



All Rail The

KING

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Please note this book contains the following elements.

Sexual assault (Not between main characters. Alphas try to claim Eli. They are stopped, but clothes are removed and he is held down)

Parental & fraternal death

Violence

Explicit sexual content

This book is dedicated to you.

Yes, you reading this book.

You saw the title and just had to click.

I love the way your mind works.

We should be friends.

Chapter One

“**Y**our father and brothers are dead.”

The words bounced and echoed around my empty mind. Repeating and repeating but still not making any sense. Until each word of the sentence dissolved into meaningless goo. I stared blankly at the police officer.

From behind me, a warm hand came to rest on my shoulder and gave it a squeeze. The familiar feel flowed warm and golden throughout my whole body. Nathan. It was Nathan. He was here, so everything was going to be okay. His scent flooded my senses and I exhaled. Suddenly able to breathe again.

In front of me, the police officer was talking about a helicopter crash and no survivors. His voice washed over me and through me. As merciless as a stormy ocean changing everything in its path. Nothing would ever be the same again. Everything familiar had been swept away.

I blinked and found myself staring at no one. The reception room was empty. Where had the policeman gone? Nathan walked back in and I realized he had been seeing the officer out. Disorientation made me dizzy. How had I zoned out so completely?

Nathan took my hand and started leading me somewhere. My body followed him. Following Nathan was always a good idea. He had been keeping me safe for two years now and not just physically as a bodyguard should. Somehow he had also become my rock. My constant companion, my best friend. Guarding my emotions and my well-being along with everything else.

The car door shut. I flinched. Nathan was in the driver's seat, I was in the back. Where was my usual driver? Had something happened to him too?

The car sped off. Trees and fields flashed by in a blur of green. The afternoon light was golden and bright. Winter was slowly surrendering to spring. The world turning to life, while my world was spinning untethered in death.

“Where are we going?” I asked numbly.

Nathan adjusted the rearview mirror until I could see his blue eyes.

“Just to a hotel. To hide,” he said inexplicably.

I stared at him through the mirror in bewilderment, but his eyes flicked back to the road. Safety first, was Nathan's way. But he gave a soft, sad sigh. He wasn't ignoring me.

“You own the King empire now, Eli,” he said gently.

More strange words to bounce around my head and not find anywhere to land. My mind could not make sense of them.

“Any alpha who claims you, will inherit it all,” said Nathan.

Perversely those words did hit home. I was worth billions. All alphas were going to want to hold me down, knot me and claim me with their bite. Then everything would be theirs. Mated omegas could not own anything. They didn't even own themselves. I shivered as icy fingers of terror inched up my spine.

Then I felt nothing but shame and dismay. I was worried about myself when my entire family was dead. How selfish could you get? I was an asshole.

“Eli, stay in the car until I get back.”

Nathan sounded worried. I glanced up at him. He had twisted around in the driver's seat to face me. Belatedly, I realized we were now parked. My mind felt like treacle.

“Eli?” repeated Nathan.

“Yes,” I croaked.

Where would I go anyway? There was nothing for me anywhere now. The universe was empty and gray. Nathan gave me one last worried look before dashing out of the car. I watched him hurry across the car park and into the hotel. It wasn't a very nice hotel. Just a chain one. Nothing like the exclusive five star establishments I usually stayed in. My

addled mind couldn't make sense of it and I didn't care enough to try to make myself puzzle it out.

Instead, my mind filled with images of helicopters spinning to the ground and crashing in a big explosion of fireballs. I wondered if they had been scared. My father and brothers were all alphas and claimed never to be scared of anything.

Nathan opened my car door. I stared at him, alarmed that I had zoned out again. He took my hand and helped me out of the car. Then he led me into the hotel. I looked down at my feet. I was wearing my bunny slippers. The sight of their ears flapping made me giggle. Nathan squeezed my hand tighter and made me walk quicker. Then he shoved me into the tiniest hotel room I had ever seen. I sat on the edge of the double bed.

"I'm going to go buy you some clothes, toothbrush, stuff like that. Anything else that you need?" asked Nathan.

I shook my head. Having my family back would be nice but he couldn't buy that in any shop. Money could only get you meaningless things.

"Lock the door after me and don't open it for anyone. I have a key. If anyone knocks, just ignore it, okay?"

I stared up at him. He dropped to his knees and took both my hands, putting them together and covering them with his large warm ones.

"Eli, do you understand?"

He was saying my name an awful lot today. It was weird. Normally he called me dude, or bro, or asswipe. Did he think I

wasn't listening to him?

"I understand," I said but my voice sounded faint and shaky.

Weakly, I followed him to the door and locked it behind him. I looked through the peephole and saw him hesitate a moment before striding purposefully away.

Wandering back to the bed, I sat back down. It was still and silent in the hotel room. Noises from outside drifted in to fill the void. People talking, traffic, children playing. It was a shock to realize that for everyone else it was just a normal day. The world continued to spin. It was only my world that had come crashing down, along with a helicopter.

Dimly, I recalled the important business trip they had been going on. If I wasn't just an omega, I might have gone with them. I could have been with them. We could have all died together.

The door opened with a beep, and I jumped. Nathan had only just left. He couldn't be back already, it must be an intruder. But then I noticed how much darker it was, at the same time as I caught his familiar scent. I had zoned out yet again. Was I in shock? Was it grief? Was I having a stroke?

Nathan put some full plastic bags on the floor, leaning them against the wall. Then he came and sat beside me on the bed. The next thing I knew I was enveloped in his embrace. I twisted my body around so I could cling onto him better.

"You can cry now," he said softly.

And I did. Great wracking sobs of grief and shock. Letting it all flow out of my body. Until I was trembling. Through it all, Nathan held me like he was never, ever going to let go.

Chapter Two

Before I was fully awake, I knew I was somewhere strange. The bed felt unfamiliar. The scents hitting my nose were wrong, but the feel of Nathan's arm around me was right. My head was on his chest, one of my legs was thrown over him and his arm was over my back.

We had slept in the same bed many times. Crashing out after binge watching Netflix or when I scared myself silly watching ghost hunting videos on YouTube.

I moved my head to look up at his sleeping face and hoped he wouldn't notice that I had drooled on him. He stirred almost immediately. Even asleep he was attentive. He smiled, then twisted around to the bedside table, turning back to me with a glass of water.

"Here," he said.

I took it and sat up, a little bemused why he was giving me water, I wasn't hungover. But the moment the water touched my lips, I realized how thirsty I was and I gulped it all down.

As my brain started to wake up more, it registered how dry and puffy my eyes felt and how sticky my face was with dried tears and snot.

“How do you feel?” asked Nathan softly.

I sighed and rubbed my hand over my face. “Gross.”

His blue eyes stared at me relentlessly until I sighed again.

“Much better,” I told him. “I don’t even know why I was so upset. They are vile people and treat me like shit.”

My words rang in my ears, and I winced. Nathan still held my gaze steadily. I took in a shaky breath.

“Were vile people, who treated me like shit,” I corrected weakly. Referring to them in past tense was going to take some getting used to.

“They were still your family, your pack,” said Nathan, having no problem with tenses at all.

I stared at him. “Just us now.”

He shook his head sadly. “One omega and one beta don’t make a pack.”

That hurt far more than it should have. Packs could only be started by a mated alpha and omega pair and only existed as long as there was an Alpha. I was an orphan and packless. Nathan was now packless too. It was awful, he didn’t deserve that.

It was too painful to think about. So instead, I gazed around the tiny, shabby room we were in.

“Where the hell are we?”

“A hotel.”

“It doesn’t look like any hotel I have ever seen.”

“That’s because it’s a hotel for normal people, not princesses,” teased Nathan.

“Douchebag,” I retorted.

“Asswipe,” he said fondly.

I rolled out of bed and stretched. “I’m going to have a shower. Do they even do room service?”

Nathan sat up and I was momentarily distracted by the way his tee shirt stretched over his abs. He had some great muscles. I would never look like that, my omega body always destined to be slender.

“What would princess like for breakfast?” he asked.

I stuck my tongue out at him. “Cheeseburger.”

“Cheeseburger?” he repeated whilst raising a disapproving eyebrow.

I gestured at his body. “You keep your protein shakes and granola in your trying-to-be-an-alpha complex and I’ll keep my delicious cheeseburger, thank you very much.”

He sighed, as if the weight of the world was on his shoulders and picked up the phone. I grinned at him and headed for the shower.

By the time I emerged the food had already arrived. I hurriedly rummaged in the bags Nathan had bought, eager to

get dressed and tuck in.

“What the hell are these!” I exclaimed in disgust.

“Clothes, I didn’t have time to go to Gucci.”

I grumbled but quickly scrambled into some of the ugly garments, feeling strangely awkward about dropping my towel in front of Nathan. Which was ridiculous because he had seen me naked thousands of times and we were shifters. We didn’t have weird human hang-ups about nudity.

“There is a whole range of clothes between Gucci and army surplus,” I informed him haughtily before tucking into my surprisingly good burger.

He flushed but said nothing as he ate his porridge. Cold horror twisted my belly. He actually had. I’d been teasing, but he really had gone to an army surplus store and that was what I was wearing. How could he do this to me?

An image of a helicopter exploding in a fireball filled my mind. I looked down at the plain tee shirt and trousers I was wearing. They were warm, clean, comfortable, the right size. My eyes started to water. My family was dead and I was whining about my clothes.

“What’s the plan?” I asked weakly, desperate for a distraction.

Nathan looked up from his breakfast and nodded. His blue eyes reading me effortlessly.

“Can’t run and hide forever,” he said simply. “We need to find you a nice alpha who will treat you well and not take all

the money for himself.”

I nodded. I was twenty years old, it was high time I was mated anyway. It was embarrassing as hell that I hadn't had my first heat yet, but I was sure a few billion dollars would soften the disappointment for any potential mate.

“Do you have anyone in mind?” asked Nathan.

I blinked in surprise, suddenly realizing that I was in a very unique situation for an omega. I could choose any unmated alpha in the world. I let the power go to my head for a moment. It felt good. If only Chris Hemsworth or Henry Cavill were alphas. It was a tragedy that they were human. I allowed myself to mourn my missed opportunity for a minute, before turning my attention to people who were actually alphas.

“Daffyd Greyfield,” I said decisively.

My oldest brother's friend. He had always been nice to me. I'd had a crush on him and his divine blue eyes forever.

“Dafydd?” spat Nathan in disgust.

“What? He is hot!”

“He's really not,” Nathan muttered.

I laughed. “Jealous?”

He shot me a startled, alarmed look, as his cheeks flushed with color. “Of what?” he snapped.

“Dafydd's impressive muscles, of course!”

Nathan looked strangely relieved. “His muscles aren’t that big,” he grumbled.

I chuckled fondly at him. He really was such an idiot sometimes. Always comparing himself to alphas when he was a beta. Nathan was perfect just the way he was. Alphas were not better. Just different.

“I’ll work out a way to contact him safely and check he won’t turn into a dick once you’re his.” Nathan paused and took in a deep breath as if something pained him. “In the meantime, we need to stay moving.”

I nodded and finished off my burger. Nathan was a damn good bodyguard. I trusted him explicitly. He would keep me safe, I had absolutely no doubt about that. Running and hiding with him didn’t even sound bad at all. It meant I got to spend all my time with my favorite person in the world. No annoying people to deal with. Just me and him.

I was looking forward to it.

Chapter Three

After breakfast, Nathan made me lock the door behind him again while he went to find a new car. Apparently the one we had was too expensive and would draw attention, as well as make it far easier for alphas to track me. By now word would have got out and every ambitious alpha would already be on the hunt. Hacking a database or bribing someone to find the registrations of all the family cars would be an easy and obvious first step.

Nathan said it might take a while, so I flopped on the bed and absentmindedly flicked through the channels on the television. I felt strangely fine and wondered if I had entered the denial stage of grief, but then I couldn't even remember if that was the emotion that was supposed to come next. My fingers itched to Google it, but I didn't have my phone.

A fact that would have made me hysterical twenty-four hours ago, but now seemed insignificant. Maybe the silver lining in all of this was that I was growing into a better person.

I gave up on finding something to watch and turned the television off, letting the silence envelope me. Images of my father's stern face and my brother's snide expressions flowed across my mind. It was strange to think I would never see them again. Never be mocked, belittled or ridiculed again.

Duncan King had wanted an omega child after his three strapping alpha sons. He had paid a surrogate and paid for some expensive cutting edge treatment to ensure the baby was an omega. Sperm sorting or something.

It took me years to understand why, after going to so much effort, he despised me so much. Figuring out the truth hurt. He wanted a bargaining chip. Something to offer in exchange for a deal. A way to create an alliance with a mating. He didn't want a child. He had created me as an investment. And now he had died before being able to cash in on it.

I was glad he had been picky. Saving me for just the right deal. A card in his hand that he was going to play carefully, knowing he could use me only once.

I was free now, free to choose who I wanted. It did feel kind of good. My family was a very high price to pay for that choice though.

Sighing, I rubbed my hand over my face. I was being dramatic. If truth be told, I barely knew my father and brothers. My nearest sibling was ten years older than me. I had been raised by nannies in a huge house. I rarely even saw the people I was related to. But it was all just sad. Sad that it had been that way. Sad I was going to get over the loss quickly.

Because, it was not much of a loss at all. I realized with a resigned huff. It was what it was. Right now I needed to concentrate on getting to Daffyd in one piece.

At that moment Nathan walked in. He smiled at me, grabbed the plastic bags of supplies and asked if I was ready. I nodded and followed him out to our new car.

It was a battered piece of junk but wonderfully discreet. No one would ever think it held a billionaire. Nathan held the back door open for me, but I smiled at him and jumped into the front passenger seat instead. He stared at me through the window.

“What? This is what normal people do, isn’t it?” I asked.

He nodded mutely, looking a little thunderstruck.

“Besides, this way I get to annoy you more. I can fiddle with everything while you are driving.”

Nathan grinned at me, dumped the bags in the back and climbed into the driver’s seat.

“Fine, but if you touch the radio, you will be in big trouble,” he said.

I smirked at him. “I would never dream of doing such a thing.”

He rolled his eyes and we set off. I nearly did a little squirm of excitement. It felt like an adventure, a road trip with my bestie. A new beginning. I was an evil person. I should be broken by grief, not enjoying myself.

Sunlight streamed down from a clear blue sky. It was a beautiful day. How many beautiful days had I taken for granted in my life? Somehow thinking I had an endless supply of them and that life could not be snuffed out in an instant.

I stared at the car door for a moment trying to figure out how to lower the window. It took an embarrassingly long time to realize that it wasn't electric. There was a handle to wind it down manually. The movement felt awkward and unfamiliar, but as the fresh air rushed in, it was worth it.

I stuck my hand out. Marveling in the feel of the wind and mesmerized by the sun glowing on my skin. Impulsively I stuck my whole head out of the window. The noise and feel of the world rushing past was exhilarating. I had never felt more alive.

Nathan pulled me back in. I grinned at him. My hair was all over the place and my cheeks were flushed. He smiled at me, his blue eyes sparkling in amusement. Something else flashed for a moment but it was gone before I could identify it.

“You're a wolf, not a dog,” he teased.

I stuck my tongue out at him and yanked the volume up on the radio as high as it would go. He winced and tried to bat my hand away while keeping his eyes on the road. The song was awful, so I started rapidly changing channels. I made it through all the available channels and was just starting again, when Nathan snapped.

“Just pick something!” he yelled.

Chortling with glee, I chose a heavy metal station before settling back in my seat in satisfaction. Nathan groaned but was soon tapping his fingers on the steering wheel. His good nature could never be deterred for long. It was part of the fun in trying to annoy him. It was hard, which made it a challenge, and he always recovered quickly. If only more people were like Nathan, the world would be a better place.

Chapter Four

Eventually, I fell asleep. Only to wake up an indeterminable length of time later, feeling groggy and disorientated. Blearily, I looked around. The car was stationary and I was alone in it. Craning my neck, I saw Nathan was filling the tank. We were in a gas station. Looking around some more, I spied a coffee shop across the road. I scrambled out of the car and started heading towards it.

“Where are you going!” called Nathan, sounding alarmed.

“Coffee!” I yelled without stopping or turning to look at him.

“No!” he snapped forcefully.

My feet stopped and I spun around. His blue eyes were worried and full of concern.

I sighed. “It’s right there, just across the road. With giant ass windows. You’ll be able to see me the whole time.”

He stared at me for a long moment before finally muttering, “Fine.”

Then he held out some cash. I scampered over to him to grab it with a sweet smile, before practically running to the coffee shop. I'd forgotten about money. In my old world, everything was just given to me and invoices sent to my father. Thinking about cash was going to be a new skill to learn. Hopefully, just short term. Dafydd was filthy rich already and once he had the King billions, he could keep me in the manner I was accustomed to. I was only going to have to play at being poor for a little while.

There was a real, actual queue in the coffee shop. I stared at it in horror, before sheepishly joining it. I wasn't sure if I had ever had to queue before. It was strangely humbling. A taste of the real world and one I probably needed.

When I got to the front, the young guy serving gave me a big smile that seemed genuine and friendly. Like he really was that nice and it wasn't just his customer service duties.

"Hi, what can I get you," he said.

"An oat milk iced latte with vanilla syrup and a flat white please."

"Coming right up!"

I smiled back at him, managed to pay without looking like a complete dork and stepped aside to wait for my order. I'd seen people in front of me do it, so I was fairly confident it was the right thing to do.

Strong fingers grabbed my wrist in a cruel grip. Startled, I glanced up. The alpha was tall with vivid green eyes and a

mop of blond hair. I'd never seen him before in my life. He grinned at me, baring perfect white teeth.

“Eli King,” he drawled. Like a predator toying with its prey.

I didn't have time to respond or do anything. Instead, I found myself being dragged towards the back door. I pulled back, but he was as solid as a mountain. My heart hammered and my head spun. My feet ground to a halt but he didn't even pause, just towed me along, my shoes sliding along the floor. I'd always known alphas were far stronger than omegas but actually experiencing it was shocking.

Nathan, Nathan, Nathan, I repeated frantically in my head. Any second, he would be here. He was just outside. He would see. He would save me.

Everyone in the coffee shop stared. They were all mundanes. They didn't think shifters were real. They knew nothing about alphas and omegas. It added to my panic. Letting mundanes know about the paranormal was strictly forbidden. An offense punishable by death. Such a public display was terrible. Some distant part of my mind tried to reassure me that they likely assumed it was merely domestic violence and that the alpha was my boyfriend. It wasn't actually a very comforting thought at all. I was being attacked, it shouldn't be a time to be concerned about paranormal secrecy.

I tried to prise his fingers off of my wrist but it was like trying to dislodge a boulder. He threw open the back door, and

we were in an alley. Where was Nathan? Had something happened to him? Surely he had seen by now?

The alpha threw me to the floor. I got my hands underneath me only when my face was millimeters from the concrete. This couldn't be happening. I was having a nightmare. My bid for freedom could not have ended before it had really begun.

A horrible ripping sound signified the demise of my trousers. I winced as a cool breeze drifted over my now naked ass. Then the alpha was on top of me holding me down. Exactly what alphas were supposed to do to omegas. What omegas are for. But I hated it. Hated everything about it. I didn't want this.

“This gun has a silver bullet in it and it's inches from your brain pan,” said Nathan.

The alpha froze, and I burst into tears. Nathan was here. It was over. Everything was going to be okay. I was safe.

Slowly the alpha climbed to his feet. The back door of the coffee shop burst open and several mundanes poured out. I scrambled to a sitting position still sobbing uncontrollably.

“I suggest you leave,” said Nathan to the alpha. His voice cold, hard and terrifying. I didn't even know he could sound like that.

The alpha growled but then turned and fled, disappearing down the alley. The nice coffee shop server hurriedly took off his apron and threw it over my lap. Covering my nakedness. I

was pathetically grateful. It took some of my vulnerableness away.

“I’ve called the police!” he exclaimed, his eyes wide and fearful.

My eyes locked with Nathan’s. Police were a terrible idea. Paranormals never involved them in anything. Too much risk that they could uncover our secrets.

Quick as lightning, Nathan bent down and scooped me up in his arms. He ran with me to the car as I clung to him desperately. He poured me into the front seat and I did not want to let him go. But he was only gone for seconds, reappearing next to me in the driver’s seat in no time at all. The car sped off with a squeal of tires. Nathan put his hand on my knee and I put my hand over his and cried like a baby.

Chapter Five

Another night, another shabby hotel room. I lay on the bed with Nathan curled protectively around me. He didn't speak until I finally stopped crying. I'd started up again as soon as we had walked into the room. I had thought I'd cried all the tears in the world in the car, but nope, it appeared I had still had some in me.

"I'm so sorry," whispered Nathan.

The anguish in his voice broke my heart. I wriggled round to face him, but he wouldn't meet my gaze.

"It's not your fault!" I gasped.

"Of course it is, I'm your bodyguard!"

"I'm the one who was stubborn about getting coffee and you got there before anything happened."

He sighed heavily, as if all the weight of the world was on his shoulders. I poked him in his surprisingly firm chest.

"Don't make this all about you, Douchebag," I teased.

He finally looked at me then. There was great sadness in his eyes but there was a glimmer of amusement in them too.

“I wouldn’t dream of taking the attention away from you, Asswipe.”

I grinned at him and he smiled back at me softly. If only there was more I could do to cheer him up. He shouldn’t feel bad about it. It was the asshole alpha’s fault, no one else’s. It was Nathan against all the unmated alphas in the world. He was doing a phenomenal job.

“Is there no one else from our staff that you trust to help?” I asked.

He shook his head. “You are just too obscenely wealthy, Eli King. Every shifter in the world has an alpha relative they would betray you to in exchange for a cut of your billions.”

“Not you,” I said fondly

“Don’t know any alphas,” he grinned.

My hand found its way to his chest again. I stared at it in surprise but didn’t move it. We were shifters, everyone knew we were touchy feely. My family had been cold, emotionless assholes but most shifters were better. There was nothing wrong with lying in bed, touching my best friend.

“Do you know what is really terrible?” I whispered.

He stared at me wide eyed and waited for me to continue.

“I never got to have my coffee.”

His eyes lit up as he laughed. He had a nice deep laugh and I loved hearing it. He sobered quickly and gave me a remorseful look.

“I don’t want to leave you alone to go get you some,” he said earnestly.

He really was the sweetest person alive. It was touching that he was concerned about my coffee needs on top of everything else. But, yeah, the thought of being left alone was terrifying. I didn’t want to tell him that, not that I had to. He just knew. He always knew how I was thinking.

“Just order some with room service,” I suggested.

Coffee and keeping Nathan by my side. The best of both worlds.

“They won’t have your favorite,” he reminded me.

“Regular coffee is fine.”

He rolled away from me to reach the landline phone on the bedside cabinet. I felt the absence of his body warmth like an ache.

“And a cheeseburger!” I exclaimed.

“I’ll never know how you eat so much and how you survive on cheeseburgers alone,” he grumbled but when room service answered, it was the first thing he ordered.

As we waited for the food to arrive, I battled against the memories trying to replay in my mind. The feel of the alpha’s steely grip around my wrist. Being shoved to the floor, the feel

of his weight on top of me. The fear, the hopelessness. I had felt so weak and helpless in that moment.

I shuddered. What if Nathan hadn't got there in time? Everyone said omegas loved getting cock and always came. I'd never had one, to know for sure, but I could not fathom it being true. There was no way my body would have gone from that level of terror to enjoying it. The mere thought was nauseating. But then again, I was a twenty-year-old freak who had never had a heat. Maybe I was broken?

The thought was alarming and depressing. I didn't want to be defective. I winced at my own harsh thought. I might be asexual, and that was not a defect at all. But I didn't think I was. I liked the idea of sex far too much, and the way everyone talked about it, made it seem like I'd really be missing out if I couldn't enjoy it.

But it didn't matter what I was. I didn't need to catch an alpha with my allure, my wealth was going to do that. I just needed to lie down for Dafydd, spread my legs and let him take me. How difficult could it be? I tried to imagine it. Dafydd's hands on me, Dafydd's cock inside me. My stomach rolled uncomfortably. He was handsome and kind, but I didn't know him very well. It all seemed very intimate.

My gaze flicked to Nathan, he was doing something on his phone and concentrating intently, if the little furrow in between his brows was any indication. It always appeared when he was thinking hard. I knew Nathan extremely well, better than anyone else in the world. If it was the unfamiliarity

that was making sex with Dafydd seem ick... Unbidden, my mind started imagining having sex with Nathan. His gentle hands caressing me. His wonderful blue eyes staring down at me, full of passion as his cock slowly filled me.

