



Not

WANTED

JILLIAN WEST

Knot Wanted

Ruined Records: Chicago

Jillian West

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World Information

This book is set in an alternate universe.

You will recognize many things as familiar, but there may be a few you don't. If you recognize the terms alpha, beta, omega then you're probably good.

If not, welcome to the omegaverse!

Here's a small bit to get you started if you're unfamiliar with how things work.

Omegaverse is an alternate universe where similar to wolves or animal biology there is a hierarchy. Alphas are at the top. They're generally bigger, more aggressive, or dominant and they have a few extra features like a knot (think wolves but no shifting.) Betas are the regular humans. Omegas are the opposite side of the spectrum from alphas. They tend to be less aggressive, smaller, and they mate with alphas (and sometimes betas too, but omegas need the alpha to help them through their heat). Alphas and omegas have scents which attract compatible mates. Omegas calm an alpha's more aggressive nature.

In my contemporary omegaverse books the world is very close to ours with just a few biological drives that are different

& some extra features like alphas have knots & purr to comfort omegas, omegas and alphas have pheromones that attract compatible mates, and omegas have a heat cycle where they're super fertile. During this time it sends compatible alphas into rut. (Lots of practicing making babies.)

A few hundred years ago the birth rates for alphas and omegas were nearly equal. Nowadays there are nearly eight alphas born to each omega. As a result alpha packs have become the norm. Omegas are the center of the pack and as mentioned earlier calm an alphas more aggressive nature. Betas (the normal humans) do join packs sometimes, but their biological drives don't demand it like alphas and omegas.

These alphas growl and snarl, but you'll find no abuse from these men. There are no shifters in this book.

This is a reverse harem romance meaning our heroine will not choose between her love interests. She gets to keep them all.

I hope this helps clarify. You can always reach out to me via social media or email & I'm happy to explain further.

Now on to the good stuff...

Author's Note

Knot Wanted is an interconnected standalone with Knot Guaranteed. This is Shanna's complete romance, but we met a lot of these characters in Knot Guaranteed. You'll likely get the most enjoyment out of reading them in order.

>>>>Spoilers After This Point<<<<<

This book is fluffy. If you suffer from reading anxiety this book should be relatively safe. All issues that arise will be dealt with quickly and in a low stress manner. I never want to discourage anyone from reading any of my books, but I try to be as transparent as possible since I want you to be satisfied. If you're looking for something with a lot of drama and action this book probably won't hit the sweet spot.

There is no cheating. These men don't waiver. They know what they want and they go after it. There is a character in recovery. He does go to meetings off page and his sobriety is mentioned throughout the book. This book includes breeding kink. There is a bit of "Call me, Daddy." No age-play. There is consensual sexy spanking, cock warming, and somno.

If you're one of those readers (like me) who hates time jumps, be aware they only last until chapter three. I wouldn't

recommend skipping them because they do include important info. But trust me, I get the urge too. lol

Mental health is important! I always want my readers to know what to expect. If you have any questions or need something clarified please reach out through email or social media.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have!!

If I've missed any things that should be listed please reach out to me on social media or email me and I'm happy to correct it.

*This one is for anyone who has ever felt like you had to
change who you are just to be accepted.*

Fuck that.

Chapter One

Shanna

August

My best friend stumbles over my feet in an attempt to get the perfect picture of her guys. I chuckle and grab her hips to steady her as she bends low with her camera plastered to her face.

Tinley is an incredibly talented photographer, but she's notoriously clumsy. I'm perfectly capable of snapping a killer selfie, but she's skilled on an entirely different level. If I was serious about taking my clothing designs to the masses, then I'd hire her in a heartbeat to photograph my collections.

Fitz leans toward the audience, belting out the lyrics to the Northern Star song. It's weird watching my brother flirt with fans. Not just because it's gross, but also because he's sickeningly in love with Tinley. It's all part of the rock star persona, but clearly, the fans don't know that.

My eyes dance across the other guys making up Northern Star.

Carter and Warrick lean back-to-back as they play the hell out of their guitars. Carter is closer to where we stand backstage. His muscles bulge as his forearms flex and his fingers move so quickly, it's nearly impossible to track their movement.

Warrick, Ramsey, and Fitz are all part of Tinley's pack. Even though they've only been bonded for six or seven months, it's clear they're all head over heels in love with her.

I turn to check out the guys of Pack Lewis. My boyfriends couldn't look more out of place. The three men I'm dating stand huddled against the back wall. They're far more interested in their phones than in the special performance I got them backstage access to.

They aren't even pretending to watch the show, and it's making me a little bitter.

Most of the audience is blocked from view, but my parents' pack is out there somewhere. They're cheering and being generally embarrassing old people. I don't have to see it to know it's true.

Our family is ridiculously supportive of whatever we want to do in life. Luckily, they're also financially stable and have encouraged us to focus on what makes us happy without the stress of worrying if we'll be able to afford to live.

My dates seemed interested when I invited them, but watching them now, they come off as annoyed.

They work hard.

I get that, but it's bad form that they can't pause whatever they're doing for an hour so we can enjoy our date.

They have their own men's clothing line, and they've been considering branching into women's wear, which is cool because designing comfortable and sexy clothes is pretty much my favorite hobby.

My mom ran her own clothing line before meeting my dads. I doubt I'd be down for all that, but I would love to give input and help them grow their business.

It's more like I don't have any objections to working occasionally, but I probably wouldn't want a full-time career. Only because my impulses are already obsessed with the idea of being the perfect stay-at-home omega. That wouldn't stop me from chipping in or helping them find decent designers.

I'd just like to think of it more as a casual thing.

The world considers me a spoiled socialite, thanks to the press, and I'm mostly fine with that. Everyone has a role to

play, and that's the one I was cast into.

I sigh, turning away from Pack Lewis to focus back on the stage.

It's late summer in Chicago and, despite the fact this place has AC, my dress still sticks to my skin with sweat.

Pulling my arm up, I unceremoniously check to make sure my deodorant is working, but the amber blossom smell fills my nostrils.

I'm still fresh.

So, why the hell are my dates keeping their distance? It's a little concerning that they're able to make me feel so self-conscious.

I do my best to shake away the self-doubt and focus on the amazing performance. Northern Star knows exactly how to put on a damn good show, and that's what I'm here for.

Most of those guys are bonded to my best friend. That makes it creepy to acknowledge how hot they are. I completely leave my brother out of that equation because, again, *gross*. He's easy enough to ignore since he's at the front of the stage, singing the lyrics to one of their most recognizable songs. I don't know the name of it, but the fans seem to love it as they sing along.

Carter and Jack are the two who are unclaimed. They're both hot in different ways, but I heard from Tinley that Jack is still healing from a broken heart, which leaves only Carter to appreciate.

He's sexy.

There's no way around that.

Carter is one of those guys who always has shaggy sex hair. The top is long and messy, like he just got done running his hands through it. Or like some woman just did. The sides and back are shaved close to the same length as his dark beard.

His ripped tank top is slit down the sides to his belt. It shows off the black tattoos lining his ribs, abs, and obliques.

Really, that shirt covers very little of his tanned skin. Dark, holey jeans and combat boots complete the ensemble.

I'm sure the women in the audience love it. He's got the rock star style down pat.

My eyes flick to Jack. He's the bass player, and he's on the opposite side of the stage. He's definitely gorgeous in his own way, with his unique haircut. One side of his head is shaved completely, and the long hair from the other side always falls around his face as he plays, making him look every bit the edgy musician.

While Carter has dark features, Jack is dirty blond with light blue eyes and only a light stubble. It's just enough to look like a few days' worth of growth.

Tinley grunts, slamming her back into my chest as she finally takes a break from the pictures. "Sorry," she says, laughing. Her head rolls around my shoulder as she grins up at me. Her sweet pumpkin pie scent smacks into me and my nose wrinkles.

Omegas can often be catty with other omegas, but she's my best damn friend. I wrap my arms around her middle, giving her a hug. It's a little depressing how desperate I am for physical affection, especially since my boyfriends are only a few feet away.

Sometimes jobs are more demanding than others.

This just happens to be a busy time in their career.

It's nothing to get my feelings hurt over. Maybe if I say it enough times, it'll actually sink in.

Watching Tinley suck face with Warrick makes my chest feel tight. No man has ever looked at me the way my best friend's guys look at her. There's this raw, hungry passion that I would kill to experience.

I lean against the wall, waiting to say goodbye. I'm going to head home after this. I don't have the first clue where my

parents' pack is, but at this point, I'm so frustrated with my boyfriends that I'm no longer excited to introduce them.

If my impulses are leading me to overreact, then that's fine. They've officially hurt my feelings to the point I'm over this entire night.

Carter's sweaty scent hits me like a ton of bricks as he tosses an arm around my shoulder. His dark hair falls over his forehead as he smirks, leaning his face close to mine. "Little Fitz."

It's unnatural for a man to have that much innate sexual swagger when he's not doing anything remotely sexual. It makes my body respond to his in a way it has no right to. My nostrils flare as my nipples tighten, but I struggle to paste on a disinterested facade. His scent might physically affect me on a biological level, but *he* doesn't need to know that.

Why does he always make it his mission to get as close to me as possible? It throws me off in a big way.

"You're sweaty," I grunt, trying to shove his arm off.

"Well, you smell sweet as ever, sugar." Carter chuckles, squeezing my cheeks with his free hand.

My sky-high heels barely give me the height needed to reach his shoulder. I glare up at him, slapping his fingers away from my face. "Don't call me that."

His dark eyes sparkle, like he thoroughly enjoys annoying the hell out of me. We've met a few times since he got out of rehab, and he always does everything in his power to torment me.

Every. Single. Time.

"Little Fitz, it is."

"It's better than what you call your groupies, so you don't have to bother remembering their names," I mutter, breathing through my mouth to try to avoid his delicious citrusy smell.

"So bitter. Tell me, are those the boyfriends Fitz said you were bringing along?" Carter nods toward the wall, where Pack Lewis stands. My chin tilts in the air, and he laughs. "No

shit, want to introduce us? I promise to be on my best behavior.” He bites his thick lower lip, and I fight the unnatural urge to suck on it for him.

It’s frustrating. He’s basically off-limits for a multitude of reasons. Not to mention, I’m over my himbo stage in life.

“They have work to do.” I slide my hands down my dress, smoothing out the wrinkles.

“Are you harassing Fitz’s sister *again*?” Jack asks, coming up to join us.

“Of course, he is.” I roll my eyes, but give Jack a smile. He’s taller than even Carter and has a slightly leaner build.

“Back to your boyfriends.” Carter chuckles derisively as his fingers caress my neck. He’s still got his arm tossed over my shoulder, and it makes it difficult to concentrate. “I’ll bet they don’t have ten inches of dick between the three of them. Do they?” My mouth falls open. “Nah, that face says *no*. That’s why you’re so uptight, isn’t it? No woman getting dickied down on the regular should ever be this tense. It’s actually gotten worse the longer I’ve known you.”

“Seriously, man?” Jack sighs. “It’s like you’re desperate to get punched in the face.”

I close my mouth as my eyes dart to my brother and Tinley. Fitz would absolutely knock the shit out of Carter for talking to me like that.

My nose wrinkles as I realize Fitz is dry fucking my best friend into the brick wall.

Gah, they’re so disgusting.

It’s also not my brother’s job to defend my honor.

“It’s interesting that you immediately checked out what Fitz is up to. He’s obviously your best shot, since we both know none of those guys are going to step up.” Carter snorts. “The photographer is getting more action in the hallway than I bet you’ve gotten from those three, *ever*.”

I frown so hard, I can feel my own forehead wrinkle.

I hate that he's right, and it makes my stomach feel even more hollow because other people are able to see it too. They've never looked at me the way any of Tinley's guys look at her.

"Christ, Carter," Jack mutters, shaking his head. "That's enough, man."

Carter nods to Pack Lewis, *again*. "Are you in your *I only fuck boring guys* phase?"

"I'm in my responsible adult phase. You know the one. Where I don't have to worry how many other women have fucked the guys I'm into." I give him a cutting smile. "There's something really attractive about a guy who *doesn't* stick his dick in anything that moves just because he can."

"Direct hit." Carter laughs. He twists from beside me to standing straight in front of me and gets really close to my ear. "Guys like that aren't going to truly satisfy you, no matter what lies you spin to convince yourself otherwise. Try to come to terms with it before you're bonded and stuck for the long haul. You don't want to cry yourself to sleep every night because your sex life is too depressing to go on."

"Do you ever shut up?" My hands land on his chest, and I shove him away with all my might. He doesn't move an inch. If anything, his hold on my lower back tightens, pulling me closer to his chest.

"You're smoking hot, Little Fitz. It's probably a good idea to stack your pack with at least one alpha who knows how to take a hit and land a few punches." He pats me on the ass and swaggers away while I'm still standing, frozen. "Leaving your safety up to those three seems like a big fucking mistake," he calls over his shoulder with little care to who might hear him.

My eyes fly to Pack Lewis. I have doubts they'd be able to withstand a fist fight. Luckily, I can afford solid security, if it comes to that.

What he said still echoes in my mind, though.

Sex isn't everything, but it is especially important to omegas.

No, I won't let Carter, of all people, get to me. He lives to torment me. All of this is probably a big game to him.

"Sorry, he's been moody lately, but that doesn't give him the right to talk to you like that," Jack says, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jeans. His dimples pop as he gives me a killer grin. "Want me to punch him for you?"

I laugh, shaking my head. "No, it's fine. I've dealt with cocky alphas before. I also don't want Fitz in the middle of it."

"Yeah," Jack says, eyeing the rest of his band still huddled around Tinley. He gives me a chagrined smile. "See ya around, Shanna."

The woman who broke his heart must be an absolute idiot. He swaggers off toward Carter as I unashamedly check out his ass in those tight jeans. He's got this vibe that screams *I've got a big dick, and I know how to use it.*

"Why was that guy all over you?" Blake asks, finally coming to stand at my side. He's technically Pack Lewis's apex alpha. *If you can even call him that.* Matt and Evan are hot on his heels.

"He enjoys annoying me." I paste on a plastic smile. "Did you guys want to peek around and see if we can find my parents?"

Blake grimaces. "We probably shouldn't have come at all. We've got a conference call with China in two hours that wasn't on our schedule. Jenna has been texting nonstop."

My gut drops.

Jenna is their personal assistant. She hasn't been downright rude or anything, but I've gotten the feeling she doesn't like me. I've casually tried to mention it, and somehow, they always make me feel like I'm being crazy or overexaggerating.

I'm not saying that's impossible, because omegas are known to be catty about our alphas, but it does bother me that they haven't even tried to put my mind at ease.

“Okay, well, thank you for coming,” I say, trying to keep my face placid.

What else is there to say?

If I make a big deal out of it, then they’ll say I’m being overdramatic.

They barely give me a peck on the cheek and friendly hugs before taking off. I’m stuck watching them walk away with my jaw hanging open.

I could’ve used those tickets to give to my friends or even Tinley’s family. I can’t decide if I am being a bratty omega or if they’re just acting really freaking weird. Having a career is one thing, but do I really want to permanently tie myself to guys who put their job first at every turn?

My eyes meet Carter’s as he leans against the wall next to Jack. His jaw is tight, and he’s got his arms crossed over his chest.

I have no idea what pissed him off, but I spin around and head off to find a bathroom. I need to get myself together before I explain to my family that my guys had to leave for a *business emergency*.

Chapter Two

Carter

November

“Little Fitz.” I flash Shanna a devilish smirk to hide how much I want to toss her up against the wall of Warrick and Ramsey’s house and kiss the hell out of her. I glance back and see her family is unloading the car, but the guys she’s dating are nowhere to be seen. “Where are the boyfriends?”

They should be here, right? It’s Thanksgiving, and despite what my family thinks, it is a family holiday.

Her face drains of color so fast, my heart drops.

I take a step forward, but she backs closer to the wall. Her lithe shoulder shrugs as her eyes fall shut.

“I actually have no idea.” Shanna always has a slight Scottish accent. It’s usually pretty watered down, but right now, it’s thicker than normal. “They didn’t show up. They could be enjoying another conference call with their manufacturers in China, or possibly their assistant cooked for them instead.” Her pretty hazel eyes pop open, and they’re a little glassy. “Who knows, but they’re no longer my problem. Are you happy now?”

“Not really.” I frown. Now I just kinda feel like a dick. “You know what you need to do?”

“What’s that?” she grunts, slamming her hand against the doorbell.

“You don’t waste a single second of brain space on those assholes.” I toss my arm around her shoulder, running my

fingers through her perfectly styled waves. “Make them regret ever letting you slip through their fingers.”

“Yeah,” she agrees, slapping my hand. “Don’t mess up my hair.”

A slow grin crosses my face. I like her feisty.

Those dicks didn’t have the first clue how to handle her. Not that I’m in any position to do a goddamn thing about that, but I like a woman with a backbone.

They didn’t even step in when they saw me hitting on her at our show. I’ve never seen an alpha who isn’t obsessively possessive of their omega. It immediately set off red flags. There’s every possibility I was itching for a fight that night, but I knew they wouldn’t say shit.

In no universe would this little omega be happy with those guys. She might have thought she would, but she’s spunky. They would literally bore her to death. It’s a good thing, even if she doesn’t see it that way yet.

I’m sure they’re the type to want a perfect, dotting omega who doesn’t talk back.

How fucking boring.

Seriously, is it even a relationship if you aren’t a little afraid of the woman you’re fucking?

Hell if I know.

I haven’t been in one of those since high school. But who wants picture perfect and well-behaved?

I’ll take the messy, imperfect version with sharp edges and a dirty mouth. It really is too bad I don’t get to keep any of it, but I’ve got to get myself right before I bring anyone else along for the ride.

I’ve been to Warrick and Ramsey’s house over the years, but it’s an entirely different place with Tinley. The tour photographer is cute, but she’s a little innocent for my tastes.

We might still be hanging on as Northern Star, but there is a very clear divide in the band since Fitz was added. Not that it's a bad thing.

Warrick needed something good in his life after being stabbed. Even trying to imagine no longer being able to sing is enough to make my balls shrivel.

It must have burned his ass when Fitz took his spot as lead singer. Then again, Warrick and Ramsey bonded the woman Fitz has been head over dick in love with for years, so I suppose it all evened out.

Shanna fields a round of uncomfortable questions about what happened to her dates. However, her family lets it go and focuses on keeping her busy while not bringing up how they straight up ghosted her.

It's hard not to be bitter when the whole reason I'm not with my family is that they refuse to support my sobriety.

It's fine.

Holidays really aren't my thing.

Growing up, they were just another day of the year, and as an adult, I've never taken a break from partying to celebrate.

I wouldn't even be here right now, but my counselor beat it into my head how many people relapse during the holidays.

I probably owe Fitz, Warrick, and Ramsey a *thank you* for insisting I spend Thanksgiving with them. Being stuck in a hotel somewhere by myself would've been boring as fuck.

We eat and hang out. I have no clue how long these things are supposed to last. We've been here for a few hours when Fitz and Warrick start rounding everyone up to leave.

I chuckle under my breath. It's not hard to figure out why they're giving us the boot. They're living it up in the newly wed stage of bonding.

"Do you want us to drive you back to your hotel?" Shanna's mom asks her as we head for our cars. She rode with them on the way here, but if I'd known, I would have offered

to bring her, since we're staying at the same bed-and-breakfast.

Shanna's eyes cut to mine. Her big hazel eyes blink repeatedly. I'm pretty sure she's pleading with me to save her.

"I'm heading to the same place she is. She's more than welcome to ride with me."

The little omega gives me a grateful smile. "You guys are in the opposite direction. I'll ride with Carter." She spins around, and the back of her teal and black dress flies up, showing the bottom of her deliciously curvy backside.

My head falls back as I curse the universe. I've kept my ass in line for the last 326 days.

One of the first things they recommend in rehab is no relationships for a year.

I'm a fucking saint lately.

I've been sober for ten months and twenty-two days, and I haven't had sex in longer than that. Not that I remember much from the couple months before I got clean.

"Are you coming, or do you intend to keep checking out my butt?" Shanna asks, her laugh a light, airy sound.

She's dangerous.

That's what she is.

She's beautiful, feisty, has a sassy mouth, and she's completely fucking off-limits for more than one reason.

Sometimes I think the universe really must hate me.

I deliver Shanna to her door, like any solid alpha chaperone should. I'm still confused why she's staying at the small bed-and-breakfast, rather than the big hotel her family pack is staying in across town, but that's not my business.

"What are your plans tonight?" Shanna asks.

I shrug.

I was planning to sleep off the food coma and maybe watch some porn. My life isn't exactly exciting these days.

"Never mind," she whispers, pulling the key card out of the door lock.

"Do you really want to hang out with me, Little Fitz?"

"Apparently, I'm exactly that desperate." She shoves the door open, heading inside.

"Way to brutally destroy a man's self-confidence." I chuckle, following her into the suite. "Damn, woman." I whistle as I check out the killer room. I'm not unused to grandeur, but I didn't grow up rich like Fitz. My family was one step away from trailer park living when I lucked into being signed to Northern Star.

"It's the honeymoon suite," she says, rolling her eyes. Black fingernails slide down her calf to undo the clasp on her heel. She's got dainty little ankles that lead down to black painted toenails. "The guys were supposed to stay here with me. I didn't want us in the same hotel as my parents... It just felt weird."

"We're not thinking about those asshats, remember?"

"Yeah," she weakly agrees.

This feels like dangerous territory, but I'm a little desperate for human contact, even if it means forgoing my favorite activity when a woman is involved.

"So, what exactly are we supposed to do to pass the time?" I ask, shoving my hands into the front pockets of my jeans.

"I'm going to get into my pajamas, and then we're going to watch a Christmas movie while being grateful we aren't alone on a holiday. How does that sound?" she asks, quirking an eyebrow.

I toss a thumb toward the door. "Is it cool if I change and come back?"

"You could just wear your boxers, but I guess." She nods to the table by the door. "Grab the room key. You can let yourself in when you get back."

I smirk. “If I was wearing anything under my jeans, that might work.”

Her eyes widen as I spin around and head out.

I hit the hallway and lean against the wall.

Do not flirt with the little sister of one of the few friends you’ve got left. I repeat it over and over until I’m actually banging my head against the wall to make sure it sinks in.

“So, what happened with your family for you to end up spending Thanksgiving with mine?” Shanna asks, rolling her head around my bicep until her eyes meet mine. We’re stretched out in her bed, watching a boring-ass Christmas movie.

I quirk an eyebrow. “Do you want the quick version or the real version?”

“Real, clearly.”

“My family and I aren’t on the same page. They wanted me to sign with another label...” I sigh. *I really don’t want to get into all the details about how my best friend still isn’t clean. Ruined Records refused to re-sign Xavier, so he went elsewhere. My family doesn’t seem to understand that I can’t be around all that shit, or I’ll spiral.* “I bought them a house a few years ago, but I’m not performing nine months out of the year anymore. Keeping up with the house payment is killing me. I’ve tried to get them to agree to downsize, so I won’t be forced to sell my house to pay theirs off, but it’s my mom, three dads, my older sister, and her boyfriend all living there. I guess it does make more sense for me to move into a condo or something.”

“Are you serious?” she asks, leaning up on her arm to look at me. “You’re going to sell your house so they can keep theirs? They don’t see a problem with that? They’ve got to understand that your financial circumstances have changed.”

“Not even close,” I scoff, pulling her back down to my chest. “They haven’t exactly been supportive of my sobriety.

Basically, if it would get me back to earning what I was, then—”

“That’s so unbelievably shitty. I’m sorry to tell you this, but if that was me, I would tell them, *good luck, but you’re on your own. If you can’t emotionally support me, then I can’t financially support you.*” Her hand lands over my heart, and she starts rubbing away the ache in my chest that always comes when I think about my family.

“If only it was that simple.”

“It really is.” She tosses a thigh over mine. “You don’t owe anyone anything.”

“You’re quite feisty, Little Fitz.”

“Yeah, I guess. Mostly, I’m just over the takers of the world.” She sighs heavily and focuses back on the TV.

I’m pretty sure I’ve never snuggled in bed with a woman. Her soft curves feel incredibly hot pressed against my much stronger frame.

My mind races.

I shouldn’t be here right now.

I’ve got very few people in my corner these days, and Fitz happens to be one of them. My conscience wrestles with the pros and cons, but I can’t force myself to actually get up and leave. Her pheromones physically comfort me in a way that’s hard to describe. It’s really fucking difficult to fight the pull between compatible alphas and omegas.

She falls asleep not long after.

Shanna Fitzpatrick is beautiful, but more than that, she’s exactly my type.

It’s a problem.

I’ve never spent so much time thinking and obsessing about a woman as I have since meeting her. Maybe it’s because I’ve spent the last year keeping my ass in line, but no one has ever tempted me the way she does.

If I've learned anything from rehab, it's that people falter when they spend too much time around temptation, meaning I've got to dip.

I stick around for a while, soaking up her soothing, sweet scent before kissing her temple and climbing off the mattress. She looks so peaceful that the urge to climb back in bed next to her is almost impossible to resist, which is a major risk, considering I've still got a month left in my year-long commitment.

Shaking my head, I grab my shit and prepare to leave her hotel room, but my eyes keep traveling back to the sleeping beauty.

I've got to go now before I do something stupid.

I practically run from the room, making sure the door closes quietly. I lean against it, trying to get my shit together. My impulses are all over the place, and my stomach feels weird. I shove a hand against it to rub away the ache. I'm pretty sure this churning feeling is guilt, because I feel like a righteous asshole for leaving without saying goodbye.

Chapter Three

Shanna

December

Conference rooms make me itchy. It's a new development, but if I never see the inside of one again, it'll still be too soon.

My lawyers sit on one side of the table and Pack Lewis's line the other. It's crazy how quickly things can devolve into legal proceedings.

My hands tighten on the arms of my rolling chair to keep myself in place. The urge to bolt is strong.

I shake my head.

It's my fault I'm here right now, and I have to live with the repercussions of my actions. I made some poor choices, like offering up my designs on a silver platter to a group of men who were only using me to further their own business. They gleefully snatched up my debut collection and ghosted me on Thanksgiving, when they were supposed to meet my family. The signs were everywhere, but they played me just long enough to get me to sign the contract.

I thought offering a legal agreement with set payments for each item was their attempt to *protect* me. I did want to help them grow their business, but I thought I'd be a part of that future.

My hair falls around my face as I stare at my lap.

The head of my legal team, Thomas, leans closer, shoving a piece of paper at me. "It's legally enforceable. They can sue

for breach of contract if you don't follow through with the obligations listed.”

Grabbing the paper, I scan the list. It's several fundraising galas and the party where my designs will be revealed.

No matter how hurt I am, I understand that I'm legally stuck.

I nod. “I'll do the events listed and nothing more.”

Thomas nods, patting me on the back. “You can go. We'll finish up here.”

The urge to run from the room is strong, but I pull my shoulders back, give Pack Lewis's lawyers a *fuck you* smirk, and slowly take my leave.

The door closes quietly behind me, and I lean against the wall. My pride is damaged, my feelings are hurt, and all I want to do is crawl into a hole to hide until this entire disaster is over.

Since that's not going to happen, I think I'll treat myself to a night out. Maybe, if I play my cards right, I can forget this nightmare for a few hours.

Music vibrates through the packed club. Darkside is only a couple blocks from my apartment, so I tend to frequent it when I need to get out.

The downsides of being an omega are more plentiful than I'd like to admit. I've had a heat every three months since the month before I turned eighteen. I'll be twenty-three in March. That's a whole lot of heat sex with guys I didn't end up with. Not that I particularly care about numbers, but it makes it practically impossible to hold out for someone you really like when biology is busy sabotaging you at every turn.

Every heat cycle goes the same way. Things are fine for the first two months, but the few weeks leading up to the heat are rough. They're filled with mood swings, lots of nesting, and the nearly uncontrollable urge to be knotted.

I've heard that it gets better if the omega is in close contact with compatible alphas, as their pheromones help soothe our system. I couldn't say one way or another because I've never shackled up with alphas. The time I spent with Pack Lewis didn't soothe the urges, but I do think it helped my heat to be milder than the ones I've gone through with volunteer alphas.

I'm still thinking about Pack freaking Lewis.

It's embarrassing, and I'm very sure I need more alcohol.

During the last few weeks, I've spent a lot of time trying to learn what kinds of guys are willing to seal the deal. There are some really gorgeous men here, but I need to avoid the altruistic ones that think they need to get to know me before sex.

I've gotten more phone numbers and polite offers to escort me to my door than I can count. But every alpha I've tried to land has acted like it's degrading to hook up on the first night.

It's ridiculous.

Omeegas need meaningless sex too, dammit.

Leaning against the railing overlooking the dance floor below, I absently watch writhing bodies in the dark, only highlighted by club lights. It may be time to abandon the VIP level for the masses. There are a few alphas sprinkled around the bar and tables, but they all seem otherwise occupied.

I sigh and decide to grab one more drink up here before forsaking the peace of VIP for higher odds of finding a decently compatible alpha.

Navigating the floor in my heels while two or three drinks deep is an adventure, but I finally make it to the bar. The guys next to me immediately turn in my direction, but they're a little too clean-cut for me to put much effort into getting to know them. The bartender comes over, and I order another shot. He heads off and comes back pretty quickly.

I toss down some cash as the bartender grins.

"Enjoy."

"I definitely will," I reply, smiling back.

I'm just finishing the shot when the smell hits me. It's rich and thick and definitely belongs to an alpha. There are hints of leather and maybe tobacco, but the pipe kind, not the gross cigarette smell that makes me want to gag.

"That dress is fierce," a low, gravelly voice says from behind me.

I twist to check out the guy standing over my shoulder, and my breath catches. He's covered in tats, at least the parts of him I can see. Giant black wings cross his neck, and there's something huge that disappears into the top of his T-shirt. He's wearing an edgy black leather jacket that's more punk-rock than motorcycle club. His hand falls to my left hip, and he slides his fingers over the mesh overlay on my dress.

"Thank you." I smile at him over my shoulder. "Want to dance?"

"Hell yeah." He chuckles as long brown curls fall over his forehead. He's wearing a beanie, so only the front is visible, but with his strong jaw and thick stubble, the style really works on him. "I've never wanted anything more in my entire life."

I laugh politely at the bad line. He can think he's the hunter, if that helps ensure he gives me what I want. He turns me around, and it becomes glaringly obvious just how tall he is. He's slender with a medium build, but enough muscles to fill out the leather jacket nicely. The jeans he's wearing are ripped at the knees, showing off even more tattoos.

It appears I've hit the jackpot. He's exactly what I've been trolling for.

Huge hands palm my ass, pulling me apart as he grinds me against his impressive cock. The height difference has it pressing against my abdomen, but his thigh works perfectly against my pussy. "Do you know how slick you smell, sweetness?"

My core convulses around nothing at the sound of his growly tone. I ache to bare my neck and beg for his knot.

I settle for nodding against his soft T-shirt as I clutch at his muscular back. My hands are under his jacket, but I'm tempted to move them under the shirt to fully feel his warm skin.

There's a group of ten or more women standing a few feet away, and they've been glaring like they can wish me dead where I stand.

"Your fan club doesn't look very happy to see you with me." I suck in deep hits of his leathery, smoky scent with zero shame. They can watch all they'd like, but this alpha is mine—at least for tonight.

He laughs, low and raspy. "Maybe we should get out of their line of sight, then?"

My entire body is warm and fuzzy from the alcohol and potent alpha pheromones. Modesty doesn't exist when I'm this far gone to my impulses. "Are you going to make it worth my while?" I roll my head up to look at him.

He smirks as his fingers dig into my ass. The proprietary grip makes me shiver.

"Fuck yes." He bends low, so he can speak directly into my ear. I gasp as his stubble scratches over my cheek. "I know it's impossible, but I swear I can already taste your pheromones just from the air. I can't wait to lick your sweet little cunt and drink you down from the source."

"Let's do it," I agree as my nipples tighten. Some guys fully understand the assignment, and whatever-his-name-is happens to be one of those men. He's made dancing feel like foreplay to the point I'm about to tackle him to the floor and ride his cock right here if we don't find somewhere more appropriate.

My hormones are completely out of control. He lifts me, wraps me around his front, and walks us off toward somewhere.

I don't know where we're headed, but I can't wait to find out.

Chapter Four

Saxon

I'm a glorified babysitter and a shitty one, at that. I lost Langdon Hughes thirty minutes ago. I've worked with more clients than I can count over the last five years.

I've never held so much distaste for another human being. Rock stars come in all varieties, but my most recent client is my least favorite kind. He's petulant, doesn't listen to a word I say, and we couldn't have less in common if we tried.

The last thing I want to do is search every inch of this packed club. If he left and didn't tell me, then it's about time I let my boss know this assignment just isn't for me.

Langdon is going through his own shit since his band fell apart, which has made him less tolerable than ever. I spot the women he was dancing with earlier and head for them.

"Have any of you seen Langdon?"

"He saw some woman and went for her. They were dancing," one of the women replies, pointing toward the hallway with the bathrooms. "They went that way, like, fifteen minutes ago. Maybe a little more?"

"Thanks," I grunt, shaking my head and stomping toward the bathrooms. It's very difficult to remind myself I love my job.

Personal protection services is a nice middle ground after spending years in the military. I get to punch people in the face, assess threats, and use my size for something good.

I slam a forearm against the men's room door and glance around.

No tattooed rock stars fucking in here.

My head tilts, and I listen for a couple of seconds, just to be sure.

There's no one.

I aim for the women's room next.

The door bounces against the wall, and several women jump. I take a few steps inside, averting my gaze from the women doing their makeup at the mirror.

Nope, not here either.

Maybe he really did leave.

That would be a nice change of pace. Although, I won't be able to call it a night until I verify he's somewhere safe.

"Are you with Langdon Hughes?" a very uncomfortable looking woman asks. She's wearing the same dress all the female servers wear. "Second door from the end of the hall on the right. It says *employees only*. He's in there."

"Thank you," I say, sighing heavily. I'm getting too old for this shit. At nearly forty, I should be spending my weekends at home. Relaxing and recuperating sounds like fucking heaven.

I find the door the woman mentioned, and the sounds of sex are unmistakable.

Do not punch your client in the face. Strangling him with my bare hands would also be uncalled for. It's still difficult to remind myself of that as I shove the door open.

The fact Lang has a tattooed hand slapped over the woman's mouth as he plows into her from behind doesn't help my composure. He better be wearing a fucking condom.

Jesus Christ.

Bullshit like this isn't in my job description, but he's a loose cannon these days. It's like he's desperate to destroy what's left of his career.

“What the fuck, Saxon? I’m busy. Back off and get out!”
Lang snarls.

The woman’s pretty hazel eyes widen as her tits bounce. I’m pretty sure her nipples are pierced, otherwise I have no idea what that shiny metal is framing them. Her black and gold dress is pulled up from the bottom and down at the top, so just the important bits are showing. Lang has to squat ridiculously low to be able to fuck her while they’re both standing.

“Two minutes,” I bark. “Clean yourselves up. It’s time to go!”

The door slams as I shove myself up against the wall to wait. I eye my watch. It’s after two in the morning. That woman better be old enough to be in this club, or I will fuck Lang up. I don’t care if I lose my job. No rational human being should be forced to deal with rock stars. It’s maddening.

They take almost five minutes before the tiny woman stumbles out the door. She nearly hits the ground as her heel gets stuck in the rivet of the baseplate for the door. My arms have been crossed over my chest, but I toss one out, ensuring she falls into me, not the floor.

“Whoa,” she whispers, blinking up at me from behind her dark lashes. “Good save.”

My hands fall to her hips as I help her get situated. “Are you all right?”

She leans farther into me as I catch how blown out her pupils are. “You smell good too, like really freaking good.” She nods dramatically. “The Daddy vibes are a major bonus. How do you feel about pleasurable spankings? I’m also open to the punishment kind.”

My head snaps up as I glare at Langdon. I don’t even know what to say to him, at this point.

Is he not an adult fully capable of discerning when consent is questionable?

She doesn’t sound wasted, but her breath does smell like alcohol, and that’s a slippery slope.

Maybe I have unrealistic expectations because I'm considerably older than they are...

Nah, fuck that.

Common decency shouldn't have age requirements.

"Get your hands off her," Lang growls, tilting his head as he finishes zipping his jeans. "She's mine!" I've never heard him bark, but unfortunately for him, it doesn't do more than send a shiver down my spine. Significantly more dominant alphas than *Lang* screamed at me in the military until I was immune.

"She's either too drunk or too far gone on your pheromones for you to say shit right now," I snarl.

My hands shake, showing exactly how furious I am. I've never had a client push me to a place where I'm actually afraid of snapping and beating the fuck out of them.

"I'm an omega," the woman says, like I could miss that blatantly obvious fact. "There's no need to fight." She pats my pec. "I'm completely capable of taking the two of you at once. We should make this a group thing." Her pheromones flood the air, and I have to shake away the fog to remind myself I'm not a predatory asshole. Playing fast and loose with consent isn't my personal style.

Lang trips over his own boots, and it's clear he's drunk too. He was wasted before I lost track of him, but that in no way absolves him of his guilt in this clusterfuck. "I will fucking murder you if you don't get your hands off of her."

I snort. "You could try. It wouldn't go well for you, but you could definitely give it a go and see how it pans out."

"Ooo." The woman glances between us. "Is there really no chance of a threesome? That just made me all tingly."

I give her an incredulous look before shaking my head.

I'm too old for this shit.

"Get yourself back to the hotel. I'm taking her home." I don't give either of them a chance to complain. Scooping up

the tiny woman, I stride down the hallway without a backward glance.

“Mmm, I’m a really big fan of your scent.” Her face nuzzles close to my chest, and I curse the universe. She smells pretty fucking delectable to me too.

“I’ve got it,” the bossy little omega snaps, trying to shove her key into the slot on the elevator. Apparently, she lives in the penthouse, which requires a key to access. However, she’s missed the hole three fucking times.

“You obviously *don’t* got it,” I growl, hiking her up higher and leaning back so my chest mostly holds her in place. The cab ride to her building was an exercise in self-control as she wiggled around my lap. We made small talk, and while it’s clear she’s not shit-faced, I’m still uncomfortable with the entire situation. It might be the nearly ten years of life experience I’ve got on Langdon Hughes, but I still feel like he should know better. He’s a public fucking figure. “Just let me help.” I get the key in the slot on the first try.

“Has anyone told you that you’ve got major Daddy vibes, Saxon?” Hearing her say my name makes me ache to have her screaming it.

I scoff, jamming the button for the penthouse. “Yeah, Shanna. You, about seven times on this delightful little adventure.”

“Oh.” She giggles, covering her face with her hand. “It’s still true.”

It’s especially difficult to keep up the disinterested facade when she peeks at me through her fingers.

Drunk people usually annoy the hell out of me, but she’s so fucking cute, it’s hard to stay focused. She’s my type, and my impulses hate that Lang touched her.

Omegas are meant to be courted and pampered, but he doesn’t know the first thing about how to handle himself, let alone care for anyone else. He better have gone straight back

to the hotel, like I instructed. If he's asleep once I get there, that would be even better, so I'm not tempted to take my rage out on his pretty face.

Women throw themselves at him, but he doesn't deserve their affection. Not until he starts treating them with some fucking respect.

The elevator doors open to a small entryway. "We need the key to get into my apartment." She stretches over, yanking it out of the slot.

I stomp us over to the door. "Well, you've been delivered safely."

She grins unapologetically. "I feel like the correct answer to anything you say is, *Yes, Daddy.*"

I groan. Not even Lang's scent is curbing my interest, and that's a problem. "All right. I'm going to set you on your feet."

"Yes, Daddy."

"Don't say it all cute and innocent like that." My head shakes involuntarily. "You obviously don't understand how lucky you are that I'm not your alpha. Your ass would never recover from the shit you pulled tonight."

Who knows why I've got such an affinity for brats, but I really do.

"Why would you say that right before I have to stand up on my own?" she whispers, poking her bottom lip out dramatically. "Now I'm going to have wobbly knees."

I grunt, carefully lowering her to the ground. I keep my hands on her arms to steady her for an extra few seconds. Her sweet sugary scent makes it practically impossible to release her. "Does that key work for this lock too?"

"Yeah, I've got it." She spins around, shoving the key into the lock.

My phone buzzes in my pocket for probably the fiftieth time.

I pull it out, and every text is from Lang.

I scoff when I get a look at the most recent message. Apparently I'm fired if I don't get her number, because he's in love with her.

She pulls open the door and leans against the doorjamb. Her puffy lips part as she checks me out hungrily.

That look makes it very difficult not to shove my mouth to hers.

"Thanks again. Have a nice night." With that, she spins around and the door slams in my damn face.

I wouldn't have minded getting her number for myself, but I know where she lives if I ever need that information.

I barely make it back into the elevator before Lang blows up my phone with even more threats that eventually give way to begging me to get her information.

If he can form a coherent text, then he was too sober for the shit situation he got himself into. My fist clenches around my phone, and I shove it into my pocket before I do something I'll regret.

I angrily jab the button for the lobby before tossing myself against the elevator wall. It's real damn hard to keep from texting my boss to demand to be reassigned.

Chapter Five

Shanna

I wobble into my apartment, completely satisfied for the first time in way too long. I'm a little confused about who I fucked and why he needs personal security. I might be tipsy, but I'm nowhere close to being past the point of being able to consent, which was exactly what I told Grumpy Daddy in the cab on the way here.

Saxon is one-thousand percent my type. He's got to be in his late thirties to early forties, based on the laugh lines and shadow of gray at his temples and in his beard. His dark hair is long on top, falling over his forehead, but the sides are shaved with a fade. Words don't describe how well the haircut works for him. There's a distinct line that frames the long hair following the curve at the top of his skull. I'm not sure, but I think the style is called an undercut. His face is covered in just enough stubble to accentuate his strong jaw and expressive eyes.

Bending down, I unhook my heel, and my vagina reminds me exactly how rough the other guy was. I probably could have asked for his number, but I don't know his name, which would have made the entire situation weird.

Saxon seemed disappointed, but more than that, it didn't seem like the two were even friendly.

I kick my heel aside and move to undo the other.

No, there's nothing to be sad about.

I had a very enjoyable one-night stand with a hot guy. It's better to leave it at that. I always end up disappointed when I

think there could be more than great sex.

Shaking my foot, the other heel falls next to the first. Not bothering with the lights, I take off for the kitchen. I know this place like the back of my hand.

The penthouse used to be two units back when the building was first constructed. When my family moved to the States, it's the first place we lived. My parents' pack had the walls torn down, turning it into one giant unit. It has enough bedrooms that it feels like two separate apartments, but they share one giant kitchen and a laundry room.

It was my parents' solution for keeping their teenagers far enough away that we didn't have to constantly hear them having sex, while still keeping us all in one place. We lived here during the two years our family house was being built, but Fitz and I moved into the two sides when we left the proverbial nest.

I yank my dress off over my head, tossing it into the laundry room without making sure it lands in the hamper. I'm about to have a couple of bites of ice cream and crawl into bed.

All in all, tonight was a success.

My phone rings, waking me out of a dead sleep. My entire body is relaxed. I stretch languidly and grab my phone.

It's Fitz. My brother has clearly forgotten that Chicago is an hour behind the East Coast. I still can't believe he and Tinley abandoned me to live in Maine.

"What?" I grunt, answering the call as politely as I can muster at just after nine in the morning.

"You sound as chipper as ever." Fitz laughs. "How are you feeling?" I hate the concern I can hear in his voice. He's not great at hiding his emotions. My entire family has been worried lately, but that just manages to ratchet up my guilt.

The next few minutes are spent doing my best to set him at ease. "...but I am confused why you're calling so early."

Fitz clears his throat, and I frown. He only does that when he's nervous. He's got a bad habit of doing it repeatedly. "So, I know Tinley mentioned that Northern Star has a show in Chicago in a few days."

"Did you guys want to stay here instead of at a hotel?" I offer, even though I have a feeling he's going to decline.

"No, our flight gets in pretty late."

"Okay, do you want me to have the driver pick you up at the airport? Maybe I'm still half asleep, but I have no idea what this is about."

"No, we'll get to the hotel on our own, but here's the thing." He laughs uncomfortably. "Carter and Jack are going to be sticking around Chicago until mid-January. They took the label up on some of the new smaller crossover shows. It's kind of ridiculous for them to blow a few hundred dollars a night on a hotel, especially since they'll be there for a month."

My jaw falls as I finally realize what he's saying. "You offered them your side of the penthouse?"

He sighs. "I did. Is that okay?"

It feels like my heart is trying to race right out of my chest as I roll over onto my stomach. My impulses are completely on board with having the two alphas hanging around, but my heat is supposed to hit at the beginning of January.

I've never liked having to share details of such a personal event with *my family*, so I always do my best not to.

It's fine.

Right?

Yeah, I can always kick them out and pay for their hotel for that week. Carter seemed especially worried about money during Thanksgiving.

"I might live here, but it's not just mine. It's completely fine," I tell him sincerely.

Fitz is a worrier. He puts the needs and well-being of everyone else ahead of taking care of himself. He's really a

great big brother. “Are you sure?”

“I’m not feeding them or anything, but we’re adults. I figure they’ll do their own thing, and I’ll do mine.”

“Okay, perfect. It makes me feel a lot better knowing you’ll have someone I trust watching your—”

I sputter, snorting a laugh. “Are you saying you trust Jack and *Carter*?”

“I guess I do,” Fitz says slowly. “It’s a big relief to know they’ll be around if you need them. At the very least, you’ll have someone close by who’s got your back. I’m sure they wouldn’t mind going with you to those bullshit fundraising events.”

I am going to murder my mother. She doesn’t know how to keep her mouth closed.

“I’ll see you in a couple of days,” Fitz says when I don’t say anything. “Oh, and Tinley says *hi*.”

My phone beeps against my ear, and I pull away to see our mom is calling. I’m sure she’s trying to do damage control, considering I specifically asked her not to mention all the details to Fitz and my dads.

I tell Fitz that I’ve got to go, along with my love for his omega, and switch to answer the call from my mom. She’s absolutely going to hear how unhappy I am about this.

My family meddles, it’s what they do. More accurately, my mother meddles. There’s very little success to be found when telling her no.

I’ve spent the last two days hiding in my apartment and trying to find a reasonable excuse to blow off this meeting.

Unfortunately, my mother wouldn’t be above dragging me out of bed.

So, here I am.

I’m not sure why I need to be at this meeting with her new husband, Donovan, and several of the owners of Ruined

Records, but here we are. The conference room sign on the door sends a shiver down my spine, and it's not the good kind.

I can recognize that I'm being ridiculous, so I do my best to refocus my attention.

It's still weird to me that my mom added an alpha to her pack after being a cohesive unit for more than twenty years. Then again, she's bonded to a bunch of former man-whore musicians, so it's probably best she keeps my dads on their toes. Donovan isn't a bad guy, and that made it considerably easier to welcome him to the family, but it's still strange.

Mom spots me and immediately pops out of her chair, beelining toward me. If I didn't know she's in her late forties, she could easily pass for somewhere in her thirties. We have the same olive skin tone, hazel eyes, and long, dark, naturally curly hair.

Unfortunately, she's several inches taller than I am. It made her the perfect height for modeling back in the day, but her passion has always been clothing design.

"You made it," Mom says, smiling brightly.

"You didn't give me much choice." I paste on a plastic smile to cover how uncomfortable I am.

"Donovan has something he'd like to talk to you about." Mom pulls me in for a hug. "It's an incredible opportunity. Don't say no just out of spite."

She steps back, and I run my hands down my dress. A family meeting shouldn't be so stressful, but Donovan has been part of the family for less than two years and he's the only face I recognize, aside from my mom.

"Shanna," Donovan says, coming over and pulling me in for a hug. "Thank you for coming."

"It's not like I had a choice," I whisper.

Donovan chuckles, guiding me over to the table. "Nonsense. It's a job opportunity, but not one that you're obligated to accept."

I frown as I take my seat. He meddled with my brother and Tinley. They're bonded now. Not that Fitz isn't a talented musician, because he really is, but I know Donovan placing him with Northern Star was a setup of epic proportions.

My forehead wrinkles as I try to determine what the hell is happening.

I'm not musically talented in the least. I took after my mother in more than just her looks, inheriting her love of fashion design and her skills to create edgy and provocative clothing.

"Rook Jacobs," one of the men says, standing and extending a hand over the table. Okay, so I actually do recognize him. He's the frontman for the band Ruin, but they're practically retired these days. "This is my father, Jamen Jacobs." He gestures to the older, way hotter version of himself sitting at the head of the table.

The Daddy vibes are strong from that one.

Don't get me wrong. Rook is hot too, but Jamen Jacobs looks the part of a retired rock star with long hair and tattoos. He's also got that commanding alpha vibe down pat. It's so rare for guys around my age to have that type of energy.

It's too bad he's married.

I bet his wife calls him "Daddy" when no one else is around.

I would.

I might not have recognized these guys by sight, but I've heard enough about them to be familiar with who they are. Jamen is one of Donovan's oldest friends. They used to play together in one of the most iconic rock bands of their generation. They opened Ruined Records twenty-something years ago, and the rest is history.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, but I'll be honest. I have no idea why my presence was requested." I glance between Rook and Jamen.

"You wanna take the lead on this?" Jamen asks his son.

Rook nods. “You may have heard that my dad and Donovan are passing on the reins of Ruined. We’re branching out and trying new things with the next generation.”

“Have you heard my mother sing? Because I can assure you, it’s not pretty, and I’m significantly less musical than even she is,” I deadpan.

I’m starting to get itchy.

I’m in a room with three alpha scents and my heat is coming up.

Rook and Donovan aren’t a problem, but Jamen smells delicious. I need to wrap this up and get the hell out of here, even if I look like a brat to accomplish my goal.

“Shanna,” Mom snaps. “Let the man speak.”

“We’re fully stocked with musicians,” Rook says, flashing me a devilishly handsome grin. Dammit, I’m pretty sure he’s bonded too. He’s actually getting more attractive by the minute. Although, his scent isn’t a match, which makes it easier to be around him than his father. “What we are in the market for is a capable designer.”

My head tilts as I look between Rook and Jamen. “You want me to design merchandise for your label?”

“We want you to help some of our artists with their style by specifically tailoring looks to the individual or band.” Rook leans back in his chair. “You can design pieces or put together outfits from other collections. We want to highlight their individual features but still have a cohesive feel for those musicians in a band. It’s a chance to attach your name to something you’re truly proud of.”

My cheeks burn as my head snaps to face my mother.

Attach my name to something I’m truly proud of?

I am going to kill her. She’s obviously been talking about me to more than just my brother, and I don’t like being ambushed in the least.

“Sweetheart, you know how much I love you,” Mom says, batting her dark eyelashes innocently as she drags me into the hallway outside the conference room.

“I’m almost twenty-three years old,” I hiss, trying to keep my voice down. “You can’t baby me forever.”

“You’re my baby. Of course, I can,” Mom says, planting a hand on her hip. “The contract with Pack Lewis is sound. I offered my lawyers an un-turn-downable bonus to find us an out, but it’s airtight.”

My stomach drops.

I look like an idiot, and now my family is having to save me, *again*. My eyes ache with tears that I can’t let fall. If I cry in front of my mom, then she’ll do something stupid. She’s actually a really great mom, even if I occasionally want to strangle her.

I deeply regret spewing all the details of what happened to my family when Blake, Matt, and Evan ghosted me at Thanksgiving. I was too hurt to come up with a feasible lie, and the truth slipped out.

Mom and her team of lawyers immediately went to work trying to find some way I could break the contract, but I’m locked in. Lewis Designs owns my debut collection, and I’m contractually obligated to advertise and promote it for them.

“So what?” I swipe a hand over my face, trying to figure out what she’s planning. “I’m supposed to still endorse my line with Pack Lewis but distract the public with my shiny new job designing apparel for rock stars?”

Designing used to be fun. Having a career as a fashion designer has never been my end goal.

Finding a loving and loyal pack is all I really want, but my self-confidence is pretty much destroyed.

“This isn’t about our family name,” Mom says, wrapping me up in her arms. “They hope to use you to boost their business, and they’ll get a small amount of press no matter what, but this gives you your power back. You flip them a monumental *fuck you* on your way out the door.”

“Fitz is fine with me working with rock stars?” I ask, tilting my head.

This will require a lot more one-on-one contact with not only his two bandmates, but whatever other musicians the label intends to put them together with. It may have been mentioned in the meeting, but once I realized my mom spilled the details of what’s going on in my personal life, it became nearly impossible to focus on the specifics.

I’m embarrassed, but more than that, I don’t want to deal with any of this.

“Your brother is knee-deep, settling into his bond with Tinley. He also doesn’t get a say in what you do with your life.” Mom’s head tilts. “Maybe your fathers and I should stay home?”

“Mother.” I sigh. “You’re not missing your world cruise with Donovan. You guys deserve to celebrate your bonding.” At first, she tried to push me into coming with them, but that wasn’t happening under any circumstances. It’s her chance to have a real honeymoon with my dads and Donovan. I have no interest in seeing that firsthand. And since I declined her invite, she’s found something to keep me busy while she’s gone. “I’ll be fine. Thank you for looking out for me.”

“Always, sweetheart.” She yanks me into her for another smothering hug. “Make those assholes regret ever thinking they could use you to accomplish their goals.”

God, I really want to be as strong as she is when I grow up. I truly couldn’t ask for a better female role model.

It’s about time I grow into my own. Until that happens, I think I’ll revisit a bad decision or two.

It’s highly unlikely I’ll run into the guy from the other night twice, but I’m still going to try. He was the perfect distraction, and he seemed to want me as much as I want him.

Chapter Six

Lang

Sneaking out of my own hotel room isn't the highlight of my day, but it has to be done.

My bandmate, Kage, comes with me, bitching the entire time when I make a pit stop at a hotel next to the club. "What the fuck, man? Couldn't we have grabbed a cab or even a fucking ride share?"

Cold air hits my face as we exit the hotel, and I shove the key card into my back pocket. It's a little fucking ridiculous that I needed to get a second hotel room at a different spot from where we're all staying, but I wasn't about to let Saxon interfere again.

I chuckle to offset my annoyance, but Kage knows me well enough that I doubt it works. "Fame has spoiled you."

"Yeah, probably," he grunts, zipping up his thick coat. "I still can't believe you let that dickwad stick around after everything. Now we're sneaking out like we're back in high school... Aren't you ready to kick his ass to the curb?"

Saxon is a major pain in the ass, but I don't employ him in the first place, so how am I supposed to fire him? The label hired him to deal with our overzealous fans and any boyfriends who pop up, trying to start shit because one of us fucked their girl.

I swipe at my lip. It's busted from a good punch Saxon got in when I tackled him the other night. He's a big motherfucker, but more than that, he's a goddamn machine. I'm tall as hell, but even I can admit that I'm a skinny fuck.

“He’s definitely overstepping his job responsibilities.” My head falls back as it shakes at the dark night sky. “What the hell am I going to do if she doesn’t come back?”

“She’s just one woman. They’re all replaceable.” Kage chuckles. “How many more nights do you plan to keep this up?”

I shrug.

It’s not my usual style, not by a fucking longshot.

I’ve never felt such a pressing need to be in a woman’s presence.

I’ve been back to Darkside the last two nights, but she didn’t show. Tonight is the third night, and I keep telling myself that, if she doesn’t show up then I won’t try again, but I know it’s bullshit.

