

R . E . B O N D

STARDUST

HOME OF THE GIFTED



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R. E. BOND

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To those who love to dance in the flames, just to feel the burn.

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CHAPTER ONE

SALEM

“Newbie alert,” someone snickered as I walked through the iron gates of my new home at Stardust, Home of the Gifted. There were apparently hundreds of people living here, and I wasn’t surprised. It was a private gated community, specifically for those with supernatural powers.

If you had some kind of power, then this was the place you ended up eventually, no matter how hard you tried to avoid it.

Here, we learned to harness the powers we’d been born with, and it gave us a sense of family when many of us had been cast out from our own. I’d had no intention of coming here, being more than happy to live in peace alone in my apartment.

I was twenty-six, single, and I wasn’t exactly a people person.

Now, I was going to be assigned to one of the Stardust houses, being forced to live with a bunch of strangers for the sake of my powers.

I obtained the power of telekinesis and air, meaning I could move objects with my mind and make wind with my hands. It wasn’t common for people to hold more than one power, so I usually kept my air powers to myself.

It sounded cool, but it wasn’t when you lost control around mortals who thought you were creations of the Devil, which was why I was here.

The curse of having some kind of power was that you were born to end up here even if you rarely used your powers, joining forces with whatever house members you were placed with to increase your strength. Without those people, your powers would start going haywire.

The magic in my veins was craving the magic of others, which was why the placement of your house was so important. You were stuck with them forever once you'd been assigned.

From the way I'd thrown my dining table across the kitchen last week, I'd say my powers were starting to short-circuit without the strength of my group.

I could no longer pretend that I was a mortal.

I dragged my suitcases behind me, ignoring everyone who was staring as I passed. If I were anywhere else, I'd say they were staring because of my thick eyeliner and gothic outfit, but it was normal here from what I'd already seen.

I liked fishnet tights and the color black, sue me.

There were no classes, it wasn't exactly what most people would classify as a school, but we were expected to train in our groups and perform tasks that arose. Who did you call when a problematic dragon needed slaying or someone's powers turned bad?

Stardust.

I pushed through the front doors more aggressively than necessary, running straight into someone.

"Sorry," I apologized, my chest going tight as a pair of sharp, blue eyes burned into me. They were the iciest blue I'd ever seen, so light that they appeared to be almost white. His platinum blond hair hung over his face, and the energy around him was thick with danger.

It didn't feel like he was filled with dark magic, just anger.

The man snarled, looking me up and down with disgust as hate flared in his eyes.

"Watch where you're fucking going."

“I said sorry,” I huffed out as he stalked off without a backwards glance, revealing another man that had been standing behind him. This one was happier to see me as he smirked, giving me a slow inspection from head to toe before meeting my gaze, his bright amber eyes flickering with amusement.

“You sure know how to make an entrance. Probably not the best idea to piss off Frost on your first day.” His hair was a mixture of orange and red tones, and it was messy as if he’d been running his hands through it repeatedly.

I gave him a quick once over like he’d done to me, making sure my eyes didn’t linger on his toned biceps. I didn’t have time for cocky assholes. His sneakers were worn and old, same as his black skinny jeans and torn white tank top.

“I didn’t run into him on purpose,” I said with a sigh, flicking my eyes to his again so he didn’t think I was checking him out as a conquest. “His name’s Frost?”

“And I’m Smokey.” He grinned darkly, holding his palm up and causing flames to ignite across his fingertips. “I’ll give you one guess what Frost’s power is.”

“Fire and ice, how fitting for a cold, broody asshole and his arrogant side-kick,” I replied dryly before turning to walk towards the front desk, but he stopped me.

“Want to tell me your name since you’re finding ours so amusing? It’s normal to be named after our powers,” he bit out, the amusement vanishing from his face.

“I’m Salem.”

“Like the witch trials from the late sixteen hundreds?” he deadpanned, irritation burning inside of me. Everyone always called me a witch, but I wasn’t. It was a completely different power.

“No. I’m not a witch,” I hissed as I let go of my suitcases to clench my fists, earning a lazy shrug in return as a bored expression crossed his face.

“Whatever you say, witch tits. Do yourself a favor and stay out of the way. Welcome home, Salem.” He wandered off after

his friend with a cocky swagger, and I almost snorted. He'd switched his mood way too fast for my liking.

I hadn't intended on being that social here, but I didn't want people to cause me problems either.

Once I'd filled in all the paperwork and had my new set of house keys in my hand, I followed the map through the courtyard and along a wide sidewalk, dragging my things behind me until I found the right house. It took forever since most of the houses looked the same and some of the streets were missing signs, meaning I got lost a time or two.

There were no cars here, the supernatural not trusted with licenses as if we were a danger on the road. Society really was strange with their rules.

I stood in front of the solid door while wondering if I was supposed to knock or let myself in. I ended up choosing the latter, sliding my key into the lock and letting myself inside and peeking around the massive entry as the heavy door creaked open.

The inside was pristine with fancy marble floors and massive tinted windows that wrapped around the entire place. It was silent, and if I hadn't found multiple coffee cups on the kitchen counter as I wheeled my suitcases through, I wouldn't have known anyone even lived here.

Once I managed to lug everything up a huge set of stairs, I was relieved to find the bedroom doors all had numbers on them to make it easy to figure out which one was mine.

I walked along the long hallway, finding my door at the far right end near a massive glass sliding door that opened onto a balcony. I opened my door and stepped inside, not expecting to walk in on some guy with dirty blond hair getting a blow-job.

His eyes narrowed as he ran his gaze over me but he didn't stop the girl as he spoke.

“What the fuck are you doing in my house?”

“I'm Salem,” I said flatly, looking at the piece of paper in my hand to double check that I definitely had the right room

before running my mouth, ignoring the fact that his cock was out. “This is assigned to me, asshole. What the fuck are *you* doing in here?”

His brown eyes flashed with heat as he assessed me again, his voice smooth as silk as his fingers laced through the random girl’s hair to keep her bobbing on his cock.

This was why I stayed single, men were pigs.

“No shit? I didn’t know we were expecting someone new. You can have the room across the hall, unless you want to share this one with me. I won’t complain.”

His date didn’t seem fazed by his flirting, but disgust twisted in my stomach. I’d been openly hit on before, but he literally had another woman’s lips wrapped around his junk right now.

He was attractive, and judging by how confident he was, he knew it too.

“No thanks. I don’t particularly enjoy company of your kind,” I answered lightly, turning and leaving the room without a backwards glance, his eyes burning into the back of my head the entire time.

Once safely shut in the privacy of my own room, which was directly opposite his, I double checked that the door locked before unpacking, inspecting the mattress for gross stains. It looked brand new, just like everything else in the room. It was larger than I’d expected, brightly lit up from the massive windows, and I had my own bathroom and a walk-in closet.

I couldn’t exactly complain, it was nicer than my old apartment.

I didn’t realize how long I’d been unpacking until there was a knock on the door and I noticed the sun was setting outside. I quickly finished putting my shoes away and headed towards the door, unlocking it and swinging it open to find the prick from across the hall on the other side.

“Uh, yeah?” I asked as he leaned against the doorframe with his shoulder and crossed his arms lazily, smiling warmly.

It threw me off because it wasn't a creepy, pervy smile, it was genuine.

“The others just got home with pizza and beer. There's always plenty so come and join us. You can sit with me, I only bite when asked.”

“Oh, that's okay. I can find something later,” I said quickly, hating the thought of the awkward staring across the table as we ate. I was more than happy to give it another day to settle in before venturing out. If they were anything like this guy, my tolerance wouldn't cope and I'd make enemies of them all fast.

He chuckled, pushing the door open wider and gently taking my wrist with surprisingly soft hands. He definitely moisturized.

“Come on. You can't avoid them forever. Sorry if it gets rowdy. We don't usually have women around at dinnertime, so they'll probably be yelling at the TV or fighting with each other. Then again, I'd be surprised if they can focus with the smell of your perfume lingering. It smells so good.”

I had no idea if his flirting should creep me out or not, so I gave him a tight smile, pulling from his hold.

“Okay, but keep your pussy fingers to yourself. I know exactly where they've been. Do the others know I'm here?”

“Nah. I wanted to keep you all to myself for as long as possible,” he winked, tugging me from the room and closing the door for me. “So, where are you from?”

“Northern Kinich,” I answered. “How about you? Have you been here long?”

“I moved in here when I was eighteen from Maydeira.”

At least he was nice, even if he was sleazy.

“How old are you now?”

“That's rude,” he teased without a single sign of offense as he glanced at me, leading me down the long hallway towards the stairs. “I'm twenty-seven. My name's Fox.”

“Let me guess. You’re fast and sneaky?” I stated and raised an eyebrow.

“Smooth and charming,” he corrected with a smirk, steering me through the massive living area and into the bright kitchen. “Hey! Make sure you don’t eat all the pizza! We’ve got ourselves a new roomie!”

My heart sank as the three guys stopped their conversation to turn around, Frost and Smokey’s eyes pinning me in place. They were the *last* two people that I wanted to see. The third guy ran his deep, blue gaze over me silently, and I struggled not to stare. They were like orbs of the ocean. His hair was so brown that it was almost black, a few loose pieces hanging over his face that he ignored as he assessed me.

None of them offered conversation, and the feeling of awkwardness soaked into me like I knew it would. I sucked at socializing and handling people.

“Tough crowd,” I said slowly as my stomach twisted with discomfort, making Fox laugh.

“They’re just shy. They don’t know how to handle a pretty woman.”

“Why the fuck is she here?” Frost finally snapped, my eyes landing on his cold ones. “She’s *not* staying here. There’s no way she was placed with us.”

“I wasn’t aware that your heart was made of ice too,” I scoffed, crossing my arms tightly against my chest. “Trust me, I’m not excited to see you either.”

“Good. Get your shit and leave. They obviously put you in the wrong house,” he argued, and Smokey chuckled.

“Well, this just got interesting. I might stay home tonight after all.” He leaned back in his chair, placing his arms behind his head to get comfortable, looking like an entitled prince on his throne.

Fox frowned, glancing between us. “You guys know each other?”

“We’ve met,” I muttered just as my stomach rumbled loudly, and Frost scowled as hate filled his eyes again. I couldn’t figure out why he was so mad at me. It was an extreme reaction to us bumping into each other.

“I mean it. Get out of my house, Salem.” They’d been bitching about me since it seemed Smokey had told him my name.

Fox groaned, scrubbing his face with his hands. “C’mon, man. Don’t be a dick. Let her eat dinner in peace.”

“She can find her own food. I didn’t buy pizza for her, she’s not getting shit from me,” he barked, and I knew he wasn’t going to share. I was hungry but I wasn’t going to beg him.

“I don’t want your shitty pizza anyway. I hope you choke on it,” I smiled sweetly and flipped him off, heading back to my room and ignoring Fox as he called for me. I’d sneak down to the kitchen later for something to eat once they were done.

I’d only been locked in my room for ten minutes when there was a knock on the door. I assumed it was Fox trying to sneak me pizza, but I was surprised when I opened the door to find the guy with the deep, blue eyes standing in front of me with a plate of pizza in his hand.

His gaze bore into mine for a moment before he offered it to me, his voice soft.

“Sorry. Frost can be a major asshole sometimes. I’m River.”

“Let me guess. You control water?” I asked, taking the plate and trying to figure out if it was a trick or not. He hadn’t seemed that interested in whether I starved to death or not when Frost was arguing with me.

“Bingo,” he chuckled, glancing behind me. “Do you have everything you need?”

“You can come in if you like,” I offered, unsure how friendly to be. I didn’t trust him but at least he was making an effort without being creepy.

He walked in and closed the door, looking around the room as if he'd never seen it before.

“Sorry about Fox, he has zero shame with flirting. You’ll probably see a lot more of him than you’d like. He walks around naked when you least expect it.”

“He lives up to his name then, I take it?” I wasn’t surprised. He seemed the type to proudly flaunt his dick around in public as if we should bow down to him.

“Definitely. He can flirt his way into a nun’s panties,” he grunted, sitting on the edge of my bed and turning his attention back to me. “What can you do? Smokey said you’re a witch.”

“I’m not a *witch*. I have telekinesis,” I said as I rolled my eyes, proving it as I lifted a slice of pizza to my mouth without using my hands and took a bite. None of them needed to know about my second power, I’d keep that close to my chest for now.

His face lit up as he watched me. “That’s cool. Frost really doesn’t like you, huh?”

“Nope. I literally ran into him in the administration building when I arrived. I did say sorry, but he didn’t seem to give a shit,” I said as I chewed. “There’s not much more I can do, so he can go and fuck himself. He’s got the world’s biggest ice cube up his ass.”

“He doesn’t like you because you don’t take shit. It’s the same reason why Fox likes you,” he said without missing a beat.

“Fox seems nice in a weird, uncomfortable way,” I deadpanned, a bark of laughter leaving him.

“No offense, but he just wants to fuck you. He’s charming as hell when he wants to be.”

“Pass. I don’t really care much for sex.” I could get myself off if I wanted to. My sexual experiences had been trash and I definitely did a better job.

I grabbed the second slice of pizza with my hand this time, taking a large bite and savoring the greasy cheese. I loved

pizza.

“You’re a virgin?” River sputtered as his cheeks turned pink, amusement filling me.

“No. I just don’t particularly care for it. I appreciate the pizza but if you don’t mind, I’m going to finish this and go to sleep. It’s been a long day and I’m ready for bed.”

“Of course. My room’s on your right in case you need anything,” he said awkwardly, running his fingers through his hair. “Good night.” He left and closed the door gently behind him, and I flipped the lock before sitting on my bed to finish my pizza.

At least one of them seemed to want to be friends.

“Good morning,” Fox singsonged as I entered the kitchen the next morning. I scowled, combing my fingers through my tangled red and black hair. I should’ve gotten dressed and put my makeup on before wandering downstairs, but I was too tired to give a shit.

“What’s so good about it?”

“It’s a beautiful day. I made you breakfast,” he said cheerfully, placing a plate in front of me with a coffee. Scrambled eggs with toast and bacon were piled high, my stomach rumbling as the smell reached me.

My brow creased as I looked from the plate up to his face with confusion.

“Why?”

“Why not? I like to cook for pretty women,” he winked, and I couldn’t hide the eye roll if I’d tried.

“There’s no point trying to charm me, it won’t work, but thanks for the food,” I drawled, grabbing a piece of bacon and

taking a bite.

“No?” he grinned, dropping into the seat beside mine and leaning closer. “I think you’d relax more if you let me in. You’re so tense.”

I ignored him, shoving more bacon into my mouth to avoid the conversation, finding myself relaxing more once River joined us and Fox removed himself from my personal space.

River gave me a soft smile, serving himself some breakfast before sitting on my other side.

“Hey. Did you sleep well?”

“As good as expected in an unfamiliar house full of assholes,” I mumbled around my food, swallowing before adding, “How did you sleep?”

Nerves flickered across his face, and he glanced at Fox who snickered before returning his gaze to me. “Uh, pretty good, actually. Thanks for asking.”

“That’s good,” I smiled, giving Fox a dirty look. It was obvious River wasn’t confident around strangers, so he didn’t need Fox giving him shit for being awkward.

I went back to eating my breakfast in silence, finishing before the other two and standing to rinse my plate in the sink.

“Allow me,” Fox murmured as he reached around me from behind to take the plate. Our arms brushed, sending heat across my skin. It was a weird sensation, almost like a tingle.

Before I could think about it too much, Smokey walked in, lazily tossing a fireball up and down in his hand.

“Morning, losers. We’re leaving in five.”

“Where are you going?” I asked before I could stop myself.

“We’re meeting with Storm. You’re coming too.” He looked me up and down, sneering at my pajamas. “Are you coming like that?”

“Who’s Storm?” I ignored his bullshit, just wanting to know what the hell was going on. I didn’t like spontaneous

shit thrown at me first thing in the morning.

“Just get ready,” he bit out, stalking from the room without a backwards glance. I should’ve known from the moment I met him that the fire guy would have a temper.

“He was fine with me until I made a comment about their names,” I grumbled, making Fox laugh.

“Smokey’s a good guy to have on your side when he’s not being a giant, flaming turd.”

“Well, I didn’t exactly intend on hanging out with him in my spare time,” I sighed, giving him the side-eye. “I can’t imagine him being nice. His version of nice is like yours. Cocky.”

“Hurry, or he’ll drag you out of the house dressed like that,” he said with a smirk, changing the subject as he turned to River to discuss something about training.

I left them to clean up as I quickly walked upstairs to my room, shoving my black leggings on with a loose shirt and yanking a hoodie over my head before snatching my sneakers. I headed back down to the kitchen once I’d quickly put on some eyeliner and mascara, combing my hair into a high ponytail with my fingers as I walked.

I found Frost leaning against the kitchen counter impatiently, the others nowhere in sight.

“Stay the fuck away from Fox and River’s dicks, got it? And don’t stare at Storm or he’ll kill you,” he grunted, his cruel eyes studying me. “Unless we have a meeting like this, stay out of the way. I don’t want you here but it seems unavoidable.”

I chuckled lightly, raising an eyebrow. “I have no interest in chasing dick in my spare time, so your friends are safe from my *cursed pussy*. Why won’t anyone tell me who Storm is? Are they part of this house?” Instead of answering, he turned and stalked out the front door, leaving me no choice but to follow. He infuriated me, and I was close to finding a heavy object to drop on top of him.

I wasn't strong enough to lift something that heavy with my powers but I'd give it a damn good attempt.

The others were waiting outside, and I was relieved when River fell into step beside me as we walked. He ignored the dirty looks his friends gave him, having no problem striking up a conversation with me.

"Storm's cool once you get to know him. Don't stare at him though or he'll flip the fuck out," he said with a small smile. "He's technically part of our house, but he's rarely there. He doesn't like living with people and isn't a fan of regular company."

"Sounds like he's got the right idea. I didn't know that was an option. Where do I sign up?" I snorted, putting my hands into my hoodie pockets. "Frost warned me not to stare at him too. Why?"

River shrugged, but he lowered his voice. "He almost died a few years ago. We were dealing with a rogue dragon and it got out of control. He has a scar on his face, and his back and one of his arms are badly burned. He'd used most of his power and his body didn't heal the damage properly."

"River," Smokey warned sharply from further in front, making us both glance up to find him walking backwards, glaring at us. "Shut your mouth."

"Blow me, *match stick*. She needs to know these things," River said with a huff, and Smokey's pissed off expression changed to a playful one within seconds.

"You think you could keep up with me in bed, squirt? That's adorable. You probably wouldn't even know what to do with someone if you got them naked."

River's face heated with embarrassment, but I rolled my eyes and kept my mouth shut. It was obvious they were used to bantering amongst themselves, so if I got involved, it would only make things worse.

River didn't speak for the rest of our walk and he avoided me once we arrived at our destination. If he thought I was

going to tease him for his lack of experience in the bedroom, he had another thing coming.

Fox stood beside me, waiting for my reaction as I ran my eyes over the house. It was run-down, but it wasn't inhabitable. My last apartment was definitely in worse condition, so I kept my face blank. He lived right next door to the bar too.

Seeming to pass Fox's test, he let out a satisfied hum before snatching my wrist and tugging me towards the door, breaking the peaceful silence.

“Yo, Storm!”

I tried to yank free of his grip but it was useless, so I jogged to keep up to avoid him pulling my arm from the socket. The others trailed behind us as we navigated the small house, and my eyes almost popped out of my damn head when I came face-to-face with the hottest guy I'd ever seen in my life. He had to be over six feet tall, his black hair hanging over his face, and the moment he pushed it back I almost came in my panties.

Striking coal eyes met mine, the eyeliner around them making them appear even more sharp. A scar started at his forehead and ran across his entire face, ending on the opposite side of his chin. He screamed bad boy, and I didn't realize I was staring until he spoke, startling me.

“Who the fuck is this bitch?”

Smokey cackled like an idiot but Frost sighed. “Our house grew by one yesterday. It's been riveting.”

“Why the fuck is she staring at me?” He was fuming as I continued to study him, and my dumbass couldn't keep my comment to myself, apparently having no shame as I blurted out my thoughts.

“You're hot as fuck.”

He frowned, running his dark gaze over me a second time while Fox groaned.

“Really? You don’t give a shit about my good looks and charm, but you’re attracted to *him*?”

I finally pulled my eyes away from the sex god in front of me, sneering at Fox.

“I’m not into pretty boys with mommy issues.”

River cracked a smile and even Smokey let out a soft snort of amusement, but the biggest surprise was when Storm chuckled, the low sound making my core clench.

“I like you, Firecracker.”

Frost grumbled something about everyone having rocks in their heads, and I met Storm’s curious gaze again until Fox tugged me towards the table that was in the middle of the living room for some weird reason.

“So, this is Salem. Salem, this is Storm. Now that we all know each other, can we get down to business? I have a date tonight. How about you, River? Do you have a date?”

I slapped his chest, making him yelp.

“Leave him alone. There’s no shame in not fucking everything that moves, you know? At least his dick’s not green and falling off like yours. I wouldn’t brag about it if I were you. I’ve seen way better and yours is nothing special.”

“What do you mean by that?” Smokey demanded, pinning Fox with a dirty look. “Why’s she already seen your cock?”

I shuddered with disgust, glaring at the asshole in question.

“Because *Casanova* over here is living in the room I was assigned to. I walked in on him getting a blow-job. Trust me, I’m not happy about it either.”

“I’m afraid to say it won’t be the last time you’ll walk in on him with his junk out,” River muttered as he sat in the chair on my other side, giving me a sympathetic smile. “You learn to ignore it eventually. I’ll find my spare pair of earphones for you to use when he has company, which is unfortunately a lot.”

“Can you two do your terrible attempt of foreplay later?” Frost snapped, smacking his palm down on the table. “We’ve got things to discuss.”

“Sure thing, Snowflake,” I replied dryly, warmth filling my chest as River laughed and patted my shoulder. I gave him a smile but it was short lived as Frost blasted small balls of ice at me from across the table, one smacking me in the eye.

I covered my face with my arms as it burned from the solid hit.

“Hey! What the fuck, man?” River shouted, yanking my chair back from the table to stand between me and Frost, blocking any more ice from hitting me. “You could’ve hurt her!”

Frost snorted as he lazily dropped into a chair, sounding bored.

“If she can’t handle a few ice balls then she’s got no hope here.”

River peered down at me with concern, ignoring Frost. “Are you okay?”

I nodded, pressing my palm to my eye to try and stop it from watering, and I winced as River gently took my wrist and pulled it aside, softly poking at my tender skin with his thumb.

“Shit. He got you in the eye?”

“Good going, asshole,” Fox hissed at Frost before crowding me too. Frost muttered under his breath and Smokey snickered, but Storm barked at them to shut up.

I tensed as someone grabbed my bicep and hauled me to my feet, my good eye finding Storm beside me.

“I’ll get you an ice-pack. Come on,” he grunted as if I was the problem, dragging me from the room without another word. I heard Smokey snap at River to sit down, and I left them to argue while I stumbled after Storm.

He seemed frustrated as he jerked the freezer open and snatched an ice-pack, wrapping it in a cloth before handing it to me.

“Frost hates everyone but I’ve never seen him throw ice at a girl before,” he mused, leaning back against the wall to cross his arms. “What did you do to him?”

“Excuse me?” I glowered as I pressed the ice to my eye. “I didn’t do anything to him. He’s been a grumpy bastard since we met.”

“Fox really likes you.”

“That’s because I have boobs,” I deadpanned, a slow grin spreading across his face.

“Good, you’re a fast learner. I still give you a week before you fall into his bed. He can be quite convincing.”

I scowled, my voice flat. “He’s not my type.”

“What *is* your type, hmm?” he murmured, his dark eyes burning into me. “Let me guess. You don’t like the romantic guys, you like the ones with big red flags.”

“If that’s your way of asking if I’m into you, you should work on your flirting skills,” I scoffed, gasping as he grabbed me and pinned me against the wall, his thigh pressing between my legs as he leaned down to speak in my ear.

“You couldn’t handle a guy like me. I’d eat you alive.”

“You’re a walking cliché,” I replied lightly, trying hard to ignore the throbbing in my core. If he wanted to eat me, he could be my guest. “You’re the complete opposite of what I like in a guy.”

“And what would that be?” he chuckled, finding our conversation amusing. “Considering you already blurted out that you think I’m hot, you’re not convincing me.”

“I love it when they leave me alone. It really gets me off when they stay silent too,” I said in a low voice, my eyebrow lifting as I continued. “Acting like they don’t *exist*.”

He leaned back, a sly smile on his lips.

“So you want to date River? He sounds ideal for you. He’d be too scared to try and get in your pants and he’s quiet as a mouse. We forget he exists sometimes.”

I smacked his arm, the humor falling from his face as I growled.

“Leave him alone. You’re all so mean to him. Why? Because he doesn’t want to shove his dick in everything with a pulse? That he can easily hold a conversation with a girl without trying? Maybe you’re jealous that he’d be easier to trust than you? I’d choose River over any of you guys because he’s a decent person,” I hissed, tensing as River cleared his throat from the doorway.

“Uh, were you guys coming back? Smokey’s getting bored.”

“If that little shit sets my house on fire, I’ll strangle him,” Storm barked, motioning to me with a sneer. “Here’s your chance, River. She’d fuck you.” He stalked off before I could scold him, leaving me alone with River who was rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly. He seemed embarrassed but he somehow looked cool doing it. I thought he was just as attractive as the others, but he had a softer side that I liked.

I hadn’t lied, he was my favorite out of all of them.

“Sorry about Storm. He can be overwhelming sometimes,” River grimaced. “I hope you don’t take their words to heart. I don’t want to fuck you. Shit, I mean, I don’t talk to you so I can fuck you. I don’t want to fuck anyone.”

I gave him a wink, not wanting him to stress about it. “It’s okay, me either. Sex is overrated, right? Besides, just because they fuck a lot doesn’t mean they’re any good at it.”

“I said that to Fox once,” he laughed, the stress easing from his face. “Come back out so we can all talk and get home. I was thinking of watching a movie when we’re done here, if you want to hang out?” His feet shifted nervously on the floor and I knew it must have taken him a lot to come out and ask. He was definitely shy around girls but it was sweet.

The lack of arrogance was refreshing.

“Sounds good, puddles,” I grinned, his entire face lighting up at the nickname as he followed me into the living room. He sat beside me silently as we tried to catch up on the

conversation we'd been missing out on, the ice-pack numbing my face.

“Why would anyone kill a unicorn?” Fox snorted, and I frowned with confusion as I tried to follow along. “They don't venture into town and they remain in the woods where they belong.”

Storm shrugged. “Their magical blood, highly sought after horn, the strands of their manes for potions. Take your fucking pick, idiot. This isn't just one targeted attack though, it's an entire herd of them.”

“Unicorns don't roam in herds,” I said as I cut in, leaning my elbows on the table and removing the ice from my eye. “They only graze together in mating season, which is over for the year.”

“I know that,” Storm scoffed as if I was the stupid one. “That's what we're concerned about. I think they were caught and slaughtered together to make it look like a herd. Someone's fucking with us. Either that or nature's unbalanced and it's fucking with their mating season.”

Smokey tossed a small fireball up and down in his hand, staring at the bright glow while deep in thought.

“Why would someone do that though? Unless they're hoping to pin it on someone else and start a war between species. Like how fire and ice first went to war centuries ago.”

I had no idea what they were even talking about. I hadn't had the privilege to learn much about the history of magic growing up. Most magical kids got shipped off to foster agencies or boarding schools where they were raised amongst other magical kids, but I'd spent most of my childhood locked in the house like an animal until my parents booted me out when I was sixteen. I never understood why they hadn't sent me away like all the other mortals did when they produced magical abominations like me.

Smokey was glaring at me but he spoke to everyone. “I think we stay out of it. It's wasting our time and we should be

focusing on our powers. We don't even know what kind of bullshit this bitch can do."

"She uses telekinesis," River answered absently, seeming lost in thought as he dripped water from one hand to the other. Frost glowered, not liking the fact that he knew that.

"She told you?"

"She showed me," River corrected, lifting his gaze to Frost's. "She'd probably show you too if you weren't such a dick."

"Why are you siding with her?" he demanded, glaring at me and clenching his fists on the table. "Are you fucking him?"

"Jealous, snowflake?" I taunted, knowing I was asking for another ice ball, but I was so sick of his attitude. I didn't deserve his anger.

He fumed, lifting his hand to ice me again like I expected, but I focused on my power and jerked his chair out from under him, sending him crashing to the ground. Fox and River hooted with laughter, Storm looked bored by our childish behavior, and Smokey was hiding a grin behind his hand.

It seemed he wasn't Frost's bitch boy after all since he didn't try and get revenge for his friend.

"I'm going home," I announced as I got to my feet and placed the ice-pack on the table. "I'll keep an eye out for any unicorn slayers on my way." I glanced at Storm, giving him a nod. "It was nice to meet you."

"Likewise," he murmured, staring after me as I walked towards the door. I didn't turn around when I heard footsteps following me. Since no ice was thrown in my direction, I knew it wasn't Frost.

Once outside, I slowed, not surprised when River fell into step beside me.

"You two are going to kill each other," he chuckled, his mouth curving into a soft smile. "Do you still want to hang out or has he put you in a mood?"

“Trust me, I’d love a distraction so I don’t murder him,” I replied, scrunching my nose. “Just don’t make me watch a romance movie.”

“Noted.”

CHAPTER TWO

SALEM

The front door slammed when the others got home later that afternoon, but I didn't take my eyes off the TV to give them my attention. River didn't move from beside me either, being more than happy to act like we still had peace and quiet.

We hadn't spoken much since we'd been home, but it hadn't been uncomfortable.

The living room was spacey, three couches and two recliners making a large U shape around the TV, the rest of the room practically empty, other than some shelves with old books on them along the wall by the stairs. The door to the backyard was in this corner by the TV too.

Fox dropped onto my other side on the couch, leaning back to stare at me. I ignored him for as long as possible before letting out a huff of annoyance.

“What?”

“Nothing. I just wanted to stare at the prettiest girl I've ever seen,” he murmured, and River snorted.

“She's not into you, dude.”

“Bullshit, everyone's into me. I make straight guys drool,” he bragged, giving me a wink. Surprise flickered across his face when I shuffled closer to River who boldly dropped an arm around my shoulders, and I would've smacked it away from me if I hadn't been so surprised myself.

Frost was nowhere to be seen but Smokey wandered in and sat in a recliner, silently watching the movie with us. That

surprised me too.

By the time the movie ended, River was absently stroking my arm with his thumb, looking deep in thought.

“Yo, River. Don’t forget to give her a good night kiss,” Smokey teased, and River went rigid. He moved to pull his arm away and I quickly leaned closer to kiss his cheek, not wanting Smokey to bully him into feeling awkward.

“Thanks for hanging out with me. I’m going to have a soak in the bath, but we’ll watch another one later if you want.”

His cheeks heated but he gave me a smile as if it would hide his embarrassment.

“Okay. Let me know when you’re ready.”

Fox grabbed my wrist and tugged me against him, ignoring my scowl.

“Do you want me to come and wash your back for you?”

“I’m quite capable but thank you,” I deadpanned. “Besides, if I need any help with water related activities I’d ask the water expert. Right, puddles?”

“Puddles?” Fox scoffed, letting me go so I could stand. “Wait, you two have sappy pet names now?”

River looked pleased despite his pink cheeks, and Smokey eyed me suspiciously as I left the room. They didn’t like me getting close to River, which was stupid. I favored him more since he was the only one who wasn’t an asshole or a creepy pervert.

I relaxed once I was alone in the hot bath, sinking down to my chin, but my eyes went wide as Frost let himself in ten minutes later, shutting the door behind him.

“Frost!”

He ignored my screech, grabbing the edge of the bath to lean down and glare at me.

“The fuck did I tell you about River? Stay away from him.”

“We were just watching TV, you psycho. Get the fuck out!” I snapped, a shiver rolling through me as I suddenly felt cold. Panic rolled through me when I glanced down to find the surface of the water had iced over, my body growing colder as it spread until I was enclosed in a block of ice. “This isn’t funny, Frost.”

“You’re only going to hurt him. You’re like a black widow, drawing them in to strike,” he said in a bored tone, his sharp gaze getting angrier by the second. My teeth started chattering and I couldn’t pull my arms out from under the ice. I was completely trapped.

“I’m not going to hurt anyone other than you!” My voice cracked as some of my fear escaped, a sick smirk tugging at the corners of his lips.

“I could freeze the blood in your veins right now, you know?” he murmured, standing up straight and running his eyes over me as if he was considering it. “Then you wouldn’t be a problem.”

“All I did was run into you!” I whimpered, the cold starting to get to me. “Why do you hate me so much?” I let out a pained cry as my chest numbed, my body burning as he pushed the cold through me. He was going to fucking kill me.

“You’re acting like you don’t remember me, but you’re lying,” he gritted out, confusing me, but I didn’t get to ask him about it before I heard the door to my bedroom slam open, and seconds later, Fox stormed into my bathroom.

He took one look at the ice block I was in and turned to Frost furiously.

“What the fuck are you doing?!”

“I’m protecting you idiots!” Frost shouted, River and Smokey poking their heads in to witness my humiliation too. River cursed and darted to my side, his eyes going over his shoulder to Smokey in a panic.

“Melt it.”

For once, Smokey looked torn, eyeing Frost for a second before stepping into the room.

“Dude, you’re taking it too far.”

I cried out again as more pain filled me, and Fox instantly punched Frost in the jaw, stopping his icy assault on me.

“You’re hurting her!”

“That’s the idea! She’s going to hurt *you*, so I’m making sure she can’t!” he threw back as he rubbed his jaw, not happy when Smokey moved beside me and placed his palms on the ice to start melting it quickly. He wasn’t using flames, so he must have been able to just access the heat.

He eyed me silently for a moment before speaking bluntly. “Did he ice you?”

“Obviously!” I growled, but he shook his head.

“No. Is he freezing *you*? Like, your organs? Blood? Muscles?”

“I think so. My chest is really hurting,” I forced out, gritting my teeth. One of my hands finally pulled free from my icy prison, and River instantly took it in his as if he could warm my whole body up through my fingers.

Smokey cursed under his breath, glancing over his shoulder at a fuming Frost.

“You could’ve killed her.”

“And I would have if you fuckers hadn’t interrupted,” he spat, shoving Fox out of his way as he stalked out, leaving his friends to deal with me.

The ice melted fast but my chest still ached, which was freaking everyone out.

“I need to touch you,” Smokey said with a surprisingly soft tone, reaching his palm out to place it on my chest, instant heat washing through me and soothing the discomfort.

He moved back from me once he decided he’d melted everything necessary, and River grabbed my towel from the floor, giving Fox and Smokey a dirty look.

“Out.”

“Excuse me?” Fox snorted but Smokey didn’t need to be told twice. He walked out without a backwards glance, probably to find Frost.

“I said *out*. Now’s not the time to be perving on her,” River bit out, holding the towel out wide to me and keeping his eyes averted from my naked body. “Here. Wrap this around yourself and I’ll help you sort out the heating in your room.”

I hesitated, my eyes darting between them before I grabbed the edge of the bath and stood, water sloshing around as I stepped out and let him wrap the towel around me. My limbs were numb and I struggled to stand, but I managed to stay on my feet.

Fox was happily checking out my bare legs after definitely getting a nice eyeful of my tits, but I ignored him and let River steer me into my room. He forced Fox out and slammed the door in his face before grabbing a remote and fiddled with the buttons until a steady flow of heat filled the room.

“Frost seems to know me from somewhere,” I whispered, tightening my grip on the towel as it almost fell. “He said I’m pretending not to remember him.”

That made River turn to face me, his brow creasing in confusion.

“You’ve met before coming here to Stardust?” I shook my head, shivers wracking my body and making him sigh. “We’ll worry about that later. Right now, you need to warm up.”

“Can you turn around then?” I questioned as I quirked my brow. “I have a feeling you don’t want to see me naked.”

“I want to,” he blurted out before his face turned bright red, his hand instantly going to the back of his neck and making him appear even more awkward. “I didn’t mean that. Well, I did, but not in that way. Shit, I’m really bad at this, aren’t I? I’m not asking you to get naked, I just mean I wouldn’t hate it.” He kept stumbling over his words, and a light chuckle left me as I offered him a way out.

“Would you like to leave?”

“Absolutely,” he said and abruptly left the room, almost running into Fox who was standing just outside the door, shaking his head. Fox’s eyes met mine as River’s bedroom door slammed.

“I got second-hand embarrassment from that.”

“He’s sweet,” I answered, holding his gaze. “Why do you guys bully him so much?”

“He’s pathetic, not sweet,” he corrected, stepping into the room with a wide smile. “If you need someone to see you naked, I have no problem being of assistance. If we both get in bed naked you’ll warm up faster too.”

“I’d fuck ice boy before letting you put your diseased cock anywhere near me.” I took a step back, not surprised when he followed. He reached out, teasing the wet ends of my hair between his fingers.

“I’d make you come multiple times before even putting my dick anywhere near you. Dinner, maybe a movie. I’d give you the full VIP treatment.” He was so close that I could feel his breath tickling my neck. “I’d fucking worship you.”

My skin heated and my breath hitched, my body leaning into him as he slid an arm around my waist. It was like I’d lost control of my body.

Just before I could drop the towel, Smokey’s sharp voice pulled me out of whatever trance I was in.

“Really, dude?” My eyes darted to the door to find Smokey leaning against the doorframe with his arms crossed loosely. He looked bored and his expression didn’t change when he spoke to me. “He’s seducing you with his powers. Keep your guard up unless you feel like riding his *diseased cock* for the rest of the day.”

I jerked back so fast that I dropped the towel, my body flushing from their eyes on me. “Would you two get the fuck out?” I snapped as I bent down to pick it up, covering myself again. “Show’s over.”

“Shame,” Fox murmured, not seeing my fist coming until it landed on his cheek and caused him to stumble back.

“I meant it, asshole. I’d fuck Frost before you. Hell, I’d fuck literally anyone else before letting you near me. Do you want to fuck, Smokey?” I practically snarled, and Smokey backed up with his hands out in front of him.

“Uh, no, you fucking psycho.” He vanished as if I was going to drag him into my bed, but Fox groaned.

“At least I’d make it good for you. He’d just hump and dump without getting you off.”

“If you try that shit with me again—”

“I might have seduction as a power but I wasn’t making you do anything you didn’t want,” he said smugly, walking backwards towards the door. “All I did was bring your feelings to the surface so you’d stop hiding behind them.”

He yelped as I slammed the door in his face with my powers, most likely smacking him on the nose or stubbing his toe. I flicked the lock as I dropped my towel again and I had to admit I was warmer thanks to Fox.

I’d never tell him that though.

I found one of my oversized T-shirts and a pair of panties to get changed into before sliding into bed to finish warming up, scrolling on my phone to kill some time.

No one bothered me until dinnertime when Fox knocked on the door to let me know there was a plate of food waiting for me. I almost didn’t respond but my stomach was growling, so I climbed out of bed and opened the door.

His eyes ran down the length of my body shamelessly before he met my gaze.

“Do you have anything on under that?”

“Does it matter? It’s not like you’re going to see it,” I threw back lightly as I pushed past him and padded downstairs to the kitchen where everyone else was already eating.

River gave me a small smile as I slid into the chair beside him, and Frost glared at me from across the table. I didn’t give him my attention, silently picking at my food. It was fries with

a burger and salad, and whoever had made it sure knew how to cook.

Frost didn't stick around once he'd finished eating, heading straight out the front door and slamming it behind him. No one seemed to notice, Smokey and Fox being too busy scrolling on their phones, while River collected our plates and dumped them in the sink.

He started running the water and I got to my feet to help him, Smokey's eyes flicking up to me silently. If they had a routine, no one had told me, so I was more than happy to help.

River didn't question me as he handed me a dishtowel, his appreciative eyes glancing at me as he spoke.

“Did you want to watch another movie?”

I went to reply but Fox cut me off.

“Sorry, buddy. Smokey and I are gaming tonight.” He sounded smug and I wished I could've seen his face when I replied.

“That's okay, we can watch a movie in River's room. You have a TV, right?” I turned to River, finding discomfort dancing across his face. “That is, if you want to. No pressure. We could go for a walk and you could show me around.”

He relaxed when he realized that I wasn't going to push him, nodding quickly.

“I can show you around. The lighting here is awesome so it won't get too dark. I'll show you the main training gym since you'll be there a lot. We train most days but we use the gym here to avoid people. We're not too social.”

Smokey snorted, giving River a dirty look. “Speak for yourself. You and Frost mightn't like it, but Fox and I need to get laid somehow. The gym's a good place to go.”

I rolled my eyes, waiting for River to hand me a washed plate so I could dry it.

“You're a whore too?”

“Says the girl who just yelled at me to fuck her,” Smokey deadpanned, shoving his chair back and getting to his feet. “Maybe don’t go to the bar tonight. Frost will be there and you’ll ruin everyone’s mood.” He walked into the living room with Fox grumbling behind him, leaving River and I in peace.

It was quiet for a while until River spoke, uncertainty in his voice.

“You asked Smokey to sleep with you?”

I let out a light huff, putting the stack of dried plates away as he motioned to the correct cupboard.

“It was said out of anger. Fox used his sex magic on me and I got mad.”

“Oh, okay.” He sounded relieved and I couldn’t help it when I hip-checked him with a chuckle.

“I don’t know where they’ve been. I’d much prefer to hang out with you than have shitty sex.”

“Kind of you,” he snickered, handing me the last of the cutlery to dry as he drained the sink and grabbed a cloth to wipe the table.

Once we were finished, I headed upstairs to my room to get dressed into a black skirt and a shirt, grabbing my black lace-up boots before heading back down to the kitchen where River was waiting for me.

“Let’s get going before it gets too late,” he suggested as uncertainty filled his eyes. He really wasn’t good with girls, but I thought it was cute. I definitely preferred his awkwardness over Fox’s flirting.

River held the front door open for me, waiting for me to walk past him before he closed it and followed.

“What’s there to do around here?” I asked as we walked along the brightly lit street, his hands slipping into his pockets as he shrugged.

“There’s the bar, gym, pool, a fast food place, and we have a theater. You would’ve seen the grocery store by the administration building when you got here. I don’t go out

much, so you should probably ask Fox. He spends a lot of time chasing tail around Stardust.” He sounded annoyed, his eyes trained on the ground in front of him as he walked. “It’s a surprise that he hasn’t dragged anyone home to traumatize us since you arrived. He always finds the screamers.”

I’d strangle Fox if he kept me awake at night with moaning women.

“What’s the deal with Storm?” I asked carefully to change the subject, knowing it was a bit of a touchy topic by the way everyone had reacted earlier. “Why doesn’t he like living with you guys if you’re all friends?”

River snorted, giving me the side-eye.

“Don’t mistake our behavior for friendship. Frost and Smokey spend most of their time trying to kill each other, Fox is a cunt, and I keep to myself. Storm likes his own space and he’d kill all of us if we were under the same roof. He’s only got his own place because it’s run-down and needs work done to it that the Board won’t make time for. He was nice to you today to piss off Frost, so don’t assume he’ll be nice to you next time.” He looked ahead of us again, motioning towards a massive building. “This is the gym. It’s open twenty-four-seven to anyone in Stardust. We all train differently but it gives us more room to practice as a group when we need to. Despite us not all being besties, we work well together.”

I didn’t know much about the Board, other than they were the ones running Stardust and were insanely powerful. I’d never met them, but I assumed I would eventually.

I studied the stupidly big building, noticing it lacked windows.

“People don’t like training in natural light? Are you all vampires?”

An amused smile tugged at his lips as he glanced at me.

“We’d only smash windows with our powers. Wait until you see Smokey and Frost going head-to-head in the battle room. You’ll understand what I mean.”

“You guys fight each other?” I asked with surprise as we started walking towards the door. “I don’t like fighting people.”

“Those two like to hurt each other, that’s all. We do try and challenge each other though to keep our skills up. I’ll fight with you and we can practice a bunch of stuff without hurting each other. I’m not a fan of getting hurt either.” He cringed at the thought, and I hooked my arm in his as we walked inside.

“I’d love to be your training buddy. As long as training means we get to stop for ice cream on the way home sometimes,” I said with a grin, his entire body relaxing. I swore he was permanently tense.

“I can do that. We have an ice cream stand in the park. I’ll take you there after training one day,” he replied warmly. Butterflies fluttered inside my stomach, and I mentally scolded myself. I didn’t catch feelings, that wasn’t who I was, but River was making things terribly difficult with how sweet he was all the time.

He showed me through the building, taking me upstairs to where the gym equipment was. The bottom level was one massive room made for battling each other, leaving the top level for the machines. It was an impressive set up.

There were tables in one corner by the treadmills but there weren’t chairs.

“What are those for?”

His eyes followed mine, and he chuckled when he saw what I was talking about.

“They tried to set up lessons on the history of powers. It failed miserably.”

“When did you move here?”

“When I was twenty-one. I was the last one here, and that was four years ago. We were starting to think our sixth member wasn’t coming.”

I lifted myself to sit on one of the tables, swinging my legs as my eyes scanned the room.

“I avoided coming here until my powers forced me to. I tried so hard to pretend to be an everyday human.” I glanced at him, frowning slightly. “I’m surprised it’s so quiet here, I expected it to be busy.”

“Most people go home for dinner. It gets really busy here around midnight though.” He leaned his butt against the table beside me, crossing his arms. “It’s another reason why we use our gym at home unless we need the space to challenge each other. This place will be packed in a few hours.” He let out a sigh, his eyes landing on mine. “I’m sorry about earlier. I don’t mean to make shit awkward, I’m just not used to having someone in the house wanting to spend so much time with me, and you’re really pretty. It’s a little intimidating.”

“I like that you’re not a cocky prick like the others,” I murmured, his eyes widening with surprise. “I think it’s cute when you get all flushed and freaked out. It’s refreshing from those pigs we live with.” He swallowed nervously when I took his hand and tugged him closer, my legs opening to make room for him. “I don’t care what anyone says. I think you’re really sweet. You don’t need to be a smooth talking asshole to make girls like you.”

“I really want to kiss you right now,” he blurted out, his eyes flicking between mine. “You really like me? Not Fox or Smokey?”

“They’re attractive, but I like you,” I reassured him, shuffling closer to the edge of the table to run my fingers through his hair, his breath catching. “You can kiss me if you want.”

Uncertainty filled his eyes as he placed a hand on my waist.

“You sure?”

He was overthinking and freaking himself out, so I wrapped my legs around his waist to pull him as close as possible, raising my lips to his. He was tense for a moment before seeming to snap out of it, his arm sliding around my waist as he kissed me back. It was desperate, his other hand lifting to the back of my head to keep me in place. Gone was

the awkward man as he consumed me, leaving me panting for more when he finally pulled back to catch his breath.

His brow creased in thought and I realized he had no idea what he was doing at all. He didn't know if I liked it or not.

“Jesus, you can kiss me like that whenever you want, puddles,” I said with a grin, causing a slow smirk to spread across his face.

“You don't have to lie to me to save my feelings.”

“If it wasn't going to make you freak out, I'd suggest shoving your fingers inside my panties to see how wet you just made me,” I said huskily, surprised when he kissed me again.

A moan slipped past my lips as he ground against my core, my hands wandering under his shirt to tease his abs. He shuddered and placed a hand on my thigh, his hand warm against my skin.

“Touch me,” I whispered against his mouth as his hand trailed higher under my skirt, but the spell was broken as we were interrupted.

“He'll slip the tip in and come before you've even begun. You chose the worst person if you want to make your pussy feel good.” River jerked back so fast that he almost tripped over his own feet, and I looked over into dark, coal eyes. Storm was leaning against the wall close by, showing zero emotion as he stared at us. “You don't want to take his virginity. He'd follow you around like a lost puppy for the rest of your life.”

I closed my eyes as I tried to keep my temper in check. I'd assumed River didn't have any experience by the way he'd been acting, but Storm was an asshole for spilling his secrets without his permission.

When I opened my eyes, River was already halfway across the room.

“Puddles! Where are you going?” I called after him but he acted like he didn't hear me, bailing to avoid facing me.

“If you want to have your soul fucked out of your body, fuck Fox. He’d probably know his way around your body better than you would,” Storm continued, making his way towards the treadmill. “Either way, keep your bedroom activities out of the public gym.”

I ground my teeth together with annoyance, slipping off the table and stalking towards him.

“What the fuck’s wrong with you? You know he gets embarrassed easily. We’re supposed to be like a family.”

I went to slap my hand against his shoulder but he spun around and gripped my throat, slamming me back against the wall.

“We’re nothing like a fucking family, so get that shit out of your head. We’re here because we have no choice, and you’d better learn real fast to mind your own business. I don’t give a shit about you banging River, I don’t care if you break his heart when you’re ready to toss him aside, but stay the fuck away from me.”

“You’re the one in my business being mad about nothing,” I hissed, his eyes narrowing as his thigh pressed firmly between my legs, making me suck in a sharp breath. His fingers around my throat tightened and his voice dropped lower as thunder rumbled in the distance.

“You went to touch me, *that’s* why I’m angry. Don’t ever touch me, firecracker.”

He released my throat but didn’t move his leg, pressing even more into my core until I whimpered. I was so close to coming. Between River grinding on me and now this, I was definitely getting myself off before bed. “Frost is right, you are a whore.”

That snapped me out of it.

I shoved him back as the thunder grew closer, backing away from him with a glare.

“What can I say? River made me so horny that I’d hump a tree right now to finish. Enjoy.” I motioned to his jeans to draw attention to the wet spot from my panties, disgust

spreading across his face. I didn't stick around to watch his meltdown.

The moment I got outside, the rain started, lightning illuminating the sky as I trudged back home. The thunder was stupidly loud and by the time I got back to the house I was soaked to the bone. Luckily it wasn't cold.

The front door opened and almost knocked me over, relief filling Fox's face as he saw me.

"I was just coming to look for you. The fuck did you do to him?"

"I didn't do anything, he just left me at the gym," I scoffed as I pushed past him, not surprised when he closed the door and followed closely.

"Not River, Storm. Who do you think ruined our nice weather?"

I paused, turning to face him.

"The rain and lightning show is Storm's doing? That's his power?"

"You're only just figuring that out? The name didn't give you a hint?" he asked dryly, running his gaze over me. "You're lucky he didn't throw a bolt of lightning at you. He's really pissed by the look of the weather. Does it have something to do with River coming home and shutting himself in the bedroom to sulk?"

I wasn't going to tell him shit so I rolled my eyes and started walking towards the stairs to my bedroom.

"Good night, Fox."

"Aw, c'mon. Tell me what happened! Spill the tea!" he called after me but I ignored him, locking myself in my room and having a quick shower to warm myself up for the second time tonight.

I wasn't going to risk another bath incident.

CHAPTER THREE

SALEM

I didn't push River to talk to me the next morning. He was sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast when I walked in, his muscles stiffening a fraction when he noticed me.

I made coffee, silently sliding one in front of him once I was done to show I wasn't angry with him, but I kept my attention on Smokey who was sitting on the kitchen counter drawing flames up and down his arm casually.

"That looks safe," I observed lightly, a sinister smirk taking over his face as his eyes remained on the glowing flames.

"I'm fireproof. My entire body can catch fire if I want it to."

"Doesn't that burn your clothes?" I asked, his eyes finally flicking to me as he raised an eyebrow.

"Is that your fucked up way of asking to see me naked? I already told you I'm not interested in your psycho-ass. Even though making you beg for it would be amusing."

He was just as cocky as Fox. I'd hardly thrown myself at Smokey but I had a feeling he was going to bring it up every chance he got.

"No thank you. I can find my own evening entertainment without praying their clothes get incinerated," I deadpanned, sipping my coffee and trying really hard not to look at River. I could sense his gaze on me, and disappointment flared in my

chest as he finished his coffee in silence before leaving the room, his feet thumping up the stairs.

I would've been able to deal with it if he was angry but being cut off sucked. I wasn't sure why I was taking it to heart so badly but he was also the only person in Stardust that actually seemed to genuinely like me. I shouldn't have crossed that line with him.

"Buy him some flowers and tell him he's pretty," Smokey suggested sarcastically. "That should fix him. Usually I'd say offer him a blow-job but if this is how he's acting just because of a kiss, I wouldn't recommend touching his dick."

"What are you talking about?" I grunted as I gave him a bored expression over the rim of my cup.

"Good idea. Pretend you didn't shove your tongue down his throat. Maybe he'll forget about it too," he chuckled, annoyance washing through me. River would've heard him and he'd probably lock himself in his bedroom all damn day because of his embarrassment.

"How about you mind your own business?" I said sweetly, draining my coffee and rinsing it in the sink. "If you want to fight, fight me. Leave him alone." I glanced over my shoulder to find him studying me as he dropped to his feet.

"You're serious? You'd fight me? You haven't seen me in action before so you might want to rethink that." He wasn't wrong. He'd been training for longer than me and I didn't have much control since my powers had been going haywire. I had no idea if they were balanced now that I was with them, but I'd risk it if I had to. I wasn't going to let him push me around, and the practice against someone like him would do me some good.

The best way to make guys like Smokey do anything was to make it seem like their idea.

I turned, crossing my arms against my chest.

"Like I said, leave him alone or I'll make you."

"You'll be eating those words in a minute," he murmured as the muscles in his arms flexed, my eyes dropping to his

hands by his sides as he balled them into fists. “Get dressed. You’re coming to train with me today.”

“You think I want to spend my day sparring with you?” I scoffed but his eyes narrowed as he walked over and towered over me, his chest bumping me in the face. He was tall like Storm but he didn’t pull off the same mean look that Storm did.

“It wasn’t a request. We train almost daily so you’d better get with the program. We like to be in tip top fighting shape. If you’re going to live here then you’re going to pull your weight too. Wear something that’s not flammable.”

“All clothes are flammable,” I huffed out, the corners of his mouth curving into a grin.

“Better be good at dodging then.” He stepped back to let me pass and I headed to my room to get dressed. I knew for a fact that he’d drag me out in my pajamas if I wasn’t fast enough.

I pulled on some leggings and a sports bra, tugging a loose T-shirt over my head before grabbing my sneakers and making my way back downstairs. I tied my hair into a high ponytail as I walked, not surprised to find Smokey impatiently waiting as if I’d taken hours.

He didn’t speak as he opened the door and walked out, making me roll my eyes. I shouldn’t have expected him to hold the door for me.

I caught up to him, silently walking side-by-side the entire way to the gym, and he didn’t speak until we were in the empty training arena.

“I don’t know why you thought this was a good idea. There’s not much here you can use to throw at me.” He wasn’t wrong. Most of the furniture and gear was upstairs, leaving the training area clear of objects. He didn’t know I had tricks up my sleeve though.

“Worry about your own powers.” I stepped back from him and bracing my feet apart, tilting my head. “Show me what you’ve got, scorch.”

His eyes flickered with annoyance and he didn't waste time as his hand shot out, causing a large ball of fire to fly towards me. Confusion filled his eyes as my lips tugged into a smile and my hand lifted, the air flowing through my fingers as I made his fireball change course with ease. It hit the ground across the room, snuffing itself out on impact.

"What the fuck?" he demanded as he glared at me, instantly throwing another two fireballs. I did the same thing with them as I had with the first, letting out a light chuckle.

"I forgot to mention I control air too."

"You have two fucking powers?" he asked in disbelief as I circled him. "That's not possible."

"Why not? It's not common but it does happen."

Smokey snarled, stepping closer and forcing a wall of fire to come towards me. I pushed air in his direction to hold it back and my arms shook slightly at how fast my power was draining, not being used to using it.

I stumbled as I tried hard to keep it in place, but it was no use. Smokey was stronger than me thanks to years of training.

My back hit the floor as the heat washed over me, and I let out a hiss of discomfort as it burned my arms. We all healed fast thanks to our magical blood but that didn't mean it didn't hurt.

"You ready to give up already?" he called out as he walked towards me, tossing his stupid fireball up and down in his hand. "I told you there was no hope of you beating me."

I sat up and eyed my burned skin, relieved that my clothes were still intact.

"I'm not giving up," I muttered as I climbed to my feet. "I needed a challenge and I got one. Do you think I can train alone? No. I won't get stronger without sparring."

I'd hoped to miraculously beat him but I knew it was unlikely.

He started throwing smaller fireballs at me in rapid succession, leaving me no choice but to dodge them as I tried

to block the rest with air. My body ached from the amount of power I had to keep drawing from within myself, and my skin was burning from the flames that I didn't manage to block.

I ended up on the ground as I shuffled back to avoid his shots, sweat coating my skin as I continued to force air from my hands. I was burning out fast and had no idea how much longer I could keep it up.

I looked up just in time for Smokey to get knocked over by a wall of water, my eyes darting behind me to find River looking pissed off.

“What the hell, dude? Take it easy on her.”

“Why should I?” Smokey scoffed, wiping water from his face with a snarl. “She wanted a challenge so she got one. We don't take it easy in here since we don't get that option in real life battles. Stay out of it.” He went to throw another fireball at me but he let out a growl as River threw more water at him. “Dammit River, stop!”

“You want to fight someone? Fight me. At least it's fair,” River snapped, moving to stand beside me without taking his eyes off Smokey. “You won so it's over.”

“It's over when I say it is!” Smokey bit out before throwing more fire our way, and I watched in both horror and amazement as River flew at him, water and fire going everywhere as they battled it out.

They threw fists at each other too, slowly wearing each other out until Smokey ended up on his back with River standing over him.

“Okay! Jesus. Get your fucking girlfriend out of here then.”

I had no idea that River was such a strong fighter, but I shouldn't have assumed anything less. Just because he was quieter than the others didn't mean he was weak.

His eyes landed on me and he gave me a nod which I took as a sign to get to my feet. I was embarrassed that I'd needed saving but I hadn't expected Smokey to be so brutal about it.

Smokey stalked towards the stairs, most likely to work out more of his anger on the machines, and River moved in front of me as concern took over his face. His gaze ran over my injured arms before he carefully reached out and took one in his hands.

I winced and his eyes flashed up to mine apologetically.

“What were you thinking by challenging him?”

“I was thinking I had a better chance than that,” I admitted, my breath catching as he sighed and dropped my arm to gently cup my cheek.

“Is this because of me?” He looked heartbroken so I quickly shook my head. I didn’t want him blaming himself when it was one-hundred-percent my fault.

“No. You didn’t do anything,” I promised, his brow creasing in confusion.

“I fucked things up yesterday.”

“You just needed space. I respect that,” I answered firmly, my eyes lowering as I added, “If you don’t want more than friendship then I won’t push you. I was out of line.”

He tilted my face again, studying me for a moment before taking a step closer so that our chests brushed.

“I wanted it. I might make things awkward a lot because I’m terrible with flirting, but don’t you think for a second that I don’t like it. You don’t make me feel stupid for fumbling with my words like everyone else. Storm was right, you know? I’m a virgin, and I won’t be any good at it.” Shame filled his face as he watched me closely for my reaction, and I swore he cringed.

“Hey,” I said softly as I took his hand and gave it a squeeze. “I don’t have much experience either. We don’t have to do any of that right now, okay? We can just keep things at this pace for as long as we like.”

“Don’t get me wrong, if I got to go further with anyone I’d want it to be you, but I’m not there yet. To be honest, I’d never

even kissed someone until yesterday.” His face turned pink and I leaned up on tiptoe to kiss his cheek.

“You can kiss me whenever you want. I meant it when I said you’re really good at it,” I said as I turned towards the door without letting go of his hand. “Let’s go home. We can watch a movie or something if you’re up for it.”

He was staring at me as if trying to figure me out but he followed without argument, his hand tightening in mine a fraction as we walked outside together.

“Wouldn’t you prefer someone like Fox?” he blurted out, making me pause to glance at him.

“You guys are all very different people, but just because Fox is really good at socializing and putting on the charm, that doesn’t mean he’s better than you. You’re kind and sweet which none of the others are. You all have your own strengths.”

“But I’m terrible at this stuff,” he practically whispered, dropping my hand. “You’re outgoing, smart, really hot—”

“And you’re sweet, smart, and really hot too,” I insisted with a smile, taking his hand again. “You’re worth waiting for. If it takes you a freaking year to be ready to take that step then that’s totally fine.”

“You’d be okay with me not putting out for a year if I needed it?” He didn’t seem to believe me and I couldn’t help but tease him a little.

“Of course. I’ve been fucking myself for a while now so I’m getting pretty good at it.”

“You’re crude, you know?” he laughed nervously but my joke caused him to relax.

“You might as well learn about me now in case you decide to run away from me,” I said with a chuckle as we continued walking towards home.

We talked about training the rest of the way, and I was surprised to find Storm in the kitchen arguing with Frost when we arrived at the house. I jumped when glass shattered as

Frost threw ice bullets across the room, but River gripped my hand tighter, his voice low.

“Don’t worry, they’re always like this. It’s why Storm doesn’t live here.”

“Shut up, River,” Frost grunted as his eyes drifted to us, his lip lifting into a sneer when he noticed us holding hands. “Aw, isn’t this sweet? You two been out on a date?”

“Fuck off,” River snapped. “I went to get her from the gym before Smokey could kill her.”

“Play with fire, get burned,” Frost said flatly as he noticed my arms. They were looking better but it was obvious what had happened.

Storm leaned back against the kitchen counter with his arms crossed, raising an eyebrow.

“You trained with Smokey?”

I snorted. “I challenged him. I thought It would be a good boost in my training to go up against someone with anger and skills. I haven’t had much training, nor do I have much experience with my powers since I’ve avoided this place for so long. I didn’t go to any of those supernatural schools like the rest of you either.”

“You really are a pain in the ass,” Storm muttered, his eyes lingering on my arms. “You’re not a good fit for our team. How can you make us stronger by throwing furniture at people?”

He was lucky I was exhausted or I would’ve turned the kitchen into a fucking tornado.

“Pray I get taken out by an enemy then,” I deadpanned as I let go of River’s hand to walk upstairs. Storm said something about me being pathetic and it was no surprise when Frost agreed with him.

At least they seemed to agree on something for once.

“Wait up,” River called out as he jogged after me, falling into step by my side and ignoring the snort of disgust from one of the guys. He looked uncomfortable but I appreciated him

taking my side. I went to walk into my room but his fingers wrapped around my wrist gently, drawing my attention to his face. “Uh, did you still want to watch a movie? I can put something on your arms too if you want. You’re not the first person to get burned by Smokey.”

“You sure? I got the feeling yesterday that you weren’t comfortable with me in your room.”

“Of course. C’mon,” he smiled warmly as he pulled my door shut again and led me to his room instead. Once inside, he directed me to sit on the edge of his bed before kicking off his shoes and padded into his bathroom to rummage in the drawers.

He walked back out with two small, wet towels, ointment, and bandages, making me frown.

“Won’t they heal on their own?”

He shook his head, sitting beside me and encouraging me to remove my shoes so I could turn to face him with my legs crossed. He placed the cool, damp towels over my arms to soothe the heated skin, his eyes flicking between mine.

“Smokey’s power isn’t as simple as the usual burning flame. It’s hellfire. You’ll be healed by morning because of your blood but it won’t be within the next hour like regular fire damage.”

“How come the psychos always end up with the ridiculously strong powers?” I grumbled under my breath, his lips kicking up into a small smirk.

“Because the universe is an asshole. Yours will grow a lot stronger now that you’re here. You just need to draw it out and train it to become more powerful.”

“I have two powers,” I blurted out, feeling obligated to tell him before Smokey could come home and make it seem like I’d been keeping secrets.

River let out a huff of amusement, easing the towels from my arms to look at them.

“I know. I walked in on you and Smokey, remember? Air is probably going to be more useful to you than telekinesis unless you have a bunch of heavy objects around that can be used as weapons. Why did you hide your second power? It’s pretty cool.”

He uncapped the ointment and started dabbing it against my ruined skin, taking his time to avoid hurting me. Part of me wanted to snatch it away and do it myself, I’d never needed help before since I was used to being on my own, but I was enjoying him looking after me.

“Having two powers puts you under the microscope. You’re expected to do more and you get treated differently. It’s not that I was hiding it from you guys out of spite. I honestly rarely use it so no one knows at all.”

I jerked as part of my arm started stinging, and he took my hand to let me squeeze it.

“I’m not upset that you hid it. We might get along but we’re still strangers. I don’t expect you to tell us your deepest, darkest, secrets. We’ve gotta earn that,” he said lightly. “I promise we can work on your powers together until you’re stronger. Taking on Smokey or Frost right now isn’t going to help you. No offense, but either of them or Storm would likely destroy you until you’ve built more strength. Fox will help too even though it’s only because he wants to fuck you.” He cringed and I couldn’t help but roll my eyes.

“He might be easy on the eye, but he’s a cocky piece of shit. He loses points for that.”

“What would you rate him out of ten?” He looked curious so I humored him.

“Probably a four.”

“And me?”

“You’re a twelve,” I said with a grin as he started wrapping my arms. “I’ll raise it to fifteen once you take me to get that ice cream we talked about.”

“Deal,” he murmured, wrapping my other arm before sitting back to inspect his work. “I think you’ll survive. I’ll put

these away but feel free to make yourself comfortable.” He handed me the remote with a shy smile. “Uh, and you can pick a movie. I suck at it.”

“Any requests for genre?” I asked as he walked across the room.

“No porn.”

“Buzzkill!” I joked as I started flicking through options, finding some random comedy that looked okay. I’d probably fall asleep halfway through the damn thing anyway.

River joined me again and we got comfortable with our backs pressed against the headboard. I didn’t want to push him, but after a minute or two I shuffled closer to lean against him, making him tense in surprise before he lifted an arm in invitation. He seemed uncertain so I snuggled into his side and draped an arm around his middle.

“Is this okay?” I asked to make sure, his arm tightening to keep me in place.

“Definitely.”

I almost made it through the entire movie before falling asleep, only waking when River gave me a gentle nudge. “Salem? You’re going to wreck your neck if you stay like that.”

“Five more minutes,” I mumbled as I snuggled into him more, surprised with his response.

“I’ll find you a shirt to change into if you want to sleep in here.”

“You want me to sleep in here with you?” I asked softly as I peered up at him. “If you’d prefer that I’d go back to my room then I’m happy to. Slow, remember?”

He reached out and brushed my hair from my forehead as he eyed me with curiosity.

“You’d go to your own room if I asked?”

“Yes,” I said without hesitation as I sat up and rubbed my eyes. “It’s okay, I can see you in the morning.” I went to swing

my legs off the bed but his arm snaked around my waist and pulled me back. I tilted my head to face him and gasped in surprise as he suddenly kissed me. He loosened his hold so I could turn around to face him, but he didn't break the kiss.

I had no idea how he was so shy but could kiss like this.

It made my pussy clench without him even touching it.

"Come here," he whispered against my lips, taking my waist and pulling me towards him, and a groan left me when I threaded my arms around his neck as I straddled his lap. "Can we do this a little longer?"

"Please," I almost moaned, grinding on him as he thrust against me. We weren't even naked but he was setting my body on fire as he explored me with his hands, his lips leaving mine to trail down my neck.

"We need to stop," he forced out after a few more moments, his muscles tensing under my hands as I held his shoulders and leaned back. I was feeling needy but if he wasn't ready then I couldn't make him. Despite my pussy's objection.

"Can you find me a shirt to sleep in then?" I asked, causing relief to fill his eyes. His confidence seemed to vanish and that was okay. I'd been serious when I'd told him we could take things at his pace.

"Sure. Stay here." He climbed from the bed and walked towards his drawers while trying to hide the tent in his pants, pulling a black shirt out before making his way back to the bed and offered it to me with a soft smile. "This is one of my favorites."

It was a band shirt from *Three Days Grace* and had "*The Mountain*" written across it in large red letters. It was a song I knew well and I felt like he'd just given me a peek into his personal life. Music really was the words of the soul sometimes.

"Thanks. I like that song too," I said as I took it. "I should shower, I probably reek of smoke."

“You can’t get your arms wet tonight. Just get changed,” he insisted. “I can give you some privacy.”

“You can stay if you want.” I swore his eyes were going to fall out of his head.

“You want me to watch you get changed? I mean, I won’t say no if you’re sure.”

He swallowed nervously as I got to my feet, his eyes tracking my movements as I pulled my shirt over my head. He went to look away and I stepped closer to touch his shoulder.

“Look at me.” His eyes lifted to mine and he licked his lips, slowly dropping his gaze lower as I reached around to unlatch my bra, tossing it aside. “I want you to see me like this. We don’t have to do anything.” Usually I wouldn’t give a shit but I wanted to see River’s reaction to my body and for him to be comfortable with me.

“Fuck,” he mumbled absently as I kicked my leggings off and stood before him in nothing but my panties, his eyes glued to my tits. “Those are really nice.”

“Thank you. I made them myself,” I joked before pulling his shirt over my head. It covered me like a short dress, and River’s scent surrounded me as he took my hand to tug me back onto the bed.

I landed on top of him and his lips curved into a warm smile.

“I could get used to this.”

“Me too,” I murmured against his lips before kissing him. His hands moved to my waist as he kissed me back but I didn’t want to overwhelm him, so I dropped down beside him and shuffled under the blanket. The bed was insanely comfortable. “Want me to turn the light off?”

“I can get it.”

“I don’t even have to get out of bed to do it,” I said with a grin, the light switching off as I mentally flipped the switch and plunged us into darkness.

He chuckled, stripping off before sliding under the covers behind me to wrap an arm around my middle. His warm legs tangled with mine as he got comfortable and pressed a kiss to my shoulder.

“Promise you’ll still be here when I wake up.”

“I promise. Good night, puddles,” I whispered, taking his hand and drawing it to my chest so I could hold it while I slept.

I didn’t think I’d be able to fall asleep fast, but I was pretty sure I was asleep before River.

River

I was freaking out a little. I’d only seen naked women in porn, but Salem had no problem stripping down to expose herself to me. I couldn’t believe I said her tits were *nice*.

Why hadn’t I said something better?

Had she expected me to touch them?

I didn’t think I’d fucked it up since she was curled up to my chest asleep, but that didn’t stop me from panicking. My dick was painfully hard but the thought of fumbling around in bed and making an idiot out of myself wasn’t exactly on the plans for tonight.

I was glad she was being patient, but for how long? Guys were expected to lose their virginity like it was no big deal, but it was to me.

I didn’t like the idea of sleeping around but that also meant I was stuck with zero skills.

Footsteps sounded in the hallway and I watched the light under the door vanish as someone stopped in front of it. The knob turned but I’d locked it on my way in, and I heard a curse before they blew out a breath and walked away.

I was pretty sure it was Smokey. If he knew Salem was currently wrapped in my arms he probably would’ve knocked

the damn door down and dragged her out. None of them trusted her.

Maybe he'd been wanting to apologize for our fight at the gym? It wouldn't be the first time he'd felt bad for taking things too far.

I jerked when Salem let out a choked whimper, worry coursing through me as her muscles bunched.

“Salem?” She didn't reply so she was still asleep.

I tightened my hold and shuffled closer if that were possible, another whimper leaving her.

“You're okay. I've got you,” I murmured, having no idea if she could even hear me. I'd had my fair share of nightmares over the years so I knew how horrible it was to be trapped inside your own head while you slept.

I kissed her neck, her muscles relaxing as she let out a sigh. She rubbed against my rock-hard dick and I mentally scolded myself as my balls ached. I'd have to deal with myself in the morning or I wouldn't last the week without begging her to touch me.

That wasn't how I wanted my first time to go.

Her breathing evened out and I tried to get some sleep myself, hoping she'd been telling the truth about being beside me when I woke up. I wouldn't cope if she bailed on me now.

We might have only just met but I was falling hard for her, and that scared the fucking shit out of me.

CHAPTER FOUR

SALEM

I stiffened as I woke up to feel a warm body beside me, but I relaxed as I remembered I'd fallen asleep in River's bed. I cracked open my eyes, snorting as I found River staring back at me.

"Morning, creeper."

"Morning," he mumbled as he quickly glanced away. "Sorry. I didn't mean to be weird." He looked embarrassed so I slid an arm around his waist, confusion crossing his face. When I didn't say anything he reached out to tuck my hair behind my ear. "You're still here. I didn't expect it."

"I told you I'd stay."

"I didn't particularly believe you," he said with a light chuckle. "But I'm glad you are." His confidence was shot to shit, so I shuffled closer and kissed his chest.

"Me too. Do you want breakfast? I'm hungry as fuck," I admitted, a grin spreading across his face.

"I'd love a coffee."

"C'mon, let's get ready for the day, then we can train together if you want?" I offered as I threw the blanket back and sat up.

"I'd really like that," he smiled as he followed, both of us wandering down to the kitchen together.

Fox was sitting alone at the table, and he literally choked on his coffee as we walked in. River sat beside him as I

shooed him away from the coffee pot, Fox's voice tight.

"The fuck is happening right now?"

"Nothing," River grumbled. "Mind your own business."

"Did you two spend the night naked? River actually managed to get a girl under him?" Fox continued, and I flipped him off over my shoulder as I poured two cups of coffee.

"You're being a prick again."

"It was on purpose too," he answered, eyeing me as I carried the cups to the table and sat beside River. He gave me a smile as he took his coffee, and Fox snorted. "Ugh, he's got it bad too."

"Do you blame me? She's gorgeous," River said confidently, giving me a wink. "I hit the jackpot." His small boost of confidence warmed my heart.

"You won't be saying that when I wipe the floor with you later," I teased, sipping my coffee and peering at Fox who still looked like we'd grown multiple heads or something. "Where's everyone else?"

"Smokey woke up in a terrible mood, and Frost is *always* in a terrible mood, so they're beating each other up at the gym. I'm meeting Storm there in an hour to work out, so if you two are heading there, it's probably best to stay out of everyone's way," he grunted.

River's eyes narrowed, his voice coming out sharp.

"Salem didn't do anything wrong. Why should she avoid everyone?"

"Let me put it this way then," Fox huffed. "Fire face is wanting a rematch with Salem, Frost will always become a psychopath around her, and Storm's got a stick up his ass after their interaction at the gym. At least the fucking rain's stopped." His eyes softened as he inspected me. "I'm honestly trying to keep you safe. I'm not being an ass."

I eyed him over the brim of my cup before putting it down in front of me, holding his gaze. "Do you have another skill

other than seduction? How do you fight dragons? Do you just try and fuck them to distract them?” That got a booming laugh out of him, tears welling in his eyes as he tried to contain himself.

“Do I fuck *dragons*? No. Seduction comes with all those charismatic skills that you’ll never have, so I guess you’re half right. I calm and soothe situations with my voice, but I can throw a good punch when needed. If you want to wrestle some time, just ask,” he said and waggled his eyebrows.

River looked irritated but he kept his mouth shut.

“I’d hate to hurt that pretty face,” I cooed, Fox’s eyes lighting up.

“You think I’m pretty?”

“Pretty fucking annoying,” River muttered into his coffee as he sipped it, making me giggle.

He smiled at me, and I realized he was only shy and unsure because of the others. They were outgoing, arrogant, cocky, and apologized for nothing. They gave River so much shit that he was always second guessing himself.

If me laughing at his sarcasm boosted his confidence, I’d listen to him make jokes all damn day. He was just as attractive as the others too, and I needed him to see that.

“C’mon, handsome. Let’s hurry this along so we can train. I want to put my hands all over you again,” I murmured, making him choke on his coffee. Fox hooted with laughter, and I patted River’s back to clear his windpipe. “Too much?”

“I just wasn’t expecting it,” River rasped.

“If you can’t handle that, how will you handle her tits bouncing in your face?” Fox drawled, yelping as I yanked the chair out from under him with my mind, sending him crashing to the floor.

I peered down at him, tscking. “River’s a gentleman, unlike some.”

“The last thing you want is a gentleman. You seem the type to want a good, hard, fuck with someone’s hands wrapped

around that pretty little neck of yours. I bet you like a finger up the ass while being fucked doggy too,” he said seriously, getting to his feet as his eyes stared into mine. “It’s okay to enjoy it filthy, Salem. Just because society says the only right way to fuck is missionary, doesn’t mean it’s right for *you*. Life’s too short. Get fucked like it’s your last lay.”

“Thank you for your unwanted input,” I deadpanned, his face scrunching with annoyance.

“I’m just saying. Enjoy your day and don’t fuck on the couch. Frost will kill the pair of you.”

He stalked off, and I gave River the side-eye.

“He’s a little sensitive, isn’t he?”

“He’s an ass, but he’s a sucker for all that romantic shit. He doesn’t like it when people are forced to push their kinks and wants aside,” he shrugged, getting to his feet. “He can be a douchebag, but if you ever have weird bedroom questions, he’ll have an answer for you. He takes his pleasure extremely seriously.”

“So I’ve noticed.” I grabbed two apples, tossing one towards him. “Eat that, get dressed, and we’ll head to the gym. Are we doing cardio, or are we sparring?”

“Sparring. I want to see how wet I can get you,” he said without hesitation, horror filling his eyes when he realized how bad it sounded. “No! Not like that!”

“Buzzkill. I was about to get really excited to train,” I laughed, ruffling his hair and taking a bite out of my apple. “I’ll meet you back here once I’m dressed.”

I quickly headed up to my room, finding some leggings and a sports bra, then I grabbed a jacket and pulled it on, not bothering with makeup. I found my sneakers, taking two seconds to brush my teeth before deciding I was ready to go, then I pulled my hair up into a messy ponytail as I made my way back down to the kitchen with my gym bag in hand.

“Ready, puddles?” I grinned as he finished putting his shoes on, looping my arm through his once he was done. “I’m going to kick your butt.”

“You can try,” he chuckled, letting me lead him out the front door.

We enjoyed the morning walk to the gym as we talked about a training plan, and I did well to ignore Storm’s eyes as they burned into me the moment we stepped into the gym.

“Smokey and Frost are glaring at you,” River muttered, but I shrugged.

“Let them. We’re here to train, not hang out with them.” I pulled my jacket off and River sucked in a sharp breath.

“You’re training like *that*?”

“Yep. C’mon, shirt and shoes off.” He didn’t seem sure, but he did as I asked, and I heard Fox speak to one of the others as he walked in their direction.

“He’s really trying to impress her, isn’t he? He never fights in just his fucking shorts.”

River heard him but I didn’t let him overthink about it. I smiled sweetly, then threw air at him, knocking him onto his ass.

“Pay attention, puddles,” I teased, and he let out a huff.

“That’s cheating.”

“I thought you were going to try and get me wet?”

He smirked, surprising me as I was hit in the face with a ball of water, soaking me from head to toe. “*Pay attention, air head,*” he mocked as I sputtered.

“You motherfucker!”

He laughed as he scrambled to his feet, dodging the wall of wind I sent his way, multiple balls of water coming back at me without him even needing to look at where he was aiming.

One got me, and I laughed as I blasted one with air, hitting him with his own power.

No one questioned my second power so I knew Smokey had spilled the beans.

It became serious, the two of us stalking each other around the gym as we took turns blasting each other while the other blocked it, and it ended with me flat on my back on the floor, panting like an unfit idiot.

“I need a timeout.”

“You need to get up and fight me,” River said dryly, standing over me and crossing his arms. “You worked harder yesterday against Smokey.”

“That was a real fight.”

“So? Always use your full potential or you’ll never improve,” he answered, flicking droplets of water at my face. “You’re not a quitter, so stop being lazy.”

That made me get to my feet.

I went to throw air at him but I was knocked on my ass by a sheet of ice, and River sighed, offering me his hand while he looked at Frost.

“Care to join us, asshole? If I knew you cared about her training so much—”

“Shut up,” Frost bit out, approaching us as I let River pull me to my feet. Frost’s cold eyes raked over me and I raised an eyebrow.

“Can we help you?”

Ice left his hands and flew in my direction, but I was ready. Air blasted from my hands to send the sharp shards away, blocking his second attempt as I stepped closer. I continued forcing him backwards as I threw more air at him, and just as Frost started to lose his shit, unbearable pain filled me.

I cried out, dropping to the ground as my body burned, managing to lift my head to find Storm playing with lightning in his hand.

“Always keep your wits about you. You never know if the enemy has friends lurking,” he said flatly. I was literally on my hands and knees, unable to move as the pain seemed to reach my joints. It was as if I’d seized. “Get up, Salem. Your

enemies won't wait for you to get your shit together. Push through it."

"How about you fucking bite me?" I wheezed, screaming as another bolt of lightning hit me, knocking me to my stomach.

"Get. Up!" Storm barked, starting to circle me. "It's not that bad."

"You electrocuted me!" My arms shook as I tried to get up, and I flinched as he threw lightning at Smokey. His muscles reacted to the electricity but he remained on his feet, his jaw clenched.

Storm did it again, and this time Smokey dropped to his knees, but he was on his feet again in seconds.

"We become stronger when we train together because we learn to take a hit. Does it hurt? Yes, but we learn to block it out. The more you're exposed to it, the sooner your body will adapt. Frost hardly notices it when I hit him with lightning, and Smokey has learned to block out most of the pain. Frost's ice doesn't faze me like it used to either. Now get to your feet and soak in the pain."

River didn't intervene, so I let Storm teach me his fucked up lesson.

I got to my feet, holding Storm's gaze as I clenched my fists by my sides. "Okay. Hit me."

Everyone seemed surprised by that, but Storm flicked his wrist at me without pause, the blinding pain rolling through me.

I gritted my teeth as I tried to fight it, the next hit knocking me over.

"Get up!" Storm roared, throwing more at me while I was still down. "Show me you're not the little bitch that I think you are!"

Smokey seemed impressed as I took another hit and my shaking body tried to get me back to my feet, but Frost scoffed.

“You’re wasting your time, Storm.”

I hated him.

Fury filled me, and I let out a scream as I blasted air across the room despite the pain, knocking Storm on his ass. I stumbled as my powers weakened, grateful when someone grabbed my arm to keep me steady.

I thought it was River but it was Fox.

“You’ve made your point, dude. Enough.” I leaned into him, rubbing my hand across my chest as it started aching. “Look, you’re giving her a damn heart attack.”

“I’m fine.” I waved it off, hiding my wince as I stepped back to stand on my own two feet to prove it, glancing at River. “I’m going to get changed. I’ll meet you back at the house.”

“Oh, okay,” he said with a frown, and I grabbed my things before trying to walk as strongly as possible to the bathroom.

Once inside, I stopped fighting the shaking and let out a breath. Everything ached, and I was starting to think maybe Fox was right and I *was* having a heart attack.

After a few minutes my body wasn’t cooling down and my chest felt like it was on fire, so I opened one of the shower stalls and turned on the cold water, stepping under the spray without taking my clothes off as I tried to catch my breath.

“How stupid are you?” Smokey said from behind me just as the icy water hit me, yanking me back out. “Water and electricity don’t mix.”

“I’m too hot. I can’t fucking breathe,” I wheezed, continuing to rub my chest. “I—”

“I know, it fucking sucks balls,” he grunted, tugging me towards a bench and forcing me to sit down. I jerked back as he pressed a hand to the nape of my neck to keep me in place, making him scowl. “Sit still for fuck’s sake.”

He swatted my hand away from my chest to replace it with one of his, and after a second I swore my body was cooling down.

“How are you doing that? You can cool people down?”

“I’m not cooling you down, I’m drawing the heat out. I can take a hit from Storm, but my body’s also used to the heat so it didn’t take me long to start becoming more immune to the pain. I don’t mean to freak you out, but you have a wicked burn down your back and across your shoulders.” He sounded apologetic, so I glanced up to look at his face to see his brow crease as he inspected me.

“Will the burns go away? My heart’s beating really fast and it hurts to breathe.”

His amber eyes finally landed on mine, and he nodded.

“This bit sucks but you’ll be fine later. If he wanted you dead, you would be.”

I went to reply but Storm wandered in, crossing his arms as he eyed us.

“Did you seriously get in the shower? Move, fire face.” He waited for Smokey to do as he’d asked, then he squatted in front of me and pressed his palm to my chest, holding my gaze. “Do you quit?”

I glared at him, willing my body to stop shaking, not that it did much.

“I’m going to fucking kill you, you overgrown sparkler.”

“Good.” A sharp zap hit me in the chest and I clenched my jaw against the pain. Realization dawned on me when he stepped back that my heartbeat had slowed, and I gave him a look of confusion. He’d reset it somehow.

“Did you just defibrillate me?” How had it fixed it and not made it worse?

“You took that better than Frost did the first time,” he said without answering my question, grabbing Smokey’s arm and giving him a light shove towards the door while speaking over his shoulder. “Strength is pain. If you want it, it’s going to hurt. The only way to get to the top is by earning it.” He shut the door behind them, leaving me alone to get dry and dressed.

The shakes had almost stopped, but my fingers still tingled.

I finally emerged from the bathroom, surprised to find Fox leaning against the wall by the door. He stood straighter when he noticed me, running his eyes up and down my body.

“You good?”

“Why are you still here?” I wanted to argue as he took my gym bag, but I knew I’d only drop it a million times on the way home thanks to my shaky hands.

“Figured I’d wait for you. Did they do anything to you in there?” he asked, motioning to the bathroom. “Smokey looked weird and I couldn’t get a read on Storm. He has the personality of concrete, with expressions to match.”

“They were helping, I guess.”

“Can you repeat that? I didn’t quite catch it.”

“It doesn’t matter,” I sighed, starting to walk towards the main door. “I’m fucking starving. What are you cooking me for lunch?”

He laughed, following me out into the cool afternoon air.

“I think the guys were getting pizza.”

“Again? How are you not all fat?” I scoffed, making him wink.

“We work out a lot. I personally get at least one hour of physical activity a day, sometimes two if she’s pretty enough.”

“Can I ask you something without you being a pig?” It was unlikely, but he looked serious all of a sudden.

“Shoot.”

“When River’s ready to take that step, how do I make him more comfortable?” I mumbled, looking at the ground as we walked. “You know how he is. I want him to relax.”

“He’s probably just nervous about making it good for you. Women are complicated,” he said without changing his tone. “Guys are easy to get off, but women? You need to press a

million buttons in the correct pattern and speed as if it's a Sims cheat code. There's skill involved and it's intimidating."

"Did you just compare my pussy to a fucking video game?" I asked dryly as I met his gaze, making him smile.

"See how easy it is to get a guy off? All you did was say *pussy* while looking me in the eye and I jizzed down my leg."

"Ugh, you suck," I growled as I gave him a shove, and he wagged his eyebrows suggestively.

"I'm like the suck and fuck express, babe. If River needs help, he knows where to find me."

"You make it sound like you're going to fuck him." I almost tripped over when he replied.

"What's wrong with that? Sex with guys is awesome. I'd have to be gentle with Water Boy though. I have a feeling he's shy," he teased. "If you need to learn how to suck dick—"

"It's not my first rodeo," I huffed, giving him a dirty look. "But nice try, Casanova."

"Was worth a shot."

It was quiet when we arrived at the house. Everyone was eating pizza in the kitchen, and I was surprised when Smokey silently pulled the chair out beside him and pushed a plate of pizza at me. He didn't look at me or speak, but everyone gave him a confused glance as if he'd handed me his life savings with a smile.

I mumbled a thank you and sat down, Fox dropping onto my other side.

No one spoke for a while until Frost glanced around the table once he'd finished eating, his voice flat.

"We're heading out tonight to investigate more unicorn corpses."

"Salem stays home," Storm said without missing a beat, anger burning through me.

"Excuse me? You don't think I can handle some dead ponies with horns?"

“I think you got *electrocuted* multiple times today and your heart needs some down time,” he replied bluntly, chewing on his lip with annoyance before adding, “Smokey can stay home with you since he cares so much.”

“What the fuck?” Smokey snapped at the same time that I did, both of us turning to glare at each other. I didn’t want to be stuck home alone with him.

He’d probably set me on fire again.

Storm rolled his eyes, leaning back in his seat to cross his arms. “It’ll be good for you both to figure out a plan for tomorrow. You’re heading to the mountains to deal with a little dragon issue.”

“Salem can’t handle a fucking dragon,” Frost argued, smacking his fist on the table. “Besides, Smokey and I have it handled.”

Smokey let out a groan, raking his fingers through his hair.

“I’m a glorified babysitter now?”

“No. You’re good with dragons and she needs to learn the ropes. You bitch and moan that I treat you like you’re incompetent, but then you whine when I give you something responsible to do. You want respect? Fucking earn it,” Storm spat, turning to face Frost. “And you need to stay out of it. You’re lucky I don’t make you go with her.”

“I’d kill her and let the dragon eat her corpse.” It worried me that Frost was so casual about my death.

“Which is the reason why you’re not going,” Storm snorted, motioning to River. “You and Fox are heading into the city and going to an address that I’ll give you. Apparently there’s a pixie problem.”

“I fucking hate pixies,” River muttered but Fox grinned.

“Could be worse. Could be dealing with ogres or swamp monsters.”

“I think I’d prefer to have lunch with the swamp monsters, that’s how much I hate pixies,” River said seriously, a shudder rolling through him.

Smokey shrugged, shoving the last bite of pizza into his mouth and getting to his feet.

“I’m going for a swim and then a nap.”

“Smokey,” Storm bit out. “Make sure you explain as much as possible to Salem tonight while we’re gone.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he muttered as he waved a dismissive hand at us before walking away, and River let out a sigh.

“I’ll teach you. He’s just going to sleep all damn night.”

“No,” Storm said calmly, getting to his feet as well. “Smokey can handle it. He acts like a prick but he’s a sucker for having opportunities to prove himself. Which is another reason why I’m making him go tomorrow. He won’t return home without her in one piece because that’s the task he’s been given.”

“That’s a shame,” Frost said under his breath, my eyes narrowing.

“What the fuck’s your problem? You’re salty that we met at a bar once and I don’t remember, or what? You said I don’t remember you, so tell me where I’m supposed to know you from.”

I thought he was going to lose his shit, but he shoved his chair back and shook his head.

“You’re so full of shit. You can act like you don’t know me all you like, see if I care. Go to hell, Salem.” He walked off, Storm’s brow creasing with confusion.

“Seriously, the fuck did you do to him?”

I wished I knew.

I glanced at him, shrugging slightly.

“He claims I don’t remember him but he won’t tell me how we know each other. I *don’t* know him, I’ve never seen him before until I ran into him when I arrived here.”

“Well, you’ve obviously met before. Either that or he’s finally losing it,” Storm chuckled, raking his eyes over me thoughtfully. “You’re his type. Did you fuck once?”

“You think I’d fuck *Frost*?” I asked dryly. “He’s a dick.”

“Most guys who have one night stands usually are,” River deadpanned, his eyes on Fox. I wasn’t going to listen to them bicker, so I stood and cleared the empty plates from the table.

My fingers tingled as I touched the metal tap to rinse them, and I stiffened when a hand pressed against my lower back.

“Leave it. Don’t play with water until tomorrow.” I didn’t move, my body heating as Storm’s hand moved to my waist and squeezed firmly. “Are you listening? Stay out of the pool, don’t shower, and leave the dishes. It’s Fox’s night anyway.”

I swore I didn’t breathe until he stepped back, my heartbeat hammering in my chest as I turned to face him. His lips kicked up into the ghost of a smirk, knowing the effect he was having on me, and I couldn’t help but run my gaze over him. His dark eyes were gorgeous against the black liner that surrounded them, and the scar gave him a rough edge that I was totally digging.

If I pushed his attitude aside, I’d probably climb him like a damn tree.

“You’re drooling,” Fox huffed from beside me as he took over cleaning up, clicking his tongue with disgust. “River *and* Storm? The two ugly ones? There’s something wrong with you.”

I snapped out of it, forcing my eyes away from Storm to grin at Fox.

“You might think you’re God’s gift to women, but if you think you’re the best looking man in this house, you’ve got another thing coming.” River looked uncomfortable as he glanced between me and Storm, and I could sense his paranoia seeping in. “Come on, puddles. Let’s snuggle and watch a movie.”

Surprise flickered across his face but he got to his feet.

“You want to hang out?”

“Of course I do. You think I want to hang out here with the man-whore and the Devil?” I teased, making Storm snort.

“It’s concerning how much you lie to yourself. You’d fuck Fox in a heartbeat.”

“I’d definitely fuck you first,” I said with a straight face, getting some satisfaction out of him having no idea how to respond. I took River’s hand, tugging him towards the hallway. “Thanks for the training session, Storm.”

“Any time,” he grunted, his eyes burning into me as I dragged River up to his bedroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

SALEM

Smokey avoided me until everyone else had left that night, wandering into the living room to sit beside me on the couch without a word. I ignored him, continuing to watch the TV, making him huff.

“Do you want to learn about dragons or not?”

I grabbed the remote and switched the TV off, turning to face him with my legs crossed.

“How big are they?”

“Huge.” He didn’t elaborate and I rolled my eyes.

“I figured that much. How do we handle something that big? Is there a process? A plan of action? A technique?”

“Some dragons are easy to handle. The angry ones though? Not so much. They’ve got a soft spot on their backs near their wings, and the soft skin along their bellies is sensitive too. The worst ones to handle are females who have babies, and territorial males can be quite aggressive,” he offered, ticking things off his fingers as he went. “Try and scare them off first. Use your windy shit to throw them off balance and they’ll probably leave. The goal is to remove them from the problem area and make them go home, not kill them. We only kill them if they’re destroying towns and are out of control, which is rare. They’ve been coming further down the mountains lately and breaking through the magic barriers, which is concerning, so we have to chase them back up. That’s what we’re doing tomorrow.”

I knew nothing about the magic barriers.

“What barriers?”

“You really don’t know anything about this place,” he grumbled, giving me an exasperated look. “The Board run Stardust, and they placed some kind of spell around the middle of the mountains to keep the dragons up the top where they belong. Lately they’ve been weakened and the occasional dragon escapes the barrier. The Board has been looking into why the barriers keep failing, but so far there’s been no sign of sabotage or anything.”

“Be honest with me. How dangerous is this?” I asked, his face darkening.

“The fact that Storm’s alive is a miracle, so that should answer your question. Why are you fucking around with River?”

That was an abrupt change of subject.

“I’m not *fucking around* with him. He’s sweet,” I said defensively. “I’m not used to having people around me who care. I’m trying to feel at home here but you guys are making it really fucking difficult. Why do you hate me? I don’t want to know why Frost does, or Storm. Why do *you* hate me, Smokey?” I stared at him, not caring that discomfort and irritation filled his face.

“I don’t hate you,” he admitted tightly, holding my gaze. “I just don’t know you, and I don’t like outsiders. Give me a reason to like you and I will.”

“How do I do that when you want nothing to do with me? You want me to fuck you or something?” I scoffed, and I swore amusement flickered in his eyes before he looked away.

“Anyone can fuck. Doesn’t mean they’re likable. Feel free to test it though if you’re that desperate for my cock.”

“I’m good, but thanks.” I intended on getting to my feet but he grabbed my arm to stop me from leaving, his grip gentle.

“I’m sorry I lost my temper yesterday at the gym. I know you haven’t trained, so it was an unfair fight.”

I sat back down, giving him a suspicious glance. It was weird how fast he’d changed his attitude towards me, let alone give me an apology. He continued when I didn’t yank back, running his eyes over my arms to inspect me for damage. “Did it heal okay? How’s your heart from Storm?”

“What are we doing with this dragon tomorrow? Herding it?” I asked instead of answering him, pulling away from his touch. I didn’t like how it made my skin tingle. “How will we work as a team when we’ve never had to before?”

“The mountain’s huge and they usually stay up there, but one keeps making its way down and is becoming a problem at the northern end of Stardust. It’s not usually violent and it’s easy to herd back up to where it’s supposed to be. Storm wouldn’t have given you a job that’s dangerous. He’s a prick but he seems to like you,” he said with a shrug, and I couldn’t help but snort.

“You think that asshole likes me?”

“He wouldn’t have helped you this morning if he didn’t. That doesn’t mean he won’t use you to piss off Frost though, so have fun with that.” He got to his feet, hesitating before speaking again. “Do you want to come for a swim?”

“Can’t. Electrocuted this morning, remember?” I replied dryly, not wanting him to know that I didn’t know how to swim. “You go, I’ll just watch TV.”

“I was going to,” he said with a fake smile before leaving the room, acting like he hadn’t just been nice to me.

Smokey.

I swam for ages before pulling myself from the water to sit in one of the chairs at the outdoor table. It was almost midnight but I didn’t want to go back inside. I peered across the yard, noticing Salem’s bedroom light on. I knew that Frost hated her but I couldn’t figure out why. He was a cunt and I hated him, but I was going to take his side for now. He had a

feeling she wasn't going to last here which I found stupid because it wasn't like she could just choose a different house.

We were all stuck together whether we liked it or not.

“Hey,” Fox grunted as he dropped into the chair beside mine, curiosity in his gaze. I knew he was going to ask about Salem before he even opened his fucking mouth. “How'd you guys do? Where's Salem? Didn't bury her in the garden, did you?”

“Her light's on so I think she's in her room. It was fine. Storm and Frost made it seem like we were off to slay the damn dragon, not shoo it up the mountain. It's not like it's hard,” I grumbled before glancing at him. “How'd you guys do?”

“Found four dead unicorns. One was badly injured, but it was too far gone to save,” he sighed. “Storm put it out of its misery.”

“Is he here? Where's Frost and River?” That made him chuckle.

“River's run off to find his little girlfriend to make sure you didn't kill her, and Frost and Storm are having a heated discussion in the kitchen. Storm's convinced that Frost has a major hard-on for Salem so he's giving him shit for it. I was sure they were going to kill each other today. All they did was fight.”

I raised an eyebrow with amusement. “How did Storm come to that conclusion? Frost hates her.”

“Whatever history they shared has Frost all kinds of fucked up. If she didn't mean shit to him, he wouldn't be so moody about it.”

“He literally tried to kill her, dude.”

“I didn't say the history was good,” Fox replied as his eyes flicked to her bedroom window. He seemed bothered, his lips tugging into a frown. “What does River have that I don't? I'm attractive, good in bed, funny—”

“You’re an arrogant dick and Salem doesn’t give a fuck about your sex skills or your pretty face,” I drawled, getting to my feet and patting his shoulder. “I think she’s really into him. Sorry, man. Not even your powers could tame that pussy now that she has her sights set on water boy.”

“Did she talk about it? Did you two hang out and have girl talk? You get all the fun,” he grumbled as he followed me into the house. I didn’t want him thinking I’d become friends with her in their absence.

“You think we painted our nails and had a pillow fight? Suck my dick, asshole. I just wanted to make sure she wasn’t playing River like a fiddle. The last thing we need is that sensitive cry baby getting his heart broken. He’d mope for months.”

“Whip it out and I’ll gag on it for you. If it puts you in a better mood, I’ll do it,” he said seriously, making me roll my eyes. I wasn’t into guys but it was almost worth taking him up on his offer just to see if he’d go through with it. If I kept my eyes shut I probably wouldn’t even notice the difference. “You’re thinking about it, aren’t you?”

“Huh?” I said as I snapped out of it and looked at him as we reached the kitchen to where Storm and Frost were having a beer and glaring at each other.

Fox smirked, leaning against the counter.

“Your cock down my throat. You’re thinking about it.”

“Eat shit,” I snorted, dropping into a chair to rest my elbows on the table, meeting Frost’s amused gaze.

“You’re so desperate to get laid that you’ll let Fox blow you? Jesus, dude. I think it’s time you went to the bar and found some pussy.”

“Did you have fun playing with dead unicorns?” I bit out, and he raised an eyebrow at my tone.

“Yep. Did you have fun playing with Salem? I’m surprised you didn’t nail her while you had her alone.” He knew I thought she was hot, I’d never hidden that from him, but I noticed his eye twitch at the thought, which was interesting.

Maybe he was jealous and Storm was right?

Storm sighed like he was sick of our shit, his tone surprisingly quiet.

“Considering she’s into River, I doubt anyone else has a chance. If she just wanted someone hot to fuck her brains out, she would’ve jumped on Fox by now.”

He had a point.

I’d almost taken her up on her offer to fuck her when she’d joked about it last time, and I knew Fox wouldn’t push her out of bed unless it was to fuck her on the floor. If she was chasing sex, she would’ve already slept with me or him.

River was likely to keep her at arm’s length for a year or two before deciding he was ready, and it seemed she was more than happy to wait.

“She’s really into him,” I confirmed. “I asked her tonight if she’s fucking with him and she said she likes him because he’s nice to her.”

Frost looked annoyed by my conversation with her, but Storm chuckled.

“Oh good, you two played nicely then?”

“I haven’t seen her much but I made sure she’s not playing River and explained the dragon shit to her. We’ll see if she can handle it tomorrow,” I answered with a half shrug. “I think she’ll be fine though. She’d better be, or you’re dead to me. I don’t need this bullshit.”

“Bite me, you fucking fire hazard. You enjoy being given big boy jobs,” Storm deadpanned, stretching his arms above his head. “I’m gonna crash here tonight.”

“You know Salem’s in your room now, right?” I asked dryly, knowing no one would’ve told him. His eyes narrowed, his lip lifting into a sneer.

“What the fuck do you mean? Why’s she in *my* room?”

“Because the room assigned to her is the one Fox claimed, so he made her take the one across the hall instead. It’s not like

you actually live here anyway,” I pointed out, but he was fuming. Fox cringed slightly, knowing he was in deep shit.

“It’s my fault, I was being an ass.”

“Why did you put her in that fucking room?!” Storm exploded, smacking his hands on the table. “That’s *my* room!”

I wasn’t surprised when River and Salem walked in due to all the yelling, but I *was* surprised when she spoke.

“It’s okay, I can move my stuff into another room. I’ll strip the bed and remake it for you. No one mentioned it was taken.”

Frost gave her a dirty look as if being nice was a sin, but Storm clenched his teeth. “Don’t worry about it.”

“It’s no hassle. I’m sleeping in River’s room again tonight anyway.”

I was still annoyed about that.

I’d gone to check on him late last night and found his door locked, assuming it was because he was shitty at me, which had made me feel like a dick. We teased him a lot but sometimes we took it too far.

Knowing she’d been in there the whole time pissed me off.

I didn’t know why it bothered me so much, the guy seriously needed to get laid, but I didn’t want it to be with her. Before today, I thought she was using him to piss off everyone else but now I wasn’t so sure. If she fucked him then bailed, I’d kill her.

Then bring her back and probably fuck her myself because there was something wrong with me.