I jumped out of bed and ran to the toilet. I could feel Nathan's puzzled glance at me through the door but thankfully he didn't say anything. After taking several deep breaths, I looked down at my semi-hard cock. What the hell was going on? Thinking about sex with Nathan turned me on?

He was my friend. My bodyguard. A beta. Omegas had sex with betas, of course they did. But it was unusual. Omegas mated alphas, it was the way of the world. Betas didn't have knots and some omegas could not break their heats without being knotted.

But sex was sex. It wasn't mating and if I wasn't in heat, the lack of a knot wasn't a problem. My thoughts whirled. I didn't need to be a virgin to be mated. My father had wanted me to be one, and I'd never been interested before. But he was dead now, and it seemed my body was changing.

I snorted at myself. Great timing body. On the run. Entire family dead. Just been violently assaulted. It was so inappropriate. There was definitely something wrong with me.

Not that it really mattered. Just because I was getting strange horny thoughts about Nathan, didn't mean he would feel the same. The idea would probably disgust him.

I stared at my reflection. Chestnut hair, just long enough to show a slight curl. Large chestnut eyes. A pale, symmetrical

face. I wasn't hideous, but certainly not gorgeous. Something that had pissed my father off. He had paid for a very stunning looking surrogate, in the hopes I would be beautiful. I shared my father's disappointment that it hadn't worked. It would be nice to be pretty.

Turning my head this way and that, I examined myself closely, concluding that it was a damn good thing I was stinking rich. There was no way I was cute enough to catch anyone's attention. Certainly not Nathan's.

Sighing heavily, I washed my hands, splashed my face and told myself to put my pointless, bizarre, dirty thoughts away. It was never going to happen. Nathan was never going to want me.

Chapter Six

Nathan woke me up just as the pre-dawn light was spreading across the sky. He was calm, so I was not worried.

“Time to go, it’s best if we keep moving,” he said.

I nodded and sleepily pulled my clothes on before following him out to an unfamiliar car. When had he had time to change it? Had he been out in the middle of the night, buying and selling old cars whilst I was snoring away?

I wasn’t awake enough to question him. Instead, I climbed into the front passenger seat and got comfy. Nathan put our stuff in the back, hopped into the driver’s seat and then we were off. Driving down the empty road. Just us and the dawn.

I had been intending to go back to sleep, but the beautiful sunrise caught my attention. Vivid reds and pinks spread across the sky as the scarlet sun regally climbed over the horizon. It was spectacular. I couldn’t remember the last time I

had seen the dawn. Maybe getting up early wasn't so terrible after all.

Being alone with Nathan was definitely not terrible at all. We had always been close, but in my old life there had always been interruptions. Staff coming and going. Social obligations and events. Everything had been busy, noisy, restricted and dull.

Now it was just me and Nathan and the open road. No itinerary, no expectations. It felt like freedom and brought me more joy than I thought was possible. Part of me never wanted it to end.

But far too soon, Nathan was going to deliver me to Dafydd. I'd be mated and more or less back to my old life. The only change would be that I would be the mate of the richest alpha in the country, instead of the youngest son.

There would be dinner parties, charity auctions, and now bedroom duties. I swallowed dryly over the sudden lump in my throat. Maybe Dafydd would be happy to claim me and then leave me alone? An omega's contribution to a mating was supposed to be providing a nice tight hole for the alpha to satisfy his needs with. But I was providing billions of dollars. Surely, that would be enough? Dafydd could afford to have his needs met elsewhere.

Except sometimes a mating bond made sex with anyone else impossible, but I had heard that only happened with love matches. I certainly didn't love Dafydd. What if I had heard wrong? What if all mating bonds made sex outside the mating

impossible and Dafydd could only take me? I'd have to present to him regularly. Possibly every night. Alphas were awfully horny.

I shuddered at the thought. I was an omega, it should be everything I wanted. A big strong alpha to take care of me and fill my hole. My stomach churned and a wave of nausea washed over me. Perhaps Dafydd was the problem, and I had made the wrong choice? Alarm spiked through me. The thought of having to tell Nathan I'd made a mistake, and he needed to make arrangements to take me to someone else, made me feel cold. But surely it was better than a lifetime of misery?

Hastily, I thought of every alpha I had ever met, that I wasn't related to, and tried to imagine spreading my legs for them. I only succeeded in making myself feel sicker. What the hell was wrong with me? Not having heats was one thing, not wanting an alpha at all was quite another.

I glanced at Nathan's profile. His gaze was fixed on the road, his hands gripping the steering wheel in a confident but relaxed manner. Yesterday, thinking about sex with him had got me all hot and bothered. I tried it again.

I imagined his lips on mine, his hands running through my hair. My hands unbuttoning his fly and freeing his cock. Stroking it to full hardness. Dropping to my knees and taking him in my mouth. Him gasping in pleasure and need. Me needing to be careful not to make him spill, because I wanted

him to do that in my ass. Wanted him to slide inside my hot wet, needy hole and finally fill it.

Whimpering, I bit the back of my hand. Turning to look out of the passenger window and crossing my leg in an attempt to hide my stiffening cock. It was pointless though. We were shifters, he was going to smell my arousal. It was a miracle he hadn't in the hotel room. But there was no escape in a car. It was far too small, too enclosed.

I squirmed in my seat. I was going to die of embarrassment. My underwear felt wet. Was that slick? I bit back my squeak of alarm. I'd never gotten slick before. I had been hoping that once my first heat finally happened, it would get everything working down there.

“Eli?” said Nathan softly.

“Arghmnb.” Some intelligible sounds of mortification were all I could reply with.

“Don't worry, it just means your heat is on its way,” he said gently.

Relief flooded through me at having such a perfect excuse. Somehow I had escaped. Nathan was such a sweetie, it didn't even cross his mind that I was having dirty thoughts about him. Instead, his mind went to a logical, plausible explanation. Bless him.

Then I let out a strange squeal as a thought hit me like a truck. What if he was right? What if I was having dirty thoughts about him because my heat was on its way? Now,

whilst on the run with every alpha in the world hunting me? Talk about timing.

“We are being followed,” said Nathan suddenly, making me nearly jump out of my seat. All worries about going into heat completely vanished.

I twisted my neck around to see a glossy black car behind us. Then the road curved slightly, allowing me to see that there were two identical cars behind it. Shit. This wasn't good at all.

It looked like some already rich alpha with a small army of goons at his disposal had come to chase me down like prey.

Adrenaline surged through my body, leaving it trembling. I could feel my heart racing but there was nothing I could do. This wasn't a fight I could run away from. Not that running would ever be much help. Evolution had pretty much decided that omegas couldn't outrun alphas. We were designed to be caught. Claimed as a prize.

“Hold on,” said Nathan.

I grabbed onto the handle above the door and the old car surged forward with surprising speed. Nathan had this. He would keep me safe. He was a trained driver. I wondered if car chases had been part of his professional training. It seemed likely. My father would have hired the best bodyguard he could find. Duncan King had been so impressed by Nathan that he had taken him into his pack. That meant something.

Nathan took a corner so fast I had no idea how we didn't go up on two wheels. Maybe we did. The turn left me dizzy but

there was no reprieve. He turned sharply again, this time onto a slip road. We emerged onto a road that was busy, with two lanes of traffic. Mostly commuters heading into the city, with some trucks sprinkled amongst them. Nathan wove through it as if he was playing a computer game.

He squeezed us through an impossibly small gap. I let out a very unmanly squeak and scrunched my eyes shut tight. I had every faith in Nathan, I really did. But my mind could not handle what it was seeing. I wasn't even brave enough to see if they were still behind us. All I could do was close my eyes and put my trust in Nathan.

It was a good thing I was holding on because the motions of the car were throwing me from side to side and starting to make me feel sick. A sudden blaring of horns made me instinctively open my eyes before I could stop myself and I was just in time to see us shoot past a red light, forcing a truck to slam on its brakes. The stench of burning rubber as it slid towards us was terrifying. But Nathan didn't even flinch and in nanoseconds we were over the junction.

He didn't slow down and the sight of the world rushing past, made me dizzy again. I slammed my eyes shut once more, only to open them a heartbeat later as the wail of sirens in the distance flipped my stomach over. Shit and double shit, what the hell were we going to do now?

Nathan didn't look worried, he merely took a series of turns, left and then right and then left again. He slowed down until we were cruising serenely down a residential street.

“We’ve lost them,” he said calmly.

But picked up the police by the sound of it. I suspected it was the chaos we had caused at the junction that had done both.

Nathan parked the car on the side of the road. Easing it in between two large SUVs effortlessly. Then he turned to me with a worried look.

“We are going to have to walk now.”

I nodded and unbuckled my seatbelt. Walking was fine, I could handle that. Nathan jumped out and ran over to my side. We started walking. He grabbed my hand and held it, causing my heart to do a full on cartwheel. I stared up at him in shock. He didn’t look at me but his cheeks turned pink.

“So we look like a couple going for a stroll,” he muttered.

Oh, of course. Of course it was just Nathan being professional as always. He never was anything else. I carefully hid my disappointment.

“What now?” I asked.

“I’ll book an Airbnb and we will hole up for a while.”

I nodded as if I understood exactly what part of the going-on-the-run handbook that was part of. Luckily one of us knew what the hell he was doing.

“To wait out your heat,” he added in a strained voice.

Somehow my feet kept moving even though I felt like I was about to faint in surprise. Heat? After our dramatic near-death

car chase, he was still thinking about me getting aroused in the car? Had it traumatized him that much?

Then I caught it. The faintest scent of a heat. It was coming from me.

Fuck.

Chapter Seven

I paced the living room of the rented apartment furiously, biting my nails as I went. My body felt too hot and too cold. Agitation itched all along my skin. Things were progressing far too fast. I'd gone from feeling slightly odd when holding Nathan's hand as we abandoned the car, to now, a mere couple of hours later, not feeling like myself at all.

One thought haunted me and refused to let go. Repeating over and over in my mind with no mercy and no escape. It may have been a stupid thing to fixate on, but I was powerless before it.

A key slid into the lock and I jumped, heart racing but Nathan's delicious scent calmed me down instantly. He walked in, arms laden with shopping bags.

"Why am I going into heat now?" I demanded.

Releasing the words that had been going around and around my head. All the times I had longed to finally go into heat. To

be normal. And now, when it was a terrible time, it was happening?

To my immense surprise he flushed and looked guilty. I watched him in astonishment as he walked over to the open-plan kitchen and carefully put his bags on the island. I had been voicing my frustration. I had not expected him to have an answer.

“Nathan?” I asked, when it became clear he wasn’t going to say anything.

Finally he walked towards me, only to stop several paces away. He gave me an anguished look. He fidgeted with his hands and then placed them behind his back.

“Mr. King had suppressants put in your food. I didn’t know where they were kept, so I couldn’t bring them.”

I stared at him in absolute horror. I could barely comprehend what I was hearing. It could not be true. How could my father do this to me? And Nathan had known? He’d always known?

Suddenly, I rushed up to him and hammered my fists against his chest angrily.

“How could you!” I yelled. “You knew how much of a freak I felt! How upset I was about it! I bared my heart to you and you... you said nothing!”

He stood stoically, accepting my rage. His delicious scent washed over me, all Nathan and masculine. It flipped a switch in my brain. I whined and pressed my body against his, my

hands wrapping around the back of his neck, my mouth descending on the exposed piece of skin where his top two buttons were undone, and licking eagerly.

Some part of me was cringing at what I was doing. But it was a very small part of myself and very easy to ignore.

Nathan shuddered, placed his hands on my hips and lifted me up. I wrapped my legs around him gladly and he started carrying me briskly towards the bedroom. Excitement made me dizzy, was he? Were we?

He dumped me on the bed in a sitting position. I looked up at him but he didn't look at me. Instead, he emptied one of his shopping bags onto the bed. I stared at the contents. Sex toys. A huge collection. He straightened with a jerky movement and strode out, locking the door behind him.

"I'll be right outside," he said softly, but there was a strange tightness to his voice.

Humiliation and rejection flooded through me like a physical pain. My chest hurt, my eyes watered. Everyone, absolutely everyone wanted an omega when they were in heat. People fought to the death over it. It felt so amazing, it was legendary. Nevermind the pheromones that drove everyone wild, even humans.

But Nathan didn't want me. Why did he hate me so much? I must be really hideous. Extremely repulsive. The knowledge hurt. It burned. It was an agony like no other.

I threw myself down to a sprawl on the bed and howled my pain and my need. Misery overwhelming me until I thought I might die of it.

“Eli! Please! The neighbors!”

He was crazy if he thought I could stop. My body was burning up, my mind clouding with want. He had destroyed me with his rejection. I couldn't possibly contain it all within me. My wolf insisted on howling to call someone else who might want me, who might help me.

“Eli, your heat is making you not think straight. You need to start playing with yourself. It will make you feel better”

His words drew my attention to my very hard cock. My clothes suddenly felt restrictive and unbearable. Whimpering, I tore everything off. Being naked was far better. But even the sheets felt wrong against my skin. There should be someone else's skin touching mine. Someone else should be caressing me, filling me. This was all wrong.

A tiny part of my rational mind was still functioning. It made me wrap my hand around my cock. It told me if I came I'd feel better. It was wrong. I knew what I needed, and that was to be stuffed full of cock until my insides were rearranged. But touching my cock did feel good. My hand pumped and my hips thrust. A short, sharp orgasm trembled through me. Unsatisfying and succeeding only in coating my fingers in cum.

I whined deep in my throat and started again. I needed more. Wanted more.

I spilled two more times but it brought no relief. If anything, it made me more desperate. I wailed in dismay.

“Eli,” said Nathan calmly. It sounded like he was just the other side of the door, pressed up against it. I wanted him to come in. I had never wanted anything more.

“I think you need to use the toys. You need to come from... your hole.”

He sounded so awkward and uncomfortable. At first I was annoyed but then I relented. Talking about your best friend’s hole can’t be easy. If my heat wasn’t driving me out of my mind, I’d probably be dying of embarrassment. But with my heat raging the only thing I felt was dismay that he saw me only as a friend. Still, what he was saying made sense.

Hastily, I ripped open the packet of the nearest toy. It was large and obscenely pink, but I didn’t care. I lay on my back, spread my legs and brushed the tip against my hole. Then, gritting my teeth, I slid it in. I was aghast at how easily it went, my body greedy for it. I had expected it to hurt or at least feel uncomfortable. But my slick drenched hole all but pulled it in.

I groaned. It felt good, so very good. I hadn’t realized how achingly empty I had been. But the silicone was tepid and too firm. It didn’t carry the silken warmth of a cock. How I knew this, I had no idea. I was merely a slave to my instincts and what they were telling me. My wolf whined in confusion. It was almost what it wanted, whilst also being not at all what it wanted.

My hand flew back to my cock. This time when I came, my ass clenched around the toy lodged in my ass. It didn't feel right. I didn't like the sensation at all. The toy was too hard, too unyielding.

My hips bucked, thrusting my cock in and out of my hand. My body desperate for a release that was satisfying. But everything I did was a tease and only got me more aroused, more frantic.

I howled my frustration and pummeled my cock. Nothing had prepared me for how intense heats were. I could not believe I had wished for this.

“Eli! Don't touch your cock!”

Could he see me? Was he peeking through the hinges of the door? I didn't care. I tried to obey him. I kept one hand on the bed, while the other slid the toy in and out frantically.

“I can't!” I gasped as my hand flew back to my throbbing cock of its own accord.

Nathan swore, unlocked the door and strode in. I whimpered pathetically. Grateful that he was finally helping me. He took my hands and tied them to the bedpost above my head. I stared at him in confusion but he was not meeting my gaze.

Then he pulled the toy out of me. Finally, finally! He was going to fill me with a real cock. My hips lifted in excited invitation. He didn't need to tie me up to take me. I wanted nothing more than to submit to him.

He was fiddling with something and taking forever. I whined my impatience.

“Sorry,” he muttered.

Then blessedly, something was sliding inside me. It was another toy, bigger, but still not a real cock. He had only restrained me so that I didn't touch myself.

“This one vibrates,” he said.

I tried to give him a pleading look but my gaze fell to the tiny remote in his hand. His thumb moved and the thing in my ass hummed, sending jolts of pleasure shooting all throughout my body.

My head fell back and my hips bounced up and down on the bed as I cried out something, long, low and utterly intelligible. I came so hard I nearly blacked out but when I landed back in reality, my heat still burned.

“Again!” I demanded.

Nathan was giving me a strange look. His eyes wide and his cheeks flushed. I could smell his deep arousal. My stupid pheromones were giving him no mercy.

“I... I could give you the controller, but I can't leave you alone while you are tied up,” he stammered.

I shook my head. “I don't care, just do that again.”

He swallowed audibly and then moved his thumb. The pleasure was immediate, intense and absolute. This time I screamed when I came but instead of slowly drifting back

down, Nathan turned the vibrations up. The increased sensations tipped me straight into yet another orgasm.

I was writhing and moaning on the bed. Pulling helplessly against my restraints. Twisting, thrashing, my muscles spasming and clenching. I was sweating, with cum covering my belly. The toy jutting out of my ass as my slick leaked out around it. I was a sobbing, pleading mess. Nathan just stood there calmly, fully clothed, watching me intently. Taking everything in. Driving me to more and more orgasms with his evil remote control.

“It’s not working!” I managed to gasp eventually.

Nathan nodded, his hand going to between my legs. He gently eased the toy out. I whimpered and lifted my hips. It was almost like he was touching me. If his fingers moved an inch, they would brush the skin of my inner thigh. I snapped my legs shut in an effort to catch his hand, but I was too late.

He opened up another toy, ripping the plastic off almost savagely. As if it were the source of all our problems.

“This one has a knot,” he said gruffly.

That surprised me. He had found a shifter sex toy shop? That was impressive. And good thinking. I spread my legs wide again, eager for relief. Desperate to get what my body craved.

Still refusing to look at me, he slid the new toy in. Distantly, I knew he was going far above and beyond the duties of a friend or a bodyguard. It was just like Nathan not to complain.

But selfishly, I wanted him to give me more. I wanted him to give me everything, all of him. I wanted him to give me his cock and make me scream with pleasure that was actually satisfying.

The toy felt like the first one. Big, but not enough. Too fake and not at all what I needed. I whimpered yet again.

“It’s going to be okay Eli,” he soothed. “I’m going to inflate the knot now”

A strange pumping noise filled my ears. It was a few moments before I could feel it in my ass. The base of the toy was getting bigger, swelling, stretching me wider. I groaned, that felt good. So very good.

“More!” I gasped.

He kept pumping until my balls drew up and yet another exhausting orgasm tore through me, leaving me panting and weak, but thoroughly unsatisfied.

Nathan gently lifted my head up and placed a cool glass of water against my lips. I drank it down eagerly. He lay my head back down on the pillow and I finally caught his gaze. His pupils were blown, making his blue eyes look dark. His handsome face was flushed. His dark hair all disheveled. It pleased me that he wasn’t unaffected.

“Please give me your cock,” I begged shamelessly.

His eyes flashed, but he didn’t drop my gaze. “I’m not an alpha.”

“Neither is this dildo.”

He licked his lips and swallowed. I could smell his arousal. It was fierce and potent. He did want me, wanted me very much. He was just trying to do the right thing. Stupid thoughts of taking advantage of me were probably filling his mind. A small voice spoke up inside me. Maybe he was merely being swayed by my pheromones and we were both just prisoners of biology. In the morning we would regret everything and nothing would ever be the same again.

I ignored the voice. I needed cock. Specifically Nathan's. I cared about nothing else.

Judging by Nathan's expression I was on the verge of swaying him into giving it to me. Inspiration struck. I pulled at the ropes binding me. They were long, not long enough to reach my cock, but long enough for what I needed.

I flipped over onto my front, pulled my knees up under me, while keeping my head and shoulders on the mattress, and presented my hole to him. He wasn't an alpha but it should have a similar effect.

He sucked in a ragged breath. Then there was a hissing noise as the artificial knot deflated. I moaned at the sensation. Bowing my back even more. He slid the toy out of my ass and I was embarrassed that all the wetness I felt was me. My slick. Evidence of my need.

A breeze drifted over my exposed, opened, wet hole. Then Nathan's hands were on my hips. Warm, firm, kind, confident. My eyes rolled back in my head. This was what I needed.

Then finally Nathan was easing his cock inside of me. It was warm, soft, yet hard. It filled me in a way the toys had not. I groaned my deep satisfaction. Finally, finally!

He started to thrust, and I keened my ecstasy. It was everything I wanted. Everything I needed. It was bliss. It was euphoria. I wanted it to never, ever stop. It made me finally understand, finally break free from my denial. Nathan wasn't just my best friend. He was my everything.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” I wailed into the pillow.

I felt him shudder. Felt hot wet gushes where his seed bathed my insides. The sensation tipped me into another orgasm that had me yelling until my throat was sore, the waves of pleasure never ending.

“More!” I shrieked as soon as it eased.

Nathan's cock was gone, and I needed it back this very instant. I was aching empty without it. Hollow, desolate.

“I'm not an alpha, Eli. I need a minute.”

I whined my displeasure and wriggled my hips. Suddenly, his finger slid inside me. I sighed in satisfaction. One finger became two and then three. Nathan gently worked his fingers in and out. I hummed my delight. It felt fantastic. I had never known that anything could feel so good. Nathan fingering me was my new favorite thing.

I heard him fiddling with something, with his free hand. But I didn't care what he was doing. Hopefully, he was stroking himself back to hardness.

“The fake knot is detachable. It looks like I can wear it like a cock ring.”

That sounded amazing. Nathan’s cock and a knot? Sheer heaven. I groaned and felt myself clench around his fingers as a fresh wave of slick gushed out of me.

“Fuck, Eli!” groaned Nathan.

He was undone by me, and I loved everything about it. I wanted him to need me as much as I needed him. I wanted to bestow him with a fraction of the pleasure he was granting me. I would have loved to share it all with him, but I did not think that was possible.

His fingers disappeared but before I could whinge. His wonderful cock was pushing inside me. I moaned and thrust my hips back to help him enter me. Feeling him sink into me all the way was the best feeling ever.

“Rail me!” I ordered, my voice rasping from all my yelling.

Nathan gasped. “Are you sure?”

“Very! Do it!”

His fingers tightened their grip on my hips, and then he pummeled. Slamming in and out of me. I howled into the pillow and took it gladly. His thrusts transported me to nirvana. My toes curled, every muscle in my body trembled. Every nerve in my body danced with pleasure.

He stilled and rapidly inflated the knot and that extra stretch, extra burn was everything. My orgasm loomed like an impending tsunami and as it let rip, it felt like it took my very

soul with it. I screamed through the pain of my wrecked throat
and spun into black.

Chapter Eight

I slowly drifted awake to the morning light. I felt sated, warm, safe and nearly deliriously happy. My gaze went straight to Nathan who was sleeping beside me. His arm was under my neck, as if he had fallen asleep holding me. Now he was on his back, giving me a wonderful view of his handsome profile. All strong jaw line and defined nose. My gaze drifted lower to his naked chest. Sculpted and manly, with a dusting of dark hair. It was a shame the sheet was pulled up to his stomach, preventing my gaze from drifting even lower.

He stirred as if he could feel my attention in his sleep. His blue eyes fluttered open and fixed on me. He smiled before immediately turning away to grab a glass of water from the bedside cabinet. He handed it to me and I drank it obediently. Touched by his desire to always ensure I was well hydrated. It was his love language. I wondered what mine would be now we were embarking on a whole new chapter of our life. One where we were together. Far more than just friends.

I refused to think about the complications. Of how I needed an alpha to claim me to secure my inheritance, before one came along and stole both. Today was for happiness. For basking in the afterglow.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

My body was sore, but in a good way. Every muscle ached. I was covered in sticky and dried fluids. There was a wonderful new sensation in my ass. It felt well used. I loved it. Sex was a billion times better than I had been led to believe. I couldn't wait to experience more of it.

My heat was spent, but remnants of it tingled along my skin. Reminding me of the feel of Nathan. I wanted to explore more of him.

“Filthy,” I grinned.

Nathan rolled out of bed abruptly. He strode to the door still naked. Inexplicably leaving me.

“I'll leave you to shower,” he snapped.

The door shut sharply behind him. Like a verdict of condemnation. I stared at it in bewildered horror. Feeling like I had been kicked in the gut by a shire horse whilst simultaneously having all my skin ripped off.

First, he had lied to me about the suppressants, and now this cold rejection? But I couldn't even be mad at him. I wanted him too much. My body yearned to be held. I wanted Nathan's arms around me. I needed his kisses. My soul hungered for his

affection. But he didn't want me. Didn't see me that way. He clearly felt nothing about last night apart from regret.

Did he hate me for seducing him with my pheromones? Or did he blame himself for not being strong enough to resist? If it was some toxic combination of both he might never be able to forgive me or himself. Our friendship could be ruined forever.

