

A shirtless, muscular man with dark hair and a light beard is the central focus. He is in a locker room, with dark lockers visible in the background. He is flexing his arms, with his hands behind his head. The title "AS WE FIGHT" is overlaid on his chest and torso in a large, gold, textured font. "AS WE" is in a smaller, more stylized font, while "FIGHT" is in a very large, bold, blocky font.

AS WE  
FIGHT

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
K.G. REUSS

# AS WE FIGHT

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A MAYFAIR UNIVERSITY NOVEL

BOOK 2

K.G. REUSS

## BOOKS FROM BEYOND

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Editing/Proofing: The Write Editor

Cover Design: Moonstruck Cover Design & Photography,  
[moonstruckcoverdesign.com](http://moonstruckcoverdesign.com)

Formatting: Books from Beyond

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# FOREWORD

Dearest Reader

This book contains dark content, double penetration, alpha-holes, more spice than a prom night in the backseat of your ex-boyfriend's Buick in '97, and other things that may offend. For a complete list, visit [kgreuss.com](http://kgreuss.com).

If you feel a need to take a break during this angsty ride, please do so. We don't use seatbelts here, but there are definitely restraints.

Safe word: Cake.

You'll find out why soon enough.

-K.G.



ONE

# ENZO

I swallowed thickly, my heart in my fucking throat as I hung up the phone.

Anson had Rosalie. He was my mystery caller.

I had no more information than that. Just that she wasn't in the shooting. She wasn't here. Cops and ambulances lined the streets and filled the parking lot, their lights flashing in the night. I'd moved the car down the street so I could get out quickly. This place was my fucking nightmare. I didn't know how many of the masked men I'd killed.

At least three.

"Well?" Cole demanded, wiping the sweat from his brow and looking over at me from the passenger seat of my Escalade.

"Where the fuck is she?" Fox demanded. "Let's go get her."

E said nothing as he stared out the window, his body still shaking. The moment he'd heard Rosalie was gone, he'd become nearly uncontrollable. I was sure he was struggling through his PTSD at having heard the gunshots. I'd found him wild-eyed and bleeding in the crowd with a bullet graze to his arm. He'd been so frenzied, I hadn't been able to subdue him in his recklessness to find Rosalie. It took Cole finding us to calm him down. Cole had cradled him in his arms as E wept. Fox had only just joined us minutes ago after not being able to locate her, tears running down his face, and blood on his hands from trying to help people along the way.

“I don’t know where she is,” I said softly. My heart clenched.

*Fuck, baby. We’re coming. Somehow...*

Cole let out a grunt and pulled his phone out and looked at her tracker. Her jewelry pinged at home. Her phone pinged here.

I was in shock. I knew he was a prick, but a prick with an agenda that involved taking what fucking belonged to us? Not like this. Never fucking like this.

“What did that asshole say?” Cole demanded. His hands shook as much as his voice. I knew Cole. He was ready to murder someone. He wasn’t alone.

“He said to meet him at midnight tomorrow at the docks. He said he has something important that belongs to us.”

Fox punched the back of Cole’s seat, making Cole jump. We were all a little gun-shy, and Fox was a whole lot of pissed off. We all were.

“You’re bleeding,” E murmured.

“What?” Fox asked. “It’s not mine.”

“It is. Look.”

We all turned to look at Fox to see blood trickling down his fingers. He blinked at us in confusion before he struggled to remove his jacket, his breathing heavy.

“Fuck,” Cole swore, taking in the wound on Fox’s arm.

A bullet. Just like E’s wound. Fox’s was deeper though. He’d require stitches.

E shook, his breath hitching before he started to hyperventilate.

“Fuck.” I slammed my hands on the wheel and got out. We had to find Rosalie, but we needed help here. E was losing his shit, and Fox was losing blood. There was a fucking calling card I’d found on one of the gunmen I’d killed. Then another on the floor of the club. Then hundreds scattered around like fucking murder confetti.

A skull and crown.

*The fucking kings.*

I hadn't said shit about it to any of them yet. I would, though, once we got Rosalie back safe and sound.

"There are ambulances everywhere," Cole said. "Let's go to one."

"I'm not going to a fucking ambulance when Rosie is missing. Besides, there are people who need it more than I do." Fox gripped his bleeding bicep with his other hand. "We need to get her. I-I can't—" his voice cracked and a soft sob left his lips.

I was barely holding it together. Everything tonight had been a mess.

I had to keep my shit together. I had to. If I broke, that would be it.

"E, man. Come on," I said, opening the door. I was still coming down from my alcohol buzz like the others, minus E. I shouldn't have even been behind the wheel, but I knew there was no way E could drive in his state.

E choked out a sob as he rocked in his seat.

"Fuck." He breathed out. "Fuck, fuck, f-fuck. *I-I can't—*"

"You *can*." I cradled his face and made him look at me. "You fucking can, E. You've survived worse. You're a fucking fighter. This is nothing. Fox is OK. Rosalie is OK. We're all OK. *You're* OK. Believe it. Breathe with me."

His eyes were wilder than they were when I'd found him. There was no way he was going to calm the fuck down.

I let out a growl as he shook harder, his face wet with tears. Blue tinted his lips as he struggled to rake in air.

I caught Cole's eye. He gave me a curt nod and got out. He came to my side as Fox rubbed E's back. E leaned forward to rock, his entire body heaving with his attempt at breathing.

"You got it?" I asked. We couldn't deal with this right now. Not with Rosalie in danger. But E mattered too. We could fix

him before we got to business with her. If we had to put him down, so be it.

Cole nodded and pulled a syringe and vial from his jacket and drew some medication into it as Fox eased E back into his seat.

I placed my hand on E's heaving chest as Cole gave him the shot.

It was a last ditch effort we kept on hand for him when shit got bad. We'd only had to use it once before, and that was mid-summer when E had awoken from a nightmare and had flipped the fuck out and rampaged through the upstairs.

E's eyes unfocused, his breathing slowing, as the medication took hold. E's doctor had prescribed it for him months ago. We always tried to keep a dose nearby because we just didn't fucking know when he'd lose it.

"Easy," I murmured as E's jaw went slack. "It's OK, man. It's OK. Everything is OK."

I squeezed his hand as he stared straight ahead, his breathing slow and even, his mind completely fucking blitzed. It didn't help that he was stressed about Macy disappearing either.

"I fucking hate doing that to him," Cole muttered.

"Me too," I said, sighing. I reached over E and connected his seatbelt before I pressed my forehead to his. "I promise I'll keep us safe, E. I won't let her get hurt. Fuck, I swear it." I kissed his forehead and released him and closed the door.

Cole pulled me to a stop before I opened my door.

"We need to go get Rosebud. I'm not fucking standing around letting him keep her. I knew the mother fucker couldn't be trusted. Now he has her. Let me go look for him. Let me kill him, Enzo." His blue eyes swept over me. "I'll bring her home. *Tonight.*"

I looked at the blacked out windows of my Escalade, knowing E and Fox were both hurt inside.

“We can’t risk it. If something happens to her because we fucked up... Man, we can’t. I want to kill the fucker too. And we will, but only once she’s safely home.” I was so fucking sick to my stomach. God, what if Anson was working with the kings? Fuck, what if he’s working with the lords?

*Fuck. Sunshine. Baby, I’m so sorry...*

“So we’re just supposed to sit for twenty-four hours and pray our girl isn’t fucking raped or murdered? No. Fuck that. I’m going.” Cole made to storm away from me, but I grabbed his arm.

“Cole. Fucking listen! We-we need a plan. We can’t just run in, guns blazing. We don’t have any idea where he is.”

“And if we did?” he countered, a muscle thrumming along his jaw. “Could we then?”

I glanced back to the car. “It would just be us. Someone needs to stay with E. Fox is hurt too, and we need to get him to a hospital. He needs stitches.”

“Let’s take E home. I’ll stay with him while you take Fox to the hospital. We can work on finding out where this fucker lives or is hiding while we wait. Then, we blow his fucking brains out and bring our girl back.”

I nodded. It was the best plan we had, even if the worst kept rolling through my mind.

“Let’s do it,” I said, opening my door and climbing in.

*This is how you rise.*

At least that’s what I kept telling myself.

TWO

# ROSALIE

“A ni?” I asked as he hung up the phone, his blue eyes locked on mine. “You’re scaring me.”

“It’s not my intention.” He walked back to me, and I shifted away, grimacing at the pain it brought.

“LeeLee,” he murmured as I scooted back against the wall and shook. Ugly memories of a time long past swooped in on me. That same fear coursed through my body as Ian’s face flashed in my mind.

Anson crouched in front of me and winced before a hiss left his lips at the pain in his leg. He reached out. “Come here. You’re hurt.”

“I want to go home. I want to make sure the guys are OK,” my voice wavered.

“I understand, but I want to make sure *you’re* OK. Come here. We can talk. I promise I’ll tell you everything.”

I hesitated as I took in the look on his face. He didn’t appear menacing or angry. Merely concerned. He was keeping me here. He hadn’t hurt me. He’d saved me. But why, if I couldn’t leave?

“Please. I’m not going to hurt you. I swear.”

He really didn’t seem like he’d hurt me. I knew well enough though to escape a bad situation sometimes you had to play along until a door opened that you could run through. I licked my lips before taking the hand he offered me and allowed him to pull me to my feet. I cried out, my old leg



injury flaring up. Now that the adrenaline had worn off, I was beginning to feel all the hurts.

He caught me against him, his arms winding tightly around me.

He held me like he gave a damn.

I lost it, sobbing against his hard chest.

*What was happening?*

“It’s OK,” he murmured, raking his fingers through my hair. “I’m not going to hurt you, LeeLee. I would never.”

I clung to him, praying he was telling me the truth. Desperate for his words to be real. I couldn’t lose someone I’d thought was a friend.

“Why can’t I go home?” I whispered, pulling away to look up at him.

He stared down at me, torment on his face. “You can. You will. I just... I need something from them, and I know I won’t be able to get it with things the way they are. They won’t listen to me.”

“So you’re using me?” My heart banged hard in my chest.

He frowned. “No. Absolutely not... but yes. Only to protect you though.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Come here. Let’s get you fixed up. I’ll tell you everything.” He swiped a tear from my cheek, worry washing across his own face.

I hesitated for a moment before I let him lead me back to the couch to sit. I knew he had to be hurting judging by the look on his face as he settled in beside me. He’d been shot only hours before in his leg. I could see a bit of blood leaking through the bandage.

“You should go to the hospital,” I said softly.

He scoffed. “This isn’t the worst wound I’ve had. I’m OK. Promise I am. I have antibiotics in my bathroom I’ll take. This

will heal up just fine. It missed all the important stuff.”

I was quiet, so many questions in my head, but only one was screaming at me for an answer.

“Are the guys OK?”

He was quiet as he cleaned the scrapes on my elbow for a moment. “They’re fine. Enzo didn’t say otherwise.”

“But you don’t know,” I said, wincing as my heart raced faster. “I need to know.”

“Let me clean you up, OK? Once you’re cleaned up, I’ll let you call them. Deal?” He placed a bandage on my elbow and stared back at me, his blue eyes full of innocence and truth.

I nodded wordlessly, knowing damn well I’d be calling them, even if it meant I was knocking his ass out to get to the phone.

He set to work on my other arm.

“Tell me what’s going on,” I said.

He let out a breath. “Remember when I told you about my mom and sister?”

I nodded as he glanced at me.

“I’m on the trail of who I think did it. Your guys would be a great asset if I could get them to trust me a bit.”

“You can’t kidnap me and hope they’ll trust you,” I pointed out.

“I hardly kidnapped you, LeeLee,” he said. “I saved you. There’s a difference.”

“But you’re holding me here.”

“Just until tomorrow. Whether they let me live or not is the next question. They seem to be a bit overprotective.”

I gave him an incredulous look to which he shrugged.

“I know. You’ve been through some shit too. I’m sorry. I’d be the same way with you if you were my girl. I’d give you some breathing room, but I’d never keep you in a situation or life where you getting hurt was a possibility.” He gave me a

measured look that made butterflies take flight in my guts. I knew what he was saying. The guys weren't taking my safety seriously enough in his eyes.

“What it boils down to is me wanting to save you. To keep you safe all while trying to figure out who the fucker is that killed my family.”

“Who do you think it is?” I asked softly as he finished on my other elbow. He reached out and shifted me easily on the couch and put my feet on his lap and set to work on my legs and knees. I winced as he cleaned the wounds.

“I think it's either the kings or lords. I'm working out the details on it. If I had to take a stab at it, I'd say Sergio Ivanov or Matteo De Santis. My next guess is they had the murder taken care of by one of their men. Klaus Seeley or Antoine Vasiliev. So narrowing it down to four is a huge step for me. I can't get closer though. I've hit a wall. These are the big leagues. I don't have the manpower for it.”

I nodded. I'd heard about the Ivanov and the De Santis syndicates. Russian and Italian. I knew it was dangerous since Enzo seemed to want to enter the ring. I'd heard enough when Anthony was over to solidify my fears.

“What could the guys do?”

He sighed. “Maybe nothing, but I just need any information they have. Or could get me.”

“They won't do it for free,” I said softly. “Everything has a price.”

“I'm willing to pay it.” His blue eyes flashed. “I'd like to offer them my services.”

“And what are those?”

He gave me a sad smile and finished his work on my knees before he reached into his pocket and handed me his phone.

“Call them. Tell them you're OK. Make sure they are. I'll step out of the room for you.” He stood up and offered me another sad smile before he left me alone. I heard a door close down the hallway, and I exhaled, worry seeping through me.

THREE

## FOX

We carried Ethan into the house and laid him on the couch. I put a blanket over him as he blinked at me, blitzed out of his fucking head.

“You’re OK,” I murmured.

“Rosalie?” he asked, his words slurring. “S’ok?”

“We’ll get her. Everything is fine.” My throat was tight as I said the words. I glanced back at Cole and Enzo to see them having one of their silent conversations with each other.

I was ready to crawl out of my fucking skin. I needed her back. So much worry and fear rushed through my veins I wasn’t sure how I hadn’t broken down yet.

“What are you guys doing?” I demanded as they left the room. I was quick to follow them to Enzo’s office.

Enzo went to his desk and pulled out a gun and added it to the arsenal he was already carrying, including several knives I knew he had in his boots. Cole loaded magazines with more bullets, not looking at me.

“You’re seriously not fucking doing this,” I snapped at them. “You’ll put her in danger—”

“Where the fuck do you think she is?” Enzo snapped back, his dark eyes glinting. “Some mother fucker has her! Again! This isn’t a fucking cakewalk, and I don’t exactly want to go killing anyone else tonight, but I’ll fucking slit any fucker’s throat who gets too close to her, especially like this.”

“Same,” Cole grunted as he started working on another magazine. “You take care of E while we’re gone. I’ll get you to the hospital if you want to go—”

“You’re not doing this. You heard what Anson said. Tomorrow. Midnight.”

“I really fucking hope you fell and hit your head,” Enzo said, stuffing a gun into his jacket. “Because the Fox Evans I know would kill anyone who touched his girl. Who even *looked* at her.”

“And I’m still that guy, but not when she’s being held hostage and we don’t have any fucking idea on where!”

“There was a calling card tonight too. It was a king calling card. We’re in this shit deep. We can’t just sit back,” Enzo snapped.

My heart jumped into my chest as Cole gaped at him.

The buzzing of my phone in my pocket dragged me away from the conversation, and I pulled it out to see an unknown number on my screen.

“Hello?” I answered, my fear making me woozy.

“Foxy?” Rosie’s soft voice came over the line.

“Oh, god. Baby.” I breathed out. “Fuck, where are you? Are you OK?”

“I’m fine. Are the guys OK?” Worry filled her voice. Just hearing her calmed me substantially. I was ready to freak the fuck out.

“Everyone is fine. Where are you? We’ll come get you.” I glanced to Cole and Enzo who’d stopped what they were doing to watch. I put the phone on speaker so they could hear.

“I’m with Anson. I’m OK. I fell when-when the shooting happened.” She let out a soft sob. “I was so scared. People died.”

“Baby,” I whispered thickly, wishing I could hold her in my arms. I hated it when she cried. If I had my way, she’d never shed another tear again.

“Anson protected me. He shielded me with his body. I-I hurt my legs and arms, but he bandaged them. He-he was shot too.”

Cole lifted his brows, a satisfied smile on his face.

“Where are you, Sunshine?” Enzo asked.

“I-I’m with Anson.”

“Rosebud, I’m only going to ask you this once. Where *the fuck* is that?” Cole demanded, glaring at the phone.

She was quiet for a moment. “I’m safe. I-I need you guys to promise you won’t hurt him.”

“Won’t hurt him? Rosie, he fucking kidnapped you and is holding you away from us!” I shouted into the phone, the freaking out moment simmering just below the surface. I fucking hated Asshole Bare Dick, and this just made me hate him even more.

“He needs your help. Please. Whatever he asks, help him. He’s a good person.”

“The fuck he is,” Cole growled. “He’s fucking dead when we see him.”

“I won’t leave here until you hear him out,” she said, her voice wobbling. “I need you to do this. Please. For me. He saved me. Doesn’t that mean anything to you guys?”

“Saved you so you could be his victim,” Enzo said softly.

“It’s not like that. I know it’s insane, but I’m asking you to trust me. Do you trust me?”

We looked at one another. Cole scrubbed his hand down his face and groaned. Enzo sighed.

“We trust you,” I murmured. “It’s him we don’t trust.”

“I’m safe. I’ll be safe tonight,” she continued.

“Why can’t we just meet tonight?” I demanded. “Why the fuck does he need to keep you overnight?”

“Because he was shot!” she practically shouted back. “I-I know this doesn’t look good, but I swear to you I’m safe and

everything is fine. Now promise me. Please.”

“Fucking damnit, Rosie,” I growled, looking to Enzo and Cole. Enzo gave a curt nod that made Cole swear softly and glare.

“Fine. But fuck, if anything happens to you—” I said, my throat tight. “Baby, I’ll die.”

“I’ll be OK. I know I will. I-I trust him.”

I ground my teeth. That made one of us.

“Where’s Ethan?” she asked after a moment.

“We had to medicate him. He was losing it,” I said, sighing.

“I’d like to speak to him.”

I licked my lips and nodded even though she couldn’t see me and left the room so Cole and Enzo could bitch at one another.

“I really don’t like the idea of you staying with him,” I said as I walked back to the living room. I wanted to scream about how much I fucking hated it, but I held back, knowing it was only going to upset her. She was just too damn sweet and trusting.

“I know, but I’ll be fine. You know me, Foxy.”

I smiled sadly, her nickname making the butterflies unfurl in my guts. “I do, baby. But I don’t know him.”

“Then just trust me on this. And promise you guys will hear him out and not hurt him.”

“We’ll try. When it comes to you, we just lose our minds.”

“I know,” she murmured.

I stopped next to Ethan who was staring at the ceiling, his eyes glassy.

“E. Hey, man,” I called out.

His gaze slowly flicked to me.



“Someone wants to talk to you. Go on, baby. He’s listening.”

“Ethan?” Rosalie called out.

E blinked. “Sweetheart?”

“Hey. I’m OK,” she said thickly. “I miss you.”

“Oh, baby,” he blubbered. “I mis-miss y-you.”

“I’ll be home tomorrow. Get some sleep, OK? I worry about you.”

E’s eyes glistened. I knew he wasn’t one hundred in his head right then and was working hard to get his shit together so he could talk to her. The meds he was given would fuck him up for another couple of hours if we were lucky.

It would be a long night for all of us.

“Promise?” he asked, his voice trembling.

“I promise,” she answered. “Maybe you and me can watch a movie together in my room.”

“All of us,” he mumbled.

“All of us,” she repeated softly. “If that’s what you want.”

He settled back further into the cushions, a smile touching his lips. “Yes.”

“OK. I’ll see you tomorrow. I love you, Ethan.”

“I lo-love you t-too, sweetheart,” he murmured, his eyelids shuttering.

I watched him for a moment as he drifted off. He’d been so worried that even the meds weren’t a huge help this time around. He’d needed to hear her.

“I don’t like this,” I said, sinking onto a chair as E drifted off to sleep.

“I know. I feel safe. I’m not scared. I-I think he just needs the time to gather his thoughts before he meets with you guys.”

“He could just give you to us and we can meet him tomorrow,” I muttered.

“He needs me so you’ll listen.”

I nodded. *Of course he fucking did.* I was going to punch him in the fucking face when I saw him though, that much I knew. If we couldn’t kill him, we could at least kick his ass so he’d remember not to fucking mess with us or our girl.

“I love you. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I love you too, baby. So fucking much. Come back to me, OK?”

“I will. I always will. Good night, Foxy.”

The phone went silent, leaving me with nothing but my fury over Asshole Bare Dick.

I was definitely going to punch him in his fucking pretty face when I saw him tomorrow. But first, I needed to get this wound on my arm stitched up.

FOUR

# COLE

I hated to compromise, especially when it meant my Rosebud was stuck god knew where with some mother fucker who was keeping her from us.

She'd sworn she was fine. She'd sounded fine.

That piece of shit could shower her in rainbows and good fortune and I'd still want to kick his cock into his asshole.

I hated Anson Beyers. Loathed him. Wished him a lifetime of oozing ass herpes and dick crabs.

Fuck.

I exhaled, hoping to calm myself. I'd smoked some sugar earlier, but it had worn off. Sleep was evading me as I lay in bed. And now we had a kings' calling card to deal with? This shit couldn't be happening.

We'd agreed we'd discuss it all tomorrow. Tonight, we needed to rest and recharge.

I wasn't doing shit for resting as I stayed locked in my own head.

Sighing, I got up and went down the hall to Rosalie's room and stepped inside. The urge to be near her was overwhelming me, but she wasn't here. The next best thing was her bed.

I stopped when I got inside her room.

Fox was already in her bed, his laptop open as he typed furiously.

He glanced over at me. "Hey."

“Hey,” I said. “Sleepover?”

He pulled the covers back with one hand.

I moved forward and climbed into the massive family bed and lay beside him and stared at his screen.

“What are you working on?” I asked.

“A story,” he muttered.

“What’s it about?”

“It’s about a sea monster who can come on land to feed. It’s really dumb and not working.”

“Maybe you need to give him a big dick and have him fuck some hot chick in town.”

He snorted and rubbed his eyes. “Yeah. Might have to at this point.”

“Give him tentacle cocks. He can stuff more than one of her holes. Or he can stuff the same hole with all the tentacles.”

Fox raised a dark brow at me.

“What?” I asked, blinking at him. “I got the Kindle app. Chicks are into that weird shit. I figured I’d ask Rosebud about it.”

He sighed. “Do you remember the first time we met?”

“Aw, memory lane. You going to kiss me after and make love to me?” I needed the lighthearted conversation to stop myself from going crazy.

He wrinkled his nose. “Are you tripping on something again?”

“No. You just seemed like you were trying to coerce me into fucking.”

“For fuck’s sake, Cole,” he groaned. “For one thing, I would never. And for the second thing, if I *were* coercing you into fucking, I wouldn’t let you sit here and continue to talk shit.”

“Fair points,” I said, rolling onto my back. “I couldn’t sleep. I wanted to be close to Rosebud.”

“Same.” He sighed and closed his laptop. “I hate that he has her. That she’s so fooled by him.”

“We can’t kill him. Yet.” Enzo came into the room and climbed into bed beside me.

“Too bad. I was looking forward to it,” I muttered.

“We need to see what he’s about. I’ll give that much to Rosalie,” Enzo continued. “But if shit starts looking sour, we’ll take care of him.”

“She’ll hate us,” Fox said.

“We all make sacrifices,” I cut in. “But if it saves her from this shit, then I’m all in.”

Enzo sighed. “I’ve been thinking. Do you guys ever think this is just too much for her?”

“No,” I said sharply.

“I have,” Fox answered.

I looked over at him. “Shut the fuck up. Don’t get Enzo started.”