There’s not much I haven’t tried to force Saxon into telling me where she lives. But every time I ask, he smirks, crossing his meaty arms over his chest and gloating like he wants me to lose my shit again. I don’t care if it makes me look like a stalker. Showing up to the club nightly isn’t fucking working. I’d sit outside her place and wait. If only that bastard would tell me where to find her.

“I’ll keep it up for as long as we’re in Chicago,” I say, glancing away from Kage’s shitty grin.

I’m sure everyone does think it’s funny.

Langdon fucking Hughes reduced to stalking a woman I spent less than an hour with.

I don’t care how it seems. I’m not too proud to admit when I’ve met my match, and the sugary sweet little omega is meant to be mine.

Kage abandons me within the first fifteen minutes of being in the club. He does give me a heads-up that he’s about to bounce with the couple he met, but I’m once again on my own.

It's not a problem for me to get into VIP, but there are so many people who clearly recognize me that it's making my skin itch.

Little Miss Sugary Sweet from the other night didn't seem to know who I am. Not that she didn't ogle me like she wanted my cock, because she totally did. She just didn't get that doe-eyed look people get when they realize I'm a rock star.

I lean against the glass half wall that gives a perfect view of the lower level dance floor. Time passes so fucking slowly, it's ridiculous.

"I'm so sorry to bother you..." a female voice says from my right. "Are you really Langdon Hughes? I'm a big fan."

My gut drops.

Fuck, I was hoping that, by showing up without security, everyone would assume I'm just a look-alike. What the hell am I supposed to do now?

"Uh, yeah." I flash a killer smile, hoping it helps her be more agreeable. "That's me, but I'm kinda undercover tonight. Can I sign something for you? Or take a quick picture? I'm waiting on someone, and she's not big on fame."

"Ohmigod, no way!" She pulls her phone out. "Are you finally settling down?"

My teeth grind together as I try to keep the smile from turning into a grimace. Well, that was the wrong move.

"Hopefully, if she'll put up with me." I lean close, tossing an arm around her shoulder as she positions her phone to take a selfie. The flash lights up the entire area, and I glance around. Now that one brave fan took a shot, everyone else will. The floodgates will officially open. "Hey, do me a favor. Tell your friends I'm just a look-alike, and I'll tell you a secret."

"Okay," she eagerly agrees.

"Kage was around here somewhere last time I saw him. No promises that he's still here, but..." I shrug.

I don't feel bad about misleading her. Sure, I'm a celebrity, but fuck, man. I need time without always having to be on for the cameras and the fans.

"Thank you!" she squeals, taking off toward the group of women watching us carefully.

I do an about-face, leaning over the railing and searching for my woman. There was a clear connection. I didn't imagine that. So, why the hell isn't she here, trying to find me, like I'm desperate to locate her?

I sigh and aim for the bar.

I need a fucking drink.

"Nice jacket," a familiar voice says.

My entire body jolts, but a smile crosses my face as a small hand slides up and under the back of my leather jacket.

I turn slightly sideways at the bar, and it is indeed Sugary Sweet. She's just as beautiful as I remember, but tonight, her eyes are rimmed in dark eyeshadow while her lipstick is a sparkly pink color I would kill to see around my cock.

"Fancy meeting you here." I smirk, studying her gorgeous hazel eyes.

She sets down her glass with her free hand as her hold on my lower back tightens. She curves around my front. "You know, it's been a long day. So long, in fact, that I can't even force myself to lie. I came hoping to run into you again."

Her face gets close to mine, but she doesn't kiss me. It's something we barely got to do last time.

I tilt my head, capturing her mouth. Plush lips gently part as my tongue swipes against them. She tastes sweet, like pineapple and coconut.

I growl into her mouth as she whimpers into the kiss. I finally drop my glass and that hand falls to her hip to pull her between my spread legs as I fully face her. My other hand slides into her thick hair, giving it a little tug because she

really liked that the other night. Well, before she got too loud and I had to cover her mouth, but that was seriously hot too.

My cock hardens against my thigh as I remember the way her cunt locked down on my shaft. I've never been with an omega, not until her. I wasn't prepared for how intense it would be when she started milking my dick in waves. I barely had the presence of mind to keep from slamming my knot inside her, but that would've fucked up the efficacy of the condom.

I still don't know her fucking name, and it's bothering me.

"Will you dance with me?" she whispers against my lips as we pull back.

I grin like a total love-struck weirdo. "Yeah, sweetness. Let's do it."

We abandon our drinks as she guides me to the dance floor with her hand wrapped in mine.

"Do you come here often?" she asks as I pull her closer with my hand on her ass. "Is that why you've got a mob of women constantly glaring, like they want my head on a silver platter?"

I snort, shaking my head. "I've only been here a few times. Maybe they just want to fuck me."

She laughs. "Yeah, I can see it. Unfortunately for them, they'll have to wait until I'm done with you."

My hand digs into the bottom of her ass cheek as I pull her firmly against my thigh. "I tried to get your information from Saxon, but he wouldn't tell me a single thing about how to find you."

"Aww, it's kind of sweet that you wanted it, but keeping things anonymous makes everything more interesting. Don't you think?"

I tilt my head down, studying her. "There is something to be said for a touch of the unknown, but I don't like the thought of not seeing you again."

“Did you come back tonight, hoping to run into me?” Her nails run over my chest and down, following my sternum.

My head falls toward the ground as it shakes, but I’m pretty sure the smile on my face gives me away. “And last night and the night before that.”

“You know, some might find that creepy, but I’ve had one too many people play games lately. Keep the honesty coming. It’s a nice change of pace.” She stretches up to kiss me, so I make sure to meet her halfway.

I’m far from drunk off the two drinks I had while waiting for her to show up, but her pheromones have an effect on my system that I’ve never experienced before. It’s like being high on the best weed I’ve ever smoked, but somehow being completely mentally clear.

Is this what all alphas feel when around a compatible omega? If so, it’s no fucking wonder we lose our damn minds and end up bonded within days or weeks.

I rake my teeth over her lower lip as she pulls back. She lets out a sexy little moan, and my head darts around, making sure no other alphas are close. I don’t want anyone hearing her sounds, which is so fucking random, I actually rear back.

“Are you okay up there?” she asks, licking her puffy pink lips. Thick, dark, wavy hair falls around her shoulders as she quirks a perfectly manicured eyebrow.

“Yeah, I’m good. I was just thinking how little we can do in the middle of Darkside. Want to get out of here with me?”

Chapter Seven

Shanna

I stare up at the guy whose name I still don't know. His leather and tobacco scent is so thick it makes my chest warm and fuzzy.

Stupid omega impulses.

They don't seem to understand this is how we end up sold at an omega auction, never to be seen again. If this guy is one of the people who lures omegas, I'll bet he's the most prolific one.

"What about the bathroom from the other night?" I ask as he quirks a bushy eyebrow.

"I'd really like to take my time with you. Spend a while actually devouring your slick little cunt. You barely let me get started last time." The cocky grin that crosses his face makes my cheeks feel hot.

That's because I was more than ready to go before he ever hit his knees. There's also the fact that it's kind of embarrassing to be literally dripping slick before even really getting started. Most alphas I've been with have had no real experience with omegas, meaning it comes as a shock to them. He didn't seem bothered, but it made me a little self-conscious.

"You're not going to sell me into sex slavery or something, right?" I ask. His face turns from sexual heat to confusion real quick. Disgust comes a half a second later. "I'm not accusing you of anything, but the first thing they teach women is not to allow yourself to be taken to a secondary location."

“Jesus Christ, that’s fucking crazy that you even have to worry about shit like that. Do you want to take a picture of my driver’s license and send it to a friend, or like, email it to yourself?” he offers.

I snort, shaking my head. That would blow his anonymity out of the water. “I think I’ll trust you.”

“Good, you should. I don’t want you to worry, though.” He grins, leaning down to capture my mouth as his hands guide me to grind over his thigh. He pulls back, and I follow his mouth. “I may have rented a room across the street. This way, you don’t even have to leave the block. Too forward?”

“Not at all. Let’s go,” I say before I can stop myself.

My back hits the mattress as he tosses my dress to the side. I’m full-blown hazy, if not about to get completely lost to the fog. This alpha’s scent is potent in a way I don’t know how to fight. Hell, I don’t even really want to. We’re highly compatible. There’s no denying that.

My head rolls around as he yanks off his leather jacket, dropping it over the chair next to the bed before kicking off his boots. If he doesn’t hurry, then I’m going to start begging, and even in the low light, I can see how glassy his eyes are as he works his belt open. He lost the beanie at some point, and his thick brown curls fall around his forehead. He sees me watching, and his face breaks into a grin that makes his dimples pop.

Oh damn, this might be a problem. His bone structure, combined with the stubble, makes him dangerous, but the dimples take him to an entirely different level.

I slide a hand down my stomach and into the waistband of my panties.

He growls, pulling his shirt off with a hand at the back of his head. “Your scent has my head majorly fucking foggy. How long until your heat is supposed to hit?”

“A couple weeks.”

“Do you always perfume for weeks leading up to it?” he asks, kicking out of his jeans. He climbs over me in just his boxer briefs and, strangely, his socks.

My eyes squeeze shut as his warm skin pushes against mine. “My scent always gets sweeter and thicker, but no. I usually don’t start perfuming until a week or even a few days before it starts.”

I rake my nails down his back as he kisses and sucks my neck.

He holds himself up on a forearm and slides a hand between us. “So, what you’re really saying is I make you all hot and bothered?”

I laugh. He’s kinda cheesy to the point it might be better if he didn’t speak. I mean, he’s stupidly hot and stacked with lithe muscles, but he can ruin it all if he’s not careful.

An embarrassing moan escapes as he pushes against my clit over the lace of my panties. I wrap my fingers in his thick curls and pull his mouth up to mine. His tongue slides around mine as I spread my legs wider, trying to encourage him to grind against me.

He pulls back from the kiss, getting close to my ear. “If you want me to suck on your clit, all you need to do is ask.” He pinches my hood and the pressure feels amazing, but he immediately goes back to sliding his fingers up and down my lower lips. “Or better yet, you could beg.” My forehead wrinkles. He was much more efficient at getting the job done the other night. His hand leaves my core to yank the cups down on my bra. My tits pop out and he groans. “How did I forget about these?” He licks over my nipple, making me arch toward him as my hold tightens in his hair. “You’ve got incredible tits,” he murmurs, switching to the other breast.

“And you’ve got an impressive dick. How about we get to the part where you shove it inside me?” I nod wildly.

It sounds like a solid plan to me.

A great plan of action.

If he’d only get to it.

He smiles around my nipple, flicking his tongue in fast movements that make my feet bounce against the mattress. “Are you always so impatient? Fuck, Sugary Sweet, you smell so damn slick.”

“I am, but I’m not fond of any nickname that includes *sugar*.” I slide my hand between us and stretch, trying to reach his cock.

“Sweetness, it is.”

“That works,” I gasp as my fingers wrap around the head of his shaft. I bite my lip to hold back the ridiculous begging that wants to escape. His dick is so thick, it’s impossible to wrap my fingers around it fully, but I give it a few jerks. I run my thumb over the sticky pre-cum soaking his boxer briefs. My impulses ache to taste him, but that’s not going to happen. “I need you inside me.”

“I want that too,” he growls, crawling down my body.

He trails licking kisses over my ribs and down my stomach. They make my nipples tighten painfully as I tremble.

His mouth is just so hot and wet.

It’s incredible.

He settles on the floor on his knees, yanking off my panties and pulling me down until I hang off the edge of the bed. He tosses my underwear aside and brings my legs to rest on his shoulders. His eyes sparkle as he stares at my pussy.

“You’re not just glistening. You’re actually dripping for me. It makes me feel like a fucking king.” His warm breath fans over my clit as he shoves two fingers inside me. There’s no resistance, and that makes my face flame even worse than his words. His tongue slides over my clit, making me moan. “You taste like sugary extra sweet pineapple. It’s crazy. Your pussy is officially my new favorite dessert.”

He goes from teasing flicks to tantalizing licks to straight-up burying his face in my cunt. It’s embarrassing that I can hear how wet I am, but that fades as my pleasure builds.

I ramble and beg like an omega lost to the fog. It doesn't take long until my feet are bouncing against his back as I come around his thick fingers.

My entire body lights with pure bliss, and I moan way too loudly. My hand lands in his hair again, giving him a tug once I start to come back to reality, but he just keeps licking. "Nah, this pussy is *mine*." His low growl echoes around the room as I tremble. "You can come on my tongue another few times. Can't you, sweetness? You want to be a good little fuck doll. Don't you?"

I freaking convulse as he goes back to lapping at my clit. He doesn't give up until I've come twice more. My entire body is languid and sleepy, but my hormones won't settle until he fucks me.

Biology is complicated with alphas and omegas. Condoms can only do so much, which means this has to be good, old-fashioned sex. No knotting without an extremely recent checkup and those test results in hand.

"Come on. No more teasing. Fuck me, please. I need you." It's nearly impossible not to ask for his knot, but I continue to remind myself that we can't go there.

"You want my cock?"

"Yes!"

"Good, because I want to watch your pussy swallow up every inch." He shoves down his boxer briefs, kicking out of them as he prowls over me. His tip bounces around my thighs, and a low growl escapes as he captures my mouth. Running his fingers down my dripping core, he kisses the hell out of me. His chest brushes against my oversensitive nipples, making me shiver.

"You need a condom," I whisper against his lips. "Now."

"Condom." His head shakes. "Right. Jesus Christ, I'm too far gone to your pheromones. That never even crossed my mind. That's seriously fucking concerning." He hops up, making his thick shaft bounce as he aims for his jeans. My impulses are terrified that he's about to leave, which rationally

seems highly unlikely. But my eyes still ache like I might burst into tears, so I use my feet and forearms to scoot back on the bed until I hit the pillows. “You’re so damn beautiful.” He knee walks up the bed and lies down next to me. “Want to ride me, sweetness?”

I nod, sitting up and finally unhooking my bra. It falls to the mattress as I climb over his lithe frame. All omegas have curves. It’s a caveat of our designation, but I know I’m on the slender side. He doesn’t seem to mind as his gaze rakes down my form. His hand lands on my lower back, and he pulls me down for a frantic kiss that makes his shaft jump.

My teeth scrape over his lower lip before I push up until I’m kneeling again and guide him to my opening. His chest heaves as his hands land on my ass.

It’s incredibly hot the way his jaw clenches as he stares at my cunt.

I lower myself down onto his thick cock.

His tattoos move as he leans up on his forearms.

“Goddamn, I love watching your tits bounce. Have I mentioned how much I love them? Because I do. The piercings are hot as *fuck*.” He cups both breasts, running his thumbs over my nipples. “You’ve got a whole lot of dick left to take. You better put some effort into it.” The lazy grin that crosses his face makes my core throb.

My nails dig into his pec as I bounce, but the stretch of him inside me is extreme. It’s not more than I can handle, but it’s a lot. He moves to cup my hips and ass as he helps pull me up and drop me down on his throbbing length. Every inch of my skin feels hypersensitive, even where my hair falls around my shoulders.

“Why don’t you try planting your feet on the bed?” I suggest. “That way, you can force more of you inside me.”

“There’s a very good reason why I wanted you to take the lead,” he says, leaning up until he’s close to my ear. “Last time, I was too rough. My instincts took over. You smell even sweeter tonight. I’m afraid, if I’m not careful, I’ll snap.”

A shiver runs down my spine as I leak around his length. That doesn't sound terrible. "I'm actually okay with that."

"You want me full-blown feral, fucking you like an animal?"

"I'm not opposed to it," I moan as he teases my clit. The next thing I know, I'm on my back while he hovers over me.

His head shakes, like he's trying to force away the fog. He slams so deep, the air seems to evaporate from my lungs. My hand flies to push back against my abdomen, where his crown feels like it's trying to push through from the inside out. He pulls back and thrusts in deep again. Terribly embarrassing sounds spill from my lips.

"Is that the sweet spot?"

"Yes." I don't know if it's even coherent, because my voice sounds slurred to my own ears. "Harder!"

He falls on top of me as my body tries to lock down on his knot. "That throws me off every goddamn time. Do you know what I'd give to be able to slam my knot inside you?" I bring my own hand up, covering my mouth as he works me to unimaginable heights. "I'd commit murder to be able to come inside you with nothing between us. Feel your slick drip around my bare cock. Fuck my cum into your belly, and when it drips out, I'll push every drop back in. *Where it belongs.*" The low, growly timbre of his voice makes me beg around my fingers. "Nah, I wanna hear you moan." He pulls my hand away.

My head shakes as I thrash, biting my lip to keep from asking for things I don't really want.

Omega impulses are the worst.

They don't understand logic.

His pheromones are so thick and mine thump in response, flooding the air. My hips wiggle from side to side, trying to force him deeper. His swollen knot teases at my opening, only to be stolen away as he pulls out to thrust back in. He works his pelvis against my clit like he knows exactly how to make me moan.

“I should have packed more than three condoms,” he growls, nipping at my lips. He seals his mouth to mine as he plows into my G-spot just right. I come violently. It’s not a slow buildup, but an explosion that rocks through my system so viciously my vision goes spotty. “Scream for me, sweetness.”

It’s not like I could stop myself if I tried. He shoves his tongue into my mouth for a frantic kiss as his muscles coil tight with tension. He thrusts deep a few more times, fucking me through my orgasm before his entire body freezes. The look on his face takes my damn breath away as I work my hips, doing my best to grind over him as he comes.

“Do you have any clue how badly my teeth are aching?” he growls as his cock swells impossibly hard. “My impulses scream that I need to bite you, so you can never escape. Good fucking God, you’re soaked. My balls, my knot, half my fucking thighs are soaked in your slick.”

I nod as my nails dig into his muscular shoulders. I’m a little obsessed with the way his forearm frames my head as his weight pushes into me even deeper. The groan he lets out sounds so satisfied that my impulses light up.

I *really* like that I can rock his world the way he just did mine.

Chapter Eight

Shanna

My knees feel like pudding as I wobble toward the front of the hotel. My family employs several drivers, but my current state of looking freshly fucked, combined with the ridiculous time of almost four in the morning, leads me to pull up a ride share app.

The lobby doors open and close as I stand around, watching for my driver. A couple comes in, looking even more trashed than I feel.

“You clearly haven’t learned a damn thing in the last few nights.” Saxon’s low, gravelly voice makes me jump. My phone nearly goes flying as I stumble to catch it, but the big guy takes a few steps, ending up directly in front of me. He tucks my phone back into my hand with a reassuring pat. “At least you’ve got a coat tonight.”

My head tilts as I study his ruggedly handsome face. Saxon doesn’t fit the mold for being classically attractive, but there’s something about the whole package that just works for him.

“Are you here for...” I frown as I realize I don’t even know the guy’s name—*still*, after two nights and multiple orgasms. “Whatever his name is.”

Saxon curses under his breath, eyeing the check-in desk with apprehension or possibly distrust. “I’m not here for Lang.”

Lang? Huh, even his name is sexy. “Don’t you work for him?”

“I do, but I stood around in the Chicago winter to see if he found you again.” Saxon yanks off his glove and pulls my hand over before helping me into it. I shove my phone into my dress pocket as he motions for the other.

“But you know where I live,” I remind him.

“I sure do. That’s not the point. The point is, I couldn’t fall asleep because I was too busy worrying about this exact thing happening.” He repeats the process with the other glove as my stomach flip-flops at his words. “You need a keeper.”

“Don’t tempt me,” I say, cracking a tired smile. “Oh well, might as well say it—are you applying for the position?”

“I wouldn’t test me right now, vixen. You really wouldn’t like the consequences of your actions if I was the one looking after you.” He pulls off his beanie, yanking it down over my out-of-control waves. “Let’s get you home.”

Saxon is an excellent buddy for late-night trips home. He lets me lean against his shoulder on the short ride, and he’s tender about waking me when I accidentally fall asleep.

“You really do worry me, Shanna,” Saxon says as we make it into the lobby of my building. “Whatever you’re going through isn’t going to be fixed by Lang. I can assure you of that.”

“I’m not trying to fix anything.” I take off toward the elevator. “It’s not me that’s the problem,” I mutter under my breath before I can stop myself.

“What is the issue, then?” Gripping my arm gently, he spins me to face him before backing me against the nearby wall. He studies my face as his eyes crinkle at the edges. Yeah, he’s got to be close to forty years old. That’s a significant age gap, but it only makes him more attractive. “I can’t help you if you don’t talk to me.” His jaw flexes, tight with tension as he runs his fingers over my cheek.

My breath catches as my eyes widen. We don’t know each other. He doesn’t owe me anything, and he certainly shouldn’t

care about fixing my problems.

“I’m fine. More than fine, really.” Using my back and ass, I push off the wall.

He slides to the side a step, blocking my progress. “You’re closer to your heat than you were a few days ago. What are you doing? You shouldn’t be out and about alone, especially in the middle of the goddamn night.”

“It’s very sweet that you’re worried about my safety, but it’s really not any of your concern.” I smile to offset some of the sting of those words.

“It needs to be someone’s responsibility. You’re obviously not taking the risk seriously. Why don’t you have security? Even one full-time specialist would make someone with the wrong kind of interest think twice.” His thumb runs over my bottom lip, and it takes everything in me not to lick it. I do find myself nuzzling into his wrist, though. “Is it a financial issue? The company I work for is—”

I shake my head. He doesn’t get it. I’m finally doing all the wild and crazy things I didn’t do when I first turned twenty-one. “I like my freedom.”

“That’s what I’m saying. You won’t have much if some asshole kidnaps you. What about a pack? A couple of alphas would likely have the same effect.”

I sigh, glancing away. “Packs never want me. Hell, alphas in general will line up to ride out my heat, but they never stick around past that.” My chest slams into his stomach as I try to push past him.

He finally steps back, allowing me to pass. “I’m pretty sure you’ve been hanging out with the wrong kind of alphas.”

I snort, aiming for the elevator as I unzip the small pocket I sewed into my dress to hold my key card and phone.

When it comes to why things don’t work out with alphas, there’s a common denominator—me.

Clearly, I’m the problem.

I guess I suck at being an omega.

I like to cuddle and nest. I'm a fan of big, growly alphas taking the lead.

What am I doing wrong? Why am I never good enough for anyone to want to build a life together?

I've never had self-esteem issues. Not until recently. Even with all the packs that didn't work out during prior heats, I always managed to stay positive.

My head shakes as I slam the button to call the elevator. Even with my head down, I feel Saxon's warmth at my back. The door opens, and I quickly bolt inside, moving to put my key in so it'll take us to the penthouse.

Saxon grabs the key before I can get it into the slot. "Answer me this. Are you always trying to build a future with guys like *Lang*?" He spits the name, making it pretty clear he doesn't think much of him. "I know women love the broken assholes who don't have the first clue how to treat them, but there's something to be said for loyalty and steady comfort."

I sigh, making a grab for my key. "I've tried it all. You name it, and over the last five years, I've spent a heat with a pack exactly like that."

His eyes narrow as his forehead wrinkles.

"Don't look at me like that!" I hiss. "Suppressants are awful on an omega's health. I've seen studies showing they're linked to depression and anxiety in long-term users. I'm not about to subject my body to that." Or I wasn't before getting really tired of constantly putting myself out there.

"I'm not judging you. I'm trying to figure out what kind of idiots you've been dealing with." He turns around, jamming in the key on the first shot before clicking the button for my floor. "You've had some shitty luck. I get that, but I've got to say I think it's leading you to make some pretty fucking poor choices. If you're not careful, you could rebel your way into a situation you're not prepared to get out of."

My eyes slide shut, and I nod, letting him know I hear what he's saying. I've always been fiery and opinionated, but I've never made such questionable choices until recently.

I get the point.

I really do.

Omegas go missing at a rate that's higher than any other designation. It's why family packs tend to keep their omega children close, even past the age of maturity. If they're not financially stable enough to provide security, then they often watch their adult children closely until the omega bonds and has a pack of their own to take up the mantle. It's majorly fucked up that it's come to that, but it's the reality of the world we live in.

"Independence is one thing, but more than that, the right group of people won't try to control you. They'll just keep you safe while you continue to be a beautiful but stubborn pain in the ass." His hand cups my jaw as he runs his thumb over my cheek. "Give me your number. If you need anything, or even if you want to meet up with Lang, then *I'll* come get you." He rolls his eyes. "I have no clue why anyone would want to be subjected to him repeatedly, but I'm willing to meet you in the middle."

"Okay, but I'll need your number too, then." I grab my phone out of my pocket and we exchange contact information.

I left my number on the little pad of paper on the desk in the hotel, but who knows if Lang will actually call. Alphas talk a big game when wrapped up in my pheromones, but they tend to disappear shortly after the haze clears.

The door pops open, but Saxon takes a step back to keep it open as he sends a text to make sure he entered it correctly.

I give him a sly smile.

Did he think I'd give him the wrong number?

"What did you enter mine under?" I grin, grabbing my key from the slot before sliding out past him. Pulling off his gloves and beanie, I hand them over.

"Vixen."

"That's fitting. I've got you set as *Daddy*." I give him a pat on the chest and stretch up on my tiptoes to give him a kiss on

his cheek. “Thanks for getting me home safely.”

I strip off my heels as soon as I make it inside the penthouse and quickly work on getting out of my clothes. I toss my jacket on the hook, pull my dress over my head, and drop my key card on the little table where I always leave it before taking off with my phone in hand.

The cool air feels incredible on my oversensitive skin.

Lang was passed out over most of the bed, and the last I saw my bra, it was lost in the blanket and sheets. As such, I called that a loss, even though it was one of my favorites. My panties completely disappeared because I did actually look for those before finally giving up.

Oh well, I was trying to escape quickly and quietly in case he woke up feeling differently than when he fell asleep. My heart is a little too fragile right now to handle another disappointment. It's way easier to replace undergarments than it would be to get over another rejection.

I chuck my dress in the laundry room on my way by, but my destination is the fridge. My mouth is dry. I clearly need to hydrate, and then my bed is calling my name.

My entire body buzzes with a warm, fuzzy feeling that I think might be contentment. It's strange for me to feel so relaxed these days. I've been struggling with insomnia, especially since I know I'm going to be facing Pack Lewis again in a few days for the first fundraising event.

There's something about Lang that calls to me, even if I can admit we'd probably be toxic if we actually got together. Either way, he's hot and good in bed. I'm not really in a place to consider anything serious right now, so he's actually kinda perfect for what I need him for. I'm not sure if I buy my own bullshit, but I'm trying hard to convince myself that I didn't make a big mistake by leaving before he woke up.

The tile floor is cool against my toes as I take the corner into the kitchen without flicking on the light.

My head tilts.

A low, whirring sound echoes out from the living room.

That isn't normal.

I spin around, and my jaw falls at the same second Jack catches sight of me. His mouth also falls open as he trips over the jump rope he's been using.

Holy fuck.

He's even more cut than I originally realized.

Also, I'm naked.

"Ohmigod!" I hiss, yanking an arm up to cover my tits. I completely forgot Fitz said his bandmates were coming tonight.

"Oh shit," Jack says, coming to a halt. His long hair falls around his face. It's slicked with sweat, just like his bare chest.

"Nice tits," Carter says, coming to a stop by the kitchen island. "Sorry to tell you this, but your vagina is also showing."

Since Jack is farther away, I figured maybe the island was hiding my bottom half.

I pull my other arm up to cover my girlie bits, using my phone to cover as much skin as possible.

Today was going so well...

"Don't stand there, staring. Give her your shirt, you jackass," Jack growls.

Carter smirks. "It's all sweaty, but sure." He pulls his long sleeve T-shirt off and swaggers over. "Arms up, Little Fitz."

My arms fly up, and he drops the massive shirt over my petite frame. Carter always smells like bergamot and citrus. He wasn't lying, because the shirt is saturated in his sweaty scent. It takes everything in me not to yank it up to my nose to inhale deep hits.

"You should be thankful it's us you ran into, not Fitz," Carter says, eyeing my hips or possibly my pussy. The shirt is

huge on me, but it only falls a few inches past my cunt. “That would have been horrifying.”

Yeah, it really would have.

My face heats for more than one reason. I did know they’d be in town, but Fitz hasn’t lived here for a year. “He told me they were going to stay in a hotel.”

Carter’s eyes move up to my breasts, and he bites his lip. “I missed the nips the first time, but are those nipple piercings poking through?”

“My tits are none of your concern,” I say with a huff, but he’s right. I’ve got dual nipple piercings in a cross. I briefly considered an X, but I preferred the way the balls look this way. And the stretchy shirt doesn’t hide them at all.

“They were going to head to a hotel, but they came to let us in. It’s late and they were tired from traveling,” Jack says, reminding me that I could have run into my brother just now. He comes closer with the jump rope tucked under his arm. “If it’s a problem, we can leave and head to a hotel.”

Carter scoffs. “Hotels aren’t cheap. It’s also like four or five in the morning.”

“We can still go if you don’t want us here,” Jack says, swallowing thickly. He keeps his blue eyes firmly locked with mine as he speaks. “I mean, we can go back to our rooms, at the very least.”

“Nope, it’s totally fine. I’m going to need you to pretend you never saw me looking like this, and you’re more than welcome to stay.” I give a tight smile, glancing between them.

“Uh, yeah, you got it,” Jack says.

“I’m a vault.” Carter crosses his arms over his tattooed chest, and it becomes difficult to think again. He’s got a happy trail of dark hair that leads into the band of his basketball shorts.

I shake my head, trying to clear thoughts of tackling him to the tile. His energy screams that he’s a cocky fucker for a reason.

My brother and Tinley are in the penthouse. That thought lights a fire under my ass. I spin around, head back to grab my shoes, and disappear into my bedroom without another word.

How mortifying.

Tinley tosses herself down on my bed early the next afternoon. The entire mattress shakes. “Well, you’re looking considerably rougher than I expected.”

I vaguely remember saying something similar to her when she broke up with her last boyfriend before going on tour with my brother. “You’re funny.”

“Late night? You weren’t here when we got in.”

“Yeah, I also forgot Carter and Jack would be here.” I grimace. Getting into all that seems like a terrible idea.

“It’s not a bad thing, right?” She laughs awkwardly.

I tilt my head, studying her carefully.

That’s one of her tells.

She’s usually up to something when she laughs all high-pitched and awkward like that. It’s how I originally realized she had a crush on my brother.

“They don’t really have anyone to spend the holidays with either...” She chews at her bottom lip, pausing as she thinks before finally going on. “Jack is great, like genuinely a nice guy—”

I quirk an eyebrow. “Are you trying to play matchmaker?”

Her head bobbles up and down before she can stop herself. “Your mom and I are in agreement that you guys should keep each other company for the holiday. I don’t want to gossip, but Jack has been down in the dumps since he came to Chicago to surprise Ava this past Valentine’s Day. Did you hear about that?” she asks, like she’s hoping I have, so she won’t have to explain it.

“No.”

“Just between us?”

“Of course,” I agree, because I have been wondering what happened there. The woman can’t have a single brain cell. Seriously, seeing him shirtless last night makes it clear there’s no other option.

“He thought they were dating, or I don’t know. He liked her, but she left while we were on tour, and then he came to visit her only to find out she was engaged—”

“She cheated on her fiancé with Jack?” I ask, leaning forward.

Her eyes get huge. “No, I think they were broken up and got back together after her hookup with Jack. I misjudged that situation. I really thought she liked him too.” Her forehead wrinkles like it does when she thinks she’s said the wrong thing. “That’s not the point. The point is, he’s a solid guy and he’s clearly ready to settle down.”

“I’ve tried that before.” I sigh, shaking my head. “I’m seriously considering going on suppressants after this heat.”

Unfortunately, they have to be started immediately following the end of a heat to be effective, like how a beta is told to start a new pack of birth control lined up with their period.

“Oh, hell no,” she hisses, jabbing a finger at my chest. “Those awful men do not get to push you into doing something you’ll regret. You know how bad they are for your system.”

I blow air through my lips, nodding my agreement. “Yeah, but I really don’t know how many more times I can keep doing this.”

“You’re smart, talented, outgoing, fun, compassionate. Those guys weren’t even close to being on your level. It’s a blessing that they showed you their true colors before locking you to them for life.” She pats my thigh. “I know it’s hard, but that’s why your mom and I filled your house with rock stars for Christmas. Surprise!” She giggles like a fiend.

“And you think Fitz would be totally fine with me hooking up with his bandmates?” I ask incredulously.

Tinley and my mother are out of their minds. Love is clearly making them too optimistic for my own good.

“We all noticed the chemistry between you and Carter at Thanksgiving...” She shrugs. “And I did go out of my way to remind Fitz how incredibly hypocritical it would be for him to have anything to say about you and Carter, when you’ve been so amazing about accepting us.”

“Thank you,” I tell her, grabbing her hand and giving it a squeeze. “But I’m a hell of a lot more rational than Fitz is when he’s upset about something.”

“Well, I believe he’d get over it pretty quickly.” She gives me a wide smile. “He’s your brother. He can either get on board or...” She pauses, then jabs a finger at the ceiling. “I’ll make him sleep on the couch until he comes to his senses.”

“I love you,” I tell her, glancing away.

I really fucking miss her now that she’s living in another state, but I keep that to myself because she’s finally as happy as she deserves to be.

“I love you too.” She hops up, giving me a goofy grin. “I know Carter can be...” She blows her lips together. “A lot, but he’s a completely different guy since he’s been sober. He reminds me a little of a lost puppy. He just needs someone to adopt him, house train him, and give him love. If you do that, I think he could make for a solid companion.”

I snort, shaking my head. “I’m sure he’d love to hear that you compared him to—”

“No.” She jabs a finger at my chest. “That part is just between us. Now, if nothing else, I know you’ll be surrounded by alphas I trust.” One eye squints closed as she raises a hand, wobbling it from side to side. “Mostly trust, but that’s okay because they’re hot and your heat is just around the corner. They’re also the perfect dates to every event Pack Lewis forces you to.”

“That part totally came from my mom.”

“Yeah.” She chuckles. “It really did.”

Chapter Nine

Carter

“The more I think about it, the more I feel like this is a setup,” I whisper to Jack as I lace up my boots. We’re about to head on stage to perform, but my head isn’t in the game. “Are they testing me? Is this a test? Are you in on it?”

Jack laughs, swiping his ridiculously long hair back from his face. “Shanna is getting to you.”

I scoff, moving to lace the other shoe. “She’s fucking beautiful, but so are half of our fans.” My attempt at deflection doesn’t work. She’s abso-fucking-lutely throwing me off.

“It’s like the perfect storm of temptation. I’ll give you that.” Jack’s wrist bands slide around his arm as he grins over at me. “We’ve got what? Seven or eight days until our year is up?”

My eyes cut to the side.

Celibacy isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, but whatever. I’m trusting the program enough that I gave up the one thing I think I might actually enjoy sober. Well, outside of performing. “Five, four once we hit midnight tonight.”

Jack laughs, shoving himself out of the chair next to me. “I knew you’d be counting down.”

The fucker, he thinks he’s funny.

He is not, but women love him.

It’s like they can sense he’s a hopeless romantic. I once saw him write a chick a legitimate poem. It was even

handwritten, and he gave it to her with flowers and champagne. Too fucking bad she was only using him to get back at her ex-fiancé.

It worked.

Poor Jack is three for three.

Every woman he dates gets immediately engaged... To someone other than him. The first time it happened, we hazed him about it pretty hard, but now it's just kinda sad.

Fitz jogs over and comes to a stop next to the two of us. They've got us all in full punk glory, which is ridiculous. It's freezing outside, and they've got us in tank tops and ripped skinny jeans. It'll be fine once the stage lights start blaring, but for the moment, it's cold.

"I just wanted to talk to the two of you before we get out there," Fitz says.

"Sure, what's up?" Jack turns to face him, pasting on a good-natured smile. Like we both didn't almost pounce on his little sister last night.

I don't think Jack got close enough to realize it, but sweet Little Fitz had definitely been drinking before she made it in. She also smelled like straight-up sex.

My cock made it its mission to act a fool all night long. I barely slept a fucking wink. It's like dangling a perfectly cooked steak in front of a starving man.

"We're heading out as soon as the show is over, but I wanted to check in. You've each got a key to the penthouse, and Shanna is good with you guys staying." Fitz shoves his hands into his pockets. He's already gone over this twice today, and it's making me suspicious. "It feels like an asshole move to mention it, but she's my little sister." He sighs heavily. "She hasn't been herself since Thanksgiving. Carter knows what I mean."

"I barely know her." This feels like dangerous ground. I'm pretty sure she didn't mention our food coma holiday movie marathon to him because he never tried to punch me. "But yeah, she was bummed at Thanksgiving."

“Just keep her busy. I know the clothing design stuff for Ruined will help, but if I try to hire full-time security for her, she will shit a golden brick.” Fitz shrugs. “Shanna has always been independent. If I try to stick around just to keep an eye on her, it will also get ugly.”

“We’ve got this,” Jack says, clapping Fitz on the shoulder. “But you said yourself, she’s got a heat coming up...” I think he’s hoping Fitz will tell us what the fuck we’re supposed to do when that happens. Personally, I’ve been wondering how we’re supposed to handle that, and some direction would be nice.

“Jesus Christ, don’t remind me,” Fitz says. “Listen, I get that she’s an adult. I don’t know what I’m even asking. Don’t let her make sad choices? She’s hurt, and I’m worried it’s influencing her more than she’ll admit. Just make sure any guys she’s around don’t give off questionable vibes.”

“Make sure they pass vibe check. Got it,” Jack says.

“Only let trustworthy guys bang your sister,” I say, ducking in case he decides to punch me. “I hear you loud and clear.”

Fitz tracks my movement with his fists clenched at his sides.

“I’ll punch him for you if you’d like,” Jack says earnestly.

Fitz gives me an unimpressed glare. “You’ve got a sister. I’m assuming you understand the assignment.”

“Yeah, but I had to give you a fair amount of shit about it. That’s what friends are for.” I laugh, shaking my head.

“It’s time,” Ramsey calls from the doorway.

“Let’s do it.” Jack claps me on the back, swaggering off.

Fitz is still rocking on his boots, looking entirely too pensive.

A dangerous smile crosses my face. I know exactly how to get him out of his head.

“Man, are you having flashbacks to last time?” I ask, referencing the time he got pegged in the face with a pair of panties. We’re all firmly in agreement about never letting him live that down. He shook them off, and they ended up hooked around the neck of his guitar for the rest of the performance. It was priceless. “You’ve gotta get better about ducking and weaving.”

Fitz snorts, shaking his head.

I clap him on the back, nodding to the exit. “Let’s rock the house down.”

Sometimes I wonder if it counts as being sober when I get slammed with the high that comes from being on stage. There’s nothing like it, but I’ll admit, I got distracted by the painkillers. Once the withdrawal passed, the cravings turned mostly manageable, but I’m still nervous about what happens when the tendonitis and carpal tunnel flare up.

Back before Warrick ever got shanked, I was suffering in silence.

Well, until I brought it up to the tour doctor.

To this day, I know it was a mistake admitting how much trouble my wrists were causing. They patched me up with opiates and a consult with an orthopedic surgeon, who said things I didn’t want to hear. Before too long, the surgeon pushed for surgery on my wrist, but I couldn’t deal with that kind of downtime.

It would’ve been the end of my career.

He eventually stopped refilling my prescriptions, but all it took was a few conversations with our manager’s assistant, and suddenly, the meds were back online.

At least for a while.

I can’t decide if I thought it was on the up-and-up because it’s what I wanted to believe, or if I was already too far gone to my addiction to care. That’s the wild thing about opiates—they aren’t just a mental addiction. They also cause a physical

dependency. By the time I got tired of the bullshit cycle of constantly running out and having to re-up, I couldn't quit without getting sick. At that point, there was no looking back.

My wrist twinges painfully as Warrick and I end up back-to-back for our solo. Based on the screams, the women in the audience love it, but the pulsing discomfort gets so intense that I feel like I might miss a chord. My eyes stay firmly on my hands as we play through the intricate pattern.

Fitz sings the hell out of the song. There was a time before I abused my body that I likely could've taken over for Warrick as lead singer, but by the time he was injured, I was too strung out to do much, other than coast through the end of our contract.

Fitz is meant to be with us. I hold no ill will or hard feelings. It's all water under the bridge at this point, and truthfully, I'll be lucky if my hands hold out long enough for me to pay off the last few hundred grand I owe on my parents' house. Fitz wraps his hand around the microphone, leaning toward the crowd as the women shriek.

Warrick spins away as I take over backing up Fitz on the extro. Tinley and Shanna are at one of the high-top tables right in front of the stage. There's decent security tonight, but I watch Warrick and Fitz continually check in on them. I'm sure Ramsey is too, but he's behind me on the stage.

I bounce on my knees, leaning back to strum my guitar. My veins are poking out more than normal, and I vaguely wonder if that's a bad sign. Oh well, I'll ice my hands as soon as I get out of here.

Shanna bites her lip, studying me as I play. I make sure to shoot her a wink, tossing my head back to get the hair out of my eyes. She's fucking stunning with her long brown curls falling around her slender frame. The way her puffy lips fall open, gently parting as she watches with rapt attention, is highly dangerous to my self-control.

I saw her bare tits last night with her slick little cunt taunting me with everything I want but can't have.

And I actually clothed her instead of fucking her on the kitchen floor.

I'm a legitimate goddamn saint these days. Seriously, these assholes really need to start giving me more credit.

Chapter Ten

Shanna

Is forbidden fruit actually a thing? It has to be, right? My entire body subconsciously leans forward as I lick my lips, watching Carter play the hell out of his guitar. My panties get more than a little damp when he winks, biting his thick lower lip like he fully understands the effect he's having on my body.

The song comes to an end, and Fitz takes over introing their last song, but my eyes are glued to Carter's chest as it heaves. Ramsey counts them down on the drums, but I'm still transfixed.

There's no doubt about it; performing is a workout. Carter's pecs stretch that ridiculous tank top to its limits. The sides are ripped all the way down to his dark jeans, and even his obliques flex as he moves. I'm about to start perfuming if I'm not careful.

My gaze slides to Jack. He stares down at his bass with a heart-stoppingly sexy look on his face. His jaw flexes as he plays with his edgy blond hair falling over half his profile.

I lean over, slapping Tinley's thigh. "For the love of God, catch a picture of Jack. Otherwise, I might have to steal your camera and grab one myself."

She laughs, pulling her camera up. I'm not sure what she's doing, but she eventually pops out of her seat and meanders closer to the stage. The security guys would be on the rest of us in two seconds flat, but they all know that she's employed by Ruined Records as their part-time photographer.

The show would be so much better if Fitz wasn't up there, ruining the male perfection currently on display. My eyes stay on the stage as Tinley snaps pictures, hopefully grabbing one of Jack looking like *that*.

I feel my nipples tighten, poking through the fabric of my thin dress as he tilts his head. He stares straight at me, a slow smile spreading across his face.

Am I hyperventilating?

My chest rises and falls in rapid pants as my abdomen cramps almost painfully.

Panic rips through my system. I'm familiar enough with heats to know the signs of a wave coming on. I'm not sure if my face gives away my terror, but when I look up, Carter is watching me with his brow furrowed.

My hand falls to my lower stomach to push back against the pulsing ache, but I plaster on a fake smile. From the concerned way Carter studies me, I'm guessing it doesn't manage to set him at ease.

Tinley comes back, taking the seat next to mine. Her nose twitches. The music is so loud, it vibrates through the floor and even against my feet, but when she gasps, I swear I can hear it.

Or maybe I'm picking up on her worry.

Omeegas are very sensitive to the emotions of others.

She leans over, getting really close to my throat. "Oh, crap." Her cold hand wraps around my wrist, and she yanks me out of my seat while the guys are still playing their last song.

I almost expect the security guys to tackle us, but we've both got badges. Tinley raises hers and beelines for one specific security guy. He doesn't even glance at her lanyard before nodding to the other guy, who opens the door that leads backstage.

"Is everything all right?" the big guy asks as soon as we're behind closed doors.

“Yeah, Steve. All good. Everything is absolutely fine. Where’s the closest bathroom?” Tinley asks, bouncing on her knees.

The echoing sounds of the guys playing are still so loud, it’s difficult to think. There’s an area about ten feet in front of us to the left that leads to the backstage area. It was one of the options they gave us on where we preferred to watch the show.

My face feels hot as my entire body pulses with a wave of tingling heat. This is not okay. I’m supposed to have two and a half weeks left before my heat hits. It’s not an exact science, but it shouldn’t be this far off my calculations.

“I’m guessing down on the right.” Steve chuckles, gesturing down the long hallway. “I no longer scope them out at every venue, but that would be my best guess.”

“Come on,” Tinley grunts, yanking me down the hall. “You smell ripe. No offense, but yeah, it’s not my favorite smell.”

“Thanks,” I deadpan as the men’s room sign comes into focus. Just past that is the women’s room.

“I guessed correctly,” Steve says, making me jump. I didn’t realize he was following us.

“Okay, you get in there and…” Tinley frowns. “I actually have no idea. I’ll come and try to help.” She shoves through the door to the bathroom, dragging me in behind her. “Rinse off or something.” She nods to the sink while unzipping her small purse. “I’ll dig around for supplies.”

I don’t know what kind of supplies she means, but I shake out of her grip and head for one of the stalls.

Being an omega is mortifying at times like this. Not nearly as embarrassing as when I finally sit down on the toilet to clean myself up.

I’m soaked.

Just from ogling Jack and Carter.

This is so bad.

A pink and purple pad flies at my face, but it's the menstrual kind, and not one made specifically for omegas. It smacks me right in the forehead.

"I have body spray too, but I don't want to take out your eye if I miss," she says, sounding extremely serious.

I once again curse the universe for my biology while simultaneously thanking God for giving me a really amazing best friend.

Tinley rambles her plan while I use the bathroom and then do my best to rinse away my pheromones at the sink. It doesn't work, but at least it's something.

"Fitz can't know how quick your heat is coming. I like to think we're slowly warming him up to the idea, but there's no way he'd let Carter and Jack stay at the penthouse if he knew," she says as I finish wiping my neck with a handful of paper towels. "As soon as they get off stage, I'm going to make sure we leave."

My hands wrap around the cool porcelain of the sink as I look at her in the mirror. "Okay, thank you."

"No need for that. Come on, let's wait for them in the greenroom," she says before yanking open the door to the hallway.

We beat the guys to the dressing room, which she explains isn't unusual, since they often get caught by the press. The door flies open and slams into the wall, making me jump, but I quickly get back to pacing.

This is a big mess.

"Don't worry, I've got this," Tinley whisper-hisses.

"What happened?" Warrick growls, pulling her into his arms. "You know better than to just disappear like that."

"Bladder emergency," she says, like that explains everything.

Warrick lifts her, wrapping her around his front, and my heart twinges painfully. It's not jealousy, exactly, but more of a sadness and deep longing for someone to treat me like that.

"Are you okay?" Jack asks, sliding around the now-kissing couple. His sparkling blue eyes meet mine as he comes closer.

I nod. "Yeah, I'm fine. Great show, by the way."

"Not to be a downer, but we've got to go. I checked the schedule for our flight and it's on time." Tinley nods, running her fingers through Warrick's beard. "I need you to find Ramsey and Fitz. We've got to leave now if we don't want to miss it."

"Already here," Fitz says, coming into the room. "But I thought we had more wiggle room to get to the airport."

"We did, but your performance went long. And I'm guessing you got caught up with fans or the press," she says with a shrug.

"Damn." Fitz's eyes fly to mine. He looks so conflicted that I give him an encouraging smile.

"Don't worry," Jack says, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jeans. "I'll make sure Shanna gets back to the penthouse safely."

"Do we have time to grab dinner before you guys head out?" Carter bounces into the room with a smile on his face. "I'm starving."

"No, but you three can get something. We've got to go. Where the hell is Ramsey?" Tinley asks, wiggling in Warrick's hold.

Carter snorts a laugh. "I don't want to get him in trouble, but he was fending off the grabby hands brigade. They were looking a little hungry, so I bolted."

"Ohhh, hell no." Tinley looks up at Warrick. "Put me down, and don't you dare try to hold me back. It's about to get ugly."

I exhale in pure relief.

This is the perfect distraction. Also, she's bonded. I know as well as she does that she has nothing to worry about, but it will help get them out of here in a hurry.

Tinley gathers up her men as Fitz repeats everything he's already said for the hundredth time. Luckily, my best friend is very persuasive when she needs to be. She pulls me aside, giving me a hug that lasts until I let go. All the while softly whispering the same pep talk she's already given me. She barely lets Fitz give me a quick squeeze before she's demanding they leave to catch their flight.

Once they're gone, I have no idea what to do with myself.

Omega impulses are universally embarrassing, but I've never had such a violent reaction before. My gaze flies to the door as I contemplate bolting. Logically, I know that wouldn't work. They're living at the same place I am for the foreseeable future. It's not like they're psychic. They can't tell I experienced a wave of heat just from checking them out.

Thank God for that.

I don't know what my deal is. Normally, I couldn't care less when a man knows I'm interested.

"Don't look so damn melancholy." Carter tosses an arm around my shoulder. "You'll see Tinley again soon."

"I know." I give him a tight smile to hopefully offset the move of shoving off his arm. His bergamot and citrus scent is far too potent for me to be this close to him for long.

"We're technically supposed to be out there mingling." Jack scratches his jaw, glancing at the door.

"I fucking forgot they paid for a promotional package." Carter stretches out wide on the couch next to me and looks at me. "I've still got a house to pay off."

Jack studies me carefully. "I heard what Tinley said, but did something happen while you were out there?"

"Just needed a bathroom break." I push myself off the small leather couch. "Let's get out there, so you can mingle."

“Yay,” Carter says sarcastically as he shoves himself up too.

“Wait, isn’t it hard for you to be around alcohol?” I frown, turning to face him. “We’re in a club.”

“This is my job and, believe it or not, I was never a drinker. My parents are alcoholics, which was enough to keep me away from it, even at my lowest.” Carter shrugs, shoving his hands into his pockets. “I’ve also got my built-in babysitter.” He nods to Jack. “Add in the fact that I hate the way it makes me feel, and it’s not a problem.”

I have no idea what to say to that.

“It’s literally my job to hang out in clubs,” Carter repeats, staring straight at me. “Stop worrying. I’ve got this.”

“We can get you a cab back to the penthouse if you don’t want to stick around,” Jack offers.

“No, I’m good,” I assure him. “Let’s go.”

Chapter Eleven

Jack

“In what fucking universe would you expect to be trusted with babysitting not only me, but also Fitz’s little sister?”

Carter chuckles, shoving hair back from his eyes as he watches Shanna dance.

A weird snorting laugh escapes as I shake my head.

That’s a very good question.

“Yeah, we’ve come a long way.” I bump my shoulder against his. The music is loud, but I’ve become immune to the chaos over the years. “That goes for you too.”

“Don’t go soft on me now.” His gaze stays on Shanna. “Why the fuck is she ignoring us?”

I chuckle and refocus on the dark-haired beauty. “Have you ever considered maybe we honestly aren’t her type? She grew up with famous musicians. She’s clearly not impressed.”

“Oh, fuck you. I might have taken a sabbatical from actually slipping inside a woman, but I can still pick up the vibes.” He raises a hand, gesturing at the two women at the bar. They already made a play, which we simultaneously shut down. “Women love me.”

That they do, but...

“You’ve tormented her since the first time you met. Maybe she really does like clean-cut businessmen.” I smirk, cutting my eyes away from the women who look like they might come back to try their luck again. At this point, I’m just fucking with Carter out of boredom.

“It’s two, we’re officially off the clock. I’m going to tell little miss *I’m a lawsuit waiting to happen* that it’s time to go before I knock those assholes out.” Carter shoves himself off the couch. “It’s real fucking hard to remember how much I hate sitting in jail, especially with how hard they’re pressing their luck.”

Shanna does seem dead set on trying to drive the entire room crazy. It’s why I’ve been only casually checking in on her. There’s a fine line between making sure she’s okay and overstepping to the point she wants nothing to do with us.

Carter comes to a stop next to Shanna and the three guys dancing with her. She looks annoyed, but nowhere close to the level of pissed off that the men look.

I laugh and pull my phone out to text the driver. I also hit up our security team that’s fanned out, blocking the entrances to VIP. I’m in the middle of sending the final text when someone sits next to me on the sofa.

I glance up, fully expecting it to be Carter or Shanna. My heart stalls when I recognize the face.

“Hey, Jack,” Ava says, blinking at me from behind long blonde lashes.

My mouth literally falls open. The last time I saw her, she made me feel like a total stalker for trying to surprise her with a visit.

My track record with women is a fucking joke at this point.

Literally.

The guys will never let me live that shit down.

Ava never mentioned she was on the rebound when we met. If she had, then I wouldn’t have wasted months of my life trying to carry on a long-distance relationship. The last time I saw her was Valentine’s Day, and it’s almost Christmas. I’m still baffled about her end game. She didn’t try to hide from the press or paparazzi when we were together. If she was hoping to reconcile with her ex, wouldn’t it have made more

sense to have a discreet hookup with someone other than a rock star?

“Why are you here?” I ask, stretching as far back into the edge of the couch as I can get. It took a while, but it finally clicked. I wasn’t falling for Ava. I was in love with the idea of settling down and having a real life. The industry was fun and exciting for a while, but I just turned thirty years old.

I want all the things Warrick, Fitz, and Ramsey have. Staying in one place and raising a family actually sounds like heaven when, ten years ago, the thought would have sent me running.

“I made a mistake,” she says, leaning closer. “I spent almost five hundred dollars to get a ticket to see you tonight. I want to talk. I’m so sorry for everything. I’ve missed you so much, but you blocked my number. I didn’t know what else to do.”

“What?” I scoff, rearing back. “You legit made me feel like a creep for bringing you Valentine’s gifts in person.” I probably should have gotten the hint when she ghosted me for the two weeks before that, but I thought it was my chance to step up and show her I was serious. And thinking about that entire clusterfuck makes me feel like a complete idiot.

“This little pain in the ass is going to need a spanking when we get home,” Carter says, guiding Shanna over by the shoulders. “I think she forgot she’s officially off the market.”

I open my mouth to ask what the hell he’s going on about, but Shanna climbs right into my lap. My hand flies to her ass to make sure the short little dress isn’t flashing the room her backside.

“If you can flirt with groupies to keep them happy, then I can grind on random dick until you notice.” Shanna grins. “And threats of spankings don’t really qualify as a punishment. You know that.” She leans in, nuzzling her nose to mine.

I watched her drink a couple fruity drinks while we mingled and signed shit for the fans, but she smells like

spearmint. Though it could be gum, I'm not sure.

She nips at my lower lip, and my eyes fall shut as she licks and sucks. There's no stopping my cock from jumping when she grinds over my lap, whimpering like a needy little omega.

A low growl rattles out of my chest in response, and Shanna's knees tighten around my hips as she drags her cunt over my zipper.

Carter tosses himself down on the couch between me and Ava, but I can only tell from the way the cushion bounces. My free hand flies up to cradle Shanna's head, and she shoves her tongue into my mouth.

"Did you call for the car, or do I need to do that?" Carter asks, ruining the moment. I give him a thumbs up with the hand wrapped in Shanna's long hair. She's an excellent kisser. She's sensual and teasing in a way that makes my cock throb. It's been too long for me to be able to pretend I'm not affected by her on a visceral level. "That's not exactly helpful."

Shanna moans, pulling back to catch her breath.