I wanted to cry, but the pain was so immense it stole my tears away. Somehow I hauled myself out of bed and into the shower. If I did start sobbing, I didn't want Nathan to hear me. I didn't want to give him my misery. The best thing I could do was pretend that everything was fine. That last night meant nothing to me either. Nothing more than an unfortunate accident of biology. That way there was a slim chance that I could salvage our friendship at least. I couldn't lose Nathan completely. That would be unbearable.

After showering and dressing, I walked into the living area. Trepidation was making me tremble. My gaze fell on a takeout bag on the table. I drifted over to it and opened it. Cheeseburger, fries and onion rings.

Nathan was leaning against the breakfast bar, sipping a protein shake. As much as I stared at him, he refused to look at me. Sighing in defeat I sat down and tucked into my food. My appetite, as ever, was indestructible.

Silence stretched awkwardly. Nathan must have showered in the other room because he smelled divine and he was dressed in clean clothes. I couldn't think of anything to say. I

needed to say something, some inconsequential small talk to lighten the mood. But what?

I couldn't ask him what the weather was like outside, I was sitting by a giant ass window. I couldn't ask him if he was okay, because that would open up a can of worms.

"I'm sorry about last night!" Nathan blurted suddenly.

I paused with the burger halfway to my mouth. The words 'I'm not,' dying on my lips. I couldn't say that to him. So instead I murmured, "It's fine."

More uncomfortable silence.

"Is it?" he asked and the misery in his voice tore at my heart.

"My heat is broken, that's all that matters," I said, trying to sound nonchalant but my voice sounded brittle and strained even to my own ears.

"It was your first time!"

"Had to happen sooner or later. Better a friend than some rando."

He sighed heavily. "How are you so damn forgiving Eli? You have to be the sweetest person in the world."

We still were not looking at each other. I couldn't bring myself to do it now. Despite how much I had wanted him to meet my gaze earlier. Now, I knew it would just make me fall apart. I shrugged and forced another bite of the burger down.

“It was just a heat, no big deal,” I said with my mouth full, disguising all emotions.

Sex wasn't supposed to be that big of a deal. Not amongst shifters. We weren't humans. We understood it was just another physical need. Like eating and drinking. Nothing to get upset about. I blinked back my tears.

“No big deal?” he repeated and the hope in his voice was the most awful thing I had ever heard.

“Yep!” I said with as much false cheer as I could muster. “Now stop talking about it Douchebag or you are going to make it weird.”

He chuckled. “You're the boss, Asswipe.”

“Yes, I am. Now fetch me a coke.”

Immediately he went to the fridge. I used the moment of his back being turned to take in a big shaky breath and pull myself together. When he came over with the coke, I was going to pretend that last night never happened. Having Nathan as a friend was far, far better than nothing and I was going to cling onto it with all my might.

He'd never know I was pining for him.

Chapter Nine

Eli was quiet in the car, which was not surprising since I had taken advantage of him so utterly last night. He had been lost in his heat and I'd been unable to control myself. I'd stolen his first heat, his first anything. He didn't deserve that.

I wasn't going to demean myself by trying to blame my abhorrent behavior on pheromones. When I knew the truth in my very bones. It was embedded in my soul. I had wanted Eli King from the very first moment I had ever laid eyes on him.

I had walked into a pure white reception room to meet my new charge, and Eli had jumped up to greet me with a dazzling smile. Large chestnut eyes had stared up at me full of warmth and sweetness. His burnished hair had shone in the light and I had wanted nothing more than to run my hands through it, to see if it was as soft as it looked.

In the days after, I got to know him. His daft humor, his blazing intelligence. His integrity. And I had been falling in love with him a little more every day since.

Two long years of pining had primed me to jump at the chance to have him in my arms. I was never going to be able to resist. I should have locked him in the apartment and run far, far away. But I hadn't. Some dark part of myself had planned the whole thing.

I had chosen to stay close to him during his heat when I knew damn well I would be overcome. The consequences of not leaving had been blindingly obvious. Yes, I had wanted to protect him, but far more than that, I had wanted the inevitable to happen.

And, worst of all, I was getting away with it. Sweet, kind, amazing Eli was determined to innocently forgive me. He was naïve and trusting enough to believe it had all been an accident and not my fault. His current quietness was likely him being embarrassed. If I knew him at all, I knew he would bounce back soon. Eli would not brood for long. And he was far too lovely to be angry at me.

The irony of all the reasons I loved him, being the very reasons I could betray him and get away with it, was not lost on me. The world was cruel and Eli was too good for it.

Unbidden, images of last night started to play in my mind. It had been amazing. Incredible. Easily the best night of my life and far surpassing the dirtiest of fantasies I had ever had about Eli King. Being with him had been mind-blowing. As shameful as it was, I knew I would cherish the memories of my deception for the rest of my days.

I would go to sleep every night, reliving it. Remembering the soft noises he had made, The way he had felt. The joy of finally having him in my arms. It was bittersweet. I had been blessed to receive everything I had ever longed for, but it was never going to be repeated.

Eli was too good for me. Nevermind that he was an omega and I was a beta. Or that he was a billionaire and I was a bodyguard. He was just simply a better person. I would never be worthy of him. Last night was all I was ever going to get.

He would be mated soon. Making him even further out of my reach. Hopefully, I would get to stay as his friend and bodyguard. But that was all I could ever be to him. He would never be mine. The pain of that thought stole my breath away. Grimly, I forced myself to breathe and pull myself together. Friends was as good as it was ever going to be and it was a million times better than nothing. I would hold on to our friendship with my dying breath.

So I needed to pretend that last night was no big deal. Eli would never know how much I wanted him.

One silver lining in the whole mess was that his heat had come and broken quickly. When I had caught the first faint tantalizing scents of it, I had thought we might have to hole up for days, even a week. The thought had been terrifying. Staying in one spot for too long was asking for trouble. So it was a good thing it was all over. However, the speed with which his heat had hit was a little alarming. It was probably

something to do with coming off suppressants so abruptly after being on them for so long.

I gripped the steering wheel tightly and waited for my wave of guilt to pass. I never should have kept the truth from him. What kind of friend did that? No friend at all, that was the truth of it. It was the actions of a jealous man who liked that the object of his desire's own natural appetites were subdued. So he didn't have to watch him flirt and be interested in others.

I was a terrible person. No doubt about that. Then, as if I needed further proof of that fact, my mind turned to thinking about how Eli's heats would be unpredictable now they had started. All omegas took a while to settle into a cycle. Eventually finding anything from a monthly to a yearly rhythm. Eli was old for a first heat, and who knew what long-term effects the suppressants were going to have. His heats could be very frequent at first. And very intense.

Pleased excitement rushed through me, hotly followed by a deep shame that flipped my guts over. Happiness should not be my first reaction. I shouldn't want Eli to go into heat again so that I could have him once more.

My foot pressed harder on the gas pedal. I needed to get Eli safely to Dafydd. He was in danger, from all alphas and most of all, from me.

Chapter Ten

The universe was mocking me. Mere hours after my newfound determination to get Eli to Dafydd as soon as possible, the car started making alarming noises. Then a horrid burning smell started pouring in from the engine and steam was rising from the hood.

Swearing, I pulled over and switched the engine off. Everything popped, pinged and fizzed. I looked around. We were in the middle of nowhere. Woods next to us and nothing but open fields on the other side of the small road.

Isolation wasn't all bad. No one around, meant no one to try to steal Eli. But it also meant no one to fix the stupid car. Mechanics were not my strong point. Grumbling, I popped the hood and climbed out of the car to take a look. Eli flashed me a quick smile. His gorgeous eyes calm and content. He clearly had every faith that I could fix this. I swallowed tightly and got to work.

A short while later the sound of an approaching car caught my attention. It shouldn't have been a problem. Nothing more

than a passing mundane. They might even help. But for some reason, unease trickled down my spine.

I wiped my hands clean on a rag and decided to grab my gun from under the driver's seat. As I placed my hand on the door handle the stranger's car stopped right beside me. It had driven unexpectedly fast, and I had been too slow.

The whir of an electric window had me spinning around to face the newcomer, just as the unmistakable scent of alpha hit my nose.

I stared at the middle-aged shifter. He was alone and looked fairly relaxed. Just a normal rural shifter come to investigate the unknown shifters that had stopped on his territory. I assumed he had a magic-weaver in his pack and wards had alerted the alpha to our presence.

“Good afternoon Alpha,” I said politely. “Sorry to intrude, we were supposed to be just passing through but...” I tailed off and gestured at the opened hood.

His sky-blue eyes regarded me intently, but he nodded calmly.

“Do you need a hand?” he asked in a deep gravelly voice.

“I'm pretty sure it's just overheated, and when it's cooled down, we can make it into the next town and buy a new thermostatic valve.”

He nodded thoughtfully again.

“What pack are you from?” he asked bluntly.

I glanced over at Eli, who was staring at us wide eyed from the front passenger seat. It was odd for a beta and omega to be traveling alone together. The alpha would have heard of Duncan King and his alpha sons' dying, but he might not have heard about Eli going on the run. He might assume that the youngest King was holed up in his mansion.

“Mosshill,” I said to the alpha, rattling the name of my birth pack off. I hadn't been a part of that pack for years, but there was no way he could know that.

The alpha stared at me. Tension thickened the air until my fingers itched for my gun. Why, oh why hadn't I put on a holster this morning? Or at least told Eli where the gun was? Grimacing, I told myself to drop the innocent act. I knew the answer to those questions. I had done neither because my entire being had been consumed with my guilt and joy at fucking Eli. Leaving no brain cells free to think of practicalities. That was why, and now one fuck up was leading to another.

A phone pinged and the alpha looked down. His shoulders stiffened, and I knew. I just knew. Someone had confirmed his suspicions and sent him a picture of Eli.

“Eli locked the doors!” I yelled, as the alpha barreled out of his car and into me.

A beta physically fighting an alpha was hopeless, but I was going to give it everything I had. I would not stand by and watch him take Eli. The alpha would have to do it over my dead body.

His weight, combined with the speed of the attack, had me hitting the floor hard. But hours of training had me rolling away and back on my feet. I aimed a kick at his knees in an effort to bring him down. He danced out of the way easily. He was nimble as well as strong. I was so screwed.

I ducked as he swung a punch and as I did so I managed to land a fist in his gut. He grunted. I tried to follow through with a jab at his face but he blocked me, the force of the impact sent pain shooting up my arm. I paid it no heed.

The next thing I knew, I was being slammed against my car. Hard enough to dent it. Eli cried out in fear and the sound called to my inner wolf. I needed to protect him. I could not lose. The thought of this alpha laying his hands on Eli made me howl in rage.

With my newfound strength, I pushed back at the alpha, surprising him and managing to topple him over. Seizing my moment I leaped on top of him, my hands finding his throat. I squeezed with all my might. He started to turn a delightful shade of red and I dared to hope, but then we were rolling and rolling again as we each sought dominance.

He was so strong and his alpha scent washed over me. My instincts were yelling at me to submit, but fuck that. No fucking way was I going to submit and let him hurt Eli. I'd be bruised and bleeding, he'd yank Eli out of the car, then bend him over the hood. That image burned through me white hot and potent.

With a roar I heaved the alpha onto his back, finally securing my place on top of him. My hands had never left his throat but now I could squeeze properly. I'd squeeze the life right out of the motherfucker. His hands were on mine, trying to pull them off of him.

Blinding white light filled my world. Then sharp pain lanced through me. Then again, and again. There was no time between blows to gather my thoughts. Dimly I noticed I was on my back now and he was on top of me, raining punches down upon my face. I was done for.

He was showing no mercy. This was my death. My only regret was that I had failed Eli. I hadn't been able to protect him.

I grunted as the alpha suddenly fell on top of me like a sack of bricks. I blinked blood out of my eyes to see a blurry vision of Eli standing over us holding a tire iron and looking terrified. I wanted to say something to reassure him but darkness took me.

Chapter Eleven

Finding my way back to consciousness felt like swimming against the tide. Darkness enveloped me and it was soft, warm, comforting. But Eli needed me. So I fought against the heaviness weighing me down and battled to open my eyes.

When I finally managed it, I found myself sprawled on the back seat of the car. It was nighttime. Eli was wedged between the front seats, pressing a cool wet cloth to my forehead.

“Where are we?” I croaked.

Even in the darkness, I could see his eyes light up at the sound of my voice.

“In an old car park, behind a closed down cinema. About five miles from where you passed out. It was as far as I could get the car to go. Should I have stolen the alpha’s?”

Pride blossomed in my chest. He had done so well. He could not have done any better. The alpha’s car might have had a tracker on it. Leaving it had been a good decision. He had done the right thing.

“How are you feeling?” he asked anxiously. Clearly too concerned to wait for an answer for his first question.

“Like shit,” I said truthfully.

He removed the cloth from my forehead and peered at me intently. His deeply worried look pulled at my heartstrings. I should be making him feel safe, not causing him anguish.

“I don’t know how to find a healer,” he whispered miserably.

Tentatively I moved some muscles in my face and then gingerly my neck. A careful test of my limbs was next. Everything hurt but nothing felt life threatening.

“I don’t think I need one,” I told him. “I’m going to be fine.”

Eli stared back at me, not looking the least bit convinced.

“Your nose!”

My hand flew up to examine my nose. It was crooked and lumpy, but I could breathe through it. When Eli was safe and this was all over, I could get a healer to break it again and reset it to something straighter. Shifter bodies were blessed with fast healing. It would take care of the rest.

I shrugged and attempted a grin. “Good thing I was already ugly.”

Eli’s eyes widened, and then suddenly he was wriggling through to the back seat. He threw his slender frame on top of me and wrapped his arms around my shoulders as best he

could. I put my arms around him and held him tightly. He sobbed, and I ran my hand down his back in a soothing gesture.

I felt terrible for scaring him, but having him in my arms was bliss. I wanted to hold him forever and never let him go.

But we needed to get moving. It wasn't safe. Hopefully, the car could limp a few more miles. My mind tried to race through plans. Maybe leaving on foot would be better. We could try to jump a train, or I could attempt to steal a car. Not that my hot wiring skills were great. A headache pounded through my mind, making it hard to think and filling me with frustration.

The alpha would have woken up by now and set his entire pack to hunting us. If we were still on their territory, we would be screwed. They would know every inch of it. They'd know where to look. The alpha knew our car was knackered and that we couldn't have gotten very far. There were only so many places we could be.

"We need to go, Eli," I said regretfully. Lying here with an Eli-blanket was the best thing ever. I didn't want it to end.

He sat up swiftly and gave me a sheepish look. One that was full of guilt and meant there was something he hadn't told me.

"What have you done!" I snapped, far too forcibly.

He flinched, and I felt awful, but alarm and panic were spiraling through me. I needed to know the danger so I could make plans to face it and protect Eli. It wasn't merely my job,

it was imperative. Keeping him safe was the most important thing in the world.

“I... I was so worried about you. You were out cold and the stupid car wasn't working. I... I took your phone and called Dafydd. He is coming to get us.”

I stared up at Eli's pale and nervous face. It was awful that I had put him through this. He was suffering because of my incompetence. I had wanted to do more checks on Dafydd. The plan had been to meet him at a secure location, with an escape route planned in case he turned out to be an asshole or if Eli changed his mind and didn't want him.

But life rarely went to plan and given our current circumstances, it wasn't a bad move. It was better Dafydd found us than the unknown alpha. Eli had chosen Dafydd. Eli wanted him.

The jealousy that tore through my soul was so painful that I clenched my jaw. I was being an idiot. I was just a beta bodyguard. There was no reason on earth for Eli to choose me and even if by some miracle he wanted to, he couldn't. He needed an alpha.

“I didn't tell him you were injured, because I thought playing all my cards was a dangerous move, but he is bound to have a healer in his pack.”

Eli bit his bottom lip nervously. I stared at it transfixed. The sight had ground my mind to a shuddering halt. The only thought in my head was the longing to kiss his lips free. I had been granted the privilege of his body, but I had never been

able to kiss him. I probably never would. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that every night for the rest of my days, I would dream of kissing and making love to Eli King.

“You did the right thing,” I said hoarsely, completely unable to tear my gaze away from his lips.

Thoughts of seizing the moment, filled my mind. I could kiss him now, before Dafydd arrived. I could steal Eli’s first kiss and nobody would ever be able to take it away from me.

I sat up awkwardly. Eli didn’t move, he just stared at me with an unfathomable expression. I leaned towards him and it seemed like he leaned closer too, closing the gap between us. It felt like the very universe was holding its breath, waiting for this moment. This slither of time that had the power to change everything.

A blare of headlights flashed into the car. Seven jet black, glossy cars swept into the car park and surrounded us. My heart beat frantically for a moment until I realized the expensive cars had to be Dafydd’s. They were far out of the price range of normal people.

His men piled out, all armed and all dressed in impeccable black suits. And every single one was a human. Dafydd was clever, I had to give him that. A human couldn’t claim Eli as his own. Only an alpha could.

Eli looked terrified. I could feel him trembling as he sat on my lap. The scent of his fear itched at my nose.

“What’s wrong?” I asked in alarm. This had been his plan, had it not?

He looked at me and swallowed. “Do you think he is going to want to do it right here?”

My heart broke into a thousand pieces and my soul withered and died. I did not know how it was possible to feel so much pain and still be alive. He was scared of the decision he had made, but he had made it anyway. Because he had been so worried about me. I was supposed to protect him, not the other way around. Yet, he had sacrificed himself for me. I forced a smile onto my face, but I was sure it was weak.

“Come on, you know Dafydd. He will take you to a fancy hotel first. That man likes his comfort.”

Eli smiled back at me but it didn’t reach his eyes.

“Come on, we can’t hide in here forever. Let’s go talk to him,” I added with false cheer.

Eli clambered off of me and we scrambled out of the car, to stand blinking in the headlights of all the vehicles surrounding us. Dafydd strode towards Eli with a huge grin on his face. The alpha looked handsome as hell in his tailored dark suit and his styled blond hair.

“Eli!” he said warmly. “You look frozen, come let me get you comfortable in my limo.”

Eli gave him a nervous smile and followed him to the car. I stayed right behind him and pushed my way into the backseat

with them. There was no way in hell I was leaving him alone with Dafydd.

The alpha frowned at me but said nothing, which instantly made me feel better. Eli deserved far better than being mated in the back of a car. Even if it was a limo.

“There is a lovely hotel not far from here. I thought we could have dinner and discuss arrangements?” said Dafydd smugly.

Eli nodded and looked greatly relieved. I felt tension leave my shoulders too. It was wonderful to be right about Dafydd. He had the manpower to take his time and congratulate himself on being a gentleman. He was arrogant enough to believe that no other alpha could swoop in and take Eli before he had staked his claim.

Eli was going to get wined and dined first, as he should. I stole a glance at him. He looked upset, nervous and miserable. Did he not want Dafydd after all? Eli wasn't just nervous about being claimed in a shitty carpark?

I swallowed dryly. The knowledge that there was absolutely nothing I could do about it sat heavy in my gut. We were in Dafydd's car, surrounded by his men.

My mind started whirling through plans. There had to be something I could do. There had to be another way. I could not let Eli submit to Dafydd if he didn't want to. That would be awful.

Deep inside me my inner wolf was gleeful. Wolf-me wanted to stop Dafydd because wolf-me wanted Eli for myself. Grimly, I made a pact with that side of myself. For once, we wanted the same thing. It would be good to work together.

Chapter Twelve

The shower was wonderful. Huge and all chrome and black marble. The shower head was enormous and the ‘Tropical Waterfall’ setting was sheer bliss. I stood under it, resting my hands against the marbled wall and tried to banish the images of Nathan’s smashed up, bloody face from my mind. It wasn’t working.

Seeing him getting brutally beaten and the hours he had been unconscious were easily the worst of my life. Far surpassing being told my entire family was dead. That thought gave me pause. Did Nathan really mean more to me than my family did?

I took in a deep shuddering breath as I realized he did. It shouldn’t have been surprising. My father and brothers were assholes. Nathan was wonderful. And I had known that about him before he had gifted me with mind blowing sex. I wasn’t being a little whore and thinking with my hole.

Groaning, I tried to steer my thoughts from the new path it was determined to hurtle down. A path full of memories of

how incredible being with Nathan had been. My cock swelled, and I glared down at the traitorous thing in disgust.

But maybe it would help? I was getting ready for dinner with Dafydd and I was under no illusions that it would be anything more than perfunctory to the main event. A brief dinner, so he could pretend to be civilized. Then he would take me to his room and... My thoughts screeched to a halt and my dick deflated so fast it was almost funny.

It would be fine. I was an omega. Omegas loved getting cock. I'd certainly adored my first experience. Once he got it in, I was sure I would enjoy it. I put my hand over my mouth to stifle my sob. I was being a ridiculous baby. Dafydd was nice. I knew him. I needed an alpha, he was the best choice. I couldn't keep running and hiding and getting Nathan nearly beaten to death.

This way everything could go back to normal. I'd live in one of Dafydd's lovely houses. Nathan would be my bodyguard. We'd watch Netflix together and I'd try my best to annoy him. He would be safe, there wouldn't be much to protect me from once I was mated.

In return, all I had to do was submit to Dafydd, tonight and then occasionally. I shuddered, suddenly feeling cold despite the hot spray. How often would Dafydd want me? He was wealthy, handsome, young. I firmly banished my previous concerns about how our mating bond might affect things and decided that he must have a slew of lovers. He might not need me at all.

That thought was comforting. Tonight could be a once and done ordeal. Then Nathan and I would be safe and free to enjoy the lap of luxury. With nothing more important to do except goof around.

Fortified by that thought, I turned off the shower, grabbed a towel and headed for the bedroom to get dressed. I could do this. In the grand scheme of things, it was a small price to pay. Everything was going to be fine.

Clothes were laid out on the oversized queen bed. Dafydd had said he would have something delivered, not that he had much choice. The army surplus stuff I had been dressed in was covered in Nathan's blood and I didn't have anything else.

I picked up the first garment and gasped. It was a black long-sleeved top, but incredibly sheer. Darker and thicker patterns of curling vines and leaves swirled across it, but not enough to cover much. Dropping it in haste, I picked up the next item. Soft black leather trousers that looked like they would be astonishingly tight and low slung. I dropped them too. What was Dafydd thinking? He knew me. He had been my brother's friend since I was small. He knew I didn't dress like that. I was all lounge wear, comfy hoodies, and if I really needed to, polo shirts and chinos. All expensive and designer of course, but still.

On special occasions like charity balls and stuff, I was partial to Gucci. But nothing like this. I'd never dressed slutty in my life or exposed anything.

A small bag nesting by the clothes caught my attention. It was stuffed with cream-colored tissue paper. I unwrapped it curiously, only to shriek and drop the contents as soon as they emerged.

Hot pink lace panties. I was so not wearing those! My stomach rolled queasily. Dafydd was a man that calculated everything that he did. What was he playing at? Was he not happy to have my billions but also wanted to assert his ownership of me by making me feel like his whore?

I sighed heavily. What choice did I have? Dafydd knew that, and it was probably the point he was trying to make. Making me aware that I was entirely at his mercy. Despite the fact I was currently richer than him, he was still top dog. Alphas and their egos.

Well, fuck him. I wasn't going to let him get to me. I would stride into the restaurant with my head high, flaunting my new look as if I loved it. He could own me in all the other ways but he wasn't getting this one.

I struggled into the trousers. Damn they were tight. I heaved them on eventually and wondered how the hell I was going to get them off again later. If there was a way to manage it, it certainly would not be sexy. Not that I wanted to be sexy for Dafydd.

My reflection stared back at me. The trousers were so low slung it was obscene. It was a good thing I liked to wax and had done so recently. Otherwise there probably would be pubes poking out everywhere.

If I had worn the panties, they would definitely be visible. I swallowed. Now he was going to know I was going commando. What an asshole.

I threw the top on, hoping it would make it look better. It did not. None of the swirling vines covered my nipples or much of anything. I was basically going to dinner topless.

Nathan chose that moment to walk in. Our eyes met in the mirror and his cheeks flushed. I didn't turn around to face him.

“What the fuck are you wearing!” he exclaimed.

“Clothes!” I snapped back.

His gaze drifted over my body, slowly this time, before lingering on my ass. My stomach fluttered uncomfortably. Did he realize what he was doing? Did he like what he was seeing? Did I have a good ass? I couldn't exactly twist around now and try to check myself out. Not while his attention was fixed so acutely.

“Did he send them for you?” Nathan growled, startling me from my train of thought.

I nodded mutely and Nathan pulled his gaze up from my ass to catch the gesture.

“You look like a sex worker. I mean an incredibly hot sex worker, but still.”

My cheeks caught fire and I dropped his gaze. I prayed to all the gods that Nathan thought I was embarrassed and not flustered and all tingly because he had called me hot.