“I’m not trying to, but look, man. She’s taken. Again. We’re worried. *Again*. I don’t want to see her hurt. I don’t want to feel that pain ever again. And E?” Fox shook his head. “He couldn’t handle it if something happened to her. None of us could, but E would follow her after me.”

“Shut up,” I snapped. “Nothing is going to happen. We’ll keep her safe.”

“Cole, man, you need to think clearly on this—” Enzo started.

“Finish that fucking sentence De Luca, and I’ll suffocate you with my ass. No joke. I’m not listening to this shit tonight. Rosalie is our girl. She and I... we are going to have a baby someday. We talked about it. She said she wants to,” my voice shook. “I’m not letting her go. Get that out of your fucking heads. Both of you.”

Enzo sighed. “Fine. But if shit gets worse, we’re going to need to figure out a better way to keep her safe. There are hits

out on my father. You saw what happened tonight. We can't escape this shit. You know it. She's a blip on the radar now. It's going to get worse. I-I can't do that to her—"

"Shut the fuck up," I snarled. "Let me take care of this shit. I'll kill them all. You know I fucking will. I don't want to talk about it any more tonight. OK? I came in here to jerk off and you fucks are ruining it."

"For fuck's sake," Fox muttered. "Do you come in here and do that shit often?"

"Only when she's not here and I miss her, which is a lot these days," I shot back.

"Well, keep your cock in your pants," Enzo said. "I'm not interested in watching you choke your fucking goat."

"Why not? We've done it together before."

Fox looked over at us and raised his brows again.

"Don't ask," Enzo said, the mood lightening significantly.

"Really? You two jerked off together?" Fox let out a huff of laughter.

"He doesn't need to ask. I'll tell him," I said. "Rosalie was at Jamie's. We had a video chat when Jamie went to sleep. She watched us jerk off. It was fucking magic."

"Well, she's not here right now to watch, so keep your dick away from me," Fox said.

"You never complained before." I frowned at him.

"That's different," he argued.

"How?" Enzo went up on his elbow. "We've all had our dicks touching. We've all touched or kissed before when we're caught up with her."

Fox grunted. "I've never full on kissed you assholes."

I shrugged. "Doesn't matter. I'll lay one on you next time we're with her."

Fox rolled his eyes at me before turning off the bedside lamp and flopping back onto his pillows.

“Is E still on the couch?” he asked after a moment of silence.

“He’s out to the world,” Enzo murmured. “Which is good. The poor fucker needed the rest. With Macy gone, everything seems to be going to hell for him. He blames himself.”

“She’s OK,” I said. “She has to be. I won’t accept anything else.”

“Yeah. I hope so.” Enzo sighed. “I’m calling Drake tomorrow. I didn’t get to talk to him tonight because the shooting started. I’ll see what he knows. I should have called him first, but it honestly slipped my mind.”

“Well, don’t let it tomorrow,” Fox said.

“I won’t.” Enzo yawned. “We owe him a thank you.”

I grunted my agreement.

“So. Heisman, eh, big guy?” I asked after a moment of silence. “That’s a big deal as a freshman.”

“Yeah. My dad is going nuts waiting for the announcement. I-I think I’ll get it. It’s insane. I never thought this would happen for me.” Fox stared up at the ceiling.

“I’m proud of you.” Enzo reached over me and squeezed Fox’s hand. “I really am.”

“Thanks.” A tiny smile tilted Fox’s lips up.

“Your mom would be too,” Enzo finished.

Fox blinked rapidly before he wiped his eyes. He didn’t say anything as he lay there.

It was too sentimental. I needed to get out of my head.

“So, we jerking off or what?” I asked.

Fox and Enzo smacked me at the same time with their pillows.

“Foreplay. Fucking perfect,” I said, grabbing my cock as they groaned and cursed at me.



FIVE

# ETHAN

**M**y head felt like metal pipes had been fucking in it all night. Even my ears hurt. I groaned as I rolled off the couch, my entire body feeling like I'd gone ten rounds in a boxing ring... and lost. My arm was bandaged and hurt like a bitch.

I stumbled to my feet, my heart in my throat. I could have sworn I'd talked to Rosalie last night, but my mind was fucking blitzed after the guys had drugged my ass.

I hated it when I lost it like that.

They'd needed me, and I was too fucking weak to be there for them.

For Rosalie.

I climbed the stairs, stumbling every few steps until I made it to the top. I went directly to Rosalie's room, intuition guiding me.

With my hand on the doorknob, I pushed the door open and went into the room to find the guys sleeping in her bed.

My footsteps were soft as I moved across the hardwood floor and stopped at the edge of the bed and looked down at my best friends. In sleep, they looked more relaxed than I'd seen them in weeks. That brought comfort to me because maybe I hadn't dreamed my Rosalie conversation last night.

Sighing, I pulled the covers back and crawled into bed beside Enzo. His lashes fluttered for a moment as I got

comfortable. They opened a moment later, his dark eyes peering out at me as I faced him.

“Hey,” he mumbled. “You OK?”

“Not really,” I said. “Did I dream that Rosalie called?”

“No. She called. She was OK. She sounded fine. Wants us to hear Anson out.”

I breathed out a soft sigh of relief. “We should.”

Enzo grunted. “We will, but only because she asked us.”

“Good.” I closed my eyes for a moment before opening them to find Enzo still staring at me.

“Talk to me,” he said softly. “What’s wrong, E?”

I licked my lips, hating how intuitive he was becoming. It seemed the longer we all lived together, the worse he got. Or maybe it was better. Enzo picked up on everyone’s thoughts and emotions easily. It was almost scary how good at it he was.

“I was worthless to you guys last night. Completely lost my shit and was a hindrance, not a help. I’m fucking sorry.”

“Oh, E.” Enzo sighed and reached out. He cupped my cheek as he stared at me. “You’re not any of those things. It was a fucked up night.”

“And you guys held it together while I lost it. I can’t be doing that shit to you guys when you need me. I was just so worried about her. She’s everything to me. If I lost her...”

“I know,” Enzo whispered. “I’d fucking die too, E. Can I tell you something?”

He released my face as he stared back at me.

I nodded.

“I-I want to marry her.” His voice shook with his words. “Have an heir. A son. I’d like if I could have the first baby with her.”

I blinked at him, stunned by his words. While I knew someday the guys would all want kids, I didn’t think I’d have

a moment with Enzo saying it to me. And marriage? I knew only one of us would get that honor. I always assumed it would be Fox if anyone were so lucky. But we'd agreed a long time ago that none of it was an option. If we all couldn't have her, none of us would.

"I'm scared too," he continued softly. "This life isn't good for her, but it's my life. *Our* life, now. The guys won't listen to me, but maybe you will."

"What are you thinking?" I asked, worry threading through my heart.

He licked his lips. "Maybe sending her away for a while. For her own good. Until all this shit blows over. Or..."

"No *or*," I choked out, my voice trembling. "Don't say *or*."

His Adam's apple bobbed. "Right. No *or*. I just want her to be safe. We've been through hell already. I'm not so eager to revisit it."

"Me either."

He sighed and closed his eyes.

"But can we wait to make sure? Like, I don't want to send her away right now. Even if it is for a few weeks. Let's just try to sort through this mess. I don't want to act fast and regret it," I said, my heart aching at the thought of her being gone, even for a small amount of time.

"For a bit," Enzo agreed. "We can wait. But if things get really bad..."

"I know," I said, nausea twisting through my guts.

"It's going to get hard. You know that, right?"

I swallowed and stared back at him. I knew it was going to get downright awful if life kept pushing us in the direction we were headed. It terrified me. Enzo would never give up Rosalie, but the way he was talking put fear in my heart. I wanted her safety too, but I was selfish and also just wanted *her*. With me. With us. He didn't say it, but I knew he was thinking it because I'd thought about it before too.

*She'd be better off without us.*

I couldn't let her go though. I knew I wouldn't be able to. Losing her would kill me.

"It'll be OK," I whispered, an attempt to convince myself because it definitely was not OK right now.

And that was terrifying.





“A KING CALLING CARD?” Cole tugged at his blond hair as we sat in Enzo’s office later that day. “What the fuck are we going to do? We needed them on our side, not as our enemy.”

“We need to call Drake,” Fox said. “He’s a lord. He’s got to have some kind of information, Plus, we need to discuss Macy with him.”

*Macy.*

*Fuck.*

In this entire mess, I’d forgotten about her. She and I had become close. Too close some might say, but I didn’t have feelings for her like that. We could just relate to one another. She mattered to me as a friend. Now that she was missing after she’d kissed me, I felt immense guilt and worry. We just needed to make sure she was OK.

In this world, nothing was ever OK.

I shoved that thought out of my head because my sweetheart was gone now too. I needed her to be OK. I was clawing at my skin to get to midnight so I could see her again and hold her. Tell her how much I missed and loved her.

Enzo pulled his phone out and dialed a number. He put it on speakerphone as it rang. Several rings in, Drake’s deep voice came over the line.

*“Zdravstvuyte.”*

Enzo glanced up at us.

“It’s Enzo,” he said. “We need to talk.”

“I haven’t heard from Macy,” he said, his voice going from strong to wavering. “Nothing. If I do, you’ll know first.”

“That’s not the main reason I called.”

“The shooting.” Drake sighed. “Listen, I wanted to call you last night after shit went down, but I was about asshole deep in a hundred Italians, so it wasn’t feasible. I only just woke up after the shit I was in last night.”

“What shit?” Cole called out.

“What shit? Fuck. The shit where Dominic De Santis had a wedding reception to celebrate his marriage to a pretty little thing named Bianca Walker. The same reception that fucking Hail Ivanov decided we needed to crash with weapons blazing. The same fucking reception where I nearly got my dick shot off trying to play pretend.”

“Wait. De Santis was at his own reception last night?” Enzo’s eyes widened.

“Yeah. He got married.”

I swore softly.

“The shooting at the club last night,” Fox said. “What do you know about it?”

“I know that I didn’t fucking do it,” Drake shot back. “I already told you where I was. The plan was Hail’s. Hail had Trent head it up. I went to the De Santis mansion and nearly died. In fact, I caught a nasty graze to my thigh and my arm.”

Enzo blew out a breath. “There was a calling card at the shooting. A king calling card.”

Drake was quiet. “Not possible. Dominic was at his reception. His men were too. Levin Seeley and Vincent Valentino. I haven’t seen Hail today, so if shit has changed, I don’t have that information just yet.”

“We need to get to the bottom of this,” Enzo growled.

“I’m on it,” Drake answered. “Just so you know, Dominic isn’t the type of guy to send others to do his business. He’ll fuck you up himself. I’ll figure out what’s going on. The card is a king card, but I very much doubt Dominic or his men left it. I’ll be in touch.”

“Don’t take too long,” Enzo said.

“Talk soon.” Drake disconnected, leaving us in silence.

“This is so fucked,” Fox snarled. “This was supposed to be a new start for us. It’s the same old shit with new players. Enzo, man—”



“We’ll get it sorted,” Enzo murmured, glancing over at Fox. “I promise.”

“I’m not willing to lose the best thing that’s ever happened to me,” Fox continued.

Enzo cast a quick glance at me, and I looked to my hands, knowing exactly what he was thinking.

She wasn’t safe with us. Probably never would be.

“We’ll figure it out,” Cole whispered. “We will. Once we’re top of the food chain, it won’t matter. Keep the faith. We just gotta keep the faith.”

I sighed.

Keeping the faith might get one of us killed.

SIX

## ROSALIE

Anson's sweatpants were too big on me, so I used a rubber band I found in one of his drawers to tie the material that way they didn't fall off me. I'd showered and put on one of his Mayfair hoodies and slipped my feet back into my high-heel boots.

"You OK?" Anson asked, frowning down at my feet as I winced.

It was just after eleven at night and I'd be reunited with my horsemen soon. And hopefully Anson wouldn't be dead.

"Not really," I muttered. I'd spoken to Fox earlier in the day to let him know I was still OK. I'd asked him to bring me shoes. He'd promised he would.

"Let me see if I have something." Anson limped to his bedroom, and I heard him rustling around in his closet.

I'd slept in his bed last night and he'd taken the couch since his guest bedroom was filled with music stuff. For a college student who didn't seem to really work, he had nice things. His bed was just as comfortable as mine was. His sheets smelled fresh and clean and everything was spotless with state-of-the-art appliances and random odds and ends.

I'd wanted to ask him about where he got all his money but opted to just hold my tongue. Although, now I was really hoping he had women's shoes.

My leg was killing me. I sat on the couch, waiting for him to return, my heart in my throat. I knew the guys weren't

going to let this go with him. I just hoped he had a plan to keep himself alive.

We hadn't spoken about what he needed from them. I didn't want to push it. I figured he'd tell me when he was ready. I was too exhausted to really be of use to anyone. Even now after trying to sleep I was still a mess. We'd worked on writing some music earlier to keep our minds clear before I'd taken a shower and another nap while he cooked dinner.

I couldn't wait to get back to my guys though.

Anson came out from the hall and smiled at me, dark circles rimming his blue eyes.

"I found these," he said, handing me a pair of flip flops. "They're my brother's from a few years ago, but I know mine would be too big. At least these might almost work."

I made to bend down to slip my boots off, but he was quick to go to his knees with a wince and take my boots off for me.

"I could have," I said softly.

"And so could I," was his answer.

"Anson, I'm concerned about you."

"If they kill me then they kill me," he said with a shrug as he held his hand out to me. "Just tell my brother to finish what we started."

I hated how nonchalant he was about his life.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on? Like what your plan is?"

He sighed. "I just need their help. It's nothing bad, LeeLee. I promise you that. If they tell me no then I'll just keep pushing it the way I have been."

I slipped my hand in his and let him help me up. A gasp left my lips at the shooting pain in my leg.

"What can I do?" he asked, frowning down at me as I pulled my hand away from his.

“Nothing. I just need to rest it. It’ll be fine in a few days. I’m more worried about your leg than mine.”

I followed him to his door and stepped into the hall when he opened it. He locked the door and led me to the elevator.

“Don’t worry about me. This isn’t the first time I’ve been shot.”

We stepped into the elevator and he hit the button for the lobby.

“How many times have you been shot?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. Six? Seven?”

I gaped at him, and he offered me a sheepish smile.

“Street life isn’t always kind.”

The elevator dinged, and we walked outside to his blacked-out Challenger. He held the door open for me and made sure I was inside before he went to the driver’s side and got in.

He started the car and it thundered beneath us.

“Is this a fast car?” I asked nervously as I put my seatbelt on.

“It’s pretty fast. It’s a Hellcat Redeye.” He shifted into reverse and we zipped out of the parking lot.

“It’s nice,” I murmured, my anxiety kicking in. I suppose it was good it was fast in case he had to get away in a hurry. Knowing my guys, he would.

*Hope it’s faster than Cole’s bullet.*

We rode in silence, me fidgeting with the hem of the oversized hoodie.

“Relax,” Anson murmured, resting his hand over mine. “It’s going to be OK, LeeLee.”

“You don’t know them like I do,” I said. “They’re... unpredictable.”

“So am I.” He removed his hand from mine and gave me a smile that sent worry into my chest.

“Don’t hurt them.” I looked at him, my heart in my throat.

He did a double take at me. “I’d never hurt them unless they came at me first. I know you love them. I wouldn’t take something you love from you, songbird.”

I breathed out and nodded.

God, I hoped he was telling me the truth.

I sent up an extra prayer.

Just in case.

SEVEN

# FOX

I paced back and forth as Cole examined his gun and Enzo twirled his knife between his fingers. He'd been too quiet lately. I knew this shit was bothering him, but he wasn't the only one. I hadn't wanted this to happen. What I wanted was to give Rosie a better life. A happy life. I wanted to play football and have a career doing what I loved while she sang. We'd have a house, a fence, that damn little dog she wanted, and a couple babies toddling around.

Not this shit.

Not me with my guts twisted, a gunshot graze to my throwing arm, and the fear that we were being played and she'd end up hurt because of it.

Or the fact we seemed to have a hit out on us or some shit. I wasn't exactly experienced in Enzo's world, but I assumed when someone comes in and shoots up a club because you're there, that meant something.

"He's late," Cole snarled, racking his gun and shoving it into his leather jacket.

"No, he's here," E said, turning to look as a black Challenger rolled up. The engine cut out and Anson got out of the driver's side, but no Rosalie. The damn windows were so tinted I couldn't see her inside.

Asshole Bare Dick walked confidently to the front of the car. Cole must have had the same thought I did because he stormed forward with me. He pulled his gun out and pushed



the barrel into Anson's forehead before I could plant my fist in the center of his pretty face.

"Easy there, cowboy," Anson murmured. "She's in the car."

I made to move to go her, but I paused when I saw Anson had a gun drawn and pointed beneath Cole's jaw.

"Drop the fucking gun," Enzo snapped, pulling out his gun and taking aim. "I'll put a bullet between your eyes and piss on your bleeding corpse."

Fuck this.

I made to go get Rosie out of the car, but the click of Anson's gun had me stopping in my tracks.

"We talk first. Then we make the exchange," Anson said. "She's locked safely inside. She can't get out even if you wanted her to. I have a locking system on that car that only I can undo. These streets take a certain amount of cunning to survive. And not get robbed blind."

I swallowed and looked to the car.

*This asshole...*

"Let's just put the guns away," E said. "We can talk with no weapons."

"Tell him to put his away first," Cole snarled.

"Not going to happen, Prince Charming," Anson snarled back.

Enzo stuffed his gun back into his jacket. "Cole. Come on. I want Rosalie back sooner rather than later."

Cole glared at Anson for another moment before he withdrew and put his gun away. Anson followed.

I breathed out a sigh of relief. My gun pressed to my waist beneath my jacket. I was sure Anson was aware we were all armed. He'd be stupid not to think that.

This wasn't a meeting where he was safe, that was for sure.

It was taking everything I had not to kill him for taking her from us. The beast I kept inside was clawing to get out and rip his spine from his body just to prove a point.

*You don't fucking touch my Rosie.*

“Say what you want so we can take Rosalie home,” Enzo said, glaring at Anson.

“I want your help.”

“Fuck you,” Cole growled. “The only help you’ll get from me is kicking your piece of shit ass into a shallow grave. And that’s only if I’m feeling nice.”

“I saved Rosalie,” he continued, his voice strong. “When you couldn’t, I did.”

“You only saved her because you got lucky,” I said in disgust. “It had nothing to do with skill.”

“You can believe what you want, Fox, but I have connections in this world. Ones that did, in fact, save her life. So you can thank me and hear me out, or I leave and take her with me.”

Cole and I took dangerous steps forward before E moved to get in front of us, blocking Anson from any onslaught.

“I want to know what he wants. He’s right. We may not agree on the how, but the fact of the matter is, he did save her. Let him speak,” E said, his voice shaking. “Please. I want to see her. I want to go home.”

I swallowed down my anger and nodded. “Fine.”

“Talk,” Enzo said as Cole continued to glare.

E stepped aside for him.

“I’m looking for the man responsible for my mother and baby sister’s deaths. They nearly killed my brother too. Left him for dead. I managed to save him, but I couldn’t save them.” His jaw quivered. “All I want is to find and kill them. I need your help. I’ve hit a dead end. In exchange for your help, I want to be the one who protects Rosalie.”

No one said a word as we stared him down.

*He couldn't be serious...*

“You want to protect Rosalie?” Enzo finally asked, his brows crinkled. “*We* protect Rosalie.”

“I’m not trying to be a dick here, but you know what music means to her. And I know the sort of shit you’re getting into. In exchange for helping me, I’ll keep her busy. I’ll push her to her dreams. I’ll fucking save her and die for her. She will be safe when she’s with me. She’ll get her dreams and the safety you want for her. I’ll get the answers I need. When it’s over, I’ll walk if it’s what you want. But please. Help me.” His voice quaked as he looked at us each in turn. “I know music and I know how to protect. Let me help you. Let me keep her safe while you... *work*.”

I looked over at Enzo who was frowning. He seemed genuine, but that didn’t change the fact I hated him and didn’t trust his ass.

“And all you want is our help?” Enzo asked.

Anson nodded. “That’s it. I need this. My brother needs this. I stay here because I refuse to leave until I kill the fucker who took my family from me. You have to know what that’s like. To want to punish those who have hurt you and your family.”

Cole visibly swallowed as E looked at the ground.

“I can even pay,” Anson continued. “Name your price.”

Enzo looked at each of us in turn. I knew what he was thinking. He wanted to say yes. He wanted Rosalie out of our hair and safe and distracted so we could work and get shit done for his father.

I fucking hated it too. I hated it with everything I was.

But I also knew Anson had protected her. I didn’t like him, but I knew he would probably be the best we could get. And he could really help her with her music, as much as I hated to admit that.

But fuck.

He’d be with her.

I already knew she was feeling a certain way.

I winced.

*What if we lost her to him?*

It's Rosalie, though.

*She loves me. She loves us. She'd never betray us like that.*

Fuck, I loved her. So goddamn much it burned my soul. I wanted her happiness more than I wanted anything else in this entire world. I owed it to her.

*Trusting this prick though...*

The argument went back and forth in my head before it settled on her happiness and the fact the dick brought her back to us and had saved her last night.

“OK,” I said softly.

Enzo nodded.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Cole demanded, shooting us each a glare as his voice rose. “No. No, *fuck him*. Fuck his bleeding goddamn heart. My answer is no.”

Enzo sighed and scrubbed his hand down his face before he looked to Ethan.

“E?” he asked.

E glanced nervously around at us before he nodded wordlessly.

“Fuck! Fuck you all!” Cole shouted. “Fucking prick asshole!”

“Stop,” Enzo snapped.

“No, you stop! What the fuck is the matter with you? You don't think I don't know what's going on in that fucking head of yours? I *fucking know*, Enzo! I know what you're doing!” Cole rounded on Enzo.

“I'm trying to save her,” Enzo said softly. “The other alternative you didn't like. Remember?”

My heart ached at Enzo's words.

He wanted us to let her go.

To save her, to give her everything she'd dreamed of, he wanted us to let her be free.

Cole glared at him and shook his head before he stormed off, leaving us with Anson.

"Come to the house tomorrow," Enzo said, frowning in the direction Cole had left. He looked back at Anson. "We'll meet. We'll set some ground rules. We'll discuss things further. If it seems too hard and too much for us, we'll let you go. No harm. No foul. You can lay it all out for us. We'll make a final decision then."

"I'm agreeable," Anson said.

I ground my teeth, hating it had come to this.

"Now, we'd like our girl back if you don't mind," Enzo said evenly.

"Of course. Allow me just a moment with her to let her know everything is OK. She was worried."

"Quickly," I said, desperate to get to her. Why I was entertaining his request at all was beyond me. Maybe I was looking for a reason to trust him.

Anson nodded at me and backed away and went to his car where he unlocked the door and slid behind the wheel. Even illuminated it was hard to make Rosie out, but she was in there. I could see her silhouette move.

We said nothing as we waited for a moment.

Her door finally opened and she stepped out. Anson remained inside the car.

I rushed to her and scooped her into my arms and tugged her face to mine before kissing her deeply.

She fell into the kiss, all Rosie, her arms encircling me.

"Are you OK?" I murmured against her soft lips.

"Yeah," she answered breathlessly. "Are you?"

“I am now.” I kissed her again as Anson’s car roared to life.

I pulled her away from it. He backed out without another word before he sped off into the night.

E wasted no time going to Rosie and hauling her into his arms and clinging to her, his soft sobs echoing in the night.

Enzo watched them for a moment, his body tense, before he turned to me.

“It’s for the best,” he murmured before walking away without a word to her.

I think that was probably the hardest thing of the night to see because I knew.

*I fucking knew...*

EIGHT

# COLE

I refused to let Rosalie go as we drove home in silence. Enzo knew I was pissed. They all did. I don't know what fucking game they were all playing, but I wanted no part in it.

