

VIOLET FOX

PART  
TWO

# SAVED

THE BETA TRIALS

*Saved*

VIOLET FOX

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# *Foreword*

Saved is a contemporary Omegaverse that takes place in an alternative/ militaristic world where the human characters exhibit animal-like traits, such as growling, nesting, and knotting. There is no shifting involved.

This story features forced proximity and an unwanted Omega in a pack of three Alphas and one male Omega. It is enemies to lovers and a slow-burn/medium-burn romance. No mpreg is involved.

I'm a British author masquerading as an American, so please let me know if any British spellings appear. If you find any pesky typos, please email [kayleerymerauthor@outlook.com](mailto:kayleerymerauthor@outlook.com) and I will get those fixed.

Trigger warnings:

There is gun violence, and all the typical OV tropes like knotting, slick, and heats. There are mean girls, and scenes of school bullying too, and a crazy, unhinged Alpha who needs to be locked up in chains.

I hope you enjoy. Expect lots of groveling.



This book is dedicated to anyone who has ever had their heart  
broken.

I hope you find your own Hart Pack one day...



VIOLET FOX

PART  
TWO

SAVED  
THE BETA TRIALS

# *Prologue*

**A** Beta's survival guide for joining an Alpha-Omega Pack.

1. Don't look an Alpha directly in the eye.
2. Don't upset the Pack's Omega and remember that their needs come first.

3. Never speak to the Omega unless the Alpha(s) have given you permission.
4. And last but not least... Never go into an Omega's nest. Especially in the weeks leading up to a heat...  
It could mean the difference between life and death...

# CHAPTER 1

## *Mila*

**T**hick, wet branches whip me hard across the face as I stumble through the woods, eager to find a source of running water.

My cramps twist in my gut, ripping me apart from the seams, but I push on, knowing that if I can just make it through the first wave, then I will survive.

Even if I am a complete novice about my own fledgling Omega hormones and body, I still dare to hope, allowing myself to spy that light at the end of the tunnel that promises things will get better...

But they abandoned me, and finally, my knees give way, and I fall to the dirt where I truly belong.

The sky and the trees swirl around me, blurring into one massive, chaotic wall, and I'm losing consciousness.

Omegas can die if they don't receive an Alpha's knot during their heat, and is this the end?

Will I be joining my dad now after all?

I guess that's one silver lining.

A familiar pair of blue eyes swivels up before me in the gloom, and now all I can see is Oliver's face, framed by loose

brown curls.

Then Lachlan's eyes appear, and Barret's, and to my surprise...

Gryphon's.

I'd have thought I'd be glad to see the back of that Alpha, but it appears he has already gotten so deep in my veins, my Omega crying out for him like some helpless damsel in distress.

He will never accept me, and from this moment on, I will forever be cursed with wanting a pack that will never want me back.

They didn't come to my father's funeral...

They weren't there when I needed them most.

Did they ever care?

I know Gryphon never did. But did Barret? Lachlan?

Oliver...?

It looks like Gryphon got what he wanted in the end.

He managed to get rid of me, the bastard.

I may never forgive him or the pack for abandoning me in my time of need, yet my body still craves them.

Oliver is my scent match, so by extension, that makes them all mine.

Even Gryphon is mine, and I growl in frustration, gripping fistfuls of dried leaves and twigs.

Stupid forest and stupid Gryphon.

But most of all, stupid Lily.

Fuck her.

I won't let her hurt Oliver or the pack.

I *will* return to them. But only to warn them about Lily.

After that, we go our separate ways.

But first things.... I need to survive this heat.

My insides coil up again, twisting and tangling like a nest of deadly vipers, and now I feel my way across the ground, looking for the softness of the soil.

Water has to be close by.

I drag myself through the undergrowth for God knows how long until I finally hear it.

A trickle of water.

There's a brook close by.

I haul myself closer, and once I find the bank, I roll, letting the babbling brook swallow me whole. I don't even feel the sharp jab of rocks in my spine. All I can feel is the soothing sensation of the currents, purifying my soul.

The water chases away the heat in my body, clearing my senses yet again.

But it just creates room for all my oppressive thoughts.

No Omega has ever survived their heat alone, and who knows if I will make it out alive.

I will most likely die out here.

Dusk settles around me like a soft blanket. Birds trill in the canopy, hopping from branch to branch, a chorus to my lonely ears.

I gaze up at a twilight sky through a web of branches, focusing on a lone star.

Somehow, I feel like it's my dad watching over me, and just maybe... I will make it through this.

I will come out kicking.

Another plunging pain in my stomach, one that sinks me lower beneath the surface, and I twist onto my side, gripping between my legs.

I suppose this beats being sold off to the highest bidder at one of those god-awful Omega auctions.

Oliver was lucky. He found his Alphas before he awakened, but if my real identity had been discovered earlier, then I

would have been sent to that Omega Academy for training.

I would have never learned how to be a fighter or how to skin a rabbit with a knife.

I would have become a fragile little flower with easy-to-break petals, and it truly sounds like a fate worse than death.

Dying alone here in the woods is far more preferable.

Unless I was matched with the Hart Pack.

Now, that would have been a blessing.

But I'm not that gullible. No point in wishing for things that will never happen.

This is reality, and reality is a cruel, heartless bitch.

Just like Lily.

Memories return, and I recall all the times Oliver sacrificed his needs for mine. He sent his Alphas to save me, even when he was in heat.

If Lachlan and Barret had never shown up at the hotel, I would have died, or worse...

My identity would have been discovered.

Then there was the time the Omega bathed me and pleased me during his heat and the time he took a bullet for me.

Shouts echo through the forest, and my heart punches against my chest.

Not now.

I can't be discovered like this.

"Over here!"

That sounds like an Alpha, and they must have picked up on my scent. Shit.

I bet I left a lovely gingerbread trail through the forest.

The voices draw closer, and I scramble out of the brook, only to go slipping through the muddy bank again when my weak fingers fail to find purchase.



“Found her!”

The Alpha splashes through the water, and I don't think.

I scream, and great. Very smart.

Attract all the local predators.

“Stay away from me!”

“Hey, it's fine...”

The Alpha kneels before me, getting his pants all muddy in the brook, and I don't see his face. It's masked in shadow.

All I see are his piercing gray eyes and the strong set of his jaw.

Judging from the calming aura he is channeling my way, he means no harm.

Who is he?

Two more people stop by his side, and one of them is a Beta woman. The other is a Beta man, and what is going on?

Who are these people?

The Alpha purrs for me, and I can't help it.

The sound sends me straight to sleep.

No...

“It's okay, Omega. We've got you now, and we are going to take good care of you. You are safe.”

Safe? Yeah, right.

The rumble continues in his chest, and I don't even try to fight it now. I am just so tired and in so much pain.

If I die, so be it.

“Safe...” I whisper.

I finally pass out and the last thing I recall before the darkness consumes me is the scent of wet forest leaves.

Safe.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Oliver*

This fucking sucks.

We have been put on house arrest, and now we can't go anywhere without one of Lily's sycophants stopping us.

I have no idea where Mila is or if she is even safe, and now there is a big hole in the wall where I kicked my leg in frustration.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. I was supposed to get better, and then I was going to be there for her when her father passed away.

Did the old man die? Did he already have his funeral, and did Mila have to go through it all alone?

I wasn't there to protect her, and once again, I have let someone I love down.

I couldn't protect my sister Isabelle any more than I could protect Mila, and I swing my fist out, punching the window.

Still the same useless kid.

Still pathetic.

The glass doesn't smash. It merely trembles in its frame.

One of the soldiers looks over his shoulder, his large gun poised in his hand. But when he finds me on the other side of

the glass scowling at him, an injured Omega who only has the use of one arm, he relaxes, returning to his duty.

He and his buddies arrived here completely uninvited yesterday afternoon, and they haven't left since. They have overstayed their welcome, and if I wasn't in such bad shape, I'd fight them.

I would knock down every single one of them if that's what it took to find Mila.

But we were outnumbered. Lily played the long game, and we lost.

Now she holds all the power in government, and there is nothing we can do to stop her.

“Oliver, come away from the window.”

That *voice*.

Once upon a time, it used to soothe me, but now... it sets every single one of my nerves on fire.

I don't look away from the window. The soldier has turned his back on me, and it's obvious he doesn't deem me a threat.

One day, I will show him.

One day, I will point a gun at his ugly face.

“Oliver.”

“Fuck off, Gryphon...”

Those three words. They have become my catchphrase.

With a growl, he rises to his feet from the couch, steering me away from the danger.

The soldier isn't going to shoot me. Call it Omega instinct, but I feel as if he has been given direct orders not to shoot me specifically

Maybe I could use my helpless Omega status to my advantage.

“Oliver... listen to me... that soldier will not hesitate to shoot.”

I bang on the glass, trying to rile up the soldier outside, but the Alpha in uniform barely budes. He just spits at the ground, keeping his gaze on the tree line.

The fucker thinks I truly am weak, but he's so wrong.

I will kill him.

“Oliver, don't make me—”

My fist goes for his jaw, and that's the second time I have punched him in twenty-four hours.

The Alpha's head jerks back, and he closes his eyes, balling his fists.

He's nothing more than a raging mountain of testosterone right now, and good. Maybe then he will finally Alpha-up and fight those soldiers outside.

He owes it to Mila after all, and me.

Barret and Lachlan don't run to his aid. The latter is barely present, disappearing inside his head like he usually does when he is sad or stressed.

He twirls a wilted snowdrop in his hand, hovering in the corner like a ghost.

It looks like one of the snowdrops he picked for Mila in the woods. I think that one came from the small glass vase on the kitchen windowsill.

Barret scowls on the chair, swigging back a bottle of whiskey, and it seems my pack has given up.

Yet, I haven't.

“Oliver, I am only trying to protect you. That man will kill you.”

Barret scoffs, “No, he won't.”

Gryphon and I turn to look at him. Even Lachlan peers up from his sad snowdrop.

Gryphon snarls at Barret. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Barret gazes deep into his bottle, searching for the answers to all our problems. “It means that they are not going to shoot

our dear Ollie boy. Lily is a female Alpha. It's not hard to figure out. She won't kill someone so precious."

My body shudders in disgust, and it is something I have thought about ever since those men arrived at the house, claiming that the former Beta Governor, Frederick, had died.

All this time, we thought Frederick was the enemy, but it appears Lily was all along.

Gryphon shakes his head, denying it immediately, and what a fucking idiot.

Can't he see that Lily is the enemy here?

"No. Ollie is already claimed. You can't take a claimed Omega..."

I scoff, "Since when did Lily play by the rules?"

Gryphon trembles and it must be hard for him.

He's afraid of Lily, and he can't even bring himself to speak badly about her behind her back.

I bet he thinks she has bugs planted all over the house. I reckon he thinks she can read his thoughts at this very moment, and he needs to get a grip.

Lily is powerful, but she is not that powerful.

We can overcome her.

I, personally, will fight her myself.

She won't get the better of me.

Lachlan sniggers in his little miserable corner, and we glance across the room at him. He has a twisted smile on his face, and now the blue of his irises seems to glow in the gloom as he stares at his wilted snowdrop.

"I've never had violent thoughts towards a woman before... but when I think about that bitch... all I want to do is drain the blood from her body and wipe it all over my face like *war* paint..."

His snigger turns into a high-pitched cackle, and now he crushes the snowdrop in his hand, eyes popping from his skull.

None of us says a thing. We're used to Lachlan and his strange mannerisms, but he's even scaring me now.

Barret sighs, rolling his eyes. "That's great, Lachlan, but wait for the right moment, yeah? Don't go running to the capital just yet. If we're gonna fight, then we need to fight properly."

Gryphon hisses, "Are you all fucking insane? Her men are standing right outside!"

I round on him now. "I am going to give you an ultimatum, Gryphon. Your first step for making it up to me and the pack... and to Mila..."

Gryphon's jaw tics as he settles those raging red-brown eyes on me, but he's calm and focused.

"You fight Lily with us," I whisper, pointing out the window. "Or go and join her friends outside."

He blinks, dumbfounded. "Why would I join Lily's men?"

I suck in a breath. "The way things are going, Gryphon... I'm not so sure if I can trust you anymore. Lily has already gotten so much under your skin... You're afraid of her, and I'm sorry. But unless you aren't prepared to fight her and rescue Mila with us... then... you are no longer a part of this pack... You are no longer my Alpha..."

A thick stretch of silence spreads across the room. Gryphon's hard eyes soften, and it's clear I hit him where it really hurts. But he needs to hear it.

It's his call.

Sure, severing my ties to him would in essence kill me eventually, but I am dead either way if I don't get Mila back in my arms again.

My life will never be complete if she is not by my side.

So, I need to know if Gryphon is on my side. I don't care if he doesn't care for Mila, but he can fight for her on my behalf.

Because that's what a good Alpha does for their Omega.

"I will give you a moment to think about it."

Finally, I turn away from him, facing the others.

Barret and Lachlan are already on their feet. I don't even have to ask them twice.

Lachlan smiles for the first time since Mila left, but it's more of a manic smirk when I glance the second time.

"We have to pick our moment. Right now, we continue to play Lily's game."

They nod, and Lachlan shakes with anticipation.

"So, I don't get to stab any soldiers yet?" he asks.

I sigh. "No, Lachlan. Not yet."

He pouts, and I look toward Gryphon.

He still hasn't given me his word, but the choice is his.

Me or Lily.

It shouldn't be hard really. He said it himself; I am his bonded Omega.

"Well?"

Gryphon looses a heavy breath from his lips. Then he lifts his face, his mouth set. "I'm with you, Ollie. All the way."

That's all any Omega wants to hear from their Alpha, but I can feel the hesitation through our bond. It's mostly out of fear than loyalty, but Gryphon is finding it hard to defy his superior.

The very concept is terrifying for him, but we will come out victorious in the end.

We just have to have faith.

After all, we are doing this for Mila.

And once we find her... our pack can finally be whole again.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Mila*

**B**right, harsh lights hurt my eyes when I rouse, and what happened? Where am I?

Why don't I hurt anymore?

Carefully, I open my eyes, finding myself in a strange bed in a strange room. It's clean and white, and the sheets beneath me are soft.

There are other beds in the room, but they're all empty.

I am alone.

Or so I thought.

"Morning."

I tug on the sheets, thinking I'd scented wet leaves before. It's a rich, earthy smell, and the image of an Alpha rushes to mind.

I peer at the right-hand side of the bed. There's an Alpha in a chair, smiling at me broadly.

While he's handsome, I don't feel any attraction to him. His wet forest smell is neutral to me, and his piercing eyes of stormy gray and rebellious locks of ebony don't make my heart pound.



I guess not all Omegas are drawn to every Alpha they meet, and vice versa.

The realization strikes me like lightning.

I survived my heat.

How?

Before I go to ask the gray-eyed Alpha my question, he raises his hand. "Four days."

How did he know what I was going to say?

He sighs. "It's what they all ask upon waking..."

Who?

I shake my head, watching him carefully. "And who are you?"

The Alpha rolls his eyes, leaning back to place his leg across his knee. He's dressed casually in a leather jacket and jeans.

"Only your savior. My team and I found you alone in the woods."

His team.

I meet those stormy gray eyes again.

He shrugs. "Perks of the job. We find a lot of you Omegas out there in the wilds. Who were you running from?"

I turn away, fisting my hands. "I wasn't running away, I was..."

My voice trails off. No, I shouldn't tell this strange Alpha who I am. I think I know what organization he works for. They often search the woods and surrounding areas outside the cities for runaway Omegas.

It's how the government keeps tabs on us.

No, not us. Them.

I am not like those helpless Omegas.

"What were you about to say?" he asks, curiosity burning inside his storm-cloud eyes.

I can't tell him. So, I will make up a story.

I can't risk being found by Governor Lily. It's a miracle I even survived that heat. I thought Omegas died if they didn't receive a knot during their heat, and another government lie, perhaps?

I'm just surprised I slept through the whole ordeal, and what did they drug me with?

I'm still away with the fairies...

"Nothing."

Wet leaves Alpha leans forward in his seat, and it looks like he is about to barrage me with questions.

"Who are you?"

I grip the crisp white sheets.

"I asked you a question, Omega."

While it's not an order, I still struggle to fight it. There's something about his smooth, lilting tone that makes me want to head his every command, no matter how gently he delivers them.

Just like that, I forget my four years of training as a Beta soldier, looking him straight in the eyes, something I was told to never do. It takes him back a little.

Most Omegas are submissive little creatures, but not me...

I am through with being a doormat.

"I am no one."

He nods. "Right. Nice to meet you, *no one*."

I purse my lips. I really should have thought this through, but my mind is still foggy. There's an IV drip attached to my arm.

And I'm pretty sure there is a leprechaun doing a jig on his right shoulder.

What did they put in my bloodstream?

“Look, I get it. You don’t want to be found by the ones you were running from. It’s fine. We get it all the time. But you can always give a fake name. After all, you’re not in the database...”

The database?

I narrow my eyes.

He hikes a brow. “You know, the Omega database? Whoever you are, you have been keeping your Omega identity a secret, and that is truly commendable. Any idiot with eyes could see what you are.”

“Yeah, well, don’t let looks deceive you.”

Silence. Apart from the hollow ticking of the clock on the wall. It reads ten thirty in the morning.

His mouth cocks up at the corner. “Funny. You’re going to make some Alpha very happy one day.”

Except it’s not an Alpha I want.

It’s an Omega.

One with ocean blue eyes and curly brown hair.

Even if he will never be mine...

“So,” he draws, studying me with calculating eyes. “What *is* your name?”

Good question. I can’t tell him I am Mila Stone because the name may ring a bell. Also, Lily may be able to trace me.

At most, that woman thinks I am dead and let’s keep it that way.

Any name will do. But my mind draws a blank.

That’s when I spot a vase of flowers on the windowsill.

“Daisy,”

“Daisy what?”

Shit.

When I don’t answer, he rises, and I jerk back by instinct.

It's fine, though. He isn't going to hurt me. He's just leaving.

"Don't worry. You can just say you can't remember. Amnesia is always a good angle to go from."

Amnesia. Is this what it has to come down to?

I guess I won't have to do anything different from what I've always done.

I have always lied about who I am. All so I could train to be a soldier and earn my keep for my father.

But I suppose I don't have to worry about my father anymore...

He's at peace.

The gray-eyed Alpha stops at the door, glancing back over his shoulder. "I'm Jeremy. It was nice to meet you, *Daisy*. The doctors will return to give you your meds, and then you will be placed into the system. I know it's not what you wanted, but it's far better than what is out there, trust me."

What *is* out there?

A fair world where no one is given the moniker of Omega, Beta, and Alpha perhaps?

Sounds nice.

Human beings whose lives aren't dictated by their designations or scents.

Fair enough. If I have to go into the system, so be it.

It's the best option I have. At least I may stand a better chance at warning Oliver about Lily, and once I have told him of her plans, I can walk away forever.

I just hope I have the strength to walk away.

Because if I don't. I will get hurt.

Only a fool would let themselves get burned twice.

Jeremy finally leaves, and now it's just me and my tumultuous thoughts.

Oh, and the leprechaun too.

It now dances on my bed.

Daisy. A flower name... and so delicate.

I guess I should get used to my new life as Daisy the Omega.

So long, Mila the Beta.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Gryphon*

One of Lily's soldiers escorts me to her office, and no matter what happens, I cannot lose focus.

I need to stay sharp.

This woman will sniff me out if she so much as suspects that my pack is planning to overthrow her, and I try to remember what Oliver said.

*"It's either me or Lily..."*

Oliver. It will always be Oliver.

But Lily has a way of getting under my skin, and she fucking *terrifies* me. I feel my balls receding whenever she looks at me with those cruel, black eyes, and this is going to be one of the most trying times of my life.

I am basically choosing between my Omega and my superior, but Oliver will always come out on top.

We're bonded. I gave him my bite, and nothing could ever come between that.

The change in head office is drastic from the moment I enter the foyer. Lily is in charge now, and it seems people have barely mourned the loss of the Beta governor.

No one even seems suspicious of Lily, and that's when I realize that most people working here are Alphas.

What happened to all the Betas?

Will they appoint a new Beta governor to replace Frederick?

After all, there always needs to be a Beta representative on the panel. It helps to create peace and order in our population.

The only designation that never gets to take a seat on the panel is the Omegas, and it seems unfair.

Someone with Oliver's best interests at heart should at least get a seat. That way, his needs may be met with less resistance and opposition.

We arrive at the door, and Lily's soldier knocks in my honor.

"Enter."

The sound of her icy voice seizes my muscles instantly, and now my throat closes up.

I won't be able to speak.

The soldier pushes through the door, and I am finally faced with the woman who rules us all.

Lily will be in charge while the Beta government looks to replace Frederick.

Well, I hope.

Left to her own devices, who knows what she will do.

"Gryphon..." she nods.

I nod back. "Governor."

She waves her manicured hand toward the seat in front of her desk. "Take a seat. There are things I wish to discuss."

So, I take my seat without protest, and now the soldier takes his place by the door.

Silence. Awful, awful silence.

And Lily's cold, X-ray stare.

She taps her long fingernails against the desk, eyeing me suspiciously, and the sweat leaks from my pores. As always, I am careful to never look at her directly in her black jewel eyes.

“So, Gryphon... I assume you have plenty of questions.”

My heart threads, and I swallow, even though my mouth is bone dry.

My palms sweat, and I am a zebra in the open African Savannah, faced by a lion.

“No, Governor.”

She raises an arched eyebrow. “Not one?”

There’s no missing the smugness in her tone, and it’s clear as day that she thinks she has won.

After all, she succeeded in removing Mila from our pack, and no one has yet challenged her about the sudden death of Governor Frederick.

It appears the whole world is as scared of Lily as I am.

Yet, I can’t help but ball my fists slightly, and Lily notices.

Of course, she notices.

Nothing misses her keen eyes.

But she still prolongs this uncomfortable meeting. She knows I am scared and she is enjoying every moment of my shame.

Yet, I don’t stop curling my fists, my first act of defiance.

She made Mila go away, and now my Omega hates me.

He blames me, but the real one at fault is sitting all smug across the desk from me, wearing a ridiculous suit of bright pink.

How I loathe that color.

Lily’s plump mouth shifts with a slight smirk, and then she leans back, her cruel, black eyes pinned on me.

“You must have one question... are you at least not curious about Mila Stone?”



The name is like a whip to my soul, and my head snaps up, and now I look her straight in the eye.

The woman falters, and it looks like I caught her off guard.

“What did you do to her?”

My voice is a growl, and suddenly, the room blackens around me. My vision zeros in on the stupid flamingo, and she actually tenses.

A gun clicks behind me, and it seems even her soldier senses the threat.

Lily’s face hardens, and she tries to throw her Alpha energy at me, but I hold up a wall of my own.

It’s as if Mila’s name has awoken the Alpha in me.

Our eyes lock, and for the first time since we met, we are equals.

The only difference is that Lily has no one waiting for her back at home. She has no one to fight for, no one to love, and that makes her weak.

It’s love that gives us true strength.

Oliver thinks Lily has her eyes on him and I won’t let her get her hands on him or Mila.

Wherever Mila is, I will get her back.

“Mila Stone has gone, Gryphon.”

I rise to my feet, but Lily remains seated. The soldier points his gun, and she holds her hand out.

“Stay back. This Alpha is not a threat.”

The soldier eyes me warily, and then he resumes his position by the door.

Not a threat, hey?

Maybe she can tell me what she did to Mila, and we will see...

“What did you do to her?”

Lily smirks. “Why? Have you finally developed feelings for that Beta, Gryphon? I am disappointed.”

My jaw tics, but Lily merely watches me amused.

However, I can’t help but notice how her aura has changed slightly. She’s not as self-assured now that I have risen to my feet, and used my growl.

Her power over me is waning.

She sighs, closing her eyes for the briefest moment, then looks away.

My heart pounds.

Did I get the better of her?

That was the longest I have ever looked into her eyes, and I saw it for the tiniest moment. A scared little girl who just wants to be loved.

“I hate to tell you this, Gryphon... but Mila has gone. She left. I went to visit her after Frederick died to inform her of her superior’s passing, and she looked all too eager to be relieved of her duty.”

No. I don’t believe that. I saw the way she used to look at Oliver.

Mila wouldn’t just leave like that. Not unless she was forced to.

“Did you threaten her?”

She narrows her eyes. “No. She left of her own free will.”

I lean over the desk. “Where did she leave to?”

Her eyes flash in warning. “That is classified.”

It doesn’t look as if she is going to tell me, and I will just have to find out for myself.

Lily still has her men watching our house, and we won’t even be able to go and look for her.

The last I heard, she had gone home to take care of her sick father.

I don't even know what happened to the old man.

"Any more questions?" she asks.

I have to play my cards right now. Go back to her thinking I am still submissive.

"No. I have accepted that Mila Stone has gone and that my pack will not pursue her."

She rises, meeting my height. "Do I have your word, Gryphon?"

"Yes."

A lie, but for some reason, I have just gotten better at lying in her presence.

Whether she could see through my lie, I couldn't say, but Lily seemed pleased with my answer.

"You are free to go. My men are no longer required to guard your house. Your pack is free now."

I nod and head for the door.

The soldier doesn't even stop me, but I'm no fool.

Lily will be keeping tabs on my pack and my house in some way or other.

We just have to be careful.

Mila is safe. I don't know how I know, but she is closer than we realize, and I will bring her back.

We just have to be discreet when we do find her.

Lily will never find out. Because if she does...

I may have to fight her.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Mila*

*Daisy, Daisy, Daisy.*

That's who I am now.

Well, at least that's what I try to convince myself.

I am no longer Mila, the Beta Soldier, but a shy, docile Omega who does what she's told.

The hospital staff seemed none the wiser to my real identity, and once the last throes of my heat finally wore off, they were happy to discharge me.

Jeremy happily escorted me down to the waiting area where I would meet my new Omega representative from the academy.

I'm still not exactly free. Once I'm discharged, I will head to the Omega Academy where I will be expected to receive training before I'm sent off to the auctions.

If my secret had gotten out way earlier, then that would have been my life. Having Alphas bidding over my freedom as if I were a piece of meat.

I'm no better than cattle.

That must have been Oliver's life at one point. The only difference was that he already had Alphas by the time he

finished his training, so he didn't have to go to any auction.

Omegas are stripped of their rights from the day they first perfume, and from that day onward, we lose all autonomy.

Don't we at least get a choice in how we want our lives to play out?

I don't even know how I am going to fit in at the Academy. I'm a soldier. Not a housewife. I have been trained in combat, but at least I have the basic skills down like cooking and cleaning.

After having to look after my father for most of my adult life, taking care of someone just became second nature.

Jeremy whistles in a seat beside me in the hospital waiting room.

He found me in the woods, but for some reason, he stuck around.

Maybe he's lonely.

I roll my eyes as his whistling echoes through the room, and I finally snap. "Will you stop?"

The Alpha stops, and now he glances at me, an amused expression on his face.

He's a handsome Alpha. Rugged, carefree, with a slight scruff on his cheeks.

His gray eyes flash. "Someone's excited about meeting their Omega representative."

Ugh. Sounds so formal.

"Yeah, well, I can kiss goodbye to my freedom now."

He sits up from his slouching. "Why?"

I meet his gray eye. "Don't all Omegas give up their freedoms when they go into the system?"

He chews the inside of his cheek. "Not exactly. How much do you really know about an Omega's way of life, *Daisy*?"

I cringe at the name. I am so not a Daisy. I could have at least picked a less feminine name.

I sigh. "If I had to be honest, not much."

He smirks. "Well, please be assured that you do get a choice on what pack you get to go home with once all your training is over."

My training. Does that mean I have to go through another four years of academia?

Will it erase the last four years of my Beta training?

It all seems a terrible waste now, but when I think about my father, who got to die with dignity in the end with the best nurse that money could pay for, well, I change my mind.

Dad was the reason why I went through four years of vigorous training; he was the reason why I ever met and fell for the Hart Pack.

My chest caves, and I suck in a shaky breath.

If only I could find the Hart pack and warn them about Lily, but they probably have no idea where I am.

There is no way I can reach them without Lily finding out.

It's just me against the world here.

That's when I cast my eyes toward Jeremy again. He has gone back to whistling, and I wonder if I can trust him.

After all, he was the one who gave me the idea to use a fake name in the first place.

Can I trust Jeremy?

"What is it, Cupcake?"

Cupcake?

I chew my lip. This is it. If I spill my secret, then it's game over.

Lily will find me and do far worse than sending me to the academy to be primed and primped into a pretty housewife and broodmare.

I suck in a breath, peering around. The waiting room is empty.

“Jeremy... have... have you heard of... the Hart pack?”

He raises a brow. “They ring a bell, I suppose. I hear their Omega is *very* special...”

Oh, he doesn't even know the half of it.

Jeremy narrows his eyes. “Why do you ask about them?”

Shit. This is it.

My secret is out.

He smiles slowly, and I keep my gaze on the ground.

What does he find so funny?

“I thought you looked familiar...”

I squeeze my eyes, drowning in the sound of my own thumping heart.

“Don't worry. I won't tell...”

Finally, I meet his piercing gray eyes. “Good. Because if you do... I will kill you...”

We gaze long and hard at each other for some time until he barks a laugh, ruffling my head.

“I'll take that threat on board, Cupcake. It just so happens that I know Barret...”

My heart flutters. “How?”

“Cousin.”

I sharpen my eyes to slits, studying him now. I guess I can see it.

They have the same mannerisms.

“I can let him know you're here, but he won't be able to take you, Daisy. I'm sorry. You still have to go through all the right channels.”

I thought he would say something like that.

But little does he know, I don't want to return to the Hart Pack. I only want to warn them about Lily.

“I’ll let them know you’ll be heading for the academy, but that’s all. It’s up to him and the rest of the pack on how they’ll proceed.”

I shake my head. “No. Don’t tell them where I am... I just want you to deliver a message.”

Jeremy eyes me curiously.

I meet his gaze. “I mean it. I don’t want to return to them. I just want to give them a message.”

“What message?” he asks.

I look left and right. No one is around, so I proceed. “About Governor Lily. Oliver is in danger.”

His expression is unreadable next as he gives me a once-over, then nods. “Fine. I will let them know about the governor.”

“And you won’t tell them that you found me here.”

“Scouts honor.”

Well, I guess there isn’t much more I can say, and it’s just as well.

A woman dressed like a government official in her crisp black business suit finally arrives, and I guess she is my new Omega representative.

Here’s to my new life.



## CHAPTER 6

### *Barret*

There's a knock at the door, and I approach it apprehensively, peering through the eyehole.

I pull out my gun, ready to shoot the bastard on the other side if he tries to cause any trouble, but when I recognize those familiar gray eyes, I relax, putting my weapon away.

Now I unlock the door, swinging it wide open.

“Jay... to what do we owe the pleasure?”

Jeremy fucking Steel. I haven't seen this bastard for over a year, and what brings my dear cousin to my doorstep?

Our dads are estranged brothers, yet we still keep in contact.

In a way, Jeremy is like a brother to me, but we never formed a pack bond.

We both grew up and went and found our own packs in the end, but that doesn't mean we're not family.

I still consider Jeremy Pack, regardless.

The only difference between mine and his pack is that we have an Omega.

Jeremy's pack hasn't found one yet, which is strange, considering the line of work he's in.

His job is to find runaway Omegas who try to escape the system, and not one has caught his eye.

“May I come in?” he asks, raising a brow.

I step aside, and the Alpha enters the house, peering at the sage-green wallpaper. “Nice. I like what you’ve done with the place.”

I sigh, heading to the kitchen to get him a beer. “You’ll have to tell Oliver that when he comes back. He decorated.”

“Of course he did. How could I forget? The Omega gets the final say on the color of the wallpaper.”

I wish he would just cut to the chase. It’s obvious he isn’t here to discuss wallpaper patterns.

What does he want?

We go to the living room, and I prop my feet up on the coffee table, using the sharp edge to pop off the cap of my bottle.

Gryphon has gone to the capitol, and Oliver is ‘plotting’ in his room. He wanted to be left alone for the time being as he came up with the best way to search for Mila, so I decided to keep guard over the house.

I have no idea where Lachlan wandered off too.

Probably hugging a tree somewhere. Who knows.

Thank fuck Lily’s men vanished. I don’t know what Gryphon did, but one moment they were here, and the next they were talking into their radios and storming off.

Whatever Gryphon said to Lily, it was enough to convince her that we were on her side. For now.

I just hope he is still on our side.

I don’t know sometimes with that Alpha. He often has a faraway look in his eyes, and his connection with the pack bond has waned.

Jeremy balances his beer on his lap, tapping his fingers against the bottle, and he needs to spill ASAP.

We haven't got all day. As soon as Gryphon is back from the capital, we are going to discuss war strategies.

Oliver's first point of call is to go to Mila's house, but it would be too dangerous.

Governor Lily will be watching our every move.

We need to plan accordingly.

Jeremy sighs, placing his bottle on the coffee table. Then he leans back, draping an arm around the back of the couch.

"Barret... there's something you ought to know..."

Well, call me piqued.

"Yeah, and what's that?"

His gray eyes find mine, and he assesses me for a long moment as if trying to determine whether I have the mental stability to handle whatever bombshell he is about to drop on me.

"I know where Mila Stone is."

My heart stops, and I choke on my beer, leaning forward on my chair to beat at my chest.

I look up at him in shock. "How the fuck would you—?"

"Because my team and I found her in the woods just outside the Beta City."

His words barely register. All I can do is gaze at him like a gormless idiot.

I thought I caught a familiar hint of gingerbread on him. But it's much sweeter than Mila's scent ever was, more potent.

Almost like...

I shake my head. "How? What..."

None of it makes sense. How did she even end up in the woods? What happened to her dad? Did he pull through?

Suddenly, a growl rips from my throat, and the bottle explodes in my hand as I crush it with my fingers.

I never should have left her that day. Back when I dropped her off at home, I should have stayed.

But instead, I went back home to my Omega.

He was in pain, and he needed me. But so did Mila.

“It doesn’t make sense. Why would she be out there?”

Jeremy continues. “That’s not all, Barret. When I found Mila... she was in heat...”

Heat?

Only Omegas go into heat.

It takes a moment for the realization to dawn on me, but when it does, I can barely breathe.

My thoughts are spinning a mile a second.

It all makes sense. The small stature, the sweet scent. My physical attraction to her...

Mila is an Omega.

All this time, we were housing two Omegas. And not one tried to tear out the eyes of the other.

No. Instead, they...

“Where is she now?”

The voice comes from the doorway, and I glance up to find Oliver standing there.

How long had he been listening?”

Jeremy turns to look at the Omega. Then his eyes find me again.

“This is going to be a hard pill to swallow, Barret... So, I think we should wait until all your pack is spoken for...”

Oliver barely hears the Alpha. He steps closer, never taking his burning gaze off him.

“Where. Is. She?”

His eyes are alight, and I should step in quickly to diffuse the situation.

“Oliver...”

But his gaze doesn't leave Jeremy.

Jeremy is cool with him, though. He merely sighs, regarding Oliver with sympathy.

“Mila is safe. That's all you need to know for now.”

It takes Oliver a moment. His eyes flit over to me, and then he relaxes, taking his place on the other chair.

Then he waits.

He heard what Jeremy said. We should hear what he has to say as a whole pack. That way, we may actually get somewhere.

A knot eases in my chest for the first time since Mila left, and at least she is safe.

That's all we can hope for now.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Mila*

**M**y representative's name is Felicia, and she's much too bright and perky for my liking.

She talks as if being an Omega is the best goddamn thing imaginable, even though she is Beta, and that I can put all my trust in her and the academy.

She's brainwashed, pretty much, and the quicker I can get away from her and her superiors, the better.

But it's a small price I am willing to pay. I have to endure her crap just so I can warn Oliver about Lily.

I don't know what will happen after. When we part ways, I will most likely be placed with a pack.

I am told that the pack I choose will be my choice, but why do I have a feeling they are just saying that to make me feel better?

Truth be told, I have never felt so hollow. For the first time in my life, I have no purpose, and now I just go with the flow, letting other people dictate how I live.

I will become nothing but a pretty puppet. Property of the government. Freedom is no longer a choice here.

No wonder so many Omegas run away.

All of it reassures me that I made the right choice all along to hide my identity. Being Beta and having the opportunity to train as a soldier was a gift, I learned, in the end, and a privilege.