There was a cheap, nasty hairbrush on the dresser. I grabbed it and proceeded to try to yank my hair into some semblance of order. When I thought I could speak without my voice shaking, I did so.

“He is just trying to play stupid games, fuck him,” I said calmly.

Our gazes locked in the mirror again, and Nathan nodded his agreement. A flash of pride burning in his eyes. My heart skipped a couple of beats. I tried not to look at his nose. Not because it looked ugly, far from it. As ruggedly handsome as it made him, the sight still flooded me with guilt and probably always would.

Wordlessly, he handed me the shoe box that had been on the floor by the bed. Gingerly I opened it. Black leather ankle boots with three-inch heels. I let out a sigh of relief. It could have been a lot worse, like bright red six-inch stilettos. Though then I would have something to stab the alphahole with.

“Are there any socks?” I asked Nathan.

He picked up the lingerie bag, and I winced, but thankfully, he didn't say anything. He just pulled out a silky pair of black socks. I sat down on the bed to put them and the boots on and wondered if I really was brave enough to go out dressed like this.

“How do I look?” I asked.

Nathan smiled at me. “Beautiful.”

My heart fluttered again. Nervously, I stood up to check for myself in the mirror. The person staring back at me did look hot. The blessings of youth and being an omega, wrapped in sexy clothes.

My stomach was flat, my chest lightly defined. The stupid top did nothing to hide either. My face wasn't great but my complexion was clear and my eyes bright. My body was small and slender. Everything an alpha would want in an omega. I was definitely fuckable.

It was disconcerting. I'd never thought of myself that way before. Probably because I'd been on suppressants all my life. Frowning, I banished that thought. Absolutely no point in being grumpy about that right now.

“Do you want to do this?” asked Nathan softly.

My heart clenched painfully, but I forced out my biggest brightest smile. Nathan knew me so well, he could tell I was dreading it. But what choice did I have? If I told Nathan I was shitting myself and would rather stick hot pokers in my eyes than present for Dafydd, my wonderful bodyguard would do everything he could to try to get me out of here. And only succeed in getting himself killed. Nathan was extremely competent, but there was only one of him.

“Of course!” I gushed cheerily and it sounded fake to my own ears.

He gave me a long sad look before nodding decisively.

“Time to go,” said Nathan, determined as ever to keep me punctual.

I nodded back at him, noticing for the first time that he was back in a dark suit. His work clothes. My bodyguard. The suit didn't fit perfectly, and it irked me that Dafydd had bought me a new outfit but hadn't bothered to order clothes for Nathan. Leaving him presumably to scrounge one from one his men. I took a deep breath and pushed the annoyance to one side. I was going to make Dafydd give me an eye-watering allowance and then I could ensure that Nathan was properly taken care of.

“Let's go knock 'em dead,” I said with a big bright, false smile.

Nathan's expression was blank as I walked out of the room, the sound of his footsteps behind me, was my only comfort.

Chapter Thirteen

The restaurant was merely the one inside the hotel. Nice enough, but nothing too fancy. The waitress didn't bat an eyelid at my outfit, instead she smoothly guided me to Dafydd who was seated by the ornate fireplace in a quiet corner.

Dafydd rose politely when he saw me approaching, and he pulled out a chair for me. I smiled and sat with as much grace as I could muster.

As he pushed the chair in, he leaned in close to my ear.

“You look ravishing.”

I felt myself flush. What an ass. As if he hadn't forced me to wear exactly what he had chosen. An uncomfortable feeling crawled down my spine, making me squirm. Dafydd had always been exceedingly polite to me before. Treating me with far greater courtesy than my brothers ever had. Having him suddenly make suggestive comments was unsettling. Had he

always seen me in a sexual way and had merely been good at hiding it? The thought felt strangely violating.

But then again, I had always admired his good looks. Suppressants hadn't made me blind. If he had been perving on me, I had definitely been perving on him too. Mutual perving. It was all good.

Nervously, I shook out my napkin and placed it over my lap. Nathan's calm, silent presence behind me was soothing.

"Would you be so kind as to dismiss your bodyguard?" said Dafydd.

I blinked at him.

Dafydd smiled, showing his perfect white teeth. "His presence is drawing attention to us, and we have private, delicate matters to discuss."

The restaurant was clearly not aimed at the type of clientele who required bodyguards. Nathan's presence was very noticeable. I swallowed dryly. As for the private and delicate matters, I did not want Nathan to have to listen to that. I looked up at Nathan. His blue eyes flashed briefly with something that looked like betrayal, then he nodded curtly and walked swiftly away. I watched him go with an ache in my chest.

"Wine?" enquired Dafydd politely, snapping my attention back to him.

I nodded and he filled my glass.

"I am so sorry about your loss," he said.

Suddenly my eyes were watering. Hastily I blinked my tears away. Seemed like I wasn't so heartless as to be able to get over my family's death quite so easily.

I managed to croak out, "Thank you."

He gave me a long look. It took me a moment to realize that he was trying to appear sincere. How had I ever liked this jerk? And now I was going to have to spend the rest of my life with him.

The waiter came over with our food and slid it deftly in front of us. Dafydd must have ordered for me. I stared down at my plate. Salad. Just great. My stomach rumbled.

"You probably shouldn't eat too much," said Dafydd with a filthy wink.

I felt myself turn a wonderful shade of tomato and hated it. Knowing he was playing games and trying to unsettle me on purpose, didn't help at all. He was still winning.

"I want an allowance!" I blurted out.

Dafydd took a long sip of his wine whilst regarding me with a raised eyebrow. His Adam's apple bobbed and it seemed like it was the only thing that wasn't frozen in place.

"Of course," he said eventually.

I stared at him in surprise. That had been far easier than I had expected. It was probably a sign that I should have set my sights higher.

“Since we are being direct, I will lay out my rules,” he said calmly but his eyes glinted coldly.

I could do nothing but squirm and nod. Hating how pathetic I was being.

“I am a very traditional man,” he said. “You will wear clothing that displays my mark at all times.”

That didn’t sound too terrible. I wasn’t a huge fan of scarves, jackets and high-necked tops anyway. Making sure my neck was bare so everyone could see I was claimed, was not the end of the world.

“You will come off suppressants immediately. I will have your heats.”

Dafydd had known about the suppressants? Was I the only person in the world that had been oblivious? The knowledge was sickening. As was the thought of giving Dafydd my heat. I did not want to be that vulnerable with him.

“I have a beta woman, Samantha. She will bear my pups and raise them.”

I clenched my fork tightly. I hadn’t really thought about pups. As a male omega, I’d always assumed whatever alpha I ended up with would find a woman to bear his pups, and the alpha and I would raise them together. I always thought I’d be a dad one day. I had never realized how much I wanted that until this moment. The pain of having that future ripped away from me hurt.

In large packs, omegas helped with all the pups. But Dafydd's pack was small. I wouldn't even get that consolation.

"I am a healthy man, with healthy appetites," continued Dafydd as if he hadn't just destroyed all my hopes and dreams. "You will present to me every other day."

I stared at him in horror. Every other day? He wanted to have sex with me that often? That seemed entirely unnecessary. Surely he would get bored? What about this Samantha?

His eyes glinted smugly and he grinned at me. No pups and bending over for him practically constantly? He painted a picture of my future that looked a lot like my personal idea of hell.

"In return," he droned. "I will keep you in the manner of which you are accustomed and you will want for nothing."

That seemed like a poor substitute. A very poor substitute. Especially as he would be providing for me with my father's money. My stomach heaved and I thought for one moment I was going to be sick. Gleeful images of aiming it at Dafydd, played in my mind but my stomach settled.

Contacting him had been the worst decision of my life and now I was trapped with the consequences forever. There was no way to backpedal now. His men were all over the hotel. Unseen, discreet, but still there. Escape was impossible. Any minute now, he was going to take me upstairs and rail me. I was fucked. Literally.

“Since you are not hungry,” he said, gesturing at my untouched salad. “Shall we go to my room?”

My heart fluttered crazily and my head spun, but there was no point delaying the inevitable. Shakily, I got to my feet. Dafydd grinned at me again. There was no warmth in his eyes. Nothing but a predatory gleam and satisfaction. He took my arm and led me to the elevators.

Nathan was nowhere to be seen. I had sent him away, but I had assumed he wouldn't go far. Just out of sight. Why had he abandoned me? Had Dafydd's men done something to him? I tried not to panic. It was impossible to decide which was worse, that I had hurt him enough to make him leave, or that he had been abducted.

Whatever the reason, he wasn't here, and I had never felt more alone. It was a ridiculous feeling because it wasn't a single thing he could do about my predicament. Yet I still yearned for his comforting presence.

The elevator doors closed. I was alone with Dafydd. He smiled down at me. I backed up until I hit the wall. He calmly stepped forward, placed his hand on the wall above my head and leaned in.

“Are you still a virgin?”

My entire body went ice cold. His potent alpha scent filled my nose. I felt like a fly caught in a spider's web. Helpless. Knowing I was about to be devoured and having no choice but to lie still and watch my impending fate approach.

The one pleasing thing was that I was not a virgin. I would not be giving him that along with all else. My first precious time had been with Nathan and nobody could ever take that away from me.

The doors opened with a soft ping. Dafydd grabbed my arm and pulled me forward, only to stagger backwards a heartbeat later, his head snapping back in an unnatural angle. Nathan stood in the elevator's doorway, a look of fury on his face and a knuckle duster glinting in his fist.

He grabbed my arm and we were running down the hallway. I tried to keep up but the stupid high-heeled boots were awkward. Dafydd roared from behind us. Nathan scooped me up into his arms and picked up his pace. I buried my head in his shoulder and breathed in his delicious scent. My wolf knew he was my home.

We exploded through a fire door and down flights of concrete stairs. Then we were in an underground carpark and Nathan was shoving a motorcycle helmet on my head. He jumped on a bike and I scrambled up behind him, faster than I had ever moved in my life. I wrapped my arms around his broad chest and held on. The bike rumbled between my legs and we were off. Up the ramp, around the barrier designed for cars and out into the night. The city rushed past me and we were leaving Dafydd far behind. Sheer glee was making me feel giddy. Nathan was here and I was free. It was everything I wanted.

Chapter Fourteen

The campfire crackled merrily. The log behind my back was strangely comfortable. Behind me, Nathan was putting the finishing touches to the tent. He was such a perfectionist.

Tonight was looking to be far more comfortable than last night. After riding for hours, we had grabbed a couple hours of sleep in a shitty motel with single, lumpy beds. Then it had been up at dawn and back on the road. One stop for clothes for me and one stop for camping supplies.

It was a miracle my ass didn't hurt and that I wasn't exhausted. But I loved being on the back of the bike with Nathan and the exhilaration chased everything else away.

I sipped my bottle of coke and looked up at the stars. Nathan was going to cook beans and sausages on the fire and I couldn't wait. We were hiding and in terrible danger, but life was back to feeling like an adventure. I'd never been camping before, and out in the woods, alone with Nathan under a thousand stars was magical.

The feel of Dafydd's arm on me as he led me to the elevator, haunted my skin. I itched at the spot and willed it to go away.

Fuck Dafydd. I wasn't going to let him being a jerk, ruin this moment. Nathan had got me away from him. That was all that mattered. I would not brood about it. It was over. I just needed to keep on running.

Nathan finished with the tent and came and squatted by the fire, getting straight to work with the food, which was great because I was starving.

Something deeper in the woods yowled and a branch snapped. I jumped, my heart hammering like crazy.

"What was that?" I said in alarm.

Nathan just calmly shook his head at me. "Eli, you are a werewolf. You are the scariest thing in these woods."

Grumbling at him, I took another sip of my coke. I wasn't scary at all. And there were things in the world far more vicious than shifters.

"What if it's a bigfoot?" I asked.

Nathan rolled his eyes. "Then we make our introductions, apologize for being in his territory and give him a sausage as an offering."

Sasquatchs were supposed to be very polite, but I had never met one. Nathan probably had though. He had met everyone and done everything. Whereas I had been sheltered in my mansion. No wonder he couldn't see me as more than his

friend and ward. I wasn't his equal. Just a dumb inexperienced kid.

"You don't need to get freaked out like you do when you watch those ghost videos," said Nathan, unintentionally proving my point.

"What's wrong with ghost videos!" I snapped defensively.

Nathan raised an eyebrow. "You get so scared you need me to sleep in your bed with you."

"So?" I muttered sulkily.

"Two ghosts attended your last birthday party. By invitation. Because they are your friends."

I felt myself flush and prayed it was too dark for Nathan to see it. I did like to scare myself silly with YouTube videos, it was fun. But even better than that was having an excuse to curl up with Nathan in my bed. The suppressants or perhaps my own denial had made me convinced it was all about comfort and companionship, but I was coming to realize that it had always been far more than that.

I took another swig of my drink. The tent was tiny. I was going to get to sleep all pressed up to Nathan. It was going to be wonderful and torture all at the same time. Whether it was suddenly coming off of suppressants or this was how normal people always felt, I had no idea. I only knew I was incredibly horny. Memories of our wonderful night together were never far from my mind. I wanted a repeat more than I wanted oxygen.

Being on the back of a bike, wrapped around Nathan had been a torment like no other. And now, his scent was tantalizing. Even watching his strong competent hands opening a can of beans was doing things to me. I needed to get a grip. He must have smelled my arousal. Being as lovely as he was, he hadn't said a word. Presumably placing all the blame on suppressant withdrawal.

My stupid addled brain kept telling me it scented arousal from Nathan too, but that was ridiculous. I was just smelling what I wanted to smell. Or the poor man was affected by having a horny omega pressed up next to him all day. He was a man in his prime, it wasn't like he would be able to help it. It didn't mean he wanted me.

I wriggled around, changing position even though I was already comfortable. I needed a distraction. I had to start thinking about something else before I did something cringe worthy like burst into tears or throw myself at him, or both.

“So, what's the plan now?” I blurted out.

Nathan gave me a surprised look but calmly continued cooking.

“We have two options,” he said softly, and I hated how much my heart fluttered at hearing him refer to us as ‘we.’

“Going feral is one,” he continued.

Running around in the woods as a wolf permanently was not my idea of fun, but maybe spending all my days with Nathan would make up for it.

“But our scents are stronger in wolf form, it would be easier for alphas to track us.”

I nodded thoughtfully, pretending that I too had considered that and was just as intelligent as he was. I probably wasn't fooling anyone, but it was worth a try.

He handed me a tin bowl full of hot beans and sausages and I wolfed it down. He had only popped into a camping supply shop briefly, leaving me outside with the bike. It was a sign of his efficiency that he had managed to grab everything we needed and that it had all fitted into one rucksack, that I had needed to wear so that we all fitted onto the bike.

“What's the other option?” I asked, after I had licked my bowl clean.

Nathan gave me an intense look that I could not interpret. “We try to make it to the Council and ask the Grandmaster for help.”

“Silas Northstar?” I squeaked.

Nathan nodded.

“But he is a necromancer and a dark mage and he killed everyone on the old Council to take power and he steals pups!”

“He is also an omega,” said Nathan.

I stared at him. Maybe he had a point. Presumably an omega who was also an infamous supervillain, would not be happy with omegas assigned roles as property. If anyone would have sympathy for my plight, it should be him. But did Silas

Northstar have any sympathy at all? Everyone said he was evil. An evil person wouldn't help me.

Unless I paid him to. As Grandmaster of the Council he might have the power to ban all alpha's from claiming me, giving me time to choose an alpha of my liking. In return, I could give him billions. Silas had a hell of a lot of power, both magical and political, but I had never heard he was rich. Everyone wanted money, didn't they?

"What do you think we should do?" I asked.

I trusted Nathan's judgment in all things. He would know what the best course of action was. Maybe I was pathetic for not wanting to make my own decisions, but my last attempt had led me to Dafydd. I was clearly an idiot.

"I think you will be safest under the Grandmaster's protection," said Nathan.

"Okay," I agreed quickly.

A warm glowing feeling settled over me. It was a relief to have a plan, a course of action to take. Hope for the future. With Nathan by my side, it all felt possible. Like everything was going to be okay.

Chapter Fifteen

The erotic dream swirled through me as pleasure tingled all along my body. I drifted to a half awake state. My cock was achingly hard, but delightfully, my back was pressed up close to Nathan's chest and his firm cock was nestled in between my ass cheeks. We had both gone to sleep naked, so there was nothing between us. I could feel him perfectly.

We had unzipped the sleeping bags and put one underneath us and the other on top. Nathan had mumbled something about it being warmer that way. I hadn't argued. The sleeping arrangement had suited me just fine.

Now, after a whole night, the tent had become stuffy. Which meant his wonderful scent was everywhere. It felt like I was bathing in it. It was glorious.

Warm, comfortable and in Nathan's arms. The morning light shone through the nylon of the tiny tent, lending everything an orange glow and adding to the dream-like quality.

My hips moved of their own accord and the sensation of Nathan's cock sliding over my hole was exquisite. I groaned and did it again. The feel of his cock twitching and swelling even more was euphoric. I did it again and again until I was panting and moaning frantically.

Nathan's hand went to my hip and gripped me tightly and then he was thrusting into my movements. His breath hitched and it was like music to my ears. Our pace increased. My balls drew up, my cock throbbed and slick leaked out of my hole, covering his cock and enabling him to glide over me.

Suddenly, his grip tightened and he pulled me flush to his groin and held me there. He groaned deeply and I felt his cock pulse as wetness spurted between my legs. I gasped in pleasure. I was so close, any second now I would be spilling too.

A blast of coldness disorientated me. Nathan's hand was gone, his chest was no longer against my back, his cock was absent from my ass crack. He was ripping the door of the tent open and then he was gone. I caught a whiff of wolf as he shifted and then nothing. He had run far away.

Leaving me alone in the torn tent with a raging hard on and a broken heart.



An hour later, and I had managed to clean myself up, get dressed and make a terrible attempt at rolling the sleeping bags up and packing away the tent. My stomach rumbled, so I

rummaged in the rucksack for some food, but everything needed cooking. I stared at the embers of the fire in dismay. I was so out of my league it was embarrassing.

Glumly, I sat on the log and waited for Nathan to return. I knew he would. Hopefully, it would be before I starved to death. Being the first werewolf to waste away in the woods was not how I wanted to be remembered. However, shifting and attempting to hunt was pointless. No one had ever shown me how to hunt. My father had believed that omegas shouldn't. He had even frowned on shifting, believing his children should rise above their nature. All in all, I was woefully out of touch with my wolf side.

Unlike Nathan. He had been raised to hunt and run free. To embrace his wolf side. Except when it came to sex it seemed. Unless it was just sex with me that freaked him out. I sighed heavily. Hopefully, he wasn't repulsed or furious that I had ravaged him in his sleep. The best I could hope for was a misguided sense of honor. That he was blaming himself for doing something he perceived to be wrong.

How on earth was I going to change his mind? Whether he thought I was his victim or believed I was too hideous to do such things with? It all seemed rather insurmountable. My chances of success seemed bleak.

Nathan approached in wolf form with two rabbits in his mouth. He placed them carefully by the fire, shifted to his human form and quickly got dressed.

I said nothing. I could not think of a single word to say. The awkwardness between us was awful. I wanted it to stop. It shouldn't be like this. This wasn't us.

He deftly skinned and gutted the rabbits. Then he skewered them on sticks, rigging up a frame to hold them over the embers. Once that was done, he coaxed the fire back to life. Through it all, I just sat there watching him, wordless and silent.

After what felt like an eternity, he passed me one of his homemade rabbit skewers. It smelled delicious.

“Sorry,” I breathed as our fingers brushed over the rabbit stick.

My eyes watered. I hated this. As wonderful as this morning had been, I wished it had never happened. Not if this was the consequence.

Nathan's beautiful blue eyes were finally meeting mine. He looked horrified.

“Don't apologize. It wasn't your fault.”

I stared back at him helplessly. He was blaming himself. I had my answer. I didn't know whether to be relieved or dismayed.

“It wasn't yours either,” I said earnestly.

I didn't want him to hate himself. I needed him to know how much I wanted him and that I longed for him to want me too. But it seemed very unlikely. Steering away from hatred was the best I could aim for.

He stared at me intently. He was so close I could feel his breath, feel his body heat, but he might as well have been across the ocean.

“You are so sweet, Eli,” he said with his voice hitching.

“Let’s just pretend it never happened!” I blurted suddenly.

A strange look flashed in his eyes. “Okay, let’s do that.”

I breathed in a sigh of relief and swallowed back a sob. Then I took a huge bite of the rabbit. It was delicious. Flavor exploded across my tongue along with the hot juices. I couldn’t help the noise of appreciation that escaped from my mouth.

Nathan flinched and moved away from me, to rescue his own rabbit from the flames.

“You and your food,” he teased.

I stuck my tongue out at him, and he chuckled. I could do this. He could do this. We could be friends.

Chapter Sixteen

Being pressed up against Nathan's broad back, with my arms around his waist and his scent in my nose was not helping my horniness at all. The wind whipped past us as we whizzed along and I prayed it was taking my stink far away from Nathan. I really needed to stop objectifying the poor man. He had never been anything other than completely lovely to me. He deserved far better in return. I had decided to just be his friend, so I needed to stick to my decision.

Nathan's entire body tensed, and instinctively I tightened my grip and braced myself. The bike came skidding to a stop, and I felt the tiniest of bumps, then everything was still. I opened my eyes to find we were stopped at a junction. Very close to the large white SUV in front of us. I couldn't see from my angle, but I was pretty sure the bike tire was touching the car's bumper.

A human woman with brown hair, pale skin and a furious expression threw open the driver's door and ran up to us.

“How dare you!” she shrieked. “My kids are in my car and you hit us!”

Nathan took off his helmet. “I bumped into you slightly after you stopped for no reason.”

The woman sputtered in outrage. “I’m calling the cops! I know my rights!”

She proceeded to whip out her phone and continued to rant and rave at Nathan whilst simultaneously yelling at the operator, demanding that the police arrive immediately because she was a taxpayer.

A couple of cars stopped around us, and several onlookers gawped from the sidewalk. This wasn’t good at all. My heart rate picked up pace. Most of the humans had their phones out and were recording the spectacle. I kept my helmet on. Humans had no idea that Duncan King had been a shifter, but they knew he was fabulously wealthy. My picture had been in the papers more times than I cared for. I wasn’t truly famous, I could walk down the street just fine but if a video of a Karen went viral, somebody would recognize me.

And then, if humans started spreading word on social media that I was here, it was only a matter of time that a shifter would see it.

“Why is he wearing a helmet? Is he a criminal? Or a terrorist?” shrieked the Karen.

“He is wearing a helmet, because he is riding a motorbike,” said Nathan calmly.

“Well you’ve stopped now! I demand to see his face, you can’t hide from me, I have rights!”

I looked at Nathan. He nodded. He was right, with all her yelling, keeping my helmet on was drawing more attention, not less. I quickly took it off and glared at her. She glared back but said nothing, clearly having nothing further to say on the matter now that she had got her way.

I stared down at my lap and wished for the whole unnecessary drama to go away. Even more people had gathered now and whilst most of the attention was on the woman and Nathan, I still felt extremely uncomfortable. Being the center of attention was grim at the best of times.

I slid off of the bike and walked a few steps away. Hoping that I might appear as an onlooker and blend into the background. The woman continued her tirade of abuse and Nathan continued to be calm and reasonable. I was so proud of him.

A single whoop of a siren signaled the arrival of the police. I tried to talk myself out of completely freaking out. It could be fine. The cops could make everyone disperse, have no time for Karen’s nonsense and enable us to be on our way.

Nathan turned to face an approaching officer with a bright smile, clearly turning on his effortless charm. I relaxed a little. Surely no one was immune to Nathan’s charisma. It would all be over soon. I just needed to be brave for a little longer.

Suddenly, cold metal was pressed against my lower back. I froze in dread, every muscle in my body tensing. My eyes

locking onto Nathan, willing him to look over.

“Come with me and don’t make a sound,” growled a voice in my ear. “If I shoot now, I will take out your spine and you will never walk again. Which is fine by me, I only need you to spread your legs, not stand on them.”

I shuddered. I couldn’t scent any trace of alpha from my attacker. Was he using something to mask his smell? Or was he merely a henchman taking me to his boss? His heavy hand fell on my shoulder and he led me away. Seemed like I was about to find out.

“*Nathan! Nathan! Nathan!*” I wailed in my head, as if I thought we had a mate bond and he would be able to hear me.

My abductor walked me to the nearest building, an empty office block. He shoved me through the side door that looked like it had recently been kicked off its hinges. Inside was gloomy and dark. The windows were boarded up and little light got through. Desks, chairs and cabinets were strewn haphazardly everywhere. Papers and files were littered everywhere like confetti. Someone, at some point had broken in and gone nuts.

