing both.

She’d been in a car accident five years earlier, and had spent a long time—too long—on the operating table. She’d recovered, and she was still his, still with him, but it was like those long hours in surgery had each added five years of age. She’d been increasingly frail and in a deepening mental haze since. In this past year, she’d no longer been able to walk, and she no longer knew almost anything of the present. Often, almost all she knew was that she didn’t know what she should know.

But she always knew him. Even when she seemed beset by a panicky confusion about everything else, her eyes found him and held. She always knew him. She sought him out like a touchstone, with her eyes and hands. They slept holding hands, all night, every night.

Tig’s mind was sharp as ever, and seemed to hold every memory it had ever held, even those he’d feel some peace to forget. Without Des to talk with, those memories had lately made a tormenting loop. But he fought them off with the decades of good memories he had now, too—a good, happy life with his old lady. They’d started far too late, but they’d had more than twenty years before her accident, twenty years of love and play, of calm and ease. They had not slept apart even one night since the day she met him at the airport and took him back to her flat—their flat. Not even one night. When she was in the hospital, he’d slept at her bedside. It had about crippled his ancient bones, but he would not leave her.

His brain was sharp, but his body was failing. He could feel his clockwork winding down. He had picked up some of Desi’s healthy habits since he’d moved to Paris, but he’d had 70 years before that to fuck up his parts. Somehow, he’d gotten through all that without cancer or a heart attack or any of the other obvious ways to die, but he was sliding toward triple digits now, and he had not lived a life that deserved to see 100.

Every morning, when he creaked awake, he could feel his body fight the process a little harder, like a poorly-maintained engine on a winter morning. He hurt in parts he couldn’t even name. He felt and heard every inhale, every exhale. His weary heart thumped desultorily in his chest. And

he was terrified. Terrified that he would not be able to hold out for her, that he would leave her alone in a world she no longer understood.

They had friends—they still had a large circle of friends. Desi had been a magnet for odd and wonderful characters. He knew they would take care of her. But she no longer knew them. She knew only him. So every morning, he willed his body to keep going. If sheer force of will were enough, he would outlive her. He would protect her. He would not let her down.

“Monsieur?”

“Oui, Jeanne. Je sais, je sais. Donnez-nous une minute.” She was a good girl, and trained in dealing with patients with dementia, but he wished she spoke better English. Tig’s French was solid, but he’d never learned to think in it, so he was constantly translating as he went. It was exhausting.

Des was leaning on his side, tucked under his arm, watching birds eating the seed she’d scattered for them. He gave her thin shoulders a gentle squeeze. “Baby, it’s time to go in. You ready for some dinner?”

She turned her face to his, and her hazel eyes, still clear and beautiful, focused as they met his. She smiled but didn’t speak. She rarely spoke. He traced the vine on her face; her skin was like velvet. “Desi,” he whispered. Her smile widened.

He took her hand and stood, ignoring the strenuous protests from his back and knees and hips. “Okay, Des. Let’s get you in your chair.”

“Monsieur!” Jeanne came trotting across the courtyard. Strictly speaking, he wasn’t supposed to pick Des up, lest he drop her, but she didn’t like anyone else to touch her—they were all strangers to her. And she weighed almost nothing, anyway. He could lift her the couple of feet to her chair. He would hold her. She was safe with him. He seated her, ignoring Jeanne’s scowl, and pushed his wife back into their house.

-oOo-

Tig woke with a start and felt his belligerent heart beating hard, making his chest ache. He sometimes wondered if these increasingly frequent startled wakings weren’t precipitated by his heart trying to sneak off the job. He startled again when he realized that Desi was curled up against him, her hands wrapped around his arm, her forehead pressed to his shoulder. For the past few years, she never moved in her sleep. She always lay on her back, perfectly still, her hand outstretched, curled in his.

He lifted his head and kissed her temple, and then he understood.

She was cold. She was gone.

He lay still for a long time, unwilling to move and disturb her. He lay still and let tears slide silently down his temples, through the creases of age, soaking his pillow. He tried to think what he needed to do for her.

And then he knew. He turned stiffly to his side to face her, sliding his arm from her grasp so he could pull her into the nest of his embrace. His lips in her soft, white hair, he whispered, “Okay, baby. You rest. I got ya. I got ya.”

He would not leave her. He closed his eyes. He held fast to her, and he let go of everything else.

THE END