"I love you," I murmured to Rosalie as I kissed her knuckles.

"I love you too," she said, snuggling against me in the back of the Escalade. At least the time away from me had lessened her anger. I figured she'd still be pissed about me fighting with Anson at the club. If she wasn't going to mention it, then neither was I.

I caught Enzo's eye in the rearview mirror and scowled at him. He held my gaze for a moment before he and Fox continued their conversation about Anson.

E seemed torn. He kept trying to keep up with Fox and Enzo, but he also kept casting longing looks at Rosalie.

He'd taken their side. He was supposed to be on my side with this, but he'd bailed on me. If there was one person I thought I could count on with this, it had been E.

Not now though. I was a fucking island here.

"He didn't hurt you, did he?" I asked softly.

"No."

"He didn't... touch you, right?"

*Say he did and he's dead, baby.*



“It was nothing like that,” she murmured. “He fixed my cuts and stuff. Made sure I ate. We worked on writing some music. I took a shower and slept. Now I’m here with you.”

“Good,” I said thickly. “I was worried.”

“I said not to.” She kissed my lips lightly before nuzzling into my neck. “Cole?”

“Yes?”

“Is Enzo mad at me?”

I hesitated. Enzo was a lot of things, but mad at her wasn’t one of them.

“No, baby. He’s just... Enzo.”

“He’s been weird lately.”

“He has a lot on his mind.”

She didn’t say anything else, but I knew she was worried. If there was one thing about Rosalie, it was that she wore her heart on her sleeve. She’d never been good at hiding her emotions from us. Even when we broke apart in high school I’d been able to read her. Enzo was better at it than I was, and Fox was a god at it, but he didn’t count because his ass knew her longer. And E was so wrapped up in his own shit lately he was oblivious to a lot of things.

“When we get home, I’m giving you a bubble bath,” I said into her ear. “I’m going to make you forget about all this shit.”

“What about the guys?”

“Fuck them. They pissed me off tonight. You’re mine. Alone.”

“What if—”

“*Mine*, Rosebud.” I bit her bottom lip. “You don’t tell me no, baby.”

She shivered against me before her hand trailed to my groin where she rubbed me over my jeans.

“Fucking bad girl,” I growled in her ear.

She gave my junk a gentle squeeze as her lips trailed along my jaw.

I was going to fuck her until she couldn't walk. She could bank on that.

By the time we reached the house and managed through the fucking security, I was ready to come in my boxers. The moment we pulled into the garage, I had her out of the car and was dragging her inside. I wanted her out of that prick's clothes and into mine.

"Where are you going?" E called out.

"Somewhere you're fucking not!" I shouted back before slamming the entry door from the garage into the house closed.

"You're not being very nice," Rosalie said as I hefted her over my shoulder and practically ran up the stairs with her.

"They weren't very nice," I huffed as we went into her room. I took her directly to her bed and deposited her there before going into the bathroom and starting a hot bath for her. She didn't even smell like my Rosebud. She smelled like that asshole.

I'd remedy that real fucking fast.

I let the bubbles and hot water fill the tub as I gathered fluffy towels, her favorite candles, and a bottle of wine from the small fridge that was in there. I'd had the fridge installed when we'd moved in just so I could keep wine on hand for times like these.

Once I had that taken care of, I went to her bedroom to find her waiting on the bed for me, her big green eyes drinking me in.

I went to her and planted a kiss on her lips before I gathered my favorite black silk nightie of hers and took it to the bathroom. I returned and held my hand out to her.

She took it, a tired smile on her face, and I led her to the tub where I slowly stripped her down until she was bare,

telling myself I was going to burn Anson's fucking clothes and attempt to cast some dick-eating voodoo on that shit.

The thought brought me great satisfaction as I removed my clothes.

But not as much as her naked body pressed against mine did.

"Come on, Rosebud," I murmured. "Let me take care of you tonight."

With a sweet smile, she let me help her into the tub. I settled back with her between my legs and held her against me.

There was no fucking way in this world I was ever letting her go.

Fucking. Ever.

NINE

# ROSALIE

Cole kissed along my shoulders, both of us having had too much wine. The last twenty-fours had been difficult. I'd seen so many people hurt because of this world we were in. It was hard to think of anything else. It was all over the news. They kept saying masked gunmen and it was gang violence. No arrests were made.

I hated it. I hated it so fucking much.

Cole's soft lips pressed against the pulse point in my neck.

"Let me make it better," he murmured, his lips trailing along my neck when I told him how scared I was.

"Please," I whispered as his hands moved up to cradle my breasts. I let out a contented sigh as he massaged me gently.

His hand slid slowly down my body until he ran his fingers along my pussy, making me whimper softly at his teasing touch while he continued to kiss and suck against my neck.

Slowly, he slid his fingers between my folds and rubbed my clit.

My chest heaved as he nipped my shoulder. I bucked lightly against his fingers, desperate for more of his touch. The warm bath water sloshed gently against the edge the tub.

"I want to take you away," he murmured. "Me and you. We can spend an entire weekend with me buried inside you. No worries. Nothing. Just us. Would you like that?"

"Y-yes," I rasped as I dug my fingernails into his knees, my body trembling from his teasing.

“Maybe we can have a second chance? At our baby?” His fingers slowed their work as he waited for me to answer him.

“Cole—”

“I know,” he murmured, his lips back on my neck and his fingers moving again. “I’m sorry.”

I swallowed thickly as he pushed a digit into my heat. I let my head fall back against his shoulder.

“You like that, Rosebud? When I touch you like this?”

“I do,” I answered, the heat growing between my legs as he continued to slide his finger in and out of me, his thumb taking care of my clit. I gripped at his thighs again.

“Yeah, baby? Come for me. Show me how much you like me touching you.”

His words were my undoing. I came with a soft moan, my body shuddering as I rode out the waves he sent through me.

He let out a grunt of approval, his dick painfully hard against my back as I came down from my delicious high.

I wanted him to feel good. Guilt rushed through me at holding him off on a baby. I turned and went to my knees and faced him, taking in the way his blue eyes raked over my wet, naked body. His hands moved to hold me at my waist as he stared up at me.

Wordlessly, I straddled him and sank onto his cock. He groaned softly beneath me as I seated myself on him, fully impaled by his thickness.

Pressing my lips against his, I raked my fingers through his blond hair, earning that growl from him I loved so much. He thrust up into my heat, hitting that place that made my toes curl.

Water sloshed over the edge of the tub as I rode him, splashing onto the tiles.

“Fuck, baby,” he choked out as I picked up my pace. “That’s it. Just like that. Fuck, yeah. God, you feel so good.”

“Do you want more?” I breathed out between our frantic kisses. “I’ll do anything you want.”

He answered by lifting me completely up, his dick still buried inside me. Once on his feet, he took us, all wet, to the bedroom where we fell onto the bed. It was a miracle we hadn’t fallen getting out of the tub, but I saw the look in his eyes. He was a man on a mission.

Roughly, he put me on my side and placed my leg over his shoulder and drilled into me, making me call out his name and grip the sheets. He’d never taken me like that before, and I’d be lying if I said it wasn’t perfect.

“Oh fuck,” he groaned, slamming into me. “Tell me you love me, Rosalie.”

“I—oh god—I l-love you.”

“Tell me you’ll have my babies.”

“I’ll h-have your bab-babies.”

He thrust into me harder and faster. I clutched onto anything I could grab as he ravaged my body. I cried out in protest when he pulled out of me, but he was quick to remedy that by turning me onto my stomach and grabbing me at the waist to haul me to my hands and knees before crashing back into my heat.

I buried my face into the pillow and screamed as I came, my release dampening my thighs and the sheets further.

He slapped my ass. “Good fucking girl, Rosebud. Now do it again.”

I gripped the sheets tighter, knowing he was going to make it happen.

He moved like lightening in and out of me, each thrust deeper than the last until I was weeping as I came once more, my body trembling violently from the delicious torment he was putting me through.

“Fuck, your pussy is so good, baby. Oh god,” he groaned breathlessly, his grip on my hips painfully tight. His pace increased, and he lifted me off the bed. With my back pressed

to his chest, he gripped my breast with one hand and worked my clit over with the other all while his cock was buried inside me.

“You going to come for me, pretty girl?”

I cried out as goosebumps popped along my skin.

“Tell me you belong to me,” he commanded, his hold on my body tightening. “Tell me you’ll love me forever. That no matter what, you’ll always be mine.” His voice cracked as he fucked me harder.

I had no idea where his emotions were coming from, but I had reason to believe it was from his worry over the past twenty-four hours.

“I belong to you,” I rasped. “I-I’ll love you forever and always be yours.”

He thrust up into me, and I came with a loud cry.

“Cole! Cole! Oh my god!” I shook in his hold, my body turning to Jell-O, all sense flying out of my brain.

With a roar, he came inside me, filling me until I had no more room for it and it dripped down my thighs. He held me against his body as he shook. It took me a moment to realize he was crying.

“Cole?” I called out, worry rushing through me. “What’s wrong?”

“I love you,” he whispered. “I love you so much, Rosebud.”

“I love you too. Talk to me. What’s going on?”

He sniffled and took my chin in his hand and turned my head. Gently, he brushed his lips against mine, the saltiness from his tears making my chest clench.

“I’ll clean you. Lie down,” he said softly, not answering my question.

He released me, and I lay on the bed on my back, staring up at him. He stared back at me for a moment, tears still on his cheeks before he wordlessly got out of bed and went back to



the bathroom. When he returned, he cleaned me with a warm washcloth before he climbed into bed beside me and dragged me into his arms.

We laid like that for a long time before I whispered, “Cole? Do you want to talk?”

“No. I just want to love you, Rosebud.” He gave me a squeeze. “Let’s sleep, baby.”

I said nothing, the worry growing. This wasn’t like Cole.

Not like him at all.

But when he shut down, that was it, so I’d just try to talk to him tomorrow.

I closed my eyes and tried to push all my anxiety out of my head and focus on the moment in his arms. We were here.

*For now.*

And I think that’s what scared me the most.

TEN

# ENZO

I couldn't sleep.

I'd listened to Cole fuck Rosalie from down the hall, knowing damn well Fox and E could hear them.

Judging by what I'd heard, he'd given it to her good. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little jealous as I lay in bed wishing I was with them.

Cole was pissed at me though. At all of us. Any other time I'd have barged in and put my dick inside her too, but I knew that was off the table right then.

Sighing, I got up and went to my office where I fired up my laptop at my desk and stared at the screen. I had so many damn thoughts in my head. We'd nearly lost Rosalie. We had to meet with Anson. My father was in danger. So was my mother. I had to make a call to Vander Veer for weapons. This world was pure fucking shit, and I was leading the gang into places we should be staying away from.

I was so worried about how it would play out. How I felt out of control and was losing what mattered most to me. The fact I was even entertaining the idea of letting Rosalie go made me sick. Losing her would devastate me. It would rip us apart. It would hurt her, and fuck, I didn't want to hurt her.

I'd never loved anyone in my life the way I loved her.

Time ticked by as I sat there, trying to find information on the kings. I looked at their social media sites. There wasn't much. Dominic didn't post often and neither did his friend Levin Seeley. Vincent Valentino had more on his Instagram.

Most of it was just pictures of random things and some sentimental caption. The guy was poetic, I'd give him that. I paused on the photo of a beautiful blonde sitting on Dominic's lap. Vincent was clearly the photographer here, but it was plain to see that Levin, who was next to Dominic and the blonde, had eyes only for her.

*She was their girl.*

A beautiful girl.

I moved to the next photo to see her in a pretty white dress in the back of a limo, Dominic beside her, a small smile on his face as he held her hand.

I read the caption.

Baby B and Dom. And a wedding date. Posted just hours ago.

*Baby B.*

I continued searching for any clues on who she was for what felt like hours. I didn't know why I'd suddenly become obsessed with finding out everything about her, but I had.

She was the key to getting them on our side. To seeing if they were strong enough.

It was a fucking gamble that could get someone killed, but it was a bet I was willing to place if it meant we'd have more security in this world with an alliance.

"Enzo?" Rosalie's soft voice met my ears.

I snapped my head up and saw her standing a few feet from me in a tiny black silk nightie I knew Cole adored. I'd been so absorbed in what I was doing that I hadn't heard her come in. I closed my laptop and stared at her.

She approached me slowly. My cock ached in my pants.

*Fuck, she's so perfect and beautiful.*

And sexy. Fuck was she sexy.

"Hey," I said softly when she reached me.

She pushed her fingers through my hair. I closed my eyes, relishing in her soft touch.

“I missed you,” she said, going to her knees in front of me.

I reached out and cradled her delicate face, drinking in her beauty.

“I missed you,” I answered.

“Are you OK? Cole doesn’t seem OK.”

I studied her for a moment before I finally spoke. “No, Sunshine. I’m really not.”

Her green eyes wavered for a moment. “Will you talk to me?”

“No,” I said, drawing her closer to kiss her. “It’s not something you need to concern yourself with.”

Her lips met mine, and the heat and desire rushed through me until it ignited everything I was.

“Enzo, please—“

“Shh,” I said against her soft lips.

She went silent as I kissed her deeper and dragged her closer to me. Her fingers landed on my bare chest, her nails gently raking against my skin.

*Hell, I loved her touch.*

Gently, I lifted her to her feet and sat her on my desk. She stared up at me curiously.

I put my hand to the center of her chest and pushed her onto her back, after sliding my laptop over, and spread her legs apart.

She wasn’t wearing panties.

“You’re wet for me,” I murmured.

“Yes,” she answered in that sweet voice of hers.

Fuck, all I wanted to do was bury myself inside her and get lost in all that was the love of my life.

My hands shook as I sat in my chair and ran my fingers along her thigh.

So many worries and thoughts raced through my head.

Only one stuck.

I was going to lose her.

We all were.

“Enzo?” she called out.

I closed my eyes for a moment and shoved it all away. All my worries. Everything. I leaned in and ran my tongue up her heat, earning a soft moan from her.

Fuck it.

I’d worry tomorrow.

I dove in and ate her pussy like it was my last meal, my hands gripping her thighs as I feasted.

She trembled beneath me, her fingers in my hair as I sucked and licked her clit until she came on my waiting tongue, my name on her lips.

I licked her clean and got to my feet. I didn’t hesitate. I didn’t overthink. I simply pushed my pants down and shoved into her heat as her chest heaved.

I fucked her with my eyes locked on her face. Her body jostled beneath mine, her eyes closed and a completely blissed out expression blanketed her.

*I love you. Fuck, I love you, Sunshine.*

*I’m sorry.*

I leaned over her body and kissed her. She fell into the kiss immediately, her lips parting so that I could taste her.

*Oh, my sweet Rosalie.*

Amid our soft gasps and moans, she tightened on my cock, urging me to come inside her. I did so with a soft grunt of pleasure, the heat washing through my body as I unloaded in her pussy.

I rested my forehead against hers, our bodies connected.

“I love you, Enzo,” she said softly, her voice shaking.

I squeezed my eyelids closed and breathed out. “I love you too, Sunshine.”

I placed a kiss on her lips and pulled out of her body.

The wild thought of marriage and children raced through my head as I took in the mess I’d made and tucked my dick away. Quickly, I shoved the thoughts away.

*No, Enzo. Fuck no. Don’t do that to her. She deserves more than this life. You already agreed to no marriage with the guys.*

“Enzo?” She reached for me.

I took her hand and twined my fingers through hers.

“Please talk to me.”

I pulled her to sit up and cradled her face. My heart fucking hurt. It ached. It made me feel like I was choking on this bullshit. This life I hadn’t wanted in the first place but was born into.

“It’s just been a really bad few days,” I said gently. “I’m trying to work through it.”

“You don’t have to,” she said, her warm hands on my chest. “You know that right? We don’t have to have this life. You can finish out your degree. You can start your own business. I-I can sing or even give it up if you want me to—”

“Stop,” I said, my voice quaking. “Just stop, Rosalie. I would never ask you to give up your dreams. Don’t ever tell me you will again.”

Her green eyes glistened as she stared back at me.

“The only thing in this world I want for you is your absolute safety and happiness. OK? If those things mean you’re away from me and living your dreams, then I encourage them without a second thought.”

“I don’t like how you say that,” she whispered.

“But they’re the truth.”

“I’m not going to leave, Enzo. I’m part of this even if I hate it.”

I scoffed and released her. I didn’t want to do this tonight. “Go back to bed. Cole will be pissed off if he wakes and you’re gone.”

“Why won’t you just talk to me about this stuff?” She slid off the desk and winced. I’d given it to her a bit harder than usual and I knew Cole damn well did.

“I told you I’m tired. I have a lot on my mind. We can do this once I have shit sorted with that asshole you’re obsessed with.” My words came out more bitter than I intended, and I immediately regretted them.

She glared at me, her hands balling into tight fists.

“I’m not obsessed with him. He’s my friend, Enzo. The only one I have here.”

I sighed and rubbed my eyes. Everything was just too fucking much right now.

“I’m not doing this tonight. I told you to go to bed, so just go, OK? We can talk about this bullshit with Anson tomorrow.”

“There is no bullshit with him. He’s asking for help. That’s it. You never want to listen or talk things out. You just make shitty assumptions.” Her chest heaved. “Lately, you’ve been the one obsessed! Obsessed with this stupid fucking world we should be leaving! People have fucking died, Enzo! We could have walked away a long time ago and just let everything go. Instead, you’re shoving us deeper into this abyss with no goddamn way out! And then you have the audacity to say that Anson asking for help is too much? In this world? You’re kidding me!”

I lost it. I stepped forward so fast she gasped and backed into the desk I’d just fucked her on. I was in her face, my heart racing.

“Every fucking thing I’ve done has been for you. Killing the people I’ve killed has been for you. The next people I kill will fucking *be for you*, Rosalie! To keep you safe. To give



you a life I shouldn't even fucking be part of. *This is our life.* You chose to be here with me in it. If you don't fucking like it, you know what you can do."

My guts clenched as she stared up at me, tears glistening in her eyes.

She didn't say a word. Instead, she pushed past me and left the room.

"Fuck," I whispered, my throat tight. "Fuck."

I should have gone after her. I should have told her I hadn't meant that she should leave. That I didn't want her to go, but I sank into my chair and cradled my head in my hands.

We both needed to cool off.

I wiped at my eyes and stared at the doorway she'd left through, a tiny part of me hoping she'd come back and hold me like I wanted to hold her.

She didn't come back though.

But I deserved that.

ELEVEN

## ETHAN

“Where’s Rosalie?” Cole demanded as he came downstairs, his blond hair messy from bed.

Enzo had been exceptionally quiet all day. He looked up from where he sat with his laptop on the couch. “Wasn’t she with you?”

“She was last night. I woke up and she’s gone.” Cole frowned. “Where’s Fox?”

“Kitchen,” I said, looking at my watch. It was after two in the afternoon. I’d assumed Rosalie and Cole were still in bed. I’d heard them last night. I’d jerked off to the sound of them, feeling like a complete creep, but I couldn’t help myself. As much as I’d wanted to go join them, I forced myself to stay in my room and let Cole have her. He was pissed, and the last thing I wanted was to make it worse where Rosalie could hear us.

I’d been up in my head over everything.

One thing I knew was that I didn’t want to let Rosalie go. I just wanted to find a way to keep her safe. Losing her wasn’t an option, but maybe we could get her somewhere safe for a while until we got things sorted. I even hated that idea though. I didn’t want her away from us for a moment.

“Fox!” Cole shouted.

Fox came into the room holding a sandwich. “Yeah?”

“Where’s Rosebud?”

Fox crinkled his brows. “I don’t know. I thought she was with you.”

Cole let out a snarl.

I wasted no time in pulling my phone out and checking her location. “She’s on campus. Looks like she’s in the music building.” My heart thundered in my ears.

*Relax. She’s fine. She went to practice. She’s safe.*

“She needs to fucking tell someone when she’s leaving.” Cole grumbled. He reached out and took Fox’s sandwich and bit into it.

“Fucking dick,” Fox muttered as Cole ate his food.

“She’s probably with Anson,” Cole continued. “Let’s just kill him tonight. Let me do it. Problem fucking solved.”

Enzo said nothing and shook his head.

“What’s your deal?” Cole demanded. “Still on a Saint Anson train?”

Enzo let out a sigh and closed his laptop. “I’ve never been a Saint Anson fan. I’m just willing to hear him out. Then we can do what we have to do while he keeps her safe. I don’t see an issue with it if he’s on the up and up.”

“He’s not,” Cole said. “He wants her.”

Enzo shrugged. “She’s beautiful, talented, intelligent, and a million other things. What’s not to want?”

Cole let out a snarl and threw the remainder of the sandwich at Enzo. It broke apart and left bits of cheese, turkey, bread, and toppings on Enzo’s designer button down before Cole stormed from the room without another word.

“That was out of line,” I said softly.

Enzo sighed and picked the food off him. “He’s just angry.”

“I meant you. You’re being insensitive.”

Enzo looked at me. “I’m being realistic and honest. She is desirable. Cole is just pissed. You know he has issues with his

jealousy and anger.”

“That doesn’t mean you should insinuate it’s not a big deal,” I said. “Because it is. I’m willing to give Anson the benefit of the doubt, but she’s our girl. I want her safe too. I’m not against sending her away until things are better sorted. I just don’t want to push her into the arms of another man.”

The thought made me want to vomit. My heart beat harder, and I took in a few fortifying breaths in the hopes I could calm myself before I freaked out and had to be medicated. It wasn’t going to help.

I pulled out a stick of sugar and lit it. Taking a deep hit, I let it blanket me in the relief I sought.

“I don’t like the idea either,” Fox said, eyeing me as I got high. I didn’t want to be this pathetic shit stain who needed an escape every other moment, but this was just who I was. *At least it wasn’t heroin.* I told myself that often, but that amber-eyed beauty was constantly trying to lure me back into her bed.

“I know,” Enzo muttered. “It’s been a shitty night.”

“You argued, didn’t you?” Fox asked, his voice low.

Enzo sighed and nodded. “She came to see me in my office last night. I shouldn’t have fucked her. I should have made her go to bed, but we ended up arguing. I said some shit I shouldn’t have said to her.”

I looked to Fox who wore a frown.

“What did you say to her?” Fox asked.

Enzo was silent for a moment. “I told her she was obsessed with Anson. She came back with telling me she knows we killed people. I yelled some more. Told her we did all the shit we did because of her. I told her if she didn’t like it she could leave. She left me standing there.”

Fox tightened his hands into fists.

“I should have gone to her and apologized. I fucked up,” Enzo finished.

“You’re trying to push her away,” Fox said. “You need to stop that shit. If anything happens, it’s because we got her to a safe place for a while. That’s it. We aren’t going to make her leave us.”

Enzo nodded sadly. “Right. You’re right. I just... I don’t want her to fucking die.”

I swallowed hard at his words, my heart in my damn throat. “Don’t fucking say that shit,” I whispered. “Don’t put that into the universe.”

Enzo shook his head. “I’m done talking about it. I’ll fix it, OK?”

“You fucking better,” Fox said. He didn’t need to say more. He looked as angry as I felt.

“I reached out to Vander Veer this morning,” Enzo continued, clearing his throat. “We’re meeting with him for dinner. He’s going to get back to me on a day and time.”

“We all have to go?” The last thing I wanted to do was have dinner with anyone.

Enzo nodded. “Yes. We do.”

Fox groaned.

I’d have to get twice as high to deal with this shit.

Cole came storming back into the room then, dressed in a white button down and jeans, his shoes on and his hair still a mess.

“What are you doing?” I asked, the high finally taking over and making me relax.

“I’m going to check on my girl,” he said.

“Can I come?” I asked. I needed to get the fuck out of there.

Cole glanced to the nearly finished sugar I held and nodded.

I was on my feet and pushing the remainder at Enzo who took it before I followed Cole out the door to his car.

We climbed in and he revved the engine. He'd traded in his sports car for another one. This one was a BMW M5 in red. It was a beautiful car, and he drove it like he stole it.