The potent scent of alpha suddenly flooded my senses. He had been hiding his presence with a spell. Terror trickled down my spine. My wolf knew how screwed we were. In the natural pecking order, this man was far above me in the food chain. Bigger, faster, stronger. Far more aggressive.

“Present for me,” he snarled.

My entire body started shaking. I could feel my heartbeat in my throat. My breaths were shaky and uneven.

“No,” I croaked.

He turned me around so fast that my head spun. Lights flashed as my head snapped to the side. Then pain blossomed. He had struck me. Hard. The force of it sent me staggering into a desk. He was over me in an instant. Pushing my back onto the desk until I was lying on it, then pulling my jeans down and lifting my legs over his shoulder.

I stared up at him in horror. He was huge, all muscles and bulk. There was nothing in his eyes but rage, fury and a dark, dark lust. This was a violent, dangerous man. I heard myself whimper. Then my body flushed hot then cold. A wave of dizziness struck and every small hair on my body stood up. I groaned. A rush of slick gushed out of me and an aching emptiness overwhelmed me, I needed to be filled.

I whimpered, and he laughed in delight. The bastard had thrown me into heat. He had scared me enough to trigger my body's natural defense system. Appease the aggressor. Make him want to fuck instead of kill.

My thoughts scrambled until I was nothing but fear, dismay and need. It was awful and there was no escape. I wailed.

Then, confusingly he was gone and Nathan was there, pulling up my trousers and pulling me into his embrace. I clung onto him desperately, too far gone to be able to do anything else.

Sheer joyous relief surged through me. Nathan was here. I was safe. He had saved me. Again. I gulped in huge gasps of air and tried to remember how to breathe properly.

Dimly, I was aware that cops were there and calling me Mr. King. Nathan had told them who I was, to ensure that they would help. His plan had worked. But all I was truly aware of was Nathan. His divine masculine body against mine. His muscular arms around me. I wanted him so much it hurt. My hips danced and I whimpered.

“Shh,” said Nathan, trying to calm me.

Part of me knew human cops were surrounding us and that I shouldn't be trying to dry hump him, but my body wasn't listening. Desperation clawed at my mind. I was hollow inside. I needed Nathan to fill me.

I pressed myself even closer and tried to grind against him. My head throbbed and I felt sick. This thrown heat was no fun at all. I hated it but it was ruling me completely. I was utterly its slave, and I knew it would not release me until it got what it wanted.

I climbed onto Nathan, wrapping my legs around his waist and my arms around his neck. I rested my head on his shoulder and licked his delicious salty skin. He shuddered and the scent of his arousal was fuel to my fire.

“Mr. King, is having a panic attack. I need to take him somewhere private for a moment, to help him calm down,” said Nathan.

He was such a genius. A sexy, kind, genius. He really was the best person in the world. And now he was carrying me somewhere so he could rail me. I was going to get to have him again. It was so wonderful, I didn't even feel bad about it.

Chapter Seventeen

Nathan carried me into a small stockroom. Lined with shelves, it was barely more than a cupboard. As he shut the door, it was dark and private. I could hear and sense the human cops just the other side of the door, but in here it was mine and Nathan's own little world. Nothing but the two of us. As it should be. He didn't put me down, and I didn't want him to.

"I'm so sorry," whispered Nathan with anguish in his voice. "I need to get you out of heat."

I whimpered in dismay. Did he really not know how much I yearned for him? How could he be oblivious to the fact that I wanted this? He was my everything, why could he not see it?

His hands moved to my waist and he awkwardly slid my trousers off my ass, just enough to give him access. I heard the sound of his fly unzipping and it made me moan in anticipation. He fiddled around for a minute and then I felt his cock resting against my entrance. Damn that felt good. I lifted

myself up a little and tried to impale myself on it but Nathan stopped me.

“Eli, look at me,” he said huskily.

I opened my eyes. My legs were still around his waist, my arms around his neck. Our faces were inches apart. His blue eyes were full of so many emotions I couldn't begin to untangle them all.

“I want you to know it's me,” he said.

I stared back at him. Of course I knew it was him. My thrown heat was intense and addling my mind, but he was Nathan. I'd know him anywhere. At any time.

I nodded my understanding. I willed him to see that I was no longer scared. I hadn't been since the moment he had touched me. My heat needed to be sated and I was more than happy to do so with him.

He stared back at me. How much of my thoughts he saw, I had no idea but his cock started pushing into me. I threw back my head and groaned. The feel of his hard length sliding into me was incredible. Nothing had ever felt so good. Nobody in the world had ever been in as much bliss as I was right now.

He slid in all the way. Stretching me, filling me, completing me. Having Nathan inside me was even better than I remembered. His breathing was heavy, and I was delighted that he was enjoying me too.

We stayed there, joined yet motionless for a moment. My body adjusting to accommodate him. Enveloping him. Then

his hands were on my hips, encouraging me to lift myself up. I understood then, he wanted me to take control, set my own pace. Even lost in lust he was concerned and gentle. Worried about traumatizing me in my thrown heat. I whimpered. He was Nathan, I'd never feel anything other than safe in his arms.

I wanted him to be happy, to enjoy this. So, I gripped him tighter with my thighs, placed my hands on his shoulders for leverage and pushed myself up, sliding up his cock as I did so. Then I slammed back down, making us both grunt.

I grinned. He wanted me to set the pace and this was the pace I wanted. I rose up again and repeated the movement, the drag of his cock inside me was divine and I forgot all else except chasing that sensation. I rode him. Hard.

His hand covered my mouth, muffling my cries. I had forgotten about the humans outside. They would never understand my need to be railed immediately after being assaulted. They were probably waiting to take my statement. I would have giggled but all my breath was taken up by the immense pleasure coursing through my body. I was already panting hard. I had no breath spare for laughing.

As my ecstasy grew my muscles weakened. I whimpered in frustration. Nathan understood immediately, his hands going to my hips and using his strength to lift me up and down his cock. I tried to hold in my cries but everything felt too good. I couldn't possibly contain all my joy inside myself.

I lowered my head to his shoulder and bit down, muffling my moans in his flesh. He groaned and shivered and quickened our pace. I bit harder, as if I thought I could claim him with a mating mark.

My orgasm took me by surprise. I had felt it growing, coiling deep within me, its first tendrils shooting tingling sensations throughout my body, making my muscles tremble. But then it suddenly erupted. My whole body spasmed, my eyes rolled back, my teeth clamped down further into Nathan's neck and my ass clenched around his cock.

Strange gurgling noises escaped from my throat as I rode the long wave of my bliss. Then suddenly I was sagging. Feeling boneless and as weak as a newborn kitten. If Nathan hadn't been holding me, I would have crumpled to the floor. My head swam. Sweat started to cool all over my body.

I clung to Nathan as best I could, using his shoulder as a pillow. I never wanted to let him go.

"Is it broken?" he rasped.

"Yeah," I breathed happily. My heat was satisfied.

One orgasm and no knot. Apparently thrown heats were easy to break. As sated and euphoric as I was, a flash of disappointment flared deep in my soul. I was out of excuses to have Nathan. But the sour feeling was a lazy one, and it soon withered. Leaving me feeling nothing but blissed out and happy.

Nathan was rummaging on the shelves around us. I ignored it until I felt a cloth between my legs. I squirmed but let him clean me up. Then he was putting me down and pulling my trousers up. I grumbled. The only thing I wanted was to fall asleep in his arms.

His hands were on my shoulders, and he was staring at me intently.

“Can you stand, walk?”

I shrugged.

He sighed. “You still look out of it.”

“I am,” I agreed happily, basking in my soporific feeling.

“The police are waiting to talk to you.”

I frowned. Way to ruin a good mood. Reality and all my problems started pushing their way back into my conscience. I rubbed my hands over my face and sighed.

“No rest for the wicked,” I said.

Nathan smiled and ruffled my hair. “You’re not wicked, Asswipe.”

“More wicked than you, Douchebag,” I retorted.

He gave me one last worried glance, and then he opened the door. Light and reality flooded in. Trying not to flinch too much, I took a deep breath and stepped out of the closet. Back into the real world where Nathan was not mine.

Chapter Eighteen

The policewoman gave me a smile that I was sure was meant to be reassuring. I squirmed in the uncomfortable plastic seat and tried not to glare at her. None of this was her fault.

The fluorescent light reflected off the white table between us, making my eyes hurt. The room was small, windowless and noise from the rest of the police station seeped in.

“Is there anything you remember about your attacker at all?” she tried again. “Height, hair color, eye color?”

I grimaced and pushed images of the alpha’s rage filled gray eyes away from my mind. I didn’t want to think about him. Ever.

“No,” I said for the thousandth time.

Part of me longed to describe him in perfect detail to her so he could be hunted down and made to pay. But that would risk humans discovering that the paranormal world was real. I

needed to abide by the rules and not involve humans in anything. As frustrating as it was.

Nathan had risked everything in alerting the cops and getting them to save me. I couldn't push our luck anymore. We probably already were in huge trouble with the Council.

She sighed wearily and I could tell she didn't believe me. But what could she do? I hadn't broken any human laws.

"Very well, Mr. King. Thank you for your time. Do you need us to drop you anywhere?"

"No thank you," came Nathan's voice from behind me. "I have booked Mr. King a hotel just around the corner."

The police woman gave Nathan a very suspicious look. "There aren't any nice hotels around here"

"I'm still keeping a low profile. You know, avoiding paparazzi and grieving in peace," I interjected with my brightest smile.

She didn't look convinced but she nodded and gathered up her papers. She led us out of the police station and I stood on the steps breathing in the fresh air gratefully. Night had fallen and it had rained. It gave a certain freshness to the city air. Nathan led the way and I followed. I wondered what had happened to the motorbike but I couldn't be bothered to ask. Walking felt good anyway.

We walked in silence for a short while until Nathan cleared his throat. Tension and guilt radiated off of his body.

"I'm... I'm sorry," he stuttered.

With a sinking heart I knew exactly what he was talking about and it wasn't about not being able to stop the alpha sooner.

“Well, I'm sorry having sex with me is so repulsive that you are driven to apologize every time!” I snapped.

Nathan took in a deep shuddering breath, placed his hand on my shoulder and steered me in a new direction. I blinked in surprise.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“To get you a cheeseburger, you are being hangry.”

My stomach rumbled in happy anticipation. I was starving. It was embarrassing that Nathan knew I was hungry before I did. It was also wonderful.

It didn't take long to find a fast-food restaurant. I sat on a red embodied seat while Nathan went to get the food. He came back quickly, and I tucked into a delicious cheeseburger. Nathan had a grilled chicken wrap, and I felt bad he was having to eat junk food. Hopefully soon everything would be settled and he could drink protein shakes to his heart's content.

“I don't think sex with you is repulsive,” he said softly, without meeting my gaze.

“High praise indeed,” I muttered. Apparently, I was still grumpy.

“You know what I mean.”

I took another bite of my burger before waving it around as I talked with my mouth full. “No, I don’t. But whatever. I’ve only had sex twice, three times if you count what happened in the tent. It’s not surprising I’m terrible at it.”

Nathan’s blue eyes met mine with an intense look. “You’re not terrible at sex, Eli. You’re incredible. I just feel awful that you haven’t had a choice about it.”

My stomach did something strange and I was quite sure it wasn’t the burger affecting it. I also felt entirely too hot.

“Neither have you,” I said quietly. “Unless you wanted me to suffer.”

“It’s not the same,” said Nathan, sounding like he was choking up. And not because of his wrap either.

I took in a deep breath. “Just don’t apologize, okay? If you ever need to fuck me out of a heat again, don’t apologize.”

Nathan dropped my gaze. “Hopefully, it will never happen again.”

I watched in horror as he took a bite of his wrap. Tears welled up in my eyes. Was that really what he thought? Okay, neither time had been in the best of circumstances and I could understand him having stupid, misplaced guilt about it. But I had thought he had enjoyed himself at least. He seemed to have found pleasure with me. Had I been mistaken, and he had hated every moment and only got through it due to a sense of duty?

He looked up at me again and his eyes softened.

“That’s not what I meant, Eli. Being with you has been the happiest moments of my life. I just don’t want us to be in precarious situations anymore.”

I couldn’t look away from his blue eyes, even though I really wanted to. So many thoughts and feelings were flooding through me in a big tangle, I didn’t want him to see them all. Not until I had a chance to untangle them myself and only show him what was safe to share.

He reached over with a napkin and gently brushed my face. His eyes filled with fondness. Then his gaze dropped to my lips, and he inched a little closer. Time ground to a halt as everything froze.

My heart fluttered like crazy. This is the moment I should tell him I love him, said some part of me. I opened my mouth, but then my sensible, rational side came back online. Why on earth would I say that and ruin everything? You know he doesn’t feel the same way. Telling him you love him will only ruin your friendship.

My stomach flipped over again. Thank heavens my sensible side had clicked into place just in time to prevent disaster. That had been a close call. I popped a french fry into my mouth and the spell was broken. The world started spinning again and the moment passed.

Nathan leaned back into his chair, dropped my gaze and took a bite of his food. Relief flooded through me, but it tasted an awful lot like regret.

Chapter Nineteen

Another small, nasty hotel room. Or maybe it was perfectly nice, and I was just outrageously spoiled. It was a question that I'd likely never know the answer to. Whatever the truth was, I hated the room. Especially the ugly twin beds. I glared at them as if the force of my disgust could melt them into one.

Nathan abandoned me for the shower. So I sat on one of the beds and tried to stop feeling sorry for myself. I was acting like a child. I took in a deep breath and decided to change track and be kind to myself. Maybe my hormones were all out of whack from being thrown earlier. If not, being violently assaulted was a valid reason to feel out of sorts. I was allowed to feel sorry for myself.

I pulled my knees up to my chest and hugged them. When Nathan got out of the shower, I'd ask him if we could push the beds together and if he would hold me. Nathan holding me always made me feel better.

I knew he would happily oblige. He'd do anything to help me. I just needed to not make it pervy or weird.

A gentle knock on the door made me jump out of my skin. The shower turned off immediately and Nathan burst out dripping wet and utterly naked. It was a fight to tear my eyes away. He had a drop dead gorgeous body. He ran over to the desk, grabbed his gun and stalked to the door. He wasn't expecting room service then.

"What can you smell?" he whispered to me.

He wanted my opinion to back up his own. It made me feel ridiculously proud.

I scented carefully. "An omega."

"Anyone else?"

I shook my head. If my nose was correct, there was a lone omega outside our door. But as I had experienced earlier, there were spells that could hide scents.

Nathan looked through the peephole, then suddenly yanked the door open, pulled the visitor in and slammed the door sharply shut again. Nathan pressed the barrel of the gun against the omega's head.

Vivid green eyes stared at us in fright. The omega was around my age. His blond hair was cut haphazardly, making it stick up in all different directions. It was a good look. With his large eyes and narrow face, he looked like an anime character.

"Are you alone?" snarled Nathan.

The omega swallowed and nodded.

“Why are you here?” demanded Nathan.

“Just... just to talk,” stuttered the omega.

“How did you find us?”

“I have a friend who is a policeman.”

Nathan glared at him a moment longer then removed his gun and clicked the safety on. Obviously satisfied that the stranger was not a threat. I wondered if he thought the omega was pretty. The flash of jealousy that followed hot on the heels of that thought startled me. What the hell was wrong with me?

“Talk,” ordered Nathan.

The omega looked up at him and nodded. “Can I get my phone out of my pocket?”

Nathan crossed his arms and cocked his head. “Why?”

“My brother is an alpha. He would like to talk to you. We thought him coming in person would give the wrong idea, but hoped Mr. King would be willing to take a video call?”

Nathan glanced at me. I nodded. What harm could a video call do? Besides, I was curious now.

Seeing my gesture, the omega fumbled for his phone. He held it up so I could see the screen, just as the call connected. A young man in his twenties stared back at me. He had short brown hair, deep brown eyes and tanned skin. There was nothing behind him apart from a plain cream wall.

“Mr. King, thank you for talking to me. My name is Alex, I’m the Alpha of Brightsky pack.”

I nodded at him and waited for him to continue. He was young to be the leader of a pack.

“I thought we might come to a mutually beneficial arrangement. I presume you would like to keep control of your inheritance, and my pack is in financial difficulty. Nothing a few hundred thousand dollars wouldn’t fix. An amount that would barely touch your wealth.”

“Why wouldn’t you want it all?” snapped Nathan.

The Alpha shrugged. “I’m not a greedy man. I have simple tastes. I merely desire to keep my pack together. Our packhouse is being compulsory purchased because humans want to build a road. The amount they are giving us is not enough to buy somewhere new.”

“Can they do that?” I asked, aghast.

“Apparently so,” said Alex

I stared at the Alpha. He seemed nice. I wanted to trust him, but my judgment was shit. What he was offering was a tantalizing solution. Of course I was going to want it to be true, and that desire was going to cloud my already limited reasoning skills.

“My proposal is that you come and stay with us. Allow me to court you. If after a week or so, you are not interested. You simply go on your way.”

“What’s to stop you claiming him as soon as we set foot on your lands?” growled Nathan.

Alex took a deep breath. “When I was eighteen a lone alpha challenged my father for the pack. At the end of the fight my father bared his throat, but the alpha killed him anyway. My mother attacked him and then he killed her too.”

He paused for a moment, and it was clear telling his story was genuinely difficult for him. No one could fake the depth of emotion he was displaying.

“I wasn’t strong enough to do anything. He claimed my brother and Fallon’s screams still haunt my dreams every night.”

My gaze flicked up to the omega. He flushed and bit his bottom lip. The phone shook in his hand and he scrunched his eyes shut tight.

Nathan flinched and I could tell he felt guilty for the harsh way he had treated the omega. But it was not his fault, he couldn’t have known.

“Sorry, Fallon,” whispered Alex as if he could see his brother’s reaction. Then the alpha’s attention turned back to me.

“It was a year before I was strong enough to challenge the alpha, take back my pack and free my brother.” He took in another deep breath. “I would never force anyone. Ever. Not for any reason.”

I swallowed and blinked away my tears. What an awful story. The world could be so cruel. It was unfair. The whole thing reminded me that I was not the only person in the world with problems and I didn't even have the worst ones.

“Please be my guest for a while. Get to know me and my pack.”

I looked at Nathan. If nothing else, it was a good place to hide for a while. No one would ever think I was with a pack, still unclaimed.

“Are there any other alphas in your pack?” asked Nathan.

Alex shook his head. “No, there are only ten of us. It's a bloodline pack. None of us have any other relatives. What happened to us made everyone very wary of alphas. No one has any alpha friends.”

Nathan nodded and gave me a look that let me know he was satisfied. The decision was mine. I hoped I was capable of making a good one.

“Alright,” I said, “I accept your invitation.”

Alex gave me a huge smile, which made me like him even more. Fallon flashed me a quick shy grin, his eyes full of relief.

Maybe, just maybe, everything was going to work out.

Chapter Twenty

The morning light blasted through my eyelids. I groaned and turned away from it, only to smush my face into Nathan's naked chest. I grinned sleepily. The Brightsky pack had given us a room with only one bed. They were shifters, so they thought nothing of it. I was delighted with the arrangement.

Delicious aromas of bacon and eggs wafted up from the kitchen. Proper packs had proper breakfasts. I shot out of bed, grabbed my clothes from the floor and threw them on. Showering could wait.

Nathan stared at me blearily.

"Breakfast!" I explained.

"I'll be down in a minute," said Nathan with a stilted tone to his voice.

I nodded and said nothing. I could smell his arousal but he didn't need to be embarrassed about it. He was a young man, it wasn't astonishing to wake up with some morning glory. And I

had probably been wriggling all over him, which wouldn't have helped.

I opened the bedroom door and yelped. Nathan was by my side instantly. He stared down at the dead rabbits and chuckled.

“He's taking this courting thing seriously.”

Bending down, I picked the rabbits up. They were still slightly warm. I thrust them at Nathan.

“Deal with these please.”

He raised an eyebrow. “You want me to accept the Alpha's courting gift?”

Heat flooded my cheeks. “Okay, no, that's a terrible idea.”

“I'll show you how to gut and skin them after breakfast,” offered Nathan.

A big smile stretched across my face. “That would be great, thank you!”

Nathan flushed a little and nodded. I stared at him awkwardly for a moment, then my stomach rumbled audibly. Reminding me of how ravenous I was.

“Go get breakfast,” grinned Nathan.

I grinned back and dashed off. Running so fast down the stairs that I nearly fell flat on my face. Luckily I managed to catch my balance before having to suffer that humiliation.

The kitchen was light and airy. Lit by one large window at the end. It was mostly filled by a long oak table, lined with

wooden benches, one down each side. An old-fashioned range filled what looked like an alcove of an old fireplace. Sally, a beta woman I had met briefly the night before, was bustling around cooking breakfast. She flashed me a quick smile, and I slid onto a bench.

The pack rushed in, all chatting and laughing. The table quickly filled, then ceramic serving dishes of sausages, bacon, eggs and other yummy things were placed in the middle of the table. My mouth watered. Plates were passed around and everyone tucked in, helping themselves to the selection in the middle. I wasted no time, and dove straight in, piling my plate high. I sat back with a happy sigh, picked up my fork and tucked in. It was delicious.

Sally placed a coffee and orange juice on the table. I helped myself to one of each. This was bliss. All around me the pack chattered away. Exchanging good natured jibes and a few playful shoves. Everyone seemed happy. Everyone seemed to genuinely like each other. It was a million miles from the stuffy formal dinners I had endured with my own family. This was what a family was supposed to be like.

A pang of grief shot through me. I missed my father and brothers. But more than that, I missed what we had never had and now never would. The whole thing was a sad tangled mess of missed opportunities, one that filled me with determination. I vowed that when I had a family of my own, I'd do my best to make it a happy, loving one.

My gaze flicked to Alex, sitting at the head of the table. He was deep in conversation with Edward, one of the betas. The Alpha looked relaxed, at ease. His pack certainly did not seem on edge around him. I watched as he laughed at something, his eyes crinkling. He was a good-looking man. He seemed nice. Could I be happy here, with him? As his mate and part of this pack? Raising pups with him?

My stomach twisted into uncomfortable knots. This pack was lovely. Alex seemed kind. It would be a great solution. I could buy a gorgeous pack house with lots of land. Or move everyone into my father's mansion. It could be a good life. I had no idea why the thought was making me sad.

"Nathan," whimpered my wolf. I ignored it, it was being stupid, as usual. I would still need a bodyguard and a friend. Nathan wasn't going to go anywhere. He would always be in my life, I knew that much to be true. I needed to settle for that. It was all it could ever be. Even if he liked me like that, he couldn't claim me. He was a beta.

Every day that I remained unclaimed, was a day that some alpha was going to try to remedy that. Nathan would not be able to save me forever. It would only be a matter of time before someone got the better of him. I needed an alpha.

Just at that moment Nathan walked in. I smiled at him and he sat down next to me. My body slid right up next to him, like he was a magnet and I was some helpless little piece of metal. Nathan didn't seem to mind, and the feel of his thigh touching mine was immensely satisfying.

I felt Alex's gaze on me, so I glanced over to find him giving me a strange look. His eyes flicked to Nathan and then away, back to his conversation with Edward. I swallowed my mouthful of food without chewing it properly and had to glug down orange juice to wash it down.

It was suddenly too hot and too cold in the kitchen and decidedly far too awkward. It was like Alex had undressed all my secrets with that one look. He was a perceptive son of a bitch. Or I was extremely paranoid. Not that it mattered. Alex was proposing a mating of convenience. My feelings for, and history with my bodyguard were irrelevant and none of his business.

I turned my attention back to my food, like it deserved. Letting my enjoyment of it be ruined would be sacrilege.

After breakfast, Nathan led me a short way from the house and demonstrated how to gut and skin a rabbit. I watched in fascination. Then he handed the knife and the remaining rabbit to me. I gulped and took both with unsteady hands.

“You could just shift and eat it,” suggested Nathan.

I shook my head. I wanted to learn. Crouching, so the guts fell on the grass, I made the first cut. The way it slid in was strangely satisfying. Nathan moved over until he was behind me. His hand joined mine on the knife as he guided me.

I giggled in glee when it was done. I hadn't done a half bad job. Twisting my head over my shoulder, I beamed at Nathan. His face was inches from my own. My gaze fixed on his lips.

“Hi,” said Alex, making me jump.

Hastily, I climbed to my feet, feeling cold when Nathan stepped away. I gave Alex a big smile while trying my best not to look sheepish.

The alpha’s gaze flicked to the rabbits, and I thought I caught a flash of pride in his eyes. He was proud I had accepted his gift. It was a good start.

“Would you like to go for a walk?” Alex asked.