My chest heaves, but I finally open my eyes. "Car should be here any minute."

"Good." Carter turns to Ava. "Hey, Ana. How's the fiancé?"

"It's Ava, and we broke up. It's what I came to talk to Jack about."

Shanna stares up into my eyes. She may be on top of me, but my torso is considerably longer than hers. It's almost like I can feel the question coming from her as she raises her eyebrows.

I shake my head to let her know I'm not interested in reconciling with Ava.

Shanna grins brightly before planting a kiss on the edge of my mouth. She leans around Carter. "Sorry, Ana. You had your chance. Jack is taken."

That's about the most satisfying conclusion to that non-relationship that I can imagine. My hand tightens on her ass as

I stand up.

Carter just chuckles, pushing himself up without a word. Shanna's cold hands slide around under the back of my shirt like she wants to make a point that she's all up in my business. Not that I mind, but also, she's freezing.

"Did you bring a coat?" I ask as Carter catches the attention of the security guys on shift tonight.

"Nope." She stretches up in my hold and buries her face in my throat. "But you're nice and warm. By the way, she's fuming right now. You better hope she doesn't have any naked pictures of you—"

"She doesn't." I clear my throat as her warm breath fans over my skin.

"Sure, buddy." Shanna laughs. "Still, I wish I could've snapped a picture of her face just now. She looks like she's been sucking on lemons."

"Nah, it's fine. Honestly, I don't wish her any negativity. I just don't want anything to do with her at all."

Her head tilts as she watches me with her huge hazel eyes. "Should I have stayed out of it?"

My hand tightens on her hip. "No, I'm glad you didn't."

"Okay, good. If not, I was going to tell you to talk to Carter. He's the one who encouraged that little show." Her legs tighten around my ass as she cuddles her face to my throat. Her electric scent is so sugary sweet that my brain is convinced I need to toss her up against the nearest wall and claim her immediately, but I exhale heavily to center myself. It doesn't help much, but I settle for following Carter and the security team out to meet the car.

"There's a line of paparazzi," Jones says, coming back inside the door we need to exit through to make it to the car. He's our team leader for our security and the guy we have the most close contact with.

“How?” Carter asks incredulously. “Why? They’ve left us alone for months.”

“Who knows?” I sigh, studying the side of Shanna’s face. She’s wrapped around my front, so I can only see half of her profile. “They’re definitely going to get pictures of us leaving. Do you want to walk?”

She grunts, shaking her head. “No, it’s cold. You should probably carry me.”

Carter laughs, pulling at the back of her dress. “You’re welcome. Now they won’t get that sexy little cheek crease that was showing. I almost want to punch myself in the face for covering it.”

“Thanks for pretending to be a gentleman.” She stretches a hand out, giving his a squeeze. “I’m ready when you are.” She buries her face in my shoulder.

Carter might be trying to be a gentleman, but I’m genuinely a good guy. I make sure the forearm under her ass has her dress fully tucked in place and wrap my free hand around the side of her head to give her some privacy.

The press is here for me and Carter. Giving her anonymity costs me nothing, but it will likely amp up their interest in Northern Star.

My eyes catch Jones’s, and I nod. “We’re ready if you are.”

Jones nods and opens the door a few inches, likely to communicate with the rest of the team. “Let’s move.”

I tilt my head down, getting close to Shanna’s ear. “Don’t worry. I’ve got you.”

Her hand slides under the back of my shirt, and she gives me a squeeze. My impulses preen. I’m pretty fucking sure that means she trusts me to keep her safe.

The heavy metal door flies open and cold air whooshes inside.

My fingers slide into Shanna’s hair as I pull her closer.

Jones heads out while Carter holds the door open with his forearm and nods for me to leave first. It's not just the paparazzi. There's a thick mass of fans, which isn't unexpected. When a show sells out, it's not unusual for them to come and try to buy last-minute tickets or even to hang around in hopes of getting an autograph.

I tuck my chin down on the top of Shanna's head and things are looking up. It's only twenty or thirty feet to the waiting SUV.

The masses descend; there's not close to enough security to keep us from getting jostled around.

"Jackson, who is that?" one of the photographers calls out.

I roll my eyes, focusing straight in front of me. I haven't gone by my full first name since middle school, but they always try to build a rapport.

It doesn't work, but they still go for it.

It's their job.

I can't blame them for trying.

"New girlfriend?" another pipes in.

"What's your name, sweetheart?"

"Carter, tell us how sobriety is treating you."

The questions never stop as Jones leads us forward, moving pushy fans out of the way.

"Finally settling down? Come on, Jack. Give us something."

I turn back toward Carter, shaking my head.

Every time they ask us to *give them something*, he flips them off.

Now isn't the time for that.

He chuckles. "You know me too well."

"Jack, please don't walk away." Ava's voice makes my entire body go rigid. "I have no way to get in touch with you."

“That’s the point. Take a fucking hint,” Carter growls.

“She’s definitely going to get her fifteen minutes of fame,” Shanna says in her slightly Scottish accent. She grimaces as she stares up at me. “Let’s hope it’s all she’s expecting and more.” Her face breaks into a silly grin. “Do you think I’ll be considered the home-wrecker? Is that how they’ll choose to spin this?”

“Not a chance,” I assure her, completely ignoring Carter taunting Ava. He’s an asshole at times, but he’s loyal as fuck. “I’m so sorry—”

I don’t get to finish, because Shanna stretches up, shoving her mouth to mine. It’s so unexpected, I stop dead in my tracks, focusing on kissing the hell out of her in return.

“Fitz is going to murder you.” Carter grins, clapping me on the back and leading me forward. I’m still lost to Shanna’s tongue sliding around mine.

“Get in the fucking car,” Jones growls, cursing under his breath about how unpredictable rock stars are. It’s not a limo, so I turn sideways at the door and let Shanna slide in. I do my best to block any pictures while she gets situated, but Carter is right. I’m fairly sure Fitz will instantly recognize his sister from any images they just caught, and I expect that to happen as soon as his plane lands.

Ava is still back there somewhere.

What a fucking disaster.

Once we’re settled into the back seat of the SUV, Jones climbs into the front. Shanna starts out by the window, but she swaps places with me, so she ends up in the middle.

The flashing lights of the paparazzi don’t stop as the driver slowly inches forward.

“Enjoy your last few days on this earth. I’m sure Fitz will make it off the plane, see the article, and be back by the time we wake up tomorrow.” Carter chuckles, man-spreading so wide that Shanna and I seem to be sharing one seat.

“Don’t be dramatic. Tinley has my brother fully covered.” Shanna gives Carter’s thigh a little shove, but he doesn’t move. She grabs my arm, wrapping it around her shoulder as she snuggles into my chest. “You okay?”

My hair falls over my face as I twist to look at her. “I’m fine.”

“Did you know Jack has a gift?” Carter laughs, and I slap him in the back of the head. I already know what’s coming. “It’s like his super power. Every woman he dates, or let me rephrase that, thinks he’s dating, gets engaged immediately after. Only, it’s always to someone else.”

“I fucking hate you,” I whisper as my eyes close and my head rolls back to face the roof of the SUV.

“You are *such* a dick,” Shanna says. There’s a slapping sound, and Carter lets out an *oomph*. A small hand lands on my thigh, giving me a reassuring squeeze. It’s so unexpected that my heart races as my eyes pop open to stare at the contact. “Look at it this way. You could’ve ended up bonded to the wrong person, and that’s the kind of misery that lasts a lifetime. Be grateful you figured it out before you were in too deep.”

“Yeah,” I agree. Shanna cuddles even closer, and I raise the hand on the back of the seat to flip Carter off.

He chuckles darkly, nodding to Shanna resting against my chest. He gives me a look that says *you’re welcome*.

Shanna starts spitting out soothing pheromones, and my entire body feels warm and floaty.

I’ve never been one of those alphas who chases omegas. They’re cute and their impulses are definitely endearing, but before seeing how Tinley softened Warrick’s edges while simultaneously curbing Ramsey’s man-whore ways, I didn’t think I’d ever really see the appeal.

My chest fills with pride as she snuggles deeper, breathing in deep hits of my scent as her face rolls around my pec.

Damn.

Okay, so I guess I get why alphas go down so fast and hard when they meet a compatible omega.

Chapter Twelve

Shanna

“Do you want to watch a movie or something?” I ask as we finally make it into the penthouse. It’s been nice hanging out with them, and I’m not really tired yet.

“I’ve got to be up in five hours to hit my early morning meeting,” Carter says. “We’ve also got that thing at the label.”

“I forgot about that.” Jack heads for the fridge. “Do you think they’ll end up opening a Chicago branch now that Donovan lives here full time?”

I shrug, leaning down to unhook my heel. “I didn’t even know they had office space here until earlier this week.”

“They aren’t running a full location like Florida or Colorado yet, but it would be a solid business move. Think about how many musicians come out of Chicago.” Carter holds out an arm to stabilize me as I move to the other stiletto.

“You guys have a work thing tomorrow?” I ask.

“It’s technically today, and you do too.” Carter smirks. “I heard you’re measuring us and setting up your minions to design us a style that fits.”

I snort a laugh.

I’ve never had minions in my life, but my mom did mention I’d have someone to coordinate with. They’ll help pick fabrics and materials, order necessary inventory, and look for retail items that I think will work. It’s not like I can conjure a full wardrobe out of nothing. That stuff takes time to

manufacture, but I can make a few individual pieces for each person.

“What time is that?” I ask around a yawn.

“Eleven.” Carter yanks off his T-shirt, and the muscles of his back bulge with every move. “We leave at ten.” He smirks as he swaggers around the island toward Fitz’s side of the penthouse. “Don’t be late, or you’ll have to get there on your own.”

My gaze follows him until he disappears from sight.

“So...” Jack laughs awkwardly. “Thanks for the save earlier.” He shoves his tattooed hands into the front pockets of his jeans and rocks on his heels.

“Does kissing really qualify as a save?” I ask, smiling playfully to try to set him at ease. Those damn veiny hands of his don’t even fit all the way in his pockets, and watching the way his thumbs flex is such a bizarre thing to be attracted to.

“Yeah, it really does. Don’t worry. I’ll talk to Fitz in the morning and explain everything.”

“Okay.” I shrug. “I’m also going to warn Tinley, so she can do a bit of damage control.” His electric scent hits my nose as I take a step closer. “I have a thing. It’s not tomorrow night, but the next. Wait, it’s already past midnight, so I guess it’s tomorrow night if you count today really as today.” My head shakes. I’m never this awkward, but my body seems to perfectly remember how those strong hands of his felt all over me. “It’s an obligatory thing.” God, this is bad. Taking a deep breath, I try again. “I have a contractual obligation to go to a fundraising event. I was hoping you and Carter might be my dates?”

“Because of what went down with those guys who came to our show over the summer?”

“Yeah,” I agree as my cheeks heat.

“I can’t speak for Carter, and I don’t have anything with me to fit that kind of vibe, but yeah. Of course, I’d love to.” His face breaks into a slow, sexy smile that makes my knees weak. “Have a good night.” He winks, sauntering off toward

the other side of the penthouse while I'm still trying to remind myself that he's a rock star.

I don't want to deal with the same garbage my mom did while I was growing up.

Some people don't care if a celebrity is taken; they'll still do everything in their power to fuck them.

Then again, Pack Lewis seemed like upstanding businessmen when we first met. And I couldn't have been any more incorrect when I assumed that would make them relatively safe life partners.

I sigh, aiming for my bedroom. Now is not the time to think about complicated feelings.

A very unexpected text pops up from Saxon, asking if I decided to stay home tonight. I type out a quick reply, assuring him that I'm safe and sound in my bed.

His reply makes me smile. *Good, stay that way. Warn me next time, so I can actually get some damn sleep.* Even his grumpy texts make me strangely giddy.

I make sure to warn Tinley through a series of hopefully coherent texts, strip out of my dress, and toss myself down on the mattress. I am officially done for. Showering will have to wait for the morning.

“Morning, Little Fitz.” Carter’s voice breaks me out of a dead sleep. I grunt, trying to roll away from him. “None of that. We’ve got a meeting to get to.”

“What time is it?” I ask as my eyes pop open.

“Just after eight-thirty.”

“What? Why? I thought we didn’t have to be there until eleven.”

“Yeah, but I figured you’d want to grab some breakfast and maybe take a shower.” His scruffy beard highlights his bone structure perfectly as he smiles.

I'd kill to know what he's thinking. I'm sure I look rough, but he stretches out next to me on top of the comforter. He rests his head on his palm, and his bergamot and citrus scent floods my nose. My entire body freezes as he stretches his free hand over, pushing back the hair from my eyes.

"I-I need a favor." My voice shakes as his hand moves to my shoulder, pulling me to face him.

His dark hair is wet, like he just got out of the shower, and it falls over his forehead. "If you need to be fucked, we're both screwed. Or more accurately, we're both not getting screwed. I've got just under four days left in my year of celibacy."

"What?" I whisper as my hands land on his chest.

A slow smirk crosses his face, and my body's response is visceral. "Yup, it fucking sucks, but I've made it this far. I'm not about to blow a year-long commitment this close to meeting my goal."

My mind can't seem to process that he could be telling the truth. All the guys in Northern Star love to call him a man-whore. And I guess he probably used to be. "Congratulations, that's huge." His eyes flutter shut as he pulls me flush to his front with enough force I can feel his cock against my stomach. "Okay, so not as big as that, but I don't have any intentions of messing up so much progress."

"What did you need?" The low, raspy tone of his voice sends a shiver down my spine.

"Huh?" I ask as he moves his hand to palm my ass over the blanket. My brain can't seem to process rational thought. The extent of my brain capacity extends to wondering whether him coming on my tits would be considered cheating against his year. Then I could scoop it up and lick my fingers clean. If we did that a few times, it would likely settle the overwhelming urge to know what he tastes like.

"You said you need a favor. What kind?"

"Oh, yeah, I need a date," I admit, trying to shake away the fog. It's too thick, or I'm too close to my heat to form

intelligent thoughts. “Or several. I need several dates to come with me to this thing tomorrow night.”

“Why?”

My nose plasters itself to his T-shirt, and a pathetic little whimper escapes. “Carter, do you know you smell like sex on a stick?”

“Thanks, but stay on track. Why do you need a date?”

I sigh. “I need you and Jack because you’re not afraid to be the center of attention. I have a point to make.”

“That sounds like it might be a problem.” Carter finally releases my lower back. “I’m always down to cause a little chaos, but I’d rather not lose the few friends I’ve got left in the process.”

I hate how shut off he seems, but I do understand where he’s coming from. “It’s nothing like that. I just need you and Jack to pretend you’re head over heels into me tomorrow night. If you do that, I promise I will find a way to make it up to you.”

“You don’t even need to. I’m guessing this has something to do with the suits,” he says as his brow furrows.

“Yeah, I’ve got to show up at their event and convince the world I’m not bitter as hell they screwed me over.”

“I’ll be there.” He shoves himself off my mattress. “Now, get in the shower or we’ll have to leave without you.”

I fall back against the pillows, trying to ignore how cold and empty the bed feels without him.

Why the hell didn’t Tinley mention he’s celibate? Is that a well-known thing when it comes to sobriety?

Ugh, this is going to get complicated.

I have no messages from my brother or Tinley, so I figure that’s probably a good sign.

No news is good news, right?

Yeah, totally.

Except, the SUV this morning has three rows. Jack barely glances my way before climbing all the way into the back.

I frown, but Carter shrugs, gesturing for me to take a seat in the middle.

The entire ride across town is dead silent to the point it's making me fidgety.

Are they going to back out?

Leave me to face Pack Lewis alone tomorrow night?

Gah, I wonder if it's too late to hire an escort or two? Maybe I could text Saxon and beg him to go with me. I haven't heard from Lang, but I'm not surprised, even if it hurts my feelings a little.

We come to a stop outside of a building that isn't the office I went to for my meeting with Donovan and my mom. The exterior seems a little rundown, but it's not dilapidated or anything. I'm pretty sure it's a bar or nightclub. It's just one I haven't been to before because it's across town from my apartment.

"Come on, Little Fitz," Carter says, holding out a hand. I smile as I take it, allowing him to help me out of the vehicle. "See, I can totally be a gentleman."

Jack scoffs, climbing out after us.

Carter swaggers off toward the front of the building, and my eyes seemed glued to his ass. His broad shoulders stretch the long-sleeve Henley to capacity. I'm shocked he's not in a jacket. I even opted for leggings and a pea coat. It's frigid today.

Jack places a hand on my lower back, guiding me forward. I blink in pure confusion, looking up at him. He seemed to want distance, but he gets close to my ear. "I was hoping to talk to you later when we get the chance."

My chest gets tight. He's absolutely going to blow off going with me to the fundraiser. "Yeah, of course. I'm sorry if I caused any trouble last night."

I don't want to throw Carter under the bus, but it really was him egging me on that made me react. Well, that and the look of misery Jack had written all over his face.

“No, we're good. I hope we're good. We are good, right?” Jack steps around me, making his hand slide from my lower back to my hip. His gaze falls over my face as his brow furrows. He's kind of adorable for not only being alpha, but also a famous musician.

“I thought we were.”

“Okay, good.” He nods dramatically, and I can't help but smile.

“Are you two coming, or do you plan to keep romantically gazing into each other's eyes?” Carter calls out, completely ruining the moment.

Jack barks a laugh, shaking his head. He stretches a hand down, linking our fingers before guiding us inside.

Rook Jacobs greets us immediately upon entry. There's a stage on the back wall with tables scattered around the room. “You made it.” He breaks out into a brilliant grin that takes over his entire face. Okay, I guess I see why he has a gaggle of adoring female fans. “Shanna, if you want to follow me, I'll introduce you to your partner for this project. Amira had a whole roomful of supplies delivered.”

A shiver runs down my spine at my mother's name. “Yeah, let's do it.” I finally release Jack, realizing it's probably not professional to be holding hands with one of his performers when I'm here to do a job. Also, an entire room of stuff? I'm pretty sure that's major overkill.

Rook gestures to a hallway on the right before moving to head down it. I purposely avoid glancing at Carter and Jack before I follow him. He takes another right and it opens into a stairwell I wasn't expecting. The stairs are wooden and they creak as I carefully gauge each step. I wouldn't have worn heels if I had known we'd be coming somewhere with uneven flooring, but whatever. It's too late now to complain.

We make it to the second floor landing, and Rook makes another right before a quick left.

“Donovan actually scouted this place. It’s going to need a round of construction renovations, but it’s a hidden gem,” Rook says as I take in the room. “It’s not quite on par with some of the arenas we’ve been branching into, but for smaller, more intimate shows, it’s perfect.”

“Yeah,” I agree.

This room is spacious, with a huge wall of windows that look out over the lower level.

There’s a woman about my age, with two buns on top of her head, standing near the glass. One half of her hair is pastel purple, while the other is a light pink. She’s wearing goth boots that are probably six inches tall, a short lime-green skirt, and a black T-shirt with a leather jacket over it.

I immediately love her energy.

“This is Chloe,” Rook says, nodding to the woman. “And this is Shanna Fitzpatrick.”

“Your mother told me so much about you.” Chloe smiles, coming closer as she extends a hand.

I laugh because I really should have seen that coming. We shake as my gaze takes in the racks of clothing already on display. There’s also a platform for whoever I’m measuring to stand on.

“If you two are good, I’ve got to go down and introduce the groups we’re melding into one.” Rook tosses a thumb toward the door. “It’s probably going to get loud, so you know, just tune that out.”

My head tilts as I study him.

Does he mean the music will be obnoxiously loud? Or that the two bands they’re blending are likely to have some heated disagreements?

It could go either way.

I've seen Fitz and the other guys in Northern Star practice. They mostly like each other and someone is still always yelling at someone else because they missed their part or came in late.

I shrug. "Got it. Am I supposed to call them up one by one while they're practicing, or does Chloe have all that info?"

"I've got their last measurements and standard info sheets," she says. "But that is a good question. We'll need to bring them up and get a feel for their own personal style. That might interfere—"

"It would be a miracle if they actually play together today." Rook chuckles, scratching his fuzzy jaw. "Just do what you need to do. This is an introductory meeting. If they make it past posturing to actually playing, then I'd be shocked."

"Understood," I say with a laugh.

Rook exits.

Chloe gestures to the bins and totes lining the wall. "Want to check out what we've got?"

"Absolutely."

We spend the next hour flipping through the bins to see what sample fabrics we have on hand. I've got my rolling stool all ready to measure inseams and everything else I might need set up.

Chloe has my coffee order, and she promised to send Jack up on her way out.

He bounces into the room with a lopsided grin on his face, and my silly heart races. "Look at you. You look all official. So, can I leave my clothes on while you measure me, or are we going to be getting even more acquainted?" His blue eyes sparkle as little crinkles appear at the edges of his eyes.

My stomach flip-flops as he smiles. "Clothes on, Jackson."

"Oh, God." He barks a laugh. "You're killing me. My mom is legit the only person who calls me that."

“Come stand on the platform.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He winks, sauntering over. God, I really love his haircut. The long half falls to the end of his strong jaw, and it just really freaking works for him.

Apparently, I’ve lost the ability to chill. My tongue licks over my lower lip, making the smile on Jack’s face grow even wider.

Once he’s situated, he gives me an expectant look.

Get your shit together, I mentally berate myself. Grabbing the measuring tape from the table, I spin around to face him. “Okay, arms out.” I circle his chest, and once I have it positioned, I tell him to bring them down.

“Has anyone told you you’re exceptionally cute when you’re concentrating?”

Oh, he’s laying it on thick. And yet, I still can’t fight the fluttery butterflies dancing around my stomach. “Thanks. Arms out again, so I can grab your waist.”

“I feel like, if I was a lady, this would be awkward.” He laughs nervously.

“If this lady was in as killer shape as you are, I’d happily let you take my measurements.” I grab his waist and quickly slide it down a few inches. “You wear your pants here normally?”

“Uh, yeah.” He clears his throat as I memorize that measurement too. I head to the table and document his numbers so far. His inseam is supposed to be next, but I think I’ll grab that last, based on how fidgety he is.

“All right, what size jeans do you buy when you purchase them for yourself?” I ask, moving until I’m behind him.

He answers as my hand slides up his side, pulling his arm out so I can measure that too. After that, I set up to get the nape to the top of the knee.

“Oh no, don’t slouch,” I admonish when I notice he’s ducking lower. “I’m completely capable of stretching, but I want to get these right.”

He stands to his full height. I bite my lip, appreciating the strong lines of muscle showing through his long-sleeve T-shirt. I'm grateful this room doesn't have the standard mirror across from my measuring station, or it would totally bust me and my ogling.

I document the next few measurements and give him a soft smile. "I've got to grab your inseam, and it's going to put me all up in your business." He glances down at his dick, and a look of terror crosses his face. "I promise I'll be quick, if it helps..."

"Go for it," he says, swiping a hand over his face.

I hit my knees on the little bench.

"So, last night was kind of the bright spot in a shitty year. I mean, it's been rough the last couple years. Things were bad for a while when Warrick was attacked, then everything was falling apart, and when it finally started to come together..." He sighs as I stare up at him. "Then Carter's shit came to a head, and I dived into taking care of him to keep myself busy."

"He's doing okay, though, right?"

"Yeah, the first few months were a fucking nightmare, but he's been doing great, outside of the bullshit with his family."

"He mentioned that at Thanksgiving. It's unbelievably shitty."

He runs his fingers over my cheek. "I got lucky with a great family, and from the way Fitz talks, you did too."

"Yeah," I agree. "Did Carter sell his house?"

His face contorts into a mask of confusion. "He told you about that?"

I nod.

"Damn." He blows his lips together. "It's on the market. I tried to get him to let me pay off his parents' place, or even lend him the money, but he's too proud to accept charity. It's why we're here, trying to blend with Trigger Finger for the mini-crossover shows." His lips tip downward. "I'm not a fan, if you can't tell."

I rack my brain, but I don't think I know who they are.

It sounds like it might be a problem if Carter feels the same way. "You're a good friend, Jack. Fitz and Tinley both made sure to tell me what a stand-up guy you are."

He leans back. "Really?"

"Yup," I agree, focusing on measuring his inseam. It's super distracting that his hand has moved to palm my head, but it feels so nice, I can't force him to stop. "And I'm sure Carter appreciates all you're doing for him too."

He nods. "I know he pushed you to step in last night with Ava, but I still wanted to thank you."

"It was nothing."

"It won't be nothing once the pictures of us hit."

I shrug. "I can handle it. My mom is a former supermodel and my dad's are rock stars. I'm used to being in the limelight."

"Yeah, but I was..." He moves his thumb to tilt my face up until I'm staring straight into his deep blue eyes. "You said you needed a date, but would you be open to us going to that thing for real? Like a real date." He clears his throat. "Would you go out on a date with me?"

Now it's my turn to be surprised. "Really?"

"If you're interested and my baggage hasn't scared you off, then yeah, definitely."

"I'd love that." My face breaks into a smile so wide my cheeks actually hurt. "All right. We're done." I stand up, but Jack pulls me closer, using his hand on the back of my head.

He takes a step to the side, and once he's standing on the ground, he bends low, brushing his lips over mine. It's such a light tease of a kiss, but it still makes my knees weak. "Want me to send Carter up?"

"Nah, I'll come down with you."

Chapter Thirteen

Saxon

Jones and I sit watching the rock stars posture against one another. They're doing a whole lot of bitching and complaining and very little blending of the bands. There are a couple other musicians standing around on the stage, but from what I gather, they aren't the big names.

"Is it really that bad?" Jones asks, nodding at Lang.

"He's, without a doubt, the worst client I've worked with," I tell him truthfully.

Jones and I work for the same security company, and we've had jobs overlap on and off over the years. It's nice to have a friendly face to talk to, to pass the time. The record label executives are standing a few feet away, watching the newly merged bands carefully. I'm no expert, but it doesn't seem to be going well.

"You'd think it would be easier because of the masks," Jones says conversationally.

I scoff. "Maybe if the world didn't know what they look like without them, but even then, it's not the fans. It's him. I've never fundamentally loathed a client before."

"Huh, want to ask Griffin or Storm for a transfer?" he asks, referencing the owners of the Stone Security branch we work for. "You take Carter and Jack the next couple weeks, and I'll take Lang and Kage. We're all stuck in Chicago, anyway."

The sound of boots on the stairs catches my attention.

The guy from earlier, Jack, comes down with a woman tucked under his arm. Her dark curly hair is the first familiar attribute.

My entire body goes stiff as my eyes fly to Lang. He was so pissed when he woke up and she was gone that I don't think he realized she left him her information. He was with her two nights ago, and now she's here with another famous person, and they look nice and cozy.

I can't decide if Lang is the luckiest motherfucker alive or the unluckiest.

"Sweetness?" Lang growls, shoving himself off the edge of the stage, where he and Kage have been sitting. "What the fuck are you doing here?" His eyes fly to Jack as he stomps across the room. "That's my fucking *girlfriend*."

"Man, you are so incredibly fucking delusional," Kage says, laughing as he follows Lang. Of course the two sides are going to back each other up. This is about to become even more of a shit show than it already was.

Shanna's eyes get huge as she glances between Lang and Jack. Carter pushes off the wall he was leaning against and heads in her direction.

"You never called," Shanna says, popping a hip out. Jack still has his arm wrapped around her, and he looks at her in what I think qualifies as bewilderment.

"You didn't give me your number." Lang comes to a stop a few feet away.

Shanna's face breaks out into a shy smile that makes me want to punch Lang in the gut.

Repeatedly.

Possibly aim for the kidneys or liver.

"I left it on the desk. I guess you didn't care enough to check." She shrugs, pushing her lips together.

"Wait, no shit?" Lang asks.

"I left you all my info," she says, nodding.

Lang's head whips in my direction. "Did you know that?"

I grin, crossing my arms over my chest. "Don't have a tantrum next time, and maybe you'll be able to find the important information for yourself instead of relying on other people to handle it for you."

"What the hell, Shanna?" Carter asks, stepping up at her side. He glares at Lang. "You know she's Fitzpatrick's little sister."

"I did not know that." Lang flashes Shanna a playful smile.

"Which also makes her Donovan Lee's stepdaughter," Rook says, coming over to join the situation. "And she's employed by Ruined. Let's keep things professional."

"Like that's going to happen," Carter mutters. "I don't see how you thought blending us with Trigger Finger was a good idea."

"You're more than welcome to pass on the crossover shows." Rook shrugs. "I wouldn't exactly call this a smashing success, but I think you could all put a little more effort into being reasonable adults."

Carter's head tilts as he gives Lang and Kage the stink eye. "I'm here and ready to work."

"You know Langdon Hughes?" Jack asks Shanna, looking majorly confused.

"We're acquaintances." She smiles, but it looks pained. "We've met a few times."

"Oh yeah, we're well acquainted." Lang smirks, shoving his hands into his front pockets as he rocks on his heels.

"You hush." Shanna jabs a finger at him. "Or we won't be *acquainted* again anytime soon."

"I think our clients are about to go at it." Jones nods at Carter, whose head is tilted animalistically as his chest heaves.

"Damn." I sigh.

"On what fucking planet do you live that you think it's okay to insinuate that type of bullshit?" Carter growls, taking a

step forward.

“It’s not insinuating if it’s the truth,” Kage pipes in, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Okay, Carter, you’re coming with me. I need to measure you.” Shanna shakes out of Jack’s hold and makes a move toward Carter.

Carter doesn’t hesitate to tackle Lang. They immediately start rolling around, punching each other in the core.

“What the fuck is your problem?” Lang snaps.

“You! You’re the fucking problem,” Carter growls.

“Oh God, what the hell are you doing? Do you want to get fired, or even worse, permanently damage your hands?” Shanna yelps, watching the men go at it.

Rook just sighs, sliding a table out of the way as they slam into a chair. “She makes a valid point about your careers. If either of you fuck up your hands, your days of playing guitar are done.”

Shanna’s eyes widen. “Aren’t you going to stop them?”

“I think we’re finally making some progress. It’s somewhat a rite of passage. If there’s not at least one fistfight, then you’re probably dealing with pop stars, not rock stars.” Rook shrugs. “I can’t tell you the number of times my bandmates and I have dealt with disagreements in a similar fashion.”

Lang and Carter continue cursing each other as they roll around, punching the hell out of one another.

Jack steps forward, grabs Shanna’s hips, and pulls her backward several feet.

“Good plan,” Kage says, nodding at Jack. He looks at Shanna. “It’s nice to put a face to all the talking Lang has done about you. I’m Kage.”

“Um, thanks. Shanna.” She waves, but her eyes fly to where Jones and I stand. “Do the two of you want to intervene?”

“Not really,” I deadpan.

“You guys are unbelievable.” Shanna taps the toe of her heel against the wooden flooring. “Okay, Kage, you’re with me.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He flashes her a wink that has me taking a step forward.

She frowns, waving a hand. “You’re up to be measured.” She spins around, heading off without a backward glance.

I look between Lang and Shanna before turning back to Jones. “Uh, yeah. Let’s switch. I’m following her. You keep those two from killing each other.”

Shanna measures Kage while he tries to make small talk. I’m pleased as pie when she dismisses him with barely a second glance.

“You can send up either of them. Preferably whichever isn’t bleeding,” she says without looking up from the notebook where she’s jotting down his measurements.

Kage chuckles. “Lang is really into you. Give him a chance. You seem like the type to enjoy the chase, but maybe let him actually catch you.”

Shanna sighs, shaking her head. “Thanks for that, but Lang is a big boy. He can tell me where I stand using *his* own words.”

“This should be fun.” Kage snorts, heading out.

I push off the wall, aiming for the potent little omega. “You’re saying you had no idea who Langdon was when you met?”

The sound she releases might be a scoff, or she may be choking. “My fathers are musicians. I’ve seen the hell my mother has experienced because of fans and the media. Not that I need to defend myself to you.”

“You don’t. Then again, a few hookups are a much different situation than considering a relationship.”

“I’ve heard of Trigger Finger, but in no way could I have picked them out of a lineup. Are you happy now?” She rubs at her eyes, frowning. “Where the hell is Chloe with our coffee? She’s taking forever.”

“Do you want a hug?” I ask, inching closer. “You look like you could use some physical comfort.”

She shrugs. “I’m tired and cranky. My heat is coming up, and what happened downstairs is definitely going to make its way back to my family. Then they’ll worry even more than they already do. I hate feeling like a burden.”

I’m not expecting her to walk right into my chest, but I smile like a fiend when she does.

“You’re not a burden. Your family looks after you because they care about your well-being. It seems to me that you’re disregarding your own impulses. Omegas need snuggles when they’re overwhelmed. That’s doubly true when your heat is right around the corner.” I stretch an arm around her and she climbs right up my torso. The room doesn’t have a lot of seating options, but I head for the outdated club chair in the corner. This place is in desperate need of renovations. My ass can handle a little dust. I place myself down, and she immediately buries her nose in my shoulder as I help her situate her legs. “See, everything is better with proper cuddles.”

“Don’t be condescending,” she grunts, inhaling deeply.

“I’m not. You’re ignoring your biology. That’s a slippery slope.”

“We’ve been over this. My options are limited.” She sighs, making her warm breath fan over my neck. I fucking ache to tell her they don’t have to be.

My head pops up as commotion comes our way from the hallway.

I vaguely wonder which one is coming up next, but knowing Kage, he probably sent up Lang. The two men make it to the door at the exact same time.

Carter slams Lang against the doorframe, but once he's past him and inside the room, Lang grabs Carter by the shoulders in return, shoving him into the wall.

"Are the two of you children?" I growl, running my hand down Shanna's back. Her head twists, taking in the sight of the two of them still pushing and shoving.

"Fuck off, Carter," Lang hisses.

"Go to hell, Lang," Carter growls back.

They come to a stop two or three feet away, chests heaving.

"I'm in love with you," Lang blurts out, resting his hands on his hips as he bends over, trying to catch his breath.

"Seriously, go fuck yourself with that bullshit," Carter scoffs. He looks at the little omega. "I want the chance to court you."

"That's what I was going to say!" Lang growls indignantly, slamming his forearm into Carter's side.

Shanna glances between them as her shoulders start to shake. I tilt her face toward me to see how upset she is, but the little vixen is silently laughing. She looks up at me, shaking her head. "They're both insane." She looks over her shoulder toward Lang. "We've met a grand total of three times, including today." Her line of sight moves to Carter. "You enjoy tormenting me for no good reason."

"It's that instant attraction between alphas and omegas." Lang shrugs. "I know you're it for me. I haven't fucked anyone else since we met. I feel like that should say it all."

Shanna snorts.

"I haven't either, and I've known you a hell of a lot longer." Carter swipes his hair back from his face. "I've been into you since we met. Why do you think I went out of my way to show you that those assholes weren't good enough for you?"

"You haven't fucked anyone else because of your year of celibacy," Shanna says. "I don't know if this is some weird

competition between the two of you. Hell, I have no idea why you hate each other in the first place. But I'm not going to get stuck in the middle of this weird as hell territorial pissing match."

I give her hips a squeeze of silent support. That's the most rational thing she could have said. They're both acting like spoiled idiots.

"I've been into you since that first night in the club." Lang stares her straight in the eyes as he speaks. "You said you wanted honesty. Well, here it is. I want to court you. I fell asleep that night running through the speech I was going to give you the next morning over room service." His shoulders slump, and he finally goes on. "I was hurt when I woke up and you were gone."

Shanna sighs, patting my chest before climbing out of my lap. She walks over to Lang and wraps her arms around his back. "I truthfully did leave you my information. I'm sorry you didn't find it."

"It's fine. I went back to Darkside last night, but you didn't show." He leans down, nuzzling his cheek to hers. "I would've tried again tonight and the night after..."

My annoyance ratchets higher.

It's clear she's got a soft spot for Lang.

Who the fuck knows why, but she does.

"That's because she was at our show. I'm sure you'll see the pictures hit anytime." Carter pastes a shitty grin on his face.

"I was there to see my brother and my best friend." She leans up, kissing Lang's cheek before turning to face Carter. "I would love it if you would stop being purposely antagonistic."

Carter shrugs. "You're the one who asked me out on a date tomorrow night."

My stomach churns.

I don't like the sound of that.

Apparently, I hate all rock stars. That emotion isn't just reserved for Lang.

"I did," she agrees as Lang pulls her back to his chest. She leans against him easily, and I hate it. "I have a contractual obligation because of the bullshit that happened with the last pack that was courting me." She glances at Lang over her shoulder before looking at me.

"Shit," Carter says, sounding genuinely contrite. "I'm sorry—"

"No, it's fine. This is actually perfect. If the two of you want to court me so badly, then I'll need both of you to be in attendance at the fundraiser tomorrow night." Her gaze moves from the rock stars to look at me as she smiles playfully. "You're more than welcome to come too. My invitation allows entry for myself *and my pack*. Although, to be fair, I believe they addressed it that way as an extra kick in the gut."

Lang lights up, bending down to pull her mouth to his. "Count me in," he says in between quick kisses.

Images of him fucking into her from behind the other night play through my mind on repeat. My fists clench as my blood pressure feels dangerously high.

Carter's teeth grind together as she looks at him. He gives a plastic smile. "I wouldn't miss it."

Shanna looks at me. "And you?"

"Those idiots better step up their game." I shove myself out of my chair. "I'm going to teach you how a *real* alpha courts an omega he's interested in."

"It's a date." Her face breaks into a smile so bright that my heart skips an actual beat.

Oh yeah, these assholes better watch out.

My eyes are on the prize.

And I play to win.

Chapter Fourteen

Shanna

Chloe finally arrives back with our coffee. Apparently, the guys also placed an order for lunch, which is why she took forever.

Lang cooperates long enough for me to measure him, but Carter glares the entire time.

I'm just finishing documenting Lang's measurements in my notebook when his leathery tobacco smell hits me. He wraps an arm around my middle, pulling me back into his chest.

"Don't try to run out again without giving me your information." He pulls my hair to the side, kissing my cheek. "How about, once you're done with Dane, you come down and eat with me?"

It takes me way too long to remember Dane is Carter's first name.

"Yeah, there's a vibe and it's actually icking me out," Chloe says. "For the sake of my lunch, I'm going to eat downstairs with the bickering." She grabs her bag of takeout and takes off. "It's better than whatever that is."

"How about you let Little Fitz get back to work?" Carter growls.

"Yeah," Lang says against the shell of my ear. "You do that. I'll be waiting." He heads out.

"You can go too. I need to talk to Carter," I tell Saxon. Grumpy Daddy doesn't look pleased, but he nods and also

leaves. “Well, come on, then.”

I wave a hand at Carter. He pushes off the wall, and the way he saunters over shows his displeasure.

Once he’s settled on the platform, I go through the motions of measuring him. The label must have recently taken all their measurements, likely for their last tour or something, because the numbers I get match the info sheets nearly perfectly. I kneel in front of Carter to grab his inseam. It’s a quick process. Once I pop up, I head over to mark it on my sheet.

It’s pretty quiet up here until the sound of Carter’s boots hitting the floor fills the air as he comes closer. I turn around to face him. His jaw is tight and he looks so intense that I take a step back, bumping into the table.

Carter prowls closer as my chin tilts in the air defiantly. My heel slides back as I edge farther away. There’s something about the way his head tilts that seems like he’s hunting me. “You want to tell me how the fuck you got wrapped up with Lang?”

My head shakes as I continue to back around the table. “I’m sure you’ve got the picture.”

Carter growls a low sound that vibrates in his chest. “I’m hardly in a position to lecture anyone, but I’m seriously fucking baffled. Really, Shanna? Lang?”

Hearing him call me by name instead of *Little Fitz* makes my stomach feel weird. Not more so than him pretending to want me just to get back at Lang, but still.

“Why do you even care?” I ask, crossing my arms over my chest. “We both know that BS about courting me was only because he was listening. Did my brother put you up to this?”

Carter picks up the pace, erasing the distance between us. His hand wraps around my throat, but his thumb caresses my jaw. A half second later, my back lands against the wall. “Do you want me to lie? Is that what you’re expecting? Yeah, Fitz asked us to look after you, but spoiler alert—in no way did he give us the green light to go after you. I still am.”

My mind races as his citrusy scent floods my nose. I open my mouth to say something. I'm not even sure what, but Carter pushes two fingers to my lips.

He bends low, speaking directly against my ear. "I've spent the last year getting my shit together. I'm trying real fucking hard to be better than I was. You think I haven't wanted you since the moment I laid eyes on you? Seriously? I thought you were done lying to yourself."

My hands land on his chest, and I have to twist my head to get him to remove his fingers from my mouth. "Lying to myself? You're such an asshole."

"Maybe, but I've been nothing but real with you. I don't trust Lang as far as *you* could chuck him."

"Then it's a good thing you don't need to," I deadpan.

"If you think I was bad, do a quick search of Lang. Then seriously tell me he's the kind of guy you want—"

"Do you want me to judge you based on your past?" I ask, tilting my head to study his face. "I'm not even trying to be hurtful. I hate the idea of anyone making assumptions about me based on mine."

"You're not seeing what I'm trying to say. You hooked up with Lang, whatever. I've got no room to talk about one-night stands, but he's going to disappoint you. Then I'm going to hate him even more than I already do."

"It doesn't seem like you need any excuse for that," I scoff. "I barely know him, but I enjoy having sex with him. All of you trying to warn me away is only succeeding in making him hotter."

It's probably a flaw in my wiring, but even as a kid, if someone told me not to do something, then there was no stopping me from doing exactly that.

"You're such a pain in the ass." Carter's nose gets very close to my hair as he breathes me in. His hand tightens its hold around my neck. "Fine, you do you, but you told me I could court you. I'm not going to speak for Jack, but he *is* into you too. Don't make any decisions until you get to test out all

your options.” His thumb runs over my jaw and his nose brushes against mine. So do his lips, but he doesn’t try to *actually* kiss me.

“You really want to date me?”

Carter doesn’t pull back, and it makes our lips dance over one another as I speak.

His head finally shakes. “No, you’re an omega. I want to court the fuck out of you. Then I’ll lock your tight little body down and use you as I see fit. Based on what I’ve seen of your past partners, I’m not sure you can handle me, Little Fitz.”

My entire body tingles as my cheeks flush. It’s not a full-blown wave of heat, but his words physically affect my system. At the same time, he’s far too cocky for his own good. “You talk a big game for someone who can’t currently fuck me.”

Carter growls, shoving me harder against the wall. He’s so close that I can’t really see it, but I can feel his mouth curve into a smile as he grins against my cheek. “Goddamn, I can’t wait to put that sassy mouth to good use.”

My shoulders actually shake as my entire body tries to curve toward him. I’d really like that too.

He chuckles. “I’m probably going to embarrass myself a solid few times, but trust me when I say I’ll make it up to you.”

I have no doubt his words are true, but I’m still not letting myself get too optimistic. Jack and Lang both showed some kind of interest before knowing about the other. Saxon did as well. But when it comes to Carter, I’m not sure what to think.

Yeah, he loves to flirt. I’ve chalked it up to being part of the way he harasses me. He only made a point of saying he wanted to court me after he found out about Lang.

I think it’s best if I keep my guard up. As far as I’m concerned, they can all help me make it through the events I need to do, and possibly my heat, if they play their cards right, but I’m not holding my breath as far as the future goes.

“You need to get back out there. I’m sure they’re wondering what the hell is taking so long.” I give him a little push, and he finally steps back, releasing my neck. “After this, we’ll need to grab clothes for the four of you for tomorrow night.”

“You’re seriously going to let Lang come? Aren’t you afraid he’s going to embarrass you?” His eyebrows pull together as he stares down at me.

I shrug. “I tend to give people the benefit of the doubt until they prove me wrong.”

“Whatever,” he grumbles. “Just know I intend to treat you so well that he’s not even a thought in your mind. Use him for the next few days if you’re *that* desperate for dick, but the countdown is on.”

“Thanks for your unnecessary permission,” I say, planting a hand on my hip. “Now go work, so we can be done. Then it’s shopping as one big happy pack.” A wicked smile crosses my face. It’s kind of fun torturing him for a change.

“This is going to be a fucking nightmare.”

Chapter Fifteen

Lang

Rook Jacobs gives us something between a pep talk and a speech meant to put the fear of God into our souls if we don't shut the fuck up and work together.

We finally make it to the part where we play. If you put talented musicians together, then you're going to end up with good music, even if the artists dislike each other. It's several hours of hammering out the details of who does what, but these are smaller shows, meaning there aren't as many of us with the same skill set.

"That's some fucking coincidence," Kage says as I pull off my guitar. He comes over, shoving his sticks into his back pocket. "Do you think she purposely went after you?"

I scoff. "I'm the one who approached her."

Kage laughs. "Oh, you want to play it like you're naive?"

"Fuck off. I know what it's like when someone is trying to be coy, but still lure you in. She never even saw me until I went over to her." I leave out that I know it's true because I creepily watched her the entire time, up until I made my move.

That would make me seem like a stalker. Which I'm usually not. This is a special occasion.

"All right. I'll take your word for it." Kage shrugs. "You're in for a whole fuckload of trouble, considering who she is."

That does send a shiver of unease down my spine. Her brother is one thing. I don't give a shit how he feels about me, but Donovan Lee is another story completely. I actually

respect Donovan. There's no way I'd be where I am today without him intervening.

"I need to talk to Rook," I grunt, taking off. Kage chuckles as I head across the stage, jumping down to floor level. "Got a minute?"

Rook nods, stepping away from the other execs. "What's up? Throwing in the towel already?"

I scoff, yanking my beanie down so it doesn't pop off my head. "You know our history. Or rather Donovan and Jamen do. Why would you put us together?"

Rook shrugs. "It was Donovan's idea. We lost a lot of good artists in the purge."

I frown, messing with my curls to keep my hands busy.

When Carter overdosed, it started a chain reaction where the label actually started paying attention to the mandatory drug tests we take before every tour. There was always a code of conduct in our contract, but it was never seriously enforced. They pulled anyone who tested positive for opiates in for some mandatory meeting where they got the choice to clean up their act or the label chose not to renew their contracts.

It seems a little hypocritical to me, considering I know Kage and I popped for coke and weed, but Rook lost a bandmate a few years back to a pretty serious opiate addiction. I mean, Bryan Thomas committed suicide, but I think we all heard about his antics over the years.

Rook gives me a serious look. "You and Carter grew up together. You both made it. Maybe not at the same time, but is there really so much hate that you can't collaborate on a few shows?"

I scoff. I still don't understand why that asshole hates me. "I'm not the one with the problem. I'll work with them, if they'll work with me, but that's not what I'm worried about. I met a woman I really fucking like, and now I find out she's related to Donovan? Is this going to be a problem for my career?"

Rook rolls his eyes. “I thought my dad was exaggerating when he said half this job is being a fucking therapist. Donovan is on a world cruise to celebrate his bonding. I’m not about to interrupt his trip to rat you out.” He scratches his thick black beard. “I’d also like to be able to stop asking my dad for advice on how he’d handle things.”

Yeah, I’m good with keeping Jamen Jacobs out of my personal life too, if there’s an option for that.

Rook leans closer, shoving up the sleeve of his long-sleeve T-shirt. “Let me put it to you like this. Man to man, I wouldn’t go there unless I was sure. You don’t want unnecessary complications just for the sake of saying you won.”

I glare, crossing my arms over my chest. “It’s not like that. I *really* fucking dig that chick.”

“That changes things. If you’re serious, then show her that. Don’t let anyone discourage you from your goals.” Rook holds out a fist, and I bump it. “There’s your opportunity now.” He nods toward the stairs.

Shanna comes down with the other fashion designer behind her. The woman whose name I don’t know is absolutely Kage’s type, but I have a different prize in mind.

“Thanks,” I say to Rook before beelining for my omega.

Shanna is talking to the other lady, and I need her to myself. I scan for Kage, giving him a nod, so he knows I need that woman kept busy.

It’s unnecessary.

As soon as Shanna spots me, she disengages from the conversation and comes over.

“Well, you didn’t kill each other.” She laughs.

“Go out on a date with me tonight?” I ask, clearing my throat.

Her head tilts as she smiles up at me. “I need to take the four of you shopping. You’ll need very specific attire for tomorrow night.”

A slow grin crosses my face as I wrap my arm around her lower back. “I’ll do that too. Will you let me buy you dinner after?”

“You want to go on a *real* date?”

“Yup, I sure do.”

“Yeah, I’d love to. As long as you don’t fight or argue while we shop. If you behave, it’ll be your reward.” She stretches up, kissing the edge of my mouth.

I ache to kiss her until she’s breathless, but that will have to wait until we aren’t surrounded by a roomful of people. See, I can be conscientious of our environment and treat her with respect.

Fuck Saxon and what he thinks of me.

“I’m not the one causing problems. You watched Carter start all of that earlier.”

“I’m going to talk to Jack and Carter too, but I want your word that you guys won’t fight, especially not at the event tomorrow night.”

“I assure you, I’ll be the best goddamn date you could ask for.” I bite my lip. “But that means you’ll have to tell me all the details over dinner.”

She sighs, glancing away as her head gives a reluctant nod. “Deal.”

We take two cars on the shopping excursion. Shanna rides with Carter and Jack.

Does it bug me?

Yeah, a little.

I’m also cunning enough to realize I’ve got to play nice.

Kage and I hop out of the SUV with some guy named Jones. I have no clue what happened there, but I’m not going to complain about the switch. He’s chill enough, and he didn’t say a word on the ride over while Kage and I brainstormed.

“I didn’t know Kage was joining us,” Shanna says as we approach the front of the building.

“I’m just keeping Lang company,” Kage says, clapping me on the back. Basically, he means watching my back. “But it looks like this place is closed.”

She breaks into a bright smile. “Not for us.”

“That’s some rich people shit,” Kage whispers just loud enough for me to hear him.

I nod.

This entire area is high end *everything*. We do well as musicians, but we aren’t at that one-percent level of billionaires who probably shop at exclusive boutiques like this place.

How many months of salary is this little adventure going to set me back?

I’ve got more in savings than I know what to do with, but I usually avoid spending twenty grand on a single suit if at all possible. This place screams that I’ll be spending at least that.

Maybe it was growing up downright destitute, but I’ve never seen the point of blowing money just for the sake of it.

“Seems like you don’t know the first thing about the woman you’re supposedly in love with,” Carter says, crossing his arms over his chest. “Amira, that’s Shanna’s mom, in case you didn’t know, owns Cuffs and Buttons.” He nods to the sign over the door. “She’s a lovely woman. We had a great talk at Thanksgiving.”

I glare, giving him a look that should have him dropping dead where he stands.

Shanna scoffs, shaking her head as she comes to my side. Her small, cold hand lands in mine. “There’s plenty of time for learning all those details. Now come on, let’s get the four of you fitted in outfits that will drive the women in attendance out of their fucking minds.”

“I like her style.” Kage laughs. “Am I invited to this party?”

Shanna snorts. “No, the last thing I need is one of my dates embarrassing me when they flirt with someone else.”

“Fair enough,” Kage concedes. “Can I at least get an introduction to the pixie?”

“Chloe?” Shanna asks, scanning a card on the reader I hadn’t noticed.

“That’s the one.” Kage nods.

“She should be here. She’s one of my mom’s top designers in training.” Shanna grins and the door pops open. “But take a hint if she’s not interested. Otherwise, I’ll kick your ass out before you can blink.”

I tilt my head down, smiling at how serious she looks. My hand tightens around hers. It’s sexy seeing her unafraid to give Kage hell.

Shanna is in her element. I’ve never shopped at Cuffs and Buttons, but I’m going to be real. They’ve got some shit I can’t believe is in an upscale shop. The dresses are downright sinful, and the men’s aesthetic covers everything from uptight corporate America to edgy punk rock night out.

It clicks. Shanna isn’t just related to the industry through Fitz and Donovan. Her dads were huge in England back in the day.

That means our kids will have latent musically inclined DNA from both sides. That’s incredibly fucking hot. Not that I’ve given a whole lot of thought to kids, but she’s an omega. It’s practically impossible for them not to want a family. I’m down for all that, under the right circumstances.

We wrap up at the store, and there’s discussion about who is going with who. Saxon usually has me as his primary client.

“This really shouldn’t be that hard,” Jones says as we stand around in the cold outside the store.

“I called a car,” Kage says, coming in clutch. I give him a nod of appreciation. I figured Shanna and I would have to drop him off before heading to find food.

“I’m going to grab something to eat with Lang.” Shanna gives Jack and Carter a grin. “But I’ll see you back at the penthouse.”

“What do you mean?” I ask, pulling her closer to my side.

“We’re living together.” Carter smirks, nodding at Shanna. “She loves to bounce around with her tits hanging out at all hours of the night.”

“One time,” Shanna grumbles. “And I forgot you were going to be there. Whatever, I’m not going to defend my right to be nude in my own home. Where are we eating? I’m starving.”

I panic for half a second before remembering the Italian place next to the hotel is delicious and cozy. “How do you feel about pasta?”

“I love it,” she says enthusiastically.

“Jones, are you with us?” I ask.

“That works for me.” Jones nods, gesturing to the SUV. “Get in before there’s any additional debate about who goes where.”

“I guess that means I get the benefit of getting to know the two of you,” Saxon tells Jack and Carter. “Is there an extra room at your place for me?” He directs that part at Shanna.

“I haven’t been staying on site,” Jones says, giving my back a shove. “Move before this turns into a debate about who is living where.” The guy has very little patience, but at least he’s not a total asshole, like Saxon.

I shrug, leading Shanna over to the waiting SUV, but I really dislike the idea of them having home-court advantage. I’ll have to find a way to rectify that.

Being a friendly person is a gift when you need a favor. I made friends with Angela on my first trip to Angel’s. The name is a play on the fact the owner’s names are Angela and Angelo. Tell me that doesn’t get confusing.

The sixty-plus year old owner is as friendly as ever when she greets us. She gives us a curved booth in the back. It's nice and private. The last time Kage and I came in, she put us in the same booth.

Angela takes our drink order before heading off. I'm busy trying to figure out what the hell I'm supposed to do now.

Am I actually sweating?

It's the middle of winter.

I'm psyching myself out.

I've got this.

I just have to be my charming self.

Shanna's eyes widen as she takes in the decor. "This place is amazing," she says in her slightly Scottish accent. It's cute as fuck.

"It's a nice spot. A hidden gem," I tell her, grabbing the menus from the wall and putting one in front of her. I toss my arm around the back of the cushion and lean close. "I don't think I've ever been on a date before."

Shanna snorts. "I'm shocked."

"Smart-ass." I chuckle. "You'll have to tell me how I do."

"I'll be sure to grade you on a sliding scale, since this is your first try." She bumps her shoulder against my chest as her head comes to rest on my bicep.

Her light pineapple and flowery scent floods my nostrils. I'm still blown away every time I get smacked with it. I've never been scent affected before, but my attraction to her is the real deal.

"Thank you for your generosity." I laugh, running my fingers through her long hair. "You seriously aren't going to let us pay for our suits for tomorrow night?"

She shakes her head. "No way. It'll be great press for Cuffs and Buttons, but more than that, I invited you. Also, the markup on most of that shit is insane."

“Still. It feels weird. Do you know what you want?” I ask when I spot Angela coming back with our drinks and the delicious breadsticks they make in-house.

We place our order and settle in to wait.

It’s so fucking weird.

I know she’s got an adorable little mole on her left ass cheek, but I don’t know anything important. “I heard a little while we were being measured and fitted for our looks, but tell me what this thing is. Why do you have to be there?”