We peeled down the driveway and gunned it past the security hut and three guys milling about out there.

"We should tell them to not let her leave," Cole grunted.

"She'd hate that and in turn hate us," I said.

He grunted again and sped up.

"Enzo is pissing me off," he said as we turned onto the main road.

"He's worried. He's not good at dealing with it."

"I'm going to punch him in his pretty face," Cole said fiercely. "He needs to stop this shit. Getting Anson involved is bullshit. I can't fucking believe you're OK with it."

"I trust her," I said softly, staring at the quickly passing scenery. "It's Rosalie. She loves us."

"I know," he murmured. "But Anson wants her. You know he fucking does."

"It doesn't matter if he does. The decision is hers. She'd never choose him over us," I said firmly. "I believe that to my very soul."

"I know she wouldn't, but I hate the thought of someone else wanting her. Of someone making her happy when she's sad and lonely. Of someone just being there for her when we can't be. It feels like we're just handing her over to him."

"We aren't," I said. "She loves us."

"If she leaves us for him, I'll kill him," he murmured dangerously. "You fucking know I will. She belongs to us. I'm not going to just let her go."

"You won't have to. We're going to get this fixed. I have faith we will."

"I'm surprised you're not breathing into a fucking bag over it."

I sighed. "It's an internal battle. The drugs help."

We pulled into the parking lot of the college by the music hall.

Cole turned to me. "I love her. We all do. I know she's upset and struggling, but let's just get shit taken care of so we can be the men she wants and needs. Promise me, E?"

"Promise, brother," I answered.

We stared at one another for a long moment before he nodded.

"And we get her and Enzo to make up. That shit is fucked."

I agreed with him and followed him out of the car and into the building. We went to the practice room and Cole checked the schedule hanging by one of the doors to see Rosalie had signed up for it today.

He didn't knock. He simply opened the door, her strong voice filtering to us as we stepped into the room. I closed the door behind me and watched as she sat at the piano, belting out the most beautiful song I'd ever head.

Cole moved to a chair and took a seat as I continued to stand. I watched, mesmerized, as her fingers soared over the keys, her attention so focused on her song that she hadn't noticed us yet.

I'd learned to play piano years ago. The sudden urge to join her and play for her overwhelmed me.

Maybe it was the high. Maybe it was my fear. Maybe I was desperate to prove to her she was loved and I could continue to make her happy even if she felt like she was taking on the world alone.

I took the steps deeper into the room. Her eyes caught me, but she continued to sing.

I slid in beside her, watching her fingers on the keys. I'd never played for her. I was desperate to though.



I tapped on a few keys as I continued to watch her before I ran my fingers over them, matching her playing. She stopped singing and playing and watched my fingers on the keys as I played her song.

I smiled at her, taking in the surprise on her face.

“Ethan?” she murmured.

“Sing for me, sweetheart,” I said, continuing to play for her.

A tiny smile cut her lips up, and she belted out her song again.

And I played.

I’d play for her until my damn fingers fell off if it would make her smile the way she was.

This was going to work.

We were going to work.

I’d fucking die if it didn’t.

TWELVE

# COLE

I hadn't heard E play piano in forever, but I sat forward in my seat and listened to him play as Rosalie sang her heart out. Unable to resist, I pulled my phone out and recorded them, hoping Fox and Enzo might want to watch it later.

If Enzo wasn't still being a prick.

He was one of my best friends in the entire world, but I'd punch him in the fucking face if he didn't stop his shit. I knew things were bad, but being a prick was just making shit worse. I wouldn't tolerate it.

He just needed to fucking breathe.

E and Rosalie finished the song and I ended the video and clapped loudly for them. Rosalie leaned in and kissed E gently. He melted into it, his hand moving to cradle her face.

My heart swelled at seeing them together. I'd never get over just how lucky we all were to have someone like Rosalie in our lives. She just completed us.

I got up and went to them. When Rosalie broke away from E, I didn't waste any time capturing her lips against mine and kissing her.

"You're a bad girl, Rosebud," I murmured. "I woke up and you were gone. You didn't tell anyone where you were going."

"Sorry," she said, wincing. "I was just upset and looked at the schedule online and saw no one had today so I figured I'd take it and get out of my head for a little bit."

“You and Enzo should talk,” E said softly. “I don’t like when we fight.”

She chewed her bottom lip, her green eyes flashing with something that made my heart jolt. Something that worried me.

“Baby. Please,” I murmured. “Talk to him. E is right.”

She closed her eyes for a moment and breathed out. “OK.”

“Good girl,” I said, kissing the top of her head. “You should rest your voice. You’ve been at it all day.”

She nodded. “Yeah. I could use a break.”

“We can get something to eat,” E said. “I’d like a burger basket from Lux.”

I looked to Rosalie. “You in?”

“Yeah. Maybe we can go to the bookstore and music shop after?” She looked at me hopefully.

Fuck if I’d be able to tell her no.

“Of course. Anything you want, babe,” I said, glancing at E to make sure he was on board with the afternoon’s plans.

He nodded at me.

It was probably for the best. We could give her a good day and then bring her home and hope she was in a better mood so her and Enzo didn’t butt heads again.

“And ice cream at Twisty Cone?” She looked at me with those big, expressive eyes.

*Fuck.*

“And ice cream at Twisty Cone,” I confirmed.

She grinned and got to her feet. I grabbed her light jacket and slid it onto her as E packed up her music and put her bag over his shoulder.

“You know, they’ll be announcing the Heisman nominees in, like, just over a month,” I said as we walked out of the room. E and I maintained our distance from her just because of

that stupid as fuck agreement we'd made with Fox about him being her boyfriend in public.

"Fox will get it," Rosalie said evenly. "I know he will."

"I think so too," E said. "Do we have a plan on how to celebrate?"

"I'll throw a party so fucking awesome that we'll talk about it well into our geriatric years." I grinned, already thinking of ways to make the magic happen.

"It'll change a lot of things," Rosalie continued. "He might even be drafted early. He might leave here."

We walked outside to my car. For the second time in a matter of hours, my heart flew into my throat. I'd been so concerned about Rosalie leaving us because of shit or her dreams coming true that I hadn't considered we'd lose Fox.

I stopped at my car and turned to look at Rosalie and E.

"What will we do?" I said, my voice soft. "Fox is one of us. We can't lose him."

"We all have to grow up," E said, giving me a wistful smile. "You know how much he wants it. If it happens for him, we congratulate him and let him go. He wouldn't hold any of us back."

I nodded, sickness churning in my guts. I knew he wouldn't, but fuck, the selfish prick who operated my fucking brain wanted him to stay with us. I didn't want our lives to change. I didn't want anyone to leave.

Rosalie gave me a hug. "It'll be OK."

I swallowed thickly as I hugged her back. "Yeah. Yeah, you're right."

But it definitely didn't feel like it would be OK.





WE'D HAD burger baskets at Lux's, spent hours in the bookstore and in the music shop, before we'd gone for ice cream. I'd bought everything Rosalie looked at, E helping. I'd even picked up a new acoustic guitar for her just because she said she liked the color of it.

E had chuckled and shook his head at me, but fuck it. I'd get her the fucking world if she asked for it.

The shooting was all over the news and there were more cops than usual around town. I kept my attention focused on potential fucks who may try to harm us. I knew E was doing it too because he was constantly looking around.

The sad fact was that was how our lives would be if we continued on the path we were on. It hit me as I looked around that evening while Rosalie laughed and told E about her plans to learn Italian and French so when she went on her world tour she could have more fun with the fans.

It was in that moment I realized she may never have that if she stayed here with us. It was the first time I was seeing it through Enzo's eyes. She'd probably never be safe if she were with us. Fox would be lucky if he could get out too.

My chest hurt.

I pushed the thoughts from my head and put her bags into my trunk as her phone buzzed. She pulled it out of her purse and stared down at the message before her thumbs flew over the screen as she replied to whatever message she'd gotten.

"Is it Fox?" E asked as he opened the passenger door for her.

"Um, no. It's Anson."

I ground my teeth together and slid behind the wheel as she got into the front and E got into the back.

"What's he want?" I finally asked.

"He's on his way over. He'll be there soon to talk."

I nodded tightly and caught E's eye in the rearview mirror. He gave me a look that told me to relax.

Like he was one to talk. He was never fucking relaxed nowadays.

But I gave him a slight incline of my head to let him know I had my shit in check before I backed out of my parking spot and headed to the house.

I waved off security and drove the distance down the winding drive and into the garage and cut the engine. None of us had spoken since she'd mentioned Anson. Maybe we were just gearing up for what the night would bring. Fuck if I knew.

Once the car was off, we got out and unloaded Rosalie's stuff and brought it into the house. I took it upstairs with E before returning to find Rosalie and Enzo already facing off.

"You're not going to be a part of it," Enzo said to her. "This is horsemen business. Not Rosalie business."

"So what am I supposed to do? Be a good little girl and make you dinner while you talk business?" She glared at him with her hands on her hips.

"Yes. If that makes you happy. Or you can simply stay in your bedroom and read. Looks like you don't have a shortage of things to do considering Cole probably just spent his life savings on you today." Enzo's face showed no emotion. It was a look he reserved when he was shutting down. I'd seen it before when he killed people.

Her face reddened. "I didn't ask him to buy me anything."

"Sometimes you don't need to ask. We do what we do to keep you smiling."

"I'm not goddamn smiling now," she shot back.

"I know. But maybe you will later. So for now, go find something to do while we deal with things."

"No," she said, her voice wavering.

Fox came into the room and took in the scene as I watched with E at my side. It was hard for me not to say something.



But Enzo was right. We needed to deal with Ass Hat on our own. I didn't want her to see me beat his ass if it came down to it. Or worse.

"What's going on?" Fox demanded, taking in the tension.

"I want to stay when Anson gets here," she said.

"No," Fox said immediately.

She widened her eyes at him before looking to me and E for help.

"He's right, Rosebud. We need to do this without you," I said, hoping I sounded gentle.

E nodded beside me, looking pained as he did it.

"Go to your room, Rosalie," Enzo said gently. "One of us will come get you when it's over."

Her bottom lip wobbled before she turned on her heel and left the room.

Enzo sighed, watching her go.

"Let's get this over with," Fox snapped. "I'm already sick to death of listening to this shit and seeing you two at one another's throats."

"Lucky for you she's going to be at all of ours now since we sent her away," Enzo said, scrubbing his hand down his face.

Fox grunted.

Enzo was right though. There'd be hell to pay later if she were pissed.

And she definitely was.

Looked like I wouldn't be getting my dick sucked tonight.

THIRTEEN

# ETHAN

Everything seemed to have gone to hell in just a matter of days, and I was helping to pilot the descent.

We sat in Enzo's office, waiting for him to come back since the security cameras showed Anson pulling up.

I hauled out a sugar stick and lit it before taking a deep hit. It probably wasn't going to do the trick as I continued to bounce my leg and fidget in my seat. I had way too much shit going through my head. We'd had such a good day with Rosalie. She'd smiled so much. It took all my willpower not to haul her into my arms and kiss the pink from her lips. I knew public displays were off limits, so I'd wrestled that bear in my head.

Cole slammed back another drink and wiped his lips as he sat on a stool at the bar in the room.

"What?" Fox grunted as Cole leveled his glare on him.

"You fucking know what."

Fox let out a sigh and raked his fingers through his hair. "Cole, man. Chill. I hate the guy too, but you can't deny he has skill."

"Yeah, to fucking take our girl," Cole shot back.

"He's not going to. And Rosalie won't," I said firmly from my spot on the chair I was in.

"I know she won't, but that doesn't mean he won't try. I'll slit his motherfucking throat. You know I will," Cole said

before putting down another drink. He grabbed a sugar stick and lit it and took a drag, his glare still fixed on Fox.

“Why are you looking at me like there’s anything I can do?” Fox demanded.

“Because there is! Talk to her. She always listens to you. You’re like that little fucking voice in her head. She does whatever you tell her to,” Cole pleaded.

Fox scoffed. “I wish. You know she’s defiant.” He sighed. “I hate this shit too, but listen, we need her safe, right? This might be how we do it. If she’s out of the way, she can’t get hurt.”

Cole grumbled and shook his head before taking another hit of the sugar.

I didn’t like how we wanted her out of the way, but at the same time, I knew Fox was right. Honestly, I hated our life. I hated what we were becoming, but we’d vowed we were all in, so I guess this is what that looked like. It wasn’t like any of us would walk out on Enzo when he needed us.

I sure didn’t want to walk out on Rosalie though, and lately, I felt like that’s what we were doing. We didn’t spend nearly enough time together.

Breathing out, I felt more at ease as her face entered my mind’s eye. Her laughter. Her voice. The way it felt when she’d touch me.

I stopped bouncing my leg and let my head fall back as I imagined going to her once this meeting was over and kissing her.

*Fuck, I loved to kiss her.*

The door opened and Enzo stepped inside, Anson behind him. I sat up and tried to focus. I needed to be in the moment so I knew what the hell was going on. I’d get to reward myself later with my sweetheart.

“Pick a spot,” Enzo said, nodding to the couch and chairs in the room.

Anson moved with confidence through the room, Cole's glare locked on his back. I watched as Anson took one of the leather chairs across from me and settled in, looking like he didn't have a care in the world in his blue button down and jeans, his dark hair styled.

I glanced at Fox to see him watching Anson with narrowed eyes.

Cole threw back another drink and continued to scowl. Much to his credit, he didn't say anything, but it could be the look Enzo was giving him too.

"Want a drink?" Enzo called out, pouring himself one before looking to Anson.

"Sure," Anson replied.

Enzo poured a scotch for him and brought the bottle and drinks over to where we were sitting and handed Anson his glass before taking his seat.

Anson drank deeply, his eyes trained on Enzo who inclined his head and drank at a slower pace.

"So," Enzo started. "Details."

Anson finished his drink and placed it on the glass coffee table. "I'm offering my services to protect Rosalie while you help me find my mother and sister's killer."

"Payment? Aside from our help?" Enzo asked.

"That's all I want. I have money. I want closure for me and my little brother."

"Yeah right," Cole finally called out, sliding off his barstool. Enzo shot him a warning look as Fox sat forward. I knew Fox and Enzo could hold off Cole. I'd throw myself in front of Anson if I had to in order to avoid bloodshed.

Anson raised his eyebrows. "I'm sorry?"

"You want Rosalie. You're hoping by doing this you'll be able to get closer to her."

Anson sighed. "I'm not going to do that to anyone. Rosalie is beautiful. Talented. Funny. Intelligent, and every damn thing

a man could want in his woman, but she's taken, and I accept that. We're friends and will remain so."

Cole snorted. "My ass."

"Do you not trust your girl, Cole?" Anson cocked his head at him as Cole stood at the end of the couch.

"I trust Rosalie, you prick," Cole snarled at him. Fox rose to his feet and took a careful step closer to Cole.

"Then you don't have a thing to worry about. Keep your girl happy and loved, and I won't be an issue for you."

Cole took a dangerous step forward, and I finally stood up, not wanting to fight. I was tired of fighting.

"Our girl is fucking happy, you sack of shit," Cole growled.

"Like I said, I'm not a problem." Anson still hadn't gotten to his feet.

"Easy. Relax," Fox said softly, resting his hand on Cole's chest.

Cole glowered at Anson before shoving Fox's hand away and storming back to the bar to have another drink.

I breathed out and sat back in my chair.

"So tell me what you're thinking," Enzo said, tearing his focus from Cole who was drinking straight from the bottle and glaring at a wall.

"Rosalie needs to be practicing and studying. I can oversee all of it. I won't leave her side. She'll be safe with me. While I'm doing that, you guys can keep your ears to the ground and see if you hear anything for me. Anything at all," his voice took on a desperate edge to it. "Ask around for me. See if any of your guys beneath you hear anything."

Enzo nodded as he stared at Anson. "And that's it?"

"Yes. Just get me the information I need."

"And if we can't get information?" Fox asked.

“Then I tried and keep looking for it,” Anson said. “And Rosalie gets to be safe.”

Fox glanced to Enzo. I stared down at my hands. I knew where Cole was coming from. I really did, but I also knew Rosalie needed this added protection. He’d saved her during the shooting. He’d kept her safe that night.

I had to ask him the question that was burning my tongue.

“Did you keep Rosalie as a way to prove yourself?” I asked.

A small smile quirked Anson’s lips up. “Yes. And I really wanted you guys to hear me out.”

“We aren’t animals,” I said, frowning. “You could have just asked us.”

Anson’s gaze darted to Cole before he offered me another smile. “Well, some of you aren’t.”

“Fuck you, Ass Hat,” Cole snarled, giving him the finger from his barstool.

Anson let out a soft huff of laughter.

“So you’ll protect Rosalie. I want there to be some ground rules,” Fox said.

“Of course.” Anson sat forward and nodded. “I’m agreeable.”

“First, you don’t fucking touch her. She’s not yours,” Fox’s voice was fierce. “You’re to protect her, not anything more.”

“I’m also her friend,” Anson pointed out. “I’m not going to stop being that.”

“That’s fine,” Enzo said. “Be her friend. That’s where your relationship ends.”

“OK,” Anson said. “Done.”

“Next, just because you’re protecting her doesn’t mean she can be gone all the time. We want her home at night. Once her practices and rehearsals are over, she’s to be brought straight

home,” Fox continued. “No little fucking dinner dates or meeting up with friends. Classes. Practice. Home. That’s it.”

“You got to give her a little freedom—” Anson started.

“We don’t have to give her shit. She’s our concern,” Cole snapped. “Learn your fucking place, Ass Ram.”

Anson sighed and rolled his eyes but didn’t push it.

“I’d like it if you did hang out with her here when we’re gone,” I said, looking at the guys in turn. Cole scowled at me, letting me know I was right back on his shit list.

“It’s just because what if something happened with our security? We don’t have anyone in the house. The guards are outside. If someone finds a way to get inside, I’d like to know she’s safe, so I think you being here with her would be a good idea.”

Enzo nodded. “I’m good with that. Fox?”

A muscle thrummed along Fox’s jaw, but he nodded.

“Cole?” Enzo asked.

“No, but like it fucking matters what I want,” he said sourly.

“Done. You’ll be here when we can’t be,” Enzo said.

Anson nodded. “OK.”

“No bedrooms,” Cole called out after a brief silence.

“What?” Anson crinkled his brows.

“No fucking bedrooms. You keep your ass in the living room or kitchen. That’s fucking it. I catch you in Rosalie’s bedroom and I won’t hesitate to put a bullet in your fucking thick skull,” Cole said, his glare aimed on Anson again.

“OK, Dad. No bedrooms. Got it.”

I rubbed my eyes. Anson was a sarcastic ass. That made this more difficult because I knew he was trying to antagonize Cole while maintaining his cool. What didn’t help was that if Cole launched himself at Anson, I knew Anson could hold his own against him and that was saying something.



Something huge.

As much as I hated to admit it, Anson really was a good fit for the job.

“Anything else?” Enzo asked Fox.

“If I think of anything, I’ll let him know,” Fox mumbled.

“I’ll put out some feelers then,” Enzo said. “You do what you’re told to do and make me happy, then I’ll give you any information I get. And if you fuck up, we’ll kill you. Deal?”

“Deal.” Anson agreed without a bit of hesitation.

I glanced to Fox who was once again frowning.

He had to be thinking what I was thinking.

*Anson agreed like it was nothing. Like he was confident and already knew he wasn’t going to mess up.*

That offered me a sense of relief. Mostly. Another part of me was still anxious, but I knew I needed to get past my distrust of people. Not everyone was a bad guy. Not everyone wanted to kill us or Rosalie.

Enzo stood, and Anson followed and shook Enzo’s hand, sealing the deal.

Fox shook his hand next before I did.

“Rosalie needs to be distracted tomorrow between classes. Can you handle that?” Enzo asked.

“Yes.” Anson pulled his phone out and handed it to Enzo. “Put your numbers in. I’ll text you from mine if you haven’t all saved it yet.”

Enzo’s thumbs flew over the screen as he gave Anson all our numbers. My phone pinged a few moments later with a message from Anson after Enzo handed his phone back to him.

“OK. We’re all set then. If anything changes, contact one of us,” Enzo said, leading Anson to the door.

Anson stopped and held his hand out to Cole who scoffed at the gesture.

“Use that hand to go fuck yourself,” Cole said, his words slurring slightly.

Anson chuckled softly. “Always a pleasure, Cole. Tell Rosalie I’ll see her tomorrow.”

Cole took another drink, a muscle working along his jaw before Anson backed away and left with Enzo.

“You need to get yourself in check,” Fox started.

“Oh, fuck off, Fox,” Cole shot back. “That guy is a prick!”

They were off and running with one another. I didn’t want to stick around and hear it, so I left the room and went upstairs to Rosalie’s door and knocked lightly on it before opening it and poking my head in.

She was sitting on her bed with her notebook open, her new guitar in her lap as she hummed softly. She put it down in its stand when she saw me.

“Hey,” she called out, putting her notebook onto her bedside table. “Is everything OK?”

I stepped into her room. “Everything is fine, baby. I just came to see how you were.”

I approached her bed as she sat on the edge of it, her plump lips set in a pout as I stopped in front of her.

“I’m just irritated. I’m angry I couldn’t be there for that stupid meeting.”

“It really wasn’t anything, sweetheart. Anson just asked for help.”

“And?” She prompted as I ran my thumb lightly against her bottom lip.

“And we agreed. He’s going to hang out with you a lot more now while we work on what we can for him.”

“There was no bloodshed?”

“None,” I said.

She breathed out, her mood shifting from bad to better. “Promise everything went OK?”

“Yes.” I pushed her onto her back and crawled on top of her. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” she murmured, staring up at me.

“Want to watch a movie and kiss me all night?”

A smile cut her lips up. “Yes.”

I leaned in and brushed my lips against hers, my heart thrumming happily in my chest.

“Good, because I wasn’t taking no for an answer tonight.”

She laughed softly before she pushed herself up and kissed me deeply in the way I’d been fantasizing about for the last few hours.

“We’re starting now?” I asked between kisses.

“Yes,” she answered, nipping my bottom lip.

“Mm, maybe I want to kiss you someplace else,” I said, heat taking over my insides at the possibilities.

Getting lost in my sweetheart was the perfect place to be when my fucking soul was a mess. I had so much stress and worry going on inside my head that I was having a hard time dealing with shit.

I was surprised I’d held it together downstairs.

I owed most of that to the sugar I’d smoked.

“You’re worried,” Rosalie murmured, staring up at me. “Your anxiety.”

I nodded miserably.

“Let me help you,” she said, rolling me onto my back and straddling me.

I watched as she pulled her tank top off, her bra following as I gazed up at the most perfect girl I’d ever known.

My cock ached beneath her heat, my heart in my throat.

She leaned down and kissed my lips before she trailed her soft lips down my body. In no time, I’d tugged my shirt off.

She peppered my torso in her love, making goosebumps course along my skin as her warm breath feathered over me.

She made her way to the edge of my jeans, her fingers on the button, and stared up at me, her red waves tumbling around her.

My breath caught in my chest as she undid my pants. I watched as she shimmied my jeans and boxers off, giving my cock the freedom it yearned for.

She licked up my shaft, making me gasp as I watched.

Before she could do it again, I stopped her.

Her green eyes widened as I sat up, her still straddling me, and pushed her tiny sleep shorts down her thighs.

“Can we... sixty-nine?” I asked, wincing at my words. I’d never done that with her, but it had been weighing heavily on my mind lately. I’d always been too nervous to ask or direct her. I didn’t know why either. I was most comfortable with my girl, but shit, life kept fucking with my head. Maybe I was scared she’d just tell me no.

“OK,” she said without batting a lash.

I breathed out and laid on my back again, eager to do this with her.

“Turn around,” I instructed gently.

I watched as she worried her bottom lip for a moment before she turned, putting her luscious pussy in my face.

