

ROUGH RIDE

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A 1,001 Dark Nights Novella

PROLOGUE

Hurt

Rosalie

He spit on me.

I felt it land on the side of my chin and slide down.

I didn't move to wipe it away.

I couldn't.

Lying on my side, curled into a ball, the pain screamed through me. All of it—and there was a lot of it—demanding attention, I couldn't concentrate, couldn't think, couldn't move in case it got worse. I couldn't do anything but lie there and pray that it was over.

It wasn't.

He bent over me, grabbed my hair, yanked it back, and I felt his hot breath hit my face.

“See if he wants you now, you stupid bitch,” he hissed.

He let my hair go and I felt him retreat, but he still wasn't done.

He kicked me so hard with his foot in its heavy motorcycle boot, my body slid across the cement.

I was too far gone even to grunt.

I felt something bounce off my hip, clatter to the floor, and then his voice came back, this time from further away.

“There you go, baby,” he drawled. “Your line to Chaos. We're done with you. *I'm* done with you. Now they can have you.”

I heard boots on cement, more than just his, his Bounty brothers in the club. I sustained a couple more kicks as they passed. One of them grabbed the underside of my jaw and shoved my head back into the cement, also spitting, his hitting my neck.

And then they were gone.

I lay there, my focus on breathing and continuing to do it even though each breath was not only an effort but an agony. The fear I'd felt early when he took me, how he'd taken me, the way he'd handled me and I knew he'd figured it out, had dissipated as pain took its place. Now, the fear was returning that they'd come back and dish out more.

He'd come back.

Throttle.

No, to me he was Beck. My boyfriend. Gerard Beck. He hated the first name Gerard so everyone called him Beck. All his life. Or since he could demand that happen and not allow anything but that. Even his mother called him Beck.

Until he got his club name, Throttle. All his brothers called him that. When I was with him when he was with his brothers, I also called him that.

But when we were alone, at home, he was Beck.

My Beck.

My man. My lover. My protector. My future.

The man who'd just spit on me and kicked me.

But he'd done more before that.

He'd grabbed me from work and delivered me right to them, right to where I was right then. Even starting it, choking me until I thought I'd blank out, then clocking me in the temple, then on the jaw, then on my cheekbone.

Throttle.

That name was given to him for a reason but not the reason he'd now become Throttle to me.

I shut my eyes tight, opened them, reached to the phone he'd tossed at me and endured the immense pain that scoured through me, leaving me feeling even more raw, which if my brain had room to process anything further, I would have thought unimaginable.

My fingers closed around the phone and I huffed out little breaths, which were hard to take since each one sent fire through my midsection. So I tried deep breaths, and those were worse because the fire lasted even longer.

Dread intermingled with all the rest as I tried to focus on moving my thumb to open the phone, but I saw the black creeping in at the sides of my eyes.

I couldn't pass out.

I had to call for help.

I had to get out of there.

My body had different ideas, sending the message to my brain that this was too much, it couldn't take more.

So I passed out.



I came to woozy and disoriented.

The pain, the stench of the room, the feel of the cement beneath me brought it all slamming back, along with the panic.

Having no idea how long I was out, feeling the phone resting in my hand, I actually grunted with the effort of sliding it up, wrapping my fingers around it, using my thumb to flip it open.

An old-style flip phone.

A burner.

We'd joked about it, Snap and me. He'd called me Scully. He had a burner too, so there'd be no caller ID when he phoned me. So I'd called him Mulder.

I was going to call him.

Not because I was working for Chaos anymore. I wasn't. That officially ended on that cement. Definitely not because I was protecting Bounty. I'd tell the police. Absolutely, I'd tell the police my boyfriend's motorcycle club beat the snot out of me. It didn't matter that I broke the code, and knew it. It didn't matter that I'd betrayed my man, and done it deliberately.

I was trying to save him. Save his brothers. Save his club. Save everyone.

I closed my eyes tight, my thumb moving over the phone from memory, knowing the way on its own, I called him so often. That was why I was calling him now rather than 911. I knew how to get to him. To Snapper. And the effort would be less. I could dial the digits to get him up on speed dial in my sleep, so I could do it lying on a cement floor, beat to hell and practically unable to move.

I couldn't lift the phone to my ear so I just shoved it across the floor closer to my face, listening to it ring.

"Rosie?" Snap answered.

I closed my eyes tighter as understanding hit me with a blow almost as brutal as every strike I'd just taken.

God.

I hadn't done it to save Beck. To save his brothers, his club...everybody.