“My mom is a big name in the design community—”

“She’s a fucking supermodel. Seriously, she’s recognizable by first name only, and I’m pretty sure that’s one of the prerequisites or something.”

Shanna snorts, slapping my thigh. “I swear to God, if you are, or have ever been, attracted to my mother, then you keep that shit to yourself.”

I laugh, running my fingers down her arm. “She’s beautiful, but I seem to be enamored with a different member of the family. All right, so you’re the designer for the clothes for the show tomorrow?”

“Right, but it’s not a fashion show. It’s basically a fundraiser to find backers to fund production of my collection. It’s not like any money is going to change hands right there, but the interested parties will have a chance to see what to expect. It’s meant to reel them in.” She sighs. “I met a group of guys earlier this year at a mixer at The Omega Exchange. It made me a little leery when I heard they have their own clothing line, but I figured it was a fun coincidence.”

My eyebrows rise. Something in the tone of her voice or her energy is throwing me off. Shouldn’t this be a joyful occasion?

She finally goes on. “It clearly wasn’t a happy coincidence. I’m pretty sure they knew who I was and either purposely targeted me ahead of time, or they saw me at the event and approached me *because* of who my family is.”

“That’s why you said you’re so over people who play games,” I say.

“They courted me, or pretended to, for almost six months. I knew they wanted to expand their business to include women’s clothing.” She picks at her dress, staring at her lap. “I thought it was my idea to offer up a bunch of designs I had lying around, but the more time that passes, the easier it is to admit they gently led me to make that choice. I’m not saying it’s not my fault, but it was weird. They were really only kind or affectionate when I did what they wanted. And damn, did I want to make them happy...” She sighs. “It was stupid.”

My teeth ache as they grind together. “It’s really not your fault.”

“No, it is. If I wasn’t so desperate for them to accept me, then I would’ve seen the signs. If the same situation happened to a friend or family member, then I would have seen it coming. I definitely would’ve warned them.”

That’s the thing about emotional manipulation. It takes being on the outside to see it. That, or some distance from the situation. Omegas, especially, are at risk of being taken advantage of. It happened to my mother for years and she’s a beta. My mom fell into my father’s trap over and over again. That’s exactly how I ended up with two younger brothers.

I tell her as much before I can stop myself. “...you can’t beat yourself up about it.”

“I’m really sorry. God, that’s awful. Is your mom doing better now?”

I nod. “She met my stepdad a few years ago. It’s wild. She was only sixteen when she had me, but yeah, she held out hope that my dad was going to leave his wife for so many years...”

My head shakes as I remember exactly what a little shithead I was. I can’t count the number of times in my teenage years that I told her to find some self-respect and say enough was enough. It’s something that bothers me to this day,

but I couldn't understand why she didn't see what the rest of us did.

"That's rough." Shanna grabs my hand of the arm wrapped around her shoulders and links our fingers. "It's weird. I always assume alphas and omegas grow up in a pack, but I know that's not always the case."

"I have your salads," Angela says, setting them down on the table. I was so wrapped up in Shanna and my memories that I never even saw her come over. "The two of you look cozy. Someone give me a phone, so I can snap a picture."

Shanna snatches her phone out of her jacket pocket and hands it over.

Angela grabs a couple of pictures. I bend down, kissing Shanna's temple and Angela squeals. "Okay, that was the one. Definitely social media worthy." She hands the phone back and Shanna scans the pictures.

"Oh, by the way, can you add the security guy's meal to ours?" I ask, nodding to Jones a few tables away.

"Will do," Angela says with a wink.

"That was very thoughtful." Shanna grabs her fork to dig into her salad.

I'm pretty sure I'm winning at this whole dating thing.

Chapter Sixteen

Shanna

Being pleasantly surprised is a nice change of pace.

Lang is funnier and easier to talk to than I was expecting. He has a moment of pure panic when the check comes and he notices he doesn't have his wallet.

A quick call to the store verifies that he left it in the changing room at Cuffs and Buttons, but one of the interns will be dropping it off at his hotel reception desk.

I'm just about to offer to pay when he determines he can pay with the wallet on his phone.

It's cute watching him totally lose it for those few minutes. He handles it, though, and he leaves a two-hundred percent tip if my mathematical skills haven't failed me.

That alone is enough to make me want to jump on him.

He extends a hand, helping me out of the booth, and it only amps up the need to kiss him.

The way his brown curls fall over his forehead as he grins down at me also doesn't help my composure.

My heat needs to chill the hell out.

I have to make it through the event tomorrow night. Although, if it did hit, I'm pretty sure Pack Lewis couldn't sue, since heats are covered under mandatory medical leave.

"So, did I fuck up our first date?" Lang asks as we make it out into the cool night air. His hand tightens on my hip, and it makes me ache to tackle him and force his knot inside me.

“Hardly. I had a really good time. I’m actually stuffed.” I turn farther into his chest, breathing in his leathery scent.

“Thank fuck.” He chuckles. “I’ll plan something fancier for next time.”

“There’s no need. That was great.” I stretch up, kissing his jaw. His stubble scratches my face, but I don’t mind. He stares down at me with a lopsided smile that makes my heart race as my knees get wobbly.

“The car is waiting,” Jones says, breaking the moment.

“Jones, my friend. We need to find you a date. You’re getting crankier the longer I’ve known you, and it’s only been a couple of days.” I laugh, wrapping my arm around Lang’s back to pull him down the sidewalk.

“I don’t need a woman. I need a vacation. Maybe a bonus.” Jones strides off toward the turn we need to take.

This area is busy with traffic. When we arrived, the car let us off in a parking lot for several of the businesses. I assume that’s where we’re headed now.

“You know, while we were waiting, Chloe mentioned how much she likes your beard. It was a solid compliment. Just saying.”

Jones stops dead in his tracks, spinning around to face us. “Are you fucking with me?”

“Not a bit,” I assure him.

His head bobs. “Huh.” It’s an interested *huh* if I’ve ever heard one.

Lang’s hand slides from my hip down to my ass, giving a little squeeze. “You’re going to cause trouble. Kage is totally into her too.”

I laugh as my nose tingles in the frigid air. “Then, I guess he’ll have to learn to share.”

“I’m not even going to mention how much I hate the idea of sharing you,” he says, exhaling heavily. It makes the air fog as I turn to face him. Those black wings on his neck are sexy

as hell, but I bet it's practically impossible for him to go anywhere without being recognized.

I'm just starting to think how lucky we are that we haven't run into any paparazzi when we take the curve that leads to the parking lot.

Dammit.

I totally jinxed us.

"There he is." It comes from a guy with a camera. A half second later, several flashes follow.

"Fuck," Lang growls, using his hand on my lower back to pull me until I'm facing him. I look up at him in confusion. "Do you want me to carry you?"

My mouth opens, but no words come out. The times the press caught me with Pack Lewis run through my mind. Not once did any of them do a single thing to shield me, protect my anonymity, or even make me feel safe.

The commotion continues behind us, but I'm still frozen.

"It's something I've seen other alphas do. I should probably carry you, right? Like, that way I'll be able to guard your front and then Jones will block your back..." He frowns. "Do I have something in my teeth? Why are you looking at me like that?"

I lean farther into his chest as an unexpected bubble of laughter escapes mine. "That's very thoughtful, but unless you're trying to hide our relationship, I say we let it ride."

"Really?" His face breaks into a panty-melting grin. "You're cool with being linked to me?"

"Yep," I agree, stretching up to meet his mouth as he bends lower.

The sound of the press doesn't abate, but Jones's bitching and complaining does join the background noise.

We finally make it into the SUV. Jones takes the front while Lang and I end up in the back together.

“Where are we headed?” the driver asks.

“Shanna’s penthouse,” Lang says before I can speak.

I swivel to face him, giving him a look that likely expresses my confusion. I figured we would go back to his hotel. My place has Carter and Jack. And possibly Saxon, now that I think about it. If a real decision was made about where he’d be staying, then I didn’t hear it.

A shiver of unease slides down my spine as I realize I haven’t heard from Fitz or Tinley all day. Maybe that means the pictures of me with Jack never made it to publication?

That seems weird.

The paps run with pretty much any story, even if they don’t know the validity of what’s being said.

“Uh-oh,” Lang murmurs, suddenly very close to my ear. “Was that the wrong answer? It’s been a long day. I kinda wanted to show you that I can court you for real. Like, not just blow you away with multiple orgasms, but also charm you with my killer personality.” He buries his hand in my curls, tilting my face toward his before capturing my mouth in a slow kiss. The sensual way his tongue slides around mine makes my thighs clench and my perfume floods the air.

Lang growls.

I notice I never buckled myself in, about the time I move. He somehow lifts me out of my seat and into his with little difficulty. My knees settle on either side of his hips as his hand tightens on my ass.

His eyes seem exceptionally dark in the low light as they sparkle. Lang is the whole bad decisions package. As though the brown curls spilling out the front of his beanie weren’t enough to melt my brain, he has to go and break into a sexy smile that makes his dimples pop.

Goddamn it.

His hardening cock pushes against my panties and it feels *incredible*, but he’s so much taller than I am—even with me

kneeling over him—that I have to stretch up to be able to attack his mouth.

Lang chuckles, holding me tight as he kisses the fuck out of me.

“Well, shit,” Jones says.

I’m guessing he’s the one who turns the radio up obnoxiously loud. He might also be the one who cracks all the windows. Being an omega sure can be embarrassing at times. My pheromones flood the air, and despite the chill from the windows being down, it’s impossible to miss.

“I want you so bad,” I groan into Lang’s mouth.

“Fucking hell, sweetness. I swear your heat is coming faster than you think,” he growls, palming my head as he pulls back for air.

“Maybe, but it’ll be okay. I’ve got you,” I whisper, burying my face in his throat.

Did I seriously just say that out loud?

Lang is already full of himself.

I don’t need to fan his ego.

“Yeah, you do.” He gets closer to my ear and whispers, “I went and got tested again. I vaguely remember you telling me you wanted very recent test results in your hand before I could fuck you without a condom. I’ll have to check my email, but they said it would only take a day or two, since I paid for rush delivery.”

“Seriously?”

He nods. “I feel like I’m supposed to ask for yours or something. Is that how this conversation normally goes?”

I laugh. “I got tested after my last relationship, but you’re the only person I’ve been with. So, I can show you those, but they are a month old, at this point.”

“That works for me.” He runs his hand down my back. It manages to simultaneously soothe me and make me ache to take this up a notch. “I want to wait until I have mine in hand

before I fuck you again.” I pull my face out of his neck, so I can see his expression. “What? I told you I wanted to feel your slick little cunt wrapped around my bare cock. I jerked off last night like three times thinking about sinking inside you raw.”

A shiver courses down my spine as goose bumps erupt on my arms. My mind plays a lovely little fantasy video clip of what that must have looked and sounded like.

I whine as Lang dives forward, locking his lips to mine.

I’m achy.

This sucks.

“Thank fucking God,” Jones grumbles from the front seat. “We’ve arrived at your penthouse. Please feel free to exit the vehicle at your earliest convenience.”

“I’ll walk you up,” Lang says, opening the door of the SUV.

“And come inside?” I ask hopefully.

“Nope. I don’t even have a condom. I was serious about that shit.”

“Dammit.”

Chapter Seventeen

Shanna

“**S**hit, you live in a fancier building than I do.” Lang chuckles as we climb out of the elevator.

“My parents own the place. It’s not like I could afford it on my own,” I say, because talking about money always makes me uncomfortable.

“Still, I bet the view is killer.”

“It is. You can come in and see it for yourself.”

“You’re so fucking cute.” He backs me up to the wall right next to the door. “So, what’s the plan for birth control? If condoms are out—”

“I take oral birth control,” I say and frown. “I will be more accurate on taking it at the same time of day.”

Lang’s forearm comes to rest over my head. My stomach flip-flops wildly as he licks his lips. His eyes freaking sparkle as a lazy smile takes over his face. “Is that important or something?”

“Uh, yeah,” I say a little breathlessly. “But I’ll set an alarm.”

The tattooed fingers of his free hand brush over my cheek as he gives me a quick but panty-melting kiss. “Or don’t. I’ll leave that up to you.” He pecks me a final time and swaggers off toward the elevator.

I raise a hand to my lips like a total loser.

No man should be able to make my knees this weak with just a few words and a peck of a goodbye kiss.

I slam my key card into the door lock, and it clicks as expected. Letting myself in, I drop the card on the table like I always do before leaning down to strip out of my heels. My hand wraps around my phone, pulling it from my jacket pocket. I yank off my coat and toss it on the hook before heading for the kitchen.

The light is on in the living room.

A jolt courses through me when I spot Carter *and* Saxon staring at me in return.

Okay, weirdos.

The television isn't even on.

Have they been sitting out here, glaring at each other in the silence?

The thought makes me snort. I drop my phone on the counter, planting my hands on my hips. "What the hell are you two doing?"

"Definitely not getting lucky. I was hoping you'd do that thing where you strip before you make it to the kitchen," Carter says, flashing me a wink.

I laugh, shaking my head.

"What? I'm celibate for a few more days. Not a fucking saint." His hair falls over his forehead as he shrugs unapologetically. It's extremely difficult not to try to ruin his streak. My impulses can go to hell. I respect his commitment and the fact he's trying to better himself.

My eyes fly to Saxon to give myself something else to focus on. He's stretched out in one of the club chairs with his ankles crossed. He looks truly giant in comparison to the chair.

I meander closer, and he nods to his lap. My impulses won't let me ignore the invitation. I probably still smell like the shit ton of pheromones I spit out while making out with Lang, but I still climb into Saxon's lap.

The commanding look on his face softens when I snuggle up to his chest.

“I’ve never seen you docile and pliant. Lang must have given you the good dick in an attempt to win you over before I’m technically allowed on field,” Carter says from behind me. My nose searches around Saxon’s chest to sniff out where his scent is strongest, but I raise a hand, flipping Carter off as I exhale in relief. “I’m not even hating. If I was him, that would’ve been my plan too.”

“You don’t smell like sex at all,” Saxon says, running his hand down my back.

“Nope, now that we’re courting, he apparently wants to be all gallant. There were a few sensual kisses and some grinding, but nothing more than that.” I sigh, wiggling my nose deeper until my face is practically buried in Saxon’s armpit. It’s nice. He always smells manly and fresh. I don’t care if it’s weird. My impulses haven’t been so satisfied without sex in a long freaking time. “So ridiculous. I’m an omega. We practically need sex to survive.”

“Well, I’ve got to be up at the ass crack of dawn to hit my meeting. Night, Little Fitz,” Carter says. I tilt my head, catching sight of his back as he swaggers off. “You might want to have a talk with Jack. He seemed a little heartbroken that you ditched him for Langdon.” Carter snorts and continues until I can’t see him anymore.

“Damn,” I whisper.

“You know the other one isn’t so bad, but that guy? He’s almost as bad as Lang. They’ve also got it out for each other.” Saxon’s tone is soft and soothing, despite his words. “Are you sure you know what you’re doing?”

An unexpected bark of laughter escapes. “No, I don’t have the first clue what’s happening. And my brother still hasn’t called, which makes me highly suspicious that he might have been in on this little setup.”

“You mean with his bandmates?”

“Yeah, my best friend and my mom seemed to have orchestrated it. I don’t know,” I say around a yawn. I wiggle around as he runs his scratchy fingers down my back over the dress. “God, that’s so soothing.”

“I told you I was going to teach you the way an alpha should treat an omega they’re interested in.”

I nod my agreement, still soaking up the feeling of being held. His delicious woodsy pine scent is making me warm and fuzzy and strangely sleepy too. “I think I probably should go and talk to Jack before I call it a night. Did they get you settled in a room?”

“They did. I chose the one next to the nest, though. They kept trying to put me on the other side of the penthouse. This place is incredible, by the way.”

“They were trying to put you on my brother’s side. It’s basically guest rooms now, but if you found somewhere you’re comfortable, that works for me.” I pat his chest and prepare to climb out of his lap. “Do you happen to know which room Jack is in?”

“Not exactly, but the last two at the end of the hall are taken. Although, I couldn’t tell you who is on which side.”

“Thanks, Saxon.” I give his fluffy jaw a quick kiss and finally stand up. “Gah, I’m exhausted.”

“You need to rest. Omegas are meant to nest and relax, leading up to their heat.”

“I will once it gets closer,” I assure him before heading off. I figure I’ve got a fifty-fifty chance of getting it right.

I knock on the door to my left once I make it to the end of the hallway.

No one answers.

Carter shouldn’t be asleep.

I saw him like five minutes ago.

So, that probably means this is Jack’s room and he’s already asleep...right?

Yeah, probably.

I try the handle like I have every right to do so. The door pops open and my jaw falls just as quickly.

Carter is in boxer briefs with a whole lot of tattooed skin on display. Jesus Christ, there's barely an inch of his flesh without intricate artwork. He's rubbing at his hair with a towel, and he turns slowly at the sound of me hyperventilating.

This is bad.

So bad.

Awful.

A disaster waiting to happen.

I'm fairly sure if I licked his abs, that would be weird.

Or wonderful.

My impulses are screaming at me to rip off my dress and present like any good omega should. I lick my lips as my mouth literally waters.

"That's some serious eye fucking if I've ever seen it." Carter gives me a cocky grin that *should* piss me off. Somehow, it only makes my thighs clench tighter.

I shake my head, trying to will away the haze. "Jack?" It comes out as a question.

"Right across the hall." He nods toward the open door. "I'm glad you're actually going to talk to him. He's a solid guy, and he's been fucked over one too many times. If you're not interested, then maybe cut the cord, yeah?"

I'm still a little too focused on the way his abs ripple as he dries his messy hair. Otherwise, I'd say something shitty right back to him. But also, he's just looking out for his friend.

Which is kind of hot.

Being loyal is an attractive trait to have.

I nod, but I'm still drooling like a total creep. I stumble out of the room, his laughter following me. The door closes

quietly as I weave over to Jack's room. My entire body is warm and achy.

Maybe I should leave this until the morning?

I glance down the hallway toward my side of the penthouse, but the urge to check on him is too strong to ignore. I knock gently, and when I don't hear any type of response, I try the handle.

His room is dark, and there's clearly an alpha-shaped lump in the bed. I let myself in and keep the handle turned until the door is closed to keep it from clicking. It's super silent. I sleep with a fan and sometimes the television for background noise.

My toes dig into the carpet as I try to decide if this is wholly inappropriate. Carter is an instigator if I've ever seen one. My feet propel me forward before I can stop myself.

Jack is stretched out with the blanket covering his lower half and his forearm tossed over his eyes. It's surprisingly cute. My dress is noisy, scratching against my skin and itself as I move. Or maybe I'm hypersensitive at the moment.

Omegas do tend to get overly sensitive to noises and scents the closer to our heat we get. My knees hit the edge of the bed, and I pull the covers back as I slide up to Jack's side. The arm he's got thrown over his face gives me a convenient opening to snuggle up to his chest.

He jolts, ripping his arm down. It doesn't take long for his hand to land on my ass.

"Whoa, hey." He leans up a little so he can look at me. "Are you okay?"

"I'm good," I agree, running my fingers over his chest. There's some type of intricate geometrical pattern lining the middle of his sternum. "I'm sorry I never mentioned Lang—"

"It's a little crazy that you know him," he says around a yawn. "But I grew up in a pack. I get it. The omega builds their unit."

"Right, but I'm still sorry for the way everything went down today. I didn't even know if he'd call, but I am attracted

to him. That doesn't take away from my interest in you, though."

"I honestly don't know how you'll get Lang and Carter to get along, but whatever. I'm down for the ride." He chuckles. "I'm sleepy. That sounded like an insinuation I didn't mean to make."

I snort, snuggling deeper into his warm chest. "You're cute."

"And you know I think you're beautiful," he says sleepily.

"You smell strange to me," I mumble, running my fingers over the few fine hairs on his chest. "Kind of electric, like the weather right before a storm. Like lightning with hints of rain or dew? I'm not sure I've ever smelled a scent like yours."

His whole body tenses for a half a second before his hand tightens on my hip. "That is interesting. Your scent is like some kind of lightly floral fresh flower with a hint of rain or dew."

"Huh, usually, I get fruity like pineapple and then roses or lilies, if someone is familiar with flower scents."

His hand runs over my hip and up to my waist before sliding back down again. He smells delicious and it makes my chest feel warm as my body gets that sleepy, floating feeling. I fall asleep before I know what's happening.

Chapter Eighteen

Jack

Shanna strips out of her dress in the middle of the night, but I don't think she's awake enough to realize it.

My heart tries to race right out of my chest when she snuggles her ass into my cock and grabs my arm, wrapping it around her middle.

Maybe it's weird, but I've always loved cuddling. Lounging is one of my favorite activities, and feeling her bare skin press against mine is enjoyable as fuck.

The only problem is my dick is being uncooperative. I try breathing through my mouth, thinking about random song lyrics, baseball, and other boring shit, but it doesn't help at all.

Several hours pass exceptionally fucking slowly. I lie here, trying to be a gentleman, or at the very least, respectful of the fact she's asleep.

My instincts are a fucking disaster. Thoughts file through my mind on a loop, trying to convince me that we have a highly compatible little omega aching to be bred.

It's by far the weirdest experience I've had in a long fucking time. I'm absolutely down for kids one day, but I'd like to spend some time actually getting to know the woman I'm trying to court. Although, my birth corresponds almost exactly with my parents' first year anniversary, and they've had a happy life together.

I shake my head, carefully pulling my face out of Shanna's hair. It's hard to convince my fingers to stop digging into her

stomach, but I manage. My impulses are definitely on the verge of going off the deep end. I scoot back a foot or so and roll onto my back.

I've barely slept a fucking wink. It's nice that she cared enough to come look for me, though. I spent a lot of hours last night wondering if she'd even want me now that Lang is in the picture.

Women only stay interested in me until something better comes along. It's happened so many times, I'm not even surprised anymore. Ramsey and Carter love to tell me that it's because I'm too nice, but fuck that. I don't care how many times I get screwed over. I'm not going to fundamentally change who I am. Some of the shit Carter says makes me want to punch him on Shanna's behalf. I'm never going to be that guy.

It's only a few minutes between when I back away and when Shanna rolls over. She huffs in her sleep and starts wiggling around until she's once again right at my side. I raise my arm, tossing it over the pillows so that she can snuggle up to my chest if she needs it.

It's hard to remember that she's an omega. I mean, it's not hard at all when I catch hits of her scent, but I've only had relationships with betas. It's a whole different world when alphas and omegas are involved. I've heard it from my dad's my entire life, but I never considered how much different things would be. She craves my pheromones just like I do hers. There's a kind of comfort in that, considering my shitty dating history.

Shanna cuddles her way right onto my chest, and I smile like a total fucking weirdo as my hand lands on her ass. Her hair goes everywhere, even landing in my mouth, but I don't mind. She tosses a leg over my pelvis, making my chest rise and fall with a heavy sigh. My dick was just starting to chill. A low purr starts in my chest, startling the fuck out of me. I pull my free hand up to rub at it. It's weird feeling the vibration.

Shanna's hand slides up my stomach, eventually landing near mine. She runs her fingers over my pec, but I'm pretty

sure she's still asleep. It's wild and *really* fucking cute.

Her skin is warm against mine, but not hot like it would be during a heat. After a while, she tries to roll on top of me but gets stuck on my side. I give her ass a helpful little shove.

Is it creepy?

Maybe.

It's probably crossing several lines too.

Her face cuddles to my purring chest, and I get slammed with that feeling of alpha pride that they always warn us about.

She's fucking precious, and she sought me out.

Not the other way around.

My cock ended up trapped to my lower abdomen when she climbed on top of me, and it pulses as she wiggles her panties over my shaft.

Fuck. My. Life.

It's been so long that it's nearly impossible to keep myself still. It doesn't help that she's mostly nude since losing the dress. The top of her tits poke out of her bra. They brush against my skin as she moans in her sleep. My hand lands on her lower back in an attempt to settle her, but she grinds over me like she's enjoying whatever she's dreaming about. Her breath fans over my skin as she lets out a little gasp.

I run my fingers along her lower back, using my palm to try to keep her still. My attempt to comfort her seems ineffective.

She probably needs to soak up my pheromones directly from my skin, but if she could do that without making me come in my boxer briefs, then that would be great.

She's still asleep.

It's not like she's purposely trying to drive me insane. Her pussy lips frame my shaft as the scent of her arousal floods my senses. Her entire body tenses as she moans. I tilt my head down, checking out her face. She wakes up, blinking owlily, like she has no idea where she is or what's happening.

“I vaguely remember you stripping out of your dress a few hours ago, but I didn’t do that, in case you were wondering.” My voice sounds pained.

“Oh, I believe you. I like sleeping naked whenever possible,” she whispers, planting her hands on my chest and pushing herself up.

My eyes widen.

The tops of her tits have escaped her bra to the point her piercings are visible—at least the top one.

“Jack...” Her eyes fall shut as she licks her lips. “I’m so completely drenched that I’m pretty sure the front of your boxers are soaked.” Her eyes pop open and her chest heaves in rapid pants. “It’s like my pussy knows there’s alpha cock right there within reach. I didn’t mean to take advantage of you while we were asleep.”

“No, you didn’t.” I clear my throat. “I’m not sure if this counts as cheating, but I’m not going to lie—it feels fucking amazing. Please feel free to continue.” A lazy grin crosses my face.

Her pheromones thump, pulsing in the air and making my nose twitch. I’m not sure I’ve ever tasted someone’s scent before, but I can taste hers.

My hands tighten on her hip and lower back. I pull her over my swollen length. The tip of my cock leaks pre-cum. My balls are already tight. This is how I embarrass the hell out of myself.

“Was I grinding all over you in my sleep?” she asks as her shoulders tremble.

“A little, but I didn’t mind. I’ve been mentally debating if this counts as breaking my streak.”

“Oh. It might.”

“I’m mostly just providing moral support for Carter,” I say, and my justification sounds shitty to my own ears.

“Yeah, but I still don’t want to ruin that if it’s important to you,” she says, curving toward my chest. I almost think she’s

going to lick my skin or maybe my nipple, but her head shakes.

“I should probably have a discussion with him before I do anything to throw off his progress,” I admit, even though it’s really hard to force the words out.

She pulls an arm to her lower stomach, pushing against it with her forearm. “That sounds logical.” Her face falls to my chest as she nods.

“Hey, are you okay?” I move a hand to cup her head.

A whimper escapes her puffy pink lips as she pushes up so she can meet my eyes. The pained expression makes my chest ache.

“I don’t know,” she whispers. “I should have weeks left before this kind of pain starts. Why does the universe hate me? I’m pretty sure being close to compatible alphas is making it worse, not better.”

My hands land on her ass, and I pull her cheeks apart, which also spreads her pussy. I yank her down over my shaft, showing her exactly how ready I am to meet her needs. It would feel so much better without the fabric of both our underwear in the way.

“Are you in heat?” I ask, using my elbows to sit up a bit. The hopeful tone in my voice makes me feel like a dick. It would make for an excellent excuse to say *fuck you* to my final few days of celibacy.

“It’s probably a wave. A very potent and early wave that I blame on you.”

“Shit, what do we do?” I ask, like I have no idea how alphas and omegas fit together.

“I’m going to go. That way, you don’t break your vow.”

“Christ, it’s not a religious thing.” I exhale heavily. “You smell too fucking good.” The tip of my cock works against her pussy as she grinds her hips.

I’m about to lose my fucking mind—toss her down, rip her panties off, fuck her, and probably claim her—if I can’t get my

shit together. She's not helping anything with the wide eyes and the way she licks her lips. Okay, it's time to problem solve, or I'm literally going to snap. If it can't slip inside her, then what's the next best thing?

"How about you get yourself off while I watch?"

Her head tilts. "Does it count as cheating if you do too?"

My hair falls over my face as my head shakes. "I have no idea."

"Okay, the two of you are physically paining me," Carter says, tossing himself down on the bed at our side.

I don't know when he came in, but he needs to leave.

She's mine.

A low snarl rattles out of my chest, but Carter snorts, flipping me off.

"The universe really does hate me. I can't be here. I'm about two seconds away from asking for a threesome and ruining your year-long commitment." She moves to scramble away, but I grab her lower back, holding her in place. "I have to go. I care, even if my impulses don't."

"Damn, Little Fitz. When did you get so dramatic?" Carter chuckles.

Shanna huffs, swiping hair out of her eyes as she frowns.

"It's not my commitment," I assure her. "I'm just providing moral support. It started because..." I realize bringing up that I thought Ava and I were in a long-distance relationship is a bad plan. By the time I learned that she was just stringing me along, it had already been almost three months with no sex, so to help keep Carter motivated, I told him I would hold out with him.

"Okay, too much talking." He gets close to Shanna's ear. "You smell like you're drenched. I'm sure you remember how to dry fuck. Go on, kiss him and get yourself off." His fingers slide under the side of her string bikini-cut panties. "I bet if you take these off, it'll be more enjoyable for both of you."

Her teeth dig into her lower lip as her thighs tighten around my hips. I quirk an eyebrow, giving her a playful smile. I'm trying to say *the ball is in your court*.

She nods as Carter snaps the band, running his fingers over her side. He moves in a flash and helps her out of them.

"Are you even allowed to be here for something like this?" she asks as he undoes her bra. My hands fall to the soft skin of her sides as I run my thumbs over her hip bones.

"I'm allowed to do whatever the fuck I want," Carter says, pulling her hair to the side. "Well, as long as you're not kicking me out. I'll watch. Maybe offer a little back-up assistance." His hands work over her shoulders, pushing her bra straps down her arms. He tosses the material aside and drags his nose over her skin. His eyes meet mine, and he winks. "You two are seriously slow." His hands land low on her hips, pushing her dripping pussy down *hard* on my swollen cock.

"Damn," I whisper, watching her tits bounce. My boxer briefs are in the way of all the good stuff.

My grip on her waist turns punishing as I growl. It seems to spur her on, even though Carter is no longer helping her grind. He frames her back as he kisses and licks her shoulder, but his hands move around to cup her tits.

I should have thought of that.

Her scent floods the air so heavily that everything gets hazy. She keeps one hand on my pec to keep steady but brings the other to pull herself even farther apart. Her pussy is pink and wet and looks so fuckable that I groan.

Her fingers brush over the material of my boxer briefs, making my shaft jump and swell. Before I can really process what's happening, she's holding herself up and ripping them down. My cock slaps against her ass as she shoves my boxer briefs just past my balls.

"Jesus fuck," I growl as she lowers her cunt until it's grinding on my pulsing shaft. Her pussy lips perfectly frame my length as she slides, bumping from my knot to my crown.

Her shoulders curve toward me as Carter continues to tease her tight nipples.

“This is so much better. God, you’re so hard,” she sobs, leaking slick all over my cock, balls, and thighs. Every gyration of her hips has pre-cum dribbling from my crown.

“You’re not afraid to take what you want,” Carter growls, nipping at her ear. “That’s seriously sexy.” He tugs nipples between his fingers. “Such a dirty girl. My cock is literally throbbing.” It seems like he grinds it against her hip because she moans, growing even slicker.

Her forearm flies to her lower stomach. A whine rattles out of her lips as she falls forward. “It’s not enough. I need more. Please.”

I lock my muscles to keep from pouncing, but it’s practically impossible for an alpha to ignore an omega’s whine.

Carter releases her tits before rolling to the side of the bed at our side. He stretches out, staring at her face. “Tell him exactly what you’re asking for.”

“More,” she sobs, shaking her head. It’s then I catch sight of exactly how glassy her eyes are. Fuck, okay, maybe the wave is worse than we originally thought?

“I’ve got you.” My hand lands under her chin, tilting her head up until her eyes meet mine. The pleading look on her face forces me into action. I lean up in a crunch, meeting her in the middle and shoving my tongue into her mouth. My crown bounces against her hole before sliding to her clit. It’s nearly impossible to keep from bucking up inside her, but I don’t have a condom, and we haven’t had any of the important conversations that need to happen. I move my other hand to her ass. It keeps her moving as she works over my throbbing length. The kiss goes on and on until we both need air. “Good God, Shanna. Do you know how much I want to fuck up into you?”

“Do that!” She wiggles her hips like she’s trying to force my dick inside her tight little hole.

“I’m hanging on by a thread here.” I slap her ass, rest a hand on her lower back, and roll her before the conscious thought crosses my mind.

“Hey, you’re covering all the good stuff,” Carter growls, scooting closer.

A moan escapes Shanna’s lips as she stares at his cock in his hand.

I still have no idea why any man would want to pierce their dick, but I do love Shanna’s nipple piercings.

Carter rolls on his side, holding his head up on his palm as he jerks off. “Don’t mind me. I’m just enjoying the show. I figure it’s basically like watching porn.”

“Please fuck me.” Her eyes fall closed as she trembles.

“None of that!” I bark. “Eyes on me, beautiful.” I lean over her on my knees, and my crown bumps all around her slick little pussy. I wrap my fist around my shaft, slapping the head against her clit. This is already too far without having a serious conversation about medical history and birth control, but her hand flies to spread her pussy open even farther and all logical thought bleeds away. Her fingers land on the top of my cock as she tries to move me to her hole. “Not yet, but soon. Fuck me, I can’t wait to slide inside you. Rub your clit for me.”

She doesn’t listen, but she does whine as her feet bounce against the bed. I jerk my crown right against her swollen pink nub. I bend over her until my forearm lands on the mattress, still jerking with the other hand. She captures my mouth as soon as it’s within reach. Her slick cunt, combined with the feeling of her tongue dancing around mine, is almost too much.

Carter continues to bitch that I’m covering all the good stuff.

“Please, I need the pressure,” she begs, clawing at my back. “Just a little. That’s all. The tip even. Just shove the tip in me. I want your cum...” She goes on, but the haze of her pheromones have me functioning at baser level only.

“I’m there,” I warn as my cock swells. My tip slaps against her wet lower lips as I run my thumb over her clit and tighten my grip on my length. My knot pulses, desperate for pressure, but I don’t have a free hand.

“Please, Jack. Just slide inside me,” she begs against my lips. “I’m... Oh, fuck.”

My balls get tight as pleasure licks down my spine. She thrashes under me, and my mouth ends up against her cheek as I growl. My cock kicks, and I spill hot cum all over her clit.

I barely have the ability to keep my weight from crushing her. Her hands slide lower, digging into my ass while I’m still frozen. She plants her feet on the bed and thrusts, forcing my cock down until it notches at her opening. I snarl as my mouth finds hers. She wiggles, pushing up off the bed and maneuvering me inside her. Her warm, wet walls ripple around my crown in a way I’ve never experienced.

“God,” I groan, panting into her mouth.

“Deeper,” she begs, clawing at my ass. “Fill me up!”

I pull out and thrust back in, but try to keep it from technically counting. It’s a ridiculous thought to have as my dick jumps, spilling a final time. My knot throbs, convinced it should be buried in her snug little pussy too.

Her hand brushes my pelvis as she moves to tease her clit. “I don’t know if I’m still coming or coming again...” The milking waves intensify to the point she actually sucks my shaft deeper.

I move my hand closer to my crown, still trying to convince myself this doesn’t count, and that I didn’t just ruin everything.

Carter’s scent floods the air, mixing with ours.

“Jack, oh God, you feel incredible. Just slam into me. Please, alpha,” she moans, curving toward me as her tits brush my chest. I’m still heaving in deep lungfuls of air while trying to catch my breath. I peck a final kiss on her lips and pull back until I’m kneeling. She writhes around the bed with her dark curls fanning around her sweat-slicked skin. The four silver

balls that frame each nipple make for such an erotic image that my cock leaks, jumping again.

“Well, I’m going to go before I do something stupid.” Carter climbs off the bed, and a few seconds later, the door opens and closes. “Good show. I enjoyed it. It would’ve been even better if Jackson wasn’t covering all my favorite parts, but still.”

“It’s been so fucking long,” I chuckle, shaking my head.

She nods. “Uh yeah, a year sounds like forever.”

I’m still buried a couple inches inside her and reality catches up pretty quick.

“I just came inside you.” I cup her left tit and bend, sucking the nipple into my mouth. I finally release my cock and use that palm to hold me up while I brush my fingers over her cheek. “Shanna, I just came inside you without a condom.”

“You should do it again.” She nods frantically. “Jack, I need more.”

Okay, maybe she’s too lost to the fog to think rationally. Now that I am not, I have no excuse. I pull free of her cunt and roll next to her on the bed.

She whines, thrashing as her feet bounce against the mattress. “No, I asked for more! Why? Do I need to beg?”

I lean over her top half and bury two fingers inside her while teasing her clit. My cum drips out around my fingers, and it makes it nearly impossible not to let the fog slip back in. “Shh, I’ve got you. Let’s make sure all this stays where it belongs.”

“Jack,” she moans, wiggling her hips. It makes her tits jiggle and my dick jumps. My palm brushes her clit as I scoop the excess cum from her lower lips and stuff it back inside her. “That actually feels really good.”

“Your snug little cunt feels pretty fucking incredible wrapped around my fingers.” I brush my lips over hers. “But do you know how pissed I am at myself right now?”

“I’m angry too. I need your knot.” She tries to turn away, but I nudge her face back toward me with mine.

“I wanted to court you before all this. Be romantic. Show you that I like you. Shit, clench just like that. Ride my hand, beautiful.”

She smiles against my lips. “I’m an omega on the verge of her heat. I need your cum more than you know. We can do romantic stuff and have sex. Sex is super romantic, especially if you actually fuck me.”

I laugh. She’s exceptionally cute. “Come on my fingers, and go on a date with me, then I’ll fuck you nice and deep. Lock my knot inside you and listen to you scream *all night long*.”

“Tonight?”

I crook my digits, changing direction and plunging in and out until her whole body convulses as she arches off the bed. “Yeah, if that event counts as a date. Come *now*, beautiful.”

“I am.”

I stretch my fingers and her pussy locks down. Her entrance ripples like it’s searching for a swelling knot.

“I almost want to punch myself in the face. I can’t wait to see what it feels like when you flutter around my knot like that. Goddamn, watching you come apart is the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.” I continue with soft praises until her body starts to settle. She pants, sliding a hand up to run through my hair. “I’m really fucking glad you climbed into bed with *me* last night.”

A lazy smile crosses her face. “Me too. By the way, I’m on birth control. I mostly take it as directed, which reminds me. As soon as my legs feel like they’ll hold me up, I should probably go take that.”

I growl, capturing her mouth.

Jesus Christ, the idea of breeding her has my cock rock hard again. It’s an innate impulse for alphas to breed omegas, but more than that, I’ve been ready for a family for a while

now. Locking Shanna down so she can't escape sounds pretty fucking perfect too.

No, wait.

I want a chance to spend some time with her before that. My impulses don't care. They're much more hedonistic than I am generally.

I finally pull my hand free of her sex as the kiss ends. "I've been tested twice in the last year. It's a mandatory part of the health screening they do before every tour or specialty show set. They were negative. I've also never fucked without condoms, but it sounds like we're good to go for tonight." All rational thought disappears as I bring my fingers to my mouth to lick her slick clean. It's sweet just like her, and I can't get enough.

Shanna's hooded eyes flutter closed as she watches me suck her taste from my hand. "That's insanely sexy." Her eyes pop open. "Holy shit, I think I just got pregnant from that look. Don't look at me like that. It makes my brain melty." She pushes my shoulders, and I stretch back on the bed with a lazy smirk crossing my face. "You're so hot, it's actually melting my brain matter. I need to go take my birth control before I forget." She rolls off the bed, grabs my T-shirt I wore last night, pulls it over her head, and runs to the door. She yanks it open and turns back, giving me a solid once-over. A whimpering moan slips out and she smiles. "You're really attractive, and I really like you."

I chuckle as she bolts from the room.

The door closes behind her as I toss myself back against the pillows. Her scent is everywhere. I could get used to smelling it for the rest of my life.

Chapter Nineteen

Shanna

Breakfast is going to be awkward. I have no idea why that's the first thing that crosses my mind as I dart down the hallway toward my bedroom, but here we are. My nose twitches as I breathe delicious breakfast smells. My one great regret about this building is that it doesn't have a restaurant or room service. Fitz called me spoiled the one time I brought it up to our parents, so I let it go.

"Nice shirt," Saxon grunts, nodding to Jack's T-shirt that falls mid-thigh. "I made breakfast."

My head tilts.

Yeah, I can smell that, but... "I never have any breakfast food." Partially because I rarely eat in the morning, but mostly, it's due to the fact I'm a terrible cook.

"Dane picked it up after his morning meeting," Saxon says, drinking what smells like coffee.

"We all call him Carter. Wait, we have coffee?" I blurt out, leaning toward the rich aroma of caffeinated goodness. I normally have that delivered too.

"You do now. Come have a seat, and I'll make you a plate." He sets down the coffee mug on the counter and moves to grab a plate from the stack.

"Uh." I back toward my side of the penthouse. "Sure, just let me go take my meds."

And maybe grab some panties.

I wouldn't turn down a quick shower, either.

Saxon's head cocks as he gives up on the plate and, instead, steps around the island, coming closer. "What types of medications do you take?"

My cheeks heat as my head shakes. That's not really any of his business. "A multivitamin for omegas, another for my hair, and birth control."

He nods, stopping in front of me. His hands land on my hips as he leans close, breathing in my scent. "You do smell like sex this morning." My cheeks get hot, but he brushes a kiss over my lips. "Go handle taking your medications and come back *just the way you are*."

Um, does he mean dripping in Jack's cum and bare under the T-shirt? Because that actually sounds kind of hot. "Just like this?"

His hand slides down, cupping my pussy over Jack's shirt. "That's what I said, vixen."

I suck in a sharp breath as my core clenches.

"Your pupils are blown." His head shakes like he's clearing away the fog. "I have plans to feed you by hand. We're going to make sure you're getting enough nutrients leading up to your heat." He nods toward my room. "Go take your medications and come back to me. You have two minutes before I come searching."

A shiver runs down my spine.

"Yes, Daddy." I spin around to skip off.

He slaps my ass, chuckling a low throaty sound.

Holy fuck.

That noise alone makes me ache to sit on his beard.

"Mmm, it smells delicious," I say, trying not to freak out. I'm not sure when I lost my chill, but Carter and Jack are at the table with Saxon as I make it back into the room. The lazy smile on Jack's face makes my heart thump as my knees get

weak. Amazing flashes of earlier play through my mind. I exhale heavily, trying to get myself together.

Carter looks extremely smug, but dammit, it works for him in a way that cocky grin has no right to.

There's a free chair next to Saxon. I move to take a seat in it, but he shoves his chair back, nodding to his lap. "Sit facing me."

"Um..." I'm not even sure what to say.

He told me to come back exactly how I was.

I did.

"Have a seat," Saxon repeats.

My knees wobble as I hike up Jack's T-shirt and take a seat.

"You've got a killer ass," Carter says.

"Thanks," I mutter.

"The big guy is just full of surprises. Do you like being covered in another guy's cum?" Carter asks, like he's desperate to start a fight.

Jack sounds like he's actually choking to death, and my head swivels to check on him. His eyes are huge as he shoves Carter's shoulder.

"Good luck surviving in a pack if you're really going to make a big deal about that." Saxon leans forward. My face ends up buried in his shoulder as his arms frame me. I can hear him cutting something up. "Her heat is coming. Biology dictates it will be less severe with milder cramps if she soaks up alpha pheromones, and yes, semen." I bury my face deeper into his chest as my cheeks flame like they're actually on fire. "No, none of that. Here, have a bite. It's French toast."

My nose wrinkles as I lean back. I generally prefer pancakes. "Can you slather it in butter and extra syrup?"

"For the next bite, I'll add some extra syrup," he agrees, wiggling the fork in front of my mouth.

“Where did you learn that stuff about her heat?” Carter asks as I take the offered bite and chew.

I brushed my teeth when I took my meds, and syrup and mint toothpaste aren't a great combination. I swallow the food, anyway.

“I took the alpha and omega dynamics class probably twenty years ago. It felt like a good idea to brush up on my knowledge, so I grabbed an audiobook and listened to it last night and in the gym this morning.” Saxon holds out a glass of orange juice, and I frown at it.

“I'd rather have coffee,” I say.

“Caffeine leading up to your heat can increase the nesting impulse. We've got a busy day.” Saxon unceremoniously tips the cup to my lips. “You can have a little if you really want it, but I didn't know that before this morning. It can also increase your sensitivity to sounds and smells.”

“Damn,” Jack says from behind me. “I'm going to need that title. I used to read on my phone a lot when we were on the bus.”

“Suck up,” Carter mutters as Saxon hands me another bite.

“Oh no, I don't do eggs. At all. Ever. Unless they're cooked into a dessert, I'm not interested,” I say, shaking my head when I catch sight of the fork of scrambled eggs.

“That's good to know. It's not an allergy, I'm guessing, if you're able to eat them in cooked foods.” Saxon takes the bite himself as his free hand runs down my back. It's extremely hard not to grind over his lap. His woodsy scent is everywhere, flooding my nose with his pheromones. That's not helping a damn thing. The fork clangs against the plate and then a half strip of bacon wiggles in front of my lips. “You need the protein.”

My mouth opens, and he offers a bite. I take it, chewing and swallowing.

“I had a whole load of wasted protein this morning...” Carter laughs.

A low smack fills the air, and Jack says, “Dumbass.”

“You finally got laid. Kinda. You kinda got laid,” Carter says, sounding amused. “Why are you so physically violent this morning?”

I laugh but take the rest of the bacon Saxon offers. My tongue darts out, licking his finger... Mostly by accident, but also maybe a little on purpose.

Saxon growls, staring down at me with a look of pure hunger—and not for the delicious breakfast options.

I lick my lips. “Is that maple bacon? Or was it covered in syrup? Either way, it’s good.”

“Maple.” Saxon runs his thumb over my lip. “They have to practice with Trigger Finger again. Do you need to go to the club—”

“I totally forgot. I’m supposed to be working on sketches for Chloe today.”

“So, you’ll be coming with us?” Jack asks.

“I’m not sure. I have no idea where my phone is. I think I left it on the counter last night.” My head swivels toward the kitchen island.

“I plugged it in. It’s on your nightstand,” Saxon says. “Christmas is in a couple days, but I want you to plan a hard stop sometime soon. Your heat is clearly approaching faster than planned and you need time to nest. Your body will thank you for listening to its cues.”

I nod, but it’s a seriously busy time. If I could get out of the fundraiser tonight, then I would, but I’m not okay with slacking when it comes to the stuff with Ruined Records. It would reflect badly on Mom and Donovan.

“I’m not trying to be a controlling dick.” Saxon’s hand moves up to palm my head. “I’m just saying, if you work there today, maybe plan to take tomorrow off. See if there are any aspects of the job you can do from home. That kind of thing.”

“It’s not a bad plan,” Carter chimes in. “Today is our last practice until after New Year’s. There’s no reason for you to

be going back to that grungy club.”

“I’m going to tell Rook you called it that,” I lie, twisting to face Carter and Jack. “I’m only kidding, but why didn’t they just wait until after New Year’s to set you guys up?”

“It’s not like any of us have families,” Carter says, shrugging. “He’s probably hoping we’ll practice on our own time, or maybe they’re giving us time to think it over and a chance to back out before the shows start. Who the fuck knows?”

“Have either of you talked to Fitz?” I ask, chewing at my lip. “I haven’t. Not even Tinley, and that’s unusual.”

“I did briefly last night.” Jack wipes his mouth with a napkin. “I, uh, wanted to give him a little warning about my interest in you. It was a quick talk, but he seemed preoccupied. I’m not sure if your family shares details, or if you keep things pretty private...”

“What are you saying? Even I’m confused,” Carter says, bumping his shoulder against Jack’s.

“He just said he had to get back to the nest. I don’t think he *really* heard a word I was saying...” Jack shrugs.

“Did Tinley finally start her heat?” I gasp, turning so far, I almost fall into the table. Saxon steadies me with a hand on my hip and lower back.

Jack shakes his head. “He didn’t say that, but he did mention she’s been spending a lot of time nesting since they got back to Maine. I think they’re hoping it’ll start.”

I nod, swallowing thickly.

“Who is that?” Saxon asks, tilting my face back to his. My body follows and I end up cuddling my face to his shoulder.

“Fitz is my brother. Tinley is my best friend.” I frown as my nose scrunches. “And she’s bonded to my brother, but she hasn’t had a heat yet. God, I really hope it does start. That would be the perfect Christmas gift.” I bite my lip to keep from saying more.

It's a complicated situation because I really don't want the details of anything involving her and my brother. On the other hand, I know she wants kids, and without a heat, that chance is unlikely. I'm adult enough to mostly ignore how weird it is that they're together.

"You'll meet them if you stick around," Carter says, shoving his chair back. I can't really see him, but the sound leads me to believe it was him standing up. "If you're coming with us, we'll be leaving in about an hour."

Jack also gets up. "Thank you for breakfast."

"No problem," Saxon says. "I'll get you some books you can check out before her heat starts."

"Thank you." Jack comes around the back of the chair and bends down at my side. He wraps a hand in my hair, pulling my mouth to his.

Saxon grunts, his hand tightening on my lower back.

Jack doesn't just give me a chaste kiss. His tongue dances against mine. As he pulls back, he rakes his teeth over my lower lip. An embarrassing little whimper slips out as I try to follow his mouth. He grins, nuzzling his nose to mine as he finally releases my hair. "Tonight. I can't fucking wait." He chuckles and heads off while I'm still licking my lips like a total weirdo.

Chapter Twenty

Saxon

“Did you really look up information about how to take care of omegas?” Shanna whispers once Jack swaggers out of the room.

“I did,” I admit. “It’s been a lot of years, and to be honest, I didn’t pay much attention in that class.”

“That’s very sweet,” she says, blinking up at me from behind her dark lashes.

“No, that’s the baseline minimum you should expect from anyone you would consider allowing to court you.”

Her head tilts as she tries to look away. It’s clear she doesn’t believe it, and it fucking *kills* me.

“How do your dads treat your mom?” I ask.

“Really well, but they’ve been together for two-plus decades. Dating now...” She huffs. “It kinda sucks.”

“Vixen, look at me.”

She nuzzles closer instead of complying. I could bark her into reacting, but that’s absolutely the wrong call, no matter how much my instincts dislike how shut down she is.

“You’ve got to start expecting more. Demand it. Anyone who doesn’t meet the standards you set gets shown the door.” I palm the back of her head. “Why don’t you go check in and see what your plan is for today? I’ll clean up the dishes, and then we can regroup. Does that sound good?”

“Yeah,” she agrees.

Shanna is independent.

I am too.

I need to mull things over and come to terms with things on my own time. Giving her a little space to process my words is my attempt to show her that I respect her autonomy, but I won't be able to stay away for long.

“Let me know what you decide,” I murmur, kissing her forehead.

Shanna's bedroom door is slightly ajar when I check on her, following my attempt to clean up the dishes. The dishwasher is loaded, but she doesn't have any of the little pods or even the gel to actually run the machine. I nearly washed them by hand before I noticed she doesn't have kitchen sponges or even—going old-school style—washcloths.

The little omega is stretched out on her bed, still in Jack's T-shirt. The urge to rip it off her, so I can cover her in my scent, is strong. Not stronger than logic, but impulses are a bitch to fight sometimes. She has her phone in her hand and she's lying on her stomach. Her legs are up in the air with her ankles crossed, and the shirt barely covers a couple inches of her thighs.

A low growl escapes as I prowl closer. She jumps, turning to look at me over her shoulder.

“You look kinda dangerous when you cock your head like that.” She smiles as her pretty hazel eyes sparkle. It's rare that her accent shines through, but I love the way her words run together when it does.

“What's the plan for today?” I ask, kneeling on the bed at her side.

“Chloe pointed out that she's not a miracle worker, nor is she capable of being in two places at once. She's staying at the store today to have the alterations finished on your suits. Everything should be delivered by five if things go according

to plan. I need to sketch and work on figuring out the style for the show wardrobe, but I can stick around here.”

“Good.” My hands slide over her back, and I rub my thumbs into her shoulders, digging around for knots.

“Damn, that feels incredible.” She drops her phone, resting her head against her forearm. “Do you have family you’re supposed to be visiting for Christmas?”

“No. Before meeting you, the extent of my holiday plans were to keep Lang alive. My family does get together, but they’re used to me traveling for work.”

“Gotcha.” She groans. “I feel like this would be even more magical with some massage lotion and if I was naked.”

“Your muscles are tight. That’s for sure. Can you work in the nest today?” I find a knot near her scapula, but when I push on it, it disappears under the bone.

“Yeah, I just need my tablet and probably a shower.” She laughs. “Maybe some clothes.”

“Clothing would be a good idea if you intend to get any work done,” I concede, patting her shoulders before pushing off the mattress. “All right, you shower. I would offer to join you, but again, that would likely impede your ability to be productive. I’ll tell Jack and Carter they’re on their own, text Jones to let him know he’ll need to pick them up, and meet you in the living room.” I head off before I do something stupid, like ask to share her shower.

“I recommend trying to get on the same page. She clearly has a soft spot for Lang.” I cross my arms over my chest, glancing between Jack and Carter. I don’t like it any more than they do, but I’m adult enough to understand reality. “If you’re serious about her, then you need to understand that it’s the omega who builds their pack. No matter how you feel about—”

“He’s a fucking snake,” Carter growls, swiping his dark hair out of his eyes. “He’s not loyal to anyone. Ever. Lang is out for Lang; everyone else, he has zero fucking concern for.”

“I’m going to sound like Ramsey, but man, I think your feelings are hurt.” Jack laughs, looking at me. “They used to play together before we made it.”

I scratch my beard, trying to put the pieces together. “He got a contract and ditched you guys?”

“No,” Carter scoffs. “Not even close. Xavier, Lang, and I were in a band together in high school, but we were always a year ahead of him. We used to play in these shitty, rundown clubs. Lang wasn’t even eighteen. Jamen Jacobs personally scouted us, but when it came out that Lang was only seventeen…” He sighs. “He wanted me and Xavier to join what would eventually become Northern Star. He’d already signed Warrick and Ramsey, and he wanted War on lead.”

That doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me. “It seems like you’ve got more of a problem with Lang—”

Carter cuts me off, saying, “We declined the offer. We were willing to wait for Lang. We told the label they could take us as a group or not at all. Only, somehow, Lang ended up with his own contract waiting for him after he graduated. Xavier and I almost missed out completely because he ghosted us. He never told us he was approached separately. By the time we found out, they had other candidates for Northern Star.” He scoffs. “We had to *audition* for a role we were already offered.”

Well, that’s not impossible to imagine. Lang has failed to impress me on pretty much every level over the time we’ve worked together.

But there are two sides to every story, and I wouldn’t mind hearing Lang’s version of events. Most of the time, he’s a shit human by my standards, but I’ve seen how loyal he is to Kage. He was the same way with Con and Travis before they skipped to another label.

Still, I can see why that would develop a pretty solid rift between them. “And the two of you haven’t talked since? How many years ago was that?”

“It’s been probably ten or eleven years. It would have to be,” Jack says when Carter fails to speak. “There’s been a lot of other things over the years. Some rivalry between the bands for shows, and three or four years ago, we both had songs up for best alternative rock—”

“I hate to say it,” Shanna says, coming into the room with curly, wet hair. I have to assume she’s been listening for some time, based on the dejected look on her face. “But I’m not choosing between you. If that’s where this is headed, then…” She frowns, aiming for Carter. “You know, I really hate ultimatums. I’m not going to give one, and I’m also not going to accept any, either. You’ll either find a way to get along, or you won’t.”