I was here to spend time with him and get to know him. Not to hang out with Nathan. I nodded and glanced down at my bloody hands.

“I’ll take you to the stream first, you can wash your hands there.”

I nodded again and let him lead the way. As I went, I looked over my shoulder at Nathan. He was standing where I had left him, staring at me. We had decided to trust Alex. If he intended to claim me by force, he could have done so the moment I set foot on his pack lands. Since he wasn’t a threat, going for a walk with an Alpha in his own territory was not an activity that required a bodyguard. My disappointment at that was stupid.

I tore my gaze away from Nathan but I felt the weight of his stare on my back until I was deep in the woods.

Alex showed me a beautiful stream first. I squatted by it and washed my hands. The woods were coming alive for spring.

Birds were singing and pale green buds dotted the trees. I got to my feet and we continued on our way.

“It’s lovely here,” I said. “Have these been your lands for long?”

“They have belonged to my family for hundreds of years,” Alex said sadly.

I imagined everything we were walking through being bulldozed to build a road. It was awful. I shuddered.

“I’m sorry humans are doing this to you,” I said.

The Alpha shrugged. “It is what it is. Home is where the heart is and my heart is my pack. As long as we can find somewhere to live that’s big enough to house all of us, then we will be fine.”

I decided then, that even if I didn’t mate Alex, I would still try to help him. Selfishly, I didn’t tell him that. I still needed the offer on the table. And if I decided not to mate him, it would be a while before I was in a position to do anything. It would all hinge on me being settled with an alpha who would grant me access to funds. It would be cruel to get Alex’s hopes up when it might not ever happen.

“Is Nathan your lover?”

My cheeks felt like they exploded into fireballs. Food probably could have been cooked on them. My feet were suddenly very interesting and I couldn’t tear my gaze away from them.

“Only for heats,” I managed to croak.

It was true, but too late, I realized how it sounded. If I hadn't been poisoned with suppressants, I would have had many heats by now. Alex would think it was far more a thing than it really was. It was certainly what I had implied.

We walked in awkward silence for a moment. I had no idea how to backtrack on what I had said and part of me didn't want to. Part of me was taking perverse pleasure in the claim.

"I'm proposing a mating of convenience," said Alex carefully. "If you agree, I hope we can become fond of one another, but a mating mark not given in love, restricts neither party." He took a deep breath. "You would be free to pursue love elsewhere."

I nearly tripped over a stick, and Alex grabbed my elbow to steady me. Our eyes locked.

"You wouldn't mind?" I breathed incredulously. Alphas were notorious for being possessive.

He smiled softly. "No, as long as you gave me the same courtesy."

He released my elbow, and the moment was broken. He led the way, and I followed, my mind spinning and a strange feeling growing in my chest. It took me a moment to realize it was hope. Maybe everything was going to work out perfectly.

Chapter Twenty-One

The next morning I rushed down to breakfast again. Lunch had been fantastic and dinner wonderful but breakfast remained my favorite. I was eighty percent certain I was going to join this pack for the food alone.

Nathan wanted to shower first, so I was the first one at the table. Sally flashed me a quick smile and I grinned back. The pack filed in but they seemed gloomy and subdued. I watched in growing alarm as everyone sat down without saying a word. Alex in particular looked miserable.

The food was placed on the table. I looked around. Fallon was missing, had something happened to him?

“Is something wrong?” I blurted out.

Alex looked at me sadly. “Fallon is going into heat.”

I nodded as if I understood why that was a bad thing and turned to my food. Confusion swirled through me. I may have had only two heats, so wasn't exactly an expert, but I couldn't comprehend how they were a cause for gloom. Even with one

of my heats being a thrown one, Nathan had turned it wonderful.

I thought back to all the conversations I had ever heard about heats, which admittedly were not many, but all had seemed positive. My brothers had talked about them with glee and filthy jokes. But they had been alphas. Maybe heats were supposed to be awful for omegas and I was a freak?

Nathan walked in and sat beside me with a smile. Everything about his presence was soothing. From his scent, to the feel of his leg pressed against mine.

“I have some bad news I’m afraid,” said Alex to Nathan. “There are some signs of strangers sniffing around our perimeter. Would you like Edward to show you so you can assess the threat?”

I stared at the Alpha in surprise. I had thought he was going to tell Nathan about Fallon going into heat. This new piece of information was unsettling, but I had every faith in Nathan’s ability to keep me safe. And Alex’s, I realized with surprise.

Nathan nodded keenly. “Thank you, Alpha. I appreciate that.”

A warm gooey feeling filled my chest. It was lovely that Alex respected Nathan and his role as my protector. Nathan, in return, seemed to genuinely respect Alex and wasn’t just being polite. If the two men could get along, then everything I was starting to hope for, might actually work.

Nathan wolfed down his breakfast, clearly keen to get out and investigate the potential danger. Edward finished at the same time, stood and nodded to Nathan. As he got to his feet, Nathan kissed the top of my head. I blushed to the roots of my hair. The unexpected gesture was touchingly affectionate.

A quick glance confirmed that Alex had seen everything. Nothing slipped past that one. I straightened my shoulders and pretended not to be embarrassed. The Alpha had said he didn't mind. Thing was, there wasn't anything to mind. Yet.

If I had my way, there would be soon enough. Butterflies swarmed in my stomach. I wanted to believe with all my heart and soul that Nathan had grown feelings for me. It didn't mean it was true, though. He might not feel that way about me. He might never feel that way about me, and the thought of asking him was terrifying.

I sighed and tried to push all my circling thoughts from my mind. Now wasn't the time. I had enough problems to be dealing with. I shouldn't be distracted by unrequited love.



Later that night, I slid into bed with Nathan with a happy sigh. He had decided that while the signs of intruders were worrying, there was no immediate need to flee. I was glad we were getting to stay.

The potent scent of Fallon's heat wafted through the air. To me it just smelled nice. Like sniffing a bouquet of flowers or something. The aroma made me feel happy, so maybe it was

more like the smell of freshly baked bread. I huffed at myself. Trust my thoughts to take me to food.

Nathan squirmed uncomfortably. “I should sleep on the floor.”

“Don’t be silly!” I admonished.

Clearly, the smell was having a far different effect on him. I didn’t mind that it was making him horny. I didn’t mind at all. It was merely biology after all. Wicked thoughts of turning it to my advantage and seducing Nathan filled my mind. I had yet to have sex without being in heat and it was something I wished to remedy as soon as possible.

A scream pierced the night air. Nathan and I both sat bolt upright. Another scream and another. Frantic, desperate and full of fear. We both ran down the hallway and I was glad Nathan didn’t try to stop me. Something in those screams called to me and I needed to help.

Alex was standing outside Fallon’s door. His arms were crossed and tears rolling down his face. He stopped us with a gesture.

“Edward is doing the best he can,” he explained. “But that monster of an alpha kept Fallon for a year when he was barely old enough.”

A terrified sob from inside the room broke my heart.

“Just leave him alone then!” I snarled, ready to fight Alex. I knew Nathan would have my back.

“We tried that. Several times. He nearly died. We tried suppressants, but they only worked for a year. His heats need to be broken and we don’t have an alpha, so it takes longer.”

I stared at Alex in horror. All my furious outrage dissolving into icy dismay.

“It’s a big reason why we need money,” confessed Alex. “Either to offer as a dowry for a suitable alpha or to get him some help.”

Omegas were in high demand. Was it really that difficult to find a decent one without a dowry? Fallon was gorgeous. But he had already been claimed once and was traumatized. That could well be enough of a deterrent for most alphas. I swallowed thickly. The whole thing was beyond awful.

“Have you tried a prosthetic knot?” asked Nathan.

My cheeks exploded into flames, and I stared at my feet.

“Prosthetic knot?” repeated Alex, sounding confused.

“You can buy them in shifter sex shops. There probably is one online.”

“Shifter sex shops? I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

My heart broke a little more then. Alex was so young to be a pack leader, and clearly isolated out here in the country. He was doing his best, but he clearly didn’t know everything.

“I’ll see if I can order you one from my phone,” offered Nathan. “They are really effective in breaking heats.”

I stared at the floorboards but despite how much I was willing them to, they did not open up and swallow me. Nathan was trying to be discreet, bless him. But it was blatantly obvious he was talking about me and what we had done together.

“Thank you,” breathed Alex hopefully, and the tentative sound made my eyes water.

“Is there anything we can do to help tonight,” I blurted.

Alex sighed as if the weight of the world was on his shoulders. “I’m afraid not, but if you could come by in the morning and spend time with Fallon, I think the company of another omega might be comforting.”

“Of course,” I said.

Nathan put his hand on my shoulder and led me back to our room. I climbed into bed gratefully and snuggled up to him. He wrapped his arms around me.

Fallon’s screams had turned into distraught sobs and the occasional wail. I didn’t think I was going to be able to sleep. At all. Quite possibly never again. My heart was breaking for Fallon, but I was also selfishly terrified that the same fate could happen to me.

“I’m going to say yes to Alex,” I whispered.

Nathan’s arms pulled me closer. “I think that is a brilliant idea.”

I let out a deep breath. It felt good to have finally made a decision and have some idea of what my future was going to

look like.

Chapter Twenty-Two

I knocked softly on the door and let myself in. Fallon blinked up at me from the bed, looking impossibly tiny in it. His blond hair sticking up even more crazily than ever.

“Hi, I thought you might like a cuddle?” I said.

My family hadn’t been touchy feely at all, but shifters were supposed to be. Fallon nodded and held up the blankets for me. I slid in and wrapped my arms around him. He clung to me and sniffled. It was wonderful that he felt safe with me. It felt like an honor.

“I’m sorry about all the noise last night,” he said in a quiet voice.

“Shh, don’t be silly!” I said as I started to stroke his hair.

I had never held another omega before and I was surprised to discover how soothing it was. I hoped Fallon was getting some comfort from it too. He deserved all the comfort in the world. The feel of his slight frame in my arms was awaking all sorts of protective feelings within me. I hadn’t known I was

capable of feeling that way. In my small pack, I had been the baby of the family. The only omega. The most vulnerable one. There had been no one to protect.

But there was now. Desire to keep Fallon safe flooded through me. I longed to take all his pain away and make everything alright. But that was beyond my power.

My thoughts turned to how I had met the little omega. Images of his wide eyes as Nathan held a gun to his head made me cringe. We hadn't treated him very well at all. Yet Fallon had still been so very brave. He must have been terrified, but he had done it for his pack. He was currently the only omega, and therefore the least threatening. I knew with a sinking heart that if they had sent a beta, or if Alex had come himself, Nathan and I would not have listened. We would have fled or fought.

Fallon had known he was the only one who could approach us. He had accepted his responsibility to his pack and done a brilliant job.

He was a good person who deserved all the best. The truth of that sunk into my soul, reinforcing my confidence in my decision to mate his brother. I would endeavor to become the best Alpha-mate I could be, and help my pack in every way I was able to, not just with money.

Fallon sniffled again, and I could feel his exhaustion fighting with his agitation. My grand plans were for the future. Right now he needed rest more than he needed anything else.

I opened my mouth and spewed forth nonsense. I could talk forever and a day if given the chance. Topics ranging from everything and nothing, but mostly random facts about television shows. I didn't ask Fallon any questions, or engage him in conversation. I just held him and made him listen to my inane waffle. He didn't seem to mind at all, and after a while it had the effect I was hoping for. He fell asleep.

Carefully, I wriggled out of the bed, breathing a sigh of relief when he didn't stir. He looked pale, with dark rings under his eyes. But his breaths were deep and steady. A good sleep would do him a world of good. I couldn't imagine that he had gotten a wink last night. Even after his heat had eventually broken.

My heart broke again for him. I couldn't wait for everything to be settled so I could use my stupid amounts of money to help him. I wanted to try healers first. Fallon had enough of alphas for a lifetime. That had to be the last resort.

The thought of what he had been through, turned my blood into ice, and not just for purely altruistic reasons. It was especially chilling because it so nearly could have been my fate, if I hadn't found Alex in time. Could still be my fate if I didn't get a move on.

Slipping quietly out of his room, I nearly walked right into Alex's chest. I managed to stifle my yelp just in time. It was almost as if I had conjured him with my thoughts, but one look at his face showed me the truth. He was here for his brother, not for me. I felt ashamed that I had thought otherwise.

Before he could speak, I put my finger over my lips and gestured for the alpha to walk down the hall. He did as I bid. When we were far away from Fallon's door, he stopped and looked at me.

"He is asleep?"

I nodded.

Alex sighed in relief. "Thank you."

I looked up at him and swallowed nervously. There was no point in delaying anything, now that I had made my decision.

"I... um... would like to accept your offer," I stuttered.

His eyes lit up and he gave me a beaming smile. "That is wonderful news." Then his look sobered. "We found more evidence of intruders this morning, they ventured further into our territory and there is at least one alpha with them."

Shit, someone had picked up my trail and figured out where I was hiding. With a billion dollars on the table, it wasn't surprising people were investing in the best trackers.

"I'm sorry, Eli. But I think it's best we don't delay things."

Taking a deep breath, I nodded. He was right. It would be stupid to wait and risk being claimed by another alpha. Once I was mated, they would all back off. Widowed omegas did inherit, so there was nothing to be gained by challenging Alex.

"Okay, I don't want a ceremony, or for you to chase me through the woods or anything. Can I just come to your room tonight?" I said nervously.

“That sounds like a great plan,” agreed Alex.

He smiled again and went on his way. Leaving me feeling dizzy and apprehensive in the hallway. I didn't want to count the hours till tonight. It would be fine. Alex was lovely. I wanted to try non-heat sex. He only needed to claim me once, then I would never need to sleep with him ever again. Nathan understood I had to do it. It was all good.

Shakily, I headed for my bedroom. Now all I needed to do was to tell Nathan it was happening tonight.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Several hours later, I stared at my reflection in the mirror. The nightgown Fallon had lent me fitted just fine. There really was no point in going to Alex's room wearing anything more.

Behind me, on the bed, Nathan glowered but said nothing. I couldn't think of anything to say to him either, but I hated this silence between us. I snuck another peek at Nathan, whilst pretending to fiddle with my hair. He looked really sad as well as really pissed off. Did it mean that he did have feelings for me? The stupid butterflies were back. It did seem hopeful. It was the most logical conclusion as to what was causing his current mood.

Things had seemed to have changed between us recently. Grown in the right direction, as far as I was concerned. There was a look in Nathan's eyes that gave me hope, whereas previously I'd been convinced he didn't see me that way.

However, it was a terrible time to ask him. The most wonderful outcome would be declarations of undying love.

Right before I left to spend the night in another man's arms.

I swallowed dryly. Mate with Alex, and then muster up the courage to tell Nathan how I felt about him. That was the best order to do things.

"I'll be off then!" I said.

Nathan nodded and looked away. "I'll be here. If he hurts you, or does something you don't like, just yell. I'll come kill him."

His eyes flicked back to me for the last part of his statement, and they glowed with a feral light. I had only ever seen alphas do that. I shuddered. Something about that look pleased me in a deeply primal way. Pleased me enough to send shivers down my spine.

I stared back at him, completely enthralled, as if he had cast a spell on me. But he looked away again and the magic between us was broken.

Mustering every shred of willpower I possessed, I walked away from him. My wolf side was frantically telling me to fling myself into Nathan's arms, and not go present myself to the Alpha. But wolves didn't understand about inheritances, greed and threats that weren't immediate.

My legs shook as I walked down the hallway. I knocked on Alex's door and he opened it immediately, as if he knew I was about to bolt any minute. He smiled warmly and ushered me inside. The gentle click of the door shutting behind me sounded like thunder.

“Would you like a drink?” he offered.

My gaze snapped to the bottle of wine and two glasses on the bedside table. It was a very sweet gesture, but I was glad he had stuck to that and not gone for candles or anything else over the top.

“No, thank you,” I croaked.

There was no way I was going to be able to force wine down my tight throat. And coughing and spluttering everywhere would not help my nerves. It would just make Alex think I was a complete idiot.

“Do you mind if I do?” he asked.

I shook my head and watched him open the bottle. His hands were shaking very slightly. He was nervous too. That knowledge instantly made me feel better. It was nice to know that we were both feeling daunted. It made it feel like we were in the same boat.

Then a sudden series of thoughts struck me. Alex was young, and his even younger years had been full of horror. His pack was small and all related to him. The only omega was his brother. His territory was in the middle of nowhere. Putting that all together, it wouldn't be surprising if he was a virgin.

I swallowed. I wasn't dim enough to outright ask an alpha if he was a virgin, Alex was lovely, but he was still an alpha and they didn't take kindly to insults. Even perceived ones. I just had to accept the fact that I would never know if I had defiled

him. He might tell me one day, but if not, he was allowed to have secrets and privacy.

But if he was a virgin, tonight was going to be a case of the blind leading the blind. My two times weren't exactly a heap of experience. And I had been lost in heat on both occasions. Nathan had basically done everything, and I had just been a pillow princess.

Alex walked up to me, startling all my thoughts from my brain. I stared up at him blankly.

“Can I kiss you?” he asked.

I blinked. Kissing? I had never done that. Both times with Nathan, we had been pretending it was merely functional. At least, I hoped we had both been pretending. Maybe he had hated it at the time and only grown feelings for me later. Maybe he hadn't grown feelings for me at all and everything was just a figment of my overactive imagination.

A deep shuddering breath didn't help me calm down at all. I needed to focus on the here and now, not spiral into another never-ending loop of angsting over Nathan and wondering if he liked me or not.

Alex was asking for my first kiss. Kissing was special, intimate. The request required serious consideration. My heart fluttered, and just like that, I knew the answer from the depths of my soul. I could feel the truth of it in my bones. I wanted to share my first kiss with Nathan. And, boom, just like that I was back to thinking about Nathan.

“I... I...” Was all I could muster by way of an answer.

A sad look flashed in Alex’s brown eyes, and he gave me a resigned smile. “I understand.”

How was he so lovely? Surely it wasn’t possible? It had to be some sort of trap. Nobody was this nice. At any moment now, the other shoe was going to drop.

The bedroom door slammed open and Nathan ran in, his blue eyes wide and frantic. I jumped back in alarm at the speed of his entrance, and Alex placed his arm over my shoulder. Comforting me like the lovely alpha he was.

Nathan glanced at Alex and then back to me. Then to my utter astonishment, he dropped to his knees.

“Please don’t do it, Eli,” he gasped. “I love you. I have always loved you.”

My heart flipped over, and my stomach rolled. A wave of dizziness washed over me, leaving me trembling. I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

“Eli, I’m so sorry to do this to you,” Nathan continued. “But I’m selfish and I know I will regret it forever if I don’t tell you now. Before it’s too late.”

His blue eyes stared up at me, full of tears, anguish and despair. He really thought I was going to yell at him and send him away. He didn’t know how I felt. Because I had never told him. I also hadn’t told him how accommodating Alex was willing to be. Nathan thought he was losing me forever. I had been such a cruel idiot. I should have been brave and

explained everything to him. My cowardice had caused him pain.

Suddenly, I was on my knees in front of him. Cupping his tear-streaked face in my hands.

“I love you too, Douchebag.”

The smile that lit up his face was blinding. “Asswipe,” he murmured, and then he was kissing me. Deeply, passionately, hungrily. I didn’t even hear Alex leave.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Reluctantly, I broke away from kissing Eli. The feel of his lips upon my own was exquisite, more than I had ever dreamed of, but I was greedy for more. Much, much more. I wanted to consume every inch of him until I could no longer tell where I ended and he began.

My gaze flicked to the Alpha's bed, mere steps away. Temptation surged but there were no words for how disrespectful that would be. I was lucky Alex wasn't tearing my throat out as it was. He didn't deserve such blatant disregard.

Rousing myself I surged to my feet, carrying Eli with me. He wrapped his legs around my waist, his arms around my neck, and stared into my eyes with a breathless look. His pupils were blown, his cheeks flushed and his lips swollen from my kisses. He had never looked more beautiful.

Still carrying him, I rushed to our room. There was a very real fear that if I dallied, I'd wake from this dream. My arms would be empty and Eli would be in Alex's. This moment was

too beautiful, too pure to be real. Nevertheless, I was going to savor every moment of it until reality reclaimed me. If this was a dream, I never wanted to wake.

As I stepped into our room, Eli reclaimed my mouth, pulling a deep groan of pleasure from me. He was good at this. He kissed me like I was the only source of oxygen in the whole wide world. His enthusiasm was contagious. The scent of our arousal twined in the air. Even our scents were combining.

I slipped my tongue into Eli's mouth, he made a noise of surprise quickly followed by one of delight. He was blessing me with his first kiss and I was humbled by the honor. Another of Eli's firsts for my collection. As my tongue claimed his mouth, he wriggled in my arms and was soon whimpering with need.

He wanted me. My Eli wanted me. It was the most wondrous thing, and made every second of my two long years of pining, a price I would happily pay again.

I gently lay him down on the bed. It was an effort to untangle myself from him. As soon as I was free, I tore off my clothes. The look in Eli's eyes as his gaze tracked over my naked body, ignited a fire deep in my belly. He clearly liked what he saw.

Hurrying back to him, I attempted to both kiss him silly and undress him at the same time. If I had been any less desperate, it would have been comical. As it was, it was purely frustrating. Luckily the nightgown was fairly easy to remove.

Anything more complicated would have been destroyed by my haste.

As soon as he was naked before me, my hands explored his body, delighting in the feel of him. My fingers drifted across his smooth chest to stroke a nipple. He cried out and bucked. Grinning, I released his mouth, lowering my head to rasp my wet tongue across his sensitive nub. He moaned deeply and it was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. I licked his nipple again, while flicking the other with my fingers. He writhed and moaned and panted. It was exciting to discover how sensitive he was.

Changing the angle of my head so that I could look down his body, I saw his cock was hard and his legs had spread. I licked again, and he lifted his hips up in invitation. The sight pulled a pleased growl from my throat.

Still nibbling and sucking on one nipple, I moved one hand down to between his legs. I growled in satisfaction again, because despite not being in heat, he was wet for me.

My finger traced lightly around his hole. The sultry noise he made nearly made me come right there and then.

“Is this okay?” I breathed, belatedly remembering that Eli had merely kissed me. He hadn’t said yes to any of this.

He nodded so frantically that it made me chuckle. He opened his beautiful eyes to glare at me.

“Put something inside me right now!” he demanded.

Happily, I obliged. Slipping one finger into his tight wet heat. Eli threw back his head and wailed. Worry flashed through me before dissolving. His wail had been a sound of pure pleasure. My touch had the power to do that to him.

My cock twitched eagerly. It would have to wait. Rushing things when Eli was not in heat, would never be an option. He deserved to be truly worshiped. Given all the pleasure his body could take.

Adding a second finger was divine, Eli's reactions were mesmerizing. I could watch him forever. His cock looked tantalizing, but I did not want him to reach his peak yet. Omegas could spill multiple times, in quick succession whilst in heat, but when not, they were limited in their stamina, like betas or humans.

It may have been selfish, but I wanted him to come while my cock was inside him. I wanted to feel him clench and quiver around me. My body joined to his as he rode the crest of his pleasure. Connected in our joy.

The words he had said to me rang in my head. 'I love you too, Douchebag,' he had said. His familiar, affectionate insult only making it even more special. More intimate. Making that glorious sentence the five best words I had ever heard. Words that had exploded like fireworks in my mind, heart and soul. Illuminating my entire world with euphoria. It was everything I had ever hoped for.

And now he was here, lying beneath me, granting me the pleasure of his body. I had found paradise. My soul, my body,

my wolf, every part of me fulfilled and lit up with ecstasy.

Eli bucked and keened, and I thought for a moment he had come. Not wanting to risk it any longer, I withdrew my fingers and positioned myself over him. He stared up at me with hazy eyes and a sappy smile.

“Is this okay?” I asked again.

He nodded eagerly. I lined up my cock and eased gently inside him. Gasping as the silken feel of him enveloped my cock. He felt so damn good and took me so well. I’d never be able to get enough of Eli King.

His body rose up to meet mine. Chasing his pleasure. Seeking more of me. I sunk all the way in and he gasped in delight. I wanted to pause, to savor him and this moment, but neither of us were going to last long.

I rolled my hips, starting long languorous thrusts. He cried out as his fingers dug into my shoulders. He threw his head back, baring his long slender throat to me. If I was an alpha, I would have claimed him in that moment without the slightest hesitation. Eli was my world, my everything. There was absolutely no reason not to be bound to him. I was going to protect him forever anyway. Telling the world that would be divine.

Eli moaned needily and the sound pulled my thoughts from what could never be, to relish in the here and now and everything I had been blessed with. I thrust into him carefully, our bodies dancing together, joined as they were meant to be. I tenderly changed the angle of my movements with each sweep

of the dance, keen to find the way to please him the most. I knew I had found it by the erotic noise he made, and the way his legs started shaking. Grinning, I held that angle. I wanted to drive him to nirvana.