At first, I'd done it to make Beck into Shy.

And then I'd done it to make him be Snapper.

And last, I'd done it to make his club Chaos.

"Rosie?" Snap's Eddie Vedder baritone got sharper.

Oh no.

No.

The black was creeping in again.

"Sss..." was all I could get out.

"*Rosalie*," he bit out, curt, alert, *alarmed*.

"Hurt," I whispered.

And then, again, I blacked out.



I'd come to and gone out, managed to drag myself a few feet toward the door, hearing the burner ring, then stop, ring again, stop, drifting in and out before I heard him.

"Jesus, fuck, *Jesus, fuck*."

Snapper.

"Ambulance or call a brother?"

Roscoe.

"Rosie, honey, you with us?"

Snap, close to me, pulling my hair out of my face gently.

“Fuck,” growled from Roscoe. “Those motherfuckers spit on her.”

“Rosie, babe, darlin’, you with us?”

Snap, tighter, letting the anger rise through the concern.

My eyelids fluttered.

“Good, honey, good, stay with us,” Snapper ordered.

“Am-am...bu—” I tried.

“Okay, baby, okay, good,” Snap cut me off, not making me expend more effort. Then to Roscoe, “Call an ambulance, man.”

I felt hands on me, careful but not hesitant, swift and searching. Moans coasted out, little twitches when he’d hit a bad spot that sent new aches, stings, or fire through me.

“Gotta check, honey,” Snap murmured apologetically while Roscoe talked on the phone somewhere else. “Stay awake, Rosie. Stay with me, yeah?”

I said nothing until I moaned again when I felt him gently lift my head then rest it on something that was a lot softer than cement.

It smelled of leather.

His Club cut.

I was lying on Chaos.

I swallowed.

It hurt.

Thankfully, Snapper quit his body injury survey and started stroking my hair.

That hurt too.

Roscoe came back. “Called emergency. Called Tack. Where we at with Rosalie?”

“Rib, definitely. Right wrist is bad,” Snapper told him, still stroking my hair.

“Face is a definite too,” Roscoe said in an infuriated mutter.

Face too.

Oh yes.

They definitely took care of my face.

“Someone choked the fuck outta her.” Roscoe kept up the tally, the fury in his voice escalating.

That wasn’t a “they.” That was only Beck.

“Was it Bounty?” Roscoe asked.

“Of course it was Bounty,” Snapper stated tersely.

“We gotta know, brother,” Roscoe returned quietly.

I felt his hand leave my hair, which was a relief, but then his fingers curled around mine, which made me wince.

Eightball had bent them so far back, it was a wonder they didn’t snap off as he was holding me when he was hitting me.

“Squeeze once, it was Bounty, Rosie,” Snap said.

I wasn’t going to squeeze. It was easier to speak.

“Yeah,” I pushed out.

“Kay, babe, ’kay,” he crooned, thankfully his fingers leaving mine, but they went back to my hair. “We got it now. You’re good. Gonna take care of you.”

No they weren’t.

He wasn’t.

No one was going to take care of me.

But me.

Not anymore.

They were supposed to do that before.

And now I was on a cement floor, beat to hell.

But I was going to be.

Good that was.

Yes, I was going to be.

Finally.

And it was going to be me that made me that too.

I turned my face into Snap’s cut as an indication he shouldn’t stroke my hair anymore, as a way to tell him to get the heck away from me, to leave me to the ambulance, to leave me alone, to get out of my hair, out of there, out of my *life*.

But the fabric snagged my swollen nose and a whimper slid from me.

“Baby,” he whispered, feeling close, seemingly all around me, “just hang tight. Don’t move. Help will be here soon.”

Help would be there soon.

I'd be in an ambulance.

Then I'd be in a hospital.

While there, I'd talk to the police.

Eventually, I'd go home and live in fear of what my boyfriend's motorcycle club would do to me after I pressed charges against them for beating the crap out of me.

What could be worse than this?

I didn't know.

I didn't want to find out.

But there was a good possibility I would.

I couldn't think of that.

So instead I thought about the fact that I actually couldn't go home. I had to move out of the home I shared with Beck, but I could only do that after I figured out where the hell I'd go.

It was too much. The pain. The humiliation. The nausea that was beginning to edge in. The thoughts crashing through my brain, fighting for supremacy. The tear slid out of my eye, soaking into the lining of Snap's cut.

The next slid over the bridge of my nose on the same trajectory.

I felt something of him brush my shoulder.