And then her warm mouth met my cock, drawing me into her throat.

I dove in, face first, eager to just fucking eat and save my anxiety and worries for another day.

For now, I just wanted this.

Me and my sweetheart, feasting on one another.

FOURTEEN

# ROSALIE

Ethan was always full of surprises, this time no exception.

*Sixty-nine.*

He was not typically so bold, but neither was I, so this was really something for us.

Ethan's tongue swirled and dipped in all the right places, making me moan along his thick erection that was buried in my throat.

His hands on my thighs gripped me tighter as he juttied his hips up to fuck my mouth. His hands trailed along my ass where he gripped my cheeks and pulled me apart for him.

We were in such a position that nothing was unseen for him. My face heated at the implications.

He sucked my clit hard as he gathered my wetness and circled my tight rosette with it, making me cry out as he teased me.

Ethan and Fox weren't the ones to knock at my backdoor. That was always Enzo and Cole in their vicious sharing. Fox and Ethan were much more gentle with me.

This Ethan seemed desperate to try though, and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't interested in what he had planned. It had been a long, draining evening, and I'd been thinking about my guys through most of it. Some of it wasn't good thoughts because I hated how they tried to keep me away from things that concerned me, but at the end of it, I knew how they were and how much they cared.

Ethan's expert mouth worked my clit over, his thumb putting pressure on my ass as he breached it gently, in and out.

My legs trembled with each lick and flick of his tongue. Each suck. Each warm breath.

I moaned again, the sound vibrating his cock. He grunted and thrust upward into my mouth before he removed his thumb and gripped my hips. He tugged me firmly onto his face and ate faster.

I returned his fervor by sucking him at the same pace, the fire building low in my belly until I ignited, my release sweeping through me in a hot rush.

I was always messy when I came, and I knew this time was no exception. But Ethan didn't seem to mind as he ate down everything I gave him amid a soft groan, his hands still tight on my body.

I shook, the orgasm too much as he continued to lap at my heat until I was weak and felt boneless. He let out a contented sigh and pressed a kiss to my clit before he reached out and helped me off of him.

"Did I not do good?" I asked, worry seeping into my voice. I hadn't finished him.

He answered by kissing me deeply and pushing me onto my back, his body positioned between my legs.

Wordlessly, he entered my heat, making me jolt at the sudden, thick intrusion. Ethan didn't typically push inside me. He'd sweet talk me and take his time. His body shook, like he was trying to restrain himself.

He filled me completely, making me wince. It would never get old. The guys' sheer size and my body's ability to make it feel like the first time all over again always gave me a shock.

My gasp of surprise broke off our kiss as he bottomed out inside me. He wasted no time burying his face in my neck, a hand massaging my breast as he sucked along the delicate skin where my neck met my chest.

“E-Ethan,” I breathed out as he slowly pushed in and out of me.

He groaned, breathless, as he continued his work on my body.

I dug my nails into his back, earning a grunt from him, his pace picking up as he pulled away and watched me as we fucked.

I reached out and cradled his face, watching as his eyelids shuttered closed and he tilted his head to kiss my wrist, his hips rolling against my center in a fierce rhythm.

The pleasure he brought to my body made me moan softly, and my hand fell away from his face. His eyes snapped open as he stared down at me, his lips parted.

“Tell me you love me,” he whispered as he jostled my body with his even thrusts.

“I love you.”

“Tell me you’ll never leave,” he demanded, his voice shaking.

“I’ll never leave.”

He moved faster as I arched against his hard body, my release rushing from me like a tidal wave.

“Ethan! Oh god,” I cried out as I tightened around him, so much heat pouring through my body I thought I’d caught fire.

He slammed into me harder. Faster. The headboard banged against the wall as I tried to reach for him.

He answered by pinning my arms over my head and fucking me harder, one orgasm crashing into the next, his eyes locked on mine with every powerful thrust.

“E-Ethan. E. Please,” I cried out, the pleasure so fierce I thought I was dying and leaving for heaven.

“I trust you,” he choked out, slamming into me. “You won’t hurt me.”

I didn’t know where his words were coming from.



“I’d n-never... oh, please. God, Ethan,” I practically wept as the pleasure continued to roll through my body like a freight train.

He continued to hold my arms over my head with one hand before using his other hand to cradle my face. It was a sweet move until his fingers tangled through my hair and he tugged against it.

His eyes were wild as he drank me in. I’d only ever seen that look on his face during one of his panic attacks when he was losing control.

Loosening his grip, he moved his hand to my throat where he wrapped his fingers around it, his green eyes full of something so feral I whimpered.

He tightened his grip on my neck as he plundered my heat, the slapping of our skin sounding out.

“Come for me, sweetheart,” he said breathlessly as he continued his onslaught. “I love it so fucking much when you come on my cock.”

A few more thrusts and I was done for, giving him what he wanted, my body arching up to meet the kiss of pain he was bringing to me with his fierce fucking.

His hips rolled again, slamming his cock deep into my heat until I was a blubbering mess on the mattress, everything soaked from the orgasms he tore from my body.

He came with a low groan, filling me, his body trembling with each pump he put into my heat.

He finally collapsed against me, his body damp with sweat.

I raked my fingers gently through his hair, earning a low hum of contentment from him.

We laid in our mess for a long time, wordless, before he finally pulled himself free of my body and sat on the edge of the bed, his head down.

Frowning, I sat up and went to him.

“What’s wrong?” I asked softly, winding my arms around his neck.

He gave my hands a squeeze but said nothing for a long time.

“Let’s get cleaned up,” he finally murmured, ignoring my question. He brought my hand up and pressed a kiss to my knuckles before he got to his feet and offered me his hand. I took it and let him pull me up.

“Shower. I’ll change the sheets.” He kissed my cheek before breaking away from me and going to change the bedding.

I frowned but did as he instructed. I’d finished washing and was just letting the hot water pelt me when his arms wound around me in the shower. His lips met my shoulder in a soft kiss, and I relaxed against him, my back to his front.

“Are you clean, sweetheart?” he murmured in my ear.

I nodded wordlessly.

“Meet me in bed, OK?”

I turned in his arms and stared up at him. The look on his face made my chest clench. It was filled with so much turmoil and love that I wasn’t sure what to say to him, so I simply kissed him gently before getting out of the shower and toweling off. When I got back to my room, I pulled on one of my favorite t-shirts of Fox’s and my panties and climbed into the clean bedding and waited for Ethan to return.

He entered the bedroom a few moments later, his eyelids heavy. I watched as he unwrapped the towel from his waist and draped it over a chair before he got into bed beside me and dragged me into his arms.

“I love you. I’m sorry if I was too rough with you.”

“I love you too. I’m not complaining.”

He chuckled softly and pressed a kiss to my lips.

“Is everything OK?” I asked.

“Everything is fine,” he said as I turned in his arms and stared at him. He dipped his head down and kissed me. “Everything is fine, right?”

“Yes. It’s perfect,” I murmured.

He breathed out and hugged me against his body.

“I just get inside my own head sometimes,” he whispered. “It’s hard for me to believe I have you. You’re my dream girl, Rosalie. I’m scared I’m not being the man you need. I’m scared there are better men out there for you than me. I’m scared you’ll go—”

I silenced him with a kiss. “I’m never leaving you, Ethan. Until you tell me we’re done, I’ll be here. I love you and everything that makes you who you are. Trust me?”

“Fuck yes,” he said, his lips crashing against mine again, his hand moving to cradle me at the hip. “I’m yours.”

“Mine,” I confirmed between kisses.

He let out a growl, and we burrowed deeper into the bedding until we were beneath the covers, simply kissing and exploring one another’s body again.

Until he was back deep inside me, his whispered *I love you’s* on repeat as our bodies shook against one another’s.

This was what loving Ethan was like.

It would never get old.

And I was really OK with that.

FIFTEEN

# ROSALIE

I woke up wrapped in Ethan's arms the following morning. It was Cole staring at me that made me blink.

"Cole?"

"Hey, Rosebud," he murmured as I snuggled deeper into Ethan's hold. He let out a soft snore as the heat from his body warmed mine.

Cole lay next to me and looked like he hadn't slept.

"What are you doing?" I asked, rubbing at my eyes.

"Watching you and E sleep."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "I heard him fucking you last night. Figured I'd make sure everyone was OK in here."

My face heated at his words.

"H-how long have you been in here?"

"Few hours." He reached out and pushed a curl behind my ear. "I want to hold you too, but E is being a Rosebud hog. He never lets you go."

"Because then you hog her," Ethan mumbled, sleep garbling his voice. He kissed the top of my head.

"Come on," Cole pleaded softly. "My turn."

"I'm not a toy," I said, smiling at Cole who juttied out his bottom lip. He scooted closer and moved his hand to my hip but found Ethan's already there.

“Fucking, E. Come on. You’re cock blocking me.” Cole let out an exasperated sigh and scooted even closer so our noses were almost touching.

“You cock blocked the rest of us the other night,” Ethan argued, tugging me closer, his erection digging into my back.

I ground against him, earning a soft hum from him.

“Then fuck her so I can watch,” Cole commanded. “Do something. I need to come.”

“Doesn’t she get a say in this?” Ethan asked, waking up more.

Cole let out an exasperated sigh. “Rosebud, do you want to be thoroughly fucked?”

I was still sore from Ethan last night, but I knew how good it would feel, so I nodded yes.

Cole gave Ethan a triumphant smile.

“Fine. You want to watch then?” Ethan asked in a husky voice.

“Fuck yeah I do.” Cole was already stroking himself beneath the covers.

“I have class soon,” I said as Ethan’s fingers tangled in my panties before he pulled them down my thighs. I lost my shirt a moment later as he kissed along my shoulder.

“Take the covers down,” Cole rasped, as he continued to stroke himself. “I can’t see.”

“Use your imagination,” Ethan chuckled softly.

Cole let out a snarl and snatched the blankets off us, his blue eyes zeroing in on Ethan’s fingers between my legs, rubbing me.

“Fuck, that’s hot,” Cole rasped, his hand moving at an even pace on his cock. “Tell me you like it, Rosebud.”

“Mm, I like it,” I said, relishing in the feelings.

“Fuck, E, baby. Please. I can’t stand waiting. Ride his dick for me.”

I rolled onto Ethan who smiled up at me.

“Hey, beautiful,” he murmured, seemingly happier today than he was last night.

“Hey,” I answered, breathless as I rubbed myself against his thickness, his hands on my hips.

“E, man. Tell me what she feels like,” Cole croaked out, the muscles in his abs taut as he craned his neck up to watch us.

“Hot,” Ethan answered as I lifted off him so he could position his dick for me. I slid down the long, thick length, earning a soft moan from him and growl from Cole.

“And so fucking tight and wet,” Ethan finished as I slowly moved on him.

I rode him, watching as his eyelids fluttered and his lips parted.

“That’s hot,” Cole husked out. “Grab her tits, E. I like that little fucking gasp she does when it hurts.”

“I don’t want to hurt her,” Ethan said thickly, reaching out and cradling my breasts as I continued to ride him.

“Tell him you like it, baby. He thinks you’re too fragile,” Cole said, his voice thick with lust.

“It’s OK,” I said, breathless. “Do it.”

Ethan’s gaze swept over me before he sat up and kissed me, his hands squeezing my breasts until it was a painful pleasure. He pinched and rolled my nipples, stimulating me further and earning a soft cry from my lips.

“Fuck. Fuck, you two are hot.”

The bed shifted and I cracked my eyelids open to see Cole had gotten up and grabbed his phone. He was recording us as we had sex.

My heart jumped into my throat as he trained the phone on me and Ethan.

“Cole—” I protested. I remembered one of the last videos of me that was on a horseman’s phone. It always invaded my mind whenever him or Enzo took out their phones to record me.

Ethan was quick to steer my lips back to his, his tongue lashing against mine as he deepened the kiss and gripped my hips, urging me to move faster.

“E-Ethan,” I gasped, self-conscious of the camera on me.

“It’s OK, sweetheart,” he said breathlessly against my lips. “It’s just us.”

I swallowed hard and dove into his frantic kisses, telling myself nothing happened with video they’d taken of me last year. That nothing happened with videos since.

I felt Cole’s warm hand on my back as he pushed me forward so Ethan had no choice but go onto his back beneath me.

Cole pushed me until my chest was flat against Ethan’s chest.

“I want to fuck her with you,” Cole said thickly. “Same tight space. You good with that, E?”

Ethan hesitated for a moment, and I wondered if it had to do with the abusive past he was so desperate to escape. He wasn’t always eager to be as sexually close to everyone. Even touching him could be difficult some days.

“Y-yeah, man. Yeah.” He didn’t move as Cole situated himself behind me.

I knew what was coming.

*Same tight space.*

Cole’s thick erection nudged my already filled hole, making me wince. He liked to fuck me like this with Enzo.

“Breathe,” Cole instructed softly as he breeched my entrance and slid his cock painfully slow along Ethan’s inside of me until he bottomed out and let out a hiss of delight.



“Fuck, you’re both so warm and soft. I could stay here forever,” Cole murmured, sliding out of me before pushing back into me. “Fuck her with me, E. Make her come with me.”

Ethan gently thrust into me as Cole adjusted to the speed.

I let out a soft whimper as they acclimated to my body and one another. My nails dug into Ethan’s shoulders. His lips crashed against mine as he kissed me hard and deep. He reached around me and twisted his fingers in Cole’s hair who was now nearly lying on top of us, his warm breath on my shoulder.

“Pull it,” Cole grunted, pistoning in and out of me along Ethan’s cock.

Ethan tugged Cole’s hair, earning a satisfied growl from him that made my body Jell-O.

“It’s good, isn’t, E? Sharing this tight pussy with me,” Cole choked out.

“Fuck. God yes,” Ethan moaned as I buried my face in his neck and sucked along his skin, knowing damn well I was marking him.

I didn’t need to see to know Cole was kissing Ethan, but I chanced a peek anyway. Sometimes the guys did things like this in the heat of the moment. Ethan and Fox were rare to join in, but they surprised me from time to time, like in this instance. It never progressed past that though.

Ethan let out a hiss as Cole bit his bottom lip and pulled away. Cole’s fingers twisted in my hair and he pushed my lips onto Ethan’s.

I took the bait and kissed Ethan, our tongues doing a timeless waltz we knew by heart.

The electricity pinged through me, signaling I was nearing my release as they plundered me.

“You going to come, baby?” Cole rasped. “You going to come on mine and E’s cocks?”

“Y-yes. Oh god. Fuck. Cole! Ethan!” I cried out as the pleasure took hold. I came long and hard, my body buzzing

from the intensity as I gripped Ethan tightly and let them fuck me breathless, their pace fast and hard until they were both tensing around me, filling me.

We lay breathing hard in a heap with one another for a long moment before Cole leaned in and pecked Ethan's lips.

"Nice work, buddy," he said. "I fucking loved kissing you. Enzo bites back and Fox tries to punch me in the dick whenever I try."

Ethan chuckled softly, his cheeks reddening. "Rosalie taught me everything I know."

I laughed at that and kissed him, delighting in the smile on his lips as Cole withdrew from my body and stood up.

"You'll be late, sweetheart," Ethan said, giving me a squeeze.

"Mm, I know."

There was a knock on the door and Enzo cracked it open and stepped inside. His dark gaze swept over the three of us.

"Anson will be here in about fifteen. Fox already left an hour ago for his early morning practice." Enzo's focus landed on me, his eyes darkening.

"Should have joined us, brother," Cole said, grinning in his birthday suit.

Enzo stepped forward and reached for me, tilting my chin up. "Did you come for them?"

I nodded wordlessly, still a little angry with him for the way he'd spoken to me last night.

"Good girl," he murmured. "Think you can come for me in the next fifteen minutes?"

Butterflies fluttered to life in my belly.

"I-I'm really sore," I said, wincing. "But I want to."

Enzo let out a soft chuckle and released me. "Go clean up. I'll have a talk with these animals about giving you some rest."

“You can join me—” I got to my feet and reached for him. I hated fighting with the guys. I already knew things were rough. The fear of losing them because of it was constantly plaguing me.

He took me in his arms and placed his hands on my hips and gave me a squeeze as he leaned in to whisper in my ear.

“The truth of the matter is, Sunshine, I want more than fifteen minutes with you. I want to fuck you until you’re breathless and begging for mercy. Fifteen minutes isn’t going to cut it for what I have in mind. I owe you an apology.” His lips brushed against my ear. “So go clean up, my sweet girl. I’ll spend all day thinking of ways I can make you scream when we both have more time.” He moved his hand between my legs and let his fingers explore for a moment before he pushed Cole and Ethan’s release back into my pussy.

My breath caught in my throat as he pulled away and smiled down at me. Enzo was always so... alarming and intense these days. I didn’t hate it.

I nodded and backed away as he kept his gaze on my naked body. When I was into the bathroom, I let out a whoosh of air and grabbed another shower, my mind on all the dirty things my horsemen could do to my body.

I smiled, excited for the first time in weeks to come home later.

SIXTEEN

# ANSON

I stood in Rosalie's kitchen watching as Enzo made breakfast. The place was immaculate. There wasn't a doubt in my mind this wasn't a seven-figure home and that De Luca wasn't loaded to the teeth.

When I'd arrived, I was stopped at the gate and questioned before I got to enter. Just like last time. I saw my name on the list, but I wasn't going to get pissed over it. They were doing their job which made my job with Rosalie easier. The last thing I wanted to do was get caught up in a fucking gunfight with her around.

She was far too sweet and delicate for this life.

I hated she had to live it. She deserved someone who could give her everything she'd ever wanted, and maybe the horsemen could if they had a different lifestyle.

I looked around, wondering where everyone else was.

"Hey, Ass Hat," Cole greeted me as he came into the room with his shirt off and his blond hair a mess.

"Princess," I said, smiling at him.

He scowled at me before flipping me off and going to grab a waffle off a plate Enzo was piling high.

Enzo looked over his shoulder at me. "You hungry? There's plenty to go around. Eggs. Toast. Bacon. Waffles. A cereal bar."

"My ass," Cole muttered.

I shook my head. He was a riot, but I also knew he'd pull the trigger to the gun he was desperate to put to my head. The guy was certifiably insane, but that was fine by me. He wasn't the first nutcase I'd ever met. Wouldn't be the last either.

Ethan came into the room a moment later, dressed in jeans and a polo. He looked every bit the slice of American apple pie mamas wanted their daughters to date.

"Hey, Anson," he greeted me, a small smile on his lips. "Rosalie will be down in a minute."

"Hey. Thanks," I said.

Ethan was definitely the nicer of the four.

"Here. Have something to eat," Enzo said, pushing a plate at me from across the marble-top island.

"Nah, I'm good," I said. I wasn't good and was, in fact, starving, but I didn't want to make Rosalie wait for me to eat.

"Rosalie will eat before she leaves," Enzo said. "I won't let her leave without doing it, so you may as well take the plate and grab some food."

I hesitated for a moment before giving in and taking the plate. I grabbed some scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, and a waffle and settled next to Ethan at the island and ate.

Fucking De Luca knew how to cook a breakfast.

"Wow," I murmured, eating another mouthful of the fluffy eggs.

"Eat more. It's poison," Cole said.

I locked my gaze on him and bit into my toast. "I think I will."

He opened his mouth to retort some shit at me, but stopped, his gaze fixed on a point over my head. I turned to see what he was staring at and my heart skipped as Rosalie came into the room looking beautiful in a baby doll black dress with tiny pink rosebuds printed over it. Her red hair cascaded around her in those wild waves I adored, her lips

shiny with her pink lip gloss. And boots. Knee high brown boots with a heel.

Fucking breathtaking. That's what she was.

"Good morning, Ani," she greeted me, her green eyes lighting up.

I couldn't keep the smile off my face.

"Hey, LeeLee," I said.

She moved past me and gave my shoulder a squeeze before she went to Enzo and kissed him. I didn't miss the frown on Cole's face at her affection towards me.

As hard as I tried, I couldn't stop watching her with Enzo. Her cheeks reddened as he whispered in her ear in his damn yellow checkered apron. He kissed her again, his hand on her tiny waist.

Ethan cleared his throat and offered me a smile.

I swallowed and went back to eating.

These guys were fucking lucky. I wished they knew just how much.

"No Fox?" I asked as Rosalie settled on Ethan's other side and began to eat her breakfast.

"He had an early practice," Ethan said.

"We'll get you a schedule," Enzo added. "I'll make one up and message it to you."

I nodded. Seemed solid.

"We won't be home tonight," Enzo said, clearing his throat.

I chewed my breakfast silently as Rosalie looked at him and frowned. "Why?"

"My father has some things he needs me to look into. The guys are going with me."

"That means you take care of Rosalie," Cole said, fixing his glare on me. "No fucking around. She comes straight home after classes. You stay downstairs with her."

“Right. I remember the rules,” I said.

“Wait. So you’re letting him hang out with me, but he’s not allowed to take me anywhere?” Rosalie looked at Enzo then Cole.

“That’s right, Rosebud. You’re welcome,” Cole said without missing a beat.

“Not happening,” she said, getting to her feet as I finished my food. I got up and took my plate to their sink and rinsed it off, the tension so thick in the room I could spread butter on the shit if I wanted to.

“Also not negotiable,” Cole snapped back.

“I’m not negotiating, Cole. I’m telling you that after classes get out, I’m going to the grocery store to pick up some things. Then I’m going to stop at the mall and get a new jacket because it’s starting to get cold out.”

“If you’re so worried about the weather, then go upstairs and change,” Cole said.

I cast an uneasy glance between her and Cole. I wanted to put him on his ass for talking to her like that, but I had a feeling she might do it herself.

“Rosalie. We made an arrangement with Anson,” Enzo broke in. “He’s going to make sure you’re safe. He’s to bring you straight home after classes. Nothing else. He knows that. He’s agreed to it. If you need a new jacket, I’ll get you one. As for groceries, I can order them online before I leave and have them delivered when you get home.”

“You can’t keep me managed like this,” she whispered. “It’s not fair.”

“I love you,” Enzo said gently. “And I’m desperate to keep you safe. Can you please be a good girl for us and just do what you’re told? I promise we just need a few weeks. Then you can have your freedom again.”

I watched, taking in the complete change in him as he took her hands in his. He’d gone from alpha leader to someone gentle in a matter of moments.



She sighed and nodded miserably.

He leaned in and kissed her tenderly on the lips before he pulled away and focused on me.

“Straight home after classes.”

I didn’t say a damn thing. Instead, I nodded, desperate to get her out of here so she could breathe for a moment.

“Eat,” Cole said to her.

She pushed her plate away without paying him a bit of attention.

“I love you,” she said, pressing a kiss to Ethan’s temple before coming to me. “Let’s go.”

I nodded and glanced at the guys. “Uh, thanks for breakfast.”

“Rosalie,” Cole called out.

She ignored him and stormed from the room. I kept pace with her as I grabbed her bag from beside the door and we went outside to my Challenger in the driveway.

I knew Cole was following us. I didn’t even need to look back to know it.

He grabbed her arm and pulled her to a stop.

“Wait,” he said as I opened the passenger door and put her bag in the backseat.

Cole looked at me, scowling before focusing on her again. “You didn’t tell me goodbye.”

“I thought it was obvious I had no intentions on it when I left the room,” she said.

I bit back a smile. I loved how she stood up for herself. She had a long way to go, but she’d get there. At least she didn’t let them completely walk all over her.

“We had a good morning,” he said softly. “Didn’t we?”

“We did until you were a jerk.”

He cradled her face. I tried to look busy as I waited for her.

“I just... It’s hard for me, OK?”

She sighed and leaned into his touch.

*Fucking prick knew how to work her.*

“I know. It’s hard for me too.”

“I’ll take you out soon, baby. I promise. We’ll do whatever you want to do.”

“I want you to just stop doing this shit for Anthony. Please?” The soft plea in her voice made my chest constrict.

“You know I can’t,” he said, glancing at me. “We’ll talk tonight, OK?”