I picked up the pace. Eli sobbed in pleasure, then suddenly was undone. His whole body trembling and quaking. His ass clenched and pulsed around me. A low gurgling noise came out of his throat. Thick ropes of cum shot out of his cock. The sight pushed me over the edge and I grunted as my own peak hit, sending waves of pleasure tingling along every nerve ending in my body. My cock throbbed as I emptied my load deep inside him. Eli gave me a satisfied moan.

Knowing that I had pleased him, was a far more fulfilling joy than my own physical release. I yearned to spend all my days worshiping his body and giving him the ecstasy he deserved. The knowledge that he enjoyed the feel of me bathing his insides with my cum, merely added fuel to my delight in satisfying him.

Feeling lightheaded and dizzy, I managed to pull out and collapse beside him while I breathed like a steam train. Eli rolled over and all but climbed on top of me. Placing one leg and arm over me and at least half his torso. I ran my hand over his back. Hardly daring to believe that it was all real.

There was so much to discuss. So many plans that needed to be made, but morning would come soon enough. Tonight was just for us.

Chapter Twenty-Five

I woke up all tangled up with Nathan. At first, my sleepy mind didn't notice anything new or unusual. Then all my memories of last night came rushing back. I grinned so hard it hurt my face.

“Here,” said Nathan as he sat up, dislodging me.

My indignant squawk turned into a sappy smile when he passed me a glass of water. I drank it happily. I didn't know why he thought I was dehydrated all the time, but I loved the attentiveness.

He took the empty glass from me and placed it on the bedside table. There was so much love in his eyes when he turned back to me, that it gave me a fresh wave of butterflies. But there was also somberness in his look.

“We need to work out what we are doing,” he said.

I sighed. He was right. We were in far too precarious a position to enjoy any sort of honeymoon. Unfair as it was, we

needed a plan. I took a deep breath and told him what I should have told him from the start.

“Alex is happy to share me.”

Nathan’s blue eyes widened, then he shook his head. “I’m not.”

“Not even for one night?” I clarified.

“No,” he said resolutely. His eyes flashing like an alpha’s again.

His reaction made me want to melt into a puddle of goo. His response was irrational, impractical, dangerous, and everything I wanted to hear.

“We are not going to find anyone better,” I said, clinging on to some semblance of being sensible. Alex was as lovely and accommodating as it was possible for an alpha to be.

Nathan sighed and rubbed his hand over his face. “I know,” he admitted.

“So what do we do?” I asked.

I never wanted to have sex with anyone else, ever. The thought of it made my skin crawl. Now that I knew for sure that Nathan loved me too, I knew I couldn’t do it. We were together now, and that changed everything. I wasn’t even entirely convinced I would have been able to go through last night’s attempt with Alex, even without Nathan’s dramatic interruption and the wonderful events that had followed.

But few alphas would forgo the chance to claim billions of dollars out of a respect for true love. The pursuit was still very much on. Regardless of my feelings or relationship status. Choosing which alpha claimed me, still seemed as good as it was ever going to get.

“Going to the Council is our best option,” Nathan said decisively. “Silas Northstar can decree that it is illegal to claim you, and who knows, he might even make an exception to the law and allow you to inherit.”

I stared at Nathan incredulously. Surely that was never going to happen?

He smiled softly. “You are a unique case, Eli King. And in the position to give the Council a very generous donation.”

Bribery? It wasn't a terrible idea. My father had taught me that money bought most things. And it had more or less been the plan when we had first decided to head for the Council. Despite it feeling like the entire universe had shifted because Nathan had declared his love for me, nothing in the real world had really changed. Except we were walking away from the sensible solution Alex had offered. If we were daft enough to do that, going back to our original plan was not an outrageous plan b.

“Okay,” I agreed. Then my heart sank.

“What is it?” asked Nathan, concern flashing in his eyes.

“I should talk to Alex.”

Nathan nodded. “We both will, together.”

I smiled. I liked the sound of that.

He kissed the top of my head. “Go have a shower and get dressed. I’ll find Alex and tell him we need to talk to him.”

He rolled out of bed, threw his clothes on, gave me another dazzling smile and left. I stared at the closed door for a moment before hugging my knees to my chest and finally allowing myself to let out a soft squeal of excitement. I could not believe it was actually happening. Nathan and I were in a relationship. He loved me. We had had fantastic sex, just because we wanted to, not because I needed to because of a heat. Everything was absolutely perfect. I did not know what I had done to deserve such luck.

After hyperventilating with glee for a moment, I headed for the shower. I was still in terrible danger, and letting Alex down was going to be awful, but I was too happy to care.



Less than an hour later, I was in Alex’s bedroom staring uncomfortably at my shoes. Nathan was standing beside me with one arm looped over my shoulder. Alex didn’t have an office, so the most private place we could talk was his bedroom. It was as awkward as hell.

“Thank you for your hospitality, Alpha. But Eli is declining your offer and we are leaving.”

It was great that Nathan was speaking for me but also a little embarrassing. I wasn’t a child. I should be able to talk for myself. But I was more than happy that he was taking the lead.

If this was what being his boyfriend was going to be like, I was all for it.

Alex nodded solemnly. “I understand. Thank you for considering my proposal.”

The stuffy formalness was hurting my soul, I couldn’t take it anymore. Leaving things like this would be a nightmare that would haunt me forever.

“I’m so sorry, Alex!” I blurted. “When we are settled, I still want to help you.”

Alex frowned. “I don’t accept charity.”

I winced. Nathan gave my shoulder a little squeeze, as if he was pushing confidence into me. Miraculously, it worked.

“It wouldn’t be charity,” I insisted. “It would be pack funds. I cannot be your mate, but Nathan and I would be honored to join your pack.”

I hadn’t breathed a word of my plan to Nathan. Mostly because it had only just popped into my head. But somehow, I knew I was right to speak for both of us. We had both fallen for this little pack and we were both longing to be part of a found family.

Alex looked at us both intently. His gaze flicked to Nathan and back to me. He must have liked what he saw because after a while he smiled fondly.

“I’d like that very much,” he said.

The bedroom door flung open and Fallon rushed in, throwing his arms around me. “I’d like that too!” he exclaimed.

“Fallon! How many times have I told you about eavesdropping!” admonished Alex but there was a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

Hugging Fallon nearly brought tears to my eyes. I wasn’t used to affection, and I was not sure at all how I had earned it. However I had managed it, I was proud to have done so.

Determination filled me. I was going to return. Soon, and with my inheritance intact, or at least a decent portion of it. Then I was going to become a Brightsky and spend the rest of my days in boring domestic bliss. I couldn’t wait.

Chapter Twenty-Six

The cheeseburger was so delicious that a little moan of happiness escaped from my throat. Nathan quirked an eyebrow at me, his blue eyes glinting.

“Should I be jealous?” he asked.

I threw a french fry at him, which he dodged effortlessly. “It is the most satisfying thing I’ve ever had,” I teased.

He grinned. “Is that a challenge?”

“If you want it to be,” I retorted.

His blue eyes flashed with a predatory gleam and suddenly I felt all hot and squirmy. And definitely not like I should be in a public place. It was probably illegal to be this turned on in a Burger King. Joking around with Nathan was definitely not like it used to be. Despite my embarrassment, it was most definitely a change I was keen to get used to.

A nervous glance around the fast-food restaurant reassured me a little. The humans were paying us no attention at all and

it wasn't like they could smell my arousal. Which was a good thing. A very good thing indeed.

Nathan gave me a very evil wink, and I flushed even more. He could tell the effect he was having on me. But then again, it wasn't like it was one sided. I could smell him too and it was immensely flattering how much he wanted me.

If only we had time to stop and jump each other's bones. I sighed wistfully and told myself all good things come to those who wait. We were due to arrive at the Council Chamber before nightfall. If we didn't make any unnecessary stops.

Nathan had said this stop was unnecessary and that we should just go to a drive-thru, but after several hours sitting in the car Edward had lent us, my ass needed a break. Telling Nathan that if we didn't stop soon, my ass would be too sore to do anything for days, had made him turn into the next exit so fast I nearly got whiplash.

"We should talk," said Nathan.

My heart rate increased to a billion and I stared at him in horror. Was I getting dumped already? What on earth had I done wrong? Surely even I hadn't had time to mess up already? His eyes widened in alarm and he reached over to take my hand.

"A good talk!" he clarified.

"Don't scare me like that!" I snapped as I willed my heart to slow to a healthier pace.

“This is why we should talk! We haven’t discussed where we stand.”

I eyed him suspiciously, “Where do we stand?” my stomach was tying itself up in knots. He had said it was going to be a good talk, and I had every faith in him, but I was still terrified of what he might say next.

“I love you Eli King,” he said with a soft, easy smile. “And have done so since the moment we first met. I’m not going anywhere and I absolutely would never leave you. You are my forever. If I was an alpha, I’d ask if I could claim you.”

“And I would say yes,” I croaked as tears suddenly welled up in my eyes. The relief and joy were overwhelming.

Nathan grinned and squeezed my hand tighter. “See? It’s good to talk. Now nobody is going to think the other person feels this is just a fling.”

“From the moment we met!” I exclaimed belatedly. My startled mind finally latching onto what he had said and ignoring Nathan’s last comment in order to backtrack.

“Don’t get big-headed, Asswipe,” chuckled Nathan.

“I... what... Oh my god! We so should have talked sooner!” I garbled incoherently as my mind struggled to comprehend what Nathan’s words meant.

Nathan smiled softly. “Better late than never.”

“You are right, as usual,” I admitted with a grin. “And you were right that we should talk. That was far more grown-up than just kissing and fucking.”

“Last night wasn’t fucking,” growled Nathan. “It was making love.”

“What’s the difference?” I asked, genuinely curious.

Nathan glowered and picked up his coke. “You’ll never know.”

Those three little words made me feel all warm and squishy inside. I had never had sex without love and now I never would. I understood how lucky that made me. Lucky and blessed.

I longed to lean over the plastic table and kiss him but I wasn’t sure how I felt about public shows of affection yet, and besides, I very much doubted I would be able to stop at a kiss and I very much was not up for public displays of that.

Instead, I merely held his hand and gazed into his eyes like the lovesick fool I was. My love for him had never been unrequited. It was wonderful, magical knowledge. Wasting time on regrets and wishing we had been honest about our feelings sooner, was pointless. Basking in the here and now was a lot more fun. There was an entire future together to look forward to. Hopefully.

“Do you really think the Council will help us?” I asked.

Nathan shrugged and popped a french fry into his mouth. “Only one way to find out.”

“That’s not very reassuring!” I complained.

Nathan’s blue eyes stared at me intently. “I’m never going to lie to you, Eli. I will not make promises I can’t keep by

telling you I know everything is going to be okay.”

I sighed happily. How was Nathan so perfect? So perfect and mine? I would have pinched myself, except if I was dreaming I never wanted to wake up.

As wonderful as Nathan was, going to the Council was still extremely scary. It wasn't something I had ever thought I would be doing. The Council had always been a terrifying prospect. They arrested people in the middle of the night who were then never seen again. And that was before the evil necromancer Silas Northstar had taken it over.

“Silas Northstar is evil and steals pups!” I said.

“Good thing we don't have any for him to steal yet,” said Nathan wryly.

I stared at him and refused to be distracted by his ‘yet’ even though that one little word had set my heart racing again. At this rate, I was going to be at serious risk of cardiac arrest.

“Besides,” continued Nathan calmly. “The story I heard was that he adopted some orphans to raise as his own.”

That did sound like a much nicer version. Hopefully, it was true. But I wasn't petitioning Silas Northstar because I thought he might be nice. We were going to him because he was powerful and dangerous, and bewilderingly, he was both those things whilst also being an omega. It was a stroke of luck that the current Grandmaster of the Council was not only a wolf shifter but an omega too. It wasn't ludicrous to think he might have sympathy for my plight. He certainly had the ability to do

something about it. He probably was the only person who could. Whether or not he would, was an entirely different matter.

I took another bite of my cheeseburger. Nathan was right. There was only one way to find out.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Whoever had built the Council Chamber had absolutely run with the ‘terrifying and imposing’ brief. It was deep underground for a start. A cavernous hall with huge stone pillars. The only light was the flickering flames of torches set in iron holders on the walls.

At the far end was a raised dais with an enormous iron throne on it. All I could see of Silas Northstar from this distance was that he was a slender figure dressed in black. The whole thing was so Game of Thrones, it made me wonder if George R. R. Martin was a paranormal who had gotten into trouble with the Council and found his inspiration that way.

Nathan gave my hand a reassuring squeeze, even though I was already clinging onto his hand with a death grip. The poor man was going to have bruises.

The walk up to the throne was long and silent apart from the ominous sound of our footsteps. Two guards walked beside us and there was a small gaggle of people standing by the dais.

Other than that, the huge hall that could have hosted thousands was empty. It all added to the creepy feel.

Eventually, we got close enough to the throne to be able to see Silas Northstar, Grandmaster of the Council, properly. He had jet black hair that fell to his shoulders. His shirt was also black and billowy and tucked into skin tight leather trousers. He sat with one leg draped over the other, perfectly displaying knee-high black boots with amazing laces. He looked every inch the super villain.

“What makes you so special, Eli King, that you should be above all laws and customs?” said Silas, getting straight to the point. Not even a hello first.

I stared up at the Grandmaster helplessly. His eyes were as dark as his hair, and both probably reflected his soul. If he had one at all. His skin was pale and smooth and he had cheekbones to die for. He was absolutely gorgeous, and that was intimidating all on its own.

“Is it because you are rich?” asked Silas Northstar.

There was a cold edge to his voice, but he mostly sounded bored. Nathan pulled me close and draped his arm over my shoulder. I was shaking.

“He is special to me, but all omegas should be special, and none deserved to be raped,” said Nathan firmly.

The Grandmaster’s dark eyes flicked to Nathan and I thought I saw a flash of something that might have been interest.

“Eli is in the position to fund changes that benefit all omegas,” said Nathan, bravely continuing.

Silas regarded us silently for a long moment. It was impossible to read his expression or get the faintest clue what he was thinking. He was the most intimidating person I had ever met. As well as the most confusing. He smelled like an omega. He looked like an omega. He very much did not act like one. It was disorientating.

“The world doesn’t work like that,” he said eventually. “You can’t always throw money around to get what you want. You have twenty-four hours amnesty to leave here safely, but your petition is denied.”

I stared at my shoes and thought I might drown in the wave of misery that washed over me. That was it. A few seconds to decide my fate. Now all hope was gone. At some point, an alpha was going to claim me and I’d be torn away from Nathan.

Big fat tears started rolling down my cheeks but I didn’t have the energy to wipe them away. Nathan was guiding me somewhere and I just followed blindly. Our audience with the Grandmaster was over and so was our future. It had all happened so quickly. A decision had been made on our lives in mere moments. Silas Northstar would forget all about us in an hour or two, if he hadn’t already, while his ruling would affect Nathan and I forever.

Dimly I realized we were back in the small guest room we had been given. Nathan abandoned me in the middle of the

room to hurriedly grab our things. I could tell he just wanted us to get the hell out of there. It sounded like a great idea. Twenty-four hours wasn't a great head start. Not when considering how many alphas would know I was here.

Packing didn't take long, as we hadn't brought much. Nathan reclaimed my hand and towed me out of the room to stride down the maze-like corridors. Our guards had escorted us back to the guest room but had since left. It was up to us to find our own way out. Luckily Nathan had a great sense of direction.

We turned a corner and Nathan stopped so suddenly that I walked right into him. Startled, I looked up. Silas Northstar was standing in the corridor, with a silver haired, amethyst eyed man by his side.

"I can't help you publicly because..." Silas trailed off and made a face. "Politics."

Was he apologizing? I blinked at him in confusion. It was too much to take in.

"There are too many people like your friend Dafydd, that have too much money and influence."

My heart sunk even further. Dafydd had got to the Council before us? That was awful news. Though I didn't know why I was surprised. Money and power were so intertwined it was sickening. Rich men always wanted more. There was no hope for me and Nathan.

“I’m inviting you to come stay with my pack. You will be safe there while we figure out a more permanent solution.”

My mouth fell open in surprise. I had not been expecting that. Silas Northstar, infamous villain, did want to help me after all? Was this really happening, or was it some kind of trap?

I looked at Nathan but his expression was guarded. I couldn’t tell what he was thinking. Maybe he needed more time to tell if this was a good idea or not.

“None of my pack will breathe a word to anyone that you are there. They know what’s good for them,” said Silas ominously.

The words sent chills down my spine. Being in the necromancer’s pack must be terrifying. I felt sorry for them. An invitation to join them, even temporarily, was daunting.

“We only have one unmated alpha and he wouldn’t dare,” continued Silas.

The silver-haired man made a noise of disgust and crossed his arms. “No, he fucking wouldn’t,” he muttered.

Silas grinned at him, and the expression made him look completely different. Softer, younger, far more approachable.

“The Alpha is with him?” asked Nathan, gesturing to the silver-haired man.

“The pack leader is mated to me. Our only unmated alpha is in a relationship with him,” clarified Silas.

That surprised me, though once I thought about it, I had heard rumors that Silas Northstar had been mated. Something everyone had assumed no alpha would ever be brave enough to attempt. Not that any would admit that of course.

My gaze automatically flicked to his neck, but his long dark hair was hiding the spot where a mating mark would be. I wondered if that was why he wore it long.

Nathan looked at me, asking if I wanted to go with Silas Northstar, and I nodded. Despite my fears, it seemed like a lifeline to me. It would be stupid to refuse it. But I was happy to leave the final decision to Nathan. I trusted his judgment more than I trusted my own.

“Thank you, Grandmaster. We would be honored to stay with your pack,” said Nathan solemnly.

Silas nodded and gestured to his friend and suddenly a large swirling purple vortex was in the corridor. I yelped in fright and Nathan squeezed my hand. It was a portal. A real-life portal. I never thought I’d see one. If we walked through it, we would emerge somewhere else. Possibly hundreds of miles away. Or the other side of the planet or inside a volcano.

Silas turned and calmly walked into it, vanishing from sight. I swallowed. Nathan gave me an encouraging smile, and we stepped forward together.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Eli and I emerged from the portal into a pleasant study. The room was fairly small but sunlight streamed in from a large window.

An alpha was sitting at the desk, he looked only mildly surprised to see a portal and strangers appear in front of him. Hopefully, the fact Silas and the silver-haired man were with us was reassuring him.

The alpha got to his feet calmly. He had tawny hair and striking green and gold eyes. A young healthy, handsome alpha. Everything that Eli should be looking for. It was difficult to not feel insecure. Even though I was fairly certain this was the Alpha of the pack and therefor Silas's mate.

“This is Nathan and Eli, they are going to be staying with us,” said Silas.

My eyebrows raised. I'd never heard an omega talk to an Alpha like that before. Telling him we were staying rather than asking permission. The Alpha seemed completely unphased.

He walked around the desk and shook my hand. I politely bared my throat to him.

“Hi! Nice to meet you. I’m Alpha Dean Darkstar. Welcome to the Darkstar pack.”

Of course, if Silas was now mated he wouldn’t have his father’s name anymore. He must be Silas Darkstar these days, though with such notoriety built up as Silas Northstar, I imagined most people forget to use his new name.

Dean shook Eli’s hand too, and Eli also bared his throat. There was nothing sexual about the gesture, it was just showing respect to the leader of the pack we were guests of. But the gesture still filled me with jealousy. I wanted Eli to bare his throat to me. It was a ridiculous desire. I wasn’t an alpha. No one was ever going to submit to me.

“Come on, I’ll show you to the guest cabin,” said Silas and he started walking out of the study.

“Angel!” said Dean.

Silas turned back to him. “What?”

“You look incredible,” grinned Dean.

Silas raised one eyebrow and crossed his arms. “Are you saying that I don’t normally?”

I winced. But to my surprise, Dean merely grinned and stalked up to Silas. Before I knew what was happening, Silas was pushed up against the wall and they were kissing. Passionately. It was the most filthy kiss I had ever seen.

The silver-haired man tugged me away and out of the room. “I’ll take you to the cabin. You’ll be here forever if you wait for them to finish,” he said with an eye-roll.

I glanced down at Eli and chuckled at his wide-eyed stare. As soon as we were alone, I was going to kiss him the way we had just witnessed. He deserved no less.

We walked through the compound of what was obviously a very large pack. When we got to the cabin, I was pleasantly surprised. It was set amongst the houses and outbuildings of the compound, not on the outside. The guest cabin itself was not a mere afterthought. It was warm and cozy. A comfortable looking bed dominated the main room and there was a lovely shower room and toilet. Someone had taken time on the design and finish, and the quality of the furnishings was high. It was an inviting, private space. The Darkstar Pack liked having visitors.

On our walk over, the silver-haired man had introduced himself as Eifion and he was now giving us a brief tour of the cabin. Including a demonstration of how to work the shower and where the fluffy towels were kept. He was just finishing, when to my surprise Silas walked in.

“Do you have everything you need?” he asked.

Silas Northstar, no, Silas Darkstar, was a good host. Wonders would never cease. I carefully hid my surprise.

“Yes, thank you,” I said.

“Dinner is at six in the old barn. It is a bit of a noisy affair, so feel free to grab something and bring it back here.”

“Thank you,” I said again.

“I’ll leave you to settle in. Tomorrow we can discuss plans.”

I nodded my agreement. “Sounds great.”

Silas cocked his head and gave me an intense look. “You do realize there is one very simple solution?”

Eli gave me a puzzled glance before turning his attention back to Silas. I stared at the necromancer in confusion. If there was a simple solution, I had completely missed it.

“Let someone claim him,” said Silas, “And then kill the alpha. Widowed omegas can inherit.”

“Silas!” admonished Eifion wearily.

The necromancer glared at him. “What? It’s a perfectly good plan.”

Eli pressed up close to me until every inch of his body was touching part of mine. I could feel him trembling. I draped my arm over his shoulder and tried to reassure him with my presence.

Silas regarded Eli for a moment before sighing. “Fine, we will think of something else.”

“Thank you,” I said weakly.

The necromancer nodded sharply, turned on his heels and left with Eifion walking beside him and muttering something

about normal people. I shut the door and put both my arms around Eli.

“I’m not going to let them do that,” I said.

“I know,” said Eli, easily. Trusting me without question.

He seemed happy pressed up against my chest, so I didn’t move. The silence of the cabin fell around us and Eli’s gorgeous scent filled the air. I took in a deep breath and let it out. Peace and quiet. We were finally safe. No one would dare try to attack Eli whilst he was in Silas Darkstar’s territory. For the first time since Duncan King’s death I could relax.

Eli was in my arms, and all was well. It was almost too good to be true. Hope blossomed. Maybe everything was going to work out perfectly after all. Eli loved me, and Silas Darkstar was on our side. If anyone could find a solution, it was him. It was suddenly seeming possible that I really was going to be able to keep Eli.

“Fancy trying out that bed?” suggested Eli as he looked up at me with a naughty twinkle in his eye.

Arousal flooded all my senses instantaneously. “Yes!” I exclaimed.

Eli giggled and then shrieked as I scooped him up in my arms. I carried him over to the bed and gently laid him down. “I love you, Eli King,” I whispered as I stared deep into his eyes.

“I love you too,” he breathed and then he kissed me, and I forgot all else.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Breakfast at the Darkstar pack was incredible. The old barn was lined with huge tables and bustling with people. Young pups scampered around playing with each other. Tiny pups were held in their parents' arms. Everyone looked really happy.

One long counter along the wall was practically groaning with food. Eggs, bacon, sausages and even pastries. I heaped my plate high and started stuffing my face before I even got back to my place by Nathan.

“I wonder if they are accepting any new members?” I said with my mouth full.

Nathan shook his head at me and sipped his coffee. Clearly thinking I was joking. It was his one tiny flaw. He didn't understand my devotion to food.

I shoveled a forkful of scrambled eggs into my mouth and groaned in bliss. Last night, I had fallen asleep after a wonderful and vigorous sex session and woken up to Nathan

coming back to the cabin with dinner. That had been delicious too, but something about eating with the pack, made the food taste even better. I could get used to this. Maybe the Brightsky pack could join too and we could all be one huge happy family, protected by Silas Darkstar.

It sounded great to me but I doubted Alex would see it that way. Most alphas wanted to be leaders of their own pack. Not many would want to give it up. Which was a shame. But not the end of the world. Nathan and I would be very happy as Brightsky's too.

Silas suddenly appeared by our table, and I nearly jumped out of my skin. I was incredibly grateful that he was helping us, but he was still as terrifying as hell.