His chest, I guessed, because then I felt his forehead pressed lightly against the side of my head and I heard his lips at my ear, that deep voice of his low and solemn, promising, "Got you now, baby. I got you. Nothing will ever hurt you again. Nothing, Rosie. Won't let it. Nothing, baby. Not a thing."

Another tear slid over the bridge of my nose.

And I heard the sirens.



Snapper

“Stand down, brother,” Hop said at his ear.

Snapper had Speck up against the wall, their noses so close, the tips were brushing, Snap’s hand around his throat, squeezing...*squeezing*. He had three brothers working him, trying to pull him off, but he had his weight aimed just right, straining against it, and he wasn’t budging.

Speck stared into his eyes, not moving.

“Snap, man, everybody gets you,” Rush said coaxingly. “Speck definitely gets you. Step off, man.” Pause then, a jerk of his arm around Snap’s chest, “*Step off*, brother.”

“You were on her,” Snapper clipped.

Speck just stared into his eyes, his face so red it was turning blue.

“You were supposed to look out for her,” Snap carried on.

“He knows, Snap, look at him. *Step off*,” Joker ordered.

Snapper kept squeezing.

Speck kept letting him.

“Brother, he fell down. He knows it. We’ll deal with that later. We got two priorities here. Rosalie. And a reckoning for Bounty.”

At Tack’s voice, their leader, the president of the Chaos Motorcycle Club, Snap pushed off of Speck, letting him go, and shrugged off Hop, Joker, and Rush’s holds.

The second he felt them start to move away, he went back in, slamming his fist into the wall by Speck’s head, feeling his knuckles split and Joker’s arm coming around him to put him in a chokehold.

But Speck didn’t even flinch.

Before he could try to make a move to plant his feet in order to throw Joke over his shoulder to get out of that hold, High had come in, caught Speck by the back of the neck and yanked him from the wall and away from Snapper’s reach.

“Take your hands off me,” Snapper bit at Joker.

Joker hesitated a second, felt Snap maneuvering his legs to break his hold, but when High had Speck well out of reach, he let go.

Joke stayed close, as did Hop and Rush, and Snapper's eyes didn't move from Speck.

"She was workin' that shit for us," he told Speck, and the whole room, something they knew.

"We promised we had her back and you were on. You were supposed to *have her back*."

"He knows that. We all know that," Boz confirmed. "We're all feelin' this."

Snap turned on Boz. "Yeah? You got one guess who's feelin' it the most right now."

Boz winced.

"Yeah," Snap gritted. "And you didn't even see her, man. Beat to *shit*. She didn't have her waitress apron on and seein' her hair, I wouldn't have fuckin' recognized her."

"Fuck," Shy whispered.

Snapper slashed a glance through Shy but only allowed himself to do it at a slash.

Rosie had been Shy's once. He'd scraped her off, took up with Tab before he really even ended it with Rosalie. Cut her deep.

Sent her straight to Bounty.

To Throttle.

She hadn't wanted him at the hospital. She'd wanted him and Roscoe gone. But he'd heard. He'd heard that Throttle had delivered her ass to his brothers after he figured out Rosie was informing on Bounty's maneuvers with an enemy of Chaos.

She'd just wanted her man clean. Clean and clear of something that had two endings, one or the other certain: it'd either get him dead or incarcerated.

It seemed Rosie had bad taste in men.

That was going to change.

"Are we ridin' out on Bounty or what?" Hound snarled.

"They're fucked. Half of them are out on bail and Snap says first thing she asked for when she hit emergency was the police," Rush pointed out.

Hound took in Rush's words and then repeated to the room at large, "Are we ridin' out on Bounty or what?"

"We're riding out on Bounty."

That came quiet. Quiet and sinister.

From Tack.

Snapper moved first, yanking open the door to the Club's meeting room and running right into Tabitha Cage.

Shy's wife.

Tack's daughter.

"Is it true?" she snapped.

"Get outta the way, Tab," he said low.

Her eyes moved beyond him and she demanded, "Tell me it isn't true."

"Darlin', we're on this," her father said.

She took a step back and declared, "Yeah, we are. And I'm ridin' with Shy."

"Uh, say what?" Boz muttered from behind Snap.

"We don't have time for this shit," Snapper hissed.

"We actually don't, baby. We got work to do," Shy said.

"You're not in this either," Tack declared.

Shy pivoted on his father-in-law.

"Come again?" he asked.

"You're here," Tack decreed.

Were they seriously doing this?

Now?

Rosalie was still at the goddamned hospital. They were keeping her overnight.