As Felicia walks me across campus to my new dorms, it becomes immediately obvious that I am not like other Omegas.

Their bodies are not as strong as mine. They are delicate and dainty. Several plant flowers in a garden, and others knit by a stream. Some Omegas are painting in a circle, and others are doing yoga.

It's like a little village here, and everywhere I look, I see bright smiles.

However, those smiles vanish when they find me, and then the whispering starts.

Already, I am the talk of the town.

Felicia gushes. "You're going to love it here, Daisy. You have everything you could ever want and more. We have a gym, a swimming pool, dance studios, cooking classes..."

But no shooting range classes.

I think I will pass.

The whispers grow around me, and now my ears burn.

"Sounds amazing," I lie, trying to ignore the malicious stares of several Omegas.

Damn, they look as if they walked straight out of a postcard. They wear pastel-colored dresses, and there is no black or camouflage to be seen.

Finally, we arrive at a block of offices, and Felicia leads me to a small cubicle so she can enter my name in the database.

They still have no idea I am Mila Stone, so let's hope it stays that way.

"So, Daisy," Felicia starts, loading her computer. "What kind of pack are you hoping to join?"

My mind draws a blank, and I wet my lips, thinking of my answer.

My best bet is to give her a standard one.

What does every Omega dream of? Like hell I'd know.

The only other Omega I knew was Oliver, and he'd already had his dream.

I suppose I could say that I just want a pack that treats me right. But I would be lying there also.

I don't want to go through the system; I don't want to even have to choose a pack because I don't want to get hurt again.

I had a pack, and they broke my heart.

They abandoned me, and I am still licking the wounds of their betrayal.

Felicia cocks her head, and I refrain from rolling my eyes. Her smile is just a bit too bright, and she's too sickly sweet for my tastes.

"Well? Any preferences?"

A sigh looses from me. "I'm not so sure."

Felicia tightens her lips, and it's obvious my answer displeases her. I'm not sure what she expects, for me to gush and list off all my favorite traits in an Alpha, perhaps?

Quite frankly, I've had enough of Alphas.

Alphas have caused me nothing but pain lately, and I just wish I could withdraw from the world and disappear into my own private bubble, but unfortunately, that is not an option here.

Felicia is aware that I'm a 'runaway', and my reluctance to give a specific answer won't work in my favor.

In the end, I give her my answer, batting my eyelashes. "Just a pack who treats me right..."

The woman brightens, and now she types at her keyboard, her fingers working a mile a second.

Wow. Now that is a real skill.



Forget shooting a bullet at long range; I should have gone into secretarial work.

“Don’t worry, Daisy. Our algorithms are flawless and will match you up with every compatible pack in the city. You’re in good hands now, dear. You just leave your fate to me...”

My chest caves at that last sentence, and I tense my shoulders, peering around the office.

All the other government drones type away at their keyboards, and I spy other Omegas before their desks. One beautiful redhead is listing off with her fingers, telling her representative exactly what she wants in a pack.

She looks so excited, her brown eyes lighting up with every word, and I really am living amongst a group of aliens here.

Or maybe I’m the alien here?

Everyone is so perky and smiley, and I miss the military. I miss having angry drill sergeants screaming in my face, getting their spittle all over my cheeks.

Now I have to deal with faux kindness.

No one is genuine.

Finally, Felicia stops typing, and now she glances up at me, her smile brighter than ever.

“You’re all set, Daisy. Right now, our specially curated algorithms are working their magic, matching you up with the perfect pack as we speak. Isn’t it exciting?”

A deafening silence follows as she grins that faux smile, her eyes crinkling at the corners, and I just want to bolt and get to my new room.

“How... lovely...”

Her grin falters, and then she giggles nervously, returning to her keyboard.

“One day, you will thank me... and maybe you will name one of your *babies* after me.”

Oh, dear God.

*When is this over?*

I return her smile, hoping she doesn't notice that I am internally dying.

She is making me nauseous.

Felicia pushes her glasses up her nose. "You do want to have children right, Daisy?"

Why is she asking this? It's such a personal thing.

What I do with my womb isn't any of her business.

But it all makes sense...

After all, that is what this is all about.

Why else would they have all those pastel-colored Omegas out on campus, knitting, painting, and learning to cook?

They are training how to be mothers.

In the end, I give her an answer. "Of course."

She purses her lips for a moment, assessing me a little while longer. Then with a happy squeak, she goes back to her keyboard.

I never did get to see what she was typing.

"Well, then. That's all sorted. Now, are you excited to see your new room?"

Yes.

I just need somewhere to sleep for the next few days.

But that is not an option.

Tomorrow, I will start my Omega training.

Sounds fun.

## CHAPTER 8

### *Lachlan*

**M**y heart hasn't stopped singing since Barret's cousin, Jeremy, told us the wonderful news.

Mila is safe.

My sweet snowdrop...

The bad news... Lily laid a hand on her, and a low growl rumbles in my chest when I think about that woman.

She is dead.

My fingers twitch, itching for my knives, and now red splatters my vision.

It's Lily's blood. Or it will be.

Barret is beside me. He glances my way, resting a hand on my shoulder.

"Steady, Lachlan."

It takes a while for the red droplets to disappear, and finally, I breathe, gazing around the room.

Oliver is quiet, stewing in his own guilt, and my heart goes to my Omega.

I tug on the bond, but he's radio silent, his white fingers gripping the couch beside him. Gryphon is above him, only

having eyes for our Omega as usual.

But I didn't miss the way his eyes flashed when Jeremy told us the condition he found Mila in.

Mila is an Omega. And the others are still processing the news.

Me? I couldn't care less. It wouldn't matter to me whether she was Beta, Omega, or Alpha.

Mila is going to be mine. No matter what.

Now all we have to do now is figure out how we're going to get her back.

After all, she is Oliver's scent match. Surely, they won't keep her away from us.

Yet, I know it won't be that simple.

But no matter what, we will fight the system. After all, you can't stop fate.

"What happened to her dad?" Oliver asks suddenly, and the room falls wintry silent.

We all look at Jeremy expectantly.

He looks a little surprised at the question.

"I don't know... she never mentioned him."

My stomach rolls, and I have a bad feeling.

Poor Mila.

She must have been so alone and afraid, and I swear I will make it up to her.

We just have to get her back first.

I hope she was able to be there for her father in his last moments.

Another bout of silence trickles through the room, and I can't help but feel anxious.

Why are we all just sitting here? We need to do something, right now.

We have to rescue her from the system.

“So, what now?” I ask.

No one replies, and I jump to my feet, my hand resting on my knife inside my pocket.

“Lachlan,” Barret warns again, but I don’t hear him.

I march to the door.

To my surprise, Oliver joins me.

“Oliver...” Gryphon says, and I round on him.

“Fuck off. You can’t stop us.”

Barret rushes up behind Gryphon. “No, he’s right this time. We need to plan our next move carefully. You can’t just go storming to the academy and demand her back. Mila is now —”

“Don’t fucking say it!” I spit, spinning around to face Barret.

Now our pack is divided. Two against two. Me and Oliver against Gryphon and Barret.

At least I know on some level that Barret is as anxious as us to get her back, but I’m still unsure about Gryphon.

However, something about him has changed. Ever since he came back from Lily’s office, he seems stronger, in control.

Did he finally stand up to the governor?

Jeremy steps up beside Barret, and now it’s three against two.

Shit.

“They’re right, fellers. I’m sorry. But Mila is off-limits right now. Her details are being added to the database as we speak. Once they go through, that’s it. She’s a part of the system.”

A growl rips from my throat, and I grip the Alpha by the shirt, yanking him close. “Then *why* did you send her to them in the first place? You should have brought her to us. This is your fault—”

Barret shoves me off his cousin, and now I round on him.

I have never fought with any of my own pack mates, but right now...

I am prepared to rip Barret's face off.

"Back off, Lachlan."

I ball my fists, but when I feel that gentle hand on my shoulder, I relax.

Oliver sighs. "It's okay to be angry, Lachlan, but we should listen to them."

So, I am on my own now then?

Screw them all.

Jeremy scowls at me, smoothing down his shirt where I crinkled the fabric. But I have no regrets.

He's the reason why we can't get to Mila.

"Look, I was just doing my job. I found an Omega lost and in heat alone in the woods. I had to take her to the hospital. She could have died out there."

It finally dawns on me. How did Mila survive her heat? They need an Alpha's knot after all, and the horror hits me like a freight train.

This time, I grip my knife, aiming for the Alpha who isn't a part of our pack.

He may be Barret's blood, but right now, he is the enemy.

I will *kill* him.

"You fucker! You touched her!"

Before my knife aims for his chest, Barret and Gryphon are on top of me, pinning me to the floor, but all I can see is red.

My world is a bloody haze of murder and gore.

"He knotted her! He knotted her!"

Through the blood raging through my head, I hear Jeremy, "What? You're fucking crazy!"

But I am beyond reasoning with now, and Barret and Gryphon have no choice but to fight me.

Barret hisses through clenched teeth. “That’s it, Lachlan. You leave us no choice... it’s time out.”

No... not time out.

It’s been some months now since I had to go in time out, but when they drag me toward the basement, I dig my heels into the carpet, refusing to go.

“No, no!”

“Too late,” Barret breathes, kicking the basement door open.

Now he and Gryphon haul me down the stairs, kicking and screaming.

There’s a room at the end of the basement. It’s where they place me on time out. Luckily for me, it’s well-insulated and clean.

Gryphon holds me down while Barret chains my arms to a hook in the wall, and then they walk out.

I yank on the chains. “Let me out!”

Barret peers back at me. Gryphon is already halfway up the stairs.

“Sorry, Lachlan... we had no choice... you know what happens when you go into stabby mode...”

I do.

I go batshit crazy, and it’s any wonder why I wasn’t institutionalized a long time ago.

I am not all that right in the head. I’m a fucking psycho, and I have certain triggers.

Right now, Jeremy is the enemy. He’s the reason why Mila can’t be with us, and I’m convinced that he was the one who knotted her.

Otherwise, why else would she have survived her heat?

It doesn’t matter to me right now. All I know is that I need to kill someone, and Jeremy makes a good substitute for Lily.

Barret shuts the door, and I yank on my chains, ready to tear up some shit.

My mind darkens, and the color red fills my vision.

No matter what, there will be bloodshed. Maybe not now, but in future...

I will get to sate my bloodlust.



## CHAPTER 9

### *Mila*

It turns out that I'm a few years older than the other Omegas at the academy.

Some of them are still in their teens. There are hardly any twenty-somethings here, and I really am going to find it hard to fit in at this place.

Not only are they some years younger than me, but they are ridiculously feminine too, and wear the same pastel-colored dresses.

Plus, they all smile far too often. It's what they are told to do in order to appear more attractive to potential Alphas, and everyone is just so spic and span.

Even the teachers.

My first class was embroidery, and I've punctured my finger far too many times on the sewing needle.

Cooking was easy enough for me, and at least I excel in some aspects of being an Omega. They actually have cleaning classes too, where they teach the Omegas natural home remedies to remove stubborn stains from an Alpha's clothes.

Blood being one of those main stubborn stains.

What baffles me the most is that we are not forced to be taught self-defense. We're the most vulnerable designation, yet we're just supposed to sit back and expect an Alpha to take care of us?

No, instead, we are taught how to apply makeup and do our hair.

This place is something else.

I always appreciated the opportunity to do something feminine, especially as I trained in the military for most of my life, but this school just takes the cake.

No wonder Oliver was so miserable here. Once upon a time, he was training with his friends, learning how to be strong and dependable, and the next, he was shipped off to Pastelville.

Did they make him wear a pastel polo shirt too?

Most of the Omegas are female at the academy, but I have spotted several males too. Not many. At least four.

They sit at their own designated table, all wearing similar polo shirts.

I'm currently learning how to style my hair with a curling wand in Hair and Makeup, and it's harder than it looks. I end up frazzling my hair before my mirror, creating a stream of steaming smoke, and that's my hair burning.

The scent of burned kertain fills the air, and I gag.

I was never good at this girly stuff.

Several Omegas laugh at my shame, and I know the culprits.

The same gaggle of vicious Omegas who have been giving me a hard time ever since I arrived.

It's only day two of my training, and already, I have enemies.

I'm not surprised. I had enemies back at the Beta Academy, and now I have enemies here.

One male hangs around with them, and just like his female cohorts, he is beautiful beyond compare.

He has better skin than I do.

That's because I am useless at skin care regimes. I'm used to painting my face in mud and camouflage, not foundation and blusher.

I am never going to fit in at this place.

It's humiliating being here, being shown up by people four to five years my junior.

I'm practically an adult compared to these kids, and it's like I am going backward.

This is the price I paid, just so I could enlist as a Beta and join the army and take care of my father.

When it comes to hand-to-hand combat, I could run circles around these Omegas, but at this school, where perfection is paramount, they are kings and queens.

I have a lot to learn.

The teacher passes my station, shaking her head when she sees the mess I have gotten myself into, and if someone had told me that curling my hair would one day become a matter of life and death, then I may have taken them more seriously.

"Daisy... what have you done to your hair?"

She investigates my singed, wonky curl, and the snorts continue at the back of the class.

I blow a frustrated sigh through my cheeks, gazing up at her desperately. "I'm sorry... I just can't..."

She tsks, her salty disappointment almost palpable, it hurts, then peers at the back of the room.

"Bridget, would you come to the front and help Daisy with her hair? Show her how a proper Omega does it."

A proper Omega. Well, that certainly isn't me.

I glance behind my shoulder, and my stomach roils when I spy the girl who has risen from her chair at the teacher's request.

It's her. The apparent queen bee of my gang of bullies, and great. Just what I need.

For her to rub my shame in my face.

Bridget is blonde, like me, with periwinkle blue eyes and a perfect white smile. She seems to be the teacher's pet, the exemplary student that the others must live up to.

Her scent of vanilla cupcakes makes me sick, and she truly is poison.

I will never be like Bridget. Even if I live to be a hundred.

But I bet this school won't stop until I am her carbon copy.

The teacher wanders off to appreciate another student's wonderful styling skills, and now it's just me and Bridget.

With a malicious smile, she grabs my curling wand and loops it around my frazzled hair, and just like that I have the perfect curl.

"Just so you know... you will never fit in here..." she drawls, her voice like poisoned honey.

I roll my eyes, and she yanks on my hair, wrapping the strand around the wand a little too tightly.

My eyes burn with tears, but I hold my stance, refusing to show her any emotion. It's what she wants, and I'm trained enough to withstand her horse crap.

If I can put up with being screamed in the face by my sergeant, then I can deal with her saccharine bullshit.

"Is that so?" I reply.

Bridget looks at me next as if I just said the most absurd thing imaginable, and then she rolls her own eyes. "Obviously... you're never going to find a pack, honey. What are you? Thirty?"

She snorts, and I grind my teeth.

I eye her viciously. "I am twenty-three."

Bridget smirks. "Well, what does it matter? You're a mess, and you don't belong here. No pack will ever want you, so you

may as well just give up now.”

It’s not like giving up is a choice, anyway. They’re going to force me into a pack, regardless.

“Do you even know what happens to Omegas who don’t find a pack, *Daisy*?”

I don’t. No one ever told me.

“Dare I ask?”

I hiss when she yanks on my hair with the wand, and what a bitch.

Why the hell has she got it in for me?

“Well, just know that it’s bad. So, if you don’t hurry and catch up with the rest of us... you’re going to be left behind...”

My heart thuds, and I swallow a lump in my throat.

Either way, I’m screwed.

If I end up with a pack, then my life is over. But if I end up alone...

Bridget’s threat looms over me like an omen of death.

What do they do with the Omegas who don’t find a pack? Where do they go?

It’s not worth thinking about.

*Well, there’s always one pack you could go to...*

No. Never again.

I won’t even go there.

So my inner voice can shut up.

They made their choice. They don’t want me, and I have to move on.

Finally, she finishes my hair, blowing me a kiss as she heads back to her own styling station.

“See ya! And don’t say I didn’t warn you, dear.”

She disappears, and now I am left alone, gazing at my beautiful curls in the mirror before me.

I hate to hand it to her, but Bridget is good. I almost look like a real Omega now.

But I will never be like her or the rest of these perfect dolls.

Forever an outcast. No matter where I go in life.

Yet there was always one place where I belonged, and that was with the Hart Pack.

But we can never be together, and I have to make peace with that fact.

I just hope Jeremy found Barret and warned him about Governor Lily.

That's the best I can hope for in life.

To keep Oliver safe.

At least then I can die happy.

## CHAPTER 10

### *Oliver*

Gryphon taps the steering wheel irritably beside me, and I have half a mind to reach across and snap his fingers.

Man, he is getting on my every last nerve lately. But now that we're closer to Mila, I don't feel so anxious.

We're parked across the street from the institution where I trained for years, and I curl my fists when I remember everything I had to endure.

At the time, I was the only male Omega, so I got all kinds of shit.

Women can be so cruel.

And now Mila has to endure the same shit.

Over my dead body.

Mila is *mine*, and I will get her out of that prison if it kills me.

Gryphon exhales, regarding me warily. "Oliver, this is a mistake. They could be watching us right now."

I couldn't give two shits whether Lily's men are watching us right now. I have half a mind to stick my middle finger out the window to let them know my exact feelings towards them and their oh-so-mighty superior.

Lily doesn't scare me. And it's time Gryphon found some balls too and stood up to her.

However, I have noticed a little change in his scent since he arrived back from her office. His roasted marshmallows and campfire is no longer laced with fear and sweat.

His scent is stronger now, and it nearly overwhelms me as we wait in the Jeep.

He wants to go inside with me, but I have to do this alone.

I have an old score to settle with this place.

No Alphas allowed, anyway. That is the general rule.

Only Betas and Omegas from this point onward.

All those young, viable Omegas would be too tempting for any Alpha.

"It will be fine, Gryphon. Don't get your boxers in a twist."

He tenses when I insult his boxers, and finally, I look across at him.

Things haven't been the same between us since Mila came into our lives. We haven't been as intimate.

I've punched him several times.

My arm is still healing, and I'll have to keep wearing my sling for some time now.

Getting shot is nothing like they depict in the movies. For one, there is way more blood. Two, it takes a while to heal, and now all those action movies seem ridiculous when I think about the way the heroes remove the bullets themselves and carry on fighting.

That bullet almost hit an artery, and I'm lucky to be alive.

It was Mila's quick thinking that saved my life. She used the tulle from the dress that I got for her as a tourniquet, and I owe it to her.

I will get her a new dress.

Lo and behold... Gryphon is actually smiling at me, and it's so good to see him grinning again.



“Finally,” I mutter. “You haven’t laughed in a while.”

Gryphon shrugs. “It’s just good to hear you cracking jokes at my expense again.”

I raise a brow, and I think I have been a little too hard on him lately.

He just hasn’t made the most amicable choices these days.

“I’m going in there, Gryphon.”

He sighs, knowing he’s losing this battle. “I know. Like I have a choice in the matter, anyway.”

I stiffen, and I have no idea what he is about to confess next. Is he about to apologize for being a major asshole these last few weeks?

Really, it’s Mila he needs to make it up to.

When we get her out of that building.

I reach across, grabbing the back of his head. Then I lean forward and kiss him on the lips, even nipping his mouth a little. Gryphon rumbles when I press my forehead against his, and that’s how we stay.

“Fuck, Ollie...”

“I know.”

That was our first kiss in weeks.

Finally, I pull away, opening the door.

“Be careful, Ollie. Don’t do anything stupid. If you see her...”

It’s like he can see right through me. I was hoping to catch a glimpse of her, just to see if she was okay. Hopefully, if I get a chance, I can talk to her and apologize for abandoning her.

Barret stopped by her old man’s house. It was up for sale, and a dark prickle shot up and down the side of my ribs.

It seems my worst fears came to light.

“I won’t, Gryphon. Don’t do anything stupid either.”

And with that, I depart, leaving him to wait in the car.

Time to take a trip down memory lane.

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Nothing has changed.

The same hedges and creepy topiary animals greet me across campus.

Omegas are planting bulbs in gardens, and a group are practising meditation by the willow tree.

Some are fencing, and that's new. I remember advocating strongly for the Omegas at this school to learn at least some fighting techniques, but they probably treat fencing more like a dance here.

Omegas are treated like living pieces of art. They are told how to move their arms, and even how to walk and talk.

To my pleasant surprise, there are a few male Omegas. They congregate at one table, but I spy one male hanging around a large party of women, and the sight of them hurts my eyes.

What's with all the pastels?

The large group of Omegas points at me, and it looks like I've been recognized.

I'm quite well known. I was the first male Omega at this school after all.

Therefore, I'm one of its most famous alumni.

Time to throw on the shades.

Unfortunately, it seems to have the opposite effect of what I was aiming for, and now that gaggle of mean Omegas squeals in delight.

Not interested.

There's only one Omega I want, and she's hiding somewhere in this school.

Was I surprised that Mila was an Omega all along?

Only a little.

Honestly, I guess I sort of always knew. I just disregarded it because she was registered as a Beta, and how did she manage to pull it off for so long?

She truly is admirable.

I know finding her won't be easy. After all, Jeremy told us she goes by Daisy now.

I find the office at last inside an ivy-coated building.

My time at this school wasn't all that unpleasant. I did get along with its headmistress, Charlotte.

She always listened to my concerns about the curriculum at this school, and she agreed that Omegas should be given the option to learn some self-defence.

However, most Omegas would rather learn hair and makeup, and to each of their own.

Maybe today I can make sure it becomes mandatory.

She has nothing but a warm smile for me when I arrive at her office. "Ah, Oliver. It's so good to see you again. How have you been?"

I may be in a bad mood these days, but I loosen up when I'm reunited with Headmistress Charlotte.

She really was a great advisor.

I'm distracted through our reunion, as I can't stop glancing out the window behind her.

"I heard what happened after the Beta Trials. You must be so thrilled that they're finally over."

Yep. Over the moon.

But I still want Mila back in my life.

"Whatever did happen to that Mila Stone? She was your Beta, right?"

My fists curl. I know Charlotte means well, but I would rather keep talk of Mila to a minimum.

She seems to pick up on my mood, deciding to discuss something else instead, and I bring up my stance on self-dense

classes becoming mandatory.

“I’m sorry, Oliver, but it’s up to the board in the end. They get the final say.”

Of course, they do. Because they’re all Alphas and Betas. They want to keep Omegas submissive.

Can’t let us have too much independence now.

Sometimes, I wonder if the government feeds us lies.

Do Omegas really die during a heat?

Sure, it feels like I am dying whenever I am begging for one of my Alphas’ knots, but I guess I was just too chicken to test out my theory.

No Omega in their right mind would deny their Alpha’s knot anyway, especially if they’re bonded. Once a bond is formed, an Omega’s heat becomes stronger. More intense.

I’m about to argue my case when I spy a familiar figure making her way across campus, and my heart pounds.

Mila.

She stops beside a tree, opening up a book, and I knew it.

She’s a loner here.

And that is why I have to set her free.

Mila is going to be *mine*.

## CHAPTER 11

### *Mila*

“Daisy?”

It takes me a few seconds to register the name as I am too lost in my book, trying to ignore my current surroundings.

I just finished a particularly challenging class on Omega Biology, and my head is swirling.

They were vivid diagrams of an Omega’s genitalia, and they showed us the exact way the muscles stretch when we take an Alpha’s knot, and I had to excuse myself.

It’s all just too much, this new identity...

It’s all too hard to process, the loss of my dad, being abandoned by the pack, Lily...

I don’t even know who I am anymore.

For so long, my purpose was to join the Beta Trials so I could get the care that my father needed, and now... all that’s gone.

I don’t even know who I am living for now.

“Daisy,” the voice says with a little more impatience, and I peer up, meeting the bright, faux smile of my Omega representative, Felicia.

Can’t they all just leave me alone for two minutes?

I came to this tree so Bridget and her crones couldn't harass me.

I hate it here, and I have to find a way out.

They think they can pair me up with a pack via their stupid algorithms, but there is no pack out there for me...

I am destined to be a lone wolf.

"Hi, Daisy," she says, lowering to my level, and she may as well be talking to a child.

They all treat me like a child here.

"Can we speak a moment? In my office?"

Her office? More like a cubicle.

I tuck the book under my arm, rising to my feet. "Sure."

With another fake, dimpled smile, she places her hand behind my back and steers me toward her cubicle.

Once again, I sit inside that confined box, feeling the walls closing in, and how can she sit in here all day?

Felicia's fingers fly over her keyboard, and we don't talk for some time. In fact, a part of me is convinced she just brought me here to watch her type, and I wish she would hurry up.

I just want to return to my lonely tree with my lonely book...

Finally, Felicia stops typing, and now she swivels around in her chair, a sad gleam twinkling in her enormous eyes.

"Daisy... I hate to be the bearer of bad news..."

My stomach coils, but I try to remain calm, breathing steadily through my nostrils.

Felicia sighs. "We just got word back from Central Government..."

My heart pounds and this is it. They know who I really am.

"Unfortunately, they cannot provide the funding for your training. The cut-off age is twenty-one, and you are twenty-three now... I'm sorry."

That's it? What a relief.

I mean, I would be disappointed if I actually wanted the training, but I don't. I don't even want a pack.

Maybe this is my saving grace.

What's the point in my being here then if they can't fund my training? It's not like they would expect *me* to work for it.

Omegas aren't expected to work for anything, and don't we have it easy...

"This must be terrible news for you. I know how much you were looking forward to finding a pack..."

No, I wasn't.

Lord, this lady. She doesn't know me at all.

She just assumes I want a pack because I'm an Omega, and that is how I'm supposed to be biologically inclined.

Well, I say screw biology. It's scary, anyway. The way we just eat up an Alpha's knot.

What else can an Omega fit down there?

I shudder...

I can imagine people will be making assumptions about me for the rest of my life.

I just look forward to the day someone forgets that I know how to fight, and then I can bodyslam them to the floor for taking my itty bitty looks for granted.

Felicia perks up, pushing her glasses up her nose as she returns to her computer.

"Not to worry. This just means we can streamline your process much faster. Traditionally, an Omega isn't placed up for auction until they've finished all of their training, but we can make an exception for you. Once our algorithms have matched you up with some potential packs, we can make a start on..."

Her voice drones on, and I lose myself to my bleak thoughts.

No. This can't be happening.

Just when I thought I found my lucky escape.

"No..."

Felicia stops typing, and it looks as if the little hamster that lives inside her head has finally stopped running on its wheel. It's broken down.

She blinks rapidly, so bloody confused, it hurts to watch.

"Pardon?"

I lick my lips, closing my eyes as I count to ten. I need to be careful now and make sure I don't say anything that could potentially be incriminating.

"I mean... that I would like to finish my training first... it's... just too soon..."

Somehow, enduring another four years here with the likes of Bridget as my arch-nemesis seems far more preferable to being placed with a pack.

I can't go through that hurt again.

Not after the first time.

Felicia gives me a sad, apologetic smile, reaching across to grab my hand. She actually seems genuine.

"I know, sweetie, but I promise... we will find you a pack who will take good care of you..."

Does such a pack exist?

I know they do. I saw the way the pack treated Oliver. They doted on him, but I'm not such a fool to think that I could be lucky enough to find the same thing.

Girls like me don't find their happily ever afters.

I had my family, and now... he's gone.

Reunited with my mother.

"I promise, Daisy, you're in safe hands. You just leave your fate up to us."



And so, she edits my details, ensuring that I'll go through the process much faster than originally planned, and it appears I truly have no choice here.

Either way, I will never leave this place completely free.

Now that I'm an Omega, I no longer have any choice.

I just hope that whatever pack I end up with, that they don't break my heart.

## CHAPTER 12

### *Gryphon*

When Oliver didn't return after an hour, I unbuckled my belt and got the hell out of the Jeep.

I don't care if he will be mad at me. He's been gone an hour, and things have been extra tense lately.

I still have the inkling that Lily is watching us. She could be watching us right now, and it's time to get home.

He just wants to get a glimpse of Mila. I get it. But he is not helping our cause one bit.

We need to play this carefully. We can't risk Lily finding out that Mila is here under the name Daisy.

A strange name she chose. Daisy reminds me of a small, delicate girl who faints at the sight of blood.

Alphas normally aren't allowed through the gates, but I managed to walk through with ease, and such a flawless system they have here.

Luckily, I'm not a pervert who has any interest in the Omegas they've got training here. I'm just here to find Oliver and get him home where he is safe.

I'm not sure what interests my superior has in Oliver, but they won't bode well for either of us.

There's a part of me that is too scared to fight her, knowing that she could easily beat me in hand-to-hand combat, but could I really fight her when the time comes?

In the end, I have to fight by my Omega's side. He will always come first.

A couple of Omegas are hanging around the neatly cut hedges, and I grimace at the sight of them.

They hurt my eyes.

Too much color... it's creeping me out.

They look like a bunch of macaroons.

They stop when they catch sight of me, and then they whisper excitedly, eyeing me up and down like I'm a piece of meat.

I'm probably the first Alpha that a majority of them have seen in a while, and when they start stalking me across the green, it only confirms my theory.

They're Omegas. It's only natural for them to be drawn to my Alpha pheromones, but they need to back off.

I think I'm starting to understand why they keep Alphas out.

These Omegas are something else.

Too sex-starved.

*Come on, Ollie, where the hell are you?*

I pass one table of male Omegas, doing a double take. They look surprised to see me too.

How times have changed...

I remember when Ollie was the only male here. He was lonely too.

That's why I couldn't wait to get him out of this awful place. They treated him like an outsider, and the other Omegas harassed him for the four years he spent here.

Once upon a time, he was training with some of the strongest Alphas in the country, and the next, he was getting

coleslaw dripped all over him by a pastel pink she-devil who smelled of fresh peony.

Well, at least he has us now.

Oliver and I were scent matches. And that beats any so-called algorithm these psychos can come up with.

I just feel for the Omegas who never find their scent match.

I've been tracking Oliver's honeycomb scent for over forty minutes, and this is getting ridiculous.

I swear, if something happened to him...

I never should have let him go off alone.

But I understand why he wanted to go.

He just needed to see her.

Truth be told... I hope to see her too.

But she is nowhere in sight.

Just like Oliver...

There's a commotion across campus, and I spy a group of Omegas. They're standing around by a tree, and it appears they're bullying another Omega.

And does the school just let this happen?

To my surprise, one of the girls ends up on her ass, and it looks like a genuine fight has broken out.

There are screams, and I run toward the danger.

Finally, the first interesting thing to happen at this awful place.

The bright colors were starting to get to me.

When I get closer, I spy another Omega tackling the one on the floor, and she doesn't just rip at her hair and use her claws...

She uses her fists.

This is no normal catfight.

Holy shit.

“Get off her, freak!”

Another Omega tries to pull her off, but the psycho is too strong.

As I draw near, I get a glimpse of those crazed green eyes, and my world comes to a screeching halt.

There’s blood splattered on her freckled face, but she still looks as beautiful as the last time I saw her.

Mila.

Looks like I found her.

## CHAPTER 13

### *Mila*

I have no idea what came over me. I just lashed out and attacked Bridget in the end.

I was never the violent type, even back when I was training as a Beta. I always remained professional, never losing my temper even when the other recruits used to give me a hard time.

But Bridget has pressed way too many of my buttons.

It's bad enough that I am never going to get out of this place.

For one beautiful moment, I thought I had found my ticket out of this purgatory. Felicia had given me the best news in the world, telling me I was too 'old' for the government's free funding, yet now...

I am expected to go into the system much faster. Right now, the algorithms are working their magic as I knock the perfect teeth out of Bridget's skull, most likely ruining her chances of ever finding a pack now, but I am past the point of caring.

Maybe then the bitch will learn to pick her battles more wisely.

Strong hands wrap around my arms, hauling me away from the Omega, and the scream that spills from her lungs next is

deafening.

But I'm not done with her yet. I'm still kicking my legs out, eager to finish what I started.

One of those strong arms pins me to the grass, twisting my wrists behind my back, and I shriek in frustration.

Bridget's screaming continues in the background—a beautiful symphony in my deranged, twisted state.

This place is turning me into a monster.

“She's crazy! Lock her up!” Bridget cries, her friends huddling around her to keep her safe, and everyone seems to be in agreement.

I am too much for this school.

An Omega that bites back is never good for publicity.

“Hey! Get your goddamn hands off her!”

My blood runs cold when I hear that familiar, grumbling voice, and I twist my head around, spying those enraged burgundy eyes across the green

No... please no...

Anyone but *him*.

I shake my head, swivelling my neck around so I can look at the security guard above me. “Lock me up... *please*...”

The man doesn't hear me; he just watches Gryphon warily, switching on his walkie-talkie as he calls for backup.

Shit's about to go down on campus. Rogue Alphas and batshit crazy Omegas *everywhere*...

The monster explodes inside me again, and I wriggle in the security guard's hold to get his attention. “Hey, I said lock me up! I'm dangerous! Look at that Omega's teeth!”

Those *teeth* in question have been placed into a glass vial. Poor Bridget covers her bloodied mouth in shame while her friends search the grass for the rest of her smile.

Good thinking. If they find them all on time, they may just be able to insert them back into her face.

I start thrashing again, and the Beta security guard finally loses his patience, planting his knee between my shoulder blades in order to keep me still.

Hopefully, they will send me far away from this dreadful place after what I just did to Bridget.

I am not fit to be any pack's Omega.

Prison sounds far more preferable than getting my heart broken again.

The security guard goes flying above me next, and I finally have the use of my arms once again.

But I don't look up.

Gryphon's roar sends a ripple across the green, trees and even blades of grass undulating like waves across a fathomless sea, and the whole world seems to stop.

Even Bridget has stopped screaming, and her friends have ceased searching the grass for her missing teeth. No one draws a breath as the predator finally makes his presence known.

It reminds me of the time I paid a visit to the zoo with my parents when I was little. The lion got up on his rock to roar, defending his territory, and everyone stopped moving just to listen to the magnificent creature.

It was both fascinating and unnerving.

That's what Gryphon reminds me of now. That very same lion.

His parents named him well. He truly is like a lion. Well, part lion, part eagle, to be more precise.

The only difference here is that *this* lion isn't behind bars. He is free to roam and exact his revenge on anyone he deems fit.

The blood rushes through my head, and I swallow, sweat dripping down my temples like dew.

People start to run away, and Bridget's friends abandon her now as she's left alone to search for her own teeth.



The Omega doesn't even see me anymore. Her blue eyes are fixed solely on the raging Alpha above us, her face five shades lighter.

Most of these Omegas haven't spent much time around an Alpha until now, and I bet they're second-guessing whether they want to join a pack of three more of these beasts.

Gryphon is still ascertaining his dominance over the security guard, and judging by the wet patch inside the Beta's pants, he has wet himself.

His walkie-talkie lies forgotten on the ground several feet away. His backup has yet to make an appearance, and I wonder why...

One look at Gryphon would have anyone running.

With another roar, the security guard finally scampers off, and that's when the Alpha whirls on Bridget.

His eyes flash, and the Omega squeals, grabbing her vial of teeth as she runs off with her tail between her legs.

Then we're the only two people left.

The Alpha doesn't move for a while, his chest heaving as he gathers his composure. Then he whooshes out a final breath, and kneels on the ground beside me.

He doesn't speak. He just appraises me with those burgundy eyes.

I still don't look up, my gaze peeled on the grass beneath my palms. I grip blades of grass, tearing them from the roots.

"Mila?"

I don't respond. I keep glaring at the grass as if I can set it on fire.

The monster still hasn't gone yet. I still feel it writhing beneath the surface, ready to bare its fangs again.

"Mila..." he half growls this time, reaching a hand across to touch me.

The monster snaps, and I wack his hand away. “Don’t fucking touch me!”

My shriek echoes across the empty campus, and it looks as if Gryphon scared everyone away with his display of dominance.

They all got the message; no one is to touch me.

But that doesn’t give him the right to lay his paw on me. Not after everything he put me through.

I look him straight in his burgundy eyes, letting him know my exact feelings towards him.

His eyes waver, and I spy nothing but regret and shame.

But it’s too late for regrets now.

No going back.

“Gryphon!”

We both jump at the voice, and I spin around, coming face to face with those tumultuous ocean eyes.

My lungs give out, and then my vision shimmers as tears begin to fill my eyes.

Oliver. He’s here.

My mate and scent match, and for the first time in weeks, I feel whole again.

He came looking for me... they both did.

But it can never be.

I can’t go down that road again.

So, I stumble to my feet, and both guys take an immediate step toward me.