“Would you do as you’re told for *once*?” Storm demanded, a bubble of laughter leaving me.

“At least we know she doesn’t have a praise kink or she’d be more obedient. I can’t imagine River bossing her around while she preens at him,” I snickered, River’s face turning red with embarrassment as he scowled at me.

Fox smirked. “Don’t be so sure. It’s always the grumpy, independent ones who love being called a *good girl*.”

“You guys suck,” Salem bit out, glaring at Storm. “I’ll go and get your room ready.” She stomped off, making Storm shove his chair back and start stalking after her, glaring at River on his way past.

“Stay here. If I strangle your girl, just know the little freak probably fucking liked it.”

I laughed as he left the room, and River gave me a wary look.

“Should I follow?”

“Nah. He’s right, the sadistic bitch would enjoy it,” I grinned, not reassuring him in the slightest. I’d almost bet money on her being into some kinky shit.

Salem

The moment I entered my bedroom I was shoved back against the wall by Storm, his angry eyes on mine.

“I told you to leave it.”

“It’s just a room. I really don’t mind if you want it,” I replied, my gaze flicking over his face. He was standing so close his breath caressed my cheek, his hips holding me in place against the wall. I didn’t realize I was staring until I cupped his chin, rubbing my thumb across the end of his scar.

He tried to flinch back, but I held firm and met his dark eyes.

“Why do you hate your scars so much? It just shows that you’ve survived bad shit.”

“Don’t fucking touch me,” he said sharply, but it sounded strained. His fingers wrapped around my wrist in a bruising grip when I didn’t move, but he didn’t force my hand away, speaking more calmly. “Don’t, Salem.”

My heart was hammering in my chest as he stared back at me, and when he glanced down at my lips, I swore he was

going to kiss me.

“You two are quiet.”

I jumped, but Storm didn't move, let alone take his eyes off mine. “Fuck off, Smokey.”

“Fuck no. It's way more interesting in here,” Smokey chuckled.

Storm finally stepped back from me, his voice soft.

“Keep the room, Salem.” He stalked out, and Smokey gave me a smug look.

“I knew you couldn't help yourself. Pretty sure you two were about to go to town on each other. What will River think?”

“I didn't do shit. Excuse me,” I huffed and shut the door in his face before locking it, dropping to the floor to rest my back against it. I'd done nothing wrong, so why did I feel guilty?

I ended up in bed, not wanting to see River. Smokey had probably made it out like Storm and I had been banging in here, and I didn't want to deal with it tonight.

He was just going to break things off with me because he'd never believe me over someone he'd known for years.

I'd only been asleep for what felt like minutes before a knock on the door woke me.

“Salem?” It was River. I waited a moment before climbing out of bed and unlocking the door, finding him standing there in nothing but his boxers, stumbling over his words. “Storm told me what really happened after Smokey tried to start shit. Did you think I'd believe that troublemaking asshole over you?”

“Why wouldn't you believe him?” I said with a frown, tingles racing through me as he stepped into the room and placed a hand on my waist, his fingers dipping under my shirt to tease my skin.

“Because he's a dick. Get back in bed, I'll sleep in here.” I didn't know why that made me so damn happy, but it did.

Probably because he seemed so confident. He walked me backwards a little to shut and lock the door before steering me towards the bed and climbing in beside me. “This okay?”

“Definitely,” I replied with a smile, the moonlight illuminating his eyes in the dark. “Thanks for believing me.”

“I’ll always believe you,” he promised, giving my waist a gentle squeeze. “I missed you tonight. I tried to wait until tomorrow to see you but—”

I pulled him down to kiss me and he instantly accepted it, his hand sliding up my side under my shirt until his thumb brushed the underside of my breast. He stilled his hand, but when I arched into him more in invitation, he cupped my breast hesitantly.

I kept kissing him, running my hand up his bare back, and I wasn’t surprised that when he noticed he was pressing his hard dick against my core, he stopped.

“I—”

“We don’t have to sleep together,” I whispered, leaning forward to bite his lip gently. “But I can make you feel good if you’d like?”

“How?” His voice was strained, his hips jerking as I pressed against him more with a slow grind.

“Let me go down on you.”

“You want to give me a blow-job?” He swallowed, a nervous chuckle leaving him. “Are you sure?”

“Is that moving too fast for you? I don’t want to push you but if you want—”

“Please,” he asked softly, cupping my cheek. “My dick’s so damn hard for you right now.”

“Lay on your back.” I shoved the blanket off and scrambled to my knees, dipping my fingers below the waistband of his boxers before looking up at him. “You sure?”

“I’m going to die if you don’t,” he joked, not hiding his nerves as I slid his boxers down. He seemed to keep his pubes

trimmed which was nice, and his dick was thicker than I'd anticipated.

His thighs tensed as I curled my fingers around his length and slowly pumped him in my hand, and he sucked in a sharp breath as I wrapped my lips around the head to tease him with my tongue.

“Fuck, Salem.”

I pushed him down my throat, holding it there for a moment before pulling back and repeating the motion, not surprised when River's fingers ended up in my hair. His grip was light, but it became firmer as I went faster and ran my tongue along the underside of the tip.

“Shit, fuck. That feels so good,” he groaned, his breath picking up speed as I pushed him even deeper until I gagged. The grip he had on my hair was almost painful but it spurred me on until panic filled his voice. “I'm going to come.”

I kept going, satisfaction rolling through me as he practically shouted my name as he came.

Everyone *definitely* heard that.

I made sure he was done before pulling away and swallowed the bitter liquid, lifting my eyes to his to find him staring at me like I hung the damn moon.

“Better?” I murmured, startled as I suddenly found myself on top of him as he kissed me hard.

At least he wasn't afraid of the taste of himself. Some men were ridiculous about that.

“My bones are like jelly and I'm really tired,” he laughed softly once he stopped kissing me, fatigue in his eyes.

“Get some sleep then,” I grinned, dropping down beside him to snuggle into his side.

He frowned, concern in his tone. “Shouldn't I make you feel good too?”

As much as an orgasm would be awesome, I was tired and didn't want to do too much at once or he'd probably run for

the hills. I didn't mind waiting.

“Another time. I'm tired too,” I reassured him. “Besides, I need some sleep so I can keep my wits about me in the morning. Any tips for dealing with dragons?” I asked, a light chuckle leaving him.

“Avoid the teeth. You should probably be more worried about having to tolerate Smokey all damn day.”

He wasn't wrong. I wasn't looking forward to it but it seemed he wasn't as bad when Frost wasn't around, which was interesting.

“Good night, puddles.”

He kissed the top of my head, holding me close.

“Sleep well, Salem.”

CHAPTER SIX

SALEM

River grumbled about wanting to sleep longer when I woke him up the next morning, so I left him in bed while I showered and got ready for the day. He was snoring softly when I emerged from the bathroom, so I padded downstairs to the kitchen, finding Storm sitting at the table with a coffee in his hands. Annoyance spread across his face as he assessed me, finally speaking once I'd rolled my eyes and started pouring myself a coffee.

“You work fast.”

“Huh?” I said absently, not in the mood for his theatrics. It was too fucking early.

“You haven't even been here a week but you got the virgin to fuck you,” he clarified, his eyes still on me as I turned to face him. “Why him? He's quiet, has zero pussy skills, and he's weird. I really thought Fox or Smokey would get you into their beds first.”

“What's everyone's problem with River?” I demanded, crossing my arms tightly. “He's the only one who's been nice to me since the beginning. I'm not looking to get laid or I would've fucked the man-whore. I didn't sleep with River either, not that it's any of your business.”

“He's just a strange choice. I don't think I've even seen him hug a girl before.”

“I've never seen you assholes hug girls,” I pointed out, jumping as arms went around me from behind, pinning my arms by my sides.

“If you wanted to snuggle, you should’ve asked,” Fox purred in my ear. “Whatever you did to River last night, feel free to do it to me too.” I slammed my ass back into his groin, a wheeze leaving him as he released me. “Low blow, Salem.”

“You’re lucky I didn’t punch it. I don’t know where you’ve been so don’t touch me,” I gritted out, and despite his obvious pain, he still managed to smirk at me.

“If you need a medical report, I’ll get you one.” He stepped closer, his heated gaze not leaving me. “Considering I didn’t hear you screaming last night, I assume he left you needy. I can fix that in two seconds if you let me.”

His voice felt like a caress on my skin, my heart beating faster as his smile softened.

“Stop it, lover boy,” Storm said dryly, snapping me out of it. “I have a feeling if she wanted an orgasm, she would’ve gotten one. She’s a bossy little thing in case you haven’t noticed. Don’t you have shit to do today other than harass girls?”

I’d never been so grateful for him to state his opinion before.

Fox huffed, stepping away from me before I could knee him in the balls.

“You guys are no fun. It’s not like I’m forcing her to feel things, I’m just drawing out her hidden feelings.”

“Where’s Smokey?” I asked as I grabbed my coffee and sat at the table opposite Storm, changing the subject. “Aren’t we supposed to leave soon?”

“He’s a lazy prick, he’s still in bed. You get ten points for being ready on time,” Storm deadpanned, my eyebrow raising in question.

“What do I do with all my points? Do I get a reward?”

“What do you want?” He sounded playful which threw me off a little. So far he hadn’t yelled at me once this morning.

“I get to choose? That’s dangerous.”

“Unlikely.”

“Fuck Fox then. Put on a good show for me since everyone’s so worried about my lack of an orgasm,” I teased, amusement filling his dark eyes.

“There’s not enough points in the world to get me to do that. Go wake up your travel buddy or you’ll be late.”

I didn’t want to wake that asshole up. He should’ve been ready himself like a normal adult.

“I’ll wake him when I’ve finished my coffee,” I smiled sweetly, sipping at the steaming liquid. “Snowflake still asleep too?”

His lips quirked with the ghost of a smile, but he shook his head.

“Frost is in the home gym. He usually works out early.” I wasn’t surprised. He seemed to take his training seriously, and he had a lot of anger to work out. “You should be using the gym daily too. One or two training days a week isn’t enough for you. How often did you use your powers before coming to Stardust?”

“As little as possible. It was easy for a long time but this past year or two they started going haywire, which is why I finally came here,” I admitted. “I know how to use them, but it drains me really fast.”

“When we train it’s to build stamina with our magic. If we’re in good physical condition it helps, but in most cases we need to use our powers regularly and push ourselves to get our bodies used to using it for longer. Practice holding air in your hands whenever you can. You don’t have to do anything with it, but using the power for longer periods of time will help,” he replied, holding his palm up and letting a ball of lightning spark. “Like this. Do it when you can and it will make all the difference when you’re sparring.”

“Thank you,” I said softly, doing as he said and holding a ball of air in my palm. “How long should I hold it for?”

“Do it for five minutes, then after a few days, extend it to ten. Every week after that, add more slowly until holding it for

an hour is easy,” he nodded, and Fox let out a snort, reminding me he was here.

“I thought Smokey was full of shit last night about you two being cozy, but I’m starting to think the prick was right. Did you just smile at a girl?”

He let out a yelp as Storm zapped him with a scowl, and I drained my coffee and stood, not wanting to listen to them bicker.

“I’m going to wake up Smokey. Ignore him, Storm. Fox is just jealous that you’re hotter than him.” I walked away, hearing Storm chuckle as Fox started spilling nonsense about me needing glasses. I hoped I hurt his huge ego.

River was still asleep when I poked my head into my room, so I left him alone and knocked on Smokey’s door.

“You awake, asshole?” He didn’t reply, so I huffed and twisted the handle. It opened with a soft click and I pushed the door wide to find Smokey asleep on his back, the blankets bunched around his lower half and exposing his bare chest and stomach. His arm was draped over his face as he slept, and I couldn’t help but get a good look at him.

We were going to be late if he didn’t get the fuck out of bed though.

“Smokey? We need to go chase dragons. C’mon.” I walked closer, nudging the mattress with my knee to attempt to jostle him. “Hey, scorch. Wake the fuck up.” I leaned over him to shake his shoulder, letting out a squeal of surprise as he jerked awake and hauled me onto the bed to lean over me with his hand around my throat. Flames flickered in his eyes as his other hand created a fireball, causing a bright glow to light up the dark room.

He blinked hard after a second as he woke up properly, but he didn’t move.

“The fuck are you doing in here?” he finally bit out, loosening his grip on my throat without letting go. I swallowed, my heart rate spiking as he continued to stare at me with the flames still brightly engulfed in his palm.

Did I have a fire kink now?

“Storm told me to wake you up. We need to go and deal with the dragon.”

“Sorry, I needed the extra sleep since *somebody* kept me awake last night,” he grunted, the glow leaving his eyes as the flame in his hand faded too. “Did you at least make me a coffee?”

“Say please and tell me how you want it. I’ll consider it,” I threw back, sucking in a sharp breath as he leaned down until his chest was against mine, his dick jerking between my legs from behind his boxers.

“You want to know how I like it?” he murmured, a dark chuckle leaving him. “I like it rough. I like a girl who will do anything to please me. I like it when they beg me.” My pussy clenched and my breath stalled as he leaned lower so that his lips teased my neck by my ear. “My favorite part is when they tremble for me once they realize I’m not letting them out of my bed until I destroy their pussy.” He was going to make me come if he didn’t shut up. “So unless you want me to rail you until you can’t walk again, I’d suggest getting out of my bed. I don’t think your boyfriend would be too pleased with me.”

That pulled me out of it.

I shoved him off and sat up, but his hand darted out to circle my throat again, hauling me against him so that I crashed into his chest.

“Smokey—”

“When you get sick of faking it in bed with River, you know where to find me. I don’t have to like you to fuck you. At least I’d get you off before passing out.” His voice was low, sending tingles through me. He’d obviously heard us from across the hall last night.

I forced a scowl, swatting at his hands.

“Not everything’s about sex. I already told you, I like River, so fuck off. I’m not into you.”

“You can like him but that doesn’t mean your pussy doesn’t want me,” he said arrogantly, releasing me as he climbed out of bed and stretched his arms above his head, flexing his abs. “I’ll be waiting for when you’re ready to have a hate-fuck.”

“You’ll be waiting a while. Hurry up so we can leave,” I snapped as I stalked from the room, heading back into the kitchen to glare at Storm. “Next time, you wake him up.”

“Blow me and I’ll think about it,” Storm replied bluntly as he scrolled through his phone without looking up at me, Fox nowhere in sight. “Smokey takes his coffee with milk and sugar. He’ll be in a better mood once he gets it into him.”

He finally lifted his gaze to mine, seeming amused.

“What’s so funny?” I demanded just as Frost walked in looking freshly showered, his hair still wet. He looked me up and down for a moment before snorting.

“If you’re going to play with flame face, you should probably wash the soot off of you once you’re done.”

“What are you talking about?” I growled, looking down at myself. “I’m clean.”

“You’re throat’s black,” he muttered, narrowing his eyes on Smokey as he entered the kitchen in jeans and a plain black T-shirt. “You got over hating her fast.”

“I can fuck someone I hate if they’re hot enough,” Smokey replied offhandedly, turning to me with a smirk as he eyed my throat. “Where’s my coffee?”

I lifted the chair beside me using my telekinesis, having every intention of throwing it at him, but Storm appeared beside me and placed his hand on my lower back.

“He’s pissing you off on purpose. Wash your neck and I’ll make his coffee.”

Frost rolled his eyes but I did as I was told, stomping up to my room to wash my neck in my bathroom.

River was sitting up in bed on his phone when I walked in, his eyes landing on my throat instantly.

“Did he hurt you again?”

“No. I woke him up and he was being an asshole,” I grumbled, leaving the bathroom door open so I could talk while I washed up. “Did you get a good sleep?”

“Slept like the dead,” he chuckled, walking in to see me in the better light. “He only did that to piss me off. He can control that shit when he wants to. Leaving soot on things is something he does when he’s being a dick.”

“He was definitely being a dick.” I wet a cloth and scrubbed at my skin, smearing the soot more than removing it.

“Let me help you,” he sighed, reaching out to take the cloth, tilting my head to start on the left side. “He’s as bad as Fox but without the charm. I don’t know how that prick gets laid.”

“He’s attractive.”

“You think so?” He didn’t sound bothered by it.

“Yeah, it’s just a shame about his personality,” I laughed, his mouth curving into a smile.

“True. Hopefully he’s good today while you’re out.” He rinsed the cloth and wrung it out before wiping at my neck again, and it seemed he was doing a better job than I had.

“He should be. He’s not so bad when Frost isn’t around.”

“That’s because he doesn’t hate you as much as he’s letting Frost think,” he mumbled, the cloth pausing for a moment. “Do you want to sleep with him?”

“River, we talked about this.”

“He’d give you a really good time,” he said seriously, moving around to my other side to clean the rest of my throat. “Maybe you should.”

“I should what? Fuck Smokey behind your back?” I scoffed, his eyes meeting mine in the mirror.

“It’s not behind my back if I know about it.”

“That’s not how relationships work.”

“Says who? I think you—” I snatched the cloth from him, not caring if my neck wasn’t clean yet. I stalked into my room, River right behind me. “What did I say wrong? I don’t want to see other people but if someone can make you feel good—”

“You worry that someone’s going to come and make me leave you, but then you push someone else at me anyway!” I shouted, not caring if the others heard. “If you don’t want to be with me then say so!”

“What? Of course I want to be with you. I just thought—”

I didn’t care that he was panicking. I knew that he wasn’t experienced but I didn’t like that he was trying to pawn me off. I left the room, slamming the door in his face as I went. He didn’t follow but that was no surprise. I was pissed.

I marched into the kitchen, glaring at Smokey.

“Are you fucking ready?” I wanted to get out of the house. I felt like breaking shit.

Smokey sipped his coffee, in no hurry whatsoever, eyeing me over the rim of the cup.

“Do I look ready?”

“I’ll meet you there then,” I bit out, not bothering to wait around as I headed towards the front door. A chair scraped behind me but I didn’t turn around, slamming the door and walking in the direction of the main gate. Lots of people were walking around the street, and they all gave me a wide berth.

I growled with frustration as someone grabbed my wrist, my angry eyes darting over my shoulder to find Smokey frowning at me.

“What happened? Did you and water boy have a fight?”

“When I get really mad I accidentally start to move furniture with my mind and break shit. It’s better that I’m away from the house,” I gritted out, trying to pull away from him but he held on tighter. His eyes lingered on my throat that still had his mark, but he didn’t mention it.

“We can break shit, that’s kind of my speciality. What did that dumbass do? He really is terrible with girls.”

I didn't want to tell him, but I found myself speaking anyway.

"He wants me to fuck you despite him being ridiculously insecure. What kind of bad idea is that? He freaks out all the time that someone else will take me away from him and I'll realize he's not what I want, but then he tries to push me into someone else's bed."

His eyebrows almost hit his damn hairline.

"He wants you to fuck me? Why?"

"Because you know what you're doing, *apparently*." I looked him up and down, my nose scrunching. "I don't believe it for a second though."

"Wouldn't he tell you to fuck Fox? He likes Fox more than me," he said, ignoring my dig about his skills. "Why me? Is this because of this morning?"

"I don't know. I didn't stick around for the rundown."

"He's not wrong though," he said lightly, a small smile tugging at his lips. "I know what I'm doing."

"If I wanted an orgasm I could fuck myself."

"Can I watch?" he chuckled, letting me go as I took a swing at him. "You'd be fun in bed. I can tell."

"Never going to happen, scorch." I walked ahead but he caught up to me.

"Do me a favor and tell him you agree next time. Watch his face drop," he snickered, tossing a fireball up and down in his palm. "I can't believe he'd just come out and say that shit to you. It's hilarious. I can tell you right now that he wouldn't be okay with it."

"I'm aware," I huffed, slowing my steps as the frustration started leaving me. "He doesn't like that you guys all mess around with girls, so why would he even ask me to sleep with someone else?"

"Because he's paranoid that you'll leave him since he's not putting out."

“But I don’t care about that,” I argued, tucking my hands into my pockets. “Guys who just want sex all the time treat their girls like shit. I don’t waste my time with them. River though? He wants a connection like I do. Sure, getting off is nice but—”

“Nice? You think it’s *nice*? You’re having the wrong kind of sex if that’s how you view it,” he snorted, not letting me finish my sentence. “It’s explosive, mind blowing, turns your bones to jelly. It’s not that you don’t like sex, you just don’t care for shitty sex. Me either. I need wild and passionate or it’s fucking boring. I could’ve come in my hand and been more satisfied than some pussies I’ve stuck my dick in before. At least you can teach River how you like it. Don’t let him be lazy or fake it with him. Tell him if it’s not what you want and make him work for it.”

“Wow, I didn’t know you were a professor of sex,” I deadpanned, but his face remained serious as he watched me.

“I know how to have good sex. Good sex means making it good for the girl too. Do you know why?”

“Because it’s polite.”

“Nothing feels better than a pussy gripping your cock. Satisfied women make hot noises, you know? If they’re enjoying themselves, then I’m enjoying myself. For you to not know that tells me you’ve had shit sex forever,” he muttered, and I swore he gave me a look of sympathy. “I’ll send River all my good pornos so he can learn. See? I can be a good buddy.”

I swatted him, but I couldn’t help but smile.

“You’re an idiot. Let’s just deal with this dragon so we can go home.”

I’d be relieved if he stayed in a good mood all day.

River

Salem was going to leave me. I thought I’d been doing the right thing by letting her enjoy herself sexually, but it seemed

I'd fucked up. I'd heard her leave, watching out the window as Smokey chased after her. He totally liked her, the lying bastard.

The door creaked open and Storm poked his head in, raising an eyebrow.

"The fuck did you do to her? She's gone psycho."

"I just said something I shouldn't have," I mumbled, walking towards him so I could leave the room. He moved back so I could step into the hallway, running his gaze over me curiously.

"What did you say?"

"It's obvious she's got some kind of attraction to Smokey. I thought maybe if I told her it was okay to sleep with him, that she'd be able to enjoy herself since I don't know what I'm doing." I walked towards my room, hearing him snort behind me.

"Just what every woman wants to hear. That you want your friends to fuck her."

"We're hardly friends, and I was doing it for her. I like her a lot but she deserves someone who can give her a good time. I'm a twenty-five-year-old virgin, Storm. That doesn't exactly scream romantic." I opened my door, pausing when Fox spoke from across the hall.

"Being clueless in bed has nothing to do with romance. Ask her to guide you. Take a vibrator if you want to get her off easily, a lot of women respond well to those. Not all of them though, but try it. You're an idiot for telling her to fuck Smokey because she'll either fuck him to spite you now, or think you don't care enough to want her. Have you even asked her what she likes in bed?" When I cringed, he rolled his eyes. "Just ask her what she likes. She's not as shy as you so she'll probably just come out and say it. Don't waste time guessing. You don't have to give her a million orgasms either. Make it sensual. Tease her, build up to it, and get to know her body. Don't rub her clit too hard though. You might think it's working well but it gets painful."

“I have to buy sex toys?” I groaned, my face heating at the thought of walking into a sex shop. “I don’t even know what type.”

“She probably has her own already,” Storm suggested, walking back into Salem’s room and making me scramble after him.

“What are you doing?”

“Looking for her toys,” he said casually as he started rummaging through drawers, Fox helping.

“Don’t breach her privacy like that!” She’d kill us for starters, but I didn’t want her feeling violated. They ignored me though, and Fox waved a small ball thingy at me with a grin.

“She wants you to breach her privacy, dude, and by that I mean her pussy. Catch.” He threw it to me, and I frowned as I looked down at it, turning it around in my hand. It looked like a flower with a hole in the middle. “Press the button.”

I did, almost dropping it as it started pulsing. “What the fuck is it?”

“The Rose. Every woman seems to have one, they’re good apparently,” Fox shrugged. “The hole goes over the clit and the pulsing sends vibrations straight to their happy place. Use it on her, trust me. Put a towel down too, it can get messy.”

“Messy?”

“Yeah. She might be a squirter.” He went back to rummaging, and Storm let out a low whistle.

“Damn, she’s freaky. She’s got a bunch of stuff. Vibrating butt plugs, and I’m pretty sure this is an alien or monster dick.” He pulled out a weirdly shaped toy, my eyes going wide. “If you don’t want her, pass her to someone else. Maybe she’s not so bad after all.”

Fox snatched the monster thingy, waving it at me.

“These things are so fucking cool. I fucked some girl named Kayla once and she had stuff like this. Girl came so

hard she soaked the bed. It's a shame she got married. I'd do her again, she's freaky as fuck."

I turned the rose thing off and stalked towards them, taking everything from their hands and shoving it back in the drawers.

"Stop touching her stuff. She's already mad at me so don't make it worse."

"It's fine, Smokey will fuck the mood right out of her," Storm grinned. "Maybe you should ask him to join you two in bed. He can tell you what to do."

I didn't know if he was serious or not, but the thought of having help made me feel better.

Could I do something so intimate in front of one of the guys though?

Definitely not Smokey, but Fox took sex seriously so he wouldn't make fun of me.

Much to my relief, Storm got bored and wandered off, but Fox followed me back to my room, apparently not done with the conversation.

"Do you want some tips?" he offered, and as much as I wanted him to leave me alone, he'd have the best advice for the bedroom, so I nodded. "Use your words with her. Tell her she's pretty and that her cunt feels good. Girls like reassurance." He dropped down onto my bed, making himself comfortable on his back to watch me. "Foreplay's important. Warm her up, make her come once or twice, *then* you can fuck her. If you want to do ass play you need to prepare her first. Don't just jam your dick in there."

"Dude, I'm not touching her ass," I said with embarrassment, making him frown.

"Why not? She has a nice booty." He pulled his phone from his pocket, typing something before turning the screen to face me, finding a picture of a pussy in my face. He was acting like I'd never watched porn before. "Crash course on coochie. This is the clit. It's the doorway to heaven and it's your new best friend. Keep it lubed and be gentle. You can be fast if you

want but don't press too hard. Some girls might like it but in most cases it's the feathery touches that work best. When you get to explore, slide your finger just inside her pussy, you'll feel a rough patch. That's the G-spot. You—"

"This is fucking weird."

"This is an art form and I need you to pay attention so you make it feel good instead of fumbling around like an idiot," he huffed, holding his hand out to show me what I was supposed to do with my fingers. "Curl them towards yourself like this while using your thumb on her clit. Ninety-nine percent of the time it works really well. For fuck's sake, don't freak out if you think she pees on you either, you'll embarrass her. It's called squirting and it's fucking hot. Not everyone does it but you can coax it out of her if you try hard enough."

"So it's not pee?" I didn't think even Fox would think being pissed on was hot, but then again, he was into some weird shit so maybe he did like it.

"There's a whole science thing behind it. Some girls have a higher pee percentage than others, but yes, there's still pee in it. Who gives a shit, if you can make her squirt then keep going until she's begging you to stop. You can clean the mess up later and she'll feel like she died and went to heaven. If she's never squirted before she'll probably get awkward about it but just tell her how hot it is. If you hesitate, she'll second guess it and freak out."

"Maybe you should just fuck her then because I'm going to make her super uncomfortable," I said with a nervous laugh that had him rolling his eyes.

"I can come and help you if you need me to, but she doesn't want me. For some weird reason she's into *you*."

"You'd come and help me? Like, tell me what to do?" I sounded pathetic but I was almost desperate. I didn't want to flail around in bed and make a dick out of myself. I wanted to impress Salem and make it enjoyable for her.

He eyed me for a moment before nodding.

“Yeah, if you want. I don’t have to join in. I’ll talk to her about it if you want since you’re terrible with words. You really need to work on that, by the way.”

“I barely know how to kiss girls, let alone talk to them and give them mind blowing sex,” I bit out. “It comes naturally to you.”

“Stop stressing so damn much. Seriously, just ask her if you can use toys on her and make sure you keep everything lubed or you’ll make it uncomfortable and hurt her. There’s no shame in asking her to guide you if you’re unsure. I ask girls to guide me sometimes so I know it’s good for them. All women are different with what gets them off.”

“How different does it feel to fuck a girl compared to a blowjob?” I was *extremely* uncomfortable but if he was going to help then I wanted to know.

He chuckled, finding the question amusing.

“Pussy’s way better. If you came in her mouth fast last night, you’ll be lucky to get further than pushing the tip into her pussy before coming, which is another reason why foreplay is important. It’s okay to come fast if you got her off first with your mouth and fingers. It doesn’t have to be while you’re fucking her.”

I sat beside him, crossing my legs.

“Okay, is there a technique I should use while having sex?” Might as well make the most of his charity. If I was going to have sex I was going to make sure Salem had a good time too.

Even if that meant embarrassing myself in front of Fox.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SALEM

“How do we even find a dragon?” I grumbled as we trekked up the mountainside, earning myself a look of disbelief from Smokey. We’d been walking for four hours now and we were both over it.

“They’re fucking huge. You won’t miss it, dumbass.” I forced a blast of air at his feet, causing him to stumble. “You want to play games with me, hurricane?”

The stupid nickname made me all warm and fuzzy, but it was short lived as a small ball of fire whizzed past my head.

“Hey!”

“You started it,” he grinned, playfully throwing another one. I hissed out a breath as it fizzled out against my skin, giving him a dirty look.

“That hurt.”

“Aw, your boyfriend will kiss your boo boo better when we get home,” he teased, and I let out a huff of annoyance.

“I’m still mad at him.”

“Take him up on it and fuck other people. If you want some good, loud sex to make him jealous then climb into my bed. I’ll talk dirty to you, just how you like it,” he winked, making me laugh.

“Why do you think I’d like that?”

“You couldn’t hide your reaction this morning in my room,” he answered confidently, his cocky smile in place. “I

bet you'd come easily with the right words."

"Can we just focus on finding the dragon?" I pleaded, letting out a scream as a wall of brown scales landed right in front of us, the ground shaking from the impact and knocking me over.

"Found it," Smokey said unhelpfully, shielding me as heat scorched the air around us. "I guess it doesn't want to play nice after all."

"What do we do then?" I was freaking out. I'd never had to face a dragon before and my powers would burn out fast. Going on this job had been a stupid idea, and I was going to get both of us killed. The dragon was bigger than I'd imagined too.

"You run left and I'll run right. Force your powers at it and try to herd it, okay? I'll push it from the other side." The fire around us stopped and he moved back, pulling me to my feet. "Go!"

I ran hard, panic fuelling me as the massive beast tracked my escape, tears burning my eyes as it started following me. I was so screwed.

I threw walls of air at it, forcing small trees from the ground to throw in its direction too, but nothing changed its course. My feet pounded the ground harder as it drew in a breath before flames filled the air around me. There was nowhere to hide, but arms suddenly wrapped around me and yanked me against a solid chest to block the heat just before it could touch my skin.

I went to pull back but a hand moved to the back of my head, keeping me safely tucked away from the flames.

"Run when I tell you to!" Smokey said loudly as the dragon let out an ear piercing roar, and I didn't have time to reply before he spoke again. "Run!"

I didn't want to leave him, but he was fireproof, so he had a better chance than me.

I ran, my lungs burning as I pushed my legs faster, glancing back to find Smokey and the dragon throwing fire at

each other. The sky was alight with flames, and my heart beat so hard in my chest that I was surprised I didn't have a damn heart attack.

I slowed once I was far enough away, glancing around frantically for something I could throw at the dragon. Apart from trees, there wasn't much else. My powers were weakened from using them already, and I cursed myself for not training more.

I eyed a large tree for a moment before trying hard to focus on it. I'd probably drain all my power attempting to yank the damn thing from the ground, but I had to try.

Sweat coated my brow as I strained, using everything I had to force the tree out by the roots. I sensed myself weakening rapidly but after a moment, the tree came free and I used what little power I had left to throw it at the dragon. To my surprise it made the distance, smacking into the scaly beast's shoulder and startling it. I was exhausted, my limbs shaking as I managed to lift the tree again, the dragon backing away slightly.

I threw it, and Smokey whooped as he started throwing fireballs to help chase it away, both of us managing to force it into flight as it tried to escape us. It was flying right up the mountain like we'd needed, and I dropped to my knees as the last of my power slipped from my fingers, leaving me panting as Smokey finished the job.

I didn't move, I couldn't. My body was like jelly and it was as if my brain wouldn't connect to it. I wanted to stand up but nothing was happening. I'd never drained my power like that before and part of me panicked that I'd lost them completely, but I also knew that wasn't possible.

Smokey squatted in front of me, his soot-coated fingers brushing my damp hair from my face to inspect me.

"You good?" His clothes were singed and soot marked his face and arms but he seemed unharmed.

"I can't move," I managed to force out, earning a chuckle from him.

“I drained my powers a few times so I know how much that sucks. You’ll be fine soon.” He helped me to my feet, keeping his arm around my waist as we started back down the mountain. My legs shook and he let out a huff. “Climb on my back. I’ll carry you.”

“I can walk.”

“Yeah, like a fucking snail. I’ll starve to death before we reach the bottom,” he grunted, moving in front of me and squatting down. My pride told me to keep walking but my legs screamed at me to accept his help, so I put my arms around his neck and wrapped my legs around his middle, letting him hook his arms under my thighs to keep me steady.

It was definitely a lot faster and we made it back to town by dinnertime.

“Do we have to go home right away?” I asked with a sigh, making him snort.

“If you think I’m carrying you around for the sake of it then you’re delusional.”

“I don’t want to deal with River just yet.”

“Not my problem.”

“Put me down then,” I grumbled but he held me firmly, not slowing his steps.

“You’re exhausted, Salem. You need to go home, have a shower, and pass out. I’ll tell River to fuck off if you want but we’re not detouring,” he replied with annoyance. “Just tell him you’ll fuck me and then he’ll leave you alone because he’ll be sulking.”

“I don’t want to lie to him out of spite,” I scoffed, laughter leaving him as he grinned over his shoulder at me.

“Who’s lying? I’ll fuck you extra loud so he knows just how terrible his idea was.”

“I’m not talking about this with you,” I chuckled tiredly. “Put me down, we’re almost home.”

“No. I want River to see me carrying you so his imagination can run wild with paranoia,” he answered without hesitation. “I guarantee it will have him trying to fuck you before you fall asleep tonight. You’re welcome.”

I swatted his shoulder, scolding him. “I don’t want to push him. He’ll want to when he’s ready.”

“I hope you enjoy your hand then because he won’t budge *forever*,” he snickered, walking onto our street and slowing his pace. “You did good today.”

“I spent half of it running away.”

“So? You had to get away to form a plan of attack. That’s smart thinking and it kept you alive.” He wasn’t wrong but his praise felt strange.

“Thanks for not letting me get burned alive,” I said dryly, his tone turning gentle.

“Any time. You’re not as bad at this as I expected.”

He didn’t speak again after that but his thumbs absently brushed against my legs every so often as we walked, sending tingles across my skin.

We arrived back at the house and Smokey didn’t put me down until we reached the living room where everyone was watching TV. River’s eyes studied us closely but Fox smirked.

“Today went well then?”

Smokey didn’t hesitate to throw a fireball at Storm, not hiding the anger in his voice.

“That dragon wasn’t a simple one and she could’ve been fucking killed, you dick.”

Storm glared daggers at him, rubbing his arm when the fire had hit.

“What’s the problem? You’re both fine and she learned how to handle it.”

My head spun, and I would’ve hit the ground if Smokey hadn’t caught me, sliding an arm around my waist. “She drained her powers. She’s not training tomorrow.”

“Says who?” Storm bit out but Smokey was already turning me around to walk me towards the stairs, speaking over his shoulder.

“Me. She needs to rest for a day or two.”

He led me away, practically carrying me up to my room, and I instantly knew someone had been going through my stuff when I noticed one of the drawers was opened.

“Those motherfuckers,” I growled as Smokey placed me on the edge of the bed, raising his eyebrow.

“What?”

“They’ve been touching my shit,” I answered, not giving a fuck about him seeing it as I opened the drawers and started pulling sex toys out.

“Whoa, you kinky little minx,” Smokey laughed, having no problem grabbing my rose toy. “You use these while we’re all sleeping? Wake me up next time and I’ll give you a hand.”

I snatched it back, giving him a dirty look.

“Why would I need you when I have these?”

“Nothing compares to a rock-hard cock. Do you need proof?” he teased, grabbing one of my custom monster dicks. “I’m going to shamefully beg you soon. What else are you hiding in there?”

The door creaked as River joined us, uncertainty in his eyes.

“Uh, hey. How did it go?”

“The only beast she slayed today was behind my zipper,” Smokey taunted, giving me a wink. “Right, hurricane? I fucked her so hard I had to carry her home.”

River’s eyes widened a fraction and I flipped Smokey the bird.

“I don’t want your dick, stop trying to upset River. If you want, I’ll happily bend you over with a strap-on?” I offered, more laughter leaving him.

“If you want to make someone your bitch, ask your boyfriend. He’d let you.”

“Get out, I’ve put up with you long enough today,” I groaned, scowling as he ruffled my hair and dropped my monster dick onto my lap.

“Have fun tonight, River. I made her all frisky for you.” He left us alone and River couldn’t contain his panic any longer.

“I’m so sorry about this morning. I didn’t realize it came across as rude and I just want you to have a good time.”

“As you can see, I know how to have a good time,” I deadpanned as I held my toys up at him. “Were you the creepy one rifling through my drawers or was it Fox?”

His face heated and he dropped his gaze to the floor.

“Fox and Storm were giving me a sex talk about stuff girls like, and they suggested I get toys to make you feel good. Storm figured you’d probably have some already so they went snooping. I tried to put it all back but—”

“Here.” I tossed the monster dick at him, raising an eyebrow as he scrambled to catch it. “Get comfortable with it. Toys are fun but only if you’re into them too. If you’re going to freak out just holding one then I don’t think you should be attempting sex toys right now. I already told you we can take it slow, so don’t let them push you.”

“I’m going to freak out about all of it until I’ve done it a few times,” he admitted, sitting beside me but keeping the dildo in his hands. “Fox offered to guide me. I don’t think you’d want him there but he said he’d talk to you about it if I wanted.”

“He just wants an invite,” I snorted but he shook his head.

“No, he said he wouldn’t touch you. He can just teach me stuff.”

Either Fox was being genuinely nice or he was going to try and slip a sneaky dick in me.

My money was on the latter.

“Puddles—”

“I want him there,” he blurted out, trying to appear more confident. “If you don’t care about him seeing you like that then I’d like you to consider letting him tag along. You don’t have to touch him unless you want to but that’s up to you.”

I sighed, shoving the toys back in the drawers and closing them before lying down, pulling him with me.

“River, I’m worried you’ll regret it. Once you bring other people into the bedroom you can’t just erase what happened later when you’ve had time to overthink. What if things get heated and he tries to fuck me? It’s going to make you uncomfortable.”

“I’ve been thinking about it all day. I think it could be fun to explore,” he said softly, and I saw the interest flash in his eyes. “If I want him to leave, he will. I’m okay with it as long as he doesn’t push you.”

“I need a shower and a sleep, but we’ll talk more about this later, okay? If you’re serious then I won’t hold you back from exploring.” I wasn’t sure what Fox’s intentions were but I wasn’t going to fall for his bullshit. If he was going to make River feel more confident then I’d allow him in the room but his dick could stay in his pants.

“I’ll go and get ready for bed then come back and join you if you want?” he offered warmly, kissing me quickly before climbing from the bed and padding to his room. I forced my weary muscles to have a shower, then I climbed into bed with River where I passed out quickly, exhausted from the day’s events.

Storm

Smokey wandered into the kitchen freshly showered once he’d helped Salem to her room, and he was lucky I didn’t tear his teeth out for throwing that damn fireball at me. He looked tired but seemed to be in a good mood, making me snort.

“She blow you or something?”

He looked over at me, his eyes drifting to Fox who lingered in the doorway between the kitchen and living room. Frost had stalked off, as usual.

“Who went through her things?”

“We did. We wanted to help River out,” I chuckled, motioning to Fox. “He’s a genius though. Convinced River to let them have a threesome.”

Smokey rolled his eyes, leaning his hip against the kitchen counter.

“You really think Salem’s going to agree to a threesome? She’d literally fuck anyone else before you and your cocky attitude.”

Fox shrugged, not seeming fazed.

“I didn’t say I’d join in but I can boss River around and see Salem naked. Sounds good to me.”

“You just want to drool over her tits? How old are you? Twelve?” I asked dryly but he smirked.

“Don’t act like the rest of you don’t want to see her naked. She’s fucking hot.”

“I’m going to bed,” Smokey announced, snatching a bottle of water from the fridge. “You guys enjoy a romantic evening on the couch together.” He started walking away but he glanced over his shoulder with a confused look. “Why are you still here, anyway?”

I didn’t have an answer for that so I flipped him off, making him grin as he headed off to his room, leaving me with Fox who was giving me a similar look of amusement.

“Yeah, Storm. Why *are* you still here?”

“Bite me, dickbag. It makes sense to stay since I’m training with Frost in the morning.”

“You know, I think you like being at the house now that Salem’s here. Admit it, you like her.”

“I don’t even like *you* assholes so I definitely don’t like her. She’ll never agree to you fucking her though, just in case

you need a reality check,” I scoffed but he grabbed a beer from the fridge and walked back towards the living room.

“I don’t have to fuck her but maybe I can convince River to bend over for me. You never know.”

“That’s about as likely as fucking Salem,” I muttered, getting to my feet to follow him. I preferred living alone but some nights it was nice to just hang out with the guys, and it had nothing to do with Salem.

Frost joined us hours later but he didn’t say anything, his jaw tight with annoyance.

After twenty minutes of him grinding his teeth, I sighed.

“What the fuck’s your problem now?”

“Smokey’s either snuck Salem into his room or he’s going to town on himself,” he grunted with disgust. “You’ve all lost your damn minds. Sure, she’s got nice tits or whatever, but so do all the other women in Stardust. She’s not special.”

“Smokey will stick his dick in literally anything, and River’s desperate. It’s easy pussy, that’s all,” I offered, making Fox raise an eyebrow.

“Why do you want to fuck her so badly then?”

I got to my feet, giving them a dirty look.

“I don’t, she’s a pain in the ass. I’m going to bed.” I stomped off and Frost muttered something about me running off to fuck my hand but I ignored him.

He was only trying to get a reaction out of me and I wasn’t going to give him the one he wanted.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SALEM

I slept until lunch the following day. River was missing when I woke up but he'd mentioned something about training with Fox this morning, so I wasn't surprised to find myself alone. I padded down to the kitchen, combing my tangled hair with my fingers and yawning. Smokey was sitting alone at the table with a coffee in his hand, giving me a small smile.

"Morning, hurricane. You must have been tired."

"How are you *not*?"

"I've already been to training and done laps in the pool. Gotta build that stamina," he winked. I rolled my eyes, moving towards the coffee machine to pour myself some liquid gold.

"Where are the others?"

"Fox and River are sparring at the main gym, Storm was gone when I got up, and Frost is lifting weights in the home gym. Fox left some pancakes in the oven for you but they're probably cold so you can throw them in the trash if you don't want them."

I turned to look at him, not hiding my horror.

"You mean you don't eat cold pancakes? What's wrong with you?"

"There's a lot wrong with me. Would you like the list?" he chuckled, leaning back in his seat to watch me. "Train with me tomorrow."

I scoffed, giving him the side-eye. “Why would I do that? Last time you tried to kill me.”

I turned back to my coffee and heard the chair scrape on the marble floor, tensing as hands landed on my waist and Smokey’s voice sounded right beside my ear.

“I said I was sorry about that. I’ll take it easy on you.” When I didn’t say anything he moved closer, his chest pressing against my back. “We can start in the pool if you want. Basic fitness training. I won’t push you so hard this time.” I jutted my butt out, whacking him in the dick and making him huff out a breath as he grabbed himself through his pants with a wince. “Just when I’m starting to like you, you turn into a cunt again.”

“I haven’t even sipped my coffee yet. You’re lucky it wasn’t worse,” I said sweetly, grabbing my coffee before sitting at the table. He sat beside me, raising his cup to his lips to sip it.

“What are your plans today? Want to go to the bar?”

“We don’t hang out, scorch,” I replied dryly, making him frown.

“Why not?”

“Frost won’t like it for starters.”

“I don’t give a fuck what Frost thinks. He’s not the boss, and I like him about as much as I like you,” he grunted, looking thoughtful before adding, “I think I like you more, actually.”

“Can we go to the main gym and watch the other two train? I want to see Fox fight. I’ve only seen him try to charm his way into stuff, not use his fists.”

“Ugh, boring. I’m going to the bar but feel free to watch those two dickbags wrestle.” He drained his coffee before standing, rinsing it in the sink. “Last chance to do something fun.”

“Pass. I’d prefer to watch River beat up Fox,” I smirked, taking a large mouthful of coffee. “Have fun catching

chlamydia.”

“Can’t catch it if I already have it,” he joked, pointing to the oven on his way out the door. “Eat those first before you go.”

“Make me,” I grumbled, and he halted in the doorway, looking back at me with a dark smirk.

“I didn’t think you wanted to have fun today?”

“Touch me and die.”

“Bye, honey. See you later,” he laughed, and I flipped him off.

I finished my coffee in peace, shoveling the pancakes down my throat before heading back to my room to shower and get dressed, then I grabbed my phone on the way out the door. It was a nice walk to the community gym, and it was surprisingly busy when I arrived. Fox and River were sparring in the corner of the room, both of them drenched in sweat and missing their shirts.

I watched for a while before joining them, earning a cheeky grin from Fox as he wiped his brow with the back of his hand.

“I was wondering how long you’d stand there perving on us.”

“I was watching my man beat you up,” I replied, stepping closer to River to run my fingers across his sweaty abs, standing on tiptoe to give him a quick kiss. “You winning, puddles?”

“I am, actually. What are you doing here?” he grinned proudly, suddenly wrinkling his nose. “Sorry, I reek.”

“Only of success,” I teased. “I came to watch you wreck Fox.”

Fox snorted. “He’s hardly *wrecking* me. You think you can take me on, Salem?”

“I have no problem throwing fists at you. I doubt you’d hit a girl,” I replied as I tilted my head in thought. “Maybe we

should spar after all. I need an ego boost.”

He crooked his finger, his eyes flashing with challenge.

“Come on then. I don’t have to hit you to win.”

I shrugged and pulled my shirt over my head, leaving my sports bra and leggings on as I stepped in his direction, and River sighed.

“This should be interesting.”

Fox and I circled each other for a moment before I threw a fist at him, catching his cheek. It only skimmed my knuckles but it still connected. I grinned, throwing another that he managed to dodge this time, but he didn’t throw a hand at me once, his calculating gaze on me. I was about to call him out for it but he suddenly struck, his leg kicking out to knock mine out from under me.

It sent me sprawling to the floor where he caught me, somehow ending up with my arms above my head with him laying over me.

“You need to slow down and assess people more before you attack. You showed me your hand too early and I just had to wait it out,” he murmured, my nipples pebbling as his chest brushed across my bra. “You’re too impatient.”

“You’re too cocky,” I argued, and his lips kicked up into a smirk.

“I have a right to be. You just wore yourself out trying to take me down and all I had to do was one swipe of my foot to get you down here.” My pussy clenched as his eyes dropped to my mouth, and he was definitely leaning down to kiss me when River cleared his throat.

“Uh, maybe don’t do that here. People are looking at you.”

I snapped out of it, lifting my knee and managing to get Fox in the balls while he was distracted, and he rolled off me with a howl.

“Dammit, Salem! I need those!”

I scrambled to my feet, surprised to find River adjusting his cock in his pants. Apparently watching us had turned him on, which was interesting considering he was so freaked out about me taking interest in someone else. Fox wasn't as subtle as me when he noticed, pointing to River's tented pants with a sly smile.

"Looks like someone liked that. You have a voyeur kink, River? Excellent, I like putting on a show."

"Fuck off," River hissed with embarrassment, and I moved in front of him to avoid other people noticing.

"Go get changed and we can head home. Unless you want to go to the bar? Smokey's there," I offered, and Fox grinned.

"Good idea. I need to get laid after that. You felt good under me and now I'm horny as hell."

"You're *always* horny," River deadpanned. "But sure, go get laid and leave my girlfriend alone."

"How much is he paying you to fake date him?" Fox purred, his fingers teasing the back of my neck as he stepped into me. "I'll double it."

"You're such a dick," I sighed, pushing him back a step. There were a lot of eyes on us right now and I didn't need to make a name for myself. Everyone knew who Fox was so I didn't need to be labeled as a diseased whore.

"I'll be the best dick you've ever had," he said confidently, giving River a wink. "You too, *puddles*."

"I'm not into dudes," River snapped, snatching his shirt from the floor and tossing mine over in the process.

"You will be once I'm done with you. I'm leaving. This dick won't suck itself," Fox said lightly, running his eyes over me one last time before grabbing his things and heading to the bathroom to shower and change.

River gave me an uneasy look as I slid my arms around his middle, kissing his lips again.

"I'm not into guys," he said firmly as if trying to convince me, making me shrug.

“I don’t care what you’re into. You know you can explore anything you want and I’ll try to make it good for you,” I promised, his muscles relaxing as he studied my face.

“I’m not into Fox though.”

“That’s fine, I just meant if you wanted to experiment, I’m open to you seeing what you like. No pressure.”

He waited until Fox left before going to the bathroom to shower, then we walked outside into the warm afternoon air.

“Would you like to go to the bar? I don’t go much but their drinks are good and they have music to dance to,” he stated as we walked, and I took his hand, giving it a squeeze.

“If you want to go we can. I haven’t been there yet.” I’d been meaning to but I was still getting used to my new home, let alone the entire area of Stardust.

It was a nice day so I was more than happy to avoid going home for a while.

The bar was busy when we arrived, and Smokey raised an eyebrow from his seat at the bar, the girl on his lap giving me a once over. I didn’t understand how girls fell for guy’s lies and charm so easily. If Fox and Smokey were regulars here then they all knew they were whores.

“I thought you didn’t want to come to the bar?” Smokey drawled as we joined him.

“I didn’t want to go with *you*,” I said sweetly, keeping hold of River’s hand. “River’s different.”

“Of course he is,” Smokey muttered, reaching for his beer and taking a large mouthful before pinning River with an amused look. “So, you going to get drunk and get your fuck on? Proud of you, dude. I bet Salem’s really skilled, you’ll have a blast.”

“Don’t talk about her like that,” River scowled. “Focus on your own date.”

I went to tell them to stop fighting but hesitated when the ground started shaking and a loud roar filled the air as people started screaming. River immediately pulled me into him and

glanced around for the danger, but Fox ran over to us, his eyes wide.

“We’ve gotta go!”

Smokey shoved the girl off his lap and got to his feet, ignoring her as she landed on the ground with a shriek.

“What’s happening?” Another roar rattled the building and my blood ran cold as I looked at Smokey with frantic eyes.

“Is that a fucking dragon? How did it get down here without someone being notified?”

“The barriers must have gone down again. We need to handle this. Follow me,” he bit out as he started pushing through the crowd of panicked people, and I couldn’t believe how many were freaking out instead of jumping into action. Everyone here had powers and were learning to deal with shit like this.

Surely they weren’t all new like me?

River kept a firm grip on my hand as we followed Smokey outside, and terror ripped through me as my eyes landed on two massive dragons that were currently destroying the town. Fox stood on my other side, keeping me between him and River as they assessed the situation, but one of the dragons suddenly turned our way, their eyes on me.

“Uh, do dragons have good memories?” I stuttered, and Smokey cursed.

“That’s the dragon we chased up the mountain. Fox, get her the fuck out of here. We’ve got this.” I didn’t like how he assumed I couldn’t help.

River released my hand but I didn’t move, glaring at Smokey.

“Are you fucking kidding me? I can help you.”

The dragon roared as it started moving towards us, and Smokey fisted the front of my shirt, almost hauling me off my feet.

“River and I can handle it but we’ll be distracted if you’re here. You need to train more before tackling dragons again, remember? Our last attempt was lucky but your powers haven’t had enough time to recover, and this time there’s two.” The buildings shook and people scattered as the dragons tore houses from the ground on their way towards us, leaving a trail of destruction in their paths.

“Let me help!”

“Fuck, fine! Fox, you deal with the people. See who can help. Those with smaller powers need to get the fuck out of here, so find someone who has portal magic,” Smokey ordered, and Fox gave him a brisk nod before taking off to do as he was instructed. “River, you and Salem go right. I have a feeling they’ll follow Salem, so steer them towards the mountain. I’ll go left and herd them from behind. There’s no way the Board haven’t heard of this so hopefully by the time we get closer to the mountain, they’ve gotten the barriers restored. Go!”

River and I took off and Smokey was right. For some reason, the dragons followed me.

Our feet pounded the pavement as we ran, and I glanced back to see them gaining on us rapidly. Without Smokey here to block their heat, we were definitely going to get burned.

River blasted walls of water behind us to slow them down to give us more time, and just as one dragon went to blanket us with fire, lightning flashed across the sky, striking it on the nose. It roared in pain, the other coming at us faster but ending up with the same fate. It stalled them but they didn’t stop, so we kept running until we passed the Stardust gates, my heart thumping out of my damn chest.

My legs were like jelly and we still had miles of running to do. I definitely needed to work on my stamina.

Smokey kept chasing them, blasting them with fire as he stopped them from turning back towards town, then Storm was suddenly beside us, throwing lightning behind him as we ran.

“Use your powers, Salem!”

“I’m trying to keep them chasing me, not push them back the other way!” I shouted over the noise.

“Don’t throw things! Use objects to trap them in place!”

I was freaking out. I should’ve gotten out of here while I could because I wasn’t strong enough to do as I’d been asked.

I tore power lines from the ground, utilizing the metal wires to try and snake them around the dragons’ feet, but I kept missing. The more I panicked the worse it got too. There were more people running alongside us now, all throwing different forms of power at the beasts from all sides.

I was suddenly shoved to the ground, Storm covering my back as heat filled the air around us. One of the dragons stumbled as its legs became encased by ice, and River threw more water at it, the moisture instantly freezing as the guys worked together. Storm hauled me back to my feet, shoving me to keep going while he stayed back to contain the dragon that was still charging for us, and I took one last attempt at trapping its legs with the wire.

Victory filled me as two legs became tangled and sent the dragon crashing to the ground, a loud whoop leaving me.

My powers were weakening fast as I stopped running and tried to focus on holding the dragon in place, relieved when River and Frost managed to cover both beasts in an icy cage. I was sweating as I continued to hold the wires just to be safe, Smokey noticing me and running over.

“Let go! You’ll drain your powers again!”

Frost and River were hardly breaking a damn sweat as they contained the dragons, and I only let go when Storm turned to me.

“They’ve got it, firecracker! Let go!”

I released my grip on the wires, stumbling forward as my body grew weaker, but Smokey grabbed me with ease, not letting me fall. I leaned into him and caught my breath, my vision flickering in and out.

“Relax. It’s fine now,” Smokey reassured me as he gently lowered us to the ground before my legs could go out, pulling me into his lap to grin down at me. “You’re a little badass, you’re definitely getting stronger. Your stamina could do with some work though.”

“You think?” I panted, looking up as Storm joined us.

“You good?” he asked, his brow creasing with the hint of concern.

“I can’t feel my legs but I’ll be fine,” I mumbled, and he sighed, glancing at Smokey.

“Get her home. We’ll handle the Board when they arrive. I’ll let them know everything that happened. Take Fox too.”

Smokey nodded and climbed to his feet with me still in his arms, not putting me down as he started walking.

“Do we have any of that power stabilizer shit? Draining her powers so rapidly over two days is frying her system,” he asked over his shoulder and Storm nodded.

“I have some at home. I’ll bring it over once I’m done. Good job, Salem.”

I was too tired to be surprised by his praise, but Smokey chuckled as he carried me back towards the bar.

“Praise from Storm? Wow. He must really like your tits.”

“You’re an ass,” I grumbled, wriggling to get down but he didn’t let me.

“Face it, you like it when I carry you around. You’re giving me a workout, you know?”

“Did you just call me fat?”

“There’s not an ounce of fat on you,” he scoffed, walking in silence for a while before speaking again. “You’re a bitch but you’re a pretty one so it’s kinda hot when you get mad.”

I chuckled tiredly, but Fox’s voice cut me off before I could reply.

“Shit, is she okay?”

“Drained her powers again. Storm told me to take her home and grab you too. They’ve got it handled,” Smokey explained.

“Want me to take her?”

“Nope.”

“Selfish prick,” Fox muttered, following us as we made our way towards home. After a few minutes, Smokey put me on his back like last time, giving me a better view of Stardust. Half the town was destroyed, the gym was flattened, and the streets were filled with debris.

“This will take forever to clean up,” I said absently, and Fox gave me a smile.

“Nah, the members of the Board are all pretty powerful. They’ll have this back to normal with the click of their fingers.”

“Hey, Smokey?” I said quietly, making him hum in response. “Maybe we *should* train together.”

“We’re a pretty good team I think,” he answered brightly. “You really are getting better so I think consistent training will be seriously beneficial. I know he’s a dick, but train with Storm too. His training hurts but it’s worth it.”

“Why didn’t many people help with the dragons? So many were running scared, it was just us out there doing the hard work,” I said with confusion, and Fox grunted.

“A lot of people have powers like mine. Effective, but not in battle. They’re here to learn how to use them best, but that’s unfortunately not by fighting dragons. A lot are con artists, seducers, or insanely smart with things like math or telling the future. The ones who contain powers that are good for battle are out on jobs and aren’t here often.”

“How many people contain powers like mine? Or Smokey’s?”

“A small handful. Many train here then move on, or they’re still avoiding coming here. I’ve heard that some have had witches remove their powers completely so they can live

normal lives. You know we're the top house in Stardust, right?"

"We are?" I sputtered, making Smokey huff out a breath.

"How do you not know that? You have to pass a bunch of tests to get chosen for the right house. Didn't they tell you all this when you applied to stay here?"

That made me frown. I hadn't had to apply for anything, I'd just given them my details and they assigned me to the house.

"Uh, what tests? I just filled out some forms and they gave me my key. I didn't have to do shit to be assessed." Both guys stopped walking, Fox looking at me like I was nuts.

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. It was just paperwork. I didn't even have to write down my powers which I thought was a little weird but they put me in a house with similar powers so I didn't question it."

They exchanged a look before walking again, and Smokey spoke quietly.

"Whatever's going on isn't right. There's a huge process before you get chosen for a house. How long did you stay here before getting assigned to ours?"

"My first night here I spent with you guys." Something twisted in my stomach at knowing I'd skipped a whole process, and I was going to make sure I looked into it.

From the way the guys kept looking at each other, I knew they were going to as well.

CHAPTER NINE

SMOKEY

Salem looked a little brighter by the time we got home. Luckily our house was further back from the chaos and hadn't been damaged. A lot of other people weren't so lucky.

I placed her on the couch, both Fox and I sitting with her as we tried to figure out how the fuck she'd ended up in our house if she hadn't gone through an application process. We were the most powerful house in Stardust and there were insane tests to prove you belonged here, so knowing Salem hadn't even had to state what her powers were made me uneasy.

"You don't know anyone on the Board?" Fox enquired, leaning back to get comfortable.

"I don't know anyone here. I've never run into someone with powers before. Where I lived, it wasn't common. I didn't even know people moved out of Stardust, I thought we all just lived here for the rest of our lives," Salem answered, her brow creasing with confusion. "What did you guys have to do to get in?"

"Started out as paperwork but we had to fill in a bunch of shit about our powers, unlike you. Then once they knew what we could do, we did target practice to test how strong our powers were and our accuracy. Those who impressed the Board ended up being put in a room with others to see how we interacted together. It was like a fun little science project," I scoffed, and Fox grinned.

“It was a little weird considering none of us got along when they put us together.”

“There has to be a reason Salem was placed with us,” I mumbled, trying to think. Her powers were definitely balanced with ours and she’d be just as strong as us if she trained regularly, but if no one had documented her power supply, how come she’d ended up in the highest powered house?

We were still trying to figure it out when the others arrived home, and River instantly took her face in his hands, not hiding his worry.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, puddles. I’m just drained again,” she smiled. “I might head to bed actually.”

“Not until you’ve taken this,” Storm grunted, pulling a syringe from his pocket. “It’ll balance your powers and give you a boost. If you keep being drained repetitively, your powers will go awol and won’t regenerate properly.”

Her eyes widened and she laughed nervously.

“Uh, I’m fine. Thank you.”

“Don’t be a little bitch. It’s just a needle,” Frost taunted, but Salem shook her head.

“I’m terrified of needles, asshole.”

“No you’re not,” he said with a frown, and Storm gave him a strange look but didn’t say anything. We were pretty sure Frost’s history with her was bullshit and he was imagining it, or he had the wrong person. “You’re scared of drowning.”

So many emotions crossed her face as she stared back at him, her voice so soft I barely heard it.

“How do you know that?”

“Because you never learned to swim. Your mom wouldn’t let you go to lessons.” He scowled when he realized he was talking too much, pointing at the needle in Storm’s hand. “Just let him jab you with it, for fuck’s sake. It’s not hard. Hold River’s hand or something.”

He stomped off, leaving us all extremely confused, but Storm blew out a breath.

“The hard way it is then, I guess. Hold her still.” I hated this but it was for her own good.

We’d all needed the jab at some point from overdoing it, Storm more than the rest of us, which was why he had it at his house. He might have been the strongest but he also pushed himself hard to get there.

Fox cringed but helped me pin Salem facedown on the couch, and guilt ate at me as she started thrashing and crying hysterically. It wasn’t an act, she was terrified.

“Guys, take it easy,” River said weakly, knowing she needed it but not knowing how to ease her fear. He sat on the floor beside the couch to gently cup her cheek, and Fox sat above her head to hold her shoulders down while I straddled her thighs to hold her hands by her sides.

“Let me fucking go!” she begged, her voice cracking as she screamed at us, and I gave Storm a dirty look.

“Can you hurry up?”

He was taking his time on purpose. Storm liked to expose people to their fears to force them to overcome them, but sometimes it was simply cruel. Salem was hardly even breathing as she tried to fight us off, and I almost let her go so she could escape.

Almost.

Storm grabbed the back of her pants and tugged them down, her sweet ass coming into view, and he uncapped the syringe with his teeth before running a palm over her ass.

She flinched as she sobbed, Storm’s voice surprisingly gentle.

“Just a pinch, firecracker. I’ll be quick.” He quickly and smoothly pushed the needle into her rounded ass, a panicked scream leaving her as he pushed the liquid into her skin. The moment he was done, he pulled it out and I ran my palm over the spot, giving it a light massage. It helped mine from hurting

too long as it pushed the liquid through my system faster, so I wanted to make it as easy as possible for her.

“Get off her,” River snapped when we didn’t let her up straight away, and I fixed her pants before climbing off her, Fox releasing his grip too. She scrambled to wobbly feet, almost collapsing, but she jerked back when Storm reached for her to catch her.

“Don’t!”

“You can hate me all you like, but unless you want to fuck up your powers, you needed that,” he replied calmly, giving us all a bored look. “Make sure she eats.”

I was pretty sure none of us were going to get a say in anything with her right now, and I wasn’t surprised when she took off to her room, slamming the door behind her.

“What the fuck was Frost saying about her fears?” Fox asked Storm, but he shrugged.

“I have no idea and I don’t really care. Have fun with her, I bet she’ll be real cheerful tomorrow.”

“Thanks,” I deadpanned, getting to my feet with every intention of checking on her. River gave me a knowing look but he didn’t stop me as I walked upstairs. She’d surprisingly left the door unlocked, and I poked my head in to find her with a knife, trying to cut her damn ass open where Storm had given her the injection.

“What the fuck?” I snapped as I pushed my way in and wrestled the knife from her, pausing as I noticed her eyes looking slightly glossed over. “Salem?”

“I have to get it out!” she cried, pure panic on her face. “I can’t go through it again!”

“Go through what again?”

“The pain!” Furniture rattled as her powers started losing control, and I dropped the knife on the floor and climbed onto the bed to pull her closer. She fought me, panic consuming her and drawing Frost’s attention as he stopped in the hallway.

“What did you do?” he asked me in a flat voice.

“Nothing! She’s trying to cut the injection out,” I bit out, holding her more firmly as she thrashed. “Salem, stop. You’re fine.” I stroked her hair, her hysterics turning to sobs and eventually she was quietly crying in my arms, her body limp as she calmed.

I had no idea what had just happened, but it was more than just a needle phobia.

Salem

Memories plagued my mind the moment Storm pulled the needle out. I had no idea where they were from, but all I could feel was the fear and pain. I wasn’t in the living room at Stardust, I was in a facility with masked people around me as they held me down.

I could hear people talking and I tried to calm down so I could hear what they were saying, and I suddenly realized it was Frost and Smokey.

“She’s not faking that. That’s some PTSD kind of freak out,” Smokey said firmly.

“She’s never had a needle phobia before.”

“You want to tell me how you know that?”

“Not particularly. I’d just know if she had a phobia like that, okay? Drop it. Put her ear against your heart. It calms her.” I heard footsteps walk away and Smokey hesitated before turning me to face him, cradling me against his chest and placing my ear against the steady thump of his heartbeat.

I shuffled closer as the sound pushed the memories from my mind, my arm sliding around his waist.

“I’ve got you,” he murmured, loosening his grip to cuddle me.

“I remembered something but I don’t know where from,” I said as my voice cracked from all the screaming I’d been doing, his hand lifting to toy with my hair.

“What do you mean?”

“I was being held down by people in masks. They were injecting me with something and it was burning. My whole body hurt. I don’t know where it’s from though. It’s like a movie in my head but I can’t recall the actual situation around the memory. What’s in the injection Storm gave me?”

“It’s like a vitamin boost for your powers. It only replenishes and heals. We’ve all taken it multiple times so it’s safe and it only stings as it’s trying to push through your system, but it’s not unbearable. I’m sorry we scared you but you needed it. You’ll fuck up your powers without it.”

“It hurts.”

“Is it like a pressure pain?” When I nodded he sighed. “Roll onto your stomach. I tried massaging it to hurry it along but we had to let you go. You didn’t manage to cut yourself, did you?”

“I don’t think so,” I answered as I did as he asked, tensing as he sat on the backs of my thighs again. He tugged the back of my leggings down and he let out a breath of relief.

“No cut.” His palm soothed over the tender skin and my muscles relaxed as he started carefully massaging it, the burn fading a little. “You still don’t know how Frost knows you?”

“Nope.”

“I think you’ve had your memory wiped. Frost seems to know you quite well and your meltdown seems connected to memories you weren’t aware you had. You’ve triggered them with the needle,” he stated, sounding thoughtful. “It might be cruel but maybe we should expose you to some things and see if it triggers more memories.”

River stepped into the room, halting when he noticed Smokey massaging my bare ass.

“Oh. What are you doing?”

“Massaging the injection in. It worked for me,” Smokey replied lightly. “Don’t worry, I’m not putting the moves on your girl.”

“What’s up with Frost? He took off and went to Storm’s place,” River said as he sat on the edge of my bed. “What happened? That was a serious freak out.”

Smokey filled him in on everything, and by the end of it, River was frowning.

“Missing memories, no assessment for Stardust, and Frost is seriously fucked up from whatever history you share. Something really weird is going on.”

Smokey’s fingers absently moved from my ass to my waist as he continued massaging me, working his way up my spine, only pausing when I let out a moan.

“That feels good.”

He continued, chuckling slightly.

“I’m surprised you’ve tolerated my touch this long.”

“If I don’t think about where your hands have been, it should be fine,” I mumbled, peering over at River. “Take notes.” I was only joking but he started paying attention to everything Smokey was doing, making Smokey snort.

“You don’t know how to give a massage? Jesus Christ. Switch with me.” He climbed off my thighs so that River could take his place, and Smoke instructed him where to put his hands. I soaked in the benefits as River learned, and Smokey gave me an amused smirk. “You’re welcome. Want me to teach him how to eat your pussy properly? I’ll demonstrate.”

River’s movements stalled and I grinned.

“I’m pretty sure I can teach him that. I’ll get Fox to draw up a diagram just in case though.”

River groaned, continuing with the massage.

“I’ve already seen videos and pictures. He showed me *hundreds*. You guys act like I’ve never seen porn, I know what a pussy is and what I’m supposed to do with it.”

“I think you should just let me give her a good time. I can warm her up for you,” Smokey laughed but River didn’t find it

funny. He was taking it way too seriously.

“I did suggest that but I got in trouble, remember?”

“You don’t want to share your girlfriend, dude. I’m telling you right now, you’ll hate it,” Smokey said without hesitation. “Not that I’d say no if Salem jumped on my cock.”

“You guys, I’m right here,” I said dryly. “Can you not discuss my pussy?”

“How about you get your pants off and I’ll show him the right way to fuck you?” Smokey purred but River huffed.

“She doesn’t want to. No means no.”

“I’m aware what rape is, River. That’s not what I’m into,” Smokey snorted, his fingers teasing the back of my neck. “Salem’s just conflicted because she doesn’t like me but her pussy does.”

“True,” I muttered, not realizing I’d said it out loud until Smokey’s deep chuckle drew my attention.

“Well, when you and your pussy stop fighting, let me know. I have no issue with River watching us. You can blow him, let’s make it a party.”

“You can leave now,” I scowled, my face softening after a second. “But thank you for coming to check on me. Don’t think I’ve forgotten that you held me down though.”

He climbed from the bed, giving me a wink.

“For your own good. You’ll forgive me eventually. I’m going to order pizza so I’ll let you know when it’s here.” He left the room and River dropped down beside me, drawing me against his chest.

“I’m sorry I didn’t stop them but Smokey’s right. You needed it,” River said quietly, sorrow in his eyes. “I hope you’re not too mad at me.”

I wanted to punch him but I couldn’t force myself to hurt him. I was pissed that they did it against my will but I also knew they were serious about it being important. I’d never

seen Smokey so serious before and I was grateful he'd come to check on me.

"I can't believe everyone saw my ass," I grunted, surprised when he kissed my neck and replied boldly.

"You have a nice ass. Pretty sure even Storm liked what he saw and he's a grumpy piece of shit." I tilted my head to let his lips explore my skin more easily, my skin tingling as his arm banded around my middle to tug me closer. "If it's still tender later, I could kiss it better for you."

"You want to kiss my ass?" I teased, making him groan.

"Definitely." I'd never really been into butt stuff but if River wanted to play around, I'd give it a try. I met his gaze, uncertainty taking over his face. "Is that weird? I was trying to be sexy."

He was so fucking cute.

"It's not weird. If you ever want to try something just let me know. I won't shame you for your kinks, River. If it makes us both feel good then it's worth a try," I assured him, dropping a leg over his waist.

He relaxed and leaned forward to kiss me, taking charge as he rolled me onto my back and laid over me without breaking the kiss. My arms wrapped around him and I arched against his body, loving it when he confidently slid a hand up my shirt to grab my breast.

I hooked my ankles behind his back to keep him close, nibbling his lip and raking my fingers through his hair. His solid length ground against me and I gasped as my clit throbbed, making him hesitate before grinding on me again.

My head dropped back on the pillow, my voice almost a whine.

"Keep doing that. Fuck."

Heat filled his eyes as he continued, his fingers tweaking my nipple as he dropped his lips to my neck again, nibbling my skin before sucking it into his mouth and branding me with a hickey as I squirmed below him.

I had no problem dry-humping but apparently he needed more.

He growled with frustration, slipping a hand down the front of my pants and toying with my soaked pussy, his fingers finding my clit.

“Oh fuck. River,” I begged, arching into his hand as he circled his fingers. “More. Fuck me with your fingers.” I was panting, my orgasm close.

He didn’t hesitate to do as I asked, sliding two fingers into me and trying to set a steady pace as he thrust them in and out, his thumb landing on my clit and almost making me jump off the bed as I slammed my eyes shut. I came hard, my hips lifting off the bed but not getting far thanks to River hovering above me, his fingers and thumb still working hard as he cursed quietly.

“Fuck, I can feel you squeezing me.” He didn’t slow his hand, and I had to physically grab his arm to stop him, his face falling. “Did I do it wrong?”

I laughed breathlessly, my bones like jelly.

“No, I just can’t take more. That was so fucking good, baby.” His eyes lit up at my praise and he slid his hand from my pants, eyeing his soaked fingers for a second before popping them into his mouth.

I almost came again at the sound he let out as he tasted me.

I grabbed the back of his neck and yanked him down for a kiss, loving how I tasted on his tongue. He came willingly, devouring me as his rock-hard dick pressed against my core, but when I reached for his pants, he stopped me.

“That’s what I owed you. You don’t need to return the favor.”

“Believe it or not but I like sucking your dick,” I grinned. “Maybe later?”

“Maybe,” he murmured, tucking my hair behind my ear.

“If you two are done, pizza’s almost here,” Smokey said from the doorway, and when I looked over at him, his eyes

were ablaze with lust. I had no idea how much he'd seen, but he definitely had a tent in his pants. "If you want to keep going though, I won't say no."

"Were you watching us?" River asked uncomfortably, climbing off me and hiding his own erection under the blanket.

"Some. Good job, buddy. There was no way she just faked that," Smokey answered with a smirk, running his eyes over me. "She definitely looks satisfied."

"Do you mind?" I huffed, my pussy clenching as he drew his bottom lip between his teeth as he studied me.

"Absolutely not. Feel free to go again if you like."

"You're a perv."

"Proudly. If I knew how much of a horny little minx you were, I would've nailed you in my bed while I had you in it. You're lucky you got out of it with your clothes intact."

"I'm with River," I argued weakly for the hundredth time, not surprised when he stepped into the room more, glancing at River as he walked towards the bed.

"River doesn't mind. He'd love to watch you get your pussy pounded."

I sat up as he stopped by the side of the bed, my voice not sounding very convincing as I replied.

"Who'd want to watch their girlfriend be fucked by someone else?"

"If you were my girlfriend, I'd definitely want to see that," he grinned, his hand snapping out to lightly grip my throat. I swallowed as his thumb ran over my pulse, and he leaned down so that our lips almost brushed. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? Two of us worshiping your body until you blackout from pleasure?" I didn't mean to whimper, and his eyes flickered with satisfaction as the sound left me. "I bet you're a filthy little thing too."

River mumbled a curse but he didn't sound mad, and when I forced my eyes off Smokey's to look at River, desperation and need was written all over his face as he watched us.

Smokey's hand lifted from my throat to my chin, bringing my eyes back to his. "Eyes on me, Salem. River would've said if this bothered him by now."

"Smokey—"

"Fuck, I love how you say my name when you're needy," he murmured, his free hand moving to my waist. I stopped fucking breathing when his lips brushed mine. "I bet it would sound better when you're screaming for me though."

"I'm going to bust in my pants," River grumbled, Smokey's eyes sliding to his.

"You want to watch me with your girl?"

My heart was hammering in anticipation as River assessed me. I could tell he liked the idea but it also made him nervous. How the hell had we gotten here? I was just mad at him for considering sharing me but now it was making my panties wet.

"If she was into it then sure," River finally answered, but we were interrupted by Fox.

"As much as I'd prefer to watch this shitshow play out, the pizza's here."

I jumped but Smokey smirked against my mouth, his fingers moving back to my throat to give it a small squeeze.

"Shame. It was just getting interesting. Maybe another time."

He pulled away and gave me a smoldering glance over his shoulder as he left the room, and Fox let out a low whistle.

"Damn, I'm sorry for breaking this up. It was getting steamy in here."

I cleared my throat and got to my feet, straightening my pants from when River's hand had been down them.

"He's just playing around."

"If you think that was him playing, you're delusional. He's not all talk either, that man will fuck your soul right out of your body then fuck it back into place again. I might have

skill, but him? Pure primal shit. Gets me all hot thinking about it. So, which one got in your pants because I can smell pussy.”

I rolled my eyes but River climbed out of bed, his dick now in control.

“You don’t need to know that.”

Fox snatched his wrist and lifted River’s hand, having no shame in sniffing his fingers.

“Proud of you. It’s about time you got acquainted with good pussy,” Fox chuckled, then he wrapped his lips around River’s fingers and sucked, my eyes almost falling out of my head. I was soaking my panties but River tried to stand firm. He was failing though.

“I already licked them clean, you freak.”

“Good.” He stepped closer, having no problem cupping River’s re-tented pants and giving his dick a gentle squeeze. “I did it for you though. You’re so close to coming.”

“Fuck off,” River snapped as he jerked away, literally running from the room and leaving me alone with Fox who gave me a sly wink.

“He’s a little shy but we’ll fix that.”

“Leave him alone. He’s learning what he likes and how to do stuff. Don’t make him uncomfortable,” I scolded, his eyes softening a fraction.

“You’re good for him. You’re patient and sweet. He’s always felt weird for being a virgin but you make him feel like it’s normal.”

“It *is* fucking normal, Fox. There’s no shame in waiting. He only thinks he’s weird because of you assholes. You keep tearing his confidence down and I want to beat you up for it,” I hissed, his arm dropping around my shoulders to tug me against his side as he started steering me from the room.

“It builds character.”

“It’s bullying.”

“You going to punish me?” he teased, leaning closer when I didn’t shove him away. “I’m starting to think you like fighting with me, but okay, I’ll make it up to River.”

Relief filled me and I glanced up at him as we made our way down the stairs into the living room.

“Really?”

“Yeah. I’ll blow his fucking mind when I get him naked. I’m good at reading people and he’d be into it. He’s just nervous and shy.”

“Don’t push him,” I warned and he raised an eyebrow.

“You’d be okay with me railing your boyfriend?”

“Of course, but only if he’s sure he wants it. I don’t want him feeling uncomfortable,” I said as we entered the kitchen to find Smokey and River already eating. I sat beside River and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, grabbing my own slice of pizza before taking a huge bite. Frost and Storm were both still out which was fine by me.

I didn’t need them here causing more shit.

I glanced at Smokey whose eyes were already on me, and he shamelessly stared at me as he ate. I didn’t need both him and Fox trying to get me in bed but it seemed my pussy disagreed.

The thought of fucking both of them sent pulses through me, and I ate in silence to avoid awkward conversation. Every time I looked up though, Smokey and Fox were both eyeing me with heat.

It was going to be an interesting night.

CHAPTER TEN

RIVER

Salem excused herself after dinner, wanting a bath before bed. I didn't think she realized she was covered in soot thanks to Smokey, her neck and chin black. I was deep in thought as I relived the feeling of her pussy clamping down around my fingers as she soaked my hand, a tingle going straight to my balls.

“Stop sniffing your fingers, you weirdo,” Smokey snorted, snapping me out of my thoughts. Her scent was right under my nose and I pulled my hand away, giving him a dirty look.

“I can't believe you were watching us.”

“Don't act like you hated it. It made your little dick hard,” Smokey chuckled, flicking his gaze to Fox. “Maybe he's got some hidden kinks. He's definitely into voyeurism since he practically begged me to fuck Salem in front of him earlier.”

“I didn't! I just said she can do what she wants!” Heat washed over my skin and I was surprised when Fox scolded him for me.

“Don't make him feel bad about it. Watching's hot.” He turned to me, patting my thigh and making me tense at how close to my dick he was. “Don't listen to him. He's just jealous that you've bagged the hottest girl in the world. If you want to watch someone bang her, I don't blame you. I love that shit. Smokey likes it too so don't let him tease you.”

“I don't need you guys witnessing me making a dick out of myself, so can you keep your watching to a minimum?” I

mumbled as I rubbed the back of my neck awkwardly, but Fox shook his head.

“We won’t let you fumble around. Besides, it sounded like you got her off so that’s all that matters.”

Smokey started clearing our plates but he gave me a wink.

“You did a good job and you didn’t make it weird. You’d be proud, Fox. He did everything she asked him to.”

“See? I knew she’d be happy to guide you,” Fox replied as he smiled at me, getting to his feet. “I have a date tonight so I’ll let you listen in on how things should be done.”

Smokey snickered but I groaned. “You’re bringing someone over?”

“I know, it’s been a while,” he said lightly before walking towards the stairs to go up to his room, and I scrubbed a hand over my face, knowing we’d get no fucking sleep with that asshole going to pound town on whatever girl he was bringing over.

“He’s just trying to make Salem jealous,” Smokey said absently as he ran the dishwasher. “He tried being available and it obviously hasn’t worked, so now he’s trying to make her mad.”

“Why would she be jealous? She’s *my* girlfriend,” I scoffed, earning an amused glance from him.

“Fox’s love language is pleasure. He’s going to use every trick in the book to make his date scream his name, and Salem will wonder what he’s doing. She’ll envision it and imagine it’s her getting the Fox special, and she’ll either march in there to tell them to shut up, or she’ll lay in bed and fuck herself over it. Do yourself a favor and get comfortable with putting your tongue up her cunt. That way you get to reap the benefits but you’ll also have her thighs around your ears to block out Fox’s noise. It’s a win-win.”

“I’m not doing that.”

“I fucking will then. She’s going to be stupidly horny and I don’t want to listen to Fox all night,” he shrugged, starting to

scrub the dirty plates. I blew out a breath and leaned back in my seat, watching him silently for a few minutes before speaking again.

“Do you actually like her or are you just being a dick?” He seemed to genuinely like her but he was also really good at faking it. For all I knew, he’d fuck her just to throw it back in her face later.

“I like her,” he said lightly without turning to face me.

“I’d be okay with it.” That made him spin around.

“You’d be okay with what? Me banging your girl? Dating her?”

“Yeah, all of that. If Salem’s happy then so am I. Just don’t compete with me. I know I’d lose,” I said casually as if it didn’t bother me, but he walked over and clapped a hand on my shoulder.

“She really likes you. Trust me, you’re the last person she’d leave.”

“How are you so confident around women? I’m lucky to hold eye contact.”

“Easy. I’ve fucked a lot and I know what I’m doing. You’ll get better at it with time. If you do what you did today before you fuck her, it doesn’t matter if you get her off again. Just make sure she comes.”

“Fox suggested toys.”

“Go for it. Use your fingers and one of the clit stimulators. Easy and effective,” he smirked, tapping my cheek. “Or let me and Fox take her for a ride.”

“I just said you could,” I muttered as I got to my feet. “I’m going to warn Salem that Fox has company tonight. Maybe she’ll want to go out.”

“Doubtful. She’s a homebody,” he snorted. “Good luck. Remember if she gets horny to let her sit on your face.”

“Noted.”

I walked up to her room and hesitated before opening the bathroom door, biting my tongue to stop myself from moaning. She was still in the shower, water and bubbles cascading over her as she stood under the spray with her face tilted up at it. I should've waited for her in her room but I found myself pulling my clothes off to join her.

I opened the shower door and her gorgeous eyes met mine.

“Hey. I didn't hear you come in.”

“Is this okay?” I asked, relieved when she nodded and pulled me closer. My hands landed on her ass and I hauled her against me, my dick jerking at the feel of her wet, soft, body against mine. “Heads up, Fox is bringing a date home tonight so expect to not get any sleep.”

“He has a date?” I heard the hint of hurt in her tone, and I mentally cursed at myself for not being more gentle about it. It was obvious she liked him despite telling me otherwise, but I didn't think she'd get upset about it.

“Yeah. Smokey said he's just trying to make you jealous. If you want to leave for the night we can stay at Storm's.”

“Or we can stay here and I can make a tornado start in his bedroom,” she offered with amusement, kissing my chest. “We can have a movie night or something if you want? Just turn the TV up loud and we won't even notice.”

“Smokey will probably join us unless he goes out.” Her hand slid between my legs and I hissed as she wrapped her fingers around my dick. She dropped to her knees, my head falling back against the glass as she sucked me into her mouth. “Shit.” I was ridiculously horny from earlier so I wasn't surprised when she pushed me quickly towards release. Her hot, wet, mouth felt so good, but I pulled back before I could finish, fisting myself and stroking it. “Can I come on your tits?”

“Sure,” she said and sucked her lower lip between her teeth while peering up at me, waiting patiently as I jerked myself until I came on her chest, and my legs almost gave out

when she ran her finger through the mess and popped it into her mouth.

“That was hot,” she murmured, letting me help her to her feet so I could clean her up before the water could go cold.

“Really?” I asked with a small smile, waiting for her to nod. “You liked it?”

“I like when you ask for what you want. Let’s go snuggle since we’re both feeling pretty satisfied right now,” she teased, rinsing before shutting the water off and stepping out. She grabbed two towels and handed me one, my eyes glued to her ass as she rubbed the towel through her hair. There was a tiny bruise where Storm had jabbed the needle, guilt hitting me in the chest again.

I didn’t realize what I was doing until Salem chuckled.

“You’re insatiable.”

I was squatting behind her, running my lips over the bruise as if to make it go away, and I refused to get embarrassed.

“There’s a small bruise so I’m kissing it better.”

“Damn, my pussy hurts too then,” she joked, tugging me to my feet. “C’mon, let’s go and find Smokey to see if he wants to watch a movie.”

I took her hand and led her into her room so she could get dressed, then I wrapped the towel around my waist and walked next door to my room. Fox’s company had arrived and the woman giggled as she followed him along the hallway, Salem’s fingers tightening in mine. Fox seemed smug by the reaction but his face fell slightly as Salem completely ignored him and stepped into my room.

“You’re a dumbass,” I murmured as I stepped past them to follow Salem, closing the door and dropping the towel. Salem’s greedy eyes raked over me and I almost covered myself with the towel again as my confidence wavered. I’d never been this vulnerable around a girl before and some of my bravery was wearing off.

“I can’t believe I landed myself such a hot piece of man-meat,” Salem sighed dreamily, making me jump as she trailed her finger down my side. She grinned at my reaction, swatting me on the butt. “Hurry up before I maul you.”

“Don’t threaten me with a good time,” I joked, dancing out of her way as she went to swat me again. I almost told her to get naked again.

Almost.

Salem

We headed downstairs to find Smokey already lounging on the couch with a gaming controller in his hand. He was playing some kind of shooter game, so River dropped down on the other end of the couch, pulling me down beside him so that I was sitting between them.

“Did you guys want the TV?” Smokey asked without looking at us, smashing the buttons to shoot at someone who ran across the screen.

“We were going to watch a movie but you can keep playing,” I replied as I sat up to watch him. He was really good at it, and after a while he handed the controller to River for a turn.

They ended up getting the second controller out and shooting at each other until Smokey slipped an arm around my middle and hauled me into his lap, grabbing the controller with both hands again.

“Help me kill River. He’s cheating.”

“Am not!” River exclaimed with a huff of annoyance.

I pulled back but Smokey’s arms tightened and he leaned back against the couch to get comfortable, thrusting the controller at me.

“I don’t know how to play!” I said in a slight panic, but he chuckled and adjusted me on his lap, putting his hands over mine on the controller.

“This is to aim, this is to move, and this is to shoot. It’s easy, even River can figure it out.”

“Dick,” River scowled, shooting at someone as they jumped out at him. I squealed as someone started shooting at me and Smokey laughed, helping me take them down before we ran for cover.

After a few minutes I was cracking up laughing, gunning everyone down like a psycho. River cursed at me when I killed him, leaving Smokey yelling at me to take down the final person. I found them and used what was left of my bullets, my screen flashing with a winner’s sign.

“I won!” I grinned, fist pumping the air. “Eat shit, River!”

“You’re mean when you game,” he said dryly, giving me an amused smile.

“I’ll give you a chance this time,” I teased as I hit *new game*.

I did well in the second round until Smokey’s finger’s started teasing my waist. I tried hard to block it out but I couldn’t ignore his lips on my neck. River managed to kill me easily while I was distracted, and I couldn’t help but squirm on Smokey’s lap as his teeth grazed my skin.

His dick hardened under me, making him chuckle as I ground down on it.

“Don’t think I won’t flip you over and fuck you right here on the couch, hurricane.”

“That’s not happening,” I replied, squealing as he slammed me down on my back, bracing himself above me with a cocky smirk.

“Was that a challenge? Stop toying with me. You’re making my cock hard.”

“Sounds like a *you* problem.”

“*Feels* like a Salem problem,” he chuckled darkly, grinding his erection against my core and lifting his gaze to River who was sitting by my head watching us. “What do you

think, River? Should I fuck your girl right here? Teach her a lesson about teasing me?”

“Leave her alone,” River mumbled but his eyes burned into us with interest.

Smokey ignored him, dropping his lips to my neck and trailing them along my throat. I wasn't even breathing at this point, my body buzzing with excitement as his fingers grabbed the waistband of my sleep shorts.

Sudden pain shot through me and I cried out, clutching my chest as it spread. Smokey jerked back from me and placed his hands on my chest, his concerned eyes on mine. “Hurricane?” He was suddenly hit with a ball of ice and scrambled to his feet, flames already in his hands as he snarled at Frost. “The fuck is wrong with you?”

The pain in my chest only got worse, and I screamed as Frost threw ice at me and it pierced my skin. He was throwing ice daggers. He went to do it again and I forced my hand out, wind tearing across the room and knocking him over, a snarl leaving him.

“Just come clean! Why the fuck are you here, Salem? Did they send you to finish what you started? Or are River and Smokey your targets this time?!”

“What are you talking about?!”

“Don't act stupid with me, it's not cute. You can pretend to not know me but I'll never fucking forget what you did!” Pain hit me again and I dropped to my knees, chaos breaking out as Smokey and River lunged at him. I gripped my aching chest, touching my side to reveal blood on my fingers. It was flowing fast, my vision dimming as I got to my feet and forced power from my hands again, sending Frost sprawling backwards across the carpet.

Thunder rolled in the distance just as Fox jogged down the stairs, eyeing us with irritation for ruining his playtime. Pain stabbed my chest at seeing him in his boxers and nothing else, and I had to avert my gaze before I made a fool out of myself.

“What the fuck, guys?” Fox snapped, grabbing the back of Smokey’s shirt to haul him away from Frost. Smokey’s hands ignited again but Fox smacked the back of his head. “Enough!”

“Me? Look what he fucking did to her! And he iced her *again!*” Smokey exploded, turning his wild eyes to mine. He held so much anger that it almost knocked me on my ass.

“I’m okay,” I promised, making him snort.

“No, you’re not.” He stalked closer, lifting the side of my shirt to reveal my injuries. Fox’s eyes narrowed when he realized I was hurt, Smokey’s free hand moving to my chest to melt the ice in my body.

The front door slammed and Storm appeared, his sharp eyes going to me without hesitation.

“The hell is going on now?” His eyes dropped to my side, his jaw grinding as he noticed all the blood. “Frost? Explain.”

Frost got to his feet, sneering at me. “This *cunt* is only here to kill us. It’s not the first time she’s pulled a stunt like this.”

“Excuse me? Why would I kill any of you?” I growled, letting Smokey continue to fuss over me as River joined us, pressing a kiss to my cheek.

“Ignore him, baby. He’s obviously lost it.”

“Oh yeah? Your little girlfriend tried to kill me the last time I saw her. She’s good at sucking you in and spitting you back out,” Frost seethed, his eyes flicking to Smokey. “And now not only does she have River wrapped around her finger, but you too.”

“Let it go, dickhead. Whatever bullshit you’ve imagined is exactly that. Bullshit. You think she’s a fucking assassin now?” Smokey bit out, my chest loosening as the cold left me. “You just can’t handle us enjoying ourselves.”

“Is that what we’re calling it now? You were literally humping her on the fucking couch.”

“Fuck off, Frost. Seriously. Stop being a dick,” Smokey scoffed, patting River’s shoulder. “C’mon, let’s get Salem

upstairs. I want to check her wound.”

“You’re going to regret coming into my house and fucking with us, Salem,” Frost promised darkly but Smokey threw a ball of fire at him, sliding an arm around my middle to help me towards the stairs.

I looked over my shoulder at Frost as we left the room, confusion swirling through me. His accusations didn’t make sense. I’d never tried to kill anyone, let alone him.

Fox followed us, worry lining his features as he stopped us from entering my room.

“Are you okay?”

“Fuck off,” I gritted out, making him frown.

“What did I do?” He was such a dumbass.

I jabbed a finger against his chest, forcing him back a step.

“Go back to your date. You wanted to piss me off? Job successful. All you did was prove that you’re nothing but a fucking whore, just like I thought.”

“Salem—” He stepped closer and went to touch my face but I slapped his hand away.

“What? You thought I’d throw myself at you and beg you to choose me? Get out of my face,” I spat, grateful when River pulled me into my room, leaving Smokey to get rid of him. It wasn’t fair to be angry when he hardly even knew me, especially since I was dating River, but I was so mad that he’d brought someone home after trying to get in my pants.

“Don’t worry about him. Get your shirt off so I can look at your wound,” River murmured gently, helping me out of it before kneeling on the floor and running his fingers over the heated skin. It was still bleeding but the flow was slowing which was good. He pressed a kiss to my stomach, his voice soft. “I’m sorry he’s being so difficult.”

“I don’t understand what his problem is with me. I’ve never met him before and I think I’d remember trying to kill him,” I scoffed.

Smokey walked in with a First-Aid kit, squatting beside River to inspect the damage.

“I’ll clean it and put a bandage on it. It should stop bleeding soon anyway.”

“I guess our fun night is ruined,” I grumbled but he shook his head.

“Nah. We’ll just game in River’s room.”

“I’ll go and set it up if you’ve got her?” River offered, waiting for Smokey to nod before giving me a quick kiss and leaving the room.

Smokey worked quietly as he cleaned me up, but he spoke once he was finished, his voice low.

“I’m sorry about Fox. His date’s gone home.”

“I don’t care what he does,” I lied, making him raise an eyebrow as he stood up straight, looking down at me.

“Is that right? Considering the way you just flipped out, I’m going to call bullshit. He didn’t fuck her if that helps.” It did but I wasn’t going to admit that.

“Sucks to be him then. I wasn’t going to fuck him anyway.” I went to move around him but his hands moved to my waist, halting my escape.

“If Frost hadn’t interrupted, would you have fucked me?” he asked, his eyes darkening when I shrugged.

“Maybe. River’s not ready to take that step and I don’t know if he’d be comfortable with us fucking without him, you know? I need to think about everything. I suppose you’ll bail now that you know you’re not getting laid tonight?” I asked dryly, squeaking as my back hit the wall and he crowded me, his lips landing on mine.

It was rough, his tongue forcing its way into my mouth, and I tasted blood as he bit my lip sharply. A whimper left me and I fisted his shirt to keep him close, but he pulled back after a moment with blazing eyes, gripping my chin firmly with his fingers.

“I never expect anything from you, but if you want to let me get close like that, I won’t throw you aside the next day. I promise.”

I blinked at him in surprise, River’s voice coming from the doorway.

“Uh, I’m done if you guys still wanted to hang out? I brought you a shirt.” He’d definitely seen our kiss. Uncertainty covered his face, but luckily Smokey saw it too and decided not to be a dick as he pressed a kiss to my head before gently pushing me in River’s direction.

“You two get comfortable, I’ll grab snacks from the kitchen.”

River visibly relaxed, taking my hand and giving it a squeeze.

“Alright. See you in a minute then,” River answered, waiting for him to leave the room before unlatching my bra and tossing it on the bed. He eased the shirt over my head then led me into his room, question in his gaze that made me sigh.

“I knew you wouldn’t be okay with it. I’ll tell Smokey he can’t join us,” I said without hesitation, but he held my hand more firmly.

“No, it’s fine. I just wasn’t expecting it. I’m okay with you two,” he said confidently, steering me towards the bed. He pulled back the blankets and ushered me into the middle, handing me a controller. I dropped it on the bed between my legs, cupping his chin and giving him a lazy kiss, loving how he melted against me.

I placed my forehead on his, holding his gaze.

“I promise I won’t leave you for someone else,” I murmured, lifting my hand to his cheek. “If this gets too much, tell me and it stops. I don’t know what the fuck is happening between me and Smokey but I’d like to explore it. I won’t if you’re not okay about it though.”

“I want to see you guys together,” he admitted, not being able to hide the embarrassment from his face. “Not tonight, but another time. Tonight can we just game?”

“Definitely,” I smiled, giving him another kiss just as Smokey walked in with his arms full of snacks, placing them on the bed before sitting beside me.

“Storm’s losing his shit at Frost in the kitchen. I think he’s staying the night too so expect breakfast to be tense.”

“Excellent,” I muttered, handing Smokey the controller. “You two have the first game.”

“Sold,” he grinned, shuffling closer to get comfortable.

I ended up sandwiched between them both for the rest of the night, sleep pulling me under at some time after two in the morning.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SALEM

I woke up overheating, snuggled into Smokey's chest with River pressed against my back.

"Morning," Smokey mumbled, pressing his lips to the top of my head. "How did you sleep?"

"It's too fucking hot in here," I grumbled, a cheeky smirk spreading across his face.

"It can be hotter if you wish."

I went to protest but he claimed my lips, his hand resting on my waist as it slipped under the shirt I was wearing. A shiver rolled through me as his fingers skimmed up my body until he reached my tits, rolling one of my nipples between his finger and thumb.

I groaned, rubbing my thighs together, my brain practically short-circuiting as River's hand dipped into my pants from behind. I was going to combust at this rate.

Smokey smiled against my lips as he must have felt River's hand between us, and he pinched my nipple sharply and made me cry out in surprise. The slight sting felt good as River toyed with my clit, but I jerked as Smokey lifted the front of my shirt and wrapped his lips around my nipple instead.

My stomach clenched as they worked me up, my thighs clamping together as River pushed me closer to the edge, and the moment Smokey bit down, I screamed out a curse, my pussy clamping around nothing as I came hard.

River didn't drag it out too long this time, but Smokey gave me an evil smirk as he eased his hand into my pants the second River removed his, my eyes going wide.

"What are you doing? I came."

"Making you come again," he said with amusement, my body jerking as he made contact with my sensitive clit. "Open your legs."

I did as he asked, my hips bucking as he pushed two fingers inside me and rubbed my clit with his thumb.

"I can't," I choked out as I squeezed my legs shut, and he got to his knees and pushed my legs open enough to lay between them, blocking my ability to shut them again.

"You can. Show River how good you are." Smokey's fingers curled inside of me between pumps, my eyes shifting to River who was staring at us from his place on the bed.

He was sitting up now and he seemed to have no issue spectating.

My pussy clenched around Smokey's fingers as my hands fisted the blankets, and I detonated when he worked faster.

I was pretty sure my curses weren't even in English.

Just as Smokey slowed, he suddenly went fast again, pushing me into another orgasm that had me begging him to stop, and I was grateful when he finally took pity on me and pulled away.

I stared up at him as I panted, his eyes softening as he hovered above me.

"So pretty at our mercy. C'mon, I'll make us all coffee now we're awake," he murmured before leaning down to kiss my lips. It wasn't rushed this time, and when he pulled away to climb out of bed, he gave River a wink. "How about you blow me to say thank you for getting your girl off?"

"How about you make me that coffee you mentioned to say thank you for letting you *touch* my girl?" River deadpanned, sliding an arm around me and pulling me on top

of him. I nuzzled into his neck, sighing contently as I got comfortable, and Smokey chuckled.

“Get your lazy butts out of bed. Pretty sure I can smell pancakes.”

“I guarantee it’s Fox trying to be a kiss-ass,” River muttered, kissing my head before patting my butt. “He’s right though, we need to get up. Storm’s probably got a job for us.”

“Light training only, no job,” Smokey said firmly as he eyed me. “Unless you want to be having injections every damn day to replenish your fucking powers.”

“Yes, *Dad*,” I huffed, a grin taking over his face.

“I can be your *Daddy* if you want, hurricane.” I flipped him off instead of responding, making him laugh. “That’s what I thought. Be in the kitchen in five minutes for coffee.”

He left the room and River ran his fingers up my spine, kissing my head again.

“That was hot watching him get you off.”

“Do you want me to repay the favor?” I offered as his firm dick pressed into me.

“Not right now. We really do need to get out of bed,” he sighed, letting me climb off him to get to my feet. “Last night was fun with the gaming. I’ve never really spent much time with the guys like that. Usually Fox and Smokey play games but I usually play alone.”

I frowned, my chest aching for him.

“You guys really don’t get along, do you?”

“Nope. It’s been nice having you here,” he smiled, following me from the room and down to the kitchen where Fox was cooking pancakes and Smokey was placing coffee on the table. Frost and Storm were nowhere to be seen so I sat in a chair and grabbed my coffee, giving Smokey an appreciative smile.

He sat beside me, not hesitating to slide his hand onto my thigh and leave it there, while River sat on my other side but

he was busy on his phone.

“Storm’s got a job lined up today. Sorry, babe, but you’re staying home alone. Maybe work on your powers here but don’t over do it,” Smokey said lightly, my heart sinking.

“Why doesn’t he want me to go? Can’t I just tag along?”

“You need to give your body a break. He said if you want to train in the gym that’s fine, but be careful. Your power supply will still be pretty low and you’ll burn through it faster than normal. Do some basic shit today and I’ll train with you tonight when we get back,” he suggested, relaxing me.

“Can we work on blocking? I suck at that and hopefully it won’t drain my powers so much.”

“Sounds like a plan,” he grinned, reaching for his coffee with his free hand.

Fox placed a plate in front of me, clearing his throat.

“Here. It’s got a bunch of added protein stuff in it.”

“No thanks,” I said and pushed it away from me, and Smokey let out a sigh, squeezing my thigh slightly.

“You’re being a bitch. Just eat them.”

“You’re on his side now?”

“There’s no sides. It’s just breakfast,” Smokey snorted, pulling the plate back towards me and grabbing the fork and knife to cut a bite sized piece, lifting it to my mouth. “Say *ah* for Daddy.”

“You’re a dick,” I growled but I opened my mouth and let him feed me, amusement filling his eyes.

“Good girl. Do it again.”

I let him feed me a few more bites before he ended up hauling me onto his lap, keeping an arm around me while feeding me. I thought River was the affectionate one but it seemed Smokey was big on it too under his asshole exterior.

River shuffled over into my seat and stole part of my pancake, making Smokey scoff.

“You want a bite too?” He held the next bite out to him and River grinned, leaning forward to eat it. Watching Smokey feed him shouldn’t have turned me on, but it did.

Fox gave me a knowing look, interest in his eyes as he watched us. I wasn’t sure if he was curious about what was happening, or the simple fact that the guys were getting along.

Both options were probably highly amusing.

Once all the pancakes were gone, Smokey checked his phone and cursed.

“Storm messaged me half an hour ago. He wants us at his place so we can get this job done.” He kissed my neck, lifting me so he could stand, then he placed me in the seat. “Stay home today and rest. Then I’ll kick your ass later.”

“Bite me, scorch. I’ll wipe the floor with you,” I taunted, tilting my chin up to silently ask for a kiss. He didn’t hesitate to drop his lips to mine, kissing the shit out of me before stepping back.