He had asses to kick and a woman to get back to.

"Who's ridin' is ridin' and who isn't is stayin'," Snapper began and turned his head back to Tab, "and you are not riding."

"Says who?" she asked.

"Says me," he fired back.

"Excuse me but *she* is a sister who put her ass on the line for the Club and *I* am the sister who's gonna go kick their wuss asses in retribution. Ganging up for a beat down on a *girl*? Weak. Weak and lame," Tab returned.

"Don't you got a baby to look after?" Roscoe asked with more curiosity than refusal, and her narrowed eyes turned to him.

Then she lifted a hand, fingers clenched around a set of brass knuckles. Shy's brass knuckles. Hound got every brother a pair when they earned their patch. The palm grip had the Chaos emblem etched in and letters above each knuckle read one of the words from the Chaos motto: Wind, Fire, Ride or Free.

Shy's read "Wind."

Snapper's said "Ride."

"Don't you got a nose I can break?" she asked Roscoe back.

Snapper heard Hound's grim chuckle.

"Baby, give me my brass," Shy murmured.

"I'm riding!" she shouted.

"You're not and Shy's here but the rest of us are going," Tack declared.

"Dad!" she yelled.

"Tack," Shy clipped.

"Tabby, you wanna help, don't hold us up, we got shit to do," Tack growled then added, "And I'm thinkin' you get it's kinda important." He turned to Shy. "To do what we gotta do, you need control. You won't have control."

"Yeah, like Snap has control," Boz mumbled.

Snap felt his neck get tight, ready to take down a brother, even if that brother was Tack, to ride out on Bounty.

But Tack's eyes just slowly came to Snapper and he rumbled, "Snap is riding."

"Could that happen about now?" Snapper asked sarcastically.

"A statement has to be made by one of the Chaos women," Tab announced.

"Christ," Snapper hissed. "Can this stupid-ass shit be done?"

"Why is it stupid-ass?" Tab retorted. "'Cause I'm a girl?"

"Uh," he leaned toward her, "*yeah.*"

She leaned toward him. "That's what I call stupid-ass."

"We'll make your statement for you," Hound put in.

Tab turned her gaze on Hound and even Snapper lost track of what was happening and paid attention with the look that settled on her pretty face.

“You do not take your fists to a Chaos woman,” she whispered. “You boys got an alarming trend goin’ on with your women bein’ caught up in your shit. So a Chaos woman needs to make a statement and Tyra might break a heel, Lanie might break a nail, Carissa probably doesn’t even know how to form a fist, Millie already went through her trauma, Sheila’s on the Western Slope, and Bev’s at work, so this is on me and *I’m riding.*”

Tack was done.

So was Snap.

Tack got there before him.

“Deal with your woman,” he ordered Shy. “Rosalie has reported the incident, we gotta get to them before the cops do. We don’t have time for this. We need bail, you and Pete are on that.” He finished with Shy and looked over his shoulder to his brothers. “The rest of you, let’s ride.”

“Dad!” Tab shouted, but Shy clamped an arm around her while the rest of the brothers rolled out.

They marched through the common room of the Compound to their bikes lined up at the front outside.

When they rode out, Tack was lead, Hop behind him with High riding next to Hop where Shy, as one of Tack’s lieutenants (with Hop) and as the Club’s Sergeant at Arms normally rode. But High made a motion to Hop and fell back. He then made a motion to Snap, who rode forward.

Of all of them, not that he’d left much in question bearing down on Speck like he had, High knew where his head was at with Rosalie.

It was a huge solid to take that place in formation.

It was late winter. Cold. Dark. Night had long fallen.

But Bounty would know they were coming.

They’d be prepared.

They’d be ready.

They’d be waiting.

And they were.



Snapper sensed her waking up and looked over the top of his book to her.

He beat it back, the tight, hot feeling that welled up inside.

They'd laid Bounty out.

There was a lot of anger on both sides.

But Chaos had experience and skill. Joke used to be an underground fighter. Hound, Snap suspected, drank blood for breakfast and ate nails for dinner and outside that was all-around a lunatic. Boz was half-lunatic, but it was the good half when it came to a fight. High and Tack had had women they cared about messed up in bad shit, High recently, Tack not so much, but that shit never went away, so they were skilled as well at working out issues. Rush was all about the brotherhood and when the brotherhood had a mission, even if he didn't agree with it, he was always all in to carry out the mission. Hop had always been their hand-to-hand man. He used to play in a rock band but straight up, the way the man used his fists, he could have been a contender. Roscoe had seen Rosalie. Speck had making up to do.