“Mila!” Oliver cries, his voice so full of pain and anguish, but I keep running, running far away from the pack that abandoned me.

I can’t go back. I never can.

I’ll just keep running.

## CHAPTER 14

### *Barret*

The door whines open, and I make my way down the squeaky stairs until I reach the room at the other end.

Lachlan is singing a song about snowdrops, and it's kind of catchy. Too bad the lyrics make absolutely no sense.

Seriously, what the fuck was he thinking, going for Jeremy?

Lachlan may be pack, but that doesn't give him an excuse to kill my cousin.

What was I supposed to tell my aunt if he'd gotten away with it too?

Worse, Jeremy has his own pack, and we would have had to deal with their retaliation.

We need Jeremy on our side. He is the only one who can get us information about Mila.

Lachlan hangs limply from his chains, his blond hair greasy and lifeless as he sings that stupid song. How did I get stuck with babysitting this Alpha?

I stop several feet away, trying to keep a safe distance. I'm carrying a bowl of pasta and hot dog chunks, the same meal that we cook for Oliver when he's sad.

We really are the world's shittiest cooks.

“Hey, Lachlan... how you holding up?”

The Alpha stops singing at the sound of my voice. Then his head jerks up, and I meet those luminous blue eyes.

My heart caves in, and I take another step back.

His pupils are huge and fuck this.

It's not safe.

“Barret... to what do I owe the pleasure?”

Ah, shit. Which of his personalities has taken the reins now?

I grab the bottled water, holding it up to the light, yet his blown eyes remain on me.

I don't think he can even see me.

“Brought you some grub. You must be starving.”

He's been locked in the basement for nearly twenty-four hours, and not one of us has gone down to see if he's okay.

Who in their right mind would want to visit this Alpha? His eyes suck me in like black holes.

I shiver runs down my spine.

Before I met Lachlan, I always considered myself pretty disturbed.

But I know better now.

No one can hold a candle to Lachlan's crazy.

I unscrew the bottle cap, holding it out for him. “Now, are you going to be a good Alpha and let me feed you?”

Those unblinking eyes don't leave me for a moment, and finally, I sigh, approaching him at last. I coax his mouth open, and now he guzzles back the water.

When he's had his fill, I grab the steaming bowl of pasta and hotdog chunks, pressing the spoon to his mouth.

“You're meant to make airplane sounds...”

I sigh through gritted teeth. “For fuck's sake, Lachlan. You're twenty-seven years old. You're a month older than me!”

No.”

He shuts his eyes, and his arms start to shake, rattling his chains, and for a moment, I think he’s crying.

But it turns out he’s laughing.

Did one of the voices inside his head say something funny again?

Lord, he would be a psychotherapist’s wet dream...

With an impatient growl, I grip his jaw and force-feed him the pasta and hot dog chunks now, and it’s fine. I’m good.

His arms are shackled.

Sometimes, I think he likes being chained to the wall, like some creepy-as-sin masochist.

I barely give him a chance to breathe, shoving the pasta down his throat, and I just hope he remembers to breathe through his nose.

My phone buzzes in my pocket and for the love of all that is rotten in this world...

I’m busy.

I let go of Lachlan’s jaw, answering the phone. Then I step away.

It’s Jeremy, and I don’t want his voice to trigger Lachlan again.

“Barret speaking.”

“Barret... something has happened...”

My heart hiccups, and I start ascending the stairs. Lachlan yanks on his chains, calling out my name when I shut the door behind him.

“What is it?”

My cousin sighs, creating static through the phone. “It’s Gryphon and Oliver... it appears they have gotten into a little trouble at the Omega Academy. Gryphon broke onto campus and started throwing his weight around.”

A growl rips from my throat, and I'm already halfway out the door.

It looks like I'm hoofing it to the Academy because Gryphon took the fucking Jeep.

Asshole.

So, that's where they went off to, hey? They have gone to find Mila, and they are going to mess everything up.

We need to keep our distance.

"I'll explain when I get there. I'll come and pick you up."

Good.

The sooner I get there, the better.

What the hell is wrong with those two?

Do I always have to be the sensible one here?

\*\*\*

Jeremy leads me into a back entrance when we arrive.

Apparently, Alphas aren't allowed on campus. It would cause too much of a stir for the trainee Omegas.

But there's only one Omega I care about at this school.

We'll get her back. We just need to play our cards right first.

Then we can all be happy again.

We arrive at the headmistress's office, and there I find Gryphon with his hands handcuffed to a pipe, Oliver looking sorry as he talks with an older Omega at a desk.

The headmistress.

"Seriously, Oliver... I am so disappointed in you..." She sighs, shaking her head.

Poor Ollie bows his head in shame, looking so defeated, and what the hell happened?

I tug on the pack bond for an answer, and the Omega sends me a heartbreaking image.

A pair of green eyes, eyes so full of hurt and sadness, and then she gets up, running away.

Mila...

She doesn't want us back.

"Sorry, Headmistress Charlotte..." Oliver whispers, trying his best to hide the heartbreak in his voice, and I'm too numb to move.

No. It can't end this way...

I never got to apologize for leaving her that day. I should have stayed with her when I dropped her off at her father's, but I left.

I *fucking* left, and I will regret that day for as long as I live.

The woman continues to shake her head, and we get it, lady. We're a disgrace for breaking that sweet girl's heart...

She folds her arms, glancing up at the door. Her disappointment morphs into pleasant surprise when she spies Jeremy, and at least she's happy to see one of us in this room.

"Jeremy...so good to see you again..."

My cousin smiles at the Omega, inclining his head. "Good to see you again too, Charlotte."

The woman smiles and glances at me next. "I suppose you're here to talk some sense into your pack mates? Gryphon, apparently, saw fit to apprehend one of our security guards..."

I look at the Alpha. Not a scratch to be seen on him, and I feel sorry for the poor security guard.

I'm about to ask why he attacked this random guard when the headmistress answers for me. "The guard in question was apprehending one of our Omegas. She had attacked another Omega, and had to be stopped."

I don't need to ask who the Omega is, and my heart pounds.

Mila. Is she hurt? What did they do to her?

I try not to let the emotion show on my face in fear of the headmistress discovering who Mila truly is.

Let's hope she hasn't already made the connection.

Silence. Apart from the insufferable clock on the headmistress's wall.

With a sigh, she asks a Beta guard to release Gryphon, and now the Alpha rubs his wrists once he's free.

Again, Oliver is guilty as he grovels before his former headmistress. "I'm so sorry... it won't happen again..."

"No, it won't," she replies, her voice stern. "Because you and your pack are now banned from ever entering school property again."

Oliver flinches, and I heave a gritty sigh, reaching up to pinch the bridge of my nose.

I hope they're happy. Now any chance we have of making it up to Mila has just gone up in flames.

I guess I truly am the sensible one in our pack.

Getting her back is going to be harder than we hoped.

It's like fate will always be against us, and we deserve every moment of our shame.

Nothing will ever be as it was again.



## CHAPTER 15

### *Mila*

The school has put me on house arrest, and now I am not allowed to leave my room.

All my meals are delivered to me, and I watch my classes live on TV.

A security guard stands outside my room at all times, even when I poop, and now I have lost my freedom.

It's my punishment for attacking Bridget, and it's going to go on my record now.

An Omega with a record. Now I will be chosen for fewer events, fewer auctions, and boo hoo, I'm about to cry a river.

I didn't plan on attacking Bridget, but I had just finished talking to Felicia, and I lost my shit.

I thought I finally had an out. I'm too old for this place, the government simply won't pay for my funding, yet they tell me that it's okay. I can just be fast-tracked quicker.

Auctioned off like a piece of meat so that my prospective pack can happily pay for my training, and fuck that.

I am no one's housewife. No one's broodmare, and no matter what, I will get out.

They can't keep me here forever.

I'm not proud of what I did, but hitting Bridget bought me time at least.

Now that I have a record, I won't be fast-tracked so quickly.

Not as many eligible packs will want me now, and that gives me time to plan my great escape.

The Academy can't expect to keep me prisoner forever. What if no pack ever wants me? Then what?

Will they have me working in the kitchens?

There's just one thing I don't understand... Why had Oliver and Gryphon been there at the scene of my crime?

What were they doing at the Academy?

Were they here to see me?

My heart flutters at the prospect, but I push the sensation away, turning the tap on my faucet.

Even if I wanted to go back to the Hart Pack, I couldn't.

Life just isn't that simple.

Oliver is my scent match, but we can never be together...

He already had three Alphas.

What does he need with little old me? I can never satisfy him the way they can, and vice versa.

I am an Omega, and I need an Alpha's knot in order to live.

I got lucky the last time I went into heat.

The next one could simply kill me.

A thin rap at my door, and I look up from the sink, water dripping down my face.

It's most likely Felicia again to give me another pep talk. She is sorely disappointed in me, and I am in no mood to deal with her fake concern right now.

She is not my friend. She is just some bureaucrat who is getting paid by the government to fast-track me into the system.

Drying my face with a towel, I head for the door, not even bothering to put on a smile or a show for this woman.

Simply put, I don't want to be here.

Yet instead of Felicia's faux smile, I am met with a pair of jewel black eyes that still haunt me to this day, and before I have the chance to shut the door on her face, she slides her manicured hand through the gap, barging her way into my room.

My head whips around, desperately searching for an escape, but I'm trapped. They put bars on my window after what I did to Bridget, and I really have become a criminal.

How did she even find me here?

My heart pounds, and all the blood drains from my body.

Had she known all along?

My security guard has vanished outside, replaced by armed soldiers, and how did she even get inside the school?

Alphas are banned from campus.

"Why, hello, *Daisy*... we meet again..."

Lily is just as cruel and convincing as last time.

"How did you know where to find me...?" I say, my voice hollow.

Lily arches a brow, folding her arms across her chest. "I'm the head of state now, dear... nothing ever gets past me..."

Looks like she has people working for her here at this school, and I was a fool to think I could go on undetected.

Silence trickles between us, and I have no idea what to say to this woman.

My head is still spinning.

"Are you here to finish the job, Governor?"

Lily laughs, taking a seat on my bed without invitation. "No. If I had realized you were an Omega, I never would have banished you in the woods."

Oh, that's nice of her.

I get it. All Omegas are precious and need to be protected. As an Alpha, even Lily can't resist my allure.

"I'm impressed that you managed to hide who you were all this time, Mila. Even I was none the wiser. Did Frederick ever know? Don't answer that. It's obvious what the answer will be... That man didn't know his right knee from his left elbow..."

I scoff. "Then how come you never realized?"

Lily stills, and I immediately regret my comeback.

But then she waves her hand in dismissal, yet I still make sure to stay as far away from her as humanly possible.

If I could melt into the plaster, I would.

Any way to get away from this woman.

"Why are you here? If you're not going to kill me..."

Lily rises, stepping toward me, and the difference in our height is alarming. Her silly pink hat almost touches my chandelier.

"I have a proposition for you, Mila..."

I don't look away from her cruel black eyes, despite everything I was taught as a Beta and then as an Omega.

Never look an Alpha directly in the eyes.

"What proposition?" I ask, puffing out my chest.

Lily merely rolls her eyes. It's obvious she is not interested in me, but she could still use her bark on me if she so desired.

"You want to get out of this place, right?"

I set my jaw in place. "And what if I do?"

One side of her plump mouth quirks. "I could make it happen... I could set you free in a heartbeat. Set you up for life, dear... You wouldn't even need a pack or an Alpha to get by. Pure freedom."

Pure freedom, my ass.

If I accepted her offer, I would become her creature for life. Just like how I was Frederick's creature.

Lily would own me.

"You just have to do one thing for me first..." she drawls.

I grind my teeth. "What would I have to do?"

Her smirk returns. "You would join the Hart Pack again under *my* orders this time..."

It takes me a moment for the words to register, and when they do, I bark a laugh. "You've got to be kidding me? The same pack you chased me away from?"

Lily gives a mock sigh. "We discussed this... That was before I realized you were an Omega... and that you may be of actual use to me..."

I shake my head, trying to move around her, but her arm shoots out, and now she has me cornered.

Shit.

My heart thumps like a little rabbit.

"The choice is yours, Mila. Continue to rot in this place or seize your freedom. You will never get out without my help..."

I scowl up at her beautiful, harsh face, and she really has backed me into a corner here.

She's right. I will never get out of here, and the more Omegas I beat to a pulp, then the worse it will get.

They most likely will have me working in the kitchens one day.

Either way, I am trapped. If I go into the system and meet a pack, I will become nothing but a prisoner.

I refuse to join another pack.

This may be my only chance to get away.

"I saw the state of that girl, by the way... Very commendable. That's how you deal with your enemies, Mila. As I told you once, you and I are quite alike..."

She's talking about Bridget. What I did to her was terrible, and I will never forgive myself.

I knocked her teeth out, and I heard that the school had to pay an extortionate amount in the end just to cover the cost of her dental fees.

Worse, my future pack will have to pay back the cost once I'm auctioned off, which again makes me even more undesirable.

Who wants an Omega with baggage?

"Don't worry about a thing. I can make it all go away, clearing up your record. It will be like it never happened..." Lily promises, her voice like venomous candy.

And she most likely could make it go away. She's the freaking head of state. She can do whatever she wants now.

"So, what do you say? You join the Hart Pack for a short while, and then I will grant you your freedom. You will live life by your own means... the first and only packless Omega to ever exist..."

A packless Omega.

Can such a thing be possible?

I have a lot to think about, but one thing does concern me.

Why does she want me to join the pack again? Especially as I already know her plans for Oliver.

"Why the Hart Pack? Why now?"

Lily exhales, stepping away. "I'm afraid that Gryphon may betray me... steal my place as Governor... I saw it the other day when he came to my office... the challenge in his eyes... It was enough to rival my own strength..."

I raise a brow. "And it has nothing to do with Oliver?"

She snorts. "Who said it ever was? I have only ever had his and the pack's best interests at heart. But now I fear that they may betray me..."

Yeah, right.

“Look, Mila... I understand the hesitation, but that pack never cared about you. They abandoned you in your time of need. Where were they when I came for you?”

Is she serious? Her words are pretty, but she’s only making herself the bag guy here.

She was the one who hurt me. Not them.

*But why weren't they there for you? Why didn't they turn up to your father's funeral?*

No pack would abandon one of their own.

I’m stuck. I just don’t know who to trust.

But there is one thing I do know...

I want to get the hell out of this place.

Lily holds out her hand. “What do you say, Mila? A truce?”

I grip my head, trying to remember all the positive times I spent with the pack. There were many, but now, all those good memories are clouded with doubt.

All I can remember is standing alone in the rain, gazing down at my father’s headstone.

Grief can do that. Wash away all the good times...

Oliver may have cared about me. He even took a bullet for me, but he will never be mine.

That I have to accept.

But can I really bring myself to double-cross them? If they are planning something against Lily, then I would have no choice but to expose them.

After this, I will become her creature.

No going back.

Lily will own me forever.

Despite my better judgment, I reach my hand out. Lily grips my wrist, dragging me closer, then wipes her scent on my cheek.

She's marking me, and I have never felt so sick to my stomach.

From this moment on, I am at her every beck and call, and already, her scent is seeping into my veins, making me loyal to her, and no wonder Gryphon was so afraid.

The woman doesn't even need to bite me to make me hers.

Her scent of dead roses is strong enough.

"You made the right choice, Mila."

Have I?

It doesn't feel like it.

But only time will tell.



## CHAPTER 16

### *Lachlan*

**B**y day three, I am finally released from my time-out, and I feel like a newborn again.

Being in the basement gave me enough time to reflect on my behavior, and it appears I owe Jeremy an apology.

I was in the wrong, and I shouldn't have accused him of knotting Mila.

However, Barret wasn't entirely comfortable giving me free rein to move again, so he cuffs my arms behind my back and frog marches me up the rickety stairs.

Once I am out of the musty basement, I throw my head back and breathe in the fresh air.

It was getting lonely in time out, and the voices in my head were even starting to disturb *me*...

"Sweet, fresh air," I cry, breathing in through my nose as Barret pushes me toward the living room.

"Don't get too comfortable. You have to apologize to my cousin first before you're completely out of the woods. Now march."

He shoves me forward, and now I skulk toward the living room, my hands handcuffed behind my back like a criminal.

Everyone is waiting for me, Oliver, Gryphon, and Jeremy.

I can't look the Alpha in the eye.

I almost killed him.

What was I supposed to think? He comes here, telling us he found Mila in heat, that she was okay, and that she survived.

Omegas can die without a knot, and once again, I clench my fists, closing my eyes as I breathe in and out.

*It's okay, Lachlan... He did not knot Mila... Your snowdrop is okay... You will see her again...*

I think I just needed somewhere to direct my anger, and Jeremy was a good candidate.

We should be kissing the very ground he walks on for finding her in time.

Barret shoves me to my knees, and now I prostrate myself for Jeremy, humbling myself before him.

"What do you say?" Barret says above me.

I squeeze my eyes. "I'm sorry for trying to kill you..."

"And?"

"And for getting the wrong end of the stick."

Agnozing silence, and for a moment, I don't think the Alpha is going to forgive me.

But then he sighs, yanking me back up to my feet. "Get up."

I look at him surprised. "We're good?"

Jeremy rolls his eyes. "We're good, Lachlan. Besides, it's not me you should be groveling to. That goes for all of you..."

We all look at him at that.

My heart pounds, and now I am all ears.

Gryphon narrows his eyes. "What are you saying?"

Jeremy gazes out the window, lighting up a cigarette, and he really shouldn't smoke.

It's not healthy...

“I got word from the headmistress. Mila... she wants to see all four of you...”

It's like all my favorite Christmases have come together at the wonderful news, and I stagger toward the smoking Alpha who looks just like Saint Nick to me right now, my arms still bound behind my back.

“Snowdrop... wants to see us?”

“That's right,” he says, placing a hand on my shoulder when I nearly fall into him, blowing smoke away from me, and he's so nice.

I have no idea how to react to the news. I'm just grateful that Barret had the foresight to keep my wrists handcuffed because I go crashing into Jeremy now, crying onto the bastard's shoulder.

He chokes on his smoke, patting my back. Then he glances at Barret. “Get those cuffs off him.”

Barret sighs, “Your funeral.”

My packmate removes my cuffs, and now I throw my arms around Jeremy, my personal harbinger of good news.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Jeremy still smokes his cigarette, even when I lift him off the ground. “The honor is mine, but... you may want to take a shower first... *seriously*... you fucking stink of shit.”

Confused, I lift my arm and sniff.

I still smell of the basement, and now a sheepish smile crawls across my face.

Without another word, I rush up the stairs to stake my much-needed shower, and I sing my heart out the whole time, anticipating the moment I will meet with my sweet snowdrop again.

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Several hours later, we enter through the back entrance of the school as Alphas are forbidden from entering the main campus.

It's to ensure the safety of all those unbonded Omegas, but there's only one Omega I am interested in seeing.

We arrive at the headmistress's office, and when I see her sitting in the chair before the desk, I don't think.

I drop to the ground at her feet, burying my nose into the carpet as I beg for her forgiveness.

I swear... I will never abandon her again for as long as I live.

Forever hers.

## CHAPTER 17

### *Mila*

Lachlan bows at my feet, and the embarrassment darkens my face.

Well, this is awkward. One moment, he was standing at the door, and the next, he was at my feet, burying his nose deep into the carpet.

But a traitorous lump lodges in my throat when I latch eyes on all four of them again, and my gaze goes straight to Oliver.

His smile is shy, and I have to glance away lest the guilt chews me up.

Alas, it's not the reunion it could have been, because I am secretly working undercover for Lily this time, and forever someone's little pawn.

I will never truly be free.

Thankfully, Lachlan distracts my morose thoughts next by bawling at the ground, and I shift my eyes.

Oh, lord.

“Mila... *please*... forgive us...”

Yeah. Extremely, extremely uncomfortable.

“We never meant to forsake you... We are not worthy of your forgiveness, but I swear... on behalf of the entire pack...”

that we will make it up to you...”

The Alpha shakes with the very weight of his grief now, and it looks like my disappearance must have really taken its toll on him.

It’s hard to be so mad at an Alpha when he is wailing at your feet, the pack as a whole, for that matter, when he looks so pathetic right now, with snot and tears running down his face.

But who am I to seek forgiveness when I’m the one betraying them this time?

No, no, I can’t let my thoughts go there. This is for the best. No matter what, I cannot let them get the best of me again.

We can never be together...

I’m better off alone.

However, it’s hard to look any of them in the eye, and I notice Gryphon’s careful, narrowed stare then, as if he is suspicious of something that he can’t quite put his finger on.

The last time I saw him, I had yelled at him, whacking his hand away as if he had the plague or something, and I bet he is very confused indeed at my sudden change of heart.

I would be, too. So, so very confused.

No one does a complete one-eighty like that. Not in the span of twelve hours.

They all keep their distance, well, except for Lachlan, who’s still bawling like an overgrown baby.

Headmistress Charlotte watches Lachlan completely appalled, her hand hovering over the security button on her desk in case the Alpha tries anything nefarious.

It doesn’t take a genius to realize that Lachlan may have a screw loose or two, and now Barret finally steps forward, yanking him back up to his feet.

“Get a hold of yourself. You’re going overboard.”

Lachlan stammers. “But... she deserves to know how sorry we are... Mila... we... never...”

And there he goes again with the waterworks, and Barret shoves him toward Oliver now so that the Omega can comfort his Alpha.

I guess Lachlan is just a tad sensitive. He used to bring me flowers from the woods after all, and my heart flutters at the memory.

He always had a sparkle in his blue eyes whenever he handed them to me, and I shove those thoughts away, and any lingering scent of fresh grass and woodland flowers.

Lachlan always smells so good. They all did, and I must keep my distance.

I can't get attached again.

Finally, Oliver steps forward, scratching the back of his neck, and I hold my breath when my nose gets its fill of his honeycomb. "Mila... we don't know what to say... thanks for giving us another chance... I... guess..."

I don't speak. I don't think I can bring myself to gaze into his ocean eyes.

This was a huge mistake. I can't go through with this, and I'm about to run out of the room and tell Lily that the whole deal is off.

I will just have to put up with a lifetime of imprisonment at the academy, serving nasty Omegas in the kitchens for the rest of my days.

No matter what choice I make, I am stuck. If I stay, I'm trapped.

If I go...

My dad's face flashes up before me. I remember how happy he had been when he thought that I'd finally found my family, and it's all too much.

I start to cry.

No one in the room knows what to do. They just watch me cry crocodile tears, and I'm not sure what came over me.

The death of my father, the pack's abandonment, Lily, and now this...

I just don't know what I want anymore.

Before, it was so much simpler. Become a soldier, and join a pack so I can take care of my father.

Now nothing makes sense.

"Mila?" Oliver asks, stepping closer.

He reaches out a hand.

I don't think. I merely take his outstretched hand, letting him pull me into a hug, and I bury my nose into the crook of his shoulder, his honeycomb scent taking me back to a time when I was still happy.

When things seemed so much simpler.

Lachlan joins our hug, and now I breathe in his wildflower scent, too.

This doesn't mean that I forgive them just yet.

But I just needed someone to hold onto.

Once the world makes sense again, I will distance myself and seize my freedom.

I will never be tied down to any pack ever again.

It's for the best.

The only way.

Only then, I can truly be happy.



## CHAPTER 18

### *Oliver*

I don't let go of Mila, not even when we pull up to the house and bring her inside.

She peers absentmindedly at a burned mound of rubble on the edge of the treeline, and it takes her a moment.

“The tool shed?”

A nervous sound escapes me, and I run my hand through my hair. “Yeah. Lachlan is really going that extra mile to earn back your forgiveness. Just... humor him, okay?”

She nods, peering at Lachlan. The Alpha isn't too far behind, trailing her like a lost puppy. He even offers his jacket when she shivers, and I need to step up my game.

He's making the rest of us look bad.

Finally, we enter the house, and Mila wraps her arms around herself.

Nothing has changed, but she almost looks as if she is trying to find something familiar. Something to ground herself.

Not wanting to overwhelm her, I offer to take her to her room.

We've barely been in there since she left. I couldn't bring myself to go in.

She took all her things with her when she went home to be with her dad, but the blue paint remains, and the same sheets on the bed.

“Come, I’ll take you to your room.”

Mila hunches her shoulders again, and she has never looked more uncomfortable. I bet a part of her still feels like an outsider here, and I have to rectify that immediately.

This is her home, and she will always have a place here.

So long as she will have us.

I won’t smother her. The choice is hers.

No one is forcing her to be here anymore, and best of all...

We all want her here now.

Even Gryphon, who has the most to prove out of all of us.

He was the one who hurt her the most, and he has a long way to go before he can earn back even a smidge of her forgiveness.

Even now, he hardly tries, keeping the furthest amount of distance possible from her, and I will have to have a word with him later.

I understand he’s not the most touchy-feely person. It took him a while to open up to me, but if we want to make this work, then he needs to try harder.

Mila has been through enough trauma. She not only lost her father but she was banished and then sent to that god-awful school.

I wouldn’t wish that school on my worst enemy, and I’m just glad that we got her away from there.

At least she managed to knock the teeth out of that one Omega, and if only I’d had the same courage back when I was training.

It’s okay now. She is safe and away from those nasty bitches, and most of all...

She is away from Lily.

Thank the heavens Lily never discovered she was there.

I don't think the Alpha ever realized she was an Omega in the first place, and how Mila managed to hide her real identity all this time, I'll never know.

She did it all to protect her father, and she's such an inspiration.

At least that man is at peace now.

I open the door, and the room is cold when I direct her inside. Mila runs her hands up and down her arms, and once again, she looks around as if she is in an unfamiliar, alien world.

Something I will definitely rectify soon.

I give her space as she runs her hand along her old cabinet, gathering up a little dust, and we should have really considered giving this place a quick clean before she arrived.

Everything is just happening so fast.

We barely had the time to blink.

Mila glances at the bed, and again, she is cautious, acting as if everything will blow away before her eyes.

It won't.

It won't ever blow away again.

Mila is ours.

*Mine.*

No one will put their hands on her again.

Especially Lily.

I will gut that woman before she ever has a chance at hurting Mila again.

No one will keep us apart.

"This is the first time I have stepped inside this room since..." I don't finish, reaching up to run my hand through my hair.

Mila just nods. She has barely made a sound since we left the headmistress's office.

She went through a terrible loss, and it doesn't look as if she has had a chance to truly grasp it.

I'm not even sure how to give her my condolences.

Both my parents are still alive.

The same with Barret and Lachlan.

The only one of us who can relate is Gryphon. He lost his dad too, though he barely likes to talk about it.

He was pretty young when it happened. Though he does wear the man's watch, even to this day.

However, I'm not counting on Gryphon to extend an olive branch anytime soon. But when the time comes, that would be a great place to start.

I don't want to overstay my welcome.

It's best to give Mila her space.

She needs to make herself at home again. This is her room, after all, her safe place.

However, an Omega's true safe space will always be their nest, and that's when I have my lightbulb moment.

I think I know how to start making it up to her.

I'm an Omega myself, so there's no excuse.

I'll give Mila the best nest an Omega could ever dream of.

It will be even better than mine.

"I'll leave you alone to unpack," I say, placing her bags by the door, and once again, Mila doesn't look me in the eye.

The guilt chews me up. I'm the reason why she is distant.

She can't bring herself to trust me again.

But she agreed to come back, so it's a start.

Mila hasn't completely given up on us, and so long as she is willing to trust us again, there is hope.

“Dinner will be ready at six.”

Finally, I close the door, realizing already that I’ve set myself up for failure. I can barely cook, and I really am the worst Omega in existence.

Still, I didn’t spend four years in that awful institution for nothing.

I swear... I am going to make Mila the best goddamn meal she has ever had.

My first step to making it up to her.

## CHAPTER 19

### *Mila*

I don't unpack. I just stare at the blue wall that Oliver and I painted together, knowing I don't deserve to be back here.

Who am I to seek forgiveness, when I am here to betray them all?

After all, I am working for Lily now.

The woman promised me my freedom. With her assistance, I won't need a pack; I will be free to live life by my own means.

I'll just have to sell my soul in the process.

Once I've betrayed the pack, she will expect more from me. I just know it. And then one day I won't even be able to look at myself in the mirror anymore.

Even if I changed my mind and decided to stay with them in the end, she would make me suffer. She would make all of us suffer, doing everything in her power to keep us apart.

Even if she has nothing to gain from her cruelty, she will do it.

We're her subjects, and we have to do as she says.

At this point, I wouldn't stay with the pack anyway out of sheer guilt. They deserve better.

Before, I was afraid of getting my heart broken again, but now I am going to break theirs.

And Gryphon's hatred of me will finally be justified.

I run my fingers through my hair, pulling at the roots, hoping the pain can knock some sense into me.

Dinner will be ready soon.

I don't think I can go out there and face them.

No, instead, I will go back to the academy, call Lily, and tell her that the deal is off.

At this point, I deserve a life of imprisonment.

No pack will ever want an Omega with a record like mine.

I attacked another Omega for crying out loud; I knocked out her teeth.

Six pm comes and goes, but I don't leave the room. I just keep burning a hole into the wall, stewing in self-hatred.

This is all so wrong.

I can't betray them like this. They may have abandoned me, but I am not this person...

I am not vindictive.

I'm the type of girl who works her ass off to ensure her father has a nice warm bed to sleep in.

And now he has a beautiful grave where he can sleep for eternity with my mother.

I will call Lily, and tell her that I won't work for her.

I will not disrespect my father's memory.

All he wanted was for me to find a family. Someone to take care of me after he's gone.

The time on the clock reads six twenty, but I don't move from the bed.

How can I eat at the same table with them?

Lachlan was wrong to burn down the toolshed. I deserve to go back in there, eating cold beans while cutting my fingers on the tin and getting rained on by the leaky ceiling.

It's fine. I can hunt for rabbits in the woods.

It's not until six-thirty when one of them finally approaches the door, and I groan when my nose picks up on roasted marshmallows.

Gryphon.

Great. The last Alpha I want to talk to right now.

This will be fun.



## CHAPTER 20

### *Gryphon*

**O**liver drums his fingers on the table, fretting his little heart out.

His blue eyes flit over to the clock on the wall, and then he bites his lip, nearly drawing blood.

It's six ten now.

Mila is ten minutes late. But he needn't fret.

I'm sure she will arrive.

Though no one could blame her if she wanted to ditch dinner altogether.

Not after what we did to her.

I bet she doesn't have the stomach to sit at the same table as me—the Alpha who has been nothing but an asshole to her from the moment she entered his life.

I have to find a way to make up for all the hurt I have caused.

The problem is, I just don't know how.

I am not a sensitive guy. I don't even know how to relate to people. I am only good with my Omega and my pack because we're bonded.

I peer around the table.

Lachlan gazes forlornly at his food. Barret has his face in his hands.

Oliver keeps staring at the clock, desperation taking over at last, and it looks like I have to step up here.

Maybe this can be my way to extend an olive branch.

However, I have a long way to go before I can expect to receive forgiveness of any kind.

But it can be a start.

“Oliver... it’s fine... just give her time...”

He gazes at me. “But it’s already gone ten past. This is ridiculous. Who was I kidding? As if she would want to sit at the same table with us again.”

The Omega deflates. Lachlan wobbles his lip, and Barret, the broody bastard, scowls down at his food as if it said something to offend him.

It’s a beef casserole. Oliver did a pretty good job of it, if I had to be honest, and maybe he did learn some culinary skills while he was at that school.

We sit in miserable silence for another twenty minutes. Once the big hand on the clock hits half past, I rise.

They all perk up at the first sound of movement.

Oliver narrows his eyes suspiciously. “Where are you going?”

A sigh heaves from my lips as I move around the table. “To get Mila.”

“No!”

He jumps up, and he’s not the only one. Barret and Lachlan have risen to their feet, and now all three of them look at me as if I am about to commit the crime of the century.

“Why?”

Oliver shakes his head. “Because you will mess this up. No offense, but you’re not the most sensitive guy.”

I would be offended, but he's right. I am not sensitive; I am brusque, blunt, and honest.

Oliver starts to leave. "No. I'll go..."

"It's fine, Oliver. Let me do this. Let her see that I mean no harm. It... may help her warm to us if I..."

My voice trails. But I know they understand.

Out of everyone in this room, I have treated her the worst. This could be my first step to redemption.

The first of many.

Oliver takes a moment to consider. "Maybe you're right."

Barret and Lachlan turn on him, aghast.

"Ollie? You're not serious..." Barret says.

Lachlan is already gripping his knife. "No... not him. He will only make her cry."

Oliver closes his eyes. "He may, but... we should give him a chance. After all, he owes it to her and us to make this right. And this can be the first step. So, Gryphon has to be the one to get her. It's the only way we will move forward and put the past behind us..."

All grows quiet again as I feel the judgmental eyes of my pack. Oliver's especially.

"I swear, Gryphon... if you upset her... Lachlan will be the least of your concerns when I'm through with you..."

Oliver's eyes glow, and a shiver runs down my spine.

Never thought I would be intimidated by my own Omega.

A creepy giggle sounds from Lachlan, and when I turn toward him, he's spinning his knife around his fingers, his eyes aglow too.

Barret is deadpan. But the threat is still there.

If I make her cry, they will kill me.

Pure and simple.

Well, it looks like I have no choice but to be on my best behavior now.

Unless I want my head to end up on a pike.

## CHAPTER 21

### *Mila*

Maybe if I close my eyes hard enough, I can pretend that I didn't just catch wind of his campfire and marshmallow scent on the other side of the door.

I can even pretend that I'm somewhere else, back in my room at the Academy where I rightfully belong.

Of all four members of Pack Hart, Gryphon is the last one I should be talking to right now. That Alpha was suspicious of me from the very start, and if I let him into my room, I would only give him a reason to hate me further.

He will smell the first hint of betrayal from the moment he steps in.

He knocks. "Um... Mila? It's me... Gryphon..."

Moons and stars. He actually sounds nervous.

Yet I won't be fooled so easily. For all I know, he could just be lulling me into a false sense of security, trying to catch me out. I bet he *is* suspicious of me.

I bet he can smell Lily on me.

That could explain why he sounds so nervous. That woman terrifies him; I saw it at the Governor's Ball.

He still has the scratch marks that she so kindly gave him.

Still. I cannot let him in. This was a mistake. I should leave at this very moment, but I'm too afraid.

Afraid of what Lily will do to me, the whole pack, if I go against her.

“Mila?”

Guilt claws at my veins, raking its cruel talons down my spine, and I can't take it anymore. If I don't leave now, then I will explode.

I have to go.

But if I leave... things will only get worse for all of us.

Besides, there's a small part of me that still hopes. Maybe one day... we can all be happy together...

In another life, maybe.

Leaving now would be a grave mistake. Even if I told Lily that the deal was off, she would just send someone worse to spy on the pack.

At least this way, I can protect them. And gain my freedom in the process.

So, I am going to open that door and let Gryphon inside. He may sense that something is off, but I can play the game a little longer.

Finally, I rise to my feet, opening the door a crack, and his scent catches me off guard.

I forgot how good he smelled.

Once again, I gaze up at that chiseled face, the square jaw, and the deep, burgundy eyes...

Eyes that don't meet mine.

He's... reserved. A side of Gryphon I thought I would never see.

And his cheeks are pink.

Holy smokes. Gryphon is shy.

He gives a curt nod. “Mila.”

I glance down at my boots. “Gryphon.”

Silence, but I have no idea what to say.

He inclines his head at the door. “May I come in?”

Shit. He wants to come into my room. Where he can smell my betrayal. I bet it lingers all over my bedsheets since I’d been sweating so much.

But I don’t think Gryphon is here to catch me out. He genuinely seems to be reaching out, and making amends. Building bridges, so to speak.

Well, he has a lot of bridges to build.

He didn’t make it easy for me when I first got here, but I am prepared to hear him out.

Only because I would be a massive hypocrite. I’m here to spy on him now and his pack. Just like before, but... different.

Because now I am working for the one who he thought he trusted.

Lily does not have his or the pack’s best interests at heart.

So, I open the door, and now I sit on the bed while Gryphon leans against the wall, looking at everything but me.

His gaze lands on the framed picture of my father that lays flat on the bed. I had been clutching it during my existential crisis a moment ago, hoping his spirit would give me a message from beyond.

Gryphon points at the picture. “That your dad?”

I nod. “Yes.”

Another awkward pause, and for a moment, I think he is about to offer his condolences.