Carter leans down, whispering something in her ear that I can’t hear. She’s in a set of Jersey cotton pajamas, but they’re shorts with short sleeves on the top. It’s not cold in her penthouse, but it’s chilly.

I turn around, heading for the hallway where I saw the thermostat. I find the unit and bump it up a couple of degrees. By the time I make it back into the living room, Carter has her wrapped around his front with her back against the wall as they kiss.

Jack gives a shrug once he catches me staring. He grabs his phone from his pocket and sighs heavily. “Sorry to break this up, but the car is here.”

Shanna giggles, staring straight at me. She’s got her hands around Carter’s neck as he kisses or licks her neck. He moves to her ear, but I can’t hear what’s being said.

She bites her lip, giving Carter a nod. “I need you all back here by five, or five-thirty, at the absolute latest. We’re supposed to be there at seven.”

Carter places her back on her feet, but shoves her against the wall for one final kiss.

“We will,” Jack says, typing away on his phone. “Should Lang come back here with us after practice?”

Shanna frowns, but eventually nods. “Yeah. Here’s hoping he brought socks. I’m going to make sure I order dress shoes for all of you. I just realized I forgot that yesterday. I need your sizes.”

“Thirteen and a half,” I say, clearing my throat. Her scent is heavy in the air from that little show she and Carter put on. “Sometimes a fourteen, depending on the shoe.”

“We’re both twelves,” Jack says. “We gotta go. See you this afternoon.”

Carter steps aside so Jack can lean down to kiss her. It’s a much more appropriate kiss, considering they have an audience. They head out, and the adorable little vixen turns her attention to me. She’s absolutely not wearing a bra under those pajamas. They have a matching polar bear and penguin print.

She’s cute as hell. Having some backup around to remind me I’m a gentleman might have been a good idea.

“Come on.” I hold out an arm, nodding toward the nest. “Let’s get you settled in, so you can get some work done.”

“Okay,” she agrees, walking into my hold. “But I’m not going to lie. The idea of a nap sounds absolutely divine.”

Shanna’s nest is incredible. The walls are light gray with thick, white crown molding. It frames the walls in some design I don’t know the name for, but it’s beautiful. There’s an open circular cushion about ten feet inside the doorway. Off to the right is a small hallway that runs behind the wall of the den-style nest that takes up most of the right wall.

The open area directly in front of us has a view of the skyline that speaks to exactly how much a place like this must cost.

It’s hard not to compare my income to what I know this place goes for. Then again, money isn’t everything. I’m not insecure. I just have to show her that I can be what she needs. I’ve been saving for ten years and can easily afford a decent four-or-five-bedroom house in the suburbs somewhere. If

that's not enough, then I guess the rock stars will have to chip in.

“Come on. You can snuggle in my nest with me.” Shanna tucks her tablet under her arm and grabs my hand. My impulses light up. An omega inviting an alpha into their nest is one of the highest honors they can bestow on us, outside of bonding. She sways her hips as she slides around the giant circular cushion and aims for the steps that lead to what I assume is a den nest. “The bathroom is that little hallway straight ahead. There's a shower and a bunch of storage in there. Like replacement sheets and stuff.” She circles past the hall and clicks a button on the wall that lines the steps. A heavy curtain retracts slowly as we head up. Once we make it to the top, she glances at my feet. “Normally, I'd ask you to take your shoes off, but you're all set.”

She's still holding my right hand, but my left comes to rest on her hip as I take in the luxurious space. There are orangey-pink pillows in a color I also don't know the name for. Others in gray and white line the top of the thick mattress. I'm sure it was specially designed because it's larger than a king.

Shanna grins at me over her shoulder. “Ready to cuddle?”

“Absolutely.”

Shanna spends the next hour or two sketching while I read on my phone. I coordinate with Jones. If I'm her date tonight, then I want someone on duty who is purely around to assess threats.

At some point, she falls asleep. I grab her tablet and drawing pencil, tossing them on the carpet that lines the mattress. She cuddles her sweet little ass right into my cock. I keep my arm over her and spend a while watching her sleep. She's beautiful, probably too young for me, but that's not going to stop me from showing her not all alphas are untrustworthy.

I position the pillow under my head and try to get some sleep. She rests for a while, probably close to an hour before

she starts whimpering. Her heels dig into my shins as she starts fidgeting around.

Pulling her hair to the side, I nuzzle my cheek to hers as my other hand moves to cradle the top of her head. “Hey, sweetheart.”

She whines, rolling over so suddenly, her face ends up plastered to mine. “Saxon?”

“I’m here. Are you okay?”

“Bad dream.” Her eyes clench as she scoots down until her face is buried in my neck. “I really don’t want to see those guys tonight.”

“I promise I will be by your side the entire time. You don’t have to face them alone.” I’ve gotten the picture. She told me enough during that night I brought her home after the hotel that, when I overheard bits and pieces, I was able to put the story together.

“I feel so stupid.” Her breath fans over my neck as she speaks. “It’s pathetic. I let myself be taken advantage of because I desperately wanted a pack of my own.”

“There are some people who will take advantage of any situation they can. You do these couple things to honor whatever contract you have, and then you move on. It’s a lesson.”

“Yeah,” she whispers. “I’m really glad you’ll be with me.”

“Me too, sweetheart.” I wish I could save her from it, but I can’t. I’ll have her back every step of the way. There’s something about her that draws me to her. Something more than the fact she’s a scent match. My impulses see a vulnerable omega, and there’s no way I could walk away.

Not that I want to. There are times she claps back against one of us, and I need to see more of that. I’ve always liked a woman who can hold her own. Knowing she’ll eventually open up and let me help her carry some of those burdens she’s been toting around makes her even more appealing.

Sir is more my style, but every time the naughty little vixen calls me *Daddy*, it makes my cock throb. She's temptation wrapped up in a gorgeous package, and the best part? She wants me too.

I wrap my hand in her hair, tilting her face to mine. My nose nuzzles hers before marking her cheek with my pheromones. It should help settle her system. I'm sure it is overwhelming. Not only knowing she'll see the assholes who betrayed her, but having to go out in public so close to her heat.

She pushes her lips to mine as she wiggles forward, erasing all the space between us. The growl that vibrates out of my chest has her gasping. It's the perfect opportunity to tease my tongue into her mouth.

She moves her leg over mine and digs her toes into my ass as I cup her cheek. Her scent floods my nose, but more than that, she tastes like sugary pineapple and some sweet flower that's impossible to describe. My system aches to pin her to the mattress and rut into her like a fucking animal.

My brain is screaming this is a dangerous situation. Unbonded alpha and unclaimed omega in a nest. Yeah, it's problematic, especially when her perfume floods the air as she rolls onto her back, trying to pull me on top of her. She couldn't move me if I didn't comply, but I'm obsessed with the way she yanks with all her might. I end up kneeling with a knee between hers and the other outside her thigh.

My forearm hits the mattress above her head, holding up the majority of my weight as I dive in to kiss her again. Her naughty little hands slide up the sides of my T-shirt, and she tries to pull it off.

"I'm not going to fuck you yet," I warn her, yanking it off with a hand at the back of the neck.

"What? Why?"

"We've got important conversations to have," I say, scooting down her legs.

“I’m on birth control. I got tested after my last relationship and everything was negative. Lang and I used condoms, but he’s supposed to show me his test results before my heat because I wanted recent ones.” Her chest heaves under her pajama shirt as I grip her shorts, pulling them down.

“What about the others?” I hold myself up, carefully helping her out of the pajama bottoms.

“Jack hasn’t been with anyone in a year. They get tested before every tour. He’s good.” She licks her lips, studying my physique as I settle back between her now fully stretched thighs. “I haven’t had sex with Carter, but I will talk to him before I do.”

I pull her top half up and handle getting her pajama shirt off. Her dark hair frames her shoulders as she falls back to the bed.

“You really are a beautiful fucking vixen.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Shanna

“You really are a beautiful fucking vixen,” Saxon says, falling on top of me. My legs wrap around his thighs, trying to force some friction against my clit. Really, it’s embarrassing being this turned on by a couple of kisses and the way he cradled me to his chest. It’s always like this, and it’s only going to get worse the closer my heat gets.

His beard scratches against my skin as he nips at my lips. He cradles my head, palming my hair, and if he wasn’t on top of me, then I’d pop up to present. Except, he said he wasn’t fucking me yet.

“Please,” I beg into the kiss. “I need you.”

“Give me a little faith.” He swaps the arm holding himself up and trails the fingers of his other hand from my ear, down my throat, and eventually over my sternum. He cups my right breast, tugging the nipple between his fingers.

I arch off the bed as a moan escapes.

I’m not sure how he knows I’m about to start rubbing my own clit, but he holds himself up on his knees, yanking both hands above my head. He keeps them there by trapping my wrists together.

“Naughty little omega,” he growls against my cheek. The hand not holding mine moves, brushing his fingers down my stomach and trailing around my belly button.

“Now isn’t the time to tease me,” I whisper as my eyes fall shut. My system pulses with need, making my core ache.

He shoves his mouth to mine, and his bare chest brushes my sensitive nipples. His fingers dip lower, but it's a slow process.

He's an excellent kisser. It feels like he's truly enjoying tasting me. It sends my desire through the roof as I use my feet to push myself up and into him.

The pressure of his cock thickening under the material of his sweats grazes against my core as I grind.

"I told you that I'm going to take care of you, and I meant it," he growls, pecking my lips as his hand flattens against my lower stomach. It pins me to the mattress, and a half second later, a thick finger tests my pussy. "So fucking slick."

"Yes," I sob, nodding wildly.

His lips curve into a smile against my cheek. "Feel free to beg for Daddy."

The way he holds my wrists while teasing a finger over my palm is comforting, but his words light up every nerve ending in my body. Heat pulses through my system as the fog slips in. It might be the way his palm runs over my clit, or it could be the way he slams another thick digit inside my leaking cunt, but incoherent begging slips from my lips as I thrash.

"That's it. Fuck my hand," he growls, pushing his chest against mine.

I give up trying to force his cock into me and plant my feet on the mattress, so I can do as he asked. My nipples ache as he twists his fingers in and out, grinding his palm against my clit with the perfect amount of pressure. He nudges my head to the side, sucking and biting at my earlobe before moving down my neck. He's so much larger than I am, he has to bend awkwardly to make it work.

"Saxon, please. I need your knot!" I wail, wiggling around under his massive frame.

"No," he growls, pulling his fingers from my cunt as he slaps my clit.

I gasp and my feet bounce around the bed. “No! God, don’t stop.”

“Saxon works outside of the house, but if we’re alone, or especially if I’m inside you, then you know what you call me.” He thumbs my clit, moving until his face hovers over mine. “What do you call me?”

“Daddy, please. I’m sorry. I’m so close.”

“That’s it. Beg dirty for me, sweet girl.” His dick bumps around my hip as he finally slams his fingers back inside me. “Tell Daddy how you like being wrapped around him.” I do, sobbing out words that sound incoherent to my own ears. Saxon growls. “How am I supposed to fit my cock in this tight little cunt, huh? You already feel stretched to capacity around my fingers.”

I moan, which turns into a scream as he crooks his fingers just right. The pressure on my G-spot disappears and reappears as he fucks me into oblivion... With his hand. I can’t even fathom how amazing his dick would feel. My core tightens as I get even wetter. The slick sounds that fill the air as he works me over would normally be embarrassing.

“Bite me,” I whisper out the plea. “Please, bite! I need your knot...” I continue rambling.

“If you really wanted my bite, I’d give it to you in a heartbeat. Be a good little omega and come all over my hand. Come for Daddy,” Saxon growls, capturing my mouth.

Pleasure lights through my body, starting in my core and radiating out in shocking waves that have my eyes rolling back. My knees fall to the mattress like two sideways triangles as he presses me deliciously into the bed. The orgasm is so intense and it seems to go on forever. He doesn’t stop working in and out, but when I groan, “It’s too much,” he does let up on my clit.

“You want to be nice and relaxed for tonight?” he asks, nuzzling his nose to mine.

I nod, struggling to catch my breath.

“Let’s see exactly how many orgasms an omega can handle before their system shuts down from all the pleasure.” He chuckles, sounding extremely smug. “I’ve never been with an omega, so I’ve got no experience with slick. But I’m pretty fucking sure I made you squirt. I’d really like to make that happen again.”

And he does. By the time I physically don’t think I can come anymore, there’s an actual puddle on my side of the bed.

Saxon shrugs. “I’m guessing that’s what those waterproof sheets are for.” He rolls over on the other side of the mattress and pulls me with him. My head lands on his shoulder as I breathe in his soothing woodsy scent. I’m finally able to touch him, which was the only downside of him pinning me to the mattress. My thigh lands over his pelvis as he bends over, kissing my forehead.

“You’ve still got a couple of hours. Why don’t you try to get a little rest?”

“Okay,” I agree.

I run my fingers through the few fine hairs on his chest for what seems like forever, but it’s just not working. Now that the buzz from sex is fading, all the worries slam back in full force. The design community in Chicago isn’t huge. Most, if not all, of the potential investors know my mom. I’m sure they’re all wondering why her daughter didn’t launch with the family brand. Me working with Lewis Designs didn’t seem strange when they were courting me...

But now?

“I can practically hear your thoughts racing.” Saxon runs his hand down my spine. “Do you have any things you do when you need to relax?” I shrug and his hand moves to my hip. “You have to communicate with me if you expect me to get to know you.”

“I know.”

“Do you want a massage?”

“No.”

“Do you want to get up and get something to eat?”

My head shakes *no*.

“Do you want me to give you a bath?”

That sounds kind of relaxing, but it’s not quite right, either. “Maybe a shower before I have to get ready. Do you know what cock warming is?”

“I do,” he agrees as my hand slides into the waistband of his sweats. “Vixen.” It sounds like a warning, but my fingers brush sticky cum. I don’t know if he came during the multiple mind-blowing orgasms that he just gave me, or possibly, that’s a whole lot of pre-cum.

I pull my hand free, lapping at my fingertips.

“Oh, God,” I groan, trying to wiggle down his body. He catches me by grabbing my shoulders.

“Is cock warming a way you self-soothe?” he asks.

“I’ve only tried it with one person, and that was a while ago.”

“But you brought it up for a reason,” he muses. “I’m sure this close to your heat, it wouldn’t hurt to let you soak up the extra pheromones.” He hums. “We’ve already determined that sex is off the table this afternoon. I’d like to give you at least one of my courting gifts before we take that step—”

“You don’t have to buy me anything,” I assure him.

He swats my ass. “That doesn’t work for me, and we already discussed why it shouldn’t for you, either. That really only leaves one option.”

“Yeah.”

“Is that what you want?”

“Yes,” I whisper, nodding against his shoulder.

“And you won’t push for more?”

“No sex. I promise.” I push up until I’m sitting, but I have to twist to be able to see his face.

“Ask sweetly.”

“Can I warm your cock in my mouth?”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” he groans. “I don’t think it would physically be possible for me to deny you. Go on.”

I move until I can pull his sweats down. He’s got a line of dark hair smattered with a few grays that disappear into the waistband. I hold myself up on my knees and shove the material down enough that his thick length bounces out. It slaps against his lower stomach and my eyes widen. He’s huge—like really big, even for an alpha—but I’ve found that height and body size don’t always correlate to below the belt. “That’s not helping my composure.” He thumbs my hanging-open lower lip. “I love that look on you.”

My cheeks heat as I get back to work. He pushes up on his feet to help me get his sweats down. Once they’re around his knees, he helps and eventually kicks them off.

I scramble up, stretching to kiss him. I don’t know if I’m more enamored by the fact he knew something was wrong and cared enough to ask how to fix it, or that he didn’t balk at the idea.

This is why older men are so attractive.

Most guys my age would’ve already fucked me.

It’s also a huge relief that he knows what cock warming is. The one time I tried to explain it to Blake, we ended up having really unsatisfying sex because he didn’t understand the concept.

I scratch my teeth over Saxon’s lower lip as I pull back. He’s not covered in tattoos like the others, but he’s got a few. My fingers dance over his pecs as his head shakes.

“If you want to keep this sweet, then I’m going to need you not to tease me.”

I grin shamelessly. I’m not opposed to that either, but I would like to see if I enjoy cock warming as much as I remember.

I plant a hand on the mattress and the other on his chest as I wiggle down farther, keeping my eyes on his the entire time.

“You’re so goddamn beautiful,” he murmurs, pulling my hair back from my face. I finally stop when my face is level with his cock. I’m still embarrassingly soaked and my cheeks heat as my pussy lands on his shins.

Wrapping a hand around his shaft, I lick my lips. There’s a little puddle of pre-cum on his lower stomach. I dive for it, licking it clean as I work his shaft.

“Okay, that tickles,” he groans. “Show me what that tongue will feel like wrapped around my cock.”

He’s thick, making it impossible for my fingers to touch. He doesn’t seem to mind. I aim for his crown with my mouth. His shaft pulses in my hand and pre-cum beads at the tip.

A whiny moan escapes as I lap at it. Saxon releases a guttural growl that makes my cunt clench around nothing. I swirl my tongue around his swollen crown and his muscles bulge. He pulls my hair away from my face, twisting it and holding a good handful of it. Not more than an inch or two of his length has made it into my mouth, but that’s because every time I hollow my cheeks, more pre-cum dribbles onto my tongue.

“You’re really pushing the limits of my self-control here, vixen. If you wanted to suck me off, then you should have asked for that,” he growls.

My eyes fall shut. Damn, maybe I asked for the wrong thing. “Sorry. I got a little carried away.”

“No need to apologize.” He chuckles. “I’m here for what you need, but it’s been a long time. I almost blew my load multiple times watching you come. If you really want to relax, then I think we need to try something different.” He grips my shoulder, giving me a gentle shove.

I move to lie next to his legs instead of kneeling over him. It still puts his cock in front of my mouth, but now I can stretch out. I roll to face him completely, and he does the same. His tip bounces around my cheek. He’s incredibly hard. This might qualify as borderline cruel.

“Just in case it gets too much,” I say, meeting his gaze. “I’m completely fine with you coming in my mouth.” I grin, wrapping my hand around his hard shaft. “Afterwards, we can just get back to the warming.”

He chuckles. “Good to know, because this is going to be a challenge.” My lips wrap around his crown as his salty taste hits my tongue. His cock jumps as he exhales heavily. He palms the back of my head, running his fingers through my hair at the base of my skull. “That’s it. Relax, sweet girl. I’m here. I’ve got you.”

My left hand falls to his hip that’s facing the ceiling to brush his warm skin as I work my way deeper. It’s a challenge due to his thickness. His tip bumps the back of my throat when I’m not even halfway down his length. My tongue rolls around the bottom of his shaft as he dribbles pre-cum on my tongue. I pull back a little so I can lick up more directly from the tip.

The way his wrist curls around my neck must qualify as perfection. It sets me at ease in a way that’s difficult to understand. His woody scent is all my nose can process and, combined with the way he gently massages my scalp, has a contented sigh escaping.

“Feel better?” he asks in a soothing tone.

I nod as my eyes fall shut. My mouth pools with extra saliva as I softly suck him. It’s all very relaxing as a warm fuzzy feeling fills my chest. He continues teasing his fingers through my hair and giving soft praises. After a few minutes it stops feeling like he’s having to physically hold himself back from thrusting. He’s still thick and hard, but I’d like to think he’s relaxed too and that I’m not torturing him.

“This is fucking surreal,” he says softly. I nod, nuzzling my face into his wrist. My entire body floods with that same warm feeling from my chest, and I snuggle closer. It’s weird because my tits brush his thighs, but I don’t care where we’re touching. I just need there to be no space between us. “Are you releasing soothing pheromones?” He stretches his thumb down to tease my cheek while his fingers still work through my hair. “It’s okay. You don’t have to speak. I can recognize

them, even if I've never experienced it firsthand. You better watch out. I have a feeling you'll never be able to get rid of me. You're too fucking sweet. It's addictive."

My eyes open as I suck, tilting my head up so I can meet his gaze. He's so ridiculously attractive that, when his eyes crinkle at the edges as he gives me a fond smile, my thighs clench. That kind of tender affection is dangerous to my heart.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Shanna

The euphoric feeling has me floating. Time is a hazy concept that seems impossible to comprehend. It could be minutes or hours, I have no idea. I've heard cock warming, when done right, can lead to subspace, but I thought it was a myth. Sure, I've managed to get there a time or two with an ex who had a lot of experience with BDSM, but that was only with quite a lot of impact play and edging.

Maybe this is just the euphoria omegas get smacked with when they soak up really compatible pheromones.

Saxon speaks softly when he speaks at all, but even that is sporadic. He holds his head up on one palm, and every time I glance up at him, he's staring down at me with a softness that makes me melty. He goes from so hard I'm convinced he'll burst at any second to half hard, but he never gets truly soft. My hand cups his knot as I work deeper. He's back to that swollen state that makes my body yearn to feel him inside me.

"I've done my best," he groans, caressing my cheek. "But I've got to tap out or I'm going to come." The deep, gravelly tone of his voice has my nipples turning to tight peaks. I circle the bottom of his shaft, rolling my tongue as I hollow my cheeks. "Really? You want that?" My pussy aches as I nod. I already told him I'm good with that. I want to give him pleasure too. "Okay, then, pretty girl. I'm going to flood your mouth."

I moan and it vibrates around his length.

“Deeper,” he growls, giving my head a gentle push. I smile around him and really work my way down his throbbing length. It’s a challenge because it’s the biggest cock I’ve ever had in my mouth. My hand works the lower half as I twist and suck like an omega lost to the fog. “You’re so goddamn beautiful with my cock in your mouth.” A dangerous grin crosses his face as little wrinkles appear around his eyes. “Let’s see how it feels buried in your throat.”

I whine around him as my eyes flutter shut. “Use me.” I nod, hoping he gets the picture, even if my words were indecipherable.

“Give my thigh a pinch if it’s too much.” He digs his fingers deeper into my hair and gives me a solid shove. I don’t make it past half his length, but the look on his face spurs me on. It doesn’t take long before his tip is bouncing against the back of my throat. I’ve heard omegas can be knotted orally, but I’ve never trusted anyone enough to try. It’s dangerous for both partners if the person being knotted were to panic. I think I’d be down to try with Saxon.

My eyes clench shut as tears spring to my eyes. He’s definitely fucking my mouth.

“It’s not going to be easy because of the position, but the next time I hit the back of your throat, I want you to swallow. Can you do that for me?” He coos the words and my entire system aches to please him. My eyes pop to see he’s still holding himself up on his forearm. He gently brushes my cheek with scratchy fingers, and it makes his palm caress my throat. I ache to beg him to choke me. “If it’s too much, I can jerk off all over your fantastic tits.”

I shake my head, doubling down on my efforts. He shoves his hard length deeper as his fingers dig into the base of my skull. I do my best to swallow as he slams into the back of my throat. His crown slips down my esophagus and panic sets in.

It feels impossible to breathe.

My nails dig into his pelvis.

He stills, stopping his thrusts.

“That’s a good girl. You’re so fucking perfect,” he moans. My entire body lights up at the praise. “Take a second and practice breathing.” He thumbs my cheek, but I have no idea how to make that happen. “Breathe for me, vixen.” Because of the intense pressure, it takes a second, but eventually, I realize I can suck shallow breaths through my nose. “That’s it, sweet girl. Can Daddy get back to fucking your throat now?”

I nod as much as I can.

His abs and obliques flex as he works my mouth over his shaft. He moves his entire hand into my hair, holding it in a painful grip, but my system somehow transforms that to pleasure. I feel warm and fuzzy and a little disconnected from reality as he slams his crown deeper. Moving my hand lower, I cup his knot. It pulses against the pressure of my grip, making Saxon snarl.

“Fuck, you’re doing entirely too well.” He pulls out until his tip is over my tongue and he explodes. “Drink down every drop.”

I work what’s left of his length with my thumb and his knot swells. The rawest, most guttural sounds I’ve heard from a man echo around the room. His flavor floods my senses as his cock kicks. I do everything I can to keep it all in my mouth, but I’m a wreck. My eyes are watering, my nose is weirdly runny, and I’m a slobbery freaking mess.

“Ask me again to bite you,” Saxon says, caressing my cheek. His chest heaves as he tries to catch his breath. “Ask me when you’re not foggy. I’ll make you mine before you can blink.”

I pull back, licking my lips as my thumb circles his crown. “I’ll hold you to that.”

“Catch your breath and we’ll grab a quick shower,” he says, rolling onto his back and pulling me on top of him.

“That sounds truly heavenly.” I bury my face in his shoulder and try to ignore the way his still-hard cock lands right between my thighs.

He runs his hand down my spine, but once his fingers brush my ass, he slides back up. “I know you enjoy designing clothes, but tell me something else about you.”

My shoulders bounce as I shrug. “What do you want to know?”

“Where do you want to be in five years?”

My heart races. Oh, he’s serious about the whole wanting to get to know each other thing. Alphas ramble and swear they’re down for bonding. I’ve had more than a couple swear they’d bite me, but I’m ridiculously grateful they didn’t. Something about Saxon tells me he’s a legit prospect to build a future with.

“I don’t know,” I say as I try to force myself to be real. It’s tiresome always opening up to others when they don’t extend the same courtesy in return.

“Okay, I’ll start.” He chuckles. “I’m getting up there in age. If I ever want to have a family, then it’s something I need to think about soon. I don’t want to be too old to chase after a couple of rugrats. Maybe have a house in the suburbs somewhere. Hell, I wouldn’t be opposed to living on a farm. It’s how I grew up.”

“You’re hardly on the verge of grandpa level, but that all sounds pretty amazing to me too,” I whisper, teasing over the tattoo on his chest.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Truly. I’d like to have a couple of daughters to spoil, and I wouldn’t want to live here if I had a pack. My parents had our family house built when we moved to the States, but that took time. I hated this place when we moved. We had a lot more space in Scotland.”

“You just have the one brother you mentioned earlier?”

“Yeah, his name is Colin, but he hates it. He goes by Fitz.”

“And he bonded your best friend...” Saxon chuckles. “How do you feel about that?”

“I love Tinley to pieces. It was really hard making friends in a new country. Most of the girls were only friendly because they knew who my mom was. That, or they wanted to hang out for a chance to get close to my brother.”

“Well, she clearly did,” he says, sounding amused.

“No. I mean, yeah, but that was a lot of years later. I feel a little guilty sometimes. I knew they had feelings for each other for *years*, but it felt like if I got involved, it was a disaster waiting to happen.”

“That makes sense.”

“I eventually got used to the idea. I know Fitz is trustworthy, and I figured if they bonded, then she’d stay close. Unfortunately, she also claimed Warrick and Ramsey from Northern Star. She lives in Maine now.”

“That’s hard. You lost your brother and your best friend in one go.”

“I did,” I agree, blowing air through my lips. It’s been a lot harder than I expected, but I am happy for them. “How about you? Have you ever been married? Any kids I should know about?” I’m mostly joking. He better not, anyway, or the omega claws might come out.

He swats my ass. “No and no. I spent a lot of years in the military. Working security is hard on relationships. I’ve had a few here or there over the years, but I’m at that stage where I only want to invest time in something I can truly see working out for the long haul.”

Good God, it’s like the universe decided to up and deliver everything I’ve been searching for in one slightly grumpy, smoking-hot older man.

“Come on, vixen. Let’s get cleaned up.”

“Okay,” I reluctantly agree. I’m not looking forward to tonight *at all*, even if having Saxon by my side will be a huge relief.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Carter

Jack follows me into the front door of the penthouse. I'd make sure it was locked, but Jackson *helpfully* gave Lang his motherfucking key.

"Stop," Jack growls, making a grab for my arm.

"Fuck you," I hiss, shaking out of his hold. "Why don't you go hang out with your new best friend?"

Wow, that was bad.

All goddamn day, he's been playing nice with Lang. It was humorous at first, but now, I'm just pissed. I specifically went out of my way this morning with Shanna to ensure they knew I was fine with him tapping out early.

"I thought we had each other's backs." I shake my head, stomping off down the hallway.

Jack grabs the back of my jacket, giving it a tug. "Don't even try to call me disloyal right now." He steps around me, glaring at me. "I've had your back for the last year. Maybe I did a shitty job before that, but you know you're my best fucking friend." He points at his chest. "Who put their neck on the line with Fitz last night? Yeah, asshole. That was me. The same fucking person who talked you up, trying to get him used to the idea. He may have only been half listening, but I went out of my way to make sure he knows how much you've been taking care of Shanna."

"Then, what the fuck was that with Lang?"

He may be right, but I'm still pissed.

The rage that comes over me when I think about Lang touching Little Fitz has only grown over the course of the day.

I'm even more furious that it didn't seem to get under his skin at all when I recounted our early morning threesome.

Fine, two-and-a-half-some.

I watched and kinda participated.

It counts.

It's more action than I've gotten in a fucking *year*.

He was supposed to freak out and start shit in front of Rook, or at the very least, seem sullen that he has to share. The motherfucker clapped Jack on the back and thanked him for looking after her. I've never experienced alpha fog before Shanna. Definitely not the rage kind that slips in when I think about someone else with *my* omega.

Jack sighs, shaking his head. "You heard what Shanna said. She's not going to give us an ultimatum to force us to get along, but it's what she needs." He shoves his hands into his pockets like he always does when he's uncomfortable. "She likes him, but she's also into us. If we play nice, I figure one of two things will happen. Either we find out we can all survive together as a team, or Lang will get bored and eventually see himself out. Now, really fucking think here, Carter. What's going to look better if that happens? Do you want her always wondering if it was something we did to run him off? Because I don't want that sticking around in the back of her head. That's the kind of shit that breeds resentment."

My head falls back as I groan. "I really fucking hate it when you make sense."

"I know, it's the worst, right?" Jack says, laughing.

"Whatever," I grunt as the door pops open. "You can help your new buddy find a room. I'm going to check on Shanna." I head off without a backward glance.

Her room is all the way at the end of her hallway. It's clear she got the primary bedroom. My knock on Shanna's door goes unanswered.

I wait about thirty seconds and try again.

Her room is massive, and she's nowhere to be seen, so I take off toward the attached bathroom. The light is on and the door is slightly ajar.

I shove it open, taking a few steps inside.

The mirrors are foggy, except for the one in the middle. She's seated on a little bench thingy. There's probably a fancy word for it, but I don't know what it is. Other than a sparkly silver thong, she's nude. It's the thin kind that barely qualifies as three strings. Her pert, heart-shaped ass pokes out as she leans forward, applying eyeliner.

I take a page from Jack's playbook, shoving my hands into my pockets to keep from picking her up, setting her on the bathroom counter, and fucking her for all I'm worth. Which, after a year of only my fist, would probably be a pretty dismal performance.

She tosses the eyeliner down, pushes herself up using the counter, and spins around. It makes her tear-drop-shaped tits bounce. "How was your day?"

My fucking God, how I want to pounce. My cock jolts and thickens in my jeans at the sight of her soft lower stomach and hips jiggling as she approaches. Her bare *pierced* tits aren't helping my composure, either. At all.

I never realized what a stereotypical alpha I really am. I had a shit day. Lang didn't step up a single fucking time, and I spent most of the afternoon trying to pick a fight.

They say alphas on the edge of going feral have two settings to settle the rage.

Fuck or fight.

My hair falls over my forehead as I tilt my head, fluttering my lashes. "I'm here *and* I didn't punch Lang. You tell me how I did."

Her silvery gold toenails sparkle as she sways her way closer. It's a totally weird thing to focus on when she's practically naked, but she's got killer legs.

She stops directly in front of me, and her nails land on my T-shirt. Her hazel eyes sparkle as she cocks her head. “I missed you.”

My hands fly out of my pockets, landing on her hips as she stretches up on her tiptoes to kiss me. Her sweet pineapple scent is thicker than it was this morning, but all thought bleeds away as I bend lower. She wraps a hand around my neck, pulling me closer.

“Such a bossy little omega,” I murmur against her lips.

She smiles into the quick kiss and flattens back on her feet. It’s a real struggle not to follow her puffy lips.

“I’m proud of you.” Her hand rubs over my chest. “Thank you for taking what I said this morning to heart.”

Well, *fuck*.

Now I just feel like a dick again.

It’s complicated.

I don’t want to control her. I’ve even mostly come to terms with the idea of Saxon. I can handle her with Jack, because I *trust* him, but I’ve known Lang since we were preteens. He only cares about himself, and he gets bored easily. He’s going to end up hurting her, and then I’m going to have to break his fucking face. Somehow, I’m sure I’ll end up looking like the bad guy.

“Sweetness, that ass is *killing* me.” Lang shoves into the bathroom with his stupid brown curls flopping over his forehead. I vaguely wonder if he sleeps in those dumbass beanies he always wears.

Maybe I could smother him with it.

I’m sure I could pass it off as a hipster wardrobe malfunction gone wrong. A terrible, yet unavoidable tragedy.

Except, my luck has never been that good.

“You in the middle of a rock star sandwich is the shit my dreams are made of.” Lang circles around behind her, shoving her chest against mine. She laughs, tilting her head to kiss him.

The edges of my vision go a little hazy, but Shanna's scent gives me something else to focus on.

"I'm so glad the two of you didn't kill each other today." She pats my stomach, staring up at me, like I'm the problematic one in this situation.

Lang smirks. "Nah, we're cool, right, Dane?"

I'm pretty sure there's at least five people from my old neighborhood who would be down to take him out for less than a hundred grand. My fists clench as I remind myself I've got to play nice in front of the little omega.

Lang just keeps grinning.

He knows he's getting to me.

Trigger Finger used to have this gimmick where they wore masks on stage. I heard it was because some chick's boyfriend jacked him up before their first real show. It happened to coincide with Halloween, so the label tossed them all in masks to hide the fact Langdon was fucked six ways to Sunday. Once I'm done with him, he's probably going to need to pull it out again.

"Knock, knock." Jack pops his head in the door. "So, Chloe's here with a shit ton of stuff. Sorry to interrupt, but I figured I should grab you."

"Thank you." Shanna looks at Lang over her shoulder. "Would you mind helping Jack get everything set up in the living room?"

"You got it, sweets." Lang slaps her ass and heads out.

"Jones and Kage are with her," Jack says, clearing his throat. "Just a heads-up, so you..."

"Don't come out with my tits showing?" She chuckles. "Thanks for the warning."

Jack nods and leaves.

"You know, when you left on Thanksgiving without a word, it kind of hurt my feelings," she says, tilting her head.

“It makes a lot more sense now that I understand how you’ve spent the last year. I’m really glad you stuck it out.”

“Yeah,” I agree, sighing heavily. “But I’m sorry I dipped. You were way too much of a temptation.”

Her fingers tighten in my T-shirt. “That feels like a compliment.”

“It should. Not one person has made me consider breaking my commitment.” I lick my lips, wrapping a hand in the hair at the base of her skull. “Not until you.”

“I’ll do everything I can to make sure you succeed. Just remember that I do want you, but if things keep progressing as fast as they have with my heat, then I may have to keep my distance for a couple of days.”

“I get it.” I bend, pulling her pink puffy lip between my teeth. She moans but lets me lead the kiss. I keep it pretty chaste, considering my cock already thinks he’s needed. “Let’s check out our attire.”

She nods, staring up at me with her pupils blown. Based on her scent alone, I’d say there’s no chance she makes it to January before her heat hits, but I just need her to hold out a couple more days. I’d like to think I’ll keep my shit together if it starts before my year is up, but I really don’t see myself sitting on the sidelines for that.

God hates me.

Hell, I probably deserve it.

Shanna always has killer curves, but that dress is obscene. I’ve never heard the term *revenge dress* until Chloe says it repeatedly, but the cream dress with silvery-gold accents is going to turn heads.

No fucking doubt about that.

My impulses are torn between preening that she’s going to be on *my* arm and trying to find a way to ensure no one else actually sees her in the slinky little dress.

I've never seen a design like it, but admittedly, I don't pay much attention to women's fashion. I tend to prefer dresses when they're hitting the floor.

Shanna's gown is edgy in a way I'd expect to see on someone at a music award ceremony. Not at a fundraiser a few days before Christmas. The top is basically an underwire bra, but where the cups should be, there are two pieces of fabric tied into an actual motherfucking bow. If someone pulled the thick pieces of fabric, then her bare tits would be on full display. The bottom curve of her perfect breasts is visible, and then the silvery-gold trim lines the top of the underwire. The dress itself is a separate piece that had to have been designed especially for her body. The top of the dress just doesn't exist. It's straps, and the top falls just under the bra contraption. The floor-length design is a silky material that clings to her skin, shimmering as she moves.

She climbs out of the limo as Saxon extends an arm to help. The shouts and catcalls from the press aren't more than background noise. My brain couldn't process their words if I tried.

Shanna prowls closer, and I hold out an elbow. She smiles, linking her arm through mine.

"I have no idea how all these women found out we were going to be here," I tell her truthfully as I scan the crowd. It's not just press. There's a horde of women standing behind the ropes, all screaming.

Shanna throws her head back, laughing. I frown, looking down at her with a bemused smile. I don't know what's so funny, but she's so fucking gorgeous when she's happy that I'll consider it a win that I was able to make her laugh. "Listen to who they're screaming for."

Lang jogs up and Jack is right behind him.

My head cocks, and now that I'm paying attention, a slow smile crosses my face. "You have fans."

She snorts. "You're not the only famous person in this relationship."

My damn heart tries to take flight right out of my chest at the realization that she considers us in an actual relationship. I seriously don't know what the fuck changed when I got sober, but I love the idea of building a life outside of the music industry. I just need my house to sell. Then I can pay off my parents' place and have a few mill left to chip in on whatever we buy as a pack.

Maybe we could find a spot with a mother-in-law cottage for Lang. I laugh at the thought, shaking my head.

Saxon finally meanders up on Jack's other side. "I'm hoping it'll be significantly less annoying once we make it inside." He pulls a hand up, straightening his already perfect tie.

Shanna holds her free hand out. "Come on. The quicker we get in there, the faster the end of the night will come."

Jack laughs, swiping his long blond hair behind his ear. "I'm all for that."

The screams of the women change when they start recognizing the rest of us. They start shouting for Lang and yelling how much they love Northern Star.

Shanna rolls her eyes, stretching up close to my ear. "Fine, maybe my star power doesn't compare to yours, but it's kind of hot knowing they all want to fuck my boyfriends."

I chuckle and move my free hand to cup her cheek as I bend to kiss her. It's a quick kiss, since we're still in motion. "Too bad for them, because the person I've spent the last six months fantasizing about is on my arm tonight."

"How many more days?" she whimpers, holding on to my arm for dear life.

I chuckle.

That look on her gorgeous face is officially my new addiction.

"Not tonight at midnight, but tomorrow night, once the clock strikes twelve."

Chapter Twenty-Four

Shanna

The convention center of the hotel is decked out in full holiday wonder, the expansive room filled with low, warm lighting. Just by sight, I can tell they spent a fortune on a party planner. Whatever. If nothing else, it's a huge relief that I don't have to be embarrassed to have my name attached to it.

Silver and baby-blue garland frames the columns, along with large glass centerpieces in coordinating colors, but it's the full bar that has my name written all over it.

"Are you doing okay?" Carter asks, pulling me closer with his hand on my hip. His brow furrows as he studies my face. "Tell me how to make you feel better."

"I'm okay. I don't want to be here, but it means a lot that you came to support me."

"Always." His dark eyes stare into mine and my heart flutters in response. "I'm pretty sure it's a requirement now that we're courting." A lazy smile crosses his face as he squeezes my hips. "Don't even try to take it back now. You'll break my heart."

"You're ridiculous." I laugh, but I hope he's being sincere. I'm not sure I could handle someone else playing games so soon, but more than that, he's really grown on me these last six months. He's abrasive and kind of a dick at times, but he was the only one who spoke up, questioning Pack Lewis and their intentions. Even when the truth came out, he never once said *I told you so*.

“I’ve got your back, Little Fitz. And your smokin’ hot backside.” He chuckles a low, throaty sound. “But I’m being one-hundred-percent real. If you need an out, just...” He smirks. “Scratch your nose. It’ll be our signal. I’ll make a scene and ensure all eyes are on me. Then you can escape while they’re preoccupied.”

My head tilts as I stare up at him. “Seriously?”

“Absolutely. I couldn’t care less what these people think of me. Plus, I really dig the idea of being your savior.”

I bite my lip, staring up at him under my lashes. “Thank you.”

He bends low, nuzzling his cheek to mine to mark me with his pheromones. His hand slides around to my ass as he does the other side. “There, now anyone who gets close enough will understand you’re mine.”

Normally, alpha pheromones would help to calm my system, but I’m still having a tough time regulating my fight-or-flight response. It would be really uncool to run and abandon the guys when they’re only here because of me.

I give Carter an appreciative smile. “With all the women around, I should probably do the same for you.” I stretch up and mark his cheeks in return.

“You know, it’s surprisingly hot being claimed. Feel free to go full-blown catty omega on any woman who tries her luck.” He chuckles, kissing my forehead.

I’m not sure if him trying to keep my mind busy and focused on other things is out of character, or maybe I just haven’t had the chance to see this side of him before now.

Carter pulls me fully into his side, letting me rest my head on his chest as I lean into him to keep myself upright. We stand around in companionable silence while Saxon checks the room.

Time passes incredibly slowly, or it feels like it, anyway.

“Are you doing any better now?” Carter asks, running his hand down my back.

“Yep, I’m totally fine,” I lie, nodding like a bobblehead doll.

“Well, that was completely unconvincing.”

Shit. I could really use a drink to help calm my nerves. They don’t call it liquid courage for nothing.

I remember what he said after the club performance about being around alcohol, but I also don’t want to make things more difficult for him.

I need to do some research.

I’ve never been around a recovering addict before. “Would it really not bother you if I had a glass of champagne? Like, it wouldn’t derail your progress or anything?”

“It won’t bother me a bit.” He turns and brushes his lips over mine.

“Are you sure?”

“I’m the one responsible for making sure my sobriety sticks. That’s not on you—”

“Yeah, but—”

He cuts me off, saying, “I’ve gotten very good at removing myself from any situation that I can’t handle, but you’ve got to trust me when I say I’m good.”

“Okay.” I squint up at him, trying to determine if he’s only saying that to make me feel better.

Carter gives me a serious look. “Just try not to get too reliant on booze to numb the shit you don’t want to deal with. Trust me when I say it’s a slippery slope.” I grimace, but he gives me another quick kiss with no tongue. “I’m not lecturing you. I know not everyone is predisposed to addiction like I am.” His hand leaves my hip and he waves at someone. “Jack will go with you.”

“Okay, thanks.”

Jack pops up at my side. His long fingers mess with the buttons on his vest. They’re all in some version of appropriate attire, but I’m not going to lie, you can definitely tell they’re

rock stars. The tats showing on his neck and out the cuffs of his shirt are hot as fuck. He's not in a jacket, but Saxon and Lang are.

Lang, Carter, and Jack are all in modified versions of items my mom originally created for a line for my dads. It's kind of fitting, since they're all musicians.

Saxon just looks like a giant fucking hottie. The long, dark hair on the top of his head is styled to perfection, and if he's not careful, his muscles might bulge right out of that suit coat.

"Shit, you're drooling a little," Carter says, swiping at my lower lip. I tilt my head, licking his finger. "You promised to behave."

Jack laughs. "Come on. I'll grab a drink with you."

"Okay," I agree, checking out what Lang is doing. He's leaning against the wall next to Saxon. His deep brown curls fall over his forehead as he catches me staring and winks.

My entire body feels flushed, but Jack places a hand on my lower back. He leads me toward the bar.

"You're a pro at making it look easy to walk in heels." He nods to my feet. "What are those things, four inches?"

"Yep. They're torture. Some aren't bad, but these are killing my arch." I smile to offset the complaining. No man wants to listen to a woman complain about fashion. "They do give me a little extra height, though."

I grin up at Jack's handsome face. Chloe is a genius when it comes to full looks. She trimmed up the neck on his beard and cleaned up some of his edges. My thighs clench as his electric scent smacks me square in the pussy.

"You're still barely reaching my shoulder." He chuckles, nuzzling his cheek to mine. "I say go for comfort next time. You're beautiful, no matter what."

"Yeah, that's easy for you to say. The one attribute from my mom that I failed to inherit is her height. I'm five-five."

Who knows how biology decided that it was a good idea to make the average alpha six-five. Saxon has to be a couple of

inches taller than that, making him unusual on one end of the spectrum. On the other, it's rare to see an alpha shorter than six-two or six-three.

The average height for omegas is five-seven. That makes alphas, on average, an entire foot taller than we are. I guess it's a protection thing. It makes someone think twice when the meek omega has a giant alpha at their back.

"As I said. You're perfect just the way you are." Jack guides me closer to the bar.

"Thanks. I think you're pretty great too."

The bar is busy, but I'm more taken aback by how many people stop to say hello and introduce themselves. My mom knows pretty much everyone in the Chicago fashion scene. I recognize a few faces and even more names. For a few years in my late teens, I tried my hand at modeling, despite my dismal height, but even then, I never knew any of these investors. There are even a few designers I know from my mom's events and parties. I'm starting to think my mom purposely asked everyone she knows to come to give me some insulation from Pack Lewis.

Chloe saunters our way, with Kage and Jones following closely behind her. She looks fierce in her black knee-length dress. Light purply-pink crinoline lines the bottom, but somehow, it manages to look chic rather than gaudy.

"How the hell did you get in?" I ask as she stops at my side.

"I used the obligatory invitation they sent your mother. As her top designer in training, I'm here to tell her if there's anything worth investing in." She laughs. "No, I figured it wouldn't hurt to have a few friendly faces in the crowd. Are you ready for your presentation?"

I yank the glass of champagne from Jack's hand, taking a healthy swig. "Yep, totally ready."

It's clearly a lie.

Jack wraps his arm around my lower back as he palms my ass. I give him a grateful smile. It's a solid distraction.

"You've got to give a speech or something?" he asks.

"Yeah, it's only like five or ten minutes while the sketches play on that screen," I say, gesturing to the stage at the front of the room.

It's very hard not to deeply regret my life choices.

This isn't the role I want in life.

Designing clothes for people I love is one thing. It's fun and engaging.

This is business, and I hate it. I don't even want the money from the contract.

I *still* haven't been paid, but when that clears, I'm going to find a way to get rid of it.

A light bulb goes off. I didn't just call Chloe earlier when I was trying to figure out the plans for where I should work today. I also put Thomas and the rest of the legal team to work trying to find a way to pay off the mortgage on Carter's parents' house. I really don't want him to have to worry about that anymore, and using the money from Pack Lewis feels like another way to get a sliver of revenge. Besides, I promised Carter I would find a way to pay him back for being my date tonight.

Kage heads off toward Lang, but Jones stands around at Chloe's back, like she's his new priority. It's cute. He's hot, but their vibes couldn't be more different.

She eventually says her goodbyes, and they head off too.

"I think my presentation is at eight," I say, trying not to panic. "Do you think I have time for another drink?"

Jack yanks out his phone and nods. "Yeah, but just be careful. Champagne hits hard and the hangover is the worst."

"That's true." I still spin around, leaning over the bar to gesture for one of the bartenders. My nerves are officially

fried, and I haven't even come face-to-face with Pack Lewis yet.

I nuzzle my face to Jack's chest, trying to find where that electric scent of his is strongest. My entire nose ends up buried in his armpit, and he chuckles.

"If you snuggle any closer, then you'll actually be in my lap," Jack says, running his hand down my arm. "Which I'm totally fine with, by the way."

I grunt, cuddling closer.

A significant portion of guests have realized who is in attendance. Lang, Carter, and Kage have a legit line of people waiting for pictures and autographs.

Saxon sits on my other side on the small couch. There are only four of them and they all line the walls. Most everyone is dancing or mingling by the tables. I still don't get how they're dancing to the shit music, but I guess it's their style.

My impulses are a mess.

I'm panicking...

My entire body is filled with frantic energy, but I'm frozen in place. It makes no sense.

I want to run and hide.

Or burrow and nest.

Jack's and Saxon's scents are soothing, but it's not enough. I ache to whine out a plea for them to get me out of here. It might work. An alpha can bark a beta or an omega into compliance, but when an omega whines, it's nearly impossible for an alpha to deny our request.

"I don't want to do this," I whisper. "I think we should go. I have a decent inheritance. I could pay the penalty for not honoring the contract." As soon as the words are out of my mouth, I hate myself for it. I'm usually stronger than this. All I want to do is barricade the four of them in my nest and forget all of this.

“You’re okay,” Saxon coos, leaning closer. “It’s ten minutes of your life. Then you’ll be done.”

“Until the next one,” I remind him.

Jack’s chest starts to vibrate with a purr.

Saxon nods. “Good plan.” He crosses his leg and leans over my side. It puts his face near my shoulder. I’m curved into Jack, but with Saxon at my side and part of my back, it does help a little.

Jack pulls his tattooed hand up, caressing my jaw with his thumb as his palm lands over the side of my neck. “How can we help?”

I almost scoff. “I have no idea. How long until I have to be on stage?”

“Twenty-eight minutes, if they want you on stage right at eight on the dot,” Jack says. “Want to take a walk?”

My head shakes.

“You’re all right, sweet vixen,” Saxon says. I appreciate them being here and trying to help, but based on how fast my heart is racing, I have doubts about if that’s true. “Just breathe for me. Soak up our scents and let them help relax your system.”

“We’ve got you,” Jack adds, tenderly rubbing his fingertips through my hair at the base of my skull. I like the way his palm presses into my neck, but it’s not enough.

“Can you tighten your grip a little?” I ask, licking my lips. Goose bumps break out down my arms as I shiver. My body is absolutely out of whack, but their scents are so thick that breathing them in does end up helping... Maybe.

“Uh, yeah,” Jack complies, his grip tightening around my throat. “But we should probably find somewhere to hunker down for the next thirty minutes.”

A whimpery little moan escapes.

“Shit,” Saxon grunts, standing up with no warning. “All right, come on. I asked one of the servers if they had any

private areas earlier. I was hoping we wouldn't need it." He bends down, scooping me up like a bride. "With your heat coming any fucking day, I figured it was better to not take any chances."

My eyes widen as Jack pops up, following us. I hope all the guests are preoccupied. I'm sure a hulking alpha toting the designer through the room is going to make the rounds.

I've been living in a lovely bubble of unrealistic expectations since my family pack left for their world cruise. With Fitz in Maine, it feels like I don't have to worry every second about what my family is going to think. That bubble will pop eventually. There's no amount of mental preparation that can prepare me for that.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Jack

Saxon stomps across the expansive ballroom with purpose. Damn, no one ever runs out of my way the same way guests sidestep to make room for him. Then again, he's a big dude. I'm tall too, but I don't have the massive width to my shoulders like he does. If anything, people normally step into my path these days because they recognize me and want an autograph.

I glance back, checking for Lang and Carter, but they're signing autographs and keeping the guests happy. I frown, unsure if we want the investors happy or not. I don't even know if Shanna wants this collection launch to go well since her name is attached to it, or if she's hoping it'll bomb to sabotage the whole thing.

Saxon heads down a long hallway. There are bathrooms at the right, but the farther we head down, the doors have words like *security* and *employees only*.

He opens a door on the left and goes inside. I glance around, and no one pops up to tell us we can't be in here. I toss myself inside before the door closes. It's one of the hinge systems that makes the door sound like it's slamming.

It's got to be an employee dressing room or something. There's a couch in the corner and lockers lining one wall. There's a door to the left of those that might be a bathroom stall because there is a sink on the back wall just past the door.

"Uh, anyone want to fill me in on what we're doing?" I ask, shoving my hands into my pockets. These trousers or suit

pants—whatever the fuck they’re called—are tight as hell.

Saxon nods to the couch. “You have a seat.”

I quirk an eyebrow, but head over to do exactly that.

“Can we lift the dress up, or is it easier to just take it off?” he asks.

“It’s tight,” she says with wide eyes. “Probably better to take it off. That way, there’s no chance of popping a stitch.”

Saxon nods, places her on her feet, and bends down, carefully sliding the dress up her legs.

I lick my lips, leaning forward.

“This room is free of cameras. I asked the employee, and I personally did a quick check.” Saxon works his hands up under her arms and she lifts them. He removes the dress, placing it aside on a small table.

She’s in a sparkly silver thong and that fucking bow over her tits. She blocks her lower stomach with a forearm, and I frown. She’s slender for an omega, but omega bodies are always going to carry more fat than a beta of the same body type. It sounds shitty, even in my head, but that’s just the reality of omega biology. That’s what they taught us in school, anyway. I don’t mind a bit. I lick my lips, studying her curves.

“Cock warming helped earlier, but we aren’t really in the right spot to make that happen now.” Saxon wraps his arm around her middle. “You told me the first night we met that you were open to spanking. Is that still true and, more importantly, does that apply to now?”

Her hooded eyes are glassy as they meet mine. “Yeah.”

“Perfect, we have a plan.” He looks at me, saying, “Sit back.” He kisses her cheek. “Hands on his shoulders, ass out.”

Shanna trembles as he takes a step back. Her steps seem a little wobbly as she crosses to me. The closer she gets, the more I realize exactly how potent her scent is.

She’s perfuming. That’s a big fucking problem, considering where we are. My eyes widen as I stretch out my hands to

stabilize her waist. She bends forward, aiming her bow-covered chest right in my face. I toss myself against the back of the couch as her nails dig into my shoulders.

“Safeword is red. Let’s keep it simple, but this *isn’t* a punishment spanking. You know that. Right, vixen?” Saxon pulls her hips back a few inches and my hands fall to my lap.

I’m in over my head here.

“Yes, Daddy,” she agrees, smiling at me. Her face is right in front of mine, and I finally get my shit together. I have to cross my arm with hers, since her hands are on my shoulders, but I bring a hand up to gently run a finger over her cheek.

“The thong won’t be in the way, so I think we’ll leave it on,” Saxon says.

The sound of his hand landing on her ass fills the air. Shanna bites her lip, her eyes fluttering closed. Her chest heaves, making the bow on her bra bounce.

I watch every nuance of her face as Saxon continues to pepper her backside with echoing slaps. Her scent floods my nose and my nostrils flare, desperately trying to soak up her scent.

I lean my mouth as close to her ear as I can get without throwing off her balance. “You remember how you told me that I smell electric to you?”

Her eyes pop open, and she gasps as a particularly loud pop fills the air. “Yeah.”

“So, I didn’t mention it the other night, because I didn’t know how you’d take it, but my mom has a theory about that particular scent,” I say, staring straight into her eyes. “You said I smell like lightning or a storm to you, but everyone describes my scent as freshly cut grass or sometimes woody.” She looks so confused that my head shakes. “God, I think I’m messing this up. But my grandma and one of my grandfathers also describe each other’s scent that way. My mom and one of my dads are the same way.” This was probably not the best time for this. “My mom basically thinks it’s one step above a scent

match...” My cheeks actually burn, which never fucking happens.

“Like soulmates?” she gasps.

“It’s just a theory,” I say, clearing my throat. She slams her mouth to mine, moving to hold the back of my head instead of my shoulder on that side.

“Are you still good, vixen?” Saxon asks as her teeth scratch over my bottom lip.

She pulls back, gulping in air. “Yeah, but I ache so bad. I need a knot.”

“You’re slick as can be,” he says, and the slapping sound finally quiets. “Mmm, yeah, you’ve soaked straight through these three strings.”

“I’m so hot,” she moans, digging her nails into my neck. “If we don’t have time for knotting, then I need your cum. It’ll help with the cramping.” She groans, falling into my chest. “And it’s getting worse.”