She sighed and nodded.

He leaned in and kissed her deeply, his hands trailing to her ass. I knew what he was doing. Marking his damn territory.

He didn’t need to though. I’d seen the mark on her creamy skin earlier when she’d come downstairs.

They broke apart and she left him standing on the pavement as she came to where I was waiting for her. I helped her into the car and closed the door on her.

“Don’t fuck this up,” Cole said to me.

“I don’t think it’s me who is going to fuck anything up, lover boy. Pretty sure you’re doing that on your own.”

I didn’t wait for his rebuttal. I slid behind the wheel and revved the engine before backing out, but not before I took in the fury on his face.

That was fine.

I was positive we’d have a go at one another again soon enough.





I LISTENED as Rosalie sang for the class.

She was truly something to behold. Pure, raw talent. Hell of a vocal range. Pretty as could be. And sweet. So fucking sweet.

I pushed that shit out of my head.

She was my job, that was it.

I was basically her bodyguard in exchange for information. Enzo had text me earlier in the day to let me know he'd put out some feelers for me.

I needed to focus on the important shit, and that was keeping my head in the game.

Students clapped as her song came to an end. It didn't matter how many times I'd watched her sing, seeing her eyes shine brightly as she took in the crowd would never get old. Neither would the blush that colored her cheeks.

She didn't realize how good she was.

She did an awkward bow before she left the performance area and went back to her seat, but not before she caught my eye and gave me the tiniest smile that made my heart race.

I followed her with my eyes as she sat next to Fox who gave her hand a squeeze before he looked at me.

Challenging me.

I smiled and turned back around.

I wasn't the guy they wanted to challenge. I never backed down. Luckily for them, I gave a damn about Rosalie and wasn't there for a conquest. My feelings were genuine. I wanted her to succeed. I wanted her to be happy and safe. I just wished they were on the same page as me.

I listened as more students sang, some of whom I couldn't figure out how they'd gotten into the prestigious school. I offered my thoughts when I thought it would help. When class

ended, I followed Rosalie and Fox out of the room and stopped along the wall with them.

“I’ll see you tonight when we get home,” Fox said.

She looked like she wanted to say more but gave him a shaky smile instead. “OK.”

“I love you, Rosie. I’ll sleep with you tonight, OK?”

She nodded, and he kissed her goodbye. I watched him leave, noting he didn’t look twice at me.

“So, what’s for dinner?” I asked as we walked the hall.

“I don’t know,” she murmured, her eyes downcast.

“LeeLee. Hey.” I turned to face her as we stopped. “Life sucks sometimes. We’ve got to find the silver lining.”

She scoffed.

“There’s a silver lining,” I continued. “We get to hang out together. In the safety and comfort of your house. We couldn’t do that last week.”

She shrugged. “I guess.”

“What? Am I not cool enough to hang with?”

A tiny smile cut her lips up. “You’re cool, Ani.”

“Good. Now decide what kind of pizza we’re ordering in tonight and what movie we’re watching. Text it to me, OK?”

Her smile grew. “Can we watch something happy and funny?”

“It’s your choice, songbird. Just say the word and I’ll be there.”

“Do you like cartoons?” She cocked her head at me.

I blinked at the question. “I, uh, don’t hate them.”

She full on grinned. “Anime?”

I smirked at her. “That kinky shit where the character has massive boobs and, uh, it’s like animated porn?”

“Oh my god.” She laughed. “No. I didn’t even know that was a thing. How do you know it’s a thing?”

“It’s not my first time.” I winked at her, making her laugh louder.

I loved her fucking laugh. It was contagious, my own laughter bubbling out of me.

“So Ani sits in his nice apartment and watches animated porn?” She clicked her tongue. “You’re weird.”

“I am, but I didn’t say I watch that.”

“Draw it?” She raised a brow as I snorted at her.

“Definitely not. I’m lucky if I can draw a stick figure.”

“All that talent is just in your voice?”

“No, songbird. I assure you I’m talented in many *other* areas.”

Her cheeks flushed red, and my heart danced in my chest.

She cleared her throat. “I want to watch cartoons tonight. Like I used to when I was kid. When life was good.”

My heart hurt for her. She had a lot going on in her head that she didn’t talk about.

“Cartoons and pizza it is. I can’t think of a better way to spend an evening,” I said, smiling down at her. She was so tiny. I towered over her by at least a foot. Maybe more.

“I’m glad you feel that way,” she said. “Maybe we can have nachos too?”

“Absolutely.”

She smiled, it not reaching those emerald colored orbs of hers. “I’ll see you after class. You have that meeting to get to.”

I nodded. I did have that damn meeting, but fuck if I wanted to leave.

I watched as she moved past me and went into her class.

It didn’t take a genius to figure out the pull she had on a man’s heart. I’d hardly known her for long and already she had

me wrapped around her finger.

No wonder Cole was such an angry prick.

I would be too if she were my girl.

Because I knew... I fucking knew she was worth stealing and dying for.

And that put him and I on the same damn page.

Finally.

SEVENTEEN



# FOX

**M**y fist collided with flesh and bone as I beat the asshole tied to the chair. Enzo pulled out his knife as I stepped back.

When I was a kid, I wanted to grow up to be a writer. I wanted to tell stories and take readers on wild adventures. I wanted to watch Rosie's reaction as she read my words. Hold her when those words scared her. Love her for supporting my dreams.

Never did my dreams for a future include kidnapping and murder. And whatever the hell else I was wrapped up in as I wiped the blood from my knuckles.

But this guy.

This guy had a list of names and Enzo's was on it.

So was Anthony's. So was Enzo's innocent mother's.

I wasn't going to just let that shit go.

It would only be a matter of time before Rosalie's name appeared on that list. Or E's. Or Cole's. Or fucking mine.

They wouldn't stop there either. If they couldn't get us, they'd get our families.

We needed to stop it right here. Right now.

"Who hired you?" Enzo asked. It was as if he were simply discussing an incoming storm as he faced down the prick.

"I-I don't know!" The guy spit a mouthful of blood at Enzo's feet.

I couldn't control myself. My fist collided with his face again, making him groan. His head lolled on his shoulders, his eyes nearly swollen shut.

Cole grabbed the wallet we'd taken from him and went through it.

"Gavin Crane. From here in the city. Lives on the south side." Cole grinned as Gavin's eyes tried to widen. "Do you have a family, Gavin?"

"Fuck you. Don't you fucking dare—"

"Nice. Has a family." Cole pulled Gavin's phone out as I glared down at the prick in front of me. E had been quiet the entire time and hung out in the shadows. I honestly thought we should have left him home with Rosalie, but Enzo thought we needed to get him acquainted with the lifestyle better so he wasn't constantly having his anxiety attacks.

All I knew was that E was even less cut out for this life than I was.

"Aw, you have a wife. A new wife. She's decent looking. Too hot for your ass," Cole said. "Oh, look. You're going to have a baby!"

"Don't! Don't fucking look at her!" Gavin rocked violently in his chair.

"We won't if you tell us what we want to know," Enzo said politely.

Gavin's chest heaved in and out. He licked his lips. "I-I don't know who it was. Honestly. A guy approached me at Wyland's on twelfth. He offered me money. M-my wife is sick. The pregnancy... we could lose the baby too. I-I was just trying to save my family. We needed the cash." A tear trickled through the blood on his face.

"But you were going to kill me. Kill my family. Why would I give you what you wanted to take from me?" Enzo asked, his voice soft. Too soft. Scary soft. Chills raced along my spine.

Gavin shook his head, his eyelids squeezed closed as tears flooded his face. “Please. Just don’t hurt my family. I-I swear we’ll disappear. You’ll never be bothered by me again. My wife and baby need me. Let me go. Please, let me go.”

*Fuck.*

“Answer me,” Enzo said.

Gavin sniffled. “Because you’re not like me. You’re better than me.”

Enzo chuckled softly. “The truth of the matter is, Gavin, I’m really not.”

Gavin let out a shriek as Enzo sliced his knife across Gavin’s face, leaving behind a fairly deep cut that poured blood.

“P-please,” Gavin blubbered through the blood.

“He has a baby coming,” Cole said softly.

I looked to Cole to see his face twisted. He always got soft when it came to babies.

“He was going to kill me,” Enzo snapped. I could see he was a moment from destruction as his hands shook, Gavin’s blood on them. “He had my fucking name on a list! My family’s names! It’s only a fucking matter of time until Rosalie is on that list. Or any of you.”

Enzo spun the knife in his hand as Gavin continued to weep.

E stepped forward, concern on his face.

In the big scheme of things, I understood where Enzo was coming from on this. Gavin didn’t have the courage to do what needed to be done. He was sloppy. He’d have fucked himself anyway. But the fact remained, he was desperate and may have tried and that attempt could have cost Enzo or any one of us our life.

This life sucked.

This man had a family.

He was hard up for cash.

But...

“How much were you getting paid to do the hit?” Enzo asked, turning back to Gavin.

“T-ten thousand.”

“Ten thousand?” Enzo let out a sour laugh. “You’re really fucking stupid, aren’t you? Do you know who the fuck I am? Who my father is?”

Gavin shook. “I-no.”

“I’m Lorenzo De Luca, the heir to one of the most powerful mafia syndicates in the entire fucking world. Do you think someone offering you a pathetic ten thousand had any idea what you were up against?”

Gavin let out a soft sob. “I-I didn’t know. I thought you were just some street thug getting into the wrong territory.”

“Ten fucking thousand.” Enzo stomped away and tugged at his dark hair, muttering the entire time.

I cast an uneasy look at Cole who returned my stare, his face showcasing he was still thinking about Gavin’s unborn kid.

And E.

His green eyes were filled with worry. He was on the verge of losing himself.

We were in a hell of a mess.

I was just about to tell Enzo we needed to figure this shit out when Enzo stormed back and pulled his gun out. Before the words could leave my mouth, he squeezed the trigger, the bullet sailing through the air and hitting Gavin in the center of his forehead.

Gavin’s body slumped, his head falling forward.

He was dead.

“Clean this the fuck up,” Enzo snapped, glaring at Gavin’s body as we stood in silence. He stormed away again.

I was rendered speechless. I had no idea he'd kill him. My assumption was Enzo would let him go and make him promise to really get the fuck out of here with his family. To know he'd made the decision to end his life really floored me.

Cole said nothing as he undid Gavin's restraints and let his body fall to the floor. Wordlessly, he began wrapping him in the plastic we'd put down.

I hadn't really thought we'd end up using it.

Stepping forward, I helped Cole wrap up Gavin's body.

E simply stood watching, his body shaking every now and then.

Moment's later, Emilio strode in with men at his side.

"Nice work. We'll take it from here," he said gruffly. The men stepped forward and grabbed up the body while others set to work cleaning anything up that needed it.

I grabbed E by the arm and led him out into the night, Cole on E's other side.

Enzo was staring up at the stars by his Escalade and smoking some sugar.

We helped E get into the backseat before closing him in.

Cole rounded on Enzo the moment E was safely stowed away.

"What *the fuck* was that?" Cole demanded.

"That's what saving our fucking world looks like," Enzo said bitterly.

"He had a kid on the way!"

"Someday I will too. So will you. So will Fox. Even E if he can get his shit together. So what's the difference?" Enzo leveled his dark stare on Cole.

"That was fucked up. We've left a child fatherless."

"We'll leave many children fatherless in this world."

Cole let out an angry snarl before storming away and getting into the backseat with E.

“I understand why you did it,” I said softly.

Enzo sighed and looked over at me, his eyes rimmed in red.

“If we don’t teach lessons in this world, then the world will teach us the lessons. I’m not willing to learn the hard way.”

I nodded, my throat tight as he looked back to the sky.

“I’ll drive,” I murmured.

Enzo didn’t say anything. He simply put out the sugar and got into the passenger seat, his gaze set ahead of him.

But really, I did understand.

We had to look ahead of us. If we didn’t, everything behind us would catch up and drown us in our mistakes.

This was our world, and this really was us saving it.

I swallowed hard as I pulled down the gravel road, the interior silent except for E’s heavy breathing.

“For Rosalie,” I whispered into the silence. “We’re saving her.”

“For Rosalie,” Enzo agreed as he looked out the window at the stars, his hands trembling.

So this was what being a hero looked like.

Or villain.

It would seem the lines had become blurred.

EIGHTEEN

# ENZO

I let the warm water rain down on me. The night had been pure fucking hell. I'd done some shit I hadn't wanted to do, but I knew it needed to happen.

*Leave no strings. No traces. Kill anyone who is a threat.*

Gavin Crane was a fucking idiot. Just a dumbass trying to make ends meet.

I'd already made a phone call to one of my guys to get money deposited in Gavin's wife's account from an anonymous gifter.

And it was a hell of a lot more than ten thousand dollars.

Hopefully, she'd take it and get her and her kid's ass out of this city and off to a new life.

I shoved away all the feelings threatening to overtake me.

There wasn't time to be crying in the shower. I finished quickly and got out. With a towel wrapped around my waist, I went to the sink and brushed my teeth, taking in the tired look on my face.

I'd done this to keep my family safe. To keep Rosalie safe. It was only a matter of time before her name ended up on one of those lists.

In the beginning, I'd been a little upset that Fox got to claim her as his publicly while the rest of us had to pretend she didn't matter to us. That she was simply our friend's girlfriend.



Now, I could see the appeal and was relieved it had gone down this way. If anyone got wind that Rosalie was mine, she'd be an immediate target. I gagged, clutching at the edge of my sink at the thought.

*I couldn't... I wouldn't let that happen to her.*

I fucking loved her so much it was killing me inside.

She was in danger with me.

With us.

Shit was getting crazier by the day. I had to protect what was mine. *Fuck... but how? Keep killing people? Breaking apart families just to keep mine whole?*

Cole was pissed off at me. E was silently freaking out, but at least he hadn't completely lost his shit. And Fox... Fox surprised me most. He'd simply understood and accepted it.

I finished brushing my teeth, my soul aching, and went into my bedroom to find Rosalie waiting on my bed dressed in a short black silk nightie, her red waves cascading around her.

My heart jumped in my chest at the sight of her.

*Fuck, she's beautiful.*

I'd never get used to just how much.

She got to her feet and slowly approached me as I stopped in the center of the room.

"Anson leave?" I asked, staring down at her as she stopped in front of me.

"Yes. He left as soon as you guys got home," she answered, her green eyes sweeping over my face.

I nodded, my throat tight.

Seeing her was making me emotional again.

What I'd done tonight to keep her safe was eating at me.

"Did-did you have a good time?" I asked softly.

She nodded and licked her lips. "He watched movies with me. We ate nachos and pizza and worked on a song."

I nodded again. Seemed like a perfect evening.

“He didn’t...” my voice trailed off.

“He is never disrespectful to me,” she said, reaching out and cradling my face. I closed my eyes, letting myself get lost in her touch. “He’s my friend. Nothing more.”

“But you feel for him.” I opened my eyes to look down at her.

“Fox told you,” she murmured, her brows crinkling.

I nodded.

“It’s not like how it is with us. I just... he’s my friend. That’s it. That’s all he can ever be,” she said. “I would never... you know that, right?”

I said nothing as I rested my hands on her hips and tugged her body against mine. I kissed along her shoulder. She angled her neck to give me easier access, her chest heaving gently as I trailed my lips up to her jaw. To her ear.

My hands tightened on her waist, earning a soft whimper of pain from her.

“If you ever step out on me... on us...” I whispered in her ear, not knowing where I was fucking going with it.

She shivered against me.

“Don’t let me find out,” I finished. “If you decide you want him, just take him and go. If you’re gone, I’ll know what you want.”

“Enzo, I would never—”

I didn’t let her finish. I crushed my lips against hers, swallowing down the remainder of her sentence as I lifted her off her feet. She wrapped her legs around my waist, my tongue against hers as I continued to infiltrate her warm mouth.

I was angry. Broken. In fucking agony at what I’d had to do.

I needed to get out of my fucking head.

She bounced on the bed as I deposited her. She didn't get a chance to move because I had her turned over onto her stomach, her nightie pushed up to her hips.

*No panties.*

Perfect.

I let my towel fall to my feet before I shoved into her pussy.

A soft cry at my sudden intrusion left her lips, but I didn't stop. I plundered her heat, fucking her so hard she sobbed into the mattress.

“E-Enzo, please. Slow down—”

I pushed her face into the mattress, silencing her.

“Just fucking take it, Sunshine. Please,” I croaked out as I slammed back into her. “I need you like this.”

She shuddered before she stilled, taking what I needed to give her.

Fuck, was it good.

The sound of our slapping skin and heavy breathing sounded out in an otherwise silent room.

I was hurting her. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that I was.

But she let me.

And so like the fucking monster I was, I continued to greedily take what pained her to give. It was selfish and harsh, but I just needed all of it right now.

Her body shuddered as she twisted her fingers in my blanket.

I reached out and fisted her hair, bringing her chest off the bed, her tits jostling for me as I continued to slam into her wet heat.

I released her hair and wrapped my hand around her throat and hauled her back to my chest as I thrust up into her.

She clawed uselessly at my hand as I squeezed, her breath raspy and weak until I'd cut it off completely, no air movement coming from her. Tears slipped down her cheeks, making me fuck her rougher.

Her body quaked against mine as she came hard, her release drenching me.

I released her throat, allowing her to breathe.

The sweetest moan left her mouth followed by a choked sob.

I bit into her shoulder, making her cry out again as I filled her pussy with my release, my cock twitching deep inside her.

I stopped moving as she cried softly, her head on my shoulder. I reached out and cradled her breasts for a moment before I turned her head to me and kissed her soft, wet lips. The saltiness of her tears brought me crashing back to reality.

Maybe I'd gone too far.

I would never admit it to her though.

Instead, I eased her into bed and slid in beside her. I cradled her against my body as she cried softly.

"There's a monster living inside me, Sunshine," I whispered. "Sometimes it does really bad things."

She said nothing as her body shook with her tears.

"But everything I do has your name on it. I love you more than you can ever know and would do anything and everything within my power to keep you safe. Don't ever forget that."

I held her until she stopped shaking and her sobs finally silenced.

Her breathing grew deeper as she laid in my arms.

There wasn't anything I wouldn't do for her.

I realized it in that moment as clarity hit me.

I'd kill for her. Over and over. Forever.

Rosalie Bishop was more than my girl.

She was my fucking breath. She was my heartbeat. She was everything that made me who I was.

How could I regret killing a man when it meant she got a chance to live safely?

I couldn't.

So I fucking didn't.

No regrets.

Not in this fucking life.

NINETEEN

## ROSALIE

“Are you OK?” Anson asked as I tried to get out of his car the following day. Every muscle in my body hurt from Enzo’s harsh love.

I knew he was upset. Something terrible had happened that he hadn’t want to talk to me about. I’d seen Fox earlier and he was just as quiet and withdrawn. Ethan had gone directly to the basement to his lab and had locked the door, and Cole glared at Anson before going upstairs, clearly angry about more than Anson’s presence.

I winced as Anson met me at my door.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

“What happened?” he asked as he grabbed my bag. When I tried to take it, he shifted it onto his shoulder, his blue eyes drilling into mine. “Talk to me. You were fine when I left last night.”

I sighed. “It’s nothing. Enzo and I ...” my voice trailed off.

“Ah,” he said, his gaze raking over me quickly. “Got it.”

My cheeks heated as he backed up and turned to walk to our first class. I fell in step beside him, both of us silent for a beat. I’d worn a turtleneck to hide the light bruising on my neck from Enzo. I knew he wasn’t intent on harming me. It was just how he was when he was upset. Most of the time, I liked it. Last night I hadn’t, but mostly because I was so worried about whatever had gone down. And, of course, they refused to talk to me about any of it.

“Pull your turtleneck up. I can see a bruise,” he muttered.

I quickly pulled my turtleneck collar up, my face heating.

“Is it always like that with him?” he finally asked after a long moment. “Does he always hurt you?”

“No. Not really,” I said, my voice barely above a whisper. He’d hurt my throat last night more than was his typical. I’d honestly thought he wasn’t going to let go, not because he wanted to hurt me, but because *he* was hurting so much. That the darkness lurking inside him couldn’t be reeled in. It had frightened me.

We walked in silence again before he pulled me to a stop. “LeeLee, listen. If you need help or something, just let me know. You’re more than welcome to stay with me at my place. I have the extra bedroom. I can clear it out and buy a bed for it.”

“I’m fine. It was just a little, um, rough, last night. It’s not a big deal.”

“It is when you’re fucking hurting with every step,” he shot back, his eyes flashing with a shadow of anger as he grabbed my hand.

“Anson, really—”

“What’s going on?” Fox’s deep voice cut in.

Anson dropped my hand and backed away, a sour look on his face.

“You OK, Rosie?” Fox asked, his glare fixed on Anson who sighed and looked away.

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine. What’s going on?”

“Nothing,” I said. “We were just talking.”

Fox stared me down for a moment before turning to Anson. “You don’t fucking touch her. Remember?”

A muscle thrummed along Anson’s jaw as he glared back at Fox. Instead of saying anything, he looked away, his hands



shaking slightly.

He was mad.

I didn't like that.

Immediately, I wanted to reach out for him and tell him everything. Make him understand that this was just my life. It was filled with uncertainty, fear, and worry.

"Rosie." Fox hauled my attention back to him, a frown on his face.

"Sorry," I mumbled. "How was your early practice?"

"Grueling," he said, his gaze skirting over me. He reached out and tucked a curl behind my ear. He looked over his shoulder at Anson who was staring down at his phone. "You can go. I can handle it from here."

"No news on anything?" Anson asked.

"Don't you think if we did have you'd know?"

Anson scoffed and handed my bag to Fox. "Right. What was I thinking?"

And with that, he left us. I wanted to call out to him, to tell him I really needed to talk to him about everything so he wasn't upset or concerned.

"You don't have to be so rude," I said with a sigh.

"Just because we're letting him around doesn't mean we owe him shit," Fox said.

I shook my head. I didn't have it in me to argue over it.

"I was wondering," Fox continued as I began my walk to class. He fell in step beside me. "Are you doing anything tonight?"

"No. Homework."

"Do you want to listen to a new story I'm working on?"

We entered the building and I stopped along the wall. "You're working on a new one?"

He nodded, his eyes shining brightly. “I am. I was wondering if you’d like to hear it. Or read it. We could make a night of it if you have some time. After your homework, of course.”

I nodded, grinning at him, all my fears and anger ebbing away. “I’d like that. Maybe we can talk too?”

“Sure,” he said, his smile not quite reaching his eyes. “I’ll make us dinner.”

“Macaroni and cheese soup?” I teased, choosing to pick my battles. I’d save whatever was going on for later. I knew Fox and the guys were up to a lot of dark and dangerous things. I wasn’t even sure if I wanted to know. We walked again.

He chuckled. “How did you know?”

I smiled at him. “Just a wild hunch.”

“So will you be my date?”

We stopped outside the classroom and I went up on my tiptoes and pressed my lips to his.

“Yes.”

“Fuck, Rosie, baby,” he murmured, his hands tight on my waist. “Let’s go home now. No one is there. Me and you. All day. Wrapped up in one another.”

“Mm, how you tempt me, Foxy boy,” I said, butterflies stirring low in my guts.

“Stop being a good girl for the day and be my bad girl,” he continued in a growly voice. “I want you so bad, baby. Come on.”

I chewed my bottom lip. “My classes... I can’t.”

He sighed and pecked my lips. “You’re too good for me, Rosie. I’m trying to be a bad boy and corrupt you, and you’re trying to turn me into a saint.”

“You are a saint,” I said, turning serious. Something about the way he spoke made chills rush along my skin. “You’re good. You know you are.”

A sad smile graced his face. "I love you. I'll see you later. We'll just have to make up for lost time tonight."

"OK." I kissed him again. "I can't wait."

His smile turned genuine. "Me either."