“If you ever want to talk about it...”

That’s it. Although he is stiff, his words are reassuring.

But I’m too scared to talk about my dad. If I do, the floodgates may open up, and I may never be able to close them again.

That time in the headmistress's office had been a mistake. I never should have shown them my emotions.

So, it's best to keep it all bottled inside. That way, no one can hurt me if they see how vulnerable I truly am.

I have to be strong for the mission ahead.

Once again, I am an agent for a cruel governor, getting the deets on a pack of interest.

Male Omegas are still so rare. I only knew of five others back at the Academy.

When Oliver was training, he was the sole male. I couldn't imagine how lonely that must have been, and how bored out of his mind he was when he had to learn about curtain patterns instead of learning to fight and fend for himself like a soldier.

"But even if you don't want to talk about it... that's fine too. I know what it's like."

I look up at that.

He jingles his watch without looking at me. "Lost my own dad. This belonged to him. I never go anywhere without it now."

I don't think. I just blurt it out. "When?"

Gryphon tightens his lips, and I guess he doesn't want to talk about it either.

My heart is pounding, and who would have thought...

Me and Gryphon have shared trauma, and if his reluctance is anything to go by, then the loss of his father must have shaken him too.

Gryphon heads for the door. "Feel free to join us when you want. No rush."

And with that, he's gone, leaving me completely dumbfounded.

My head is reeling.

All this time, I was dealing with a grieving son. No wonder he was such an asshole.



Does it condone his behavior though?

I don't know.

But my newfound knowledge that he lost his dad too does make me warm to him. It makes me see him as human.

Well, if Gryphon can find it in himself to at least share some small part of his soul with me...

Then I can be brave enough to join him at the table.

Besides, I'm starving.

So, I take my first step, opening the door.

I can do this. Face the pack. Even if I know that I will have to betray them one day.

But maybe... something will go right for once.

One can hope.

## CHAPTER 22

### *Barret*

“**T**hey’re coming!” Lachlan hisses, rushing back to the table from his place by the door.

He has been spying on Gryphon and Mila, and the hope and desperation in the poor Alpha’s eyes was even too much for me to bear.

Truth be told, I want her to join us too, and it’s funny how we’re still walking on eggshells around her, just like the first night she arrived here.

We want to do things right by her this time. So, no more breaking her heart.

We weren’t there for her when her dad left this world, but we will be there for her now.

In the meantime, we will do all in our power to exact our revenge on Lily.

She took Mila away from us, and for that, she will pay.

Lachlan leans his elbow on the table, trying to appear ‘natural’ as Mila enters the room at Gryphon’s heels, and a quiet settles over the room.

As I live and breathe... Mila’s eyes are dry. And now it looks like we don’t have to decapitate Gryphon now.

That's a relief. I prefer him with his head attached to his shoulders.

Who would have thought that Gryphon could be civil and nice? I'm normally an ass myself. I even tried to be horrible to her the first time she got here, but she was only amused by my antics.

This girl has been hurting for a while. And I will stop at nothing until I make her feel better.

One thing I do know for certain; she isn't going back to that awful school. It was bad enough leaving Oliver there, and I'll be damned if Mila ever goes back again.

I would just love to know what strings she managed to pull in order to get away. She only scent matched with Oliver, which is not a good enough reason for her to leave the system.

The school likes to pair Omegas with Alpha via their outdated algorithm, yet here she is, back in all her beautiful, Omega glory...

I suppose I always had an inkling about her true nature. The proof was always there, the big doe eyes, and the delicate features.

And as I lay eyes on her right now, I resist the urge to run her back to her room and fuck her brains out. She's already had a heat, but she will be due another one surely sometime soon.

How in the world she ever survived is beyond me, and she truly is a fighter.

I couldn't think of anyone better suited to our pack.

Mila hunches her shoulders, wrapping her arms around herself as if she's trying to make herself smaller, and I have to do something immediately.

I'm just about to rise from my seat, but Lachlan beats me to it, dropping to the ground at the Omega's feet, and he holds up a handful of fucking snowdrops that he picked fresh from the woods.

Bastard.

I suppose flowers are his thing.

Still. He's making the rest of us look bad. I even spy the little green-eyed monster in Oliver's eyes, and welcome to the club, Ollie.

Now he knows how we all felt over the years when we all vied for his attention, but Gryphon always won.

It was to be expected. Gryphon is his scent match, but I'll be damned if I don't become Mila's favorite.

"A snowdrop for every day you have been away from us..." Lachlan whispers, his voice as soft and smooth as silk, and Mila blushes bright pink.

So, that's why he picked a handful.

God, how I hate him.

Oliver meets my gaze, and I can see he is having the same thoughts too. He shrugs, letting it go, but I stare daggers at the Alpha's back.

I'm not sure where this jealousy even comes from. With Ollie, we all seem to be on par, working in perfect tandem, but Mila just brings out my competitive side, and I need to check my emotions.

She's perfect for us, sure, but I will not mess up the bond that I share with my brothers.

"Th-thank you, Lachlan. They're beautiful."

The grovelling champion that is Lachlan smiles up at her sweetly, and how it makes his blue eyes sparkle that little bit brighter.

Then he rises, tucking the snowdrops behind her ear, and now he pulls her toward the table. He even piles her plate with food, refusing to let her feed herself.

I go to pour her some wine, but Lachlan snatches the glass from me and presses it to her sweet lips.

A growl sounds in my chest, and Oliver gives me a look in warning, shaking his head, and he's one to talk. He looks as if he wants to eviscerate the Alpha too.

At least Gryphon manages to act civil enough through the whole ordeal. He doesn't even appear to be jealous of the fact that his Omega's attention has diverted toward Mila.

Even as he fills Oliver's plate, the Omega can't take his eyes off Mila.

None of us can.

Even Gryphon can't help stealing glances at her. But for now, he keeps his distance.

It's probably for the best. Because if he does make her cry again...

Then I can't vouch for his survival this time.

I just feel this strong urge to protect her.

I'm not sure if Gryphon will ever chase Mila like the rest of us, but if he does. Well, he better get in line.

Mila thanks Lachlan every time he fills her plate, and she's starting to look a little overwhelmed by all the attention.

I can't help but detect that sorrow in her eyes, and it almost resembles the same sorrow I feel.

Mine comes from a place of regret, though.

Does Mila have regrets too?

Again, something we all need to work our asses off to change.

Mila should feel as if she deserves to be here. That it's her God-given right to be in this pack with us, in Oliver's nest...

That's it. We need to give her a nest.

I sense a tug on the bond, and I glance up at Oliver.

He's smirking at me, placing a fork into his mouth, and it looks like he already beat me to it.

The nest is going to be his gift to her, and now I really need to step up my game.

So, what gift should I give her?

That I will have to think long and hard about.

One thing I do know about Mila. She may be an Omega, but she's no delicate china doll.

When she first came here, she brandished a knife, threatening to skin me.

Well, she was talking about skinning rabbits, but I could read between the lines.

So, I can give her something from her old life. A little bit of that old freedom she used to have.

It won't be a dead rabbit. But something better.

I'll just have to wait my turn.

## CHAPTER 23

### *Mila*

The guys are acting... strange.

Almost as if they are vying for my attention and forgiveness.

Who will win? I couldn't say...

Right now, they're all in the league.

Oliver, Barret, and Lachlan are doing all they can to make me feel at home again. Yet unbeknownst to them all, I am going to betray them one day.

And break their hearts.

Just as they broke mine.

Gryphon keeps his distance, and I can't tell if things are still salty between us—that he thinks I am going to steal away his precious Omega.

I pretty much am. I am stealing the attention away from his whole pack, and it's like he isn't even present most of the time.

Yet, he may be distant, but he is less hostile. In fact, he was pretty considerate coming to collect me from my room when I was too scared, too ashamed to show my face.

Gryphon lost his dad when he was young too, and... it made me feel a human connection with him.

After dinner, just as I am about to hit the hay for the night, Lachlan asks if I want to watch a movie.

He puts me on the spot, giving me those sad puppy eyes, and how can I say no to that face?

He's not the only one who looks hopeful. Oliver stands by his right, and Barret tries to look indifferent.

Gryphon keeps out of the way, clearing dishes by the sink.

But he angles his face, and I meet that sole brown eye.

I swallow, and if my eyes don't deceive me... it's almost as if he can see right through me, and I guess the jig is up.

Gryphon knows why I really came back here, and what will happen now? Will he kick me out for daring to break his Omega's heart?

After all, I am as much as Lily's creature as he is now.

We're both under her thrall.

Maybe he can sense the same fear and despair emanating from my own pores? She's a scary woman after all.

If I want to keep up the ruse, then I can't hide away in my room.

Freedom will be mine. Once I snitch on the pack, revealing them for the traitors they are.

But the real traitor in this room is me.

With a sigh, I look at Lachlan without directly gazing into his piercing blue eyes, his bundle of snowdrops—the ones that he tied with a pretty silk green ribbon to match my eyes—still rests inside my pocket.

“Yes. I will stay up and watch a movie.”

Lachlan peeps, and then my stomach loops when he gathers me up in his arms, throwing me over his shoulder.

He's still giggling like a happy idiot when he rushes to Oliver's movie room, placing me down on the couch as if I am



made of porcelain.

Barret and Oliver storm into the room after him. Oliver looks ready to disembowel his own Alpha.

“Hey, warn us the next time you run off with her like that, prick.”

“It’s fine, Ollie. I would never hurt my little snowdrop,” Lachlan whispers, his voice as soft as a dove’s wingbeat as he wraps me up in a fluffy blanket.

Despite my tension, I melt beneath the blankets, basking in the warmth and the attention

My Omega needed this.

I think I even purr, and all three males stop.

My eyes snap open, and I become self-conscious.

“That was just...”

They’re all smirking. Lachlan smiles from ear to ear, reminding me of a creepy clown.

“I know that sound...” he breathes. “Ollie makes that exact sound when he’s happy too... except you sound way cuter, snowdrop...”

My cheeks blush, and I wrap the blankets around me to hide my face.

“He’s right,” Oliver agrees. “I can’t argue with the facts. You are cuter, Mila, and sexier. Now I can finally see why Alphas are so drawn to Omegas...”

I squeeze my eyes shut beneath the blankets. “Can we just stop talking and put the movie on, please?”

Oliver laughs and goes about setting up his TV.

Lachlan doesn’t even give me a chance to argue. He lifts me onto his lap, wrapping me up like a little burrito.

He really is going all out to earn my forgiveness. I still can’t believe he burned down the toolshed, and that I would have loved to see.

I bet he danced around the flaming ruins, the firelight burning in his blue eyes as he cackled like a maniac.

No, I take that back. I'm glad I missed that.

As sweet as Lachlan is... he can also be terrifying, too.

There's no missing the tension between Barret and Lachlan, but it seems Lachlan is pretty oblivious to the daggers that his pack brother is sending his way.

They were always as thick as thieves, and I recall the time they rescued me at the hotel from that Alpha.

I remember the way Lachlan turned him into Swiss cheese with his knife, and I shudder.

How the hell he hasn't been locked up already, I'll never know.

Lily must have made that night in question go away, just like she made the attack on Bridget go away too, and she really does have this pack wrapped around her finger.

What will happen once they take back their freedom and emancipate themselves from her?

They will be left vulnerable.

Oliver has finished setting up the TV, and now he shoves the remote in my hand.

"Your choice, Mila."

I gaze at the movie selection, and I am spoilt for choice.

In the end, I chose a cartoon movie about talking fish, and it was pretty cute.

Too cute for this cruel world.

*Relax, Mila. It is fine. Everything will work out okay in the end... You will get your happy ever after...*

But Lily...

*Forget Lily... you deserve this...*

Now I am having internal conversations with myself, and great.

I'm just as crazy as Lachlan is now.

Lachlan didn't let go of me throughout the whole movie, stroking his hand down my hair, and I loved every moment.

Most girls would feel smothered, but I basked in every brush of his finger down my temple, and I soon fell asleep.

I never saw the end of that cartoon fish movie.

When I woke up, I found myself snuggled up under the sheets in my bed, and an overwhelming sense of sadness filled me.

I am alone again.

But I swear I will do everything I can to make this right.

Just maybe... we can beat Lily.

And we can all finally be free of her.

I just have to be brave enough to take the leap.

## CHAPTER 24

### *Lachlan*

I couldn't sleep a wink, just thinking about my precious snowdrop and all the ways I'm going to make it up to her.

So, in the end, I get up and sneak to her room, and watch her sleep in the corner like a shadow.

She twists and turns on the mattress, a troubled look on her sweet, porcelain face, and I slink closer, hovering above her bed now.

I won't wake her; I just want to watch her sleep.

I'm romantic in that way...

Maybe I should go out into the woods and pick more snowdrops. So when she wakes, she will find them all over her bed.

Mila groans, turning onto her side, and now she gives me her back.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

The low growl comes from the door, and I turn my head slowly, finding Barret's face in the gap.

A small smile slithers across my face. "Why, hello, Barret... Have you come to watch the show with me?"

His eyes flash, and he bares his teeth. “What show? Get the fuck *away* from her, creep. You can’t just watch women sleep!” he whisper-yells, making Mila stir.

We both hold our breath.

I’m pretty sure she mumbles something, but I don’t quite hear the words. Just sleepless jabber and she truly is the most precious creature in the world.

She is going to be *mine*...

“Lachlan... come away from the sleeping Omega...” He speaks in a lower register now, and good thinking.

Women are programmed to be roused easily from sleep at the sound of a high-pitched sound, especially Omegas. It’s so they can recognize a baby crying.

I saw it on TV once.

“Why? She looks so perfect... You can’t deny that you’re tempted too, Barret.”

I angle my face, meeting his dark pissed-off eyes inside the gap of the door.

The look of pure denial.

Sooner or later, he will cave.

We all will. Even Gryphon won’t be able to resist her lure.

Judging by Mila’s sharp, sweet scent... she is nearing another heat. Fairly soon.

My mouth salivates, and I lean closer to breathe in her perfume.

Fuck. The universe explodes inside my eyes, and now I can feel colors.

She’s like LSD.

“Don’t you dare...” Barret warns, and I smirk, taking him up on his challenge.

“What’s the matter, Barret? You’re looking a little tense over there.”

A growl from the door, but I urge him on.

He needs to let that beast out of its cage.

My eyes flash, and a small giggle sounds in my chest. I know what this is really about. He's just mad because I'm making him look bad.

I'm the king of groveling after all, and no one can beat me.

"I get it. You're angry because I'm a better groveller than you..."

He frowns. "What? No... I'm just here to make sure you don't do something stupid. Do you want to scare her off again? It took us long enough to get her back."

I shake my head. "I don't believe you... I know you're angry because you're holding back. What's stopping you, Barret? I promise you won't regret it..."

"Regret what? *Prison*? You're a freak, do you know that? Women have *nightmares* about men like you..."

I snort. "Have you read any dark romance lately, Barret? Women like us dark and depraved..."

He looks at me as if I have just grown an extra head. I bet he has no idea what women read about.

I bet he doesn't even read.

Uncultured swine.

"Besides... I'm just watching her sleep. No harm—"

"Ah, for Pete's sake! What's a girl got to do to get some sleep around here."

Barret and I freeze, looking toward the bed where we find that pair of angry green eyes peering back at us, and guilt seizes me instantly.

"Snowdrop..."

She sighs, shaking her head. "You two are insufferable, did you know that?"

Barret growls, "Now look what you did, idiot! Sunshine... I was merely here to stop him. I wasn't—"

Mila props up on her elbows, yawning so prettily, my dick hardens. “It’s fine. I heard enough.”

My cheeks flush, and I bow my head. “How long were you awake?”

She tosses me a pointed look. “Long enough to hear you admit to reading romance novels...”

“*Dark* romance novels about fucked up guys who watch girls sleep...” Barret pipes up.

I try to deny it, but who am I kidding? I raise my chin high and nod proudly.

“You don’t know the half of it, Barret, my dear friend...” A psychotic laugh breaks free from my throat, and at this point, I’m going to wake the whole house.

But I’m already so far over the edge. I have looked deep into the abyss, saw it looking back at me, and then made it my pet.

I called him *Pickles*.

Barret regards me with disgust. But Mila just looks mildly irritated and not as disturbed as she should be.

With a sigh, she tosses her blankets aside and looks up at me. “Well, you going to join me or what? That’s what this was about, right?”

My laughing stops, and now Pickles scampers off with his tail between his legs.

Shit.

I didn’t actually expect her to invite me into her bed...

This is... *new*... and unprecedented.

Now I hyperventilate.

Barret is loving every moment. “Depraved my ass, chicken shit.”

Mila turns on him. “Oh, don’t think you’ll get off scot-free. You’re here for the same thing, right?”

Barret falters, and now a nervous sweat takes over his face.

I savor every moment of his shame.

He's just as twisted as me.

"Just get in the bed, the pair of you..."

We don't move at first. Unsure what to do.

This really is unprecedented.

Women don't often ask men like us to join them in their beds.

"Now!"

We take the bait at last, fighting about who gets to spoon Mila and who gets to sleep at the foot of the bed.

Barret wins in the end, and now I have no choice but to watch as Barret wraps his arms around the perfect Omega, keeping her warm and comforted throughout the night.

Well, at least I can keep her feet warm.

Mila has nice feet after all. Adorable little toes that look good enough to eat.

I'm good here.

It doesn't take her long to fall back asleep, and I like to think it was my gentle strokes of her ankle that lulled her in the end.

I go to tease Barret, but to my surprise... he is fast asleep too. His nose is buried deep in her hair.

Yeah. He isn't fooling anyone.

This bed is far too small, and it's about time we moved her somewhere bigger.

But for now, I am happy to keep her feet warm.

Like a good Alpha should.



## CHAPTER 25

### *Mila*

The sweet scent of pancakes stirs me awake the next morning, and I try to roll over, startled by the sleeping Alpha beside me.

Barret is fast asleep, his arm draped lazily across my stomach, and my heart pounds as the memories return.

He and Lachlan had snuck into my room last night to watch me sleep of all things. Well, Barret was actually trying to stop Lachlan from watching me sleep, but that's beside the point...

They are creeps, perverts even, and I shouldn't have invited them to join me in bed...

Yet for some reason, I welcomed them under my sheets with open arms (or *legs*) because I'm a stupid, crazy, and pretty reckless girl.

But truth be told, I'm just so touch-starved lately, and it felt nice to be coveted for once...

Wanted to the point where I'm watched while I sleep.

Lachlan sleeps like a baby at my feet, a perfect, blissful expression on his angelic face as he clutches my ankle possessively, and I almost don't want to wake him.

How someone so twisted, so depraved, can look so sweet and peaceful in slumber is beyond me.

They both look so comfortable, the hard lines of their faces having all but vanished as they sleep, breathing me in, touching me, feeling me.

Lachlan dribbles on my feet, his fingers resting on my calf, and I bask in the attention for just a moment, feeling that cold, black void inside me filling with warmth at last.

That void appeared the day my father died and the day when I had to bury him and say goodbye forever.

They weren't there for me, no. But they are here now, making up for lost time.

But those pancakes are tempting, and sooner or later, I'm going to have to wake them.

I need to eat.

Footsteps sound outside the door, soft against the carpet, and I lift my head from my pillow.

The smell of those pancakes has grown stronger. Only this time, they are laced with honey...

Wiggling myself free from Barret and Lachlan's grips, I climb down from the bed, tiptoeing across the room toward the door, opening it ever so slightly.

There, I catch Oliver in the act.

He places a plate of fluffy pancakes outside my bedroom door, holding a can of squirry whipped cream. He's just finishing the curved mouth of a smiley face on the top pancake, a face that has blueberries for eyes.

Oliver blinks. "Oh... I thought you were asleep..."

I can't stop the smile that forms on my own face, and it seems my second day here is already looking much brighter.

Waking up beside two beautiful Alphas, and now pancakes outside my door...

Oliver chuckles nervously, rising to his feet, and this is the first time we have been alone together since I returned.

His mouth is too inviting, and I just want to cross the small distance between us and kiss those plump, heavenly lips, yet I hold back.

I don't want to get ahead of myself. I have to think things through first.

I won't take advantage until I find a loophole in Lily's plan.

There has to be a way I can double-cross her somehow. But every time I think of a plan, it backfires.

"So, I guess I will leave you to your pancakes..."

He steps away, but then he turns back, looking at me in question. "Hey, you haven't seen Barret and Lachlan, have you? They're not in their rooms, and..."

The Omega trails off when the door behind me opens, and Barret appears, a yawn stretching his mouth.

His dark eyes find Oliver, and he grins, leaning against the door frame.

"Damn, you two are looking delicious this morning... Are those pancakes for me?"

Oliver growls at his own Alpha. "No, they're for Mila, actually. Glad you had a good night's sleep, ass. Let me know next time you go sneaking off to Mila's room without me."

Barret chuckles, moving past me so he can kiss his Omega good morning, but the Omega only has eyes for me.

"Sorry. I will let you know next time," Barret rumbles in his ear, and the sound of his deep, husky tone goes straight to my pussy.

Oliver rolls his eyes. "I guess Lachlan is in there too?"

Barret holds up his palms, backing away to the kitchen where the smell of pancakes is strongest. "Hey, the only reason why I was sneaking around her room last night was to stop Lachlan. The creep was watching her sleep..."

He really was. I felt the moment he stepped into my room, the awareness of those piercing blue eyes...

Barret vanishes at last, and now Oliver gazes up at me sheepishly. "I'm so sorry, Mila. We need to put a leash on them both."

Now that I would like to see.

I shake my head. "It's fine. I... needed the company."

Guilt colors his face, and I hate making him look like that.

"It's fine..." I say.

"No, it's not, Mila... I should have been there for you..."

There's no missing the double meaning, and I know he's not just referring to last night.

With a sigh, I pick up my pancakes and take his hand. "Come. Let's go and eat some pancakes. They smell amazing."

His cheeks turn bright red, and he's so cute when he's bashful.

"Thanks. Pancakes are one of the only things I know how to make."

I return his grin, and now I let him lead me to the kitchen so we can enjoy his sweet pancakes together.

So far, so good.

I just hope my good mood lasts.

I don't want anything to ruin this perfect morning.

## CHAPTER 26

### *Oliver*

I can't believe the gall of those two, spending the night with Mila without informing me.

Bastards.

Meanwhile, I was trying to be a gentleman and give her the space and time she needed to adjust. We hurt her badly, and yet she is still giving us a second chance, and it is more than we all deserve.

We cannot mess this up. We have one chance to make this right, and that means we can't do something stupid, like creeping into her bedroom at night and watching her sleep.

Lachlan is a fucking moron.

We should really consider getting him a new cage. His chains just aren't quite up to the task lately, because I bet he would still find a way to Mila.

I wouldn't put it past him to chew his own hand off at this point.

And Barret is no better.

He was there to keep an eye on Lachlan, hey?

But in all honesty, I'm just mad that I didn't think to do the same thing, but I have boundaries.

I do remember how sweet and peaceful Mila looked when she spent time with me in the nest during my heat, and it's time I stepped up my game.

Today is the day I am about to give her the best damn gift anyone has ever given her.

I'm an Omega myself, and I know what Omegas love most in this world.

It's an advantage I have over the others.

Sure, they have big, bulging knots, but I have my instincts.

Mila is my scent match too, so there is no reason why I shouldn't be in tune with her needs.

Still. Lachlan needs to give some of the rest of us a chance.

It's bad enough he was the last to arrive for breakfast. The moment he appeared at the table, he pulled Mila onto his lap, then started hand-feeding her *my* pancakes.

Not that it's a competition or anything, but if it were... Lachlan would be winning.

Barret scowls at the blond too, and we both need to try harder...

Lachlan is just too good. The way he handed her those snowdrops yesterday... He even dropped down to his knees in the headmistress's office, and the Alpha has no shame.

Gryphon is the only one of us who doesn't seem to care, but I spy the gleam in his eyes whenever he so much as glances at her.

He wants her too, and he is sorry for how things turned out between us all.

I try to get a general sense of his thoughts through the bond, but he's gotten pretty good at shutting me out, only letting me in when he wants to.

He must sense me nudging on the bond, and he lets me in for just a moment.

I don't say anything. I just meet his eyes, and he raises a brow.

His red-brown gaze falls on Mila, and his eyes soften.

He knows I'm writhing in jealousy at Lachlan's overt display, and now he extends a warm tendril through the bond, wrapping it around me like a gentle caress.

Things are still pretty tense between us. His behavior these last few weeks has been beyond forgivable, but he is trying to make it up to me and the pack.

He really came around last night, getting Mila out of her room, and if it weren't for him, then she would probably still be in there.

It's just proof of how much we must have really hurt her if she was that afraid to face us again, and shame spears my heart like a knight's lance again.

It's time we really made it up to her, and pancakes just aren't going to cut it.

I place my fork down, addressing the table.

They look up.

Lachlan pauses, a fork halfway to Mila's mouth, and I should make this quick.

"There's something I have to say... to Mila..."

I meet her eyes, and her cheeks burn bright pink when we all look her way.

She's so precious when she's shy.

"Mila... we're so happy that you have given us a second chance. It's the least we all deserve, and I know I can speak for all of us here..."

Again, she keeps her gaze on the wood grains of the table, and I clear my throat.

After all, it's only me who can make this call.

The Omega is the core of every pack; we always get the final say on any decision.

So, this gift has to come from me.

“So, to make your return official... I have decided to build you a nest of your own... right here, in the house... even bigger than mine...”

Silence ripples across the table, and it takes a while for my words to register.

When they do, I find Mila’s wide, forest-green eyes, getting lost inside them for a second, and I know at that moment that this was the right call.

Time to make it up to her, Omega style.



## CHAPTER 27

### *Mila*

I have to shake my head to ensure I'm hearing right.

Did he just say... nest?

I meet his earnest blue eyes, and Oliver nods.

I have no idea what comes over me next. I have to cover my mouth, the tears threatening to escape.

This can't be real, and I have to pinch myself to ensure this is happening.

They're all looking at me. All four of them, assessing my reaction, and I have no idea what to do with myself, or how to behave.

So, I become a sheep, hunching my shoulders as I gaze down at my pancakes. "Oh... thank you... I don't know what..."

I can't finish my sentence, but the guys don't seem perturbed by my lack of a response. They merely seemed pleased.

I'm not sure what to even do. What do I do with my hands?

Instead, I tuck them beneath my legs, trying my hardest not to cry.

I think a part of me is still too afraid to bare it all in front of them, to cut my heart right open.

*What if this is a trick and they betray me again?*

Just like I am about to betray them...

This doesn't feel right. I don't deserve a nest, pancakes, or their company in bed.

I don't even deserve to be watched in my sleep by Lachlan.

They still think I came here of my own free will. They don't know about the leash around my neck, the one Lily tied.

I can't accept their kindness.

But I don't move an inch from my seat. I merely nod my head, and Oliver gives a heartbreaking smile.

"Then it's settled. We will leave in an hour."

They return to their pancakes, and when Lachlan scoops up another piece and places the fork toward my mouth, I shake my head, a sick feeling in my gut.

I just hope I can keep my pancakes back.

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Being out in public with the pack is hard.

Only because I feel as if Lily has eyes on us at all times.

Even when we pull up to the store, I feel as if I am being watched, silently judged from every angle.

Everyone knows what I am: a liar.

I never really came back to this pack of my own accord; I am here only because I was promised freedom. The chance to escape this frivolous Omega's life.

But is it really so frivolous? When you get to have blankets and all things soft?

Plus, you get pancakes, and get to wake up beside Alphas...

As good as this life is, it should still be a choice. It should not be forced on us.

It's either find a pack while you're still of age or die alone and packless, unloved, with no means to support yourself.

Why does any Omega have to rely on a pack? We are not that vulnerable.

I, myself, know how to stab an Alpha in the diaphragm, and maybe they should start teaching better fighting techniques at the Academy.

Something other than fencing...

Lachlan rushes to the shopping carts, asking if I want a ride.

Okay. I am not three, but the idea of being pushed through all the aisles does sound fun.

So, I let him scoop me up in his arms so he can place me inside the cart, and now he pushes us through the automatic doors.

"Weeee!" he screams, and everyone looks at him.

"Not so fast, Lachlan," Oliver scolds, but the Alpha doesn't hear him, too lost in the moment.

He really does know how to seize life, this one.

I wish I had the same outlook too.

The Alpha has no care in the world as he pushes me down aisles full of blankets and other nesting materials, and despite myself, I laugh.

"Here comes the choo-choo train. Move out of the way!"

He knocks a couple over, but luckily, they land on a pile of pillows.

The Alpha laughs like a maniac the whole time, and he even gets up on the cart himself.

In the end, we go crashing into a giant tower of pillows, and so many *freaking* pillows...

I get this is a store that supplies nesting materials, but come on.

Yet I can't deny that I want them all.

Lachlan cradles my head during the crash, and for a moment, I lose myself in his piercing blue eyes, and nothing has ever felt more right.

This is where I am supposed to be... in his arms.

His gaze falls to my lips, but before it can go any further, I turn my head away, my cheeks flush with embarrassment.

Not quite there yet.

The others arrive on the scene at last, and I have never seen Oliver looking so disappointed in his Alpha.

I also can't help but notice that he looks a little jealous too, and that can't be...

He has to be jealous because his Alpha's attention has gone to me. Another Omega.

“Well, Lachlan, you've had your fun, but it's time to give someone else a chance. Stop hogging Mila all to yourself.”

Hold on...

Lachlan pouts when Barret helps me out of the cart, and now he drops me to my feet, wiping lint off my shoulder.

I meet his eyes. Nothing but sweet, dark promises.

He can't wait to see what I pick out for my nest, and my cheeks flush again.

Thankfully, Oliver distracts me by taking my hand and leading me down the aisle, and I'm like a child in a candy store.

I already know what color I am going to choose.

## CHAPTER 28

### *Gryphon*

The guys are too lovesick to see it, but I believe Mila is hiding something...

But I decide to keep my distance, waiting it out.

They most likely have put it down to her being nervous about being back, and I spy the guilt in their eyes whenever she hunches her shoulders.

But I know better, and it's a good thing I'm the only one who still has his head screwed on properly enough.

Yet I have no right to taunt her about it now. Not after the way I treated her the last time she was here.

I have the most making up to do out of the four of us, but I just can't bring myself to be a part of whatever this is today.

Mila is getting a nest, and it was a big moment when Oliver announced it over breakfast.

It sent shockwaves through the pack bond, and it's not every day you get to see an Omega accept another, let alone share the same space with his Alphas.

He even promised to make her nest bigger and better than the one we built for him, and I hope he knows what he's doing.

We all have to tread carefully here.

That is why I have taken it upon myself to seek her out in private to see if I can get a little confession from her.

I will go easy on her, and I will try my best not to intimidate her and make her feel unwelcome again.

I am not that Alpha anymore...

I find her in the scented candle section, and I almost choke on the myriad of smells.

It's all too much.

They have various Alpha scents here, like cedar, musk, and even petrichor, until I reach her side.

She's too lost in smelling a scented candle of campfire and marshmallow, and it takes me a moment to realize...

That's *my* freaking scent.

The realization takes me aback, and then I feel something primal deep inside me awaken as I watch this delicate female losing herself in something of my likeness.

What is happening to me?

*Mine...* it grumbles, and I have to take another step back.

*Mine.*

Through the myriad of smells, I can still sense her sweet gingerbread, and I latch onto that awareness, dragging myself away from the dark recesses of my mind.

*Mine...*

"You..." I growl, my voice coming out harsher than I intended, and she yelps, dropping the candle.

Luckily, I catch the candle by the base in the palm of my hand, and even my reflexes are sharper than usual.

I didn't want her getting cut by the glass now.

Startled green eyes find me, and they leave me speechless.

They really are green, and I try to find the best shade for them.

Sage? Jade? Emerald?

It's like being lost in a forest, one overgrown with moss and ferns, and I shake my head, clenching my jaw.

I have my pack to think of now, and I wonder how I am going to approach this without making her look like the bad guy.

The only bad guy here is me.

"Mila..." I repeat, my voice somewhat gentler now.

But those forest green eyes still regard me with terror, and now she steps back slightly like frightened prey.

Fight or flight.

I close my eyes, swallowing several times until I meet hers again.

She gazes at her feet now.

"Look... I know you don't like me, and that you wish to have nothing to do with me, and trust me.... you are fully justified in those feelings, but... something is bugging me... and I can't quite put my finger on it..."

Her eyes remain downcast, and I hate making her look like this. Especially when I know there is fire in this Omega.

She is no delicate flower. A natural-born fighter.

"Look at me. Please..." I add, trying not to sound like a complete asshole.

Finally, she peers up, and I see it at last. The utter helplessness of feeling trapped, leashed...

The way I felt under Lily's command.

It wasn't until I learned to show her my teeth that I finally managed to loosen that leash a little.

Mila is working for someone... and it doesn't take me long to figure it out.

My throat bobs, when I say, "What... what did she offer you?"

Mila flinches and her eyes go to the floor again.

“I... I don't know what you're...”

I step into her personal space, blocking her path, and I'm not going to let this one go.

I will get answers.

Even if I have to become the asshole for a few moments again.

Only because I want to help her. I know what it is like being under that Alpha's command.

It's terrifying and lonely. And nobody else quite understands how hard it is unless they've fallen victim to her curse themselves.

“I would recognize the scent of that fear from anywhere, Mila... I know she has something on you... what is it?”

Mila's lower lip wobbles. “N-not here... p-please...”

I get it. She thinks Lily is watching us right now, but I made sure that our lips are carefully hidden from any camera.

Poor thing probably thinks Lily can read her mind though.

I try to figure out what Lily could have offered her, something enticing enough to make her face the pack who betrayed her again and left her alone.

Her father is dead. So, what could the offer be?

What does Lily have hanging over her?

Mila really is small. Her head only reaches my chest, and the juxtaposition between our heights does strange things to my body.

She's not at all like Ollie.

Who knew female Omegas could be so tempting?

Well, at least where this one is concerned, and I feel this strong urge to protect her now.

It's the same urge that took over back at the academy, back when I saw that brutal security guard put his hands on her...

I became a lion protecting his pride...



Now I rest my palms on the shelf behind her, caging her in with my arms, and now she has nowhere to run.

“Tell me...” I almost whisper.

She starts breathing heavily, and I lose myself in her sweet gingerbread scent, and it takes everything in me to hold back and not fuck her against the shelf.

Her heat is close, and I finally understand why Lachlan and Barret are getting bent out of shape over her.

Her scent is intoxicating to me right now, and my mouth salivates.

She opens her mouth, about to confide in me, and I focus on her lips.

What would they feel like against my own?

“Gryphon?”

I straighten at the voice, and now I step away from the Omega, peering around to find Oliver behind me.

He only has eyes for me, and he’s pissed. Whether because I am cornering Mila or the fact that I am stealing her away from him and keeping her to myself, I can’t tell, but my Omega acts differently when she is around.

Almost like an Alpha.

He glances back and forth between us, and when he finds nothing untoward, he relaxes, but only slightly.

Now his gaze falls on her, and I’m all but forgotten.

“Mila? Are you okay?”

It takes her a moment to gather herself, but when she does, she wears a faux smile. “I’m good, Oliver. Gryphon was just helping me pick a candle for my nest.”

I’m still holding the campfire and marshmallow-scented candle, and I pass it to her.

“Here. Good choice...”

Finally, I walk away, leaving the two Omegas alone in the scented candle aisle.

But Mila and I are not done yet.

I will find out what Lily has on her.

And then I will do everything in my power to free her from that Alpha's grip.

## CHAPTER 29

### *Mila*

In the end, I picked out twelve blankets, and enough pillows to build myself a stairway to heaven.

Again, all blue. There's just something about the refreshing color that I adore. Not only does it remind me of the ocean, but it also matches the color of my scent match's eyes.

Oliver's eyes are as tumultuous as the sea, but I also got some things in burgundy, dark chocolate, and ice blue, too.

Something to match all their eye colors.

I shouldn't really let them indulge me like this. Not when I am about to put them all through a world of pain, but...

I just wanted to be spoiled for once in my miserable life. My Omega is literally purring at the sight of all those blankets, and I can't wait to get home and start on my nest.

My nest. It still doesn't seem real.

For so long, I had ignored this Omega status of mine, but now I am embracing it.

I shouldn't. One day, once my work with the pack is done, what will I do? Will I just pack up all my things and leave?