“Oh, fuck. What do we do?” I ask, making eye contact with Saxon.

“The two of you have already taken that step.” Saxon pulls her panties to the side.

I can’t see it, but by the way she groans, I’m guessing he shoves a finger or two inside her.

My cock jumps, remembering the way she milked my shaft like she was desperate for every drop of my cum.

I glance down at my suit. “I’m in a shit ton of clothes.”

Shanna stays bent over, a look of concentration all over her beautiful face. “I’m working on the belt. Ah-ha!” She beams when she gets it unbuckled. Her pheromones flood the air and everything gets foggy.

My head shakes, and I swipe a palm over my face to try to clear the haze.

It’s useless...

My mouth waters as my knot throbs.

“Lean up,” Shanna hisses, sounding a little intimidating.

My head rolls around the couch as I push my ass up, using my feet as leverage. A soft hand wraps around my cock as I pull my fist to my mouth, cursing into it.

“We haven’t even finished our date,” I ramble, trying to talk some sense into my perfume-addled mind.

“You’re going to need to unbutton the vest and the bottom few buttons on the shirt, at the very least.” Saxon nods to me. “She’s completely drenched. If you plan to go back out there with us...”

Shanna whines, slamming her mouth to mine. It’s uncoordinated and messy, but it makes my dick leak as she jerks me. I have to weave my arms under hers to get to the vest.

Her cunt is so wet, every thrust of Saxon’s fingers makes a slick sound. A low growl rattles out as I remind myself I can’t just rip the stupid goddamn shirt off. The vest finally falls to my sides as I get it unbuttoned and work on the shirt.

“Oh, God, pleasepleaseplease,” she sobs against my lips. Her entire body jolts as she comes. My cock jolts in her grip as her scent floods the air.

Mount. Rut. Breed. Claim.

My thoughts hone in on the *this alpha is about to lose his shit* loop. The one where rational thought disappears and instinct takes over. Yeah, based on how hazy everything is, I’m going to guess I’m already there.

I finally get the last button undone as Shanna starts begging for bites and a knot. The scary part is her eyes look so glassy that I’m not sure she cares who complies. My pants and boxer briefs are around my knees and my shirt is open. What else was I supposed to be doing?

“Shh, you’re getting a little too loud. Climb on Jack’s lap,” Saxon coos close to her ear. “You’ve gotta make this a quickie.”

Well, it's been a year since I've had sex. So yeah, I don't think making it quick will be a problem.

Shanna scrambles on top of me. "I ache for you, Jackson."

"I'm here, beautiful. Take what you need," I growl.

Saxon wasn't lying—her panties are drenched. My hands land on her waist, steadying her as she wobbles.

She slides a hand between us, pulling her thong aside. "Put your cock in me!" It comes out as a whine as her head falls back.

"I've never been inside someone without a condom before." I vaguely remember telling her that this morning, but it feels important that she knows. I grab my dick, aiming it at her dripping core. I make sure to slap my crown against her clit, but she wiggles, forcing me to her opening. She sinks down on my tip with no additional warning. "Oh fuck, *Shanna*."

My vision narrows to only her, and my chest heaves, rising and falling rapidly as her walls stretch around my girth.

"You feel so good. You're so hard," she moans.

I'm pretty sure I'm leaving bruises, but her pheromones are too thick. Her lightly floral scent smells electric. I don't have words to describe it, but the closest I could come would be flowers and lightning. Or maybe dewy flowers after a storm. She releases her hold on the panties, but with my cock wedged inside her they don't block anything. She yanks the fabric of her bow and her tits are perfectly framed by the underwire of the bra. Only the fabric falls in the way, covering her piercings.

"I fucking love your tits, watching them bounce..." My head shakes. "I wish I could suck on them."

She starts to really rise and fall on my cock, but I need to get deeper—to bury every inch inside her. Once she's used to that I'll slam my knot in.

"God, Jack," she groans, falling into my chest. "Thrust up into me."

Oh yeah, I can do that.

“You’re absolutely wrecking me here, beautiful.” My hands fall to her ass, spreading her apart farther. Using the floor as leverage, I fuck into her from below as she begs and moans. She writhes against my chest and her nails dig so deep into my pecs I think she might be drawing blood. Even the pain isn’t enough to distract me from the way her pussy milks my cock. “You keep clenching around me like that and I’m going to be dripping all out of your pretty pussy before you know it.”

“That’s so hot.” She grinds, rubbing her clit against my pelvis, but never lowering enough to take my knot. I ache to force it inside her, but some sliver of my brain that’s still working understands we don’t have time for that. She bounces on my lap, her tits brushing my chest as she begs. “Please, bite me. Please! I want your knot. I ache for you, alpha.”

Saxon’s hand moves between us. He starts to work her clit, and she gets so loud I’m afraid people from the event will hear her begging moans.

Wrapping a forearm around her head, I use the other hand to tilt her face up. “Kiss me.” I seal my lips to hers as she wails.

Someone knocks on the door as her cunt locks down on my shaft. My dick pulses, and I say a prayer that she’s close because I’m not going to be able to hold out much longer.

“Fuck,” Saxon growls, shoving himself off the couch. “Try to keep it down for a second. I’ll handle this.”

“Bite me, please,” Shanna whispers, her hazel eyes boring into mine. The pleading look on her face makes my chest tight. “I need your knot. It’s not a want Jack. I *need* you to knot me.” She ripples around my length and my impulses take over. Saxon is no longer taking up the couch. I twist and lie her down without thinking it through. On the next thrust my knot slams inside her. It’s only a hazy thought that I wasn’t supposed to do that, but it feels so incredible that I couldn’t regret it if I tried. The nerve endings, or muscle, or whatever it is that omegas have locks down, rippling against my knot. It in

turn swells, locking us together. “Oh God, that’s... It’s everything. Now bite me!” she whines. “Make me yours.”

That’s a very good idea.

I tilt her head to the side, burying my face in her throat. Her pheromones pulse, flooding my system and knocking away the last visages of intelligence. Fire licks from my balls to my spine as my teeth strike the right side of her throat just below her ear.

Shanna wails, and I slap my free hand over her mouth as she comes around me with a hot rush of slick. I’ve never been locked with someone, but it’s more of a deep grinding than being able to thrust.

It still feels surreal.

I come deep inside her, still licking over my bite.

The first pulses I get from her are her euphoria as she clamps down on my knot. Her hot little tongue flicks against my palm as she moans. I lick and suck at my bond mark, and my cock kicks inside her, but other than that I’m essentially useless.

My vision is the first sense to come back as my orgasm starts to fade, but there’s a strange anxiety in my chest that isn’t mine.

I peel my hand off her mouth, using a palm on the arm of the couch to push myself up. “Holy shit.”

Shanna’s huge eyes blink back at me with a look of utter terror. “You bit me!”

She doesn’t sound pleased.

My heart fucking drops.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Shanna

“You bit me,” I hiss.

A look of absolute horror crosses Jack’s face.

My stomach churns.

He tries to pull back until he’s kneeling, but we’re still locked together. We both moan, and a second later, his weight falls on top of me again. “You told me to.” It almost sounds like an accusation.

He’s absolutely right.

I did.

I wanted it too, but... “Omegas ramble when we’re lost to the fog. I’ve said some pretty ridiculous shit before, like trying to convince two alphas to shove their knots into my vagina... At one time. You should know better.”

“You begged me to bite you.” His head shakes. “I couldn’t say no to you. I want you too much for that.”

My jaw falls.

That was really fucking sweet.

He’s locked inside me.

He’s not allowed to make me cry.

That would make me look crazier than I already do.

“Are you upset?” he asks, his brow furrowing so deeply, I feel like I might need to offer to pay for Botox to fix it.

How am I supposed to be upset when he caresses his stupid fingers over my head while brushing the hair back from my face?

I don't know what I'm feeling.

I've begged incoherently more times than I can count. Thank God those alphas didn't listen.

I haven't been completely hazy with him yet.

I knew what I was asking for.

A giant chunk of me didn't believe he'd do it. No one really wants me past heat sex. Eventually, the pheromone haze will fade, and he'll hate me for tricking him into bonding me.

"They're looking for you," Saxon calls from the doorway.

"Too fucking bad. They can wait thirty minutes, or play the goddamn slideshow without me," I snap, my eyes falling shut. Air doesn't seem to be saturating my lungs, no matter how deeply I breathe.

"You heard her," Saxon growls. The door closes, but I can't see him, so I don't know if he's in the room or out.

"Shanna, please," Jack begs. "Tell me I didn't just fuck everything up."

My eyes pop open.

He stares down at me, looking like he might puke. My stomach rolls. He has every right to hate me. I whined and begged. Alphas have a hard time ignoring an omega when they whine. Once he has a chance to really think things through, he's going to be furious.

"Are you unhappy?" My lip trembles as I glance away. "I didn't mean to pressure you into anything."

"No, look at me," he commands. It's not a bark, but the dominance rolls over me, and my eyes snap to his. "I told you about the whole scent thing. We're a match on some deep level..." He sighs. "I sound crazy. I don't care. I want you. We're bonded, beautiful. No one gets to take you away from me from here on out."

“Yeah,” I agree as my chest fills with a warm fuzzy feeling. His blue eyes sparkle as he nips at my lips. “I really am happy. I just didn’t think you’d do it.”

I can feel the curve of his smile against my cheek.

“I enjoy surprising people.”

“Are you sure you won’t hate me once the pheromone fog fades?” I ask.

“Never.” He nuzzles his nose to mine, and my heart completely melts. “All I keep thinking is that you’re mine. We get to build a future together now.”

The door opens and closes as the sounds of booted feet approach.

“I met those assholes who were courting you. Seriously? Dear god, woman. You dodged a bullet.” Saxon stops next to the couch, crouching down. His dark eyes narrow when he catches sight of my bond mark. “I leave the two of you alone for five fucking—”

“It’s a good thing.” A bright smile crosses my face. “We’re happy about it.” I’m like ninety-seven percent sure at this point, but I’m going to trust that Jack knew what he wanted and made the same choice I did.

Saxon exhales heavily, giving a clipped nod. “Congratulations. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but as soon as that thing deflates.” He nods to Jack. “You’ve got to get out there.”

Fear pulses through my system, but it doesn’t overpower the incredible feeling of finally being bonded.

Jack sends a pulse of something in the bond. It might be amusement, or maybe it’s his smug satisfaction, but I love it.

I bend up, giving him a quick kiss.

“None of that,” Grumpy Daddy growls, ruining the moment. “Your quickie already turned into a lifelong commitment.”

Jack busts out with a belly laugh. It makes his knot drag against my inner walls, which makes me clench in response. “That’s not helping my knot deflate.”

I shrug. “I’m in no rush.”

“It’s the middle of winter,” I say, leaning over the bathroom sink. “I feel like they’ve got the heat turned up way too high because I’m still really hot.” Spinning around to face Jack, I inhale deeply. I’ve done everything in my power to not smell like straight-up sex, but I don’t have much faith it helped.

“It’s not that warm to me,” he says, stepping forward to feel my forehead and then my neck. “You don’t look as hazy as you did...”

“I’m not in heat,” I assure him. “Maybe I’m just overheated from all that energy I just exerted.” My nose wrinkles. “Except you did all the work.”

He laughs. “You rode me for a solid few minutes. How does your ass feel?”

“Deliciously sore.”

“I’m glad it helped,” Saxon says. “You seem much more relaxed. I had a feeling it would, based on some of the information in the audiobook I’ve been listening to.” He crosses his arms over his chest. “Lang and Carter are waiting. We need to get out there if you’re done.”

“Yeah,” I agree, although it’s the last thing I want to do. Jack places a hand on my lower back and Saxon leads us out of the room.

Lang and Carter are both leaning against the far wall of the hallway. Carter has a foot up on the wall behind him. Lang has a hand in his pocket and the other runs over his face. They look like they could walk onto a music video photo shoot and jump right in.

Oh shit, is my mouth watering?

My thighs clench.

I don't think my attempt to clean up helped much. My entire pussy is sticky with Jack's cum. That's one benefit of condoms, but it's actually kinda hot.

My core throbs, feeling achy and empty.

I'm pretty sure I need more of his cum.

That might help.

I shake my head, blowing out a deep breath. I can't lose myself to the fog. I need to stay focused long enough to do my job.

Lang lights up when he spots me, a wide smile crossing his wickedly handsome face. Carter's lips tip up, but he seems to stare straight at my neck or maybe my tits.

Nope, I'm pretty sure he just spotted my bond mark.

My anxiety pulses, making my chest tight. Jack has his left hand on my lower back, but he snatches up my right, giving it a reassuring squeeze. It feels like he's physically and metaphorically saying that *he's got my back*.

"You bonded," Carter growls, shoving himself off the wall.

Lang's face twists into a mask of confusion. "Which one? Jack?" Neither one of them is close enough to tell the change in my scent.

"Yeah, we're bonded." Jack runs his thumb over mine. "And we're happy about it, so feel free to congratulate us."

"Is this what you wanted?" Carter's eyes seem especially dark as he stares into mine.

I nod shakily. "Yes."

"Cool, good for you guys." Carter comes over, bends down, and plants a quick kiss on my lips.

A feral growl fills the air. I would expect that from Saxon, but it comes from Jack.

I pull back from Carter's mouth, looking at Jack over my shoulder.

“You’re mine.” Jack shrugs. “My impulses don’t like another alpha touching you so soon after we bonded.”

“You’ll have to learn to get over that bullshit.” Carter raises a hand, flipping off his bandmate. “Real fucking quick.”

Lang shoulder checks Carter out of the way. His tattooed hands cup my face as he bends down, nuzzling his nose to mine. He quickly marks my cheeks with his scent before stepping back. “Congratulations. I’m happy for you, but that doesn’t mean I’m not still in love with you.”

An unexpected bubble of laughter slips out as Saxon says, “You’re just as delusional as ever. If you can tell me her middle name, I won’t say another shitty thing to you.”

Lang frowns, shaking his head while keeping his gaze on me. “He just doesn’t get it.”

“Apparently not. It’s Gabriella, after one of my grandmothers on my dad’s side.” I smile. “Now you know, but I need to figure out what’s happening for the show.” I give Jack’s hand a pat and step back so that I can see all four of them. “I think I have to go check.”

“Well, you missed it, but the cops just hauled Kage away.” Lang chuckles, tossing his arm around my shoulder.

“Oh no! What happened? Is he okay?” I glance between him and Carter.

“He’s fine,” Carter says. “He’ll be out by morning. Jones already put a call in to the label.”

“But what happened?” I ask again.

“Chloe was here using your mother’s invitation. Security popped up, telling her she had to leave,” Lang says, his jaw tight with tension. “One of the guys grabbed her arm to lead her out.” He shrugs. “Kage handled it.”

God, they all remind me of my dads. It’s weird but kinda comforting, in a way. Maybe it’s standard in the rock world, but not one of my fathers would hesitate to take a swing if someone put hands on my mom.

This is my fault.

Chloe was here to support me.

Which is how Kage even got involved.

“Damn,” I whisper, swallowing thickly. “I’ll cover his bail or whatever—legal fees. I’m so sorry I dragged you into this.”

“Did you forget we’re famous?” Lang laughs. “He can bail himself out, but Jones is handling it. Chloe left with him. I think it might play out in his favor. She seemed ready to thank him for defending her honor.”

I sigh, rubbing at my cramping abdomen. “Are they still trying to do the presentation?”

“Miss Fitzpatrick, a word?” Jenna’s snotty tone catches my attention. Pack Lewis’s secretary seems even less pleased to see me now than she did when I was supposedly dating her bosses. She stops near the restrooms at the entrance to the hall, right near where the hallway spills into the ballroom.

Saxon growls, taking a step toward me. “Would you like some backup?”

“No, I’ve got this.” I shake out of Lang’s hold but lean up to kiss his cheek.

I do the same for Carter on the way by. His hand scratches against the silky material of my dress as he moves to kiss me for real. He tugs at my lower lip, running his tongue over the ache. “In no universe did I see Jack claiming you first.” He pinches my ass. “I’m shocked but really happy for the two of you.”

I give him a soft smile and step back to meet Jack’s eyes. He sends steady comfort in the bond, and it shores me up.

My shoulders pull back as I paste on the most docile look I can manage. Jenna is still glaring, like she can wish me dead if she only tries hard enough.

I’m only a few feet away when Blake, Matt, and Evan file down the hall and stand at her side.

I come to a stop directly in front of them. “Gentlemen, it’s a pleasure. You look lovely, Jenna.” My face twists into what I

hope is a friendly smile. It might be a grimace, but I'm lying my ass off, so whatever.

"You're purposely trying to tank our business," Blake growls, taking a step forward.

My shoulders pull back, but my impulses scream to retreat. I ignore them to the best of my ability and hold my ground.

"I've done no such thing. You required my presence, and I'm here." I slide my hands down my dress, which is always a tell that I'm nervous.

"You stocked our party with investors who are only here to see why you haven't signed with Cuffs and Buttons. Not one of them is actually here to buy in on manufacturing your collection," Blake says snidely. "Then you had your guests create a scene with security. You aren't going to get away with this!"

I shake my head. He's sounding a little unhinged. I had no part in any of that, but it's not impossible to think my mother did—at least the first part.

"I did no such thing. There are only so many businesses involved with the design community, especially in Chicago. If you hadn't pretended to be interested in me solely to further your company's agenda, then none of us would be here right now." I glance between them, letting my distaste show.

"I really liked you," Matt says, pointing at my chest. "You're the one who threw a tantrum when we couldn't make it to meet your family. You're an adult. Maybe start acting like one."

"Are you kidding?" I ask, my jaw falling open. "The number of times you blew me off actually got ridiculous, but I know *no* woman who is okay with being ghosted on a holiday and then pick back up like nothing happened."

"You weren't ghosted." Blake's bushy eyebrows rise. "You might not have liked that we had Jenna make the call, but you were told with enough notice that, if you had a problem, you could have reached out to one of us directly."

My head tilts as I study Jenna's panic-stricken face. "Is that right? You reached out to me about Thanksgiving?" I laugh, shaking my head. "I must have missed that call."

Matt turns to face Jenna. "You said you spoke to her and she was understanding." He looks at me. "Which is why it was so unexpected when you blocked our numbers and refused to reply to the multiple emails we sent."

"Sorry to tell you this, but you got played," Lang says, appearing just over my left shoulder.

"Also, if you give a shit about someone, you don't embarrass them on a major holiday. *In front of their family, no less.*" Carter comes to stand behind me on my other side. "It's fine. I was there to dry her nonexistent tears and keep her busy most of the night."

I peek at him over my shoulder, and he winks.

"You selected her. This is on you," Evan growls at Jenna.

"I gave you her file—along with several options that I explained were much more desirable candidates," Jenna huffs, rolling her eyes. "She may have had the highest return possibilities, due to her familial connections, but I also pointed out that she was the greatest risk. I'm a business strategist, not a matchmaker."

I frown.

I thought she was a personal assistant.

It takes several long seconds for the rest of what she said to finally sink in.

"You're why they approached me at The Exchange mixer?" My hand flies to cover my mouth. "What makes you think it's okay to play with people's lives like that?"

Jenna's eyes narrow. "I spent seven years in a toxic marriage. I clawed my way out with blood, sweat, and tears. You would've been fine. They're harmless, but even then, I gave you an out. You're either the shark, or you're the poor little seal who gets devoured. This is business, sweetheart."

"Jesus Christ," Saxon mutters from directly behind me.

I glance up at him and snuggle back into his broad chest. Her history sounds awful, but in no way does that excuse her actions. Also, is she saying she gave me an out by not warning me they wouldn't be coming to Thanksgiving?

I'm so done with all of this.

Saxon wraps an arm around my neck, letting it fall between my breasts. I snatch up his hand as his woodsy scent floods my nose.

"This doesn't involve any of you," Blake says. "As a matter of fact, there's no reason you brought them, except to stir up additional trouble."

"Shanna and I are bonded," Jack says, standing at Carter's side. "The others are in the courting process. Some of us know a good thing when we see it. You can't refuse them entry, either. The law says they can go where she goes while courting, unless she specifically asks for them to be denied entry."

"We can have security remove her for her highly unprofessional behavior." Blake looks a little like he might pop a blood vessel. "Then a judge can decide what ramifications she might face. This is clearly her attempt to undermine our success. If tanking your launch collection was your goal, then you've achieved it. Your entire line is dead in the water without investors to fund the production costs."

"This is on you." Evan looks between Blake and Jenna. "I told you attaching our name to hers was a mistake. No amount of career success can filter out such low-class breeding."

"You wanna see low class?" Lang asks, chuckling darkly. "Carter and I can show you where we came from."

"Talk about me all you want, but leave my family out of this," I hiss, jabbing a finger toward them.

"You're walking a real fine line," Saxon growls, making me jump.

Blake ignores us, looking at his packmates. "This isn't my fault. I repeatedly expressed my concerns that her designs were mediocre, at best." He readjusts his tie. "The sex was

slightly better, but dealing with the constant need for reassurance was tedious.”

“Hey, Lang, remember Martin’s pier?” Carter asks, swiping at his nose as he points to Pack Lewis.

“Yup,” Lang replies, rolling his neck from side to side.

Saxon’s grip tightens on my chest. Before I know what’s happening, he lifts me, yanking me back several feet as Jack steps in front of me.

Lang and Carter move forward, but they’re kind of blocked by Jack. I stretch, trying to peek around him, but they move so fast. Lang was on my left, and Carter was on the right, but they swap sides, crossing in front of each other like they already knew what the other was going to do.

Carter slams his palms into Matt’s chest, shoving him back.

Lang takes a swing at Evan.

Carter does the same on my left. His fist connects with Blake’s jaw.

I’m genuinely shocked that Pack Lewis fights back.

Jenna huffs, stepping back toward the ballroom. She presses a button on her earpiece. “Security, I need backup in the main hallway next to the bathrooms. If the police are still on site, then bring them too.”

“Stop this,” I hiss, slapping Saxon’s arm. He doesn’t release me and he doesn’t intervene. “Make them stop!” Matt, of all people, slams his fist into Lang’s side. There’s so much commotion, and Jack physically blocks me from seeing most of it. “They’re going to get arrested...”

Jack shrugs. “It wouldn’t be a first for either of them. Someone needs to put those motherfuckers in their place.”

“This is all my fault,” I whine, tossing myself to the left to try to see what’s happening. “Violence is never the answer, you giant blockheads!”

Carter has Blake on the ground, kneeling over him. Blake fights back, but Carter is in better shape, since he started working out.

Blake does manage to punch Carter in the face.

Carter snarls, slamming his left fist into Blake's jaw. The side of his dress shirt splits as he moves and, despite it totally not being the time for it, my entire body tingles.

Lang and Evan are still going at it, but with my alpha's pheromones pumping in the air, it has an unnatural effect on my body.

"Uh-oh," I whisper as my thighs rub together. My eyes fly up to meet Jack's as he watches my face. A wave of aching pain rolls through my abdomen, making my pussy clench.

Saxon holds me tighter, like he's afraid I might try to escape. "Well, *fuck*," he mutters. "We'll send someone to bail the two of you out, if necessary. I'd say our little omega just slid past the line from pre-heat into actual heat."

"I know it's wildly inappropriate," I moan. "But watching them go at it is actually really hot." My head shakes to clear the fog, but it doesn't help. "They can't be arrested. I need them to fuck me, and come all over me, and let me swallow it. This isn't okay. How are they supposed to knot me if they're in prison?"

"Jail is where they hold people," Jack says helpfully, laughing and shaking his head. "Nobody is going to prison."

Commotion heads our way as several security personnel funnel into the hallway. My heart drops when I see there are two policemen with them.

There's yelling, but it's all so hazy as heat pulses through my system.

And that's how I end up in heat, blocks from my penthouse...while Lang and Carter end up in handcuffs.

There's no way around it.

My family is definitely going to hear about this.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Saxon

I'm about to royally show my ass if these cops don't wrap this shit up quickly. My impulses are already on the verge of going full-blown caveman. The louder Shanna's begging moans get, the more likely I become to rip this cop's head off just to be done with this bullshit conversation.

Jenna gave a mostly true statement that I was able to hear a great deal of. After that, she left to dismiss the guests.

At this point, it's a whole lot of *he said, he also said*. The hallway cameras don't point where the altercation occurred, because of privacy concerns when the bathroom doors open and close.

Lang just might be the luckiest motherfucker I've ever seen. He and Carter are still in cuffs, but so are two of the alphas from Pack Lewis. The officers didn't even try to interview Shanna once they caught a whiff of her.

Jack is with Shanna, back in the room they bonded in. Lang and Carter are lined up on the floor of the hallway. Neither looks especially pleased, but someone needed to do it. They're also famous. I don't see them getting more than a slap on the wrist.

The two assholes are a few feet away. They're on the floor, backs against the wall too.

"And you have nothing else to add?" the cops asks, drawing my attention.

“As I’ve already said, my priority was removing my client from the situation.” I glance back at the door she’s behind. My stomach bubbles uncomfortably at calling Shanna *my client*. “From the way it sounded, it was a mutual grievance. I couldn’t tell you who took the first swing.”

“All right, thank you for your time. We’ve got your information. I highly suggest you get that woman home.” He nods toward the door.

“I will. What’s going to happen to them?” I ask, gesturing to the guys.

“We’ll book them. Let the DA determine the charges, if any.” He closes his notebook and heads off to the other cop.

Shanna isn’t going to like that.

I take a few steps to stand by Lang and Carter. “I’m going to get her home. Jack said he’d make the important calls, but call once they set your bail, and we’ll get you out.”

Lang sighs. “Are you sure you won’t leave us to rot while Shanna is in heat?”

“Don’t tempt me,” I mutter, but even I know she’d never stand for it. “Don’t say a word without an attorney. It doesn’t make you look guilty. It makes you intelligent enough to understand your rights.” I clear my throat, glancing between them. “I will try to do my best to be less of a dick to you. Don’t turn on each other. That’s the last thing she needs.”

“This is all my fault,” Shanna whispers as we head for the exit.

I specifically waited until the others were gone to go for her and Jack.

The overpowering scent of omega perfume has me assessing every threat. She’s not completely gone to the fog yet, but it’s clear she’s hazy. I had to wait for Jack’s knot to go down before we could get her ready to move.

I tried to carry her, but he’s acting like a newly bonded alpha. He wouldn’t let me close enough to snatch her up.

I let the snarling stand for now, because I get it, but he's going to have to adapt.

I hold up a hand, meaning he should stop at the end of the hallway while I assess the ballroom for threats. There are a few clusters of people hanging around, but the place has mostly cleared out.

I pull my fingers to my palm, waving him forward to let him know we're good. The car should be waiting. We cross the ballroom, and my head stays on a swivel.

What the fuck is setting off my impulses?

There are no threats.

There's a woman in her mid-twenties with long blonde hair standing near the doors to head into the hotel. She's got her eyes on us. I'm unsure if she's about to ask Jack for an autograph, or maybe she's part of the hotel staff, and she's waiting for all of us to clear out so she can lock up and go home.

"Look," Shanna hisses, smacking Jack on the shoulder.

His head turns and his jaw falls when he catches sight of the woman. She comes closer with something clutched between her fingers.

"Once was enough," Jack mutters, shaking his head. "Don't you think so?"

"Who is this?" I ask, my voice coming out clipped to my own ears.

My job isn't to play nice.

Not when so much has happened already tonight.

"Ana," Shanna says.

At the same time, Jack says, "Ava, what are you doing here?"

"Okay, so, I know this looks bad. I did purposely try to run into you at your show the other night, but I admitted that." She frowns, swiping long hair back from her face. "And believe it

or not, I can take a hint. I'm here tonight for work. I was hired in the accounting department right after graduation."

"I'm glad things are going well for you, but we've got to go." Jack backs away with a very confused-looking Shanna.

"I think she has a point," Shanna says. "Did you give an interview to the press the other night?"

"No," Ava or Ana says. I still don't know what her damn name is, or why she's holding us up. "I had no clue the two of you are together, or I never would have wasted so much money on a ticket..." She shrugs. "It was the first show in Chicago that I could get to, but it was expensive."

"There's a point," Shanna says, rolling her hand like she's saying *get on with it*. "I just know it's in there somewhere."

When Ana-slash-Ava doesn't immediately respond, Jack gives her an exasperated look. "Listen, Ava, I don't want to be a dick, but my omega is in heat. She's actually kind of coherent at the moment, so if there is a point, could you get there? We've got to get back to her nest before the next wave hits."

Ava's head tilts and she takes a step back. "Wow, that was fast. Um, okay, the point is, I have a contract with Lewis Enterprises. I can't explain anything to you, but..." She looks at Shanna. "You're the designer, right?"

"Yes," Shanna agrees, snuggling into Jack's chest.

"I've heard a lot about it around the office. What they did was shameful. Maybe not illegal, but..." Ava frowns. "I can't say that, either. Damn. Okay, so if you're still in legal proceedings, or if it gets there, then have your lawyers call me as a witness. I'm pretty sure, if I was subpoenaed, I could talk about the things I can't tell you." She steps forward.

Jack steps back, growling like a feral alpha.

"Seriously?" Shanna chuckles, tilting her head up to give him a goofy look.

"It's just a card with all my info." Ava turns, handing it to me instead.

“Thank you.” I grab the business card. From the sounds of it, there’s more shadiness afoot with Shanna’s exes.

Jack clears his throat. “Thanks again.”

“Yeah, no problem. I’m happy for you. I owe you a thank you,” Ava says, sounding sad. Maybe remorseful? I don’t know her well enough to tell. “I hadn’t really been treated well before we met. It took some time for it to sink in that I didn’t have to allow myself to be treated like crap. I’m sorry if I hurt you in the process, but I am really glad we met. It looks like it all worked out for the best.”

“It did,” Jack agrees, smiling down at Shanna.

Ava nods and heads back toward the door she was originally standing by.

“Come on. The car is waiting,” I remind them.

“Why do you keep putting all your clothes back on?” Shanna hisses, doing her best to get Jack’s pants down *in the elevator* of her building.

“Beautiful, you’re killing me.” He chuckles. “Public indecency is still a crime, even for alphas and omegas.”

“But I ache. You wouldn’t knot me in the SUV, but we’re here.” She whines, throwing her face forward to bury it in his neck. She grinds against his front like an omega lost to the haze of her heat. “You can now,” she mumbles against his skin.

“We’ve got like eighteen stories to go before we’ll be there,” Jack grunts, pulling her hand off his cock. “I’m trying so fucking hard to stay clear, but I’m about to crack. I’m pretty sure this elevator has a camera.”

“Yeah, but my parents own the building. My mom would totally understand.” She wiggles around, and Jack steps toward me.

“I’m sorry I repeatedly growled at you and threatened your life. Please take her before I do something to get all of us arrested. There’s no one else to bail us out.” He sounds so

damn serious that I chuckle, shaking my head. He stretches out his arms, and I take her, wrapping her around my middle.

“Half my pack is in prison,” she whispers, looking like she might burst into tears at any second. “And it’s all my fault.”

“It’s still just a county jail. Ehh, maybe the city. I don’t know how the Chicago precincts work, but they’ll be out tomorrow sometime. It may be slow because of the holiday—” Jack grimaces. “The label lawyers have never taken more than a day to get us out.”

“You’ve been arrested before?” she asks with wide eyes.

“Yeah, trespassing and breaking and entering.” He laughs, shaking his head. “It was not my finest moment.”

“Hmm.” Her nose scrunches adorably, so I peck a kiss on it.

“I’m looking at this as a good thing,” I tell her, hoping to cheer her up.

“Seriously?” she scoffs.

“Yes.” I nod, checking how many more floors are left. I need to keep her distracted for at least another ten floors. “Did you see how well they worked together? They just needed a common enemy. Pack Lewis is that enemy.”

“Or they try to kill each other and get stuck there with much more serious charges,” she says, burying her face in my dress shirt. “I feel like I’m boiling from the inside out. I need to be in my nest.”

“We’re almost there.” Jack steps up behind her, framing her back. He brings her hair to one shoulder and kisses her bond mark.

She lets out a begging moan as I glare. That was the opposite of helpful. Her pussy starts to grind over my belt, and I breathe through my damn mouth.

Jack hugs her from behind.

“I like being in the middle of the two of your scents. I need to set up my nest. It should be done by now,” she says. “I’m

going to need to grab some of their clothes. Meaning, I need to know where Lang's room is. Maybe I'll steal Carter's sheets. He won't need them tonight."

I try to hide my smile.

They say an omega going into heat is a hot mess, but she's so fucking cute, it makes me ache to make her mine. Let's hope my courting gifts were actually delivered. I don't like breaking my word, but now that I've experienced a touch of what it's like when she's perfuming full-force and begging, it's pretty clear there's no way I can leave her aching just to make myself feel better about the courting process.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Shanna

I'm a disaster.

My emotions are all over the place, to the point I'm pretty sure it qualifies as emotionally terrorizing Saxon and Jack. It's not purposeful. Once each wave passes, I do my best to apologize and make up for my overreactions, but I'm still miserable. I'm fairly sure I'm driving them crazy too, and not in the sexy way.

I'm not in full-blown heat.

Not yet. But it is the very late haze of pre-heat that lasts for a day or two. The symptoms are worse than I've experienced, but I think there's a possibility my bonding with Jack jump-started everything.

The cramps are more severe, as are my instincts, and I'm a little afraid Jack is going to think I'm a sex addict.

I ransack Carter's and Lang's rooms for things that smell like them, but it's not enough. It's making me act like an awful person. Considering how ridiculously I'm behaving, I might actually be an awful person.

My entire body is hot, but the fever isn't high enough yet to be dangerous. I'm itchy all over and half-delirious as I stack the pillows over Carter's workout clothes that I found in his bathroom.

Lang hardly had anything that was smelly enough to satisfy my urges. I did shamelessly dig through his bags, though. Saxon's scent is heavy in the nest, even though he

changed the sheets before we left for the fundraiser. I'm covered in Jack's cum, so that helps satisfy the urge for him.

I grab another of the velvety blankets that I normally enjoy the texture of.

It's too... *furry* for me to touch right now.

I toss it aside and instead wrap the light cotton blanket around my shoulders before pulling it to my nose. It doesn't smell right, and I deeply regret kicking Jack and Saxon out of the nest.

It's the middle of the night.

I'm nude, except for the blanket, but I still wander out to check where they are. The door slams against the wall as I fling it open. I stumble into the far wall of the hallway as I weave. My vision is fuzzy at the edges, but my nose propels me forward.

Saxon is stretched out on the couch in a pair of sweats and nothing else.

My mouth waters.

I'm still several feet away. It should be impossible to smell his thick woodsy scent, but it smacks me with physical force.

"Alpha," I beg, staggering toward him. He doesn't look up, and a whine escapes. That catches his attention as he jolts, ripping out his earbuds and tossing them on the coffee table.

"Did you change your mind? Or are you finished setting up the nest?" he asks, sitting up.

I climb right into his lap. His scratchy hands slide under the blanket, gripping my hips. He pulls me down over his cock. He's not hard, but the fabric of his sweats feels incredible against my core. His forearm hooks around my back as he brings me closer. It's a bear hug from a mountain of an alpha, and I love it.

"You're hotter than you were the last time I touched you." He kisses my forehead tenderly. "Do you have an omega thermometer?"

“In the medicine cabinet in the bathroom attached to the nest,” I murmur, burrowing my face into his skin. He does feel considerably cooler than I do. “My temperature will come down with your knot slammed inside me.”

“Are you inviting me into your nest for real, vixen?”

“You’re always welcome. I only needed you and Jack to leave so that I could get everything set up properly. I didn’t mean to make you feel unwelcome.”

“You didn’t. I was always taught that you don’t enter an omega’s nest without permission, and that goes doubly for when the omega is in heat.”

“I don’t think it’s full blown yet,” I admit. “But you have my explicit permission.”

“Good, because I’ve almost popped in multiple times over the last two hours to check on you.” He chuckles a low, throaty sound.

“You really are the perfect alpha,” I muse, running my fingers over his pec.

“I’m far from perfect, but I don’t mind you thinking I’m your perfect match.” He pulls one of his hands from behind my back to between us, tilting my chin up to his. His eyes crinkle at the edges as he gives me a lopsided grin. I stretch up, kissing him. He keeps it chaste and tender, but I want him to ravage my mouth. “Okay, I’m going to run and grab one of the gifts that arrived tonight. Then we can regroup in the nest. How does that sound?”

“You could just carry me with you,” I offer.

“You’re cute. You lounge here for a minute. We’ll get properly started on courting. After that, I’m all yours for whatever you need.” He nuzzles his cheek to mine, and his scruffy beard scratches my cheek in a delicious way. He lifts me, putting me down on the couch before heading off to grab my gifts.

Alphas get so weird about courting.

At least, my alphas.

Gifts don't mean a thing to me. I've gotten a lot from packs over the years. There's a closet in one of the guest bedrooms that's jam-packed with gifts I didn't want after the alphas disappeared.

Sweat beads on my forehead and between my breasts as I wait.

It's actually sweltering in here.

I drop the blanket, push myself off the couch, and aim for the balcony. It's massive, with a privacy fence covering the bottom. The curtain is open. The skyline sparkles in the distance, making for a breathtaking backdrop.

It's easy to get caught up in my feelings and overlook how truly blessed I am. I check the panel on the wall, and it's already on the setting for one way.

My fingertips trail over the cool glass as I head for the door.

I'm nude. I can't go outside, even if it's the middle of the night, but I do crack the door a couple of inches to let in the frigid air.

Christmas lights sparkle in the distance, lining balconies that have owners who are actually in the holiday spirit.

I glance back, trying to find the clock.

Huh, I guess it's Christmas Eve.

I'm almost positive Carter's celibacy year is up at midnight tonight.

My heart pangs as my chest gets tight. He and Lang should be here. My gaze falls to my bare feet as I lean against the glass wall for support. It's hard not to let myself get trapped in my emotions. I hurt for them. They were arrested defending me, which is ridiculously hot. At the same time, I don't want to mess with their future. Donovan and the other owners of Ruined Records are going to hear about this. I should probably call or text my mom and dads to warn them.

A warm, scratchy hand slides around my middle. Saxon pulls me back into his chest as his other hand appears in front

of me. There's a black jewelry box. My ass wiggles against his half-hard cock.

I glance at him over my shoulder, biting my lip. "You really are the only gift that I need."

"You're a very sweet little omega." He nudges my face back to the gift. "I appreciate that, but you're still going to open it. That way, we can appease my conscience."

I laugh, popping the hinge lid.

"Saxon," I whisper, running my finger over the charms attached to a delicate bracelet. There's a heart, a fabric measuring tape with scissors, a lock and key, a pair of sunglasses, and an iced coffee. "They're all so fitting. I love it."

"Good," he says gruffly, snapping the box closed. His warmth leaves my back long enough for him to put it down on the coffee table. He comes back and closes the door. "Is this glass see-through or privacy coated?" His lips trail over my shoulder, and it gets hard to think.

"There are like three settings. It's on the one where we can see out, but no one can see in."

"Perfect," he growls, sliding his hand down my stomach.

I wiggle my hips back, desperately trying to work against his dick. It's harder than it seems. He's too tall in comparison to me, especially without a pair of heels to give me extra height. He has to bend to be able to lick and kiss my skin. He cups my sex, scraping his teeth over my neck. It makes my clit throb and my nipples tighten. He tilts my face to his with his free hand, and even though I have to stretch my neck uncomfortably, that thought bleeds away as his tongue teases mine. The palm of his hand works against my clit, and he teases two thick fingers against my opening. It makes my knees shake almost violently.

"More." My hands slide around the glass as my toes dig into the wooden flooring. "I want your cock, but I need your knot." I shake as he slips those same fingers all the way inside me.

His warm breath fans over my skin as he growls. “I want that too. More than you can possibly comprehend.” He smiles against my shoulder. “Let’s go over this one more time. Your sweet little pussy is concerningly tight. We’re going to get there. We’ve just got a little prep work to do first.”

My nostrils flare as I breathe in his deep, woody scent. The way his arm cradles me feels amazing, but I wouldn’t mind him completely pinning me to the floor. He stretches his fingers out, pushing them against the front of my sex as he thrusts. He really does have magic hands and perfectly thick fingers.

“That’s it, sweet vixen. Soak my fist.” He chuckles darkly. That’s not going to be a problem if he keeps slamming his fingers into my G-spot. I thrash, begging uncontrollably. “You’re not going to make it out of this heat without my bite, but I would like to have my knot locked inside you when that happens.” My insides light up at his words. It’s so easy to believe him. It should scare me how easily I’ve placed my trust in his hands, but it doesn’t. “You still want that, right? You want my teeth digging into your soft flesh to show the world you’re all *mine*?”

I nod so wildly my forehead bumps the glass, but it’s fine. It’s cool against my burning skin. My cheek slides around as I twist my head to soak up the chilly feeling. I feel like I’m burning alive from the inside out.

Saxon keeps stretching his fingers, making sure his wrist and palm bump my clit as he works in and out. My orgasm rolls over me with little warning. One second, I’m teetering on the edge, and the next, pleasure courses through my system as my vision goes spotty.

My echoing screams bounce around the spacious living room.

“Fucking hell,” he growls, scratching his teeth over the top of my shoulder as I shake. It only feeds the fog.

I ramble out a plea for his bite, but even I can barely understand the words, and I know what I meant to say. He works me through my come down and doesn’t stop. My feet

stamp against the floor as I demand he shove his cock inside me. He doesn't concede to my demands.

By the time I come twice more, I can barely keep myself upright.

"Shh, Daddy's got you." His hands slide down my arms, patting mine. "You keep them here for me." I don't have any idea what he means. My head shakes, but I feel the fabric of his sweats hit my feet as they fall to the floor. His sticky cock bumps around my ass as he yanks my hips back. "Ready?"

"So much yes! Please?"

"Speak up if it's too much." His hand tightens at the top of my ass and he thrusts. My walls stretch around his girth as he works in, only to pull back out.

"No, I need more," I say, shoving my hips back at the same time he slams in. "Yes, like that."

"It's not a race," he murmurs close to my ear. "Let me savor this."

I bite my lip to keep quiet. It's practically impossible as I leak around his swollen length. The feral growl he releases rattles around the room, making my body pulse with heat. I flip my hair to the side and bare my neck.

"That's not helping my composure." His hand lands on my ass several times in quick succession. My tits bounce with each pump of his hips. His knot still isn't teasing my opening, but I know his crown is slamming against my cervix. It hurts, but in a good way. A low, throbbing ache starts in my lower stomach with each rabid thrust.

My palms are sweaty, making it hard to keep myself steady. I switch to resting one forearm against the glass, so I can lean my head on it.

My hair falls around my face as my pussy aches. It's swollen and needy.

"I need you to rut. Grind deep, slam into me..." The rest comes out garbled, but it's all just me saying the same thing in different ways.

“Not deep enough for you?” He laughs ominously, taking his punishment of my cunt up a notch. I’m so wet, and more slick drips out at his words. “Let’s see if we can fix that. You know, my impulses are trying to convince me that, if I fuck you deep enough, I can breed you. Let’s put that birth control of yours to the test, shall we?”

“Please,” I beg mindlessly. “I need your cum.”

“Keep milking my cock like that, and there won’t be any chance at holding it back,” he snarls. “Fucking hell, that’s it. Work your hips for Daddy.”

I’m not expecting to come without pressure on my clit, but his deep pounding strokes get me there.

“You are a dirty little vixen,” he growls. “Aren’t you, sweetheart? You’re coming all over my cock, and I’m not even buried all the way inside you *yet*.” His words only make every sensation more intense.

My chest heaves as I breathe in his pheromones mixing with mine. I whine, demanding he knot and bite me. His shaft swells, getting wider and thicker. I react violently as electricity zips its way through my system. My pussy locks down, trying to milk his knot, but the contracting waves, combined with the way he thickens, makes it feel like he’s going to rip me in half.

“Saxon,” I groan, trying to keep myself upright. “I-I...”

“Yeah, me too,” he growls, bumping my face to the side.

He strikes the top of my shoulder with no further warning. The pain sizzles deliciously, but it quickly transforms into euphoria as the bond lights up, expanding to include him. I guess he changed his mind about waiting, and I’m totally fine with that.

I gush around his length, and his cock kicks, flooding me with his cum. His scent and the longing feeling filling the bond make it difficult to breathe.

My entire front plasters to the glass as he fucks me through his orgasm. His tongue flicks over his bond mark, and I sob as I catch his feelings. He’s highly aroused *still*, even after flipping my world upside down. More than that, he’s smug and

happy to have tied his life to mine. He sends steady comfort, but I'm so foggy that my legs forget they're supposed to hold me up.

Saxon thankfully wraps an arm around my middle, and the other hand lifts my knees. I end up with my legs wrapped backward until my feet tuck behind his thighs.

My vision is hazy, but my arm flies to my middle to push back against the cramping pain. "Knot! I need it so bad."

"We're getting to that right now. Give me just another second," he murmurs in a comforting tone. He kneels next to the couch, laying my top half over the arm. My toes slide across the wood floor as I try to catch my bearings, but it's useless.

Rational thought disappears as he drives his knot inside me with a feral growl that would scare anyone with three brain cells. My system thinks it's the sexiest thing ever, but past that, my consciousness seems to shut off until all I can process is sensation.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Jack

A groan escapes as I roll over, searching for my phone. I pull it up to check the time, and Jones is calling. I vaguely remember Shanna kicking me and Saxon out of the nest. I took a shower and then laid down for a minute, but I never intended to fall asleep.

My brain finally wakes up enough that I answer the call.

Carter and Lang are in jail.

Fuck.

“Hello?”

“Someone finally fucking answered.” Jones sighs. “Were you asleep? I’m fucking exhausted too. How’s your omega? Did you guys get home safely?”

“Yeah,” I say around a yawn. “Are they out? Do we need to come pick them up?”

“Really? You’d leave the nest right now? I’m impressed. You are a decent friend,” Jones says. “No, don’t leave. They saw a judge, got their charges, and are being processed for release now. Although, Rook Jacobs was not pleased to be bothered on Christmas Eve.”

“Shit,” I whisper.

I completely forgot that it’s now officially Christmas Eve.

“It’s fine,” Jones says. “He sent some hot-shot lawyer that had them all arraigned within two hours. It also might have something to do with the holiday. They’re lucky this didn’t

happen tonight, or they would've been in there through Christmas Day. Anyway, they'll be out soon and we'll be dropping them off. Make sure someone is around to let them in." He laughs. "They'll be shit out of luck if not. I'm kicking them from the moving vehicle and getting on with my two vacation days."

I laugh, swiping a hand over my face. Jones is a hard-ass, but he's a good guy. "Got it. Thanks, man. Have a merry Christmas."

"You too." He hangs up without any other goodbyes.

I shove myself off the bed in the towel I fell asleep in.

Damn, Shanna gave me a workout. I get why packs became the norm. I'm not cocky like Carter or Lang, but I know I've got decent stamina. I run and do cardio daily, but my favorite is jumping rope. I'm damn good at it too. Shanna still put me to shame. Her pheromones definitely helped me along, but she's clearly got the typical omega sex drive.

I aim for the living room to ensure the latch lock isn't hooked. Even with the key, they wouldn't be able to get in with that thing on. I take a few steps down the hallway.

Shanna's begging moans are so loud they're impossible to miss.

My instincts drag me forward.

Logically, I know I have to share her.

My impulses do not give a single fuck. Sure, my cock is a little tired, but he got a year-long nap.

He can deal.

Even the chafing from the zipper on my suit pants in the SUV on the ride over isn't enough to keep him down.

My omega needed my dick, so she got it.

We probably could have been arrested for that little debacle too, but I did have the presence of mind not to knot her.

I snort, shaking my head to clear away the fog.

Saxon has Shanna bent over the couch, fucking into her from behind. My shoulders bounce as I take a deep breath, blowing it out slowly to keep from letting the fog in. Her perfume is *everywhere*. It's considerably thicker than it was earlier.

I aim for the door to unlock the latch before I forget.

Saxon spots me first. He bares his teeth as a snarl vibrates out of his chest. Dude, I'm like thirty or forty feet away still.

Shanna keeps begging like an omega in heat. I pass the laundry room and toss my towel inside like a conscientious houseguest. I make it around the island, watching the big guy carefully.

That's my omega.

We're bonded.

If he doesn't like it, then he's going to have to get over it, just like I have to do the same thing.

"Jack," Shanna moans, stretching out a hand. "I need you too."

"I'm coming, beautiful." My cock thickens as I approach. I stretch a hand down and give it a solid couple strokes as I make it to the edge of the sofa. I crawl on and wrap a hand in her hair, pulling her mouth up to mine. The kiss is frantic as she tries to suck on my tongue.

I chuckle and pull back to nip at her lips. She continues to beg for things I can't understand, which makes it challenging. She's sweaty and her skin is way hotter than mine. She sobs against my cheek as her hand lands on my cock. Her scent hits me, and my eyes whip to Saxon's. He's thrusting into her from behind, but he's clearly lost to the pheromone haze.

Okay, so I have a new packmate. Her smell very clearly indicates that they bonded.

That was fast.

Dammit, I never should have let her kick me out of the nest.

“I needed you and then you were here,” Shanna moans. “If I stretch up, and you kneel, do you think you can get your cock into my mouth?”

“I don’t think it’ll work like this,” I say truthfully, moving my free hand to cup her tit.

“Hold on,” Saxon says. He slides around to the front of the cushion I’m on, instead of on the side of the couch by the arm. He repositions until he’s sitting back on his feet as he kneels. He yanks Shanna with him during the entire process and helps her flatten her feet out on the ground.

I turn until I’m kneeling, facing the front of the couch.

This actually might work.

Shanna still has to stretch up a few inches, but I aim my shaft down and she greedily sucks me between her already puffy lips.

“Jesus Christ,” I hiss as her naughty little tongue flicks over my crown. She laps at the slit on the head of my cock like she’s desperate for every drop of pre-cum. Her hand moves to cup my knot, applying the pressure it craves. My fingers wrap in her hair as she stares up at me with hooded eyes. She’s so fucking beautiful. My heart beats funny as I remember I get to keep her for the rest of our lives.

“Goddamn, vixen. You’re absolutely wrecking me.” Saxon’s voice cracks on the last few words.

The urge to punch him is strong, but Shanna digs the fingers of her free hand into my thigh and dives so deep onto my dick that it’s all I can focus on. Her nose brushes my knot as she freezes.

She pops off long enough to moan, “I’m there.” She looks up at me. “Use me.” Her tongue perfectly works the underside of my shaft as she works her way back down my length, and my forearm flexes as I take over fucking her mouth.

She freezes as she comes, so I give her a break. The look that crosses her face as she begs around me makes my cock swell. She’s just coming down from her orgasm when I start to fuck her mouth again. The scent of her pussy, combined with

her pheromones, seems to knock out all rational thought. She sucks me deeper as I'm trying to pull back to come all over her tongue.

My knot slips into her mouth just behind her teeth. Her eyes widen, but she doesn't try to back off. She pats my thigh like she's telling me it's okay, but the way her throat clenches around my cock isn't.

I growl, coming violently. It's nearly impossible to let my cock kick without thrusting. My legs shake as my chest heaves.

Shanna stares up at me with glassy eyes and *winks*.

Holy fucking shit.

I'm pretty sure I just fell in love. Jesus Christ, I sound like Lang. Her tongue teases around my swollen knot, but I don't know what the fuck I'm supposed to do now. I run my fingers through her hair, brushing her jaw with my thumb.

Saxon leans around her, his eyes widening like he's finally more coherent. "Shit," he whispers, bringing his hand up to caress her other cheek as he stills his thrusts. "Fucking hell, vixen. You're trying to ruin us. Aren't you?" He fully frames her back, giving her that safe and confined feeling omegas love so much. His other hand slides down, and I think he starts to tease her clit. "We've got you. You're absolutely perfect. Our perfect, sweet omega."

Her mouth is hinged so wide, it's hard to tell, but I think she tries to smile. I don't know what to do with myself. My cock is still rock hard, and with her lapping at my knot, that's not going to change anytime soon.

It doesn't matter. This isn't about me. This is what she chose. My entire job during a heat is to take care of her and give her what she needs.

Shanna's confusion hits me in the bond. My head tilts, but I'm still trying to keep my shit together, so I don't try to fuck her throat with my knot locked in her mouth.

"Hey, asshole," Saxon growls, slapping my abs. "Tell your omega how good she feels wrapped around your knot."

Oh, yeah.

Fuck.

Dammit.

I am failing at this whole alpha thing.

“I know Lang is always spouting off about how he’s in love with you,” I tell her, staring straight into her sparkling hazel eyes. “But holy fuck. You just took my damn breath away.” I brush my thumb over her cheek. “You really are perfect, Shanna. I’m going to spend the rest of our lives making sure you know how grateful I am that you chose me.”

Shanna sobs around my knot, and I panic. I clearly don’t know what the fuck I’m doing. I panic but don’t move, because that would be very bad for my dick and her mouth.

“Dumbass.” Saxon sighs. “Now isn’t the time to make her cry.”

“Sorry.” I chuckle. “I just wanted you to know how happy you make me.”

She nods as much as she can, running her hand over my stomach. She sends me something in the bond that feels like maybe gratitude or appreciation... I’m not sure.

Saxon helps by continuing to tell her what a gift she is and how proud he is that she’s taking both our knots at one time. Motherfucker. I really should have found time to read up on this shit, but I’m actually kind of relieved to have Saxon on my team.

Chapter Thirty

Lang

“You know.” I bump my shoulder against Carter’s as we wait in the holding cell. “We should probably be grateful they let us stick together.” I nod to Kage a few cells down. “We could be in there with the giant, smelly dude.”

“Do you ever shut the fuck up?” he growls, swiping his hand over his face. He tosses himself back against the wall and crosses his arms over his chest.

The shitty look on his face is actually starting to piss me off.

“What the hell is your problem?” I glare, twisting to face him. “I thought we bonded earlier.”

He doesn’t say a word, simply raises a finger, flipping me off. The urge to break his stupid fucking hand is strong. It’s miserable being trapped here while knowing that Shanna is in heat, but I’m surprisingly relieved that she’s got Jack and Saxon with her.

My heart legit skipped a beat when I realized she and Jack bonded. I don’t think I’d be half as jealous if I wasn’t trapped in a cell with Carter and his shitty attitude. I’m still trying to make the best of things, because ultimately, he’s going to have to learn to get the fuck over his problem with me. I’m bonding my omega as soon as I get the chance. The two of us being mortal fucking enemies will only make her life harder.

“I still don’t understand why you hate me,” I mutter, shaking my head. “I wasn’t half as much of a dick to you as you were to me when you and Xavier were scouted.”

“Fuck off with that bullshit,” he growls, hopping up and starting to pace the cell. “I haven’t smoked a cigarette in five fucking years, but I would literally shank you right now for one.”

I laugh.

The big, dirty guy a few cells away pats his pocket. “I’ve got a smoke. Go for it.”

I look at Carter. “Dude, trust me. If he snuck a cigarette in here, you don’t want it after where it’s been.”

Carter laughs, shaking his head. “No, I definitely don’t.”

I shove myself off the hard-as-fuck concrete bench. “Come on, just tell me what I did to make you hate me, so we can kiss and make up.” I take a step back when he looks like he might take a swing at me. I jab a finger at him. “This is not an example of how to be a good packmate. Communicate with me. That way, when we get out of here, we can coexist peacefully and ideally tag-team our little omega. Today is a year, right?”