We bid one another goodbye, and I went into class to find Anson waiting for me. He moved to me quickly, ignoring the girl he'd been talking to.

"Everything OK?" His blue eyes raked over my face.

"It's fine. Fox and I are going to hang out tonight."

His lips quirked up, the smile not crinkling the corners of his eyes like I was used to. "Good. Great."

"Are you OK?"

"Of course. It's just. . . this is stressful on all of us. The guys don't like me. It makes things a little uncomfortable, but it's nothing I can't handle. I'm more worried about you."

"I'm OK. Really. I keep getting asked. I swear nothing has changed."

He studied me for a moment before blowing out a breath. "OK. But promise you'll talk to me when you're not fine?"

"Cross my heart," I said. "Hope to di—"

His finger met my lips to silence me.

"*Never* hope that, LeeLee. Sit with me."

I swallowed hard as his finger left my lips and nodded because words would fail me. He was always so surprising.

I followed him to his seat, noting the way he limped every now and then. I hated he'd been hurt because of me. It didn't sit well.

When he sat, I slid in next to him and pulled out my notebook.

I said nothing as I sat there, listening as students came up to speak to him. Girls hit on him, each one progressively getting more annoying.

“Anson, do you think you could tutor me?” A girl named Vicki gushed, reaching out to squeeze his forearm. “Oh my god. Your arm is so... thick. Is that the only thing that is...?”

I snapped my attention over to her, irritated at her bold, disgusting question.

“Do you have a reason to be here besides openly hitting on him?” I demanded.

He looked over at me and blinked in surprise at my outburst.

I plowed on. “Just give him your damn number and go sit down.”

She quickly scribbled her number on a piece of notebook paper and handed it to him.

“Call me. I’m not busy tonight. We can practice.” She winked at him and shot me a quick sneer before darting back to her seat.

He let out a soft huff of air. “What was that?”

“She’s thirsty,” I muttered.

“So you offered me up as a cold drink of water?”

“Guess so. You’re welcome.”

He chuckled. “I appreciate you being my wingwoman, but I’m fine. Really.”

My heart sped up as he crumpled her number and tossed it toward the garbage can. I watched as he sank the shot.

“You don’t date?”

“I like keeping my options open.”

“But what about...” my voice trailed off. It wasn’t my damn business. I’d be as bad as Vicki if I asked.

He turned in his seat and smiled at me. “What about what?”

“Nothing.”

“No, don’t *nothing* me. What is it? What about...?” he prompted, his blue eyes glittering as he watched me fidget in my seat.

“You’re a guy,” I squeaked out. “You have... needs.”

He chuckled, leaning in. His cologne wafted over me, clouding my senses. “Trust me. My *needs* right now are being met.”

“Good,” I said thickly.

“Very,” his voice was soft.

“I—,” I didn’t even know what I was going to say, but it was fine because our professor came in and started class.

But I could feel him watching me through a side eye.

I couldn’t help the tiny smile that worked its way onto my lips as I glanced at him from the corner of my eye.

And when his smile widened, so did mine.

“Pay attention,” I murmured, tapping the top of his hand with my pencil.

“Believe me, songbird, I am.”

I looked away from him, the smile fixed to my face.

Anson Beyers was the breath of fresh air I needed in this suffocating madness.

And because of that, I’d smile all damn day.

TWENTY

# COLE

Rosalie seemed happy.

Mostly.

I watched her as she ate a banana on the couch.

It made my dick hard.

Maybe I had a fruit fetish.

*Nah, I have a Rosebud fetish...*

“Cole. Office.” Enzo looked at me from the doorway.

I sighed and pushed out of my seat at the kitchen island. I’d had a good view of Rosalie and her banana from there and was just considering having her eat *my* banana.

“What’s going on?” I muttered as I stood next to him. His eyes were on Rosalie as she ate, her earbuds in, and her hand flying over her notebook as she wrote.

I was still pissed at him for killing Gavin. While I knew we were all monsters, I never thought we’d stoop so low. After a talk with Fox, I’d realized why, but it didn’t piss me off any less.

Maybe I was angry that it had to be that way.

I didn’t want to dwell on it or stay mad at Enzo, so I was just going to let it go. This was our fucking lives. I knew that going into this. Hell, I embraced it and lived for it. But fuck. Seriously. *Fuck.*

“The banana,” I murmured sadly as she finished it without casting a look in our direction. She tended to get so lost in her music that I wasn’t surprised.

Enzo grunted and tore his gaze from her and nodded for me to follow him. E was already lounging on the leather couch, smoking sugar.

“I didn’t know you were home,” I said, coming in and taking the sugar from his hand and inhaling a deep pull.

He sat up, his eyes bloodshot and wiped at his nose. “I had a long day. Decided to come home early.”

“Then it wasn’t long,” I pointed out as Enzo took his usual seat in the wingback black leather chair.

“Long enough,” E muttered.

“Did you find anything out?” Enzo asked.

E shook his head. “Nothing. Dead ends. Macy is just... gone. I spoke to Drake. He had nothing. Sounds like Nicolai Reznikov is sending men out to look for her.”

“He’s moved his business out to LA,” Enzo said. “He still has men on the streets here, but he wanted to take over the west coast.”

“Is he going to be a problem here?” I looked at Enzo. I knew Nico’s reputation. It was just as bad as that fucker Matteo De Santis. The last thing we needed was to add more logs to the fucking fire we were in.

“I don’t believe he will be. Nico and my father have an arrangement. They knew one another in college. If anything, I’d say Nico is more on our side than on the Ivanov’s. From what my father has told me, Nico’s sister married one of Ivanov’s men and was murdered. He’s been laying for them ever since.”

I nodded. It sucked about her death, but at least it meant our asses might be covered.

E shifted and grabbed another sugar stick and lit it. He took a deep hit and rubbed his eyes, groaning.



I sighed and pushed his legs over and sat beside him as Fox came into the room.

“You want to talk about it?” I asked softly as I watched him get high. I glanced over to Enzo who had gotten up and was at the bar with Fox, both of them in deep conversation as Enzo poured them drinks.

E sat up and let his head hang, his lit sugar stick between his fingers.

“It’s fucked, Cole. So fucked. Last night...”

“You know why it had to happen, right?” I asked softly.

“I fucking get it. That doesn’t mean I have to like it. This wasn’t supposed to be my life, man. I promised my parents I’d get through college. Stay clean. Now look at me. Fucking part of an Italian hit squad, making street drugs, and getting fucking high while one of my friends is probably in a dumpster somewhere.” He let out a shuddering breath before he sniffled.

“Easy, E,” I said, reaching out and pulling him into my arms. “It’ll be OK. We’re taking out the assholes before they take us out. Before they take Rosalie.”

“I know,” he whispered.

“If you ever want to have beautiful babies with her, we have to kill these fuckers.”

“I love her endlessly, but I’m not fit to be a father. I don’t want kids.” He pulled away from me and wiped quickly at his eyes before he took another hit.

“You don’t want kids?”

“I want kids about as much as I want someone else to touch me,” he muttered. “You can have my spot. I’m not interested.”

“Not even with Rosebud?” The idea was beyond me. I wanted kids so badly it was killing me slowly on the inside. All I could envision was my little girl or boy growing up. Me giving them piggyback rides, teaching them to tie their shoes, coloring, playing hide and seek, picking out the perfect gift for

Rosalie for Mother's Day. *Not* having a kid was out of the question.

"Rosalie is going to be the best and most perfect mother someday," he said softly, a faraway look in his eyes. "But not to my kid. I'd never burden someone with my fucking DNA. People like me shouldn't be reproducing. I'm a fucking addict who is a complete basket case." He took another deep drag before blowing out a cloud of smoke. "Besides, do you really want to bring a kid into our world? Imagine losing another baby." He fixed his hazel eyes on me as nausea twisted like a snake in my guts. My breath hitched, and my hands shook.

"You don't deserve that pain, and Rosalie definitely doesn't deserve it again. So no. No babies for me. I know you want one, but I really think you need to do some deep soul searching. We aren't cut out to be fathers. Not with what we do. Now with who we are."

I swallowed hard and looked down at my hands. The idea of never having a kid made me want to cry. I'd been so excited to meet Blossom. To be a dad. I never had my dad around in my life. He was always too busy for me. I wanted to be a good dad to someone someday. The best dad.

E was right. I hated that he was. What made it worse was that I knew I wouldn't be able to let go of my desire to be a father. I was selfish like that.

"I'm sorry," E said, sighing. He reached out and squeezed my thigh. "I'm being an insensitive prick. I know how much you want a kid. I'm just high as fuck right now and stressed out. Ignore me."

I gave him a twitch of a smile as he laid back against the cushions, muttering about how Rosalie was going to kill him if she found out he was high.

He was right though about the kids.

But I was also a fucking selfish prick.

I pulled my phone out and sent a text to Rosalie.

**Cole: I love you, Rosebud. So fucking much.**

**Rosalie: I love you too. Is everything OK?**

**Cole: Yes. I just wanted to tell you.**

I bit my bottom lip, not wanting her to worry. I needed to lighten the mood.

**Cole: I watched you eat that banana tonight and it made my cock so hard, baby.**

**Rosalie: Me biting into a banana made you hard?**

**Cole: Fuck. You're making me hard again.**

**Rosalie: (laughing face) Mm, maybe I can bite into you later.**

**Cole: Don't tease me, baby.**

**Rosalie: If I am, you can punish me ;)**

And just like that, my worries were gone.

**Cole: Deal.**

I smiled as Enzo and Fox joined us.

It would be OK. I'd get my Rosebud and my family.

*No* wasn't an option.

I always took what belonged to me, and this wasn't negotiable.

Besides, Rosalie promised me.

And you don't break a promise to a horseman.

TWENTY-ONE

# ETHAN

I laid in bed that night, listening as Fox fucked Rosalie. They'd been going at it for hours it seemed. I'd left with Enzo and Cole to hit up a club and sell sugar after our meeting in the office where we planned and plotted on how to grab the king's girl.

I wasn't comfortable kidnapping, but fuck, I wasn't comfortable murdering people either. It scared me. The only part of me I had left was this tiny ounce of my soul. I was desperate to keep it. I clung to it.

My worries about Macy were eating at my mind. It kept me awake at night. Couple that with my worries about my current life and my fear of something happening to Rosalie and it meant my ass was barely sleeping, eating, and I was higher than fuck twenty-four seven.

I blew out a breath and closed my eyes. I'd been a dick about kids to Cole. I'd seen the hurt on his face and the way his voice trembled when I'd pointed out how bringing kids into our world was a bad idea. I knew eventually Enzo would have to so he could have an heir. The thought sickened me that maybe Rosalie would be put through that fucking nightmare again. The nightmare of loss.

But I wasn't the guy you had a kid with. I didn't even like for anyone else to touch me but Rosalie and the guys. With my past... just no. I'd be a terrible dad.

My throat tightened with that thought.

I didn't like to think about it, but it was certainly plaguing me now.

With those ugly thoughts in my head, I drifted off into a fitful sleep.





I WATCHED from across the campus two weeks later as Anson and Rosalie sat near one another. I'd been fucking up per my usual and had thrown myself deep into my drug-making activities.

I'd successfully come up with a new batch that made me incredibly nervous.

It caused paralysis. A flesh prison.

I only knew this because I'd tried it and laid on the floor of my lab for hours, locked high as fuck in my own body. It was a shitty accident. But it worked, just not for what I'd intended.

Enzo had found me and watched over me.

The entire thing was a terrifying experience.

But Enzo was interested in what I'd created, and I'd given it to him, only to watch him for hours on the floor, only his eyes moving.

From that day on, I'd been locked in my lab, creating more because Enzo said we could use this drug.

Fuck, I pitied the asshole who got dosed with it.

My accident had created something that could change a fuck of a lot of things.

Because of me throwing myself into work, I'd been ignoring Rosalie again. It wasn't my intention, but I'd become obsessed with creating these drugs.

Anson said something to her that made her throw her head back and laugh. I hadn't seen her laugh like that in forever. He reached out and offered her his hand.

Or at least I thought he did.

Instead, the gesture turned into some kind of weird secret handshake that had her laughing again and him grinning before he nodded to the notebook on her lap and said something else she scribbled down.



“What are you doing?” Enzo asked, sliding into the seat next to mine.

“Watching sweetheart,” I murmured.

Their heads were together and they’d gotten serious again as she continued to scribble whatever he was dictating to her.

We were both quiet as we watched them. Anson high-fived her and then tweaked her nose, making her laugh again.

“She looks so happy,” Enzo said softly. “She hardly ever laughs at home.”

“I haven’t seen her smile in weeks,” I added, my chest tight. “Hell, I’ve barely seen her in weeks. I’m too busy. She’s too busy. Schedules are conflicting—”

“Go to her.” Enzo nodded at her. “Take the night off. Her classes for the day are over. Take her home. Talk to her. Spend time with her.”

“I don’t want to ruin whatever she’s doing,” I said awkwardly, more than desperate to do what Enzo was suggesting.

“When was the last time you got laid?”

I scoffed. “I don’t know. Did it with her and Cole. It’s been a few weeks.”

“What the fuck. If we’re in, we’re in. You’re not *in* if you’re sitting over here watching instead of taking what’s yours.”

“When was the last time you got laid?” I demanded, knowing he was sitting right about where I was.

“Since Gavin,” he said thickly.

Bile burned my throat. At least he hadn’t forgotten his name.

“We have some shit going down soon, E. You know how this works. There’s always the possibility one of us may not walk out, especially if we’re dealing with Dominic De Santis. You’ve heard the stories about him. So if you want to spend some time with her before this weekend, I suggest doing it

now because you know damn well Cole and Fox will be. Both of them are ravenous with her. Plus, we're meeting with Vander Veer soon."

"We used to be ravenous for her," I said, the words making my heart hurt.

"I still am," he whispered. "It's just fucked right now. I hurt her last time I was with her. I got carried away. I'm giving her space."

"You're giving yourself space."

"And what the fuck are you doing?" He turned his dark eyes on me.

"I don't know anymore. I miss her. I get lost sometimes. It'll always be her, though. Fucking always."

He looked back toward her and Anson. She was singing for him. Her voice carried over to us, him grinning up at her as she stood in front of him. She'd come out of her shell so much. It wasn't because of anything any of us had done for her.

It was because of him.

Anson Beyers.

People stopped to listen to her.

Gawked.

Grinned.

Recorded.

She was damn good too. Her confidence made her even more beautiful as she belted out the words to an original song of hers I'd never heard before.

I needed her.

I vowed before to not get carried away and ignore her. Fuck my mental bullshit. FUCK IT.

"She won't smile if I take her." My words struck fear into my heart.

"She'll cry instead if you continue to ignore her. If I continue."

I sighed and got to my feet.

“I hate to see her cry.”

“Then go sing with her,” Enzo said sadly.

I was way too fucking nervous for that, but ...

To hell with it.

I strode toward her.

Her green eyes found me, but she continued to sing as I approached her. I didn't know what the fuck I was doing. I never did this shit.

I was good at writing poetry, decent at piano, and I could take photos.

There was an answer buried in my fears as I approached her.

I stopped beside her as she sang. She cocked her head at me as I listened to her words.

“RUSHING FORWARD

*No one wants to make the same mistake*

*I'm just the girl with the last goodbye*

*And these tears in my eyes ...”*

“I'M *the first and the last*

*And we're both running from our past . . . “*

I COULD DO THIS.

She paused, a tiny smile on her lips as she looked at me curiously.

*Fuck it.*

I opened my mouth and sang with her, making the words up as I went. I used to freestyle with Fox for fun when we were fifteen and hanging out in his room.

Singing was Rosalie's thing, not mine, but I could hold my own if I had to. So I gave her my best rap.

WE'RE *all innocent in this world of ghosts*

*Let god try to kill me twice*

*I'm the guy who hosts*

*These demons*

*These demons inside of me*

*The ones eating my soul and trying to break free*

GIVE *me a chance*

*To break through reality*

*It feels like madness*

*Rushing straight through me*

BUT IF LOVE *feels like hell*

*I want to burn forever*

*Turn me to ashes, baby*

*And never say never.*

MY WORDS HUNG in the air for a moment before she belted out the next verse, her cheeks red. And then she hit a note I didn't know was possible before Anson fist pumped and the bystanders cheered.

I thought maybe she'd hug Anson, but she turned to me and crushed her body against mine, her arms around my neck.

I hugged her back tightly.

“I don’t know where that came from, but it was amazing, Ethan. It’s exactly what this song needed. We’ve been trying to get it sorted for a week now.” She pulled away and smiled up at me.

“I’m glad I could help, sweetheart,” I said, my heart pounding hard. I wasn’t the guy who made a scene in front of people. I liked to sit in the background and keep to myself, but I seemed to have become the center of attention.

Cole had joined Enzo and they were watching me from the table I’d vacated moments before. Cole’s brows were raised high and Enzo was smiling.

“Man, Ethan, that was some good shit,” Anson said, getting up and clapping me on the shoulder. “Rapping, huh? I never considered it for this song. It’s perfect. Where’d you come up with those lyrics?”

“I just made them up,” I said, clearing my throat.

“Impressive.” He grinned. “Do you mind if we use them for the song?”

“I’m not going to perform them,” I said immediately.

He laughed. “That’s cool. I can do it or whoever LeeLee wants. Her call.”

I nodded. “Yeah, man. Take them. They’re yours.”

“Awesome.”

“Thanks, Ethan,” Rosalie said, her green eyes bright. “You were amazing.”

She held so much wonder on her face that I stood up a little straighter.

“I, uh, do you want to hang out?” I asked, wincing at what a dipshit I sounded like.

She gazed at me, looking surprised. “Really?”

I nodded and looked around. “Yeah. I mean, unless you’re busy—“

“I’m not. I’d love to,” she said, bouncing on the balls of her feet. “Anson—“

He chuckled. “It’s fine. I’ve got somewhere to be anyway so I was hoping on cutting out early. This works out perfectly.”

She squealed, making me grin at her. I wanted to kiss her so badly, but I knew I couldn’t in public, so I opted for giving her a smile.

“You’re good?” Anson asked.

“Yeah,” I said, not taking my eyes off my sweetheart as she stared back at me. *Fuck, I was an idiot.* I’d missed spending time with her because I was too busy moping around being a fuckwad.

I reached out and gathered her bag as Anson said goodbye to her.

“See you, man,” he said before loping away.

I put Rosalie’s bag over my shoulder. “Shall we?”

“Yes,” she practically sang, linking her arm in mine.

“Fox is going to get mad,” I said softly as we walked.

“I think I can handle Foxy boy.” She laughed.

A genuine laugh.

Fuck, I’d missed her.

I really needed to get my shit together.

TWENTY-TWO

# ROSALIE

The moment we were inside the house I was on Ethan, our tongues lashing against one another's.

He grunted as he stumbled back against the wall, taking me with him as we shed our clothes. He'd been so withdrawn lately, more than the others. I hated it when he drew into himself. I never knew if he was going to come out again, and pushing and begging him never did an ounce of good but just made it worse.

But he was here now, and we were together.

He seemed happier than he had been lately. I knew the entire Macy thing was weighing heavily on him. I wished I could find out what happened to her so he could have some peace.

He lifted me, and I wrapped my legs around his waist.

"We're not going to make it upstairs," he said between kisses.

"Good." I deepened our kiss as he carried us to the living room where we fell into a heap on the couch, our bodies molded to one another's.

Within minutes, we were completely bare, and he was sinking deep inside me.

He was quicker than he typically was, not bothering with his usual niceties as he plundered my heat, his thrusts fast and hitting exactly where I needed them.



“Oh god, Ethan,” I rasped, clinging to him and jutting my hips up to meet his thrusts.

“Sweetheart. Fuck, baby. I’m not going to last.”

“Me either,” I cried out, coming hard on his cock.

He let out a deep groan, his dick twitching inside me as he reached his release with me. He drained himself inside my heat, his body trembling as he rested his forehead against mine.

“Sorry,” he said bashfully. “It’s been too long.”

I raked my fingers through his hair. “It was amazing. Don’t kid yourself.”

He chuckled. “I love you.”

“Mm, I love you too.”

He blew out a breath. “I guess we should clean up. Cole might throw a fit if we make a mess on this leather couch.”

“We can make it up to him.”

He laughed again, the sound music to my ears. With ease, he helped me up after withdrawing from me. We made it to the shower where we washed one another wordlessly, our hands drifting every now and then, a smile on both our faces.

Once done, we went to my room where we curled up on my bed and he turned on the TV and put one of my favorite movies on.

In silence, we watched the movie, our fingers laced with one another’s with my head on his chest.

“Ethan?” I asked after the movie ended.

“Sweetheart?”

“Do you talk to Cole about... babies?”

He was quiet for a moment. “Sometimes.”

“Does he tell you how much he wants one?”

“He doesn’t need to,” he murmured. “But yeah, I’m aware.”

I licked my lips. “He asked me again last night. I keep putting him off.”

I went up on my elbow and stared down at Ethan who studied me with concern on his face.

“I want to have kids. I just... “ I swallowed hard.

“Baby, you don’t need to explain it to me,” Ethan said gently. “I know. I know you’re scared and just not ready. That’s OK.”

I blinked away the tears. “I want to give him a baby. I just don’t think right now is the time for it. I’m doing really well in school and singing—”

“You don’t have to. You don’t have to do anything you’re not ready for. Cole knows this. We all do. He’s just... Cole,” he finished softly.

I nodded. “I know. I’m worried if I do get pregnant, we’ll lose another baby. I-I can’t—” my voice cracked.

“Shh, shh, shh,” Ethan murmured, reaching out and gathering me against his body. “No tears, baby. We don’t need to worry about losing our babies.”

I sniffled. “Our babies?”

“Of course ours,” he said, raking his fingers through my hair gently. “We’re all in this together.”

My heart swelled. “You-you want kids?”

He was quiet for a moment. “No. I don’t ever wants kids, but if you have a baby with any of the guys, I’ll love it like it’s my own.”

“Never?” I whispered.

“Never,” he confirmed, his voice soft.

My guts twisted. I knew Ethan was opposed to having kids now, but to know it was completely off the table made me ache inside. I thought maybe ten years down the road it would be a possibility. I supposed a part of me assumed someday we would. We all would have kids.

“We’ll never have babies together?” I whispered.

“You-you want to have kids with me?” He sounded so surprised and uncertain.

I went up on my elbow again. “I-I thought that’s what would happen for all of us years down the road. We’d all have children.”

He winced. “I’m sorry, baby. I really don’t want any. I’m not fit to have them. With my past, my-my addictions, and this life we live, I just don’t think it’s a smart idea.”

“But you’re OK with Cole wanting one?” I frowned.

He let out a sigh. “I can’t convince Cole otherwise. He wants a family. Enzo will someday too because he’ll need an heir. Fox is up in the air, but I’m sure he will want kids. But not me. I just want you. I-I don’t want to be a dad.”

“But you just said—”

“Rosalie, baby, please. This is my final decision. I’m serious about this.”

My heart broke a little. “Ever?”

A pained expression crossed his face. “I’m not good enough to be a dad. I know you’ll argue I’m wrong, but I know myself. I’d be awful having to be a father. I know where my strengths are. It’s not in functioning. You see me, babe. You see how fucked up I am. I can’t be freaking out with panic attacks at random and running through my depression, and the last thing I want to do is pass that shit down to my kid. But if I were going to be a dad, I’d pick you to be my baby’s mom. You’re going to be the best mom, Rosalie. I’m just not cut out for the father role. I’m sorry.”

We stared at one another for a moment before I nodded, my eyes burning with unshed tears. “OK.”

“Fuck, don’t cry. I’m sorry,” he said, his voice pained. “I love you so fucking much. You mean everything to me.”

“It’s fine,” I said, forcing a smile onto my face. “Maybe you’ll change your mind someday. It’s a long time off.”

“I won’t,” he said sadly. “Someday I’d even like to get a vasectomy as a permanent solution. I’m sorry, baby.”