Or would I have to abandon everything and then buy myself some new blankets?

Would I build myself my own nest?

Sounds awful, and I am just so torn.

Even if I wanted to stay in the end, Lily would just make it so that we were all miserable. She would make us all pay one way or another.

It sucks, and no matter what, I am trapped with no way out.

The best I can do is find some happiness where I can. Even if I get to have the pack for a little while, I will take it. Even if it is highly selfish.

At first, I took Lily's offer because I wanted to get away from the academy, but now that I am back with the pack, I am daring to let myself hope again.

It shouldn't be like this. It should not be this hard.

Gryphon cornered me earlier, and his words still ring through my head.

He knew... he smelled her all over me, and for a moment I thought it was all over and he would tell Oliver immediately.

But he didn't. When Oliver found us together, he said nothing and just continued as if nothing happened.

I don't understand. Why is he keeping my secret?

I am going to betray his Omega, but he still kept secrets to himself. I don't know whether to be thankful or not.

When we got to the checkout, he even offered to pay. There was a little disagreement at first with Barret and Lachlan as they wanted to do the honors, but Oliver shut them all up and agreed that it was best that Gryphon paid.

A way for Gryphon to make it up to me.

I also got a couple of scented candles, and yes, I got the one that smelled like Gryphon.

He didn't comment on it, though. However, I didn't miss the red blush that took over his cheeks when the woman at the checkout scanned it through with the rest of our shopping.

He was silent back in the car, and even when he pulled up outside the house, he didn't speak.

I don't move from the backseat. I tell Oliver that I wish to remain for a while and gather myself.

In the end, he agreed, saying that he would make a start on my nest.

They are going to convert one of the spare rooms into my nest. They have some paint left over from when we decorated my room, and they are going to paint the walls blue.

As the others head to the house, Lachlan turning back to ensure I am safe alone with Gryphon, I let out a sigh, wrapping my arms around myself to keep the cold out.

Gryphon is silent in the front seat. He taps the steering wheel with his finger, and the sound echoes through the small space.

His scent is more fire than marshmallow now, and I hold my breath lest it gets the better of me.

This is it. Time to tell him.

There's no point in hiding it. The Alpha already has me figured out.

He has had me figured out from the start.

"Gryphon—"

To my surprise, he opens the door of the Jeep, coming around to help me out. "Not now. Oliver is really excited about building you your nest, Mila, and I don't want to add a damper on it."

Shame ripples through me, and I bow my head, hugging myself tighter. "Will... will you tell him?"

Gryphon doesn't reply at first. He just keeps the door open, bringing in the cold, and I shiver.

"No. I don't know if you have noticed, Mila, but... I am not very popular at the moment. My place in the pack is uncertain right now, things are tense. If I told him, it would only make

him antagonize me further. I am just trying to do the right thing by my pack now...”

Right. I knew that.

And I can respect that too. I know he would never want me, but I can understand why he doesn't want to unsettle the pack bond.

“Besides... I'm not sure if I fully understand it myself... But there's one thing I do understand, and that is Lily. And that tells me enough.”

I cringe, squeezing my eyes.

It was that obvious, hey? I bet the fear was written all over my eyes.

A disadvantage of having big, expressive eyes. Everyone knows what you are thinking.

“However, I still shouldn't have cornered you like that. S-sorry.”

I blink, looking up at him in surprise.

The Alpha doesn't meet my eyes, his knuckles bone white as he keeps a tight grip on the car door.

I suppose it's best we both got inside lest the others get suspicious.

I still need to think of the best way to approach this. Do I tell Gryphon the whole story and confide in him or keep it all bottled up inside?

Just maybe... he can help me.

Something about him is a little different. He's more self-assured, but his scent is no longer laced with sweat and fear.

It appears Lily's hold on him has loosened somewhat, and I wonder what happened to make him bolder.

I decided that I liked this side of him more, and maybe he wasn't as bad as I thought he was.

Maybe I can understand him a little more now that the very same woman who haunted him for so long has the very same

chokehold on me now.

He asked what she had over me, and I was too scared to say.

But maybe in time, I will tell him.

There's just one little flaw to that sentiment.

Time is not something I have. Lily will want to check in on me soon and see how I am settling back with the pack. Then she will give me my first task.

So far, she has kept her distance, but it has only been a day since I returned.

Lily will come snooping sometime. And she will want a full report.

I slip on the mud as I climb out the door, but before I face-plant the mud, strong arms capture me, and instead of the floor, my face lands on a hard chest.

Gryphon's heart pounds beneath, and I almost die of shame when that heats pools between my lips.

I think I would have been better off hitting the floor. His muscles are so hard, I'm pretty sure I bruised my cheek.

A soft sound rumbles in Gryphon's chest, and my eyes widen when I realize Gryphon is purring for me.

Timidly, I look up, meeting his eyes.

They burn passionately, and now it's like I'm the only thing he can see.

But then he flinches, turning his gaze away as he helps me to my feet. Then he whirls away from me and storms toward the house, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

Well, it's progress, I suppose.

Yet, I can't stop feeling giddy.

Gryphon purred. For me.

Not Oliver; the Omega isn't even present.

That soft, reassuring sound was for me, and just maybe things will get better.

Maybe one day, I can confide in him. I can confide in them all.

For now, I will let them spoil me.

After all, I can't wait for my nest.



## CHAPTER 30

### *Barret*

The next day, we all get to work on the nest, Oliver shouting orders at us every second.

Since he's the Omega, I trust his instincts, but damn, he is getting a little testy lately.

Agitated even.

I get it. He wants Mila's nest to be perfect. But did he have to blow a fuse when I went to paint the ceiling?

I thought we were painting everything blue, but what do I know? I'm just an Alpha.

Interior design is his thing, not mine.

Oliver has special plans for the ceiling, and only the gods know what.

Lachlan thinks he is going to get some ceiling mirrors to make things extra spicy, and that was when I grabbed my brush to flick some blue paint at his face.

Pervert.

Though I won't deny that my Alpha loves the idea of a mirrored ceiling, and I have to hold back a growl when I think about both Omegas tumbling around on the blue blankets, steaming up the glass.

Maybe if we do a good enough job on the nest, then Oliver will feel inclined to let us join him and Mila once it's finished.

But I suppose all that is up to Mila. We still have a lot of making up to do and helping Oliver design her nest is the best way to start.

Her nest will be very different from his.

Oliver went for a boudoir effect with gauzy curtains, and whenever we knotted him, it always felt like we were inside a tent.

I do hope she will invite us into the nest when the time finally comes.

We haven't discussed it yet, but her heat is just around the corner.

I can smell it all over her whenever she's close, and it fills me with dread when I think about how she went through her first heat alone.

She won't be alone the next time. She will have us.

At most, she will most likely want Oliver with her, but the girl will need a knot.

It takes me back to Oliver's last heat. The Omega could not be sated until Mila was back by his side, no matter how many ways we knotted him.

He just needed to hold her. And then when we brought her back in one piece, the color returned to his face, and he was finally sated at last.

Will it be the same for Mila?

Maybe she won't even need us Alphas, and it seems the day has finally come...

We have become obsolete. From this day forward, Omegas will take over the world.

They've cracked the code by finding pleasure in each other.

I know I will be finding great pleasure in watching them fuck each other, and I bite back another growl as I apply a

fresh coat of paint.

Oliver was not satisfied with the first layer.

After all, everything has to be perfect.

Someone rolls paint onto the back of my head next, and I seethe, turning around slowly to face the culprit.

Lachlan whistles nonchalantly, painting his own wall on the other side of the room, the bastard.

“What the fuck did you do that for?”

The Alpha shrugs. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Barret.”

I roll my eyes, returning to my wall. I spy him from the corner of my eye, but before he paints the back of my head again, I whirl around, rolling blue paint up his face.

Now he looks like a Smurf.

Ice-blue eyes glare right back through that mask of blue, and I feel no shred of remorse.

Now we have a duel, trying to get paint on the other, and soon we make a mess.

Oliver storms through the door. “What the hell is going on?”

We stop, panting and covered in paint.

“He started it,” I say, pointing at Lachlan.

Oliver snaps, yanking the rollers from both of us. “Get out. The pair of you. I can’t leave you two alone for five minutes. Like a couple of little kids...”

Lachlan pouts. “But, Mila’s nest...”

The Omega rounds on him. “I’ll figure it out. After all, this is *my* gift. So leave. Now.”

Lachlan sighs, dragging his feet behind him on the plastic-covered carpet as we both leave the nest now.

Oliver can be heard muttering about “useless Alphas” as we head down the hall, and I push Lachlan against the wall. “Now look what you did.”

Lachlan bares his teeth, and they gleam white through his mask of paint. “Back off. You’re just pissed because Mila prefers me to you right now. Tell me, Barret, what have *you* done for her?”

I swallow a lump. He’s right. I’m not the most romantic. I don’t pick flowers and I am not sappy.

Still. I haven’t really done anything to show her how sorry I am.

After all, I was the one who left her that day at her father’s old house. I was the last face of the pack that she saw, and I owe it to her.

I just don’t know what to do for her.

I have an idea, but it sounds stupid in my head. I haven’t told the others in case they laughed at me.

Mila may be an Omega now, but she wasn’t always. Not really.

She is far from docile.

When she first arrived here, she threatened to skin me like a rabbit.

So, I have gotten her a knife.

I know, stupid and not very romantic.

But I thought I could give her something from her old life. To help remind her of who she was and still is.

A soldier, a fighter, and a survivor.

I shove Lachlan hard against the wall again, then head straight for the shower.

I need to wash the paint from my hair before I find her.

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After I’ve showered, I find Mila in the kitchen, cleaning up the dishes.

Oliver won’t let her upstairs. He doesn’t want her to see the nest until it’s finished.

The nest is far from complete, so we have time to kill.  
It's time Mila showed me some of those hunting skills.

## CHAPTER 31

### *Mila*

I've just finished rinsing the last dish when I become aware of a presence behind me.

He lurks in the corner of my eye, and I turn to find him inside the threshold of the kitchen.

Barret, looking so unsure of himself.

He smiles as if he is in pain, reaching up to run a hand through his soaked, shoulder-length black hair. "Sorry. You're busy."

Not anymore. I've just finished up in the kitchen. There wasn't much to do anyway; Oliver had forbidden me from going upstairs.

He really is taking this whole nest thing seriously. It's just proof of how much he cares, and I won't ruin his surprise.

"No. What is it, Barret?"

The Alpha doesn't look like he knows what to do with himself. He continues to run his hand through his hair, making his dark locks all that more gloriously mussed.

He has a fair amount of scruff on his face, and I try not to think about what it would feel like between my legs...

I return to the dishes. Maybe there were a few more things I needed to rinse.

Barret steps into the kitchen, his heavy boots scuffing against the floor as he leans against the counter opposite me.

“So, it has kindly been brought to my attention that I haven’t been trying my hardest at earning back your trust yet, sunshine...”

I don’t meet his eyes. I just continue to wipe away at an imaginary stain on a dish.

I have to disagree with him, though. Just because he isn’t getting down on his knees, giving me heartfelt declarations of redemption and forgiveness, doesn’t mean he isn’t trying.

He was there the other night in my bed. Granted, to stop Lachlan, but he was still there...

He was also there today during our shopping trip.

“I blame myself, you know.”

Now that catches my attention, and I glance up, meeting his eyes.

He stares at his boots.

“I left you that day at your dad’s, and... I should have stayed...”

Silence. A breeze blows in from the window, ruffling his hair, and I stop myself before the tears come.

I can’t believe he blames himself. I wholly understand why he left me, and besides... I needed to be alone with my dad in his final moments.

That was my journey to take. No one else’s.

There are some journeys we need to walk alone.

I shake my head. “That... it wasn’t your fault, Barret...”

Another gentle breeze from the window, one that brings the sweet scent of moss and leaves, and I cast my eyes on the woods.

Barret follows my gaze, and a hesitant smile creeps across his handsome face. And for the first time since I returned, that one dimple makes its appearance.

My heart thuds.

“So... you want to join me on a hike in the woods? I hear there are plenty of rabbits around at this time. Maybe you can show me those hunting skills of yours.”

Actually, rabbits become active at dusk, but I don't tell him that. Besides, there's no need to hunt when I have plenty of food.

I smile. “Sure. I will grab my coat.”

Barret's eyes spark to life, and I know it in my heart then.

When the nest is done, and Oliver can finally show me his surprise, I will tell Gryphon about Lily.

I will tell them all.

\*\*\*

I have the uncanny notion that we are being followed as Barret and I take our walk through the woods.

It's no one nefarious. It's someone who we know and trust, and I shake my head, sticking my hands into my coat pockets.

I think Barret has caught wind of the scent too, but he doesn't comment on it. Instead, he stops inside a clearing, and I pause to enjoy life for a moment.

The sun is shining, creating dappled sunlight on the forest floor. I breathe it in, feeling the stresses of the last few days ebbing away.

I needed this, and I know Barret feels the same way.

He leans against a sycamore tree, watching me carefully, and heat takes over my cheeks.

“What?”

His mouth tugs at the corner, and I see that delightful dimple again, more pronounced this time in the shadows of the forest.



“Do I have to have a reason for watching you admire the forest? This is nature after all. A place where you can truly feel at one with yourself.”

While I do appreciate the forest, if I had to choose, it would be the ocean.

Not that I have ever seen the ocean.

It was always on my bucket list.

That’s why blue is my favorite color.

“Oliver loves nature. It’s why his nest is green.”

I don’t say anything at that. I just continue to watch the sun-dappled forest floor, enjoying the peace and solitude.

Barret steps away from the tree, reaching up to grab my cheek, and now he has my full attention.

He doesn’t look away from my eyes.

“The forest also matches your eyes, sunshine...”

My heart pounds, and I fold my arms, not sure how to take the compliment.

Things are still so tense between us all, but I don’t want them to be.

I want it to be how it was before I left. Those few beautiful days when Oliver was bedbound, and we all waited on his beck and call.

Barret runs the pad of his finger along my bottom lip, and my heart hiccups at the sensation of his callused skin.

A shudder ripples up and down my spine, and I squeeze my thighs, trying to keep it together.

It’s getting hot in this forest.

The Alpha reaches inside his coat pocket, and I spy the glint of steel inside his hand.

He gives it to me. “Here.”

I take the blade from his grip, turning it in my hand. “A knife?”

Barret sighs. “Yeah. I thought that maybe I could watch you skin a rabbit with it sometime...”

He stops short when I spin it around in my hand, a smile spreading across his face.

“Or maybe that too.”

I giggle, flipping the knife around a few more times, and he chuckles along with me.

“Thank you. I don’t think I have ever been gifted a knife before. Well, not one like this.”

It’s true. This knife is a pure work of art. Handcrafted from ivory and bright, gleaming steel.

My enemies won’t know what hit ‘em.

They never would have let me keep a knife or any sharp object back at the academy, and it’s a crying shame that those Omegas don’t get to learn the true wonders of owning a knife.

I double over next, feeling as if someone has just stuck a knife into my gut.

Barret is right by side, worry marring his perfect face. “Mila?”

It’s fine. I’m fine. It was just...

Another piercing pain, and my heart pounds.

No. Not again.

I was in a forest the last time too.

Except this time... I am not alone.

How can I have another one so fast?

Is Mother Nature pissed that I managed to survive the last one? I didn’t even get a knot last time, but still, I shouldn’t be alive right now.

Another wringing pain and that’s when I hear the sound of approaching footsteps.

Someone is running toward us, and I can’t remember where I dropped my knife.

That's when he bounds through the bushes, all flowing blond locks and piercing blue eyes.

“Snowdrop!”

Well, I suppose it's an upgrade from my last heat. Not only do I have one Alpha by my side, but two.

Just maybe... things will be better this time.

## CHAPTER 32

### *Lachlan*

I knew from the very moment my Snowdrop was in pain, smelling the bitter tang of her fear through the thick undergrowth.

So, I rushed to her rescue at once, finding her doubled over beside Barret.

I didn't mean to spy on them. I trust Barret, I just... can't stand to be apart from her for too long.

And I'm glad I had the foresight to follow them because now we can both be there for her.

Her second heat will not be like her first.

Mila will never be alone ever again. Not so long as I breathe.

Before Barret can so much as express his dismay at my sudden appearance, I swoop her up in my arms, carrying her back to the house.

"Hey!" he snaps, stumbling behind us.

I ignore him. My main priority is getting her back to the house where we can comfort her.

She will not spend another heat in the woods.

We will be here for her this time.

Oliver still hasn't finished the nest, but I sense his worry through the bond, and I send a reassuring tendril his way to tell her that I got her and that he needn't stress.

Barret growls behind me. "You just can't help yourself, can you? Always swooping in to play the hero. Asshole."

He's right. I am being selfish here, but it's not about me or him.

It's about Mila.

So, fuck our feelings.

We're a team, and as a whole pack, we will take away her pain.

I place her down on the couch when we reach the house, and it seems her pain has subsided for the time being.

Oliver comes tumbling down the stairs, breathless, his face splotched with pain.

"What happened?"

Barret gripes, "Lachlan stole the show again. That's what happened."

I snarl at his condescending tone, but Mila shushes me.

"He's right, Lachlan. You need to give someone else a chance to shine for once."

I blink in confusion. Barret is smug beside me.

Before I can respond, Oliver pushes me out of the way, and who are we all kidding? Oliver will always come out on top.

He is her scent match. And nothing can compare to that.

Mila probably won't even need us in the nest, and my heart sinks as I watch them together, wishing I could be a part of it too.

I spy the same forlorn expression on Barret's face.

We're both not needed.

Gryphon appears next, most likely sensing Oliver's distress through the bond.

“What’s—?”

He trails off, his pupils swelling when he flares his nostrils, breathing in the scent of Mila’s latest scent spike, and then a low rumble sounds in his chest.

Well, he better get in line.

I’ll be damned if he gets to satisfy my Omega’s needs before I do.

But in the end, it’s up to Mila.

The decision is hers, and I will respect that fact.

But I’ll be there when she needs me. I won’t sleep, I won’t eat until I get to have my taste of her.

And I can’t bloody wait.

## CHAPTER 33

### *Mila*

**A**nother heat spike lances my stomach like a spear, and I grit my teeth, trying my damn hardest not to wail like a dying animal.

It's hard. So hard not to want to cry, and for a moment when I close my eyes, I can see myself there in the woods again, stumbling for water, anything, to quench the heat, the pain of having my guts ripped inside out.

I can even smell the earthy scent of that squelching mud, the thick carpeted moss, and I almost hurl up my lunch.

Why is this happening again? It's only been a few weeks. Omegas have up to three or four heats a year on average, but am I an exception to the rule?

Lucky me, I guess, getting to be so special.

The Academy never once mentioned what happens when we don't receive a knot the first time. It seemed they wanted to avoid telling us something that could have one day been the difference between life and death.

Yet, they indoctrinated us enough into believing that we needed a knot to survive, and I'm starting to expect that we were being led astray.

But then why am I in pain again? I think Mother Nature really is pissed with me, and thus my body has gone into heat yet again.

My Omega won't rest until she gets what she was denied.

A big, fat, pulsating cock with a knot attached.

Fuck my body.

The pain subsides, and now my mind slowly bleeds back into awareness again.

When I open my eyes, I find his paint-splattered face gazing back at me, a worry line etched between his brows, and I just want to reach across and smooth that line away with my finger.

I hate making him look like that. Scared out of his wits.

"Mila," he whispers, palming my cheek with his soft hand.

I nestle into his touch like a pet cat, and I'm pretty sure I purr just like one too. He responds with a purr of his own, and a preternatural quiet befalls the room.

All three Alphas still, silently waiting, observing, this magical moment between two Omegas.

It's not every day Omegas seek comfort in each other, and it only further proves what I already knew deep in my bones.

Oliver is mine.

"I'm... okay now, Oliver. Just a little scare."

The worry line vanishes between his brows, and now all is right with the world again.

"Still," he reassures, never taking his hand away from my face. "We will be here for you when it hits again, Mila. You will not be alone this time, I swear..."

Tears burn in my eyes, and I suck in a trembling breath, finally gazing around the room.

All three Alphas look at me. Even Gryphon can't tear his gaze away from me.

Not even Oliver can divert his attention now.



It's like I'm the only person in the room.

I may be out of the woods for now, but my pain isn't over yet. I can feel another spike just bubbling beneath the surface, and it looks as if my heat is only a mere few days away.

It's just too soon. I don't think I can go through that agony again.

But... I won't be alone this time. I hope.

Oliver's words still ring around my head, and I try to swallow the ball of anxiety that has lodged in my throat, telling myself that they won't abandon me and that they'll stay by my side.

They are here with me now.

I am not alone anymore.

Oliver wipes away a stray tear that escaped my eyelid with his thumb, and I thought I had managed to keep the tears at bay.

Again, I blame this stupid, traitorous body of mine. My Omega is nothing but a ball of explosive hormones.

I noticed it's worse since my last heat. I am way more explosive than I was. I always knew how to school my emotions.

You have to be that way in the military. Or it's three hundred press-ups before dawn.

Now I am smashing the teeth from other Omega's skulls, and I am simply dangerous now.

One trigger, and I will attack.

Maybe that's what the government isn't telling us. They want to instill fear in us because they are afraid of what we may become when our needs are not met.

They want to keep us in check, basically.

I saw it in Felicia's eyes whenever I showed any sign of rebellion. She genuinely looked perturbed when I didn't tell

her right away that I wanted to marry a pack and have lots and lots of little Alpha babies.

Not only does the government want to create a strong army of future Alphas, but they also want to keep us Omegas in line, too.

We are simply unpredictable. Volatile in nature.

No wonder they don't give us any military training.

Without warning, Oliver scoops me up in his arms, and my stomach loops when I become airborne.

It's good to see that the strength is returning in his arm. The cast has gone, but there's no missing the visible strain on his face. Sweat beads his forehead, and I reach across, wiping it away.

"Oliver..." I gasp.

He breathes through gritted teeth. "It's... fine, Mila... You don't weigh a thing... I got this..."

I worry my lip, my eyes flitting over to Gryphon.

His eyes are still trained on me. His face is a mask of stone, as usual, but I only spy pain and longing inside those blackened eyes.

I can hardly see the burgundy now.

Barret and Lachlan are just as still. I never thought that the latter's eyes could look so big, but his pupils are huge.

Oliver huddles me close to his chest, and now he carries me through the house toward my bedroom.

The nest isn't done yet.

But I wouldn't care either way.

I just want to be locked in a room with Oliver for a while.

I'm not sure where the others will factor in. I'm pretty sure my omega will cry out for them at some point, but I know they will come to my aid.

Lachlan especially.

That Alpha is as devoted as a knight, and I'm pretty sure he has taken an oath of some kind to a higher power.

Oliver nestles me down gently onto my bed, and then he holds me close, playing big spoon, and we remain that way for a while.

When another spike hits, he kisses the sensitive spot just below my neck, the one that makes my toes curl and my back shudder in delight.

While his anatomy will differ slightly from mine, he's still an Omega, and he knows exactly where to touch me, all my weakest, most tender spots.

His hot breath wets my ear as he nips the lobe, then whispers, "Where does it hurt?"

He knows exactly where it hurts. But he still teases me, tempting me with that deep, sensual tone.

I take his fingers in mine, guiding him down between my legs, and he finds that tender spot.

"Right here."

His answering purr makes my heart stutter, and then he slips his finger inside.

My eyelashes flicker when he rubs the pad of his finger against my clit, and I bite my lip to stop from moaning.

He whispers into my ear again, "Don't. Let them hear you moan, Mila..."

My heart stops beating for just a moment. Before I can blink, he slips another finger inside, stretching me wide, and the lights flicker in the corners of my eyes.

I moan, arching into him as I grind my ass against his cock, and he's hard.

He scissors me with his fingers, and another orgasm tears through me. Those lights appear yet again, bigger, brighter, almost blinding.

"Don't stop screaming. Lachlan is going feral out there... can't you hear him?"

I can't. Not with the blood rushing through my head, but then I hear that growling and snarling, and I can only imagine what Gryphon and Barret have to do to pin him back.

Oliver pinches my clitoris, and again, I cry out.

The feral sounds become more distant now, and it looks as if Gryphon and Barret have had to drag Lachlan somewhere far away.

Oliver purrs, kissing my jaw. "Well done, Mila. Torture them until it hurts."

He wants me to torture his Alphas?

"Torture us all... until we finally earn back your trust and forgiveness..."

My head falls back on the pillow as his words ring through my head.

Torture them?

It doesn't feel right. I know I was hurt badly by them all, but I have never been a petty creature.

But there's no missing the pain in their eyes, the guilt, whenever they look at me, and I know they want to do everything they can to make it up to me.

So, if I have to torture them until they feel they have done everything they can to earn back my trust, I will do it.

And then maybe we can finally move on and put the past behind us.

## CHAPTER 34

### *Oliver*

I don't wake her.

I just bask in her glorious afterglow the morning after, breathing in her sweet scent of gingerbread.

Her scent has grown stronger now that she is going into heat, and I try to fight off the image of her alone in the woods.

I should have been there for her, but I am here now.

We all are.

The others just have to wait that little bit longer.

Mila is *mine*...

And before I can earn back her forgiveness, I want her to torture me, make me fight for her trust again.

It's the only way I can be free of the guilt that chews me up every day.

I'm an Omega. I should have known better.

I know what it's like to crave a knot to the point where you feel as if you will die.

The others would never understand. Well, not quite.

Yesterday, I had allowed myself to be selfish, hogging her all to myself. I don't care if my Alphas are suffering.

They have to experience every ounce of pain that we put Mila in.

We all do.

I have never entered her once. I have merely pleased her.

It has always been about her, and I refuse to let her pleasure me.

I have my Alphas for that.

But not this time. I will pleasure her until I am blue in the balls. I will have no release until I know she is sated and satisfied.

Still, I won't deny that I am deriving pleasure from just being close to her, getting to touch her, and having her all to myself.

I kiss a path down her neck, and she stirs, turning around to face me.

“Oliver...”

“It's okay, I'm here... I won't leave you again.”

A soft sigh, and she closes her eyes, wiggling in close to me, and our noses brush.

I am drunk on her scent, losing myself in pure bliss, and this is how I want to stay for the rest of my life.

Forget the world outside.

It's just me and Mila...

She giggles. “You still have paint on your face.”

She reaches up, rubbing at a stubborn patch on my right cheek.

“Matches your eyes,” she whispers.

I smile. “Well, I knew blue was your favorite color...”

Mila purrs next, and if she scoots any closer, she will be right inside my ribcage.

But I would cleave myself right open if it so much as made her happy.

“Where does it hurt?” I ask, my new catchphrase.

Mila opens those green jewels of eyes, and I lose myself inside that never-ending forest.

Green was always my favorite color, but no shade of green could ever compare to her eyes.

“I’m fine now.”

As the words escape her, she winces, and I get to work, kissing a path down her body.

“Don’t worry,” I whisper against her skin. “I will make it go away...”

She lays on her back as I continue my path down her body.

I reach the apex of her thighs, burying my face deep between her legs, having my taste of her, and she’s soaked.

Even better than I remembered.

Mila arches her back, bowing off the bed when I hit just the right spot, and she pleads, reaching down to grip fistfuls of my hair

I purr against her pussy, letting the sound vibrate against her wet, swollen lips, and she pants, pushing my face deeper inside her, wrapping her legs around my shoulders.

“Yes, yes!”

That’s my girl. Let them all know what they are missing.

My own dick is throbbing painfully, but I won’t stop until I wring every last drop from her.

We can all wait to get our dicks wet.

It’s all about her...

When I pull my face out, she drags me up to her mouth and plants a feral kiss on my lips, tasting herself on my tongue.

She growls possessively, her claws raking up and down my back, and I shudder.

It’s like she’s marking me. Making me hers.

I will always be hers.

Just as she is mine.

She flips me around, taking charge, then plants a kiss on the hollow of my neck, but I flip her back around.

Gleaming rings of emerald are all that stare back at me, her pupils encompassing the entirety of her eyes, and she's losing herself to her Omega.

I know because I get the same way when I'm in heat.

But Mila is something else.

Pure, animalistic need to claim what is hers.

She *will* have me.

But I want this to be all about her.

We need to work for her trust first.

Her chest heaves, gleaming with sweat, and I'm pretty sure I can spy her heart pounding beneath.

There's no denying she is an Omega on the brink of heat now.

Still, I placate her, letting her know that I am not going anywhere as I place a finger on her full lips. "Mila... it's okay...."

Her breath is wet on my finger as she continues to gasp, lost in the throes of her heat.

I rub my finger in gentle circles around her lips, and her pupils shrink, and just like that, she is Mila again.

"It's okay..." I purr, reaching down to kiss her pulse.

It beats against my lips, and I lick away the sweat that has gathered there, wondering maybe if I can bite her here one day.

She would need one of the guys to bite her into the pack.

But I will be damned if I don't get to be the first to bite her.

A red blush takes over her face, and now Mila looks away in shame.

"I'm sorry, I don't know..."



Pure, sweet little thing. She's as green as her eyes.

I know she didn't really mean to go feral.

It's just her Omega.

I don't take my finger from her lips. I continue to caress the plump, red flesh, letting her know that I understand.

"It's okay, Mila. It happens. You... should have seen me my first time... The nest was covered in feathers..."

She looks up. "Feathers?"

I smirk. "From all the pillows I tore apart with my teeth."

She blinks. "Oh."

I chuckle, leaning in to kiss her. "Just promise me one thing... for when you do go feral..."

"Yes?"

"Make us suffer. Scare the living shit out of us. The guys will be in for a surprise."

And Lachlan thinks he's so unhinged.

Her answering smile makes my heart skip, and now she meets my kiss.

"Promise."

## CHAPTER 35

### *Mila*

**S**ex-crazed, sex-starved.

That is what I have become.

I am going completely feral, losing my grip on reality.

It's as if my Omega is protesting somehow, her revenge for being denied a knot the last time, and this is going to be tough.

I'm terrified, and I worry I may hurt someone. Badly.

Oliver told me it was fine, and he even encouraged me to go absolutely nuts when the timing was right. He thinks it's what they all deserve for abandoning me; my crazy, touch-starved Omega.

I am going to tear them all apart.

The guys won't know what hit them.

Apparently, I am not the only one losing my grip on this reality.

Lachlan has been put on what the guys like to call "time-out" since the night I made all those noises in the bedroom.

Oliver told me to moan, loud enough for all three Alphas to hear, and it looks as if his tactics worked.

Lachlan has been in the basement for two days straight, and only Barret has deigned to visit him, feeding him three meals a day.

I found him in the kitchen the other night setting up his meals, and it was all fruit and vegetables. The Alpha told me it was best not to give Lachlan meat when he has one of his ‘episodes’, and the thought makes me shudder.

Will they deny me meat when I lose my shit?

I hope not because it’s meat that my Omega wants—Alpha meat specifically—and what she wants, she gets.

Barret has just returned from one of his feeding trips, nursing his finger.

The rest of us wait in the living room. Oliver and I share one couch, his arms wrapped around me as he won’t let me go, peppering kisses up and down my neck.

Gryphon keeps his distance, and he never interferes, leaving us Omegas to our own devices.

So far, only Oliver has staked a claim on me. Barret and Lachlan want me too.

But I’m not so sure about Gryphon.

Still, there’s no denying I want him. Or some intrinsic part of me does, anyhow.

Why else would I buy a candle that smelled like him?

Will I be able to keep away once my Omega is unleashed?

Will he?

I won’t have much of a choice in the matter. It won’t be me making the decisions once I’ve gone into heat. It will be the needy, touch-starved, and knot-denied little creature that lives rent-free inside my uterus.

As I said, what my Omega wants, my Omega gets.

Oliver turns toward Barret when he enters the room, hissing in pain.

Gryphon looks up from his book. That’s right. A book.

It's like I don't even exist.

"What happened?" Oliver asks.

Barret growls. "The mother fucker bit me!"

We all fall stone-cold silent. Then Oliver scoffs, and I have to hide my own laugh.

Only Gryphon manages to keep a straight face, shaking his head with a tsk as he returns to his book.

I like to think he's just using the book as a distraction from me and Oliver. We both smell like a juicy Omega cocktail right now, our hormones running rampant.

I can't see because his leg is in the way, but I think Gryphon is hard.

Barret is in too much pain to take much notice of anything yet.

"It's not fucking funny, Ollie," he hisses through clenched teeth, but then his voice dies off when he spies the two of us cuddled up on the couch.

Sure enough, a bulge forms in his pants.

"I take it that things aren't improving," Gryphon says nonchalantly, flipping a page of his book.

"No, they're not," Barret grumbles, moving across the room to another chair. He avoids looking at me and Oliver too. "Remind me again why I have to be the one to feed him?"

"Because you two are thick as thieves, that is why," Gryphon replies.

Barret snarls, inspecting his wounded finger. "Ah, God, I think it's infected. Shit."

Oliver guffaws, and Barret glares at him. "It's not funny!"

Oliver wraps his arms around me tighter, burying his nose into my hair. "It's okay, Barret. I'll still love you, even after you've transformed into Lachlan at the next full moon."

Now it's my turn to laugh, and the silence that falls over the room is deafening.

All three males stop to stare at me. Even Gryphon forgets his book.

Oliver smiles. “Never thought I would hear that sound from your lips again, Mila.”

My face reddens, and I cringe. It was a dorky laugh; I don’t know why they’re all so fascinated by it.

I sounded like a braying donkey.

“Yeah... even if it is at my expense. It’s good to hear you laugh again, sunshine,” Barret purrs, forgetting all about his wounded, infected finger that may or may not turn him into a nightmarish version of Lachlan at the next full moon.

I finally find my confidence, sitting up to meet Barret’s dark eyes. “Well, until the day you start picking me wild snowdrops from the woods, then we have nothing to worry about.”

Barret hikes up a brow, and that’s right. I can quip, too.

Now he scoffs. “Hell will freeze over before that ever happens...”

Another silent spell befalls us, and I can’t stop thinking about my upcoming heat.

Truth be told, I’m scared.

Sure, I won’t be alone this time, but I’m scared of what I’ll become.

They may find me cute now, but once I go into heat, their sweet smiles will turn into frowns.

I also have to remember my mission, too.

Lily will be expecting a report soon.

The guys exchange glances, and I look back and forth between the three of them.

“What?”

Oliver sighs, and that’s when I realize. His face is finally free of paint.

“We finally finished your nest. Well, when I say *we*, I mean *I*, of course...”

Oliver throws a pointed look at Barret.

The Alpha shrugs. “You kicked us out.”

“Only because you and Lachlan were joking around like clowns.”

Gryphon flips another page. “As I said, thick as thieves...”

Barret growls at the other Alpha, and there’s no missing the little smirk on Gryphon’s face.

Oliver rises to his feet, extending his hand to me.

“Well, shall we?”

My heart thrums, and I look to Gryphon for affirmation.

This is really happening...

My day has come.

So, I take the Omega’s hand, letting him guide me up the stairs.

Barret follows close at our heels, but Gryphon stays behind, and my heart breaks when he doesn’t join us.

It doesn’t feel right. He should be a part of this.

Oliver squeezes my hand tighter when he senses my sadness. We’re not bonded yet, but I bet the pain is all too clear in my big eyes.

I glance at the basement door. “What about Lachlan?”

Barret shakes his head. “Trust me, he is too far gone for this. It’s best he stays down there for a while...”

My heart trembles with dread. “What’s the longest he has gone?”

“Three months,” Barret replies, and holy stars.

No wonder Lachlan is as unhinged as he is. I saw it the first night I arrived here. The way he kept those probing blue eyes on me while he cut up his meat.

My nest is tucked away at the opposite end of the hall from Oliver’s, and it feels so surreal.

I still recall the day I stole a peek into Oliver's nest, only to be scolded later by Gryphon.

But look at me now. An Omega being gifted a nest.

We get to the door, and the butterflies flap around inside my stomach.

Oliver squeezes my hand again, placing his palm on the door. "Ready?"

I suck in a breath. "Yes."

With a hesitant smile, he opens the door, and my eyes fall on that small piece of heaven.

Blue walls, blue curtains, and a mound of blue cushions right in the center of it all.

There's a mini fridge too, a TV, and even a self of scented candles.

Someone has already lit the candles, and now all their scents fill the room.

Lachlan and Gryphon may not be here right now, but their scents are, and I can't contain the emotions that take over me.

My eyes drip with tears, and Oliver reaches up to wipe one away.