“Not until midnight,” he growls, pushing his hair out of his eyes.

“But you overdosed last year on Christmas Eve. It’s Christmas Eve now. Meaning, today would be day three-hundred-and-sixty-six.”

“How the fuck do you know that?”

“I was worried about you. I followed all the headlines.” I shrug. I’m not ashamed that I give a fuck about him.

“It was the day before Christmas Eve, but I made that fucking promise on Christmas Day.” He starts pacing again, and I sigh.

“Well, I’m guessing you weren’t fucking anyone holed up in the hospital on Christmas Eve. I’d say that counts.”

“Why did you do it?” he asks, spinning around until he’s facing me. “We told Jamen it was the three of us or nothing. We had your back, and you sold us out for a contract.”

“Sold you out?” I scoff. “You were being stupid. I told you as much. You don’t pass up that kind of deal, which I said until I was blue in the motherfucking face. It was your chance to take care of your *family*. Xavier got it, but you were so fucking stubborn, you wouldn’t even think about signing. So, I removed myself from the equation.”

“Yeah, you ghosted us so you could sign your own deal.”

“Are you even hearing yourself right now?” I tilt my head. “We’ve always had different styles. And yeah, we made it work, but you’re more straight classic rock. I’m more grunge and alternative. Jamen saw that. He told me to give him a call once I turned eighteen. I did, but that didn’t fuck with your ability to also sign a fucking contract.” I take a step forward, but even I don’t know why I’ve got the strong urge to slam my fist into his face repeatedly.

Maybe it’s guilt.

I don’t know.

All I do know is nothing came before getting my mom and little brothers out of that rat-infested apartment. He and Xavier had their shot, and I wasn’t going to stand in the way of that. I was even mostly happy for them. I kept my ass out of trouble, barely got my diploma by the skin of my teeth, and called the number on the card Jamen gave me the day I turned eighteen.

“Which is the same thing I told Xavier the day he cornered me outside my little brother’s school. He told me the two of you were going to sign, and I said *cool*. I thought you already had.”

His jaw gets tight, like he’s about to crack a tooth. “When was that?”

“I don’t know. Jesus Christ, it’s been a lot of years. Maybe March or April?”

“When did you sign your contract?”

My forehead wrinkles.

Why does it even matter?

It’s been almost eleven years.

I still answer him. “I signed three days after I turned eighteen.”

“So, the middle of June.” He curses under his breath, shaking his head and tossing himself down on the concrete slab this place calls a bench. He buries his face in his hands. It might have been a decade since we were close, but I know Carter well enough to understand he’s not going to say a word until he’s ready.

If I try to press him for whatever epiphany he just came to, he’ll only shut down even harder.

I take the seat next to him, cross my arms, and we sit in companionable silence until a cop finally comes to let us out.

“They’re supposed to be here,” Shanna yells. My eyes widen as Carter and I approach the door to the nest. It’s open, but just a little. “It’s been hours. I need to go where they are. You said two hours ago that they would be here soon.”

“If you make another move toward those steps, then I can guarantee you, I am done threatening. You will go over my knee and your ass will not feel great by the time I’m done. This isn’t up for debate,” Saxon growls.

Carter and I file into the room.

It’s spacious, and they must be in the den nest, because they aren’t on the open circle cushion thing. We both took a quick shower to clean off the scent of jail, but I know we’re both rabid with the need to put eyes on Shanna.

Saxon goes on. “It’s not safe for you, and it’s dangerous to any alpha you could come across. You’ve got to think past your emotions and understand you’re in heat. They will be here as soon as they can, but trust me when I say they would want us to keep you here. It’s our job to make sure you’re safe.”

“I know that rationally,” she sobs. “But my heart aches. I need them. It feels like this huge piece is missing and the piece

is them. I know that sounds terrible. I feel like I'm messing everything up. I need you both too. Don't think—"

"We know. It's clear you're a little overwhelmed," Jack says. "How can we help?" He pauses, then adds, "Without leaving the penthouse, because everything Saxon said is still true."

My goddamn chest puffs up with pride. *She noticed we were gone.* I've been wondering if she even needed me, considering she had them. I'm going to buy her a fat diamond ring and wife the fuck out of her.

"Come on," I grunt, elbowing Carter.

We make our way up the stairs.

Carter grabs the handle, yanking back the curtain enough that he can slide inside.

I follow him in and my jaw falls.

Shanna is nude, but it's the scratches all over Saxon's chest, combined with the fact Jack's hair is standing up straight when it normally flops to the side, that has me taking a step back.

It looks like they've been to war, but the nest smells like a straight-up fuck fest.

"And there are your missing alphas now," Saxon says, bending over to kiss her forehead before releasing her hands that have been pinned to the mattress.

"Oh my god," she whispers, pushing herself up and aiming for us. She jumps when she's about a foot in front of Carter. He catches her with ease, kissing the hell out of her.

"All right, I'm taking a shower and a nap." Jack shoves himself off the mattress and moves to walk past us. He slaps Shanna's ass. "You know where I'll be if you need me." He looks between Carter and me. "Glad to see the two of you in one piece. She really has missed you."

"Wait," Carter growls, pulling back from kissing Shanna. "Can you confirm that, while I officially started my year on

Christmas Day, I was already in the hospital and not fucking anyone on Christmas Eve?”

Jack’s head tilts. “Correct, but more than any of that, you’ve put in the work to be a decent human being. Waiting twelve hours to midnight wouldn’t change all the progress you’ve made. But yeah, it’s definitely been over a year for you.” He claps Carter on the shoulder and leaves.

Saxon climbs off the bed and follows Jack, but I grab his arm before he can slide through the open curtain.

“What the fuck happened there?” I ask, nodding to his chest.

He chuckles, shaking his head. “Apparently, I gave her the good dick Carter was talking about the other night. Did you miss the bite marks she left on Jack’s neck?” He claps me on the back, and my nose twitches. “Good luck. It’s about to be a major holiday. I’m going to see if I can get food delivered, so we don’t starve while she’s in heat. Otherwise, I might have to run out to the store.” He heads off as I’m still processing that he and Shanna bonded.

Carter elbows me, and Shanna stretches her arms out. I take her from Carter and her toes dig into my towel, knocking it to the floor as she kisses me with that frantic intensity that makes my heart pound.

Her hands land on my face, rubbing through the short beard I’m now sporting. “I missed you so much. Are you angry with me?”

“What?” I sputter.

She looks between me and Carter. “I got the two of you arrested. Then I bonded with Saxon while you were in *prison*.”

Carter snorts, shaking his head. “It was overnight in jail. By the way, your exes actually cried. It was so worth it.”

I forgot about that. “They really did get weepy, and it really was.” Those guys have no chill. They acted like they’d just been indicted for murder.

Shanna traps her thick lower lip between her teeth. “I owe Saxon and Jack a sincere apology for how I’ve been acting.” She stares at my chest as her eyes close. “I missed you both so much. My impulses have been a wreck without you.”

“They understand.” Carter slides around to her back, planting his hands on her hips. “You’re bonded. Even if they don’t, they’re stuck with your crazy now. It’s always better to show the real you from the beginning.” He laughs. “It helps offset unrealistic expectations.”

“Smart-ass,” she says, grinning over her shoulder at him. “Did the two of you get any sleep last night?”

“Not a fucking wink,” Carter says.

“Come on.” She pats my shoulder. “You two can snuggle with me and take a nap.”

Carter doesn’t need to be told twice. He takes off, walking up the carpeted side of the mattress and tosses himself down.

My cock sways as I take the other corridor up and kneel on the edge. Shanna climbs out of my hold and cuddles up to Carter’s front, but that’s just fine, because her perfect ass is facing my direction. I move over, stretching out behind her. It’s hard to remind my dick that we need sleep. There’s a fluffy blanket at my feet, which I stretch down to grab, tossing it over the three of us.

Shanna’s sweet scent lulls me to sleep before I have a chance to do something like slide inside her.

I wake up with my cock hard as a rock and strangely slick. It feels a little like I’m cuddling with a furnace.

“Carter is still asleep. You were too, but I needed you,” Shanna whispers, staring at me as she sinks her way farther down my bare cock. “I figured you wouldn’t mind.”

She leans over me, trying to wedge my length deeper.

I stretch up on my forearms. “You’re always welcome to climb on my dick, but I never got to show you my test results. The email is on my phone, but it’s in the bedroom, charging.”

Her eyes are glassy as she grinds down over me. “I forgot about that. At this point, I’ll take your word for it.”

“I wouldn’t fuck around with something so important,” I say as her nails dig into my pec painfully. It’s a little surreal that I missed out on the feeling of sinking inside her raw for the first time, but I really am here for whatever she needs. I’ll savor the experience next time. It’s intense as fuck with her walls rippling around me with nothing between us. I don’t know what to do with myself.

“I just need your cum. I’m sleepy too, and knotting seems like a lot of work, so…”

“You want me to take over?” I ask, bumping her cheek with mine.

She nods, and I roll us. Her back hits the nest mattress, and she wraps her legs around mine. It’s much easier to kiss her like this. I’m obsessed with her muffled moans that vibrate against my mouth as her tongue dances with mine.

She’s so slick and hot—like hotter than any human being should be.

She’s in heat, you dumbass.

That’s why she feels like she’s burning my skin.

Fucking hell, maybe I am still half asleep.

Her slick little cunt clenches as she pulls back from the kiss, gasping for air. “Fuck me deep, Lang. Please?”

“Deep and dirty?” I muse. “Yeah, sweetness. I can do that.”

Her perfume floods the air. I thought it was dangerous the first few times we fucked, but it’s unreal how much thicker it is now.

My palm hits the bed next to her head as she sobs. I plaster my weight to her front and bring the other hand to cup her tit. She gets frustrated and starts grinding up to meet me.

It’s cute.

I’m doing my best here.

I was dead-ass asleep thirty seconds ago.

My thrusts get deeper and the hazy fog of rut does too. Her perfume has my brain functioning at baser levels only. The tip of my cock bumps against the bottom of her pussy as her lower lips tease my knot. My mouth falls to hers for a frantic kiss as I work my pelvis against her clit. I'm going to need a miracle to get her there because my balls are already tight and heavy.

I pull back, murmuring, "Exactly how long were you riding my cock before I woke up?"

Her pink cheeks get even rosier. She shrugs. "You were grinding against my ass, but no matter how much I teased you, you didn't slip inside. So, I shoved you down and I may have sucked you off for a while first."

I laugh, nuzzling my nose against hers. "You're a dirty little thing. Don't worry, your freaky self gets my cock harder than it's ever been."

She moans kinda loud, so I seal my mouth again to hers to keep her from waking Carter. She pushes down with her feet on my ass right as I thrust and my knot slams inside her.

"Fuck," I growl with wide eyes.

"Changed my mind about the knot, obviously," she moans.

All the air leaves my lungs as my knot swells, locking me inside her. My hand moves to her lower stomach to hold her in place as I practice rutting. The slow drag of my knot teasing her walls is pure fucking heaven. She starts to get loud again as she clamps down on my shaft. The fog gets too deep to fight as I fill her pussy with *my* cum. It's a very satisfying claim to make, but I've got a bigger prize in mind.

"Holy fuck, Shanna," I groan. I'm pretty sure I ramble about coming inside her *raw* and the thoughts that cross my mind of breeding her full of my baby, but it's all so hazy that I also might be dreaming. "I love you, sweetness."

"Me too, I mean, I really love your cock. Bite me, Lang," she begs, scratching my back and ass.

My head whips up to check if she's serious. I'm not going to hesitate for a second if she is. My mouth gets close to her ear. "You really want that?"

"God, yes." She nods wildly.

I capture her mouth for a soul-consuming kiss that ends with me digging my canines into her thick lower lip.

I've been eyeing that spot since we met.

It's all fucking mine.

Just like the dirty little omega currently wringing my cock for all it's worth.

The bond forms, linking my soul to hers. I grunt and nurse my bite, which only makes her cunt clamp down harder. I get hits of her contentment and arousal, but I'm so foggy, everything is muted with the need to rut.

My body slaps against her sweat-soaked skin as I fuck her until we're both sleepy. Luckily, I'm pretty skinny. I have no fears of crushing her as I fall asleep with my head on her shoulder and my knot still locked inside her.

I wake up, confused as hell but drooling on Shanna's shoulder. My knot has finally gone down. I frown, nuzzling my nose to her cheek. She huffs and runs her hand down my spine. She's clearly still asleep, which is actually kind of hot, considering my cock is still inside her.

My hips give an involuntary roll. Her cunt is soaked and our cum drips out around my length. "Let's just fuck all that back inside you," I whisper, giving another couple thrusts.

I move the majority of my weight to my forearm and slide a hand between us, scooping up a little and bringing it to my mouth.

Oh yeah, I'm a big fan of the way we taste mixed together. I smirk, licking my fingers clean and move to kiss her.

I nip at her lower lip and shove my tongue into her mouth. Her cunt flutters as do her eyes.

“Mmm, you taste good,” she mumbles sleepily. “Still tired, but feel free to use me to make yourself come.”

I chuckle, pulling out and lazily rolling my hips back against hers. It feels extra dirty as her eyes fall shut and, weirdly enough, it only makes me harder. My free hand moves to hold her in place as I work her over.

I get close to her ear, murmuring, “Such a good little fuck doll.”

Her tits bounce as I grind, making sure to work my pelvis against her skin. I move to tease her clit as she leaks around my swelling cock. I’m honestly not sure if she’s awake or if her body just really digs it. She clamps down and her head lulls around as she moans. My cock jerks, filling her to the brim again. Before I can stop myself, I slam my knot inside her to lock all that cum inside. My entire body jerks as my shaft twitches and my knot swells.

She’s really never getting away.

Now I just need to determine how to get her to ditch the birth control, so we can get started on our own little family of future musicians.

Chapter Thirty-One

Carter

“Merry Christmas.” Shanna’s nails scratch over my chest as she nuzzles her cheek to mine. My eyes pop open. It feels like I hibernated for winter. I’ve got no fucking clue where I am or what’s happening as she crawls her way down my body. “Listen, I spent the last two hours driving Lang and Jack crazy in the shower because I wouldn’t stop begging for you.”

“What? Didn’t you run out of hot water?” I have no idea why those are the words that come out of my mouth, but I’m going to blame it on being half asleep.

“Tankless water heater. It never gets cold.” Her fingertips tease down my abs and into my sweats. “But you slept for eleven hours, meaning you officially honored your promise from the day it was made. You should really thank Lang and Jack for that. I forgot a few times.” Her head shakes as she laughs. “Can I put your cock in my mouth now?”

“Fuck, yes,” I growl.

She pulls my sweats down, and I kick out of them as she wraps her hand around my thick girth. “Damn, I forgot to ask about your test results.”

“I got tested in rehab. It was negative. I’ve had two with the label since then. They’ve all come back free of anything.”

She nods, flicking her tongue over the slit on the head of my cock. “I saw these the other morning with Jack, but I didn’t let myself think too much on them.” Her thumb teases down the rows of piercings lining the bottom of my shaft.

My hand wraps in the hair at the base of her skull. “They’re new. We can test them out together.”

“What?”

“Yup. I had the pubic piercing before, but the ladder is a product of taking the year off.” My grip turns punishing as she swirls her tongue around my crown. “You’ll really like the surface piercing when it’s teasing against your swollen clit.”

Her warm breath fans over my length as she pulls back, smiling as she stares straight into my eyes. “Do you have any idea how many times I fantasized about you?” Her head shakes as her cheeks get extra pink.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yes,” she moans, and dives down my length.

My free hand flies to my mouth as I curse into my fist. “Me fucking too.”

Her naughty tongue flicks the rungs on my ladder piercing. It’s wild, feeling them move and roll, but it’s hot as fuck.

“Tell me about it,” she begs, popping off my cock long enough to speak.

“All those times you talked shit to me were like verbal foreplay. I couldn’t decide what I wanted more—to push you up against the closest wall to smack that juicy ass red before fucking it, or to shove you to your knees and make you worship my cock with that frisky tongue of yours. Fuck, Shanna, your hot mouth is almost too much.” I’m definitely going to embarrass myself. Just the sight of her on her knees sucking me off is enough to get me close to the edge.

She smiles around my shaft, and my chest gets warm and fuzzy. She’s beautiful and we’re definitely a scent match, but I’ve been attracted to her since the first time she told me off. I’m willing to admit that interest grew into a bit of an unhealthy obsession, but despite all the risks and reasons I shouldn’t, there was no forcing myself to stay away.

I want to build a life together.

Ten years on the road were a few too many. My priorities have changed, and keeping her is my endgame.

I tighten my hold, pulling her until only my crown rests on her tongue. “You know I’m not going to last if you keep that up. Do you want my cum sliding down your throat, dirty girl? Or do you want me to warn you, so I can jack it off all over your pretty tits?”

She moans as her eyes roll back. Her wet cunt grinds against my shin, and I chuckle. “Both!” She dives deeper down my shaft, hollowing her cheeks and whimpering as my cock pulses. Pre-ejac spurts into her mouth and she pulls back to sucking only the tip. She wraps a hand around my knot while the other moves to show me she wants me to shove her deeper.

“Really?” I ask with a hopeful lilt to my tone. “You want me to fuck your mouth?”

She shoves at my hand on the back of her head again, and I take over. Her pheromones flood the air. It intensifies every sensation as her tongue cups the underside of my shaft. The sliding and tugging of my piercings only jacks up my desire. It’s messy as her saliva drips down the inches of my length that she can’t fit in her mouth, but the lube feels great as she twists her hand around my knot. Her tight nipples graze my thighs as she moans around me and my cock swells.

I tug her hair to try to give her some warning I’m about to bust, but I barely get any. My nuts get tight and my tip grazes the back of her throat as my cock kicks. She rolls her tongue over my piercings, grinding her cunt over me like she’s aching for more than my dick in her mouth. My vision goes spotty as my cum floods her throat, and even when I start to come down, my eyesight stays hazy.

I yank her hair, pulling her off my length.

She pops off, licking her puffy lips. Those hazel eyes of hers are glassy as fuck. “You taste so good.”

I give her a tug, telling her to climb up me. She does, and her slick little slit ends up grinding against my length as she

kisses me. Tasting my cum on her tongue does crazy shit to my brain. My teeth rake over her lower lip as she pulls back, and she whimpers.

Blood fills my mouth and I frown.

Either I'm further gone than I thought or...

It finally clicks.

She bonded with Lang.

I release her hair to brush her cheek. "Shit, I didn't realize..."

She grins, licking her lip. "It's okay." Her drenched cunt grinds over me. "I'm hoping you'll bite me next, and our pack can finally be complete."

I growl, rolling us.

Her back hits the nest mattress, and she smiles seductively. "Let's see if the quick blow job helped your performance skills."

I hold myself up on my palm and grab my cock with the other. I tease it in a figure eight around her clit and down to dip inside her just an inch before pulling it out and starting all over again.

"Carter, please," she sobs, her nails raking down my biceps.

"Not yet." I smirk, slapping her clit and following the same pattern. "I've never fucked without a condom. I want to savor this."

She starts rambling and demanding.

It's cute as fuck, but I'm finding it hard to stay focused.

Every time I dip into her cunt, her walls ripple. I've never experienced anything like it.

It's a whole different level of strange, feeling the way my piercings roll as I practice working in and out of her.

"I swear to fuck, I'm going to hurt you if you don't slam inside me," she whines as her head thrashes. "Bruise me. Own

me! Make sure I feel you for days..." She goes on, but it's so slurred, I can't understand a word.

I bury myself to the hilt, and all the air evaporates from my lungs. My knot bumps her lower lips. I yearn to buck it up inside her, but I'm also really digging being able to move. Every thrust has slick dripping out all over me. The sounds she makes spur me on. My impulses scream at me that we know how to meet all her needs.

My mouth falls to hers, and I tenderly lick Lang's bite in apology for being so rough. Shanna is a wildcat, scratching and thrashing.

She begs for my knot, but the mattress jolts.

I bare my teeth, growling like a lunatic. There's another alpha in my omega's nest, and I instantly view them as a threat.

"Oh God, I'm a huge fan of the piercings," Shanna sobs, tightening around me in milking waves. My ass cheeks clench as I grit my teeth, but her orgasm sends me over the edge.

I slam deep, bumping the bottom. "I'm gonna fuck my cum into that bruised little cervix of yours. Rut you so deep, I breed you. Watch your stomach swell with our baby and take you all over again when you're big and pregnant..." The insanity goes on, but Shanna starts grinding under me before I'm even finished coming.

She pushes at my shoulder, and I roll over until she's on top of me. She tries to wiggle down to take my knot, but Lang grabs her hips. He came in right before my orgasm, but I lost track of him.

"Nah, sweetness. How about a little pack bonding?" Lang chuckles.

"What?" she asks.

"I can't think of a better way for Dane and I to get on the same page than to tag-team your sweet little pussy," he says, winking at me.

Shanna's nipples tighten as she nods. I bring my thumbs up to tease them to keep myself busy.

I took a lot of shit over the years because I'm a loyal motherfucker. My head shakes involuntarily. Thinking about Xavier right now would only ruin this incredible moment, but I'm still bitter *as fuck* about what Lang said. There's a whole lot of feelings there I'm not ready to think about. Luckily, Shanna is the perfect distraction.

Lang moves until he's kneeling over my thighs behind her. I grit my teeth when he shoves a finger inside her. The pressure was already unreal, but I wanted to knot her. I move a hand to tease her clit while she trembles, curving toward me like it might be too much.

"Are you good?" I ask, bringing the other hand to brush her hair back from her face.

"Both," she nods wildly. "I need both of you inside me, and then I will be."

"We're working on that." Lang chuckles. "All this cum is helping, but I'd still rather be safe than sorry." He pulls his fingers free. I think he's lubing his cock with mine and Shanna's combined juices, but I can't see him to be sure. "Flatten out on his chest."

Shanna plasters herself to my front. She's clearly warmer than she was. I bring her mouth to mine, bending to kiss her as Lang pulls her up until only the tip of my cock is left inside her.

I pull back, whispering against her lips, "If it's too much, then say so."

"I will, but I want you to bite me." She nips at my lip, rolling her tongue over it, and a snarl escapes my chest as Lang sinks inside her.

I curse, studying every nuance of her face. Her mouth falls open, and she shivers. Lang plants a palm on the bed next to my head and grins. He still isn't thrusting, but instead, allowing her to get used to the stretch.

My chest heaves. It's pressure like I've never felt, and the urge to move is difficult to ignore.

Lang slaps her ass with his free hand, and it makes her gush around both of our cocks. "Don't forget to claim our little omega." He winks. "Jack and I spent two hours listening to her cry. It was quite difficult to not let it hurt my feelings that all she wanted was you, but you officially met your year of celibacy." He grins. "Let's make the most of celebrating."

Shanna moans, begging incoherently against my cheek. Lang starts to work his way in and out. The wet sounds that fill the air are obscene. I wish I wasn't trapped to the mattress, but there will be hundreds of other opportunities to take the lead.

I haven't had a lot of tender moments, but I focus on taking care of my omega. I tilt her head to mine, brushing my lips against hers as I caress her cheek. My hand that's been trapped between us is barely able to move, so I yank it free and cradle her face in my hands.

"You know you've kept me going these last few months, right?" I nuzzle my nose to hers. "I knew I had to keep my shit together, or there was no way I could have you. Good fucking God, it takes my breath away every time you tighten your cunt."

Lang fucks her on my cock, and with all three of our pheromones in the air, it gets hard to think.

I pull her wrist to my mouth as Lang curses. "This is where I want my bond mark. Can I bite you?"

She begs, nodding wildly as my cock swells. I lick over her inner wrist and bite as I lose the battle to hold on. Lang's thrusts get jerky as his weight falls on Shanna. Her cunt floods with our cum. Her euphoria smacks me first in the bond, but Lang's filters in too. Jack's amusement comes next. He's happy for us, and he's getting closer, even if I don't understand how I know.

My chest heaves as I palm Shanna's head, trying to give her comfort. She just rocked my fucking world.

“More,” she begs, wiggling her hips. My chest is sweaty, but heat radiates off her even more heavily. My eyes widen.

“Open for me, beautiful,” Jack says, stretching out at our side. He’s holding out an omega thermometer.

“No.” She shakes her head. “Only if you’re going to come down my throat.”

Lang groans, pulling out a little before thrusting back inside her.

“Open your mouth, or I’ll get Saxon in here to spank your ass!” Jack barks.

I blink in utter shock. I don’t think I’ve ever heard him bark before.

“Go on, sweetness,” Lang says, moving his weight off her back. He still stays inside her, but he’s no longer lying on us.

“Smack her ass,” Jack growls as Shanna turns her head away.

Lang does, in fact, land several loud smacks.

“Ugh, fine,” she mutters, turning to Jack. He pops the thermometer in and runs his fingers over her cheek.

“Dude, my dick needs a break,” Lang grumbles, finally pulling free of her pussy. It’s unreal how her body immediately molds to my cock when it was just accommodating both of us, but pussy really is the most incredible gift.

The thermometer beeps, and Jack pulls it free of her mouth.

Shanna uses her hands on my pecs to push up until she’s kneeling. She rises and falls on my still-hard cock, and my knot wedges just inside her tight little hole. It swells, locking every drop of mine and Lang’s cum inside her.

“Oh, good,” Jack says. “Yeah, she’s close to 110. It’s definitely time for knotting.”

“It is,” she moans, nodding wildly. “Jack, I’m going to need you to put your dick in my mouth.”

He chuckles, crawling around my feet. Once he's on the carpet, he tries kneeling, but that doesn't work, so he stands. She guides his tip to her lips as my hands fall to her waist to help her grind on my knot.

Saxon climbs in the nest, putting himself down in the spot Jack vacated. He grins, sending a pulse of something in the bond. "Congratulations. I was expecting at least one of you to growl at me."

I swallow thickly, managing to say, "Thank you."

My mind is officially blown.

Holy fucking shit...

I'm bonded, and I couldn't be happier about that.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Shanna

Most of Christmas Day and two days after are lost completely to the fog. I have brief flashes of clarity, but other than being knotted and rutted, there's not much that makes sense.

I wake up on the morning of the fourth day a little clearer. My cheeks feel hot when I think about how bratty I've been. Maybe it's because, for better or worse, these guys are stuck with me. The other packs I spent time with didn't even see me half as crazy as I was this time, but they ran as soon as they had the chance.

There's a weird comfort in knowing they saw all that terrible behavior and still chose to bond me. I'm sandwiched in between Lang and Carter, with Lang behind me and Carter facing me on his side.

Lang's cock is mostly soft, but it wasn't when we fell asleep or the multiple times he knotted me during the course of last night.

Carter's dick is still in my mouth, but once I passed out the final time, I fell asleep hard. I vaguely remember him telling me we could try cock warming, because he didn't think he could come any more times.

I can only imagine what we looked like while we slept. The thought has me smiling as I let Carter's length fall from my lips. My entire body aches deliciously from all the ways they used me. It's hard to tell if my heat is over, or if it's just momentary clarity between waves.

Either way, I completely disappeared on Christmas. I'm a little surprised my family didn't send the cops for a wellness check. That thought sends a shiver of unease down my spine. I give Carter's thighs a little shove, and he groggily rolls over on his back without waking up. I'm not shocked. I've put them all through the wringer the last few days.

I carefully wiggle off Lang's cock. I consider sliding down the mattress, but it's easier to climb over Carter's naked form. He's so fucking hot, even while he's asleep. It's even sexier when he grabs my hips, pulling me down on his chest as I try to climb over him.

"Hey," he says in a gravelly, sleep-lined tone. "Are you okay?"

"I'm great," I whisper, pecking a kiss on his lips. "Just need the restroom. Get some sleep."

He pats my hip and releases me.

I make it to the carpet and move to head out, but my gaze is drawn back to them.

I really hope they can let go of whatever happened in the past. I need them both, but more than that, I think they need each other.

Carter lost Xavier, and it's good that he has Jack, but I think it would be a step in the right direction if he could forgive Lang. Holding on to all that hate can't be good for his heart.

I head to my room and take a quick shower without washing my hair. I know Saxon gave me a bath yesterday or the day before when I was slightly coherent. Washing and drying my hair is a whole experience that I'm not ready to undertake right now.

I dress in a cotton pajama dress that I choose by the way it feels when I rub a bunch of things against my inner wrist. Based on that alone, I don't think my heat is completely over just yet.

My mom made it clear that her cell phone would only work in certain cities during her cruise, but I still try to call. When she doesn't answer, I end up keeping it simple and ask her to call me when she gets the chance. I never got to tell her about what happened at the fundraiser, but I don't want to leave that in a voicemail.

After that, I try Fitz and Tinley, but neither answers. I'm even more baffled that I don't have a single call from either of them.

My mind races.

Did Jack warn them that I went into heat? That's the only thing that would explain why they haven't called. That, or if Tinley did, and they're preoccupied with their own stuff. God, I hope that's it. Tinley wants to present more than just about anything.

It's nearly unavoidable, but I hate having to share personal details, like heat stuff, with my family. I text Tinley to call me when she gets the chance. Though, I do warn her my heat hit, so I might not get back to her right away.

My final call is to Thomas.

I vaguely wonder if my mom's legal team ever takes a holiday, because he called me four times between Christmas Eve and today.

"Miss Fitzpatrick, did you have a good holiday?" Thomas asks, answering the call.

"I did. I'm sorry I missed your calls—"

"No, no, it's completely understandable. Let's get right to it, shall we?"

"Of course."

He hums. "The mortgage company in question does allow for anonymous and gift payments, but I'm afraid, due to the tax ramifications, it's very unlikely you'll be able to keep your involvement completely under wraps. You'll have to pay gift tax, as will Mr. Carter."

"Hmm," I say mindlessly. "Are there any other options?"

“I did find the listing for his house in Florida. If you’re truly committed to making this happen, you could simply purchase that. Then he can use the funds to pay off the mortgage on his other property. His main residence is paid off, so reinvesting a portion of the sale proceeds would offset the taxes...” He goes on, but it’s all over my head.

“If I ask you a personal question, would that stay between us?”

“I’m not a criminal attorney,” he says, chuckling. “But I’ve got several colleagues in mind for—”

I already know that. “No. Carter and I bonded. I’m asking if that changes anything with the laws and taxes and stuff.” I frown as my hand flies to rub at my forehead. I managed to forget about all the legal bullshit.

“You know, I’m not sure it will, unless you plan to have a pack commitment ceremony immediately. Let me dig around a little more.”

“No, I don’t want to wait. Are you able to issue a check directly from my trust fund to pay off the existing mortgage?”

“I can,” he confirms. “I’ll work with them to ensure the check isn’t kicked back because of questions of validity.”

“Thanks, Thomas,” I say as my stomach gurgles with hunger for the first time in days.

“Not a problem.”

“Before I go, I need to tell you about what happened at the fundraiser—”

“I’ve already been fully briefed on that. We’re preparing our case now in case they try to do anything that would qualify as highly unintelligent on their part.”

“Right, but I met someone at the event. Her name is Ava. She works in the accounting department of Lewis Designs. She said that, if we needed anyone to testify, she had information she couldn’t tell me directly due to her employment contract. I have her business card...” I frown. *Damn, I hope Saxon held onto that.* “I’ll send you a picture as

soon as we disconnect. I think she's someone you should speak to."

"I'll look into it." He disconnects, and I try not to majorly stress about the future. It was a nice break being trapped in the nest, but reality is always waiting once the fog clears.

Saxon did hold on to the card with Ava's info. We get that sent over, and he feeds me breakfast by hand.

We're just finishing up when Carter comes out of the hallway on his side of the penthouse. I thought he was still asleep, but I must have missed him coming through while I was in my room making all the calls.

"Damn, do we all get fed by hand?" He chuckles, tossing himself down onto the chair next to us.

Saxon raises his hand off my back, flipping him off. "There's plenty. You can help yourself."

"I see how it is. I've got to go on a three-day hunger strike before anyone cares if I starve to death." Carter laughs good-naturedly, and I'm surprisingly grateful to pick up how lighthearted he feels in the bond. "I vaguely remember you declaring you were a camel and perfectly hydrated, so Saxon could fuck off with the bottle of water he was trying to give you."

My cheeks heat.

I groan, burying my face in Saxon's shoulder. "I'm sorry for anything I said while dick drunk and lost to the fog."

A breathtaking grin takes over Saxon's face as he nuzzles his nose to mine. "No hard feelings and no need to apologize. It seems your heat might be coming to an end. Do you agree?"

"It's hard to tell." I shrug, picking at his shirt. "The thickest part is over, but like there were erratic waves as it started, there will likely be those as it ends too."

"It was fucking wild." Carter shoves a piece of sausage into his mouth. "We look like we were attacked by a mountain lion. I'm not going to lie. It's hot."

I snort, shaking my head. “Do you think you and Lang will be able to peacefully coexist?”

Carter sighs, crossing his arms over his chest. “That’s between me and Lang. You don’t need to worry about refereeing us.”

I pat Saxon’s shoulder and he releases me. When I immediately climb onto Carter’s lap, he wraps his arms around me. His citrus and bergamot scent is watered down from the shower he must have taken, but it still makes my nose twitch.

“I really hope you know how much you mean to me and how excited I am to see what the future holds for all of us.” I stretch up to kiss his dark beard. It’s gotten thicker and fuller recently, and it works incredibly well on him.

“Me too, Little Fitz.” He gives me a quick kiss that has him licking over Lang’s bond mark. It makes my thighs clench around his as my body pulses with interest. “I hate to ruin the moment, but I’ve got alerts set up on my phone when a headline pops with any of our names...”

My head falls against his shoulder. “Shit.”

Carter laughs. “I’m legitimately shocked Fitz hasn’t busted his way into the penthouse.”

“Oh God,” I groan as my forehead rolls around. “Just tell me.”

“Well, the pictures of you and Lang outside a restaurant hit the internet. So did the ones with me, you, and Jack leaving the club the other night after our performance.” He snorts. “Then they made sure to include mine and Lang’s mugshots. Luckily, they’re not half bad.”

“Ugh, this is going to suck. I bet my mom is already on a flight back to the US.” My stomach drops. She really deserves that trip. My only hope is that, since cell reception is spotty, maybe she hasn’t seen them and won’t for a while.

“The few articles I read left out anything about your exes. On the bright side, they also didn’t mention the fundraiser.” Carter clears his throat. “But they did make it seem like Lang

and I tried to kill each other fighting over you. And they definitely know who you are.”

I snort, shaking my head. “Jack got left out of all of it?”

Carter brushes his fingers over my cheek. “Nah, they included him. Even tossed in a line or two about how he walked away from his ex to get you out of the situation.” He laughs, sucking his thick lower lip between his teeth. “He somehow managed to come out the golden-boy savior. It’s fitting, isn’t it?”

“He’s a great guy. He deserves to be the star of the show once in a while.” My hands land on his chest as I push up until our faces are level. “But I will fervently defend you and Lang to the press the next chance I get. I’ll make sure they understand you’re all my rock star prince charmings in ripped skinny jeans and occasionally too much eyeliner.”

“You ridiculous pain in the ass.” Carter laughs as I slam my mouth to his. My nostrils flare as his hand helps me grind over his lap.

“I’m going to go with that being a *no* when I asked if your heat was over,” Saxon says with humor lining his tone.

Carter shoves his chair back, lifting me as he stands. “Come on, Daddy. You can hold our little omega still while I devour her cunt.”

Chapter Thirty-Three

Shanna

I'd laugh at Carter calling Saxon "Daddy" if I didn't moan at the thought. "Please do. I'm down for all of that."

Carter's hand slides up the back of my pajama dress as he carries me over to the couch, tossing me down. I bounce against the cushions as he nods to the chaise lounge. "Arms up. I left plenty of room for you to stretch out."

I'm lying across the actual couch cushions, but Saxon climbs up the chaise lounge and stares at me upside down.

Carter yanks up my pajama dress, kissing and licking across my hip bone.

My nipples tighten painfully as Saxon quirks an eyebrow, giving me a lopsided grin. "You gonna toss your hands up for me, vixen? Or should I handle that?" he asks, trailing a finger over my cheek.

My hands fly up and slap him in the thigh.

He chuckles. "You're absolutely fucking beautiful."

Carter crawls over me, pulling my pajama dress the rest of the way up and tucking it over my breasts. His tattooed hand wraps around my right tit as his thigh brushes my core. He flicks his tongue over my nipple and squeezes hard. It makes my inner walls clench. His hair falls over his forehead as he stretches up, hovering his mouth over mine.

"Remember when I told you I was going to use your tight little body as I saw fit?" He bumps his cheek to mine. "It's about that time, Little Fitz." He captures my mouth for a

tantalizingly slow kiss that has me grinding my cunt against his thigh with no shame.

Saxon holds my wrists in one of his hands. His woodsy scent radiates in the air as he brushes his thumb over my palm.

Carter pulls back, smirking dangerously. That look alone makes me ache to toss him to the floor and climb on his face. He bumps my head to the side, nipping at my ear. “Feel free to really scream for me. It’ll only make me fuck you harder once I’m done.” His hot breath fans over my neck as he bites my earlobe, tugging gently.

The look on his face as he crawls back down my body seems to force the fog in. Everything except Carter gets muted and hazy. I have to lean up a little to see him over my tits, but Saxon wedges a throw pillow under my head.

I grin up at him, whispering, “Thanks.”

Carter gives me a playful grin, spreading my lower lips. He licks his lips sensually as his dark eyes sparkle. God, he really is mind-meltingly hot. He bumps my clit with his nose, pulling back as his nostrils flare. “You smell fucking delectable. Such a needy little pussy. Swollen and pink and aching to come all over my tongue.” He swipes a tantalizingly slow lick over my clit. It makes my eyes roll back in my head and goose bumps prickle at my skin. He does it again several times, until I’m on the verge of begging and demanding before we even really get started.

The smug look on his face as he catches my eyes and winks should piss me off, but it only makes me ache for him even more.

Saxon keeps my wrists trapped over my head, but he moves his free hand to pinch and tug at my nipple. “Watching you tremble for us is officially my new addiction.”

“Mine too,” Carter muses, kissing my clit.

I wiggle to try to force him where I want him, but he’s so good at making me think I could get there, only to pull back when it’s finally what I ache for. What a tease.

He blows a hot breath over my swollen nub, making me whine. He and Saxon growl in response. Heat pulses through my oversensitive system as Carter makes another slow licking pass over my clit. This time, he rakes his teeth over each of my lower lips.

“You want me to bury my face in your cunt? Or are you enjoying the slow buildup, Little Fitz?”

I have to bite my lip to keep from snapping something snotty. I’m an omega—of course I want it all, plus maybe a little extra. But I’m afraid if I’m short-tempered, then he’ll do the opposite out of spite.

“More please,” I beg. “I need you, alpha.”

“Such a sweet little omega,” Saxon coos, nuzzling his nose to mine. It’s a strange feeling with him leaning over me and it being upside down.

“You’re good.” Carter chuckles. “Don’t think I’m going to let you get away with playing me for the rest of our lives, but for now, don’t be shy. Ride my fucking face.”

I sob, bowing off the cushions as he buries a thick finger inside my hole. A half second later, he latches on to my clit, sucking in a way that makes me arch toward him even farther.

Saxon abandons teasing my tits to plant a hand on my middle. He pushes me down on the cushion at the same time Carter shoves another finger in my cunt. He twists them in and out on every plunge. Saxon leans over, giving me a slow and sensual upside down kiss.

Carter must be a sadist. He alternates between sucking directly on my clit, and when I’m just about to explode, he pulls back to those languid slow licks that make my thighs shake. I spread my knees as wide as they’ll go, but there’s no rushing him. I think I can actually feel him smirking against my pussy, or maybe I’m just picking up his cocky smugness in the bond.

At some point during my kiss with Saxon, my eyes fell shut. I gasp and he pulls back.

“You fucker. You’re using the bond against me,” I accuse as my eyes pop open.

Carter’s warm breath fans over my sex as he chuckles. “I sure am. Whatcha gonna do about it?”

I raise a leg, tossing my calf over his back and trying to guide his mouth back down. I really shouldn’t get all fuzzy when he’s wearing such a bemused smirk, but dammit, he’s really hot.

“Do I need to get Jack or Lang in here to hold your legs?” He purrs the words and scrapes his teeth over my clit. “Actually, keep it up. Feeling you fight me makes my cock hard.”

I squint, looking at him dubiously. “I’m fighting to push you deeper, not keep you away.”

“Doesn’t matter,” he growls, aiming for my G-spot with those magical fingers of his.

“How do you feel about a little primal play during your next heat?” Saxon moves to flick his tongue over my aching nipple.

“She was pretty animalistic during this one,” Carter muses, burying his tongue in my hole with his fingers.

“Indeed, but I’d like to chase her sometime. Hunt her down and fuck her on the forest floor.” Saxon chuckles darkly. “No matter how loud she screams, we’d be the only ones around to hear it.”

I don’t know if it’s the feeling of Carter’s tongue teasing my opening, or maybe I really like the thought of acting out Saxon’s words, but my core locks down on Carter’s fingers as he rips his tongue from inside me to tease it over my clit.

Their scents get even thicker in the air as I gasp and writhe, using my calf around Carter’s back to hold him in place. My vision goes spotty as I scream out my release, doing my best to ride Carter’s face from below.

“Fucking hell, vixen,” Saxon growls, raking his teeth over the curve of my breast. “Sometimes just watching you come is

enough to have me ready to blow my load.” The aching scratch of slight pain only intensifies my orgasm.

Carter keeps licking and sucking until I’m forced to try to push him away, rather than pull him deeper. “Nah, none of that. We’re just getting started. My face is soaked, but I want to be *fully* drenched in your pussy before I slide inside you.” He continues until I come so many times I lose count. My orgasms actually start to feel a little painful.

I think I moan that, but I’m so hazy, I have no idea.

“Good goddamn,” Carter growls, pulling back until he’s kneeling. “Look at how swollen that pretty pussy is.”

Saxon grunts. At some point, he moved to kneel on the floor next to the couch and only holds my hands down when I try to use them.

Carter rips his sweats down, thrusting inside in one vicious thrust. His palm falls near my head and the other lands on my hip.

I groan, sputtering out a string of pleas that don’t make any sense. Those ladder piercings of his tease places inside me that I didn’t even know exist.

“Don’t worry,” Carter says against my lips as his hips plow into mine. “I’m going to make this quick. Be a good little fuck toy for me, and maybe I’ll let you come too.” He kisses me, working in and out as he teases his pelvis against my clit. As it turns out, I’m equally in love with his surface piercing. I’m soaked; every thrust fills the air with the slick sounds of my alpha rutting me through the couch cushions. He plows in and out as my chest bows toward his. He wasn’t joking about using me, and yet, it only makes everything more intense.

“Carter,” I sob. “Deeper, right there…”

“Jesus fucking Christ.” His cock lengthens and thickens to the point it gets slightly painful, but with his crown grazing my G-spot, it’s barely a thought in my mind. He rams deep on his next thrust, keeping me in place with his hand on my hip. “You’re about to be really fucking pissed when you’re still all turned on but dripping in my cum because your needy little

pussy embarrassed me. Come on my cock, dirty girl!” He barks the last few words, and my body complies as though an alpha can bark an omega into an orgasm.

Electricity zips through my system as he slams into my G-spot a few more times before groaning. He freezes as his cock kicks. His arousal smacks into me in the bond and, combined with the way his shaft swells, it only intensifies my own release. It takes forever for the bliss to fade long enough for me to be coherent. And when I do, Carter looks down at me with an expression that takes my breath away.

“That was intense,” he murmurs, struggling to catch his breath too.

I can only nod.

It really was.

Carter crawls off of me and leans back against the cushion, pulling me up too. “Seems like the big guy is ready for you.”

I smile, biting my lip before giving him a quick kiss. I’m not sure when Saxon pulled his cock out, but it’s thick and the tip is dripping. He kneels with his knees spread out in a V and his forearm rippling as he palms his massive length.

I scoot sideways on the couch until I’m sitting on the cushion in front of him. I bring a foot up and place it on the chaise lounge before pulling the other up to the couch cushion closest to Carter. I lean back and spread my pussy wide. I’m dripping in Carter’s cum, but I tease my fingers over my clit.

“Vixen,” Saxon growls, staring straight at my cunt.

“Yes, Daddy?”

“Are you trying to make me snap?”

I moan, my head falling back. He grabs my hips, pulling my lower half off the cushion. My arms end up spread wide behind me on the couch, kind of like a spider, as he shoves his cock inside me. He wraps my knees over his forearms and tucks his hands under my ass as he works me over his impressive length.

Carter chuckles and stretches over to suck on my nipple. Saxon doesn't ease into fucking me like he has the last few times. Nope, he leverages his hold on my ass to fuck me on his cock, and he's not gentle. Carter teases my other nipple and moves to seal his mouth to mine. It's complicated because my entire body jolts with each powerful thrust from Saxon.

Saxon's cock swells, getting even thicker. It's mildly painful as he slaps against the bottom of my cunt. Sloppy, wet sounds fill the air as he ruts.

"Aww, you're all spread wide open with no friction on your clit," Carter muses. "It must suck." I give him an unimpressed look. "Don't worry, I'm not cruel. I've got you." He stretches his hand down, flicking his fingers over my clit. "Damn, he's got like three inches of dick left. I'm baffled how his knot fits inside you."

"Move and I'll show you," Saxon growls.

Carter slides out of the way as Saxon swaps from kneeling to having a hand planted on the back of the couch as he hovers over me.

All sorts of sounds spill from my mouth as he slams his tip into my cervix. His knot brushes my lower lips, but I'm equally baffled by how that thing fits inside me, because it currently feels impossible. He wraps my feet around his ass, and all it takes is one vicious thrust before his knot enters my hole.

Well, that's how it fits. It just took a little alpha determination.

"Shh, Daddy's got you. Breathe through the pain and give it a second." Saxon moves a hand to work my clit. "You're the most perfect omega in all of existence." He grinds his knot, and pleasure courses through my system as I wail. I don't even think this is reality, but maybe that's a good thing with how embarrassing the sounds are that come from my mouth. "I'm going to breed you now, vixen."

I curl toward him, coming violently. Saxon growls, his knot and cock swelling even thicker as he curses under his

breath. His grinding thrusts get shaky as my nails dig into his biceps.

My entire core aches. It's not painful, exactly, but it's super intense, to the point my entire body convulses as he comes. His muscles bulge as he growls, sounding truly animalistic. My jacked-up system lights up like we just won an award. Saxon works his hips, slamming my top half against the back of the couch as he fucks me through his orgasm.

My chest heaves, but I tilt my face until I can watch the expressions he makes. I'm so incredibly fucking lucky. I can't see myself, but if I could, then I'd bet I look like a total lovestruck weirdo, staring at him with googly eyes.

"Yup, that was the good dick," Carter says, chuckling. "She's giving you goo-goo eyes."

I raise the hand closest to him, flipping him off, which only makes him laugh harder.

Saxon releases a low, throaty laugh, wrapping an arm around my lower back. "Sorry, sweet girl. I fucked you into the pretzel position."

I beam as he pulls me up from being wedged into the back of the couch. "No complaints. It was so totally worth it."

Saxon's eyes crinkle at the edges as he smiles. Holy fucking shit. I am the luckiest omega in existence.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Shanna

It takes a couple extra days for the unpredictable waves of heat to stop completely. It's unusual for it to last so long, but I'm guessing bonding made everything more severe.

Tomorrow is New Year's Eve, and the guys need to practice now that things have settled down. I'm more than a little concerned when Jack mentions that Rook called a mandatory meeting.

My plan is to go with them. They're not practicing at the same club as before, since it's in the process of starting renovations.

Carter missed a week of his meetings, but he went this morning. He always goes to the one at the crack of dawn, but he said that's just because he likes that group of people. He got back a while ago, but after a quick kiss, he immediately went to hop in the shower in his room to get ready because they've got to leave for practice soon.

I'm just finishing my eyeliner when my phone vibrates across the counter.

Tinley's name pops up.

I snatch the phone, answering the call. "How are you?"

My best friend laughs a light, airy sound. "Good. Sorry we dropped off the face of the planet. My heat started on Christmas Eve. It was rough, but good."

"Tinley," I squeal, standing up and starting to pace the bathroom. "I'm so happy for you."

“Thank you,” she says a little breathlessly. “It really is a huge relief, but Warrick showed me the news articles. Are *you* okay?”

I bite my lip. I have no idea where to start or how much to even say. “I’m bonded.”

“To who?”

“Jack and Carter,” I whisper.

“Holy shit.” She laughs. “That’s incredible! How do you know Trigger Finger’s lead singer? And more importantly, why the hell was the first I heard about it from paparazzi pictures?”

“Lang and I hooked up a few times. I met him the week you were here to visit. I didn’t even know his name until he walked into the club when I was there to measure everyone during their practice—”

“Shanna! You’re supposed to tell me this stuff.”

“I know, but there’s been so much going on, and we were both MIA for our heats. So, this is really the first chance I’m getting. Lang and I bonded after he and Carter got out of jail. That fundraiser was a fucking nightmare...” I go on to tell her about everything that happened with Pack Lewis, and how I’ve met Ana twice now.

Yes, I know her name is Ava. But she had sex with my alpha. Unless I’m talking to a lawyer or someone important, she will forever be known as Ana.

Tinley is my best damn friend, and I really need girl talk. I tell her all about how I met Lang and the really hot anonymous sex that then led to meeting Grumpy Daddy. Eventually that spills into how we bonded too.

“Saxon? Whoa, even his name is hot.” She laughs.

“I know,” I groan. “I can’t even explain how well the Daddy vibes work for him.”

“I’m so happy for you.” She sighs. “I miss you like crazy.”

“Me too,” I assure her, chewing at my lower lip. “Does Fitz know?”

“He does,” she says slowly. “Yeah, he definitely does.”

My heart drops. The last thing I want to do is cause problems between my brother and his bandmates, but there’s nothing to be done about it now. We’re bonded. There’s no taking that back.

“He had a very heated conversation this morning with Carter—”

“What?” I hiss as my eyes fly to the door.

“It’s okay. Please don’t stress. After that, he had a not-so-heated conversation with Jack.”

“Why don’t I know any of this?”

“They probably just haven’t had the chance to tell you yet. The conversation ended on a good note. He’s happy for you.”

“Then why isn’t he telling me that himself?” I ask, shaking my head.

“He will. He absolutely will. He loves you, and he’s happy for you.” Someone says something in the background that I don’t catch. “Ramsey says congratulations on bonding.”

“Has he been sitting around with you for this entire conversation?” I ask, tapping my toes against the cool tile floor.

“Yes, but only because he’s not going to say *a word* to Fitz about anything he may have overheard. And gah, my cramps are terrible. He’s giving me a lower back massage. I never knew they’d be like a hundred times more severe than normal period cramps...”

She keeps talking, but my jaw falls as I rub at my abdomen absently. The cramps usually start by now, but they can be erratic. It’s probably a good idea to toss pads and tampons into my bag. How the hell did I forget the cramps?

Probably because they always start before the sex is even over?

Where the hell is my birth control? Maybe it's because my heat came early and it didn't line up with the placebo pills that come at the end of the three-month pack?

"Shanna?"

"Yeah, they are awful. I'm sorry. I've got to go, but call me tonight, okay?"

"Are you okay?" she asks in a weird tone.

"Yeah, totally. I just realized how late I'm running." I grimace at myself in the mirror.

"Oh, okay. I love you. Fitz does too. I think he's probably just coming to terms with stuff. You know?"

"Yeah. I love you too." I hang up and stagger toward the bathroom counter. My hands hit the cool surface as I stare at myself in the mirror. I don't remember anyone giving me my birth control while I was hazy.

I grab the pack and my phone. I missed a whole week of pills that should've been taken, but more than that, my heat should have hit around the eighth of January, based on how many pills are still left in the container.

Holy fuck.

Terror rips through my system.

Bonding is one thing, but we're still just getting to know each other. We don't even have a house. I mean, Carter owns one in Florida. Lang also mentioned owning a condo, but I don't even know what city he normally lives in.

I type away on my phone, doing a quick web search to see if I should take yesterday's and today's pills, but my heart sinks the more I read. Betas who miss pills right before the placebo are supposed to be covered, but omegas are more fertile the closer we get to our heat. It's actually less dangerous to miss pills earlier in a pack.

"Oh shit," I whisper, tossing my phone down on the counter. "What the fuck am I supposed to do now?"

“Well, unless you want me to bend you over the bathroom counter,” Lang says, sauntering into the room. “Then I suggest you cover that fine ass up.”

I laugh awkwardly, trying to force my face into a smile. Based on the way Lang tilts his head, coming closer, I’m going to guess I fail to convince him everything is fine.

“You know you can stick around the penthouse if you’re uncomfortable leaving the nest so soon. Carter and I will play nice. We’re a united front.” He wraps his hand around my bare middle, and my heart tries to race right out of my chest. He told me ditching the birth control or not was my decision, but no one really gets pregnant this fast...

Right?

Dammit.

I know good and well how fertile omegas are. This is an absolute nightmare, but there’s no reason to panic the guys until I’m sure.

The cramps could just be delayed.

It’s not like they’re an exact science.

It’s the same way with heats. They normally come every three months, but they vary, just like periods sometimes get weird.

“No, it’s okay,” I say, doing my best to breathe through the anxiety. I’ve read up in the past, and it’s too soon to take a pregnancy test. My only option is to wait and hope the cramps start. If I sit around here worrying while they’re gone, then I’ll drive myself crazy. “I’m going to bring my tablet, so I can sketch.”

I also don’t want to stay here, stressing that they’re getting cut from the label because of what happened at the event. No, it’s much better to go with them and find out firsthand. I’ll beg, if necessary. It wasn’t their fault. The owners aren’t allowed to hold something that happened because of me against them.

“Perfect.” Lang grins, catching my eyes in the mirror. “I can’t wait to show you off now that you’re officially mine. You also haven’t had the chance to watch me perform.”

“That’s true,” I agree, running my fingers over his hand on my stomach. “Hey, I was wondering. Where’s your condo?”

He laughs, tilting his head. “Orlando, but it’s nothing like this place. Don’t get me wrong—it’s nice. But I snagged it at auction a couple years ago, just to have somewhere to land in between tours.”

I nod, but damn, I really have no desire to live in hot-as-hell Florida. Summertime visits for the beach and theme parks wouldn’t be bad, but no way could I survive in the humidity.

“It’s cool. It’s not like I expect the five of us to move there.” He kisses my cheek. “I’m probably going to hang on to it for visits to see my family, but I’m down for whatever we decide as a group.”

I spin around to face him, stretching up on my tiptoes. He bends low, so I can wrap my hands around his neck. “I just want you to know how grateful I am that I ran into you at Darkside.”

“Me too, sweetness. Me fucking too.”

The club where the meeting’s taking place is spacious and a little intimidating. It’s so weird, but it takes seeing them on stage together to really get the fact that I’m bonded to rock stars. Not just famous musicians, which is something I swore I would never do because of the way I grew up, but they’re in two different bands.

I’m a little terrified of what happens when they go back to touring with their original groups. Saxon sits at the table with me, listening to an audiobook as I sketch on their outfits. I’ve got looks for Kage and Jack completely finished. I’m working on Carter’s when the guys take a break.

Rook and his father, Jamen, come down from the balcony, where they’ve been holed up to watch the show.