And Snapper had incentive.

That incentive was right there, lying on the hospital pillow.

Her beautiful face was blown up, eyes swollen shut, lips inflamed, nose huge, broken, so taped. Red and mottled had given way to deep raisin-purple black, mostly around the eyes. There were livid scrapes and deep cuts that shared some of Bounty didn't bother taking off rings. There was flesh stitched together above and through her left eyebrow, along that side's jaw, and he knew, under the bandage at her nose, down the left side of the bridge.

Her throat was stippled with angry jam-colored bruising. Along the left side and at the top of her windpipe, there were distinct heavier discolorations where Throttle had dug the pads of his fingers in cruelly, positioned like he wanted to tear her throat out.

How Snap knew she was awake, he couldn't say. Her eyes were now so swollen they weren't open because she couldn't open them. But like earlier, he saw her long lashes fluttering so he clapped his book shut, set it aside, and leaned toward her.

"Hey," he whispered.

Her head had been turned to the side, his way.

She rolled it, facing the other way.

Snapper extended his fingers, flexing them before curling them in. They were swollen and mottled too, all the knuckles split and raw.

He didn't feel a thing.

He considered his next move.

He wasn't going to make her keep trying to escape him by rounding the bed.

Instead, he bent over her.

"You want some privacy, Rosie?" he asked.

She said nothing, just kept her battered face turned away.

"Baby, swelling will go down, bruises will recede and you'll be just as beauti—" he started to assure.

"Get out," she whispered.

Fuck.

Fuck!

"Rosie—"

"Get out," she repeated, still quiet, frail.

"We want an eye on you," he told her.

"No," she replied.

Snap leaned closer. "Honey—"

She turned her head so it was righted on her pillow and he saw just that pulled at and tightened her lips, showing him it caused pain.

They hadn't laid out Bounty enough.

Not near enough.

It was still feeble, but she kept at it. "No Chaos. No you. Get out."

"Rosie, we got them then the cops got them so you're safe, honey. But I wanna make sure you're safe so—"

"I never wanna see you again."

Snap froze.

"Get out," she reiterated.

"Rosie," he whispered.

"Everett, go."

She pulled out his real name.

This was more serious than the serious he already knew it was.

He tried again, mostly because he couldn't give up.

“Got up in Speck’s shit, Rosie. Brothers are pissed. We rolled out on Bounty. All of us, we claimed you as one of our own. This didn’t stand, Rosalie.”

“I won’t say it again,” she whispered. “In five seconds I’m hitting the call button.”

He put his hand over hers, which was actually at the call button.

She pulled it free, taking the button with her, and her mouth again got tight.

He didn’t push that.

He tried another tack.

He shot her a grin. “C’mon, Scully. It’s me. You know you got—”

It was the wrong thing to do.

“I’m not Scully and you are definitely not Mulder. We aren’t out fighting for truth, having each other’s backs.”

Shit, that cut.

He leaned closer to her. “Baby, it’s not on Speck. I know, the way it is between us, what we got...I fell down. I fell down lookin’—”

“It’s done, Everett. It’s over. I’m out. And you need to get gone.”

Snap opened his mouth.

She lifted up the call button.

It was time to pull out the big shit.

“I’m in deep with you,” he admitted softly.

“Then dig yourself out,” she returned quietly, but her voice was harsh, ugly, and not just from having her throat squeezed to shit.

“I’ll go now but I’ll come back,” he told her.

“Don’t.”

“I’m gonna take care of you.”

“No you aren’t.”

“We’re not done, you and me.”

“Yes...we...are.”

He got as close as he dared.

And he put it out there.

“I fell for you when you were Shy’s and if you think that now, when you need me most, now, when I finally, fuckin’ *finally* got a clear shot, I’m givin’ up, think again, Rosie. You’re hurt and you’re pissed and I get that. But I’m not givin’ you up. I don’t care what way I gotta take you, as mine or just havin’ you in my life in a way you’d let me be there, but however that is, I’m not givin’ up. Not ever, Rosalie. I’m not givin’ *you* up. You’re gonna be in my life and I’m gonna be in yours. Bank on it.”

He gave her that because he had to and she had to have it.

But he didn’t push her further.

He reached up, kissed her forehead, straightened, grabbed his book...

And walked away.

For now.

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ROUGH RIDE is available for pre-order now on Amazon in print and on Kindle.

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After that 90 days, **ROUGH RIDE** will be available in all digital formats.