“Call me or River if you need us, okay? One of us can probably come back early.”

“Be careful,” I warned, having no idea what the job was but knowing it was probably dangerous if I wasn’t going.

“Always,” he winked, and River leaned over to give me a quick kiss too.

“You can game in my room if you get bored.”

“Thanks, puddles,” I smiled, giving him a kiss on the lips before they both wandered off to get ready to leave, and Fox gave me a curious glance.

“That’s new. You’re sleeping with both of them?”

“None of your business,” I said bluntly, getting to my feet and glaring at him as he took my hand and pulled me closer.

“I’m sorry. Last night was stupid,” he confessed, genuine regret in his eyes. “I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“You can do what you want. You and me? Not happening.” I was being a bitch despite having no right to be mad.

I froze as he lifted his palm to my cheek, his thumb stroking across my skin tenderly.

“If you don’t want me then why is this making you so mad? Admit that you like me. I want you so fucking bad, Salem. I want to worship you, to be there when River takes you for the first time so I can share that with you guys and to taste you on his lips,” he said so softly that I hardly heard it. He stepped closer so that he was against me, leaning down so that his nose brushed mine. “I want to taste *him* on your lips. I’d watch him fill your pussy with his cum, then I’d drop to my knees between your thighs and lick you clean.” He went to kiss me and I forced myself to shove him back, trying not to let him see how much he’d affected me.

“Stop using your bullshit on me!”

“I’m not. I won’t use it on you again. I want you to come to me on your own without me forcing your feelings to the surface,” he murmured, his lips lifting into a small smile. “Have a good day. Rest.”

I watched him leave the room, my heart hammering in my chest. Part of me wanted to follow and make him eat my pussy but I stood my ground. My pussy would have to wait for Smokey or River to play with it.

I spent the next few hours working out in the gym and trying to practice my powers like Storm had shown me, a grin taking over my face as I managed to hold a small ball of air in my palm for an hour without breaking a sweat.

It was now the afternoon and I was sitting on the edge of the pool, dangling my feet in the water to enjoy the sun. Footsteps approached me from behind and I went to turn but was suddenly shoved into the pool, panic consuming me as I sank. My hands clawed at the surface as I kicked my feet but I couldn’t reach the top, my lungs burning as I tried desperately to hold my breath. I pushed my hand over my mouth to give myself air but there was still water in the way and I inhaled it before I realized, choking as water flooded my mouth and went straight into my windpipe.

My limbs flailed as I tried to reach the edge but it was no use.

I was drowning.

The more I choked, the more water I swallowed, and my vision dimmed from the lack of oxygen. I couldn't tell if I was up or down, my body growing weak until I became filled with a sense of peace, everything going silent as darkness pulled me under.

Storm

I was pissed. Frost had fought me all damn morning, and by the time lunch rolled around, I was close to killing him. Smokey and River were getting along which was strange, and Fox was unusually quiet.

“I can fucking handle it. It's just one asshole with a complex! I can take him down!” Frost argued as he got in Smokey's face, making me snort.

“He's not the only one with a fucking complex. We're meant to be a team, so act like it.”

“Says the dickbag who can't stand the thought of being near the rest of us,” Frost spat, and I threw my hands up in the air.

“You want to be the leader for the day? Fine. Have at it. It's not like you assholes listen to me anyway.”

“You're not the leader! We don't have one!” Smokey growled, giving Frost a shove. “And there's no way I'm listening to ice boy.”

River hummed his agreement, and Fox rolled his eyes.

“I vote we just kill him.”

“We can't kill him, we're meant to take him back to the Board,” I sighed, and he raised an eyebrow.

“I was talking about Frost.”

“Oh, then that’s fine.” Frost glared at me but I turned and ignored him. “You fuckers have fun. I’m going to go and make sure Salem’s not overdoing it.”

“Yeah, go fuck your little girlfriend,” Frost sneered, and River scowled.

“She’s *my* fucking girlfriend. Stop being a dick.”

Fox grinned, crossing his arms. “She’s Smokey’s girl too. He’s probably got the smell of her pussy all over his fingers still.”

I was surprised by that. I figured Fox would worm his way into her bed, but not Smokey. Then again, they’d definitely bonded more since chasing dragons together and he wasn’t being such a dick anymore. It made sense that he was being nice to River too if they were rubbing balls now.

“I don’t give a shit who’s fucking her. You guys deal with this shit and I’m going. Kill each other for all I care,” I gritted out, stalking off towards home and leaving them behind.

We were only a twenty minute walk from Stardust, so I jogged and made it to the gate in just under fifteen minutes. Sparks jumped between my fingers thanks to my mood, and I tossed a lightning ball between my hands as I walked the rest of the way to the main house, letting myself inside and closing the door behind me.

It was silent, and I frowned as I checked all the rooms before heading upstairs to Salem’s bedroom, poking my head in to see if she was napping. She wasn’t there.

I headed back downstairs with a huff, not hiding the bite in my tone.

“Salem? Where the fuck are you?” She wasn’t in the gym either which was odd. “For fuck’s sake, stop being a pain in the ass. Did you drain your powers again or something?”

I stalked outside and came to an abrupt halt as I noticed something in the pool, horror filling me when I spotted the bright red in Salem’s hair as it floated through the water.

She wasn't moving and I knew Frost said she couldn't swim.

"Oh shit, no. Fuck."

I tossed my phone from my pocket as I ran towards the pool, not giving a second thought about my shoes or clothes as I dived into the cool water, wrapping my arms around her limp body and lifting her to the surface.

"Salem? Shit. Salem!" I barked when she didn't respond, and I somehow managed to haul her out of the water on my own, pure adrenaline pumping through my body. I didn't have time to call for help so I placed her on the grass and started CPR, cringing when I definitely broke one of her ribs. A broken rib would heal but I had to get her breathing again, her lips were so blue.

I had no idea how long she'd been in the pool for so for all I knew she'd been in there for hours.

"Don't you fucking die on me," I growled before dropping my mouth to hers and forcing air into her lungs, going back to compressions before giving her air again. Nothing changed, so I smacked my palms down on her chest and hit her with lightning, trying to jumpstart her heart that way. I did it again, relief filling me when I checked her neck to find a weak pulse.

I gave her one more zap before giving her mouth-to-mouth again, her body jerking as she choked and water went everywhere. She'd swallowed a lot, so I rolled her over and patted her back, allowing more to flow from her lungs.

"I've got you," I murmured, trying to assess her for other injuries but it was hard while she was covered in soaked, black clothes.

I kept hold of her while reaching out to snag my phone with my fingers, calling River. He'd be able to help clear the water easily.

"You're not missing much. His ego got bigger somehow," River drawled the second he answered.

"Get the fuck home. I just pulled Salem from the pool. She's awake now and she's coughing up water but I don't

know how to make sure it's all out," I snapped, not meaning to sound mad but she'd scared the fuck out of me.

"Was she conscious when you got there?" he demanded, and I heard Smokey ask what was going on but River ignored him.

"Pretty sure she was dead. I tried CPR but I ended up having to zap her heart a few times to get a pulse." A wet choking sound came from Salem as she tried to pull away from me. "Don't move, firecracker. You're okay."

"I'm on the way. Get her inside and get her warm and dry. Keep her awake," he warned, Smokey losing his patience.

"What the fuck happened? Is Salem okay?"

"She drowned in the pool. Storm's with her," River bit out before speaking to me again. "Can she talk?"

"She's too busy choking. Hurry up and get here," I said with frustration before hanging up, brushing her wet hair back from her face. "Salem?"

"Pushed," she forced out in a raspy breath, making me frown.

"Pushed? Wait, someone pushed you?" I glanced around the yard but we were alone, so I stayed on alert as I waited for her to stop coughing up water so I could lift her into my arms.

Her head dropped back as I carried her through the door and into the living room, not giving a shit about soaking the couch as I placed her down on it and glanced around for a blanket as I turned the heating on, making my way back to her and placing the blanket on the armrest. "I have to get those wet clothes off you. Don't punch me or anything."

She was trying to focus on me, her hand reaching for mine blindly as her lip trembled. I squatted beside her, giving her hand a squeeze.

"You're okay. River's on his way. I'll get you warm, alright?"

"K." It wasn't much, but she was responding which was a good start.

I stood back up and wrestled her soaked clothes from her body, feeling like a creeper as I tried to inspect her for more damage. She was completely naked, her eyes staying on me as I eased my arms under her to lift her again. The couch was soaked and she'd never get warm there, so I placed her on one of the other couches, draping the blanket over her and sitting on the edge beside her, not wanting to get her all wet. I couldn't leave her here while I went and got changed, so I sat there and let her cling to my hand until the guys arrived.

I wasn't surprised when Smokey bullied me out of the way and slid onto the couch behind her, drawing her against him to share his heat, and I stepped away to watch as River sat where I'd been, cupping her cheek and murmuring to her. Her eyes kept flicking back to me to make sure I was still here, and Fox spoke quietly from beside me as he walked in.

"Is she okay?" I noticed Frost didn't seem to be with them, but that was no surprise.

"I think so."

"Why was she in the pool? She can't swim," he continued, and I raked my fingers through my tangled, black hair.

"I think someone pushed her in. She's only said a couple of words, one of them being *pushed*," I explained, Smokey's eyes flashing to mine as he overheard me.

"Someone did this to her?"

"I don't know. She hasn't said much. Let her rest and we'll find out what happened later. River, do you think she got most of the water out?" I asked, and he shook his head without turning to face me.

"She still has a lot in there. She's sounding really wheezy. I can force it out but it's not going to be pleasant for her. I don't know how there's still so much. She should still be drowning." He sounded confused, so I moved closer, Salem's cold hand lifting to take mine.

I wanted to pull away but she looked so scared and weak, so I gave it a reassuring squeeze and kept hold of it as I spoke to River.

“How much are we talking?”

He finally glanced up at me, his tone wavering. “More than she physically should be able to hold. There’s like, a whole-ass gallon in there.” That didn’t make any sense.

She’d already coughed up a lot so there was no way there was that much more still inside her lungs.

“How do we get it out then?”

He blew out a breath, stroking her cheek with his fingers.

“I’m going to have to pull it out by force, which means she’s going to feel like she’s drowning again. It’s likely to come out her nose too so she’s going to freak out. Can you guys hold her to keep her still?” It pained him to ask that. I could see it written all over his face.

Smokey nodded, and Salem’s finger’s tightened in mine, her voice scratchy.

“It’s okay. You have to.” Her free hand reached for him and he took it in both his hands, his eyes going wide when she started choking up water again. Luckily River seemed to take control of the whole situation and knew what to do because right now, I was fucking hopeless.

“Keep her on her side, don’t let her up.” Smokey kept a firm grip on her as she started fighting him as she panicked, and I ended up literally sitting on her legs to stop her kicking about. Fox stood there helplessly, raking his fingers through his hair as we watched her drown all over again.

River placed a hand on Salem’s chest, closing his eyes for a moment before wincing.

“Here goes nothing.” He moved back and held a hand out, squeezing it into a fist before pushing his other hand straight out in front of him. I’d seen him do that with his own water before, it was forceful and hurt like a bitch when it hit you, but I’d never seen him do it to a person before to draw water out.

An awful sound left Salem as water flew from her mouth, tears leaking from her eyes as she clawed at her throat. She

gurgled out a scream as Smokey held her tighter, and I realized he was pressing into her ribs.

“Careful, I broke ribs when I did CPR.”

“You broke her fucking ribs?” Smokey snarled, earning a glare from me.

“Broken ribs are better than being dead. She’ll heal by morning.”

Fox couldn’t watch from afar any longer and he walked closer to stroke her hair, his voice soothing. “Almost done, babe. You’re doing good.”

River’s hands dropped as the last of the water left her, sobs wracking her body as she choked on air, and he immediately leaned forward to hold her, whispering in her ear.

I climbed off her legs to give her some space, needing some myself.

“I’m going to get changed.”

The guys didn’t reply but I felt Salem’s eyes on me as I left the room, and I couldn’t help but wonder what the fuck had actually happened. If someone had attacked her, who?

And how the hell had she inhaled that much water?

CHAPTER TWELVE

SALEM

I didn't see Storm again that afternoon. I thought maybe he'd gone home but Fox said he was in his bedroom. River and Smokey wouldn't leave me alone and for the first few hours I appreciated it, but I was slowly losing my patience as I climbed out of bed to pee, only to find them both following me to the bathroom.

"No. You're not watching me piss."

River hesitated but Smokey crossed his arms stubbornly.

"Why not? It's just piss. Everyone does it. You shouldn't be alone."

"Personal space, scorch."

"If someone attacked you—"

"No one's going to get to me while I'm on the toilet. Both of you can go and occupy yourselves for a while because you're giving me a headache," I snapped, stepping into the bathroom and slamming the door. "You'd better not be in my room when I'm done!"

I didn't think they'd listen, so I was relieved to find my room empty when I walked back in, and I poked my head out into the hallway to make sure they weren't lingering by the door. There was no one around, so I quietly made my way past River's bedroom and knocked lightly on Storm's, letting myself in when he grunted in response.

He was lying on his back on the bed in nothing but his boxers, and it was strange to see him without eyeliner. He'd

showered, I could smell his body wash, and his hair was still slightly damp.

He ran his eyes over me before meeting my gaze.

“Shouldn’t you be in bed?”

“I’m bored and the guys are driving me insane. I wanted to thank you.” I closed the door to give us privacy. “Next time let me die though because I can’t take Smokey and River’s smothering anymore.”

His lips kicked up into a smirk, finding my joke amusing.

“Don’t say that too loud, River will freak out.” He swung his legs off the bed and stood, my eyes dropping to his abs as they flexed with the movement. “You were literally dead five hours ago, so don’t look at me like that. I’ll hurt you if I do what your eyes are asking of me.”

“What are they asking you?” I murmured as I looked up at his face, lifting my hand with every intention of touching the scar on his cheek but thinking better of it a second later. He tracked the movement, stepping closer until I had to crane my neck to look up at him.

“They’re asking me to fuck you and put all those broken pieces of you back together, but I don’t fix pretty things, Salem. I fucking break them.”

“You can’t break me,” I said softly, not missing the amusement in his dark eyes.

“I’d have fun trying.” His abs bunched as I pressed my palms to his stomach, the heat radiating from him and drawing me closer. “You’re asking for trouble.” I lifted one of my hands again, pausing when he flinched, but he relaxed after a moment and let me touch his face, my fingers brushing across the scar. He leaned into it but he kept his hands by his sides, not touching me back as he spoke again. “I shouldn’t, but I like it when you touch me.”

“You do?” I got a thrill out of that, knowing I was probably one of the only people that he’d said that to. I moved my hand to his hair, massaging his scalp and loving how he closed his eyes.

“I do, but I can’t.” He opened them and grabbed my wrist, pulling it away. “My brother doesn’t trust you and he’s rarely wrong. I can’t let you in. I’m sorry.”

“Your brother?” I stepped back, not hiding the surprise from my face as he answered.

“Frost. You didn’t know he’s my brother?”

“That explains a few things,” I mumbled, his eyes narrowing.

“Like what?”

“Your grumpy-ass attitudes match,” I deadpanned, but apparently he was over playing nice. His mood swings were so hard to see coming.

He shoved me back against the door, all softness gone from his eyes as he stared into my fucking soul.

“Why don’t you stop playing games with him and just tell me what you did to deserve his wrath? He claimed you tried to kill him but won’t elaborate, so start talking. You want to earn our trust? Prove it.”

“I honestly don’t know!” I wheezed as he pushed his forearm against my throat. “I really don’t! I don’t fucking know him!” My lungs and ribs were aching thanks to the trauma they’d endured already, but he didn’t care.

“This is why I won’t let you in,” he said in a low voice, frustration flickering across his face. “Keep your secrets, but don’t be upset when they sink you. Talk to Frost if you need a fucking reminder on what happened. Get out.”

“Storm, please—” I didn’t want him to shut me out again. Mainly because he’d just saved my life and I was feeling a little emotional about it, but also because *maybe* he could’ve helped me figure out this shit with Frost without a fight breaking out.

Storm grabbed the back of my neck and yanked me off the door, opening it and shoving me out into the hallway.

“River! Put your bitch on a leash and keep her out of my room!” I heard someone curse from downstairs just before

footsteps thudded up the stairs, and I gave Storm a pleading look that made him snort. “If you want to get laid so badly, find Smokey. I don’t fuck desperate girls.”

I had two seconds to register the lightning sparking in his hand before he threw it at me, and I clenched my teeth and collapsed as electricity moved through my body painfully. He slammed the door and locked it, leaving me twitching on the floor like a fish out of water.

It burned, and I couldn’t move thanks to my joints seizing up.

“I’m starting to think you like getting hurt,” Smokey muttered as he helped me to my feet, keeping his arm around me as River joined us. “Why’d you go and bother him?”

“I wanted to thank him for today,” I huffed, pressing my hand to my aching chest. “I didn’t know he’d be such a dick!” I said loudly enough for Storm to hear, and I smiled slightly as something hit the door from inside, telling me he’d heard me.

“Yeah, you have a death wish,” Smokey sighed, pushing me towards River as my legs thankfully worked. “Make her get back in bed.”

River looked horrified, his eyes going wide.

“*Make her?* Have you tried to make her do anything before? I’m going to get killed.”

“Just toss her in bed and eat her pussy. I doubt she’ll get out if you do that,” Smokey chuckled, giving me the side-eye. “I’ll find you a coffee if you behave.”

“Eat my ass, how about that?” I scoffed, a dangerous smile taking over his face.

“Spread those cheeks then, hurricane. You think I’m afraid of shoving my tongue in your ass?”

“You’re gross.”

“Absolutely filthy,” he confirmed with a smoldering look, steering me towards my bedroom since River didn’t move to do it. “Be a good girl and get in bed.”

I dug my heels in, not hiding my irritation. “I’m fucking bored in there. Can’t we at least hang out in the kitchen or something?”

“No.”

“The couch?” I huffed, his eyes running over me for a moment before he sighed.

“Deal. If you lay around on the couch all night I suppose that’s fine. I’ll get Fox to make you something to eat.” I didn’t want Fox doing shit for me, but most of my anger towards him had died down. He’d honestly done nothing wrong.

It wasn’t like I could claim all of them anyway.

River helped me downstairs while Smokey wandered off to find Fox, and I crawled onto River’s lap to straddle him once we were on the couch. I threaded my arms around his shoulders, giving him a quick kiss on the lips.

“Stop stressing, you’ll get wrinkles.”

His brow creased and he took my face in his hands.

“Baby, you fucking died today. I think I’m allowed to be stressed. Not only that, but someone pushed you.”

I couldn’t remember much other than hearing someone approached me just before I ended up in the water. We’d discussed possibilities but we had no idea who’d done it, but we guessed they knew I couldn’t swim or why had they done it and run?

My first thought was Frost, but he’d been with the guys so that wasn’t it.

“I don’t know anyone here so why would they try to kill me?” I murmured, trying to figure it out but coming up with nothing. “Do you know anyone around here that’s a murderous psycho?”

“Only the ones under this roof, and they were all accounted for,” he replied dryly, dropping his hands to my waist. His fingers slipped under my shirt to stroke my skin as he thought, but it seemed impossible for him to figure out too.

“You haven’t met anyone else? Even someone that seemed nice?”

“No. Could it be a random attack? Someone from outside of Stardust might have snuck in? You know how the world hates anyone with magic,” I offered, but he didn’t look convinced.

“There’s a lot of security here. It’s doubtful.”

“Maybe some of it isn’t working. They haven’t repaired everything from the dragons yet.”

“I can tell you right now, security would’ve been their top priority. You don’t remember anything about the person who attacked you?”

“I didn’t see them, I don’t think.”

“I might have an answer for you,” Frost said coldly, and I glanced over to the kitchen doorway to see him standing there with a scowl on his face. “I checked the cameras like you idiots should’ve done, but you didn’t want that to happen, did you?”

“What are you talking about?” I said slowly, a dark laugh leaving him.

“Your little friend was here. You set it up to make everyone pity you.”

“She was fucking dead, Frost. She didn’t fake it,” River grunted as his hands tightened on my waist.

Frost rolled his eyes and moved towards us, pulling up part of the security video on his phone. I watched it with a frown as the man snuck up behind me and shoved me into the pool, a vague memory flashing in my mind before it vanished.

I’d met them before but I had no idea where.

“Give me that,” I said quickly as I snatched his phone, playing it again before pausing as the man looked at the camera, zooming in on his face.

“Do you know him?” River asked hopefully, and Frost scoffed.

“That’s her boyfriend. Well, he was when she left me for fucking dead.” His words were bitter, and I glanced up at his face to see just how serious he was. He definitely wasn’t making this up, which meant Storm was right. I needed to talk to Frost about our history.

“I honestly don’t remember anything, Frost. Tell me everything so I understand. I’m not playing a game with you, I swear. I have no idea who you are or who this man is. If you know things that can help me, tell me,” I begged, and I was surprised when he didn’t stomp off in a huff like he usually did.

His crystal eyes watched me silently for a second before he spoke, his voice low.

“River, get out.”

“If you think I’m leaving her alone with you, you’re crazy,” River stated but Frost gave him a dirty look.

“I’m not talking to her with a fucking audience. You assholes don’t need to hear shit.”

I didn’t want him to leave me hanging so I got to my feet and kissed River’s cheek.

“I’ll be fine. He’s not trying to kill me, he’s talking.” That made Frost snort.

“I didn’t promise that, but sure.”

River looked conflicted for a moment before standing with a nod.

“Fine, but don’t touch her. I mean it, Frost. Be nice just this once. She really doesn’t know anything so if what you’re saying is true, it might help to stick together to figure it all out.”

He left us alone, and Frost’s cool eyes met mine again, so many emotions swirling inside them. Pain, hate, sadness. Love? That didn’t make sense.

“We were best friends as kids. You lived next door to me and we spent every damn day together,” he started, his expression softening slightly as if he didn’t mind me seeing it

now all the guys couldn't witness it. "We were twelve when we started dating. Even then, you were really fucking convincing that you loved me."

"Wait, we dated?" That didn't make sense either. I hated everything about him so why would I have ever dated him?

He knew I didn't believe him, so he flicked through something on his phone before holding up a photo, my heart hammering as I took it in my hands. That was definitely me as a kid, a wide smile on my face as I held hands with a boy with icy blue eyes and white hair.

A small memory hit me and all I could see was Frost holding me tightly in a bed, murmuring sweet nothings to me.

"Do you remember now?" he asked sarcastically, snatching the phone back but keeping the screen facing me, flicking through photo after photo of us as kids. "You can't keep playing the guys when I have proof right here that you're full of shit. Is that you?"

"Yes but—"

"So why do you keep fucking lying? Admit it, you know exactly who I am and what you did!" he snarled, grabbing my throat to haul me closer. "Say it, Salem."

My emotions were running wild as I tried hard to make sense of everything, tears burning my eyes as I took the phone back and continued looking through the photos. There were hundreds, memories filling his phone that I had no recollection of. We hadn't met in passing, we'd spent *years* together.

"This doesn't make sense," I choked out, my hands shaking as I kept looking, the last one not seeming like that long ago. I pressed on the detail option, more confusion hitting me as the date stamp stared back at me. It was just before my seventeenth birthday. Nine years ago. "Tell me more. Did we go on dates? Have common interests? What did my parents think about it all? I remember my childhood as me being locked in the house all the time and not being allowed out. They were ashamed of me since I was born with powers. They said I was dangerous and lost control all the time."

For the first time since I'd arrived at Stardust, Frost looked at me with something that resembled pity.

"You really don't remember? Salem, we spent fifteen years together. Every day without fail."

"I tried to kill you? Wouldn't Storm remember me too then?" I searched his eyes for answers, betrayal seeping out of him in waves.

"I woke up to you stabbing me. You fucking laughed when I begged you for answers, and you know what you said? You'd been playing me. You hated me. You wanted me dead. You kept stabbing me until I blacked out and I don't know shit after that other than I found out you were part of some organization that assassinates people. Your little boyfriend who pushed you in the pool is part of it too, and you ran straight to him after you thought you'd gotten rid of me. You're a trained killer and you can't lie to us and say otherwise. I didn't know Storm existed until I came here after what you did to me." His voice cracked and I absently reached for his hand, not realizing I'd done it until he jerked back. He flicked through more photos without taking the phone from me, managing to draw out more of his anger. "See what you did to me? I was covered in blood. Multiple stab wounds. I was in the hospital for weeks because of you. Your knife had some kind of magical poison on it that refused to let me heal."

Images of Frost laying in a hospital bed flashed across the screen, and I gasped as one popped up of him the day it happened. His chest was soaked in blood, his hospital bed sheets too, and I pressed my hand to my mouth as if to stop more noise from coming out. It didn't work though as a sob tore through me, and I shoved the phone into his hands and got to my feet.

He'd been right all along so why couldn't I remember it?

I was freaking the fuck out, snippets of memories flashing in my mind of his face as I tried to catch my breath. A cold room, nothing but each other, and then his blood. So much fucking blood. Did I really hurt him? The memory was fuzzy.

I reached blindly for something to brace myself, my hands landing on a solid chest as someone caught me before my legs could give out. A familiar scent hit me and I buried my face in their chest, but I pulled away suddenly as it brought forward another image of me curled up in a bed with Frost, my face buried in his neck as he thrust into me.

Frost was staring at me now, but all forms of kindness left his eyes as they suddenly narrowed and he shoved me back further, standing over me as I landed on my ass.

“You almost fucking had me. You really are a professional snake.”

The images playing in my mind were tender, not rushed as he made love to me.

“Frost, please—” I eyed his hands as ice formed in them, but I didn’t move. I couldn’t.

I was paralyzed from a past that I hadn’t known existed.

“I fucking loved you, Salem. I would’ve jumped in front of a bullet for you, but I didn’t realize you’d be the one holding the gun,” he hissed, taking a step closer.

“Frost,” Storm said flatly from the doorway, stopping Frost’s attack. “Come with me.”

Anger lined his voice and I wasn’t surprised to look towards him to see his hateful eyes on me. He’d heard most of it apparently, and he’d picked a side to believe in.

I couldn’t blame him, Frost had some damning evidence against me.

Frost stalked off without a backwards glance, and Storm shook his head at me with disgust.

“That’s why I’ll never let you in. A person who believes their own lies is dangerous, and it’s obvious you’ll keep playing dumb despite the proof being right in front of us. I think it’s best that you leave. I don’t give a fuck if it messes up your powers.”

He walked after his brother, leaving me to cry on the floor, and since no one else came to check on me, I knew they all

thought I was full of shit too.

River

My heart was breaking. Part of me wanted to believe Salem but it was difficult after what we'd all just heard. She was crying but she didn't deny anything, which instantly meant it was true.

Frost had been right this whole time, she'd been deceiving us.

We'd walked past her in the living room to get upstairs, and her broken eyes had been glued to me, begging me not to walk away from her, but I did. I walked right past without a word.

"I'm going to fucking kill her," Smokey seethed as he paced back and forth in my room, Fox eyeing us skeptically.

"I think she's telling the truth. She doesn't remember," he stated, and as much as I wanted to believe it, Smokey shut it down fast.

"She's twisted her way into our lives, she's manipulated you into thinking she's sweet but she's not. She's a manipulative piece of shit. Stop thinking with your dick."

"I'm not, I'm using my brain. Someone just drowned her in the fucking pool, she can't fake her death. Storm had to jumpstart her heart again," he said calmly, his eyes landing on mine. "Are you going to believe Frost or your girl?"

Smokey didn't hesitate to smack him in the face with his fist.

"Don't put that shit on him! You'll guilt him into feeling sorry for her!"

I already felt sorry for her. She was a mess, and everything inside of me was screaming for her. The only thing stopping me was the fact that I wasn't sure if I could believe her or not. No one ever chose me over the other guys, so had she just selected me because I was so trusting and easy to manipulate?

I'd almost given her my virginity. Would she sink that low to use me like that?

"What if Frost is right and she's just been playing with me? It would explain why she got close to me and not one of you guys," I finally said, making Fox snort.

"Why is it so hard for you to believe that someone could want you? You're fucking hot and you're really nice, you idiot. Not all girls just want to find someone to fuck, they love affection and little thoughtful things. You've been sweet with Salem since day one so of course she'd want you."

"You're just saying that to make him feel better. It's your charming bullshit to defuse the situation," Smokey muttered. I went to agree but Fox pinned me with a glare.

"Believe what you want, but I was just as excited about getting you naked as I am with Salem. You know what? Fuck you guys. I don't even know why I'm in here with you when I could be with her. That girl is breaking right now because her life's been one big lie, and she needs someone to believe her." He turned and walked out, slamming the door behind him and leaving me with Smokey who clapped me on the shoulder in a bro hug.

"Don't listen to him. She fucked with us so don't feel bad. You and me? We're going to the bar." That was the *last* thing I wanted to do but I knew if I stayed here alone that I'd end up in her room begging for answers. She'd only lie to me and suck me right back in again.

I gave him a nod, letting out a sigh.

"Okay. Maybe we can hang at Storm's tonight?" I couldn't come back here drunk. I'd have zero control over myself. "I think we should all talk about this."

"Good idea. I assume Frost is already staying there since they left together. C'mon, fuck that bitch. Let's have a good night, okay?"

"Sounds like a plan," I smiled, but it was fake. All I could think about was the shattered heart in my chest as Smokey dragged me from the room, Salem's sobs reaching my ears. It

was agony, her pain tearing through me as we walked down the stairs. I could hear Fox trying to console her but it didn't seem to be helping, she was hysterical.

“Puddles, please,” she cried when I reached the bottom of the stairs, and Smokey dropped an arm around my shoulders to keep me beside him. My mouth went dry and my throat tightened, leaving me speechless. He walked me right past without acknowledging her, and I squeezed my eyes shut as a loud sob left her.

I wanted to stop her pain even though she'd hurt me. I couldn't stand it.

“Keep walking,” Smokey murmured, knowing my thoughts. “She was probably planning on killing you in your sleep too.”

Salem wouldn't hurt someone like that, surely, but if Frost had proof, then I wanted to see it.

We walked silently along the quiet streets, and I wasn't surprised to find Frost and Storm at the bar when we arrived. Storm's eyes were firmly on Frost as if trying to get inside his head, but Frost was tense, the beer in his hand somehow coping with the grip he had on it.

Storm finally slid his eyes to us and I saw the flicker of surprise at seeing me. He probably assumed I'd crawl back to her which I would've done without Smokey.

“I want to see proof,” I said calmly as I sat in the barstool beside Frost, and he didn't even look at me as he absently slid his phone across the bar to me.

“Have at it. I fucking told you, and none of you believed me. She's a damn good actor. I should've just shown you guys this shit the day she showed up here, but you know I hate people knowing my business.”

I picked it up and flicked through the photos he'd left open, my heart sinking the more I looked. There were so many, and there was no mistaking the little girl as Salem. Even without all that gothic shit, it still looked like her.

Smokey peered over my shoulder, his frustration coming out in waves.

“She needs to go.”

“It’s not that simple,” Frost bit out, snatching the phone back when he remembered I was looking through something so personal of his. “She can’t just leave Stardust.”

“We kill her then,” Storm shrugged and panic consumed me. I was mad and hurt, but I didn’t want her dead. “But if she leaves, it will only fuck with her powers, not ours since we have each other. I say let her go and fate can deal with her.”

Smokey ordered us a beer each before speaking, his voice gentle.

“I’m sorry. I know you really liked her.”

I fucking loved her but I wasn’t going to admit that out loud and look like an idiot, so I gave him a small smile.

“You did too.”

“She’s just another pussy to me,” he said flatly but he was so full of shit, I could see it written all over his face. His heart was breaking too.

“Let’s get drunk then go back to Storm’s. We need a plan,” Frost grunted, making Storm sigh.

“Fine, but you’re all bunking in together because I’m not sharing my bed.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SALEM

Watching River and Smokey walk out without a word tore what was left of my heart apart. This was why I didn't get close to anyone. They always left, but it seemed it was my fault this time.

Fox was speaking quietly but I couldn't hear him over my sobbing, his arms tightly around me as I curled into myself on the floor. I was suddenly lifted into his arms and he let me cry as he carried me upstairs, managing to open my bedroom door without putting me down. I had no idea why he was being nice to me, but I accepted his kindness without argument.

My body was aching and I just wished the day would be over. Between dying and finding out I had a history that I knew nothing about, my heart couldn't take any more curve balls.

"They're so fucking stupid," Fox muttered to himself as he placed me on the bed, sliding beside me to keep me close. I clung to him, soaking in all the comfort he'd give me, and I was relieved when he spoke quietly, calming some of the raging emotions inside of me. "We'll figure this out. There's no way you're faking this, I believe you."

"It was me in all those photos but I don't remember any of it happening," I choked out, his lips pressing against my forehead.

"I know. Something weird is going on. I'm not going anywhere, okay? You need to calm down so we can figure it out."

It was easier said than done, but after thirty minutes, I seemed to have gotten some kind of control over myself.

“I keep getting little snippets of memories but they’re vague. I don’t remember any of them actually happening,” I explained without moving from his hold on me, my cheek against his chest. “The guy who pushed me in the pool is definitely familiar.”

“I’ll pull the footage myself and we can run through it. We can do some digging,” he offered. “Can you get hold of your parents?”

“No. I have no idea where they are now and I don’t have contact details for them. What if they’re not even my real parents? The ones I remember would’ve never let me play with Frost. They kept me locked up out of embarrassment.”

“I have someone we might be able to ask, but then they’ll know all your personal shit too,” he warned, and I sat up quickly with hope.

“I don’t care, I want to find out. How can they help?”

“Their power is being able to slip into people’s minds. If someone’s wiped your memory and filled it with fake ones, they’ll be able to tell. I’ll call them in the morning and see if they’re willing to help,” he promised. “Get some sleep, okay? I’ll see you in the morning.”

I didn’t want him to leave me. What if he changed his mind and ran off to the others?

I grabbed his wrist to stop him from getting up.

“Stay with me. Please.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. I know River will come running back once he’s thought about it and—”

“Fuck River. He said he’d always believe me but it’s obvious that was bullshit. You did though,” I said sharply, my mouth tugging into a frown. “I can’t believe he didn’t.” Smokey was always going to stand beside Frost and Storm, but River was different. “Did you just stay behind so you could finally get me alone?”

“Babe, I’m not the type to take advantage. You have a lot to process and I have zero intention on making things worse by getting you naked,” he sighed, pulling me close again. “The last thing you want right now is my cocky bullshit.” I’d do almost anything for that cocky bullshit. At least if he was trying to fuck me, I could forget about all the other crap from the day. It would be a petty way to say *fuck you* to River and Smokey too. I thought about it for a moment before lifting my eyes to his, conflict flashing across his face. “Salem, bad idea.”

“You don’t even know what I’m thinking about.”

“No? You’re thinking that my dick would be a good distraction. Not happening. You might like the idea now but you’ll hate me later for letting you do that to yourself,” he said firmly. “You know what you need? A hot bath. You can relax for a while so it helps you sleep.” I preferred my idea. At least mine came with a side of orgasms. “I’ll run the bath for you.”

I let him have his way, eyeing him as he untangled himself from me and wandered into my bathroom. The water started running and he walked back into the room as the bath filled, claiming he needed to get something from his bedroom.

I panicked until he came back with a bag of stuff, but I didn’t question what it was. If he had fancy bath bubbles or scents, I was all for it.

I blew out a breath and waited until the taps turned off before I climbed out of bed and found some fresh sleep shorts and a tank top, wandering in and halting in the doorway. The room was lit with the glow of candles, the room smelling like citrus and melons. The bath was filled with bubbles, and there was a huge fluffy towel folded on the sink.

“What’s all this?”

He smirked, moving towards me and ruffling my hair.

“It’s called relaxing. You should try it more. Now, I don’t want to see you for at least thirty minutes. Don’t get out until the water’s going cold.”

“I’ll turn into a prune.”

“A happy, *relaxed* prune,” he pointed out, patting my shoulder on his way out the door. “I’ll wait in your room. Take your time.” He shut the door and I placed my fresh clothes on the sink with the towel, staring at the bath. Last time I’d been in it, Frost had turned me into a fucking ice block.

I stripped off my clothes and eased into the steaming water, a sigh leaving my lips as I sank down to my chin. I jerked as I slipped a little lower and panic filled me at the thought of going under, causing water to slosh over the edges loudly.

“Are you okay?” Fox called, and I mentally scolded myself for being stupid. I wasn’t going to drown in the damn bath.

“I’m fine, just slipped,” I replied, closing my eyes and trying to enjoy the calm surrounding me. It didn’t work. The silence gave me time to think, and within ten minutes I was more tense than I had been when I’d gotten in.

I tried to stay in there for five more minutes, but then I gave up and got out, wrapping the towel around myself before pulling the plug, ignoring Fox as he asked why I was out of the bath already.

I brushed my teeth and splashed cool water on my face before opening the door to find Fox sitting against the headboard with a flat look on his face.

“That wasn’t even fifteen minutes. I told you thirty.”

“It’s making me more tense. I need a distraction, not time to overthink,” I said firmly, his eyes going wide as I dropped the towel. “Distract me.”

His eyes roamed my naked body for two seconds before he forced them to my face.

“I don’t want you to hate me, but you will. You’ll wake up tomorrow and blame me for seducing you when you’re in an emotional state. You’re gorgeous and you know I want to fuck you, but I don’t want to lose you as a result.”

“You won’t lose me and this is my idea, not yours. I can’t blame you when I’m the one begging,” I huffed, crossing my

arms.

“You won’t see it like that tomorrow,” he answered softly, eyeing me as I made my way towards him.

“I need this. Please.” I never thought I’d be begging someone for sex but I knew all his talk about rocking my world was true. He’d fuck me until I passed out, and I needed that.

I raked my fingers through his hair as I dropped my mouth to his, and he didn’t move for what felt like forever until his lips finally opened for me and his hands went to my waist to pull me onto his lap. He pushed his tongue into my mouth and wrapped an arm around my lower back to hold me closer, my body vibrating with anticipation.

Nerves kicked in as he leaned forward without breaking the kiss, dropping me onto my back. I wasn’t shy in the bedroom but I was out of practice. Fox would’ve seen hundreds of women naked, and that intimidated me. He moved so confidently that it was obvious he’d done this a million times before.

He pulled back to hold my gaze, his voice strained.

“Are you sure?”

“I really want it.”

“Don’t move,” he said as if it pained him, climbing off me and making me scramble to sit instead.

“Where are you going?”

“Condoms are in my room.” He halted before turning around and scooping me up. “On second thought, it’s faster if you just come with me.”

He carried me naked across the hall to his room, kicking the door shut behind us before tossing me down on the bed. I went to speak but he climbed over me and kissed my lips again, a needy whine leaving me as his fingers brushed my clit. My hips lifted to chase his touch as my hands went to his hair to thread through the soft strands, and I cried out as he

pushed two fingers inside me, his breath shaking as if he was holding himself back.

“Jesus, Salem. You feel so good.” He kissed down my body slowly, taking his time to trail his lips down my stomach and across my hips. I squirmed, attempting to hurry him along, but he simply chuckled and went even slower before finally running his tongue around my clit. He was lucky one of his arms was banded across my stomach to hold me down, or I would’ve bucked right off the damn bed.

His fingers pumped in and out as he alternated between licking and sucking, his pinky teasing my ass as if testing my reaction. I pushed into his hand more to encourage him, my legs shaking as he eased it in and rolled his tongue at a different angle until I came.

I squirted a little which only seemed to drive him more wild.

He growled out a curse, fucking me harder with his fingers and making me see stars as he continued toying with my clit, my hands fisting the blankets as my orgasm rolled into a second one.

I was a sobbing fucking mess by the time he took pity on me and stopped, climbing up my body with a smirk.

“Do you tap out?”

“There’s more?” I joked tiredly, sliding a hand down his front until I reached his pants, dipping my hand inside to stroke him. He tolerated it for all of five seconds before moving off me to get naked, snatching a condom from the drawer in the process.

Of course he had a good looking dick.

It was long, thick, and he had the perfect amount of pubic hair.

“Do you want lube?” he asked as he rolled the condom on, his eyes on mine.

“If you think it’s not wet enough, just spit on it. Hurry up,” I groaned, making him chuckle.

“Trust me, you’re wet enough. You’re literally lying in a fucking puddle right now.”

“Then why’d you ask?”

“I’m polite and like to offer options.” He crawled over me and I yanked his mouth down to mine, a groan leaving him as he dragged the head of his dick up and down my pussy a few times before starting to push inside. I lifted my hips to make him push in faster, and I whimpered when he was finally all the way in, easing in and out of me slowly.

I felt so damn full.

“You take me so good,” he murmured, and I was pretty sure I was going to melt into a puddle.

I expected him to be wild and rushed but he took his time, making sure I was warmed up before picking up the pace. My legs wrapped tightly around him and I moaned as he thrust harder, biting into his neck to silence myself. I couldn’t help the loud curse that left me though as he changed angles, and my body started tingling with an impending release.

“Fuck. Again?”

“Gotta make up for all those other idiots who didn’t give you any,” he said slyly into my neck before sucking on my skin just below my ear, my back arching as if to buck him off. It was too much, too intense, and I came so hard I squirted again.

It was getting embarrassing.

“That’s so fucking hot,” he groaned as if sensing my worry, kissing me and scrambling my brain even more. It should’ve been illegal to have this much skill in the bedroom. No wonder girls put up with his cocky attitude. He fucking earned it. “You want me to fill you with my cum, baby?”

I definitely had a thing for dirty talk. I knew he had a condom on but the thought of him spilling into me and leaking back out was insanely hot.

“Please,” I begged, squirming as he started pulling another fucking orgasm from me. “Oh, fuck. Fox—”

“Come all over my cock. I want to feel you squeezing around me as I come,” he ordered, his tone going straight to my damn pussy. I tried to fight it but it was no use, my muscles locking tight as I detonated again with a scream. He slammed into me, chasing his own release, and he mumbled curses as he finished, his sweaty body laying over mine.

“Jesus, Salem.” I tightened my pussy muscles around him as he jerked inside me, and he let out a huff of amusement. “You can’t honestly want more.”

“What if I do?” I was joking but he peered down at me with a smirk.

“My weapon is sex and seduction, so be careful what you wish for. If you think I need recovery time, you’re in for a nasty surprise when I give you ten more orgasms and put you into a sex-coma.”

“Thank you for staying with me,” I answered instead, his face softening.

“This isn’t why I stayed, but you’re welcome.” He pulled out and disposed of the condom in the bathroom before joining me again, pulling the blanket back to reveal the huge wet spot under me. “Did you know you could do that?”

“Yes, but it’s never been with company before,” I cringed. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. It’s a compliment to my skills,” he said as he waggled his eyebrows, reaching for me to pull me to my feet. “I’ll fix this, you clean yourself up. You can use my shower if you want.”

“Thank you,” I murmured, slipping into the bathroom.

My entire body was relaxed and I was surprised my legs worked.

I felt bad about soaking his bed though.

Fox

I hated having to clean up the evidence of our fun together. I wanted to leave it there as proof. I wasn't sure sleeping in a puddle would be pleasant though, so I pulled the sheet and the soft mattress protector off, tossing them in the corner to wash in the morning. I was surprised it hadn't soaked through to the damn mattress.

I heard the water start and I smiled at the thought of her in my bathroom. I'd had zero plans on getting her naked tonight, but I wasn't exactly mad about the outcome. I was glad I'd been able to take her mind off things, even if I was a little worried about her freaking out in the morning, but I wasn't going to let her run from me.

Not now that I'd had her fucking pussy clamping down on my cock.

I remade the bed with fresh sheets and climbed in, checking my phone as I waited for Salem to join me. There were multiple messages from girls that I ignored, annoyance washing through me as I found one from River.

River: Is she okay?

Fox: None of your fucking business, dick.

River: Please. Just tell me she's okay.

Fox: You're such a weak piece of shit. You only left because your new boyfriend told you to. You should've stayed. To answer your question, she's fine. I fucked your name right out of her memory.

He didn't reply for a few minutes, and I thought he'd given up until he finally replied.

River: I deserved that.

Fox: Yes, you fucking did.

I turned my phone off and tossed it into my bedside drawer, my eyes flicking to the bathroom door as Salem wandered in completely naked. She was stunning, and I loved that she wasn't ashamed to expose herself to me. Lots of girls

turned shy after sex as if I hadn't just had my dick slamming into them, but Salem wandered towards me and slid into bed, draping herself over me like the goddess that she was.

“You have the best towels.”

“You can steal them whenever you want,” I grinned, palming her ass to pull her on top of me more. My dick pressed against her pussy but I didn't try to convince her to fuck me again. A lot of people assumed I only cared about sex, but seduction wasn't just about banging, it was the romantic shit that came along with it. I loved cuddling, and I really enjoyed planning dates and sweet stuff. If a woman was going to let me be intimate with her, I wanted them to know how grateful I was because no one was obligated to fuck me.

Sex was special, bodies becoming one in a beautiful dance, and I appreciated that.

I'd never fuck another pussy in my life though if Salem was in my bed, because she was more than a dance of pleasure but a soul I wanted to intertwine with mine. Sure, at first I'd just wanted to fuck her because she was hot, but the more time I spent near her, the more I wanted to let her consume me.

“You're so fucking beautiful.”

She gave me a weird look as a nervous laugh left her, a tinge of pink coating her cheeks.

“Thanks.”

“I mean it. If I could look at one woman for the rest of my damn life, it would be you.”

“You don't have to charm me, Fox. You already got into my panties.”

She obviously didn't believe me. I hated that she didn't know how stunning she was.

I brushed her hair back from her face, my voice soft.

“I'm not trying to charm you. Get some sleep, it's really late.” She went to slide off me but I tightened my hold on her. “Stay here. I like this.”

“Me too,” she whispered, snuggling into me more, and I wasn’t surprised when she fell asleep within minutes, her body so exhausted that she physically couldn’t stay awake any longer.

I listened to her calm breathing for what felt like hours before falling asleep myself, hoping she didn’t sneak out on me when reality came crashing through her and made her realize what she’d done.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SALEM

Pain rippled through me as someone held me down on the floor, a masked man standing over me.

“Again!”

“No! It hurts him!” I cried out, but they didn’t care. They slapped me and I fell forward, my eyes lifting to familiar icy blue eyes of a little boy in front of me who was cowering in the corner.

“It’s okay, breeze. I can take it.” He sounded so fucking scared.

“It hurts you!” I was crying, my tears falling on the floor, and he gave me the most beautifully broken smile.

“Let me hurt so you don’t have to.”

I jerked awake from my dream and strong arms wrapped around me, Fox’s voice trying to soothe me.

“It’s just a nightmare, you’re okay.” My face was wet with tears and my heart was hammering in my chest, my eyes finally zoning in on Fox’s gentle gaze. “There you are. I’ve got you.”

“He was so scared,” I choked out, making him frown.

“Who?”

“I hurt him. He was just a kid. I need air,” I blurted out as I struggled to get out of his hold.

“Salem, calm down and talk to me.”

“Let me go!” I shouted, his arms releasing me instantly. I scrambled from the bed and down the hall, racing outside into the yard and tripping. My knees hit the ground hard, my fingers curling in the grass as if it grounded me. Frost hadn’t looked older than ten years old, but his eyes showed a lifetime of pain, and I squeezed my eyes shut as if to block it out.

They haunted me, those crystal eyes boring into me and searing my insides.

“What the fuck is she doing?” It sounded like Storm but I couldn’t be sure.

I lifted my head to find the guys all sitting around the table by the pool, my chest burning as I looked at Frost. He looked just as pissed off as he had the day before, and he obviously hadn’t calmed overnight.

Soft material dropped over my back, Fox’s voice right behind me.

“C’mon, back inside.”

“No, I—”

“Babe, you’re naked. Come back in the house,” he said softly, realization dawning on me that I was in fact exposing myself to everyone and he’d tried to cover me with a blanket. “It was just a nightmare, you’re okay.”

I shook my head, grabbing the edges of the blanket to wrap it around myself better.

“It wasn’t a dream. I think it was a memory.”

“You’re really convincing, you know?” Frost snorted, his cool gaze raking over me with disgust. “Now that your secrets are all over the place, you coincidentally start getting your memories back? Well played, Salem.”

“She’s not faking that,” River said, sounding surprised. Smokey muttered something about him being an idiot but Fox lost his damn mind, getting to his feet.

“Don’t act like you give a fuck now! You were her boyfriend, and that meant you were supposed to stand by her! What, now that Smokey’s humping your leg you’ll choose him

over her? You're a dick. Did you tell your boyfriend you were texting me last night because you were worried about her?"

I hadn't known that but it didn't change a thing. River had left me.

"He mentioned you were bragging about getting into her pants," Smokey chuckled dryly, giving me a cruel smirk. "He only stayed here because you were vulnerable. Girls do really stupid shit when that happens."

Part of me believed him, but after a second it vanished. Fox wouldn't use me like that, Smokey just wanted to hurt me. I didn't care if they knew we'd slept together.

"He's full of shit," Fox scowled, clenching his fists. "You assholes forget that I can read people. I'd know if she was lying."

My heart hurt as River slowly stood and took a step towards me, my voice defeated.

"Don't think I won't slap you if you touch me."

He stopped and gave me a pleading look, but I got to shaky feet and headed back into the house before I could do something stupid like throw myself at him.

The guys started arguing as I headed straight upstairs to my room to lock myself inside, walking into the bathroom and locking that door too before pressing my back against it and sliding to the floor. I hugged my knees to my chest and took a deep breath, trying to make sense of the dream I'd had.

My eyes closed and I ignored the knock on my bedroom door. It was either Fox checking on me or River coming to grovel, one of those I wasn't in the mood for.

They didn't knock again, so after an hour I slipped from the bathroom to find some clothes, my phone flashing on my bedside table. The battery was almost dead since I'd forgotten to charge it due to my meltdown last night, so I grabbed it to find messages from Fox.

Fox: Come to the gym with me. We'll break stuff.

Fox: You'll do anything to get out of training.

Fox: I'll pretend to be Frost so you can beat on me.

I smiled at his attempts to draw me out, quickly getting dressed and opening my door to find Fox sitting on the floor with his back against the wall.

“You saw the message about beating me up, didn't you? I knew that would draw you out.”

“Can we do something else?” I asked as he got to his feet.

“Like what?”

“I don't know. I want to get out of the house but I don't want to train.” I was too tired to use my powers. “What do you do when you're bored?” That earned me a grimace.

“Get laid. I guess I need a new hobby.”

“I mean, we could stay home and fuck for the rest of the day but I'd like some fresh air,” I teased, his eyes sparkling with amusement. He stepped towards me, sliding his hand across my hip to pull me closer.

“I thought you had no interest in sex?”

“I have no interest in shitty sex. You give me the good kind.”

“If you want fresh air and good sex, I could always rail you in the garden,” he chuckled, his free hand lifting to my chin to tilt my face up. “How about we go to the park? I'll make a picnic.”

“I like that idea,” I smiled, my mood sinking as River reached the top of the stairs, halting when he noticed us. His eyes studied us and Fox dropped an arm around my shoulders, kissing the top of my head.

“I'll go and get ready to go. Will you be alright?”

“I'm fine,” I nodded, watching him as he walked downstairs, leaving me with River. “I really thought you were

different.” I didn’t bother to hide the shaking in my voice, letting him hear how much he’d hurt me.

He looked uncomfortable by my statement, his voice weak.

“I am different.”

“Are you? Why’d you leave, River? Why’d you choose them over me?” When he was quiet I let out a bitter laugh, stepping closer. “I’ll fucking tell you why. You didn’t leave because you don’t trust me now, you left because *they* don’t. Smokey clicked his fingers and you followed because that’s what you guys do. You hate each other but have some fucked up kind of loyalty to one another.”

“Frost showed us the photos. It’s a little hard not to believe it,” he replied tightly. “I want to believe you, but—”

“I’m not saying Frost is lying. I’m saying I don’t remember,” I bit out, and he winced. “Why didn’t you stay? I thought you gave a shit about me but I was wrong. Did I just make you feel good about yourself? Was I a good stroke to your ego?”

“No! I really like you!” he insisted, panic written all over his face. He’d fucked up and he knew it. “This shit was just a lot to process! I needed some time!”

“Time?” I seethed, stepping closer and jabbing my finger into his chest. “Needing time means telling me you need space then locking yourself in your room to think so we could talk about it later. You fucking left, River. You let them peer pressure you into doing what they wanted and you left me crying on the floor!” I was yelling but I didn’t care. Emotions bubbled to the surface that I’d done well to control, and I gave him a firm shove, causing him to stumble back. “You left me!”

“Salem, please,” he choked out, begging me with his eyes. “Don’t push me away. I made a mistake.”

“You’re the one who left me. I’m not letting you back in.” I went to walk away but he grabbed my wrist to stop me.

“I love you! Don’t—” He wasn’t putting that on me now. He’d just ruined those words because he was saying them out

of desperation, hoping they were enough to make me forget he'd hurt me. I didn't even hesitate to lift my hand to slap him, but Fox pulled me back before I could make contact.

"Enough. C'mon, let's go." He turned to River and gave him a withering look. "Fuck you. That was the last thing you should've said. You're not saying it to make her feel better, you're saying it to try and fix your own feelings."

I couldn't take it. The pain tearing through me was becoming too much to bear and I walked away from them without a backwards glance, heading down the stairs. I wanted to turn around when River begged me to stay, but I reminded myself that he hadn't stayed when I'd begged him.

"Where the fuck are you going?" Smokey demanded as I walked through the living room, but I ignored him, heading into the kitchen and towards the front door. "I'm talking to you, you fucking cunt." Tears tracked down my cheeks as I walked faster, almost making it to the door before tight fingers circled my wrist and yanked me around to face Smokey's angry gaze. "Running away? That's probably for the best."

"Let me go," I said tiredly, not fighting him. I didn't have it in me. How had we gone from them saving me to wanting me dead?

"Gladly," he answered. "Let me help you." He opened the door and shoved me outside, causing me to trip and land on the ground. My palms grazed on the concrete and I peered up at him through my hair, his foot striking out against my shoulder to knock me back. "You're nothing, Salem. You never fucking will be."

"Smokey—"

"Eat shit and die," he said flatly before shutting the door and locking it, a sob leaving me.

I had nowhere else to go and the magic inside of me was already crying out for theirs.

How would I cope if I actually left?

I got to my feet and started walking, cursing Storm when the thunder rolled over the hills and the rain started, drenching

me to the core.

No one chased after me, not even Fox.

I was on my own.

Smokey.

I watched Salem through the peephole, my anger mixing with guilt as she stumbled away in the rain. I almost yanked the door open and chased after her until I remembered how this had started. She'd come here with every intention of deceiving us, and I'd let her manipulate me into believing she liked me.

My fists clenched as River and Fox's argument got louder, River's voice full of tears.

"Where's she going?" Storm asked as he materialized behind me, his arms crossed.

"Don't know, don't care. She's gone, that's all that matters," I grunted, but I didn't miss the way his eyes flicked to the window to see if he could see her. He was filled with rage and so much hate, but she'd gotten under his skin and it was more than he was letting us know about.

"Good. The hell do we do with River? He's going to be a mess for months," he muttered, a loud sob coming from upstairs and making me huff out a breath.

"I'll deal with it. You handle Fox. You know that asshole will chase her down and bring her back."

"Not happening," he snorted, watching me as I wandered into the living room and headed up the stairs to find River and Fox standing there, devastation on River's face as he cried while Fox got in his face.

"If you loved her you would've fucking chosen her! You can't just throw those words around as a Band-Aid, dickbag. They mean nothing when they're said out of guilt." He shoved River back against the wall and River grabbed the front of Fox's shirt, pulling him closer.

“Please, help me fix it with her. It hurts to breathe without her.”

I understood what he meant, my chest ached with every breath but the pain would fade, her betrayal wouldn't.

“River,” I said firmly, walking towards them and tugging him away from Fox. “C'mon, you've got a date with me and some video games.” His broken gaze met mine and I wished I'd thrown fireballs at Salem as a parting gift. He was hurting so badly that I didn't think I could fix it.

“You two go play, I'm heading out with Salem,” Fox said flatly, turning towards the stairs but pausing when I snorted.

“She's gone, dude.”

“The fuck do you mean?”

“I kicked her out,” I shrugged, steering River towards his room. “Good riddance.”

Fox ran down the stairs to chase her and River spoke softly to me once we were shut in his room.

“She doesn't remember anything.”

“She was going to kill you. Look at what she did to Frost.” I pushed him gently towards the bed, grabbing the controllers and tossing him one. “Boy's night, no girl talk.”

“But—”

“Let Fox chase her. You'll only make it worse,” I said as I cut him off, making him shut up. He shuffled closer and I sighed. “Fine, we can snuggle, but this isn't going to become a regular thing. I'll tolerate it because you're heartbroken right now and obviously need a good bro.”

Cuddling wasn't gay. I didn't give a shit if he wanted some comfort.

I lifted an arm for him to snuggle into my side and he didn't even hesitate to accept it. River was sensitive, always had been, but seeing this side of him made me feel bad for being such a dick to him over the years.

“Why are you being nice to me?” That made me feel even worse.

“I’m not such an asshole that I’d kick you while you’re down. Don’t get used to it though,” I warned, his arm sliding over my middle to burrow into me more.

“Can you sleep in here tonight?”

“Can you blow me?” I was only fucking with him out of habit but he lifted his eyes to mine with a frown.

“I don’t know how. Maybe—”

“Jesus, dude. I was joking. I’ll stay in here just tonight but if you tell anyone, I’ll deny it,” I grinned, ruffling his hair. “I’ve got you, okay? Girls suck.”

He seemed to be thinking hard for a moment before looking away, not hiding the pain in his voice.

“Salem didn’t hurt me, I hurt her. She’s right, I should’ve stuck by her.”

I was in for a long night.

Storm

I lingered in the kitchen, knowing Fox would come barreling down the stairs soon to chase his new girlfriend. The image of the little girl in Frost’s photos left a burning pain in my chest, confusion plaguing me like it had the moment I’d seen the photos.

I knew her as number seventy-four.

I’d spent most of my life being caged and used by those who were supposed to protect me, and kids like me and Salem had never stood a chance. She’d never seen me, she was always crying alone as my powers were thrown at her, her screams being one of those that haunted my nightmares.

If Frost and her grew up together, how come Salem didn’t remember?

And how the fuck had she been part of that torture facility if she'd been with Frost?

I couldn't figure it out and I had other things to worry about like stopping Fox from bringing her back. If she'd been part of those experiments, she was more dangerous than we knew.

Fox's footsteps thudded down the stairs, and I blocked the doorway as he skidded into the room, his frustrated eyes on me.

"Move."

"No. I'm telling you right now, you don't want to go after her. Let her go, man," I said carefully, not surprised when Frost wandered in. I'd only known my brother for nine years, he'd arrived at Stardust when he was nineteen, angry with the world and a chip on his shoulder. I'd been here since I was sixteen, my powers becoming too much for those who'd turned me into this.

I was the monster they'd made me, so they shouldn't have been surprised.

My body was a weapon, being born into my powers but my strength was man-made. No one in this community could go up against me and win.

Salem though? She was more powerful than she knew, and that was from what I knew of her when she'd been twelve, so I had no idea how strong she was now. I'd never seen the connection between that little girl and the angry woman that had been living under this roof, but now that I'd seen the photos, I couldn't unsee it.

She was the girl I'd spent my life thinking I'd killed, the one who'd caused my strength to get me thrown out of the facility and sent to Stardust.

A fist hit me in the face and I stumbled, snapping me out of my thoughts as Fox charged past, but Frost flicked his wrist and added ice boots to Fox's feet, tripping him and causing him to sprawl out on the floor.

I couldn't tell the others about her yet, not until I figured out what the fuck was going on.

Frost easily dragged Fox towards the kitchen chair to restrain him with ice, and I watched my baby brother as I tried hard to try and understand how he fit into this whole mess.

He remembered a tragic past where he fell in love with the girl next door, that same girl breaking his heart. Salem remembered a childhood of being locked away from the world out of shame, feeling lonely and helpless.

Then I remembered mine as torture, being forced to hurt people while being injected with painful drugs to enhance my powers, the little girl with hazel eyes being the most painful part of it.

I'd take the torture any day over that feeling of despair when I'd watched her die by my hands.

"Are you going to fucking help me or stand around with your finger up your ass?" Frost snapped as he struggled with Fox. "I have no problem letting him go. We'll just lock him out too."

"I'm going to fucking kill you assholes!" Fox bellowed as he fought Frost's hold. I walked towards him and put my hand on his shoulder, not wanting to hurt him, but I couldn't let him go after her.

"I'm sorry, man. We need to have a long conversation, but not tonight. We'll deal with this tomorrow." He went to curse me out some more but I sent a shockwave of lightning into him, his body seizing for a second before he passed out.

Frost released his ice, giving me the side-eye.

"You really don't want him leaving, do you?"

"We need to talk about Salem," I murmured, rubbing my temples. "But not now. I need a fucking nap."

He eyed me but nodded, not wanting to fight with me for once.

We were all mentally drained after the past couple of days, so I was glad when he left me to drag Fox upstairs to put him

to bed. I rolled my eyes when I walked past River's room to hear him and Smokey's muffled voices. Their bromance sure had grown lately.

At least it meant River wasn't my problem because I couldn't handle the whiney little fucker on top of my own shit right now.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SALEM

I walked until my feet ached, finding an abandoned house two towns over that I could sleep in for the night. My body and mind were exhausted, so I managed to sleep right through the night until the sound of cars and people woke me abruptly.

I sat up and rubbed my eyes, letting out a scream as I noticed the dead unicorn across the room. It looked fresh, and I cursed as voices outside came closer, most likely drawn to my scream.

I scrambled to my feet and managed to hide before they walked inside, hearing one of them scoff.

“I thought Stardust was handling this shit?”

“I heard that they’re behind it,” another voice whispered. “The girls at book club heard about it from—”

“Everyone knows Stardust is more like a corrupt society. The sooner that place burns to the ground, the better. It’s not like we need those creatures anyway. If the Board keeps the barriers up, the dragons wouldn’t be a problem and nothing else matters. Who cares if someone’s killing unicorns and pixies? I say let them. The less magic in the world, the safer we’ll be. It’s been nothing but trouble since that goddamn community popped up.”

Their voices faded as they left, and my brow creased as I tried to think hard about what they’d said. Stardust had been around forever, I’d seen books about its history. It wasn’t like magical beings were made overnight, we came from a millennia of generations.

I snuck over to the dead unicorn, assessing it for injury. It was missing its horn, and its mane had been cut off, the poor creature left for dead. It had a knife wound across its neck and its silky, white, coat now stained in blood.

It was still wet too.

I crept out the back door and made my way across the street, ignoring my stomach as it growled with hunger. I'd gone days without food before so I knew I could do it again. I didn't have anything on me like money or my phone, so it wasn't like I could just grab something to eat.

The streets were quiet since it was still early, a few cars on their way to work while other people stumbled home from a long night out. No one could tell I was magical as long as my powers contained themselves, which sounded easier than I thought it would be.

Between Smokey kicking me out and waking up next to a dead unicorn that someone had obviously placed in that old house when I'd been sleeping, my mind was unfocused.

I hadn't been walking long when I felt eyes on me, but when I looked around, I couldn't see anyone. My feet moved faster and I started panicking when footsteps sounded behind me. I couldn't just use my powers here without causing trouble.

I was suddenly shoved forward by a force so strong my damn skull bounced off the pavement, and I struggled to my feet as my head throbbed. Glancing back, I found a man standing close by, his eyes burning into me as power swirled around his hands by his sides. People were gasping, eyeing us as they waited to see what would happen, and I gritted my teeth as I rubbed the bump on my head.

“Can I help you?”

My eyes widened as he lifted his hands and blasted me with air, and I only just managed to block it with a wall of air of my own. People started screaming and running away from us to avoid being hit in the crossfire, my body aching as my powers weakened fast.

I really had to train more.

His power was much stronger than mine, he wasn't even breaking a damn sweat as he walked towards me. My arms shook and I had no choice but to drop my shield for a moment to regain my strength, taking his blast a second time and letting him think he had me. I needed him to get cocky and trash talk me. Anything to stop him using his powers long enough for me to either make an escape or find his weak spot.

"You're stronger than them, Salem," he stated, stopping his attack once he was closer. "You're an embarrassment to Stardust."

"Who the fuck are you?" I demanded, panting as I tried to catch my breath. My powers were definitely weaker without the others now which was a kick in the guts.

How could I defend myself if I was on my own?

"Tap into those powers," he said without answering my question, striking me with a ball of air and knocking me back again. "Don't you feel it? The power you're hiding within?"

"What are you talking about? I hardly know how to use my powers," I replied sharply, frustration building. Fire burned in my veins as he continued, a smugness in his tone that I didn't appreciate.

"You played them well. They're falling apart thanks to your betrayal. You should be proud of yourself. It's a good time to strike, you know? While they're licking their wounds. Finish the job so you can end this."

"What job? They're my team!" I argued, stepping back and studying him. "If you know something, tell me." I cried out as he hit me with a large ball of air again, my body burning as it felt like he was sucking my power out.

"Feel it, Salem! Remember who you are! What you're supposed to do!"

I got to my feet and started throwing air back at him, unbalancing him and grabbing a chair from the cafe close by with my powers. He landed on his ass as I threw it at him,

giving myself enough time to run, throwing more air balls behind me to slow him down.

My heart was beating out of my chest as I skidded around a corner, bumping into people as they cursed at me.

“Salem!” I turned briefly to see River running towards me, and relief hit me at knowing I had some kind of backup, even if he’d hurt me. I slowed and he almost bowled me over as he threw his arms around me. “You’re okay!”

“I won’t be if we just stand here,” I scowled, pushing him back a step. “Personal space, asshole.” He looked like he wanted to say more but our conversation was cut short as the wind picked up around us. “I don’t know who that guy is or why he’s chasing me.”

“Worry about that later. We’ve gotta go,” he answered, throwing a wall of water behind us and soaking anyone who was standing close by. We were definitely going to be on the news for this, shining more bad light on magical beings.

I wasn’t sure how long we ran for, but it felt like hours before we finally stopped at the base of the mountain. The trees gave us good coverage so it had been a smart place to go.

“What are you doing here?” I asked as I panted, leaning against a tree. “It’s a little far for you to be on a morning stroll.”

“Storm’s acting weird and he’s locked Fox in his room. I didn’t want you to be out here alone, so I snuck out late last night once everyone was asleep,” he explained, wincing slightly. “Smokey’s been blowing up my phone all morning but I turned it off. I didn’t want him stopping me.”

“Little late for that, isn’t it?” I asked dryly, running my gaze over him. He looked exhausted and broken, but so was I. “So what’s your plan, River? Start a double life so no one knows you’re talking to me?”

“No. We’re going to figure out what the fuck’s going on and make sense of it,” he said firmly, nodding his head as if convincing himself. “Fox is set on finding out about your past and I want to help. You did bad shit to Frost but that doesn’t

mean you had control over it. I was thinking maybe someone blackmailed you? Then wiped your memory of it all?"

"What happens if you find out I'm just a bad person?" I snorted, dropping to my butt to give my feet a rest. "You going to drown me in my morning coffee?"

"Salem, no," he murmured, dropping down to my level and crawling towards me, stopping a safe distance away to avoid me hitting him. "Even if you did all that shit and lied to us, I don't want you dead. Fox is right, I never should've turned my back on you. He reads people as his power so if I doubted you, I should've at least trusted him. He says you have no recollection of the entire ordeal with Frost so I believe it." He hesitated before reaching a hand out to touch my cheek, his shoulders relaxing when I didn't smack it away. "I'm not asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to let me help you figure this out."

"Good, because I'm not going to forgive you," I said strongly, holding his gaze. "Have you spoken to Fox? Does he know you're looking for me?"

"I texted him to let him know I was sneaking out. Where's your phone?"

"It's at home. Smokey threw me out," I mumbled, pulling away from his touch. "What did you mean about Storm acting weird?"

He sat opposite me, putting his chin in his hands. "Like he's up to something. I can't put my finger on it but he's been weird since finding out about you and Frost. He was pacing by the windows a lot last night, I checked the security footage."

"He was probably just making sure I didn't sneak back in," I grunted, sorrow filling his eyes.

"We'll find a way to get you back inside. You can't go anywhere else, you're one of us."

"Tell that to the others," I muttered, reaching my hand out with my palm up. "Give me your phone. I want to call Fox." He handed it over immediately and I found Fox's number before pressing the call button, putting it on speaker.

“Did you find her?” Fox said after two rings, something calming inside of me at hearing his worry.

“He found me, luckily. Some asshole attacked me,” I huffed. “Why are you locked in your room?”

“Someone attacked you? I tried to come after you last night but Frost and Storm stopped me. Storm’s dead when I get my fucking hands on him, he zapped me and knocked me out. Are you okay, baby?” His soft tone tugged at my chest and my stupid eyes started watering.

How had he become so important to me so fast? I literally hated him a few days ago and now he was all I had.

“I’m okay. Can you do some research for me?”

“I can try. Did you find something that could help us?” he asked, and River’s eyes watched me closely as I answered.

“I might have. For one thing, I woke up in the abandoned house I was sleeping in and someone had dragged a dead unicorn in there while I was asleep. Horn and mane cut off, and their throat was slit. Not sure if that information helps with that job. The other thing is that I heard people talking and they claim Stardust is a corrupt society and things were fine before it came along. Sounds weird considering Stardust and magic has been around forever.”

“Stardust existed before most of these damn towns did,” Fox murmured, and I could picture him scratching his head in thought. “I’ll look into it as much as I can. You and River can’t come back while the guys are like this. Stick together, especially if someone’s watching you. Do you have any idea what they wanted?”

River sighed. “Pretty sure he wanted her dead. He had air powers too.”

“I don’t think he wanted me dead,” I said slowly, remembering the conversation. “He claims I’m stronger than I think and I need to feel my powers. He also mentioned I’d played you guys well and I should strike while you’re down. I don’t know what it means but please believe me when I say ___”

“Baby, we believe you. Don’t we, River?” Fox’s voice was sharp, making River nod firmly.

“We do. I saw you running from that guy. You weren’t putting on a show, you didn’t know I was here to witness it.” He reached for my hand and I let him take it, his fingers lacing with mine. “We’re going to figure this out.”

River

Salem was letting me hold her hand so that was a good start. I shuffled closer to sit beside her, keeping some space between us to avoid her snapping at me. I deserved her anger, but right now she was in trouble, so I hoped she’d let me close enough to keep her safe.

I watched her face as she spoke to Fox, my chest tightening as I realized just how much they’d bonded in the short amount of time they’d shared together. He’d protected her like I should have, and now I’d lost her as punishment.

I deserved all the pain I was feeling for turning my back on her. I should’ve known better, but I’d been terrified of being used. If Smokey had been right and she’d chosen me because I was the easiest to manipulate, I never would have forgiven myself.

“I don’t think he’s listening. He’s staring at me weird,” Salem said, drawing me into the conversation as Fox answered.

“Focus, River. Stop being a creep and keep your eyes open for trouble. I know she’s pretty but now’s not the time.”

“Sorry,” I mumbled, raking my fingers through my hair awkwardly. “Where should we go? If there’s people after her, nowhere’s safe.”

“Stardust isn’t safe for her either,” Fox stated. “You guys need to stay hidden.” He was quiet for a moment before groaning. “You guys are on the news. Please tell me you’re not in that town still?”

“Right now we’re on the mountain. Can’t stay here though,” Salem grumbled as she glanced around. “There’s no shelter and we’re exposed.”

“Go west and make sure you practice those powers, Salem. You need them more than ever right now. Promise me you’ll stay with River, even though he’s a dick.”

I wanted to tell him to fuck off but he was right. I was going to have to grovel and hope she let me back in.

“I promise,” she answered tightly, refusing to look at me. “Can’t you come to us?”

That stung. I couldn’t handle the thought of traveling with them while they climbed all over each other.

“Even if I could get out of here, they’d only follow me. River, keep her safe and stay in touch. I’m trusting you with her damn life,” Fox bit out more harshly than I expected, and I nodded as if he could see me.

“I will.”

Jealousy pushed through me as Salem took the phone off speaker and got to her feet, not even sparing me a glance as she walked off to talk to Fox in private. I kept an eye out for trouble, frowning as I noticed she was pressing her hand to her stomach every so often. If she was sick, I needed to find somewhere we could lay low for a while until she felt better.

Once she’d hung up and we were walking again, I cleared my throat.

“Are you feeling sick?”

“No, why?” Her eyes flicked to mine with confusion and I shrugged.

“You keep touching your stomach as if it hurts.”

“Oh, I’m just a little hungry. I haven’t eaten in a while.” That made me feel like shit. Why hadn’t I thought to grab her something? Of course she hadn’t eaten, she didn’t even have her phone, so she wouldn’t have any money either.

“There’s a place in the next town that’s good. We’ll stop there for lunch,” I suggested, her nose scrunching.

“I don’t have my money.”

“I figured. I have my card so it’s fine.”

“I don’t want you spending your money on me,” she scowled, and I slowed my steps, giving her a strange look.

“It’s the same money. You have an account connected to our house, right?” Apparently not since she just blinked at me blankly. “You don’t? We all share an account for house expenses. Where did you get your money then?”

“I worked for it like normal people,” she said with a huff, her voice turning soft. “You mean you guys haven’t had to work shit jobs for minimum wage?”

“That’s why we go on jobs like chasing dragons. We get paid for those and it goes into the house account for us all to access. We’re loaded. With us being the strongest house, we get the biggest jobs and they pay well.”

How did she not know how anything worked? Frustration burned through me on her behalf because someone was definitely playing games with her.

“Uh, River? You’re leaking,” she said slowly, making me glance down at my hands to find water dripping off them. I never lost control of my powers like that.

I shook them dry before wiping them on my pants, embarrassment washing through me.

“Sorry. I think my powers aren’t too happy that someone’s fucking with you.”

“Is that a thing?”

“Our powers are connected since you entered the house as a member of the team,” I explained, hesitating before reaching out to take her wrist. My skin tingled from the touch and I pressed my palm against hers, the tingles growing stronger. “Feel that? That’s our connection. When your powers go haywire it’s because it’s craving this connection. We’re engrained in each other’s blood from the start so it slowly goes

mad without the rest. That sensation? That only happens when the connection is complete. You were the last piece we needed to become whole and all our powers are stronger because of it.”

“Shouldn’t it be blowing up since we’re away from the others? Smokey kicked me out, so don’t my powers sense the rejection? I felt it when he threw me out,” she murmured.

The connection between us grew stronger and I shook my head. Her heart was breaking and I hated that.

“He didn’t reject you. He’s angry, but your connection isn’t severed. The pain you’re feeling is emotional and it’s personal. It has nothing to do with your powers.” Smokey had drawn her in somehow even when he was being a dick. Both of them could pretend it hadn’t meant anything but they’d be lying to themselves. “Let’s go. You need to eat or you’ll be too weak to defend yourself if you’re attacked again.”

I kept the disappointment off my face when she pulled her hand away, her own mask back in place as the vulnerable expression vanished.

“Okay. Can we find somewhere with a shower?”

“I know just the place.”

Fox

I’d only just hung up the phone from talking to Salem and River, when my door opened and Storm stepped inside, eyeing me with a mix of anger and worry.

“Where is he?”

“Who?” I asked flatly, pretending like I had no idea that River had left the house. “I’ve been stuck in here since last night so I don’t know shit.”

“Don’t fuck with me, Fox.” He stepped closer, his fists clenched. “He’s in danger if he’s with her.”

“She won’t hurt him, for fuck’s sake. You guys really—”

“I didn’t say she would. Whether she’s dangerous or not is debatable, but one thing I know for certain is that something’s going on that we don’t know about. Her placement here, her missing memories, someone drowning her in the pool. This is bigger than just Salem being a psycho. Where is he?”

“What are you talking about? Do you know something?” I demanded and got to my feet, his jaw clenching as he kept his mouth shut. “Storm, if you know something, you need to tell the rest of us. It might help.”

I hated being kept out of the loop, but I’d bet money on him not telling the others either which meant he was digging into something behind their backs.

“I have a hunch, that’s all,” he finally muttered, hoping filling my chest. If he was looking into it, that meant he wasn’t completely done with Salem. There was a chance he’d help and bring her back here so we could figure it out together.

If Frost and Smokey refused, Storm could at least let her stay at his house.

“What kind of hunch? She’s okay, River’s with her, but I don’t actually know where they are. She was attacked by some guy this morning, and she also said she woke up next to a dead unicorn.”

Giving him extra information always helped, and I was relieved when he seemed to relax at knowing she wasn’t on her own. He definitely didn’t think she was the villain in all of this.

“A human guy?”

“No, he had air powers like her.” I filled him in on the phone call, and by the end of our conversation he was looking even more confused. Especially when I received a text from River to let us know Salem had no knowledge of our money or payments.

“I don’t like that River’s in danger because of her,” he said carefully, his brow creasing and tugging at the scar down his face. “But I don’t think she’s the danger right now. I don’t

want her here if someone's going to keep coming around causing trouble."

"So if one of us gets attacked, you'll kick us out to protect everyone else?" I deadpanned. "She's one of us, Storm. She's out there with low skills and powers. She's only okay right now because River was there to help her, but her powers aren't that strong. We need to bring her home and form a plan."

"The guys won't like that." He didn't say he had a problem with it, so I pushed him more, desperately needing him on her side.

"Can she stay at yours? She's vulnerable out there, she'll have more protection at Stardust. Please? I'll go and get them and we can figure the rest out later. She's exhausted and needs time to recover from her drained powers. She needs another booster shot." I was going to hate myself for making her go through that again, but now we all knew how to handle it, hopefully it would be easier on her than last time. "Please let her come back to Stardust." His eyes assessed me silently for a minute before he left the room, shutting the door and locking it behind him. "You motherfucker!"

"Bite me," he shot back as he walked away, my fist smacking against the door out of frustration. I thought he'd softened, but I guess not.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

STORM

“Where are you going?” Smokey called from the couch as I walked through the living room.

“I’m going home before I turn you all into ash,” I snapped without slowing my steps, letting out a deep sigh as I heard him get to his feet and follow.

“Ash, you say? That’s my specialty. You wanna burn some energy at the gym? I could do with a spar.”

“No, I want to go home where it’s fucking quiet.”

“I was wondering how long it would take you to go once she left.” I halted and turned to face him, finding his smug face watching me with amusement. “I should’ve bet money on it. It hasn’t even been a whole twenty-four hours. I knew she was the reason you were here more.”

His face turned to one of pain as I threw a ball of lightning at him, not giving a shit that I let my anger make it stronger. It wouldn’t kill him but it definitely hurt.

“You’re the one that’s been panting after her like a dog, you fire hazard.” I zapped him again and he dropped to his knees, his jaw tight as he tried to block out the pain.

“What’s going on in here?” Frost muttered as he joined us, growling as I threw lightning at him for the sake of it. He stayed on his feet, ice forming in his hands as he glared at me. “What the fuck was that for?”

“Keep your boyfriend under control. I’m going home,” I barked, a snort leaving him as he threw ice at me, grazing my

shoulder.

“Of course you’re leaving now she’s gone.” He went to throw more but fire shot between us and Smokey shoved us back from each other.

“Knock it off. You want to go home and sulk in your empty house? Go for it. I’m going to find water boy and—”

“Don’t bother. He’s with Salem,” I cut in and started towards the door again, but Frost hauled me back with a snarl.

“You spoke to her?”

“No.” I yanked back from him, not missing the relieved look on Smokey’s face at knowing Salem was okay. He was hurt, but he didn’t hate her. I doubted he’d admit that though, so I didn’t let him know I was going to get her. “River called Fox. They’ve run off into the sunset together. Now that’s sorted, I’m going home for a few days.”

They didn’t stop me this time but I knew Smokey’s eyes tracked me from the window once I was outside, so I headed towards home to grab a few things. If he saw me go in the other direction, he’d follow me.

I grabbed some protein bars and water from the kitchen, shoving some clothes into the bag too, then I made my way towards the main gates. I had no idea where Salem and River were, but I had a good guess when I checked my phone and spotted the news report. A short video played, Salem throwing air back at the man who was chasing her, and I almost broke my phone in my fist. She looked terrified and exhausted, my veins burning with the need to kill the fucker.

I didn’t trust her, but I was positive she was telling the truth about her memories.

I walked for a few hours before managing to catch a ride, acting like I was a tourist who was lost, and before long, I was at my destination. I knew Salem and River wouldn’t still be in the town that was on the news, so I’d decided to start a few more towns over.

I thanked the person who’d given me a ride, getting a kick out of it when I gave him money for gas and lightning skated

up my arms. The man drove off in a panic, making me laugh. People either hated us or were scared of us, both always amusing me. I'd seen more corruption and pain caused by humans than I ever had amongst the supernatural.

Even ogres had more respect.

I lifted my bag over my shoulder and started walking, pausing when I spotted Salem and River sitting in a cafe, multiple cups and plates in front of them. They must have been here a while.

I didn't want them to know I was here yet, so I watched silently until they left an hour later. I stayed back, blending in with the crowd as I followed them towards the small motel at the end of the street. I could see which room they ended up with from here, so once they were inside I headed to the front desk and claimed a room too, ending up in the one next to theirs and grinning when I realized I could hear them if I pressed my ear to the wall beside my bed. I got comfortable, knowing I'd be here a while, just listening to them talk.

My body buzzed from the sound of her voice and I couldn't help but relax the longer I listened.

"Should we tell Fox where we are?" Salem asked. "I don't want him worrying."

"Trust me, he'll be fine now he knows you're not alone. We can stay here for a few days so you can try to rebuild your strength. We need to find somewhere that sells those vitamin booster shots. I know you hate them, but you really need it to recharge to full capacity," River answered, and I could imagine the look of worry on his face for expecting her to be okay with it.

Guilt filled me now that I knew where her fears had come from, because those injections that haunted her mind had haunted mine for a long time too. I'd prefer to have all the guys throw their powers at me than have one of those needles again.

They'd claimed it was some kind of medicine we'd needed to obtain such strong powers, but it was torture. I'd seen some

people die from them, and others had been in pain for days. It was a concoction of poison, forcing it into our veins to mutate our powers into what they were today. No one was supposed to be this strong, and I guaranteed they had no idea we'd live through it all.

We were never supposed to come out of that program, but after I thought I'd killed Salem, they let me go to Stardust. I hadn't questioned it, I'd been relieved to be away from the torture and pain, but maybe I should have.

"You're delusional if you think you're stabbing me with another needle. I'm going to have a nap," Salem said quietly, and I pressed my ear harder to the wall to hear.

"I'll keep watch and wake you in a few hours," River promised, both of them going silent after that. The TV turned on in their room and I wondered if they were snuggled up together or if River was still in the doghouse.

I ended up sitting in a chair by the window, keeping an eye out for anyone lingering.

It wasn't like I had anything better to do.

Salem

"Salem? Wake up."

I groaned, rolling away from the voice.

"I'm tired," I mumbled into the pillow, making River chuckle softly.

"I know but you've been asleep for three hours. I made you coffee. It probably tastes like dirt but it's the only coffee here." I turned to find him holding a cup out to me. "If you hate it, we can go and find a better one."

"Thank you," I murmured, sitting up and taking it in both hands. I was more tired than I was before I'd shut my eyes, and I didn't have it in me to tell him to fuck off. He watched me so intensely as I sipped it, and I gave him a small smile. "It's good."

“Fox texted to check in. He’s still locked in his room. Storm’s in a foul mood as usual and left, so hopefully Smokey lets Fox out soon.” He sat beside me, showing me the message as if I needed proof. “He, uh, misses you.”

“Why did you say you loved me?” I asked, his cheeks heating as he became uncomfortable. “Was it just to make me stay?”

It bothered me that he hadn’t brought it up again but I was pretty sure he was too damn scared to after last time. From this reaction, he was regretting it.

“I meant it,” he replied tightly, averting his gaze from me. “I just panicked and blurted it out because I thought it would be the only chance I had to tell you. It wasn’t some kind of lie to make you stay with me.”

“Is that why you came after me?”

“I don’t want you to be out here alone. I’m part of your team, but I’m also your boyfriend too, so I’m supposed to have your back. Well, I was until I fucked that up.” He blew out a breath, his eyes slowly lifting to mine. “I know you won’t forgive me, but I really am sorry.”

“I know. I also know that if Smokey showed up right now, you’d leave with him. You guys sure learned to like each other,” I grumbled, placing the coffee on the small bedside table. “I’m glad you have my back, but I don’t believe it will last. That’s why I can’t forgive you, because I refuse to go through that again.”

“I can’t explain it with Smokey. We’re just getting along really well at the moment. I kind of snuck out on him last night so he’s probably really mad at me right now.”

“You snuck out on him? Were you two having a sleepover?” I asked dryly, his face heating more. He was as red as an apple. “Hey, I didn’t mean to make you feel weird. It’s okay if you and Smokey—”

“I’m not fucking Smokey,” he growled, raking a hand through his hair. “He just let me cuddle him a little after you left.”

“I’m mad at all of you but I’m glad he’s not being a dick,” I murmured, taking his hand before I could change my mind. “But like I said, it’s okay if you’re curious about guys. Maybe find a more gentle one though, Smokey’s likely to eat you alive.”

“I don’t want Smokey,” he grunted but he eyed me curiously as I stood and grabbed my coffee, walking towards the small couch in the corner. There was a knock at the door and River tensed, instantly on his feet. “Who is it?”

“Room service.” We didn’t have room service here.

River flicked his eyes to me as balls of water formed in his hands, but a thud made both of us jump. The door suddenly flew open and a man was thrown through it, seizing on the ground as a bored Storm stood in the doorway, zapping the man again for the fun of it.

“You two really are fucking hopeless.”

“What are you doing here?” River demanded, stepping closer as the water in his hands grew, and Storm raised an eyebrow at him.

“What does it look like? Saving your ass.” His eyes landed on mine and I slowly placed my cup down on the table, not knowing whether to run or not. His mouth curved into a dark smirk, challenging me. “Not even a thank you? I came all this way to bring you home, and I get no appreciation?”

He slammed his foot down on the man’s back as he tried to get up, not breaking eye contact with me. I went to blast him with air but he blocked it with ease, zapping me lightly in return as a warning.

At least it didn’t hurt.

“Just let me go, Storm. What do you want from me? You got your wish, I left.” I stepped back as he grabbed the man by the back of the shirt and hauled him out the door, motioning to River.

“Deal with that so I can talk to firecracker.”

“If you think I’m leaving you alone with her—” River didn’t get to finish before Storm zapped him lazily, making him yelp. “Hey! You dick!”

“I’m not going to kill her right this second. Why would I take out this asshole to protect you idiots if I was only going to kill her?”

He had a good point but that didn’t stop the panic increasing at the thought of being shut in a room with him alone. River didn’t seem convinced but he gave me a nod.

“I’ll be back soon.” The water swirling around his hands vanished as he stepped outside to deal with the prick that was still laying on the ground groaning, and Storm shut the door as best as he could now that it was busted.

“Sit,” he ordered, pointing to the bed. “We need to talk about some shit that the others don’t know about.”

“You’ve been keeping secrets?” I asked as I glanced at the bed, wondering if I should just run. “The others don’t know?”

“They know I’m looking into something but they’re not privy to the information. Sit the fuck down,” he grunted, not moving away from the door until I was sitting on the edge of the bed. He kept his distance from me as a puzzled look crossed his face, his eyes on mine. “There’s something I didn’t realize until I saw those photos of you and Frost as kids. You weren’t just in his past, but mine too.”

“But wouldn’t you both remember that? I thought you didn’t meet until you got to Stardust?” I frowned, noticing his fists clench a fraction.

“I never knew Frost as a kid, but I knew you. It was in a facility that I grew up in. Some of my memories are fuzzy, but I’ll always remember the ones of you.” He swallowed, trying to keep the emotions off his face but failing. “You never met me, you were always locked in a room and I was forced to use my powers on you regularly. A lot of our powers and resistance grows from being exposed to shit. Powers, chemicals, all kinds of attacks. Problem is, if you were trapped

in that facility with me, how could you have lived next door to Frost?”

“Are you sure it was me? I don’t remember a facility,” I mumbled.

“It was definitely you.” His eyes bounced between mine, the hint of a smile tugging at his lips. “I see it now you’re not wearing makeup. I didn’t know you as Salem though, you were number seventy-four.” A loud bang from my memories hit me and I jumped, instinctively lifting my hands over my head to protect myself.

“Did that make you remember something?” He asked softly, moving to kneel on the floor in front of me to study my face. “Salem?”

A hand touched my leg and I flinched, a masked man stepping into my space with a needle. “*Number seventy-four, you’re up.*” I was frozen, memories of me struggling and crying as the pain from the needle made its way through my body, and I only snapped out of it when a sharp sting hit me. I let out a scream and scrambled back but Storm was there, his hands on either side of my face.

“Sorry, I had to zap you. Are you okay?” All the anger had drained from him and had been replaced by concern, and I shook my head, blinking back tears as he released me.

“I know that number. The man with the needle called me that.” I jerked back as the door opened abruptly and River joined us, his eyes going straight to me.

“What happened? What did he fucking do?” I ignored him and looked at Storm, his eyes swimming with questions that I didn’t have the answers to.

“How long were we there?” I choked out, racking my brain for a memory of lightning but coming up blank. “I don’t remember any of that.”

“Years. We were kept separate from what I remember, and they only brought us together to force us to use our powers on each other. I left when I was sixteen.” He slowly reached out

to brush my hair from my face, his haunted eyes on mine. “I fucking killed you, Salem. I watched you die.”

“What are you guys talking about?” River murmured as he walked towards us. “You have memories of her too?”

“We were raised in a facility,” Storm replied without looking away from me. “I was forced to use my powers on her frequently. They let me go to Stardust after I eventually killed her.”

“But she didn’t live in a facility, she lived next door to Frost. Maybe you’re thinking of someone else,” River offered, but Storm shook his head and got to his feet, his fingers stroking over my hair for a moment before he straightened and turned to River.

“It was her. The moment I saw Frost’s photos it hit me like a fucking train. Where did you grow up?”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Just answer the fucking question,” Storm hissed, and I slid my gaze to River as he answered.

“In one of those schools like everyone else.” He moved to sit beside me and I took his hand, needing something to ground me. Memories kept slipping through my mind, none I could actually place. “Smokey and Fox went to one too, right? What are you thinking?”

Storm paced, lightning darting between his fingers absently.

“Everyone has similar memories. You guys all remember magical schools, Frost remembers the same thing but he lived next door to Salem, Salem doesn’t remember any of that and was just locked in her house all the time, and I was in a facility. This all has to tie in somehow. We have to go back to Stardust, this doesn’t make sense.”

“But the guys—” I didn’t want to be looking over my shoulder the whole time.

“Fuck them, you can stay with me. Maybe between us we can try to get some kind of memory flowing for you that can

help us connect it to either me or Frost. There has to be more than a few flashbacks,” he said seriously, glancing up as someone moved into the doorway with a scowl. It was the owner of the motel and he looked pissed.

“I knew you were trouble. Out, all of you. You can pay for the door.” He motioned behind him, a chill running down my spine as he added, “And take your unicorn corpse with you.”

Storm didn’t even hesitate to walk out of the room, River and I following.

“Uh, where’d the man go?” I asked slowly, but River walked towards the unicorn and tapped it with his toe, giving us a frown.

“This is where I left him.”

“So magical beings are turning into unicorns when they die now? Excellent,” Storm muttered, his hand absently moving to my lower back. “We need to go. Either something weird is happening or someone here is fucking with us. It’s not safe.”

“We can’t just stay with you,” River huffed, and the look Storm gave him was almost comical.

“Who the fuck said you’re staying too? I said Salem could stay, you’re welcome at the house so there’s no need for you to be invading my space.”

“I’m not leaving her side,” he threw back, and I rubbed my temples.

“Guys, can we figure it out later? People are staring.”

Storm glanced at me, not looking away as he lifted his hand in the air and shot lightning across the sky, making people start screaming.

“Nope. Now they’re staring.”

“You’re such an asshole.”

“Yeah, the asshole who’s gotta deal with this dead unicorn so you don’t have to,” he said dryly, walking towards it and placing his hands on its side, turning it to ash with a strong bolt of lightning.

I stared at him, and River chuckled as he put his finger under my chin to close my mouth that I hadn't notice fall open.

"Storm's kinda badass," he offered, and I let out a choked sound.

"He just turned a unicorn into death confetti!"

That made Storm bark out a laugh, joining us again as the ash started blowing around the yard. He headed into his room to grab his things and River stepped closer to me, boldly sliding his hand into mine.

"I don't like the idea of you staying at Storm's alone."

"Me either but we need to consider it as a good option. Stardust is safer and Storm can help me with my powers. You need to go back to the main house and get Fox out of his room. I'm mad at Smokey right now, but he's probably worried about you," I admitted, pulling my hand away and trying to ignore the sadness that washed over him. I'd meant it when I said I wasn't going to forgive him easily. "Besides, Storm talks more freely without an audience. Hopefully we can figure more out tonight and we can meet up tomorrow with a plan."

"I'm surprised he's helping."

"It's probably the guilt from thinking he killed me," I mumbled. "It's most likely a way for him to clear his conscience."

"Or lock you in the basement and kill you," River said under his breath, jumping when Storm spoke from close by.

"That spot's reserved for you, water boy. We don't have time to gossip."

He gave me a gentle nudge to make me start walking, and once we were closer to the town I'd been attacked in, Storm managed to flag us down a ride. The driver was a young woman who rambled the entire drive towards Stardust, and Storm was close to tearing her head off by the time we got there. I thanked her and Storm threw gas money through her window, making me wince.

“Sorry, he’s a dick.”

“Men usually are. You have your hands full with that one,” she giggled. Apparently, she was a huge fan of Stardust. Someone had saved her from wild pixies as a kid and she was obsessed. “Is he single?”

“You think anyone could tolerate his bullshit?” I asked dryly, gasping as my head was suddenly tugged back by a fist in my hair, Storm glaring down at me.

“Are you coming or not, firecracker?”

“Oh, he’s yours?” the girl asked, and both Storm and I replied at the same time with disgust.

“No!”

“Could’ve fooled me. Have fun saving the world!” she beamed as she drove off, and I slapped at Storm’s hand.

“Stop manhandling me!”

“Hurry up then,” he grunted, pushing me after River. “River’s going to head home and let Fox out, so expect him to stop by.”

That thought caused relief to roll through me. I’d feel better once I had someone I trusted close by.

River paused at the turn off we had to take to go to Storm’s, his ocean eyes staring at me with uncertainty.

“Do you want me to stay home when Fox comes over?”

“You can come if you want,” I shrugged, stepping back when he tried to move closer, and Storm growled, grabbing my bicep and steering me along the road while talking over his shoulder.

“Stay home, for fuck’s sake. She doesn’t want your little virgin dick.”

“Fuck you,” River threw back before stalking off, and I blew out a breath, letting Storm drag me along the road.

“You really have to work on that anger of yours, bolt.”

He almost tripped over his own feet.

“What the fuck did you just call me?”

“Bolt. Everyone else has nicknames. I can’t keep calling you asshole,” I teased, and he muttered under his breath until we reached his house.

“Go shower, I’ll find you some fresh clothes, then we’ll hopefully have a coffee in hand before Fox breaks down my door,” he stated once we were inside, pointing towards the hallway. “The layout is similar to the main house, just smaller. My room’s at the far end on the left. Towels are in the bathroom.”

“Thanks,” I answered slowly, not understanding why he was being so nice.

I didn’t wait around, heading straight up the stairs at the end of the living room and up to his room.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

My door opened and I went to throw a fist at Storm, but it was River.

“What the fuck are you doing back? Is Salem okay?” My heart pounded at the thought of something bad happening to her, and River gave me a small smile.

“She’s fine, she’s at Storm’s. He came to get us.”

“He did?” I asked in disbelief. “Thank fuck.”

“I came to get you. Things got way more interesting and you’re going to want to hear about it,” he said with a cringe. “More history twists are coming out.”

“Is she remembering things?” I was already putting my shoes on and grabbing a jacket. I needed to touch her so I knew she was okay. Once I slipped her phone into my pocket, I followed River out of the room and towards the stairs as we kept talking.

“She’s remembering little things but it’s not much. Storm’s the one with the big reveal. You won’t believe me if I tell you,” he snorted, and we made it to the living room before Smokey stopped us, his eyes narrowed.

“Where are you going?” He thumped River’s shoulder, giving him a dirty look. “And fuck you, dickbag.”

“That hurt,” River bit out, earning another one. “Fuck off, man!”

“I can’t believe you took off after her,” he snapped, his angry eyes landing on mine. “Where are you going?”

I wasn’t going to lie about it. If Storm was letting her stay with him, he wouldn’t let Smokey or Frost harm her.

“Storm’s. He found Salem.”

“Where is she? I thought River found her?” he sounded pissed off about it but there was a flicker of relief in his eyes.

“Storm went and got them. She’s staying at his place,” I answered, pushing past him. “Now get out of my way.”

“Wait, that idiot actually went and got her? This is hilarious. Hey! Frost! Your dumbass brother went and brought Salem back!” Smokey hollered, and Frost stomped in with a sour look on his face.

“She’s not fucking welcome here.”

“That’s fine, she’s staying with him,” River sighed, looking uncomfortable. “He’s got news for everyone, but if you can’t play nice, you can stay home.”

I could tell they both wanted to know what was happening but they wouldn’t admit it. Smokey walked over to the couch and got comfortable, acting like he hadn’t been part of the conversation, while Frost sneered.

“I don’t give a fuck what he found out. You guys are all stupid for trusting her. She tried to kill me.”

“Yeah? Well Storm succeeded in killing her when he was sixteen, so I guess you’re all even now,” River bit out, making us all glance at him with confusion.

“That doesn’t make sense.” Frost was thinking hard but Smokey was back on his feet, apparently changing his mind about not caring. I walked towards the front door, rolling my eyes when the others all followed.

I didn’t bother knocking when we arrived after a silent trek across Stardust, letting myself in and finding Salem sitting at the table with a coffee in her hand. Her hair was wet from a shower and she was wearing Storm’s clothes.

I didn't like that.

"Fox," she said softly, putting her drink down and getting to her feet, and my heart raced as she ran towards me to throw herself into my arms. "I missed you."

One of the guys faked a gag but I kissed her temple.

"I missed you too. I brought you your phone." I steered her back towards the table, sitting down and pulling her onto my lap so she could finish her coffee. River eyed us with envy as he sat opposite us, and Storm sat to our left, putting his own coffee on the table.

"Sit or leave. I'm not arguing with anyone. You need to shut up and let me talk. Clear?" he asked, his eyes on Smokey and Frost. Frost sat with a scowl but Smokey hesitated, the look on his face a mask. He looked ready to fuck and kill Salem at the same time.

None of them could have her. Not after they turned their backs on her when she needed them most.

Salem

Smokey kept staring at me while Storm explained everything, giving us more details about the facility he'd been in. From the look on Frost's face, he hadn't been aware of his brother's torturous childhood.

"Wait, so you grew up there? But didn't Salem grow up next door to Frost? She can't have been in both places," Smokey huffed, giving me a dirty look. "She's just telling more lies."

"They're Frost and Storm's memories, dumbass. That has nothing to do with Salem," River muttered.

"She probably remembers them just fine and she's faking it."

"I said no fighting," Storm said firmly, surprising me as he stood and patted my shoulder. "Salem was part of that facility. That opens doors to a lot of other explanations. Mind control,

blackmail, possibly a concoction of chemicals injected to fuck with her head. It's a lead."

"It's bullshit," Frost growled, assessing me. "There's no way she's in your memories. I spent every damn day with her and I sure as fuck didn't live in any weird torture facilities. I had a nice house right next door to Salem's nice house. You've got the wrong girl, Storm. You didn't know her name so it could easily be a mistake."

Storm stalked around the table, snatching Frost's phone and flicking through things before holding photos of me and Frost up.

"See this? This is the girl I fucking killed after blasting my powers on her too many times. I saw her all the time, and her terrified eyes haunt me every damn night to this day. It was fucking Salem." He seemed to think about something for a moment before coming back to me, my eyes going wide as he pulled me to my feet roughly.

"What the fuck?" Fox bit out, but I froze when Storm grabbed the back of my shirt and lifted it, his fingers exploring my bare back until they paused right between my shoulder blades.

"I had a weird microchip thing when I left." He pushed his fingers more firmly against my skin before holding his free hand out. "Someone get me a knife."

"You're not cutting her up!" Fox barked as he got to his feet, but he stopped when I spoke.

"If there's something in there then I want it out. Can you feel it?"

"Yeah. Give me your hand." Storm carefully lifted my hand awkwardly behind me, the tips of my fingers managing to reach. He put pressure on the tips and I felt the small bump under the surface. "You feel it?"

"Get it the fuck out of me," I begged, turning to face him. "Are they tracking me? Who put it there?" I was becoming hysterical. Why was I chipped like a dog?

Was someone following me? How long had it been there?

“It’s going to hurt,” Storm warned as he moved into the kitchen to find a knife. I followed, pulling the shirt over my head and covering my chest without flashing everyone, but from the way Storm’s eyes were pinned on me, my guess was he’d definitely seen a nipple.

“Do you still have yours?” I asked as I tried not to think about the fact that he was about to cut a hole in me.

“No. I cut it out the day I arrived here. I’m not sure what it was for but my assumption was to track me too. You can’t move once this blade’s against your skin, okay? I could seriously hurt you,” he said sternly, and I nodded before resting my forearms on the counter and putting my forehead on them. That way he had a good view of the area he was hacking up, and I could brace myself. “You ready, firecracker?”

“Yeah,” I mumbled, tensing as he moved behind me and ran his fingers between my shoulder blades to find the right spot. It was close to my spine which concerned me, but I’d risk it.

“Breathe in,” Storm murmured as he pressed the tip of the blade to my skin, and I squeezed my eyes shut and did as he instructed. “And out.” I let it out and he applied pressure, pain shooting across my skin instantly. “Block it out, Salem.”