Lang comes down from the stage and takes a seat in the chair next to me. He grabs my tablet and grins. “Damn, you’re trying to drive the female fan base completely feral.”

“It’s a life goal.” I chuckle, backing out and showing him the designs for Jack and Kage.

Carter, Jack, and Kage make their way over to stand nearby. There are two other guys with them, but I don’t know their names. They play the same instruments Jack and Carter do and, when I asked, I was told they’re adding depth to the beat. Whatever the hell that means.

“What do you think?” Jamen asks his son.

Rook scratches at his black beard, shrugging a shoulder. “It went a fuck of a lot better than the last two practice sessions.”

“Are you ready to put them on stage in front of an audience?” Jamen asks.

Rook sighs. The look on his face says he might be a little intimidated to make the wrong call in front of his father, but he pulls his shoulders back, looking at the guys. “Castles and Daydreams is currently riding out an unexpected animal quarantine. They snuck their pug on their worldwide tour and got caught...” He snorts, swiping a tattooed hand over his face. “Fucking idiots. Long story short, they aren’t making it back by tomorrow night to do the New Year’s Eve show.”

“Puggles is trapped in quarantine?” Lang asks, hopping out of his chair.

“The dog is fine,” Rook says, rolling his eyes. “They’re paying a massive fine and awaiting his test results to allow them to bring him back to the States, but they refused to leave the country without him.”

“You don’t mess with three men and their rescue mascot pug,” Lang says, nodding so seriously that an unexpected bark of laughter escapes my lips.

“This is my life now.” Rook shakes his head at the ceiling. He looks at his dad and says, “I thought you were exaggerating.”

Jamen laughs, slapping Rook on the back. “There are some things I definitely won’t miss.”

“Is there a point to all this?” Kage asks, pulling his long hair up in a tie.

“If the four of you think you’re ready, then we’d like to sub you in on the show tomorrow night,” Rook says.

The guys chat amongst themselves, but I exhale in pure relief. I’ve tried to stay positive, but my nerves are shot. I couldn’t imagine how resentful they’d be if I cost them their careers.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Saxon

The others get back to practicing while Shanna works on the designs she needs to complete. There's clearly no way they'll be ready by the show tomorrow night, but I'm thinking they're meant for future performances, anyway.

Shanna is anxious but doing her best to keep from letting it spill into the bond. I'm thinking it was too soon to bring her out in public. Even though her scent has settled down to the normally sweet smell that omegas always have, I still volleyed for her to stay in. She's as stubborn as ever, because I swear she didn't hear a word I said.

Her phone lights up with a call. She snatches it off the table and heads for the exit. I'm probably going to need to quit my job as security for the label. I follow her without a backward glance at the guys, who are technically supposed to be my clients.

Shanna doesn't head out the doors to the street, but she sticks close to them. I'm guessing it's so she can hear.

"It's my lawyer," she says when she spots me. I nod, holding out an arm for her. Maybe this is why she's been so tense in the bond. She walks right into my chest and puts the call on speakerphone. I tilt my head, but she shrugs. "This way, I don't have to repeat it. Sorry about that, Thomas. You can go ahead."

"I've got a settlement package in front of me from Lewis Designs."

“What?” she gasps, her eyes widening. “Are they threatening to sue?”

Thomas chuckles. “No, not exactly. Although, it may come to that if you choose not to accept the terms. But I’ll be honest—I don’t see why you wouldn’t. They want to dissolve the original contract with no further contact. It requires you to buy the existing collection back at the purchase price, but that’s pretty much a wash, considering you haven’t been paid.”

“Wow,” Shanna whispers, shaking her head. “I don’t understand. Why go through the trouble of all this to begin with?”

Thomas hums. “You know, I spent a fair amount of time trying to determine that myself. It wasn’t until I spoke with Miss Maxwell—Ava—that a few things became clearer. My best guess after that vague conversation is this. You still haven’t been paid for the original contract, which I find highly unusual. I imagine that’s because they don’t have the resources to do so. I believe they were counting on using the buy in for manufacturing that would have come if they found backers to produce your collection, but they underestimated your mother’s reach. Without investors, they’re at the point where washing their hands of the entire endeavor is a better option than paying out a contract for a collection they don’t have the funds to produce.”

“Wait, what?” she whispers.

“Let me say it this way. If investors had flocked to back production of your clothing line, then it wouldn’t have been a problem for them to pay out for your design contract. Without the investor funds, they’re stuck. It’s not illegal from a business standpoint, but it leads me to believe their financial state of affairs is weak. I don’t think they could financially withstand a drawn-out trial, but I can also recognize that you want to be done with all of this.”

“I really do want to be done with them,” she says. “Are those all the terms?”

“I’m afraid not. There is one clause that you might not like. We can fight it if it’s truly important to you, but if you

sign, you're guaranteeing no civil action will be taken against Pack Lewis for the physical altercation that occurred at the event. They, in turn, assure the same. You'll also need to have the gentlemen involved sign a document of guarantee, stating they won't take civil or legal action."

"What's the part she won't like?" I ask, running my hand down Shanna's back to comfort her. I've dealt with lawyers before, and they always weigh the pros before the cons.

"Yeah, I need to know what might be an issue," she agrees.

"There's a non-compete clause. If you sign, you'll be agreeing that you won't design or market clothing under your name, or any other company or brand, for the next three years." He pauses, clearing his throat. "But we can attempt to negotiate that down to one year."

"Does that limit me designing clothes for my own personal use or say, making a dress to give to a friend?" she asks as her forehead wrinkles.

"No, of course not," Thomas says. "This only applies to mass production, marketing, or advertising a brand with your name attached to it. Though it would prevent you from immediately turning around and selling the bought-back collection to Cuffs and Buttons."

"I don't care about that, but I'm in the middle of designing outfits for several of the artists on the Ruined Records label. How would that—"

Thomas cuts her off, saying, "That would breach the agreement. Even if it's not mass produced, it would fall under the marketing and advertising subsection."

"Damn, okay. I need to touch base with Chloe and the owners of the label to see if they'll allow me to step back, considering the circumstances."

"Would you like me to reach out to Donovan directly?" Thomas asks.

"God, no. I'm already with Rook and Jamen. I'll speak to them myself." Shanna exhales a hot breath that seeps through my T-shirt. "Anyway, thanks, Thomas. I'm definitely planning

to sign. They'll just have to understand that, to legally protect my pack, I'm going to have to step back from the label project."

"That sounds reasonable to me," the older gentleman says. "One last thing. I've issued a check for the balance on Mr. Carter's second property. He'll get a small refund on his final bill for some of the interest that always ends up refunded. He'll need to coordinate with his insurance company and pay taxes separately, as that will no longer come in one bill."

Shanna grimaces, looking up at me with wide hazel eyes. "Great, thanks. I'll be in touch soon." She disconnects the call and shoves her phone into the pocket on her dress. "God, what a relief."

"Yeah?" I palm the back of her head. "Are you good with all that?"

"I really am. I never wanted to make a career out of design. I'm a little bummed that the stuff I worked on today will have to be sidelined, but I can give Chloe my sketches. She can put her own spin on them or start fresh." She shrugs. "It is what it is."

"That's true. How are you feeling? I'm happy to take you back to the penthouse now if you've had enough for the day..."

She breaks into a bright smile. "You really are a caregiver. Let me make a quick call to Chloe and then talk to Rook and Jamen. After that, I might take you up on that offer."

I bend low, nuzzling my nose to hers. It's way too soon, but feeling her soft affection slam into my chest from the bond makes it very difficult not to tell her I love her. Fucking Lang. He's clearly rubbing off on me, but I get why my dads have always said that the bond changes everything. It hits me at the most random times. Like when she was sketching earlier, and I caught a hint of her feelings. I looked up, and she was staring straight at me with a smile on her gorgeous face.

I'm pretty sure I'm done for, but I'll hold on to the words a little longer. I like to savor things and take my time.

Shanna makes another call to Chloe and heads inside to talk to the guys in charge. The band takes a break, and I aim for them.

I nearly pull Lang and Carter aside, but Jack is as much a member of our pack as any of us.

Kage sticks around, listening to the details, but he doesn't interfere.

"The two of you will need to sign that document," I tell Carter and Lang, glancing between them. "She's been stressed this morning, but she seemed relieved once she heard from her lawyer."

Kage bumps his shoulder against Lang's. "You picked a good one. She's hardcore. I was shocked when she actually showed up this morning. I've heard the post-heat cramps are no joke."

All four of our gazes whip in Shanna's direction.

"Holy fucking shit," Carter says, swiping a hand over his face.

"No way," Jack says at the exact same time.

"I certainly didn't remember to hand out her birth control." Lang looks between us. "Did any of you?"

"It never crossed my mind," I tell him truthfully.

"Wait." Kage turns to face us, tossing a thumb toward Shanna. "Are you saying the cramps *didn't* start?"

"Put your fucking hand down before she sees you pointing, or I'll break your fingers one by one," Carter growls, taking a step toward Kage.

Lang yanks Kage's hand down for him. "I'm sure she's going to tell us."

Jack laughs, shaking his head. "Wow. Fitz is definitely going to murder us if she is..."

Carter snorts. "Probably."

My chest gets warm and fuzzy as I stare at my omega. She's absolutely the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. The thought of watching her body change and grow with our baby has my cock hardening in my jeans. The breeding impulse is ridiculously hard to ignore for alphas and omegas.

"That's why she asked where I live," Lang says. "We're going to have to look for a house. We can't keep camping out at her parents' penthouse, and omegas are notorious about nesting during pregnancy."

"Fuck," Carter mutters. "I really need my house in Florida to sell."

"Don't stress," Jack says, bumping his shoulder to Carter's. "We'll cover you until it does."

"It's a team thing." Lang holds out a fist to Carter. "We've got your back."

I'm not the only one shocked when Carter bumps with Lang.

"I'm guessing these crossover shows aren't going to turn into a full tour if she's got a belly full of one of your babies." Kage laughs. "I can't wait to be crazy Uncle Kage, teaching the kid how to skateboard and play drums."

"You know, I think we're going to have to take a trip to Maine." Jack swipes his blond hair out of his eyes. "She really misses Tinley since she and Fitz moved to live with Warrick and Ramsey."

Carter's eyebrows rise. "It might buy us some brownie points with Fitz. Or it might give him home-field advantage for finding locations to bury our bodies. He could toss us in a snowdrift, and they wouldn't find us until the following summer."

I yank out my phone. They're all warming to the idea, which is good. However, I need to do a little more research before I let myself get my hopes up. The guys continue to banter and chat, but I read everything I can about post-heat cramps. It says that if they don't start seven days past the end of the heat, then it's a good indicator that conception occurred,

but that she won't likely show positive on a pregnancy test for three to four weeks.

Motherfucker.

I keep reading and scrolling through random information.

I like to know as much as possible about any given thing. It lessens my anxiety by helping me feel in control of the situation.

There's a news article that talks about how, during the last ten years, the rate of omegas conceiving outside of a heat has skyrocketed. The medical community is stumped as to what changed, but many believe it's an evolutionary response to suppressants being widely used. With suppressants blocking heats, the rate of conception dipped dangerously low.

It's interesting information to have, but it doesn't apply to our situation. Although, it does mention that omegas are encouraged to speak to their doctor, as certain brands of birth control have been found to be less effective.

Damn, I wonder if Shanna knows about all of this. I bookmark the page and shove my phone into my pocket.

I thought evolution was a painfully slow process. Then again, the swap to packs from single alpha-omega pairings was surprisingly fast.

I exhale heavily, my eyes flying back to my little omega.

Pure fucking excitement bubbles up, despite my best attempts to stamp it down. Oh well. If she's not knocked up, then we can try again on the next heat and the next until we finally breed her.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Lang

Our little omega is definitely acting shady. It's throwing the others for a loop, but I can't lie—I think it's cute.

Apparently, if you pay lawyers enough, they work on holidays like New Year's Eve. The four of us accompany Shanna to sign the papers to release her from that bullshit contract with her exes.

Carter and I have to sign a paper saying we won't try to sue them, which is kind of wild, considering we definitely started the physical part of that fight. I mean, what did they expect when they were talking about our woman that way? But whatever, it's done.

We've got the show tonight, but I'm not worried about that. It's nearly impossible not to ask her if she thinks there's a possibility she's got a bun in her oven.

I'm not afraid of kids.

I spent the majority of my teenage years taking care of my two little brothers, who are eight and ten years younger than I am.

I was the one in the hospital holding my mom's hand when she gave birth. I took damn good care of her when she got home too. Especially considering I was only a kid myself. Luckily, my brothers are out on their own now, and I even paid for them to go to college. They got a lot of the opportunities that I missed out on, but I'd still like to do better with my own kids, and step one of that is actually being around.

What Kage said about no more year-long tour schedules was like a kick to the balls at first. The more I think about it, the better it sounds. We can still do crossover shows and holiday special performances, but I'm so totally fucking down for staying in one place that it's not even funny.

Saxon, Jack, and Carter drop me and Shanna off at the penthouse. I've got a feeling they're going shopping for other courting gifts. I've got mine stashed away in my duffel bags, but I've noticed that she's sketchy about gifts.

"We've got a few hours to kill before the show tonight. Do you want to take a shower with me?" I ask as we make it into the penthouse.

Am I being a sneaky fucker? Maybe a little, but it keeps crossing my mind that she might just be good at handling pain. What if she's on her period and hasn't mentioned it because she's private about that kind of stuff?

"Yeah." She smiles, leaning into my chest. "We could do that."

I grin, shaking my head. There's nothing like the feeling when her excitement radiates in the bond. "All right. Let me grab my shit from my room. I'm officially moving it into yours."

She laughs. "You might want to drop it in the nest. There's no way my bed will fit the five of us."

I bite my lip to keep from saying the others can sleep wherever they like. Instead, I bend down and nuzzle my cheek to hers. "That works for me. I'm wherever you are from here on out."

Confirmation has been achieved. Shanna is most definitely not on her period. Our quick fuck in the shower spilled over into me eating her out on the bathroom counter after.

I've always had a low chill factor. If I'm excited about something, it's nearly impossible to not talk about it, and I'm about to bubble over with pure fucking glee.

Shanna stretches out on her bed, resting her face on her forearm as she lies on her stomach. I'm going to join her, but I need to grab something first.

The towel around my waist nearly slips off as I bend down, digging in my duffel bag. I wrap my hand around the knot, holding it in place, and grab the gift that cost the least. I'm pretty sure going with the most meaningful one first will open her up to being receptive to the others.

If not, I'll figure out her love language and give her my courting gifts in whatever fashion she's open to receiving them. If she wants acts of servitude, then we can weave that way. If her love language is affection or quality time, then I'll duck the other direction. For it being my first relationship, I'm pretty fucking sure I'm nailing this whole dating thing.

If the others aren't careful, they'll push too hard with the gifts. I let the towel fall and climb over her juicy thighs. She's got kind of a pear shape, and I love every inch of her curvy ass.

My dick bounces around her rear end as I stretch up to hand her the plain paper-wrapped package.

She takes it, running her finger over the tape. "What's this?" she asks, peeking at me over her shoulder.

"Your heat hit really fast. I wasn't about to force you to open gifts." I chuckle, running my hands over her bare shoulders. "I let my cock be my first few courting presents."

She laughs, making her shoulders jump under my hands. Her olive skin is so fucking smooth that it makes me realize I need to moisturize better. I tease my hands down her spine as she rips into the package.

"Okay, this is really cool, but I have no idea what it is."

I climb off her, rolling onto my back. She turns to face me, bringing the frame so we can look at it together.

"It's a star chart. I used the coordinates of Darkside, and it's a map of the stars the night we met..." God, is it cheesy? It is a little, isn't it? It says *Every great story begins when you realize you're in trouble*. "I knew from the moment I caught

sight of you that I was in real trouble. Once I caught your scent, it was game over.”

“Lang,” she whispers, tilting her face up to mine. I grab the gift, shove it on the other side of the mattress, and pull her on top of me. “That was an extremely thoughtful courting gift.”

“Yeah, I don’t want to brag, but I’m a beast at picking gifts.” I thumb her puffy bottom lip and bring my mouth to hers so I can lick over my bite. The kiss is slow and sensual. It could be spillover from the bond, but it steals all the air from my lungs.

She pulls back and her hazel eyes sparkle. “I spent so much time trying to find a pack, but I felt like the only omega no one wanted to keep. Then I stopped looking, and I found you.”

“I’m really fucking grateful you did.” I nuzzle my nose to hers before wrapping my hand around the back of her neck and pulling her to my chest. It takes a while as I focus, but she whimpers when I start to purr.

Oh yeah, she’s a very sentimental little omega. And that’s okay too. They say the mood swings during and after heats can be extreme, but I do everything I can to settle her system. It makes me feel like a fucking king when she lets out a contented little sigh, running her fingers over my clavicle. See, I’m totally killing it at the sweet and romantic stuff. I just needed some practice.

Shanna lies on my chest for so long that I start to wonder if she fell asleep, but her eyes are open when I tilt my head down to check. I’m just about to bring up the no-cramps thing, but Jack comes in. He does a double take when he spots us, but he’s got a package under his arm.

I glare, raising a hand to flip him off, but it doesn’t deter him from coming closer.

Shanna’s head pops up, and she gives a little wave when she spots him.

“You two look cozy.” He grabs my gift and carefully sets it in the bedside chair before climbing onto the mattress. He lies facing us and reaches over to kiss Shanna. Once they pull back, he hands her the small gift.

This whole surviving in a pack thing is new to me, but I don’t want to upset my omega, so I stifle the growl that wants to escape.

“Did you all have a team meeting about buying me stuff?” she asks, pushing up on her knees to give herself space to open it.

“Nope, but my mom mailed that for you. It came yesterday, but I needed wrapping paper.” Jack laughs as she rips at the ridiculous amount of tape. “I haven’t had to wrap anything in a while.” She finally gets past the tape and tosses the wrapping paper on the bedside table. “So, this is the same book my grandma gave my mom. It’s got a lot of information about alphas and omegas, but it also explains that whole scent thing better than I did.”

“The thing where you smell electric.” She nods, briefly scanning through the chapters before also setting it on the end table. She pats my chest and climbs her nude form between Jack and me. Her thick ass ends up plastered to my thigh, but Jack is still fully dressed. “You guys really are killing these courting gifts.”

They kiss, and I roll over to fully frame her back. I feel like I’ve got insider information about the whole *she could be pregnant* thing, but I don’t trust the bond well enough to try to explain it that way. Instead, I run my hand down her side to her hip and let myself daydream about exactly how much life will change if so.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Shanna

The club is packed full of fans who are here to see a different band, but they sure don't seem to mind. The backstage area is stocked with beer and liquor, but I keep my distance. There are a fair amount of people lining the hallways. I've learned most of them are waiting for the meet and greet with the opening act.

Saxon sticks right behind me as we watch the guys rock the hell out of their set. They're dressed in outfits provided by the wardrobe department, and the more I study them, the more I can recognize my skills were never needed.

Maybe for the specialty pieces for something like tonight, since it's New Year's Eve, or even an award show, but Ruined Records employs clearly capable designers at every level.

They've got Lang in dark jeans, a white undershirt, and a button-up vest. The tats lining his arms are sexy as hell, but it's the wings that always get me. He wraps his hand around the microphone, bending toward the crowd as he introduces what I think is the last song.

The women in the audience lose their damn minds. Not that I can blame them. All my guys are hot as hell. I snuggle back into Saxon's broad chest as he wraps his hand around my lower stomach. My heart races as my eyes close. The cramps still haven't started. I'm going to have to say something soon. They've all mentioned they haven't been with an omega before, so it's entirely possible they haven't thought through how menstruation goes for my designation.

Saxon leans over, nuzzling his cheek to mine from behind. “I’ve got you, vixen. If the crowd is too much for you to handle, we can head back and wait in the greenroom.”

I give him a grateful smile. “No, I’m good. I think they’re almost done, anyway.” I seriously don’t think I could have matched with a more perfect pack. Each one of the guys fills a different part of my soul that I didn’t realize was missing until they shoved their way inside.

Things get majorly chaotic when the guys exit the stage. Multiple people with press badges descend, but Carter elbows his way past them with his eyes on me. It’s a killer feeling. Saxon releases me with a low chuckle and a swat on the ass.

“Come on.” Carter wraps his hand in mine, dragging me down the hallway. He ignores everyone and their attempts to get him to talk or sign autographs. Opening the door to the greenroom they were in before being called to the stage, he drags me inside and backs me against the wall.

I stare up into his dark eyes. He bends down, wrapping a forearm under my ass and lifting me. I circle my legs around his backside as he grinds his cock against my core. His arousal smacks into me in the bond as he brings a hand between us, running his fingers over my cunt. There’s some underlying emotion he’s trying to block, but I can’t quite figure out what it is.

My head tilts as I try to parcel it out.

“You know, it’s really convenient having you at the ready.” He smirks and shoves his tongue into my mouth. The way he teases over Lang’s bond mark sends an aching pulse to my clit as he drags his fingers down my lower lips. He nudges my head aside, licking down my neck.

“Are you sure you won’t get bored of having to fuck the same woman for the rest of your life?” I twine my arms under his and work on getting his belt unfastened.

“Not a fucking chance,” he growls, biting my throat. I moan, yanking his belt open. He’s feeling feral, but I’m not

sure why. Not that it bothers me. Whatever he needs, I'm here for it. I open the button on his jeans as he pulls my panties to the side and thrusts two fingers inside me. I'm not drenched, like I would be if I was in heat, but feeling him rake his teeth down my neck as he flicks my clit with his thumb does help. "Shit, I'm rushing things."

"No," I assure him, working his zipper down. He's bare underneath the jeans. I slide my hand inside the material and wrap my palm around his thick length. The piercings lining the bottom of his shaft always feel cooler than his skin.

He growls, slams my back against the wall even harder, and moves to capture my mouth again. He's already so hard and his crown is sticky as I tease his tip.

"You should get inside me," I beg, nodding. Not every quickie has to involve me getting off. Being used can be really hot with the right person.

"Are you sure you're ready for all that?" he growls, working his hips as he thrusts into my hand.

"Fuck me, please?" I beg, tightening my legs around his waist.

He keeps my panties pulled to the side as I guide him to my hole.

"Be a good little fuck toy and just take it." He thrusts and my entire body arches off the wall and toward him. "That's right, swallow up every thick inch." He grunts and the raw, animalistic sounds make my nipples ache painfully. My hand falls to his side to hold on as he ruts me into the wall. The faces he makes only ramp up my enjoyment. "Such a good girl, letting me use you." His pelvis slaps against my clit with each vicious thrust, but even then, I'm not sure I'll come.

That is, until he releases my panties, planting that forearm on the wall above my head. He adjusts his strokes until he's bumping my G-spot and rolling his pelvis against my clit.

Begging moans slip out, and he seals his mouth to mine. It's a frantic, open-mouthed kiss as our tongues meet in the air.

He really does know how to wreck me with very little effort. My heels dig into his ass as I arch, trying to chase my release.

“You’re gonna need to come soon if you plan to,” he growls, slamming into my cervix. My pussy locks down on his swelling shaft, and I’m pleasantly surprised that I’m able to come at the same time he does. “Fucking hell, milk my cock *just like that*. I swear to Christ, if you aren’t already knocked up, I’m definitely going to breed you.”

I gasp, clawing at his T-shirt-covered back.

Holy shit.

My senses get hazy as I come around his throbbing length. He curses and shoves his tongue into my mouth as he gets even thicker, rutting deep. His knot teases my opening as he slams me into the wall and comes violently. The feral growl he releases makes me feel like I accomplished something huge, even though I’ve done very little.

He rolls his hips through his come down, and grins wickedly. “You’re so fucking beautiful. I’m not about to bust out *I love you* right after sex, but I have serious feelings for you, Shanna.”

“Me too,” I agree, struggling to catch my breath.

He digs into his back pocket and pulls out a black ring box.

“It’s not what you think, but it is the most meaningful courting gift I could come up with.” He bites his lower lip, shaking the box between us. I grab it, popping open the lid. “It’s my one-year sobriety chip. It’s the first, but it won’t be the last.”

My heart flames at his words. “Shouldn’t you keep it?”

He rests his forehead against mine. “See, the way I look at it, I’m going to be wherever you are from now on. So, I’ll have it if I need a reminder.” His hand slides up under the front of my dress, resting over my lower stomach. “But I’m not going to fuck up. Life has been too good since I got sober. I’m not going to mess up in the same ways my parents did.”

My head shakes as I exhale heavily. “It’s not a sure thing.”

“It doesn’t matter. If you’re not pregnant now, then the four of us will practice breeding you until you are.” He laughs. “Holy shit, not only did your cunt just clench, but I can feel how excited you are about that. I fucking love being bonded.” He gives me a quick but tender kiss.

“I have something else I have to tell you,” I whisper as my eyes clench closed. “And I’m worried you’re going to be upset, but I need you to accept that we’re a team now.”

“Little Fitz,” he growls, brushing his fingers over my cheek. “You’re making me nervous.”

“I paid off your parents’ house,” I blurt out before I can stop myself. “I didn’t want you to worry about money, and I have it. Please don’t be upset.” His forehead rolls around mine as his head shakes and he curses under his breath. “Also, your dick is still inside me, so...”

He nuzzles his nose to mine. “You really didn’t need to do that, but thank you.” My eyes pop open as I close the box with his sobriety chip. His jaw is tight with tension, but the bond doesn’t indicate anger. Not exactly.

“Could you put this in your pocket? It’s really important and this dress doesn’t have any.” I hand him the box, and he shoves it away in his back pocket. My hands move to cup his furry jaw. “Money is a sensitive subject for me too, but please don’t let this come between us.”

He sighs. “Is spanking safe during pregnancy?”

I snort. “I’m pretty sure it is, and you can spank the hell out of me if we can just move past this.”

He smirks, quirking an eyebrow. “It’s already over, but I might call in fucking your ass if the feeling hits.”

I exhale in pure relief, nodding. “Absolutely, anytime.”

The door flies open beside us.

Carter growls, turning to block me from whoever it is.

My jaw falls.

We've never met, but I do recognize Xavier. He and Carter used to be really close, but that all changed when Carter overdosed.

"Carter, how the fuck have you been?" Xavier asks, chuckling. "I've been looking everywhere around here for you."

"Yeah, I know. I saw you in the fucking crowd." Carter vibrates with tension, and my heart drops. That's why he was so upset when he first sought me out. "Get out!" he snarls, covering me even more fully with his strong form. My dress blocks our lower halves, but yeah, he's still inside me.

"Aww, come on—"

"I said get the fuck out!"

I jump at how loudly Carter yells and how dangerous he sounds.

Xavier shrugs. "Fine, I'll wait for you out here."

My stomach drops.

This isn't good.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Jack

Shanna's worry slaps into me in the bond, and my eyes catch Lang's. He goes stiff, like he just caught it too. We disengage from the fans, taking off down the hallway. We make the curve to where the greenroom is, but I stop dead in my tracks. Saxon barrels into my back as I'm still processing that Xavier is here.

"Ahh, fuck." Lang gets his shit together before I do. He takes off as I tilt my head, trying to understand what I'm seeing. Saxon gives me a shove, and we both jog down the hall.

Carter has the door to the greenroom shut, but he's holding the handle closed with both hands and glaring at Xavier over his shoulder.

"Man, come on. You're my best fucking friend," Xavier says. "It's just a couple hundred grand."

"Do not open this fucking door," Carter growls through the door. "I don't want him anywhere near you. If you try to come out, I won't just fuck your ass, I'll do it with no lube after I spank the hell out of you."

Shanna huffs through the closed door. "Promises, promises."

Carter releases his hold on the handle and spins around to face Xavier. "Are you fucking with me right now? You walked away when I was in the hospital. I haven't seen you in over a year."

Lang growls, taking a step toward them, but I toss up a hand. It's not like we're going to let Carter beat Xavier to death, but I do think this reckoning has been a long time coming.

For a whole lot of years, those two were inseparable. It was always Ramsey and Warrick on one side, and Xavier and Carter on the other. I always lumped each side in with each other, but the last year, it's been harder to figure out if Carter really did completely change his personality when he got clean, or if maybe I unfairly judged him in the past.

"You constantly let me take the fall for shit you did. You lied to me for *years* about not knowing Lang got his own contract," Carter growls, shaking his head.

"Oh, what? You and Langdon are friends again? You're seriously going to take his word over mine?" Xavier scoffs.

"Yeah, I really am. Now that I've got some distance, a lot of things are clearer." Carter sighs, jabbing a finger at Xavier's chest. "I almost can't believe you'd pop up, trying to borrow money, but then again, I really can."

"You think I want to be here right now? Fuck no, but this is serious. I owe Henry like—"

Carter takes a step forward. "I told you the last time I paid him off that I wasn't giving your bookie another fucking dime."

My jaw falls.

Fitz, Tinley, Warrick, and Ramsey come around the opposite corner from where the hall leads to the parking lot. I blink repeatedly. *When did they get to town?* I catch Fitz's gaze, trying to send him a look to let him know that, if he wants to start shit with me and Carter, now isn't the time. He can scream at me all he wants after this shit show is over.

"Come on, I know you've got it," Xavier says, swiping his hair out of his face. "This is the last time I'll ask you for anything."

Carter laughs. "Not even close. My pregnant baby mama just paid off the loan on my parents' house."

“You knocked up my sister?” Fitz growls, coming forward at a rapid pace.

“Ohmigod, a baby?” Tinley whispers with wide eyes. She slaps the shit out of Fitz in the gut. He lets out an *oomph*. “We’re having a *baby*.”

Carter nods to the greenroom. “She’s in there, but she’s not pleased that I told her to stay put.”

Fitz and Tinley immediately take off toward the room, but Saxon steps in front of the door. “Shanna and I are bonded. You can call me Saxon.”

“It’s Grumpy Daddy!” Tinley squeals, clapping.

“Baby girl,” Warrick growls.

Her head swivels to look at War. “He’s Shanna’s Grumpy Daddy.” Looking back at Saxon, she says, “I’ve heard all about you. It’s nice to meet you.” She smiles and he nods. When she moves to head into the greenroom, Saxon lets her pass but steps in the way before Fitz can follow.

“You’re Shanna’s brother?”

“Yes, now move,” Fitz growls. He looks like he’s about to chip a tooth with how tight his jaw is.

“As you probably heard, there is a chance your sister is pregnant.” Saxon crosses his arms over his chest. “If you go in there and upset her, then the two of us will have a problem that is not easily rectified. Since you’re family, I’d rather avoid that.” Saxon gives Fitz a serious stare. “This is a happy time for us. If it’s not for you, then you should hold off on seeing her until you can be more supportive.”

Fitz nods, exhaling heavily. “I just want to see with my own eyes that she’s okay.”

Saxon nods and steps to the side, but he follows Fitz into the greenroom.

Carter glances between the door and Xavier, who he has somehow pinned to the wall with his forearm. Damn, I clearly missed some things while I was preoccupied.

Carter stares straight at Xavier and releases him from the wall. “I don’t wish you any ill will, but I’m done cleaning up your messes. I’ve been doing it since we were fifteen years old, but it’s a hell of a lot easier to stay sober without your bullshit weighing me down.”

“How did he even get in here?” Lang mutters.

I shake my head. I have no idea.

“I suggest cleaning up your act before you sink so low you can’t dig yourself out of whatever hole you’ve crawled into.” Carter sighs and spins around.

Xavier makes a move to swing at Carter, but Lang steps in the way, taking the hit.

Carter turns back around, but Lang just shrugs, rubbing at his jaw.

“He punched harder when we were teenagers,” Lang says, tossing an arm around Carter and heading for the greenroom.

I make eye contact with Ramsey and Warrick, nodding to Xavier. “Would you mind?”

Warrick gives a clipped nod. “I’ve got this.”

I follow the others inside the greenroom but grab Carter’s arm. “I’m really proud of you.”

“We all are,” Lang agrees.

Carter looks at Lang. “Why’d you step in?”

He laughs. “Because I could. Why give him the satisfaction of knowing he hit his target?”

Carter’s head tilts. “Thank you.”

“I like to think we’re well down the path to being besties again.” Lang chuckles.

Carter snorts, nods, and takes off for Shanna. She’s sitting on the couch next to Tinley. Fitz and Saxon stand a few feet away, talking.

Carter scoops Shanna up, bringing her to sit in his lap. “Sorry about locking you in here. I didn’t want him anywhere

near you.”

She pats his arm around her middle and grins at him over her shoulder. “It’s fine.”

“That’s so romantic,” Tinley says wistfully. “I feel like I’ve got a real chance at making a go at being a professional matchmaker.”

Shanna snorts a laugh. “I think it’s probably best if you quit while you’re ahead.”

Lang heads over, tossing himself down on one of the club chairs. “So, we hear Maine is a frozen tundra this time of year…”

“But we’re still considering a move,” I add, grinning at my omega as I make my way over.

“What?” Shanna and Tinley squawk in unison.

“Yeah, we found a realtor,” Saxon adds, scratching his beard. “But there aren’t a lot of options on the market this time of year.”

Carter laughs. “It surprised me too. You’d think everyone would be trying to escape during winter, but the realtor said there would be a lot more options hitting the market in the spring.”

The omegas start chattering away among themselves.

I meander over, offering Fitz a hand. “Still want to strangle us?”

Fitz barks out a laugh, shaking my hand. “Only a little.”

“Well, that’s better than nothing.” I laugh.

“I really thought my mom and Tinley were insane,” Fitz says, carefully watching Shanna and Carter. “I’m happy for you, or I’m trying to get there—”

“Fitzzy,” Tinley growls in a tone I’ve never heard her use. She jabs a finger at Fitz, and he raises his palms.

“Just no details.” Fitz laughs, looking at me. “Past that, as long as you take care of her, then we’re good.”

“Not to brag, but Carter and I have already been arrested...” Lang runs his fingers through his curls. “So, basically, that means the two of you have some catching up to do.”

“Fucking idiot,” Saxon mutters.

“Jesus Christ,” Fitz whispers.

Shanna busts out giggling as a bright smile takes over her face. She looks between me and Saxon. “You heard him. The two of you need to step up your game.”

She really is the most beautiful human being I’ve ever seen, and I get to keep her for the rest of my life.

Epilogue

Lang

Three Months Later

The crowd goes wild as Fitz and I intro the last song. It's a bit of a treat for the audience, considering they've got all of Northern Star and me and Kage on stage tonight.

It's loud as hell as Kage and Ramsey have a drum off to give all of us time to find our spots. Once they start counting down, the fans scream and whistle all over again. Warrick and Carter are both doing rhythm, and they slide in before I do.

It's a whole process waiting for my turn to come in on lead guitar, but I think I'm just exceptionally ready to be done with this song. It's our final crossover show on the contract we agreed to before bonding. I might be a little ready to be done with them as a whole too. Not that I don't love performing, but I've got different priorities recently.

We've got Shanna's family pack in the audience for our surprise. It's about time for this, if I do say so myself. I'm fairly sure we've managed to keep our plans from our mate, but who knows. The bond gives unparalleled access to her thoughts and feelings, but it also makes it damn hard to keep a secret.

Fitz sings the hell out of the song, which is cool with me. It's one of Northern Star's lineup, so it makes sense.

Damn, my hands are sweating to the point I have to keep my eyes on my guitar at all times.

The others are just as anxious, which is only ramping up my anxiety.

It's kind of wild.

She let us bond her.

It's not like she's going to decline our proposal in front of a thousand screaming fans...

Right?

Holy shit.

I'm a hot mess.

I wasn't even this nervous when she peed on the stick. When the doctor came in to tell us her hormone levels were really high, I did get a little anxious, but it was nothing serious.

We're just having twins, which strangely feels like a victory. We didn't just knock her up once. We managed it *twice*.

The song comes to an end, and I'm still kinda frozen to my spot. One of the roadies comes up, waving for my guitar as the crowd screams for an encore.

"If you're doing this, now would be the time," Fitz says, laughing and shaking his head.

I finally get my shit together when I see Saxon guiding Shanna out on stage. I yank off my guitar, tossing it at the roadie.

Fitz steps back from the mic stand and aims for the side of the stage with Kage, Warrick, and Ramsey.

Tinley waves, shaking her camera to let me know she's ready when we are.

Saxon guides Shanna to the front of the stage. Her hair falls around her shoulders in long, dark waves as her hazel eyes sparkle.

Carter comes out of nowhere, swiping the mic. He looks at me, laughing. "Now, I know she's beautiful, but you've been

staring with your mouth open for like thirty seconds.”

Jack bumps his shoulder against mine. Oh yeah, I’ve got the ring in my front pocket. I try to fish it out, but the box is wedged into my tiny pocket. Shanna always complains the pockets on women’s clothes suck, but dammit, these skinny jeans are not giving up the box without a fight.

Carter looks at me, rolling his eyes. He focuses back on Shanna as my sweaty fingers fail to grasp the box. “Did you enjoy the show?”

“Yeah, but what the hell is Lang doing? Are you having a wardrobe malfunction, handsome?” Shanna chuckles, snuggling back into Saxon’s chest.

“For the love of God, let me help,” Jack says, trying to slap my hand away. His hands are the same size as mine. He isn’t going to fit in my pocket any better than I am.

“At least he’s pretty,” Amira calls out from the audience. “Keep shaking that fine ass in our direction. We aren’t complaining, are we, ladies?”

The chicks in the audience scream. Damn, I bet I have been giving them a nice view. My head falls back as I laugh, but it’s nervous and awkward.

On the plus side, it’s really easy to imagine how my omega is going to look and act in twenty years, because Shanna and her mom are so similar it’s eerie.

I finally wedge the box out of my pocket, and it almost goes flying, but Jack catches it.

He spins around and takes a few steps forward.

I follow and the three of us hit a knee. We all agreed Saxon should stay with her to keep her upright, in case it’s so romantic she gets weak in the knees.

I have a very eloquent speech prepared, but Carter has the microphone. I try to snatch it away and it picks up our shoving match.

“Just fucking give it to me,” I growl.

“You had your chance. You got stage fright. Deal with it.”

“Oh, fuck you. I’ve never had stage fright a day in my life,” I scoff, pinching his nipple.

Carter wins, pulling the mic back to his mouth. “Hey, Little Fitz. We already put not one, but two babies in your belly, so this feels like overkill. But we’re just letting you know we’re going to get hitched.”

“That wasn’t a question,” she says, laughing.

“Nope, it sure wasn’t.” Saxon waves for the ring box. “Hold out your finger, vixen. We’ve got one more claim to make, so the world understands you’re officially ours.”

I’m guessing the audience can’t hear anything Shanna or Saxon said, so I grab the mic and jump up. “She said yes!”

The crowd loses their shit.

Let’s be real. If she said no, we would’ve tied her to the bed and fucked her until she gleefully accepted, so it’s really not that shady.

Huh, that’s not a bad celebration plan for tonight.

The guys take turns kissing our little omega. I wait patiently, and when it’s my chance, I pull her into my chest. “You know I love the shit out of you, right, sweetness?”

“Yeah, you big goofball. I love you too.”

I kiss the fuck out of her. She stole my heart from day one. Now the four of us get to steal her last name. It seems like a decent trade to me.

This wraps up the main epilogue, but I get more requests for extra long happy endings than anything else. If you’re content with how the story stands, then you can be done here. If you’d like to live in the happily ever after for a little longer, then snuggle in and enjoy the fluffy comfort.

Epilogue

Jack

Four More Months Later

“I can’t come with you. You guys will have to go alone,” Shanna says, poking the giant baby belly. She’s only seven months pregnant, but it’s twins. The OBGYN we found in Maine said the same thing as the doctor we had in Chicago. It is, in fact, completely normal for the belly to look like she’s going to pop any day. “I probably shouldn’t fly, anyway. My feet are swollen. Donovan and my mom will understand. Also, none of the dresses are fitting right. I think I’m just going to stay home.”

I nod, sliding up behind her as I study her in the boutique changing room mirror. They’ll get it, but it’s a huge honor. Jamen and Donovan are getting a lifetime achievement award. It’s wild to *kinda* be related to the owner of the record label we’ve been with for nearly twelve years now.

Still...

“You know not one of us is going to go without you.” I kiss her cheek, running my hand over the swollen belly. Her tits spill out of the top of the bra that she just bought a couple weeks ago, and I find myself grinding my cock against her ass.

“Really?” She laughs as her eyes sparkle in the mirror. “I feel like a giant beached whale, and you’re trying to get your dick wet?”

“You know how hard the belly makes me.” I slide my hands into her panties as I nurse Saxon’s bite mark. I usually

prefer to aim for mine, but any of them will do to send a pulse of desire through the bond.

Her body is totally different than it was seven months ago, but I love every single iteration of her. Pregnant, not pregnant, it doesn't matter. I'm wildly attracted to all of them, but even I can admit that I've got a bit of a fascination with the baby belly.

It might not make a lick of sense, but it does fill me with an unnatural level of male satisfaction. Everyone knows she's ours.

I pinch her clit, teasing my middle finger down to test her core. My tongue teases down her neck as I bring my free hand up to pinch her nipple. It takes a little work to slide inside the cup, since the bra really is tight. She slams her ass back against my cock, smiling at me in the mirror.

My heart feels like it could take flight right out of my chest. She's always been gorgeous, but true happiness lights up the bond in a way that makes her seem even more beautiful.

Her hand slides behind her as she tries to get my belt undone.

I chuckle against her throat. "Are you really going to let me bend you over in the changing room?"

"Yes," she says very seriously. "In fact, I'd almost say you have to after getting me all worked up."

"Gladly," I murmur, pushing her panties to the ground. Getting my belt and jeans undone takes no time at all. I move her hands to the wall on either side of the mirror and pull her hips back. Spitting on my hand, I work my cock against her ass cheek while she wiggles her hips, glaring at me in the mirror. That expression shouldn't be so damn cute, but when she looks at me like she's contemplating murdering me, I find it absolutely adorable.

"Jackson," she whisper-hisses.

I smirk, shoving my cock to her opening. "I love you, beautiful." I thrust home and immediately move a hand to

cover her mouth. The moan I knew was coming vibrates against my hand as her walls stretch around my length.

I lean over her, wrapping a forearm under the baby belly to help support some of the weight. It's complicated as I stretch a hand down to tease her clit, but the faces she makes in the mirror make up for the minor inconvenience.

My hips slap against her ass as her tits bounce and she licks my palm. Her soft moans slip out around my skin as I try to keep relatively quiet, considering our location. Her eyes widen as I lick over her shoulder. I run into the damn bra strap, so I work my way back up to her neck. Luckily, her mane of hair falls over the other arm.

My thrusts get deeper as my need to fill her grows. Her eyes clench shut as she wiggles her hips and gets so much slicker. She bites my palm as she comes, and when her pleasure fills the bond, I don't have a hope of holding back.

I come inside her, trying to stay reasonably quiet.

"Ohmigod, tell me you're not having sex in there," Tinley calls from the hallway.

"I told you that you didn't want to disturb them right now," Warrick says in his low, growly tone.

I barely manage to keep quiet through the last few jerky thrusts, but when I pull my hand away, Shanna busts into giggles.

My face falls to her shoulder as I laugh. I'm not sure what I expected life to be like, but she sure does keep things interesting.

Epilogue

Saxon

Shanna 36 Weeks Pregnant

“Ugh, I don’t know for sure, but I think all those chips were a mistake,” Shanna groans, rolling her head around my chest.

My eyes meet Carter’s. He’s on her other side on the couch, and he’s got a tattooed hand planted on her stomach. He shoots me a look that says exactly what I’m thinking—it’s not the barbecue chips at all, even if she did polish off half a bag by herself.

Lang frowns. He’s on the floor, rubbing her swollen feet. “Do you need to hit the bathroom again?”

“You know, watching movies and seeing social media...” She sighs. “They never warn you how unsexy pregnancy really is, but yeah. Someone is sitting on my bladder. I feel like I have to pee every two seconds.”

Lang carefully drops her leg and scoots back before standing to offer her his hands. Carter and I both give her a helpful shove on the rump.

“I’m worse than a whale at this point,” Shanna mutters, rubbing the belly. “Did you see how far he had to lean back to get me off the couch? And he needed assistance...”

Lang grimaces. “Nah, it’s not like that. I probably need to hit the gym. I’ve been lazy recently...” He continues promising her it’s him, not her, as they head out of the room.

“God,” Jack whispers. “I was really hoping she’d hold out for two more days until she hits thirty-seven weeks.”

Carter exhales heavily, nodding. “Yeah, me too.”

I glance between them. “She’s only a few days shy of what the doctor was hoping for. The girls are safe to be born anytime. I’m nervous too, but you need to block your anxiety in the bond.”

“I’m doing my best,” Jack says, grabbing his phone off the coffee table.

I look at Carter, but he’s got his face buried in his hands.

Stretching over, I give his shoulder a shove. “Lang and Jack can keep an eye on her for an hour or so. You want to hit a meeting?” He doesn’t go daily anymore, but he usually goes at least two or three times a week. He’s been solid since I’ve known him, but I’ve heard life changes qualify as a trigger.

He shakes his head. “No. No way. I’m good. I don’t think I could be that far away from her right now if I tried.”

I get that. “Let’s hit the gym. I’ll run with you for a half hour or so. That way, we don’t have to leave the house.”

He shakes his head, but after a second, he nods. “I won’t turn down the endorphins right now.”

“Good.” I shove myself off the couch and follow him toward the gym, but we run into Lang in the hall. “We’re going to work out for a while.”

Lang glances at the bathroom and back at us. “How about I hit the gym with Carter?” He chuckles. “I need it, anyway, and yours and Jack’s scents are the ones that soothe her the most. She said she’s feeling a little queasy.” He grimaces, shrugging like he has no additional information past that.

He and Carter have come a long way in the last nine months. Hell, we all have. Never in a million years did I think I’d consider Lang a friend, but he grows on you...

A little like foot fungus, but still.

I snort, nodding my agreement as I clap Carter on the back. They head off, and I lean against the wall. We're all hovering a lot these days, but at least she knows how much we love her.

The toilet flushes, and a minute later, the sink turns on and then off. The door pops open shortly after.

Shanna looks rough. Her face has been slightly swollen with extra water weight for the last few weeks, but the doctor said that was normal. She gives me a tired smile. "I think I'm too fat to live. I almost didn't make it off the toilet."

I snort, scooping her up.

We head through the living room, and I wave the hand on her hip to tell Jack to follow us. She spent a lot of time when we first moved in setting up the nest, but the further she's gotten into the third trimester, the less she goes in there.

I carry her up the stairs and into the massive pack bedroom. Finding a house with a nest and an extremely large primary bedroom was harder than we anticipated, but we all sleep together every night.

We had no choice but to be picky.

We ended up buying an old bed-and-breakfast on the other side of town from Tinley and her pack. It's a twenty-minute drive when it's snowy, but only five when the roads are clear.

I carefully put Shanna down in the middle of the bed before crawling on the edge. Jack takes the other side, snuggling up to her back. He immediately starts rubbing at her lumbar region. I nuzzle my nose to hers, tenderly rubbing the belly.

She huffs. "I love you both. I would apologize that you're stuck with me, but one of you did this." She yawns. "So, we can all suffer together."

I laugh, planting a kiss on her nose. "I love the three of you more than life itself."

The belly jumps under my hand. My chest pulses with warmth. This is all I've dreamed of for years. It might not be perfect because it's real life, but I wouldn't change a thing.

Epilogue

Carter

A Day Later

S hanna makes it to the next afternoon before the upset stomach turns into full-blown contractions. It's terrifying and exciting all at the same time. We've had the hospital bags packed for days as well. The SUV we bought will fit all of us, even the girls, since it has three full rows.

It's wild.

Kage loves to torment me and Lang because we're having daughters. It is a little like the universe is paying us back for years' worth of shitty behavior.

We call the doctor's office before leaving the house to make sure the doctor will meet us there. The trip to the hospital doesn't take long, but my nerves are already shot. They get her settled in a room, determine it is active labor, and move us into a birthing suite. Watching her get hooked up to an IV and answer a ton of questions is even scarier than when I woke up in the hospital to realize I overdosed.

We got one of the nest rooms, and it has gauzy curtains lining the bed and a dim setting for the lights. I'm sure that'll change once the action starts.

After the nurse leaves, Lang gives me a shove. "You're losing it. Sit with her. It'll help."

I swipe my sweaty hands off on my jeans, but he's right. "Thanks."

Shanna breaks out in a tired smile when she spots me. “Come on.” She pats the bed next to her and I climb right in. “Take a deep breath. Another one is coming.”

I turn her face so that she can breathe in my scent. It’s wild how biology works with omegas. Breathing in alpha pheromones can act as a natural pain reliever, or that’s what the books said.

The rolling wave of her contraction slams through the bond. It’s significantly stronger than any she’s had before. Her nails dig into my arm as she huffs deep hits of my scent.

The twins have their own sacs and placentas, so the doctor said there is a possibility of being able to deliver them naturally. Shanna doesn’t want a C-section, if at all possible, but I just need the babies out.

That way, she can feel better and they’ll all be okay. We can also help her, when the burden has been on her for her entire pregnancy.

God, why didn’t anyone warn me this would be the scariest thing I’d face in my life? Probably because no one would ever procreate if they understood the helpless feeling that comes for dads during delivery.

Shanna stretches a hand up, running her fingers through my beard and tilting my eyes down to hers. “I love you. I’m okay. I know you’re worried, but we’ve got this.”

“I love you too,” I assure her as my eyes ache. I shudder out a breath and attempt to get my shit together.

“Um, is this normal?” Shanna asks the nurse with wide eyes. “I’m totally fine, but...”

The nurse glances between the four of us as we weep like we’re the ones who just gave birth.

“Yeah, you know, it’s sweet. Sometimes dads cry, sometimes they don’t, but I think the three of you are very lucky ladies.” The nurse pats Shanna’s leg and heads off.

“You guys are too much,” Shanna says, smiling brightly. Whoever created epidurals has my eternal gratitude. Once she got that thing, it was smooth sailing.

“They’re absolutely perfect,” Saxon says, sniffing as he cradles Jarica to his cheek.

“They really are,” Jack says, rocking Laney against his chest.

“You guys only get five more minutes before it’s time to switch,” Lang pouts, snapping pictures.

I laugh, leaning over to kiss my wife. I run my fingers through her hair, sending all my love and appreciation that she and the girls are okay through the bond.

“I love you too,” she says as we pull back. “But my vagina and I are in firm agreement that two kids are plenty.”

I quirk an eyebrow. I’m absolutely going to miss the baby belly. Ehh, but I also value my balls too much to mention that right now. We’ll revisit it again once she’s forgotten how rough it was, and if she doesn’t change her mind, then that’s fine too.

Epilogue

Shanna

Three Years Later

My husbands are up to something. I know it before we pull into the rural mansion in the North Carolina mountains. We haven't spent more than a night away from the girls since they were born, except for heats, and that's only because it's necessary.

After much discussion and some begging on my mom's part, we did agree to let them stay with my parents' pack for three nights and four days. It's technically our honeymoon, according to the guys. So, it's both way overdue and completely unnecessary.

Life is good.

I couldn't come up with a single complaint if I tried, except maybe how fast time flies.

The house is unreal. It backs right up to the edge of the forest, but Saxon assures me that there are trails that lead down to a gorgeous lake. It's even the perfect time of year. It's chilly but not full-blown winter, and the leaves are absolutely beautiful.

We're all exhausted the first night. At least I am, but I wake up the next morning, excited to explore and start the day.

Saxon comes in when I'm just climbing off the stair climber. He always looks handsome, but the girls love his beard. As such, he hasn't shaved it in the better part of a year

and, surprisingly enough, the fluffy monstrosity works for him.

“Damn, if I’d known you were going to be on the stair machine, I would have made sure my workout was inside.” He grins.

I climb him. I love that I always know he can lift me with no trouble. Even if I’ve still got the extra twenty-five pounds leftover from the twins that I never quite managed to lose.

“Mmm, you smell extra sweaty.” He chuckles, running his nose down the column of my throat. “Let’s shower together to conserve water.”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” I agree, shoving my nose against his throat as I run my fingers through his mountain man beard. His woodsy scent is thick, but I always love it even better when they’re sweaty after a solid workout. His hand tightens on my thin, stretchy shorts, and he takes off toward the door.

“You know how much fun the girls are, but I just can’t help but think that it’s about time we try for one more.”

My hand tightens in his beard as I bite my lip. The last year, they’ve all been pushing for one more baby. The sad part is, they’ve worn me down. I hardly had to lift a finger last time, except for the pregnancy and giving birth part.

“But what if we end up with another two-for-one special?” I groan as he teases my pussy over the material of my workout shorts.

“We survived the first time, and we’ll do it all over again.” He heads up the stairs without even sounding winded. “Plus, you know how in love the girls are with Jagger.” He mentions Tinley’s little guy. “They’ll be built-in helpers from day one.”

I pull back so I can see his face. His eyes sparkle like they do whenever he’s really excited about something.

Dammit.

That look gets me every time.

“I love sleeping through the night, though,” I complain, just to give him a hard time.

He kisses my nose. “I’ll handle your night shifts. I’ll even stick the portable breast pumps on every two hours, so you don’t have to wake up for that.”

I snort. They really do make it very hard to say no. “I’ll consider it.”

“Thank you.” He beams, and his smile takes my damn breath away.

The five of us spend the day by the boat dock at the lake. It’s only a five-or-ten minute walk and the scenery is breathtaking. It’s a little strange that they each ask me to take a stroll, and we all follow different paths from the house to the lake.

We eat a delicious dinner and hang out in the living room until it’s just getting dark. They’re all up to something. I just don’t know exactly what that is. My gaze travels to Lang. My tattooed lead singer is a beautiful man, but he’s also the easiest one to break when I need information. He’s stretched out next to me on the couch, but when he sees me looking, he starts acting super sketchy.

“Nope, not going to happen.” Lang shoves himself off the sofa and bolts before I can even say a word.

“He’s being weirder than usual.” I chuckle, moving my gaze to Jack.

He shrugs.

The door to the outdoor terrace opens and Saxon comes inside. He’s got a grin on his face that makes me even more confused.

“We’re all set,” he calls out.

Jack moves to shove off the chair he’s been reclining in.

“What exactly is this?” I ask, also moving to stand.

“Remember when I told you I wanted to hunt you through the forest so no one could hear you scream?” Saxon chuckles

darkly.

“No way,” I whisper, glancing down at my pajamas.

“Oh, yeah.” Lang jogs back into the room.

“Be prepared,” Carter says, shoving Saxon out of the doorway. “When we catch you, we’re fucking you in the moonlight like true animals.”

Jack smirks, shoving his hands into his pockets. “Your safeword is *red* and you get a two minute head start.”

“Use it wisely,” Lang taunts.

I move to aim for the open door, but Carter grabs me on the way by. “There are LED lights lining the trails we deemed safe.” He gives me a toe-curling kiss before slapping my ass.

“And there’s a blanket with a cooler and snacks not far from the dock,” Saxon adds, eyeing me from head to toe.

“Good to know.” I make it to the door and slide outside. The cool air prickles at my skin, but I know from experience that, once they start tag-teaming me, I’ll be hot enough to burn alive. “Two-minute head start, right?”

“Yep,” Carter agrees.

“And my safeword is *red*.” I grin, glancing between them. “I just thought you should know. All your begging got tedious. I ditched my birth control three days ago.” I spin around, bolting for the steps that lead down the porch as their low growls fill the air.

A wide smile crosses my face as I aim for the treeline. Life really doesn’t get any better than this.

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