"I take it you like it then?"

I sniff. "Like? I love it."

His answering smile warms my heart, showcasing the dimples of his cheeks, and the tension eases from his shoulders.

He was nervous as we made our way up here, and I bet he was afraid that I would hate it.

I approach a wall, running my hand over a swirl of lighter blue. "Wait... are these waves?"

"Yes," Oliver replies. "I took a few art classes back at the Academy."

Too right he did. These waves are beautiful, the way the light blue overlaps with the darker shades.

“Look up, sunshine.”

At Barret’s voice, I glance up, and a smile takes over my face.

“It’s the sky!”

I spy an array of puffy cumulus clouds, a bright shining sun, and several seagulls.

Oliver painted my nest to look like the seaside.

How did he guess?

“You should see it in the dark,” Oliver chuckles, and my heart skips in excitement.

Finally, I step up toward him, throwing my arms around his neck so I can kiss him. Barret looks away, giving us our moment, but I also know he’s doing it for his own good too.

Oliver and I are too tempting.

“Thank you. This is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me.”

And as those sweet dimples take over his face, I know it deep in my veins.

I am never going to leave.

I will get the better of Lily.

And I will have Gryphon’s help.



## CHAPTER 36

### *Gryphon*

Oliver and Mila have barely left the nest since its debut, and I've hardly seen my Omega since.

However, I don't intrude. Not this time. Oliver needs this as much as I need him to be happy.

I will not be that Alpha again. I will not rain on his parade, or that sweet female Omega's either.

Lord knows she deserves all the happiness in the world.

I'm just not sure if I can be the one to provide it for her.

She still can't stand me, but I do catch her lingering stares. Like the other day, for example, when Oliver and Barret took her upstairs to the nest.

I have yet to see it myself, and I haven't dared ask.

I know I am not welcome.

That is a line I am not willing to cross, and I guess it's payback in a way.

Once upon a time, I caught her peering longingly into Oliver's nest, and I gave her hell for it. I got possessive, and I made her cry.

I made her feel unwelcome.

I only made my own Omega despise me in the end, and then he loosened the tether of our bond just to punish me.

So, this is my penance.

So far, it's only Oliver and Mila who frequent the nest.

Barret was there the day Ollie revealed it to her, but no more than that.

He's a little too busy with Lachlan these days, anyway.

But by day three, after the nest's creation, they invited him inside, and Barret whistled like a smug prick all the way up those goddamn stairs, telling me that I wouldn't see him for a few days.

I pretended that I wasn't jealous, that I wasn't dying inside.

But I would rather Barret than the crazy piece of shit, Lachlan.

Barret and I are quite similar. We're more reserved and keep our emotions inside.

Lachlan is insufferable at the best of times, and I don't know how he can do it. Just... grovel, and shame himself.

Yet look at him now, locked up alone in the basement with a permanent hard-on.

I prep a meal for him, pinching my lips in irritation.

How did I get stuck babysitting that crazy bastard?

I want to be with my Omega, both of us bathing in Mila's gingerbread scent, but I made my bed, and now I have to sleep in it.

Barret has written me instructions. *No meat, and don't look him directly in the eye. Also, feed him with the extra-long spoon... not unless you like your fingers, that is.*

*Extra long spoon?*

Finally, I finish Lachlan's mush and take it to the basement.

This food looks nasty. I almost feel bad for him.

I go down to the basement, and there I find him in the padded room at the back, hanging limply from his chains.

I made sure to use desensitizer before I came down.

Anything to remove any traces of Mila's scent.

It's all over the house, and sometimes I wonder how I'm not losing my own grip on my sanity.

So, how am I going to do this, then? Feed him without losing a finger.

That's when I see it. The 'extra' long spoon, leaning in the corner of the padded room out of Lachlan's reach.

It's just a bunch of plastic spoons all tied together, and good thinking on Barret's end.

Good. Because if Lachlan so much as bites me, then I will kick the living shit out of him.

I'm not as patient as Barret. Hence why he usually does this.

I grab the spoon, or *spoons*, poking the Alpha in the face. He hisses when I jab him in the eye.

Fucking freak.

"Hey, Lachlan. Your grub is here."

He's more animal than man now, and why the hell we never committed him long ago, I'll never know.

I poke him again with the spoons. "Now, are you going to be a good Alpha, and let me feed you? I should warn you, any crap, and this bowl goes over your head. I'm not Barret. I don't play nice."

Those enraged blue eyes don't leave me, and nothing but pure animal hatred.

I know the real Lachlan is in there somewhere.

But until the day he wakes again, he can stay down here.

I don't want him anywhere near Mila.

I scoop up some mush with the spoon and direct it toward his mouth. Lachlan chomps too hard, and I have to fight to pry

it from his jaws again.

“Let go!”

He giggles like a creepy court jester next, showing me the sclera of his eyes, and I have to remind myself that I brought this upon myself.

My punishment for hurting Mila and my pack.

But I’ve had enough.

My own eyes flash, my lips peeling back from my teeth, and now an unearthly sound rumbles from my chest.

I’m just glad that one of us is in chains because we would only end up killing each other.

I step forward, yanking him up by his blond, greasy hair. I shouldn’t take my sexual frustrations out on him, but I still pour that mush over his head, watching as he laps up that filthy gruel with his tongue anteater style.

Then I let go of his hair, turning my back on him as I stomp up the stairs.

His disgusting slurping sounds fill the basement as he licks his face, and I don’t care anymore.

I need an ice-cold shower.

## CHAPTER 37

### *Mila*

Oliver never leaves my side, not even in the lead-up to my heat.

We spend all our time in the nest now, tucked up safe in our own little world, and no one can get to us here.

My heat spikes are getting worse by the day, and soon I will lose all sense of myself. My Omega will take the reins, but this time...

I will let her.

My body is going to crave a knot, maybe several at the same time, and we need to decide now who will be best.

If I could choose Oliver, then I would, but he's an Omega, like me.

I want them all in truth, even Gryphon, but I have a special connection with Oliver.

He's my scent match; I felt it the day I first locked eyes with him at the Selection.

He made me a promise once, during the throes of his own heat, that he wanted me all the way.

But he decided to wait until the time was right. When it would all be about me and me only.

Because back then, his own needs would only get in the way.

Well, now couldn't be a more perfect time.

Once my heat hits, all I will think about is a knot. I may not even see him, craving Alphas only.

Right now, all we do is cuddle, his arms draped around me as we bury ourselves in piles of plush blue pillows and blankets.

My nest is a dream.

The blinds are shuttered closed, and stars burst to life on the ceiling, the perfect skylights.

The ocean at night.

Maybe one day, we can lay beneath the real stars at sea, lost in each other's company.

Hardly anyone else has come into the nest. Barret has given us company several times, but only to watch us.

Oliver's idea.

He said at least one of them should join us so he can tell the others how amazing it is, thus adding to their torture.

Lachlan is currently locked up, and Gryphon is Gryphon, so that leaves Barret to be the messenger.

It's inevitable. One of them will have to join when I go into heat, and I still haven't made up my mind about who will be the first to knot me.

But while I still have my wits about me... I want my Omega.

I run my fingers down the sculpted muscles of his chest, and he closes his eyes, sighing in deep reverence.

I bite my lip. "Oliver?"

Blue slits meet my eyes. "Hmmm?"

"So... I was thinking... before I lose all sense, and I don't know one knot from the other..."

His brows rise in question, and I go on.

I grip the back of his head, leaning in closer, hoping he gets the message. “I want you to take me, Ollie.”

Ollie. Gryphon’s pet name for him.

I’ve heard the others calling him it too, but I bet Gryphon was the first.

I kiss his lips, hoping my message hits home, and he soon gets with the plan.

I’m still a virgin. As embarrassing as that sounds.

I just never showed much interest in the guys back at the Academy, and I know the feeling was mutual. Perhaps.

I don’t really care.

Sex was just not something I concerned myself with. Until now.

Until Oliver.

He looks me carefully in the eyes, searching.

I wonder who was his first.

Most likely Gryphon.

Has he ever been with a woman before?

He cups my face. “I would love nothing more, Mila... I’ve dreamed of this since the day I first laid eyes on you... though I would have denied it then.”

A smile tugs at my lips.

I want this. And it’s important to me that Oliver is my first.

I rub my nose against his and he sighs. “It may hurt.”

“I know... but I wouldn’t want anyone else.”

He purrs, a comforting sound, and then he runs his hand up my arm. “I don’t feel like I deserve to be your first, but...” he swallows. “But I will be damned if I’m not...”

His purr turns into a growl, and now he lays himself above me, gazing straight into my eyes.

We're perfectly aligned, and when he enters me, I remain calm, never taking my gaze from those turbulent blues.

Oliver edges inside me further, taking it slowly, and I never realized how tight I was.

I'm not sure what will happen when I go into heat. Will I even feel the stretch?

I saw those diagrams back at the Academy, the ones that made my head whirl, and it's the reason why I wanted to give myself wholly to Oliver first.

A splintering pain when he slips another inch further, and I curl my arms around the back of his neck, and he pauses a moment.

He seems to be thinking about his next approach, and then he takes me by surprise, flipping us both around until I'm on top.

"It may hurt less if you're the one in control," he mutters.

Good thinking, and this angle definitely does feel more liberating. I can take as much or less of him as I want from this position.

So, I slip further along his shaft until we meet at the hilt, and soon we're joined at the hips.

The pain has subsided, and now we just stare into each other's eyes.

He's inside me. Wholly and completely.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

Oliver's eyes are closed, his hands running up and down my back, and although it feels strange to be filled like this, I still roll my hips, biting my lip.

He groans, urging me on, and I push harder.

He's right. This angle is way more pleasurable.

To give me all the power...

Lights spark in the corners of my eyes as I reach my peak, and then I squeeze on his cock, slamming my hands down



onto his chest.

I may even use my claws. The first sign of my Omega...

He shuts his eyes, brushing his fingers up and down my back as I finally release.

His own follows after mine, and when we've both reached our peak, I collapse on top of him, holding him close.

He doesn't remove his cock from me, keeping it warm inside me, and then he pulls up the blankets and wraps us both up like a giant Omega burrito.

And then we just be.

Two Omegas coming together as one.

Soon, I will want a knot, but for now, I will enjoy every inch of him.

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Later that night, my heat finally hit.

And the guys really will be in for the shock of their lives.

## CHAPTER 38

### *Barret*

Mila's heat came in the middle of the night, and Lachlan could be heard thrashing in his chains from the deep bowels of the house.

He must be able to smell her all the way down there, and once again, I thank my lucky stars that he is locked away where he can't hurt anyone.

It's just a shame I can't put myself in chains.

Her scent lingers all over the house, and I have a permanent hard-on.

Gryphon is the same, and he is extra snappy and grouchy whenever we speak.

We're both sexually frustrated, but we know it's what we deserve.

Still. I hope they invite us inside.

Lachlan I could understand, but I would love to be a part of their nest, even if I were just there to watch.

Still. Mila will need a knot.

And I would be honored if I were to be her first.

Gryphon pretends to read in the living room while I flip a blade around in my hand, trying to take my mind off the

wonders happening in that blue nest upstairs.

So far, Mila hasn't called out for any of us.

It seems Oliver is enough to satiate her Omega needs for now.

But sooner or later, her Omega will cry out for a knot, and I'll be ready...

It has to be me.

Lachlan is in no fit state to be around anyone, and Gryphon is an asshole.

If anyone deserves to have blue balls around here, then it's him.

He still likes to pretend that she doesn't exist, but I saw the state he left Lachlan in.

The poor Alpha was covered in food, and now I watch Gryphon from across the room, keeping a careful eye on him.

"What?" he grumbles.

I blink, then shrug, flipping the knife again.

"So... Mila has gone into heat..."

I gauge his next reaction, but he keeps his sour puss of a face hidden inside the pages of that book. A book which is currently upside down, and what a complete prick.

A female groan of pleasure echoes down the stairs, and Gryphon tenses, his fingers bone white on that book.

I'm having a hard enough time keeping my own Alpha at bay, but I'm loving every moment of Gryphon's suffering.

It's obvious who they will pick.

Why else would they have given me permission in the nest?

Poor Gryphon hasn't even been inside. Not even while it was being created, and I bet it is *killing* him.

A chuckle escapes me, and I spin my blade again.

"It seems our Ollie knows what he's doing. I guess we should be proud. He only learned from the best."

Finally, the Alpha puts his book down, glaring at me with bared teeth. “Shut up.”

Then his book appears in front of his face again.

I stretch my arms, smiling when they give a satisfying click. “Hey, look on the bright side. It could be worse. You could be in chains downstairs like Lachlan right now.”

Gryphon growls when I mention that Alpha’s name, but I go on.

“Maybe we can find an extra spot in his padded cell. I’m sure he would like the company... maybe...”

The book goes flying across the room, and now Gryphon is on his feet, looming over me.

The sexual frustration radiates from his body in waves, and I have to cover my nose.

I can taste his anger on my tongue. Nothing but burned marshmallows.

He’s all fire and brimstone now, choking me with his smoke, but I hold my ground.

Especially when those feet pad down the stairs, and Oliver appears, reeking of gingerbread goodness.

My mouth salivates and now a growl rips from my own throat.

He watches us both warily, wondering how best to approach.

Gryphon puts his game face back on, standing to attention. I rise to my own feet, albeit a little more relaxed.

We’re both sporting massive erections.

Oliver takes one glance at us both and rolls his eyes.

“Barret...”

My heart sings when he calls my name, and now I look at Gryphon smugly.

I knew it.

“Yes, Ollie?” I ask.

Blue eyes meet mine. “Mila... she... wants to see you... while she still has her wits about her...”

Her wits?

My. It must be worse than I thought.

With one last look at Gryphon, I follow Oliver up the stairs, and there’s no missing the tic of the Alpha’s jaw when he realizes that he wasn’t the one to be chosen.

I follow my Omega, but he stops just outside the door of the nest, assessing me carefully.

There’s a smirk on his face.

It’s almost as if he knows something that I don’t, and I raise my brows.

“Is there something you need to tell me, Ollie?”

He keeps watching me, then shrugs. “Just... prepare yourself, all right?”

That’s when I spy the scratch marks on his exposed back, but before I can ask, he opens the door, pushing me inside.

Her scent hits me first, but I hold back, keeping my eyes closed as I dare not look.

“Barret,” she whispers, stalking closer like a predator, and my heart trembles.

Hands find my belt, and then I am tugged further into the nest.

“Open your eyes...”

So, I open them, and it’s remarkable I manage to have any restraint.

Mila, looking up at me with those doe eyes, her pupils dilated as she bites her lip, sex-starved, sex-craved...

Eager.

She starts undoing my shirt buttons, kissing up and down my chest, and I groan against the sensation of her warm lips.

Then she starts with my pants, almost using her teeth to rip them off, and then she throws me down onto the mound of plush pillows that smell exactly like her and Ollie.

But mostly, they smell of her.

Oliver watches as the Omega seizes control, and there's nothing but love and pride on his face.

My heart thumps, and what have I walked into?

Before I can so much as take my next breath, Mila yanks off my boxers with her teeth, exposing my knot, and the way she stares...

Nothing but pure hunger.

"Mine..." she growls, and my heart shudders at the possessive tone.

I look over at Oliver, but he only sees Mila, his hand jerking back and forth as he rubs his cock.

His eyes are on fire as he licks his lips. "Take him, Mila..."

Mila plants her palms on my chest, digging her claws into the flesh, and all I can do is lay there, letting her take me.

She impales herself on my cock, rolling her hips back and forth as she fucks with pure, wanton lust.

She's going to fuck me hard, and it will be everything I deserve...

I left her that day...

And this is my penance.

## CHAPTER 39

### *Mila*

**B**arret falls completely limp beneath me as I rake my fingernails down his chest, my mouth salivating as I skim my eyes over that ribbed wall of muscle.

My scent blooms around me, saturating the air with thick gingerbread, and Oliver pants and grunts in the corner, his eyes a brand on my spine.

“Take him, Mila... Make him suffer... Claim what is yours...”

*Oh, I will.*

Barret is almost helpless below me now, wholly surrendering to me and my Omega, and I’m just going to take a backseat and let her take the reins.

I’m sure I will regret it later, but right now...

I don’t care.

I don’t care about anything, not even Lily, as I take what is mine.

So, I’m going to fuck Oliver’s Alpha until he begs for forgiveness.

I start slowly at first, my pace torturous and languid as Barret falls into a rapturous state beneath me.

This Alpha blames himself for my departure. In his mind, he let me down that day, and in turn, he will gladly suffer if that's what it takes to earn back my forgiveness.

They all let me down, and it hurt deeply. I'm still hurt, but right now, all I can think about is his knot and what it would feel like inside me.

My Omega is even more restless since she was denied this the first time, by him.

By all of them.

Oliver watches as I take his Alpha, his punishment for abandoning me too.

Gryphon and Lachlan are going through their own cycles of self-torture.

However, I don't think Lachlan has much control of his body right now. He really needs to get a hold of that Alpha of his. It is dangerous, but don't worry...

So am I.

I can take him.

Gryphon tortures himself by keeping away.

He hasn't even set eyes on my nest, and I can't help but notice the irony—the similarity to that day he denied me access to Oliver's nest.

I was merely taking a peek. I never had any intention of going in.

Barret reaches up, eager to touch my skin, and I let him. For now.

Only because my Omega craves an Alpha's touch.

He's bigger than Oliver, but the Omega was the one who got to explore me first, the first to stretch me, preparing me for his Alpha's knots.

So long as they are aware of the fact that I am Ollie's Omega and his only.



I push harder, faster, moving up and down his cock, and Barret gasps, digging his nails into my rounded hips.

Oliver stops jerking off long enough to tell him off. “Hey, claws to yourself, Barret.”

Barret sighs, opening his eyes to peer up at me apologetically, and I purr to reassure him that it’s okay.

But the only scratching here will be from my own claws.

Only I get to claim what is mine...

So, faster I go, and he matches my speed, remaining flat on the mound of plush blue pillows. When he tries to sit up, trying a different angle, I growl, shoving him back, and he blinks, stupefied.

He’s *my* fuck toy, my sex doll, and he better keep still or I will...

“Fuck... *sunshine*...”

He kicks up inside me when I squeeze on his cock, claiming my prize, and then I roll my hips, the sound of slapping skin echoing through the nest.

I’m chasing my release, that glorious peak that is just in sight and soon...

I am going to jump right off the edge.

I may even be so kind as to let him jump off it with me....

But he has to earn it first. His penance for abandoning my Omega the first time.

While I don’t harbor ill feelings as much as I used to, my Omega sure as hell does.

She holds onto grudges like some people hold on to old socks, and she is going to make him pay.

Stars flicker at the edges of my vision, and I’m close.

He is, too. His abs flex, shining with sweat, and I growl.

“Don’t you dare... you release when I do... when I give *permission*...”

I have no idea where this dominating nature comes from. I never realized Omegas could be so dominant.

My Omega is just pissed about her last heat. And it seems she is one bitter, needy creature.

Maybe later, when all is right with the world again, I will give them back their control. So as not to bruise their egos too much, you know.

The Alpha opens his eyes, and I meet those dark slits.

He's Alpha. The natural dominant. Yet he yields and lets me take full control, almost as if his Alpha is aware that my Omega needs this, that she needs her sense of control.

She got burnt badly.

And she is out for revenge.

"With... with pleasure..." he pants, continuing to let me fuck him at my own, cruel, vicious Omega's pace.

My movements become jagged next, and then my muscles seize.

It starts at the base of my spine, rising through me like a crescendo, and then my Omega extends her claws, raking cruel, red gashes down his chest as she finally releases.

Barret grits his teeth, and then he releases, too. I clench around his cock, milking him for all he's worth.

A useless Alpha who abandons his Omega in her time of need.

She takes what is rightfully hers, what she was denied from the start, and he just merely lays there and lets me take it from him, all of it, his seed, his cock, his knot...

Even his dignity.

His knot swells, and my vision whitens next when he fills me, notching deep inside, and I orgasm once again, clenching around his thickness.

My Omega stops scratching at last, finally satisfied, and I have no idea what comes over me next.

Tears slip from my eyes, and I cry.

That vindictive little creature has finally gone back into her cage, and I am just Mila again.

My hormones are running rampant, and I can't...

Barret's Alpha takes over now, and then he sits up, wrapping his arms around me, and purrs.

"It's okay, sunshine... it's okay... you didn't hurt me that much..."

That's not what I am crying about. I don't even know what this emotion is.

That was a lot of anger I just released, a lot of grief, and now I feel... *weak*... like a big blob of jelly.

I'm shaking.

He's still notched inside me, locked at my hips, and it's his very knot that has me overwhelmed.

This was what my body needed, what it was denied in those cold, lonely woods, and now that I have it...

I... don't know what to feel.

Oliver approaches at last. There's no need for him to keep away anymore.

I got my 'revenge'.

Still, I can't stop crying.

I hurt Barret.

He's bleeding.

I scratched him too hard.

"He's fine, Mila... you did amazing..."

Oliver kisses the back of my neck as I cry into Barret's chest.

"I'm... sorry..." I hiccup.

Barret chuckles, his warm, velvet laugh soothing my spirit, my fears.

This. This was what I needed.

Comfort. Reassurance.

“I enjoyed every moment, sunshine. I want those claws tearing into me again and again... Maybe one day you can bring the knife into the nest too... so you can skin me alive like a rabbit...”

I giggle, burying my nose into his neck.

Oliver rearranges my pillows and blankets, creating a fort for the three of us, and he knows exactly how I like them.

For the first time in weeks, I feel safe.

No, for the first time in my entire life.

I always had to be a fighter. A protector.

But with them, I am safe. I am protected from the world, and I never want to come out of this blanket fort again.

## CHAPTER 40

### *Lachlan*

I t's hopeless.

Utterly hopeless as I lose all sense of control, my Alpha taking the front seat at last as he drives us both off a cliff.

He is relentless, and all I can do is bang on the glass screen of my mind.

He yanks on the chains, hoping to rip us free, and if he's not careful, he's going to get us both in trouble.

I wouldn't be surprised if he tried to bite our hand off, and I have to get through to him somehow.

I can't have a hook for a hand...

How else will I pleasure my snowdrop?

Her scent lingers all over the house, even reaching me in the basement, and I worry that the others have forgotten about me.

My Omega's groans echo through the house, and I have to—no, *need* to reach her...

I can't even jerk off to the sound, my hands shackled in chains, and this is ridiculous.

I am ridiculous. I am a human, not an animal.

I am better than this.

Must escape. *Need* to escape.

Must reach my snowdrop... so I can take her pain away...

I won't abandon her again. I promised I would be there for her. I even got down on my knees and made a vow to ensure she never knew a moment of sadness again.

She has the others, but it's not enough.

She doesn't have *me*...

Damn, these chains!

I pull and I pull, roaring the house down, and I'm sure the walls of the basement shake.

I see her in my mind's eye, her pussy dripping with need as she begs me to ease the pain.

*Come to me, Lachlan...* she whispers.

So, I tug and tug on the chains again, roaring till my voice is hoarse.

My heart pounds, the only thing I can hear at that moment.

Another groan of deep, sensual pleasure from upstairs, and with one final tug of my chains, I yank myself loose.

With a crazed cackle, I sprint up the basement stairs, my chains clanking heavily on the wooden steps behind me as I chase her scent through the house.

The house is stone-cold silent. No sign of Gryphon in sight.

He has gone, abandoning our snowdrop once more, but that's all right.

She has me now.

I'm all she needs.

And maybe Barret and Oliver too.

Her gingerbread scent leads me up to the second level of the house, and there the sounds and smells grow stronger when I set my sights on that door.

So, I charge forth, bursting through the doors, and my mouth waters when I behold that beautiful sight.

My precious snowdrop getting thoroughly fucked.

Oliver behind her, and Barret between her legs.

All three stop at the sight of me, but I don't move, don't think as I fall to my knees on the threshold, tears streaming from my eyes.

The sight of her is enough to tame the beast in me, and just like that, I am *me* again.

Snowdrop licks her lips, reaching her hands out for me, and at once, I go to her.

But before I can beg for her forgiveness, she yanks me inside her blanket fort, throwing me down on the pillows as she has her way with me.

And I wholly submit.

## CHAPTER 41

### *Mila*

**M**y Omega casts her eyes over her beautiful prize, aware of a faint growling in the corner of the nest.

Barret is tense, and understandably so.

Lachlan has been in that basement for days. He's fucking *insane*, and only God knows how he managed to escape.

Judging by the chains and shackles hanging from his wrists, the Alpha tore himself free.

The scent of my heat must have been enough to propel him forward, but damn, that must have hurt.

His wrists are in some serious need of TLC, and he's filthy.

Well, it just so happens that I like my Alphas filthy...

He doesn't take his gaze off me, his eyes burning electric blue, and when I scratch my fingernails down his chest, he throws his head back and sighs.

"Snowdrop..."

"No talking," I snap, reaching down to peel his shirt free.

Days of sweat and grime come away with the shirt, but in my sex-craved state, I hardly care.



My Omega wants one thing and one thing only, and that's a knot.

I grip the shirt by the hem, dragging it up his body to tuck it over his head, and now those eyes burn through the stained cotton.

My mouth salivates when I rake my gaze over those sculpted muscles, stroking my fingers through that chiseled six-pack, and Lachlan completely melts beneath my gentle touch.

Well, he better enjoy it while it lasts, because I won't be gentle for long.

Soon, I will get my claws out.

I reach down, licking a path from the cut V of his hips to his pecs, tasting the sweat of his skin.

Lachlan groans, gasping for air, and he almost swallows that stained shirt. Then I kiss another trail down his chest, stopping at the bulge in his pants, and then I pull down his zipper.

I set him free, raking my gaze over his shaft.

He's already weeping, and I lower, blowing softly on that inflamed head.

Another moan from below, this one ending with a slight growl. When he reaches his hands up to touch me, I bat them away.

No. He doesn't get to touch. Not yet.

Not until I have gotten what I want from him.

The others watch as I take what is rightly mine into my mouth, hollowing out my cheeks so I can take him all the way to the back of my throat.

Lachlan turns into Alpha putty as I move my mouth up and down his long shaft, feeling those veins beneath my tongue, lips pressing against his balls.

He even tries to reach up and grip my hair, but I push him away again, meeting his gaze pointedly through the cotton of his shirt.

Crazed blue eyes are all I can see now, and I know at that moment then that Lachlan is a demon.

Why else would his eyes glow?

He can have his way with me later.

For now, he is all mine...

His abs flex, and then he balls his fists, ready to burst at the seams.

But just before he explodes, I slip my mouth free of his cock. "Don't you dare come."

He growls, growing restless, but he has to remember...

This is *my* nest.

And he has to play by my rules.

"Snowdrop... you're *killing* me..."

Barret scoffs, massaging his own erection. He's a good boy and always holds back, waiting for my release to come first.

Oliver is just as patient in his own designated corner, and they don't even seek each other's company.

They want to make it all about me.

"Oh, you haven't seen anything yet..." Barret taunts, winking his eye at me.

He's right. I haven't even gotten my claws into him yet.

Lachlan is trembling beneath me now as I deny him his release with just my bark alone.

Normally, it's Alphas who deny an Omega their release, but I am turning the tables here.

His dick kicks up, weeping that dark seed, yet I still deny him that sweet, rapturous pleasure, prolonging the torture.

"Snowdrop..." he growls, but I ignore him, lift my hips, then impale myself on his cock.

That right there was my first mistake.

The Alpha snarls, and before I know it, he flips me around, and now I am on my back, gazing up at those crazy, lust-filled eyes.

His eyes blur, exposing the whites, yet I show no sign of fear.

Not when I am the one who is still completely in control.

He's not the only crazy one around here...

My Omega is about to run circles around him.

The Alpha pins my arms to the mattress of the nest and then starts thrusting his hips.

He's gone into a rut, mad with lustful rage, but I'm worse.

*Far* worse.

So, I flip us back the right way around, and soon I'm the one on top, gazing down into his surprised face, and the Alpha blinks at me, stupefied.

I roll my hips, grinding into his thick, long cock, and he shudders, closing his eyes when I start rutting into him now.

But then he opens them again, and I see the challenge.

A slow smirk stretches across his face, and then an insane sound ruptures his throat. Without warning, he hooks his hands beneath my knees, shooting us both across the room.

He ruts me against the wall, and I wrap my legs around his waist, marking my claws into his back, and he arches into my touch.

Only a psychopath gazes back at me now when I meet those eyes, and we have to play this carefully.

We're walking a knife's edge here.

Alphas can lose all control in a rut and have even been known to bite Omegas.

But I will stop him before it gets to that.

After all, I am the one in control.

Lachlan won't know what hit him.

He continues to fuck me into the wall, the snap of our hips the only sound to be heard throughout the nest.

Sweat drips down my body as he works me up to an orgasm, but before I reach that sweet mountain peak, I plant my feet against the wall, pushing us forward.

Now I rut him on the floor, and the Alpha merely lays there, letting me take over.

My back arches, fire burning up and down my spine, and finally, I release.

With a roar, Lachlan flips me around one last time, knot filling me at last as I stretch around him to accommodate his size.

We're locked at the hips, and now absolutely nothing can break us apart.

My heart is pounding, and I can feel Lachlan's beneath the palms of my hands as I caress the strong muscles of his back.

He's shaking, resisting the urge to bite.

His teeth tease at my neck, a dog with a piece of meat in its mouth.

He's even dribbling, but I shush him, purring softly.

Poor thing is still lost to his rut.

But I've got this.

"It's okay, Lachlan..."

His chest heaves, pressing against my own as ragged breaths escape him. Then with one final shudder, he slumps, burying his nose into my neck.

His hot breath makes me shiver as he breathes me in.

"Snowdrop..."

I smile against his greasy hair. He is in desperate need of a shower, but I savor his touch, his wildflower scent as I hold him close.

"It's me, Lachlan."

“I... I am sorry... so, so, sorry...”

I giggle, rubbing my hand in circles on his back. “I know.”

Finally, he lifts his head, looking into my eyes, and he’s all Lachlan again.

It appears that the maniac has gone to bed.

So long as he remembers to wake up again.

That maniac will always be welcome in my nest.

Just so long as he remembers who is in charge.

He cups my face, swirling his thumb across my cheekbone. Then he leans forward, planting a kiss on my lips, and I open my mouth, inviting him inside.

When we break apart, we bump noses, and that’s how we remain.

Soon, Oliver appears, taking up his place on Lachlan’s right. Then Barret arrives, taking up my rear, and soon, sleep finds us.

My nest is finally complete.

Well, almost.

There is still one missing.

I still have his campfire and marshmallow candle sputtering on the shelf.

Maybe one day, I can have the real thing.

But an Omega can dream.

## CHAPTER 42

### *Oliver*

Mila is approaching the last wave of her heat, and as a result, she is needier than ever.

All she can think about is a knot, and I don't mind taking a back seat as my Alphas give her what she needs.

I won't have her getting sick on my watch.

A knot is as vital as breathing for an Omega during heat, and this is my penance.

So, I will sit back and watch my Alphas as they pleasure another Omega, but I barely even see them, even when Barret slips his cock between Mila's lips and fucks her mouth.

All I see is her, on her hands and knees, looking so soft, so beautiful...

Barret's heavy balls slap her face, and once again, I jerk off, holding off on my release.

I only release when she does.

Barret and Lachlan wait too, and I am proud of my Alphas.

They seem to know what she needs, patient as ever as they ensure that her pleasure comes first.

Lachlan fucks her from behind, a high-pitched laugh escaping him as he slaps Mila's ass. She groans on Barret's

cock, and the Alpha grits his teeth, sweat dripping down his snarling face.

Yet I don't approach. I watch until I'm blue in the balls, waiting until she calls me over.

But at least I get to be a part of this.

Gryphon has been denied entry into her nest.

The thing is, I don't think Mila has truly denied him. He has kept away mostly of his own accord.

At first, I thought it was for the best. His way of making it up to her after how he treated her, but I spy the longing in Mila's eyes.

Her gaze will drift toward the door now and then, as if she is expecting someone, but I don't have the heart to tell her.

Gryphon booked a room at a hotel and the irony...

He can't stand to be in the house, her glorious scent in every single room.

So strong, that even Lachlan managed to escape his chains, and it looks like we are going to have to find some stronger chains.

Lachlan quickens the pace, slapping his balls against her swollen, wet pussy, and I run my hand up my shaft, gripping the blankets beside me.

Not yet.

Not until Mila has her release.

She will always come first.

Even after her heat.

I have already made up my mind, but I am going to ask one of the guys to bite her into the pack.

I just haven't decided who yet.

Then she will finally be a part of us.

A part of me.

Mila groans, clenching her cheeks around Lachlan's cock, and finally, she releases.

We all follow suit, and finally, I lay back on the pillows, satisfied.

But not wholly. No.

Yet I won't approach. Not until she needs me.

Mila nestles down on the nest, resting her head on Barret's chest. Lachlan plants kisses up and down her spine, and she sighs in contentment, opening her eyes.

They find me.

She reaches her hand out, and I crawl forward, placing my face beside hers. I sweep my fingers through her hair.

"Mila? Are you all right?"

She smiles, nodding her head, and my heart melts.

But then I pause when I spy that yearning in her eyes, and I don't speak, don't think as she yanks me close, throwing her arms around me.

She kisses up and down my throat, and once again, I am hard as she helps herself to my body.

I'm already covered in enough scratches, but I don't care.

She can claim me again in that endearing fashion of hers.

She's cute when she's possessive. Not to mention *sexy*...

The guys agree too.

It's why we pander to her needs. We like it when she takes control.

Even Lachlan. The sadistic bastard.

Mila plants a bruising kiss on my lips, and her groan is a balm to my soul as she untangles herself from Barret's limbs, pushing me down onto the pillows as she takes what is hers.

She spies my cock, licking her lips, then takes me in her mouth.



Pure rapturous bliss fills me as her warm, velvet mouth covers me, but I keep my arms by my sides.

I won't touch. Not until she gives permission.

She massages her tongue along the underside of my cock, and I'm about to come from that alone.

She's pure torture.

Torture and bliss.

Mila slips her mouth away from my cock, slowly and tortuously, then takes me between her legs, sliding down to the hilt.

More lights tease at the edges of my vision, but once again, I let her have her way with me as she feasts her eyes all over my body, scratching her claws down my chest.

Fuck.

That alone is enough to undo me.

She grinds her pussy along my cock, rolling those delicious round hips until she reaches her peak.

I know the moment it starts.

Mila squeezes on my shaft, and I grit my teeth, beads of sweat blooming across my body.

Her walls flutter around me, trembling and shaking with her orgasm, and then she sharpens her claws, creating new gouge marks in my flesh, completely feral.

I'm not even this unhinged during my heat, and female Omegas are something else.

It's intoxicating.

Being used, abused, and wrung dry.

Barret and Lachlan look spent, yet Mila is still raring to go.

She summons them, and they happily oblige, despite how worn and tired they are.

She orders Barret to take her from behind this time, and Lachlan to take her mouth while she fucks me.

When Barret thrusts, pushing her up against my cock, I groan out my pleasure, never taking my eyes off her.

Her eyes glow like the green eyes of a cat, and her feline beauty never ceases to amaze me.

Barret ruts again, and she moans, throwing her head back. She takes my hands, guiding them to her breasts, and now I massage her nipples.

When she gives me the order, I lean up, and take one of her breasts into my mouth, sucking, pinching, and sucking again.

Lachlan ruts into her mouth, his breaths labored above us as he is losing steam.

His eyes look a little glazed, and what has she done to him?

The Alpha can barely stand on his own two feet.

He looks ready to drop.

None of us were prepared at all for Mila.

Only when she releases, do we release, too.

That's the rule in this nest.

Mila wraps her hands around Lachlan, scraping her claws down his back, and then he comes to life, a small, rasping laugh escaping him.

Finally, Mila moves her mouth from Lachlan just long enough to scream her release, and I feel the echo through the bond as the sound vibrates along Lachlan's cock, and finally, we release.

All three of us at once.

Then we pile on top of each other, a tangle of sweaty limbs.

Lachlan grabs the blankets, and if he's ready for bed, then I guess we all are.

Barret seems to share the same sentiment, but little do they know as they both snore beside us, sandwiching us in the blanket fort, Mila and I continue.

Alphas. They never last.

Omegas on the other hand...  
I could never grow tired of her.  
And I know she feels the same.