I cursed loudly, my fists clenched tightly as I tried to stop myself from moving. The blade dug deeper and I swore I was going to pass out as I swayed slightly. He stepped closer, his groin against my ass to keep me in place as one of his hands moved to my waist, giving it an encouraging squeeze.

“I see it, hold on. Can one of you assholes get a towel?”

I cried out as his fingers pushed against the wound, my ears ringing as I had to put all my focus into staying awake. Blood ran down my back and sides, dripping onto the floor and soaking into the sweats that Storm had lent me.

“Got it,” Storm murmured, the hand on my side moving up and down in a soothing motion. “You good?” I went to stand up but stumbled, and luckily he was paying attention and

caught me. “Take it easy. Where the fuck’s the towel?!” he shouted, and Fox appeared a moment later, intending on helping to clean me up, but Storm snatched it and gently pressed it against the wound. He wrestled the shirt from my hands, doing well not to stare at my tits as he helped me back into it while leaving the towel against my skin to soak up the blood. “Come sit down. You should start healing soon.”

“I’ll bring some water,” Fox murmured as Storm steered me into the living room again, and River instantly jumped to his feet to help. Smokey’s brow creased as Storm sat beside me and moved closer to avoid me falling on my face if I passed out, and he held up the bloodied chip in his hand.

“It’s the same as mine. I’m telling you guys, she was there.”

“But how is that possible?” Frost mumbled as he stared at the chip. “You saw the photos. She was with me.”

“Come here,” Storm said slowly. “And turn around.”

That made Frost snort.

“I don’t have one of those things.”

“How do you know?”

“I just do. I remember my entire childhood.”

“Then stand here and let me check so you can prove me wrong,” Storm answered, and Frost growled as he got to his feet, yanking his shirt over his head.

“This is stupid.” He turned around and Storm stood, running his fingers over Frost’s back before pausing, pressing more firmly in one spot.

“Stupid, huh? What’s that then?”

“Bullshit,” Frost spat, reaching around to feel for himself, not hiding the surprise in his voice when he felt it. “What the fuck?”

“Maybe all of our memories have been altered. We’re all remembering different pasts, and I’m starting to think none of them are real,” I said softly, Frost turning to look at me. There

were so many emotions there but I could tell he refused to believe I was a good person.

“I have photos of my past, so mine has to be the real version.”

“Maybe those are snippets of your past. The bad bits might have been erased like Salem’s,” Fox offered. “I need to get hold of Minerva. She might be able to help figure this out.”

“Who the fuck’s Minerva?” I snapped without thinking, amused glances going around the table, other than Fox who gave me a completely serious expression.

“She lives on the other side of Stardust. She’s the one I mentioned to you earlier about getting into your head. She’s good with memories. I never slept with her.”

“You’ve slept with everyone,” Smokey said unhelpfully, earning a dirty look from Fox.

“I haven’t touched her, why would I lie about that? Salem knows I’m not the virgin fucking Mary.” He turned back to me, taking my hand and giving it a squeeze. “I wouldn’t lie to you.”

“I know. She can help me remember things?” I asked hopefully, my jealousy flying out the window at the thought of finally getting some kind of understanding of my past. “I really want to find out what the fuck is going on.”

“So do we,” Storm murmured, assessing me for a moment before turning his attention back to Frost. “You want me to cut it out?”

“What do you think?” Frost snapped, and Smokey grinned.

“Give me the knife, I’ll slice and dice him.”

“Touch me and it will be the last thing you do.”

“Deal,” Smokey chuckled, flames igniting in his palm. “The safe word is Daddy.”

“This isn’t helping!” I said sharply, both of them turning to glare at me.

“Fuck off,” they both spat, and Frost hissed out a breath as Storm dug the tip of his knife into his back to start cutting out the chip without warning.

“Stop bickering, both of you. Maybe you should be checking yourself for a chip, Smokey. You too,” he said as he glanced at River and Fox before continuing his task. “You doing okay, firecracker?”

He didn’t look at me until I sucked in a sharp breath as Fox lifted my shirt and gently peeled the towel off my wound to look at it. Storm didn’t speak but his eyes flared with violence for hurting me.

I shouldn’t have liked that, but I did.

“I’m okay. Can I go and lie down? I’ll heal faster if I rest,” I murmured, and Fox started getting to his feet.

“I’ll come too. You—”

“Sit the fuck down,” Storm growled, and Frost cursed as he dug deeper into his back out of anger. “Salem can lie down but she doesn’t need a babysitter. We’re in the middle of a meeting, in case you hadn’t noticed.”

Fox looked ready to argue but I leaned over and kissed his cheek, giving him a small smile.

“I’ll be fine, promise. You guys need to talk and figure out if you have one of these chip things implanted in your back too.”

Storm managed to pull the little silver device out of Frost before giving me a nod.

“Go, we won’t bother you. You can have the room next to mine.” It sounded good to me so I headed upstairs to my new room, easing myself down on the bed to make sure the towel was against my back, and I fell asleep within minutes.

Frost

My brother was such an idiot. He’d fallen for her, I could see it on his fucking face as he watched her leave the room. I

didn't care if I was getting blood all over his living room as I tugged my shirt back in place and sat down in the chair, crossing my arms.

“What else don't we know?” Discomfort moved through me at the thought of us all being in the dark this whole time, and I tried to cling to the hate I'd felt for Salem for all these years, but I was struggling. If we didn't know the truth, then chances were high that she really had lost her memory and had been nothing but a pawn in this fucked up game too.

“That's the burning question,” Smokey huffed, the flames dancing across his fingertips as he toyed with it. “That doesn't explain why Salem tried to kill Frost though.”

“Maybe she didn't and it's just the past Frost remembers?” River offered, managing to duck just in time as I threw a ball of ice at him.

“You think I made it up? I have fucking photos, dumbass.”

Why the fuck didn't any of them take my side with this? Smokey seemed to, but my brother and the other Salem-loving idiots didn't.

“What if they were fabricated?” Fox asked slowly, turning to me. “That's possible, right? Maybe they're planted in your phone to give you a false sense of reality?”

“If it were only one or two photos in his phone, I would've assumed that myself, but there's thousands,” Storm answered slowly, sliding his gaze to mine too. “I don't trust her, but I also don't think she's to blame for your trauma.”

“I don't want her back at the house. I don't care what we find out because she still tried to kill me. I won't forgive her for that,” I said tightly, giving Smokey the side-eye. “You gonna check your back?”

“Why the fuck would I? You guys are all the ones with messed up pasts. I know mine,” he said with a snort, but his eyes darted towards River briefly with concern. Their little friendship was starting to grind on my nerves. They were complete opposites, Smokey being loud and cocky while River was quiet and nervous, but they'd somehow bonded lately.

“You should check though, River. You don’t remember all of your past, right?”

“Only if you check yourself,” River said stubbornly, and Fox let out a sigh.

“Are you two going to have this ridiculous lovers tiff for long?” He got to his feet and moved towards Storm, tugging the back of his shirt up in the process. “Can you check me?”

My back was healing fast, making me wonder why Salem’s hadn’t started healing straight away. Her powers must have been running on empty, which wasn’t good.

“You’ve got one too,” Storm mumbled as he moved his fingers over Fox’s back. “What the fuck is going on?”

“Check me,” River blurted out, and Smokey got to his feet, grabbing the back of River’s shirt to roughly jerk it out of the way. River stiffened as Smokey’s fingers moved across his skin and I was pretty sure the idiot was getting a boner.

I smirked, leaning back in my chair to watch them.

“Careful, fire face. You’re making him excited.”

“Leave him alone,” Smokey muttered without stopping his search, suddenly pausing. “I found it.”

Why the fuck did we all have microchips? I’d bet money on Smokey having one too, and I was right when Smokey demanded that River check him, finding the small bump in his back.

Storm blew out a breath, flicking the knife around in his hand while he thought. As much as we claimed we were all equal, we looked to Storm as a leader. Did I like to admit that? Definitely not, but he was good at keeping control of situations and coming up with plans.

I noticed Smokey and Fox watching him as they waited for him to speak, but River was too busy freaking out. He was lucky his powers were so strong or he never would’ve lasted here.

“We’ll remove all the chips now and come back to this tomorrow. I need you all to try and see if you can remember

anything that might help us understand,” Storm finally said, looking at Fox. “You get hold of Minerva and get her here tomorrow too. We need to pull as much information out as possible and she’s the only way to do it.”

“So we’re just going home?” I scowled, not liking the idea at all. “What if we get attacked in our sleep?”

“We’ve gone this long without knowing the truth so one more night won’t hurt. Besides, Stardust’s security is strong and we’ll be alerted if anything happens,” Storm answered, scrubbing a hand over his face. Fatigue took over his expression, and I wondered if this was too much pressure on him. He was stronger than the rest of us but that meant he had so much more weight on his shoulders. “I’ll look into the unicorn bullshit tonight before bed too, so I’ll hopefully have answers about that tomorrow.”

“We can look into it,” Fox said, noticing how tired Storm was too. “I’ve already started since River and Salem called me about the dead unicorn she woke up next to.”

Smokey nodded, glancing at Storm.

“I’ll help. You need a break, you look like shit.”

“That’s just his face,” I said dryly, ignoring Storm as he glared at me. I got to my feet, motioning to River and Smokey. “Cut your chips out and let’s go. I still need to train before bed.”

I knew what River was going to say before he even opened his damn mouth.

“Can’t I stay here? I want to keep an eye on Salem.”

“None of you are fucking staying,” Storm bit out, getting to his feet too. “Turn around so I can cut you up and send you home. Salem’s fine here and she’ll probably just sleep until morning.”

I could tell this was going to turn into an argument so I didn’t bother waiting for them.

“I’m going home. I’m not waiting all night for you guys to stop comparing dick sizes.” I turned to leave and was surprised

when Fox told me to wait. I thought he was going to put up a fight like River since he was the one currently fucking her.

“I’ll come with you and make a start on this unicorn shit. River?” He turned back to face the whiney fucker. “Leave her alone, I mean it. You might have helped her but she hasn’t forgiven you and she needs space. Storm won’t let anything happen to her.”

He’d probably fuck her to death but that was about it. My brother never cared for anyone, but I could tell he was at war with himself over Salem. I knew how that felt.

Memories hit me of my hands on her soft skin as I fucked her, those long legs tight around my waist as she screamed my name. Nothing had ever felt so good but I’d never have that again.

Not after what she did.

“Are you okay?” Fox asked with a frown, making me realize I’d zoned out and the guys were all looking at me. I hadn’t even noticed Storm had already cut out Fox’s chip.

I sneered, stalking towards the door as the memories of Salem faded.

“Fuck off.”

I ignored Fox the entire walk home as he trailed behind me, and I swore the asshole knew what I’d been thinking about.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SALEM

I woke with a start, my heart hammering as I tried to get my bearings thanks to another fucked up dream. It took me a moment to remember where I was, and I strained to listen for any noise in the house. It was quiet other than the TV downstairs, so I climbed out of bed, taking the bloodied towel with me.

My body was still weak from my drained powers, which was weird.

I flicked on the light and checked my back in the bathroom, trying to wash off the dried blood so I could see the damage. Most of it was healed but it needed more time.

Putting the shirt back in place and tossing the towel in the basket in the corner, I padded down the stairs to the living room, finding Storm on the couch. His eyes flicked up to mine as I moved closer, his voice rough.

“I’m surprised you’re awake. It’s two in the morning.”

“I had a nightmare. Why aren’t you asleep?” I dropped down beside him, not surprised when he grabbed the back of the shirt to shove it out of the way, checking my injury without asking.

“Couldn’t sleep. You still haven’t healed?”

“My powers are pretty low,” I admitted, creating a small ball of air in my hand, the swirls flickering in and out weakly. “Why don’t you guys burn out?”

“We’ve trained daily for years, so our stamina is better. This is why I told you to practice,” he muttered. His fingers brushed my back and I tried hard to ignore the tingles that shot through me. “I have to be the bad guy again.”

That confused me.

“What do you mean?”

“You need another booster injection.” Panic consumed me and I was surprised when he hesitated before reaching a hand out to tuck my hair behind my ear. “I need you to trust me. I know the needles you fear, I had them too. You need to push that aside or your powers won’t heal.”

“I can’t just switch it off. It’s like I go back there in my head.” I shuffled back from him and he assessed me silently before getting to his feet.

“Do you think it will help if you shut your eyes and just let me do it fast?”

“I don’t want it.”

“You need it,” he said firmly, crossing his arms tightly. “None of us like it but you need to be ready for war at every second of the day. What if we get attacked? You need to be ready, but you can’t defend yourself when you’re weak.”

He walked into the kitchen, my body going tense as I noticed the needle in his hand when he returned.

“Please don’t,” I begged, tears burning my eyes the closer he became to me. “Storm—”

“Trust me,” he repeated in a low voice, conflict in his gaze for a moment before he leaned down and kissed me. I hadn’t been expecting it, so I froze for a moment before my brain caught on to what was happening, opening my mouth for him. My hands ended up under his shirt as my fingers moved over every dip and curve of his abs, and my panties became soaked as he kissed me harder, his hand sliding to the waistband of my pants and tugging them down. I lifted my hips to make it easier, one of my hands ending up in his dark hair to keep him close.

Considering I'd never cared for sex, I sure as fuck had been interested in it since arriving here.

Just as I reached for his pants, he pulled back, a mask in place again as if he hadn't just melted my damn panties off.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?"

"What are you—" My eyes landed on the empty needle in his hand, then I felt the aching pain start in my ass cheek. He'd only kissed me to distract me while giving me the injection.

"Massage it in and it won't hurt so bad." He turned to leave as I scrambled to my feet, my panic fueling me as I was right back there in that dark room, the pain filling me as masked men laughed.

I blindly reached for something to stop myself from collapsing, and my fingers curled in soft fabric as an arm slid around my lower back.

"You're killing me here. Get your shit together." Storm's voice sounded far away, the laughter in my head so loud that I couldn't think. "Don't fucking blast me."

I flinched as I was lifted off the ground, a scream stuck in my throat. My nails dug into someone and I was suddenly dropped onto the couch, lips landing on mine as hands roamed my body. I winced as fingers started massaging my tender ass, my panic subsiding as Storm's scent surrounded me. No one was hurting me, I was fine.

Storm cursed as he pulled back, glaring at me as if it were my fault.

"I'm not doing this. I don't trust you." I reached for him, surprised that he didn't pull away. Instead, his hand tightened in mine. "Salem, I can't want you like this."

I wasn't sure what I wanted myself, but all I knew was my powers were screaming for him and I needed his touch. I didn't want to like Storm, he was an asshole, but I couldn't deny he was hot and there was a pull between us.

"Storm, please. I need you," I murmured, tugging him closer. "I need—"

“I can’t fucking have you. I want you, but I can’t,” he bit out. “We don’t even know who you really are. Do you understand? You tried to kill my brother. You got River to fall for you. Smokey and Fox weren’t long after that. For all we know, you’re playing us.”

The rejection burned through me and I let him go, pushing him back and getting to my feet to fix my pants. I only made it two steps towards the stairs before he grabbed the back of my neck and hauled me against him, his mouth crashing into mine.

I gasped in surprise and his hand moved to my hair to keep me in place as his other hand landed on my waist, walking me backwards as my fingers bunched in his shirt. He was kissing the hell out of me, a growl of warning leaving him as I dropped a hand to his pants to dip my fingers below the waistband.

“Fuck me.” I didn’t have to say anything else to convince him as he shoved me down on the couch and laid over me, his fingers moving to my throat.

“You’d better not fuck with me, firecracker,” he warned, a flash of vulnerability in his eyes. “I *will* kill you.”

“I’m not fucking with you,” I insisted, needing him to believe me. I pushed my hand down the front of his pants and wrapped my fingers around his length to stroke him, pausing for a second before continuing when I felt cool metal piercings along the underside. “I need you. You guys are all I have.”

“Promise me this isn’t a game.”

“I promise.” I’d hardly gotten the words out before he started stripping me, yanking his own clothes off in the process and giving me an eyeful of his cock, the four silver barbels staring back at me. “We need a condom.”

“I’ll pull out.”

“No you won’t,” I hissed, his hands gripping my ass as he dragged me closer, lining himself up with my entrance. “Storm!”

He ignored me, spitting on my pussy and smearing the moisture around before pressing the head against my opening and starting to push inside. I forgot all about my request as the piercings rubbed on the inner walls of my pussy. It felt so different, and I couldn't help the breathy moan that left me. His fingers flexed on my throat, not cutting off my airways but just wanting me to know that he could if he wanted to. My hips raised slightly to encourage him, and I reached for him so that I had something to hold on to.

My fingers brushed the scars on his back and he drew back with a snarl.

“Keep your hands to yourself!”

“No, let me touch you,” I said softly, wanting to feel his imperfect skin under my fingertips.

He pulled out of me and slammed back in again, his voice gruff.

“Salem, don't. I mean it.”

“Do you think it repulses me or something?” He tried to pull away but I wrapped my legs around him to stop his escape, trailing my hands across his back and down his shoulders. “You're so fucking hot, Storm. Your scars are just part of your story. I want to know all of it.”

The burns must have been bad to scar like this, but Storm wouldn't be Storm without the damage. He was strong because he'd had no choice.

I lifted a hand to his face, tracing the scar lightly.

“I think you're perfect.”

His hand left my throat to grab my wrists, pinning them above my head.

“You really are good at lying,” he murmured, starting to move inside me at a slow pace. “I don't care what you say. Don't fucking touch me.”

He started moving faster as he leaned down to claim my lips, and I had no option other than to lie there and take it. His free hand slid up my front to my tits, a tingling sensation

starting in my nipples and making my pussy clench. It grew stronger until a zap rolled through my body, a loud moan leaving me as he chuckled, leaning back to look down at me as lightning danced between his fingers.

“You liked that? You really are into some kinky shit, aren’t you?”

The zap hadn’t hurt but it sent tingles through my entire body.

I went to speak but he suddenly released me, flipping me onto my stomach. Doggy wasn’t my favorite, it made me self conscious for some reason.

He lifted my ass up and pushed back inside, my eyes almost rolling into the back of my head as his piercings moved backward and forth across my G-spot.

“Fuck, Storm—”

“Hold on,” he warned before fucking me hard, making me scream as he held my hips in a bruising grip and pushed me towards orgasm, his piercings teasing all my nerves until I exploded on his cock. He only fucked me harder as my pussy clamped down around him, the feeling growing stronger, and he let out a curse as he pulled back, breathing heavily as warm cum hit my back. “I don’t think I pulled out fast enough.”

I was a panting mess, not moving as he pushed his fingers inside me.

“What are you doing?”

“Checking.” He cursed before withdrawing his fingers, his voice angry. “I definitely came in you.”

“Wait, what?” I glanced over my shoulder at him as he got to his feet, frustration all over his face as he tossed my shirt at me.

“Clean yourself up. I’ll be back later.” He started shoving his clothes on and panic filled me.

“Where are you going?”

“Out.”

“It’s the middle of the night!” I sat up, ignoring the cum that ran down my back. “You’re really just going to bail on me now that you’ve drained your balls?”

It shouldn’t have hurt, but it did.

He stared at me for a moment before blowing out a breath, snatching the shirt from my hands and wiping at my back to clean me up.

“I’m coming back. I need to get you one of those tea things.”

“What tea things?”

“It’s like a magical morning after pill. Basically kills all the sperm in your entire body so it can’t turn into anything,” he answered, his voice softening. “Please stay here until I get back. We need to talk about what just happened.”

I could hear it in his tone. He was regretting it already.

“I’ll stay,” I whispered, peering into his eyes as he stroked my hair.

“Go get yourself some fresh clothes from my room, I won’t be long.”

I didn’t answer as he left, and I didn’t move for a few minutes as I tried to process what had happened. I felt closer to him now but I could sense him pulling away further.

He was probably going to kick me out and go back to being an asshole.

I headed up to his room for fresh clothes, using his shower to scrub myself clean, and I finally let the tears fall.

Why didn’t he want me?

Storm

I cursed myself for the millionth time as I walked back home from the store. I’d always wondered why it was open twenty-four-seven, but now I was grateful for it.

Why had I been so stupid? I hadn't wanted barriers between us, needing to feel her wet cunt around me, but I'd been so into it that I forgot to pull out before that first rope of cum left me.

"What are you doing?"

I turned to find Fox and Smokey walking towards me, and I bit back a groan. I didn't need them knowing about this shit.

"Enjoying the fresh air. Isn't it obvious?" I deadpanned. "Where are you guys going? It's three in the morning."

I growled as Smokey snatched the box from my hand, a smirk spreading across his face.

"Damn, dude. You fucked her raw?"

"Mind your own business," I spat, snatching it back and earning a flat look from Fox.

"You didn't use a condom? How did you two end up banging anyway? You hate her, remember?"

"It was an accident and it's not happening again."

"Sure," Smokey grinned. "We're heading out to handle another unicorn problem. Someone's found three dead together and put it in the reporting system. Figured while we're on the unicorn hunt, we might as well do the job."

Fox didn't give a shit about the unicorn problem apparently, he only gave a shit about Salem.

"Did you leave her crying somewhere?" he demanded, and I raked a hand through my hair, taking a deep breath to avoid swinging at him.

"No. I wasn't even that rough with her. Can you guys fuck off?"

"I can't wait to tell River," Smokey laughed, stumbling as I gave him a shove.

"Keep it to yourself, asshole. Do you really want River crying all damn week?"

"He's got to let her go," he shrugged, not meeting my eye.

“Why? Do you fucking want him?” I threw back, flames igniting in his hands and moving up his arms.

“What the fuck did you just say?”

“Guys, enough,” Fox sighed. “We don’t have time for this. Storm, go back to Salem. Smokey, let’s go find these unicorns.” The flames retreated until they were only small flickers in Smokey’s hands, but he glared at me as if the look alone would make me drop dead. “Smokey. Go.” I rolled my eyes as Smokey stalked off towards the main gate, and Fox gave me a firm look. “I swear to God, she’d better be okay.”

“She’s fine. Fucking text her and check if you’re that worried,” I bit out, pushing past him. “She was the one begging me for it so don’t blame me.” I kept walking, not waiting for his reply.

I quickly made the tea for Salem the moment I got back, carrying the cup upstairs to her room. I opened the door to find the room empty, my heart sinking at the thought of her running out on me. Maybe I had been too rough? I wasn’t sure of her experience other than she obviously liked to use toys on herself. She’d mostly complained that guys didn’t know what they were doing, but what if she had some kind of trauma and I’d scared her?

She’d seemed fine when I left but she was definitely upset about something.

I closed her bedroom door and wandered into my room, relief hitting me as I found her asleep on my bed on top of the blanket. I had no idea why she was in here but I didn’t question it.

I hated waking her, but she needed the tea as soon as possible.

“Salem?” I sat on the edge of the bed, placing the tea on the bedside table and combing my fingers through her soft hair, the red strands appearing more vibrant against my skin. “Firecracker?”

She stirred, her eyes opening to reveal they were red from crying. I felt like such an ass. I’d had every intention of telling

her what we'd done was a mistake, but she stared at me with so much hope that it hit me right in the stomach.

"You came back?" she murmured, making me feel worse. She thought I'd left to get away from her. Well, I had at first, needing to clear my head, but I'd also been worried about her.

She deserved more than me and my fucked up demons.

"I bought you the tea." Her eyes flicked to the cup and I reached for it, handing it over as she sat up. "Did I hurt you?"

"No, why?" she asked, sipping the tea while watching me. "I expected you to tear me in half to be honest."

"Why would you think that?" I ran my eyes over her, one of my shirts being the only thing she was wearing. I never understood why guys liked seeing girls in their clothes but I totally got it now. It was some kind of territorial primal shit, and I wanted everyone to see her in my shirt and think she was mine.

I didn't want to like her, but she was making it extremely difficult.

"You're always so angry," she whispered, giving me a soft smile. "I was prepared to come out of this pretty battered and bruised."

"You sound disappointed that you didn't."

"I was just surprised. You won't break me like you think you will, Storm." Her soft fingers touched my face, and I tried hard not to flinch away as they touched my scar. "You can always be yourself with me. Even if that means you rail me through the damn wall to help center your own emotions when it gets too much."

"Finish your tea," I answered instead, the conversation getting too heavy for me. "We need to go to sleep."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell her to go back to her room, and from the look on her face, she knew. Every part of me screamed to make her go, but I didn't want her to. I wanted her to stay in here with me.

I'd never shared a bed with someone I'd fucked before.

“Do you want to sleep in here?”

“With you?”

“Yeah.” I felt like an idiot as she stared at me strangely, and I gave her a dirty look. “Don’t fucking worry about it then.”

I got to my feet but was tugged back down, her soft lips landing on mine. I was aware of the cup she still had in her hand so I didn’t haul her on top of me, but fuck I wanted to. I wanted to sink back inside her and fuck her until she begged me to stop.

Then I’d fuck her harder.

“I really want to stay in here with you,” she said against my lips, kissing me again before downing the rest of her tea and placing the cup on the bedside table. I stripped down to my boxers, hesitating when I realized she could see all my scars again. She pulled the blanket back and climbed under the covers, patting the spot beside her.

“Are you coming?”

I slid in beside her and made sure to keep a small gap between us, not that she let that last for long. The moment I was in bed properly she snuggled into me, making me tense. Her arm wrapped around me and her fingers brushed the scars on my back, her cheek pressing into my chest.

After a second I relaxed, sliding an arm around her and getting comfortable. I didn’t think I’d like this but it felt nice, and it meant no one could break in and try to hurt her without waking me in the process.

“Good night, bolt,” she murmured, placing a soft kiss on my chest.

“Night, firecracker.”

I slept like a fucking baby too.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SALEM

I woke up before Storm, staring at him like a creeper for a good twenty minutes before his eyes opened to catch me.

“What the fuck are you looking at?” His voice was rough from sleep and his eyes were unsure, his arm still draped over my waist.

“You look grumpy even in your sleep,” I said with a small smile, reaching a hand up to rake my fingers through his messy hair. “Do you spend the whole time yelling at the guys in your dreams?”

His mouth curved into a smile and his hand moved to rest on my bare thigh.

“I’m not that bad.”

“You are. This is as relaxed as I’ve ever seen you.”

“You’ve never seen me after getting laid. It’s physically impossible to be tense after that,” he chuckled, surprisingly tolerating me as I continued to toy with his hair. “I still don’t like you though.”

“Sure you don’t.” He was so full of shit. I dropped a leg over his waist to straddle him, placing my palms on his chest. “I like you.”

He had no idea how to respond to that, staring up at me like I’d grown two heads, and he slowly moved his hands to my waist, sliding them under the shirt that hung off my small frame.

“I guess you’re not that bad,” he said quietly, sitting up but not removing me from his lap. “We just need to figure this shit out about our pasts.”

“We’ll do it together. All of us. We’re a team and I have your back, even when you don’t have mine.”

That made him grimace and his arms went around me to keep me in place. He looked so torn, conflict written across his face as he tried to figure out what to say to that. I didn’t let him stress about it as I slowly leaned forward to kiss him, stopping before our lips could touch to let him make the choice.

If he didn’t want to, I wouldn’t.

“What are you doing to me, firecracker?” he murmured, his dark eyes burning into mine.

“Shaking up your world, baby,” I whispered back, his lips landing on mine as he tightened his hold on me. It was almost violent the way he kissed me, his dick thickening in his boxers under me.

I wasn’t wearing panties so I felt all of it, whimpering as I ground down on it.

“You want me again?” he said against my mouth, and I nodded as he reached between us to pull himself free, groaning when his fingers brushed against my soaked entrance. “You’re so fucking wet.”

He pushed two fingers inside and his thumb found my clit, my thighs tensing with anticipation as he pumped them in and out, bringing me closer to release while watching my face. It was intimate, and I flushed from the intensity of it.

It was like he was studying my every expression and sound.

I tried to hide my face in his neck but he didn’t allow it, his free hand wrapping around my throat to hold me back, and the moment I came, his eyes darkened with lust. I had two seconds to recover before he lined himself up and eased inside me, my sensitive body clenching as he continued toying with my clit.

“Fuck, you feel so good,” I mumbled, keeping my eyes on his as I started rolling my hips. It felt so deep like this, and I was glad he let me keep control or he’d probably hurt me.

We weren’t in a hurry, our bodies moving together as one as his lips found my throat and his fingers dug into my waist. He tensed when my hands wandered his back but he didn’t stop me this time.

My phone rang from the other room but I ignored it, not wanting anything to ruin this. Storm and I both needed this moment together, him more than me it seemed.

I ground down so that my clit pressed against his pubic bone, the tingles starting as I rode him, and we both came together not long after.

We sat like that for a while until Storm cringed.

“Do you think you’d be interested in contraception?”

“I’m starting to think I should get some,” I answered, wrapping my arms around his neck lightly and pressing my chest against his. “I’m worried about sleeping with multiple people without condoms though, which is why I’ll probably insist on you still using them.”

“Get Fox to take you to the store. There’s a bunch of magical shit to prevent diseases.”

“Why don’t you guys just use that all the time then?”

“Because that’s pretty intimate, Salem. We don’t want to be with just anyone like that,” he said softly, cupping my cheek. “I can’t explain it, but I don’t want barriers with you. I shouldn’t, but I want all of you.”

“I hope there’s more tea,” I chuckled nervously as his cum started leaking out of me.

“I got a whole box,” he smirked, swatting my butt and startling me. “Time to get out of bed before Fox marches over here and barges in. I bet that’s who tried calling you, so he’s probably freaking out.” I climbed off him, getting to my feet and feeling more leak out.

“I’m going to go and shower.”

“Me too. I’ll meet you in the kitchen,” he replied, some of the softness leaving his face as if he was ready to put his mask on for the day. I hated that but I couldn’t expect him to change just because he’d fucked me.

As long as he wasn’t a dick to me, that was all that mattered.

I showered quickly before padding down to the kitchen in another one of Storm’s large shirts, finding a steaming cup of tea waiting for me. Storm’s back was to me, and he jerked when I pressed a hand to his lower back.

“Shit, sorry,” I mumbled, hating that he pulled away. His time in the shower had apparently been enough time to think, and he’d gone back to being a prickly asshole.

“Drink your tea, the guys are coming over,” he grunted, grabbing a plate of eggs and bacon that I hadn’t noticed and handed it to me. “And eat that.”

I guess he wasn’t completely being an asshole.

“Thank you,” I said as I took it, doing as he’d asked to avoid upsetting him. I didn’t like fighting with any of them and I wanted to cling to the sweeter moments we’d shared, so I silently ate my breakfast in peace, finishing my tea just as Fox barged through the front door.

“Don’t you check your phone?” he asked me almost angrily, making me frown.

“I haven’t today, no. Why?”

“I thought this dickbag had killed you or something,” he huffed, his fingers teasing the back of my neck as he leaned down to kiss me, my eyes darting to Storm’s to see his reaction. His jaw was tight but that was the only sign that he hadn’t liked it.

Fox apparently noticed it too, a taunting grin spreading across his face.

“So, how did your night go?”

“It was good,” I shrugged, and Fox snorted.

“So I heard.” He tapped the tea cup, raising an eyebrow. “You didn’t wait until this morning to drink that, did you? You gotta drink it fast for it to work.”

“Why do you know about the tea?” I demanded, and Storm huffed.

“I ran into him and Smokey last night when I went to get it. But no, that’s her second cup.”

“You only need one,” Fox pointed out, chuckling when Storm didn’t answer. “You went for round two? So much for a mistake that wasn’t happening again.”

My chest tightened with pain as I glanced at Storm, his face unreadable. I stared at him but he didn’t offer me an explanation or apology, so I pushed my chair back and got to my feet.

Fox called my name but I ignored him, heading up to my room and locking the door.

If I’d been a mistake, why had he fucked me again this morning?

Why hadn’t he told Fox he liked me and to fuck off?

Storm

I forced myself not to watch Salem leave the room, knowing I’d chase after her like a fucking idiot. Now that I’d had five minutes away from her while I’d showered, my emotions had run wild, freaking me out. I needed space but didn’t know the right way to say it, so I just acted like an asshole.

I should’ve just told her the truth, and I should’ve told Fox that I’d been confused about the whole thing last night and it wasn’t a mistake, but I hadn’t, letting Salem’s heart break in front of me and now I felt like an absolute prick.

“You slept with Salem?” River asked quietly as he walked in, his face scrunching with confusion. “You don’t even like each other.” I didn’t need his whiney-ass drama this morning. I

was already frustrated with my own shit, I didn't need anyone else's too.

"Since when do you have to like someone to fuck them?" Smokey asked as he joined us, giving me a look. "You fucked her again, didn't you? You look really relaxed this morning."

"Can everyone shut the fuck up about my sex life?" I asked dryly, glaring at River as he started walking towards the stairs. "Where the fuck are you going?"

"To check on Salem. She's upset."

"She's always upset," Frost muttered, dropping down heavily into a seat at the table as if the guys had dragged him here against his will. "The fuck is wrong with you idiots? She doesn't have a magical pussy or anything."

His face said otherwise but I didn't call him out for it.

"Everyone sit the fuck down. You too, River. She's fine." I was ready to throw them all back out the damn door, and they hadn't even been here for two minutes. "I want an update on the unicorns right now."

"What can I say?" Smokey drawled. "We showed up, they were definitely dead, and we couldn't find anything around them that led us to the culprit. I'm more interested about how Salem's walking today after you railed her. Twice, I might add. You have so much pent up anger."

I saw straight through that fucker. He was worried I'd hurt her, and it pissed me off that they all thought I would.

"Salem's cunt is fine," I snapped, smacking a hand on the table. "Considering none of you give a shit about her, why are you suddenly so invested? Sure, I fucked her, and I fucking liked it. Do you need to know which positions we did too?" Fox gave me an amused look and I pointed at him. "Don't answer that. If you're all so worried, I'll go and check on her."

I stomped up the stairs, ignoring Frost calling me a whipped bitch, and I went to open Salem's door but found it locked.

“Salem? Open the fucking door.” She ignored me, some of the anger melting away when I realized she was definitely upset. “Firecracker?”

“Go away.”

“Let me in or I’ll break the door down.” She didn’t answer so I kicked the door hard enough to make it fly open, the bang echoing through the house and making Salem jump from her spot on the bed.

“What the fuck, Storm?”

“I warned you,” I bit out, stalking towards her. “Why didn’t you open it?”

“Why do you care?” she threw back, sitting up to glare at me. “I was just a mistake anyway.”

“No you weren’t,” I growled, grabbing her chin firmly and forcing her to hold my gaze. “I was freaking out when I ran into them last night. I don’t do feelings, and you’re forcing them out of me without my control. You fucking terrify me because for once in my life, someone has enough control to break me.”

“I don’t want to break you! I just want *you*, dumbass! I really fucking like you!” she shouted, and I didn’t know how to express what that meant to me, so I kissed her. She fought me for a moment before kissing me back, her arms going around my neck to pull me closer until I was laying over her.

My muscles relaxed and it was like all the rage went away. She calmed everything inside of me.

I pulled back, looking down at her with what I hoped was an apologetic expression.

“You’re not a mistake.”

“I don’t expect you to have a personality transplant, but don’t push me away. Please,” she whispered, and if the guys weren’t downstairs I would’ve stripped her naked and fucked her again. She was like crack and I was an addict, I couldn’t get enough of her.

“I don’t know how to deal with these emotions but I’ll try harder,” I promised, standing up and pulling her against me. “I don’t like the guys knowing my business either. I’m not ashamed of you, they’re just assholes.”

“You know you have to share me, right?”

Worry filled her eyes and she nervously chewed on her lip, telling me she’d seen my reaction to her and Fox. I’d wanted to rip his lips off his face. For once I understood River’s concern about her leaving him for someone else because I was sure that was going to happen for me. My body was a mess of scars and damage, so why would she want that? Fox moisturized and had perfect skin, for fuck’s sake.

How could I compete with that?

“Hey, bolt? You’ll get wrinkles if you keep frowning like that,” she teased, standing on tiptoe to kiss me. “Are the guys still here?”

“Yeah, we should go back downstairs,” I sighed, burying my face in her neck and trailing kisses across her skin. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

I took her hand and pulled her after me as I walked back down the stairs, ignoring the amused glances from the guys as I steered her towards a chair so she could sit down, then I dropped into one beside her.

“Does anyone have jobs today?” I asked as if I hadn’t left the conversation, leaning back in my chair and meeting their gazes. “We’ve been slack lately and things are starting to pile up.”

“I’m still on the unicorn hunt,” Fox answered, motioning to River. “And he’s helping a town with a flooding issue.”

“I’m dealing with fucking dragons again,” Smokey grumbled, flicking his eyes to Salem before looking at Frost. “Ice boy over here can come with me.”

Frost scowled but didn’t argue, his eyes on me.

“What are you going to be doing while we’re out on jobs?”

“I need to handle an *aqrabuamelu*,” I snorted, glancing at Salem. “And you can come with me.”

“Shouldn’t she be resting?” River asked, his brow creasing. “Her powers—”

“I gave her a booster last night, she’s fine. I wouldn’t take her if I didn’t think she could handle it,” I argued, but Salem frowned.

“What’s an *aqrabullema*?”

I tried not to laugh at her pronunciation but I let a chuckle slip.

“An *aqrabuamelu* is half man, half scorpion. Angry fuckers with a nasty sting if they get you. One’s been bothering the locals, so we need to move it along.”

“If you’d just called it a scorpion dude, I’d have understood what you meant. How do we do that?”

“Between you and me it won’t take too much hopefully. Ask Smokey how much fun being stung is.” I looked at Smokey who flipped me off.

“Hey, I took it like a champ. Until you’ve felt the pain of that sting, don’t give me shit for how I handled it. It literally feels like someone’s injected acid into your veins days after the paralysis wears off. I don’t think Salem should go. She needs more training.”

“She can train on the job. Like I said, I wouldn’t take her if I didn’t think she could do it. Fox, get hold of the Board and see if they know anything that could help us with the unicorns. They think we’re wasting our time on them, but after that asshole who attacked Salem turned into one once he died, I think that makes it a priority.” I pointed at Frost who was still scowling. “And you, it’s your turn to stock up on food so be a good boy and handle that when you get back from your adventure with Smokey.”

“Can’t Salem do that?”

“It’s not her turn yet, so no. We put this schedule in place to avoid arguments breaking out, I do recall it being your idea,

so don't complain," I said tightly. "I'll stop by later to pick some stuff up."

Frost stood and walked out without another word, making Smokey sigh as he got to his feet.

"I guess we're going then. See you later." His eyes flicked to Salem on his way out, and she grumbled beside me.

"He's such a lying asshole. He doesn't hate me."

"We know," I answered, getting to my feet too. "Fox? Call Minerva. I wanted her here today."

"She didn't answer the phone, not my fault," he huffed, walking around to Salem to pull her to her feet. His eyes held so much concern for her, and jealousy surged through me again as he gave her a kiss. "Let me know when you get back. I want to spend some time with you later."

"We're busy," I said sharply, earning a smirk from him.

"Gotta learn to share, man. You've had her since yesterday."

"Can you guys not fight over me?" Salem mumbled, looking annoyed. "Talk about this later, but I need to go to the main house and grab some clothes. I can't fight giant scorpion dudes in nothing but a shirt."

"You don't have panties on under that?" Fox asked, not hesitating to drop his hand between her legs. "Oh, you naughty girl."

"Stop it," she hissed as her cheeks heated. It wasn't like we hadn't seen her pussy before, but her eyes flicked to River who looked just as uncomfortable. They really needed to figure their shit out or move on.

"You guys need to go so I can give Salem the rundown on our job. Shoo."

Fox rolled his eyes at me but gave Salem another kiss before walking towards the door to wait for River who mumbled an awkward goodbye on his way out, leaving me and Salem alone again.

Just how I fucking liked it.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SALEM

“How much further?” I complained as we trudged along the road. We hadn’t walked that far but I was too tired for this shit.

Storm glowered at me, annoyance in his tone.

“We’ve only been walking for ten minutes. You really need to train more if you can’t even walk for a few minutes without needing a rest, you fucking brat.”

“I’m not a brat!”

“Sure,” he said under his breath, not slowing his steps. I was practically jogging to keep up with him, his long legs eating up the distance while I struggled to keep pace. “I don’t think I’ve seen you run on a treadmill once since you got here.”

“Do I look like a runner?” I huffed, a light laugh leaving him as his face softened.

“You sure seem to run away from dragons a lot. Probably couldn’t hurt to learn to run faster.”

“You’re an ass. Tell me more about this overly large scorpion man we’re dealing with. What are their weaknesses? Where do they live usually? Do they speak since they’re part man? I know what they look like, but that’s about it.”

He seemed happy with all my questions, finally slowing a fraction.

“Their sting is agony and can cause temporary paralysis, so trust me when I say you don’t want to get hit. Aim for their

chests with your powers, that part is human and isn't covered by a hard exterior like the rest of their bodies. They do speak English but it's like dealing with a drunk toddler on steroids. They have no manners."

"Sounds like a bunch of guys I know," I grumbled, squealing as he zapped me playfully. "Hey!"

"We're not drunk toddlers." He seemed amused, his usual scowl long gone as he assessed me. "Maybe Frost is though. Do you think you really spent so much time with him in the past? You must have had your entire memory wiped to forget that much."

"Are you going to hate me if we find out that I really did try to kill him?" The thought made my chest ache, my eyes dropping to the ground as we walked. "What if I really am a monster?"

"We're all monsters, Salem," he murmured, walking so close that our arms brushed. "But so are the people who claim to fear us. They think we were never supposed to exist, and maybe they're right, but that doesn't make us *bad* monsters. We're just different, and that's what scares them."

We walked in silence for a few minutes before I replied, glancing up to find his eyes already on me.

"You're not a monster to me. We're just gifted, that's all. Is that really how you see yourself?"

"Unlike you, I remember everything." His voice dropped and regret flickered across his face. "I forced so much of my power into you and others. I inflicted pain and suffering, even death." He paused, his steps faltering for a second before he continued walking. "Well, I thought I did. Maybe the deaths were just an illusion since you're walking around with a heartbeat."

"I think someone's been playing us like puppets and everything's been a fucking illusion," I answered, sliding my hand into his. He yanked away abruptly, cursing under his breath before managing to look embarrassed as I forced a small smile. "It's fine, I'm pushing it."

“No, I’m just not used to, well, this.” He pointed at me and then back at himself. “I don’t do this.”

“Wait, were you a fucking virgin?” I sputtered, a booming laugh leaving him.

“Unlikely, firecracker. Did I fuck like a virgin? When you finally fuck water boy, come back to me so we can compare some skills.”

“I’m not going to sleep with River. That’s over,” I said firmly, the words tasting sour in my mouth. “He hurt me and I can’t forgive him.”

“I do recall you hated me and Fox not that long ago, and look at you now. Having a Fox and Storm fuck-fest,” he deadpanned, hesitating before linking his fingers with mine and giving my hands a gentle squeeze. “Don’t get me wrong, I want to tear that little pansy apart just thinking about him being with you, but he’s a good guy. The kind of guy you’re supposed to have.”

“What exactly am I supposed to have? If you haven’t noticed, I’m kind of into bad boys with anger management issues,” I replied sweetly. “One in particular really rocked my world recently. He’s fucking hot too. I’m wet just thinking about it.”

I gasped as his fingers were suddenly pressing into my throat, firm enough to gain one-hundred-percent of my attention without actually hurting me.

“Do you want me to fuck you right here on the sidewalk? You’re asking for it.”

“I’ll beg if it helps get your pants off faster,” I said breathlessly, holding his gaze. “Believe it or not but I’m really good at doing as I’m told when I want to.”

“We’ll come back to this conversation later,” he murmured, conflict in his gaze before he released me and started walking ahead. “We have a job to do, so stop getting distracted.”

He was the one distracted and he knew it, but I didn’t call him out on it. If he wanted to keep pretending to be the big,

bad, asshole, then I wouldn't burst his bubble.

We walked through a sidegate and made our way into a creepy old house, my skin breaking out into goosebumps as a cold shiver ran down my spine.

“Storm, not to be a little bitch, but I don't like this.”

He grinned and went to give me shit for being a pussy, but he suddenly shoved me to the side and lightning burst from his palm in the direction we'd just come from. I hit the ground hard and my shoulder burned from the impact, fear racing through me as I noticed the massive monster that had somehow gone unnoticed until now.

His body was a scorpion's, eight massive, thick legs that tapped across the floorboards now that he wasn't trying to be quiet, his massive stinger curved behind him as he scrambled back to put distance between himself and Storm's lightning.

“Get the fuck up, Salem!” Storm barked, snapping me out of it as I quickly got to my feet. Air swirled in my hands as I went on alert, my eyes darting around the room to make sure the creepy bug dude didn't have any friends.

“You!” he hissed, his pincers snapping in my direction as anger radiated out of him. Confusion moved through me but Storm didn't give me time to think about it as he sent a large bolt of lightning at the guy.

“Don't even look at her, you shitbag. What the fuck are you doing here?”

“I should be asking you psychos that,” he gritted out, glaring at both of us. “You have a lot of nerve, you know that?”

“What are you talking about?” I asked, earning the side-eye from Storm as I took a step closer. “We're just doing our job. You're the one terrorizing people. You act like you know us.”

“I know you and your people quite well since you're the reason we were put in cages to be used in your little science experiments. I don't know why you're still here, acting like you're better than everyone else. You destroyed so many lives

and you have no remorse.” He clicked his tongue, taking another aggressive step towards me. “You’ll all burn in that fancy place you call a home. You really think you’re safe behind those big gates?”

“The Board won’t let you destroy Stardust. We won’t either,” I sneered, Storm moving fast as the guy tried to strike me with his stinger. Storm yanked me closer, his arm firmly around me as his lips brushed my ear.

“Pay attention, for fuck’s sake. We’re not here for a goddamn tea party.”

“This is why everyone’s always fighting. No one communicates,” I muttered, the scorpion dude chuckling.

“You can’t act like you care now. You know exactly what you did.”

I had no clue what he was talking about.

“Care to enlighten me? All I know is you’re here bothering people and now you’re attacking us,” I huffed, his eyes narrowing to slits.

“Your people kept us locked up for years, extracting our venom to use on your little army. You’re only as strong as you are because of everything you’ve been exposed to. No one’s born that fucking strong,” he said with disgust. “You’re freaks of nature.”

“Says the scorpion with the man tits and head,” I said dryly, apparently pissing him off because he struck again, the tip of his stinger grazing my chest and sending white-hot pain through me. My body locked up instantly from the venom, paralyzing me as my body hit the ground like a sack of shit, and Storm lost his mind, lightning flying around the room as thunder rumbled in the distance.

He was super pissed, and I could tell when I heard rain start pounding down on the roof.

Cries of pain left me as I laid there on the floor in agony, fear suddenly hitting me. Weren’t scorpions deadly if their stings were left untreated? Would my body heal me fast enough to stop the venom from getting to my heart?

I couldn't move, but I saw the moment Storm went flying across the room, landing on the floor close by, writhing in pain and clutching his arm. He must have been stung too.

"You're the reason for all the suffering, so it's about time karma came back to bite you in the ass," the guy spat, and pure terror raced through me as he came into my vision, standing over Storm with his stinger ready to strike again.

I tried hard to move but I was still frozen, my limbs aching as I kept trying. He placed one of his creepy scorpion legs on Storm's chest, pressing down hard and making him grunt in pain, and I saw red.

Fire moved through my veins as air blasted out of me like a shockwave, my body trembling as I somehow gained enough strength to get to my feet, tornados replacing my hands and arms. I'd never become one with my powers before.

"Get the fuck away from him!" I snapped, not giving him time to reply before throwing a huge wall of air at him and knocking him off his feet. The pain from the venom only turned to anger, fueling my power as I sent blasts at him again and again until he was against the wall.

"There you are. Your innocent act didn't last long," he chuckled, his eyes raking over me. "You really think you can take me on, seventy-four?"

"How do you know me?!"

"I already told you. Your people kept my people caged, stealing our venom to inject it into their little army of soldiers and turning them into machines against other supernatural beasts. We can hurt you but you can't die. You're immune." He frowned, his eyes flicking to Storm who was still on the floor. He was facing the wall, his body unable to turn around to watch us. "You really have no idea, do you?"

"That obvious?" I hissed, intending on blasting him again but he spoke.

"You're nothing but soldiers, created to be the strongest against all creatures. You were never supposed to exist, that kind of power shouldn't, but they just kept pumping it into you

like it was your life source. I remember your friend, the one with the smart mouth. He had fire in his eyes and a sharp tongue.”

“Smokey?” I murmured, staring at him warily. “You know Smokey?”

“Forty-three. That was what they called him. He almost burned the place down once, that’s the kind of power he had. I can’t imagine how strong he is now. I only saw him when he was dragged into the cages one night and we were zapped with cattle prods until we stung him. He must have been around eight or nine years old. That place was where nightmares were created.”

“Keep talking.”

“You were all tested regularly it seemed. We didn’t see you all that often, but we heard the screams.” He shivered, his face softening. “Yours more than anyones. I saw you a few times. You were brought past the cages often to be revived. Every time we thought they finally killed you, they’d bring you right back and start all over again. I think the first time I saw you, you were still in diapers.”

“What about a boy with water powers? Or seduction?” I demanded, the memory of Frost’s terrified eyes on mine hitting me with full force. “Ice powers?”

“I don’t know, like I said, I heard you more than I saw you.” He glanced at Storm before continuing. “Who told you I’m bothering anyone?”

“The Board. They keep jobs posted for different houses. You really can’t—” I didn’t get to finish my sentence before he cut me off.

“I’ve kept to myself. The Board are full of shit, as usual,” he grunted, moving along the wall towards the door.

“Why did you attack us then?” I argued.

“You’re the ones who blindly came here to attack me. I was only defending myself.” He gave me a nod, moving closer to the exit. “You need to start looking for the real villains.

Everything you've been told is a lie." Then he scuttled out the door without a backwards glance.

"Storm?" I said with panic as the magic faded in my hands and I dropped to my knees, helping him roll over to face me. His jaw was tight as he clutched his arm, and I had no idea how to help him. I didn't have an antidote for the venom to reverse it.

What if we weren't immune? If he didn't get help, he could die.

I pulled my phone from my pocket and tried calling Fox but he didn't answer, River was the same. Everyone was away on jobs.

"Fuck," I cursed, trying Frost and not expecting him to pick up.

"What happened?" he asked when he answered, not greeting me.

"How do you know something's wrong?" My voice broke and he paused before answering.

"I'm the last person you'd call. Where's Storm?"

"He's here but he got stung and he's paralyzed. I don't know what to do." Tears burned my eyes as Storm silently watched me, Frost's voice firm.

"Stop fucking crying, that won't fix it. I'm on the way." He hung up and I tried to get my shit together. Storm probably thought I was a pansy, he just couldn't actually say it right now.

I had no choice but to sit on the floor beside him and pray Frost hurried up.

Frost

"How did Storm get stung and she didn't?" Smokey asked with a snort as we jogged along the road, my eyes on my phone so I could track Salem's location. I wanted to know that too but figured I'd wait until we got Storm home first.

He wasn't going to die but the pain was awful. I remembered how bad Smokey was when he got stung. He writhed in bed in pain for days once the paralysis wore off.

“We'll figure that out after. They're lucky we hadn't gotten far yet or they'd be stuck there for a while, and there's no way Salem could carry him home on her own. They shouldn't have gone, I knew she'd fuck it up.”

I was fuming but I was also worried about Storm which just made me angrier at Salem.

It was her fault, all of this shit was.

We finally arrived at the abandoned house that wasn't far from Stardust, and we walked inside to find Storm on the ground and Salem beside him, gripping his hand. Her worried eyes lifted to mine and I almost asked if she was okay.

I caught myself at the last minute though, not surprised when Smokey sighed and decided to be a dick.

“What did you do to make him get stung? It wouldn't have happened if you weren't here.”

“Does he need a hospital? Will—” She was freaking out and I wasn't going to humor it. It was probably just an act anyway. Maybe it wasn't an accident.

“Move,” I grunted, not bothering with the conversation as I bent down to lift Storm, Smokey joining me to take some of the weight. We managed to get him upright, but the walk home was going to be slow.

I eyed Salem as power kept burning in her hands and up her arms, Smokey's eyes flicking to her too every so often as we walked in silence. She didn't offer conversation which was strange, not that I was upset about it.

If she spoke, I was likely to ice her until her fucking heart stopped beating.

Her phone rang and she ignored it, only pulling it from her pocket the third time they tried calling. I had no idea who it was but my guess was Fox or River. She'd probably tried to

call them before me because there was no way I was her first choice.

She sent a text before pocketing her phone again, glancing at Storm occasionally, but then guilt filled her eyes and she looked away again, giving me my answer.

It was her fucking fault.

After what felt like ages, we hauled Storm through the doors at our house, dragging him up to his room and placing him on his bed. I was pretty sure some of the paralysis was wearing off because he seemed to be scowling at me more than he had earlier.

“He’s going to end up a screaming, sweaty, mess soon,” Smokey murmured, crossing his arms to watch him. “I can’t draw the heat out either when he gets a fever. I couldn’t stop it myself when I got stung.”

Salem lingered in the doorway, looking awkward as always.

“The guy said a few interesting things. He knows us from the facility. They—”

“Shut the fuck up,” I said flatly, keeping my attention on Storm. “I don’t want to hear it.”

“He remembered Smokey. Said he was number forty-three. Their venom was taken and injected into us to make us immune to it. Smokey was thrown into their cage and they were hurt until they stung him.”

She was staring at Smokey who was fighting himself on joining the conversation. Just because he was mad at her, didn’t mean he wasn’t feeling hurt. He really liked her, and now there was an insight on our past, he was getting curious.

I was too, but I didn’t want her to know that.

“Wait until Storm’s able to talk then. He can tell you all this too if you don’t believe me,” she said in defeat before turning and leaving us alone, and Smokey let out a breath.

“Do you really think that’s the truth?”

“I guess we’ll find out when Storm’s back to normal,” I grunted, hoping that was sooner rather than later.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SALEM

River got home and hunted me down instantly, concern in his eyes as he found me in my room. Smokey and Frost had been in Storm's room since we'd brought him home three hours ago, and when I went to check on him an hour ago, they'd locked the door to keep me out.

I hated not knowing what was happening but I knew they wouldn't let him die, so I tried to relax and figure out what the hell had happened with my powers. My body ached from the venom but I wasn't in agonizing pain.

"Are you okay?" River asked, sitting on the edge of my bed beside me where I was holding a ball of air in my palm. "Hey, that looks stronger." I kept my eyes on my hand, increasing the strength until my hand started vanishing and turned into swirling air. "What the fuck?"

I glanced up at him as I dropped my powers, just as confused as he was.

"Something weird happened while we were on the job. For starters, I was stung too, but the weirdest part was that when Storm was stung, an insane amount of power washed through me and it was as if the paralysis wore off. I've never had that kind of power leave me, it was a massive shockwave."

"Wait, you got stung? Where?" I pulled the front of my shirt down enough to see the damage, the small slice still visible even though it was healing. "Shouldn't you still be paralyzed like Storm? Smokey was a mess when he got stung. It was like a nasty fever and he was like that for days."

His fingers brushed my skin and I let him inspect it, knowing he'd freak out otherwise.

"I was only paralyzed for a moment but once my powers took over, it's like it vanished."

"That's not possible." He frowned, glancing up when Fox walked in and heard the tail end of our conversation.

"You got hit too?" He swatted River's hands out of the way and got a look at the small wound too, his brow creasing. "Maybe you didn't get injected enough to have an effect."

"I definitely got injected enough, it hurt like hell and I couldn't move," I grumbled. "Have the guys let you in to see Storm? They locked me out."

"I haven't tried to see him yet, I was worried about you," he admitted, and River took my wrist and waved my hand around.

"Salem's powers grew. She can turn into an actual tornado or something! Show him!" He looked excited and I blew out a breath, pulling my hand back from him.

"It's weird. Considering the power is stronger, it doesn't burn me out as fast." I held my hand up to show Fox, the air swirling in my hands until it merged with my arms. Fox's eyes went wide as both arms vanished up to my elbows, the strong air easy to hold without me breaking a sweat. "I just got so mad and scared when Storm got stung. Do you think I unlocked the power? People keep saying I have more power that's hidden within. Well, those who attack me keep claiming that but I wasn't too sure."

Smokey appeared in the doorway, his eyes on me and my newfound magic trick.

"How long have you been hiding that?"

"I just discovered it, asshole," I muttered, dropping the power and letting my arms and hands return to normal. "Is Storm okay?"

That made him cringe.

“He’s in for a hell of a few days. He’ll probably spend the next day screaming. It gets worse before it gets better.”

“Could someone get stung and not have that kind of reaction?” I asked lightly but River threw me under the bus without thinking.

“Salem got hit too but she managed to snap out of it somehow.” He swallowed uncomfortably as Fox glared at him. “Was I not supposed to tell him? Why do you look pissed?”

“We don’t keep secrets,” Smokey bit out, glaring at me. “Bullshit. You didn’t get stung or you’d be frozen still, or at least screaming. It’s a pain you can’t ignore.” He moved closer, his eyes burning into me. “Show me.” I moved my shirt out of the way, his eyebrows pulling down as he saw the mark. “There’s no way.”

“My powers went weird when I freaked about Storm,” I offered, making him snort.

“You think you manifested more power or something? You’re starting to sound crazy, Salem. Admit it, you’ve always been stronger and it’s just getting hard for you to continue with this lie you’ve started.”

“I’m not lying,” I said sharply, getting to my feet to shove him back a step. “I have nothing to gain from that. The scorpion dude was telling me all about the facility and you guys don’t believe me!”

“That’s because it’s bullshit. I think I’d remember being thrown into a cage and stung by one of those assholes, let alone multiple. He played you to escape, that’s it,” he snapped, and Fox gave me the side-eye.

“What did he say?”

“Can we all have a meeting or something? I don’t want to keep repeating myself,” I gritted out but Smokey grinned at me cruelly.

“We’re not talking about it until Storm’s awake and can confirm you’re a lying cunt. I wasn’t tortured in whatever facility you claim—”

“You were there!” I shouted, getting in his face. Well, I tried. He towered over me but that didn’t stop me from pretending I could intimidate him. “You had a microchip too, just like the rest of us. You just don’t remember it properly because your memory’s been fucked with.”

His hand snapped out, grabbing my chin firmly to glare down at me.

“There’s another explanation for that. I told you, I grew up in one of the schools for gifted kids. I bet we all got them as part of their security protocol.”

“Enough, both of you,” Fox growled, getting between us. “Salem, go wash up. Smokey, you fill me in on Storm’s condition.”

“Wash up? Do I smell?” I scoffed, and he motioned to Smokey who had a blank look on his face.

“Match stick over here marked you again. Your chin’s black.” I was so sick of his sooty little fingers getting all over me. It was like he was marking his territory while lying about hating me. It was almost comical at this point.

“Smokey might be leaving smudges on me, but you’ll be the one marking me later, Casanova,” I murmured, giving him a wink before walking into my bathroom, ignoring Smokey’s rude comment about me being a whore.

I’d only just finished washing my face when a loud scream sounded in the house, and my heart hurt when I realized the awful sound was Storm. The guys were already in his room when I got there, Storm’s muscles contracting and spasming as he clenched his jaw. Sweat beaded his brow and I went to climb onto the bed beside him, but Frost shoved me back so hard I almost fell over.

“Get the fuck away from him!” He was furious, his hands balling into fists by his sides.

“But—”

“Get out, Salem!” Frost took a menacing step towards me but Storm managed to put words together despite the pain he was in.

“Don’t fucking touch her.” I met his gaze, the pain inside them hitting me right in the chest. I couldn’t make it better but I could sit with him until it didn’t hurt so badly. “Salem—”

“I’m here,” I said softly, pushing past Frost and sitting on the edge of the bed to take Storm’s hand in both of mine. “Fox? Can you get me a cool, damp, cloth?”

“On it,” Fox said without argument, running off to get what I’d asked. Storm cried out again, curling in on himself as the venom continued its destructive path through his body. It was cruel to watch but there wasn’t much else we could do other than wait it out.

I pushed Storm’s hair off his sweaty forehead, taking the cloth from Fox when he returned, and pressed it on Storm’s clammy skin. He was practically gasping for air, drenching the sheets with sweat.

“Why aren’t you writhing in pain, huh?” Frost demanded, seething at me. “You got stung too, right?”

“It’s hard to explain. I seemed to unlock some kind of hidden power,” I said, glancing at him briefly before looking back at Storm to keep cooling his skin with the cloth. “I freaked out, overloaded my powers, and it’s like I extinguished the venom or something.”

“You can lie to everyone all you fucking like, but you’re not fooling me. Who are you working for?” The temperature in the room cooled as he got angrier, and before I knew it, Frost had grabbed me and hauled me off the bed. “Who are you working for?!”

He was shouting now, slamming my back against the wall as he held me by the front of my shirt.

“Frost!” Storm barked, trying to get up but collapsing back on the bed in pain. River tried to intervene but ended up copping an elbow to the eye, the familiar icy feeling suddenly spreading through my veins. I cried out as the pain moved through me, but I was stronger now than I was that first time Frost iced me.

I put my hand against his chest and blasted him with air, sending him flying backwards. He continued to ice me as he laid on the floor, and surprise hit me as Storm let out a loud growl, lightning igniting the room as he blasted Frost.

The guys stepped back with wide eyes as Storm got out of bed on shaky feet, forcing power from his hands as he came to my rescue. Frost's body seized on the floor, and I was surprised when he cried out in pain.

He was supposed to be able to block it out but it was obviously hurting him.

"Storm, stop!" I begged weakly as I kept a hand over my burning chest, grabbing his arm to draw his attention, gasping when he turned to face me and his eyes were glowing brightly as if the lightning had been consumed by him. "You're hurting him!"

He blinked a few times, taking deep breaths as he seemed to start calming down, his hand going to the back of my neck to pull me closer.

"Are you okay?" He pressed a hand to my chest, looking up at Smokey who was standing silently by the door. "Melt it or I'll fry you."

Smokey didn't argue, doing as he was told while we all kept glancing nervously at Storm.

Frost got to his feet, cautiously stepping towards his brother.

"What the fuck was that?"

"Some kind of deep power," Storm mumbled, holding his hands out in front of him as if trying to figure out where it came from. "The same thing happened to Salem on our job. She wasn't lying, dickbag." His eyes met mine again, his voice soft. "You handled today well."

"I couldn't help you," I said quietly, looking at the ground as Smokey stepped out of the way. "I couldn't stop you from being hurt, and I couldn't get you back here myself."

He took my waist, tugging me against him so that I had to crane my neck to watch his face.

“But you did, firecracker. You pushed the venom out of your system to stop him from hurting me more, then you called for help. That’s what a team does, they rely on each other.”

“I thought you were going to die.”

“I’d stay alive to spite you,” he joked, relaxing me slightly. “I think we all need to sit down and talk. This is way over our heads and if we’re suddenly getting power boosts, I want to know how and why.”

“So you really believe the overgrown insect? About the facility?” Smokey asked, playing with a flame in his hand as he tried not to look interested in our conversation. “And all of our minds have been manipulated? I know we toyed with the idea before but this is getting ridiculous.”

“I think it makes sense,” Storm nodded, not very discreetly shuffling closer to me on the couch as we all sat around the living room to figure out what the hell was happening. “For all we know, we’re all still in the damn thing and this is some kind of simulation.”

“Now you’re starting to sound crazy like Salem,” Smokey grumbled, but his eyes weren’t angry as they studied me, they looked lost. Finding out our pasts had been one big lie was scary. Were any of our memories real?

Who’d held us captive?

Fox was sitting on my other side, his hand dropping to my knee to show his support.

“Minerva can help us find out the truth tonight. She’s stopping by after dinner.” He turned his attention to Storm,

asking the question everyone wanted to know. “You don’t hurt at all anymore? It’s just gone?”

“It aches, but yeah, the pain’s gone,” Storm confirmed. “I’m not sure if I powered up, blocked it out, or if maybe mine and Salem’s powers connected somehow. You know how our powers go weird eventually if we’re not together? I honestly think our emotions are more connected than we thought. Salem was upset over me and her powers boosted, so maybe the same thing happened to me. You were going to ice her, Frost. I wasn’t going to let you kill her.”

“What’s so fucking special about her?” Frost said bitterly, his cold eyes on mine. “She’s nothing but a lying—”

“If she’s not that special, then why did her apparent betrayal hurt you so badly? Why does it still affect you?” Storm asked sharply, crossing his arms against his chest. “She meant everything to you, I see it in your anger, which is only so strong because you hate yourself for still loving her despite what she did.”

“I don’t fucking love her!” I thought Frost was going to blast me, but River stood between us, staring him down with so much confidence that I wondered if something had possessed him.

“Well I do, so back off.”

“She was only using you because you’re the weakest link, dumbass. You really are an idiot,” Frost answered bluntly, and water went everywhere as River lost his temper, making Smokey grin proudly as Frost coughed and sputtered. “Lay off, asshole!”

Even Storm chuckled lightly, finding amusement in Frost’s humiliation.

Fox rolled his eyes, leaning back on the couch and tugging me onto his lap, earning dirty looks from both Storm and River.

“As much as this is hilarious, everyone needs to sit down so we can figure this shit out. I think Storm’s idea of their powers connecting might be right. The longer we’re all

together, the stronger we become. Maybe that's how our powers grow? We've all felt it, the feeling of being whole now that Salem's here. I think we should all try to draw out more power to see if it's just them, or all of us."

"I think it's a good idea," River said brightly.

"Of course you agree, you're a lap dog," Frost grunted, his eyes on Storm. "You really think we've all magically bonded? The facility is one thing but this—"

"It's a good theory," Storm said, cutting him off. "We'll know more about the memories tonight when Minerva gets here, then we can try to see if you guys have a power boost too. I'm going to speak with the Board. They might have answers for us."

"The Board don't give a shit about us. They're only here to delegate tasks and to ensure none of us turn to the dark side," Smokey said with a light laugh. "We'd have better luck finding help from one of the other teams who left Stardust. They'd be able to tell us if they had power boosts when their group became whole."

"Alright then, you tell me someone we can go to and we'll do it. I wasn't aware you had connections to them," Storm said flatly, snorting when Smokey stayed quiet. "And that's why we can't do that. None of us actually know anyone with powers this strong."

That confused me since they'd been here for so long.

"Wasn't there anyone here when you arrived? Surely not everyone just had smaller powers." I directed the question at Storm since he'd been here the longest.

"Most have moved on, but now I'm wondering if there's a reason for that," he answered. "I think this place holds secrets that we need to uncover."

It seemed Stardust's history wasn't all it was made out to be. Maybe humans were right and it was all bullshit?

"You mean to tell me that every supernatural being that walks through those gates is being kept in the dark and no one knows the truth?" Frost said with disbelief, getting to his feet

and shaking his head at me. “If it was just a few of us it would make sense, but not everyone. No one could keep secrets for that long here.”

He walked off and I was surprised that Smokey stayed, confusion lining his face.

“Is it possible? That our pasts are all one big lie?”

At least he was starting to listen to what we were saying.

“I think we should do some digging to see what we find,” Fox mumbled, River nodding his agreement.

If we were going to go on a detective mission, we needed to lay low about it.

Someone didn’t want us knowing the truth about our pasts, and secrets like this were how people ended up dead.

“We’re staying here tonight. I don’t give a shit if any of you have a problem with that. I think it’s going to be a late night if Minerva needs to get into all of our heads, as well as us actually having time to discuss it,” Storm stated, standing and looking down at me. “You good with Fox for a while?”

I didn’t want him to leave. He’d probably decide to go back to hating me and then the connection between us would be severed. I didn’t know how it had happened, but I’d fallen for him so damn hard.

“Where are you going?”

“I need to talk to my brother alone and then I need a hot shower.” He looked like he was going to walk away but he stopped himself, reaching down to cup my chin. “And don’t take this the wrong way, but I’d like to sleep alone tonight. I like you, I really do, but I can’t just change how I feel about my own space in a short amount of time. Stay with Fox or have a night to yourself too, okay? I have a feeling we’ll all have a lot to think about by the time we go to bed.”

I nodded, understanding his need for space, but it didn’t ease the sting in my chest.

Once he’d left the room, Smokey chuckled.

“I was starting to think he lost his mind, but it appears he was just keeping you happy until he could hand you over to someone else. I guess it’s Fox’s shift to babysit.”

“Fuck you, fire face,” I hissed, making him yelp as I tipped the couch with my telekinesis, causing him to end up sprawled out on the floor. He cursed at me but I ignored it, taking Fox’s hand and pulling him towards the stairs, not surprised when River trailed after us.

I didn’t want him to but I didn’t want him to stay with Smokey either. River might have started believing me, but how long until Smokey or Frost convinced him that I was the Devil again?

It was nice not to have all of them hating me for five fucking minutes.

Once in my room, we all sat on my bed in silence. River kept nervously glancing at me, waiting for me to kick him out, and Fox let out a sigh.

“Well, what now?”

“I don’t know. Maybe we should just watch a movie or something,” I suggested, my eyes sliding to River’s. “Or we could game in your room?”

“That’s a good idea,” he answered, fiddling with his hands in his lap. “Look—”

“Stop. I don’t want to talk about it,” I said as I cut him off, and Fox kissed my temple, taking my hand while looking River right in the eye.

“If you upset her tonight, you’ll regret it. I’ll either fuck her in front of you to remind you of what you could’ve had, or I’ll bend you over and rail you until you cry. You won’t be able to sit down for a month.”

River’s eyes widened and he swallowed nervously before speaking.

“What?”

“You fucking heard me,” Fox said, tilting his head. “I’ll tear your ass in half.”

“That’s a little rapey, you know?”

“I have a feeling you’d like it.”

I was going to combust soon if they kept up this flirting. Fox was mad, but it was obvious he was trying to get a rise out of River to have an excuse to put his hands on him. If I wasn’t so pissed at River, I’d have enjoyed the idea myself.

Looking at River now, I could see the fear and the excitement in his eyes. Fox scared him for many reasons, mainly because I was pretty sure he was attracted to him and he didn’t know how to handle it. I understood that.

Fox was intimidating with his skills and charisma, but he’d probably rock River’s world like he had mine.

“I’m not into guys. I just want Salem,” River said firmly, making me groan.

“Puddles, we have a long way to go before we even come *close* to fixing things between us.”

The use of the nickname made his entire face relax.

“I don’t care how long it takes. As long as I fix it,” he replied softly, reaching over to take my hand. “I’ll do anything.”

“Even fuck Fox?” It was mean, I knew that, but I couldn’t help myself.

His face fell and he slid his gaze to Fox who was finding this hilarious, amusement in Fox’s voice.

“Would it make you feel better if I said I’d make love to you instead? I can be a gentle lover, ask Salem. I can romance you first, maybe a nice dinner?”

“That’s what you want?” River asked me without taking his eyes off Fox. “If I sleep with Fox—”

“It would be hot but I’m not into blackmailing someone into sexual acts,” I huffed, intending on pulling my hand back from his but he held on tight.

“Tell me what to do. I miss you.” His voice cracked and I had a moment of weakness as I reached out to run my fingers

through his hair. I missed him too, and part of me wanted to let him back in, but what would stop him from walking away from me a second time when things went south?

“I really don’t know,” I murmured, moving back and leaning against Fox. “C’mon, let’s go and play video games until Minerva gets here.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

RIVER

I spent the rest of the afternoon watching Salem, enjoying the fact that she was spending time with me, but hating the distance between us. We didn't talk much, and my heart hurt from having to watch her snuggle into Fox, but it was my own fault.

I deserved this kind of pain.

I excused myself to grab a drink from the kitchen, finding Smokey sitting at the table drinking coffee. I had no idea how long he'd been sitting here on his own, but I was pretty sure Storm and Frost still hadn't come back down from upstairs.

"Hey, you okay?" I asked, reaching into the fridge to grab a bottle of water.

"You're pathetic, you know that?" His words were emotionless, causing me to turn to face him. "The moment she gives everyone a sob story, you literally get down on your knees and beg her for forgiveness. She's supposed to be begging you, River. She's the one who fucked up."

"She's just as blind as the rest of us. We'll have more facts soon, so until then, lay off."

"You going to get in my way if I decide to burn her little world down?" he chuckled dryly, running his eyes over me and raising an eyebrow in challenge.

I'd never let him hurt her, even if she never forgave me.

"Yes."

“I don’t think you’ve got the balls,” he answered, getting to his feet and stalking towards me. My back hit the fridge and the bottle hit the floor, my muscles tensing in confusion as he grabbed my dick through my jeans, squeezing it gently as his lips brushed my ear. “Are you really going to choose her over me, raindrop? I thought we’d bonded?”

“Don’t touch me, asshole,” I gritted out but my body betrayed me as I stiffened against his hand. I was conflicted between wanting him to leave me alone, and wishing he’d go further. Both Smokey and Fox would make me see stars if given the chance, and I was struggling to remind myself that I wasn’t into guys.

He stepped closer, pressing his front against mine and rubbing his palm over the tent in my pants.

“Why not? Don’t want your little girlfriend to know you want my cock in your ass?” I thought he was just trying to freak me out but I felt his dick harden against my thigh, a hiss leaving me as he nipped my earlobe. “What if I asked you to get on your knees and blow me right here?”

“Stop it!” I whisper-yelled, trying to slip away, but he kept me caged against the fridge as he leaned back to hold my gaze.

“What if I let you bring Salem with you? Would you get in my bed then?”

My heart was slamming against my ribcage, the answer right there on my tongue. I’d do almost anything if Salem was there since I was pretty sure she was into the idea of some guy-on-guy action.

I didn’t have to think for too long though because we were interrupted.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Frost growled as he walked in with Storm behind him, Storm not bothering to hide the amusement on his face at them catching us. “Are you two fucking kidding me? First I had to worry about you all fucking Salem on the couch, now everyone’s just fucking everyone?”

“I’m not fucking anyone other than Salem,” Storm offered unhelpfully, but Smokey rolled his eyes and stepped back from

me, exposing my goddamn boner to the world. I was surprised my zipper didn't break from how hard I was.

"I'm not—" I didn't get to finish.

"Well maybe you should because you're panting after everything that smiles at you and coming in your pants like a teenager," Frost barked, my cheeks heating with embarrassment. I wasn't panting after everyone and he knew it.

"Leave him the fuck alone," Smokey warned, and Frost let out a dry laugh.

"This is great. Here's me thinking water boy's the one catching feelings, but it's really you?"

"Watch your mouth!" Flames burst across Smokey's arms and he took a step towards Frost, my dick going down really fucking fast when I realized the kitchen was likely to turn into a battle field any second now.

Like the little bitch that I was, I darted from the room and took the stairs two at a time, shutting myself in my bedroom and locking the door.

"River? What's wrong?" Salem asked, and I couldn't hold back the curse that left me. I'd forgotten they were in here, and now they were going to witness my impending meltdown. My eyes flicked to Fox just as there was a loud knock on the door, my eyes closing with shame as Smokey spoke.

"C'mon, man. Ignore Frost, it's none of his business if you like me touching your dick."

"Go away!" I forced out, cringing as he knocked harder.

"Let me in so we can talk about this. I don't expect you to just bend over for me, I know you're saving your virginity."

Fox's face was neutral but Salem looked confused. I was pretty sure Smokey had just fucked things up for me with her because she didn't seem that excited about the idea now it seemed serious.

I yanked open the door, glaring at him as his eyes went over my shoulder to my company.

“Do you fucking mind?” I hissed, his eyes sliding back to me after a moment.

“Not particularly. You having a party in here?” He pushed past me, flopping down on the bed. “If you won’t blow me, Fox will.”

“Will not,” Fox snorted, and Smokey let out a laugh.

“You’re so full of shit. Hey, Salem, tell him to blow me. I bet he’d do it if you asked,” he smirked, his voice lowering. “Unless you want to choke on me. I’ll allow it.”

This was getting uncomfortable, and luckily, we were interrupted.

Storm stepped into the room, crooking a finger at Salem who instantly climbed off the bed and made her way towards him, her smile warm.

“Minerva is here. Everyone needs to play nice so we can get to the bottom of this.” He dropped an arm around Salem’s shoulders, the motion so natural that you wouldn’t have thought the guy had hated her earlier in the week. “Smokey? No duels while she’s here. We need to at least pretend like we have our shit together.”

Smokey sat up with a grin.

“Hey, she knows I’m a spicy little thing. If I want to throw fire at ice boy, I will.” I had no idea if they’d even thrown fire and ice once I’d left the kitchen, but if they hadn’t, they were likely to very soon. Their bullshit had been brewing for a while now.

Storm tugged Salem from the room, Fox wandering after them once he’d eyed me and Smokey for a second, and once we were alone, Smokey stood from the bed and walked towards me.

“Don’t touch me,” I said sternly, and he put his hands up in front of himself in defeat.

“I won’t.”

“Don’t fuck with me like that again.” I didn’t mean to sound upset, but I was. I loved Salem, but Smokey ignited

something inside of me that I couldn't explain. Something like temptation and sin. Fox was seductive because he knew the right things to say, but Smokey?

He was dangerous.

I saw why girls wanted to get in bed with him, he was attractive, but it was the alluring danger that made me want to risk taking things further. I could test it out, experiment with him and see if I liked it, but I didn't trust that he wouldn't make a joke out of it.

I wouldn't handle that.

"Hey," he said quietly, all the humor gone from his face. He went to touch my chin and I pulled back. "I'm not going to leave marks on you." Against better judgment, I let him take my chin in his hand, his gaze boring into mine. "I'm sorry for being a dick. I'm not fucking with you though, River. I liked when she was gone and you relied on me. I don't know what I'm feeling but—"

"I'll help you out with that. You're feeling horny and mischievous. You don't think I know that you'll just try to convince me to sleep with you then make a big joke about it later to everyone and humiliate me?" I said to cut him off, swatting at his hands as he tried to place them both on my cheeks. "This is what you do, Smokey. You find amusement in others' embarrassment. I'm not stupid enough to play into your games."

"If it's just a game, why's my dick so fucking hard?" he grunted, making me pause my argument. He had a point but maybe he was just really good at acting. Dicks went up easily, he probably just thought about someone's tits or something. "I get it, you're a little fragile, but I swear I'm not playing games with you."

"I can't deal with this right now," I bit out, thankful when he took a few steps back and gave me space.

"That's fine. Look—"

"Are you assholes coming down, or not?!" Frost shouted and cut Smokey off, making me sigh.

“I suppose we should get this over with. You ready for a whole new past?”

“I’m ready for some answers, that’s for sure.”

I followed him out of the room and down the stairs, silently scolding myself as my eyes drifted to his ass. It was an accident, I wasn’t checking him out.

That was what I told myself, anyway.

Smokey.

I had no idea what I was fucking doing. I’d been so mad at River for bailing on me for Salem, and I guess I just snapped. I hadn’t been lying, I wasn’t playing a game with him, but I also had no idea how I felt. Maybe it was just misplaced feelings of friendship?

I could like a guy without wanting to nail him.

So why did the thought of him on his knees for me make me insanely hard?

My eyes drifted to Salem the moment we reached the kitchen, and I completely ignored Minerva who was eyeing me with interest. I didn’t like getting involved with people who could get inside my head, so that was one pussy I’d managed to stay out of.

Salem looked uncomfortable, sticking close to Storm who’d apparently discovered public displays of affection. He was happily holding her hand to comfort her, which was an amusing sight in itself, other than the fact it was someone I didn’t trust anymore.

I wanted to, I was really starting to miss her and I couldn’t stop thinking about her goddamn pussy, but I couldn’t cave. Not until we knew the truth. There was no way I’d been raised in that torture facility, I’d definitely remember bits of it.

“Smokey,” Minerva purred, my traitorous heart skipping a beat when Salem’s face scrunched with jealousy. Yeah, I definitely still wanted her. “You look good.”

“Stop looking, you know I’m not interested,” I answered in a bored tone.

“I’ve never known you to play hard to get,” she giggled, and I couldn’t help the cruel smirk that spread across my face.

“What’s that telling you then? That I finally found someone I didn’t want to fuck. Stop breaking your own heart, I don’t want your pussy. Can you do this memory thing? I have plans.” I didn’t but I wanted her gone.

It was stupid, but I didn’t like that Salem was getting so annoyed by her. I’d seen how she’d reacted when Fox had tried to make her jealous, so there was no way in hell that I was going to try that tactic.

“You’re an asshole.”

“Certified,” I chuckled, sitting in the chair at the table. “This is your one chance to put your hands on me. Get in my head, then get back out.”

I didn’t understand how the memory searching worked, but surely it had to be down those lines. I wasn’t expecting to black out the moment her hands touched my temples though.

It played like a movie, snippets of memories coming to the front of my mind while reality was stuck on pause, but then things changed and I was in places I didn’t know. Screaming and crying filled the air, and bright lights blinded me as I made my way through a room.

I frowned when I looked down at my hands and noticed I was walking around as if I was really there.

“Excuse me,” I said firmly as I saw someone with a mask and a lab coat, becoming more confused as they turned and walked right through me. It was as if I was a ghost in my own head.

I made my way along a narrow hallway, slowing when I heard screaming on the other side of a door. I opened it, my stomach twisting as I saw a little girl curled up on the floor, being hit with some kind of electric energy. I swore she heard the door creak because her frightened eyes jerked around to face me, my heart hurting when I realized it was Salem.

“Hey, what’s going on?”

She continued to stare at me but she didn’t respond, telling me I was still invisible to her like I was the other dude. She was hit with the energy again, her screams of agony bouncing off the walls around us and causing me to clench my fists. There was no reason for this, they were just torturing her.

Someone walked through me and my eyes landed on the needle in their hand, and Salem’s screams of agony turned to those of fear. She begged and pleaded for them not to, but they ignored her and fisted her hair to keep her still before roughly inserting the needle, pushing the liquid into her neck.

I’d never heard that kind of scream before, apart from the one time at the house when we’d given Salem the booster shot.

This was the root of her trauma.

I didn’t want to leave her, but I couldn’t handle the sounds she was making any longer, so I walked into the next room, surprised to find Storm.

He looked to be maybe thirteen years old, tears burning his eyes as he stared through a small window. I walked closer, noticing he was watching Salem. His hands shook as he pressed a palm to the glass that must have been tinted because I hadn’t seen him when I’d been in Salem’s room, his voice soft.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so fucking sorry.”

I had no idea what he was sorry for, but I didn’t get to find out.

I was suddenly in another room, pure horror racing through me as I watched myself being attacked by multiple scorpion stingers, the beasts being beaten through the bars by men with masks. I flinched with every sting as if suddenly remembering how it felt, my heartbeat rising the longer I watched.

Salem was right, we’d all been here, and we’d treated her like she was a psycho.

Sudden pain filled me and I screamed, gasping for air as I was suddenly yanked out of my own head to find Salem in my face, her hands on my cheeks.

“It’s okay, you’re not there anymore.” I felt like a fucking idiot but I pulled her into my lap and crushed her to my chest as I caught my breath, not sure if I was trying to keep her safe from the monsters, or using her to hide myself from them. She didn’t complain, holding me tightly as I finally lifted my eyes to Frost whose face was completely void of emotion.

“I was there. I saw Salem and Storm,” I managed to get out, my grip on Salem tightening so much that I was surprised I didn’t break her ribs. “It was real.”

Storm nodded, glancing at Frost.

“You want to go next so you get your answers?”

I could tell he didn’t, but he wasn’t going to be called out for looking like a little bitch, so he sat in a chair with a scowl.

“Hurry up then, I don’t have all night.”

I didn’t move, and Salem stayed right on my lap where I needed her.

Frost

I knew I’d black out since we’d watched it happen to Smokey, but I didn’t expect to be thrown straight into the pits of fucking hell. The screams made me wince, and I made my way through long hallways and random doors, searching for nothing in particular.

I opened one and shut the door behind me, the room calling to me for some reason. I never thought I’d come face-to-face with myself, but there I was. My small body was curled up on a bed, my cheeks wet with tears.

I must have only been seven or eight.

The door slammed open and I spun around, a large man walking right through me. He didn’t hesitate to yank the younger me to his feet by the hair, hitting him across the face

when he put up a fight. Confusion and fear washed over me as I followed them from the room and into another, the man vanishing and leaving behind the young boy and a little girl.

Pain filled my chest at seeing little Salem's beaten body, lacerations all over her arms and a bruise forming around her eye.

"I told you to do it."

Hearing my own voice as a child startled me, the sound full of so much sadness.

"I don't like hurting you," she choked out, tears falling down her cheeks as she reached for him, memories of us curled up with a movie becoming twisted, the images flickering until all that was left was this.

This couldn't have been my past, because that meant Salem wasn't the girl next door, the one who I'd played with on the swings every day and the one who I'd kissed for the first time under the oak tree.

The memories burned away like paper in a furnace, opening my eyes to the truth. We'd been prisoners, locked in cages and abused, just like Salem said.

Her eyes lifted to mine and even though I knew she couldn't see me, I pretended that she could. She knew that in the future she was a strong woman, one who took no shit and was free of these walls that haunted her.

I watched myself pull her closer, that kid protecting her more than I realized. There were no sweet moments on the couch, just tears in dark corners as we'd held each other out of pure terror and uncertainty.

I couldn't watch anymore, running from the room only to come face-to-face with more of the past. A dark room, heavy breathing, my heart remembering it as the sounds Salem made as she came. That surprised me because I was starting to think I'd made up our entire relationship and I was the fucking crazy one.

I stepped closer, feeling weird watching myself fucking her, but also relieved that it had actually happened. We were

older here, and she looked just like she had in the most recent photos I'd taken on my phone.

"You have to do it," I heard myself whisper, her teary voice following.

Why was she crying while I was still inside her?

"I can't."

"You have to or they'll punish you. I'll be fine." He rolled off her but she continued to hold his gaze, my heart breaking when I realized what was happening as I watched myself hand her the knife. "Do it. If you love me, you will. I'll be okay, breeze."

"What if you actually die this time? I can't be here without you. I can't live knowing I killed you," she begged, my eyes landing on a man who was sitting in the corner with a cruel grin on his face, his voice firm.

"Do it or I'm going to tear that pussy apart and make him watch."

Salem was sobbing now, her hand shaking as she clutched the knife and stared at the younger me.

"I love you, don't hate me for this." The irony of this situation was getting out of hand.

"I could never hate you. I love you too much. Do it."

She didn't move, tears falling down my cheeks as I watched myself grab her hands and slam the knife into my own chest, her cries growing louder as she begged for me to be okay, the asshole in the corner grabbing her by the hair and dragging her naked from the room, leaving me in the bed to bleed out. They were stopped by someone our age, his worried eyes on Salem.

I realized just as the door closed behind them that the young guy was the man who'd pushed her into the pool at Stardust and drowned her.

Salem hadn't tried to kill me, she'd had no choice and I'd forced her hand.

Guilt ate away at me as I watched myself die, confusion hitting me after a moment of my chest being still. No one came to save me, and suddenly the memories of the hospital faded until I watched my body jerk upright with a loud gasp, realization dawning on me as the last of the memories started fading.

Everything was a fucking lie.

I wanted to find Salem, to make sure they hadn't assaulted her while she'd been vulnerable, but I was yanked from my mind sharply, finding myself breathing heavily in the kitchen chair with everyone staring at me. My cheeks were wet with tears and no one spoke.

My eyes landed on Salem who looked ready to say something, and like a pussy, I bolted from the room and headed straight up to my bedroom to lock myself inside.

How could I face her now? After all, I'd been the one to lie to her about never hating her, and she'd never done a single damn thing wrong other than wanting to risk her own life to save mine.

Someone knocked on the door but I ignored it, needing to figure out what the fuck had just happened. My entire life had been based around my love of Salem and her betrayal, so how the fuck did I come back from this?

My phone chimed with a message and I hesitated before pulling it from my pocket.

Storm: I'm here if you need me.

I didn't reply, tossing the phone on the bed beside me, but my heart beat faster when Salem's name popped up on my screen next.

Salem: Let me know if you want to talk.

I didn't deserve her kindness, but some of the hate melted away and made way for hope. Hope that maybe the girl I'd loved with my everything, wasn't the monster of my story after all.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SALEM

I went to chase after Frost but Smokey was gripping me like his life depended on it, and Storm gave me a discreet shake of the head. If Frost had learned the truth then he'd need time to process it.

I managed to get my arms free so I could send him a text, offering comfort if he needed it.

He didn't reply, but I hadn't expected him to.

"Who's next?" Minerva asked as she wiggled her fingers in our direction.

"Me." I gave Storm a pleading look, needing him to help pry Smokey off me. I had no idea what he'd seen but he was traumatized from it. He really didn't want to let go, but he loosened his hold after a moment of Storm coaxing him, and I moved into Frost's vacated seat.

River dragged a chair closer to Smokey and patted his shoulder to let him know he was there, which caused me to relax a little. I felt bad for leaving him, even if it was only for a few minutes, but I needed to find out the truth.

Everyone's worried eyes were on me as Minerva placed her hands on my temples, my vision vanishing as I blacked out just like the others had. Images flashed through my mind rapidly, showing snippets of a life I had no recollection of, all of them moments of terror and pain. I'd never been locked in my room at my parents house, none of that existed.

How had I ended up here in the first place?

Where were my parents?

A door slammed and I whipped my head around to watch some kid being dragged into the room, his dirty blond hair stained with blood. I knew it was Fox, I'd bet money on it.

"It's not difficult, just do as she says," the man bit out as he tossed Fox's small body to the ground. He wasn't even a teenager yet, the cocky attitude nowhere in sight as his eyes scanned the room in a panic.

"Please, don't make me do it. I don't want to."

"Do you know how many men would kill to be in your position?"

"I don't like it!"

I gasped as the man punched Fox in the face, knocking him back and sending him sliding across the ground.

"You will fucking like it! Pretend it's ice cream. Just lick it." He fisted Fox's hair and yanked him to his feet, my heart breaking when a woman walked in completely naked. I knew everyone had grown their powers over the years, but I hadn't even thought about how Fox had become so skilled in the bedroom.

His skills weren't something that naturally grew over time, he had to practice and learn like the rest of us.

I couldn't watch, running from the room and choking on a sob, skidding to a halt when I stumbled across myself. I was screaming while masked men held me down, one of them shoving a needle in my veins as I begged them to stop. They threw me into a room as my back bowed, my little body trying to escape the pain that had been haunting my dreams. No wonder I was so terrified of needles.

I remembered the pain, but it was awful to see.

I hadn't noticed anyone else in the room until they walked towards the younger me, Frost's icy eyes filled with so much emotion that it almost choked me. He didn't hesitate to drop down beside my writhing body, pulling me close to whisper reassurance in my ear.

I tensed when he said he loved me, my body heating in response.

Maybe he was right about one thing, we were definitely involved with each other.

More memories flew by, showing snippets of Storm hitting me with lightning repeatedly while he cried as a little boy, even one of who I assumed was River being dragged along the hallway past my door.

We were all here, every single one of us. These weren't just my memories since the younger version of myself wasn't always there. It was as if Minerva had thrown me back into the past like watching a video.

“Baby? Shit. Why isn't she waking up?” I looked around at the sound of Fox's voice, the memories fading and making way for the darkness. I blinked hard, slamming my hands over my ears as an awful sound filled the empty space, realization dawning on me that it was someone screaming.

I blindly walked through the dark, finding a random door. My hand hesitated before reaching out to open it, tears leaking from the corners of my eyes as I found River gasping for air, my air powers sucking the oxygen from his lungs and suffocating him. He passed out and the room stilled, and I waited until he woke up before starting it all over again.

Why were we all hurting each other?

“No more!”

I jumped, the shriek coming from my younger self, devastation all over their face. I was proud of myself for standing up for River, but then the beatings started.

How many times had we been through this?

“Salem!” The ground below my feet shook and I was suddenly sucked out of the memories, finding myself sitting in the kitchen with Storm shaking me firmly.

Relief covered his face as I blinked at him, Minerva speaking quietly.

“I think that’s enough for today. I can come back for the others’ memories another time.”

“No!” I blurted out, panic filling me at the thought of either of them reliving that. I pushed Storm out of the way, grabbing Fox’s shirt. “Please, don’t search for yours. Please. I don’t want you to see that.”

“What happened? Did you see me?” I hated the hope in his eyes. I wished that I hadn’t seen him and that he was right about growing up in one of those gifted schools.

“Please, don’t look,” I whispered, conflict in his eyes as he glanced at Minerva, knowing she’d seen it too.

“How bad?”

“Bad,” she confirmed, eyeing me as Smokey sandwiched me between them, his chest flush with my back.

“We all need to talk and compare memories.” His voice was tight, my chest aching at knowing we all went through hell together and didn’t even know until now.

Fox nodded, kissing my forehead and stepping back.

“I think we need to face this tomorrow. There’s no way Frost will come back downstairs tonight and everyone’s freaked out. Salem, did you want to sleep with—”

“She’s staying with me,” Smokey snapped, Storm watching us with annoyance as if he wanted to argue. He’d wanted to be alone tonight, but if that had changed, he didn’t mention it.

“Actually, I really want to sleep by myself,” I mumbled, his arms tightening around me.

“Hurricane—”

This didn’t change things. I needed time to think, and they needed to figure out their feelings. They’d hurt me, and Smokey had literally thrown me out of the damn house because he didn’t trust me, so seeing a few memories wasn’t going to fix that.

“You hurt me, Smokey. I can’t just forget that,” I answered, pulling away before he could stop me. “I’m going to bed.”

I walked off, more memories coming back to me as the manipulated ones faded, unveiling the truth that had been hiding from us all this time.

The pain, fear, and torment all hit me at once, my breath increasing with every step. I stumbled into my bedroom and made my way into the bathroom to turn the shower on full blast, not bothering with the heat as I stepped under the icy spray fully clothed. I let the water beat down on me, soaking me to the bone, and I didn’t move even when Frost spoke from somewhere behind me.

“I didn’t fucking know.” He didn’t elaborate, and I turned my head to watch him out of the corner of my eye.

“Didn’t know what?”

“Any of it,” he mumbled, his gaze on mine. “You didn’t try to kill me out of hate.”

That made me stand up straight, wiping the water from my face.

“I didn’t?”

“No. You had no choice. I forced your hand to keep you safe.” His words were so quiet that I barely heard him, so I turned the water off and stepped out of the shower, staring at him. “I didn’t fucking know.” He kept repeating it, looking lost, and I saw that little boy in his eyes, the broken one that held all the pain. He jerked back when I reached out to touch him, his eyes flaring with frustration. “I hated you for no fucking reason.”

“We can talk about it tomorrow. Everyone’s wires are fried tonight,” I replied softly, keeping some distance between us to avoid scaring him off. He was like a frightened wild animal, and I didn’t want him lashing out at me. “We all hurt each other, we had no choice. We can’t fix it tonight.”

“I didn’t know,” he repeated before leaving the room, quietly closing the door behind him.

The wet clothes hung off me so I stripped down and dropped them in a pile on the floor, grabbing a towel and padding into my bedroom once I'd wrapped it around myself. I didn't bother getting dressed, I just slid into bed in my towel and closed my eyes, ignoring when someone knocked on my door.

They didn't come in and I didn't bother staying awake to figure out who it was.

The house was silent the following morning. I didn't get dressed and leave my room until after ten, and that was only because I was starving. The stairs creaked under my feet, the sound loud in the quiet house. Fox was in the kitchen alone, staring at his coffee cup in thought, giving me a small smile as I walked towards him.

"Hey. Get much sleep?"

"Yes, surprisingly. I slept like the dead," I sighed, letting him slide an arm around me to pull me down onto his lap. "How about you?"

"Not really. Smokey paced in his room most of the night and kept me awake. Frost left before daylight too."

"Where did he go?"

"I'm not sure," he shrugged, resting his chin on my shoulder. "Storm and Smokey are at the gym, so Frost isn't there or they'd have told me by now."

"Where's River?" The memories of me suffocating him rose to the surface, and I fought not to wince. I swore I could still hear his screaming.

"He's in the pool. He's stressing, and he swims laps until he's exhausted when that happens." He was quiet for a second

before adding, “What did you see in your memories that was so bad you don’t want me to see? And River?”

“I hurt River over and over again,” I explained, swallowing before continuing. “We all grew our powers with practice and training. You were no different, Fox.”

“Salem, what did you see?” he asked firmly, but I could tell he already knew by the way he was looking at me, he just wanted me to confirm it.

“You were crying, begging them to stop. I left when the woman showed up because I couldn’t watch anymore,” I said as my voice broke. “You were so young. They forced you to do stuff even though you were crying and—” I flinched as the sound of his cries filled my head, and his arms tightened to comfort me as if it was my trauma, not his.

“It’s okay, it’s all over now,” he murmured, giving me a reassuring smile. “I think we should check on River. He’s freaking out that everyone else is freaking out. Especially with the way Smokey was last night. I checked on Smokey before going to bed myself, and River was with him. Pretty sure he spent the night there.”

I wasn’t surprised. If River could offer him some kind of comfort, I was glad they had each other. I’d felt really bad for not letting Smokey stay with me, but I wasn’t ready for that.

I had my own shit going on, I couldn’t handle his too.

Fox made me a coffee while I quickly ate some toast to stop my stomach from rumbling, then we headed outside to find River swimming laps like Fox said he would’ve been. I rolled up the bottom of my sweats and sat on the edge to drop my feet in the water, and Fox sat beside me.

River swam to the edge, treading water in front of me as he pushed his wet hair off his face.

“Hey.” He looked like he hadn’t slept at all.

“Hey. You going to do laps all day? You look like a drowned rat.” I tried to make light of it, hoping he knew I was teasing, and luckily, he smiled.

“Maybe. Believe it or not but water is kind of my thing.” He looked thoughtful for a moment before speaking again. “You wanna come in?”

“No, thank you. The last time I was in there, I drowned,” I chuckled, sipping my coffee. “It’s better for everyone if I stay here.”

“We won’t let you drown. C’mon, I won’t let go of you.”

“River—” My hands shook at the thought, and Fox took my coffee from me before I could end up wearing it on my lap. The memory of me drowning flashed before my eyes and I jumped as River’s wet fingers curled around my calf muscle gently.

“I won’t force you to get in but I’m here if you want to. I can teach you to swim whenever you want too.”

I’d love to learn to swim. I’d always been jealous of others at the beach when they could cool off on a hot day while I roasted on the beach. Then again, I guess that wasn’t real either.

I had no idea how everyone knew how to swim when I couldn’t, but there was no point thinking about it. It wouldn’t change anything.

“How deep is it?” I swallowed, trying to talk myself into being brave. I’d be fine with both guys here.

“If you get in the other end, you can touch the bottom easily,” Fox offered, standing and offering me his hand. “I’ll help you in.”

Fear stabbed at my insides as I let Fox pull me to my feet, and I eyed him as he stripped down to his birthday suit.

“Uh, I don’t think—”

“You don’t have to get naked, just strip down to your bra and panties,” Fox said when he saw my discomfort. “Unless you want to get naked.”

“No thanks.” Considering we’d had strange men sneaking into the yard to kill me, I didn’t want to be that exposed.

I stripped down to my underwear, glancing at the pool nervously as Fox walked down the stairs and into the water, holding a hand out to me. I took it, taking my time to step into the cool water as it lapped at my ankles, then my calves.

River joined us, not rushing me as I finally ended up waist deep, my heartbeat thumping loudly as I tried to calm myself.

“We can just stay here,” River smiled, taking my hand and giving it a squeeze, but I shook my head.

“No, I want to keep going.”

“You won’t be able to touch the bottom of the pool soon. If you want to come back to the shallow end, let me know and I’ll bring you back, okay?” he asked, waiting for me to nod before turning around. “Jump on my back.”

I slid my arms around his neck, clinging to him as he started wading out deeper into the water until we were floating. We sank a little and I panicked, almost choking him with my arms.

“Ease up so the man can breathe,” Fox murmured, swimming alongside us. “When we get to the other side, grab onto the wall and slide off.”

“I’ll sink!” I couldn’t let go of River. No way in fucking hell.

“No you won’t. Trust me.” I stared at him, wanting to but being terrified of going under again.

No one pushed me into letting go once we’d reached the other side, patiently waiting for me to grab the edge of the pool and let go of River. One of my hands slipped and a scream left me as the water ended up under my chin, but River moved behind me, caging me against the wall so I could lean on him without sinking.

“Do you want me to teach you how to float on your back? That way if you ever fall into deep water, you don’t sink?” he offered. His fingers toyed with my waist, sending tingles through me.

“Is it hard?”

“No. Do you think you can let go of the wall? We won’t go far. Fox will stay beside you too.” My muscles bunched as we sank a little again, but I let River drag me out into the water more, trying hard to relax as he instructed me to lay back. Both him and Fox placed their hands under me to support my weight, my front sticking out of the water as I took deep breaths. “You’re doing good. Keep your head back a little.” I jerked as water lapped around my eyes but the guys kept me afloat, not letting go like they’d promised. “That’s all you have to do. Just relax your body. Close your eyes if it helps.”

“It’s only working because you’re holding me up. If I fell in, this wouldn’t work,” I grumbled.

“Yeah, it works. If you fall in, roll over so you’re facing up, and lie like this. We can let go if you want so you can see.”

“I’ll just sink.”

“I promise you won’t. Keep breathing and relax.” I squeezed my eyes shut, a whimper leaving me as their hands left me, only opening my eyes when I realized nothing happened. I didn’t sink like a bag of rocks, I was still floating.

“I’m floating!” I sank a little thanks to my excitement, and River chuckled as he quickly put his hands under me again to stop me from going under.

“Relax or you won’t. After practicing a few times, you’ll do this a lot easier.”

He helped me upright and I put my arms around his neck, wrapping my legs around his middle.

“Thanks, puddles.”

He gave me the biggest smile, holding onto me firmly.

“I’ll let you know next time I’m going swimming. I’ll teach you some more.”

The backdoor opened and Storm walked out with Smokey, both of them appearing to be worn out.

“Is that a good idea?” Storm asked, pointing at the water. “The last time you were in there, I dragged your dead body out.”

“They’re teaching me to float!” I grinned as River helped me to the edge so I could climb out. “At least if I fall in, then I won’t sink.”

“True.” His eyes raked over my body and I suddenly felt self-conscious. I didn’t usually give a shit but all of them were looking at me like I was their next meal. Storm moved towards me, not giving a shit that I was drenched as he pulled me against him.

“You scared the fuck out of me last time, so don’t practice alone.”