He was wearing a loose purple tee shirt and black ripped jeans. Seeing him dressed more casually did make him seem slightly less intimidating. But only slightly. His hair was up in a ponytail, leaving his neck bare. The sight of his claiming mark made me feel absurdly jealous. I was here to avoid being given a mark. Why did part of me want one?

Then my attention was caught by a very faded bite mark on the other side of his neck. Silas had been claimed before. A long time ago and the alpha was dead. Something about the sight sent uneasy shivers down my spine. I was suddenly certain there was a dark story there. My jealousy evaporated.

“After breakfast, let's meet in the guest cabin,” he said.

“Okay,” agreed Nathan.

I was so glad he was brave enough to talk to the necromancer, because I certainly wasn't and the only thing more nerve-wracking than talking to Silas, was not talking to him, and having Silas think I was being rude.

Someone called Silas over and he walked away without saying another word to us. Under the table, Nathan squeezed my knee. I smiled, even though it was embarrassing that my nervousness was so obvious.

I picked up a piece of bacon, and the taste soon had me fully distracted. Meeting with Silas was going to be scary, but worth it. I'd do anything for a chance to stay with Nathan.

A short while later, back at the cabin, I paced around nervously. Nathan stood calmly with his hands behind his back, as if he was in bodyguard mode. I was about to open my mouth and ask how he was staying so unruffled, when the door opened and Silas walked in, accompanied by an omega with long red hair.

"This is our healer Malachi," said Silas. "He is going to examine you," he added as he looked at Nathan.

"Me?" asked Nathan, his brows scrunching in confusion.

Silas just stared at him.

"Okay," said Nathan with a shrug and he sat on the bed.

The healer walked over and started prodding and poking Nathan all over. He listened to his heart, looked in his mouth and did some sort of magic scan.

"Have you ever wished you were an alpha?" asked Malachi.

Nathan flushed and looked away. “Doesn’t everyone?”

Malachi didn’t answer him, instead he turned to face Silas with an excited gleam in his eyes. “I think he is a perfect candidate.”

“For what?” I blurted out and instantly regretted it.

Silas’s dark eyes fixed on me, and I wilted. “For attempting to turn into an alpha.”

My mind went completely blank. I couldn’t have heard that right. It was such an outrageous concept that I could not wrap my thoughts around it. Surely, it was not possible? I had never heard of such a thing.

I looked at Nathan, but he wasn’t looking at me. His gaze was fixed on Silas and his eyes were brimming with so much hope that it broke my heart. I had teased Nathan so many times about wanting to be an alpha, how could I have not seen it truly was his true heart’s desire? I was a terrible boyfriend.

“Is it possible?” said Nathan shakily.

“We think so,” answered Silas. “If the candidate already has some alpha tendencies and is healthy.”

Silas turned to me, “I take it he does have alpha tendencies?”

I nodded sharply. The way he took care of me, the way his eyes flashed sometimes. Nathan really did have alpha qualities. He was even more aggressive in fights than most betas.

“It’s experimental, you would be our first attempt. But we are fairly confident it would work.”

Nathan did look at me then, his face practically glowing with excitement. I had never seen him look so happy. All my questions about side effects and what would happen if it didn’t work, dissipated. Nathan really wanted this.

“I’ll be an alpha, I’ll be able to claim you!” beamed Nathan.

I grinned back, that would be incredible. A miraculous solution to our problems. It would solve everything. All the fear and uncertainty about the future would vanish. I would be able to stay with Nathan forever and no one could ever take me away from him.

Then unbidden, my mind conjured up images of Nathan growing a knot, holding me down and knotting me, his teeth biting into my neck to claim me. I swallowed dryly. Oh my, that was the hottest thing I had ever imagined.

Silas was smirking at me and I realized the scent of my sudden deep arousal was wafting around the cabin. I stared at the floor and tried to will my cheeks to not turn a shade of tomato.

“Looks like we have an agreement,” teased Silas. “Malachi will prepare the tea, it’s a mixture of herbs and magic. You will need to drink a cup, morning, noon and night. We think three days should do the trick.”

That didn’t sound too terrible. How much harm could a tea do? Surely it would either work or it wouldn’t. I could not bear

the thought of Nathan getting sick. Or turning into a frog or something.

Silas was staring at me again. I swallowed and gave him my full attention.

“He will likely go a little nuts at first, being pumped full of alpha hormones will do that. We will lock the cabin door to keep him in here, but it is probably best you stay with him. His possessiveness is going to go extreme.”

I nodded eagerly. I wanted to stay by his side, he wasn't going to go through this alone. I was going to be with him every step of the way.

“He will more than likely get horny as hell,” said Silas.

I felt all hot and flustered again, and then I realized that Silas had meant it as a warning, not a positive. Whatever expression I gave, it made Silas chuckle.

“Well, just in case it gets too much, we will give you a magic pendant to wear. Squeeze it and we will come get you away from him.”

I nodded but knew I wouldn't need it. Nathan all growly, pinning me down and railing me into the mattress? I'd never get enough of that. It sounded like paradise. And even if Nathan was drugged out of his mind, I knew he would never hurt me.

As long as he didn't get sick, the next three days were shaping up to be fun.

Chapter Thirty

I stared at Nathan as he downed his first cup of tea. He grimaced but put the cup down steadily.

“How do you feel?” I gushed.

He turned to me and smiled. “It’s not going to do anything instantly, Eli.”

I crossed my arms at him and huffed. It might. It had magic in it. Anything could happen. I stared at him intently for a few long moments. Noises from the pack going about their daily business seeped into the cabin. Nathan held my gaze calmly. After a while it became apparent he was right and nothing spectacular was about to happen.

“So now what?” I asked.

Nathan shrugged. “Read a book, try to relax and wait.”

I sighed and flopped on the bed dramatically. After Malachi had dropped off the tea, the sound of a heavy iron bolt sliding over the cabin door from the outside had unnerved me far

more than I wanted to admit. The feeling of being locked in was not nice, so I tried to ignore it.

The pendant was a comforting weight around my neck. I wasn't really a prisoner, they would let me out if I really needed them to. It was good to have a get-out clause. Even though it unsettled me that Nathan didn't have the same option.

The pendant was a pretty amethyst on a simple leather cord. I wanted to fiddle with it, but I didn't want to set it off and have people bursting in here thinking Nathan was hurting me. Nathan would never hurt me. But I had accepted the safety measure without complaint. They didn't know Nathan like I did, I could see how they would be worried.

Nathan came and sat on the bed. His color was normal. His breathing was steady. He wasn't sweating. Everything really did seem fine. Sighing, I picked up a book from the pile by the bed. It was unlikely that I would be able to concentrate, but I needed to try to distract myself somehow.

I hadn't bothered to look at the cover of the book. As I read, my eyes widened as I realized it was a very spicy romance. It soon grabbed my attention and carried me far, far away. So much so that when the alarm on Nathan's phone went off, I jumped a mile. Startled and disorientated to be back in reality.

It was time for Nathan's second cup. I watched apprehensively as Nathan calmly prepared it.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

He shrugged and blew on his cup of tea. “Normal. I haven’t noticed anything different.”

I caught the edge of disappointment in his voice, so I got up and stood next to him. Laying a comforting hand on his arm.

“Hey, you’ve only had one cup. It’s going to take time.”

He smiled softly at me, drowned the tea and made a face before shuddering.

“How gross is it?” I asked.

“Very,” he said with a grin. “I could kiss you and then you could taste it,” he added, leaning in.

I backed away quickly. “Ew! I don’t want any alpha-ness, thank you very much!”

“I’ll just have to kiss you somewhere else then,” he said and then he pounced.

I shrieked in surprise as he threw me onto the bed. Then before I could catch my breath, he flipped me over onto my front, pulled me to the edge of the bed until my ass was dangling over it. My trousers were yanked off next. I was just about to make a comment about the tea working, when all of a sudden he pulled my ass cheeks apart and his hot wet tongue lathered my hole.

I clenched the sheets and yowled. I had already been feeling slightly aroused from reading the naughty book. So Nathan’s sudden attention was skyrocketing my desire to astronomical levels.

His tongue swirled around and around my sensitive hole, sending tingling waves of pleasure shooting all along my body. My cock swelled so fast it almost hurt.

Nathan paused and my shameless body arched back at him, demanding more.

“Is this okay?” he breathed, sounding a little out of it.

“Yes, yes, yes!” I wailed.

He buried his face in my ass again and resumed licking me to ecstasy. I started writhing, but he placed a warm hand on the small of my back and held me down. Keeping me in place so there was nothing I could do but lie there helplessly and be ravished. It was wonderful.

His tongue continued to torment me in the best possible way. Strange sobbing noises started coming out of my throat. A wetness grew between my legs that wasn't just his saliva. He moaned deeply and started lapping eagerly, as if he couldn't get enough of the taste of me.

His tongue penetrated my rim and pushed inside me. I yelled my delight. Nothing had ever felt so incredible. I was already right on the edge of orgasm. Hovering painfully and deliciously at the brink. My entire body shuddering and my cock pulsing and leaking. He stiffened his tongue and started fucking me with it. Flicking in and out at what felt like lightning speed.

My looming orgasm barreled through me, causing every muscle in my body to go rigid. I felt my eyes roll back into my

skull and was only distantly aware of my cock pulsing ropes of cum from where it was trapped between my stomach and the bed.

Nathan did not relent, did not ease up. He kept going, adding the occasional swirl to his tongue thrusts. My peak rolled on and on, each flick of his tongue unleashing a new tsunami of pleasure that whipped my orgasm along, feeding it with more fuel until it felt like it was never going to ebb.

I screamed and screamed but still he showed no mercy. Every inch of my body was unbearably sensitive. It magnified his touch, pushing more and more pleasure into my body in a never-ending loop.

I was going to die from orgasm overload and it was a beautiful way to go. But I didn't want to leave Nathan behind.

"N... Na... Nathan!" I managed to rasp through my sore throat, in between wails of delight.

He stopped immediately, and with a groan every muscle and bone in my body dissolved into jelly. My orgasm finally receding, leaving me dizzy and gasping for air. Everyone had always said that omegas were incredibly sensitive down there, but nothing had prepared me for the mind-blowing intensity I had just experienced.

"Fuck! Eli, are you okay?" Nathan sounded horrified.

"Fine," I wheezed.

The sensation of cooling sweat all over my body made me realize I was drenched in it. Despite all the sweat and the

dizziness and gasping, the main thing I was feeling was euphoric.

“I don’t know what came over me,” whispered Nathan.

“Alpha horniness,” I gasped, still breathless. “It’s working.”

There was a long pause. I wanted to roll over and face him but I was entirely too weak.

“Maybe you should leave. I don’t want to hurt you,” said Nathan, sounding so forlorn that it broke my heart.

“Nathan, that was as far from hurting me as it is possible to get!”

“But...”

“But nothing, you stopped when I asked you to!”

Another long pause in which the silence stretched. I racked my brains for ways to reassure him that didn’t require moving, because I suspected it would be awhile before I was capable of that. I didn’t want to remind him about the pendant. Thinking on how other people had thought he might be a danger to me, would not be confidence inspiring.

“I want to rail you right now, without giving you a rest,” growled Nathan.

I shivered. Goosebumps dancing along my skin. The thought of Nathan sliding into me when I was like this, all warm and loose and lost in an euphoric daze, was electrifying. Lying there all floppy and sated while he took his pleasure in

me... I let out a tiny whimper. My legs spread wide in invitation.

“Do it,” I urged.

His deep manly groan sent even more shivers down my spine. Suddenly his hands were on my hips and he was sliding into me effortlessly. His saliva and my slick, combined with my bone-deep contentment and relaxation, eased the way.

I gave a soft grunt at the satisfying feeling of fullness. There was nothing better on this earth than having Nathan inside me. My eyes fluttered shut as he started to rhythmically thrust into me. This was bliss and it was only going to get better. It was only noon on the first day.

Chapter Thirty-One

Nathan woke me up in darkness by rolling me over onto my back, looming over me and staring intently. His eyes were glowing. He really did not seem himself.

“What’s wrong?” I asked as my heart raced anxiously.

“I... I need you,” Nathan growled.

He was sweating and looked distressed. He smelled of alpha and arousal. I reached up and grabbed his shoulders.

“I’m right here,” I said as calmly as I could manage. I needed to be strong for him. It was nice to be the one taking care of him for a change.

He shook his head. “I need to be inside you,” he clarified.

Lust instantly coiled low in my gut, sending butterflies fluttering throughout my insides.

“I’m never going to say no to that,” I told him.

He gave me a doubtful look, so I spread my legs wide in invitation. His eyes widened at the sight and he growled. A

low rumble whose vibrations I felt in my chest. Then he lowered himself over me and his hard cock slid inside my hole. I was still wet and open from earlier so he entered me easily. I groaned at the sensation.

Hopefully, once he was fully an alpha, he would still be into foreplay most of the time. He was just overwhelmed by the changes at the moment. Unable to control his urges and have patience. I could roll with it. It was hot as hell.

His hot mouth descended onto my neck, licking, sucking and kissing right where hopefully he would be biting and claiming me before too long. The sensation sent bolts of pleasure dancing along every inch of my body. Combined with the pleasure coming from his cock thrusting in and out of my ass, it had me bucking and moaning helplessly.

He bit down. Not a true mating bite. He hadn't knotted me. I didn't even know if he could grow a knot yet, or if he ever would be able to. My body didn't care. I came so hard I saw stars. My ass clamped down on his cock, milking him, while my own cock erupted between us, coating my belly.

After a long breathless moment, reality reformed, and I found myself panting on the bed. Nathan lying beside me. I was all sticky, sweaty and gross. There had been several sex sessions before I had fallen asleep only to be woken up for this one.

"I need a shower," I said, sitting up with a groan. I felt stiff and well used all over. It wasn't a bad feeling. Certainly one I could get used to.

Nathan sat up too. "I'll come with you."

I turned to look at him. He looked a lot calmer now. More like himself, his eyes were less frantic. But he still wasn't entirely Nathan. I didn't let myself wonder if he ever would be again.

"I need a shower, not shower sex," I said.

"I know," he agreed easily.

"Then why..."

"You might slip, or the water might be too hot. You could faint from exhaustion. The roof might collapse!" Nathan stared at me looking deeply worried.

I stared back at him for a long silent moment until his look turned pleading. Okay, he was getting crazy levels of alpha protectiveness along with crazy levels of horniness.

"Come on then," I said with a smile as I got out of bed.

Nathan beamed like I had given him the sun, then he bounded after me like an overexcited puppy. I chuckled. It was cute.

Showering while he stood just the other side of the glass watching me intently, was intense. But I powered through. When I moved my hand to between my legs and carefully eased some of his seed out of me. His eyes glowed as his gaze fixed on the sight and he growled, but he didn't stop me. Maybe I shouldn't have bothered, he was only going to fill me up again as soon as possible. My cock gave a little twitch at that thought.

Stepping out of the shower, I toweled off quickly. I walked back into the main room naked. It was only us here. Nathan followed me closer than my shadow. As I reached the cupboard holding the clean sheets, he sniffed my shoulder and whined in distress. I turned to him immediately.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“You don’t smell like me anymore,” he all but wailed.

His fists were clenched by his side and his cock was hard and I swear bigger than it was before. His hair was all over the place and his blue eyes were glowing again. I should really encourage him to take a shower, but I got the distinct impression he was entirely too fixated on my scent at the moment. I needed to fix that first. Then I could think about coaxing him into washing.

“Why don’t you change the sheets and then we can fix that?” I suggested.

He nodded like a toddler offered ice-cream, squeezed past me to grab clean sheets before sprinting over to the bed in record speed. He yanked the dirty bedding off as if it were an enemy that needed defeating. In no time at all, the bed was made. It wasn’t the neatest but since it wasn’t going to stay clean for long, I didn’t care.

I slid into it and grinned up at Nathan. But instead of jumping straight on me like I expected, he whirled away. I opened my mouth to ask where the hell he was going but he reappeared with a tall glass of water. He thrust it at me earnestly and I took it with a smile. I was actually thirsty. He

took the empty glass and put it away carefully. Then he jumped into bed with me.

He pulled me close to him and snuffled my hair. Then he rubbed his face against mine. He lowered his head to my chest and rubbed his face there while his hands roamed all over my body. I lay still and tried not to giggle at the ticklishness of it. I knew he was desperate to rub his scent into me. His head drifted lower and lower and by the time he was rubbing against my stomach my cock had gotten other ideas. I knew why he was crazy horny, however, my libido had no such excuse to be misbehaving. Maybe I could still blame suppressant withdrawal? It hadn't been that long.

Nathan found my hard cock and gave it a long wet, happy lick. I squealed and bucked. He growled, pinned my hips with his hands and swallowed me whole. The feel of his hot soft mouth encasing my cock had me yelling. He hollowed his cheeks and sucked like a machine. My peak came out of nowhere. My eyes rolled back as I pumped my seed down Nathan's throat. He drank down every last drop. Even licking his lips greedily when I was done. I was astounded that my balls had anything left in them after the night we had just had.

Nathan picked my legs up and threw them over his shoulders. I looked up at him.

"Mine," he growled and his eyes actually flashed. The tea was definitely working. Nathan was going to be an alpha.

I groaned and my cock gave a feeble if valiant attempt at twitching. Luckily my hole was more than ready for some

action. Nathan paused with his cock just teasing my entrance. He tilted his head at me questioningly.

“Yes,” I managed to croak whilst nodding.

It was obviously all the encouragement he needed as the next thing I knew I was stuffed full of cock. My head hit the headboard. Nathan pulled me back down the bed and anxiously ruffled my head, all while his giant cock was impaling me. It had definitely gotten bigger.

“I’m fine!” I exclaimed, desperate for him to commence railing me.

His hands tightened around my hips and I could feel that I wasn’t going to slide up the bed and hit the headboard again.

He thrust into me, and I yowled. It felt damn good. I stared deep into his eyes. The satisfaction, lust and pleasure I saw in their depths nearly had me undone. I had done that to him. Just being balls deep in me, did that to him. I shuddered. He picked up the pace until I was sobbing and wailing. I was so glad he had sucked me off first, it meant I could enjoy this for longer.

Suddenly he was moving. He dropped my legs from his shoulders and pulled me up off the bed until I was sitting on his lap, still on his cock. I cried out. He felt deeper like this. His arms encircled my back and his mouth nuzzled my neck as he continued to thrust up vigorously, making me bounce up and down on his cock.

He stiffened, and his arms around me tightened. Something like a snarl came out of his throat as I felt him gushing hot

inside me. I groaned and then moaned as my hole started to stretch. The sensation grew and grew until I felt impossibly full. Stretched to my limits. The feeling was incredible. His knot, I dimly realized. Nathan had grown a knot. I loved it. It was a whole different league from the prosthetic one. Knots were even better than everyone talked about.

It grew even more, swelling against something inside me that made me explode with ecstasy. His teeth bit down where my neck and shoulder joined. A mating bite. Nathan was claiming me.

I screamed and screamed my pleasure until reality spun away into black.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Three months later

The sound of a car pulling up the long gravel driveway had me bolting down the stairs. By the time Malachi got out of his car, I was right there to throw myself into his arms. He hugged me back happily.

“I’m here to check on Fallon, not you,” he teased.

I released him from my embrace so I could stick my tongue out at him.

“Come on,” I said. “We all know the truth, you are here to ogle our new pack house!”

“That too,” he admitted. “It looks impressive from here.” Before adding, “Silas sends his regards.”

I pulled a face. “I’m sure he barely tolerates me.”

Malachi grinned. “He is lovely once you get to know him.”

“He is your Alpha-mate, you have to say that!”

“No, It’s true!”

“I’ll have to take your word on that,” I said dryly. I would forever be incredibly grateful to the necromancer, but I could not fathom a future where I was anything less than terrified of him.

Malachi chuckled before changing the subject. “Show me your ridiculously fancy-looking and enormous house then!”

I grabbed his hand and towed him into the entrance lobby. “Billionaire, remember!” I said cheerily.

As we stepped inside, Malachi gawped at the grand staircase and the chandelier. Looking suitably impressed. It made me like him even more. Though I liked him plenty enough already. He had turned Nathan into an alpha, solving all our problems and enabling Nathan to be content in his own skin. Malachi had even fixed Nathan’s nose. It was no wonder that the healer was now one of my favorite people in the whole wide world. And that was even before the wonderful omega had started to help Fallon.

“How did you get Alex to agree to all of this?” asked Malachi.

I rolled my eyes. “I had to drag him out here for a look, and then he fell in love with the pastures and the woods out the back. Something about the grass quality. So now we are going to farm organic free-range lamb. Have you ever heard of anything more ridiculous than a werewolf pack farming sheep?”

The healer giggled. “Alphas need to feel useful. You can’t expect them to be happy as your kept men, lounging by the

pool all day.”

“Wait until you see the pool, then tell me that!” I teased.

“Sounds like the perfect place to do Fallon’s check,” Malachi said with a grin.

I laughed, “He is probably already there!”

Sure enough, Fallon was sitting by the pool, dipping his legs into the cool water. He looked up with a shy smile as we approached. It was fantastic that the suppressants Malachi was supplying were still working. He had said frequently adjusting the dose and type, should prevent Fallon from having heats for a long time. The omega really was an incredible healer.

“I’m going to find Nathan,” I said with a wave as I left them to it.

It wasn’t entirely an excuse to give Fallon some privacy. I still found it hard to keep my hands off of my mate. It was beginning to look like it wasn’t a honeymoon period. It was just the way we were always going to be. The thought made me grin like an idiot. My hand flew up to the mating mark on my neck and I traced the imprint of Nathan’s teeth fondly.

I knew Malachi was also going to check on Nathan while he was here and see if he needed any more alpha-tea, but he had been fine so far. It had taken him less than twenty-four hours to transition and he had remained stable ever since. It had been a little disappointing to see the extreme horniness and protectiveness go, but it had been wonderful to get my Nathan back.

He was slightly more aggressive than he had been before. A little bit more possessive. But thankfully he hadn't turned into an alphahole. This new alpha version of Nathan didn't seem to have any arrogance at all. He had been more than happy to bare his throat to Alex and accept him as pack leader.

The changes in Nathan that I had noticed the most, was the way he held his head higher and was more confident. But it was the happiness in his eyes that melted my heart. He was who he was meant to be, I was sure of that.

And I certainly wasn't going to complain about his knot. I grinned just thinking about it. But just as my thoughts turned super dirty, I saw Nathan in the distance. He was with Alex and they were working on the fence for the sheep. I took a deep breath and tried to clear my mind. I didn't want to blast poor Alex with the scent of my arousal. The poor man had to be sick of it by now.

I drifted closer, but then stopped in my tracks. It was a hot day and Nathan had taken his top off. His muscles rippled as he hammered the post Alex was holding. There was no way I could approach without stinking Alex out.

As if he could sense my presence, Nathan looked over, right to where I was standing. He said something to Alex and then came jogging over. As soon as he was close enough for me to see him properly, I saw his huge grin and sparkling eyes. Then he was pushing me against his sweaty chest and kissing me thoroughly.

I melted into it. He smelled divine, and the feel of his muscular arms around my back was glorious enough to scatter every thought I had ever had. Far too soon he stopped kissing me and merely stared at me fondly instead, still holding me close.

“I’ve completely forgotten what I was coming over to say,” I confessed after a while.

His grin intensified. “Can’t have been that important then.”

“Maybe not,” I sighed, laying my head against his chest.

The smell of his arousal tickled my nose.

“You wanna go to our room,” he breathed huskily.

“You can’t abandon Alpha to all the work,” I scolded. Even though it sounded like a fantastic idea.

He sighed wearily. “You’re right. I’ll just have to finish quickly so there is time to ravish you before dinner.”

With that, he bounded away from me to sprint back to Alex. I watched him go whilst shaking my head fondly. Then I tore my gaze away. I couldn’t spend the afternoon standing there drooling. I headed to the kitchen. Deciding to distract myself by being an excellent host. I could bring Malachi and Fallon some fresh lemonade.

Then hopefully Nathan would come and find me for a quick interlude. A thorough shower and then dinner with all the pack and Malachi in the dining room. It sounded like a perfect end to a perfect day. How had my life become so blessed? So full of love and found family?

A familiar flash of guilt surged through me. My father and brothers had not even been dead a year. I was a monster to be this happy, when they were in the ground. Then I remembered what Nathan kept reminding me. That blood on its own does not make a family. There needs to be love. My birth family had never loved me.

It was sad they were gone. But it wasn't my fault. Being miserable would not bring them back or change a single thing. I wasn't a bad person for appreciating my new life.

I sighed and fetched the lemonade from the fridge. Nathan could make me feel better when he wasn't even here. I was definitely going to make sure to show him just how much I appreciated him later. Before my thoughts could get too dirty again, I firmly steered them away.

It was time to be a fabulous host. These days it was the only thing I had to worry about.

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