## CHAPTER 43

### *Mila*

**M**y heat is finally over, and I never thought I would see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Don't get me wrong; it was the best four days of my life, but life needs to return back to normal.

*I need to return back to normal.*

The guys are covered in scratches, and I merely cringed when I finally woke up on the last day and saw the state they were all in.

They were good about it, though. As a matter of fact, they were happy.

*Too happy.*

Lachlan only promised to return the favor one day, and my Omega purred in deep satisfaction.

At least she is finally happy.

She finally got what she was denied a few weeks ago, and now she can rest.

I just don't know what will happen now.

How will things change between us?

After all, the future is still uncertain.

Lily still has me wrapped around her finger, and any day now, I am expecting to hear from her.

She will want a thorough report.

Oliver is giving my nest a deep clean, and I have no idea where Barret and Lachlan are.

Good. The fewer distractions, the better.

My heat may be over now, but I need to think of my next plan.

When I enter the kitchen for a much-needed cup of coffee, I freeze in my tracks, coming face to face with that Alpha at the table.

Gryphon looks *terrible*, black bags under his eyes as he nurses a steaming cup in his hand.

He's on edge, and I turn and leave until he calls my name.

"Mila..."

That deep voice is enough to make me stop, and now I glance at him from over my shoulder.

Those burgundy eyes never leave me, and I swallow, stepping back into the kitchen.

I guess it's time.

I have wanted to tell him for a while, but with the creation of the nest and my heat, I decided it was best to wait.

But I have to tell someone, and I hope they can all forgive me.

Gryphon always suspected as much.

Nothing ever goes past that Alpha, and now I approach the table, a tentative poodle with her tail between her legs.

"M-may I sit?"

The Alpha tenses for a moment, deciding his next move, but then he heaves a sigh and gestures to the empty seat.

"Go ahead."

I take the seat, and now we sit in silence. I chew my lip, thinking of something to say.

How do I start?

*I really missed you in the nest...*

No, not that. The other thing.

The more pressing matters at hand.

Still. He spent my heat at a hotel, and it hurts.

I know he hurt me in the past, but it would be nice to know that he wants me, even just a little.

Oliver assures me that he does. The Alpha just wants to torture himself first.

Luckily, Gryphon cuts straight to the chase.

“Is there something you need to tell me, Mila?”

I meet those eyes.

Yet they're not cutting or judgmental. They're merely understanding and just maybe I can do this.

Tell him everything.

I just hope it doesn't come back to bite me in the ass.

Lily is a powerful Alpha, and I fear she has bugs planted all over this house.

I'm convinced she can even read my mind, but that's just silly.

Or is it?

It's hard to tell with her sometimes.

Still. I find that my words don't come so easily.

The chair opposite me creaks, and Gryphon stands, his campfire scent overwhelming me.

“Tell me, Mila...”

My lower lip wobbles, and before I have a chance to run, he grips the back of my chair, caging me in. His eyes burn.

“Tell me... only then can I help you...”

Tears prick at the back of my eyes, but I know they won't have any effect on him.

He's a hard guy.

Still, his eyes track the movement down my face as one stray tear escapes, and this is stupid.

I'm better than this.

I gasp when he reaches across, swiping it away with his thumb, and we meet each other's eyes again.

Gryphon looks just as shocked as I do, but then he coughs awkwardly and gets to the heart of our conversation again.

“What does she have on you, Mila?”

I can't help it now. The tears come, and I cover my face, telling him everything.

He doesn't make a sound, and I'm sure he growls when I tell him how she came to my room at the Academy and cornered me.

Well, I guess my dark secret is out.

I just hope none of them hate me after this.

## CHAPTER 44

### *Gryphon*

**A**nger is all I can feel when Mila tells me her story, and I'm a little surprised that she felt comfortable enough to confess.

She didn't miss a single beat. She just cut her chest right open, that barely healed wound, and let herself bleed.

The least I can do is listen.

I never thought I would see the day she would ever confide in me, and I have to fight every atom in my body to stop myself from wrapping my arm around her, pushing her close to my chest.

*Lily...*

It's one thing to push me around, but not Mila.

*Never Mila.*

I almost snap the wood of the table when Mila recites her tale of when the Alpha came to her room at the Academy, and what she offered her...

It was almost too good to be true. Which it probably was.

She promised Mila the one thing no one else could.

Freedom.



And not just from the confines of the Academy, but true, utter freedom.

Freedom from the need and want of a pack, and the guilt cuts me up into pieces.

How this small, sweet creature could ever feel that it was better to be alone than to be with a pack who could hurt her again...

Well, that's all on me. It's my fault that she felt like she had no choice but to work for Lily and potentially betray us.

I'm not surprised that Lily suspects that we're going to try and overthrow her. Not one bit.

That woman is always one step ahead, and we need to play our cards carefully.

Still, Mila will not fight her alone.

It must have taken real courage to confess to me tonight, and I appreciate it. Even though I don't deserve her honesty, I am grateful.

Her beautiful eyes are red and swollen when she sniffs, wiping her face for the millionth time.

I resist the urge to wipe her tears away again, keeping my hands to myself.

I don't deserve to touch her.

"You must hate me..."

Her question catches me off guard, and then I have to swallow back the guilt.

She thinks I hate her...

"No. I know what it's like being leashed by that woman."

Those big, shining eyes of green waver when the words leave my lips. "You do?"

I heave a sigh, pressing the heel of my hand to my eyes. "That's... why I was such an asshole... not that it condones my behavior...."

She's too stunned to speak, but I continue, regardless.

“I was just scared. Confused. She somehow managed to convince me that you were the enemy, Mila. As if you could ever harm a fly...”

Silence. And I curse myself for being so stupid.

I sound like an idiot.

But I will get my half-assed apology out there.

The only way I can truly redeem myself.

After all, I’ve just spent the last few days in a boring hotel room, with nothing but my right hand for company, and I don’t miss the hurt on her face.

She wanted me in the nest with her, but she must understand...

I don’t deserve her. Not yet.

I have to earn her forgiveness first.

That’s all I can manage to say. I just don’t know how to be sentimental.

My father was a tough nut to crack too, and he’s who I get it from.

Only Oliver brings out my soft side, but when I look into those big green eyes of Mila’s, I feel that hard resolve melting.

She gives me a sweet smile, even though I don’t deserve it, and reaches across to take my hand.

Her fingers hover there for a moment, but then she thinks better of it and tucks her hands beneath her legs instead.

She bows her head, a sigh escaping her.

“Will... will you tell Oliver? The others?”

I close my eyes. “I don’t have to.”

She looks up.

I sense him hovering in the hall, feel him through our bond, and I am ashamed of myself for not alerting her or making him a part of this, but I incline my chin and she turns, and I see the soul leaving her eyes when she spies Oliver.

He's not mad, of course.

No. His face matches how I feel on the inside.

He's only ashamed of himself.

"Oh, Mila..." he whispers. "I'm so sorry..."

Mila breaks down, and she lets him wrap his arms around her. Now her cries echo through the kitchen, and I give them their moment.

Still. Maybe one day, she can feel safe enough to cry into my arms.

But I have to earn it first.

Until then, I will keep my distance.

## CHAPTER 45

### *Mila*

I 'm not mad at Gryphon for failing to tell me that Oliver had been eavesdropping on our conversation.

In fact, I'm grateful.

After all, the Omega needed to hear it from my own lips—my side of the story, and why I felt the need to betray them all in the first place.

It still doesn't justify the terrible choice I made. I had been willing to betray them to their superior, all just so I could live a lavish lifestyle without the need or want of a pack.

But Lily had backed me into a corner. I was alone, miserable, and trapped at that academy.

I had done an awful thing to a fellow Omega, and as a result, my future pack would have had to deal with the burden of my choices that day.

No pack was ever going to want me after that fight with Bridget, and after I revealed my tale to Gryphon, Oliver had held me tight all night in my nest, assuring me that no one would keep us apart again. Not Lily, not the Academy, and not some archaic algorithm, which is outdated and in serious need of an overhaul.

And as I lay in his arms, breathing in the sweet scent of his honeycomb, I truly felt at peace. As if I had found where I truly belong.

The family my father had been assured that I had found on his deathbed, and I vow to keep my promise.

I am going to stick with Oliver and the pack. Even if it kills me.

I will fight for my own freedom. I'd rather die than be Lily's puppet for the rest of my life.

After all, she has a way of slithering under your skin, and Gryphon wholly understood.

He knows firsthand what it's like to be under her thrall, and maybe if we work together, we can set the both of us free.

Gryphon still keeps his distance, but he doesn't regard me with the same animosity anymore.

As a matter of fact, I think I can spy the same longing in his gaze too, but I tell myself that it's all probably just in my head.

I am not that lucky. Sure, I managed to win Oliver, Barret, and Lachlan over, but to assume that I could win Gryphon, too? That's just spoilt and very presumptuous.

No, I am happy with just the three of them.

I suppose Gryphon can just stay at a hotel every time I have a heat.

But when Oliver's next heat comes around again, will we both pleasure him in his nest? At the same time?

How will that even pan out? Will it be awkward?

It's been three days since I saw the Alpha. My heat may have finished, but I spent the whole time in the nest with Oliver.

Barret and Lachlan visited, too. They found out about my proposition with Lily, and they, like Oliver, understood. They only blamed themselves that I felt the need to make such a deal with such a devilish woman, and Lachlan even got down on one knee, vowing to make it right for me again.

He also promised me Lily's head, and that he would avenge me.

But now, I feel a hell of a lot better about myself. Unfettered for once in my life.

It was a load off my chest, and I feel light as a feather.

I know the high won't last. So I am going to enjoy it while I can.

Lily is not a woman you can cross so easily.

But we will find a way. We all will.

I just need to find Gryphon first.

It's time we talked strategies.

My feet lead me to his bedroom. A room that always felt forbidden.

Even now, I feel as if I am intruding, but his scent led me here. As if he had been calling to me somehow.

The door has been left ajar, and I spy him sitting on the end of his bed, gazing down at a photograph.

I can't see the photograph, but what I can see is the taut expression on his face.

His countenance is hard, but his eyes...

It looks as if he has been crying.

The floorboards creak beneath my heels, and the Alpha goes ramrod straight, turning his head to glare at me.

Flaming eyes meet my own, but then they soften when they discover that it was me who had been lurking, and now he faces his whole body toward me.

"Mila?"

I back away, holding my palms up.

"Sorry... I shouldn't..."

He's on his feet in seconds, breaking the small distance between us. He opens the door wider.

“No. Don’t go. It’s fine. In fact, I was just thinking about you...”

My heart flutters. He was thinking about me?

He coughs. “So we can discuss Lily?”

Oh, yeah. Of course.

*Silly Mila.*

We stand in a few more seconds of awkward silence. Then he inclines his head toward the bed, urging me to sit.

My heart screams in my ears when I gaze at those black sheets, sheets that are covered in his scent. I also catch Oliver’s scent, too, and I’m starting to realize that this was a mistake.

But I inhale a breath, and walk toward the bed, perching at the very edge.

I spy the corner of the photograph peeking out from beneath the sheets, and it looks as if Gryphon didn’t hide it as well as he thought he did.

It’s a picture of him, much younger, with an older man.

By the strong jawline and similar burgundy eyes, it has to be his father.

Gryphon follows my eyes, and shame colors his cheeks next—as if holding a picture of his deceased father is something to be ashamed of.

His eyes were shining when I spied him through the crack of his door, and I hate to intrude on his privacy.

But he shouldn’t bottle his grief.

Crying is a form of release. It reminds you that you’re not dead yourself. That you still have life in you.

I drag the photo out from beneath the sheets, and Gryphon doesn’t even tell me off. He merely leans against the chest of drawers, bowing his head.

“That’s my dad. Well, *was*...”

I stroke my finger around the picture of his dad. The semblance is uncanny. Even as they have their picture taken, not one of them is smiling, and I guess I see where Gryphon gets it from.

Still, I smile up at him, appreciating that he at least is sharing this little bit of his soul with me.

“Photographs are all we have in the end after they’ve...”

Silence. I can’t even bring myself to finish my sentence.

Saying they just *left* makes it sound like they went on a long vacation, but it also feels juvenile.

I have no idea where my dad is now, but I like to think he and Gryphon’s dad are watching us now, shaking their heads in disbelief.

Even heaven knows that Gryphon and I should be together.

I won’t deny the pull toward him. The one that makes my toes curl in a good way.

It was hard to see it at first because he had thrown up so many walls, and I was quite frankly afraid of him.

But we are getting somewhere at least.

Maybe after we defeat Lily, we can finally... I don’t know.

Have a go at it perhaps?

“So,” he starts. “Lily...”

I nod, running my hands up and down my pants. “Yeah.”

Gryphon steps closer, and his face hardens at last as he goes into mission mode. “She will want a report. Very soon.”

My heart seizes next, and I shrink, hunching my shoulders.

“She won’t call you to her office. Too obvious. So, she will likely call your phone.”

Again, I shiver just at the idea of her phone call. I bet it will come when I least expect it.

“So, what should I say when she does?”



Gryphon purses his lips, his burgundy eyes distant as he thinks up an approach. “Continue to play her game. Make her think that you are still subservient.”

I can do that. Work as a double agent.

“But... won’t Lily suspect what is happening?”

He sighs. “She may. But it’s the best choice we’ve got.”

So, we’re just going to wing it at most.

How terrifying.

Especially with a woman with a whole army at her disposal.

Now that she is the sole Governor in charge, there is no stopping her, and I curse that idiot Frederick for getting himself murdered.

We can’t even prove that she murdered him because he is dead, and this sucks.

Gryphon’s plan is the best option. For now.

Unless a miracle arrives on our doorstep.

No more words are exchanged between us, and I guess our conversation is over.

I shouldn’t outstay my welcome any longer. Especially as I am getting my scent all over his sheets.

So, I rise to my feet, heading for the door.

I still hold the photograph, and just as I pass, I hand it to him.

He takes it from my hand, not meeting my eyes.

I smile. “It’s... okay to cry about him from time to time, you know.”

His throat bobs, and finally, he looks my way.

Although his face is hard, his eyes are soft. Watery.

He doesn’t speak. He merely nods, but as I leave the room, I feel his gaze on my back, and I’m pretty sure he can see my heart thumping inside my ribcage.

Still. It's a start.

Maybe one day, we can make amends.

And maybe one day in the future, we can be more than friends.

## CHAPTER 46

### *Barret*

I enter the seedy tavern, questioning my cousin's choices when I plant my feet on the sticky bar floor.

Nice. Very rustic.

That passed-out Alpha at the bar really gives the place a nice touch.

This place is a dump, and why would Jeremy ask to meet me here of all unholy places?

I may be debauched, but I am not *this* debauched.

I have standards.

Thankfully, this place is dead, even at three pm in the afternoon. So it doesn't take me long to spot the Alpha.

He waves his arm, calling me over, and he already has a cold beer waiting for me when I join him in the shadowy booth. The bulb has blown in this corner of the bar, and I'm starting to think that Jeremy has chosen this place on purpose.

We clink beers when I join the table, and now I swig back my drink, letting it fill my head.

Then I drum my fingers on the wood-grained table, ignoring all the sticky black stains.

“So, you have invited me to talk at this shitty bar because...?”

Jeremy narrows those blue-gray eyes, looking up and down the bar. The unconscious Alpha drooling on the counter hasn't stirred once, and maybe someone should check on him.

There are only a few patrons around, but they're too lost in their own drinks, gazing down at their bottles in search of answers.

“I have news that may be of benefit to you, cousin...”

I try to remain nonchalant, but Jeremy is often my go-to man, telling me things he has seen or heard in central government.

“There's a lodge just east of the city... hidden deep in the woods...”

The woods. The place where Lily had her men dump Mila when she was in heat, and my fists curl.

The glass bottle almost cracks beneath my grip.

“Yeah? What of it?”

Jeremy doesn't tell me directly. It would be too dangerous, but that enough tells me everything I need to know.

Whatever it is, it may just be what we need to dispose of Lily and get her out of that seat.

She is the only thing getting in the way of our pack's happiness, and the sooner she is gone, then the happier all five of us can be.

And yes, I included Mila in that. I don't care what anyone says; Mila is a part of the pack now.

She belongs to us.

She belongs to *me*...

I knew it from the moment my knot swelled inside her, locking me in place between her legs. From the second I gaze into those too-green eyes.

Mila is ours.

And I will do all that I can to protect her.

I don't blame her at all for taking up Lily's offer. At the time, she had no other choice. She was trapped at that school with no way out.

The system would have only destroyed her in the end, dousing that inner fire that I adore so much.

Mila is not a soft, delicate doll. She is a fighter, a huntress.

And I'll be damned if she ever goes back there again, having Alphas bidding on her as if she's a cow at a county fair.

Jeremy must spy the look in my eyes and now he sighs, gritting his teeth.

"You all fucked her... didn't you?"

There's no missing the disappointment in his eyes as I grab my beer, giving it a smug swig.

"So? What's it to you?"

"I'm just warning you, cuz. Don't get attached."

I place my drink down, studying him now.

In his line of work, I suppose it is vital. His job is to seek runaway Omegas and return them to that piece of shit school. He doesn't care, so long as he gets his paycheck.

Hence why he doesn't get attached.

Suppose he just hasn't found the right one yet.

Because from the moment he does... well, he will finally understand what the birds are singing about.

"That school doesn't have their best interests at heart, and you know it, J. Oliver was fucking miserable there for four years, and he couldn't wait to get out. I just thank our lucky stars that Gryphon had already been his scent match at that point."

"Yet isn't Mila Oliver's scent match too?"

He is. But the government wouldn't care.

They believe Alphas and Omegas should be together.

That's at least something I can be grateful for. Without Lily's inference, we never would have gotten her back.

But she still needs to be stopped.

Because Lily could just as easily take her away from us again.

Jeremy shakes his head, swigging his beer. "Check out the lodge, Barret. That's all I will say on the matter."

Well, it looks like I have a trip to make.

I will go alone.

No point in involving the others yet.

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I head out the morning after.

And I find the lodge just as Jeremy instructed.

It's a few miles away from the Alpha City, and whoever they are, they do not want to be found.

Well, too bad I have already found them.

I switch off the jeep's engine and head out the door.

I knock on the wood. No one answers at first.

So I bang louder and louder until the door finally swings open, and there I find myself staring at a living ghost.

My skin whitens, and I step back, unable to believe it.

"What?" the Beta snaps, clearly drunk.

I'm too numb with shock. Yet, I still manage to say, "But you're dead..."

It takes the previous Beta governor a moment to register my words, but when he does, he throws his head back and caws like the crows.

A few real crows fly away at his offensive sound.

"So that bitch wants you to believe..."

I still don't speak. We just stare at each other.

Finally, Frederick sighs, opening the door. “I’ll get us both a drink.”

I gaze into the lodge, wondering if I will come back out alive.

Still. I came here for answers, and I am going to get them.

This may just be what we need to defeat Lily.

## CHAPTER 47

### *Mila*

**F**rederick isn't dead after all.

He is alive, and my head is still reeling over the news.

We're all gathered in the living room, Lachlan and Oliver comforting me on my left and right.

He was my old superior, a ghost from my past—one I'd thought I'd escaped. Sure, he may have been the lesser of two evils, but he still had a hold over me.

Yet if it weren't for his scheming ways, I never would have met the pack.

He used me as a pawn so he could get closer to one of Lily's most loyal soldiers—an Alpha with whom she once held serious sway.

He was also aware of her special interest in Oliver, and he planned to use it against her.

The former Beta Governor may just be what we need to overthrow Lily. The only downside; he is a prick and we can't trust him. Not really.

As I said, the lesser of two evils, but he's the only trump card we have.



Any day now, I will be getting that call from Lily. I can just feel it looming on the horizon, and I have been on edge for days.

Gryphon has given me advice, and he has even written me a script.

I just hope I don't blow it.

No matter what, I must not lose my cool. We may have just found the one thing to defeat her, and I can't give myself away.

Gryphon is massaging his temples, eyes closed as he thinks of a strategy.

Barret has been back for an hour. I thought he had been gone an awful long time, and it turns out he had gone on a secret mission without telling us.

No doubt for the best, but still...

I had been worried.

Yet I didn't scold him about it, though. I am not going to be that Omega.

Barret currently lounges on the chair, leg draped over the arm as he nurses a tumbler of whiskey. He said he needed it after seeing a man who we all thought was dead.

His skin was as white as a sheet when he arrived, and I wanted to go over and comfort him, but I was in too much shock.

Oliver runs his hand up and down my arm, gazing up at his Alpha. "So, any plans yet?"

"I'm thinking..." Gryphon rasps back.

I resist the urge to get up and soothe him too, but I am glued to my seat. Even if I wasn't in shock, I don't think I'd have the nerve.

Things are still pretty tense between us.

I'm just about to offer a suggestion when my phone rings. My heart stops when I spot that private number.

Shit.

Lily was kind enough to give me back my old phone after she'd confiscated it, and how sweet of her. I will have to remember to thank her when I next see her.

Which may be sooner than I like.

I meet Gryphon's eyes, and his jaw is clenched. He gives me a nod and I take a deep breath, rising to my feet.

I have to take this call in private. Otherwise, Lily will be suspicious.

In the end, I find a closet.

May make it seem more convincing for her.

Sometimes, I still think she can see me from somewhere, like an evil queen in a fairytale story, watching me through her magic mirror.

I shudder at the thought.

I'm not going to be the helpless princess in this story.

So, I answer the phone, clearing my voice. "Mila speaking."

Silence. Then my heart freezes when I hear her voice.

"Hello, Mila. Long time no see."

My teeth chatter, and I swallow, going over everything Gryphon told me.

Breathe evenly. Don't let her sense the fear in my voice.

He's well-versed when it comes to dealing with Lily after all.

"It's lovely to hear from you again, Governor."

"Likewise. So, anything to report?"

I stop a moment, trying to think of something to say about the pack that's not too incriminating.

I hate to do this, but Gryphon said it was fine. He said if I had to, that I only had to throw him under the bus.

Besides, he has already challenged her before, anyway. He recounted the story for me, and I had a lump in my throat the whole time.

He challenged her because of me...

“Gryphon appears to be losing confidence in your leadership, but not the others. They’re as loyal to you as ever.”

There. That’s all I will say.

That was the script Gryphon told me, and it’s almost humbling how far he will go to protect the pack.

I can almost hear the Alpha’s purr of satisfaction over the phone. “Just as I feared... I can’t say I am surprised. I had my reasons to suspect him.”

Another bout of silence, but I keep my face a mask of natural calm. As Gryphon taught me.

“Anything else to report?”

I knew this question would arise, and I must keep my tone neutral.

“No. Nothing, Governor.”

She doesn’t pry any further, and I really hope she can’t see me right now because I have sweat dripping down my temple. My heart is pounding too.

“Well, when we next speak, Mila. I suspect you will have more to report next time.”

She cuts off, and I breathe a huge sigh of relief, taking a moment to reorient myself.

Even when she’s not in the room, she’s terrifying.

The closet door opens about twenty minutes later, and it’s Gryphon.

His face is a mask of stone, but his eyes are burning with passion.

How long has he been standing outside the door?

I try to smile up at him to break the tension, but my legs have turned to jelly. I can’t get up.

Finally, he kneels to my level, placing his hand on my shoulder. His fingers squeeze, and I close my eyes, feeling the anxiety ebb at his mere touch.

“It’s over now, Mila.”

Is it, though?

While I don’t think she suspected anything, I just have an awful feeling...

We don’t speak for a time, and I wonder why none of the others arrive.

I suspect Oliver encouraged Gryphon to be the one to comfort me, and I’m grateful to him. I don’t know what I would have done without his guidance, and he has become somewhat of a friend these past couple of days.

Soon, he rises to his feet, extending his hand to me, and I let him pull me up.

He doesn’t smile or congratulate me, but I know he is impressed with me. Even as he leads me back to the others.

They’re all waiting eagerly for me when I arrive. Lachlan scoops me up in his arms and cradles me on the couch, whispering sweet nothings.

Oliver and Barret gather around me too. Lachlan and Barret purr.

Gryphon leans against the mantel, keeping his distance per usual.

Oliver cups my cheek. “You did well, Mila.”

I sigh, closing my eyes against his touch. Lachlan’s purr vibrates beneath my ear, and I just focus on the sound.

Barret purrs above me, stroking my head.

I just want this to all be over.

I want to see this war with Lily come to an end.

I want my pack and my happy life, and I am going to do everything I can to get it.

So, I glance up at Gryphon, telling him my half-baked plan. It's a start at least.

“Enlist Frederick. Get him on our side. It's time everyone knows what Lily did.”

That she framed his death.

Hopefully, they will lock her up after this.

That's if she hasn't already spread her poison far and wide.

People are afraid of her, but not for long. Hopefully.

It's time to let the world know how corrupt she is.

Then we can all find happiness.

## CHAPTER 48

### *Lachlan*

Gryphon and Barret leave the very next day to enlist Frederick to our cause, and now it's up to me to protect the Omegas.

Gryphon didn't want them anywhere near that Beta, and for once, I agreed with him.

It seems like he is finally growing a soft spot for Mila, even considering her as important as his own Omega, and maybe there is hope for him yet.

Still. He better get in line.

Mila is *mine*.

We're having movie night in Oliver's room, and the distraction was what we all needed.

We barely even watch the movie as Oliver and I pleasure Mila.

Oliver kisses her lips while I kiss between her legs, and her groans of pleasure sound like music to my ears.

I'm just kissing a tortuous path down her body when my Alpha picks up on the first sign of disturbance.

My hackles rise, and I stop kissing my Omega.

Both Oliver and Mila watch confused.

“What’s wrong, Lachlan?” Oliver asks.

I listen to the sounds outside the window for a moment. There’s a storm tonight, the branches of a tree scratching against the glass, but I can’t seem to shake the feeling that we are being watched.

A growl slips from my lips and both Omegas freeze.

I jump to my feet, shooting for the door.

“Lachlan!” Oliver calls behind me, but I press on.

“Wait here,” I tell him. “I’m going to investigate. You got a gun, right?”

Oliver nods, and then he shows me his handgun.

Mila has one too, and I smile at her proudly.

Our little fighter.

I slip out the door, carrying my knife. I don’t need a gun.

My eyes search the woods around our house, and I think I spy a shadow.

Something moves, and a smirk curls my lips.

It looks like I’m in luck.

My dick was already pretty hard from Mila, but now I grow even harder as I pursue that trespasser.

My Alpha is out for blood.

They’ll be sorry that they ever trespassed on our territory.

I chase them through the forest, completely barefoot. Their scent is strong, and it doesn’t take me long to gain on them.

I tackle the bastard to the floor, a lion pursuing a gazelle, and when I point my knife at his neck, a crazed laugh escapes my throat.

“You messed with the wrong pack...”

He’s not a big guy. Maybe a Beta and this will be over in seconds.

Maybe I can bring his head back home to my snowdrop.

“Any last words before I sever your head?”

He grits his teeth, eyeing that sharp blade. Then he whispers just loud enough for me to hear.

“Lily sends her regards...”

I falter. Lily?

His answering smirk tells me everything I need to know, and I knock him out, deciding that I will deal with him later as I run back to the house.

Fuck. It was a diversion.

Oliver. Mila...

The lights of the house appear in the gloom up ahead, and I pick up the pace, hoping I make it on time.

*Don't worry, Oliver, Mila...*

*I'm coming...*



## CHAPTER 49

### *Mila*

“It will be okay, Mila. Everything will be fine...”

I can hear the uncertainty in his voice, and now we sit in silence, the movie droning on in the background as white noise.

Gryphon and Barret went to visit Frederick, seeing if he was willing to come back with us, exposing Lily for the liar she is.

She framed his death, and he should want to get even.

I don't know what she did or said to convince him to live on the fringes of our society, becoming a recluse basically, but it must have been enough to terrify him.

He was paving the way for Betas, threatening Lily's Alpha government.

The most likely explanation: she threatened him.

And I wonder what she said to get him to leave.

Did Frederick have secrets?

I never liked him, and I always got a bad vibe from him whenever we exchanged pleasantries. The Beta was a pig, and I saw the way he ogled those Omegas at the Governor's Ball.

Whatever Lily has over him, it could be enough to damn him and his career. Maybe send him to prison.

I just hope he is brave enough to come back with us.

Oliver freezes beside me next, and I glance his way, my heart pounding.

His face is white.

“What is it, Oliver?”

He peers at me, his lip shaking. “Gryphon... he just sent a message through the bond...”

The *bond*. Something I don’t have access to.

One I hope to one day.

When all this is over. When we are free from opposition.

“What did he say?”

Oliver’s face breaks, and it looks as if he doesn’t know how to tell me, that he is too afraid.

“Frederick... he’s dead. A knife to the throat... Gryphon and Barret...”

He doesn’t have to go on. My mind has put two and two together.

Gryphon and Barret had gone to visit Frederick, and enlist him...

Only to find him dead.

Lily. She’s already one step ahead of us.

She must have gotten wind that we found Frederick, and was it something I said over the phone? Did my voice give it away?

Unless she is as omnipresent as I feared.

I’m too numb with shock. I can barely move, but when Oliver jumps out of the seat, pinning me to the ground, I don’t even react.

Not even when the house explodes all around us.

Still, I wrap my arms around his back, knowing that this could be the end. That we may die.

I'm just grateful that I got to die in the arms of someone I love.

Not everyone gets to be so lucky.

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When I wake, it's not the arms of Oliver I find myself, but in a cold, dark cell, gazing up through the gaps of the bars to see *her* face.

Lily. Sitting on a stool in a ridiculous pink suit, her arms crossed, disappointment leaking from her cruel, black eyes.

An armed guard stands close, his eyes peeled ahead, a formidable force.

If Lily gives the order, he will shoot. No questions.

My throat swells, but I hold back my emotions and face her head-on.

“Where is he?”

Lily gives me nothing. Not even a tic of the jaw. The only muscle that she moves on her face is her eyebrow. “Who?”

I stumble up to my feet, gripping the bars. “You know who.”

The armed guard shifts, but Lily holds her hand out.

He resumes his position.

The idiot is on the wrong side. I wonder if she threatened to kill his wife and kids.

This woman has a leash around us all, and it's time we put a stop to her.

She's still a person, though. Maybe I can ruffle her up somehow, poke at a nerve. It could spell the end for me, but I'm willing to try anything now just to save my family.

Oliver and the pack *are* my family now, and we will all live happily ever after.

“Oliver... my *Omega*...”

Lily finally reacts. One side of her mouth curves, and she's mocking me, I know it, but I never falter, never let my glare

waver.

“*Your* Omega?”

I nod. “That’s right.”

Lily blinks. Then she laughs, repositioning her legs.

That pink pencil skirt does not suit her at all. Her legs are far too muscular.

Still. She could probably pop my head off my shoulders with those thighs, but I can hold my own.

I was the best in my class after all. The top Beta.

“I never knew an Omega could have an Omega...”

I scoff, “He’s more of my Omega than he’ll ever be yours, Governor.”

Lily’s eyes flash, and for the first time, she gives me something. A flicker.

Merely rage, but that rage has to come from somewhere.

I will find its origin.

“And what about Gryphon?”

I stop, and she smirks, knowing she hit her mark. Things are still tense between me and Gryphon, and I don’t think we will ever become closer than we are now, but I still hold on to hope.

“Still trouble in paradise, I see...”

I fall quiet, but I still don’t look away from her.

“A pity. I thought I saw something in his eyes that day in my office... the first time he showed me defiance. I had mentioned you, of course. Hence why I had to act.”

I don’t reply, my eyes stinging as she discusses Gryphon.

Just maybe things could have been different between us. In different circumstances.

I always assumed that Oliver, Barret, and Lachlan would have been enough, and they are.

But my life wouldn't be the same without Gryphon in it.

I don't want him to book a hotel for my next heat. I want him in the nest, pleasing me along with Oliver...

Pure heaven.

And I will have that one day.

I still have hope.

Lily regards me with those shrewd eyes, and she really can see right through me.

The fault of having doe eyes—doe eyes a rare shade of green.

“I saw this coming, you know. From the day I entered your dorm room and gave you that proposition, I knew you would betray me...”

The comment pisses me off, and I grit my teeth. “Then *why* come to me in the first place?”

She shrugs the padded shoulders of her pink blazer, and the last thing she needs is shoulder pads with those broad shoulders. “I guess I just like playing with my toys... or my *chess* pieces, if you will.”

Yeah. Because we are all nothing but pawns on her big strategy board. The witch.

It makes sense why she was able to anticipate all our moves.

The woman can see every possible outcome, every possible action her subjects could potentially make.

A true skill.

And it's that developed abstract thinking that makes her a feared leader.

“Why?” I ask

“Why what?”

“Why can't you just leave us alone? You finally have it all. You're at the top. Frederick is dead... Why can't you just let us be?”

I spy it, then. A flicker in her eyes, and I pay closer attention now.

She senses my awareness, and rises from the stool, giving me her back, but it's too late.

I saw it all in just that one glimpse.

Lily doesn't have it all. The words just blurted out of me. I hadn't even planned them, yet they made her react.

Made her *human*.

The woman hates insubordination. But I've started to realize. Her power is all she has...

That fear and respect.

So when it wanes, she falters.

It may not be much, but I revel in my small victory.

She may be able to see right through my big green eyes, but I saw something in hers too.

Even if it was brief, it was something.

I will just have to bide my time. Strike in the right moment.

And when I do, I will make it *hurt*.

## CHAPTER 50

### *Oliver*

**M**y throat is hoarse, and the distant ringing has finally subsided.

I may have made it out of the explosion, but did Mila too? I protected her with my body once again, and I hope it was enough.

I swear if anything happened to her, then Lily is *dead*.

The door opens in the room, and I look outside the bars of my cell. A growl tears from my throat when I spy that obnoxious pink.

Speak of the she-devil...

*Lily.*

An armed guard steps in behind her, and he doesn't scare me.

And neither does she.

The sound of her heels grates on my ears as she steps toward my cell, a poisonous smile painted on her face. She crosses her arms next and just stares at me for a while, cocking her head.

As if she is sizing me up, to see if I am to her liking.

However, I spy no true want or desire inside her jewel-black eyes. Not the same lewd gaze I get from most other Alphas.

She only wants me for the sake of power.

I was the first male Omega enrolled at the school. Back then, we were so rare and highly coveted.

If I hadn't already scent-matched with Gryphon before I graduated, then I would have fetched a sweet sum in the auctions.

I bet Lily would have been one of the first in line.

A shudder runs up my spine, and I step away from her stench of rotten roses.

Never in a million years.

She rolls her eyes. "Oh, relax, Oliver. I am not interested in you that way. If it's any consolation, I hate children."

Children?

I wasn't even thinking about *children*...

Bile fills my mouth, and I have to get out of here, ASAP.

Gryphon tugs on the bond, sensing my discomfort, and I wrap a soft tendril around our tether.

Thank God for mate bonds. Otherwise, he would have had no idea where I was. That I am even alive.

I just wish I could sense Mila.

If we survive this, then I am biting her into the pack. Not me personally, but one of the guys.

It's the only way for us all to move forward.

"So, what *do* you want with me?" I ask, trying to stall her.

Gryphon is on his way. Hopefully, he will get here on time.

I never wanted to be the damsel. I wanted to be the hero, but right now I just want him here.

Because then we can rescue Mila together...

Lily steps closer to the cell, and her rose scent truly is stifling. It's no wonder that so many are intimidated by her. But I still hold my ground, never breaking eye contact.



“Isn’t it obvious by now?”

When I don’t reply, she continues.

“I want power. I want other Alphas to fear me and know that I have something they want... that they can never have...”

And, of course, having me as her bitch will help her seize that power.

Stupid, really.

“Also... I want that Alpha of yours to realize what happens when he crosses me...”

My head jerks up, and another growl vibrates in my throat.

She snorts. “You sure you’re an Omega, Oliver?”

I meet her height, baring my teeth. “If you hurt him...”

Her eyes taper, almost mockingly, and I bet she finds me highly amusing.

But I swear I will kill her if she hurts Gryphon or Mila.

“Perhaps you’re the one I should have been keeping an eye on all along... Remember your place, Omega. You are my subordinate. Act like it.”

Silence. Apart from the humming of the air vents.

This place is putrid, and where are we, anyway?

Looks like some kind of basement.

Lily finally steps back, taking her rotten flower smell with her. “In the end, I have a score to settle with that Alpha of yours, and I am going to start by taking those he loves most...”