“I promise,” I mumbled into his chest. “Have you guys seen Frost?”

“No. He’s not answering his phone either.”

“Should we be worried?”

“I don’t think so. Whatever he saw in those memories fucked him up. He needs time,” he shrugged. I leaned back, looking up at his face.

“He came into my room last night before I went to sleep. He said I hadn’t tried to kill him and he’d forced my hand to keep me safe.”

Smokey blew out a breath, raking a hand through his hair as he dropped down into a chair.

“If his memories of you are as fucked up as mine, then I’m not surprised.” He seemed calmer this morning but I could tell he was still freaked out by whatever he saw. “We need to find him so we can figure this out though.”

“I’ll go,” I offered, but Storm shook his head.

“He might know the truth now but that doesn’t make him less dangerous around you. One of us can deal with him.”

“He’s hurting and you guys will only make it worse. You all suck when it comes to talking about feelings,” I scoffed, pulling away from Storm and walking towards the house. I should’ve grabbed a towel before jumping into the pool, I was going to track water all through the house. “Trust me, I’ve got Frost. You guys stay here.”

Once I'd showered and gotten dressed, I put my makeup on and left my hair out to dry. It was a nice day so the sun would dry it on my walk. Storm wasn't happy with me going alone but he didn't fight me on it, Smokey and River insisted they could go but I turned them down, and Fox gave me a stern look, hauling me against his chest.

"If he flips out, leave him. Don't try to be a hero, okay? We don't know what his mental state is like right now and he could snap."

My phone buzzed and I smiled, holding up the message to show him.

Frost: We need to talk. Come to Storm's alone.

"He's at Storm's place?" Fox frowned, glancing at Storm. "Did you know that?"

"No, but I'm not surprised," Storm grumbled, his gaze sliding to me. "Don't trash my fucking house. Call me if you need us."

I was glad they were leaving me alone to handle it.

I said goodbye before making the walk across Stardust to Storm's house, finding the door unlocked when I arrived. The sun had almost completely dried my hair, and I ran my fingers through it as I walked through the kitchen.

"Frost?"

"Living room." He sounded so unsure, my heart hurting for him. I was relieved to know I wasn't the monster he thought I was, but how could he just stop hating me?

He'd spent years thinking I'd betrayed him.

"Hey," I said softly as I walked into the room, finding him sitting at the table, deep in thought. "You okay?"

"Does it fucking look like it?" he bit out, and I winced at how angry he was. The guys were right, he could snap over this.

I sat in a chair opposite him, trying to give him a warm smile.

“What do you want to talk about? Your memories?”

“I don’t even know,” he admitted, some of the anger vanishing as he stared at me. “I’m surprised you even showed up.”

“We’re a team.”

“I’ve tried to hurt you so many times, even tried to kill you, and—”

“Because of lies, snowflake. We’re fixing that now, remember?”

“Don’t fucking call me that.” He didn’t sound mad, just frustrated. “You used to call me that as kids sometimes when you were mad at me.”

I chuckled, tilting my head to watch him.

“Why was I mad at you?”

“Because I kept getting hurt trying to keep you safe. It used to drive you wild.” His voice faded as he dug through his memories again, speaking again after a few beats of silence. “The assholes running the facility found out about us. How we’d formed some kind of relationship. They kept forcing us to hurt each other out of spite, and I remember multiple times where we’d be forced to fuck in front of them.” The smile fell from my face as an image flashed through my mind, fuzzy memories rising to the surface as he talked. “Every time we fought them on it, they’d beat us bloody. Other times, we’d have to use our powers on each other. Those times when we’d be in bed together were both my good memories and my bad. Good because I loved you and you were the one person to take all the pain away, even if it was just for a little while. It was also bad though, tarnished thanks to those assholes for taking our solace and turning it into entertainment for themselves. Now that my memories have been unlocked, more keep coming back to me. You begged me to be your first just in case they took that choice away from you.” His broken gaze didn’t waver from mine. “You were terrified of them raping you,

you'd heard them saying how nice your body was growing. Every day you waited for them to touch you. You were only thirteen when you begged me to take your virginity."

Nausea swam in my stomach at the thought, more fuzzy memories coming back to me as he started opening invisible doors in my mind.

"Did they ever—"

"If they touched you, you didn't tell me and I didn't see it."

"That wasn't fair for me to put that on you. You were just a kid too, Frost."

He stared at me for a moment, surprising me as he reached across the table to take my hand.

"My memories might be warped and manipulated, but you were still in almost all of them. I wanted that with you, because I really did love you, Salem."

I squeezed his hand as tears threatened to spill down my cheeks.

"I know. I could sense it in the memories I do remember. They're the only ones that I'm not in pain or terrified."

We spent the next hour going over everything we could remember, and I had to wipe away tears when he explained the truth behind me trying to kill him. It unlocked so many memories, the devastation I'd felt at thinking he was dead every time I'd been forced to attack him. The loss I'd carried when one day I just never saw him again.

When had our memories been wiped, and why? And what had happened after that?

It was just fuzzy darkness in my head.

Frost went from being broken and upset, to overstimulated with emotions in the blink of an eye. I jumped as his fist slammed down on the table, his jaw tight with anger.

"I can't just stop hating you! I've spent years blaming you for this and now to find out it was bullshit?"

“We’ll get through it. We’ll—”

“You’re just going to forgive me for all this shit I’ve put you through since you got here? You could be dead right now because of me!” he shouted, pointing at the door. “Fuck off, Salem.” Ice formed in his hands the angrier he became, panic mixing with the anger on his face. “Go so I don’t hurt you. Please.” When I didn’t move, he stood and kicked his chair across the room, getting desperate. “Go, Salem!”

“I’m not leaving you!” I snapped back, getting to my feet and stalking around the table so that we were face-to-face, my finger jabbing him in the chest. “It wasn’t your fault. You didn’t know.”

“If you don’t leave you’re going to get hurt.”

“Then hurt me, Frost. I can take it.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FROST

“Then hurt me, Frost. I can take it.”

Her words both drove me wild and terrified me at the same time. A week ago I would've loved the chance to hurt her, but now? I didn't want to see her hurt ever again. The things we'd gone through together without even knowing was insane, and knowing the truth had fucked with my emotions. I wanted to kill her, fuck her, and fix her broken pieces all at the same time. I was dangerous right now, but she refused to back down.

I tried to scare her away, an ice shard forming in my hand as I held it to her throat, but she didn't even bat a fucking eye at it. I'd always thought she was stupid, but she was just strong.

She had to be if she'd survived the hell we'd been through.

“Stop being a cunt and go home.” I was freaking out, my powers building inside of me, threatening to burst free and destroy everything in their path, but she just jutted her chin out and stared me down.

“I told you I'm not going anywhere. We've been through hell and back, so I'm pretty sure I can survive whatever the fuck you want to throw at me.”

Her defiance was making my dick hard, and my ice vanished as I grabbed the nape of her neck and slammed her chest down on the table, leaning over her back.

“I don’t think you can because I want to tear you apart and I’m not sure I can hold myself back.”

“Then don’t. Take it out on me.”

Any control I’d had completely fell away as I snarled and yanked her pants down with one hand, keeping my other hand curled around the back of her neck. I had no idea what I was doing, I wanted to hurt her but at the same time I wanted to get lost in her and forget about all the bullshit.

I didn’t want to feel anything other than her pussy around my dick.

I unbuckled my belt and pulled myself free, not warming her up before pushing the head of my dick against her pussy, my veins feeling like they were on fire as I realized how wet she was.

I slammed into her with a single thrust, her scream bouncing off the walls and soaking into my bones. Keeping her pinned to the table, I rutted into her like a mad man, and it made me sound like a pansy to admit that it was like coming home.

The familiar feeling of her pussy gripping my dick as I pounded into her sent tingles through my body, and it was both not enough and too much at the same time. I fisted her hair, yanking her back and giving her no choice but to blindly reach her hands out for the table.

“Fuck, Frost. Oh my God!” It seemed she liked the bite of pain, her body tightening around me as she came hard. Liquid ran down both our legs, urging me to go harder as she screamed for me, my teeth sinking into her neck and my free hand digging into her waist as I tried to hold off my release. I wanted her to come again, the primal need overwhelming me. I wanted to go harder, deeper, leave my mark inside her so when she walked around my cum leaked out of her.

She was chanting my name, the sound doing weird things to my damn balls as they tightened to prepare for release, and I shoved her back down on the table, gripping her waist so hard

I knew it would bruise, holding off until the moment I felt her gush all over my dick again.

A shout left me as I slammed inside one last time, my dick pulsing inside her as I emptied my balls, and neither of us moved as we panted to catch our breaths.

“I told you I’d hurt you,” I growled as I pulled out and noticed her wince.

“And I told you I could take it.” She stood, turning to face me without giving a fuck that my cum was dripping out of her. I guess we were past the point of worrying about a mess since she’d literally squirted all over the floor, both our legs, and our pants. “Do you feel better?”

“No. Now I’m just angry *and* tired,” I snorted, blowing out a breath as I assessed her. My finger marks on her waist were red and her makeup was smudged. She looked like a goddamn mess, but it just made me want to slide right back inside her and fuck her all over again.

“We’d better clean this up,” she said with a light laugh, glancing down at the puddle on the floor. “Do you know if Storm has a mop?”

“No, I don’t.” I didn’t bother fixing my pants, they were soaked with her juices and so was the bottom of my shirt, so I stripped off and tossed them on the floor before reaching out to strip her too. She didn’t complain, letting me do what I wanted, and that didn’t sit well with me. I’d done nothing but bully her since she’d arrived and now she was blindly trusting me without question.

“You should be punching me in the face right now, you know that?”

“I was hoping you were going to fuck me again.” No hesitation, nothing. She grinned at me, my muscles bunching as she slid a hand up my abs. “After the past twenty-four hours, I really needed that.”

“Oh, so you’re using me?” I was just as surprised as she was by my teasing, a giggle leaving her that hit me right in the chest. The familiarity of it steadied me, calming whatever

monster had been threatening to spill out of me just moments ago.

“I think I’ve earned it, don’t you? I accept orgasms as apologies.”

“Good to know,” I murmured, forcing myself to step back from her touch before I did something stupid like kiss her. I had lots of memories of that, so I knew how good it would be, but I didn’t deserve it. Not until we’d all sat down and tried to piece everything together as a group. “Aren’t you dating Fox? And fucking my brother?”

“Teamwork makes the dream work,” she singsonged, forcing a smirk from me.

“Is that your way of asking for a gangbang?”

“That depends. What would your answer be?”

“I have a feeling I’d tear them apart, but feel free to test it. Can’t promise they’ll be okay by the end of it though.”

I grabbed my phone from the pocket of my ruined pants, texting my brother.

Frost: Do you have a mop by any chance?

Storm: What the fuck did you do to my house?

Frost: Your house is fine. So, mop?

Storm: I’m coming over, asshole.

Relief hit me at knowing I wasn’t going to be alone with her anymore. I was still feeling fucked up, and I wasn’t sure if I was going to lash out at her or fuck her some more. Storm being here would keep me grounded and my dick out of her.

“Storm’s on the way over. He’s worried we trashed the house,” I said lightly, her eyes widening.

“Fuck, get dressed!”

“Why? You ashamed of me all of a sudden?” I was only joking but a sharp pain tugged at my chest. If she wanted to

keep what we did a secret, that meant she'd regretted it.

As if sensing my thoughts she scowled, crossing her arms over her naked chest.

"I'm more than happy to give them details if you wish, but there's currently a massive puddle of body fluids on his living room floor. That's gross."

That relaxed me.

I wanted her to tell them that I'd claimed her on Storm's table, then he could see how much she fucking loved it and that I'd always own her pussy.

"Nah, Storm's likely to sit down in it and bathe. He's kind of obsessed with you," I answered, leading her upstairs and into Storm's room for a change of clothes. "Just clean up the mess between your legs and get dressed. We can shower back at the house."

"Is that your way of making sure the guys know we fucked? I reek of sex." She was amused by my neanderthal behavior which just warmed my damn chest even more.

"Yes. I'm going to rub it in River's face too."

"Don't be a dick."

"How do you expect to like his little virgin dick now that you've been fucking the good stuff?" I couldn't help it as I ran my gaze over her naked body, my eyes lingering on my cum between her thighs. "You'll have to fake it for the entire five seconds or you'll hurt his feelings."

She thumped my arm with her fist on her way towards the bathroom.

"He's really good at instructions, snowflake."

I chuckled at that, sliding a pair of sweats over my legs and grinning to myself at knowing my pussy-covered dick was rubbing all over Storm's pants. He hated it when we borrowed his clothes and free-balled it.

I wandered back downstairs just as Storm marched through the door, halting as he walked into the living room to see the

puddle.

“What the fuck is that?”

“I was going to clean it up for you but you didn’t tell me where the mop was,” I said and raised an eyebrow. “Do you have any of that tea left? I think she needs it.”

“Jesus Christ, where is she? Is she okay?” He instantly started towards the stairs and I thought I’d better not leave him hanging.

“She’s fine, just cleaning up and getting dressed.”

He paused, turning to face me.

“And you? Are you okay?”

“I don’t really know,” I shrugged, sitting in one of the chairs. “My head’s a mess. The manipulated memories are fading and letting the real ones in. I’m starting to think I wished the fake ones were real instead because the ones popping into my head now?” My fists clenched on my lap as anger filled me. “They’re fucking awful. I’d prefer that she tried to kill me than the reality that we’d been through all that other shit. Those sick fucks watched us together, forced it even. They made us hurt each other as punishment. She was only thirteen when I took her the first time.” I swallowed around a lump in my throat, emotions clawing at my insides. “I was her first, Storm. She begged me so no one could take that away from her and tarnish it.”

Fury filled his eyes, his voice low with violence.

“They fucking touched her?” Lightning sparked in his hands by his sides, the sound of thunder rumbling in the distance.

“I don’t think so but they said stuff to make her think they were going to. She was just a kid.”

“So were you,” he reminded me as he reined in his powers, dragging a chair closer to sit in front of me. “You were what, fifteen?” That made me feel even worse. I was two years older than her, she was barely even a teenager. Had I taken advantage of her? “Hey, stop it. I can tell what you’re thinking

about. You were both in a traumatic part of your lives together and you both leaned on each other for comfort. You only gave her what she asked for and it's obvious she doesn't regret it."

I felt sick at the thought. How had we even ended up spending all that time together? I didn't remember many times I saw other kids, so it wasn't like we all got to play together when we weren't being tortured and experimented on.

Warm fingers slid around the back of my neck and Salem didn't hesitate to sit on my lap, offering me comfort.

"I think we both wouldn't have survived without each other," she offered quietly, and against better judgment, I gently put my hands on her to encourage her to get off my lap. Part of me wanted to soak it in, but it was hard to forget all the hate and bitterness I'd felt. Fucking her was one thing, but I wasn't comfortable with her snuggling into me and acting like none of that had happened.

Her brow creased but she stood without argument, and Storm pulled her onto his lap instead. He understood how I felt because until recently, he'd never been the type to bother with affection. I could tell he was still getting used to it, but he pushed it aside for her.

I should've too, but I just couldn't.

"You guys want to tell me how the pussy puddle ended up on my floor?" Storm asked dryly, and Salem sighed.

"He needed an outlet, so I gave him one."

"He could've really hurt you."

"I know." Her eyes landed on mine and she gave me a reassuring smile. "We both needed it. Sorry about the mess."

"We can clean the floor in seconds so don't stress about it. You need more of that tea though. I don't mean to sound like a piece of shit but if you're going to keep ending up pumped full of cum, you really need contraception." He hesitated before kissing her neck, the motion so soft and sweet that it was hard to believe he'd even done it. "Unless you want to just start beating us up for not being careful."

“I don’t like barriers between us,” she murmured, cupping his cheek. “I love knowing I drove you so wild you filled me up.” I was going to bust in my pants like River soon.

“How about Frost makes you that tea, while I deal with the floor? Then we can go back to the house and sit down together for a serious talk. Minerva’s coming back tonight for the rest of us.” I saw the panic cross her face instantly. Whatever she’d seen must have been bad.

“I don’t want River to go back to that kind of pain, and Fox can’t remember his trauma or it might break him. Please, I —”

“Everyone has the right to know their pasts, firecracker,” Storm said gently as he tried to soothe her. “Whatever it is—”

“They forced him to do disgusting things. We all trained to become stronger and Fox was no different. He didn’t just wake up and know how to fuck.” Her teary eyes landed on mine and as much as me and the guys hadn’t exactly been best friends this whole time, the thought of Fox being abused like that made me feel sick. “He was a little kid. I didn’t see the exact acts but—”

“Fox knows what you saw?” I asked slowly, waiting for her to nod before continuing. “Then he knows what to expect. If he wants to see what his past was really like, you can’t stop him. Just be there if he needs you.”

Storm tightened his hold on her, his voice strained.

“I remember most of my past. I used to hurt you and most likely the others. I don’t remember much else other than that dark room. I’d watch you through the window and cry as you were electrocuted repeatedly. I assume I did it to the guys too. For all I know, my memories have been tampered with too.”

“How did they manipulate all those photos of me and Salem?” I asked as I pulled my phone from my pocket and started flicking through them, almost dropping it as confronting images slid across the screen instead of the happy ones.

They were photos of security videos, our time in that place documented like a sick souvenir for those who hurt us.

Hundreds of special photos were gone, ones I'd held on to for my entire life, and they were now replaced with nightmares. All of us beaten and tortured, other beasts attacking us, even some of me and Salem in bed together.

I closed out of it when I found a couple of Fox and some woman. Salem was right, he'd been through some disgusting shit.

"What's wrong?" Storm demanded, and I just handed it over and got to my feet.

"I'll make the tea." I left the room, not wanting to see the photos again, trying hard not to throw up all over the kitchen floor in the process.

Storm

Salem and I only looked through a handful of photos before we couldn't look anymore. She instantly headed into the kitchen to be with Frost, leaving me to clean up the mess they'd made. I couldn't exactly scold my brother for not being careful since I had a tendency to lose all my brain cells when my dick was near Salem too.

I finished mopping the floor while thanking the gods that I didn't have carpet. This place needed a major renovation but I'd always liked it like this. Fancy paint and furniture didn't change a thing.

I glanced into the kitchen and watched Salem and Frost talking quietly between themselves as she sipped her tea, a sense of longing burning in my chest. Why did I continue to live here alone when I had a family at the main house? Now that Salem had arrived and shaken things up, even me and the guys were getting along better.

I actually enjoyed their company most days which surprised me.

I put the mop back upstairs and joined them, not being able to help myself as I gave Salem's shoulder a gentle squeeze on my way past. I needed a beer. I didn't know how to feel about the look she gave me, as if I was her everything. I'd never meant anything to anyone before and it was scary as fuck.

"I'm thinking about coming back to the house," I said before I could change my mind, grabbing a beer from the fridge and resting my hip against the counter to watch them. I didn't have to think about it anymore as I saw Salem's reaction.

Her face lit up like a Christmas tree and her smile melted my damn heart.

"Really? You'll come back permanently?"

"Might as well since I won't be able to sleep here without knowing you're safe, and I doubt the guys will be cool with you moving out," I chuckled, a snort leaving Frost.

"Yeah, that's not happening. It's about time you came back and stopped being such a stubborn idiot anyway."

"Bite me. You appreciate your own space too," I argued, earning a half-assed shrug in return.

"Yeah, but that's what my bedroom's for. I didn't pull a drama queen act and move out." Amusement twinkled in his eyes, relaxing me. He was being a dick to make light of it. Maybe he'd even like me being around more? We hadn't had much brotherly bonding time since meeting, but I wasn't opposed to it. All we knew was that we shared DNA on our medical records. "This house is falling down around you anyway."

"You'd be okay with me living there?"

"Of course. You're my brother," he said with a frown, and we both stared at each other for a few beats without saying anything. It felt good to have each other's backs even though we'd never cared to before. We trained and fought together out of obligation for Stardust, we were a team, but now it was more than that.

We were becoming a family.

“I think that’s the first time you’ve called me that without scowling,” I finally answered, smiling as he flipped me off.

“Eat shit. Want us to grab your things while we’re here?”

I glanced around the kitchen, the chipped painted cupboards and the old furniture not feeling like home anymore. My home was with Salem, my family, and this place held nothing but bitter memories of loneliness and anger.

“Yeah, I think that’s a good idea.”

Salem squealed with excitement, flying out of her chair and throwing herself at me, her arms going around my neck and almost choking me as she kissed my cheek.

“I love this so much! We can have a movie night with pizza to celebrate!” I didn’t flinch as her hands took my face, her thumb stroking over my scar. I liked that she saw my scars as those of a survivor. “What do you want me to pack for you?!”

“I’ll be packed in two minutes. I’m only bringing my clothes.”

“You don’t want anything else?”

“Nothing else means shit to me. It’s just stuff,” I mumbled, soaking in her excitement as she gave me a kiss before grabbing her tea and downing the rest of it.

“I’ll check the room I was staying in to make sure I didn’t leave anything here. I’m so excited!” She tore up the stairs like a tornado, making Frost chuckle.

“Do you think she’s excited?”

“Not too sure,” I deadpanned, chugging my beer before placing the empty bottle on the counter beside me. “I’m going to pack. I’ll be back down soon.”

“I’ll wait,” he replied, watching me leave.

I caught myself smiling as I walked past the spare room and saw Salem running around checking drawers and the bathroom, and I couldn’t help but stop and lean against the doorframe, crossing my arms to watch her silently.

She didn't notice me at first, but when she did, her whole face brightened.

“What are you looking at?”

“You,” I said, running my eyes over her. “You're fucking gorgeous.”

Her face flushed at the unexpected compliment.

“I look like shit. My hair and makeup's a mess thanks to Frost—” She stopped talking as I made my way towards her, and I claimed her lips as her hands fisted the front of my shirt. I couldn't explain it exactly, but all I felt was peace when I looked at her, despite all the chaos that we were still in the middle of.

I leaned back, my fingers sliding through her tangled hair to force her eyes up to mine.

“I really love how you look when you're freshly fucked, even if it's my brother's cum between your legs and not mine.”

“Jesus,” she muttered under her breath, her fingers slipping under my shirt to trail across my skin. “Why is that so hot?”

“You think that's hot? Wait until you're screaming between us,” I whispered as I kissed her neck, forcing myself to take a step back. I had no idea if Frost even wanted that but I'd deal with it later if he said no.

“You need to go and pack before I fuck you right here,” she groaned, putting more distance between us. “Go.”

I laughed as I left the room, heading into my own room to pack.

It didn't take long for me to be ready, and once we were standing outside with my bags in our hands, I looked back with a satisfied smile. I was finally going home.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SALEM

I pretended like Frost's need for space wasn't bothering me, but it did. I hadn't processed the fact that he'd bent me over the table and railed me, let alone all the other shit. His discomfort when I'd sat on his lap made my chest tight, but I couldn't really expect much else from him.

He'd hated me for years, so I needed to give him some time, which meant pushing my own emotions aside.

My instincts told me to cling to him now that we'd found out the truth but I knew that would scare him away, not to mention I had a lot to think about myself.

He *had* tried to kill me a handful of times, after all.

Luckily, Storm was happy to walk at my pace, chuckling quietly as Frost walked ahead like he didn't know us, one of Storm's bags over his shoulder.

"Give him a little time. He won't be like this forever."

"You sure? Pretty sure it's part of his personality at this point," I sighed, and he shifted the bag in his hand to toss it over his shoulder like Frost's, taking my hand as we walked.

"If I can play nice, he can too. You're really hard to stay away from." We watched Frost walk faster, turning onto our street and making a beeline towards the front door. "He'll crawl back when he wants more of that golden pussy of yours."

"So you're all using me for my pussy?" I asked dryly, and he wagged his eyebrows suggestively.

“I didn’t hear you complaining.” I swatted him and he laughed. “I’m only fucking with you. Your pussy is just a bonus.”

“Do all guys think with their dicks?”

“It’s cute that you pretend you’re not obsessed with our dicks.” Frost walked inside and slammed the door, making Storm cringe. “Okay, maybe he’ll need extra time.”

“He still hates me,” I said quietly, defeat washing through me. “What if he can’t change how he feels?”

“He will. Until then, I only have to fight Fox for you,” he smirked, releasing my hand so he could open the door. Frost had left the bag on the kitchen floor and vanished, and Smokey wandered in with a frown on his face.

“What’s up with the giant icicle? I didn’t even get a word in before he told me to fuck off.” He noticed the bags and his frown deepened. “What’s going on?”

“I’m moving back in.” Storm didn’t make a big deal of it, bending down to grab the bag off the floor and started walking towards the living room.

“No wonder Frost is pissed then.”

“No, my baby brother’s angry because he’s going through an emotional roller coaster. He bent Salem over my table and railed her, so he needs to process it. I’d stay away from him if I were you,” Storm said without any sign of emotion, heading towards the stairs to his room.

Smokey chuckled but it sounded forced.

“I bet that was fun for you. Are you okay?” He looked me over, stepping closer. “You *reek* of sex.”

“Probably because I have dried pussy juice all down my legs and a bucket-load of our ice maiden’s jizz in my love chamber,” I deadpanned. “I need a shower.”

He cracked a grin, following me as I walked in the direction that Storm had gone.

“Ice maiden? Love chamber? I’m glad you still have your hilarious sense of humor. Wait, he didn’t wrap it up?”

“I drank tea and now I just need to wash it off me. You’re not welcome to join me, by the way,” I grumbled but he kept following.

“We’ve been freaking out the whole time you were gone, thinking that asshole was going to turn you into an ice cube, but he was busy fucking you raw? Did he at least let you come?”

“Smokey—”

“What? I bet he didn’t. He’s a selfish prick.” We walked into my room and didn’t hesitate to drop back on my bed. The humor faded and he gave me a serious look. “For real, are you okay?”

“I don’t think any of us are okay. It gets worse too. All Frost’s photos were manipulated and have turned into ones of what really happened in the past. It’s awful,” I said softly. “Can you leave me be? We’ll talk when I come downstairs.”

He looked torn but nodded, getting to his feet.

“I know you don’t want to hear this, but I’m sorry. I should’ve believed you.” He seemed really upset and it was hard to stay mad at him. The evidence had made me look like the bad guy, so I couldn’t blame him for putting his walls up around me.

I hesitated before stepping towards him, reaching up to ruffle his hair.

“We’ll figure it all out. You didn’t know.”

He took my hand, hugging it to his chest.

“I should’ve known though. Then I convinced River to turn against you too. That wasn’t fair.”

“You care about him, I can’t exactly fault you for that. This whole thing’s a mess but we’ll get through it. You hurt me, but now that we’re learning the truth, I think we can talk it out and be on the same page.”

“I know we all give River shit, but you would’ve broken him if you were lying, Salem. I didn’t want that for him, especially now that we’re friends.” He stepped back, raking his hands through his hair. “That little fucker’s grown on me and I don’t know how.”

“Go find him while I shower,” I encouraged, grateful when he reluctantly left the room and shut the door behind him. My peace didn’t last long though.

The hot water cascaded down my body as I kept my face tilted up at it, vaguely hearing the door open. Clothes rustled and the shower door opened, warm hands sliding around my middle as lips pressed against my shoulder.

I knew Fox’s soft hands anywhere.

They slid down my belly, moving between my legs gently, but they stilled when I became tense.

“You okay?”

“I’m a little sore,” I admitted, turning in his arms so that the water wasn’t pounding against my face. “I had a spontaneous fuck with Frost.”

“I heard,” he said lightly, his hand cupping water against my pussy. “I’m just helping clean you up. Pass me the soap.”

“You’re going to clean up Frost’s mess?” I asked slowly, apparently taking too long with the soap because he reached over me to grab it, lathering his hands before starting to massage it into my shoulders and around my back, making me sigh contently. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the attention he gave me, only opening them again when he shifted to his knees in front of me and started cleaning my pussy and thighs.

He took his time, making his way down my legs to my feet, ensuring to wash every inch of me before kissing my stomach and standing.

“Turn around.” I did as he asked, fighting a groan as his fingers massaged my scalp. He shampooed and conditioned my hair for me, washing my ruined makeup from my face before rinsing us off.

The water stopped and he gently pulled me towards the sink, a smile forming on my lips when I noticed he'd brought me one of his huge, fluffy, towels. He wrapped me in it while quickly drying himself, sliding boxers on before giving me his full attention.

“Where’s your hairdryer?”

“Bottom drawer.”

I watched him as he got it set up, pulling my hairbrush from the drawer and motioning for me to face the mirror. He was gentle as he worked the brush through my hair before grabbing the dryer from the sink, his fingers combing through the damp strands as he slowly started drying it.

Hugging the towel around myself, I took the time to study him, noticing how relaxed he was.

Seduction meant more than sex, he'd told me that himself, but he looked so happy right now as he doted on me.

This was what he was best at, looking after people and spoiling them with kindness.

The second he turned the hairdryer off, I turned to face him, threading my arms around his neck to tug him down for a kiss, and his hands automatically went to my waist to pull me closer. We kept it slow and sweet, only stopping when we both needed air, and he instantly cupped my cheek with a warm smile.

“What was that for?”

“You know *exactly* what that was for,” I murmured, kissing the tip of his nose. “You’re really sweet, Fox. Thank you.”

“This whole thing has everyone tense. Trust me, I needed that as much as you did,” he answered, taking the towel from me to start drying my body. “I roped River into making you a coffee too.”

“How do I forgive them?” I asked softly, peering into his deep, brown eyes. “I want to, but it still hurts. Both him and Smokey.”

“I have plans for River, don’t worry.”

“Don’t hurt him,” I said quickly, relieved when he shook his head.

“I don’t intend to. Are you comfortable with him seeing you naked?”

“Uh, I guess. Why?” Nerves flickered inside of me but he calmed them instantly.

“I want to show him what he almost lost, that’s all. We’ll talk about it later. I have a feeling today’s going to put everyone in a bad mood and no one’s getting naked.”

He led me into my bedroom where I found one of his shirts on my bed, and he grabbed a pair of panties from the drawer and squatted to help slide them up my legs. Once the shirt was over my head, we made our way down to the kitchen where Smokey and River were sitting at the table, coffee cups in hand while they talked amongst themselves.

It seemed awkward between them too.

“I made you a coffee,” River blurted out as he spotted me, getting to his feet and grabbing two cups off the counter. “You too, Fox.”

“Damn, and I didn’t even have to touch your cock or call you pretty,” Fox joked.

River scowled and pushed the cups across the table towards us, dropping back into his seat beside Smokey.

“I don’t want your dick.”

This argument had the potential to explode and I wasn’t going to handle that on top of the real problems we had.

“Can you guys not fight today, please?” I asked as I sat in one of the chairs, making them all shut their mouths. “Thanks for the coffee, puddles.”

His posture softened at the nickname and he gave me a smile.

“Any time.”

“Where’s snowflake and bug zapper?”

“Here,” Storm said from behind me, his hands landing on my shoulders as he leaned down to speak in my ear. “*Bug zapper?*”

“I said what I said,” I teased, squealing as he lifted me and dropped down into my vacated chair to pull me onto his lap.

“Brat.” He wound his fingers through my hair, tugging my head back a little. “You want to get sassy with me?”

“Always,” I cooed, butterflies swarming in my stomach as he dropped a kiss to my temple.

Frost silently sat in one of the chairs, refusing to look at me, and I figured we’d just start the conversation while everyone was present and calm.

“So, who wants to go first with their memories?” I asked, glancing around the table. No one spoke for a minute, but Smokey finally leaned forwards.

“I can.” He explained all the details he’d seen, and I’d gone next since Frost hadn’t said a damn word. By the time Frost’s turn came around, he was staring at me. He eased his phone out of his pocket and unlocked it, scrolling through something before sliding it onto the table. I knew it was the photos without seeing it.

“The photos I’d shown you guys had been manipulated. This is the real past.” His eyes landed on Fox, his voice softer than I’d heard it before. “I need you to be prepared for this. It’s not pretty.”

Storm gently tapped my leg, encouraging me to get off his lap. He knew Fox was going to need me in the next few moments.

Fox looked nervous as I slid onto his lap, his fingers taking the phone as he started to scroll through the photos. His hand started shaking after a while and my heart broke for him as he passed photo after photo of himself being abused.

It was always the same woman.

“Why the fuck do you even have these?” Fox asked sharply, not lifting his eyes from the screen.

“I don’t know. The fake photos made sense, I thought they were selfies we’d taken together, but most of these are taken from security footage. Someone put them on my phone to fuck with us.”

“What sick fuck would do that?” Fox choked out, pushing the phone away so that Smokey could take it. River peered over his shoulder and I hated the looks on their faces. I wasn’t sure if it was photos of Fox or of themselves, but it was equally traumatic. “Was it just me that happened to?”

“We think so,” Frost mumbled, glancing at me. “I have memories of Salem being dragged away from me, completely naked, but I don’t think they touched her. She doesn’t have any memories of it either. You hold the power of seduction, so while we were all being forced to grow our powers, they were doing that to you to grow yours.”

“They were assaulting me!” Fox shouted, making me jump at the volume. “Get rid of those fucking photos.” His body was shaking with rage and I took his hand in mine, hugging his arm to my chest. He pulled it away, his voice gentle despite his growing anger. “Can you move, please?”

“Are you—”

“Baby, move,” he said more firmly, and I rose to my feet, tears burning my eyes as he pushed the chair back and left the room. I went to go after him but Smokey snagged my wrist before I got too far.

“Leave him be.”

“He’s hurting,” I said weakly, earning a sad smile from him in return.

“I know, hurricane.”

“Then let me go to him. He doesn’t have to suffer alone, he has me now.” A tear fell and I swiped at it with frustration. “He needs me.”

“He needs space, trust me,” Frost muttered, hesitating before patting his thigh. “Come here.” I was so surprised that I didn’t argue, moving towards him and slowly lowering myself onto his lap. He buried his face in my neck, a tormented sigh leaving him. “Check on him in an hour. His memories would be coming back and haunting him right now. He needs to feel like he has a grip on reality again before he’ll want your comfort. It’s what I needed too.”

“Are you okay now?” I asked, not daring to move in case it snapped him out of it. He didn’t move either, his face remaining in the crook of my neck.

“We’ll talk about it later.”

At least he wasn’t angry with me right now.

He went back to telling the others bits of his memories that he was remembering, looking at Storm.

“I remember you now that some of my memories are coming back. You were watching Salem through a small window and crying.”

“I saw that when Minerva got in my head,” Smokey said quietly, glancing at me. “I think he was electrocuting you.”

“I hated hitting her with my powers,” Storm replied, toying with his hands on his lap. “My memories are still pretty strong of that aspect, but I’m worried what Minerva will uncover about the rest of you. I have a feeling my memories are still manipulated in some way.”

“You thought you killed her, right? Maybe that’s part of the manipulation?” River said softly, but Frost shook his head.

“Doubtful. Salem killed me and I came back to life. The same thing probably happened to her.”

“So we’re immortal now?” Smokey asked with a scoff, not looking convinced. None of us had an answer for that but it wasn’t something I’d like to rely on. If we were immortal, I needed hard evidence before risking it. “Can we get hold of our records? All the paperwork in the administrator’s office is technically ours, right?”

“If it even exists. I’ve been thinking more about how we’re the only ones currently here with strong powers. Why? There’s loads more people born into power. Stardust’s history is legendary, so there has to be others like us around that we can talk to,” Storm said gruffly.

“We battled others when we arrived, remember? So some were still here back then,” Smokey argued, his face twisting with confusion a moment later. “And the guy who attacked Salem had air powers like hers, so we know some are still around. They can’t all have turned bad though.”

“I’m starting to think this entire place is a lie and everything we’ve faced is a hallucination or something,” Frost answered, his arms tightening around me slightly. “My memories of our arrival here are getting fuzzier by the day. Maybe they’re manipulated too?”

My memories of my first day were fine, but some from my past were now blurry or replaced.

“We need to give Fox some time, but once he’s ready, I think we need him to convince the administrator to hand over our files. Can he get into people’s heads and force their hand?” I asked curiously.

“He can usually charm things out of people,” River offered with a cringe. “But he doesn’t like to do it and he’s not strong with it. He only likes to manipulate true feelings, so he’s hardly practiced the mind control aspect.”

“We need him to get over it,” Storm said flatly, glancing around the table. “He’s the only one of us with the ability to do that. This isn’t a drunk girl in the bar, this is our lives. What if the truth is behind the admin desk? He’s not forcing someone to fuck him, it’s just handing over paperwork that’s ours anyway.”

“I’ll ask him later. For now, we need to keep our eyes peeled for anything strange,” I said lightly and went to stand, but Frost didn’t allow it, tightening his hold on me.

“Where are you going?”

“We need to keep acting like everything’s fine, right? We need to go on some jobs before someone gets suspicious. What if someone on the Board—” I didn’t get to finish my sentence.

“Bite your tongue, it’s not the Board,” Storm said firmly, narrowing his eyes on me. “They’re the only truth in our lives.”

“Says who? We’re not even sure if Stardust is as it seems, so why wouldn’t the Board be involved? All I’m saying is we can’t trust anyone outside of this house right now. Assume everyone’s the enemy. What jobs are available at the moment?”

He knew I was right by the way he clenched his jaw and pulled his phone from his pocket, pulling up the job listing screen.

“More fucking unicorns have been dropping dead, another dragon is being a pain in the ass, and apparently there’s a rogue member of Stardust on the run.” His eyebrows lifted slightly in interest as he kept reading. “They contain the power of fire and went rogue recently, killing another member before going on the run. The Board can’t trace them.”

“Fire, you say?” Smokey grinned, holding his hand up as flames flickered across his palm. “I might know a thing or two about fire.”

“How powerful is this guy?” River asked Storm as worry filled his eyes. “Can Smokey handle him or is this a group task?”

“Group task,” Storm said without hesitation, pointing at Smokey knowingly. “We risk nothing and stay together. Don’t go out there guns blazing, you fucking hazard.”

“Me? I never go in guns blazing!” Smokey objected, lightening the mood as everyone chuckled. “I don’t!”

River grinned, putting him in a headlock.

“No? Everything you do is reckless, match stick.”

The chair scraped on the floor as Smokey pushed it back from the table, both of them ending up wrestling on the floor.

Storm rolled his eyes and Frost scowled.

“We don’t have time for this. It also answers our question about powers like ours being around. I guess we just have to find them.”

“Yeah, we do have time,” I smiled, looking him in the eye. “It’s been a heavy week for all of us, so let them have fun for five minutes. I need to check on Fox before we go anywhere anyway.”

“I think you should leave him be a little longer. Can I talk to you? In private?” he murmured, his crystal eyes studying me. I got to my feet and motioned for him to follow, the guys pretending like they didn’t see us walk off outside.

We sat on the chairs by the pool, and he cleared his throat before speaking.

“I don’t know what to do here, Salem.” Dread pooled in my stomach, and he didn’t jump to correct himself this time. Discomfort swam in his eyes, and he looked away from me to avoid my gaze. “I want to love you, so badly, but our love was tainted and I shouldn’t have fucked you before figuring my feelings out first.”

“We talked about this—”

“It’s not fair to you. I look at you and I want to hurt you, but then I remember none of it’s your fault and I’m mad at something that didn’t exist.” He hung his head, and I refused to let him stop whatever was finally happening between us.

“We’ve been robbed of what could’ve been. They fucked with us then turned us against each other, but they can’t break us,” I answered, and he scowled at me out of habit when I straddled his lap, trying to pull away as I took his face in my hands. “Don’t fucking let them, Frost.”

I leaned forward and kissed him, not surprised when he pushed me back, but then his fingers wound through my hair and he brought me forward again to claim my mouth, sliding an arm around my lower back to keep me in place. His grip on my hair tightened and he hardened beneath me, his teeth nipping at my lip and making me moan.

We were a panting mess by the time we pulled apart, and his hands ended up on my ass as he tugged me forward a little more.

“I give myself emotional whiplash, so I know I’ll hurt you. Right now, I want to pull your panties to the side and sink my dick inside you, but in an hour or two when those feelings fade, I’ll hate myself for it.”

He looked so frustrated with himself but he let me drape my arms around his shoulders and run my fingers through his white hair.

“Don’t run from this. I’ll give you space, I won’t suffocate you with affection because I know it’s not your thing, but don’t avoid me. If we have to hate-fuck for a while until that changes, I’m okay with that. I want to get to know you. It seems like you were my lifeline for most of my life, so I want the chance to feel that again. We deserve that, don’t we?”

He didn’t answer, he simply grabbed my throat in a gentle grip and pulled me in for another kiss. It was sweet, a memory flashing through my mind of us in a dark room, his arms wrapped around me as he kissed my fears away.

“Salem?” I snapped out of it to find Frost frowning at me, his fingers stroking my cheek. “What just happened?”

“A memory.”

“A bad one?”

“No,” I said with a small smile. “Promise me that you won’t cut me off. I need to hear you say it,” I answered, needing him to give this a chance. He nodded, his muscles tensing as we were joined by Smokey.

Luckily, Smokey knew not to be a dick and he acted like it was normal for us to be all over each other.

“I’m heading to the gym for a training session. Want to come and spar, Frost? Storm and River are using the gym here but I need to let out some power in the battle room,” he said casually, his eyes flicking to me. “It gives you some alone time with Fox too.”

“Why me?” Frost grunted, and Smokey raised an eyebrow.

“Thought maybe you’d want to burn some power too since your head’s all over the place.”

“You’re not wrong,” Frost muttered, standing and placing me on my feet. “You’re staying home, right?” He gave me a look that said I’d better not be sneaking off anywhere, so I chuckled.

“Yeah, I don’t plan on running away. Don’t hurt each other too badly, okay?”

“I’ll wipe the floor with him,” Frost huffed, turning his attention to Smokey. “Right, fire face?”

“Bring it, ice brain,” Smokey grinned, the two of them walking off together and leaving me to check on Fox.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Memories plagued me, the photos awakening something inside of me that had been hidden for so long. I fisted my hair and pulled as I paced my bedroom, wishing it was all a dream. I didn't need Minerva to bring my memories back, they'd come back all on their own.

Salem had been upset when I'd left the table, but I'd needed the time alone.

Finding out the truth of my past was worse than I thought.

Salem left me alone for an hour before letting herself into my room, finding me sitting on the edge of my bed with my face in my hands. I couldn't stop the memories and emotions from hitting me all at once, and I felt completely out of control.

"Can I sit?" she asked softly, waiting for me to nod before dropping down beside me. She didn't touch me, and as much as I appreciated it, I'd never not want her touch. I laid back and brought her with me, pulling her onto my chest and pressed a kiss to her hair.

"A bunch of my memories are coming back," I explained, swallowing hard before continuing. "There's so much more than what those photos show. I remember all of it."

She snuggled into me, pressing a kiss to my chest.

"I'm so sorry, and I don't blame you for needing some space. I was going to come after you but the guys agreed you'd need processing time alone." Her sad eyes lifted to

mine, my heart hurting with her next question. “Do you have any memories of me? Did they force us to do anything together like how Storm had to hurt me and I hurt River?”

“You’re asking if I assaulted you?” My lungs burned at the thought and I racked my brain for an answer. I couldn’t find a memory of that but her question was something that I’d wondered myself. Had they forced me to touch her?

The thought made me physically ill.

“I shouldn’t have asked,” she said quickly, but I shook my head, not wanting her to feel guilty for her question. I’d want to know too if I were her.

“I don’t think we touched each other. I have small memories of you and the guys, mainly from peeking in random windows and doors. I don’t think I interacted with anyone other than the masked men and the woman though.” I stroked her hair, holding her close. “I want to find them and tear them apart.”

“We will, baby,” she murmured, shuffling up the bed more to kiss my cheek as nerves flitted across her gorgeous face. “I don’t want to stress you out right now but there’s something we’re hoping you’ll do for us.”

“What is it?” I didn’t like where this was going. If she was worried about asking, chances were high I’d hate it.

“We need to access some documents, our private files to be exact.”

She didn’t have to say anything else.

“You want me to use my persuasion on the administrator so she’ll hand it over.”

“I know you don’t like doing it but—”

“I’ll do it,” I said without bothering to wait for her to finish her sentence. “Well, I’ll try. Whoever the fuck did this shit to us needs to pay. Once we have those files we might find out information that could help us.” I was going to kill them all for what they’d done to us. “When do we do it?”

“Whenever you’re ready. Not today though, I think we need to just chill out for a day or two.”

“Can you sleep in here tonight?”

I knew I’d probably have to make room for someone else to join us, but I was fine with that. I definitely preferred the company right now.

“Sure. The guys will understand.”

Her smile repaired some of the cracks in my chest and I forced myself to relax.

“They can all sleep in here too for all I care, as long as you’re beside me.”

“I don’t think we’d all fit,” she giggled, and I leaned forward to kiss her on the lips.

“We’d make it work. I’d planned on punishing River tonight but I think it can wait. Maybe tomorrow night.” Not knowing how Salem would cope with my plans was difficult, so I thought it was time to just tell her. “I want to fuck you in front of him.”

“That’s your punishment?” she asked with a snort, pulling back to watch me with amusement. “How is that a bad thing?”

“Because he’s not allowed to touch you.”

“That’s cruel.” She was still smiling though.

“Maybe if he’s a really good boy I’ll let him come,” I stated, giving her one last kiss before sitting up. “What are the guys doing?”

“Smokey and Frost went to the gym to throw powers at each other, and Storm’s in the home gym with River. Why?”

I got to my feet and she followed, taking my hand as we walked downstairs.

“I’m roping them all into a movie night. I think we need it.” I thought it was an awesome idea. It was rare that we all got along so well.

“Pizza and movies are the plan already. Storm moved back in today, he cleared out his place,” she said with excitement, and I couldn’t hide the surprise on my face.

“He did? Why?”

“He didn’t want to be away from me.”

“I don’t blame him,” I chuckled, sliding my arm around her waist once we reached the bottom of the stairs. “Look at you, bringing everyone together.”

Despite her acting like it was nothing, it was to the rest of us. Storm had moved out of here not long after we’d all moved in, so it was a huge deal to have him back home.

Salem had been slowly fixing us and turning us into a family ever since she arrived, and I hoped she knew how much we appreciated it.

“Let’s check on River and Storm to make sure they’re not killing each other. Then we can start the party early by picking a movie. How about something romantic?”

She gagged, giving me the side-eye.

“No thanks. Gunfire or comedy, please.”

River

Little snippets of memories hit me randomly as I worked out. I couldn’t remember much, but the things that I did remember were awful.

Pain, screaming, Salem.

I jerked at that thought, almost falling off the damn treadmill.

“You good?” Storm asked as he glanced at me from the weight bench in the corner.

“Just unwanted memories coming back,” I answered, slowing the machine a fraction. “I have little flashbacks of Salem.”

“You do?” He put the weights down and sat up, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. “What happens?”

“She’s hurting me with her powers, suffocating me until I pass out, then I wake up and it starts all over again.”

I frowned as the memory of another kid slipped into my mind.

We were huddled in the corner as a door slammed open, a large man stalking towards us with a clipboard. I clung to the other kid harder as the man grabbed me, crying as I tried to fight him off.

I must have only been five or six.

The man was terrifying, his voice sending chills down my spine.

“Get the fuck up!”

I flinched, my friend trying to keep me behind him, putting himself in danger.

“Leave him alone!”

“You want to take his place, you little shit? You’ve got it. Let’s see how heroic you feel after spending an hour in the chambers.” He grabbed the kid and jerked him away from me roughly, my eyes burning with tears at the sound of my own screams as I finally saw the familiar fiery hair.

“Smokey!”

Flames flickered in the boy’s eyes as he looked back at me, not saying anything as he was dragged from the room, the door slamming behind them and leaving me alone.

“River!” I jerked as the memories faded and I found myself standing on the treadmill that was now off, Storm in my face as he tapped my cheek firmly. “Hey. What the fuck happened? It’s like you blacked out.”

“I knew Smokey,” I choked out as more images flashed in front of my eyes. The dark rooms, the pain, clinging to Smokey. Someone cursed, my memories fading again as

Storm slapped me. I stumbled but he grabbed my chin hard, getting in my face.

“Snap out of it. You keep zoning out and getting stuck in your own head.”

I glanced around and noticed I was sitting on the weights bench. When had we left the treadmill?

“River!” he bit out, and I blinked hard to focus on him.

“I’m here,” I mumbled, wincing as I touched my cheek. “Did you have to hit me so fucking hard?”

“I tried the gentle approach first and it didn’t work,” he replied, gripping my chin harder to keep my gaze on his. “I’m not letting Minerva in your head. If you can fall into memories so easily just from a few photos, I’m not risking you being permanently stuck by actually going in there.”

“I don’t need to look. If I knew anyone else, it doesn’t matter. We all know we were there.”

Fox walked in with Salem, and even though I knew she was still hurt by me turning my back on her, she could see the distress on my face from a mile away and didn’t hesitate to sit on the bench behind me to press her chest to my back as her legs dropped to either side of mine. Her arms wound around my middle and I leaned back, accepting the comfort she offered.

“What happened?” Fox asked gently from beside Storm, looking down at me with worry. Storm explained it to them, his eyes not leaving me for a second.

I’d probably scared the shit out of him.

Salem’s arms tightened around me, her lips pressing against my shoulder. I didn’t hold it against her that she’d hurt me in the past with her powers, we’d all been hurting each other and no one was to blame other than the freaks in the lab coats.

“I need to talk to Smokey,” I said quietly, stopping their conversation. “It seems we were allowed to see each other, at least when we were really young. I don’t think he remembers

any of that. I remember Salem too, but I don't think we got to spend time together outside of using our powers on each other."

"Cancel Minerva stopping by," Storm said firmly to Fox. "The rest of us know enough and we don't need to get stuck in our own heads. After Salem not coming back to the present quickly and River now getting stuck in memories without even needing the help, I don't think it's worth the risk."

"My memories are coming back after seeing the photos," Fox mumbled.

"The same thing is happening to River, and I remember being there without the help. If my memories are messed up, I don't give a shit."

We all nodded, none of us wanting to see anymore.

"Frost needs to delete those photos." Fox looked devastated and I couldn't blame him. Finding out that kind of secret from your past would be hard to push through, especially since he knew we'd all seen it.

"Already done," Storm promised, patting him on the shoulder. "He smashed his phone to pieces when he left for the gym. Smokey texted me and told me to call his phone instead if we needed them. Frost can pick up a new phone later."

The relief on Fox's face was instant, and he scrubbed a hand over it as if trying to get his feelings in check. I hated seeing him like this, he was usually the only one out of us who never had fucked up emotions.

"We're going to watch a movie if you guys want to join us? I heard that Storm's rejoined the house and we're having a pizza and movie night?"

Storm hadn't mentioned that to me but from the way he was currently looking at Salem, told me she was the one spilling the beans to everyone. She looked so pleased with herself too as she stood, moving to Storm's side and wrapping both her arms around one of his.

"C'mon, it's exciting! Don't be such a sour-puss!" She laughed as he ducked down to throw her over his shoulder,

swatting her ass as the shirt she was wearing rode up and exposed her panties.

“What should we do with you?” he growled but there was no anger behind it. If I wasn’t mistaken, he was fighting a smile. He’d been smiling a lot since Salem had waltzed through our door.

“I can think of a few things,” she purred, earning another swat.

“Cheeky shit.” He turned to me, his face more serious. “You sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah, I just need a hot shower,” I answered as I stood, waving off his concern. “I’ll come back downstairs once I’ve had one. You guys go hang out in the living room or something.”

I knew Salem didn’t like me being alone but she didn’t ask to join me, so I didn’t push it.

I wandered upstairs to my room and shut the door, turning on the water and not bothering to turn on the heat before stripping off and stepping under the icy spray.

My eyes closed and I let the chill soak into my bones, finding myself flashing in and out of my memories until all I could feel was pain and misery.

Smokey.

Storm: River keeps getting stuck in his memories and claims he saw you in them. He’s kinda freaking me out.

I frowned down at my phone, ducking at the last minute as I noticed Frost’s ball of ice heading right for me.

“Can you fucking focus?” He crossed his arms with annoyance, his murderous glare on me. “I thought you wanted to burn power?”

“We’ve been burning it for hours. Storm said River’s memories are coming back and he keeps getting stuck in

them.” I replied to the text to say I’d be home soon, pocketing my phone before giving Frost my attention. “I’m going to check on him.”

“You’re really dicking him, aren’t you?” he snorted, but he didn’t argue about leaving as he followed me across the room towards the door, snatching our shirts off the floor and yanking them over our heads on the way. We could just shower at home.

“No. It’s complicated.” I didn’t want to talk to him about it because I didn’t know how to. River was important to me, and right now, that was all it was.

Frost walked beside me, surprisingly not giving me shit for it.

“What about Salem?”

“You want to discuss Salem?” I chuckled, raising an eyebrow as I glanced at him. “What’s going on with *you* and Salem?”

“I’m trying to stay away from her and she’s not letting me,” he muttered, not sounding annoyed in the slightest. “She’s driving me nuts.”

“That’s code for she’s making your dick hard and you hate that you like it.”

“Basically.” He walked in silence for a while before continuing. “How do I stop hating her? None of my memories about her were right. She didn’t do anything wrong, but it’s hard to change how I feel about her.”

We never talked about anything personal, but I wasn’t about to be a dick and make him regret it. Frost was the worst for expressing himself outside of angry bursts of power, so if he was opening up to me, it meant he was really fucked up about it.

“You loved her once, you can love her again,” I offered. “I don’t think she’s opposed to an angry fuck anyway. Rail her a few times and you’ll never be mad at her again.”

“This isn’t a joke,” he bit out, and I shrugged.

“Who’s joking?”

We turned onto our street and Frost kept his mouth shut for the rest of the walk, acting as if the others hearing him would be the biggest embarrassment of the century. We all knew his feelings for Salem were a mess, so knowing he was trying to work through them was a relief.

Salem, Fox, and Storm were all in the living room watching a movie when we walked in.

“Where’s River?”

“His room. He went up for a shower but hasn’t come back down,” Storm stated without looking up at me, content with Salem tucked between him and Fox. She was napping, her chest rising and falling steadily.

“How long has she been asleep?”

“Only ten minutes. Figured we’d let her nap now so she doesn’t fall asleep later. Pizza and movies, mandatory gathering,” Storm deadpanned. “Our little tornado demands it.”

“Whatever,” Frost grunted and headed towards the stairs. He’d come back down later, not wanting to upset Salem.

Once he left, I sighed.

“I’ll check on River and have a shower. I’ll be back soon.”

I took the stairs two at a time, knocking on River’s door and getting no response.

“River?” I opened it and slipped inside, hearing the water running. “Yo, River!”

Still nothing.

Seeing him naked didn’t bother me, so I opened the bathroom door and found him standing in the shower, his forehead pressed against the tiles. He didn’t acknowledge me as I shut the door behind me, walking towards him.

“It’s not like you to waste water. Did you have a really good tug on your dick, or what?”

I opened the shower door and reached out to touch the water, finding it fucking freezing, and by the looks of his skin, he'd been in it for a while now.

“Fuck. Hey, River? Snap out of it, dude.” I turned the taps to warm, realizing he'd never turned them on in the first place. I didn't give a shit if he freaked out at this point, so I stripped my clothes off and stepped in behind him, pressing my front against his back and wrapping my arms around him.

My natural body heat would warm him up fast, I was like a furnace.

It was five minutes before he moved, his muscles tensing as he felt me behind him.

“You were zoned out under the cold water and were turning blue,” I murmured, cringing as my dick jerked against his ass. “Sorry, I'm trying not to make you feel weird and my dick's gonna ruin it.”

He didn't speak but his muscles relaxed, his ass pushing back on me a fraction. I ignored it, assuming it was an accident, but he did it again a moment later, my dick hardening like a rock. Testing him, I pushed against him more until my dick was pressing firmly against his ass cheek. He released a breath and threaded his fingers through mine that were resting against his stomach, making me realize he was encouraging me to touch him.

“I need you to speak, River,” I rasped out, dropping my lips to his shoulder. “I need to know you're here with me.”

“I'm here.” It was quiet but it was there, so I trailed my lips along his shoulder and up his neck, a shudder rolling through him. His hand tightened in mine as he tilted his head to the side, bumping his ass back against me and making me groan.

“I think we need to talk about this.”

“Don't fuck me,” he forced out. “I just—”

“I can work with that. Trust me?” I asked, honestly surprised when he nodded. “Tell me to stop and I will.” I should've dragged him out of the shower and made sure he

was alright, but he sounded desperate for my touch and that made my brain cells vanish.

My teeth grazed his neck as I slid my free hand down his front, and I almost came when I wrapped my fingers around his length and he released a breathy moan. I pumped him slowly, grinding myself against him like a damn teenager.

My balls were so tight I was surprised I didn't come all over his ass.

He released my hand to brace his palms on the tiles, bending slightly. He'd asked me not to fuck him, which was becoming seriously fucking difficult to remember, so I spat on his ass and eased a finger between his cheeks while continuing to stroke him with my other hand.

He tensed but didn't stop me as I took my time, kissing his neck and shoulder as I pushed it inside of him. He jerked when I pressed my finger across his prostate, repeating the motion and making him curse.

"Smokey—" I stroked him faster, tightening my grip a little as I pushed my finger in and out of him, adding a second one that pulled a desperate whine out of him. His legs shook and his breath quickened, his ass tightening around my finger. "Fuck, fuck, fuck."

A panicked gasp left him as his dick throbbed in my hand and his ass gripped me, breathy curses spilling from his lips as he pushed back against me more. I slowed but didn't stop, letting him ride it out, but concern washed through me when he stayed facing the wall when he was done.

I eased my fingers from him and placed a hand on his waist, mentally scolding myself. He hadn't been ready and I'd just fucked it up.

"Are you okay?" I waited for him to flee but he didn't. He nodded, slowly turning to face me.

"It definitely feels better when someone does it for you." He cracked a small smile, my entire body relaxing at knowing he was fine.

“Now you see why I can’t keep my dick in my pants. I’ve had a finger up my ass before so I know how good it feels.”

“Can I touch you?” He sounded unsure, biting his lower lip as nerves filled his face. “I assume I just do to you what I usually do to myself, right?”

I forgot he had next to no experience.

“You can if you want,” I answered slowly, his fingers instantly curling around my dick and making me blow out a breath. I was so fucking close. His free hand slid around the back of my neck as he tugged me against him, and our gentle kiss turned into one of desperation fast.

My balls were insanely tight, and I groaned into his mouth as he kept the same speed.

“I’m going to come. Fuck, River.” Both my hands braced on the tiles on either side of him as I thrust into his hand, cursing as I came hard. My legs almost gave out so he slowed his strokes, a squeak of surprise leaving him as I devoured his mouth. I explored his chest with my hands, a possessive growl leaving me as I slid them lower and felt my cum on his abs. “That felt so fucking good.”

“We should get out before we waste all the water,” he said lightly as if he hadn’t wasted gallons of it already, his cheeks turning pink. He wasn’t running away which was a good sign, but he was obviously feeling awkward about what we’d just done.

Not wanting him to start freaking out, I grinned and tugged him under the water more to rinse him off.

“The others are watching a movie, so let’s go and join them.”

I stepped out and grabbed us both a towel, quickly drying off and getting dressed before we padded down to the living room.

Salem was curled up on the recliner in Frost’s lap, his eyes narrowing on me, daring me to say something about Salem and him. I ignored him and sprawled out on one of the couches on my back, tugging River down between my legs so that he

was laying over me. He came willingly which was a surprise, but I could tell he was unsure about being like this in front of the others.

Salem was beaming, Frost wasn't going to say shit or I'd bring up Salem, and Fox and Storm fucking knew better.

I slid my hand up the back of River's shirt, trailing my fingers up and down his spine, and he let out a content sigh as he relaxed. One of his palms rested against my chest and his fingers drew lazy circles on my shirt as he absently watched the movie that was playing.

I had no idea what it was but I didn't care.

I glanced at Salem to find her still watching us, a soft smile on her face. Frost was glaring at me for stealing her attention, so I stuck my tongue out at him, his lip lifting into a sneer.

He was so easy to rile up.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SALEM

Something had definitely happened between River and Smokey. They didn't move from their position on the couch all evening, apart from when they sat up to eat the pizza when it arrived. Frost was tense as fuck after a couple of hours, so I moved back to my spot on the couch between Storm and Fox, Frost's body language changing drastically. His shoulders relaxed, his jaw unclenched, and he even joined in with the conversation that Fox started about the bad camera angles in one of the movies.

He wanted me close but struggled with it too, which I had to respect.

I excused myself to go to the toilet, padding upstairs to my room and shutting myself in the bathroom. When I was done, I stepped back into my bedroom, a scream lodged in my throat as I noticed a random man standing by my bed.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," he said gruffly, my stomach lurching at the familiar voice. He wasn't wearing a lab coat or a mask, but his voice was one of those that haunted my dreams. "Stay silent or you and those wretched men will die."

"What do you want?" I asked quietly, keeping my eyes locked on his. "Who are you?"

"You know exactly who I am, seventy-four," he grinned, moving towards me with long strides. I jerked back as he reached out to touch my cheek, clicking his tongue with disappointment. "You never did learn to obey." His fingers

grabbed my chin, his nails digging into my skin and making me hiss out a breath. “Looking into the past never helped anyone in this world.”

“What did you inject us with in that facility?” I whimpered, hoping to get answers to at least something little. “Can you tell me that?”

“A concoction of venom from different species, building you up over time to an immunity of all creatures. It’s why you can’t kill each other with your powers either,” he mused, his fingers gripping my face harder. “When exposed to things in small doses, you eventually—”

“But it wasn’t small doses. We used our powers on each other until we passed out.”

“That’s what you remember. From the start though? Small doses. A baby would never live through a blast like that.” He released me, walking towards the window to look out into the night below us. “Your value is expiring. You can either save yourself by finishing your task, or perish with those around you.”

“What does that mean?”

I tensed as I heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and his smile turned sadistic.

“It means you need to hurry up and find a way to destroy those men you’ve grown attached to, or wait for one of them to destroy you when the truth comes out. People become desperate towards the end, especially when hatred and betrayal are involved. Do you really think they’ll forgive you for your sins?”

“I didn’t do anything wrong, we know the truth,” I scoffed, his eyes raking over me skeptically.

“You’re too far gone. I told them you’d fail but they didn’t believe me, they’re too busy thinking with their dicks. Remember who you are.”

The bedroom door opened just as the man vanished into thin air, and I jumped as Smokey took my face in his hands.

“What happened? You look like you saw a ghost.”

“He was here,” I forced out, stepping closer to him for comfort. “One of the men who hurt us at the facility.” Smokey’s body went rigid and he pulled me firmly against him as he glanced around the room on high alert. “He’s gone now, he vanished when you opened the door. It was like a projection but he could touch me.”

“He fucking touched you?” he growled, and flames flickered in his eyes as he gently took my chin in his hand to run his fingers over the tender skin. “What did he want?”

“He said I can either find a way to kill you all, or wait for one of you to kill me when the truth comes out,” I murmured, peering up at him with worry. “Apparently, I need to remember who I am and finish my task.”

“He’s talking in riddles to scare you,” he scoffed, steering me towards the door. “None of us will turn on each other, you already got your memories back so we know the truth.”

“What if—”

“I promise we have your back,” he said firmly, guiding me down to the living room to where the others were waiting. “Guys, we’ve got a problem.”

“Another one?” Frost grunted, but his eyes instantly moved to me, his jaw clenching. “What happened to her?”

Everyone’s eyes flashed to me, and Smokey tugged me down onto the couch with him and River. I let him explain it, worry coursing through me the more I thought about it. These guys hated each other not that long ago, so how easy would it be to turn them against me or each other? How loyal would they be if pushed to their limits?

Right now, we were all vulnerable from our discovery of our hidden pasts, but when that subsided, where would we all stand with each other if our lives were at stake?

Storm squatted in front of me, eyeing my chin that I assumed was bruised.

“He just vanished right in front of you?”

“He had some kind of projection power. I didn’t recognize his face but I remembered his voice from the facility. He’s the one that used to inject me all the time.” I shivered at the memory, absently taking his hand. “That’s why none of us can die from a scorpion sting, or—”

“But he asked you to kill us, right?” Storm asked slowly, confusion creasing his brow. “If we’re immune to each other’s powers, how are you supposed to do that?”

“He said to find a way. It doesn’t make sense though because when Frost was stabbed in the chest, he didn’t die,” I pointed out, and Frost cleared his throat.

“No, I died but I came back to life. We have to have a weakness that we don’t know about, right?”

“That would make sense, I guess. I don’t think it’s wise for us to attempt to test our immortality though to find out the truth,” I said with a cringe. “I’m going to be a party pooper and go to bed.”

Fox stood and moved towards me, offering me his hand.

“C’mon.”

“How come you get to sleep with her?” Storm grumbled.

“You can come too if you want, but this was preplanned,” Fox answered, taking my hand and pulling me to my feet. “No funny business though.”

“I’m not sharing a bed with you,” Storm snapped, but he ended up following us despite his argument.

The next morning almost felt normal. Smokey and River headed out to wrangle a grumpy troll, Fox buried himself in research, while Frost and Storm bossed me around. I’d intended on doing some training, but Storm wouldn’t go on his

unicorn hunt without me, and Frost refused to let me leave the house.

We compromised and now all three of us were walking through the forest in search of fucking unicorns.

“This is ridiculous,” Frost bit out as we walked, the overgrown trees and grass making it impossible to move quickly.

Storm glared at him from my other side, frustration seeping out of him.

“No one asked you to tag along, dumbass.”

“It’s not safe out here for Salem.”

“We’re looking for unicorns, you big slush puppy. Not dragons and demons,” Storm grunted, making me giggle. They both turned to scowl at me, making me laugh harder.

“Slush puppy? I like that one. It’s better than snowflake.”

“Shut your mouth or I’ll shut it for you,” Frost snapped with fake anger, and I slid my hand into his, swinging our arms slightly.

“You can choke me with your cock if you want but I don’t think now’s the time.”

He let go of my hand and hooked an arm around my neck, tugging me against him to speak in my ear.

“Don’t fucking tempt me, breeze. You think I won’t force you to your knees and fuck that bratty little mouth of yours?”

“I wish you would, *snowflake*,” I taunted, suddenly hauled back from him. Storm gripped my bicep firmly, giving me a gentle push to walk ahead of them.

“As much as I’d love nothing more than to see you on your knees, we don’t need the distraction right now. Be a good girl and sniff out some unicorns, then we can go home and put your mouth to good use.”

“I’m not a fucking dog, asshole,” I hissed, his mouth curving into an amused smirk.

“No, but I’ll be fucking you doggy-style later. Maybe Frost will join us and keep you quiet?”

Frost huffed, not seeming impressed with the idea.

“You’d be joining *us*, lightning rod.”

“Eat shit.”

“Fuck off.”

Storm threw lightning at him and I rolled my eyes, the pair of them ending up having a standoff while I continued ahead. I turned, walking backwards as I watched them.

“Would you two grow the fuck up? We’ve got unicorns to find, bad guys to catch, creatures to—” The back of my foot caught on something and I fell backwards, hitting the ground hard as the air whooshed from my lungs. Sticky liquid soaked into my jeans, and I lifted my hands to find blood all over them.

“Oh look, a unicorn. We can go home now,” Frost deadpanned as he crossed his arms against his chest, but Storm jogged over and helped me to my feet. My clothes clung to my ass and back, making me cringe.

“This is gross.” I glanced around, my eyes landing on the dead unicorn I’d tripped over. Its white fur was soaked with blood. “It looks really fresh.”

Storm was already pulling me back before I finished the sentence, his eyes scanning our surroundings.

“Frost—” he said firmly, and Frost’s eyes moved to us, irritation in his gaze.

“No.”

“You can trust her, man. Just do it,” Storm bit out, confusion washing through me. I had no idea what they were talking about, but Frost flicked his gaze over me before nodding, the breeze becoming still around me. The trees were still, the birds stopped singing, and an eerie silence rolled through the forest.

“What the fuck just happened?” I asked quietly, keeping my eyes on Frost who looked highly uncomfortable. He moved towards the dead creature, speaking while inspecting it more closely.

“I froze time.”

“Excuse me?” I squeaked out, not getting a response.

Storm sighed, taking my bloodied hand and tugging me towards the trees.

“C’mon, we’ll look over here while Frost checks this out.”

“He can stop time?” I exclaimed as I was dragged away. “Since when?”

Hurt seeped into me for being kept in the dark about it, and Storm chuckled slightly.

“I only know because he was practicing and I didn’t freeze when everything else did. The guys don’t know and he’s sensitive about it.”

“I’m not sensitive about it.” I jumped as I turned to find Frost right behind us. “It’s just not anyone’s business. You might have forgotten, but none of us actually liked each other until recently. I *still* don’t really like anyone.”

“I think it’s cool,” I grinned, his eyes narrowing.

“Don’t tell the others.”

“I won’t. Secret’s safe with me,” I promised before glancing at Storm. “What are we looking for that requires time to freeze?”

“The body’s fresh as fuck, it’s still warm,” Frost offered, peering around the trees.

“So?”

“Which means the person who killed it could still be around, dumbass,” he muttered, pushing past us to walk ahead. I flipped him off behind his back and Storm snickered as we followed.

My eyes landed on scuffed dirt and I followed it, stumbling across another person. The man appeared to be in his forties, his dark hair starting to gray around the edges a little.

They were frozen in time thanks to Frost, and when I reached out to touch them, Frost hauled me back.

“Don’t touch them.”

“Why not?”

“How about because I said so?” he gritted out, but he looked worried. His eyes moved to Storm, his voice quiet. “It’s Anthony.”

“Who’s Anthony?” I asked as I eyed the man in question, surprise hitting me as Storm answered.

“Anthony is one of three members of the Board. He’s the one that posted about the unicorn issue to begin with.” That didn’t make sense.

Why would the Board be killing unicorns, then getting us to find the culprit?

“Maybe he’s out here looking for the unicorn slayer too?” I suggested, but Frost shook his head and pointed at Anthony’s frozen body.

“He’s facing the other way and he’s crouched down like he’s hiding. He must have heard us coming and tried to hide.”

“Unfreeze him and ask.” It was the best option I could think of but the look of disbelief on both the guys’ faces told me it wasn’t. “Oh, bad idea?”

“Yes, *bad idea*. We need to know what we’re dealing with before questioning the Board. What if we’re wrong and accuse an innocent member? We’d be punished,” Storm explained, glancing at Frost. “Can we take photos of frozen time?”

“No. I tried once and all I got was a blurry light. I think we need to walk back to where we were, unfreeze time, and head back to the house. We need to act as if we can’t figure it out and leave so Anthony doesn’t catch on that we know. If someone on the Board has gone rogue, we don’t want them to

know yet until we have solid evidence. Our word against theirs won't mean shit."

It made sense so I nodded, looking Anthony over one last time before turning to walk back in the direction we'd come from. We made sure to try and stand in the exact same spots as earlier, Frost unfreezing the world around us and letting out a sigh, instantly putting on an act.

"This is getting ridiculous. I'm sending Fox next time, I have better shit to do."

"Like what? Scowl at people?" Storm deadpanned, acting bored.

"Says the guy with resting bitch face."

"Guys," I huffed, putting my hands on my hips. "I can't deal with this shit. If you're not going to handle the unicorn, then let's go home. I need to wash the enchanted pony juice off me."

"I'm sorry, what did you just say?" Frost asked with a straight face.

"Enchanted pony juice."

"I thought so," he grumbled, trying hard not to crack a smile but failing. "You're weird, you know that?"

"Yep. Let's go, I want a shower," I grimaced, walking off towards Stardust with the guys following me. I was pretty sure Anthony believed our little act.

The guys bickered the entire walk back to Stardust. It was the longest few hours of my life.

Frost

Anthony followed us along the treeline until we reached town. I could sense him, and it was a struggle not to seek him out. He wouldn't want us to see him, and we didn't want him to know we suspected him, so I was glad when I sensed him vanish.

Storm argued with me about literally everything until we got home, where he stalked off to work-out, and Salem went to her room to shower the *enchanted pony juice* off.

I'd intended on finding Fox to let him know what we'd discovered about Anthony, but then I'd have to explain how we found it. Storm knowing about my abilities was one thing, but Salem was making me nervous. I didn't like that I was letting people closer, because that was how people found a weakness and extorted it. Storm wasn't likely to do wrong by me but I wasn't sure about the others. Sure, we'd all shared a traumatic past, but they had no loyalty to me.

For all we knew, maybe one of the guys was acting? What if Salem was playing us? The thought made me sick. I'd given her too much of myself for her to tear my heart out, and I'd let my walls down around the others.

Any of them could be lying.

The entire thing was driving me insane and I was losing my grip on things.

I made my way upstairs, somehow finding myself in Salem's room. The water was running and she was humming to herself, so I locked the bedroom door before making my way into the bathroom, watching her as she washed the blood from her body.

My dick jerked in my jeans and I started stripping without taking my eyes off her. This hadn't been my plan but I needed something that apparently only she could give me.

She silently moved over to make room for me without question as I went to open the shower door, telling me she'd known I'd been watching her like a weirdo.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," I said more harshly than intended, making her snort.

"Sounds like it." She continued washing herself, facing away from me to wash her hair and I snapped. I fisted her wet hair, yanking her back around to face me.

“Why are you such a brat?”

“It’s a real hoot making you mad,” she smirked, biting her lower lip and peering up at me through hooded eyes. “Are you going to punish me?”

She was playing games with me, ones that I was starting to like. It appeared she liked them too, wanting me to use her body as I pleased.

“You want me to punish you? Would that make you feel better?” I demanded, the amusement leaving her face as she watched me.

“It would make *you* feel better.” Tingles skated across my skin as her palms slid up my chest, her voice gentle. “What do you need? Let me give it to you.”

I shouldn’t have been so rough considering she was offering herself up on a silver platter for the taking, but I forced her to her knees, not caring that the water was pelting down on her face.

“I need you to open that bratty mouth for me.” My fingers remained tangled in her hair as she obliged, blinking up at me as she awaited instruction. It was strange to see her so submissive, the stubborn spark in her eyes long gone as I slid my cock between her lips. “You don’t need to breathe, you only need me slamming down your throat until I come. Understood?” I asked, and she nodded, gagging as I forced myself down her throat. “You like choking on my dick, Salem?” Something fluttered inside of me as she nodded again, and I thrust my hips, trying to go deeper. I held it in place until her eyes watered and her throat constricted with panic, then I pulled back and tightened my fingers in her hair. “Head back against the wall.”

She was good at doing as she was told, and I had to squeeze my dick painfully hard to stop myself from coming.

Her mouth opened again obediently as she waited for me to step closer, not bothered when I pushed down her throat until her nose was buried in my pubes. I didn’t warn her before starting to fuck in and out of her mouth firmly, the sounds of

her choking echoing around the room as her fingernails cut into my thighs. My balls ached with the need to come, my thrusts becoming erratic the closer I became until I finished with a roar, probably giving her a fucking headache from the way I was wedging her between my groin and the shower tiles.

The gasping sound she made when I moved back from her made my damn balls tingle, her watery gaze on mine as she caught her breath.

“Feel better, asshole?”

“I could come again to be honest,” I chuckled, reaching out to take her hand to help her to her feet. I needed more, I always needed more.

I was so fucked.

“Are you done in here?”

“No. I still have to wash my hair and—” I turned the water off and dragged her out of the shower, not caring that we were leaving puddles of water everywhere as we made our way into her room. “Frost! We’ll get the bed wet!”

Ignoring her protesting, I lightly tossed her onto the bed, crawling up her body with a devilish smirk.

“It’s going to be soaked soon anyway.” I dipped between her legs and buried my tongue inside her pussy, loving the way she groaned as her back arched, and she threaded her fingers through my hair, pulling hard. I got her off quickly before going in for seconds, her sounds of pleasure heard right through the house, so I wasn’t surprised when the door rattled after her second orgasm.

“Let me in, dickbag,” Storm ordered, making me chuckle as I raised my eyes to Salem’s.

“Should I?”

“Let him in and learn to fucking share,” she hissed down at me, her body jerking as I nipped her clit playfully.

“Fine, but just remember you wanted this.” I climbed off the bed and padded towards the door, opening it to let Storm in. “I warmed her up.”

“Kind of you,” Storm scoffed, already stripping his clothes off without hesitation.

I heard someone else walking up the stairs and quickly locked the door, not wanting this to become a fucking party. Storm was lucky I let *him* in.

He didn't bother asking permission before rummaging in her drawers, her eyes widening.

“Ah, what are you doing?”

Buzzing filled the air and I crossed my arms as I stood back and watched Storm bring the small device closer to Salem, knocking her legs apart.

“Making you come before I fuck you.”

“I already—” She squealed as he pressed the toy to her clit, her body lifting off the bed.

“Frost made you come, but I didn't,” he murmured, looking over his shoulder at me. “How many did you give her?”

This asshole was going to try to one-up me.

Salem writhed on the bed, her eyes squeezing shut as Storm turned the level of vibration up.

“Storm! Shit, I—” He started rolling it around her clit and she detonated, screaming for mercy as he refused to take it away. Her pussy pulsed and clear liquid squirted out of her in spurts, my dick becoming hard like granite. I fisted myself, watching as my brother held her down while her legs shook and her eyes rolled into the back of her head.

“*Now* she's warmed up,” Storm said smugly as he finally released her, letting her melt into a puddle on the bed. She didn't move, laying there panting with her legs open, and I wanted nothing more than to watch my cum leak out of her.

“I'm not warmed up, I'm spent,” she said between breaths, her eyes moving to me. “You don't want to rub balls with your brother anyway.”

“Why not? They’re just balls,” I joked with a straight face, making my way back towards the bed. “Be a good girl and let me between those thighs.”

“I can’t take more,” she pleaded, not making an effort to move.

I was starting to think we broke her.

“You can and you will,” Storm answered, tossing the toy aside now that it was off, taking her chin in his hand to tilt her face toward him. “You can choke on my dick while he fucks you too.” I assumed he was going to come in here and take over, but he gave me a look to hurry up as I moved between her legs. “You want Frost to soak your pussy with his cum?”

“Please.”

That was all I needed to hear.

I pushed inside her with ease thanks to all the foreplay, a whine leaving her as I selfishly took what I wanted. She wasn’t likely to come again today from my hand.

I fucked her hard, taking out the rest of my mood on her as she screamed and choked on Storm, and I vaguely remembered to pull out at the last minute, watching as ropes of cum hit her clit and dripped down her pussy. It was so fucking hot.

“Move,” Storm growled, and I dropped back beside Salem to slow my heartbeat, eyeing Storm as he moved between her legs while stroking himself. At first I thought he was going to fuck her, but then he came with a grunt, leaving his mark on her pussy too.

He wasn’t about to let his ego walk away without taking away my territorial bullshit.

“Smooth,” I muttered, earning an amused smirk from him.

“I win.”

“How so? I made her come more than you.” I rolled my eyes as he raised his hand to send small blasts of electricity at her pussy, the small sparks igniting something inside of her and making her body arch as she came again. “Show off.” I

had no intention of sticking around now that my mood had been sated, so I got dressed and went to leave, looking back at her from the door. “Thanks.”

She knew I wasn't just thanking her for the sex, it was the reason behind it. I felt grounded again, my control back in place, and she gave me a tired smile.

“Anytime.”

I let Storm clean her up, and I wasn't surprised to find Fox lingering in the hallway. His eyes lifted over my shoulder to get a quick look at Salem before I shut the door, but he wasn't here for her it seemed.

“Minerva called. There's been an attack. We've all been called in for a meeting.”

“What kind of attack? Is it the rogue fire guy?” I wanted a shower and a nap, but apparently that was going to have to wait.

Fox winced, raking a hand through his hair in a nervous tell.

“Three homes were destroyed today on the far end of Stardust and all occupants have been killed. There was a note too.”

He held up his phone, showing me a photo of the note, making me curse.

“*Stardust must perish?* We're dealing with a fucking anti-supernatural cult now?”

“Maybe. The twisted part is that only members of Stardust have been past the gates today.”

We were going to have to tell the others about our discovery today.

It was starting to look like Anthony was a bigger problem than we thought.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

SALEM

Storm had to hold me in the shower to clean me up. My entire body was like jelly and there was no way I could stand on my own just yet. His hands carefully washed the evidence of our fun from my pussy, both of us more than content not to speak. It wasn't an awkward silence, and I was grateful to have the time to enjoy this with him.

Fox had switched all my towels for the big fluffy ones I loved, and I made a mental note to thank him for it. He was always doing sweet little things for me.

Storm's lips trailed across my neck once we climbed out and I sighed, leaning into him more as he dried the water from my body.

"You need to eat," he chuckled as my stomach rumbled loudly, breaking the silence.

"I'm considering a nap first."

"You can use my bed, yours is a little wet right now."

"I noticed," I replied dryly as he led me into the bedroom, both of us pausing when we found Fox standing by the closed door. His eyes landed on us and he grimaced, dread pooling in my stomach. "What's wrong?"

"The Board's called a meeting," he answered, and Storm let out a snort.

"Right now? Can't it wait?"

“No. Stardust got hit today. Three houses gone and all members dead. Pretty sure it was an inside job too because no one outside of Stardust has entered the premises today from what they can see on the cameras.”

“Fuck.” Storm scrubbed a hand over his face before glancing at me. “Looks like no nap for you, firecracker.”

“I can’t walk properly,” I groaned, sitting on the edge of the bed gingerly, avoiding the massive wet spot. “Where’s the meeting being held?”

“The battle gym. It’s the only place that holds that many people. All of Stardust will be there,” Fox offered. “Frost wants to meet in the kitchen before we go. He said there’s something you guys need to tell us.” He raised an eyebrow, and Storm cringed.

“Ah, yeah. It’s important we tell you before the meeting too.”

“If it was important, why did you come home and have monkey sex instead of—”

“You’ll fucking find out when we talk about it, won’t you?” Storm bit out, stalking into my closet to grab me some clothes. Fox rolled his eyes at Storm’s temper and cupped my cheek, giving me a small smile.

“I’m glad to see that the guys are looking after you. Who knew that grumpy bastard had such a sweet side?”

“I fucking heard that,” Storm growled from the closet, making me giggle. I took Fox’s hand in mine, lifting it to my lips to kiss his palm.

“They’re always sweet. Thank you for the towels.”

“Anything for my queen,” he said seriously, placing a kiss on top of my head as Storm joined us again, the pair of them helping me get dressed before Storm wandered to his room for a change of clothes himself.

Fox led me down to the kitchen where the others were, and Frost’s cool gaze landed on me instantly. I could tell he was

nervous about admitting his power to the others, and I had no idea if he needed comfort or to be left alone.

He discreetly patted his thigh, giving me permission to sit on his lap, and surprise filled me when his arms slid around my middle as he pressed his lips against the back of my neck affectionately.

“Are you okay?” I asked quietly, a huff leaving him.

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Sorry, I forgot you have the personality of a brick wall,” I scoffed, his fingers winding through my hair to tug my head back.

His lips brushed my ear as he spoke, no sign of amusement in his tone.

“Don’t sass me. I just don’t like people knowing things they don’t need to.”

“I’m starting to think we’re all more powerful than we think,” I murmured, making him frown.

“You think the others have hidden powers too?”

“Possibly, but they might not know about it yet. Maybe you powered up like how me and Storm did?” I suggested, guilt flicking in his gaze.

“I, uh, I’ve been able to do this for a while now, it’s not new. I just haven’t practiced a lot so I’m not that good at it.”

“Yeah but maybe something gave you a boost? Storm’s and mine were triggered by our emotions so—”

He released his grip on my hair, understanding dawning on him before I even finished my sentence.

“It was you,” he said softly, his brow creasing in thought.

“What was?”

“I’ve been able to do this weakly since I thought you’d tried to kill me. I got so mad one day that the world just stopped around me,” he answered, his eyes flashing up to Smokey and River who were talking at the other end of the

table. “Hey! What’s your power boost? I know you’ve got one.”

“What are you talking about?” River scoffed, and Smokey raised an eyebrow.

“A boost? Why? Did *you* get one?”

“Did *you*?” Frost snapped, making me roll my eyes. This was going nowhere.

“Guys, calm down. Storm and I got a boost due to our emotions and—”

Frost fingers dug into my waist painfully to shut me up, and Smokey got to his feet to glare at Frost when I visibly winced.

“You’re hurting her, asshole.”

“Mind your own business,” he bit out, but his grip on me eased and his palm rested over the tender skin in silent apology. Smokey stepped closer, flames sparking to life in his hands.

“She is my fucking business!”

“Since when? From where I’m sitting, she’s my girl and you threw her away. She doesn’t fucking want you.”

Fox silently plucked me from Frost’s lap, tugging me out of the way just as Smokey lunged for Frost, the two of them ending up on the floor. Storm wandered in and sighed, watching them with a small shake of his head.

“Why can’t we all just play nice for five minutes?”

“Like you’re such a team player,” River muttered, crossing his arms as he joined us at the safer distance.

I jumped back as flames shot past us, shards of ice flying around the room and forcing us into the living room. Storm stayed in there, yelling at both of them to grow up, and I knew they’d end up destroying the room.

“We don’t have fucking time for this,” Fox grumbled as he drew me against his chest. “Do you know what Frost wanted to talk about?”

“Yeah, but it’s personal and I can’t tell you.” If Frost wanted to tell them, that was up to him.

“But he told you? You guys really are bonding, aren’t you?” River replied, confusion written all over his face. I wasn’t surprised that they thought it was strange. Frost didn’t make a habit of being nice to me, let alone letting me in on his secrets.

“It wasn’t exactly a choice.” The house became silent and I frowned, poking my head into the kitchen and gasping as I found Storm laughing while Frost sneered, crossing his arms as he eyed a frozen Smokey. “Frost!”

“What? He fucking started it.”

“Unfreeze him right now!” I moved towards Smokey and cupped his cheek, glaring back at Frost who didn’t budge. “Now, asshole!”

“Fire hazard had it coming,” Frost argued as Fox and River stepped into the room, River’s eyes going wide.

“What the fuck did you do to him? Is he frozen?” He moved beside me, waving a hand in front of Smokey’s face, not hiding his panic when nothing happened. “Whatever you’re doing, stop!”

“He’s fine,” Frost grunted, moving out of the way and unfreezing Smokey who continued throwing fire as if nothing had happened. He stopped, glancing around until his eyes landed on Frost.

“How the fuck did you get over there?”

“Magic,” Frost deadpanned. “I got a power boost.”

“You can ice entire bodies without harming them?” Fox asked with surprise, all of them going silent when Frost replied.

“No, I can freeze time.” You could’ve heard a fucking pin drop. No one spoke, causing Frost to glare at them all. “This is why I didn’t tell anyone. You’re all making a big deal out of it.”

“How long have you been able to do that?” Smokey grumbled, pouting like a child. “How come you get cool abilities?” That seemed to surprise Frost, his tense shoulders easing as he uncrossed his arms.

“You think it’s cool?”

“Obviously. You can stop time, you giant fucking ice cube. Why can’t something like that happen to me?”

Storm snorted, leaning against the kitchen counter to stare at him.

“In what world would the universe give you power like that? You’d take advantage of it.”

“Fuck yeah, I would. I could freeze people then rub my balls on them.” Smokey slid his eyes to me, a small smile tugging at his lips. “I wouldn’t do it to you guys though.”

“Liar,” I said with a raised eyebrow, and Storm rolled his eyes.

“And *that’s* why you can’t freeze time. Frost is a dick, but he’s not childish.”

I could tell Smokey was about to start arguing so I shook my head and looked at Frost.

“Maybe you should freeze all of them so we can get to the meeting before it’s over.”

He smirked, surprisingly stepping towards me to slide an arm around my waist.

“We could fuck right here in front of them and they wouldn’t even know.”

“My pussy can’t take anymore right now,” I groaned, his eyes softening a fraction. I assumed he was going to say something sweet but I should’ve known he was going to do the opposite.

“I don’t really care. It’s warm and wet so that’s all I need.”

I swatted him away with a dirty look, ignoring the amusement on his face.

“We need to get going or we’ll be late, we’ll have to discuss the rest when we get home. Feel free to stay here if you wish.”

“I’m coming with you,” River said quickly as he grabbed Smokey’s wrist and tugged him in the direction of the door, and thankfully the others all followed too.

The walk to the gym was nice despite the guys continuing to bicker the entire way, and when River slid his hand into mine, I let him. Things were getting dangerous, and we needed to stick together to make sure we came out the other side unscathed.

Had I forgiven all the guys for how they’d treated me? Not exactly, but I was starting to realize none of us could trust what we thought was the truth, so we had to find out what was real together.

People were everywhere as we approached the gym, murmurs and whispers floating around as people tried to figure out what was happening. They parted for us like we were royalty, discomfort twisting inside of me.

I didn’t like how they looked at us as if we could fix it all for them.

Storm dropped an arm around my shoulder, speaking in my ear.

“You need to relax a little. You’re going to break River’s hand for starters, but you have a serious case of resting bitch face right now.” I eased my grip on River’s hand and tried to do as Storm said, but it was hard with so many eyes on me. I’d spent my life avoiding people, so I didn’t like being in the spotlight. “Better. Chin up, shoulders back, bad bitch vibes only. You look angry and constipated.”

“I’m highly uncomfortable,” I whisper-yelled, making him grin.

“Because you’re constipated?” He laughed when I slapped his abs. “Seriously, we’re the face of Stardust, Salem. Get used to it. Right now? You’re a queen among peasants.”

I hated that term, but looking around I saw all eyes on us, looking to us for answers as if we were the ones in charge.

I found Minerva surrounded by who I assumed was her own house members. She gave me a once over, my body tensing at her scrutiny, but she gave me a wide smile.

“Salem. I think this is the first time the guys have arrived on time. I’m impressed.”

“It’s like wrangling drunk children,” I deadpanned, trying to shake off Storm’s arm but he didn’t budge. The asshole stepped closer, running his eyes over the guys beside Minerva before placing a possessive kiss on my temple, replying to Minerva.

“Yeah, she’s a good girl for us.”

Minerva gave me a knowing look when my face heated slightly but she didn’t say anything about it.

“I think she’s a saint for putting up with the macho alpha shit you’re pulling right now. My guy’s don’t want your girl, chill out.”

“Salem gets off on my alpha bullshit,” Storm chuckled, but he finally stepped back and gave me space. I flipped him off and he grinned, giving me a wink. “See? She’s flirting right back.”

Minerva’s eyes kept drifting to Smokey which I didn’t like. River’s hand tightened in mine, knowing I was getting mad about it, but Smokey read everyone’s energy so easily. He moved behind me, pressing his lips against my neck and speaking loud enough for everyone to hear him.

“I’ll meet you inside, hurricane. You ladies play nicely.” His hand rested on my waist, giving it a gentle squeeze before he stepped back and jerked his chin at River. “C’mon, water boy. Let’s go find a good spot to stand.”

River gave my hand one last squeeze and followed him, and Fox muttered something about them causing trouble so he quickly kissed my cheek on his way past and took off after them.

“You seem to have wrangled them just fine,” Minerva said dryly, flicking her eyes to Storm. “This meeting is only bringing panic to everyone. Why do you think they called it? It would’ve made sense to just call for those houses who could help.”

“How the fuck should I know?” Storm bit out, his pleasantries vanishing. “We’re in the dark just as much as everyone else.”

“I was just asking,” she snorted. I could tell her next question was going to be aimed at Frost by the way she assessed him, but he didn’t give her the chance to speak before grabbing my wrist tightly and dragging me inside behind him, leaving Storm to deal with it.

“That was rude,” I scolded, earning a half-assed shrug.

“I don’t give a shit. She doesn’t have to be so fucking nosey all the time. Ever since she got here she’s done nothing but harass us. She feels she was put in the wrong house since her powers are strong.” He slowed his steps but didn’t release the death grip he had on my wrist. “She’s right where she’s supposed to be. She’s weak.”

“She’s not weak!” I hissed, slapping his arm firmly. “Can you let me go and stop being a dick?”

He ignored me, his grip tightening more.

“Minerva’s a pick me bitch. She might come across as strong because it’s the front she puts on, but she wouldn’t handle chasing dragons with Smokey, being stung by scorpion venom with Storm, and she’d drive us batshit with her *yes sir* attitude. I can’t stand girls who roll over and do as they’re told just to impress guys. It’s pathetic.” He glanced down at me, finally easing his grip a little. “She’s nothing like you.”

“Was that a compliment?” I teased, his eyes narrowing.

“Do what you want with it.”

I thought that was the nicest thing he’d ever said to me so I was going to claim it as a compliment.

We found the guys easily, the three of them leaning against the far wall. I assumed they'd wanted to be near the front but apparently not. Smokey's eyes landed on me and he smirked.

"You get jealous faster than Frost gets mad, you know that?"

"I wasn't jealous," I huffed, absently leaning back against Frost and rolling my eyes as he pushed me away and let go of my wrist. "I just don't like how she looks at you like you're a gourmet meal."

"Look at me," he said with a cocky grin, lifting his shirt to show off his abs. "How is this not gourmet?"

Air whooshed from his lungs as I smacked his stomach.

"You get *arrogant* faster than Frost gets mad."

"I have a right to be." I let him pull me against him, his lips brushing my ear as both his hands slid down my back and over my ass. "Romeo over here has nothing on my skills."

Fox scoffed. "It's not about an orgasm, it's about sensual feelings *and* romance. I'm romantic as fuck."

"Sounds like you can't get her off fast," Smokey stated, and I couldn't help but giggle.

"Trust me, Fox can get me off hard and fast."

Smokey's hands squeezed my ass as he dragged me closer, his hard cock pressing into my stomach.

"I think you should let me prove myself."

"I might if you ask really nicely," I whispered back, his eyes flaring with heat. I swore all I thought about these days was sex, my hormones were out of control.

He spun me around so that I could face the front and pressed himself against my back, not caring that people were glancing at us as he ground himself against my ass. His tongue teased my earlobe and he chuckled when I shivered.

"Just you wait, hurricane. I'm going to fuck you so good when you let me in."

Fox and River were adjusting their dicks but Frost scowled.

“Can you two stop it? We’re in public and people are staring.”

“So? Let them see the power our girl has over us,” Smokey said with ease, placing a kiss on my neck before leaning back to hold me. “Like Storm said, she likes our alpha bullshit.”

“Can you behave?” I asked sharply, my cheeks heating as someone openly stared at us. Luckily Storm found us and the tap of a microphone bounced around the large room, my eyes moving to the stage at the front. Three people sat behind a table, each with their own microphone, and my eyes instantly landed on Anthony.

This must have been the board.

“Don’t let him know that you know,” Frost said in my ear, Smokey speaking quietly in return.

“Know what?”

“We’ll tell you back at the house. It’s something that I was going to talk about before we left but we were running late,” Frost replied as if he wasn’t one of the reasons.

“People of Stardust,” a woman with ash-blond hair said warmly, glancing around the room as she spoke. “We have suffered a huge loss today, one we will not allow to happen again. We have doubled security, no one gets in or out without going through administration to keep track of where everyone is at all times, and we all need to work together to keep our home safe.” Her eyes landed on us and I swallowed nervously. “We don’t need to fear. We’ll be sending our secret weapon out to get to the bottom of this! Whoever is messing with us won’t even see them coming!” People cheered and clapped, and I was going to throw up when she waved a hand at us. “Everyone, our powerhouse is complete, their final member is home!”

“Be glad she doesn’t ask you for a speech. She loves to put on a fucking show,” Smokey muttered in my ear, and Storm snickered at the look of horror that was probably on my face.

It wasn't funny, I'd pass out in front of all these people.

My eyes drifted to Anthony to find him already staring at us, so I quickly darted my eyes away, looking over the other members. Both men wore fancy suits, while the woman had a tight, black dress on.

All of them appeared to be in their forties or fifties.

I tried to pay attention to what she was saying but it was difficult with Smokey's breath on my neck and Anthony staring at us so openly.

"You really need to learn to relax," Storm mumbled, taking my hand. His thumb brushed backward and forward against my skin, and Smokey shifted me so that I was leaning on both of them instead. He leaned over to speak to Storm, his voice barely a whisper.

"Do you think we could sneak out? This is boring."

"I think people would notice," Storm said dryly, glancing around the room to find most eyes returning to us on and off throughout the women's speech.

"Everyone should remain in their homes unless going on jobs, and all jobs will be assessed by us prior to it being announced to ensure everyone's safety. We don't want bogus jobs being posted and our people ending up trapped!" She kept repeating herself a lot, and I swore she heard my yawn because her eyes flashed to me. "We won't rest until peace returns! Am I boring you, Salem?"

It startled me that she knew who I was, my face heating as all eyes swung to us. Smokey and Fox chuckled at my misery as I shook my head.

"No, Ma'am."

"Good. Maybe get better sleep if you're tired." I tried to step away from the guys a little but Storm tightened his hold on my hand, his voice quiet.

"She's just jealous that no one's railing her sloppy cunt."

Smokey laughed loudly, the woman's eyes narrowing.

“Something funny, Smokey?”

This was insanely embarrassing and I shrunk back against the guys more, wishing the wall would just swallow us up.

“It’s nothing,” Smokey grinned, not giving a shit that he was being called out publicly. “How long will this take? I’m itching to get out there and turn those who wronged us to ash.”

“I’m glad you’re taking this seriously. I know you’ve been trailing the unicorn mysteries but I’d like you to leave that and focus on our new threat. Nothing else matters right now for your team, understood?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Are we free to leave?”

“No.” She glared at us silently for a moment before continuing her speech about how we needed to stick together and stay alert, pulling a second yawn out of me.

We were stuck in the gym for over an hour, each of the Board members speaking about the matter, and I was glad when they finally dismissed us.

“Don’t get too excited,” Storm murmured as I went to follow the crowd out of the building, his arm sliding around my back to pull my chest against him. “We stay behind.”

“Seriously? What more can they tell us?” I whined, my back going straight as a man spoke behind me.

“Are we keeping you from something more important?”

I turned to find the third member behind me, and I couldn’t help but cringe as he glowered.

“No. I just don’t think—”

“You’re not supposed to think,” he bit out, surprising me with his anger. The guys didn’t seem that bothered by it so I figured he was always in a bad mood. “We need to discuss private matters with you all. Follow me.” He stalked off and Fox gave me a smirk.

“Peter’s mood gives Frost’s a run for its money, that’s for sure.”

“Eat shit,” Frost muttered and trailed after Peter, the rest of us doing the same until we reached the stage.

“Who’s the woman?” I asked quietly, Storm leaning down to reply.

“Meredith. She’s a tyrant.”

“I noticed.”

Meredith gave me a scathing glance but she smiled widely as she turned to Smokey.

“You’ve been doing a good job at controlling the dragons lately. Hopefully the new barriers will keep them in place for a while and you won’t have to worry about it.”

“I hope so, they’re getting meaner,” he grunted. “What do you need to tell us? Is something else going on that we don’t know about?”

“We think it’s a rogue Stardust member who caused the mayhem this morning. They’d know all the hidden ways to get past security,” Peter offered, not looking at us. He was too busy on his phone. “We’re worried about more casualties and are considering getting your team to run more security. Three split up and wander Stardust at night, then the other three do the day shift.”

“Why do we have to do it?” Frost asked with annoyance, rolling a ball of ice around his palm. “You pay for security. If they’re not doing their jobs right, you need to fire them and find someone else.”

He had a good point but the man snorted.

“If you stumble across someone, you have the power to control the situation. Security doesn’t. You’re the strongest option here.”

“If we’re not sleeping properly—” Storm started but the woman glared at me like she had a personal issue with me as she replied to him.

“If you can’t give yourselves a proper sleeping routine, that’s your problem. You’re all adults, so maybe focus on the

task at hand.” Her eyes narrowed as Storm tightened his hold on me. “Relationships only get in the way.”

“I have a question,” River said firmly, changing the subject slightly. “How come Salem didn’t have to be assessed? How did you know she was going to fit in our house?”

“Salem was tested just like the rest of you. Now, I need to ___”

“No I wasn’t,” I said with a frown, stepping forward from Storm’s hold. “I was sent straight from administration to the house.”

She rubbed her temples as if I was giving her a headache.

“What are you talking about? Have you been gone that long that you’ve forgotten?” That didn’t make sense. The guys were all here before me. At seeing my confusion, she sighed. “You’ve been on a job for us for the past five years. You were needed elsewhere while your team was needed here, Storm was regularly checking in with you. If you’ll excuse me, I have other things to attend to. Remember what I said, don’t worry about the smaller jobs, I’ll give them to someone else. You just need to focus on keeping Stardust safe.”

She turned and walked off, and before I could ever speak, Storm muttered under his breath.

“Fucking bullshit. Let’s get home so we can talk in private.” Relief filled me at knowing this wasn’t going to become another argument, and Storm gave me a knowing look as he took my hand. “C’mon, let’s go. They can’t drive a wedge between us and plant more doubt in our minds. If they think you’ve been here before and that I’ve been communicating with you, something else is going on. Something big.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

STORM

There was no way Salem had been here before. I'd gotten here before any of them, and I knew for a fact that I was on my own until the guys started arriving. I'd never sent her a message or called to check in, she was a stranger to me when she walked through those gates.

Well, she was until our past came back to slap us in the face, but I definitely didn't remember working with her here.

"Maybe the Board have had their memories manipulated too?" River said lightly, leaning back on the couch beside Salem, looking at her for approval. "Right? Meredith believes we've all been together this whole time, so maybe someone got inside her head?"

"Who's powerful enough to fuck with the Board?" she asked, and I loved how her eyes slid to mine in question. It was a hard question to answer though because everything we'd been told was likely to be a lie anyway.

I didn't know what was reality or lies anymore.

"I'm not sure, but it's possible. Maybe someone out there had orchestrated this entire thing and we don't even know they exist. Which brings me back to our earlier conversation. This stays inside this house, but we suspect Anthony to be rogue."

Fox choked on the beer in his hand, and Smokey laughed from beside him on the couch they shared.

"You're blaming the fucking *Board* for all of this? Dude, you're going to get publicly hung with an accusation like

that.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Frost growled, dropping down beside Salem as if it wasn’t deliberate, but I noticed his muscles relax the slightest amount as she leaned into him. “We found a freshly killed unicorn this morning, so I froze time and we walked around trying to catch the person who’d done it. We found Anthony hiding behind some bushes, and he was facing away from the scene like he was sneaking away.”

“I always assumed if anyone was going to go rogue, it would be Meredith,” River mumbled, everyone turning to glare at him. “What? She has shifty eyes and bad energy.”

He wasn’t wrong.

Meredith was a pain in the ass. I knew it had to be her idea for us to become glorified security guards.

“Look, this guard duty bullshit is going to wear us out fast, and then half of us won’t be awake enough if there’s trouble,” I said with a scowl, earning a flat look from Salem.

“What happens if we get attacked at night when *all* of us are sleeping? How’s that any different?”

“Don’t sass me today, firecracker.”

“I’m being serious!”

Frost sneered, looking at her with annoyance.

“You talk too much.”

“Give me something better to do with my mouth than, snowflake,” she threw back, her eyes widening as he grabbed her and shoved her face down in his lap. “Frost!”

It was muffled thanks to the material of his pants, the rest of us snickering as she flailed against his hold.

“Don’t let your mouth write checks that your ass can’t cash,” Frost grunted as he held her down, but his lips curved into an amused smile. He finally let her up and she swatted at him with the cutest snarl, my dick jumping to life.

“Fuck you, asshole.”

“What, right here?” he asked with a fake huff of irritation. “Fine, but can you be quick? We have stuff to do.” He reached for his pants and she shoved to her feet, flipping him off and stalking towards the recliner, but I snagged her arm and pulled her down onto my lap instead.

She squirmed for a moment before pausing, glaring over her shoulder at me suddenly.

“Are you fucking hard right now?”

“Yes.” I forced her to lean back against my chest, my arms banding around her to keep her in place. This woman was making me ridiculously possessive, and from the look that Smokey was giving me, they all knew it too. “So, who wants to take the night shift?”

No one moved, but Salem put her hand up after a second.

“I can do it.”

Suddenly all of them wanted to do the night shift, and I clenched my jaw.

“River, Salem and I will do the night shift. You three can swap with us at daybreak,” I ordered, Smokey’s eyes narrowing to slits.

“Why the fuck do you get to do it?”

“I was already going to do it, and I know River won’t drag Salem off into a dark corner to rail her,” I said dryly, raising an eyebrow at the man in question. “Right, water boy? Your little virgin dick can control itself?”

“You’re the one with a brick in your pants because she got *mad*. You all need to stop throwing stones while sitting in your glass houses,” River grumbled, his cheeks coloring slightly. “Besides, I’d be a little more romantic than that.”

“Salem doesn’t want romance, she wants to be fucked. Big difference,” Frost said as he ran his eyes over her.

“You’d be surprised what a woman will do for you if you romance her,” Fox objected, flipping Frost off. “Good girls turn bad for those who deserve it.”

“Good girls do as they’re told.”

“How’s that working for you?”

“My dick’s satisfied, so yeah, I’d say it’s going well,” Frost said without taking his eyes off Salem. “You like it hard and fast. Just because Romeo over here needs to charm you like a snake, doesn’t mean the rest of us have to. Tell him. You like it when we just take what we want and leave you leaking with cum.”

“I’m buying her that herbal contraception pill,” Smokey grunted, not hiding his envy as he adjusted his dick. “Before one of you assholes knock her up with devil spawn.”

He had a valid point. Frost and I really needed to be more careful but it was so goddamn difficult. I liked feeling her around me without a barrier, and I *really* liked watching my cum drip out of her when she was lying in bed spent.

“Get the one that lasts twelve months at a time,” I muttered, Salem turning in my lap to straddle me, crossing her arms like a brat.

“You don’t get a say in it.”

“Why not? It’s my pussy,” I taunted, grabbing her throat to tug her closer, her pupils dilating. “And my baby brother’s right. You really get a kick out of it when we just take what we want.”

I considered railing her right here on the fucking couch to prove my point, but Fox wasn’t going to allow it.

“You’re proving right now that you can’t focus on the important tasks at hand. Maybe we do shifts without her.” Salem didn’t like that idea, her head snapping around to scoff at him.

“So what? I just sit here and look pretty?”

“No. We all need a detailed training plan in place that we can combine with our bullshit security task, and I know they said to stop looking into the unicorns, but that’s not happening. There’s something really suspicious going on with that and I want to get to the bottom of it, especially now we think

Anthony is connected to them. I know we don't want to point fingers at the Board, but nothing's safe outside of this house. No conversations, plans, nothing." Fox raked his fingers through his hair, blowing out a breath before continuing. "No one's alone. We don't sleep alone, we don't—"

I didn't like that part of the plan. I wasn't about to turn this into a buddy building kinda thing.

"I'm not bunking in with anyone unless it's Salem."

"Me either," Frost grunted, giving Smokey a teasing smile. "Smokey won't mind snuggling with River though. I have a feeling."

River sucked at keeping his emotions to himself but Smokey tilted his head, appearing bored.

"You think you can make me lose my shit over that? Ask the real question, ice brain. What do you really want to know?"

"Are you fucking River? You two are all over each other like a fucking rash," Frost said sharply, all eyes on Smokey. They had something going on but no one had asked for details until now.

"No, but if you fuck with him I'll turn you into a pile of ash," Smokey answered bluntly, motioning for River to switch couches. At first River didn't move, but when he realized we weren't going to stone him over Frost's accusation, he relaxed and got to his feet, padding towards Fox and Smokey to drop down between them.

I rolled my eyes when Fox patted River's knee in support and Smokey literally hooked an arm around River to yank him away from Fox. It seemed it wasn't just Salem everyone was going to fucking fight over, but now Fox and Smokey were going to fight over River too.

Salem finally allowed herself to loosen her muscles and melt into me more, curling against my chest to rest her face in the crook of my neck. She listened to us argue for over half an hour, and just when I thought she'd fallen asleep, she sat up to glare at us.

“Why does everything turn into an argument with you idiots? Flip a coin or something.” To my frustration, she climbed off my lap. “I’m going to the store. When I get back, I want you all to know what you’re doing.” She stormed off, and I scowled when River pulled away from Smokey without hesitation, chasing after her.

“I’ll come with you!” He was such a kiss-ass.

Smokey wasn’t happy about being abandoned but he let it go and turned to me.

“So, I’m on night duty, yes?”

“Wrong,” I grumbled as I got to my feet. “River and I will do the night shift with Salem. I’m going to bed to get some rest for a couple of hours. Tell Salem and the glorified water fountain to do the same when they get back.”

I left the room to avoid their whining, heading up to my room to get ready for the evening.

River

I was relieved when Salem didn’t tell me to fuck off. I’d taken a risk earlier by holding her hand, but she hadn’t shooed me away then either. My fingers entwined with hers as we walked towards the store, the streets dead despite it being late afternoon.

No one wandered around, the park was empty, and it was obvious everyone in Stardust was taking the Board’s new rules seriously.

“So, you and Smokey, huh?” I tensed at the question but she quickly added, “I think it’s sweet. Always knew that prick just needed someone to soften him up a little.”

“He’s not that bad when the guys aren’t around, you know how he is,” I shrugged. “Besides, I think if you let him back in, he’ll drop me like a sack of shit. He’s only clinging to me right now because he has nothing better to do.”

Memories of yesterday in the shower with him played through my mind, my skin heating at the thought of his hands

on me.

Salem halted, turning to face me.

“You really think that? I don’t think he would. Besides, who said anything about me letting either of you back in?”

“Oh,” I frowned and went to pull my hand back but she tightened her hold.

“I love you, Puddles. I’m just not ready to let you break my heart again,” she said softly, and I couldn’t stop myself from reaching out to cup her cheek.

“I swear, I’ll never hurt you again. I love you so much. Whatever I need to do to prove that I mean it, I will.” I stepped closer to her, my thumb teasing her lower lip as she stared up at me. “Punish me, yell at me, anything to help us move past this.”

I wasn’t expecting her answer.

“You’re in luck. Fox is punishing you.”

“Excuse me?”

“Fox. He wants to make you suffer a little and I’m not exactly opposed to his plan.” I didn’t like the way she was smiling at me. She reminded me of Storm right now, her eyes dark with a sadistic sense of amusement. “How do you feel about watching us fuck?”

A nervous chuckle left me and I rubbed the back of my neck, stepping back from her.

“Like, a live-action porno? With you and Fox?”

“Yeah. You’d have to watch us without being allowed to join in.”

“He’s a real mean fucker when he wants to be,” I grumbled, but my dick hardened at the image of them fucking in front of me. I’d never say no to seeing Salem naked, especially if I got to watch her fall apart with Fox. I’d loved her reactions when Smokey touched her, so seeing Fox fuck her? I was definitely going to come in my pants. “Do I at least get to jerk off while I watch?”

“Pretty sure he’s tying you up, so no,” she giggled, standing on tiptoe to kiss my cheek. “He probably just wants to make you beg.”

“And I’ll beg with zero shame too,” I murmured. “We’d better hurry up before anyone comes looking for us.”

“I’m way too tired to be staying awake all night,” she admitted once we’d started walking again. “I was going to have a nap earlier but then we got called to the gym.”

“The guys need to leave you alone for five minutes, you’re going to burn yourself out,” I said with a frown, glancing over at her curiously. “Can I tell you about something that happened between me and Smokey? I want advice.”

It made me uncomfortable to talk about it, but I knew she wouldn’t judge me.

“Of course. I don’t know if I’m the best for sex advice though.”

“I almost let him take my virginity yesterday,” I blurted out, flicking my gaze away from her as my face heated. “You know how I kept getting stuck in my own head with my memories? He came to check on me when I was in the shower.” I swallowed, my face so hot it was as if it was on fucking fire. “His dick was hard against my ass and I really considered just letting him fuck me. I’m sick of it defining me and I figured if I let him in, then things would change. I liked his hands on my skin and asked for more, which led to his fingers in my ass, but I’m still not sure if I’m ready to go all the way.”

“You’d regret it if you let someone fuck you for the sake of it.” I looked back at her, finding her worried eyes on me. “Don’t let him push you into anything you’re not one-hundred-percent on board with.”

“He wasn’t pushing me. If anything, I was pushing him,” I cringed, my steps slowing. “He ended up jerking me off and fingering my ass until I came.”

“Did you like it?”

“Yeah, it felt really good. He’s a good kisser too. Sorry if you don’t want—”

“No, I want to hear about it. You can always talk to me about anything,” she insisted, her arm linking with mine. “Did you touch him back?”

I swore this was making her horny, so I nodded and continued.

“I gave him a hand job back. I’m really starting to like him. How do you do it? Like more than one person? I feel guilty for wanting him after telling you I love you.”

It was eating me alive.

Smokey made me feel good but when I had five minutes of silence, my mind wandered to Salem, and I felt bad as if I’d been lying to her about my feelings.

“You’d be surprised how many people aren’t made for monogamy,” she said as we reached the store. I held the door open, letting her walk ahead of me as she kept talking. “I don’t think people plan to fall for multiple partners, it just happens. I hated all people equally before coming here, I didn’t want one boyfriend, let alone more.” That made her chuckle to herself, a smile tugging at my lips. “But then I met you and things changed. No one’s ever given a shit about me, but you did. You looked at me like I was everything you’d been looking for.”

“You kind of are,” I replied, sliding my arms around her from behind as we walked into an aisle, being mindful not to tread on her feet. “You’re gorgeous, patient—”

“How the fuck am I patient?” she asked with a snort.

“You don’t push me past what I’m willing to give, but you guide me when I want to go further. You respect my boundaries.”

“That’s a normal requirement.”

“Just let me say nice shit about you,” I laughed as I stepped back, taking her hand again to give it a squeeze. “You

knew from the start that I wasn't going to just jump in bed with you, and you acted like it wasn't weird."

She let out a cute huff, giving me the side-eye.

"That's because it's *not* weird. The guys have poisoned your brain. Your value, believe it or not, doesn't come from your dick. You're the sweetest guy I know and I only want you to give that part of yourself to someone who deserves it. If you think Smokey is the one then—"

"No, I want you to be my first," I said quickly as we reached the right aisle. "I like Smokey and feel like maybe we have good chemistry, but I still really want you to be the first person I share that with. If you still want to."

"Give me a little time and we'll talk about that possibility." Her smile was warm, and I almost sighed in relief at knowing I hadn't completely fucked up my chances with her. "Damn, they sell loads of different stuff."

I turned my attention to the shelves, scanning the items. Bottles and boxes of pills, tea, and injections lined the shelves, and I reached out to take a box of tea.

"Maybe I need this," I muttered, reading the label. It seemed to be some kind of tea that helped alter your confidence in the bedroom.

Salem snatched it from me and put it back.

"You don't need to change anything about yourself. Everyone else went through the awkward bedroom fumbling, so you can too."

She grabbed multiple boxes off the contraception shelf, eyeing the back of them to read the instructions. I was surprised when she put them back and reached for an injection one instead.

"Uh, that's—"

"It lasts for two years." She chewed on her lower lip nervously, eyeing the box in her hands as she thought about her options. "You guys can help give it to me, right?"

“If we have to, but no offense, I don’t *ever* want to hold you down while you’re terrified again. That first time was awful. I have no idea how Storm managed to give you the second booster alone considering it took all of us last time.”

“Because Storm’s a fucking snake and he bit me while I wasn’t looking.” She didn’t sound mad. “It wasn’t so bad last time. Maybe I’m getting better at it.”

I wanted to believe her, but I couldn’t.

I had a feeling it wasn’t going to be as simple as she expected.

Salem

I thrashed as Storm and Smokey tried to hold me still, a panicked scream leaving me.

“Why the fuck did you let her buy the injection?” Storm scowled, glaring at River.

“She insisted it was fine!”

“Does this look fine?” Storm grunted as he managed to pin me down on the couch, his voice softening for me. “You’re going to be the fucking death of me. Do I force you or distract you?” The panic had consumed me, my muscles aching as I fought against his hold.

“I don’t want it!”

“Tough shit. You should’ve bought tea or something. You wanted contraception so you’re going to be a good girl and calm the fuck down so I can give it to you.”

“Get off me!”

“Jesus Christ,” Smokey puffed, taking a breather while Storm managed to keep me still, glancing at River. “You’re the nice one. Deal with it.”

“I don’t think being nice is going to help,” River mumbled, stepping closer and making me flinch. “Baby, you said you could handle it. Want me to go back and get the tea?”

“Please!” I begged, but Storm snorted.

“No. She thought she could handle it, so let her prove it.” I struggled more, tears falling down my cheeks as he restrained me. “You can hate me later, firecracker.”

I jerked as he pushed my pants down right there in front of everyone, worry filling River’s voice as I kept crying.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“Being an asshole. It’s kind of my thing,” Storm grunted. “Hold her still for me.” I didn’t want his hands on me, I wanted them to leave me alone and let me freak out in peace.

River stepped back and even Smokey looked unsure, but Frost scowled as he stalked towards us.

“For the love of all things silent, get out of my way.”

I whimpered when Frost’s rough hands grabbed my arms, a scream leaving me as Storm yanked my pants off my ankles. Frost’s fingers kept me in a bruising grip as I kicked my legs, and River spoke louder as he realized what Storm was doing.

“Stop! She doesn’t want it!”

“You’re about to learn the woman you’re in love with is a certified whore and always wants it,” Storm snapped, my muscles locking up as he kicked off his own pants. “Just shut up and trust me.”

“No, get off her!” He tried to grab Storm but Smokey hauled him back, not seeming sure which side to take. He looked highly uncomfortable about the whole thing.

I tried to keep my legs together but Storm overpowered me, rubbing his cock up and down my pussy while Frost kept me in place.

“Let me in, Salem. Show River how much you love my dick.” All I could think about was the needle that I knew one of them had in their hands, Storm’s distraction not working in the slightest. “Or keep fighting me. You know I like it.”

A sharp pain hit me as Storm forced himself inside me, and Smokey struggled to keep hold of River as he freaked out.

He was fighting so hard to get to me but I couldn't hear anything over the hammering of my own heart and the blood whooshing in my ears. I cried out as Storm rocked into me firmly, my sounds of terror slowly turning to those of pleasure.

“There you are, It's just you, me, and my dick right now, babe.”

Frost's grip on me loosened as I lifted my hips to meet Storm's thrusts, a groan leaving me as I opened my legs more. The others went quiet as Storm railed me, my breaths coming in short, sharp pants as Storm slid a hand between us to tease my clit. “Such a good girl for me. You want me to make you come?”

I nodded, relaxing when I realized one hand was touching me while the other was gripping the couch. He didn't have the needle.

“Storm—”

“Your pussy feels so good strangling my dick,” he practically snarled, my eyes squeezing shut as he picked up the pace. I prayed I didn't squirt and ruin the fucking couch.

Luckily, I didn't but the orgasm tore through me hard and fast as Storm lifted my leg higher, his thrusts slowing as his mouth dropped down to mine.

Frost let me go and I wrapped my arms around Storm's neck, soaking in his version of comfort, and it wasn't until he came and stepped back that I noticed that everyone was still staring at me.

River had a tent in his pants, long since abandoning his mission to save me from Storm's method of calming me down, Smokey shamelessly had his hand down his pants as he stroked himself, leaving Fox assessing me with a smirk and Frost glaring at me.

“Really? A bit of dick stops you freaking out?” Frost bit out.

“Leaving me alone fixes it actually,” I choked out, making him roll his eyes.

“You didn’t even feel me jab you.” He held up the now empty needle, my eyes widening, and he surprisingly ruffled my hair affectionately, his voice softening. “You’re welcome. I got you just before Storm could pump you full of cum again.” The panic mixed with my hormones and confusion, my entire body exhausted from the fight, and River seemed to snap out of it as he pulled his shirt over his head and walked towards us, making Frost snort. “Whoa, dude. You’ve gotta be this tall to ride the Salem express.”

“I’m not going to fuck her,” River hissed, shoving Storm out of the way and gently easing his shirt between my legs to clean me up. “I told you guys we should’ve done this later. She’s going to fall asleep on her feet out there tonight.”

I was almost asleep now, and dread filled me at the thought of being awake all night.

“She’s not doing the night shift,” Storm said firmly, motioning to the stairs. “I’ll carry her up to bed and she can sleep it off.”

“Yeah, being raped is tiring,” River said tensely, and I felt the mood in the room shift as Storm’s jaw clenched. He looked down at me, keeping his voice level.

“Did I rape you?”

“No, but that needle was a fucking violation,” I scowled, giving Frost the side-eye. “I don’t think there’s a time I wouldn’t want you assholes to touch me. I’m fucked in the head, didn’t you know?”

“We know,” Frost scoffed before stalking from the room, apparently sick of comforting me.

Storm went to lift me but River got in the way.

“I can carry her.”

“You’ll drop her on the stairs with those jelly muscles of yours,” Storm argued but I shut them both up as I got to my feet, not bothering to grab my pants off the floor as I started walking towards the stairs.

“I’m going to bed. You guys have fun.”

Smokey groaned, his eyes on my pussy as he continued to touch himself.

“Do you have two seconds to deal with my dick? It’s going to explode.”

“That’s the idea,” I deadpanned. “But no, deal with it yourself.”

They all watched me as I left the room, and I was surprised when none of them followed.

I didn’t even have the energy to shower so I stripped my shirt off and fell into bed contently, sleep hitting me with ease.

CHAPTER THIRTY

SALEM

I woke up overheating, snuggling into whoever was in front of me. A dick pressed against my ass just as a soft hand slid over my waist, lips meeting my neck.

“You awake, baby?”

“Not enough for your dick, Casanova,” I mumbled, making Fox chuckle.

“I wasn’t going to give you my dick. It’s just happy to see you, that’s all.” I opened my eyes to find River sleeping in front of me. “He was worried you’d wake up and freak out about Storm being pushy with you, so he came to bed a few hours after you. You were having nightmares again so I slept in here too.”

“Wasn’t River on night duty?” I asked as I tried to wake up properly, and Fox’s hand trailed up my front to cup my breast as he continued to kiss my neck. It felt so good.

“Frost and Smokey went with Storm, it’s fine.”

“Have you heard from them? Are they okay? Did—”

“They’re fine. I promise.” He smiled against my neck, his teeth grazing my skin. “You sure you don’t want my dick? I bet you’re wet.”

“Chances are high that it’s Storm’s cum,” I deadpanned, rolling slightly to look at him. “Can you make me a coffee? Since you’re the romantic one?”

“Anything for you.” He tilted my chin towards him more, giving me a slow, lazy kiss before climbing out of bed. “I’ll make you breakfast too since you asked so nicely.”

“Chocolate chip pancakes?”

“You’ve got it.”

He wandered off to the kitchen to make my breakfast and River stirred, his arms tightening around me as he felt the small gap between us. I rolled back against his chest, his entire body relaxing as he let out a content sigh.

“Morning, baby.”

“Morning, puddles,” I murmured, placing a kiss on his bare chest before I could stop myself. “You didn’t have to stay and babysit me.”

“I can’t believe he forced himself on you like that,” he said bitterly, the sleep gone from his voice in an instant. “You were freaking out and—”

I loved that he cared so much, and something eased in my chest as I draped a leg over his hip.

“I appreciate you worrying, but there’s no need. It’s Storm and we just get each other. He knew I wasn’t freaking out because of him and that I needed his firm hand to pull me back from my fear. He didn’t hurt or scare me.”

River’s hand didn’t hesitate to slide around my waist and down to my bare ass, his voice low.

“I wanted to fucking kill him for touching you like that, and for calling you a whore. You’re not a whore,” he said sharply, holding me tighter.

My skin on his must have been getting to him because his dick hardened from behind his boxers and it pressed against my stomach.

“He didn’t say it out of spite. Storm and Frost both need to feel superior in the bedroom and they get off on inflicting pain and degradation. I enjoy being able to explore that with them. I trust them to only do things that benefit me too.”

“But—”

I shut him up with a kiss, his dick instantly turning to stone between us as he kissed me back. Staying away from River was a chore and this kiss cemented the fact that I couldn't be without him.

We ended up in a tangle of limbs as he draped his body over mine, a needy whine leaving me as his dick pressed against my opening. My hips lifted as I ground against him, and I could feel him fighting himself on what to do. He could shove his boxers down and slide inside right now if he wanted and I wouldn't push him away, but luckily, he was thinking a little more clearly than me and forced himself back.

“Salem—”

“I know,” I said softly, running my hands up his sides and around his back. “Not right now.”

“God, I want to,” he said as if it pained him. “But not until we're solid.”

“You feel pretty solid to me.” I ground against him and he laughed, kissing me softly.

“Like a brick wall too, but I want to wait until this rift between us is fixed and Fox punishes me. It's the right thing to do.”

Groaning, I lightly pushed him off me and sat up.

“Sweet guys are great until they use their morals. You're a fucking saint.”

“It's a struggle, trust me,” he grunted, climbing out of bed and grabbing his phone from the bedside table. “Ugh, the guys are on their way back to the house so we need to get ready really fast to switch shifts with them.”

“I'll go shower. Fox is doing breakfast,” I replied, noticing his change of mood. He looked worried, his fingers flying over the keyboard on his phone as he replied to the message. “He's okay if he's texting you.”

His eyes lifted to mine, some of the concern wavering.

“You think?”

“I know.” I pulled him close for a hug, kissing his cheek. “Get dressed and wait in the kitchen for him. He’ll be home soon. Besides, Smokey’s like a roach, that asshole could live through anything.”

My joke worked, his mouth curving into an amused smile.

“You’re right. I’ll meet you downstairs.”

Once I was alone, I quickly showered and dried my hair, putting my makeup on before heading down to the kitchen. The guys were back, Storm’s eyes doing a quick assessment of me as he finished his conversation with Fox.

“I think he was telling the truth and was just going to the store. Nothing suspicious.”

“We’ll keep an eye out today for him,” Fox nodded, pointing at my plate and coffee.

I did as I was told and started eating, but I stopped chewing when Frost spoke.

“I saw Anthony at three. He was hanging around the east end. I lost sight of him though and have no idea where he went.”

I swallowed my mouthful, joining the conversation.

“Do you think it’s suspicious?” That earned me a bored look as he sat in a chair opposite me.

“A Board member hiding in the shadows at three in the morning after giving us guard duty? Yes, Salem. I do think it’s a little fucking strange.”

“Maybe he was just checking to make sure we were actually doing it?”

“Doubtful. They have access to the security here so why would they get their shoes dirty by wandering around in the dark?” He gave Smokey a dirty look as he leaned over the back of River’s chair, his arms draping over his shoulders. “You two are welcome to fuck but do you have to be so touchy-feely at the breakfast table?”

River snorted, tilting his head slightly as Smokey buried his face in his neck, skimming his lips across his skin.

“Says the one who held Salem down on the couch so that Storm could fuck her in front of all of us.”

“That was different,” Frost grumbled, narrowing his eyes. “You’ve always been a pain in the ass, but I swear you argue more than usual lately.”

“*I’ve* been a pain in the ass? Look in the mirror, fuckwit. You’re the one that’s difficult to live with,” River threw back, and Storm made a T with his hands for timeout.

“Guys, we don’t need a domestic today. We’re tired, and getting snappy with each other won’t make things better. You three, eat so you can go. You two, eat and go to bed,” he ordered, giving Frost a pointed look. Frost’s lip curled with anger but he dropped into a seat beside mine and started eating the pancakes in front of him, flicking his eyes to mine.

“How do your powers feel? Have they been restored now you’ve rested?”

I wasn’t surprised by the question, it seemed all I’d done lately was burn them out, but I’d given them a good break the last few days.

“Yeah, I bet I could single-handedly take on a dragon right now. Between my power boost and the injections, I feel really strong. I haven’t tested it but hopefully I’ve built up more stamina with it,” I answered, taking a bite of my pancake.

It was quiet for a while, all of us eating in peace, but when I stood to leave, Frost’s hand slipped into mine.

“Train with me later? I’ll make time.” He watched my face as he waited for my answer, his jaw relaxing when I nodded.

“Yeah, that sounds good.” I glanced at River and Fox. “You guys ready to head out?”

They finished their coffees and stood, and I hesitated before quickly dropping a kiss to Frost’s cheek. “I’ll see you later.”

He scowled but didn't tell me to fuck off, which was progress.

Storm tugged me close and gave me a possessive kiss, swatting my ass as I pulled back.

“Be careful. Call us if you need backup.”

“I will,” I smiled, intending on walking off, but Smokey fisted the back of my shirt and yanked me back, causing me to land on his lap with a yelp. His eyes flickered with humor as he wrapped his arms around me, smacking a kiss on my cheek.

“Did you really think you could sneak out without saying goodbye to me? I'm wounded, hurricane.”

“You know, you and me still aren't besties,” I huffed with fake annoyance, trying to climb off his lap. His fingers wound through my hair and dragged me back, his lips so close to mine that I stopped breathing.

“I'm sorry. How else can I fix it? You want an orgasm?”

“I need to go.”

“I guess I'll just give it to you later then,” he murmured before crushing his lips to mine without hesitation, a squeak leaving me from the unexpected kiss. It was hard and fast, my mind barely catching up to what was happening before he pulled away. “Stay safe.”

River plucked me from Smokey's lap as if to save me, not expecting Smokey to grab him by the throat and tug him down for a passionate kiss too. I giggled as River came up for air with a bright red face, turning and walking towards the door with embarrassment as Smokey called after him.

“Bye, raindrop! Have a good day!”

“You're an ass,” I said with a chuckle, making him smirk.

“Speaking of ass, you going to let me in yours?” It was clear he was in a teasing mood so I flipped him the bird and took Fox's hand.

“C'mon, let's go before Smokey calls for an orgy.”

Fox's laugh was low in my ear as he followed me towards the door.

"You don't think I'd be into an orgy? You're lucky I don't drag River back in here and start the party."

"We save the world first, then we have the orgy," I scolded, his eyebrow lifting as he held the door open for me.

"Promise?"

Patrolling Stardust was boring as fuck. Nothing happened all damn day, and my feet hurt from all the walking. There was no way in hell I'd get any training done if I had to do this every day, my legs were like jelly.

"Hey," River murmured as we crossed paths late in the afternoon. "Having fun?"

"It's a fucking blast," I deadpanned, falling into step beside him as he kept walking. "Have you seen anything suspicious? Illegal activity? Monsters in dark corners?"

"No. Fox hasn't either, I ran into him two hours ago." His hand brushed mine and I threaded my fingers through his, giving him a soft smile.

"Do your feet hurt? Mine are on fire."

"Would you like to sit down for five minutes? We can get an ice cream," he offered, uncertainty flashing across his face. River was so easy to love. The small gestures of kindness always made me fall harder for him, and it made me feel things I'd never had before.

"I'd love to. It's about time we had that ice cream date," I answered, his hand tightening in mine as relief washed over him.

We walked the rest of the way to the park, and once we both had an ice cream in hand, we sat on a bench and assessed the area. It was almost silent, other than some birds singing, and it sent a chill down my spine.

“It’s crazy, right?” River murmured after a while as he glanced over at me. “How we all ended up here together in the same house and that all our pasts are entwined.”

“The real question is *why*. You can’t tell me fate put us on this path. Our memories being changed is a huge red flag that says we’re just pawns in someone else’s game. The past is a concern but I’m scared about what the future will bring. More lies? Pain? Death?” I licked my ice cream, staring across the park. “And why the fuck does the Board think I’ve been here for so long? Whoever’s in charge of all the memory stuff must be really powerful if they can fuck with the Board’s minds too.”

“No one’s dying,” he answered carefully, finishing his ice cream and eyeing me thoughtfully. “We’ll be okay.”

I flicked my gaze to his, my voice soft. “How do you know? So far everything else we knew has been wrong.”

“We’re a team, and you coming here has turned us into a family. Nothing is more powerful than that. It gives us a reason to live and fight.” He reached out to take my cheek in his palm, his voice dropping. “You made us whole, Salem. We can handle anything the world throws at us now that we have each other.”

My phone rang, jerking us apart, and panic filled me at seeing Fox’s name on the screen. I hit the answer button and all I could hear was heavy breathing.

“Fox?”

“West side,” he panted before he cursed, a pained sound leaving him. “I need help.”

“We’re coming, I’m with River,” I blurted out, jumping to my feet.

The phone cut out and I started running, leaving River to scramble after me as we headed towards Fox.

A house was burning when we arrived, my eyes darting around for Fox and finding him on the grass. I headed straight for him, noticing the sweat coating his skin as he ground his jaw in pain. Blood seeped through the shin of his pants and his eyes lifted to mine as we approached.

“Forget me, track down that asshole. He’s got steel powers so watch out. His body can turn into armor too.”

I ignored him and dropped to my knees, lifting his pant leg to see the damage. Nausea swam inside me as I found the wound, his bone punctured through the skin. “I’m calling the guys. You need to get out of here.”

“No need,” Storm said from behind me, and I glanced over my shoulder to find him jogging towards us with Smokey and Frost. “River texted and said you’d likely need backup.”

“Fox—”

“It’s broken but it will heal,” Storm promised, turning to River. “Do you think you and Frost can get him home?” Frost didn’t look happy to be on babysitting duty but he didn’t voice it as River nodded. “Good. Get him home and we’ll help Salem.”

I wanted to throw up as Frost and River helped Fox to his feet, agonizing screams coming from him in the process. Smokey winced, moving towards me while keeping an eye out for danger.

“Knock him out. He can’t make the trip home like that.”

“Okay,” Frost said without hesitation, wrapping his arm around Fox’s neck and started choking him out. Fox accepted it, knowing the trip home would be too painful otherwise, but his mind still forced him to panic from the lack of oxygen. His body quickly became limp in Frost’s hold, and despite hating it, I knew it had been the only humane way to move him.

“You did that with way too much happiness,” I grumbled as I eyed Fox’s still body, making Frost shrug.

“He annoys me.”

Storm rolled his eyes, giving his brother a pointed look.

“Go. Make sure he gets home. If you want to come back and help once he’s settled with River, feel free to.” That sparked Frost’s motivation and he almost dragged Fox off on his own, leaving River stumbling after them.

A whizzing sound came from somewhere and Smokey yanked me against his chest to keep me close as a large, steel pole slammed into the ground, my eyes going wide. Fox had been lying there only moments ago, and we weren’t sure if we were immortal or not.

Storm spun around and threw lightning at someone as they walked out from between two houses, laughing coldly as the electricity did nothing. Balls of air filled my hands, and flames shot up Smokey’s arms as we braced for battle, the man’s eyes landing directly on me.

“I fucking told them you’d be nothing but a pain to deal with. Do you think they believed me? No.” He threw a steel ball towards me but Smokey melted it with his flames before it even got close to us, the steel droplets landing on the ground. I went to blast him with air but I paused when he spoke again. “Look at you, being good little puppets for your masters. They only created us to control the magic in this world, but all they did was turn us into weapons that they couldn’t control. Do you know how many died fighting a battle they knew nothing about?”

Storm threw lightning at him, the sky rumbling with thunder as a light rain started.

“We’re not weapons, we’re people!”

“Look around you, number thirty-six. You’re just pawns in a game of power,” he chuckled dryly, confusion washing through me. “They fear us, you know? Our powers are legendary, unique. Their greed for power made them selfish, and now they’re grasping at straws to keep the control over the monsters they created.”

Smokey held me back as steel and lightning flew everywhere, shielding me from the chaos.

“You’re the ones destroying the only place the gifted are welcome!” Storm shouted as more thunder boomed overhead, the rain growing heavy and soaking us to the bone. “We keep people safe while you’re out here tearing it down! Don’t you see what you’re doing? Why turn on those who have given us a place to call home?”

“You’re puppets that do their bidding and you don’t even realize,” he huffed, Smokey’s body tensing against mine as the man kept talking. “You don’t question what is good or bad, all you know is what they tell you. You’re soldiers of death, just like I was. The only difference is that you don’t fucking see it.”

“I can’t tell if you’re a good guy or a bad guy right now,” I said absently, and Storm gave me a dirty look as I stepped closer, pushing Smokey’s arm off of me. “Are you trying to warn us? Why are you destroying Stardust?”

“My name’s Vulcan, and I was number fifteen,” he answered, his hands relaxing by his sides. “And to answer your question, I’m both. To you, I’m the bad guy, but in reality, you are.” He took a step in my direction and Smokey threw flames at him, snarling.

“That’s close enough.”

“Guys, it’s fine,” I said without taking my eyes off Vulcan, and I jerked as Storm zapped me lightly with a growl.

“Are you fucking kidding me? He’s the enemy, Salem!”

Maybe he was, but Vulcan’s words dug deep inside of me, uneasiness settling in my chest. Something about his words made complete sense, and I wanted to know more.

Were we the bad guys somehow?

“Why are you destroying Stardust? Can you tell me that?” I asked, Vulcan’s eyes softening a fraction.

“We were never supposed to exist. Most people here are just failed experiments, numbers in a bowl that didn’t get picked. Those more powerful are only here because they knew they’d lose control over us eventually. We’re the ones who took to the power like it was a part of us, and now we’re

indestructible. Destroying Stardust means those with smaller powers won't have the ability to possibly turn into one of us and become an army." His eyes flickered to Storm, his voice firm. "Nothing here is real, and it took me a long time to realize that. I spent years in that facility, just like you, and our creators used us as weapons against the innocent to keep control. This place causes more problems than you realize. We're not heroes, saving the world from dragons and other creatures, we're the ones destroying it. We're nothing but a mindless army, doing the bidding of those too weak to do it alone. We follow the Devil because the sins are dipped in lies of solace."

"What do you mean we're created?" I whispered, disbelief hitting me when he replied.

"We were made in that facility as test tube science experiments. There's hundreds of us, but not everyone survived. Me and you? we're top tier, the ones who were successful and managed to obtain the powers forced upon us. The people here?" He motioned around us, the flames from the house behind us casting an eerie vibe around the street as the sun set in the distance. "They survived, but they're failed experiments. They can't fight like we can, and they're not invincible. Some didn't make it out of the facility, let alone past the age of two. They're only still here because it's believed with time, something will come from it and benefit those who play God. The power we hold? It's toxic, and hundreds of bodies rejected it. Some were weaker than others and didn't handle the venom desensitization, while some simply shut down for no reason and were disposed of like trash."

"None of this makes sense," I said slowly. "My parents—"

"We don't have families out there who hated us for being a burden, we are only here because we were *made*. The memories of your parents were implanted into you. I bet if you asked everyone to draw you a picture of their families, they'd draw the same image. Power isn't born out of love, it's born from evil and greed."

“You’re fucking lying,” Smokey bit out angrily, but I could see in Vulcan’s eyes that he was telling the truth. I reached into my mind to pull memories of my parents, finding only blurry images and muffled voices that I didn’t recognize.

They’d never existed, and the fabricated memories faded the more we talked.

“Stardust is powerful, you can’t take it on yourself,” I stated, my meeting with the projector guy in my room confusing me even more. He was trying to get me to tear down my own house, but we were the best chance at keeping Stardust safe from those who’d gone rogue. “Why was I told to kill my own team? Was that your plan? To make us turn on each other?”

He studied me before glancing back at the burning house with a sigh.

“That wasn’t me or my team. I have no idea why anyone here would ask you to kill your own house though, especially when you’re the only hope they have of trying to keep the rest of us under control since you’re so fucking brainwashed. They don’t realize the power we have though, so if you’re against us, you’ll perish with the rest of this town.”

“How do you destroy the indestructible then? We’ve all died over and over, but each time we came back. Our memories are full of it, and I recently drowned so I know it’s not a fake memory. I died, so how am I still standing here?”

“We’re immortal, but every weapon has a killswitch, and we are no different. We’ve spent years researching, and we finally discovered that the blood of a unicorn mixed with the powder of its horn is toxic to our bloodstream when added to the ground up shell of a dragon’s egg.”

“The dead unicorns,” I said softly, glancing at Storm who was watching me with a tight jaw as he spoke.

“And that explains the failed barriers that kept letting the dragons down the mountain. It was so someone could extract their eggs in peace.”

Vulcan hummed, his eyes jumping between us.

“You need to make a choice. You can try to save your home, or you can fight on the right side and get your freedom back. This prison can’t hold you unless you allow it to. It’s all pretend, the stories of those before you being on jobs or living elsewhere. They’re either dead or on the run, and those you blindly follow are making you do their dirty work. Every creature or rogue member you’ve killed was simply trying to save themselves.”

My heart leapt in my chest as he let us see just how tired he was, and I absently reached out to touch his arm.

“How long have you been running for?”

“Too long,” he whispered as he turned to walk away, speaking over his shoulder. “This place isn’t for the gifted, Salem. It’s for the cursed. Society is right, we’re an abomination, but what we do with our powers can change that. Stop blindly following orders from those who deceive you, or we’ll have no choice but to kill you too. Stardust won’t be left standing for much longer.”

He vanished into the dark between the houses, and Storm’s arm wrapped around me, tucking me protectively against him.

“What the fuck,” he muttered under his breath as he steered me towards home, and sirens sounded in the distance but we didn’t stick around. Smokey fell into step beside me and took my hand, his voice full of uncertainty.

“What do we do now?”

“We need to pick a side,” Storm answered, his gaze flicking around for anyone lurking. “But we need to wait until we get back to the house to discuss it.”

Smokey nodded and gave my hand a reassuring squeeze, but all I could think about was Vulcan’s words.

Were we the villains?

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

SALEM

Frost was pissed that he'd missed all the action, complaining that Fox was being a pain in the ass. Considering Fox's shin bone was sticking out of his leg, I thought it gave him a good excuse.

"Hey, Casanova. How's the leg?" I murmured as I slipped into his room where River was tending to him, blood all over the blanket from the puncture wound. They'd cut his pants down his leg to access the injury better, and Fox grimaced as River poked and prodded at it.

"It's been better." He reached for my hand, so I took it and sat beside him as his eyes lifted to mine with concern. "What happened? Did you manage to kill him?"

I sighed, giving his hand a small squeeze.

"It's a long, complicated story. Vulcan—"

"You named it? Great, we all know how women get once they name a stray. They end up bringing it home," Fox grunted, making me chuckle at the jealousy in his eyes.

"No, he already had a name. I have enough of you assholes, I don't want any more." I contemplated waiting to tell him about it all until he felt better, but in the end, I couldn't. "Vulcan and other past Stardust members are trying to destroy the town because everything's a lie, Fox. We're not supposed to exist."

River paused, glancing up at me with a frown. "What do you mean?"

I explained everything that had happened, my eyes burning with tears by the end of it.

“What if it’s true? What if this place is more like a prison and we’ve been blindly going on jobs, hurting creatures who don’t deserve it? What if—”

“I think this is way over our heads. Maybe we need to bring it up with the Board? If we were all created in a lab, then they would’ve been there too, right? They’re magical like us, if not more powerful, so someone had to have made them too,” Fox suggested, but I shook my head. I didn’t like the idea of the Board getting involved. If they weren’t the one’s running the show, they were still working for whoever was.

“We can’t risk it,” River said, voicing my thoughts.

“Can we trust Vulcan though? Maybe he’s twisting things and completely full of shit,” Fox grunted, and I winced as River went back to tending to the damaged leg, pushing on the bone to put it back inside the skin. Fox gripped my hand painfully and squeezed his eyes shut, panting as River started stitching the hole. “Just because I’m doped up, doesn’t mean I can’t feel that, you bastard.”

“Sorry,” River grimaced, looking up as Storm entered the room. “Good news, boss. He’ll live.”

“I thought you said it was good news,” Storm said flatly, but his mouth twitched with the ghost of a smile. “Did Salem fill you guys in?”

“On the metal man with the vendetta against Stardust? Sure,” River answered with a snort. “Now what the fuck do we do about it?”

“I think Vulcan’s right,” I replied, holding Storm’s dark gaze. “We need to consider the possibility that everything is bullshit.”

“It can’t all be bullshit, firecracker. Our entire lives have been built around this. Our past is a lie, but do you really think our present is too? Is any of this real? Are *we* even fucking real?”

My heart hurt at the thought, and I'd never seen Storm so unsure before. We thought we knew everything, but our world was slowly crumbling down around us.

"We're real," I said as confidently as possible. "Our connection is real."

"What if this tears us all apart?" he mumbled, showing his true worry. "What if we're all forced to turn on each other out of desperation in that facility again? I can't go back to that, my nightmares still haunt me. Hurting you—"

"None of us are going back there," I promised, getting to my feet and walking towards him to slide my arms around his waist. "I'd prefer to die than hurt any of you."

"That's what I'm worried about," he murmured, holding me close as he ran his eyes over Fox again. "How long until you're back on your feet?"

"By morning. River gave me a healing shot to speed things up a little," Fox replied, sucking in a sharp breath as River adjusted his leg and started washing the blood off with a damp cloth.

"You will *not* be up and ready for action in the morning. You're staying in bed," I exclaimed, making him chuckle.

"I'll be fine in a few hours, but I'll make sure it's healed by resting it until tomorrow. Are you going to stay here and make sure I rest, baby?" He waggled his eyebrows, and River swatted his arm lightly.

"You're going to sleep it off and I'm going to stay in here to make sure you actually do. If Salem stays, you'll only wreck your leg more by trying to nail her."

"I'll nail you instead, pretty boy," Fox snorted, crossing his arms with annoyance. "You can't cock block me, I can be creative. If Salem's not on my dick, then you can take her place. I have no problem sitting still while you do all the work since you're so worried."

"You're a terrible patient," River huffed, but his cheeks flushed pink. "And Smokey would kill you."

“I didn’t know you were exclusive,” Fox purred, and Storm let out an impatient sigh as River sputtered.

“We’re not but—”

“I’ll make your first time good, forget about him.” He reached out to grab River’s shirt, hauling him so close their lips almost touched. “I’ll take you slow, building you up until you’re writhing under me and begging for more.”

“Guys,” I snapped as I squeezed my thighs together at the thought, drawing their attention. “We have other issues right now, can we not fight please?”

“Who’s fighting? I was just going to leave River in a puddle of his own cum.”

River jerked back the second Fox’s lips brushed his, a snarl on his face.

“Fuck off, I don’t want you. I know it’s a hard concept to understand because you’re such a cocky piece of shit but—”

“We don’t have time for this,” I scolded them, rubbing my temples.

“She’s right,” Frost grunted as he walked in, a nervous look on his face. “The Board’s here, and they’re not happy.”

“We did everything we could,” I argued, but Frost’s eyes burned into me with something that appeared to be pity.

“Apparently not. C’mon, don’t keep them waiting, it only makes it worse.”

Fox had to stay in bed but the rest of us wandered down to the kitchen, finding all three Board members waiting with Smokey who looked highly uncomfortable. His eyes flicked to mine and he grimaced, Meredith’s wrath apparently on me.

“Explain yourself!”

“Oh, Fox called for backup and—” I didn’t see the slap coming until her hand connected with my cheek, and I pressed my palm to the sting as I stared at her with surprise.

“You were supposed to be patrolling, not having an ice cream date!” Meredith seethed, embarrassment washing

through me. “And then you let him go! We watched the footage, and none of you followed protocol. You two were busy on a date, and Fox—” she spat his name like it left a bad taste in her mouth. “Was lying around uselessly! That prick got away, all because you took part in a conversation! What did he say to you?”

“Fox was injured!” I argued, and I knew she was going to slap me again before she even raised her hand. Storm pulled me back a step before it could connect, not hiding his fury.

“*Don't* touch her. Fox wasn't lying around, the bone in his leg snapped in half. The metal guy was just spinning some bullshit about how he's saving the world and burning down the supernatural. We let him talk because it stopped him from destroying the town. We're all indestructible, remember? We need to sort out a proper plan of capturing these rogue assholes because right now we have nothing. We can't kill them, have no where to contain them, and even though you don't want to believe it, they're really fucking powerful. It's not as simple as tying them up and calling it a day.”

He wasn't telling them the truth but we couldn't have the Board knowing. We had to keep this between us for now until we had a plan or we'd all be on the run together.

Meredith glowered at me, not hiding the anger in her tone.

“You're all distracted because of your damn hormones. If two of you weren't having a date, then Fox wouldn't have gotten hurt.”

“That's absurd. We were all spread out! Fox still would've been there on his own!” I argued, and Storm's arm tightened around mine as Anthony stepped in my direction, lightning sparking to life in Storm's hands.

“Jesus Christ,” Meredith bit out, glaring around the room at all of us. “Control your tempers. We're frustrated too, but we need everyone to remain at their posts until this is dealt with. We're looking into things on our end, so all you need to do is handle anyone who threatens Stardust. Don't ask them questions, we want them dead.”

“It’s a little difficult to kill those who can’t be killed,” Frost said dryly as he crossed his arms. “Can we access security? If we can have eyes on Stardust at all times, we wouldn’t have to patrol. It’s wasting our time and energy. We might not be at our strongest when they come for us.”

“Absolutely not. Only we are allowed to access the cameras,” Anthony snapped, suspicion burning inside my gut. I wanted to argue, but Frost beat me to it.

“In that case, you can let us know if someone’s hanging around. We’re not going to walk around the streets twenty-four-seven.”

“You’ll do as you’re told,” Anthony growled, Frost’s eyes narrowing to slits.

“Or we could leave you here to deal with this mess since you seem to have it handled? Stardust would crumble without our help and you fucking know it. We aren’t required to stay, so fucking push me and see what happens.”

“This is getting out of hand,” Meredith sighed, and I could tell she was nervous at the thought of us leaving. “We can keep an eye on the cameras and set up more security along the perimeter. Happy?”

“*Ecstatic*,” Frost deadpanned, his eyes finding mine. “Go check on Fox to make sure his dumbass hasn’t fallen out of bed. Take water boy with you.”

“Fuck off, how about that?” I grunted, and Storm snickered beside me before giving me a light push in the direction of the stairs.

“Stop being difficult and just go.”

“I hate you.”

“Sure you do,” he answered, motioning for River to follow me. Meredith didn’t like me leaving, I could tell, but she seemed rattled from Frost’s declaration of us leaving.

“Salem?” I met her gaze, waiting for her to continue. “You need to remember why you’re here. This was your decision.”

That didn't make any sense, and I frowned at her as River took my hand and pulled me up the stairs, apparently more than happy to escape the awkwardness in the kitchen. He practically pushed me into Fox's room, shutting the door behind us before speaking.

"Maybe Frost's idea is a good one. That was a little weird."

"You think we should just leave?" I asked with surprise, a snort coming from Fox as he stared at us from the bed like we were crazy.

"Frost thinks we should leave? We can't."

"Why not?" River demanded, pacing as he thought hard about it. "We only have to come here to safely learn to use our powers, and to find our team. As long as we stay together, it'll be fine." He had a good point. We technically didn't need to be here anymore.

Fox grimaced as I sat on the bed, jostling his leg.

"Where would we even go? We've hardly spent much time out in the world, and I guarantee our money will vanish from the account if we bust out," he stated.

"I'm a professional at living like a homeless person in the real world," I offered. "I know how to make money last."

"We don't. Do you really think the guys will manage without ordering food all the time? Or needing dumb subscriptions for shit? If you think Smokey will go a week without pizza, you have another thing coming," he scoffed. "I also require way too many hair and skin products to get by with a homeless income."

"I don't even have a skin care routine," I deadpanned, earning a dirty look.

"I can't believe I fell for an animal."

I rolled my eyes at his dramatics, shuffling beside him to snuggle into his side.

"For now, at least we don't have to patrol. I think we should have a nap so you can rest your leg."

“I like that idea,” Fox smiled, patting the bed beside him. “C’mon, water boy. You can come and snuggle me too.”

“No thanks. I’m not giving you a reason to get that close to me,” River huffed, crossing his arms as he stood by the foot of the bed. “I thought we were buddies, but you’re going to fuck Salem in front of me and not let me finish? That’s a whole different kind of cruel.”

“We’ll be *best buddies* once I’m done with you. I’ll let you finish, promise,” Fox smirked, and River flicked his eyes to mine.

“Are you into this? Me watching you both while I suffer and come in my boxers?”

“One-hundred-percent,” I teased, reaching a hand out for him. He hesitated before walking around to climb in behind me, and Fox grumbled as we all made room, but he didn’t tell River to get out, letting him nap with us in peace.

“How’s Fox?” Storm grunted as I walked into the kitchen the next morning, his eyes glued to my bare thighs. I was in nothing but Fox’s shirt since he *insisted* he’d sleep better with my skin on his.

My butt peeked out from under the fabric as I reached into the cupboard above my head for a cup as I answered.

“His leg is healed. River’s just checking it over but he seems fine.” I almost dropped the damn cup as hands slid up my thighs and over my hips, exposing me as the shirt rode up more.

“It’s going to be your turn for a rest day if you keep flashing me your ass,” Storm warned in my ear, pressing the solid bulge in his pants against my butt. He shoved my chest down on the counter, sliding a hand between my butt cheeks

and moving it lower until he was teasing my pussy. “Don’t move.”

I couldn’t see what he was doing as I sensed him move, but I gasped as his hot tongue suddenly swiped between my legs.

“Storm!”

He ignored me, holding me open to lick and suck at my pussy, Smokey’s voice sounding from close by.

“It’s about time we had something good for breakfast. Save me some.”

I went to stand properly but Storm growled and placed his hand on my back to stop me, continuing to devour me until I came loudly, squeezing my eyes shut as I fought to stay on my feet.

“My dick’s so fucking hard right now,” Smokey groaned, brushing hair off my face as my eyes fluttered open to find him right beside me. “I think you should stay right where you are and let me—”

Banging on the door stopped his proposition, and Storm stood to fix my shirt and wipe his mouth as Smokey got the door. Minerva stumbled into the kitchen, blood all over her clothes and face, which snapped me out of my orgasm bliss.

“What happened?” Storm bit out as he assessed her, sobs leaving her as she collapsed to her knees.

“They’re dead,” she choked out, lifting her red rimmed eyes to mine. “Some guys broke into our house and killed my team and—”

“What powers did they have?” Smokey demanded as he squatted beside her. “Fire? Steel? Projection?”

It could’ve been anyone at this point. Between the men from the facility and those who’d apparently gone rogue, there was about to be a lot of death inside these gates.

“Projection and fire. I’m the strongest in my house so their powers didn’t affect me like the others. He called me number nine.” She lifted her shirt to show multiple stab wounds across

her stomach, her voice cracking. “I’m healing but the others tried to protect me and—”

“The others were failed experiments from the facility, but you’re one of the successful ones,” I murmured as I stepped closer. “You’re invincible, but the rest of your house wasn’t.”

“I wasn’t at the facility from your past, my memories can’t be altered. It’s my power,” she said with a shake of her head but Frost walked in with a book in his hand, dropping it heavily onto the table.

“Wrong, your memories can be altered by someone stronger than you. Projection powers are a higher level of mind control. They can force your minds to see things that technically aren’t there, the strongest ones managing to touch things despite not really being there.” He opened the book, flipping through some pages until he found the one he wanted, pointing at it. “We only use a small percentage of our brains, but some have discovered how to access more. This is what we’ve been calling a power boost.”

“Where did you find this?” I asked as I skimmed my eyes over the page, finally looking at him to see exhaustion all over his face. He hadn’t slept by the look of it.

“I ran into Vulcan again while I was scoping some shit out once you were all asleep. He offered it to me for more proof.”

“Vulcan? The guy with the steel powers that attacked last night?” Minerva sputtered, drawing all our attention. I didn’t like that she knew his name, because that meant that the Board knew from either hearing our conversation, or from the past which meant they knew more about what was happening that they’d let on. “He’s rogue. You’ve spoken to him since the attack? You have to tell Meredith that—”

“How do you know of him?” Storm asked bluntly, her face heating a fraction.

“He’s one of the strongest members to ever come through Stardust with steel powers, and he’s been on the run for years. There’s talk of him making an army to wipe out Stardust. Why haven’t you told the Board you saw him again?”

Distrust filled her eyes and I glanced at the guys, not knowing how to handle this. We couldn't just tell her we suspected the Board to be the problem here.

"You need to keep your mouth shut," Frost said coldly, ice forming in his hands by his sides. "We're looking into something and we can't have you wrecking it by—"

Relief took over her face and her shoulders relaxed.

"You think something weird is going on too? I saw Anthony sneaking around the woods last week. He was dragging a dead unicorn."

"You think the Board is corrupt?" Storm asked slowly, making her nod.

"I didn't want to say anything because I'd end up dead. The last person who accused them of anything vanished without a trace. What did Vulcan say?"

Fox and River joined us, Fox letting out a scoff.

"Before or after he snapped my leg?"

We explained how yesterday had gone, and her eyes widened.

"He's number fifteen?"

"Yeah, why?" Smokey asked with a frown as she pulled her phone from her pocket, fumbling with it until she pulled up diary entries. "Don't you use a notebook?"

"It's a waste of paper," she said offhandedly, turning the screen to me. "I see the number fifteen a lot in visions and memories. It's one of my lucky numbers actually, so is three, twelve, and seventeen." She thought hard, letting out a scream as a man's voice spoke.

"Maybe Vulcan is right and there's hope for you guys after all." Storm tugged me against him as we all turned to find some asshole leaning against the doorframe. "I'm a little disappointed that you all haven't figured out your boosts though. I thought you were the face of Stardust?"

Frost threw ice shards at him but his body flickered in and out, the ice doing nothing. It appeared he had projection powers like the dickbag that had shown up in my bedroom. Minerva calmed after her initial panic, telling us that this wasn't the guy who'd just killed her team.

"Why are you here?" I asked as I stepped back from Storm, much to his annoyance.

"Vulcan thinks we should hold off on killing you, and I want to know why. What do you think of the Board?" he asked without hesitation.

"I think they're lying to us," I answered honestly, and River scowled at me.

"Don't tell them shit. They might be working for the Board."

"Ha! You think I'd work for those pricks? I haven't been their puppet in a long time," he laughed. "I'm Ronin. Number Seventeen." He bowed dramatically, and Minerva gave me a worried glance. One of her lucky numbers.

"You don't know where number three and twelve are, do you?" I asked dryly, his eyes narrowing.

"What do you want with Coal and Porter?"

"We need the truth," Storm said sharply, stepping between me and Ronin. "What the fuck is happening here?"

Ronin kept his eyes on me for a moment before sliding his gaze to Storm's.

"The Board are the bad guys and we were created to be their puppets. Everything was running smoothly for them until I broke free of their chains eighteen years ago, many following in my footsteps. Vulcan followed a year or two later with Porter, and Coal recently joined us. He'd been on a job for them for years but his team started questioning his loyalty to the Board. He killed them and ran."

"Why didn't he just run without killing them? And how is that possible if they had powers like his?" Frost asked as he

crossed his arms, my stomach dropping as Ronin raised an eyebrow.

“Don’t you guys sense each other? I can tell you exactly where Vulcan, Porter, and Coal are right now without calling to find out. Your powers connect and—”

“But you just said Coal killed his team,” Storm said tensely, and Ronin shook his head as if we were stupid.

“The magic in your veins isn’t a bond created by whatever god you believe in. It’s a connection of family and loyalty that you create on your own. All that other shit you know has been planted in your heads by those you follow so blindly, the bond of your house being fabricated to force you here. Whatever you’ve been told? Scrap it. If you want to know the truth then you need to get the fuck out of here while you still can. We’re tearing this place down and you’re welcome to help. We’ve been stealing the poison that acts as our killswitch, so anyone strong who stands against us will die. It was how Coal killed his team, we’d already met him prior to the incident, and Vulcan decided to give him some in case he needed an out.”

“But my powers went haywire until I got here,” I said suspiciously, wondering if I’d caught him out on a lie. “Explain that.”

“Of course they did. You’re programmed to believe fake memories and information. How long do you really think you lived in the real world? My guess was only days before your mind convinced you to come here because it’s what you believed in. They fuck with your head in that facility then toss you out in the street to make you believe that’s your life. You struggle for a few days, your body reacts to the lack of power that it *thinks* it needs, then you find yourself walking through the gates here as your savior,” he grunted, sliding his gaze to Storm. “How old do you think you are? We’re not normal people, we don’t age like them.”

“I’m thirty,” Storm muttered, but I could tell he was second guessing it.

“Doubtful. I’ve been in my thirties for close to fifty years now. I just didn’t know until I got out of this place. The longer

you spend away from here, the stronger your mind becomes. Think about it, they can keep you blanketed in magic here, but not outside those gates.”

My head was spinning, and I was glad that Smokey noticed and slid an arm around me to keep me steady.

“We did grow like humans though, we were children in that facility,” Smokey pointed out, and Ronin sighed.

“You went through stages of growth, yes, but not in human years. We took a lot of files when we broke into the administration office one night, and you guys were in the facility for a long time. You must have impressed them if they kept testing you on what you could handle.”

“You’ve got our files? I want copies of ours. How long were we in there for?” Frost bit out, making Ronin cringe.

“I can get Coal to copy them for you. About forty years.”

Minerva stepped forward, her eyes glassy as she spoke.

“Are you and your friends responsible for the death of my house? A man with Projection powers killed them this morning.”

“We only kill those who remain loyal to Stardust as soldiers,” he said quietly, running his eyes over her bloodied body. “But we haven’t made any moves since last night. If this happened today, it wasn’t us.”

“How can we believe that you’re the good guys? People are dying and no one knows who they can trust,” she replied. “Your power is projection too, right? So you have a form of mind control. Show me memories or something so I believe you.”

“You won’t like what you find.”

“I just want the truth. If you can show it to me, the others will believe me too,” she said confidently, glancing at us and relaxing as Storm gave her a small nod. She was the best hope at seeing the truth.

“Very well,” Ronin murmured, stepping towards her and carefully placing his hands on her head. She didn’t blackout

like we did, his memories flowing into her mind through his touch as her eyes glazed over.

“What if he’s giving her fake memories?” River said quietly as he joined me and Smokey, but Ronin lifted his gaze to ours while continuing to feed Minerva’s mind.

“It’s a risk you take since I’m more powerful than her, but do with my memories as you wish. We won’t force you to believe us, it’s your choice whose side you’re on.”

Minerva’s legs shook as he finished showing her the past, and he slid an arm around her waist without hesitation. He held her up as exhaustion took over her body, and she suddenly lifted her gaze to Storm, her voice weak.

“They’re telling the truth, everything’s a lie.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

FROST

Everyone fussed over Minerva while I watched skeptically. Storm didn't seem to completely believe it, but it was hard to ignore. Minerva's memories had been wiped like ours, and they flooded through her mind as Ronin gave them back to her.

We needed to catch the Board in the act before I'd completely believe these assholes, but I couldn't lie, they were awfully convincing.

Especially the way Ronin was assessing her like she was the most fragile thing on this earth and he'd jump in front of a bullet if it shot through the window right now. He wasn't acting like a bad guy, he showed too much compassion and concern for others.

The memories also gave Ronin a look at who attacked Minerva's house, and after comparing those memories with Salem's, it revealed it was the same guy who'd been in Salem's bedroom.

The part that really confused us was that he apparently worked for Stardust.

We'd never seen him before, but Ronin claimed *William* was here when Coal was, but he went by number one. Was he the first of our kind? If he was one of us, then why was he on a mission to make us turn against each other?

He wasn't part of these guys who were trying to take on Stardust, he was flying solo with his own vendetta in mind.

The thing that bothered me most was that he'd made himself known to Salem, but hadn't killed her like he seemed to be doing to others. It didn't make sense.

Annoyance washed through me as Salem leaned into me, and I had to force myself to relax and not push her away. It was a habit to want to hate her, but my body hummed for her touch once I pushed through it, my arm snaking around her waist to keep her close.

I focused on freezing time, and Salem tensed in my arms when she realized what I was doing. Storm was the only other person who didn't freeze, his powers outweighing mine in strength, but he simply sighed and crossed his arms to wait my plan out. He knew I wouldn't have done it without reason.

“What are you doing?” Salem demanded.

“Snooping,” I said with a shrug as I let her go and moved towards Ronin, not hesitating to slide my hand into his pocket.

“Frost!”

“We're a little morally gray around here, get over it,” I grunted as I pulled out his wallet, opening it to check his identification. He seemed legit, but so had the Board.

They were starting to look like the villains here, so we couldn't be too careful.

“You can't just go through someone's—”

I spun around and scuffed the front of her shirt to haul her close, her breath catching as I glared down at her.

“I won't take any fucking chances when it comes to you or the others. I won't give anyone the benefit of the doubt. Treat everyone like the enemy until they've proven otherwise.”

“It's rude!” she hissed, and she was lucky I didn't bend her over and fuck some sense into her. She was definitely more compliant after a few orgasms.

“I'd prefer to be rude than lose you again. This is what it means to be wanted by me, breeze. I'm possessive, obsessive, and unforgiving when it comes to your safety. Take it or leave it.”

“He’s got a point,” Storm offered, his eyes on Ronin. “Let him do whatever he needs to make sure this isn’t bullshit.”

She nodded, stepping into me and sliding her arms around my middle.

“Okay, snowflake. I hear you, but hurry up so you can unfreeze them. I don’t think Ronin’s lying though.”

“Thank you. It’s not like I’m going to rob him or anything, I just wanted to make sure he is who he says he is.”

“Good to know,” Ronin murmured behind me, and I jerked around to find him watching us with amusement. “The freezing thing is great and all, but I’m way more powerful than you and my powers are based on the mind. Did you honestly think it would work?”

“It *did* work! You were frozen!” I snapped, glancing around at the others to see they hadn’t moved. “Minerva is, and she has mind powers!”

“I faked it, I wanted to see where you were going with it. Minerva hasn’t boosted her powers, which is why you were able to freeze her. Yours are currently stronger than hers.”

Salem frowned, tilting her head to the side.

“So his powers will only work on those weaker than him?”

“Sometimes he’ll get lucky, but I’m almost as powerful as the Board, so not much affects me,” Ronin chuckled, ice flooding my veins that had nothing to do with my powers.

“But I froze Anthony.”

“That’s not possible,” Ronin scoffed as he snatched his wallet back, but interest flickered across his gaze when we didn’t say anything else. “You’re serious?”

“Yes. Storm and Salem were with me. We were looking for the dead unicorns when we stumbled across a fresh one. I froze time to see if the person responsible was close, and we found Anthony frozen in the bushes, his body looking like he was sneaking away from us. Do you think maybe he faked it like you just did? If that’s the case, he knows that we suspect the Board,” I said tightly, clenching my fists by my sides.

How could I have been so stupid?

“How do we know how powerful they are?” Salem asked slowly, her eyes on Ronin. “Have you seen them in action? If they’re stronger than us, why do they keep sending us on jobs that they could’ve done?”

“Now that you mention it,” Ronin said thoughtfully. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen them use their powers.”

I unfroze the room, ignoring the look my brother gave me to hurry this up so we could get rid of Ronin. Regardless of how nice he was, we didn’t need him getting too comfortable here.

“If the Board have no powers, how come so many people have been killed or contained? They have to be in charge of this entire thing, right?” I asked, pulling Salem back a step so that she wasn’t so close to Ronin. I wasn’t going to blindly trust him with her. “We could all just walk out and nothing would happen.”

“They have a lot of powerful minions fighting their battles for them. Remember some of those were you guys up until now,” Ronin said with a shrug, glancing at Minerva. “Do you have somewhere safe to go?”

She seemed surprised by the question but nodded.

“I’ll get assigned a new house to stay in.”

“No.”

“No?”

“You can’t trust anyone. You have no idea who attacked you, but I bet it was orchestrated by the Board. Stardust is no longer safe for you,” Ronin scolded, swinging his gaze around the room at all of us. “Can she stay here until organizing somewhere to go?”

“No,” I scoffed, not caring if I sounded like an asshole. She wasn’t my issue and I didn’t want her snooping through our shit. “We don’t have any room.”

“You’re a dick.”

I didn't argue, giving him a half shrug. It wasn't a lie, I wasn't exactly a giving person.

"We can't let her leave without protection," Salem snapped, spinning around to glare up at me. I wanted to fuck the scowl right off her pretty little mouth. "You learned to be nice to me so be nice to her too."

My fingers curled around her throat and I smirked when she let me manhandle her, her hands pressing against my abs as if to push me away, but she didn't.

"I learned to like you because you feel good on my dick. I don't want her."

She smacked my stomach but it wasn't hard.

"Pretend to be an asshole all you like, but you like me for more than my pussy."

The line between love and hate was so blurred now that the truth continued to come out, but I wasn't ready to admit the hate was vanishing along with the fucked up memories of our fake past.

Ronin eyed me with amusement but I ignored him and tugged Salem closer so that our lips brushed when I spoke.

"She's not fucking staying here."

None of the other guys jumped in to argue with me, so I knew they didn't trust her enough to let her stay either.

"She's welcome to come with me," Ronin offered, all of us whipping our heads around to look at him, and Minerva took a step back as she shook her head, making him roll his eyes. "We're tearing this place down anyway, so you might as well leave now. You'll be safe with us if you're against Stardust."

"But this is my home," she whispered, pity flickering across his face.

"This isn't a home, it's a prison. We'll keep you safe and help you with your power boost. You all should've had one by now, and trust me when I say you'll need it if you're going against the Board."

Salem annoyingly pulled away from me and walked towards Minerva, taking her hand firmly.

“You need to go. It’s not safe here and I agree that the Board are the ones who tried to hurt you today.”

“How do you figure that? It could’ve been anyone,” Storm grunted, but Ronin nodded.

“Me too. Think about it, you’re their strongest house here right now and you’ve been questioning things. If they’ve got others with projection powers possibly on their side, they probably know how much of a threat Minerva is. She’s been pulling memories out of the dark and exposing things that were supposed to stay buried. I’d bet money on today’s attack being about silencing her to keep control of the rest of you.”

“What if Ronin is full of shit and he’s giving you false memories? What if he’s the villain in all of this and he hurts you?” River said sharply, narrowing his eyes on Ronin who chuckled.

“My team could’ve killed you all in your fucking sleep by now if we wanted. Vulcan claims we should give you a chance to pick a side before that happens. You’re all powerful, I can sense it, so it would be a big help to have you on our side.”

“Tell that to my fucking leg,” Fox grumbled. “He snapped the bone in half.”

“You healed, you cry baby. If he wanted you dead, he could’ve killed you before your friends arrived to help you. We have the one thing that can kill any of us, thanks to us stealing those bottles of poison from the facility. If you’re willing to turn on Stardust, we have no intention of coming after any of you. Besides, your friend’s pretty. I won’t hurt her,” he grinned, Minerva’s face turning red as he assessed her.

“Trust me, assholes fuck hella good,” Salem muttered under her breath, and possession rolled through me as Ronin gave her a teasing wink.

“You can come with me too if you like. I’ll be a good host.”

Ice left my hands but it went right through him, reminding me that he technically wasn't here and was just a projection. If he thought I'd let him put his hands on Salem, he'd have another thing coming.

"Frost!" Salem scolded as she glared at me, a squeak leaving her as I stalked over and fisted her hair, yanking her against me and kissing her. She fought me for all of two seconds before melting against me, and I didn't pull back until Storm spoke.

"If you ever hint about touching our girl again, I'll fucking kill you." Salem was in a daze from the unexpected kiss, but I watched my brother as he moved across the room, stopping right in front of Ronin. "And we won't do it quickly either. I'll tear you apart, drop you in acid, and repeat it for eternity until you're begging for mercy."

Smokey stepped closer with a scowl, and even River and Fox looked ready to tear the man apart. What had Salem done to us? We were controlled by our emotions when it came to her, and I knew without a doubt that we'd go to war right this second over her if Ronin didn't back off.

We'd turned into those pathetic assholes I'd always talked shit about.

"Minerva's single though, right?" Ronin answered, unbothered by our bullshit.

"You're a pig," Minerva grumbled, but her shoulders dropped in defeat. "I have to go with you, don't I?"

His entire attitude changed, the cockiness leaving his face as it softened.

"Sorry, I promise you're safe with us. We've helped a lot of people leave, and we'd be happy to find you somewhere to stay with other women. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable."

Annoyance washed through me when she glanced back at Smokey, her eyes pleading with him to let her stay with him. He was too obsessed with Salem to humor it, but he'd never given Minerva a reason to think he was interested in her.

She needed to let it the fuck go.

I didn't have to say anything though because Smokey gave her a pointed look, not caring about sounding like an asshole.

"You think I'm going to save you? Feel free to ask the Board to find you a new house if you're that insistent on staying, but unless you want hurricane to tear your eyes from your skull, I'd stop looking at me like that, if I were you."

Salem's arms had turned into swirling air, but she tried hard to pretend she wasn't bothered. She was failing, but at least she hadn't started throwing fucking furniture.

"What's everyone looking at?" Salem bit out, and Smokey raised an eyebrow.

"No need to be jealous."

"I'm not!"

"You're turning into a ball of air," he deadpanned, making her look down at herself to notice her powers taking over her body. "It's hot."

"Shut up," she hissed, a smirk tugging at his lips as she glared at Minerva. "It's probably safer for you to go with Ronin."

Ronin laughed, finding amusement in this entire thing.

"I just *know* you guys have the hottest sex. You're all so —" He stopped talking when we all glared at him. "Shutting up now. So, are you coming with me, Minerva?"

"Okay," she murmured, stepping closer to him. "How do we get there unnoticed?"

"Easy," he grinned, vanishing for a moment before returning with another guy through a rift in the air. "This is Porter."

"What's his power? The anticipation is killing," I deadpanned, the new guy giving me a grin.

"I bet you're fun at parties."

I scowled and Ronin huffed.

“Like the rest of your names aren’t connected to our powers.”

“Porter means gatekeeper, right?” Minerva asked, tilting her head. “I’m guessing what you just did was portal magic.”

“Smart and pretty,” Porter murmured, reaching a hand out to take hers and kiss her knuckles. “Lovely to meet you.”

I didn’t even give a shit if they took her and killed her at this point, as long as they all got the fuck out of my house.

“We’d better go,” Ronin said dryly as he eyed me knowingly. “I think we’ve overstayed our welcome.”

“Thank fuck,” I grunted and started walking towards the stairs, trusting the others to make sure they left, speaking over my shoulder. “I hope the door hits you on the way out.”

Salem

I didn’t chase after Frost, I let him grumble in peace as we said goodbye to Minerva and our new alliances. Porter effortlessly created a portal gate, the air appearing almost like rippling water.

“Take my hand,” he murmured to Minerva who appeared nervous, her eyes flicking around us before she did as he asked. “You’ll feel a little dizzy when we step through but that’s it.”

She nodded, taking a breath before following him through and vanishing right before our eyes, and Ronin gave us a salute.

“We’ll meet again.”

“Riveting,” Storm muttered, making Ronin chuckle as he flickered in and out before vanishing, the portal closing and leaving us alone. I turned to speak to Storm but Smokey’s mouth was suddenly on mine, his hands gripping my waist to keep me close. It took me a moment for my brain to catch up, then I shoved him back with a scowl.

“Don’t—”

Flames flickered in his eyes as he backed me against the kitchen counter, one arm sliding around my waist while the other gripped the nape of my neck.

“No one has a chance in hell with me now that I’ve tasted you. I know you’re still mad at me, I can live with that, but I don’t want you doubting my feelings. You never have to be jealous, because you’re the only woman in the world that I fucking see.”

His lips met mine again and I let him, my arms banding around his neck to tug him down more. He ground against me, making me gasp as he lifted one of my legs to get closer to my pussy, and my body jerked as tingles hit me from the friction.

I was going to come if he kept grinding on me like this.

He stepped back but I fisted his shirt and yanked him back, glowering at him.

“Where are you going?”

“I thought you didn’t want to kiss me?” he teased, leaning down to nibble my lip.

“Fuck the kiss, finish what you started,” I snapped, shamelessly rubbing against him. “Make me come.”

His eyes darkened and his fingers dug into my waist firmly.

“You’re begging me to get you off?”

“Please?” I whined. “I need—”

“I know,” he murmured. “I’ll show River how you like it.”

My butt landed on the counter before I could respond, Smokey’s fingers curling around my throat to pin me back against the wall awkwardly. Was it comfortable? No. Did I care? Absolutely not.

Fiery eyes held mine as he dropped his mouth to my pussy, his fingers sliding into me and making me gasp.

“Fuck, Smokey.” I squirmed but he held me still by the throat as he fucked me with his mouth and fingers, not

bothering to take his time. I came so fucking hard that I squirted on the counter, his face, and the floor.

“Holy shit,” River murmured as I met his gaze and crooked my finger at him. He didn’t hesitate to join us, letting me rake my fingers through his hair to tug him down for a kiss. I was aware of Storm and Fox’s eyes on us as they sat at the table close by, having no problem watching the show we were putting on. It only turned me on more.

Smokey’s fingers slowly moved in and out of my soaked pussy, but he stood up to wipe his mouth with the back of his free hand.

“You want a taste?” I had no idea who he was talking to, but River pulled away from me, eagerly turning to Smokey. “Open.”

He did as he was told, and Smokey eased his fingers out of me before lifting them to River’s mouth, and River wrapped his lips around them and sucked, a whimper leaving me as I watched them.

I wanted more.

“Give me your hand,” I murmured, reaching for River who linked his fingers with mine instantly, but when I guided him towards my opening, Smokey swatted my hand away.

“I’m teaching him. You just have to lie there and take it like a good girl.”

“Yes, Daddy,” I chuckled, his eyes flaring with heat. He took over, grabbing River’s hips to steer him between my legs.

“He’s not allowed to fuck her until I’ve punished him,” Fox said from the table, making Smokey scowl.

“You’re not touching him, asshole.”

“No? Your boyfriend likes it,” he answered. “Right, River? You’ve been looking forward to it.”

I could tell they were going to start fighting, but before I could tell them to shut up, Storm spoke.

“If you want to argue, get the fuck out and I’ll look after Salem.”

River’s eyes landed on mine and I gave him a grin.

“Are you going to touch me, puddles? Or do I sit on your face and take what I want?”

His eyes widened and Smokey chuckled, slapping my ass firmly with his palm and making me squeak.

“Be gentle with him. Ease him into it, you animal.” He moved behind River, an arm around his waist as his free hand threaded through his hair. “Go on, raindrop. Put your mouth on her and give her what she wants.”

“I don’t think—” He was so worried about making a fool of himself, but Smokey wouldn’t let him fumble awkwardly.

“Don’t think, just feel. You want to touch her? Then touch her. She’s going to come just from looking at you in a minute, so I bet she gushes all over your fucking face if you bury your tongue in her cunt,” Smokey murmured, sliding his hand lower until he was rubbing his palm over River’s tented pants. “Be good for her and I’ll make you come too.”

I flicked my eyes to Storm and Fox, worried they were going to make River uncomfortable, but both were focused on us still. Fox even surprised me with words of encouragement.

“She’s super responsive. Remember what I told you? Slide your fingers inside her and feel for the G-spot. You’ve gotten her off before on your own so you know how to do it.”

I jerked as River did as he was instructed, and I was surprised my nails didn’t snap as I gripped the counter. I was going to come so easily, River had nothing to worry about.

Smokey grinned at me over River’s shoulder, kissing his neck and pressing himself against River’s ass.

“You going to come all over River’s face, hurricane?”

I bit out a soft curse as River’s fingers curled inside me, and I instantly threaded my fingers through his dark hair as he leaned down and sucked my clit into his mouth. He groaned,

eating me enthusiastically as he pumped his fingers in and out, my legs shaking as I got closer to my climax.

“Get her off the counter,” Storm grunted. “You’re going to wreck her neck.” I looked over just in time to see him shove the contents off the dining table, a glass shattering on the floor that they all ignored. “She can lie back on here properly.”

“You can play with her when we’re done,” Smokey grumbled, but River stopped and tugged me closer to the edge, banding his arms around me so I could wrap my legs around him. They were weak, but I managed, letting him carry me over to the table where he laid me back and went right back to eating my pussy. His desperation to make me come was driving me wild, his fingers working faster as he swirled his tongue around my clit.

“River, fuck. Right there,” I moaned, lifting my hips to chase the needed friction. Smokey had no problem guiding him, literally gripping River’s hair in his fist and most likely suffocating him with my pussy as he held him in place.

“Make her scream. Don’t stop until I tell you.”

My back arched off the table as my orgasm crashed through me, my entire body quaking with pleasure as River kept licking and sucking, fucking me even faster with his fingers until I squirted, Smokey letting out a growl.

“Keep going, fuck that’s hot.” I was over stimulated to the point it was almost painful, but River didn’t let up until I squirted again and Smokey finally pulled him back. “Look at what you did, she made a mess for you.”

River’s pupils were blown and he was so hard that I was surprised he didn’t rip his pants off and fuck me. He probably would’ve if Smokey didn’t slide a hand into his pants, fisting him as he nipped River’s neck.

“Fuck,” River cursed almost in a panic, telling me he was going to bust in two seconds flat. He liked finishing on my chest last time, so I managed to make my arms work and pulled my shirt up.

“Come on me.”

“Is this an open invite?” Fox asked seriously. “Or can I just bend River over and go to town on him instead? I’ll go get my vibrating cock ring and a whip to make it a party.” That seemed to set River off, ropes of cum landing on my stomach and chest as Smokey continued to stroke him, a smirk pulling at Fox’s mouth. “Knew water boy was a closet freak.”

Storm told him to shut up, raking his eyes over me before speaking.

“You’re in my bed tonight.”

“That’s not fair!” Fox barked. “I want her in my room!”

“She’s mine tonight, end of discussion,” Storm grunted. “You’re the romantic one, so go run her a bath or something.”

They bickered until Frost stormed in and shoved River and Smokey out of the way, hooking his arms around me to cradle me against his chest.

“I’ll fucking do it. Jesus Christ.”

River went to argue but we’d already left the room, Frost’s jaw clenching as he carried me up the stairs.

“You don’t have to—” He didn’t let me finish.

“Shut up and let me.”

“Okay.” I wasn’t going to argue if he really wanted to, even though Smokey should’ve been the one to clean me up since he instigated this entire thing.

Once locked in Frost’s room, he yanked my shirt off and pushed me into the shower so firmly that I almost slipped.

“Hey! What—” My voice died as I turned to find him stripping off to join me, his muscles flexing with the movement. “Never mind.”

The ghost of a smile teased his mouth as he stepped in, rinsing me off before motioning to his very hard dick.

“That’s your problem, just so you’re aware.”

“Smokey started it.”

“I’m not hard because of that asshole, I’m hard from you screaming while I imagined it was me between your legs.” His hand slid between us and I hissed as he toyed with my tender clit. “You’re lucky I don’t make a meal out of you too.”

“Is this your weird way of asking for a blow-job?”

“No.” He spun me around, jerking my hips back to bend me over slightly as he pressed the head of his dick against my opening and slid inside with ease. “You’re going to hold onto that wall until I’m done.”

“But—”

“I can shove it in your butt if you want but it’s going to be rough,” he bit out, starting to fuck me without warning.

After somehow pulling an orgasm out of me and filling my pussy to the brim with his own release, he surprised me by drying me, tucking me into his bed, and wrapping his naked body around mine.

I was asleep before his head had even hit the pillow.

Storm

“Why are you so grumpy?” Smokey asked as I threw lightning at him across the battle room at the gym. He easily dodged it, making me scowl as the flames he threw back burned my arms. “You’re not focused either.”

We’d been here for the past three hours training, and so far, Smokey was definitely getting more hits in than me, which was unheard of. The fucking fire hazard was usually the unfocused one, not me.

“I’m fine,” I bit out, his eyebrow lifting.

“I’m not cocky enough to think I’d beat you unless something was off with you. We’ve moved past this shit, talk to me.”

My hands dropped to my sides, his stance relaxing once he knew I wasn’t going to sneak-attack him.

“I don’t know how to fix everything, and all I can think about is Salem’s cunt on my cock. I’m distracted and I don’t like it.”

“Go take your frustrations out on her pussy then. It’s not like she’s likely to tell you no,” he chuckled, crossing his arms. “Don’t think you’d care if she said no anyway.”

“I can sense her,” I said quietly, holding his gaze. “Do you? I can sense where she is, what she’s doing, and how she’s feeling. It happened when I got my boost. I can turn it on and off whenever I want, so I try to keep it off to avoid invading her privacy, but—”

“I can’t,” he frowned. “I mean, I sense her powers sometimes but not her personal feelings. Can Frost? He got a boost with the time freeze.”

“I’m not sure but he’s always been connected to her differently than the rest of us,” I shrugged.

“How do I get my powers to boost? You guys went through trauma to get yours, but I can’t just create personal trauma to unlock mine,” he huffed with annoyance, flicking his eyes across the room to where Fox and River were sparring with their fists, and jealousy flared in Smokey’s eyes as Fox tripped River and ended up on top of him.

“You’ve got it so bad,” I grinned, playfully throwing a small spark of lightning at him to make him jump. “I don’t find it weird that you’re into a guy, you’ll fuck anything because you’re a horny dog, but River? You gave Salem so much shit about wanting him, and now you’re the one panting after him.”

“Don’t ask me to explain it because I don’t have an answer for you,” he snorted, continuing to glare at Fox. “Look at that smooth motherfucker.”

“They’re sparring.”

“They’re *flirting*.”

“You’ve spent too much time with water boy, you’re getting sensitive,” I laughed, clapping him on the shoulder.

“Are you annoyed that someone’s flirting with your man, or are you annoyed that you want to join in and make it an—”

“Bite your tongue or I’ll set you on fire.”

“It was an honest question.”

He didn’t answer, stalking across the room and shoving Fox away before taking River’s hand and yanking him in my direction. The poor guy looked so confused, glancing back at Fox with a frown. Fox knew exactly what he was doing though, smirking at me like the asshole he was. It was all fun and games until Smokey burned the damn town down over it.

I thought they just needed to all jump in bed together to get this shit out of their system.

“What did I do?” River blurted out, worry flashing in his eyes. “Why are you mad?”

“His hands are all over you,” Smokey bit out, and River chuckled, the concern vanishing as amusement took over.

“Well, yeah. We’re sparring, dude.”

I ignored them as they bickered like an old married couple, my phone ringing and drawing my attention. Frost’s name popped up on my screen, and I eyed the others as I lifted it to my ear.

“Smokey’s finally lost it. Pretty sure he’s about to fight Fox over water boy.”

“Is Salem with you?” Frost asked, confusion hitting me.

“No, she was with you. We left not long after you took her upstairs. You can’t find her?”

“I woke up and she was just gone.”

“Check the cameras.”

“I did, there’s nothing there. The power went out so it’s been off for fuck knows how long.”

I could imagine the scowl on his face as he spoke, and I instantly reached out in my mind for Salem, jerking as a strong sense of pain hit me before it vanished.

“Something’s wrong. She’s hurting but I can’t feel her now.”

“What does that even mean?” he snapped. “You know what, I’m coming to you.”

He hung up and I turned to the others, my voice sharp.

“Stop fucking around, Salem’s missing.” I was trying to keep the panic out of my voice but it wavered slightly. She wouldn’t just wander off alone, so someone must have taken her.

“What? She’s with Frost,” Smokey said slowly, his face falling when I shook my head.

“Frost woke up and she was gone. He’s coming here and we’ll start looking for her. We’ll start with Stardust, then make our way out of town after that.”

“Can’t you sense her? You just said—”

“I felt pain then nothing, it’s like our connection is gone. Something or someone is hurting her,” I answered, grabbing my shirt from the floor and yanking it over my head. “If we all split up, it won’t take us long to comb through Stardust for her. If she’s here, we’ll find her. You guys go, I’ll wait for Frost to arrive. We’ll take the southern end while you guys go to the west.”

They all darted off and I painfully waited for my brother, knowing we’d tear this place apart to find her.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

SALEM

My body ached as I woke up, the cold concrete below me making me shiver. I sat up, feeling disorientated as I tried to get my bearings. It took me a moment to realize I wasn't in the house, my heartbeat increasing as panic set in.

I was in the facility, I knew it without being told. The icy chill, stained bed sheets, and the stale smell that lingered hit me hard as memories washed over me. The bed shook slightly as I lost focus of my powers, thanks to my fear.

"Frost?" I choked out, both wishing he was here but also praying that he was safely back at the house. My breaths came in short and sharp as I got to shaky feet, moving towards the door and hesitating before grabbing the handle. I was surprised when it opened, and I peeked out into a long hallway, hearing crying and screaming echo throughout the building.

My feet were silent on the concrete floor as I crept past doors, pausing when light flickered behind the small glass panel of one. Dread filled me as I looked through it, finding a little girl sobbing as lightning danced up and down her arms. Tears continued to fall as she forced the lightning across the room, drawing my attention to a little boy who was curled up on the ground, his body jerking as the electric blast hit him.

They couldn't have been older than ten.

Surprise filled me though when he stumbled to his feet a second later, blasting her with lightning in return and sending her flying back against the wall.

This was the next generation of weapons.

I reached for the handle but a hand went over my mouth, hauling me back.

“If it isn’t the long-lost weapon of destruction,” a gruff voice chuckled in my ear, my body tense as an arm snaked around my middle to pull me flush with their chest. “I was wondering how long it would take you to return.” I jerked forward when his lips met my neck, and I spun around to find a familiar man behind me, amusement in his gaze. “What’s wrong? I know it’s been a while, but are you really going to push me away, babe?”

“Who the fuck are you? And why the hell did you drown me?” I spat, my skin crawling from his touch.

“You were never in any danger, it’s not like you’d stay dead,” he hummed, his eyes raking over me with warmth. “I was hoping it would snap you out of the weird memory issue you’re having. It must have worked if you’ve come back to us.”

He reached for me and I slapped his hand away, his brow creasing with confusion.

“I don’t know who you are or why I’m here. Someone kidnapped me and brought me here.”

Hurt flashed across his face, his next words stabbing me right in the chest.

“Salem, you need to remember. How much longer do you think we can stand by and watch you with them when you’re ours. Do you know how hard it’s been to not break your fucking cover by storming into that house and claiming you in front of them?” He moved faster than I’d anticipated, his body pressing against mine as my back hit the wall. “You’re mine. Letting you go on this mission was the worst mistake we’ve ever made. I told William this would fuck everything up, he shouldn’t have let you go.”

“Get off me!” I snapped, but he only came closer, his lips teasing my neck as nausea swam through me.

“Jesus, baby. Are you even still in there? Your memories weren’t supposed to be wiped like this. Zeo’s going to lose his

fucking shit. You really don't remember us? Ash, Zeo, and Thor? We're your family, babe. Your team. You were supposed to go to Stardust to kill those assholes, not get cozy with them."

"What? No, *they're* my team. If I already had one, then why the fuck—"

He sighed, stepping back and thankfully giving me space as he eyed me with defeat.

"No, you were planted there to take them out, then you were supposed to come back here to us. Meredith said you seemed confused, but she assumed it was all an act."

"Meredith?" I choked out, our suspicions correct. "She's part of this?"

"Walk with me," he murmured, starting to walk along the hallway until we reached a solid door, and panic flared inside me when he ushered me into the room and I came face-to-face with the guy who'd attacked me with air powers.

"Whoa, babe," the guy frowned, taking a step back to try and encourage me to come closer when it was obvious I was going to bail. "Ash? The fuck is wrong with her?"

I jumped as the door closed behind us, and the guy from the hallway moved into the room with a sigh.

"She doesn't remember. You're just the guy who attacked her."

"She just needs time away from those fucking assholes. Her memories will come back the longer she's here," another man grunted as he appeared out of the dark corner, dropping onto the couch. "Welcome home, baby. For the record? I told you this was a stupid idea."

A hand touched me and I lost it, spinning around to blast them with air, the guy on the couch smirking as he watched his friend with the air powers go flying backward.

"Take me home!" I shouted, my arms turning to air beside me. "I'm not who you think I am! You've got the wrong

person! I've seen my memories, and none of you are in any of them!"

"Let's start over," the guy on the floor wheezed as he got to his feet. "I'm Thor, the asshole on the couch is Zeo, and the one over there is Ash. You were sent to Stardust under the disguise of being a newbie so you could get intel on the team and take them out. Both you and Storm played your parts well, but—"

I was going to throw up.

"Storm isn't part of this. He's just as clueless as me," I answered weakly, Ash joining Zeo on the couch.

"Storm's undercover like you. Originally, he was placed there to monitor the failed experiments, he lost a bet with Zeo," Ash said dryly, motioning to the other couch. "Sit. You can't leave this place without William's say so anyway. Might as well get comfortable."

Thor gave me a small smile as he got to his feet, his voice calm.

"Coffee?"

"Do I want a *coffee*?" I snorted, backing up towards the door. "You're delusional. I'm leaving."

I turned to try the handle, but it didn't budge.

"That won't open until morning," Zeo offered unhelpfully, pointing at the other couch. "Seriously, sit down. You're safe here, we won't hurt you."

"Why not?"

"Because we love you, idiot. Now do as you're told," he muttered, my heart hurting. There was no way I was with these guys. They were the villains, the people we'd been trying to find and destroy. I wasn't really one of them, I couldn't be.

Against better judgment, I made my way over and sat down, scowling when Thor dropped down beside me.

"Okay then, I'll play along. I want answers. What are your powers and how long have we been together for?" I asked,

crossing my arms tightly. All three of them lifted a hand, each of them forming their powers with ease. Blue flames flickered across Ash's palm, Thor's hand turned to air like mine did, and Zeo's entire hand and forearm turned to stone. My eyes widened though when Ash's flames fizzled out and a ball of water replaced it, and I instantly glanced at Zeo beside him to find lightning skating up his arms. "You guys have two powers too?"

"Two?" Zeo scoffed, the lightning making way for flames. "We contain all powers. You do too, not that you seem to remember."

This was too much. What was real and what was a lie? Were these guys victims like the rest of us, following orders blindly? Or were they running the show?

Tears burned my eyes as my emotions hit me hard, and all I wanted was to go home to my guys.

"Shit, you broke her," Thor grumbled as he shuffled closer, placing a hand on my thigh. "Salem—"

"Please. Don't touch me," I whispered, his sad eyes assessing me before he pulled his hand away.

"I think that's enough for today," Ash said firmly, getting to his feet. "Come. I'll show you your room. Have some time alone to process."

I'd do anything to get away from them, so I got to my feet and followed him down a hallway and into a room, my emotions hitting me harder when I realized they'd been telling the truth. The room smelled like home, familiar perfume bottles sitting on a shelf in the corner, and there was even a photo frame on the bedside table of me and them. I walked towards it and picked it up, Ash leaning on the doorframe with his shoulder as he watched me.

I looked happy in the photo, sitting on Zeo's lap on the couch with my legs draped over Storm. Ash and Thor sat on the other side of the guys, smiling for the photo, but all I could stare at was Storm.

There was no scar on his face, a sly grin on his lips as if he was about to do something he shouldn't, and I pressed my fingers to the glass as if I could reach out to him for comfort.

"Why was I sent there to kill them?" I asked quietly, finally lifting my gaze to Ash again.

"They have the potential to unlock great power. Do you really think Frost could be contained if he unlocked it? Or Smokey? River has too much of a conscience to be part of what we do, and Fox feels too much for others because despite having the power to get inside people's heads, his morals stop him. They don't fit, but we can't afford to risk them gaining more power. They could tear our organization apart, especially when you add Frost's anger and Smokey's recklessness."

"How come Storm and I got picked to stay here then?"

The look on his face told me I wasn't going to like what he said.

"Because both of you became numb to the carnage. Your desperation to never feel pain again meant you'd do anything to stay on top. You stopped caring who got hurt, as long as it wasn't you. You weren't the same after you thought you'd killed Frost." He moved closer, stopping right in front of me. "Our world only has one saying. Kill or be killed. You and Storm learned to fit, and it kept you alive. Those other guys you think you're in love with? They weren't strong enough, so they were sent to Stardust where Storm could keep an eye on them until we couldn't use them anymore. They're asking too many questions now, so they need to be dealt with. Minerva too. She was the perfect weapon until she let her morals take hold."

"I want to go home," I mumbled, clutching the picture as if I could manifest Storm. "They're only a threat because you've cornered them. Leave them alone and—"

"We can't, baby," he said softly as he cut me off. "Once you start to remember, you'll understand."

He left me alone after that, letting me break down in private, but one thing was certain.

I'd never go back to my past, because I had the chance at a future that I deserved, and nothing would ever push me far enough to hurt the guys I'd fallen in love with.

Fox

“Why can't we find her?” River choked out as he raked a hand through his hair as we sat around the table in the kitchen. We'd looked for Salem all night, but it was as if she didn't exist anymore.

“I get little snippets of her emotions, but it's random and isn't enough to track her,” Storm scowled, smacking his fists onto the table. “We need to go to the Board and demand answers.”

“Whoa, slow down there,” Smokey exclaimed, resting his elbows on the table. “We need to form a plan.”

“I have a plan. I'm going to burn the place down and torture the Board until they hand her back!” Storm snapped, Frost grunting his agreement.

“Smokey's right, we need a proper plan. We need to be smart about this,” I stated as River glanced at me with worry.

“They could kill her. If Vulcan and his guys are right, the Board has the one thing that can kill us. What if they took her to—”

“I'm not entertaining the idea of them killing her. Think, guys. Why would they want Salem? There's enough of them to come into this house and inject us at once, so there has to be a reason they only took her,” I said as I thought out loud, motioning to Storm. “I think we need to get hold of Vulcan. Let's see who's side they're really on.”

Frost snorted, leaning back in his seat to get comfortable.

“He won't give a fuck about her. His only concern is tearing down Stardust, not saving people from it.”

“Bold of you to assume,” Vulcan said dryly as he walked into the kitchen from the living room, his buddies not far

behind. My eyes went straight to the stranger with the bright red hair, a teasing smirk on his face as he assessed us.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Storm bit out, getting to his feet.

“We come in peace. Ronin was eavesdropping and figured you’d like a hand,” Vulcan explained, sliding his eyes to me. “And pretty boy’s right. If you attack the Board, you won’t find her any faster. They took her for a reason or they’d have injected her in her sleep and left her here for you to find. They’re fun like that.”

The thought of Salem being alone and scared tore me apart. I’d take any help we could get, even if the others wanted to be stubborn.

Surprisingly, Frost blew out a breath and spoke calmly.

“We’d love some help. Things have been weird since Salem got here, not just because we discovered the truth of our pasts, but she’s been attacked twice now and approached by that William guy. Why didn’t he kill her? And are those attacks from the Board, or someone else?”

“Maybe they took her because she’s hot?” the new guy said with a grin, not even flinching when Smokey’s arms turned to flames and he got in his face.

“Who the fuck are you? Don’t—” He became silent as the newcomer chuckled, blue flames sparking to life across the man’s hand.

“Sit down before you hurt yourself, man. Your little Birthday candle hands can’t do shit against my metal melting torches.” He closed his hand to extinguish the flames, offering it to Smokey to shake. “Nice to meet you, brother of fire. I’m Coal.”

Smokey hesitated before accepting it, relaxing when Coal didn’t make a move to do anything else.

“Smokey. How the fuck is yours blue? Was that your power boost?”

“It would be yours too if you focused hard enough,” Coal replied brightly, flicking Smokey on the forehead. This wasn’t going to end well, there were too many assholes in one room, but Storm barked at Smokey to sit down before continuing the conversation.

“I can’t sense her properly. Sometimes I get some of her emotions, but it’s basically blank like she doesn’t exist.”

Vulcan and Ronin exchanged a look before glancing at Porter, making him sigh.

“Do I have to? You know I hate it there.”

I shoved my chair back, walking towards him with hope.

“Where? You think you know where she is?”

Ronin cringed, my heart hammering in my chest as he replied.

“My guess is the facility.”

“You know how to get there? Take us. We’ll pay you,” I blurted out, the others nodding in agreement, but Vulcan shook his head.

“It’s not that simple. You can’t just wander along the street and stumble across it, you can only access it with portals. None of you guys have portal magic, so it’s likely to be the first place they’d take her.”

“But you have fucking portal magic, so let’s go,” River argued, losing his temper. “Do you understand how fucked up that place will make her? She needs us!”

Porter and Ronin seemed to have a silent conversation between themselves before Ronin spoke.

“We can’t take you, it draws too much attention and can get us trapped. Porter and I can get her for you.”

“She won’t go to you,” Smokey scoffed, but Ronin grinned.

“Your girl loves me, what are you talking about? While we’re busy, you guys can discuss your power boosts. Coal can

help Smokey at least. Surely his reckless, energetic-ass can reach for more power.”

“It’s that simple?” Smokey asked in disbelief, holding his hand up to his face with a frown. “I just have to focus more? I’ve pushed myself a lot but nothing’s ever happened.”

“A little guidance doesn’t hurt,” Porter offered, motioning to Storm. “If you’d feel better, I can probably try to bring one of you, but that’s it. You can’t bring attention to yourself though, so don’t use your powers.”

I wanted to go, but we all knew Storm was the one who should. He was the strongest in case there was an emergency, and he was also the only one of us who’d never been affected by the mind blocking. Maybe that meant he was immune to it.

“How big’s that place? Will it be easy to find her undetected?” Frost asked, his eyes flicking to Storm with a hint of worry. I couldn’t blame him for being concerned about Storm, we’d all grown a lot closer since Salem had appeared in our lives.

“Porter can usually pinpoint an area close to someone he’s met, but it’s not exact. We’ll get as close to her as possible,” Vulcan answered, pointing at Coal with a stern look. “You stay here, play nicely.”

Coal smirked, his tone teasing. “Yes, boss.”

“I fucking mean it,” Vulcan snapped, motioning to Smokey. “See if you can get him to boost, but don’t be a dick about it.”

“I said I’d behave,” Coal chuckled, giving Smokey a wink. “You believe me, right?”

“Not in the slightest,” Smokey deadpanned, turning his back on him to look at Storm. “Bring our girl home.”

Storm nodded, moving to stand beside Vulcan.

“Let’s do this.”

Porter opened a portal and ushered Vulcan and Storm towards it, the three of them vanishing into thin air, and Ronin gave us a mock-salute.

“I’ll project myself so if I need to update you on anything, I can easily.”

He dropped onto a chair and got comfortable, but he didn’t do anything.

“Aren’t you going?” River asked slowly, making him shrug.

“I can project without it affecting my being. I can talk to you while being there. Fun, right?”

“Riveting,” Frost grumbled, eyeing Coal with annoyance as the guy dropped an arm around Smokey’s shoulders.

“Maybe we should take this outside. It can get a little... messy.”

River stood to follow them, leaving me inside with Frost and Ronin. I didn’t like us splitting up, but if Coal could get Smokey to boost his powers, it would benefit us.

“So, who’s going to get me a beer?” Ronin asked, and I let out a sigh.

“Coming right up.”

Smokey.

“How can I do this without trauma? The others only got boosts due to being overwhelmed with stress,” I huffed as I tried to force my flames to burn brighter, but there was no change in the strength of them.

“It’s not trauma that reacts with your powers, it’s emotion. You know how when you’re mad or upset that you want to hit things? Break stuff?” Coal asked, continuing when I nodded. “It’s the depth of those emotions that make you pull power from deeper within, not the situation. You love your girl, right?”

“What kind of question is that?” I bit out, but he put a hand up to silence me.

“Focus on your feelings. Put all your emotion into it and dig even deeper. Once you draw those powers out, they’ll be

easy to access, you just have to unlock them first.”

“How did you access yours?” River questioned, and Coal raised an eyebrow.

“I got mad and it exploded out of me. Which is why I’m surprised that Smokey hasn’t had a boost yet. He’s a spicy little thing.”

I rolled my eyes, trying to feel my inner power to draw it out, but I paused when River spoke firmly as he walked towards me.

“Focus on her being gone.”

“What the fuck?” I scowled, but he took my hand and gave it a squeeze.

“Think about it. You care about her, so if you focus on your feelings about her being in danger, it might help heighten your emotions about her.”

He was right, and Coal gave me a nod in agreement.

“Do it. Just maybe face away from the house though in case it gets too strong. It can be hard to control at first, but I’ll help you rein it back in once you release it.”

The thought of Salem being locked up in that hellhole was hard to think about, but I focused on my emotions while digging into my powers, holding the flames in my hands as they got a little stronger.

“Good, keep going,” Coal encouraged, my hands shaking slightly as I tried to force out more. “More, Smokey. You could barely light a fucking Birthday cake with that. If you want to keep your girl safe, you need to do better than that. You *are* the fire, so be the fucking fire.”

I lost control of my emotions for a moment at the thought of Salem being hurt, the flames flickering with a shade of blue through them. I’d do anything to keep my family safe, even if that meant burning down the entire town.

I loved Salem and River. The only way to keep them safe was by unlocking my powers.

“You’re almost there!” River exclaimed, but the strength died and I let out a growl of frustration.

“This is impossible!”