She heads for the door, but I still throw the last word in. “Fuck you, bitch.”

Lily stops, and now she gives me her worst, slamming me with that wall of angry, Alpha energy.

Yet I hold my ground.

I’ve dealt with Alphas my whole life.

She is no different.

A small smirk crosses her painted lips now. “What was her name? That *sister* of yours...?”

My heart plunges, and I finally back away.

This woman truly is poison.

“Isabelle? Was that it? The one you *abandoned*? If it weren’t for you, dear Oliver, then she would still be alive today. Yet you *failed* her... just like you’re about to fail Gryphon and Mila...”

She doesn’t even stay to see the effect that her words have on me, but when I am finally alone, I drop to the ground, fighting back the tears.

Not again.

I’ve been down this rabbit hole before, and it’s just as grim and lonely as I remember.

That all-consuming grief, the guilt...

The face of a blue-eyed little girl flashes before my eyes, and finally, I break.

Isabelle.

I let her down that day.

And I am about to do the same thing to Gryphon and Mila too.

To the whole pack.

It’s hopeless.

Lily won in the end.

And I deserve to die alone in this cruel cell.

## CHAPTER 51

### *Gryphon*

“Ollie? Ollie? Talk to me!”

Oliver has completely shut down, and now I can't even sense him through the bond anymore.

All I can see is the face of a child I never met—his sister, Isabelle.

No matter how many times I have told him that her disappearance was not his fault, he still blames himself.

He was twelve. A child himself.

Fuck. This is not good.

Lily got into his head, and I swear...

This time, I will *kill* her. Just like she killed Frederick.

We found him with his throat slit on the floor of his dirty lodge, and all I had felt was anger.

Anger that Lily had got to him before we did.

She knew. Knew that we had found his location.

It's almost as if we have forgotten who we are dealing with. My old superior is always one step ahead, and defeating her won't be easy.

Especially now that she has Oliver and Mila.

Even if he is inconsolable right now, at least I can still feel him.

But I can't sense Mila, and the thought terrifies me.

I have no idea if she is okay, or if she is even alive, and I curse, slamming a fist on the steering wheel.

"Easy now..." Barret warns on the passenger seat beside me, and how the hell can he be so calm?

Lily has our Omegas!

Yeah, I said it. Mila is mine as much as Oliver is, and how it took this goddamn long for me to see it, I will never know, but I swear I won't dawdle any longer.

I just hope she will accept me.

I won't push it but I'll let her know that I am hers. If she will have me.

After all, I still have a long way to go before I am worthy of her forgiveness, but I don't mind.

Mila is worth waiting for.

"Barret... she has them... the *both* of them. Fuck! Where the hell was Lachlan? Wait till I get my hands on him..."

Barret grits his teeth. "I'm sure he's beating himself up enough as it is."

I don't care; I need to direct my anger somewhere. But I have to remember that he and Lachlan are thick as thieves. They may be at odds at times, but Barret will always have the crazy blond's back.

Yet the only person I truly blame is myself. I should have been there for them, but instead, I went to that dilapidated backwater lodge to recruit a dead man to our cause.

Frederick was already dead from the moment Barret turned up to his shack; he was dead from the moment his cousin Jeremy heard whispers that he was still alive.

I wasn't even sad when I found the former Beta governor surrounded by a pool of his own blood.

I just felt numb, empty.

It wasn't suicide. It was obvious he was murdered.

I wonder what plans Lily had for him. There would have been a reason why she had kept him alive for this long.

But in the end, she sacrificed him.

Just so her secret wouldn't get out. Just so we would lose our only trump card.

The government thinks Frederick has been dead this whole time, so nothing has changed on that front.

He is now and utterly truly dead, and we are back at square one.

Worse, Lily knows that I have strayed, and she will make me suffer by taking my Omegas away from me.

The woman will do all that she can to cling to her power. It's all she has after all.

Still. The time has finally come when I will stand up to my superior. She's had her leash around me for too long, and it was starting to choke. I couldn't breathe, but now...

The air has never tasted so sweet.

Pure freedom, and it's liberating.

I haven't felt this kind of buzz in years, and now my Alpha is eager for revenge.

Three faded marks burn on my cheek as a reminder, and I reach up, patting them gently.

It's time I paid her back for that.

We arrive at the house to find it blown to smithereens, but my eyes fall on the slumped figure in the leaf litter out front, and I've never seen a sorer creature.

I storm out of the car, going after me.

"Gryphon..." Barret warns.

I ignore him, descending on the Alpha. "*You...*"

I yank Lachlan up from the ground, gripping him by the scruff of his shirt, and he doesn't even fight back. It's like all the fire has left his body, but I still shake him around a bit.

"Why? *Why* did you let this happen? Where the fuck were you?"

Lachlan blubbers, producing a generous amount of saliva from his mouth, but I press on, gripping fistfuls of his shirt.

"They're gone," I say more to myself now, hardly seeing the crying Alpha before me.

"I... I tried..." he cries, and finally, I explode.

"Well, you didn't try hard enough!"

I grip his shirt tighter, almost choking him now, and the Alpha gladly lets me. It's almost like he wants me to kill him.

Fortunately, Barret steps in, pushing me away from him, the whites of his dark eyes showing.

A warning to stay away. To back off and leave the Alpha alone.

I get it. Why kick a man when he's already down? I'm just so lost, so furious.

But the only one I blame is myself.

Lachlan did all that he could, I'm sure. Someone had intruded onto our property, and he went to deal with them accordingly.

Guessing by the blood on his shirt, he's already killed them.

Can't say I feel any remorse.

I drop Lachlan back to the ground, and now he cries into the dirt. The sound yanks on my heartstrings, and I have to look away.

I really am a bastard.

"Come on, get up." Barret drags him up to his feet, but Lachlan pushes him away.

"No... I deserve..."

He doesn't finish, but I've lost interest in him now, casting my gaze ahead.

We need to get to Central Government.

It's what she wants after all.

She's using our Omegas as bait.

Once Lachlan picks himself up off the floor, we'll go. I'm sure he will be back to himself in no time.

I shouldn't have been so hard on him, but I was just so angry.

With a roll of my eyes, I turn back, getting down on my knees at his level. "Look... I'm sorry. It could have happened to any of us. Lily is smart. She knows our weaknesses. Yours is a need for blood, a need to protect, Lachlan..."

He shakes his head, and snot pours out of him this time, and how disgusting.

The poor thing really does wear his heart on his sleeve, and for someone so strong, and downright fucking terrifying at times, he is just too sensitive.

An enigma if I ever saw one.

"And it's that insane bloodlust that we need now, Lachlan. Lily took something precious from us, and we're going to get them back."

I squeeze his shoulder as if to bring some life back into him, and finally, he stirs.

I don't look away from those bloodshot eyes as I continue. "That's right. Lily needs to pay. And I'm going to gift you the killing blow..."

Something sparks to life in his eyes. "K-kill?"

The one word he loves. That sustains him and gives him life.

The fucking psychopath.

How is he not inside a padded cell right now?

“Yes. You will be the one to kill her for us, Lachlan. Make that bitch pay...”

Finally, the tears stop, and then a smirk spreads slowly across his face. A purr of satisfaction leaves his lips and now he rises back from the dead. “Yes...”

“Now get the fuck up off your knees and help us get our Omegas back.”

It starts quietly at first—a small, rattling sound. Then it grows into a crescendo—a batshit crazy cackle more befitting of a circus clown than an Alpha— and there’s no stopping him now.

He flies toward the Jeep, taking the wheel, but that’s where I draw the line.

Like fuck I’d let him drive...

I buckle up, turning to Barret. “Make sure he keeps his hands to himself.”

Barret sighs, grabbing a piece of cloth so he can tie up Lachlan’s arms. It’s necessary.

The Alpha is too lost in his crazy thoughts to notice the innocent little game of bondage right now. He barely even reacts when Barret gags him, shaking uncontrollably in anticipation of blood.

I needed to light a fire under his ass, but once that fire is lit, well, it needs to be maintained.

We will untie him when we get there.

Our greatest weapon.

For now, we need to focus.

Oliver and Mila are counting on us.

\*\*\*

It’s quiet when we get there.

Too quiet.

Almost as if she was expecting us.



Our footsteps echo off the floor as we enter the spacious hall, and where is everyone?

This place is usually bustling with government officials, but it's like someone gave them the order to go home.

It's not hard to figure out who.

She's not hard to spot, a pink blur hovering on the stairs just ahead of us, and Lachlan charges forth.

Barret yanks him back by the shirt, and thank God Barret tied and gagged him.

Lily only appears to be alone, but she has this building surrounded.

She barely even looks at him, only having eyes for me. She never did care for the rest of my pack. Maybe Oliver, but never Barret or Lachlan.

She couldn't bend them to her will, which is why she won't think twice about disposing of them now.

To make me suffer.

I know I promised Lachlan blood, but only when the time is right.

The woman holds too much power. People are afraid of her, and she has armed guards at her beck and call.

We just have to turn them against her somehow.

And there is only one thing I can think of.

It may just be the trump card we need.

"Hello, Gryphon."

Her voice is like ice, but I maintain my stance, looking her straight in her eyes, and it looks like her jaw tics.

Anything to show her that she no longer has any control over me.

I'm not her puppet anymore.

"Hand them over. Before it gets nasty."

She raises a brow. "Is that a threat?"

I never look away from her jewel-black eyes. “Only if you don’t comply...”

Again, her face gives her away, and I spy another tic on her face. She’s slowly slipping, knowing she is losing her grasp on power.

“You leave me no choice, Gryphon...”

This is it. Where she gives the order, and her men will surround us.

But I throw her the oldest trick in the book.

Let’s play like our ancestors did. Before the days when we had governors and just relied on pure animal instinct.

“No, Governor. Your men won’t touch us... because I challenge you to an Alpha duel. Just me and you. No one else.”

My eyes flash, and her face blanches for a millisecond.

I bet she wasn’t expecting an open invitation to a duel. I bet no one has ever offered to fight her one-on-one.

After all, if she is so powerful, why would she need armed guards in the first place?

A true leader needs no one.

Well, so she thinks.

Ego is the worst detriment of them all.

And I’m about to use hers against her.

Lily laughs once, a cruel, mocking sound, and it echoes in the spacious foyer.

“Fair enough. If that’s how you want to end this, Gryphon... A shame. You were always my most loyal subject.”

But not anymore.

“Meet in the stadium in half an hour.”

With that, she walks back up the stairs to her office, and Lachlan growls, going after her again.

Barret grabs him by the shirt. He turns to me. “You sure about this, Gryphon?”

I don’t take my eyes off her retreating form. “Never been surer of anything.”

Lachlan moans. “But... I was gonna be the one to kill her...”

“And you will. Once I beat her.”

Finally, I turn back the way we came, heading to the Jeep where we parked it rather haphazardly on the sidewalk.

But the streets were mercifully empty.

We may not be any closer to getting Oliver and Mila back, but this may be our only shot at securing their freedom.

I don’t actually intend to win this duel. I just intend to expose Lily for what she truly is.

Let the duel begin.

## CHAPTER 52

### *Mila*

**M**y cell door squeaks open, and I look up from pressing my face against my knees.

A guard has arrived.

“Get up.”

I don’t move.

“Where are you taking me?”

“That’s classified,” he replies, with no emotion. “Now get up.”

He storms into the cell, dragging me up to my feet, and I have no choice but to concede and follow him.

Another one places a blindfold around my eyes, and then they lead me through various hallways. Soon I am taken outside, the breeze cold on my cheeks as I am forced into a vehicle.

A short drive later, we arrive at another building, and the strong scent of perspiration tickles my nose.

Have we entered a gym?

I don’t have time to ask as the guard shoves me hard onto a bench and then rips off my blindfold.

My vision is blurred, but then things come into focus, and I find myself inside an auditorium, a large fighting ring at its center.

I'm too distracted by my new surroundings to notice the person shoved down beside me, and when they remove their blindfold, I gaze into the ocean-blue eyes of Oliver once again.

“Oliver!”

He leans toward me, but then a guard shoves him back again, and the Omega growls in frustration.

“Mila? Are you all right?”

Our hands are bound behind our backs, so we can't even touch each other, but I'm just so glad to see him again. To see that he is alive and well.

I just don't understand why they brought us here.

That's when I spy two familiar figures across the fighting ring, and it's Barret and Lachlan.

Lachlan's eyes blur in recognition, and then he goes to rise from his seat, shooting his way across the room toward us most likely, but Barret holds him back.

His own hands are bound, but Barret's remain free.

What is going on? Have we come to see a show or something?

All the seats are empty, and it appears that we're the only ones here.

There are several armed guards by the doors, but that's it. There's another with a big gun behind me and Oliver too, acting as a wedge between us, and my heart pounds.

One of the doors opens, and my eyes light up when I recognize a shirtless Gryphon.

Oliver looks just as pleased and relieved to see him too, but then a worry line forms between his eyes when another figure enters the fighting ring, and my heart caves.

Lily.

Oliver and I catch each other's gaze, and understanding finally dawns on us.

Gryphon is going head to head with Lily, and I swallow a lump in my throat.

This is only going to end one way, and I won't even be able to cover my eyes when it all goes to shit.

Because my hands are tied behind my back.

*Gryphon... what are you doing?*

The Alpha doesn't hear my silent pleas, obviously, and I wish I could run across the room and stop him.

It can't end like this. There has to be another way.

Lily will slaughter him.

"Shit..." Oliver curses, and I try wriggling out of my binds, but the guard behind me shoves the butt of his gun into my back.

"Keep still!"

"Don't you fucking touch her!" Oliver snaps, but he gets the butt of the gun shoved into his back too, and a very Alpha-like growl escapes his lips.

Silence falls over the auditorium as Gryphon and Lily meet at last, and I sense his eyes.

Gryphon looks at me and only me, his hands curled at his sides. Fire burns in those burgundy eyes, and they are more red than brown now.

Both he and Oliver look as if they want to skin the guard alive, and I spy similar expressions on Barret and Lachlan across the room.

Lily starts some warm-up exercises, stretching her arms over her head, and it's the first time I have ever seen her without a suit or a dress.

She wears yoga pants, and a cropped sports bra, and holy shit...

I always saw proof of those muscles, even beneath her delicate pink suits and dresses, but to see them exposed.

Lily truly is a force to be reckoned with, and if only we can find a truce some other way.

Gryphon does no warm-ups, and he appears far too relaxed. He merely watches his opponent, a blank expression on his face as he folds his arms across his equally muscled chest.

Lily is nowhere as muscled as he is, but she could still give him a run for his money. Nothing but pure, female strength radiates from her form, and my heart trembles at just the mere sight of her.

Finally, she straightens her posture, clicking her neck as she gets into position. “This is your final chance, Gryphon. Back out now, and you can go home with your dignity still intact.”

And his head too, I bet.

Gryphon merely stares, his face void of emotion as he keeps those arms folded in front of him. “No. This ends today, *Governor.*”

I bow my head.

If only I could stop him.

He can't do this. Oliver needs him.

*I need him.*

I never even got to tell him how I feel.

Lily smirks. “Very well. I'm sorry it had to end this way...”

Two heartbeats pass. My mouth dries, and then in the blink of an eye, she swings her leg out, aiming straight for his head.

Gryphon dodges the blow, and I close my eyes, unable to look.

Lachlan cheers for Gryphon in the bleachers across the room, and I'm just grateful we have a sound to drown out the noises happening in the ring.

But Lachlan's cheering soon dies out, and now I am left with the sound of punching and heavy breathing.

I open my eyes a tiny sliver.

Lily and Gryphon are entangled on the floor, her thick thighs around his neck, and I feel the blood draining from my skin.

She managed to get the better of him. Just as I feared.

Gryphon's face is blue as she wraps her thighs around his neck like a boa constrictor, depriving him of air, and I guess she really is going to take his head off.

She speaks through clenched teeth. "Last chance, Gryphon. Give up now, and I will let you off with a warning..."

No, she won't. She will have him imprisoned for his insubordination, and only the Gods know what will happen to the rest of us.

He doesn't reply, still fighting for air.

"Just slam a hand down on the mat, and we will end this. Your call."

Yet Gryphon doesn't concede, his face turning bluer by the second, and what is Lily made of?

His eyes flit up to me, and times seem to freeze.

I'm pretty sure he is about to die right before my eyes. Oliver is just as breathless beside me, and none of us know what to do as our Alpha fights for his life.

Yeah, our Alpha...

I can't believe it had taken me this long to finally realize it.

A spark ignites in the Alpha's eyes, a declaration and a promise.

He is going to win this fight for me, for all of us.

He moves in a flash, and I barely see the moment he slams the heel of his palm into Lily's chin, his action buying him enough time to slip free from her killer grasp.

Both Alphas jump back to their feet in an instant, circling each other once again.



Lily's mouth is bleeding, and it looks like she bit her tongue the moment Gryphon slammed his hand into her chin.

I can't say I feel bad for her.

She becomes a woman possessed, the whites of her eyes flashing like a wild animal, and I shrink in my seat, trying to press as close as I can to Oliver.

Our shoulders brush, but the guard doesn't even notice, his gaze fixed on the fight before us.

One moment, Lily is standing, and then the next, she's flying across the ring, kicking and punching, and it's hard to keep up.

Yet Gryphon dodges every blow, and now they play a game of chase across the ring.

They're both exhausted, Lily even more so, and I think I am starting to see what Gryphon is doing.

He's tiring her out.

That hand to the chin must have pissed her off, and now she's really mad.

No more calculated attacks. She throws everything she has at him, and with every blow he evades, the angrier she gets.

Wow. For someone so seemingly powerful, she sure does have anger issues.

In a flash, he kicks his leg out, and Lily goes flying across the ring.

Lachlan gives a whoop, but his cheers are premature. Because Lily lands like a cat on her feet, smoke flying in her wake as she goes for Gryphon again.

She's more animal than woman now, and I just want to run across the room and protect Gryphon from that monster.

Gryphon feigns a step to the left, and when she is caught off guard, he plants a kick right on her breastbone.

She crashes onto her back and the thwacking sound echoes across the room.

Lily doesn't rise for some time, and it looks like Gryphon hit her in a sensitive spot.

Unless... it's a trick.

He steps toward her, planting his foot onto her chest right where he hit her. Then he sneers, growling down at her face. "Surrender, Lily. Set my Omegas free, and we can resume as normal. You will still have your power. All I ask is that you leave me and my family alone and let us live in peace. Your call."

Something clogs my airway and then a tear slips from my eye.

He called me his Omega.

I'm too overwhelmed to notice Oliver shifting slightly beside me. I'm not the only one.

Everyone is focused on the fight. On Gryphon.

Even if she agreed to his terms now, nothing would ever be the same for her again. Gryphon has proven tonight that he is the strongest Alpha, and Lily's reputation will surely be in tatters now.

She won't back down.

Yet, to my surprise, and the whole room's, she finally concedes, flopping onto the ground, and no one breathes for a while.

Then she says, loud and clear, "I surrender."

Gryphon doesn't remove his foot from her chest for some time. Then when he is satisfied, he lifts it from her, placing it back down on the ground again.

Then, he turns, showing her his back.

Is he *serious*? She may be weakened, but I doubt she is *that* weakened.

It happens in slow motion. Lily is back on her feet, flying straight for Gryphon.

Fucking bitch.

She has no honor. A sore loser if I ever saw one, and is this really who the people want as their leader?

Oliver jumps to his feet next, then knocks out the stunned guard behind us, grabbing his gun.

When did he untie his binds?

Wait... Mine have been untied too...

H-how?

Oliver sprints across the auditorium, gun pointed straight at Lily. "Stand down, bitch."

Lily freezes, and Gryphon, with a smirk, turns around and faces his opponent again.

He's not the only one in the ring with her now. Barrett and Lachlan have joined the ranks, and the latter is frothing at the mouth.

"Please... *now* can I kill her?" he begs, but no one answers him.

The whole room is at a stalemate. No one moves.

The guards are silent, waiting. The one behind me is still coming to. He'd been too distracted by the fight to even notice what Oliver was doing, and I guess he shouldn't have taken that Omega for granted.

Oliver really is a sneaky little bastard.

Quickly, I stumble to my own feet, cutting across the room. I don't have a weapon, but I will still fight by my pack's side.

This will be our final stand.

Not one guard intervenes. They're waiting to see how things pan out.

Who will be the victor tonight?

She growls when we surround her next, Oliver stationed between us as he still aims the gun between her eyes.

"You lost. *Deal* with it," he snarls.

Lily glowers at him for a while, and my heart thunders in my chest. Then she cackles, tossing her head back. “You idiots. You forget that I am still in power. All these men answer to me!”

Oliver cocks a brow. “Oh, really? Then why are their guns down?”

The comment takes her by surprise, and then Lily casts her eyes around in utter disbelief.

“What are you doing? Defend your superior!”

Yet not a single soul moves. They all watch, completely unmoved by the sorry excuse of a leader before them.

Not only did she attack an opponent when his back was turned, but she’s one fucking sore loser who can’t admit defeat.

Also, she is weak. No pack or family, and it’s kind of sad.

Power was all she had, and now it’s gone.

Gryphon played his part well. I wonder if he and Oliver were silently communicating the whole time he was fighting Lily, and it just proves where the real strength lies.

Nothing can defeat a mate bond.

I spy it then in Lily’s eye, a silvery tear, and it takes me by surprise.

She has finally realized that she has lost. And it must be tearing her apart.

To lose the one anchor you had in this world...

My heart almost goes out to her.

Did she ever have anyone?

She shakes her head in utter denial, squeezing her eyes. “No... it... wasn’t supposed to be this way... D-Daddy p-promised...”

Hold hold. Did she say, Dad?

Finally, I see her for what she is—a lost little girl who loved her father once, a man who promised her the world...

Just like I loved my dad. A man I fought my entire life for.

She's right. It can't end this way...

That was my biggest mistake right there. Seeing the vulnerable, human side of her.

Because the moment I let my guard down, she attacked.

But Oliver gets there first. He shoots the gun, aiming for her thigh, and the woman screams, dropping back to the ground.

The Omega steps in front of me, and now I watch as all four members of Pack Hart surround her.

"*Big* mistake..." Oliver growls, his eyes almost glowing. "That was my Omega you tried to hurt then, Lily."

The woman has tears streaking down her cheeks, as she pleads and cries for a father who will never come.

This is awful. I can't watch.

Strong arms grab me next, and then I am pressed against a muscled chest, his campfire and marshmallow scent filling my nose.

"Don't look."

And just as he instructed, I don't look. I keep my face squashed against his chest, listening to the sound of his heartbeat.

I shouldn't feel bad. She would have done the same to me and my pack if the roles were reversed, but I still cry as her death plays out around me.

"Do your worst, Lachlan," Oliver rasps next, his voice dark.

So, that was why Oliver aimed for her thigh. He wanted to give Lachlan the honor.

Gryphon starts leading me out of the room as Lachlan's crazed laugh echoes through the enormous space. But before we leave, I hear Oliver whisper, "And don't you ever use my little sister's name in vain again, *whore*..."

His sister? Isabelle?

I don't get to hear any more as Gryphon has finally dragged me away in his arms.

He purrs, rubbing his hand up and down my back. "It's okay now, Mila. That woman can't hurt you ever again. We're free."

Free?

As the horrors continue in the room behind us, I meet his burgundy eyes.

They melt for me now, and I don't think. I grab his cheek, and finally, we kiss.

He's right. We *are* free.

And I finally got the family that I always wanted.

## CHAPTER 53

### *Mila*

Seven days pass, and Lily has mysteriously vanished.

Well, so the reports say.

But I know that my pack dealt with her accordingly, and I can't help but feel for the poor woman.

She had no one in the end. No one to fight by her side, and I suck in a deep, trembling breath, staring blankly at the headstone before me.

This is the first time I have been back to his grave since Lily ambushed me.

The day my pack never came...

But look how far we have all come. All four of them fought for my freedom in the end, and I think that my heart has finally forgiven them.

Wounds are still a little fresh, but it's only been seven days since we defeated Lily.

I needed the time to think. But one thing I do know...

I am going to stick with the pack. No point in being lonely in this world. It was what my father wanted for me. I saw it in his eyes when I held his hand—that peace.

He knew he wouldn't be leaving me all alone, and now he and my mom can truly rest.

Still... I wish that I could see them again. Just for one last time.

So, I picture them in my mind's eye.

They're standing behind me, practically glowing like angels, and I smile.

"Hey, Mom. Hey Dad..."

They grin back at me. Mom even reaches down and grips my shoulder, and for a moment, I can feel her touch.

I wipe a tear from my cheek. "So... it turns out that I've found my family. For *real* this time. Now, nothing can keep us apart."

A bird chirps in a nearby tree, and the wind rustles my hair, but I know they're listening.

I can still feel their presence.

Dad has a glint in his eye, and Mom's smile is as bright as I remember.

A lump clogs my throat next, and more tears streak down my cheeks. "I promise I'm going to live my life to the fullest. For the both of you. I wouldn't be who I am today without either of you and... thank you... For bringing me into this world..."

Mom's eyes crinkle, and what I would do to hear her warm voice again.

To hear either of them.

Another form appears behind them, and it takes me a moment to recognize him.

After all, he looks just like his son...

Gryphon's dad.

The grass rustles behind me, and when I turn, it's not my parents I find, but those deep burgundy eyes.



My heart seizes, and I quickly remove the tears from my cheeks.

We haven't spoken much since we kissed in the hallway. I had been the one to make the move, yet the Alpha didn't push me away.

He kissed me back.

He was determined to take me away from the horrors that were about to unfold, and it's because of him that I'm still a little foggy about the exact details of Lily's defeat.

He had protected me. Like a good Alpha should.

Gryphon doesn't say anything when he spies my tears. He merely takes up a place beside me on the grass, and now we both sit cross-legged before my parents' grave.

We don't talk as we gaze at the headstone, but I don't mind.

Just having him here is enough.

"It's a beautiful resting place..." he remarks, and I agree.

It really is. There's a grove of trees not too far, one filled with the sound of birdsong.

"Thank you."

A few silent beats. Then he whispers, "My dad's grave is just a few headstones away..."

I look up.

I never knew that.

He doesn't meet my eyes, but I study that stoic face, the perfect square jawline, and the aquiline nose. But I notice the tic on his cheek, and finally, he turns my way.

Again, neither of us speaks, but we seem to have a mutual understanding now.

Oliver and Gryphon had communicated via their bond during the fight with Lily, and it still amazes me.

Had the whole pack been communicating the whole time?

A void fills my chest, and I bring my knees to my chin, thinking about how sweet it would be to be so close to them all too.

To share in that pack bond.

“So... ready to return to the house?”

I nod, keeping my face buried against my knees.

Gryphon rises to his feet, extending his hand out for me. I stare at his outstretched fingers for some time, biting my lip. Then I get over myself and take his hand, and that's when I spy the others standing a few feet away.

They had all waited in the Jeep outside the cemetery. I told them that I wanted to see the grave on my own at first. But I know that I don't have to be alone anymore.

Now, I have them.

\*\*\*

Oliver tells me that they have a surprise waiting for me when we return to the house.

The house is still being repaired after the explosion.

Gryphon was offered a place on the council, and as a result, he has recently come into a massive amount of funds.

At first, he didn't want the position, but Oliver managed to convince him in the end.

After all, things need to change. Omegas are treated like possessions in this world, pretty much stripped of their rights the moment they perfume, and it's about time that it all stopped.

And Gryphon can be the one to make that change.

People will listen to the Alpha who managed to defeat Lily in a duel. Now he is the strongest Alpha in the country, and hopefully, his influence will extend far and wide.

But it's still early days. The other governors have agreed to hear him out.

I just hope it all works for us.

Omegas should at least be given a choice. If they want a pack, so be it. If they want to learn how to cook and knit booties, each to their own.

And if they want to learn how to fight and shoot a gun, then the option will be there for them.

I'm surprised by how well the house is coming along. All signs of the explosion have nearly vanished, and once again, it is in livable condition.

Unfortunately, my nest was destroyed, along with Oliver's.

Yet the Omega has a smile on his face as he leads me down to the basement, and I blink.

Where is he taking me?

It was the only room in the house that didn't get destroyed.

The others follow behind us. Lachlan is a little more hesitant, considering this is where they used to lock him up during his episodes, and I don't understand...

"Why are we going down into the basement?"

Oliver smiles up at me. "Just you wait and see..."

I glance at Barret to see if he will give me any answers, but he merely smirks.

I guess I am on my own then.

Oliver covers my eyes, then whispers close to my ear. "So, you know how our nests got destroyed in the explosion?"

I nod. "Yes."

"Well, I decided that it was time for an upgrade anyway. For the *both* of us..."

Finally, we reach the bottom step, and when the Omega removes his hands from my eyes, I gasp.

It's the ocean and the forest.

One side of the wall is painted blue, and the other is bright green. Oliver's side of the nest has trees and long, gauzy curtains that act as a forest canopy, and mine has waves, seagulls, and even seashells.

It's... beautiful.

“So, do you like it?” Oliver asks.

I nod, taking his cheeks in my hands. “It’s perfect. The blue matches your eyes...”

A smirk crosses his lips. “And the green matches yours...”

My heart thumps in my chest, and then the next thing I know, we’re kissing.

Oliver lifts me in his arms, and now I wrap my legs around his waist, letting him lead me to the blue and green line that bisects our nest.

He gazes deep into my eyes, panting for breath. “Mila... I have decided... that I want you to join our pack... Gryphon will be the one to bite you...”

My heart pounds, and then sweat heats my back and my upper lip.

The nest grows silent at Oliver’s declaration. I’m not even sure if they have all discussed it as a pack. They most likely have, through their bond.

A bond that I want to be a part of.

Gryphon steps closer, a question in his eyes. I nod.

For the first time since I have known him, Gryphon smiles at me, and hot damn.

He’s beautiful when he smiles.

“Are you actually smiling?” I blurt out without thinking, and the guys laugh.

Even Gryphon chuckles as he shrugs, and now he takes up a position beside his Omega.

“So, how about it Mila? Will you have me?” he asks.

I chew my lip, thinking it over. Maybe I should make him beg for it first. Grovel until he is blue in the face and the balls, but no.

I have waited long enough. We all have.

I am going to be a part of this pack.

This time, Gryphon makes the first move. He takes my face in his large hand, rubbing his thumb in circles over the apple of my cheek. Then he kisses me bruisingly, almost possessively, and a growl rumbles in his chest.

Quickly, we remove each other's clothes, and I have waited so long for this.

It appears Gryphon has too, and he's an animal.

One moment, his pants are on, and then the next, they're lying in a heap on the floor with mine.

Oliver, Barret, and Lachlan's clothes join ours too, and now we're all naked.

We meet in the middle of the nest, just between the ocean and the forest, and it couldn't be more perfect.

Gryphon presses the head of his cock to my entrance, and I grind against him, wrapping my arms around his neck.

He growls, responding in kind, and now he slips between my legs, burying himself to the hilt, and we both take a moment to enjoy the sensation of being so close.

*Finally...* is all I can think.

My body has yearned for him for so long, and my Omega is practically glowing, basking in his attention and warm glow.

Honeyed heat spreads through me, reaching my fingers and toes, and I don't look away from Gryphon's eyes.

They're brown now. No trace of that angry, demonic red remains.

Well, maybe just enough to be sexy.

The red circles his pupils, a burning ring of fire, and then he thrusts, hard.

A groan escapes me, and then he growls, picking up the pace.

It's just the two of us at that moment as he slips in and out, slow, then fast, and then slow and torturous again, and I

shudder as he grazes my walls, biting my bottom lip until I bleed.

I feel Oliver's blue gaze and I'm pretty sure Lachlan is jerking off, but for the moment, I focus on Gryphon.

Just me and him.

The heat spreads further, up and down my spine, and then I freeze, lights sparking behind my eyes when I crest my peak.

Gryphon follows right at my heels, and the liquid movements of his hips become jagged as he comes next, and finally, I feel his knot.

It expands inside me, locking him in place, and I lay back on the plush blue and green pillows and sigh.

It's even better when I'm not in heat. Because this way I can truly appreciate it.

Gryphon kisses my neck, and I open my eyes, meeting his dark ones.

"Ready, Mila? It will feel strange at first."

My heart skips a beat, but then I nod, burying my fingers into his thick hair as he marks a spot on my neck.

Gryphon purrs softly, running his fingers through my blonde locks.

And then he bites.

My body goes numb, new sensations swimming through me. The room burns white, and I squeeze my eyes, spying a glowing thread.

Gryphon's mate bond.

It wants me to grab on.

And so I do.

My vision tunnels, and then I spy myself, panting and flushed on a blue and green cushion, and I am seeing myself through Gryphon's eyes.

Holy fuck.

We are connected.

I stare at him and then back at myself, and how is this possible?

I have two streams of consciousness, and it's not as disorientating as I would have thought.

It's beautiful...

I sense the others, though it's a little faint.

My nose fills with the scent of honey, and I feel Oliver through the bond. I latch on to him, and he sends a warm tendril my way.

Then I sense wildflowers, and Lachlan pokes at me through the bond.

Barret isn't as intrusive, but I smell his earthy, rainy scent too.

Gryphon's campfire and marshmallow is the strongest, though he's more squishy marshmallow than brimstone now.

Now they all crowd around me, and we speak through the bond.

*How is it, Mila?* Oliver asks.

I take a moment, replying in my head. *Like a dream...*

I don't open my eyes, wanting to sense them this way instead.

Gryphon remains inside me, locked at my hips, so it will be some time before either Barret or Lachlan can have their turn.

But that doesn't stop Oliver from slipping in behind me, taking me from the rear.

He uses my slick to wet his shaft and my backside, and then slowly edges in.

It's a tighter hole, so it takes a moment for me to adjust, but when he meets me at the hilt, just a small membrane keeping him apart from his Alpha, I bask in them both, enjoying every second.

Oliver brushes my hair away from my neck and then he bites. A bond won't form, but I do notice that ours grows a little stronger.

His voice strengthens through the bond, along with his honeycomb scent.

*I love you, Mila...*

I smile, tugging his tendril closer. *I love you too.*

He licks the wound when he's finished, kissing beneath my ear. *You didn't think I was going to let Gryphon have all the fun, did you? You are mine, Mila. Always will be...*

I still don't open my eyes. I don't need to.

I can feel them all around me.

Barret and Lachlan are close now.

*Hey there, sunshine...* Barret says, taking my wrist gently in his hand. *Mind if I claim you here?*

I nod. *Go ahead.*

The Alpha purrs, stroking the spot he has chosen on my wrist, then bites.

And my connection with him grows stronger too.

*Love you, sunshine.*

Tears prick my eyes, and then I reply. *I love you too.*

Now Lachlan's wildflower brushes gently against my right, and then he takes my other wrist. *Snowdrop...*

His warm tendril wraps around me, curling around my wrist and neck like a game of bondage.

*Lachlan...* I reply.

*I love you, snowdrop.*

And just like that, I smile again.

*I love you too.*

He doesn't wait to ask. Lachlan goes straight in for the kill, and I see the world through his piercing blue eyes now.



Everything looks a little crazy from here, and I make a note not to spend too much time behind his eyes.

It's Gryphon's turn now, and finally, I open my eyes, meeting his burgundy.

One side of his mouth quirks, and he decides to say it out loud.

"I love you, Mila. Have from the moment I looked at you. Just didn't know it yet then."

Tears pour in earnest now, and then I bring him closer, kissing his lips.

"I love you too."

Now all five of us are connected, our bond forming a perfect, five-pointed star, and more tears shed from my eyes.

I will never be alone again.

**END**

Want to see more of the pack and Mila? Well, look no further! I have a new book in this series in the works! It will be about Isabelle, Oliver's long-lost baby sister, and Jeremy and his pack! Isabelle is still very much alive, and I plan to have her reunite with Oliver. I think it's what he deserves. I just want him to be happy...

Follow me on any of my channels for more on the next page! I post teasers regularly in my Facebook group Violet's Foxy Readers.

# *Afterword*

Thank you so much for reading my book! Please leave a review as it would mean a lot ♥

\*\*\*

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## *About the Author*

Violet Fox is a UK-based author who lives in the middle of the Welsh Mountains.

When she's not fighting dragons with swords, she's writing about hunky men who possess feral, animal-like qualities. Expect all of her fictional men to become major simps for their ladies by the end of each book/ series.

She loves to write about all kinds of women, be they shy, snarky, diva-like. She believes they all deserve a chance in the

limelight.