“Trauma it is then,” Coal said with a sigh before grabbing River by the throat and hauling him off the ground, a cruel glint in his eyes. “You’re too weak to save those you care about, man. I could torture your little friend here for hours while overpowering you.”

River’s hands clawed at Coal uselessly, anger filling me.

“Let him go!”

“Who’s going to stop me, hmm? You don’t stand a chance against me. You’re nothing, Smokey.”

My flames burned up my arms as River’s face turned a deep shade of red, his movements becoming sloppy as the oxygen left his body. He tried blasting Coal with his powers, but it had zero effect. We couldn’t die, but River was freaking out.

I didn’t like that.

I charged at them, hitting Coal with my powers and making him laugh as he carelessly dropped River on the ground, taking my hits with ease.

“Stop it, that tickles! Didn’t you like me touching your little boyfriend? How about if we get your girl back in one piece you let me take her for a ride? I bet she’s a screamer.”

Red clouded my vision as he shoved me back like I was nothing more than a pest, and heat pulsed through my body and turned my flames lighter. I blasted him, his laughing pissing me off more with each hit until Coal suddenly went flying backwards, triumph on his face as I stalked towards him, blasting him again and again without stopping.

“See? Wasn’t that hard,” he wheezed as I finally stopped, River choking on air as he stumbled towards me and rested a hand on my shoulder.

“Look at your hands.”

I glanced down, the bright blue and white flames engulfing my hands and arms as if they'd always belonged there. My eyes widened as the flames grew bigger, and Coal winced as he got to his feet and brushed off his pants.

“Face away from the house, dude. Aim for the pool or you'll burn everything down.”

“Why's it getting stronger?” I asked with panic when I tried to stop but failed.

“Aim away from the fucking house!” he snapped, grabbing River to haul him aside just as my body ignited, Coal managing to keep River behind him to take the brunt of the heat as I literally exploded with a scream. Pain filled me as flames shot across the yard, my entire body becoming one big flame as I stumbled towards the pool. My flames had never hurt me like this before, it was agony.

“Smokey!” River cried out, but Coal kept him back while trying to speak to me.

“You are the fire, dude! Harness it and pull it back in!”

That was easier said than done.

Balls of fire shot across the yard, burning the grass and taking control of my body. For the first time in my entire life, I was terrified of my power.

“Calm your emotions,” Coal said from close by, reaching out into the flames to rest a hand on my shoulder. “River's fine, and Salem will be too. Let the anger go. You're scaring your boyfriend.”

I glanced back to find River wide-eyed, knowing he wanted to help me but he didn't stand a chance against my power right now. He was as helpless as I was.

The flames flickered lower, the pain leaving my muscles aching and my clothes in tatters, and I dropped to my hands and knees with exhaustion as the last of the fire burned out. My vision dimmed but River was suddenly there to stop me from face planting, his voice strained.

“Are you okay?”

“Everything hurts,” I grunted, and Coal squatted beside me to pat me on the back.

“Your body isn’t used to the heat. Next time won’t hurt and you’ll have full control.”

My arms shook but River sat back and eased me down to the ground to put my head on his lap, running his fingers through my hair.

“Don’t move. Just rest.”

“What the fuck just happened?” Fox said from close by as he joined us. “I heard you screaming.”

“He’ll be fine,” Coal grinned, climbing to his feet.

“Didn’t sound fine.”

“Good news, he boosted his powers. Bad news, it hurt,” he shrugged, and I wanted nothing more than to punch him in the face.

“Why didn’t the others hurt like this when they boosted?” I demanded, enjoying River’s comforting touches. Coal laughed like I was an idiot.

“Because they don’t turn into a fucking fireball, man. Fire’s hot, in case you hadn’t noticed.”

“I noticed,” I deadpanned, peering up into River’s worried eyes and forcing a smile. “I think you should carry me inside and blow me to make me feel better.”

Amusement flickered across his eyes as he relaxed a little, playfully swatting me.

“How about you blow me? You scared me, you fucking asshole.”

“I was the one on fire, raindrop,” I teased, managing to grab the front of his shirt to tug him down for a quick kiss. “Maybe we can sixty-nine?”

“Trust you to almost burn to death then want to come,” Fox muttered, helping River pull me to my feet.

“You can blow me too, asshole,” I scoffed, giving him a dirty look when he slapped River’s ass.

“I’d much prefer to blow your boyfriend.”

Coal chuckled, crossing his arms.

“You guys are funny. Go rest, I’ll hang in the kitchen with Ronin and the grumpy ice cube.”

I wasn’t going to argue, I felt dead on my feet.

We all made our way inside, and Frost gave me a once-over before going back to staring at Ronin who was scrolling on his phone. I knew it could take a while to portal jump, but shouldn’t they have found Salem by now?

Coal stayed in the kitchen while Fox and River dragged me up to my room to drop me onto my bed, and Fox raised an eyebrow at me.

“You want some new pants? Your dick’s out.”

“I’m good, but feel free to look at it,” I mumbled, a sense of relief washing over me as River curled into my side and slid an arm around my waist. My dick jerked to attention and Fox laughed.

“You’re seriously thinking about fucking him right now? Dude, you were just on fire.”

“Like you don’t get a boner at dumb times,” I replied dryly as I closed my eyes. “Get out. I need a nap.” Fox huffed and walked out, but my arm shot out to grab River’s wrist when I felt him move. “You stay. Nap with me. We can’t do anything to help Salem right now anyway.”

“Were you serious about me blowing you?” he asked awkwardly, a smile tugging at my lips as I wrapped my arms around him tightly.

“No. For now, I just need this.”

I passed out before he replied.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

SALEM

Zeo poked his head into my bedroom after I'd only been alone for an hour, dropping down onto the bed beside me. He tried not to seem bothered when I shuffled away, but his eyes told an entirely different story.

He was hurt that I didn't remember him.

"We never should've let you go," he said softly, reaching out to tuck my hair behind my ear but pulled back when I flinched. "Baby—"

"I'm not your fucking baby," I choked out, his eyes searching mine as he sighed.

"You're more than that to me. To us. You're our entire world, Salem. You really don't remember any of it? Dig deeper and find something. I need you to."

"I want to go home."

"I want you to come home too," he murmured, sadness washing over him. "We had plans, you know? When all of this was over we were going to travel, maybe get a place outside the facility, and we wanted kids."

"Are you delusional?" I snapped, moving further back from him. "Whoever's in charge here would never let their weapons go free. You're supposed to take down the other supernatural beings with powers, right? That's because you're the only ones left who blindly follow. Do you honestly believe they won't kill you too?"

“Meredith loves us like her own children,” he argued, making me snort.

“You mean like those children in the halls? The ones being used against each other in padded rooms where nobody can hear them scream? She doesn’t fucking love you, Zeo. She’s using you until there’s no reason to keep you around.” I got to my knees, startling him as I leaned forward to shove him. “Wake the fuck up and think about it. Once there’s no one left to kill, they’ll inject you too. Come with me to Stardust. You don’t have to stay here.”

He sat up slowly, reaching for my hand, and I let him despite better judgment. I didn’t know this guy, but I didn’t want him to die either. Maybe I could convince him and his friends to get the fuck out of here and take down the Board with me so we could all be free.

“You’re staying here. I can’t lose you again,” he answered, squeezing my hand gently. “I love you, but you’re wrong about this. Meredith loves us and she won’t hurt us.”

I snatched my hand away, my voice low.

“You love a version of me that no longer exists. I have a family back in Stardust who I love, and I’ll do anything to keep them safe. You either join us, or you die too, Zeo.”

“You wouldn’t kill me,” he chuckled, but it sounded hollow as if he knew the truth. I’d kill him six times over if it meant saving my guys.

“I would because you’re nothing but a stranger to me. You’re a victim of this place too, which is why I’m giving you a chance to pick the winning side. The Board are going down, and you’ll sink with them if that’s what you choose to do. Are you too scared to leave? We’re safe if we stick together.”

“Scared? Of what, the Board?” he snorted, making me frown.

“Well, yeah. Their power might be intimidating, but together we can—”

“You really don’t remember anything, do you?” he said softly, not letting me finish my sentence. “The Board has no

powers, other than the anti-aging thing they've got going on. If they were so powerful, why would they need us?" I stared at him in disbelief, another sigh leaving him. "Jesus Christ, they fucking fried your brain for real. Maybe I can help you remember." He didn't even hesitate to grab me tightly and kiss me, ignoring me as I shoved my hands against him and bit his lip sharply. It only made him haul me closer, his voice strained with emotion as he moved back the smallest amount. "Please remember me, baby."

"Zeo," Ash bit out firmly from the doorway, and I scrambled back the second Zeo released me. "Don't fucking push her. You're being rapey."

"I'm kissing my girlfriend!"

"You're kissing someone who has no recollection of who you are!" Ash roared, flames skating up his arms. "Leave her the fuck alone until she starts to get her memories back."

Thor appeared behind Ash, worry in his eyes as he watched me. I hated how they weren't mean or cruel, because this was becoming hard to handle. They weren't bad people, they were sweet guys who'd become brainwashed.

In my past life behind the lies and deceit, I could see myself loving them like they claimed. It was obvious they cared for me, but no matter what, I'd never love them again.

Not now that I had a family back at Stardust waiting for me.

"I'm sorry," Zeo murmured, sliding his eyes to mine without hiding the raw emotions behind them. His heart was breaking over someone who didn't exist anymore. He left the room and Ash walked towards the bed, looking down at me with so much sorrow that it almost choked me.

"I'm sorry about him. You and Zeo were together the longest, so this is hard on him." He turned to walk away but he paused when I said his name.

"Ash? For the record, I'm sorry too. I can't love you or be the person you remember," I said quietly, a sad smile tugging at his lips as he stepped out of the room and glanced at me.

“I’m sorry that you don’t remember too. Because you’re loved so fucking hard, Salem. I really wish you knew how much.” He closed the door as he left, tears threatening to choke me.

How could I kill them when they cared so much for me?

I reached for the photo on the bedside table and inspected it, my eyes running over Storm as a sense of longing filled me. I’d never loved anyone as much as I loved him and the guys, I felt it in my soul. Yes, I probably had loved Zeo, Ash, and Thor, but the guys waiting for me back at Stardust? I loved them more than anything in this world.

They were my soulmates, and I was theirs.

I let the tears fall as I stared at the photo, wishing everything was clear for once. Every time we thought we knew the truth, another lie covered it up and destroyed it. When would it end?

“Hey, pretty lady.” I startled as I glanced up to find Ronin in front of me, a mischievous look in his eyes. “You want to go home?”

“Ronin,” I breathed, not giving a fuck if I looked like a psycho as I leaped at him, grateful that he caught me.

“I told those idiot guys of yours that you loved me,” he chuckled, pulling me back to inspect me. “Are you okay?”

I didn’t have time to reply before Porter and Vulcan appeared, my emotions running rampant as Storm stepped through the portal behind them. He didn’t need to speak as he opened his arms and I ran into him, crushing him in my arms so tightly that I was surprised he could breathe.

“This is sweet and all, but can you have your reunion at home?” Vulcan drawled, his eyes flicking nervously towards the door. Storm didn’t let me go as he pulled me towards the portal, but I yanked back to snatch the photo frame, hoping it lasted the trip so I could show the guys.

Ronin gave me a wink before his figure flickered in and out as he vanished, and Vulcan stepped through the portal

before Storm tugged me after him. I glanced back just as the door opened, Zeo's broken eyes meeting mine.

"Baby, wait!"

The portal closed behind us, and I was suddenly back in the kitchen at home, stumbling slightly as Frost appeared in front of me to firmly take my face in his hands.

"Are you okay?"

"Nothing's okay," I whispered, clutching the photo frame firmly to my chest as he stepped back to assess me. Storm moved in front of me, questions written all over his face.

"Why'd that guy call you baby?"

I didn't have the energy to explain it all, so I pushed the photo at him.

"The lies keep coming. You had your memories wiped too."

He frowned as I walked off, not waiting to see his reaction to the proof. They deserved answers, but I wasn't sure I had them all.

Once locked in my room, I curled up in bed and let sleep drag me under, not ready to face the others. Storm and I were nothing but monsters of deceit, so how could I tell the guys I loved that they'd been right all along?

I'd come into this house with the purpose of killing them, just like Frost had said.

Storm

I watched Salem leave the room, grief and guilt all over her face. Fox went to chase after her but I stopped him, knowing she wanted time alone.

"What's that?" Frost murmured, pointing at the object Salem had handed me, and I couldn't hide the surprise on my face when I finally looked down at it to find it was a photo. The guy who'd called her baby was there, Salem curled up on

his lap with a wide smile on both their faces, but the weirdest part of all was that I was there too.

“I don’t really know,” I answered with confusion, studying the image harder. Memories flickered inside me, and I almost dropped the photo as one of me and Salem in bed together came to the front of my mind.

“Fuck, Zeo,” Salem moaned from beside me as she came, confusing me even more until the blankets were pulled off her and a person appeared between her legs, her fingers reaching down to grip his hair to try and pull him off her.

“You ready for me and Storm to fill that pretty pussy of yours, baby? Show him how good you can be for us,” Zeo said huskily, making his way up her body to kiss her before turning to look at me. “Since you’re leaving soon, I’ll let you fuck her first.”

“What the fuck?” I said under my breath as the memory faded, finding myself looking right at my brother.

“What? Did you see something?” he asked, not asking before snatching the photo from my hands. His eyes narrowed as distrust built in his gaze. “That’s the guy who caused her to drown.”

Fox glanced over his shoulder, going still as he studied it.

“That other guy is the one with air powers that attacked her on the news. Did you guys used to be friends?”

My chest ached as more memories slammed into me of nights laughing at the dinner table as we ate with them, sleepless nights of worshiping Salem, and even one of me and the air power guy hunting through the woods together.

They loved her, but that didn’t make sense. How had I been there?

“Earth to Storm,” Frost scowled, clicking his fingers in my face with annoyance. “Stop zoning out.”

“They weren’t friends, they were family,” I said slowly, sliding my gaze to Vulcan. “They’re mine and Salem’s team.”

Vulcan blew out a breath, pity flickering across his face.

“You sure?”

“Positive. My memories are coming back. Why didn’t we see this earlier? Minerva got inside Salem’s head and pulled them already, but this is a whole different life. We weren’t being tortured, we were sitting around a house eating dinner, fucking, and going on jobs together. I saw that guy,” I said as I pointed at Zeo in the photo. “His name’s Zeo. I remember me and him fucking Salem together. He saw us leave just now, and he looked devastated.”

Frost snorted, shoving the photo back into my hands.

“They can’t be your team, we are.”

“Teams are built off trust and loyalty, remember? It’s not the fucking universe fating us,” I snapped, turning to Vulcan. “Right? Is it possible—”

“Yes. The question I have is why are those memories compressed so deep? If Minerva didn’t pull them, it means they were hidden well or she didn’t want them found,” he muttered, sliding his eyes to Porter. “Go fucking get her.”

“Are you sure—” Porter looked worried, but Vulcan was furious.

“If you don’t get her, I’ll go, but I’ll be dragging her back here by her hair!”

Porter nodded and vanished through one of his portals, and Coal gave me a teasing look.

“The good news is that I pissed off your little firebug so much that he boosted his powers.”

“Where is he?” I frowned when I glanced around and realized Smokey was absent, as well as River.

“They’re snuggling in bed. You guys might not have had a rough transition to your boost, but a fire boost? That shit knocks you around. Basically burns you alive the first time and it hurts like hell. He’ll be fine when he wakes up,” he shrugged. “I was going to push the little water fountain to see if he’d boost too, but he’s a little softer than Smokey. I’d already scared him enough for one day.”

I had no idea what that meant, but I didn't bother to ask.

Minerva had barely stepped through the portal before Vulcan grabbed her throat and yanked her closer.

“Which fucking side are you on?!”

Her eyes went wide as she grabbed at his hands, but she had no chance against him. She was tiny, and she still hadn't boosted.

“What are you talking about?”

“You didn't pull all of Salem's memories! Why did you try to hide them?” he demanded, his grip loosening a little as Porter joined them.

“Take it easy, man. We've learned no one knows shit, so her memories are probably altered too.”

“What memories are you talking about? All I saw was the facility and Salem getting hurt,” Minerva asked with a shaky breath, stepping back when Vulcan released her. “I honestly didn't see anything else.”

I moved towards her, my voice low.

“Salem and I had a team in the past.” As much as I hated people knowing my business, I pushed the photo into her hands. “Did you see these guys in any of our memories?”

She took it, shoving it back the second she looked.

“He's one of the guys that killed my team! What do you mean they were your team? Yours are here!”

“Are you sure these guys did it?”

“Positive. That one was called Ash, I think. He has fire powers. The guy with projection isn't any of these guys though,” she whispered, flicking her eyes to the photo again as I held it out. “I didn't see them in any memories though.”

“Ro,” Vulcan said firmly, none of us understanding it until Minerva's legs gave out as she stared blankly up at us from the floor. I spun around but Ronin put his hand up to silence me, making his way towards her and dropping to his knees.

“I won’t hurt her, but I need to get into her head. I can find out if she’s lying or not.”

“You could’ve been nicer about it,” Fox grumbled, dropping into a chair at the table.

We stayed silent as Ronin dug through Minerva’s mind, his eyes flashing up to Vulcan after a few minutes.

“She’s telling the truth, she hasn’t seen shit, but that’s because there’s a block. She wouldn’t notice it because she hasn’t boosted, but I can push through it.” His eyes slid to mine, a cringe on his face. “You might want to sit down.”

“Just fucking tell me,” I growled, not expecting his next words in the slightest.

“The Board are the ones who built this empire of supernatural soldiers, and they’re the ones who are trying to end it. You and Salem are part of their inner circle.”

“What? There’s no way,” I said weakly, Frost glaring at Ronin.

“You think my fucking brother is the bad guy? He’s part of my team, idiot. That means we’ve all got more wiped memories that we didn’t know about. We’d be part of that circle too.”

Ronin sighed, not sugar-coating it.

“Salem and Storm were placed here undercover. Storm was only sent to supervise you guys, and Salem was sent later when you stopped being useful. They’re supposed to kill you guys and return to their team, I’m sorry.”

“I’m not going to hurt my family!” I barked, pointing a finger at Ronin. “Get in my head and see for yourself! If I was sent here for a reason, I have no intention of—”

“We know,” Vulcan murmured, cutting me off as he assessed me. “I don’t think you remember your task at all, and neither does Salem.”

Not having control over the situation was freaking me the fuck out, my emotions fighting inside of me as I tried to figure out what the hell was going on.

How had we missed something this big?

I gripped the photo tightly as I stalked towards the stairs, ignoring my brother as he called for me. Nothing made sense, my mind twisting things until I had no idea what the truth was anymore. I needed control, and there was only one person in the world who could help anchor me again.

Salem had locked her door, and I didn't bother knocking before slamming my foot against it to force myself inside.

Salem jerked awake, barely opening her eyes before I'd yanked the blanket off her and grabbed the waistband of her pants, roughly pulling them off her legs.

"What are you doing?" she asked in a panic, flinching when I reached for her shirt. Frustration burned through me at knowing this whole mess was burning away at the trust we had for each other, and I slammed my mouth down on hers without a word.

At first, she fought me as the fear filled her, but after a moment, her arms wrapped around me to slide up the back of my shirt. A flicker of my own fear and anger melted at her acceptance, grateful that she knew what I needed and letting me have it.

I bit her lip sharply and made her cry out in pain, but she didn't pull away, soothing something inside of me. She'd let me do whatever the hell I wanted to her if it meant healing the carnage that was currently wreaking havoc in my mind, telling me all I needed to know.

We'd get through this, and we'd all have each other's backs no matter what.

I wrestled my shirt over my head and kicked my pants off, shoving her legs open and moving between them as she stared up at me. She didn't fight me as I forced myself inside her, her face pinching with discomfort as I slammed inside her again and again until my arms shook and I was gasping for air as my demons faded.

"Keep going," she murmured as she reached up to take my face in her hands the moment I stopped moving, her legs

tightening around my waist. “Let it all out.”

“Fuck,” I choked out, the emotions taking their toll on me as I dropped my forehead to hers to hold her gaze. “Firecracker—”

“I love you,” she said softly, her hands wandering down my back to tease my scars. “I’ve got you.”

I didn’t move, caught between wanting to break her and also being too scared to.

Footsteps moved towards the bed, and I finally lifted my head to meet Frost’s icy gaze. I had no idea how long he’d been in here, but there was some kind of understanding in his eyes that I hadn’t seen before.

“Roll over,” he said firmly as he pulled his shirt over his head, his pants hitting the floor a second later. “Now, Storm. Let her ride you.”

Salem pushed at my shoulder to get me to do as he’d asked, and I sank into the soft mattress beside her with a sigh. My head was quiet, which was nice, and I was a little surprised when Frost reached for the lube in Salem’s drawer and squirted some onto his fingers before crawling onto the bed towards her.

“Here,” he whispered, sliding his hand between Salem’s parted legs to lube her pussy, a hiss of pain leaving her. I’d been too rough, I knew that, especially if Frost was looking concerned.

She seemed surprised by his gentle touch, her eyes fluttering closed as he dropped his head between her legs to tongue her clit as he slowly moved his slick fingers in and out of her.

“That feels so good,” she breathed, sliding a hand into his hair to keep him there. He didn’t pick up the pace, continuing to slowly build her up until she came with quiet gasps, then he crawled up her body to place a kiss on her lips.

“You want both of us, breeze?” he murmured against her lips, waiting for her to nod before pulling away. “Climb on Storm.”

I reached for her as she straddled me, dragging her down to kiss her more softly than I had a moment ago, letting her sense the apology in my kiss instead of giving her words. She could handle my monsters, but that didn't mean she deserved them to hurt her.

Her pussy sank over my dick and I groaned, letting her set the pace as Frost squirted more lube on his fingers before sliding them into her ass, her pussy clenching around me with anticipation.

I needed Salem right now, but she needed him. I didn't have a problem with that in the slightest.

Frost

Watching Storm rail Salem was a major turn on, but I could see the discomfort all over her face as she let him use her to fix himself. Part of me was envious, but another part of me was focused on wanting to take her pain away. We'd gone through so much in our lives, and I could no longer hate her. I'd been right, she'd been placed in this house to kill me, but my damn soul cried out for hers over the pure self-hatred that had reflected in her eyes in the kitchen.

I loved her, and I'd do everything in my power to make her know that.

I made sure she was lubed well before she continued with Storm, giving him a moment to gather his emotions, and my cock was painfully hard at the thought of sliding into her tight ass.

"You ready for me?" I asked once I'd prepared her, slicking my dick with the lube to make sure I could be rough without causing damage.

"Please, I need you," she replied as she rolled her hips and leaned forward on Storm's chest, his arms banding around her to keep her close.

"Hold still until I'm in. I'll be gentle," I promised, lining myself up with her ass before slowly pushing in. It was so fucking tight, and I struggled to rein myself back. I wanted

nothing more than to slam inside her, but right now I was doing this for her, not me.

“It’s too much,” she choked out as her body tensed, and I slid my palm up and down her spine to soothe her, edging inside a little more.

“You’re doing so good for me. You can take a little more.”

“Oh my God,” she practically whispered as I finally became fully seated, slowly pulling back before sliding inside again. I slid an arm around her chest to draw her back, my fingers toying with her throat as I pressed a kiss just below her ear.

“Roll your hips, baby. Let me and Storm fill you up.”

She started moving and all three of us groaned at the feeling, my eyes flicking to the doorway to find River peeking in at us. In his defense, the door was wide open, thanks to Storm kicking the damn thing in.

He noticed me watching him and ducked out of view, and I couldn’t help but roll my eyes.

“If you’re going to be a creepy pervert, you might as well come in and join us.”

Salem glanced at the door as he stepped in, nerves all over his face as he watched us.

“Oh, I—”

“Where’s your boyfriend?” Storm asked, and I knew exactly where he was going with this. “Maybe he can give you a hand while you watch us with our girl?”

Giving River hell over Smokey was always the highlight of my day, but I honestly didn’t give a shit about their relationship. At first, it had been weird, and I’d been a little defensive about it because I didn’t want them getting the idea that we’d all have a big orgy kind of relationship. It was obvious Smokey and River cared about each other in ways they didn’t about me, and the thought of them messing around in the bedroom with us didn’t faze me now.

I should've just straight-out asked Smokey about it earlier instead of being a pig-headed asshole, but until now, we'd never been this close.

"He's just having a shower," River mumbled, his eyes burning into Salem with so much heat that I was surprised her tits didn't melt off. "Should I get him?"

Salem gasped as I thrust a little harder, my eyes still on River.

"If you want to come, then I would if I were you."

He darted off, making me chuckle as I returned my attention to Salem, my hands cupping her breast as I let the chill trickle down to my fingertips. She squirmed at the sensation, her nipples pebbling between my fingers as I pinched them a little.

"Jesus," she squeaked out, startling as I let one of my hands drop between her and Storm to tease her clit. "Frost! That's cold!"

"It's supposed to be," I answered as I toyed with her, pulling another orgasm out of her before Smokey barreled into the room with River in tow.

"Orgy? Yes please," Smokey grinned, having no problem stripping naked.

"No, you can play with your boyfriend while watching us with Salem," I snorted, earning a shrug in return.

"Suits me just fine. Come on, raindrop. Get naked for me," he replied, River giving him a worried look as he slowly pulled his shirt over his head.

"I don't know. I don't want to have sex—"

Smokey pressed against his front, raking his fingers through River's hair affectionately.

"And I'd never push you for that. Your first time can be with Salem, I'm okay with that. We can mess around though if you want. If not, I'm shoving Frost out of the way and diving face first into that tight little booty our girl's got."

“You sure they won’t say anything?” River whispered, but I heard him clearly. He didn’t care about people knowing, he was worried we’d tease him about his lack of skills. I couldn’t lie, a few months ago I would’ve been cruel about it, so I couldn’t exactly blame him.

“Come here,” I said sternly, slowing my hips as I pointed to the empty side of the bed. “Lie down.”

“You’re not touching me!”

“Dude, I don’t fucking want to touch you. Just lie down and relax. You want Salem’s hands on you?” I didn’t want to share her, but she could easily reach him in this position.

Smokey guided River towards the bed and finished stripping him, River’s face flushing at being so exposed in front of all of us.

“If it makes you feel better, your dick’s bigger than Frost’s,” Smokey whisper-yelled, making me roll my eyes. Salem didn’t hesitate to wrap her hand around River’s cock, his muscles bunching as she slowly worked him, and he swatted at her hands after a second, panic flaring in his eyes.

“I can’t do group stuff. I already need to come,” he blurted out with embarrassment. “You guys have stamina and I just—”

“Just watch,” Salem murmured, rolling her hips faster to encourage me and Storm to hurry up, Smokey laying over River to kiss his neck.

“Watch her face, River. See what they do to her,” Smokey mumbled, taking River’s hand and guiding it between them. “Touch me. I’m so fucking hard for you right now.”

Salem’s thighs shook as Storm and I fucked her harder, her orgasm hitting hard and fast. I wanted to be selfish and drag this out forever, she felt so good, but I plowed into her until my balls tightened and I emptied myself inside her, Storm following a moment later.

Smokey gave me a strange look when he realized we’d hurried things up on purpose, understanding dawning on his face as I placed Salem on her back and grabbed a random shirt off the floor to start cleaning the mess we’d made.

River wanted her, he looked desperate, but he wasn't going to take things further with us in the room. If he wanted her to blow him without an audience, I'd give him that, and so would Storm.

"I love you," I whispered in Salem's ear before climbing off the bed, motioning to Storm to follow. "We'll leave you guys alone before River's fucking balls burst."

River stared at us as we left, and I tried pulling the door shut as much as it would go.

It was better than nothing if he wanted privacy, and it was the only olive branch he was getting from me.

He wasn't bad for a pussy.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Coal shot me an amused look as Salem screamed upstairs, his voice taunting me.

“Why aren’t you invited into their little huddle? Are you in the doghouse?”

“No. I’m busy babysitting you guys,” I grumbled, envy washing through me at the sounds we could hear. She was in my bed tonight, no exceptions.

“We’d better leave. Now Salem’s safe, there’s no need for us to witness this shit,” Vulcan said dryly, but Coal huffed.

“I don’t mind. I can add it to my spank bank for later.” Ronin punched his shoulder, making him scowl. “What? It sounds good up there. I haven’t been laid in days, sue me.”

“Vulcan will fix it for you,” Ronin teased, making both men state their disagreement on the subject. “No? Suit yourselves. Tell flame brain to reach out if he needs help with his boost. He should be fine now, but it might take some getting used to,” Coal said to me as he waved a hand at Porter, signaling it was time to go. Porter didn’t hesitate, wanting to get out of here and away from the porn show sounds from upstairs, and Ronin followed, leaving Vulcan and Minerva for last.

“Are you safe?” I asked Minerva when it looked like she didn’t want to follow, her features relaxing a little as she nodded.

“They’ve been taking care of me. I’m staying with a few other women, but Vulcan checks on me regularly and Ronin is trying to help boost my powers.”

“Good.” I eyed Vulcan, his face void of expression. “We’ll meet up again soon. Give Salem and Storm some time to process their emotions first.”

“Time is something we don’t really have, but sure,” he replied, looking behind me as someone joined us. “Feel better?”

I turned to find Frost and Storm there, and Storm scowled.

“Yes. Why are you still here?”

“The free entertainment,” he deadpanned, ushering Minerva towards the portal. “See you guys soon. Send my condolences to Salem’s vagina.”

“You motherfucker,” Frost bit out just as Vulcan laughed and vanished with Minerva, the portal closing behind them. “I hate that asshole!”

“Right now, I hate both of you,” I grumbled, glaring at them both. “You left me on babysitting duty while you got laid?”

“Tag, you’re it,” Storm said with a straight face. “River and Smokey are with her, so if you wanted to punish him, now’s a good time before he sticks his little dick in her.”

“Hell no,” I snapped, marching towards the stairs and leaving them both laughing behind me. River wasn’t allowed to fuck her until I’d tormented him, but even that plan felt stupid now in the heat of things. I didn’t want to think about it, but some of us could die for real, and I’d never forgive myself if I’d kept River from Salem like that.

I walked into her bedroom to find Smokey sitting against the headboard with River sitting between his legs so that his back was flush with Smokey’s chest. Salem was sucking River’s dick, taking her time as he cursed at the feeling.

“You’re not trying to get out of punishment, are you?” I drawled as I entered the room, River going tense at my voice.

“No, I—”

“How about if you’re a good boy and do everything I tell you, we forget about that little punishment?” I offered, Smokey’s eyes narrowing on me.

“For the last fucking time, you’re not touching him.”

“I can sit here and tell you what to do, no touching required,” I grinned, sliding my gaze to Salem as she sat back to look at me. She seemed keen on that idea, her eyes bright.

“You want to boss us around?” she asked, and River cringed.

“I don’t like this game already.”

“Are you afraid of touching Storm and Frost’s cum?” I scoffed, but River shook his head.

“No, I just don’t want to fumble like a fucking idiot. I almost came in two seconds in front of the other two, and—” He became silent as I moved towards the bed and tugged Salem closer, skimming my lips over hers with a smile.

“You want to blow his mind, baby?”

She nodded as she kissed me, and I couldn’t help myself as I pushed my tongue into her mouth to taste River. I’d never love him in the way I did Salem, but I’d never shy away from touching or tasting him when we were in the bedroom together.

Sex was a weapon, but it was also a beautiful, natural thing. I wanted to make River enjoy himself and help teach him about sex, but I also wanted to make him feel good about himself in the process.

Pulling back, I met River’s eyes again.

“Do you want to play and see where it goes? Or do you want to just mess around and make Salem feel good today?”

The poor guy looked like a deer caught in the headlights, but Smokey trailed kisses across his shoulder for support.

“We won’t push you. It can just be you and Salem, or I can play with her too. It’s your call.”

“I want to fuck her,” River said softly, fiddling with his hands on his stomach. “But I want it to be good for her. You promise we can do that?”

I reached for her bedside drawer, pulling out a vibrator with a smirk.

“Trust me, we can make it really fucking good.”

River

This was happening. I was going to lose my virginity in front of an audience.

My movements felt awkward as Smokey guided me to kneel between Salem’s legs as she laid back, her hair fanning across the pillows as she reached for me.

My heart hammered as I laid over her and accepted the kiss she offered, my body slowly relaxing as her hands slid across my back. I wanted this so badly with her, I knew it was time, but my own insecurities nagged at me inside my head, ruining the moment.

I flinched as hands landed on my waist, and Smokey spoke gently from behind me. “I won’t do anything unless you want me to. Shuffle a little closer and take this.” He handed me the vibrator that Fox had pulled out, and nerves washed through me as I held it in my hands. “I’ll stay right here and help you.”

Salem gave me the biggest smile, sliding a hand down to her clit to lightly tease it.

“You look so fucking hot with that. You going to make me come, puddles?”

Her words encouraged me to turn it on, and Smokey chuckled as I turned it up multiple times.

“Start on a lower setting, we’ll torment her with the high one’s next time.” He adjusted it and handed it back, placing his hand over mine to guide it where he wanted it to go. “Just on her clit. When she isn’t already half dead from the others, we’ll spend a day playing around with different stuff.”

A moan left Salem as we pressed the vibrating toy to her clit, her eyes on me the entire time as if no one else was in the room.

“Fuck, puddles.”

Smokey remained at my back, a hand on my waist as his other helped move the toy in small circles. His breath was hot on my ear as he spoke, my dick going painfully hard.

“Slide two fingers inside her, baby. You know how to do this bit, so tease her G-spot. Let’s see if we can make her squirt.”

I liked making her squirt. At first, I’d been wary about it, but after managing to make her do it myself last time, it was almost like a fun challenge.

Fox dropped down beside us, placing a kiss on Salem’s shoulder.

“She’ll squirt. Trust me.”

Her face heated a little and I relaxed even more. I might have been nervous, but she was too. That made me feel better.

Her hips lifted off the bed as she got closer to release, and I remembered to curl my fingers against the spot I knew would help. She tried to shut her legs but couldn’t because of me and Smokey, her hands fisting the blankets on either side of her. Bravely, I leaned over her more and kissed her, her nails going straight into my back as my groin pushed the toy against her harder.

She screamed into my mouth as she came, her pussy pulsing around my fingers as liquid squirted out of her, and the second Smokey withdrew the toy, I removed my fingers and claimed her mouth even harder, her hands gripping me as my dick prodded at her opening.

The heat of Smokey’s skin vanished from my back as he let me take control, and not even Fox argued as Salem reached between up to guide my dick towards her pussy.

It felt natural with her as I finally pushed inside, my arms shaking slightly as I braced above her. It felt like fucking

heaven, her inner walls clenching around me as I moved in and out of her, my balls aching with the need for release.

“Slow down,” Smokey murmured, drawing my attention to him sitting beside us. “If you want to last longer, it’s okay to stop for a second until the feeling passes.”

For some reason I glanced at Fox, and he gave me a nod.

“We all do it. Her pussy’s good, right? Do you think we can resist it for long?”

I went still, waiting for someone to laugh, but no one did. Salem was trying to catch her breath from under me, her nails lightly dragging across my skin as she watched me. When the feeling passed, I started moving again, her thighs squeezing me as she groaned.

The need to come hit me again but this time, Salem gently kicked my butt with her heels. “Come for me. We can play more later, but I really want to watch you come.”

“You sure?” I asked tightly, knowing I couldn’t hold back much longer.

“Yeah, baby. Give me your cum,” she murmured, rolling her hips a little to encourage me. Three more thrusts and I was a goner, a grunt leaving me as I filled her like she’d asked. Her arms wrapped around me as she kept me close, my voice breathless as I spoke.

“Fox is going to kill me. He didn’t really get to boss me around.”

Fox chuckled, patting my shoulder.

“That’s because you didn’t really need the help. You did good.”

My body was like jelly, and I ended up wedged between Smokey and Salem in the middle of the bed.

I was asleep before Fox turned the light off.

Salem

I woke up the next day to Fox carrying me into the bathroom, and I managed to use the toilet despite his eyes on me, then he helped me into the bath before he climbed in behind me. I leaned back against his chest, a content sigh leaving me as he ran a cloth over my body.

“Where’s River and Smokey?” I asked with a yawn, my skin tingling as Fox kissed my neck.

“Still in bed. I wanted to spoil you a little on my own this morning,” he replied as he continued washing me, his fingers gentle as he moved between my legs. I was tender, but it wasn’t too bad.

“Are you going to let me spoil you back?” I asked with a grin, closing my eyes.

“Being with you is a gift in itself, but I won’t say no if you want to sit that pussy on my face later and let me drown in it,” he said huskily, nipping my ear. “Whatever you did to Storm and Frost last night must have been good. I can smell food, so someone’s cooking.”

“My money’s on Storm.”

“Why do you think that?”

“He was rough. Battling demons isn’t pretty,” I replied, leaning forward as he started massaging my shoulders and back. We didn’t speak as he turned me to a pile of jelly, his expert hands working out the tender muscles, and he didn’t stop his task when the door creaked open and Smokey stepped inside.

“Morning, hurricane,” he mumbled as he dropped a kiss to my forehead before walking towards the toilet to pee, making Fox sigh with annoyance.

“You’re ruining my hard work by giving us a pissing soundtrack to listen to?”

“Could be worse,” Smokey chuckled, giving me a cheeky glance over his shoulder. “You want me to eat your pussy for breakfast to say sorry?”

“I’m out of commission for the day,” I said dryly as he finished and flushed the toilet, a frown on his face as he turned around.

“He hurt you, didn’t he? That explains the food I can smell. It smells like guilt and apology.”

“I’d do the same thing for any of you,” I murmured as I leaned back against Fox, tilting my head to the side as his lips skimmed across my neck and shoulder. “Storm needs control, and right now, he has none. Abusing my pussy then watching me wear his shirt should fix him a little.”

“You’re too good for us,” he muttered, squatting beside the bath to ruffle my hair affectionately before glancing at Fox. “Thanks for last night. I know you wanted to punish River, but —”

“I can punish him with orgasm denial another time. We have enough people against us right now, so we don’t need to hold resentment towards each other. Is he still sleeping?” Fox chuckled, sliding his arms around me as he continued to kiss my skin. It felt nice, and I honestly could have fallen asleep right here in the bath.

Smokey’s lips kicked up into a smile, dropping a hand into the water to run his fingers across my inner thigh.

“Yeah, I was going to wake him up but figured I’d let Salem do it. He’d probably like a morning snuggle.”

He moved his hand down the bath more, the water heating around my legs.

“Are you making the water hotter?” I asked with a raised eyebrow.

“It’s almost cold. You’ll start shivering soon if I don’t,” he answered, satisfied with the temperature after a moment and stepping back. “You know what? You stay in there for another ten minutes and I’ll wake water boy. Want me to go steal one of Storm’s shirts for you?” Their acceptance of each other in this relationship made my heart melt, and he rolled his eyes as if it was no big deal. “You’re such a girl. You’ve got that dopey smile on your face.”

“In case you didn’t notice, I am a girl.”

“Trust me, hurricane. I fucking noticed,” he said in a low voice, running his eyes over me before leaving the room and making Fox huff.

“And they think *I’m* a charming piece of shit.”

“Thank you for this,” I said softly, peering over my shoulder at him. “I needed it.”

“Don’t thank me yet. I haven’t held you down and lathered you in skincare products yet,” he teased, being more than happy to soak a little longer with me.

By the time we got out and dried off, Smokey had woken River and retrieved one of Storm’s shirts for me, raking his gaze over my naked body as I let Fox drown me in moisturizer from head to toe.

“Can’t you just walk around naked? I guarantee Storm will be in an even better mood if you do that,” Smokey stated, reaching out and pulling me against him. I went willingly, much to Fox’s annoyance, and I threaded my arms around Smokey’s neck as I gave him a quick kiss.

“With the way people keep popping up in this house, I think I’ll decline the birthday suit plan. I’ll get naked for you later.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” he grinned, releasing me as he grabbed Storm’s shirt and yanked it over my head. We walked into the bedroom to find River sitting in bed, his eyes softening as he saw me.

“Hey, baby.”

“Morning, puddles,” I smiled, crawling across the bed towards him and placing a kiss on his lips. “Get a good sleep?”

“Definitely.” He hauled me on top of him, sliding his hands down my back until he had a good grip on my ass. “Are you sore this morning?”

Smokey laughed, jumping onto the bed beside us.

“You want to go again, raindrop? I knew you’d turn into a sex maniac once you came in her pussy.”

“I wasn’t going to fuck her again, I was just going to offer to kiss it better,” he smirked, and Fox rolled his eyes.

“I’m glad to see you’ve embraced sex, but whoever made breakfast is probably getting impatient, so time to head downstairs.” He tugged me to my feet, giving me a gentle push towards the door. “Go butter him up so he’s nice when we get down there.”

I didn’t mind being sent down first, my feet padding down the stairs and through the living room. Frost and Storm were both sitting at the kitchen table, their heads lifting as they heard me enter.

“Morning, lovers,” I grinned, dropping a kiss on Frost’s cheek before moving over to Storm and doing the same. “Do I smell breakfast?”

Storm’s face had been tense when I first walked in, but his eyes took in what I was wearing and he seemed to relax a little.

“Is that my shirt?”

“Yes. So, who made breakfast?”

“We both did,” Frost grunted, standing and heading towards the coffee machine. “Sit and eat, I’ll get your coffee.”

I dropped into a chair, my eyes on my ice prince as if I had no idea who he was. He’d gotten better at playing nice lately, but he’d been sweet last night and now this morning.

It was freaking me out a little.

Storm placed a plate of pancakes in front of me, his arms draping over my shoulders from behind as he spoke quietly in my ear.

“I’m sorry.”

“Do you feel better?”

“Yes.”

“Then don’t be sorry,” I replied before getting to my feet and tugging him around so that he was sitting in the chair I’d just vacated. He pulled me onto his lap and kissed the back of my neck, his arms wrapping around me as I ate.

Frost brought my coffee over, and it only got weirder when the others joined us and he slid coffees in front of them too.

“Where’d Frost go? This is an imposter,” Smokey teased, earning a hard glare in return. “Never mind, found him.”

Frost sat down opposite me, his sweet behavior making sense when he spoke to me.

“So, you’ve got other boyfriends?”

I choked on my coffee, and Storm gave him a dirty look as he patted my back.

“I told you to leave it this morning.”

“I think it’s better that we lay it all out on the table. Who are they? Did they hurt you when they snatched you from my fucking bed?” Frost demanded, gripping his own coffee cup so tightly that I was surprised it didn’t break. “Did you see anything else there?”

Once I recovered from almost drowning in my coffee, I met his gaze.

“Zeo, Ash, and Thor didn’t take me, I think William did. I met Ash first, and he thought I’d gotten my memories back and gone home myself. They didn’t hurt me, they were worried about me.”

“Why the fuck do they care that much?”

“If I lost all my memories right now of you guys, what would you do?”

He scowled as if I’d asked a stupid question.

“Lock you up until you fucking remembered me. You think I’d let you leave?”

“Exactly. They were my team, and as much as I hate to say it, it’s obvious we all loved each other. They were trying to help me remember so I’d stay.”

“They can’t fucking have you,” he snarled, River’s eyes going wide.

“Wait, you had another team? What powers do they have?”

I started from the beginning, explaining everything in detail, and Storm tensed beneath me when I mentioned them containing all the powers.

“Does that mean we contain them too?” he asked curiously.

“They said we did. Maybe we should try and arrange a meeting with them?” I suggested, causing Smokey to glare at me.

“If you think I’ll let them anywhere near you, you have another thing coming. They’ll try and take you again.”

“They have answers that we need,” I argued, Storm’s hold on me tightening as he sighed.

“No one is to meet up with anyone. We need to figure out how to handle the Board first.”

“That’s going to be the easy part,” I said softly, glancing around the table at them all before continuing. “The Board don’t have magic, that’s why we were created.”

They all stared at me, and I took the chance to shovel in my breakfast.

“Are you serious? How do you know that?” Fox finally asked when I didn’t elaborate.

“Zeo told me. They see Meredith as a mother figure.”

“You trust his word?” Smokey scoffed, his face softening when defeat washed over me.

“They believe they’re the good guys, ridding the world of dangerous weapons. Storm and I were only part of their group because we gave in to the carnage to keep ourselves alive. You guys didn’t, and they’re worried you’ll discover greater power and take them down.” I stared at the coffee in front of me, not wanting to keep secrets from them. “Zeo kissed me to try and

refresh my memories, but Ash flipped out at him over it. They're in love with me, and they're really sweet."

"So you're going to run back to them?" Frost snapped, shoving back from his chair and slamming his hands down on the table. "One little kiss and you decide to throw us away?"

"I'd never do that," I whispered, grateful when Storm kissed the back of my head for comfort. "I tried to convince them to come here, but they're too brainwashed to see the truth. They think once this is over, me and Storm will rejoin them and we'll all travel and start a family together. How can we kill them? They're kind."

"I'll fucking kill them for you," Frost bit out, his icy glare firmly on me. "Did you kiss him back?"

"No!" My chest ached at the look he was giving me, and I flinched back against Storm as Frost stalked around the table and grabbed my throat. Storm growled, tightening his hold on me.

"Back off, asshole."

Frost suddenly slammed his lips down on mine, his fingers roughly threading through my hair as he poured all his emotion into the kiss, my eyes burning with tears as he finally pulled back.

"If they come for you, they're dead. I don't care about your morals or your conscience. Understand?"

"Let me try to convince them to switch sides," I choked out, but he shook his head and stalked from the room, speaking over his shoulder.

"I'm not giving anyone a second chance to take you. You're mine, Salem. You'd better fucking remember that."

I jumped as a door slammed, and Storm placed a kiss on my shoulder to soothe me.

"I'll handle him. Do you think you can convince them to switch sides?"

"Honestly? I don't think so," I mumbled, getting to my feet. "Can I go for a walk without you guys following me?"

“Doubtful,” Smokey said lightly, toying with the flames in his palm as he focused on forcing the pretty blue to shine through.

“You boosted?” I asked with surprise, a grin taking over his face.

“Coal helped. Well, he was being a dick about you and then hurt River to force it from me, but it worked. Cool, huh?” The flames became almost white, and he hissed as he shook it to put it out. “It’s a work in progress though. It’s seriously fucking hot.”

Storm took my hand, drawing my attention. “I understand you want time alone, but it’s not safe to walk around right now. You were taken right under Frost’s nose last time, so we need to be more careful. Would you like to sit on the balcony or something? We’ll leave you alone.”

“I can just sit in my room,” I sighed, squeezing his hand in thanks for giving me the space I needed before heading up to my room and locking the door behind me.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

SALEM

I woke from a nap, jerking back as I noticed Zeo sitting on the edge of my bed. Panic filled me that I'd been taken again, but once I'd taken in my surroundings, I realized I was still in my room.

"I always knew that love would be the death of me," he chuckled softly, glancing over at me with a sad smile. "It was always you and me against the world. I beat up Ash the first time he kissed you. You were so mad at me."

"You can't be here," I said quietly, not moving from my spot on the bed. He shrugged, turning a little to face me.

"I brought you something. I don't intend on dragging you back, it's obvious you won't stay there." He grabbed a box from the floor, placing it on the bed beside me. "There's a lot of memories in this. Go through them. I need you to remember me."

"It won't change anything, Zeo. Things will never be the same again."

"I know, but at least you have the chance to remember who I was to you. Storm probably has a lot of questions, so make sure he sees it too." He swallowed, hesitating before reaching out to take my hand. "In another life, I'm not letting you go."

"Can you tell me more about the Board and William? Or do you know who abused us? Was it William?" I asked, my throat tight as he clung to my hand.

“I can tell you that William is Meredith’s biological son. He was the first of our kind to succeed. For the record, you hated him in the past too. He’s a piece of shit, and yeah, he got a kick out of hurting you.”

“Do you know who abused Fox? It was a woman.” I wanted a name so I could go after that vile woman first.

“Cherry. She always was a raging slut, and she had a soft spot for Fox. William killed her a few years ago when her usefulness expired.”

As long as she was dead. I had a feeling it would’ve been painful if William had been the one to do it, so that was good enough for me.

“Why don’t you leave?”

“The facility is my home, and those inside its walls are my family. Would you walk away if you were me? Stardust is just a prison filled with pretty lies to keep you content, so why haven’t you left?” His eyes bore into me as I pulled back, hugging my knees to my chest.

“Because it’s my home, I need to defend it. And the guys —”

“Are your family,” he finished for me, raising an eyebrow. “Seems we’re not that different from each other after all.”

“People will die.”

“I’m aware.”

“Just because I don’t remember you, doesn’t mean I want you guys dead,” I mumbled, not being able to look at him. “You’re kind, loyal, and I know you think you’re doing the right thing, but you’re wrong. Stay here in Stardust, help us take down the Board.”

It was silent for a moment before he got to his feet, trying to hide his sorrow behind a smirk.

“Would it make you choose me? I’d take down an army if it meant having you back. I know your body as if it were my own. I know how much you love pizza, and the quickest way

to make you squirt all over my fucking face. Your natural hair is light brown, and you love action movies.”

“I prefer romance movies,” I lied, but he chuckled and raked a hand through his hair.

“No, you hate romance movies. You’ve always thought they were bullshit, but Thor and Ash are suckers for a romcom, so you tolerated it for them.” His face fell and he held my gaze. “If I came to Stardust, what are the chances of you attempting to remember me so we could be together again?”

“You need to let me go,” I whispered, and he nodded.

“Thought you’d say that. I’d tear the world down for you, baby, but a world without you by my side means nothing to me.” A portal opened and he moved towards it, glancing back at me with a small smile. “I call dibs on you in our next life, Salem. Make sure you let those assholes know this is their only chance with you.” Then he vanished.

My hands shook as I reached for the box, lifting the lid and finding photos, DVDs, and random little trinkets that obviously meant something important to my past. The photos showed so many memories that I didn’t remember, and I found a blank disk with no label. I had no idea what was on it, but something told me I should find out.

The guys were still downstairs, so I crept into Storm’s room and put the disk into the DVD player, getting comfortable on his bed as I hit play. It was a home video, pieces of my life that had been taken from me.

Christmas, my Birthday, and even one of me sleeping between Thor and Ash as Storm teamed up with Zeo to dump water over us. The sound of our laughter filled the room, my eyes burning as my memories woke up and started invading my mind like a tsunami.

The love I felt for them hit me in the chest and I choked on a sob as I tried to make sense of it all. I loved them, but I couldn’t. I wasn’t that person anymore, and I’d never turn on my guys for them.

I didn't know I had company until Storm climbed onto the bed behind me and pulled me back against him to comfort me.

"Where'd you get this?" he murmured, his attention on the TV as a video of him and Ash sparring popped into view, my laughter seeming so loud as Zeo teased me for perving on them without their shirts on.

"Zeo was here," I sniffled, trying to control myself but struggling. "I remember, Storm."

"Me too, firecracker," he sighed, hugging me tighter as we continued watching the real truth of our past. Smokey poked his head in to check on me when he heard my sobbing, his eyes pausing on the screen before he took a step back. I could tell he wanted to comfort me, but he left Storm to handle it, knowing we needed this time alone.

How could they comfort me over this? I'd just fallen in love with the three men that we'd been trying to hunt down.

"We'll figure it out," Storm said seriously, but I heard the emotion in his voice. He knew the feelings I felt, because he loved them like family too.

I quickly turned the TV off when a goddamn sextape started, my heart shattering even more. I'd looked so happy, so did Storm, but I couldn't handle witnessing a love that I didn't want to face.

In every video, Zeo had been touching me in some way, and even Thor and Ash had been close in all of them.

I tried to pull away from Storm when it became too much, but he refused to let me struggle alone, yanking me back against him and laying me over his front to hold my gaze.

"I always wondered why I'd been drawn to you from the second you stepped foot into my house. I figured it was our childhood, but it was so much more."

"I need the pain to stop," I choked out as he lifted a hand to wipe the tears from my cheeks.

"What can I do? Do you just want to be held while you process, or do you need to be railed so you can forget for a

while?” he offered, his other hand sliding down my back.

“I don’t fucking know.”

“I’ll meet you in the middle then,” he murmured before his lips landed on mine, the affectionate touch almost foreign from him. I’d expected a repeat of last night, but he kept it slow and sensual as his fingers slipped up my shirt and skated across my skin, not seeming to be in a rush like normal.

He took his time stripping me naked before laying me out on the bed, kissing and touching my entire body like he was worshiping me, and he made me come twice before bracing himself above me and sliding inside.

My fingers tangled in his hair as I held him close, our bodies moving as one as he made love to me in a way that I’d never expect from him. I knew he could slow down, but this was on an entirely different level.

“Is this a party?” Fox asked as he walked in, but instead of getting mad, Storm shook his head while continuing to thrust into me at the slow pace.

“No. Get out.”

“I can cheer her up too, you know?” Fox grumbled.

“Leave, Fox,” Storm asked more firmly, and something in his expression must have gotten through to Fox, because he gave us a look of understanding.

“Okay. Let me know if you need anything,” he said softly. “Either of you.”

He left us in peace and Storm dropped his forehead to mine, holding my gaze.

“I’m not going to share you right now. I need you.”

“They’ll understand,” I promised, sliding my arms around him and digging my nails into his back lightly. “We can stay in bed for the rest of the day if you want.”

“I’d like that,” he replied, dropping his mouth to mine again to end the conversation as he slid a hand between us to

tease my clit and make me forget all about our problems for a while.

We napped and lost ourselves in each other on and off for the rest of the day, but eventually we got hungry and headed down to the kitchen. River and Fox were sitting at the table, but Smokey and Frost were nowhere in sight.

“They’ve gone to battle it out in the gym. Frost’s powers are increasing, and he needed to let some out,” Fox said, seeing the question on my face.

“Is that a good idea?” Storm asked with a yawn, steering me towards River and gently pushing me down onto his lap. River looked surprised but he happily wrapped his arms around me and kissed my shoulder.

“They’re both on the same power level and needed to blow off some steam. I think they’ve reached an understanding with training. They both push each other, which can be a good thing,” Fox answered, his eyes on me. “You hungry? I can order some pizza if you want?”

Storm scowled, moving towards the fridge.

“She needs real food. You want steak and vegetables, firecracker?”

I nodded, leaning into River more as Storm set to work.

“How are you feeling? I’m sorry I neglected you today, but —”

River chuckled, kissing my cheek.

“You and Storm needed each other, and it’s not like you need to baby me.”

“I took your virginity. There’s meant to be more affection after that,” I huffed, his face softening.

“I got to snuggle you all night afterwards, and it’s not like Smokey’s left me alone until now. I’m fine, really.”

Fox smirked, leaning back in his seat.

“Yeah, water boy’s a man now. I did offer to bend him over, but he didn’t appreciate it.”

“Don’t tease him,” I scolded, but Fox shrugged.

“I wasn’t, he knows I’d fuck him.”

“He’s with Salem and Smokey, he doesn’t need you,” Storm muttered, glancing at River over his shoulder. “How does it feel to not be a virgin anymore?”

River’s cheek heated as he grinned.

“Really fucking good. I’m glad I waited for Salem.”

“You’re so mushy,” Storm chuckled, turning his eyes back to the vegetables he was cutting.

“I bet you want to fuck all the time now,” Fox said brightly. “You won’t leave Salem’s pussy alone for more than a day. Are you going to let Smokey fuck you now? I know he was waiting for you to lose your virginity to Salem.”

“That’s a little personal,” I warned, but River shook his head.

“I don’t mind. We’re all past that point of crossing a line, I think.” He placed his chin on my shoulder, seeming deep in thought. “I’d like to try more with Smokey, but what if I don’t like it? I love him, but I don’t like the idea of a dick in my ass.”

Fox nodded in understanding, the humor leaving him.

“It can be daunting at first. Smokey will ease you into it. Maybe he’d let you fuck him first? If you take your time and try new things slowly, you’ll learn what you do or don’t like. Smokey’s new with this too, so don’t stress about it. He’s probably nervous too.”

“You think?” he asked as he perked up.

“Sex is intimate, man. Remember to communicate with Salem and Smokey, and you’ll be fine. For the record? A dick in the ass is fucking amazing. Maybe try a small dildo to start with and work your way up,” Fox suggested, and I gave him a smile, loving how supportive he was being. If anyone could give good sex advice, it would be Fox.

I didn’t want to ruin anyone’s mood, but I had to tell Fox about Cherry. I’d told Storm earlier, and he gave me a small nod of encouragement, making me clear my throat.

“Um, so Zeo told me who used to abuse you, Fox.”

“Who was it?” Fox asked lightly, but his voice shook a fraction.

“Some bitch named Cherry. Apparently, she lost her value a few years ago and William killed her.”

“Hopefully it was fucking painful,” he grunted.

Everyone was quiet throughout our meal, all of us seeming to be lost in thought. It had been a draining week for all of us, so the silence wasn’t unpleasant.

Smokey and Frost returned home after an hour, and we ended up curled up on the couches with a movie. River had wanted me on his lap, so Storm sat beside us while Smokey sat on River’s other side. Fox was happily sprawled out on a couch of his own, but Frost kept staring at me with a sense of longing that I’d never seen before.

When we started a second movie, I switched couches, dropping onto Frost’s lap and snuggling into him. There was no hesitation as he wrapped me tightly in his arms, his lips moving to my ear.

“Suddenly remembered I existed, breeze?”

“How could I forget? Your obnoxious voice is a constant reminder that you’re near,” I whispered back with a smirk, squealed as he nipped my neck sharply. “That hurt, you dick.”

“It was supposed to.”

“Were you feeling lonely, snowflake?”

“When you’re not on my lap? Always,” he said seriously, tugging me around until I straddled him and met his gaze. “Are you okay? Scratch that, I know you’re not. What can I do to make it better?”

I stared at him, my palms resting on his chest as he assessed me. This side of Frost was almost more terrifying than the angry one, because the way he was currently looking at me told me he’d murder a thousand people if I asked him to. That he’d tear my pain from my chest and shove it inside his own if he could.

“You just did,” I said softly, confusion filling his eyes as I leaned forward and gave him a quick kiss.

“I didn’t do anything.”

“You didn’t have to.”

With my guys at my side, I knew I’d have the strength to kill our enemies, even if they were people I loved too. I’d spent most of the day feeling conflicted about my feelings, but I knew where I stood with them. Zeo, Thor, and Ash were my past, but the guys under this roof were my future.

I had to protect them, even if that meant slaying my past in a bloodied battle.

I buried my face in Frost’s neck as the movie played in the background, his hand moving up and down my spine in a soothing motion as he held me. His silent comfort held more words than his mouth ever could, and I was grateful for every touch.

He didn’t growl or snap at Smokey as he sat beside us, allowing Smokey to maneuver me so that my legs laid over his, and it was at that moment that I realized just how much the guys had bonded since I’d arrived. They were no longer enemies, they were family.

I was a little surprised when I noticed River sleeping on the couch with his head on Fox’s lap, my eyes flashing to Smokey for his reaction. He was staring at them, his jaw a little tense, but he didn’t start a fight over it.

Not even when Fox absently threaded his fingers through River's dark hair to play with it. I wasn't even sure if Fox was aware he was doing it.

Smokey's eyes slid to me and he relaxed a little, reaching out to take my hand and giving it a squeeze. He didn't have to share River with Fox, not romantically. Fox was all about making people feel good, but he'd never love River the same way Smokey did.

I fell asleep halfway through the movie, only waking when I felt someone placing me into a bed. My eyes fluttered open and I found Frost tucking me in, his gaze on mine as he climbed in beside me. Movement against my other side caught my attention, and I discovered Smokey already sleeping peacefully.

"Go back to sleep, baby," Frost ordered quietly as he pulled me against his chest, tucking my head under his chin.

"What time is it?"

"Four in the morning. Sleep before I decide to do something drastic like turn fire face over there into a fucking ice cube for stepping foot in here."

"Why'd you let him then?" I teased sleepily.

"Because I'm a fucking pushover. Go to sleep before I make you." His jaw clenched as I lifted my head slightly, amusement in my tone.

"How will you make me?"

"I could either fuck you half to death, or simply wrap my fingers around that little neck of yours until you pass out. Right now, I'm tired, so you're likely to end up with the latter. I'm sharing my damn bed with the human fire pit, so please, let us sleep before I change my mind."

My hand slid up his bare chest and I kissed his jaw before snuggling into him again.

"Thank you."

"For threatening to choke you out?" he deadpanned, and I couldn't help but roll my eyes.

“No, for learning to share.”

“Face it, you love us fighting over you. Gives you a real good ego boost,” he grunted as he got comfortable and wrapped an arm around me.

“I much prefer it when you guys share me,” I chuckled, not hearing his answer as sleep pulled me under again.

Storm

I couldn't sleep. My mind was a mess of chaos, stuck between what I thought I knew, and the truth. How had I been so stupid to think my memories hadn't been altered?

Lightning skated up and down my arms as I walked towards the park, needing time alone to think. I could've just gone to my room, but I was worried I'd end up setting off lightning and thunder throughout the house and wake everyone up.

Eyes had been following me the entire distance from the house until now, and something inside me relaxed at their closeness. I didn't call them out until I was sitting on a bench, my eyes scanning the darkness surrounding me. “Are you going to be a creep, or come out? I know you're there.”

“Good to see you're still observant,” a voice said clearly, as Ash stepped out of the shadows and moved towards me, my eyes adjusting to the dark easily. “But you know I like being a creep, especially with you.”

“Please tell me my hidden memories don't consist of taking a dick up the ass,” I deadpanned, a light laugh leaving him as he sat beside me.

“I love you, but not like that. You don't seem surprised to see me.”

“Nothing surprises me anymore. Besides, your stalking skills suck, you've been following me since I left the house. Why?” I finally turned to face him, studying his face like a long-lost friend. I guess he was.

“I wanted to talk to you.”

“You could’ve tried knocking.”

“There’d be a war in the kitchen within minutes if I walked into your house, and you fucking know it, Storm,” he murmured. “I assume you got your memories back since you know exactly who I am.”

“You can thank the annoying friend of yours for that. He hand delivered a box of fun stuff for Salem yesterday,” I said dryly, his mouth tugging down in a frown.

“Zeo was here?”

“Portaled right into Salem’s bedroom. I must say, the sextape was riveting to find.”

“You need to understand how Zeo works. He’s been patiently awaiting Salem’s return, yours too, but her not remembering anything is starting to freak him out. He’s getting desperate. He shouldn’t have sent the sextape though, I apologize,” he sighed, raking a hand through his hair.

“Salem turned it off. She’s a mess. Hell, I’m a fucking mess. Neither of us saw this kind of twist coming,” I scowled, leaning forward to put my elbows on my knees.

“We miss you guys. We’re trying to give you time to come home on your own, but Zeo’s losing it. Can’t you convince Salem? You never really cared for the others anyway,” Ash stated, my fists clenching.

“You want me to move back to the facility and leave my friends for slaughter? My fucking brother? Is he even my blood relative, or was that a lie too?”

“DNA doesn’t lie. All supernatural beings that pass through the facility have testing done. Frost is your full-blooded brother.”

“But we were created in a factory, right? How did they manage to get that many kids to torture?”

Annoyance washed through me at how easy it was to talk to Ash, my memories refusing to admit that he was the villain in all of this. To my mind, he was family, even though I tried to fight it.

“Jesus Christ, your memory is that bad too? They had baby farms back at the start, where they experimented on toddlers and babies who had been stolen. Then they brought in women to impregnate, the babies being taken from them the second they were born. That’s a pain in the ass, because it takes too long.”

“And now?”

The thought of mine and Frost’s mother being trapped and forced to have us against her will made me feel sick. How long had she been there? Was she even still alive?

“Now, they’ve replicated the womb thanks to science. The new generations are nothing more than test tube babies, made without a parent present at all. You’re the result of rape, whereas Frost was medically planted in your mother with the same sperm donor,” he said casually as if it meant nothing.

“That doesn’t bother you? It’s sick and inhumane, Ash.”

“It’s life. None of us are here because we wanted to be, but what you do with that life is up to you.”

“Is my mom alive?” I bit out, staring into the dark to try and imagine what she’d look like. Frost and I were polar opposites, but some of that was thanks to the magic forced into our veins. Frost hadn’t had pale hair as a baby, I had a strange memory of him in the back of my mind. His hair was as black as mine, his eyes a golden brown.

The change happened before he could even walk, that much I remembered.

“Your mother died giving birth. You already knew all of this, by the way,” he grumbled as if I was being an inconvenience.

“To Frost?”

“No.”

“Elaborate,” I snapped, making him raise an eyebrow.

“Why does it matter? Your mother had lots of children. Twelve, to be precise. Only four survived the magic though.”

“Who the fuck are they? There’s two more of my siblings out there?” I snarled, getting to my feet angrily. “Tell me who!”

“Number fifteen and number six.” He watched me closely as I paced, halting my movements after a moment.

“Wait, fifteen? Vulcan?”

“I don’t know, probably. Guy with a chip on his shoulder and steel powers. You know where he is? I have beef with him,” he grunted, not flinching as I scruffed the front of his shirt and glared up at him.

“Who the fuck is number six?”

“Me,” he replied quietly, his eyes flicking between mine for a reaction. “We’re half-brothers.”

“Do you know any other bloodlines here? Does Salem have family?”

This was a mindfuck, but if he was willing to give information, I’d keep asking questions.

“Smokey and Salem both had younger siblings, but they didn’t make it. River was a triplet, but his sister and brother died before they were two,” he explained, keeping his voice low. “Fox had no siblings, but he fathered children.”

“What the fuck?” I snapped, starting to lose some of my control as thunder rumbled in the distance. “How do you know that? Was he a willing participant?”

“I think you understand by now that no one in this game is a willing participant,” he said with a huff. “They were training him for seduction, right? That’s a lot of baby batter to be throwing around. None of them survived the process anyway, we’re pretty sure the supernatural are infertile.”

Part of me was glad Fox didn’t have kids stuck in the facility, but my chest ached at the knowledge that they’d used him like that. He was going to be devastated when I told him.

“If you ever call cum that again, I’m going to punch you in the face,” I growled, making him grin.

“Baby batter bothers you? You’re getting soft in your old age, bro.”

My fist connected with his face, making him stumble back with surprise.

“I fucking warned you,” I said bitterly. “I’ll never be grossed out by the word *moist* ever again. Baby batter takes the cake.”

“Baby batter cake?” he teased, narrowly dodging my fist. “Okay, I’ll stop! You’re a big ball of grumpy. When did you get laid last?”

“All day yesterday,” I smiled cruelly, noticing his jaw tighten and his eyes narrow a fraction. “Did I hit a sore spot?”

“You know what she means to me, so yes, asshole,” he said through his teeth. “Months she’s been gone, and we managed because she was coming home. It’s been even longer without you, you’ve been gone for years.” He held my gaze, his shoulders dropping in defeat. “Meredith will order your execution soon if you don’t finish your task and return home. Don’t make me kill you, Storm. Come back.”

He looked broken, his eyes haunted by the possibility of ending mine and Salem’s lives.

I stepped closer, jabbing my finger against his chest firmly.

“Then tell her to pick a fucking date because me and Salem? We’re not going anywhere, and we won’t be good little bitches in her army of terror. Nothing you say or do will convince me to turn my back on the others. Go home, Ash, and tell Zeo to stay the fuck away from Salem. He’s only breaking her fucking heart into a million pieces. The love she has for me and my guys overpowers whatever love she holds for you. If you’re not with us, then you’re against us. It’s as simple as that.”

I stalked across the park, fury filling me as flames licked my back, and I spun around to face him with lightning balls already in my hands.

“How do you expect to take us down when none of you have access to our kind of power? Have you idiots even

boosted? It's obvious you and Salem have forgotten how to dig deeper and switch between strengths, but the others—" I cut him off as I lit the park up with lightning, the thunder crashing overhead as I blasted him. He blocked it by throwing his blue flames my way, surprise etched on his face as I erected a wall of electricity to stop it from hitting me.

"Don't assume you know us, you don't. Thanks to a few friends of ours, most of us have boosted. When you guys told Salem about us having unlimited access to multiple powers in the past, she obviously told me. I fucking remember now." I focused hard as I dug so deep into myself that a roar of pain left me, holding a hand out to keep the electric wall in place as my other hand turned to ice. "You won't have to worry about killing me, Ash, because I have every intention of killing you first."

The longer I held my powers, the stronger they became, and I threw my icy hand in his direction to force ice shards from my palm. Ash seemed conflicted as the blue flames took over his arms, jerking back as one of the ice shards hit him in the shoulder. We went blow for blow, slamming fists and power into each other until I ended up flat on my back with Ash towering over me.

"Come home," he said firmly before vanishing through a random portal, and I punched the grass beside me with frustration. Killing him wouldn't work anyway, I needed that damn poison to do so, but for now, I could make a point that he meant nothing to me.

Even if it was a lie.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

SMOKEY

It felt weird waking up without River beside me, but we'd both agreed that Salem had needed me more last night. Frost refused to hand her over, so I negotiated my way into his bedroom. I was surprised it even worked.

Frost and Salem were both gone, my eyes scanning the room as I tried to wake up properly, but I heard the shower running and Salem singing to herself. I quietly moved across the room to let myself in, stripping off before sliding into the shower behind her. She leaned back, not caring about the company that had intruded on her alone time.

"Morning, hurricane," I mumbled into her neck as I placed kisses across her skin, a breathy sigh leaving her.

"Morning, scorch. I'm surprised you didn't smuggle River in last night," she chuckled, finally turning in my arms to look up at me. She'd always been hot as fuck with the gothic makeup and clothes, but I loved seeing her face bare and her body naked.

She was fucking gorgeous.

"He wanted to talk to Fox, and we agreed you needed me more. Frost wouldn't have let us all in here, you know what he's like," I replied, sliding my hands down her back towards her ass, giving it a squeeze.

"Is River okay?"

"Yeah, he's just got a lot of sex questions. I try to discuss things with him, but I think he feels awkward talking to you

and me sometimes. Fox is a third party, so he doesn't matter, if you know what I mean."

"You know Fox and River are likely to mess around, right? Are you okay with that?" she asked, making me sigh and pull her closer.

"Honestly? I think maybe it would be hot to see River being teased and touched by Fox. I just don't like that Fox is trying to make it romantic. Playtime is very different from a relationship, and I'm not okay with Fox trying to date him."

Fox was charming and kind, which was everything River needed. I couldn't compete with that.

Warm hands cupped my cheeks, and Salem forced me to look down at her.

"River's intrigued by what Fox can do in the bedroom, but he doesn't love him, baby. Not how he loves you and me."

"I know I give Fox a lot of shit, but he's good at what he does. It wouldn't take much for River to fall for him."

"Would it be so bad if that happened? I love all five of you guys equally, and I don't compare you to each other. If River fell, that doesn't mean he'll fall out of love with you in the process. I don't think it will happen though, it's just some fun between them."

"You seriously don't favor any of us?" I swallowed, hating to sound so vulnerable. "Some days I feel like it's just me and River, and I'm okay with that because I know it's just my jealousy talking, but if Fox steals River's attention like the others steal yours—"

Her mouth landed on mine and I groaned, forgetting all about what I was saying as her tongue explored my mouth while her hands trailed across my skin. I bit her lip playfully as she wrapped a hand around my dick, stroking me while holding my gaze.

"Put your hands on the wall," I murmured against her lips, my dick hardening as she turned and did as she was told, and I wasted no time easing two fingers inside her pussy from

behind. She cursed under her breath, her body shivering from my touch. “You want my cock, hurricane?”

“Please,” she basically whined, wiggling her butt at me. “Smokey, please. Fuck me.”

“If this is an apology for neglecting me, you need to do better,” I joked, not being that brokenhearted about the lack of attention she’d been giving my dick lately. A lot had happened, and we’d all been feeling distant in a way. It wasn’t Salem’s fault that she’d been taken, or that she’d needed Storm when she’d returned.

If someone was looking after her, I was okay with it, as long as she came back to me. It helped that I had River in my bed to take my mind off things too. We’d messed around a little, but we hadn’t taken the plunge into sex. I knew he was nervous, but I was too.

“If you don’t fuck me, I’ll die,” she complained, a chuckle leaving me as I pulled my fingers from her body and lined my dick up with her entrance. She was so wet, her body welcoming my intrusion easily as I buried myself as deep inside her as I could. I placed a hand on her waist, the other on the wall beside hers, and the sound of relief that left her had me squeezing her waist a little tighter.

“You’re so fucking perfect for us,” I rasped as I thrust in and out of her, taking my time to savor it. “Touch yourself.”

She obediently moved a hand off the wall and dropped her fingers to her clit, her inner walls clenching around me as she moaned. I picked up the pace a little, bending my knees a fraction to get deeper as she widened her legs.

“Oh, shit. Smokey—”

“Keep going. I want you squirting all over me.” I took my hand off the wall and sucked a finger into my mouth, making sure it was nice and wet before bringing it to her ass.

“Oh my God,” she choked out as I pushed it deep inside her, her legs shaking slightly as her hand picked up speed.

It didn’t take long for her to come, her cries bouncing off the walls around us as I fucked her through it, and I forced a

second one out of her a moment later to make her squirt before filling her pussy with my own release.

She turned to face me, letting our cum run down her thighs as she threaded her arms around my neck to pull me down for a kiss.

“I’m addicted to you,” I murmured against her lips, her eyes softening.

“I’m addicted to you too, scorch.”

I was about to lift her into my arms and slide inside again when the door opened and Frost stepped inside, a serious look on his face.

“If you two are done, you’re needed downstairs.”

“What happened?” Salem asked, her voice higher than usual. “Is everyone okay?”

Frost sighed, leaning against the sink to cross his arms.

“Storm just walked in, he’s been out most of the night. He got into an altercation with Ash at the park, and he discovered some pretty messed up shit about the facility. He’s not the one that needs you though.”

I frowned, not understanding the issue, but then I heard Fox’s raised voice. It wasn’t an annoyed kind of yell, it was one laced with pain and frustration.

Salem rinsed my cum from her body before stepping out, and I rinsed off too, both of us quickly wiping the towels over our wet skin so we could get dressed and follow Frost down to the kitchen.

This wasn’t good, I could sense it before we even entered the room.

Fox

Pure horror washed through me as Storm stared at me, his voice surprisingly gentle.

“I know it’s a lot, but Ash was adamant that it’s true. He said none of them survived the process, but he said you were a regular donor. I’m sorry, man.”

“They used my fucking sperm without permission!” I snapped, my chest tight at the thought.

“Shit,” Storm cursed before lunging at me, and it took me a second to realize why. My hands were burning up, a sense of heat filling me that tingled up my arms and through my body. Sparks flew and my eyes widened as lightning tore out of me, the kitchen table going flying from the force of it.

“Hey, focus on me,” Storm snapped, grabbing my face roughly in his hands to make me hold his gaze. “You need to calm down. I know it’s hard, but you have to.” The tingles turned into a pulsing sensation and thunder rumbled as another blast left me, sending both me and Storm stumbling back. “Fox, look at me!”

“They fucking used me for their sick baby factory!” I barked, the anger burning through me and sending more waves of power across the room. “How the fuck do you think I can calm down about that?!”

“Stay back!” Storm snapped at whoever had just walked into the room, but I suddenly found myself being wrapped in a warm embrace, Salem’s scent calming something inside me as she clung to me. I glanced down, some of the rage vanishing as she spoke.

“It’s okay. I’ve got you.”

No one else spoke as she steered me towards one of the chairs that I hadn’t destroyed, and she straddled my lap and tightened her hold on me as if trying to soak up my pain.

“What the hell just happened?” River asked softly as he stepped into view, staring at my hands with surprise. They were still sparking, but at least it wasn’t leaving my body. I’d never forgive myself if I hurt any of them.

Storm sighed, motioning to me.

“I found out that Fox’s sperm was used in the facility. None were successful though.”

“So he learned a new power from that?” Frost grunted as he studied me too, all of us going silent when Storm held up his hand and a ball of ice formed.

“I remembered how to switch between powers while handling Ash early this morning. I had ice in one hand and electricity in the other. I also discovered that he’s my fucking brother, and so is Vulcan.” He turned to Smokey, his voice lowering. “You and Salem had siblings, but none survived.”

“What about me?” River piped up, hope filling his eyes that was crushed instantly as Storm shook his head.

“I’m sorry, but yours didn’t survive either. Apparently, you were a triplet.”

This was all too much, my emotions running wild inside me as the lightning in my hands grew again. Storm didn’t hesitate to pull Salem off me to keep her safe, and I closed my eyes to try and block it all out.

Lips landed on mine suddenly, a hand going to the back of my head to keep me close, but it was unfamiliar. Salem’s lips were softer, and when the hand moved to the back of my neck, I instantly knew that it was one of the guys.

I took my anger out on the mouth that had been offered to me, not wanting to open my eyes as the magic drained from my hands. Pushing everything aside, I focused on the task at hand and yanked the body into my lap, deepening the kiss with everything I had until my mind was clear and I sensed the burning magic vanish.

My eyes met River’s as I leaned back and finally looked at him, concern etched across his face. He seemed nervous, unsure if I was okay with what he’d just done, but he relaxed when I blew out a breath and leaned forward to rest my forehead on his shoulder.

“Thanks, man.”

“Don’t get used to it,” Smokey grumbled, but River wrapped his arms around me and silently comforted me.

“You’re a good kisser, water boy. I think those lips would feel better around my cock though,” I finally teased to lift the

mood, his body tensing on my lap. Smokey yanked him off me and pointed at Salem.

“Those are the only lips allowed near your dick.”

“We’ll see.” Smokey was insecure about the whole thing because he thought I was going to steal River, I knew that, but I needed him to see that I just wanted to help them discover what they liked in the bedroom. Storm didn’t want to let Salem go, but she pulled away when I stood and reached for her, wanting her close. “I do prefer your lips though, baby.”

“I’ll let you play with me later,” she promised, giving me a kiss before squeezing my hand. “How about we make a coffee and sit outside? We can figure out your powers since you’re not used to ones like ours.”

“I’d like that,” I said as I exhaled, glancing at Storm. “You want to come and teach me how the fuck to control it?”

“Sure thing. Welcome to the club,” he grinned, patting my shoulder as he walked towards the coffee machine. My eyes met River’s again and his face heated, but I didn’t tease him again. I appreciated him distracting me, but I also knew he wasn’t really interested in me romantically, and I was okay with that.

I was still going to get my hands on him at some point though, because there was nothing I loved more than pulling the quiet ones out into the open and teaching them just how much fun sex could be.

Salem

“How’s he doing?” Smokey asked quietly as he dropped into a chair beside mine by the pool. Fox and Storm were standing in the yard while Storm taught him how to use his powers, and so far, it was going well.

“He’s okay. Well, he will be once he processes everything. Are you okay?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“River kissed him.”

“It was just a kiss,” he grumbled, but something flashed in his eyes that I didn’t recognize. “A very steamy kiss, but it didn’t mean anything.”

“I can’t tell if you’re jealous, or aroused by it,” I said lightly, his jaw tensing.

“Okay, so it was a fucking hot kiss.”

I changed the subject, knowing he’d figure out his feelings on his own.

“No one ever gave me a schedule for the cooking and cleaning. When’s it my turn?”

“Never. You just have to sit around and look pretty, we’ve got it handled,” he answered with a grin, sliding his hand onto my thigh and leaning closer. “You want to go grocery shopping with me? It’s my turn and I’d like the company.”

“Pretty sure it’s my turn for groceries,” I scoffed.

“You have enough stuff going on. Besides, I’m a good little house husband,” he laughed, but it quickly turned into a scowl. “Ugh, what are you doing here?”

“Came to see my favorite student,” Coal deadpanned as he approached, Vulcan beside him. “Shouldn’t you be practicing?”

“We’ve hit a few hiccups.”

“Like what? Hey, Salem,” Coal smirked, dropping into a chair close by. Vulcan swatted the back of his head before sitting down too, his serious eyes on mine.

“What kind of hiccup?”

“Long story short? Fox discovered his sperm was used in the baby factory at the facility, and that resulted in him losing his shit and waking up hidden lightning powers. Oh, and you’re Storm and Frost’s brother,” I replied bluntly, crossing my arms as his eyes widened. “Which means you’re Ash’s brother, the fire guy from my old team.”

“How the fuck did you find that out?” he demanded, but Coal let out a low whistle.

“Dude, plot twist. Does Fox have kids running around then?”

Smokey huffed, eyeing Coal.

“No. None of them worked. The real twist is that Storm remembered how to unlock other powers. He can control ice and lightning at the same time. I think we can all do it, we just have to figure out how.”

“You struggled to boost, how the fuck do you think you can unlock other powers?” Coal joked, but his face was serious as he thought about it. “Storm remembered how to use other powers? Do you think he could explain it to the rest of us? We’d be unstoppable.”

“We’re only unstoppable with that poison,” I reminded him, my face falling a fraction. “Why can’t I remember how to switch between powers? I remember so much now, but that knowledge hasn’t come back to me.”

Smokey patted his thigh and I silently moved to sit on his lap, snuggling into his chest as he kissed my forehead.

“I hate to say this, but can you take advantage of Zeo? Get him to help you? Maybe you could pretend you’re switching sides and want to lead us to slaughter but need your powers to take us out?”

That idea made me feel sick, but Vulcan slowly nodded.

“That could work. It would mean Salem would have to be alone with them though, right?”

A shadow fell over us and I glanced up to find Storm looking down at me.

“Not if I go with her. Ash is adamant that both of us return, so maybe we can play it that I convinced her.”

Fox scowled as he joined us, sweat coating his skin from his training.

“They’re not going to believe you guys both decided to turn against us. I don’t want either of you in that facility.”

“Aw, you worried about me?” Storm smirked, but Fox’s expression didn’t change.

“Of course I am. You’re my fucking family. Anything could happen to you guys there and you wouldn’t have backup if things went wrong.”

“Ash thinks I don’t care about the rest of you that much. He asked me to get Salem to return with me. Besides, no matter what, those three assholes won’t let anything happen to us. They care,” Storm reminded us. He had a point. Zeo alone would tear the facility apart to keep me safe. I had a feeling he’d do the same for Storm.

“How do we do it then?” I murmured, Storm’s dark eyes studying my face.

“Today, we keep training. Tomorrow, we use a portal to go to the facility. I remember how to use portal magic and how to get there, so I can get us in and out when needed. We can act like their friends easily.”

A scoff left Smokey as he held me more tightly.

“If they think Salem’s on their side, they’ll want to put their hands all over her. It’s the one thing we didn’t consider. I’m not okay with that.”

“If I have to fuck Salem in front of them so they can jerk off, so be it,” Storm replied bluntly, my eyes going wide.

“Are you serious? I can’t do that!”

“Sure you can. They care about you, so they won’t push you. Explain how you’re not ready to fuck them and that you want to take smaller steps while your head’s still a mess.”

Zeo wouldn’t sit back and not join in. He’d want to at least touch me in some kind of way, or let me touch him. As if reading my mind, Vulcan spoke.

“They’d find it strange if she didn’t want to even kiss them though. You’ve got to make it believable.”

“She’s not fucking kissing them,” Smokey said sharply, but Fox let out a sigh.

“The power of seduction can be the biggest weapon in our arsenal right now. Those guys will believe anything if Salem acts like she wants them, they’re in love with her. It’s not like it’s real though.”

I yelped as Smokey stood with me still in his arms, fury all over his face.

“What happens when a kiss isn’t enough? Are you okay with them putting their dicks near her? Or their mouths? This isn’t the act of flirting, Casanova. She needs to pretend she wants to fuck them, and the only way to make that believable is if she allows them to touch her.”

“Scorch, I won’t let them—” He didn’t let me finish my sentence as he stalked towards the house with me still in his arms.

“They’ll never believe you,” he bit out, moving through the living room and slamming me back against the wall, holding me up when my feet scrambled for the ground. “Do you want them touching you?”

That was a difficult answer, because deep down, I did. The love I held for the others was fucking with my head, I couldn’t just switch it off. The guilt of that made me feel sick.

“I want them, but I’d never do that to you,” I whispered, flames flickering in his eyes as jealousy set in. His fingers wrapped around my throat and he kissed me hard, his other hand sliding down the front of my pants without warning. I gasped into his mouth as he forced two fingers inside me, pumping them quickly as his thumb found my clit.

“They’ll never have you like that again, Salem. You’re mine. Ours. If you go into that facility and fuck them, I’ll drag you back here by the hair and remind you who owns you. Do you fucking understand?”

“Fucking hell,” I managed to get out as he abused my pussy like a mad man.

“Answer me!” he snapped, his hand going still and making me cry out with frustration. I’d been so close to coming.

“Yes! I understand! Please let me come.”

His thumb found my clit again and he curled his fingers inside me, my orgasm hitting me hard and fast as he kept me wedged between his body and the wall. My nails dug into his arm as I rode his hand, his face softening when he finally pulled his hand away and kissed me gently.

“They don’t get to fuck you,” he practically whispered, and all I could do was nod.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SALEM

We spent the rest of the day training before going to bed. River, Smokey, and Fox had all ended up beside me, Frost and Storm pacing and arguing in the kitchen about going to the facility until the early hours of the morning.

Frost wasn't happy, but we saw that coming a mile away, so we let Storm deal with it.

I woke up to an orgasm taking over my body, a tongue lapping at my clit and someone's lips on my neck.

"Morning, hurricane," Smokey mumbled close to my ear, a sly smirk on his face as I came down from my high.

"Morning," I croaked, lifting the blanket to find Fox between my legs. He grinned, crawling up my body to drop a kiss on my lips.

"I was just showing River the right way to wake you up," he stated, sliding his eyes to River who laid beside me looking slightly uncomfortable. "He was worried about asking permission."

"You always have permission to wake me up with an orgasm," I chuckled tiredly, reaching a hand out to River to reassure him. He relaxed, shuffling closer to snuggle into me.

"I love you," he said softly, and Smokey huffed from my other side.

"Then wake her up with a tongue up her pussy. Show her just how much you love her with orgasms."

“Leave him alone,” I grumbled, kissing River’s cheek. “I love you too.”

A content sigh left him as he nuzzled my neck, but he jerked back with a scowl aimed at Fox.

“Did you just grab my dick?”

“Did you like it?” Fox threw back playfully, leaning towards him with a smile. “Come taste Salem on my lips.”

I groaned, scrubbing a hand over my face.

“It’s too early for you guys to be fighting.”

“No one’s fighting,” Fox answered, glancing at Smokey to gauge his reaction, and surprise overtook me when Smokey grabbed the back of Fox’s neck and yanked him down for a kiss. Fox didn’t hesitate to kiss him back, his dick hardening against my stomach when Smokey forced his tongue into Fox’s mouth.

“I’m going to come in my boxers,” River said almost breathlessly as he watched them, and I made a sound of agreement. I’d always loved seeing Smokey and River together, but this was different. There was nothing sweet about it, it was a show of dominance.

One that Smokey was starting to win as he hauled Fox over me and pinned him to the mattress.

“If you want to touch River, then you can touch me too,” Smokey warned, amusement flickering in Fox’s eyes.

“You make that sound like a bad thing. I don’t have a problem touching you.”

“You will when you realize I’d make you my bitch.”

“Again, I don’t have a problem with that. You want to top me, fire face? Go right ahead. We can show your boyfriend what you’ll do to him when you finally get your dick in his ass.”

I shoved them, breaking up their bullshit before it escalated to an argument.

“You three need a civil conversation about this before anyone crosses that line, and it’s not going to be right here in my bed. I need to get up and get ready to leave,” I said firmly, and Fox pouted.

“You’re really leaving us?”

“Just until tomorrow. I promise,” I sighed, pushing the blanket away just as the door opened and Storm walked in. He raised an eyebrow at Fox and Smokey who were still on top of each other, and he shook his head.

“I don’t even want to know. It’s time to get out of bed. I made breakfast.”

“Where’s Frost?” I asked as I moved past River and got to my feet, Storm’s arms wrapping around me instantly as he kissed my forehead.

“He’s making coffee. Maybe go give him a kiss or something, he’s still pissed about us leaving.”

“He’s worried about us,” I corrected, his hands slipping under the shirt I was wearing so he could squeeze my ass.

“He’s murderous at the thought of Zeo kissing you again,” Storm muttered, and I couldn’t blame Frost for his mood. The guys had all agreed that if kissing the others was going to convince them that I was on their side, that I’d have to do it, but that was as far as it could go.

“If he’s not okay with it, then I’m not doing it. This plan will only work if we’re all on board. Maybe we should come up with another plan. We could just train here and wait for them to come to us,” I said firmly, but Frost spoke from the doorway, drawing my attention.

“The second you get back tomorrow, I’m fucking your mouth until you forget what his lips felt like. You’re right, I hate this plan, but it’s a good plan. They trust you, so if you can fool them with a kiss, do it. Train with them today, get stronger, and see if they’ll discuss their plan of attack with you guys. If we can get our hands on that kind of knowledge, we’re more likely to succeed in taking them out.”

I pulled away from Storm to slide my arms around Frost's waist, his icy gaze burning into me.

"I don't want to come home to you hating me. We can find another way."

He grabbed my throat in a firm yet careful grip, dropping his mouth to mine and demanding access with his tongue. I gave it to him, soaking in his affection as if I was starved of it.

"I'll never turn my back on you again," he whispered against my lips as he moved back, my chest tightening with emotion.

"What if this doesn't make a difference and I let him kiss me for nothing?"

He stared at me for a moment before cupping my cheek.

"As much as I hate knowing how much they mean to you, maybe it's how you can mentally say goodbye to them. That's worth it in my eyes."

"I wish they'd side with us so we didn't have to kill them."

"For your sake, I wish that too," he mumbled before taking my hand and tugging me towards the door. "Come have your coffee. This shit is too heavy to be doing first thing in the morning."

I let him drag me down to the kitchen, and after a moment, the others joined us to eat in silence. It wasn't uncomfortable, but we were all worried about the impending fight we had on our hands.

River glued himself to my side after that, soaking up as much time with me as possible.

"You sure they won't hurt you?" he asked quietly as we sat by the pool watching Storm work with Fox and Smokey with their powers. Frost sat close by, trying to figure out how to switch between powers. So far only Storm had done that, but the rest of us were trying.

"Zeo would kill anyone to keep me safe, and so would Thor and Ash. Storm wouldn't let me go back there if he

didn't think it was safe," I reminded him, earning a nod of agreement.

"True. I just hate that we can't come with you."

"I know. When we get back tomorrow, hopefully we'll have answers. Maybe we can celebrate with your dick in my pussy," I offered, a smile forming on his face.

"I like that idea." Storm glanced our way and I knew it was time to leave. Nerves filled me, but River took my hand and gave it a squeeze. "You'll do fine."

"Maybe you, Fox, and Smokey can talk tonight about whatever it is you guys are doing. Mess around a little or something to see how you feel," I suggested, making him wince.

"It's weird without you there."

"No, it's not. I'll be off kissing strange men, so you might as well do the same," I teased, leaning over to give him a kiss. "Communicate. Only do what you're comfortable with, and I want to hear all about it when I get home tomorrow."

"Deal."

Smokey and Fox suffocated me with kisses before we left, and even Frost gave me a slow kiss as if reminding me his feelings wouldn't change. I hated leaving them here, but the plan wouldn't work if we took them along for the ride.

"You ready, firecracker?" Storm murmured as he took my hand, waiting for me to nod before he opened a portal. He did it so easily, jealousy spiking inside me at how quick his memories were coming back. Hopefully by tomorrow, I'd remember how to switch between powers too.

The others watched us leave, and Storm kept hold of my hand as he stepped through the portal, finding ourselves in the living room at the facility.

"Baby?" Zeo said with surprise from his place on the couch, getting to his feet quickly to hug me. It was hard not to flinch back, forcing myself to lean into him as Storm squeezed my hand for reassurance.

“Hey. I hope you don’t mind us stopping by unannounced,” I said softly as Ash and Thor walked in and stopped when they saw us. Ash’s eyes narrowed a little with suspicion, but Storm gave him a wide grin.

“She’s getting more memories back and I managed to convince her to come back here for a night.”

“You didn’t want to come back either,” Ash pointed out, but his face relaxed as I moved closer and threw my arms around him. He hugged me tightly, pressing a kiss to my temple. “Well, this is nicer than last time.”

“Storm and I were talking about everything. We can’t let the others power up much more, it’s going to their heads,” I said with fake worry, glancing at Zeo. “I think you guys were right, they’ll be dangerous if we don’t eliminate them.”

Ash didn’t seem convinced, and he grabbed my chin and peered into my eyes.

“What made you change your mind?”

“Storm and I spent all day in bed going through the things that Zeo brought me. My mind is still messy, but my heart is telling me that this is where I’m supposed to be. We can figure out a plan, then Storm and I can return to Stardust to keep making the others believe that we’re on their side. Then, we can lure them to battle and wipe them out easily,” I stated, Thor letting out a snort.

“Why don’t you just stay here and we can attack them in their sleep?”

“I like a good fight,” I grinned, stumbling slightly as Zeo snagged my elbow and yanked me against him. He buried his face in my neck and held me, his lips soft on my skin.

“God, I’ve missed you.”

“I missed you too,” I said softly, noticing Storm looking twitchy. If he blew up about them touching me, this plan would be fucked. “Can we take it slow until this is dealt with? My memories are still confusing me and I just—”

“I’d never push you, I’m just happy to be able to hold you without getting hit,” Zeo murmured, sliding his gaze to Storm. “Thank you for bringing her back.”

“Your sextape probably convinced her,” Storm said dryly, and Zeo smirked.

“I’m not surprised. That was a good one.”

It was obvious Zeo was blinded by love, but Ash and Thor eyed us warily, as if sensing our bullshit. I had to appear more invested in this, and that meant taking things further.

I hated that I wanted to, my heart longing for the return of their love.

Storm knew what I was going to do, annoyance flashing in his eyes as I slid my arms around Zeo’s neck and pulled him down a little.

“Thank you for not giving up on me. I promise we’ll be back to how we used to be soon.”

“How slow are we taking this? I really want you to sit on my face,” he huffed, seeming surprised when I lifted slightly to brush my lips against his. He didn’t hesitate to kiss me back, his arms wrapping tightly around me to keep me close as he consumed me. It felt so natural, more guilt slamming into me as I thought of the men back at home waiting for me.

I had to do this to keep them safe.

“I love you so much,” he whispered against my mouth, and I did well to keep my own voice steady.

“I love you too.”

Storm

Watching Salem kiss Zeo made me murderous, but I had to rein it in and let her seduce him so our plan would work. I spent most of the afternoon with Ash, trying to pry information out of him as best as I could, but my eyes kept drifting back to Salem, who was sitting on Zeo’s lap on the couch with Thor beside them, the latter rubbing her feet.

At least I knew if all of us died and our mission failed, they'd look after her. They wouldn't kill her, that much I knew.

"You're tense," Ash observed the longer I watched Salem, and I let out a sigh.

"I'm possessive. I've never liked sharing her."

"You used to love watching us fuck her."

"I've struggled with it since arriving at Stardust. It's something my memories coming back didn't fix."

"You'll remember once you watch Zeo fuck her. He thrives off her pleasure," he chuckled, and I fought not to react. If Zeo tried getting her into bed, I was going to go psycho on his ass.

"He's not touching her until she's ready," I said firmly, and Ash shrugged.

"He won't, but he's always been impatient when it comes to her. He won't wait too long before trying. Besides, I don't think she'd mind."

Ash was wrong. Salem was playing the part well, but I could tell she wasn't comfortable. That concerned me, because if I noticed, the others probably noticed too, and we needed this to be believable. When Thor's hand rested high on her thigh, she tensed, forcing herself to relax after a second.

"I think she's a little shaken by all the truths that have come out lately. I told her we can stay the night and try to make sense of it all, and basically slowly introduce ourselves back into the facility. That way she doesn't get overwhelmed," I said quietly, Salem's eyes meeting mine from across the room.

I wanted to take her home, this plan had been a stupid idea.

"She seriously can't remember how to switch between powers? She was almost stronger than the rest of us," Ash stated with a frown, watching me as I cringed.

"We were kind of hoping you guys could help her."

“We can plant the knowledge in her head easily with our powers,” he smiled, hope flickering inside me. If it was that easy, we could do that to the others when we got back. I’d have to send Vulcan a message to see if he could get Minerva to help us once we returned since I wasn’t really good at it just yet.

“It won’t hurt her?”

“No. Our bodies are made for power, Storm.” He was watching her with a softer expression now, his voice gentle. “Thank you for bringing her home, even if it’s just for the night. We needed this.”

“So did we,” I answered, knowing this was probably the last time we’d get this kind of closure. Just because we knew the right thing to do was kill these guys, that didn’t mean it wasn’t fucking with us. Deep down, these guys felt like family.

The sooner we killed them, the better we’d be.

River

“You’re making me dizzy, sit the fuck down,” Frost barked at me as I paced in the living room, freaking out about Salem and Storm being gone. What if those other guys weren’t as caring as they thought? They could force themselves on her to try and make her remember their relationship.

“What if things go bad? How will we get to them? What if —” The panic was choking me, and it took me a moment to realize someone had taken my hand and was pulling me towards the couch. Smokey eyed me from the other couch, and I glanced up to find Fox was the one guiding me across the room. He sat me down, sliding behind me before grabbing the back of my shirt.

“Off.”

“You think I’m in the mood for your bullshit right now?” I scowled, but he tugged at the shirt again, his voice calm.

“This isn’t sexual, I promise.” My eyes slid to Smokey who gave me a small nod, and I hesitated before doing as Fox had asked. I jumped when his warm hands touched my skin, but I relaxed when he started massaging my back and shoulders expertly. “They’ll be fine. Storm will keep her safe.”

“But—”

“Just sit there and relax, man,” he murmured, making Frost roll his eyes and walk off. His footsteps thumped up the stairs until we heard the sound of his bedroom door closing, and Smokey moved to sit beside us.

“Fox is right, babe. They’ll be fine,” he said gently, resting his hand on my thigh. “Want me to blow you? You can’t think about anything when your dick’s involved.”

“Salem thinks we need to talk about Fox,” I said with a sigh, Fox’s hands stalling for a moment before he continued with a light tone in his voice.

“What do you mean?”

“About the bedroom stuff. I want to try new things, but I don’t want to fight about it. I haven’t even had sex with Smokey yet, so adding someone else is a stupid idea.”

“Do you want to have sex with Smokey?” he asked, tsking me when my body tensed. “You can be open about this, we won’t judge you.”

Nerves washed through me as Smokey moved to kneel in front of me, giving me no choice but to look him in the eye.

“Are you worried about me topping you? I’m okay with you fucking me first if that’s what you need. Talk to me, what are you feeling?” His hands took mine and gave them a squeeze, a smirk tugging at his lips when my eyes widened. “What? You didn’t think I’d let you top me?”

“No.” I wasn’t confident in taking control, but knowing he’d give it to me soothed some of my concern. Smokey could be rough in the bedroom, and I couldn’t lie, I’d been worried about him hurting me.

“Do you want to do it? Fox doesn’t have to be there, but he can be if you want,” he offered, flicking his gaze over my shoulder to Fox. “You could guide him, right?”

Fox’s hands slid around my sides to rest on my stomach, his chest pressing against my back.

“I can do that. Give me some boundaries. Do I keep my hands to myself, or can I play too?”

“What did you have in mind?” Smokey asked, surprising me that he was considering it.

“Just my hands and mouth, I won’t get my dick involved.”

“What the hell do you get out of it then?”

“I get to make you guys feel good. I don’t think you understand how important that is to me in the bedroom. My partner is always my first priority. How about we mess around a little and see where it goes?” Fox murmured in my ear, a shiver rolling through me. It sounded fun, but making a move like this could ruin everything. Smokey had made it obvious that he didn’t want to share me with Fox, so I had to make sure he was on board.

I’d never risk losing him.

As if sensing my thoughts, Smokey spoke.

“I need to know if this is serious or just fun. Do you love River?”

“No. I’m attracted to you both, but it’s all about pleasure. I love Salem, but I love being able to enjoy time with you guys. Does that make sense? I don’t want to date you, I just want to help you experience things. This isn’t a relationship, it’s purely casual with no strings. I don’t need to join you guys in the bedroom, but I’m at your service if you want to get spicy with me. Like I said, I don’t even have to get my dick involved,” he said firmly, and I almost melted into a puddle as his lips connected with my neck. “I don’t need to fuck either of you to make you feel good.”

A shaky breath left me as his hand trailed south, grazing over the growing bulge in my pants. Smokey’s eyes were

glued to my face, his voice low.

“Do you want this? I’m okay with it if you are.”

“If we change our minds once we start?” I managed to force out as Fox’s lips kept a slow path across my skin.

“Then I get up and leave the room. If you want me to guide you without touching you, I won’t overstep that boundary. I’m a master of seduction, River, but I’ll only push you as far as you’re willing to go. You’re in charge, I’m just helping.”

An embarrassing groan left me and I swatted his hand away.

“Stop, or I’ll come in my fucking pants. Can we take this upstairs?” Heat filled my face and Smokey reached out to take my chin in his hand, acceptance in his eyes.

“We can do that. Come on, let’s go play.”

I stood, taking Smokey’s hand and letting him pull me towards the stairs, and Fox was right on our heels as we reached the upper level.

“Uh, who’s room do we use?” I asked awkwardly.

“Mine,” Fox said without hesitation, opening the door and motioning for us to walk inside. “If you back out and get uncomfortable, I don’t want you thinking about it every time you’re in your own bed. I have plenty of lube and stuff too. This doesn’t change anything though, if you want me to leave, I will without argument.”

Neither of them pushed me, waiting for me to walk into the room on my own, and once inside, Fox locked the door while Smokey steered me towards the bed.

This was really happening.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

RIVER

“How do we do this then?” I asked as I sat on the edge, my eyes sliding from Smokey to Fox, wanting him to take control of the situation. I wasn’t a leader, especially in the bedroom, so I had no idea what to do. “Do we just get naked?”

Fox didn’t laugh like I’d expected as he moved towards me, stopping right in front of me. “Boundaries first. You’re okay with me touching both of you?” I nodded, his eyes narrowing. “Words, dude. I’m not starting until I know exactly what you’re thinking.”

“Yes, you can touch me.”

He turned to Smokey, waiting for him to say he was okay with it too before continuing.

“Okay. If I do something you don’t like, speak up. If you want me to leave you guys alone, tell me. This only works with communication. I have no problem telling you what to do, but I’m also okay with you bossing me around too. Understood?”

“That sounds good,” I said as I toyed with my hands on my lap nervously.

“Smokey, are you okay with me focusing on River right now?”

He still didn’t touch me, respecting our boundaries until we were all on the same page.

Smokey studied me for a moment before agreeing, seeming satisfied that I was ready.

“Yeah, warm him up for me.”

“This isn’t a race, so we’ll take our time. Pleasure doesn’t have to be hard and fast, it can be slow and gentle. River, lay back on the bed for me,” Fox instructed, and I shuffled back, reaching for my pants, but he finally reached out and touched me, stilling my movements. “I’ve got it. You just lie there.”

I expected him to strip me in one go, but I was surprised when he crawled between my legs and leaned over me to kiss my neck, his hand sliding up my chest to tease my skin. He wasn’t rushed, taking his time to kiss and touch me until I was so fucking relaxed that I practically melted into the blankets.

He worked his way down my body, kissing my chest and stomach, his chest pushing against my dick and sending tingles through me. This felt erotic and he wasn’t even doing anything extreme.

“Smokey? Kiss him,” Fox said softly, not stopping his delicious torture as he unbuttoned my jeans and kept kissing lower, my abs flexing as his warm breath fanned across my skin.

“You’re being so good,” Smokey murmured in my ear, the praise doing stupid things to my insides. His fingers splayed across my throat as he dropped his lips to mine, and I moaned from the sensation overload. Fox’s touches were gentle, and I struggled not to thrust my damn dick in his face to hurry him up. I knew Smokey was marking me with soot, as if wanting to remind Fox who owned me despite what was happening.

His possessive side made me swoon like a fucking idiot.

My fingers tangled in Smokey’s shirt as I held onto him, gasping into his mouth once Fox had removed my pants and boxers, his warm tongue teasing the head of my dick. I wouldn’t last long, not if they both kept this up.

A curse left me as warm heat suddenly surrounded my dick, and I thrust up slightly to push myself down Fox’s throat more, Smokey’s lips leaving mine so he could look down at what Fox was doing to me. My legs trembled as he took me deeper, one of my hands going to his hair as if to push him

away, but I didn't. It felt so good, his fingers toying with my balls as he kept the slow pace with his mouth.

I didn't flinch when one of his fingers prodded against my ass, and he pulled away from my dick long enough to spit on my ass. If I came now, I wouldn't have the energy to fuck Smokey.

"Wait," I blurted out, and Fox instantly stopped. "I don't want to come fast."

"I won't let you come until you're balls deep in Smokey," Fox said with a slight chuckle, glancing at Smokey. "Do you want this special treatment too?"

"Help River prepare me, but I don't need all of that," Smokey replied as he motioned to my dick. "Even though that looks really fucking good."

"Sensual foreplay is one of my favorites," Fox admitted, lowering his head to take me into his mouth again, a strangled sound leaving me as he went back to the slow pace while slowly pushing his finger into my ass.

"You like that, raindrop?" Smokey whispered in my ear as I squirmed, his hand sliding across my chest to tweak my nipple. "You look so good at his mercy." He smiled against my neck as I jerked, his teeth grazing my earlobe as he added, "I take it that he found your G-spot?"

"Oh shit, I'm going to come," I choked out, but Fox stopped a second later, leaving my body on edge. "You're stopping?!"

"Trust me, you'll come hard at the end," Fox grinned, only returning to his task once my muscles relaxed. He built me up like that three times before I was begging him to make me come, but he still didn't let me as he shuffled up my body and nipped my lower lip. "We need to get Smokey ready to take you."

"I don't think I can move," I huffed, letting him pull me upright until I was sitting.

"Now we'll strip Smokey and—"

“I can strip myself, no more foreplay,” Smokey scoffed, yanking his shirt over his head. “Watching you two has me worked up enough.”

“You sure you don’t want the gluck-gluck three-thousand?” Fox teased, laughter bubbling out of me before I could stop it. Smokey flipped him off with a smile, kicking his pants off onto the floor.

“I’m sure, Romeo. How, uh, what’s the best way to do this?” Sudden uncertainty flickered across his face, and I crawled towards him to kiss him to ease his worry. It had worked for me, so hopefully it worked for him too.

Fox didn’t interrupt us, letting us have a moment together, and Smokey’s arms wrapped around me as he spoke against my lips.

“You ready to fuck me, baby?”

“You’ll tell me if it’s bad?” I asked, his fingers going around my throat firmly, probably marking me even more.

“It’s never going to be bad if it’s with you.”

I nodded, glancing at Fox as he offered me a bottle of lube.

“Here. Make sure he’s nice and slick so you don’t hurt him. One finger at a time so you slowly get his body used to the intrusion.”

“How much do I use?” I frowned as I opened the bottle, and Fox didn’t hesitate to take it from me and hold my wrist in his other hand, squirting the cool liquid onto my finger. Smokey’s eyes were burning into me as I got into position between his legs, and he flinched from the cold lube when I started teasing his ass with it. I took my time, easing one finger inside him and slowly pumping it in and out before Fox moved beside me and placed his hands on my waist.

“Add another. Scissor your fingers to stretch him.”

My eyes flashed to Smokey’s face as he bit out a curse, raising his hips off the bed as I inserted the second finger.

“Does that feel good?”

“Fuck yes,” he groaned, precum leaking from the head of his dick as he thrust up again. Confidence filled me and I leaned down to lick the moisture, Smokey’s hand suddenly threading through my hair desperately. “Put me in your mouth.”

“Look at you two, you’re so fucking hot,” Fox purred as he laid beside Smokey, his hand sliding across Smokey’s chest as he nuzzled into his neck. I did as Smokey asked, swallowing him whole while fingering his ass, and I gagged loudly as he thrust down my throat more. Embarrassment washed through me at the sound, but Smokey’s fingers loosened in my hair as he praised me.

“Choke on me again, your throat tightened and it felt good.” I did it again, choking as he forced himself deeper. “Fuck, just like that.”

My dick was painfully hard, and I reached between my legs to stroke myself, forcing myself to let go when I felt close to coming again. I ached for a release, but I wanted to wait so I could come inside him.

That thought alone almost finished me off.

“If you don’t fuck me in the next few seconds, I’m going to come,” Smokey warned, cursing when Fox bit his neck sharply.

“You getting desperate?” he taunted, earning a glare in return. “Fine. River, soak your cock in lube. It’s time to fuck your man.”

Smokey.

I wasn’t shy in the bedroom, but knowing I was about to take a dick in my ass made me a little wary. It was a lot bigger than a finger.

“You can either lay like that or get on your knees. I might even blow you so you don’t make a mess on my blankets,” Fox suggested, and I was definitely on board with that. Watching him with River was better than I’d expected, and I was more than happy to have a repeat of today in the future.

River pulled back so I could flip over to my knees, a shudder rolling through me as Fox reached out to fist my dick in slow strokes. I was so fucking close.

“You’ll tell me if I hurt you?” River asked, placing a hand on my lower back as his dick pressed against my ass.

“Yeah, baby. I’ll tell you. Just take it slow for me, okay?” I answered, nerves starting to race through me as he pushed in a little. I lowered my head down onto my arms to try and get comfortable, and Fox must have sensed my need for a distraction because he laid on his back and positioned his head under me to take my dick in his mouth. “Holy fuck.”

My body was buzzing as River made his way inside me, and I was struggling to keep it together. I wanted to fuck Fox’s face so badly, but I didn’t want to rush through this either.

“You good?” River checked in, slowly pulling out to slide back in again.

“I’m good, keep going,” I confirmed, the sound muffled from my arm against my face. Fox’s tongue rolled around my length and my thighs tensed, fighting off the surge of pleasure that was building as River rocked in and out of me. “This is going to be fast.”

“Me too,” River chuckled, his hands trailing up my back to pull me back into him a little harder. I was shaking with the need to come, giving Fox a two second warning before I couldn’t hold back any longer. He swallowed around me as I filled his mouth, a loud, breathless moan spilling from my lips as my body trembled with waves of pleasure. River cursed as he picked up the pace, my overstimulated body gripping to him until he buried deep with a shout, both of us almost squashing Fox below me as River plastered his chest to my back.

None of us moved for a while until Fox slid out from under me, heat in his eyes.

“Feel better?”

“I can’t form words right now,” I mumbled, collapsing to my stomach and bringing River with me, his dick still buried

in my ass. “I’m spent.”

“You guys can hang in here for a while if you want, I’ll leave you be,” he answered, but River reached out to grab his wrist, stopping his escape.

“Give me a second and I’ll deal with that.”

I forced myself to look towards Fox, finding his pants tented and his palm rubbing the bulge for some sense of relief. If River wanted to keep playing, that was fine by me, but I was done for the day. My bones were like jelly.

“You don’t have to,” Fox smiled, but River shook his head.

“I want to. Just let me remember how to breathe first.” He pulled away from me, and Fox instantly grabbed a shirt off the floor, easing it against my ass.

“Here. Put that under you and roll onto your back. You can watch your boyfriend put his hands on me,” he smirked, making me smirk back.

“It’s the least he can do after what you did to him.”

“Is that a sneaky way to say you had a good time?” he asked, the humor fading as he dropped down beside me. “No regrets?”

“Nah, man. No regrets.”

River fumbled a little with Fox’s pants once he was between his legs, but Fox didn’t rush him or try to take over. I liked that he was happy to let him learn but was there to guide him when he needed it. We didn’t need Fox, but I was glad we’d done this. I probably would’ve rushed through it and not taken my time, and he’d done well to keep River relaxed.

My eyes felt heavy as I watched River try to mimic what Fox had done to him, kissing his abs and making his way down to his dick.

“Kiss it,” Fox ordered softly, groaning as he did as he was told, kissing and licking his length before taking him into his mouth to roll his tongue around him. “Jesus, keep doing that.”

Seeing River gain confidence wasn't something I'd thought would be a turn on, but my dick hardened slightly as River held Fox's gaze. He reached out to pump Fox with his hand as he continued to use his mouth, and it didn't take long for Fox's fingers to firmly grip River's hair.

"I'm close, can I come in your mouth?"

River nodded, going a little faster and making me wish I had the energy to fuck him. He looked so good on his knees like that, worshipping Fox with his mouth. I didn't mind spectating, but I forced myself to shuffle closer, kissing Fox's neck with a groan.

"He looks so fucking hot right now. I love watching him with you." I moved lower to gently bite his nipple, his muscles tensing as he cursed. I looked down in time to watch River swallow, his tired eyes on mine as he waited for approval. "Fuck, baby. You're making me hard again."

He moved back and I grabbed his arm, yanking him closer to kiss him and erase any worries he had. I didn't want him regretting this or doubting that I'd enjoyed it.

"I need a drink, and you two should hydrate too. Come downstairs when you're ready," Fox murmured as he got to his feet, not bothering to grab his boxers before walking towards the door and giving us a few moments alone.

River snuggled into me with a sigh, his voice soft.

"You really enjoyed that? I did good?"

"You did so good," I promised, kissing his neck and trailing a hand up and down his spine. "I'll be just as gentle with you when you're ready. Maybe Salem can play with us next time? You could eat her pussy while I fuck you."

"You're making me hard again," he grumbled, making me laugh.

"You're insatiable."

Fox

I grabbed a few bottles of water and started rummaging in the cupboards for food, deciding to make the guys something to eat. It was an honor to be brought into someone's relationship like that, and I wanted to show them my appreciation.

"Put some fucking pants on," Frost grunted as he stalked in, dropping onto a chair at the table.

"If you're jealous, just say so. I can blow you too if you like," I grinned, grabbing the bread so I could make sandwiches. "You hungry?"

"Have you washed your hands?"

"I'll take that as a no then," I snickered, a sound of disgust leaving him.

"Wash your fucking hands and get dressed if you're going to be making food. It's unhygienic."

"Says the guy who railed Salem on Storm's table where he ate," I deadpanned, moving to the fridge to grab fillings. "The hand touching the food wasn't used on River's ass if that helps. If I wash my hands, do you want a sandwich?"

"Sure," he muttered, eyeing me as I put everything on the table before turning the water on and pumping soap into my hands. "Storm texted me. They're okay, and so far the others believe they've turned on us. He said he has a plan about our powers."

"I don't like how vague that is."

"Me either, but we have to trust him. How are your powers going?"

This was freaking me out a little bit. He was being nice.

The look he gave me told me to keep my thoughts to myself, so I shrugged.

"I think I have a handle on the lightning. It's weird, I never expected to get a power like yours. I don't seem to be burning out like you guys did when you were learning yours."

“Probably because yours is a second power. Your body’s used to handling the strength of the mind stuff, so it’s been a smoother transaction to lightning,” he suggested, which made sense. Everyone else’s powers were growing by the day, but I was worried we’d get too strong for our bodies to manage, especially if we kept gaining new powers.

“Maybe. Turkey or ham?”

“Turkey.” He was silent for a while until I slid his sandwich in front of him, his voice surprisingly gentle. “I’m worried about Salem. Her feelings for those assholes might get in the way of things. What if she can’t let them go?”

“Then we kill them for her then bring her home and smother her with affection until she feels better. We’re a team, so if she needs to lean on us, that’s what we’re here for.”

I jerked as something hit the back of my head, and I turned to find Smokey and River behind me in their boxers. My boxers were on the floor by my feet, and Smokey chuckled.

“Put your dick away, you’ll ruin Frost’s appetite.”

I bent down and gave Frost a good view of my asshole, hearing him growl as I took my time putting my boxers on.

“You’re an asshole.”

“What was that? You like the look of my asshole?” I smirked as I stood straight, my boxers in place. He angrily took a bite out of his sandwich, turning his eyes to Smokey.

“I can’t believe you let him touch you.”

“You’re missing out,” Smokey winked, sitting down and accepting the plate I pushed in front of him, River giving me a shy smile as he took one for himself before sitting. The temptation to tease him for being shy after what we’d just done was right there, but I squashed it down. He was probably feeling vulnerable, so he didn’t need me giving him shit over it. I couldn’t risk upsetting him, or he’d never blow me again, and I was looking forward to it happening in the future. I still couldn’t believe Smokey allowed it, let alone let me touch him too.

I was in sex heaven if I played my cards right.

We all ate together, and Frost updated them on hearing from Storm. I wanted to text Salem to check in with her, but it wasn't worth the risk.

We spent the rest of the day practicing our powers, and I wasn't surprised when Vulcan and his guys showed up with Minerva in tow. They were good at helping the rest of us boost, so training together was smart.

"We spoke to Storm and have a plan," Coal grinned, pointing at Minerva. "When Salem and Storm get back, Minnie over here can get inside their heads and find the key to unlocking the extra powers. She can plant the information in everyone so then we can all be cool as fuck. Ronin can help too."

"Don't call me that," Minerva scowled, crossing her arms, but Frost glared at them.

"Why didn't you think of that before we sent Salem and Storm into the facility? Storm already has access, so he could've done that without the fucking trip."

"You wanted to know the battle plans, so they still would've gone," Vulcan said dryly, dropping onto a chair. "Besides, it's Storm's plan. It's how Ash is going to get Salem to remember."

"Yeah, Storm checked in, they're okay," I sighed, eyeing Minerva curiously. "You've boosted enough to get in our heads like that?"

She grinned, her cheeks heating a little as we all looked at her.

"Um, yeah. Ronin's been helping me."

"And she's getting really good at it too," Ronin praised, her cheeks going even redder. Frost grumbled about her need for attention, but we ignored him.

"We're heading to the gym soon to use the battle room. Do you guys want to come?" I offered, and Vulcan gave me the side-eye.

“We’re not supposed to be here, remember?”

“Who’s going to attack you? The Board are running out of soldiers and it’s not like they have any power. If anything does happen, you can just portal out of there. C’mon, I think it’s good if we all learn to work together, especially if we’re about to take down the board and their puppets.”

“Fine, but I’m going against the giant ice cube,” he grinned, making Frost scoff.

“I’ll put you in an icy tomb, asshole. Don’t get cocky with me.”

“You can try. I look forward to the challenge though,” Vulcan said smugly, before motioning for us to go. “I hope you guys are ready. We won’t hold back.”

Smokey’s smile was sinister as he started walking towards the house.

“Neither will we.”

Frost

“You can do better than that!” Vulcan taunted as I threw balls of ice at him, a snarl leaving me as I formed a large brick to throw at him instead. He dodged it easily, a teasing smile on his face. “I think this is even easier than high school dodgeball. You really think you can take down the Board’s soldiers with that bullshit?”

I stumbled as he threw steel poles my way, one catching my arm and making me hiss through the pain as it pierced my skin on its way past. I glanced down to see the cut on my arm, glaring back up at him.

“Fucking asshole.”

“Dodge me then. At this rate, the Board could take you down without any fucking magic.” Fury filled me as my body crackled with power, a grin taking over his face. “That’s right, get mad at me. Show me what you’ve got.” He was suddenly knocked back by a blast of air, and for a second I thought Salem was back, but then I realized it had come from me. My

hands burned as I threw more, Vulcan laughing like a maniac as I sent him flying again. “That’s it!”

I tried to manifest fire or lightning, but I couldn’t, making me growl.

“Why can’t I access the others?”

“You will once your girl gets back and we get inside her head. You’re overthinking. Even without those other powers we can take them down, just remember that. If we all work together, we can contain the enemy and inject them with the poison.” He moved towards me, lowering his voice. “This battle doesn’t fall on your shoulders alone, Frost. It will take all of us to bring them down.”

“I don’t want Salem and Storm killing them,” I gritted out, my arms falling to my sides as the anger left me. “Just because we have to kill them, doesn’t mean they’ll cope with their deaths on their hands. Their memories mean their feelings are back, so it’s going to make them feel like they’re murdering one of their own. I don’t want that for them.”

This would destroy Salem, so if I could take it off her hands, I would.

“Have faith in her, she’ll ask for help if she needs it,” he smiled, glancing around the room before adding, “Do you think we should go? We’re drawing a crowd.”

He wasn’t wrong, other members of Stardust were watching us from around the room nervously, whispering to themselves with concern. Vulcan and Coal’s faces had been splashed all over wanted articles online, so people here knew they were the apparent enemy.

“I have a better idea. How do you feel about causing some chaos? You know, since we’re brothers and all,” I said slyly, his mouth twitching with a smirk.

“What do you have in mind?”

“Follow my lead,” I grinned, walking towards the front of the room where the small stage was. The Board had been unusually quiet, so if they didn’t need the stage, I’d use it.

The guys frowned at me as they watched me climb up with Vulcan behind me, my voice traveling around the room loudly.

“People of Stardust! Since we seem to have your attention, I figured now was a good time for an update! Come closer! Don’t be shy!”

A few people shuffled closer, but they kept glancing at Vulcan and his guys warily. I couldn’t blame them, we’d thought they were the enemy until recently too.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Fox hissed as he approached, but I shrugged.

“I think it’s time we tell everyone the truth about this place, don’t you?”

“Jesus Christ, are you serious? Don’t do this while two of our own are in enemy territory!” he spat, but I ignored him and turned my attention to the rest of the room.

“You don’t have to fear, No one in this room will hurt any of you. I want you to meet some new friends of ours, Vulcan, Coal, Porter, and Ronin.”

One of the other members got brave and spoke up, her voice wavering slightly.

“Aren’t they the guys you’re supposed to be bringing down? They’re rogue, they’re not our friends!”

“A lot of information has come to light recently. They weren’t rogue, they’d simply escaped this prison we call a home. All of our memories are fake. We never had families or lives outside of this place, we were born in a facility and tortured until our bodies adapted to the powers forced upon us. Stardust was created to babysit us until a weapon was made to wipe us out. We’re seen as failed experiments or dangers to the Board. You don’t have to follow us blindly, you can make your own choice, but the Board aren’t on our side. Death awaits us if we don’t take a stand.”

Gasps of outrage moved through the room as more people got closer, and Vulcan stepped up to speak.

“I’ve been on the run for a long time after finding out the truth behind this place. I’m a danger to the Board because I know their secrets. A war is coming, and we need you all to be prepared for that. Run, hide, do what you can to stay safe. The Board are going down, and then we can return this community to a safe place for us all.”

“The Board are protecting us! Their magic will keep us safe from anything!” someone else argued, and Fox muttered under his breath before stepping up onto the stage to take over. He was better with words and people trusted him a lot more than the rest of us.

“The Board have no magic, why do you think we were created? Without an army of supernatural beings, they’d have nothing to keep them in power. We discovered the dragons kept escaping their barriers due to the Board turning them off so they could harvest their eggs, and the unicorn deaths were thanks to the Board too. A weapon to destroy us was made from those items, and the Board controls others like us who are out to kill us all. They’re worried we’ll learn new powers and become unstoppable.”

“That’s impossible. We can’t just learn new powers!” someone else shouted, and Fox didn’t hesitate to lift his hand and show everyone the lightning skating across his palms.

“We’ve been boosting our powers, and some of us managed to access other powers in the process. It’s right in front of you, you can’t deny it. I know it’s a lot to take in, but it’s the truth.”

The voices grew louder as panic and wonder went through the growing crowd, and I grinned at Vulcan as we heard people favoring us over the Board. We were getting through to people faster than I expected.

“Maybe I can help clear some things up,” Minerva offered as she walked into the crowd, wiggling her fingers. “I can help people get their memories back. It’s not pretty, but it will help.”

Before long, she had people lining up so she could pull their memories out of hiding, and Smokey nudged me as we

got off the stage.

“This will piss the Board off. They’ll take action against us.”

“That’s what I’m hoping for. C’mon, let’s get back to training while Minerva works with everyone else. You’re with me, match stick.”

CHAPTER FORTY

SALEM

Power surged through me as Ash gave the memories of my power back. I felt so strong, a grin spreading across my face as I held my hand up to my face to watch flames flicker across the surface.

“It’s that easy?” I asked, making Ash chuckle as his hands rested on my waist.

“Yeah, babe. It’s that easy. For some reason you had a weird kind of block in your head. It’s like your mind didn’t want you to remember.”

“At least I do now. I can’t wait to hit Smokey with his own magic,” I lied, needing him to believe I was on his side. “It’s strange. It’s like I’ve always had it.”

“You have. You had this shit figured out before the rest of us,” he said dryly, glancing across the room at the others who were deep in conversation. Storm was trying to form a fake plan of attack, and Zeo and Thor had jumped right into it blindly. “If you can’t kill your new friends, tell me. I know you have feelings for them all, but I love you enough to take that burden from you.”

“The Board will want proof that I’m not rogue, so killing them is the only way to do it. It will be hard, I won’t lie, but those guys are dangerous, Ash. I know I grew up with them, but it’s like I don’t know them at all. I don’t trust them like I trust you guys,” I said softly, leaning into him with a sigh.

“I was worried about you and Frost. You two had a connection unlike the others, and it’s one reason I didn’t want

you to go in as our spy. You're strong for being able to push your emotions aside and do what's right," he murmured, cupping my chin and tilting my face up. "Once this is all over, I promise I'll do everything I can to help you heal."

"You'll need to heal too, Frost is your brother," I whispered, making him snort.

"Frost doesn't mean shit to me. Blood doesn't make a family in our world, a connection does. Storm and I trained a lot, so we grew close, but Zeo and Thor are family to me too, despite them not sharing the same bloodlines as me."

"Do you really think Meredith will let us move away from all of this once everything's over?"

"Yeah. Meredith always keeps her promises," he smiled, lowering his mouth to mine for a gentle kiss. Having access to more powers meant it was easier to seduce them, my hands sliding up the front of his shirt naturally as I kissed him back. Once this was over, I needed my guys to ravish me and wipe Ash, Zeo, and Thor from my mind and body completely.

"You're supposed to be practicing your magic, not making out with Ash," Zeo teased from behind me, his arms sliding around my waist as he kissed my neck. "But if you want an orgy, I'm okay with that."

"Let's kill these assholes first, then you can wipe them from my mind," I promised, turning to meet Storm's eyes. He wouldn't last much longer without flipping out about them touching me, and I couldn't take it much longer myself. Between my mixed emotions and the guilt, it was eating me alive.

The door slammed open and Meredith stormed in, her eyes blazing with fury.

"Those bastards are ruining everything! We need to deal with them!"

Zeo was on his feet, moving towards her with worry.

"What happened?"

“I just got a call from one of those failed experiments. They were at the gym, and Vulcan and some of the other rogue assholes are training with Frost and the rest of his team! The nerve of them didn’t stop there though, those idiots got on the stage and announced they’re turning on us and spilled the truth! Minerva’s been giving people’s memories back all day, it’s chaos at Stardust,” she spat, surprise flicking across her face when she noticed me and Storm. “What are you doing here?”

“I heard Smokey and the others talking about this betrayal. Storm and I snuck off for the night to form a plan of attack. They’re dangerous, Meredith, we definitely need to deal with them,” I said with fake anger. “They fucking announced everything? They’re more out of control than I thought.”

“Your acting at Stardust had me a little worried, I really thought you’d sided with them, especially after your tracking chips all vanished from our system. I’m glad you remember where you belong,” she said with a smile, turning to Storm. “What can you tell me about them? Do they have a plan in place? We need to know what we’re up against.”

Storm crossed his arms, letting his fake anger show too.

“We had to remove the chips, Smokey discovered his, and we had to act surprised about it. It would’ve seemed weird if we didn’t remove ours too. They’re getting stronger, but they don’t have a plan. We convinced them you wouldn’t attack Stardust, so when we get back there, we’ll tell them some bullshit about it being a good idea to attack the facility. That will take weeks of planning for them, and it means we can surprise them with an attack that they won’t see coming. This won’t be as simple as injecting them in their sleep, not now they’ve caused panic amongst the community. We need to take down the whole town until there’s no one left.”

“Excellent plan. It seems they’ve started figuring out how to unlock other powers, so we need to make a move soon. You’ll need to take some of the injections with you, just in case they figure out you’ve been against them this whole time. Only use them if you have no choice, and keep them hidden. You are the only people I can trust right now, other than

William and the rest of the Board. You'll be rewarded for your loyalty when all of this is over," she said proudly, believing our bullshit with ease.

"You're family to us, so of course we'd be loyal," Storm smiled, giving me a wink. "Not to mention Salem's been itching to tear those guys apart. They've been a pain in the ass to live with."

"You can say that again," I scowled, leaning back against Ash comfortably. If Meredith had any doubt, it seemed to vanish when she realized how close I was being with these guys. That was all that mattered right now.

"Your task now is to keep those animals contained, understand? When will you return to Stardust?" Meredith asked, her question aimed at me.

"In the morning. I needed a night with my guys. My memories have been haywire for so long, and I needed this to ground me so we all work well as a team. Next time, don't wipe my memories so much, it's been a fucking roller coaster," I chuckled, amusement filling her eyes.

"It worked well though, didn't it? I knew you'd get them back quickly once you got there. I couldn't risk you acting like you knew them, but I can see your acting is really good."

"Can I ask a question about the unicorns?" When she nodded, I continued. "Parts of my memories are still fuzzy, but when people die, they seem to turn into unicorns. Why is that?"

"They didn't turn into unicorns, we've had people following you whenever you left Stardust. We can't just let bodies pile up on the street, it would raise questions. We simply switched them out for unicorns. William has a terrible sense of humor, and he enjoys fucking with people. That weakling with water powers seemed to freak out a little."

I wanted to snap at her and tell her River wasn't weak, but I needed her to underestimate us, so I let out a laugh.

"I think it's hilarious, although it freaked me out a little bit too. I thought we were going crazy. Tell him to give me a

heads up next time.”

“I will. You guys get some rest and plan for war, this is happening in two days,” she said, suddenly serious. “Leave no one standing, that’s an order. I don’t need an army when I have your team by my side, you’ve all become more powerful than I ever could’ve imagined.”

“What about the others in the facility? Do we kill them too?”

“We’ve dealt with the weak, but there’s some really strong kids in there. We’ve kept them alive and they’ll join the rest of you when this is over. They’ll remain loyal as long as we remove anyone from this earth who would try and infiltrate their minds. Get it done,” she warned, waiting for us to nod before turning towards the door. “Get anything out of that house that you want to keep. We’ll start there to make sure the strongest are gone before taking down the rest of the town. I’ll make sure a barrier is in place around the gates to stop anyone from fleeing.”

Once she was gone, Zeo pulled me against him with a grin.

“I can’t wait to take those fuckers down. They’ll regret ever touching you.”

“Two more days and this will all be over,” I said with a small smile, sliding my gaze to Storm who gave me a nod. I wanted to get back to Stardust now and let the others know what was coming, but we needed to wait until the morning as planned or these guys would get suspicious.

“It will be easy. Take down Smokey and Frost first, they’re more powerful. Fox and River should be a piece of cake,” Thor smirked, dropping down onto the couch. “Now that’s dealt with, let’s just hang out tonight. Come here, baby.” Zeo let me go so I could move towards the couch, and Thor tugged me onto his lap so that I was facing him. “You sure you aren’t in the mood to be railed within an inch of your life?”

His dick was hard under me, and I shook my head.

“I want all my memories back first. I want you to have all of me, not just a little piece.”

“You really fell for them, huh?” he sighed, taking my face in his hands. “I get it. Once they’re gone from your life, hopefully you can move on and come back to us properly. Your heart is the thing I love most about you, and I’m proud of you for putting the importance of the Board above your own feelings. It’s a sacrifice the Board will notice.”

“This is way too heavy,” Storm grunted, dropping down beside us. “Put a movie on or I’m taking Salem to bed. She’s tired, it’s been a long day.”

“You get her all the time, she’s with me tonight,” Zeo bit out, panic washing through me. What would he do if he had me alone? Zeo was pushy, and he’d made it well known that he was struggling to keep his hands off me.

Ash lightly tossed little sparks of flames at him, shutting him up.

“Salem’s more comfortable with Storm right now, we have all the time in the world to be with her again. Let them be.”

Storm eyed me silently and I cringed.

“Uh, how would you feel about sharing a bed with us then, Zeo? No funny business though, I mean it when I say I need more time. We can snuggle though.”

“I’m down for a snuggle,” he said and waggled his eyebrows, the anger burning away when he realized I wasn’t pushing him away. Him and Ash sat on the other couch for the movie, but the second it was over, Zeo got to his feet and took my hand, pulling me off Thor’s lap. “C’mon, bedtime.”

I was half asleep, so I didn’t argue, saying good night to the others and snagging Storm’s hand on the way out. It felt strange being shut in a room with them both, but Zeo wasted no time pulling my shirt over my head, making me panic.

“You said—”

“We’re just snuggling, but I want you in my shirt while we do it,” he said warmly, not letting me finish. A large shirt was forced over my head, and he removed my pants, leaving me in my panties. “There, much better.”

Storm wasn't looking at us, trying to keep his anger in check as he focused on stripping to his boxers and climbing into bed. I slid into the middle, leaving room for Zeo, who instantly hauled me back against him to spoon me.

Storm's hand moved to my waist, and he kissed me softly, silently asking if I was okay with his eyes. I smiled, knowing he was two seconds away from fucking this up if I kept looking uncomfortable, and I flipped the light off with my powers, plunging us into darkness.

"Maybe you two could put on a show for me so I can at least see you naked," Zeo chuckled, his lips trailing across my shoulder. "How about it? You're comfortable with Storm, right?"

"It's not just you, Zeo. I'm not really in the mood," I replied dryly.

"Fine, but the second you guys move back in here, I'm stripping you naked and feasting on you for hours," he grumbled, holding me tighter.

After a while his breathing evened out, but I knew he was faking it. It was a good opportunity to make us look like we were definitely on their side.

"Storm?"

"Yeah, firecracker?"

"What if we lose? Smokey and Frost together are strong, but if they get their hands on that poison—"

"I won't let that happen. I promise. In two days, we'll be back here where we belong. Besides, Zeo won't let you die, he wants your pussy too bad," he teased, knowing exactly what I was doing. "Get some sleep, okay? We'll go back to Stardust and make sure we throw them off our trail."

"I love you," I whispered, his lips meeting mine in the dark.

"I love you too, baby."

I woke up to lips on my neck and a hand between my legs. I groaned, grinding on the hand for a second before I remembered where we were. I jerked back, finding Zeo smirking at me.

“Morning, baby.”

My movement woke Storm and he scowled, not aware that Zeo’s hand had been in my panties.

“Can you two sit still? I’m fucking sleeping.”

“Our girl’s feeling better today, maybe you should wake up and play too,” Zeo replied, reaching for me again and frowning when I scrambled back further. “What’s wrong?”

“You said you wouldn’t touch me,” I snapped, Storm now fully awake, his eyes narrowing as Zeo shrugged and sucked his fingers into his mouth to taste me.

“I was hoping you were just a little nervous. We can—”

“You said you would wait until I was ready!” I shouted, his face falling when he realized how upset I was.

“Baby—”

“You lied to me.” I climbed out of bed and shoved my clothes on, throwing his shirt at his face. “Don’t you understand how fucked up my head is right now? You went from being a stranger, to an enemy, then all of a sudden, I have feelings for you. I want time, Zeo.”

“Why is it so hard for you to trust me if your memories are back?” he demanded, and I knew he was starting to get suspicious. I couldn’t risk them knowing the truth, so I sighed, raking my hand through my hair.

“I’m a mess, Z. I can’t sleep with you then go back to Stardust and sleep with them. Once they’re gone and I’m back

here, things will be better. I just can't do it right now, I'm sorry."

Storm was watching me with a clenched jaw, his voice low. "He touched you?"

The door opened and Thor walked in, his eyes already on Zeo.

"What the fuck did you do?"

"I just want her to fucking look at me like she looks at him!" Zeo exploded, pointing at Storm. "She trusts him, but she doesn't trust us."

"Touching her without her permission is just proving that she shouldn't trust you, idiot. She asked you to wait," Thor bit out, not reaching for me as he moved in front of me. "Are you okay? Take all the time you need, we're not going anywhere. We can figure it all out once you're home."

"That's what I want," I nodded, taking a breath before stepping against him and resting my cheek on his chest as his arms went around me. "I'm sorry, I just—"

"You have nothing to be sorry for. Just because you're ours, doesn't mean any of us have the right to your body," he said seriously, glaring at Zeo over his shoulder.

Storm got out of bed and got dressed, needing to distract himself from the thought of murdering Zeo. That would really fuck up our plans.

"We'd better go before the guys start questioning us. Next time we're here, it will all be over and your wandering hands can have a blast."

"You're leaving right now?" Zeo asked quietly as he eyed me, his shoulders slumping, but Thor shot him a dirty look.

"Whose fault is that?"

Tears burned my eyes and Storm pulled me close, kissing the top of my head.

"It's okay. We'll head back and get this mission completed so we can return here and sort all of this out." It concerned me

that we were so good at lying.

I nodded, my chest aching as I walked towards Zeo and gave him a quick kiss, knowing it was the last time he'd get one from me.

"I'll see you tomorrow. Give me some warning before you tear my damn house down."

"I'm sorry," he choked out, cupping my cheek and wiping a tear as it fell.

"Me too," I answered, not that he knew what I was sorry for. He might have lied to me, but I was lying to him too.

I said goodbye to Thor before wandering down the hall with Storm to Ash's room, finding him half-awake in bed.

"You're going." It wasn't a question, he'd probably heard the commotion from down the hall.

"Yeah. I'll see you tomorrow," I said and tried to force a smile, but he hooked an arm around me and pulled me down on top of him. I tensed, but he simply held me, stroking a hand up and down my back.

"I'm sorry about Zeo. You two are usually all over each other, so he's not used to this. That's no excuse though," he murmured, kissing the top of my head. "We'll be in touch when we're on the way to Stardust. Take some injections with you, just in case." He let me sit up so he could rummage in his bedside table, pulling out four syringes. "If they attack you, use these. Don't let them know you have them."

"Thanks, bro," Storm said quietly, taking them and putting them in his pocket. "We'll let you know if we lose control of them."

"Be careful," Ash warned, giving me a kiss as Storm opened a portal and offered me his hand. Thor and Zeo stood in the doorway, and tears fell at knowing this was an end that they'd never see coming. They trusted us, loved us, and we were going to be their downfall in all of this.

"Let's go," Storm murmured, knowing I was starting to lose grip on my emotions, and he took my hand since I hadn't

moved, pulling me through the portal until Ash's bedroom was gone and we were back in the kitchen at Stardust.

Storm caught me as I broke down, all my emotions and memories fighting amongst themselves. It would've been easy to kill them if they were cruel, but knowing we were killing those that trusted us hurt my damn soul.

"I'm sorry I let him touch me," I choked out, and Storm's fingers threaded through my hair as he held me close, keeping my head tucked into the crook of his neck.

"You didn't let him, it's not your fault. Why are you crying? From him touching you, or because we have to kill them?"

"Both."

"It's almost over, baby," he murmured, a sob leaving me.

"What the fuck happened?" Smokey growled as he appeared beside us, instantly sandwiching me between him and Storm as if he could put all my broken pieces back together. I sobbed harder, and he turned me around to face him. "Hurricane, what happened?"

"I let him touch me," I forced out, and Storm scowled.

"You didn't let him. You were asleep."

Smokey's eyes blazed with fury, his voice sharp.

"He assaulted you?"

I hugged him more tightly, burying my face in his chest.

"He woke me up with his hand in my panties. He figured I'd be fine with it."

"Why the hell would he think that?"

"Because you guys know I'm okay with you doing it. He loves me too, Smokey. He thought it was okay, he wasn't forcing me. He stopped when he realized I was upset," I said with a shaky breath, finally pulling back to look up at him. "I just need this to be over."

“It’s about to be,” Storm sighed, glancing at Smokey. “They’re attacking tomorrow, starting here. If there’s anything we don’t want destroyed, we need to move it.”

Fox walked in with River and paused, River’s arms opening as I moved towards him.

“Hey, baby. Are you okay?”

“We need to have a meeting. Now,” Storm said firmly, pulling out his phone. “I’ll get Vulcan’s guys here.”

“No need, they’re already here. They trained with us yesterday and crashed here afterwards,” Fox replied, still watching me. “Are you hurt?”

I didn’t get to answer before Frost stalked in, yanking me away from Smokey and taking my face firmly in his hands, his voice low.

“Who the fuck am I killing?”

“I love you,” I said with a choked laugh, his face softening a fraction.

“I love you too. Seriously though, why are you crying?”

“We’re going to sit down and talk about it as a group,” Storm grunted, motioning to the living room. “Everyone meet in there. Wake Vulcan.”

Fox ran off to get the others, and before long, we were all squashed onto the couches together. Frost had pulled me onto his lap, and Smokey sat right beside him to take my hand for comfort. They all looked worried for me, and I couldn’t blame them.

I was a fucking mess.

Storm gave them the rundown of what had happened and explained the details of the impending attack. It gave me time to pull myself together, and it was easier now I was surrounded by my guys. Part way through Storm’s update, River stood from the couch and sat on the floor at my feet, my free hand dropping to toy with his hair. He sighed, seeming to calm more now that I was touching him.

He'd been tense as hell since I'd gotten back, so I knew he'd been worrying the entire time we were gone.

“So they're going to attack us first?” Fox asked from his place on the other couch, his full attention on Storm. “Will we know the time?”

“We're supposed to be getting a heads up, yes. If Minerva and Ronin can get in our heads, they can transfer the knowledge of our powers to the rest of you and we can transfer some ourselves. I know we can't risk being too burned out for tomorrow, but I think we need to use portals to secretly get into every house in Stardust and get everyone out of here. The Board wants everyone dead, so we need to try and save as many as possible,” Storm warned, and Vulcan scowled.

“That's going to take forever. We don't have time.”

“If we want people to trust us, we need to prove we have their backs. When all of this is over, we can try to rebuild Stardust as a safe haven for the gifted. We need to do more than protect ourselves, we need to protect the community too. If we can all use portal magic, it won't take as long to drop by every house and evacuate them.”

“And where the fuck do you think we can put them all? There's hundreds of people here, man.”

“We have to try,” Storm snapped, looking at Minerva. “Can we make this work? They've been hiding you, so tell me if this is impossible.”

She blew out a breath, glancing at Vulcan for a second before nodding.

“They'll be squished into houses like sardines, but they'd be safe. It would only be for a few days, right?”

Porter cleared his throat, speaking quietly.

“Just say we do this. How do we know the Board can't track us somehow through the portals? It's a risk we take every time we use them. If they find out we're hiding everyone, they'll know you guys aren't loyal to them and they'll attack unannounced, destroying our safe houses and Stardust in one go.”

“Like you said, it’s a risk, but it’s one we need to do. Please try this. Even if we can save a handful of people, it’s worth it. No one asked to be here, and none of them deserve death just because the Board are done playing with their toys,” Storm replied, looking at Vulcan again. “Ash gave me four injections of poison. It was intended to take my team out if they turned on us, but we can use them on Ash, Zeo, and Thor. If William shows up, we can take him down too. You guys trained together yesterday, right? Do you think it’s possible we can win this war, or do we give up and let them end us?”

My eyes slid to Vulcan to find him watching me, a sense of worry in his eyes.

“Which side are you really on, Salem? I can almost feel your heartbreak over this. Can we trust you?”

All my guys growled their opinions, but I climbed off Frost’s lap to stand in front of Vulcan, needing him to believe me.

“I love them, but they’re from a past I no longer see in my future. This is my home, my family. I’d rather die than bring any harm to anyone in this house, your family included. I won’t lie and say it doesn’t hurt, because my memories are making it difficult, but they’re poison for our kind, Vulcan. They can’t survive this, I won’t let it happen. I’ve tried to convince them to come here and start fresh, but their minds remain loyal to the Board. They can’t be saved.” I choked on the last few words, sympathy crossing his face as he nodded.

“I believe you. I’m sorry it had to end like this.”

“Me too. We only have the rest of today to clear the town, so we need to transfer our powers and start evacuating. Don’t be seen outside, and we’ll mark sections off as we go to save doubling up. We all get a list of numbers in a street to do, and then when we’re done, we’ll meet back here and get ready for the attack. If there’s anything we want here, we need to take it to a safe place too.”

“Let’s get this done then,” Vulcan said firmly, pointing at Minerva and Ronin. “You guys up to this? It might drain you a little.”

Storm chuckled, drawing all their attention.

“Trust me, once everyone has this power, it will take a lot to feel drained. We’ve got this, guys.”

Who knew he was such a motivational speaker?

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

SALEM

Surprisingly, most members of Stardust didn't question us appearing in their houses through portals, let alone argue about coming with us to safety. The guys' speech yesterday had everyone in a panic, but it made our jobs easier for getting them all out.

A few had argued with us, one even tried to run to report us to the Board.

Coal didn't let them get far though, having no issue incinerating the loyal followers of the Board.

"I'm not even burning out," Coal smirked, waving his hand around at Ronin as he switched between powers as he returned to the house, reminding me so much of Smokey who'd already been showing off in the backyard for the past hour.

It was getting late, but no one seemed ready for bed. We were all too wired for the battle that was coming, and my nerves were shot to shit over it.

Tomorrow, I'd kill those I'd claimed to love, and it was tearing me apart.

Arms slid around my waist from behind, and I instantly knew it was Frost. He'd been glued to me at every chance possible since I'd returned from the facility, his piercing blue eyes tracking me when he wasn't close enough to touch me.

"I was hoping you'd be in my bed tonight, but I have a feeling water boy's going to win that fight. Did you know he

messed around with fire face and Casanova last night?”

“I told him to figure the shit out between them all. We need a bigger bed so we can all bunk in together,” I mused, a snort leaving him.

“I don’t mind putting you between me and someone else, but I’m not sharing a bed with all of them. I give them enough leeway, don’t you think?”

“Yeah, it’s so kind of you to let them spend time with me,” I deadpanned, and he turned me around to face him, his eyes narrowed.

“You were supposed to be mine, Salem. I don’t like sharing you at all, but I’m pushing my feelings about it aside because it makes you so fucking happy. I’ve learned to like those assholes, sure, but that doesn’t mean I enjoy sharing you.”

I wanted to get mad, but he was allowed to feel like that. I wouldn’t be okay with them finding another girl, so I was grateful they all got along enough so they could all be with me.

“I’m sorry,” I said softly, standing on tiptoe to kiss his jaw, the tension slowly leaving him as I kissed him again. “I promise we’ll spend more time together soon.”

“I miss you, even when you’re here,” he murmured, leaning down to bury his face in my neck. “We need a schedule or something.”

I giggled, his teeth nipping at my skin and making me shriek. The playful side of Frost was rare, so I enjoyed every second of it.

“Can I talk to you?” Fox asked from close by, his eyes on me, and Frost sighed.

“Told you, breeze. When they piss you off, come find me.” He walked off, glancing over his shoulder to give me the hint of a smile, telling me he wasn’t that mad about it.

“What did you want to talk about?” I asked Fox as I gave him my attention, a cringe lining his features.

“River—”

“I heard about you playing around with them. I hope there was no argument from it,” I said firmly, and he relaxed at knowing I wasn’t angry.

“No, it was really good. I wish you’d been there though.” He pulled me against his chest, kissing my lips softly. “He was so worried about you, so as much as I wanted to convince you to sleep in my bed tonight, sleep in his with him and Smokey. I think he needs it more than the rest of us.”

“That’s very kind of you,” I said slowly, my eyes sliding to where River was laughing at Coal and Smokey who were now throwing random powers at each other. “He’s okay after last night?”

“He’s fine. Smokey let him top him instead and the three of us just messed around. He just needs some confidence, that’s all,” Fox grinned, threading his fingers through my hair and tugging slightly to regain my attention. “I think he’ll want you there when Smokey tops him.”

“He might not,” I pointed out, but Fox chuckled.

“Trust me, he does. Talk him through it and give him lots of praise. He relaxes a lot when he has reassurance.”

“Thank you for doing that for them,” I said with a warm smile, giving him a kiss.

“It was my pleasure. I hope they invite me back again sometime,” he answered and waggled his eyebrows. “Your boys are hot, baby. I appreciate you lending them to me.”

“You’re always welcome to play when they invite you,” I winked, almost landing on my face when a stray ball of water hit me. Fox caught me, glaring at my attacker over my head.

“Watch it, asshole.”

“Shit, sorry, hurricane,” Smokey winced as he joined us, cupping my chin to inspect me. I was soaking wet, a bubble of laughter leaving me as I slid my hand between us and sprayed him with water of my own. He sputtered as he stumbled back,

a smirk taking over his face as he held his hand up with another water ball. “You want to play games, baby?”

“Don’t you dare!” I warned, squealing as he blasted me with water again. I was surprised when Storm joined in, our water fight growing as he got Frost in on it, and before long, all of us were chasing each other around the yard throwing water.

It was going fine until my dumbass ended up in the pool thanks to a stray blast of water, the familiar panic creeping in as I tried to figure out which way was up, and I forced myself to relax as my hands broke the surface, managing to lie back to keep me afloat.

River slid in fully clothed, putting his hands under me as I faltered.

“You did it,” he beamed, bringing me closer so I could wrap my legs and arms around him, and I glanced up when a shadow fell over us.

Frost looked almost scared, his eyes raking over me.

“Are you okay? I didn’t mean for you to end up in the pool.”

“I’m fine. I floated!” I grinned, his face softening.

“You did good.” He offered me his hand so he could pull me out, and at the last second, I yanked hard, sending him sprawling into the cool water beside us. The others hooted with laughter as he surfaced, his scowl already in place as he wiped the water from his eyes. “You’re dead.”

I couldn’t exactly swim away, despite River’s efforts to help me, so I wasn’t surprised when Frost grabbed me around the middle and pulled me against him to dunk me. For a moment I struggled as the fear gripped me, but he pulled me back up quickly and kept an arm firmly around me, his mouth on mine the second I stopped sputtering.

Frost wasn’t trying to kill me anymore, he loved me, so I had nothing to worry about.

I sank a little and I wrapped my legs around him, his voice quiet against my lips.

“I’ve got you.”

He swam towards the shallow end so I could stand, the water dripping off my wet clothes and making me shiver.

“It’s fucking cold.”

“Let’s get you inside,” he murmured, helping me out as River followed. I gave Storm a nod to let him know I was okay, leaving him to deal with the others while Frost and River took me inside, Smokey hot on our tail.

“Is this where you all fuck me to warm me up?” I smirked, a huff leaving Frost.

“You just fell in the pool, without the ability to swim, and all you can think about it taking my fucking dick?”

“It would warm me up really fast,” I cooed, the look on his face telling me I wasn’t going to get what I wanted.

“You need a hot shower and some warm clothes. You’re shivering.” He carried me into my bathroom and sat me on the sink while he adjusted the water in the shower, and Smokey moved to stand between my legs to wrap his arms around me. His natural body heat soaked into me and I leaned into him, his lips brushing my ear.

“You’ll do anything for our attention, won’t you?” he teased, nuzzling into my neck. His warm breath instantly sent a shiver through me, and I slid my arms around him to get ever closer.

“Says the show pony,” I threw back. I expected Frost to drag me under the hot spray, but he motioned at Smokey.

“Get her in there. Don’t let her out until she’s a prune, and then wrap her in blankets in bed like a Salem burrito.”

“You’re not staying?” I asked with a pout, a cute as fuck smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

“We have bigger issues to conquer right now other than your desperate pussy. Get warm, rest, and get ready for war.

We'll fuck once this is all over.”

I swore I whined, making him chuckle as he left the room and closed the door, and Smokey hauled me off the sink to strip me naked before removing his own clothes and guiding me into the shower. River joined us, both of them sandwiching me between them under the hot spray until I stopped shivering, my body feeling heavy from being so relaxed.

“Don't listen to Frost, we'll fuck you before battle,” Smokey grinned against my neck, his hands sliding down to my ass to squeeze my cheeks as River pressed closer to my back. I was surprised when River boldly slid a hand between my legs to tease my pussy, a shaky breath leaving me as he pushed a finger inside.

He added a second finger and pushed even deeper, a desperate whine leaving me as I leaned into Smokey more. I liked the growing confidence River was getting, especially when he removed his fingers and replaced them with his dick. It was slow at first, his strokes shallow and lazy as he made his way inside me, but then he picked up speed once he was all the way in, my nails digging into Smokey's arms as I held on.

“That feels so fucking good,” I groaned, tilting my head to the side so he could kiss my neck as Smokey's fingers slid between us so he could rub circles on my clit. A gasp left me at the sudden jolt that went through my body, and I knew I was close already.

“Make her come then finish this in bed,” Smokey murmured, his free hand gripping my chin to force my mouth to his. It was rough, needy, and everything my body wanted as I came hard, my legs shaking so badly that River had to wrap his arms around me to keep me on my feet.

“Bed,” River said roughly in my ear, the sound going straight to my pussy. He could boss me around all damn day if he kept using that tone.

Smokey switched the water off while River lifted me against his chest, my arms sliding around his neck to kiss him. There was a moment of hesitation before he dropped me a little lower, his dick nudging my entrance as he pushed inside

me again. I wriggled, but he held me tightly as he walked us into the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed, my hips instantly rolling as I took over.

“Look at you two,” Smokey practically rumbled as he walked in, his heated gaze roaming over us. “Scoot up the bed.”

River shuffled back so that he was laying down, my hands falling to his chest to brace myself as I kept riding him. He grabbed the back of my neck and pulled me down for a long kiss, his hips thrusting up into me a little more erratically.

“Don’t come yet,” Smokey warned as he crawled across the bed and sat right by River’s head, stroking himself before shuffling a little closer. “Open wide for me.”

I leaned back to watch as River tilted his head back enough for Smokey to push between his lips, my hips faltering as I got lost in the show. Smokey’s head dropped back as River moaned around his dick, and it took me a second to realize I’d stopped moving completely. A shriek left me as River’s palm suddenly spanked me, and Smokey chuckled as he reached out to take my hair in his fist to yank me forward slightly for a kiss.

River gagged as Smokey leaned forward to meet me, my body remembering what to do as I circled my hips and made River groan as Smokey consumed me, his tongue teasing mine as he kept a firm grip on my hair.

I knew River was close when his muffled sounds got louder and his muscles tensed, his fingers digging into my waist tightly as he encouraged me to keep going as he choked on Smokey again.

“You going to come in me, puddles?” I said breathlessly as I pulled back from Smokey who shuffled back to drop a kiss to River’s lips.

“I want to be inside you when you come.”

“I can’t—” River panted, but Smokey cut him off.

“You can. Hurricane, stop.” I stopped moving and a frustrated growl left River, his abs flexing as the sensation

died down. “Now lean forward a little so I can get behind you.”

“Wait,” River said with the edge of panic, and I leaned down to trail kisses along his jaw to soothe him.

“You know Smokey will take care of you,” I said softly, his body relaxing a fraction as his arms banded around me. Thankfully, Smokey dropped down beside him and snuggled into him, kissing his neck to calm him.

“I’ll be gentle, and I can stop if you don’t like it. It feels really good, I promise.”

River’s deep blue eyes stared up at me as he thought about it, and I took one of his hands to kiss his knuckles.

“We’ll take it slow, but if you’re not ready, we don’t have to.”

“I want to. I’m just nervous,” he admitted, finally glancing at Smokey. “Really slow?”

“Really slow,” Smokey repeated with a nod, rummaging in the drawer for the lube. “I’ll make sure to prep you first, okay?”

I wished I could’ve watched what Smokey was doing as he moved behind me, but I didn’t want to move. Watching River’s face and giving him my full attention was more important, and we’d have plenty of times in the future for me to watch them fuck.

“I won’t last,” River said tightly as his hips jerked, telling me Smokey was doing something he liked. “I need a distraction.”

“Then make our girl come. She needs at least two more,” Smokey replied, and River snorted.

“If her pussy clamps down on my dick, it’s over for me.”

“Fight it. I’m going to add another finger,” Smokey warned just before River’s body shook slightly. “You’re doing so good for me. Hold it off.”

An actual whimper left River as he struggled to control himself, and I didn't dare move. He was trying so hard to wait, but he was losing the fight, so I did the only thing I could think of.

I pressed my palms to his chest and burned him.

He jerked with a curse, his eyes narrowed on me as he scowled.

“Um, ouch. What the fuck was that for?”

“Distraction.”

“You burned me!”

“Bet you don't need to come right now though, do you?” I smirked, laughter coming from behind me.

“You can burn me any day, baby. I don't think it's River's thing though.”

“It wasn't supposed to be,” I hummed. “Are you almost done?”

“I think so. You ready, raindrop?”

The uncertainty in River's eyes was back within seconds, and I leaned forward to kiss his lips softly, relaxing him until he answered.

“I'm ready.”

I knew when Smokey started pushing his dick inside him, because River squeezed his eyes shut and went completely rigid, so I gave my hips a small roll.

“Eyes on me, River.”

River

It burned. Smokey wasn't small, but my ass was.

I opened my eyes to find Salem peering down at me, rolling her hips gently to try and take my mind off it. Smokey pushed in a little more, but he froze when I spoke.

“Stop.” Why did this feel good for him? This was awful.
“When’s it meant to feel good?”

“Once I’m in and you loosen your muscles a little. Am I hurting you?” Smokey asked, peering at me from behind Salem. The worry on his face made me calm slightly, knowing he wasn’t going to push me. He was hardly inside me yet, but I knew he’d abandon this idea if I told him to.

“It really burns. Can you use more lube?” My face flamed but he didn’t hesitate to do as I asked, drowning both of us in it and running his finger around where we were connected.

“You want to try a little more or do you need more time?” he asked, still not moving. Once I nodded, he gave me a dopey smile. “Yes to what? Needing time, or continuing?”

“Keep going.”

Salem murmured sweet words to me as Smokey focused on pushing inside me more, the extra lube definitely helping but it still burned. My fingers tangled in Salem’s hair as I tugged her down to kiss me, needing something to focus on. She started fucking me a little more, my dick painfully hard inside her, and I was surprised when Smokey spoke again.

“I’m in. Still okay?”

“It’s still burning but it’s okay.”

“Can I move? It gets better as your body adjusts.”

I nodded, my fingers gripping Salem’s hips so damn hard I knew I’d bruise her. She didn’t flinch, keeping a steady pace as Smokey slowly started fucking me, a strangled groan leaving me and making Smokey grin.

“Told you.”

“Fuck.” I couldn’t form other words. My body was coiled tight like a spring, my balls aching with every stroke of his dick, and I completely relaxed into it as Salem’s lips dropped to mine again as they both worked me towards release. The burn slowly faded and pleasure built in its place, desperation filling me. “I need more.”

“Faster or harder? Me or Salem?” Smokey asked, my legs tensing as my climax grew even closer.

“All of it,” I blurted out, cursing as Smokey’s thrusts got sharper and deeper. “Oh, shit.”

“You look so good right now,” Salem praised, the words going straight to my dick as she changed from rolling her hips to bouncing on me. It wouldn’t take much more, I was so close.

I didn’t ask Smokey to go even harder, but it was like he read my mind, slamming into me more until I was shouting words that weren’t even in English, my orgasm hitting the second Salem’s did. It was intense, it felt like it went forever as Smokey railed me, and he finally let out a curse and came inside me, all of us going still to catch our breaths.

I hadn’t even done anything, but it felt like I’d run a marathon.

“Holy shit,” I finally croaked, my body jolting as Smokey eased out of me and moved to lay beside me.

“Is that a good holy shit?”

“Definitely.”

Salem looked tired, but Smokey reached out and thumbed her clit, her eyes going wide.

“We don’t—”

“I said two more, you still have another one. Lean back for me,” he ordered gently, and he gave me a wink before getting to his knees and dropping his mouth to where Salem and I were still joined. His tongue teased my dick as he licked and sucked her clit, and I swore I almost came a second time when he coaxed her orgasm out and she clamped down around my sensitive dick. I was spent, but I needed to look after her.

Once Smokey sat back I pulled Salem down against my chest, stroking a hand up and down her spine.

“Let’s have another shower and then we’ll sleep in Smokey’s room. The bed’s a little drenched.”

She giggled, my cum leaking out of her as I forced my body to shuffle to the edge of the bed so I could stand, and I cringed as Smokey's cum started leaking out of me too. He gave me a knowing smirk before moving towards the door.

"I'll find us some clothes. You get her in the bathroom." He opened the door and paused, drawing my eyes to whatever it was that he was looking at. Clothes were placed on the floor at his feet, alongside two huge towels and three bottles of water. I knew without a doubt it was Fox's doing.

"He's such a romantic fucker," I chuckled as Smokey scooped them up and shut the door, amusement on his face.

"Definitely. I'll thank him tomorrow. Right now, we need to clean up and get some sleep. Tomorrow's going to be a big day."

Nerves filled me at the thought, but I knew we'd all be fine.

We had to be, there was no other option.

Storm

I paced in my bedroom all night, freaking out about what I had to do. The injections stared back at me from the bedside table, my thoughts at war with themselves.

"You look stressed," Ash's voice said from close by, but I didn't jump. I'd sensed his arrival minutes ago and had been waiting for him to speak.

"Of course I'm stressed. I have to kill a bunch of people. What are you doing here?"

"Zeo's stressing, so I figured I'd come and check on you and Salem. If he'd come over, he would've killed the two she's in bed with. Last hurrah?" Suspicion filled his face and I forced a laugh, needing him to stay the fuck away from them.

"If they're fucking her, they can't plan an attack. She kept them busy while I gave bullshit plans to the others. They have no idea what's coming tomorrow."

My chest ached and I had to force myself not to rub my palm across it. Tomorrow was the day I lost everything. Going against my plans with Salem and the guys was eating me alive, but I had to do what was right. Even if the look of betrayal on their faces killed me.

I had to be the bad guy, but could I really kill my family? My brother?

Maybe in another life, Salem and my guys would forgive me for lying to them.

“I’m worried about Salem. I think she’s more attached than she’s letting us think,” Ash muttered, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Is she playing us?”

“Even if she was playing you, she wouldn’t play me,” I said firmly, guilt nipping at me for being the one to play her. “I’ll do what she won’t if it comes to it. If I have to drag her to the facility and lock her up for a while, I will. She should focus better once Frost is dead, he’s always had a weird connection with her. Hopefully breaking her will detach her emotions a little.”

“You think she’s going to switch sides?”

“I think our girl is too emotional for her own good and will hesitate. I just need to give her a reason to get her head in the game,” I shrugged, his entire body relaxing. He couldn’t sense my inner turmoil as it choked me, and I’d never let him know just how fucked up this was making me.

I swore there’d be no more secrets, but my past was colliding with my future, and I had to pick a side. The winning side was the only option, even if it destroyed those I loved. This one last lie was going to sever any trust Salem had towards me, and I’d have to live with that for the rest of my life.

No one expected me to go off script, which was exactly why this plan would work.

“You ready for war then, little brother?” Ash grinned, my stomach tightening in response.

“Yeah. Let’s burn this place down.”

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

The house was mayhem all morning. Everyone was on edge, especially Storm. He was barking orders like a tyrant in the kitchen, his shoulders tense. Vulcan gave me a weird look and I shrugged, having no idea what his problem was. I put it down to stress and left it alone. I wasn't going to get mad at him for being worried, even though he was being a bit of a dick.

"Maybe you should've bounced on boss man's dick last night instead," Smokey muttered beside me, making me sigh.

"Should I blow him before this goes down? Maybe he's just—"

"Salem!" Storm snapped, a frown tugging at my lips. He looked freaked out now that he was stalking towards me, hidden anxiety flickering in his eyes. "Stop fucking around or you'll get hurt. No one's fucking anyone."

"Dude, chill out," Smokey warned, stepping between us. "Just because you're in a mood, doesn't mean you get to speak to her like that."

"I'm glad you're so calm after your orgy, but this isn't playtime, this is war. Do you understand you could actually die today if you're not paying attention?"

"I'm aware, asshole. Just stop snarling at Salem like a psycho," he growled, earning a shove in return. I got between them and put a hand on Storm's chest, something instantly feeling wrong from the way he flinched.

“What’s wrong?” I asked in a low voice, feeling the dread and loss inside of him. “You’re keeping something from me.”

He stepped into me, a soul deep sigh leaving him as he pressed his forehead to mine.

“Please stay close to me today. I want you safe.”

“That’s not the answer I was asking for.”

“That’s the only answer you’ll get,” he said so softly I barely heard it, then he kissed me before walking away. Storm was losing it, which meant our team was going to fight like shit today. We couldn’t afford to lose.

I watched him walk away, and Vulcan appeared beside me, his eyes tracking Storm.

“I don’t like this. He’s up to something. Are you sure he won’t turn on us?”

“I trust him,” I said without hesitation, knowing no matter what, Storm wouldn’t turn his back on us. “He’s just stressed, which is no surprise.”

“I hope you’re right.”

My phone buzzed and I glanced at it to see Zeo’s name on the screen, my heart hurting.

Zeo: On the way. See you soon, baby. I love you.

Salem: I love you too, Z.

I jammed my phone back into my pocket and took a deep breath, shaking my hands out to force myself to relax.

“They’re coming. Are we ready?” I asked, the room going quiet, and Storm nodded.

“We’re ready. Frost and Salem stay near me. The rest of you pair up and we’ll surround them. Watch each other’s backs.”

Everyone split up to stand beside someone, and Frost dropped an arm around my shoulders, kissing my forehead.

“We’ve got this.”

I didn't get to reply before Thor appeared, Ash and Zeo right behind him. The Board didn't follow, but I wasn't surprised. We'd kill them in seconds thanks to their lack of power.

Zeo's eyes found mine immediately, a sly smirk on his face. "There's my girl."

My heart beat faster as my emotions hit me hard, but I refused to cry. They had to die, they'd been brainwashed too badly to break away from the Board's leash.

"Come here," Ash said lightly, his eyes narrowing as I shook my head. "Salem, you can stop acting now. This is over. Get over here so you don't get hurt."

Frost's arm tightened around me and I stepped against him more, knowing he had my back if this went to shit, but I wasn't expecting Storm to yank him away from me, his eyes dark and void of emotion.

"Salem, go stand with Zeo."

"What? No," I scoffed, stumbling as he snagged my wrist and gave me a push in Zeo's direction. "Storm! What the fuck are you doing? This wasn't the plan!"

"Plans change, firecracker," he said firmly, but his voice cracked a little. "Do as you're told."

Zeo took my arm and hauled me against him, kissing the top of my head.

"It's okay, we'll be home soon. This won't take long."

I fought against his hold but he was stronger than me, my power building until my eyes landed on Storm, just in time to watch him inject Frost with poison.

"Frost!" I cried, but Storm released him and walked towards Ash, standing beside him and leaving Frost staring at him as Smokey jogged over to inspect his arm. The air was thick with tension as Frost let out a dry laugh, not caring about Smokey's fussing.

"You played me good, bro. I'll give you that. Should've known you'd be the one to fuck us over after all these years of

being a fucking angry hermit.”

“It had to be this way,” Storm said calmly, tears blurring my vision as I fought against Zeo’s grip, trying to get to Frost. The poison could take a while to kill him, but it was going to be painful, and he needed me.

I only had one injection in my pocket, but I couldn’t reach it with Zeo’s hold so tight. I forced myself to relax, hoping he’d let me go so I could take him out, but he kept holding me tightly as if knowing my thoughts.

Smokey lost his shit, charging at Storm and blasting him with blue flames, the two of them rolling around and taking out the wall into the living room. Flames and lightning lit up the house as they beat the hell out of each other, the rest of them breaking out into complete war. Zeo pulled me out of the way as Coal got into it with Thor close by, flames licking my skin but I barely felt it.

My eyes numbly wandered the room, and it was obvious my side was losing. Ash had River pinned to the ground while holding Vulcan back with what appeared to be a rope made of flames, Thor was fighting off Coal and Porter with ease, and Zeo sent random blasts across the room to keep everyone else away from me.

With every punch thrown, our happy ending was slipping away from my grasp.

Zeo’s arms loosened as he became distracted by Fox attempting to save me, and that was all the time I needed. My fingers slipped into my pocket and plucked out the syringe, a choked sob leaving me as I spun around and slammed the needle into Zeo’s neck, pushing the liquid under his skin before he could yank it out.

My heart tore in half as he turned to me, his eyes on the empty needle in my hand as my legs almost gave out on me.

“Baby, what—”

“I love you, but I will always love them more. I won’t let you take them from me,” I forced out as tears streamed down

my face, everyone else seeming to take notice of us as Zeo snarled.

“They’ll never love you as much as I love you! You’re the other half of me, Salem! What the fuck changed since you left the facility the other day? You said you were on our side!” When I just kept crying, a defeated chuckle left him. “You were playing us, and we didn’t even question it.”

“Zeo!” Ash exclaimed in a panic when he saw the empty needle in my hand, trying to run over but Storm suddenly blasted him with lightning, making him scowl. “The fuck, brother?”

Storm’s eyes burned into me as I let myself break, confusion hitting me as Zeo stumbled to his hands and knees with a pained grunt. Frost was still fine, the confusion obvious on his face too.

“You’re not my brother,” Storm said in a lethal tone, still watching me. “And I’d never turn on my fucking family for you.”

Frost stalked closer, his fists clenched.

“You injected me!”

“With a booster. It was a decoy so I could get close enough,” Storm answered before injecting Ash in the chest, hope and anger mixing from the mindfuck he’d just thrown at us. “I’d never hurt you.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?!” Smokey snapped, hitting Storm with a ball of flames, but Storm hardly reacted.

“It wouldn’t have been believable. Beat me up later,” he grunted, shoving Ash away and moving towards Thor who started throwing power at him from nowhere. I hardly watched as the others helped, and I dropped to my knees beside Zeo as he cried out in pain, his terrified eyes on mine.

“Why?” That word just made me cry harder, every sweet word he’d ever said to me filling my head until I felt like I’d explode.

“Because you couldn’t be saved, Zeo. I love you, but no matter what you think, you’re the villain in all of this. It was always supposed to end this way.”

“It was supposed to end with you in my arms,” he choked out, blood slipping from his lips as his arms grew weak, a pained sound leaving him as he fell forward. I caught him, resting his head on my lap as my tears landed on his cheek, his arms going around my waist as if his hold on me would stop him from leaving the world.

“That’s exactly how it will end. I love you, Zeo.”

“I love you more, Salem.” He was right, and that love for me was what got him killed.

He started writhing in pain and I held him for as long as I could until I couldn’t take it anymore.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, his broken eyes on mine as I took his head in my hands and twisted hard, his body going limp on my lap as the life left his eyes. The poison would’ve gone through his system by the time his neck healed, so hopefully my last act of love gave him a sense of peace.

The world around me was a blur, and I had no idea how much time had passed by the time I felt a hand on my shoulder. When I didn’t move, continuing to cling to Zeo’s body, Storm squatted in front of me.

“We need to go.”

“Get away from me,” I croaked, his face falling. He did as he was told though, Fox’s face coming into view instead.

“C’mon, baby. You’ve gotta get up.” I tightened my hold on Zeo, Fox’s gentle hands taking my arm. “He’s gone, Salem. Let him go so you can stand.”

I let him pry my arms off Zeo and help me to my feet, my legs shaky as I finally looked around. Everyone had blood and bruises on them, telling me Ash and Thor had gone down with a fight, but both of them lay dead on the floor. I turned away as my emotions hit me again, letting Fox steer me outside and into the sun.

Most of the house was gone, and I didn't realize until we got outside and Porter let go of his powers that he'd been holding the kitchen and living room together. The house fell in on itself, leaving it in shambles, and I tried not to think about Zeo, Ash, and Thor being buried under it.

"We need to hit the facility right now," Vulcan warned, and I ignored Storm's gaze on mine as I answered, my grief turning into anger.

"Let's fucking kill them before they see us coming."

"Ding dong," Vulcan said brightly as we portaled into the facility, and he didn't waste time as he threw a steel stake right at Peter's head. It went straight through, his body dropping to the floor before the rest of the guys had even stepped foot through the portal.

Meredith's eyes went wide and instant fear rolled off her in waves as she realized if we were here, it meant her loyal soldiers were gone.

"William!" she screamed just as Storm went to blast her, a wall of air blocking the hit as William appeared out of nowhere. His chuckle was creepy as he eyed me, his tongue swiping his bottom lip in thought.

"I really didn't think you had it in you to hurt your soulmate. Zeo was so sure you'd return to him."

Meredith darted to hide behind the couch with Anthony as Coal and River started blasting their powers in their direction, but William tsked and blocked their shots too. Chaos erupted as powers flew around the room, William fighting everyone off with ease on his own, and I grabbed Fox's hand tightly in mine, my voice low.

“Take someone with you to check the rooms. We need to get the kids out of here.”

I thought he'd argue but he seemed relieved to be able to do something else, snagging Porter and Minerva's arms.

“You two are with me. We've got kids to find.”

They seemed more than happy to play savior than fighter too, the three of them running off together and leaving the rest of us to battle William. Frost moved closer to me after sending shards of ice across the room, his voice annoyed.

“Where the fuck are they going?”

“To find the kids and get them out. They're better with words than their fists.”

“If you're staying to fight, you need to focus. Be a mess when we get home and I'll make sure no one comes near you. Right now, block it the fuck out or turn it into power,” he said sharply, pressing a quick kiss on my cheek before charging across the room to help Smokey and River who were both trapped in a lightning rope.

Frost was right, I could break down later when we were safe, but that didn't mean it was easy to switch it off. My chest ached and my eyes stung, but I let my emotions fill my body and I did as Frost said.

I turned them into power.

Flames mixed with lightning in my hands as I threw blasts at William, almost knocking Vulcan and Ronin on their asses in the process from the force of it. I screamed words that didn't even make sense, letting my pain and anger out to keep pushing me through. William laughed maniacally with amusement as he threw random powers at rapid succession back, but I blocked them all, not slowing down.

Frost and Storm kept hitting him from behind, but it was as if he didn't feel it as he stalked towards me. Furniture flew around the room amongst the carnage, but all I saw was him as we faced off.

He was trying to wear me out, I knew that, so I let him think I'd weakened. The second I stopped to fake catching my breath, he grabbed me by the throat and squeezed, laughing in my face. "You really thought you could take me down, Salem? You're nothing compared to me. I'm number one for a reason."

My lungs burned but I smiled, my voice rough.

"You're number one because you were the first success, but all the numbers after you had more time to be improved. You think you've won?"

"My hand around your throat says I win," he smirked, but it fell from his face as River appeared beside us, an empty syringe in his hand.

"The poison inside you says I won, actually. Get your hands off my girl before I cut them off."

William dropped me like a hot potato, his fingers going to his side where River had silently stabbed him, and River instantly pulled me into his arms and took a few steps back to keep me out of danger. William lost his shit, blasting energy across the room at no one in particular, but all it did was weaken him faster.

"This poison won't kill me, you idiots! Do you really think my own mother would make a weapon like that against me?" he shouted, his eyes flashing to Meredith who was now sobbing. "Mom?" His voice was tiny like a child's as he watched her, realization hitting him before she even answered.

"You might be my son, but you're a weapon, William. All weapons need a killswitch," she sobbed, her hands flying to her mouth to hold back a gasp as he stumbled. "My boy—"

I used my telekinesis to yank the couch away from them, blasting Anthony with fire and lightning until he was a charred mess on the ground, his screams ringing in my ears as I walked past a writhing William to grab Meredith by the throat. She jerked as I forced flames out of my fingertips, burning her enough to cause pain but not death.

“You’d better hope like hell that when I get to the afterlife, I don’t fucking find you. They all trusted you!” I shouted the last part, burning her again as she screamed and clawed my arms, but I didn’t feel my skin tearing or the blood dripping down my skin. All I saw were the dead eyes of my original team, the victims who’d believed her lies at Stardust, and the faces of my men as children, cowering in corners as torture was inflicted on them.

I saw me, a child who’d known nothing but pain her whole life, but was now breaking free of those chains and taking back the control that had been stolen.

That town we lived in wasn’t Stardust, we fucking were, and we were taking it back.

Meredith screamed from the pain, her dying son forgotten as he begged for her to do something. His voice was getting desperate, the pain more intense.

She didn’t care about him, he was just another fucking soldier in her army of destruction.

I let her go to blast her with ice shards, stalking her back against the wall as she begged for her life, but I didn’t stop. I just switched powers and hit her with boiling water, sucking her lungs dry of air with my powers before giving it back long enough to keep her alive, then I did it all over again until her voice was scratchy and her nose bled.

William was screaming but I barely heard it, too focused on his mother’s ending than his. She was the reason for all of our nightmares and trauma, so I’d be the reason for hers.

No one stopped me as I continued the cycle of torture then relief, and I went on long enough for William’s cries to turn silent and for my emotions to weaken to a point I could handle them.

“You didn’t break us, Meredith,” I said almost calmly, not looking away from her gaze as I smiled. “You turned us into your own killswitch. All weapons need one, right?”

She put her hands up to beg me but I was done, forcing water down her throat to fill her lungs before stepping back to

watch her drown. She flailed for longer than I thought, but I didn't want to make it quick for her.

I wanted her to feel every second of terror and pain that we had.

Her gurgling sounds stopped and the room became silent, my legs finally giving out as the adrenaline left me.

Smokey caught me, tucking my head under his chin as we sat on the ground in silence, the others starting to wander the facility to locate anyone who might still be here. I didn't move, and Smokey didn't speak, letting me have the moment of peace my heart and brain so desperately needed.

I spoke first, my voice quiet.

"I snapped his neck."

"I know, I saw. We did the same for Thor and Ash. It wasn't their fault they were brainwashed," he murmured, pressing a kiss to my head. "Did you want to head home?"

"What home? Ours is nothing but rubble and a graveyard."

"Most of Stardust is untouched. We'll find somewhere to sleep tonight and figure out a plan tomorrow. Unless you want to search for kids here too?"

I'd seen a lot of hidden rooms in this place, some that the others might not find, so I nodded.

"I want to search too. I just needed a minute."

"Me too," he sighed, getting to his feet and helping me to mine. I wobbled but he kept me steady, both of us searching rooms on our way. The guys had found most of the prisoners and had taken them back to Stardust with the portals, but I kept looking, and Smokey didn't argue with me.

I was knocked back by a blast as I opened a door hidden in shadows, my eyes landing on a familiar girl with lightning sparking up her arms. She glared at me despite her fear, the guy behind her with less bravery on his face.

"I'm not here to hurt you," I said quickly. "I'm Salem."

“Why are you here then?” the girl threw back flatly, and I was kind of glad she wasn’t naive enough to blindly trust a stranger.

“To save you.”

“There’s no saving us,” she said, a little hesitation in her tone. “Meredith said—”

“Meredith’s dead,” I said firmly, her eyes widening.

“She can’t be dead. She’s super powerful!”

“She’s a human that got too big for her boots,” Smokey grunted, squatting beside me to make himself look less intimidating. “We’re taking everyone back to Stardust where it’s safe. You guys can stay together if you want.”

“We’re not leaving with you!” the girl said loudly, standing her ground.

“Fine, but there’s no one left here to feed you. We killed them all. Stay here if you want, we don’t give a shit.” He stood and turned to walk away, and when I went to scold him for being a dick, the girl spoke in a panicked voice.

“Wait! You’re sure they’re gone? How do we know you’re not bad too?”

“Because we were born here,” I said gently, lifting my hand to let a small ball of air swirl in my hand. “We got out, and that’s why they came after us and ended up dead. This is the last time we’ll come back here, so if you don’t come with us, you’ll—”

“We’ll come!” she said quickly, taking the boy’s hand tightly in hers. “You won’t separate us?”

“Never,” I promised, stepping aside so they could leave the room. Smokey walked behind to keep an eye out while I walked ahead with the kids, finding Fox waiting by the portal that we’d come in through.

“Everything’s empty. Where’d you find them? We searched every room,” he said with surprise.

“Dark corners hide shit here,” I muttered, ushering him to step through the portal. “Let’s deal with this at home.”

He stepped through ahead of me and I was surprised when the girl took my hand just before we followed, her shaking hand gripping mine so tightly that I thought she’d break one of my fingers. I let her, knowing how this place fucked you up and terrified you.

Everyone was celebrating when we got back, laughing and high fiving each other. Kids watched them with uncertainty, but some were already drinking bottles of water and granola bars that someone had put out for them.

The girl clung to my hand as she watched, and I steered her and the boy towards the other kids, grabbing a bar and a bottle of water for each of them before offering it to them.

“Here. Take these. I need to check in with my team, so you guys can hang out with the other kids for a while. Don’t wander too far, okay?”

She put her brave face back on and nodded, motioning for her friend to follow, and I stood back to watch as they mingled with some of the other kids, genuine smiles on their faces within minutes.

“Hey.”

I looked beside me to find Storm, a snort leaving me.

“I’m still mad at you.”

“You can be mad, but at least you’re alive,” he said lightly, his gaze scanning our surroundings. “I’d never hurt any of you. Not for anything in the world.”

“You gave me a fucking heart attack. You didn’t need to go with that plan, you asshole,” I hissed.

“Ash was suspicious of you still, so I had to seem like the bad guy to make them put their guards down. I was going to kill Zeo, I didn’t want you being the one to do it,” he replied softly, chipping away at my anger a fraction. “You did good, but I didn’t want you feeling like that.”

“I felt like that when I thought you’d injected Frost with the poison.”

“But he’s okay, and Zeo’s not.”

I was quiet for a moment, getting my thoughts together before peering up at him.

“I want to bury them.”

“We will. Do you hate me?” The vulnerability in his voice stabbed at my chest, but he wasn’t being forgiven any time soon.

“I don’t hate you, but I don’t like you right now either. Don’t expect pussy any time soon,” I warned, his lips quirking up into a small smile.

“As long as you don’t leave me, I can live with that.”

“I’m on the fence about what to do with you, so it’s probably in your best interests to stay away from me,” I said with a scowl, and he didn’t argue.

“I’d better go and apologize to Frost.”

“Good luck, you’ll need it,” I said sweetly as he walked off, not surprised when Fox, River, and Smokey joined me. Coal, Porter, and Minerva appeared beside us too, watching as Storm headed for Frost, Vulcan, and Ronin.

“This won’t end well,” Smokey muttered, crossing his arms. “I’m still going to kill him.”

“Aw, you were worried about the ice prince?” River teased, earning a swat to the arm.

“We all were, you dick. Do you think Frost will ice him, or throw hands?” Smokey asked, and I let out a chuckle.

“Both.”

Everyone winced as Frost’s fist turned to ice just as he threw it at Storm’s face, sending Storm sprawling back on the lawn. No one went to help him, he deserved a few hits after that stunt he pulled.

“He’s not invited to the celebratory gangbang,” Fox grumbled, amusement flashing across Coal’s eyes. “And neither are you, you walking fire pit.”

“Noted,” Coal smirked, dropping an arm around Minerva’s shoulders. “So—”

“Keep your dick away from me,” she said flatly and walked off, making him sigh.

“I miss out on all the fun. Should we put bets on Storm and Frost?”

We turned our attention back to them to find Frost and him wrestling on the grass, and my mouth curved into a smile as Frost slammed his fist down on Storm’s nose.

“My money’s on snowflake.”

EPILOGUE

One Year Later

“Oh my God!” I screamed as Frost and Storm slammed into my pussy and ass, their erratic movements giving me no choice but to lean over Frost’s chest and hold on. They’d been ruthless lately, the pair of them in some kind of constant competition where the only winner was me.

It didn’t help that Smokey and River had been putting on a show, and then Fox randomly joined. My orgasm had hit the second he’d started choking on Smokey’s dick. Fox didn’t join them often, but it was so fucking hot when he did. He’d literally just fucked me breathless before the two barbarians took over, so it wasn’t like he was missing out or anything.

Storm came loudly with a growl, laying over my back and trailing kisses across my shoulder, Frost coming a moment later.

It had taken six months for the tension between us and Storm to fade, and he’d even spent some time at Vulcan’s to give us space. It had hurt him, but he didn’t complain about being left out of the bedroom activities. He patiently waited for me to make the first move, then he’d devoured me.

I lifted my head off Frost’s chest just in time to see River come in Smokey’s ass, the three of them looking like a pile of limbs instead of three separate people. Storm’s hand cracked firmly on my ass, startling me.

“You’re insatiable.”

“They’re hot, sue me,” I huffed, leaning back as his arm slid around my middle, his lips landing on mine. I moaned when he pumped his softening dick in and out a little before withdrawing from my spent body, kissing my cheek.

“We need to shower and get to the school or Minerva will be pissed.”

“She’s the one who offered to teach the kids,” I grumbled, but I knew he was right. Minerva was a fantastic teacher, but there were a lot of kids. A few members of Stardust also helped out, but we’d offered to stop by and help a few kids who’d been struggling with their powers.

Especially Hail and Rain. They’d attached themselves to me since I found them in that dark room in the facility, and despite them being good with their powers, they acted out a lot when we weren’t around.

Rain had turned her math class into a lightning show last week, and Hail had found it hilarious and joined in. We lost a lot of windows out of that building that day.

I tried to climb off Frost but his fingers fanned across my throat to haul me back, his lips finding mine and making me melt all over again. We still clashed and I was pretty sure we always would, but it was easily fixed by yelling and sex.

Healthy? Definitely not, but fun? Absolutely.

I started fights just so he’d angry-fuck me.

“Match stick, you’re coming too,” Storm called as he left the room, making Smokey groan.

“Do I have to? I just make it worse.”

“Stop encouraging them all to be little pyros and you’ll be fine,” River mumbled, not lifting his face from the pillow.

We let them bicker, and Frost’s hand moved up and down my back as he placed kisses along my jaw and throat.

“I’m heading out with Ronin for a bit. Someone called to let us know the dragons are getting too close to town.”

“I think we should let the dragons eat them. They still don’t accept us,” I replied, making him grin.

“You don’t mean that.” He wasn’t wrong.

Humans had slowly started letting us into their society, but not many. It all started when one of their own decided to marry one of ours, and that change was what started a better coexistence between us and them.

Was it easy? No, but at least they didn’t always run in fear or tell us to leave anymore. Some of us actually lived outside Stardust in the next town over.

We’d stayed to run Stardust though, building a new house right in the middle of town. More businesses popped up over time, and we even had humans wandering over here to spend time in the park with their kids, or to buy pizza from our restaurants. We even had one of the scorpion men living in a small house at the end of the community. He liked to stop by the school and teach kids about other creatures.

We’d become a safe haven for the supernatural and the gifted, even some of the escaped prisoners from the facility had found their way back to us once word had spread that we’d taken down the Board.

Frost finally let me go to shower, and once I was clean and dressed, I joined Storm and Smokey in the kitchen so we could start our walk across Stardust to the school. It was right by the gym so the kids could burn their energy in a controlled environment.

“I think Vulcan’s dicking Minerva. He doesn’t take his eyes off her,” Smokey hummed as we walked, making me roll my eyes.

“He’s always been protective of her. That doesn’t mean they’re fucking.”

“They’re going to for sure if they haven’t already. I’ll play matchmaker if I have to,” he answered, sliding his hand into mine. “I think they’d be cute together.”

Storm scoffed, giving him a dirty look.

“Alright, Cupid. How about you leave people alone and let them sort their own shit out?”

“How about you—”

“No arguing, please. I’m in a post-orgasm haze and I don’t want it ruined,” I cut in before they could fight, and Storm gave me a wink.

“You’re welcome.”

The guys started talking about training some of the teenagers in the gym while I got to enjoy the sun and my orgasm bliss a little while longer, but as usual, my mood sank as we got closer to the cemetery. It was on the far side of the park, with only a small handful of headstones there.

“You want to stop for five minutes?” Storm asked quietly as he picked up on my mood, and I nodded as I headed towards the small gate, Smokey’s hand still in mine. The three of us moved towards the graves but the guys stood back as I got closer. This place was more for me than anyone else, but I knew Storm had been here a few times without me.

He might have said that Ash wasn’t his brother, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t hurting over memories of our pasts that we’d let go of.

My fingers skimmed Ash and Thor’s headstones as I murmured a quiet hello as if they could hear me, then I stood beside Zeo’s with a sigh.

“Hey, Z.” They never responded, obviously, and I never cared. I just hoped they were at peace wherever they were. I’d shit my pants if I got a response anyway.

I stood there for a while, not saying anything as my fingers toyed with the headstone, and I mumbled a goodbye before joining the guys again so we could keep walking. They didn’t ask if I was okay, they knew I was still hurting over it all, so they both took one of my hands in theirs and silently walked towards the school.

We’d survived so much in our lives without even realizing it at first, but now that we knew the truth, we felt like we could tackle anything.

Especially since we had each other.

Smokey.

I loved spending time with the kids, not that anyone else seemed to like it. I always got them in trouble. The kids loved me though, so it wasn't like anyone could stop me from dropping by the school and causing a little mayhem.

“Smokey!” a bunch of them squealed when we walked through the door, and I grinned as I fist bumped them one after the other while Storm dragged Salem off to see Minerva.

“Are you guys being good?” I asked, one of the boys smirking.

“I learned if I set my homework on fire, I don't have to do it.”

“Gotta do your homework, dude, or you'll grow up to be stupid like Frost,” I instructed, making them giggle. Frost hated it here and rarely stopped by, but the kids found him funny. Some called him Mr. Grumpy Pants to his face, it was hilarious.

I let the kids show me the power balls they'd been working on, but my eyes kept drifting to Salem. Her and Minerva had become good friends, and I loved seeing her so relaxed around other people. Her nightmares had faded a lot since we took down the Board, but I knew the guilt still got to her some days about us killing Zeo, Ash, and Thor.

We just smothered her in affection until she felt better.

I'd never loved someone as much as I loved her, other than River. I swore that little shit was almost cuter than our girl some days, and I still loved stirring him up and making him blush. It was getting harder though, because he'd really come out of his shell. Especially in the bedroom.

The things he did to me sometimes made *me* blush, much to his amusement.

He was a kinky little thing and I didn't mind in the fucking slightest.

“Smokey! Do the fireworks thing!” one of the kids begged, and I cringed.

“That gets me in trouble.” Complaints went around the kids and I chuckled, holding my hands up and letting my flames spark to life. “Okay, but if I get detention, you’d better all come and suffer with me.”

It wasn’t really fireworks I could do, but when I blasted flames with lightning and rain, it mixed together into a show of falling fire drops. Tiny enough that it didn’t burn the kids, but the initial explosion of it always got me in the doghouse with Minerva.

As if she’d heard us, Minerva shouted across the room.

“Smokey! Don’t you dare!”

I ignored her, releasing my powers and making the kids clap and cheer for me. The fire alarm went off a moment later alongside the sprinklers, sending everyone running with giggles and shrieks, my smile only growing when I turned to find Salem and Storm standing behind me looking unimpressed.

“Again? Seriously, dude?” Storm scowled, making me shrug.

“What? The kids asked me to.”

“Can you do as I ask you to and jump off a cliff?” he deadpanned, earning a smack to the chest from Salem. We were getting drenched but I didn’t care.

I pulled Salem against me and kissed her, loving how she melted against me instantly.

Salem and River were my home, and no matter where we were, I’d always be happy as long as they were with me.

River

“What happened?” I asked with worry as Smokey and Salem walked into the kitchen a few hours later, both of them looking like drowned rats despite the sun shining all day.

Smokey grinned and smacked a kiss on my lips on his way past, but Salem sighed with fake annoyance.

“The fire hazard set the smoke alarms off in Minerva’s class again.”

“Where’s Storm?”

“Dealing with Minerva. The school’s a mess again,” she chuckled, running her fingers through my hair and pressing against me. “Want to get me wetter, puddles?”

“As much as I’d love to, I can’t. Fox roped me into helping him cook a bunch of shit for dinner. He invited Vulcan’s guys over for a feast,” I grumbled, Fox speaking from across the room.

“You’re the one who said we should catch up with them.”

“I didn’t mean today!” I threw back, flipping him off. Salem giggled, something she’d been doing a lot of lately, before giving me a heart stopping kiss. I’d only had her pussy on my face last night, but I wanted to shove her back on the table and make her come all over me again.

The guy’s joked that I’d been making up for all those years where I hadn’t gotten laid, and I was starting to wonder if they were right. I couldn’t keep my damn hands off her.

Between her and Smokey, I swore I was getting laid more than I was eating meals.

I shoed her away so she could shower with Smokey, mourning the loss of the sex I was definitely about to miss out on as I turned back to Fox. He gave me a knowing look, passing me a bowl of burger mince.

“Here, drown your sorrows in burgers.”

“Man, can’t you make the patties while I go and—”

“No. If I’m not getting laid right now, then you can suffer with me.”

He went back to whatever it was he was doing by the sink, and I grumbled to myself as I started rolling up balls of the

burger mince and flattening them on a plate for us to cook later.

Fox was a dick, and the next time he joined me and Smokey, he was getting edged until he cried.

Fucking asshole.

Fox

Hosting dinner was becoming my new favorite thing, especially when the weather was warm so we could sit outside by the pool. I loved cooking, and I loved parties, so it was a win-win for me. Minerva had been scolding Smokey all night for the incident earlier today at the school, and I was getting a kick out of it.

Frost was complaining to Storm about Ronin driving him nuts all day while they checked the dragon barriers, while Ronin bragged to Vulcan and Coal about pissing Frost off so easily. The two of them were good friends, they just didn't want to admit it.

Porter was talking a mile a minute to River, the two of them becoming good gamer buddies recently, and they were constantly online together.

I stood back and watched everyone talk, enjoying the feeling it gave me to know this was our lives now. No more bullshit, lies, or danger. It was just normal daily jobs, fucking our girl, and inviting friends over.

This was a dream come true for me.

“Hey, Casanova,” Salem smiled as she dropped into a chair beside mine, her hand instantly sliding across my thigh. “You did good tonight. This is really nice.”

“I aim to please,” I winked, waggling my eyebrows at her and making her laugh.

“You always please me.”

“I try. You're in my bed tonight,” I murmured, making her wince.

“You’ll have to fight snowflake. He’s been sending me raunchy texts all day and I hate to say it, but he’s winning whatever battle you guys have going on.”

“I’ll let you peg me.”

“Why the fuck do you think I’d want to peg you?”

“Because you like being the boss and you have an issue with authority. Figured we’d just attach a giant dick to you and let you go wild,” I teased, hauling her onto my lap. “Or I’ll hold Frost down so you can peg him instead. Bet he’d love it.”

“He’d wrestle me onto my stomach and fuck me to prove he’s in charge,” she said dryly, her eyes lighting up. “Actually, if you have a strap-on I could borrow—”

“Eat shit, the pair of you,” Frost muttered from across the table, his eyes burning into me with annoyance. “If she shows up in my bed and tries to stick anything in my ass, you’re a dead man.”

“You’re missing out.”

“And I’m not upset about it,” he growled, motioning to Smokey. “Let flame face take it. He’d like Salem dominating him.”

Storm groaned, smacking a hand on the table.

“Can we not discuss this right now? We have guests.”

“No, I insist. Keep going,” Coal smirked, shoving food in his mouth as his eyes bounced between us all, and Minerva snapped at him to behave. He blew her a kiss, which she responded to by flipping him the bird, and Salem huffed out a giggle into my neck as I tightened my hold on her.

She’d never get anything near Frost or Storm’s forbidden chambers, but we sure loved stirring them up about it. Salem could peg me any day, she didn’t even have to say please and I’d bend the fuck over.

I’d let Smokey fuck me once and Salem almost had a hands-free orgasm, she loved to watch. I’d been trying to coax River into fucking me, but he wasn’t as keen. Smokey had only fucked me because I pissed him off and he snapped.

Usually, they let me join in just for foreplay kind of stuff, which I was more than happy to do. It meant once the guys were warmed up they fucked each other, then I got to worship Salem's pussy like the cock palace it was.

She sighed as she snuggled into me, and I pressed a kiss to her temple. Nights like this were my favorite, just holding her and knowing she trusted me enough to close her eyes and rest while I kept her safe.

It was the best feeling in the entire world.

Storm

My favorite part about dinner parties was when everyone fucking left. I liked the guys coming over to hangout, but they always stayed late and left a mess. Luckily, Fox was in his element and dealt with it all so I could relax.

How I'd gone from living alone to this bullshit was beyond me, but the stupid thing in my chest got all warm and fuzzy with all the company. I even enjoyed Smokey's company, especially when we put Salem between us.

I guess I was a people person now.

Vulcan nudged me, his voice low.

"You good?"

"Just waiting for you to fuck off so I can go to bed," I muttered, light laughter leaving him.

"Bad day?"

"Long day. I want a shower and a long-ass sleep," I replied, grabbing my beer and taking a swig. "You fucking Minerva?"

That surprised him, and it took him a moment to respond.

"No, why?"

"Smokey's betting money on you fucking her."

"We're just friends, dude. Don't say shit like that or she'll beat me up or something," he cringed, genuine laughter

bursting from me.

“You’re afraid of her? She’s tiny.”

“So is Salem, and look how much fun you have when you piss her off,” he pointed out, a sly grin tugging at my lips.

“I piss her off on purpose and then fuck her back into her lane. She knows I’m the boss, I just let her think she is sometimes because I love her.”

“Storm?” Salem says sweetly from Fox’s lap, batting her lashes at me. “Can you get me another drink?”

“Beer?” I asked as I stood, ignoring the amused look on Vulcan’s face.

“No, that cocktail thing I like. With the fruit,” she smiled, puckering her lips to ask for a kiss on my way past.

“Since you asked so nicely,” I murmured, dropping a kiss to her lips before strolling inside, being quick to get her drink ready before returning to the table.

“You forgot the straw,” she whined, and I practically sprinted back into the house to get one before realizing what she was doing. She’d heard my conversation with Vulcan and was fucking with me.

I casually strode back outside and placed the straw in her glass, bending down to look like I was going to kiss her before my hand snapped out to grab her throat, her eyes darkening instantly as she smirked.

“You’re not cute, firecracker. I see you.”

“But you still did it anyway,” she replied, and Vulcan lost his shit, laughing so hard he almost fell out of his chair. “Maybe I *should* bring the strap-on to bed with you?”

“You can try, baby, but it won’t end the way you think it will,” I chuckled, loosening my grip before returning to my chair. Vulcan was still laughing and I couldn’t help but laugh too.

He was totally right, we were all whipped by the girls we loved, and I wouldn’t admit it out loud, but Salem could ask

me for anything and I'd give it to her.

Other than the strap-on in my ass, anyway.

Frost

I had to fight Fox and Storm off to get Salem alone in my room for the night. I didn't mind sharing her, but sometimes I just wanted to be alone with her. There was only so much of the guys' shit I could handle, and I was at my limit.

Salem though? I never got tired of her company.

My bathroom door opened and Salem walked out in a cloud of steam, looking like a fucking dark angel as always. Her hair was tied up in a bun, and her skin was tinged pink from the hell's water temperature she showered in. She was in nothing but my shirt, and my cock instantly woke up at the sight of her, but she wasn't in here for a trip to pound town.

"Come here," I murmured, shoving the blanket back so she could get in beside me, her long legs tangling with mine instantly as she snuggled into my side. Her pussy was bare against my thigh, but I ignored it. She was exhausted, and as much as she hadn't complained, I'd seen her wincing a few times today after our sex session this morning.

The girl needed a break.

She slid a hand down towards my dick, but I grabbed her wrist to stop her, placing her hand on my bare chest.

"Not tonight, breeze."

"Why not?" she asked, her brow creasing with confusion. "Do you have your period or something?"

"Smartass," I scoffed, tightening my hold on her as I pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I just want to snuggle tonight."

"What if I want to fuck then?" she asked like the brat that she was, and I dropped a hand between her legs to push a finger inside her, and she couldn't hide the wince from me. I pulled it back out and sucked it into my mouth, savoring the taste of her.

“That’s why we’re snuggling and not fucking. Storm and I almost fucked your soul from your body this morning.”

She sagged against me in relief, a breathy laugh leaving her.

“Thank fuck. I’m sorry, but we need scheduled days off, my pussy is killing me.”

“You don’t need scheduled days off, you just need to tell us to fuck off and we will. Here, open them for me again.” My hand moved between her legs and I rested it against her pussy, letting the chill leave my skin like an ice-pack.

“Don’t tell the guys, but you’re my favorite,” she mumbled against my chest, a snicker leaving me. We all knew she didn’t play favorites. If anything, we all pissed her off equally.

“Secret’s safe with me, baby.”

It didn’t take long for her to fall asleep, and I was almost asleep myself when the door creaked open. Smokey’s head poked inside, a frustrated sigh leaving me.

“No. Out.”

“Please? We won’t wake her up.”

“You and River have each other. Go away.”

“Share,” he huffed, stepping inside and dragging River behind him. My annoyance only got worse when Fox and Storm stepped in too, and I struggled to keep my temper in check. I didn’t want to wake Salem, but there was no way in fucking hell they were all squeezing into my bed. They’d fit, but it would be tight. We’d done it before, and I’d hated it.

Before I knew it, I was staring at the ceiling in the dark, Salem against my chest and Fox at my back, Smokey and River on the other side of Salem, while Storm teetered on the edge of the bed behind Fox.

If someone had told me I’d be sharing my goddamn bed with Salem and these four assholes a few years ago, I wouldn’t have hesitated to punch them in the face. Now, I was apparently a pushover fucking househusband or something.

Salem's face nuzzled into my neck more and I sighed, knowing she'd at least love waking up to find us all in here, but I'd probably wake up with fuck all sleep and muscle cramps from lack of space.

If she ever accused me of not loving her, this was what I'd bring up.

"Love you, bro," Smokey mumbled teasingly, and I did well to keep my voice quiet to avoid waking Salem as I replied.

"Shut the fuck up, you fire hazard."

The End.

ALSO BY R.E. BOND

Paranormal

Dreary Shadows series (Completed)

Dreary Shadows Part One

Dreary Shadows Part Two

Dreary Shadows Part Three

Dreary Shadows Part Four

Blood Discipline (Standalone novella)

Co-written with C.A. Rene

Blood Discipline

Urban Fantasy

Stardust: Home of the Gifted (Standalone)

Stardust: Home of the Gifted

Contemporary

Watch Me Burn series (Completed)

WARNING

This series MUST be read in order despite the characters changing. It follows one storyline. These are dark romance books with violence and multiple trigger warnings depending on the book.

Book 1: Pretty Lies

Book 2: Twisted Fate

Book 3: Beautiful Deceit

Book 4: Ignite Me

Book 5: Perfectly Jaded

Book 6: Don't Fear the Reaper

Book 7: Wrath of Rage

Book 8: Sinners Reign

From the Ashes series (Standalone)

(Watch Me Burn next generation)

Book 1: King of Carnage

Book 2: Pretty Little Psycho

Book 3: Prince of Pain

Book 4: Pray for Sin

Book 5: Beg for Ruin

The Night Thieves (Completed)

This reverse harem duet contains spice, violence, and dark content. Although these characters are part of the Watch Me Burn/From the Ashes universe, you do not need to read anything prior to this.

[Book 1: No Honor Among Thieves](#)

[Book 2: As Thick As Thieves](#)

Reaped series (Completed)

Co-written with C.A. Rene

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This reverse harem series is full of violence, gore scenes, and a lot of dark spice, with MM included.

[Book 0.5: The Reaper Incarnate](#)

[Book 1: Hunting the Reaper](#)

[Book 2: Claiming the Reaper](#)

STALK ME!

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A year and a half, 182,000 words, and multiple mental breakdowns later, I finally got this book finished. It's my favorite book I've ever written, but it was the hardest.

I started writing Stardust as a hobby book last year when I hit major burnout with King of Carnage, and I never intended on publishing it. It was supposed to be a stress-free book that I could just write freely to help me fall in love with writing again.

It became the reason I wanted to quit and was the most stressful book I've written to date.

Special thanks to Amanda, Lauren, Melinda, Kayla, Jaime, Samantha, and Chrissy for putting up with my constant meltdowns and helping me push through this devil of a book. It was worth all the tears I drowned my keyboard in and I've never been so proud of a book before. Love you ladies endlessly.

Shout out to all my readers for being patient while I figured this new genre out. I hope it's everything you hoped for from me!

If you have the time, please leave a review! It helps us authors so much!

Love you bunches,

Rachael Xx

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R.E. Bond is a dark romance author from Tasmania, Australia. She is obsessed with reverse harem books, especially if they have m/m! She collects paperbacks as a hobby, has read or written every day since she started high school, and constantly needs music in her daily life. She loves camping and rodeos in the summer, and not getting out of bed in the winter. Coffee and books are life, and curse words are just sentence enhancers.