I nodded and swallowed. “OK. I understand.”

“Rosalie—”

“I understand, Ethan. I do. Just know that if you change your mind later on, I’m willing...”

“I know,” he said softly. “And if that happens, we’ll do it. I just don’t see it as a possibility, though.”

“OK.” I gave him the best smile I could muster. “Then I guess I have to have two with Cole.”

He let out a little laugh that didn’t quite sound happy. “Don’t tell him that. He’ll really pressure you then.”

I smiled sadly at that, wondering if maybe I was just being too difficult over it. I said as much to Ethan.

“I don’t think you are. You have so much going for you. So much momentum. You need to keep going. Worry about babies and weddings some other time.”

“Weddings?” I raised my brows, needing the change of subject.

“I’m sure there will be. Although I’m sure it’ll be Fox sweeping you off your feet and giving you his name.”

“You won’t fight to be my husband?”

He rolled me onto my back and stared down at me. “If I had my way, I’d sneak off with you in the night and pledge my love and allegiance to you for all of eternity beneath a starry sky while your favorite song played in the background. You are my one true love, Rosalie Bishop. Regardless of everything in this world, that’s the one thing that will always and forever hold true. You belong to me, and I belong to you.”

“Ethan,” I said thickly.

“I love you,” he whispered before his lips claimed mine.

To hell with it.

I kissed him back, letting everything else fade away.

He was right. I belonged to him, and he belonged to me.  
And no one could take that away.

TWENTY-THREE

## FOX

“We need Rosalie gone tonight,” Enzo proclaimed, coming into the room.

“Why?” I demanded. I hardly got to see her as it was what with my football schedule, her schedule, classes and the shit we were pulling with Enzo. The last damn thing I wanted to do was be without her on a night we were supposed to have off.

“I thought tonight was going to be spent here,” E said, frowning.

Cole sighed and raked his fingers through his hair. “What happened?”

“Vander Veer came through. He wants to have dinner. Tonight. I invited him over,” Enzo said, digging into a kitchen drawer and hauling out a cookbook.

I wrinkled my nose. I wasn't about to spend the rest of my afternoon cooking from some pompous prick when I could be hanging out with Rosalie. She was due home within the hour. In fact, I'd wanted to pick her up, but Enzo had called us all into the kitchen to talk.

“I'm not cooking and neither are you,” Cole said. “I'll make some calls. We'll have something brought in. The last damn thing I want to do is spend the afternoon watching Youtube videos in an effort to figure out how to make soup or some shit.”

Enzo stuffed the cookbook back into the drawer as Cole pulled his phone out and moved to the table. If Enzo wasn't careful, we'd end up with pizza for dinner if Cole was in

charge of it. Enzo seemed to sense that because he snapped his fingers at Cole.

“No pizza or wings,” he said.

Cole rolled his eyes and greeted the person on the line.

“I can go take Rosie somewhere—” I started.

“No. I need you here. We need to show a united front,” Enzo said. “A strong front.”

E grunted. “There goes my plans to join them.”

I gave him a sad smile. It had been worth a try.

“Well, what do you suggest?” I asked, feeling defeated. We weren’t a year into this new life and already I was tired of dodging out on my responsibilities. All I wanted to do was spend time with my girl. I fucking missed her.

“I’ll talk to Anson. Have him take her somewhere.” Enzo rubbed his eyes and pulled his phone out.

“Have him take her to his apartment,” E said immediately.

I ground my teeth. “No fucking way—”

“Seriously. Hear me out.” E gave me a desperate look. “She’d not be in public, so less likely for her to get taken or hurt, *and* we can get his address because we can say we’ll be coming to pick her up. We don’t even know where he lives yet. We just let that one go, and it’s been bothering me lately. I’ve been wanting to ask Rosalie, but I don’t want her to get pissed.”

I frowned. He made a valid point.

Enzo nodded. “I like that idea.”

“I don’t want her alone with him at his place,” I said softly. I hated the idea of them alone together as it was, but at his place? Hell no.

“She’s already been alone with him there. She’s always alone with him,” E murmured. “I think it’ll be OK. He won’t try anything with her.”



I scoffed. He'd be brave to. I'd kill him. And if I'd kill him, I knew Cole would help me because he outright hated Anson.

It was a train I'd gladly ride. While I tolerated Asshole Bare Dick, it wasn't because I liked it. It was because he was so far doing a decent job with Rosalie.

"E has a point," Enzo said. "I'm good with it."

There wasn't much else we could do, so I sighed and nodded.

*There goes my evening with Rosie. Again.*





I SAT across from Vander Veer's daughter Celeste at the formal dining table we had. She kept smiling at me and licking her lips.

Immediately, I wanted to leave the room and go to Rosalie, who, by now, had to be well into the first *Lord of the Rings* movie since she said that's what they were doing tonight at Anson's. She hadn't sounded excited. If anything, she was upset and suspicious, but I told her it was because Enzo had to do this business dinner with one of his father's associates and we didn't want her to be bothered with it.

"So. Fox," Celeste said. "I saw your game last week. You're really good."

"Thanks," I said, not bothering to look at her and opting to spear a carrot and eat it.

She let out a soft laugh. "I'd love to see a game live."

"You can always purchase a ticket. They're available at the Mayfair box office," I said, then spearing a piece of broccoli.

"Don't you get ones to give away to people you're close to?" She pressed.

E frowned at her and looked to me. Cole and Enzo were too busy speaking to her father to pay us any attention. She'd practically crawled into Cole's lap when they'd sat down, giggling like it had been an accident. He was quick to push her back to her own seat, managing to keep a smile on his face that didn't quite reach his eyes.

Vander Veer had brought her along because he said it was good for her to get a feel for what he did since she was his heir.

I couldn't see her running his company or any of his underground work. She was too... something.

"I reserve anything like that for my girlfriend," I said.

"Oh." She jutted out her bottom lip.

I shook my head and went back to eating. The girl was a climber, that was for sure. Socialite looking for a rich, influential man to take care of her. She needed a reality check. I wasn't that man.

She turned her attention to E.

"What's your major?" she asked, her gaze darting to E's lips.

"Um... chemistry," he muttered.

"Mm, sugar daddy," she said, winking at him.

*God, she was despicable.*

E didn't say anything else but jerked so hard that he shook the table and spilled his glass of water. She jerked her hand away from him quickly, her eyes wide.

He swore softly and picked his glass up.

"You good?" Cole asked as Enzo gave E a look.

I glanced to Celeste to see a small smirk on her lips. She tossed her auburn hair over her shoulder, her eyes sparkling.

"Yeah. Fine," E mumbled, his cheeks red.

I wanted to toss this chick out on her ass. I knew she'd tried to touch him. The move startled him. E hated other people touching him.

He cleaned up the water with his napkin and seemed to withdraw into himself as he ate, his eyes downcast.

I hated he felt like he'd been disrespected. My anger at the entire audacity of this chick was nearing the surface. If I said anything, it might ruin the deal Enzo was putting together, so I bit back the things I wanted to say and continued to eat in silence.

"Ethan, right?" Vander Veer boomed out.

E snapped his head up and looked at him. "Yes."

Vander Veer smiled. "I hear through the underground you're the man to see if I'm looking for something... *sweet*."

“Maybe,” he said, his gaze darting to Enzo who inclined his head slightly at him.

“I’m actually in the market for that in two respects. Enzo tells me he has a girlfriend and has turned down my offer. Perhaps you’d be interested.”

E’s gaze darted around to us guys. “Uh... what is it?”

“Well, let’s start with the easy request. I need a little something to sweeten my deals. If you can help me out, I’ll pay in not only cash, but weapons. Enzo is agreeable. I just need the yes from you.”

E looked to Enzo again who nodded.

E visibly swallowed and nodded. “Yeah. I can do that.”

“Excellent.” Vander Veer clapped his hands.

My heart jumped into my throat. So more deals. More things we’d have to deal with. I knew this was all in the name of reaching the top, but what good did it make shit if you made it to the top alone?

I looked to my smart watch and saw a text from Rosie on it. I swiped it and read quickly.

**Rosalie: I miss you. I wish you were here. Or I was there.**

I ground my teeth together for what felt like the hundredth time that night. I wanted to reply to her and tell her I wished we were together too, but I had to ignore it and stay focused on this ridiculous dinner.

“Now, my second offer. My daughter Celeste. She’s looking for a good man. I hear you’re one of the best. We tend to arrange marriages in our elite circles. She just went through a rough breakup with her boyfriend Levin Seeley.”

I glanced at Enzo who frowned.

*A fucking king.*

“If you’re not opposed to it, I think you’d be an excellent match for her. You’re a soon-to-be elite. It would make sense.

Looking at you two next to one another, I can tell you'd make a great couple."

"I'm not interested in the second part of your offer," E said. "I'm sorry."

Vander Veer tensed and Celeste let out a small noise of disapproval. I looked to Enzo again who widened his eyes at E.

*No. Not fucking happening. Don't you dare...*

A muscle thrummed along E's jaw. "I, uh, I'm just too swamped with my work. I wouldn't be able to give her the time she'd require."

"I'm not that high maintenance," she said, giggling.

"Yeah, well, I'm a self-absorbed prick of a drug addict," he said tightly. "My sole reason for existing is to get high. Plus, I'm seeing someone."

I swallowed down my chuckle. I knew when E was getting upset.

"So, my apologies," he finished. "If you'll excuse me, I need to get back to work. Thank you for the offer, but I'm politely declining."

We watched as he got up from the table, leaving his plate behind.

Vander Veer let out a sigh and looked to Enzo. "It's hard finding a man who can take care of Celeste. I want the best for her. You understand, right?"

"Absolutely," Enzo said. "I'd want the best for my own daughter if I had one."

Vander Veer nodded thoughtfully. "We should retire and talk business. May Celeste wait for us in your living room?"

"Of course. She can watch anything she'd like in there." Enzo got up, Cole following. Celeste rose from her seat and moved past me but not before she brushed her hand over mine as she left.

The moment everyone was gone, I went to the bathroom and washed my damn hand and pulled my phone out.

A text from E greeted me.

**E: I can't deal with that shit. I won't deal with it. I'm going to smoke and go to bed. Sorry I'm not a team player, but that's fucked up.**

**Fox: I get it. Relax. Rest. I'll let you know how shit goes.**

He shot me a thumbs up. I moved onto Rosie's message.

Quickly, I snapped a selfie and sent it to her.

**Fox: I miss you too, baby. This dinner is ass. I can't wait until you're back in my arms.**

She replied quickly.

**Rosie: Bubble bath?**

**Fox: Absolutely.**

She sent me a little heart face, and I smiled.

Now to get the rest of this shitty night over with so I could get to the fun part... being with my Rosie.

TWENTY-FOUR



# ETHAN

I'd smoked until I was in a relaxing haze. I'd watched a movie and dozed off, knowing Enzo was going to be pissed at me for bailing on the dinner, but what did he expect me to do? Say yes to that shit?

Not fucking happening.

I could only imagine Vander Veer rounding on Cole and asking him next.

Cole would probably laugh and just go with the flow before declining. Or fuck with him before declining. The idea that anyone was that ballsy to just ask for a guy to get with his daughter was weird to me.

This elite world and I didn't jive.

I wasn't cut out for it.

I'd opted to leave Rosalie alone because I knew she'd be able to tell something was upsetting me through a text. The last thing I wanted to do was worry her while she was stuck away from us.

Fox said he was going to go pick her up tonight. She'd be home soon and then I'd get to see her.

With those comforting thoughts in my mind, I closed my eyes and drifted off.

I wasn't sure how long I was out for but I felt warmth against my body. My still wasted brain thought Rosalie came home and was in bed with me, so I smiled and let out a soft sigh as her hand moved to my cock.

She rubbed me over the top of my pajama bottoms, making me rock hard before she made to push my waistband down.

I cracked my eyelids open to see a girl between my legs.

It wasn't Rosalie.

I flew out of bed, crashing into my nightstand and knocking it over. I fell hard onto the floor, sending my lamp crashing and splintering onto the hardwood.

“Get-get the fuck out of here,” I choked out, nausea rushing through me. “Celeste, get *the fuck* out of here!”

I gagged, my body trembling.

She'd touched me. She'd touched me like Rosalie touched me.

My body shook harder as I tried to breathe.

Fuck. Fuck. FUCK. I was losing it. I was going to lose it.

“Ethan, it's just a bit of fun,” she said, kneeling beside me and reaching out to touch my shoulder. Her shirt was gone. Her tits were out.

I flinched away from her and curled into myself, my chest heaving.

“No one even needs to know,” she continued. “You don't even need to return the favor—”

I was going to kill her. I was going to strangle her until all signs of life left her fucking treacherous body.

I rocked faster, my heart racing. I tugged at my hair.

*Fuck, hold on. Hold on. Don't. Don't fucking lose it. Focus. Focus...*

“E, what the fuck is going on?” Cole swept into the room and went to his knees beside me. He shook me and I jerked away from him.

He let out a snarl. “What the fuck did you do to him?”

“I-I was bored. I came in here to see what he was doing—”

“You were slinking around our fucking house? You were supposed to stay in the fucking living room! What the fuck did you do to him?”

“I thought he’d like it,” she said, her voice wavering. “He acted like he did.”

Rage swept through me.

I reacted in the only way I knew how.

Violence.

I turned on her, taking in how large her eyes grew, before I reached out and wrapped my fingers around her throat and squeezed.

“Fuck. Fuck, E, stop. Stop!” Cole shouted, trying to tear me away from her.

I squeezed harder, my teeth grinding.

All I could think about was her dying. Killing her for fucking violating me the way she had.

“E, please, man. You gotta stop. You can’t kill her. Rosalie. Fuck. Think of Rosalie.”

*Rosalie.*

*My sweetheart.*

I breathed out and lessened my hold on Celeste’s throat.

“You’re going to leave my room,” I snarled. “You’re not going to say a fucking word about this to anyone, your Daddy included. If you do, I’ll come into *your* room in the middle of the night and slit your fucking throat and watch you choke on your mistake.” I squeezed a little bit to get my point across as tears slid down her cheeks. “You’ll do whatever the fuck plan Enzo and your old man has in place. And you’ll never fucking speak to me again. Got it?”

She nodded, and I released her. She sucked in choking breaths as she sobbed softly on my floor.

“Get her the fuck out of here,” I whispered, falling to my ass and shaking.

Cole was quick. He hauled her to her feet and dragged her crying from the room with her clothes in his hand, leaving me in silence and the moonlight.

I wasn't going to fucking make it through this. I was smart enough to know that. Smart enough to know I needed to fucking disappear.

I reached out and opened my nightstand and brought out the meds and syringe that was in there. I'd just save the guys the trouble and take my ass out for a while.

With trembling hands, I drew out the dosage, hating that this was my fucking life. I delivered the medicine into my system and let the syringe roll out of my hand as the numbness and blitzed out feeling took over.

Ugly images blearily played through my head.

Celeste's touch. Her voice. The way my dick responded to her when I thought she was my sweetheart.

I gagged, the vomit leaving my mouth. Then I collapsed onto the floor, all feeling leaving me as the meds worked through my system.

In a pile of my fucking vomit.

In my disgust.

Fucking disgusting.

The world went black, the ugly thoughts ceasing.

TWENTY-FIVE

# ROSALIE

“Tired?” Anson asked as he sank onto the couch beside me.

I yawned and nodded.

It was well after midnight. I hadn't heard from anyone in hours, and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous about what was happening at home. It was unlike the guys to not answer their phones or text me back.

He reached behind him and grabbed a blanket and draped it over me.

“Do you think you should just take me home?”

He lifted the remote and turned the TV on. We'd spent all evening working on music with *Lord of the Rings* playing softly in the background. The motion picture music had inspired me and we'd taken to his piano to work.

“Enzo told me to keep you here until we heard from them. That's what I intend on doing,” he said, going through the channels.

“Don't you think that's ridiculous though? It's my house too. I shouldn't be policed on when I can come and go.”

He sighed. “LeeLee, it's not my place to say. I know they get into some shady business, so it's probably best you're here with me.”

I nodded. He was right. I hated that he was. The fact there were probably other criminals in my home pissed me off. All I wanted was for us to have a normal life without all the guns and violence.

“How is everything at home?” he asked, pausing on a rerun of a comedy I’d seen a hundred times.

I shrugged. We didn’t talk about my home life much. Most of our conversations lately revolved around music, school, and just life.

“It’s fine. Mostly. I honestly don’t see them much. They come and go all hours of the night. Ethan is always in his area of the basement doing god knows what. Fox is always with the guys or at practice. And when they’re around at the house, I’m gone with practice and classes.” I chewed my bottom lip. I missed my guys.

“Have you talked to them about how you feel?”

I shrugged. “A little. Enzo and I end up just screaming at one another most of the time. The others tend to avoid the subject.”

“If it gets too bad, you know I have an extra bedroom. I just bought a bed for it too.”

“It didn’t have a bed before?”

He chuckled. “No. My brother has been in and out a lot and hates sleeping on the couch, so I decided to get a bed.”

“If I had to stay, wouldn’t he get upset about getting sent back to the couch?” I raised a brow at him.

He grinned. “He’ll deal.”

My phone buzzed then, so I quickly answered it without looking at the screen.

“Hey!” Jamie’s voice came over the line.

I breathed out. “Hey, what’s up?”

“Gosh, don’t sound so excited to hear from me.” She laughed.

“Sorry,” I answered sheepishly. “I just thought you might be Fox or one of the guys.”

“Aren’t they home?”

“I think so. I’m not.”

“Oh. Where are you?”

“With Anson,” I said, glancing at him. “At his place.”

I hadn't told her anything about what was happening in my life lately. We sent random messages to one another, but not anything in depth. I checked in on her to make sure she was OK and she did the same for me, but I didn't bother her with my stuff.

“Is everything OK?” Concern laced her voice.

I sighed. “I don't know. They're just... doing shit they shouldn't be doing.”

“Ah,” she said. Jamie knew how dangerous the guys were. She didn't know specifics, but she knew enough. “So you're staying with Anson?”

“No. I'm just here until one of the guys comes and gets me. But it's fine. Enough about my troubles. How are you?”

Anson got up and went into his kitchen. I watched from my seat as he put popcorn in the microwave and turned it on. He pulled his phone out and began texting.

“Ugh. Same shit, you know? Some guy in my marketing class asked me out.”

“What did you say?” I kept my eyes on Anson as he continued to text. Sometimes I wondered why I never saw him with other girls. He never seemed to date. He never talked to anyone as far as I knew past the occasional dinner and beer with people from classes. He was a bit of a loner. That made me sad because he was an exceptional guy. Sweet, handsome, funny...

He looked up and caught my eye. A wide smile blanketed his face, making my heart jump in my chest. He had a way of making that happen. I never really explored the feeling past acknowledging it before shoving it aside.

I felt my face grow warm that he'd caught me staring and quickly looked away as the smell of buttery popcorn filled the room.



“I said no. I’m just not ready,” Jamie’s voice brought me back. “Is that stupid?”

“No,” I said immediately. “You loved Spencer. I don’t think it’s stupid at all.”

We continued to talk for another few minutes before she apologized for calling so late but she was thinking about me.

We bid one another good night as Anson came back into the room with a bowl of popcorn and two cans of soda.

“Want to watch reruns?” he asked, sitting next to me and putting the bowl of popcorn between us.

I shrugged. It wasn’t like I had anything better to do. I quickly sent off a text to our group chat asking what was going on before I snuggled deeper beneath my blanket and munched on popcorn while a comedy rerun ran.

I’d give up by one AM and just closed my eyes, letting a silent prayer go with the intent that my guys were OK. And then I fell asleep because no one showed up to get me.

TWENTY-SIX

# ENZO

**E** was fucked.

He'd taken too much of his meds and needed to go to the hospital. Vander Veer and Celeste left around ten that night after Cole had cut the meeting short by letting me know the situation.

It was just as well. We'd gotten what we needed.

We'd gone upstairs after they'd left to find E passed out in his own vomit, the syringe next to him on the floor.

At first, I thought he'd finally succeeded in ending his life. But his chest finally rose and fell softly. But his breathing was ragged. So we carted him off to the hospital and were now sitting in the waiting room.

"Someone needs to tell Rosalie," Cole said.

I looked at my watch and saw it was already after midnight. We'd been there forever it seemed.

"Let's just make sure E is OK," I said. "I'll get word to Anson."

Fox hadn't said much. I knew he was angry though just by the way he glared straight ahead.

I pulled my phone out and sent a text to the asshole.

**Enzo: Hey, how's Rosalie?**

Five minutes later, I received a return text.

**Anson: She's on the phone with her friend.**

Ah, Jamie.

**Enzo: Good. We've run into a bit of a situation here. Can you just keep her occupied while we work through this?**

**Anson: I can take her home if you're not there. She's exhausted.**

I licked my lips.

**Enzo: I'll be in touch.**

"You know what's fucked?" Cole said, looking at me.

"What?"

"That fucking bitch actually had the lady balls to go into E's room and try to fuck him. I'm surprised he didn't kill her. If I wouldn't have gone up there, she'd be dead right now."

I sighed and rubbed my eyes. He was right. E had lost it, but I couldn't fault him for that. Had it been me in that situation, I'd have probably reacted the same way.

"It's bullshit," Fox said. "All of this is fucking bullshit. E has a shitty past with rape. Then this happens to him? He's already teetering on the fucking edge."

"I know," I murmured.

"And you still closed the weapons deal with her old man. It's fucked up," Fox continued.

"It's business," I said back evenly. "I wasn't aware the situation was so dire upstairs—"

"You'd have made the transaction anyway," Fox snapped. "Don't act like you wouldn't have, De Luca."

Cole remained quiet.

"It's my job. I'm sorry. We needed—"

"You know what we need? You to pull your fucking head out of your ass. Someone is going to end up fucking dead. One of us is going to die because of this bullshit." His chest heaved, and his blue eyes flashed. "I'm fucking tired of it, man. If we don't lose E, we're going to lose Rosie. Neither of

these are acceptable losses to me. Maybe they are to you, but not to fucking me!”

“What the fuck makes you think for a second I want to lose either of them?” I demanded through clenched teeth. “Huh?”

“You know damn well you’d love for Rosalie to fucking run out on us,” he shot back.

“Not because I don’t love her. Because I know it’s probably what’s best for her.” I hated the words, but they were the damn truth. “We aren’t good for her.”

He shook his head and looked away from me.

He was pissed. Too pissed to talk anymore.

“I just want E to be OK so we can go home and get Rosalie,” Cole said. “Then we can deal with everything tomorrow.”

I wanted that too so I said as much before we all went silent, stewing in our anger and misery.

For another hour we waited in silence until a doctor finally came out.

“Are you the brothers of Ethan Masters?” he asked.

We were all immediately on our feet.

“Yes,” I answered. “Is he OK?”

“He’s fine. He took a bit too much, but he’ll make a full recovery. We’d like to keep him overnight for observation.”

I nodded. If he needed it, then he needed it. “OK.”

“As long as he’s looking good in the morning, we can discharge him. Right now, he’s pretty out to the world and comfortable.”

I breathed out a sigh of relief. He’d be OK. Again.

The doctor said a few more things before leaving us.

“I guess we should get home,” I said softly. “He’ll be safe here.”

Fox grunted.

“Rosebud?” Cole asked as we walked to the exit.

“I’ll call her,” I said, pulling my phone out. We made it to my Escalade and I unlocked the door. Fox got into the back without a word, Cole following, his lips turned in a deep frown.

I hated we were going through this just as much as they did, but there wasn’t shit I could do about any of it. This was my life and we took a vow. That was just how it was. I had every hope in the world that shit would get sorted and life would be good again.

I waited until the guys were inside the car before I hit Anson’s name, listening as his phone rang.

“Hello?” His voice came over the line.

“It’s Enzo. Is Rosalie OK?”

“She’s asleep,” he answered. “Been out for about twenty minutes. Do you want me to wake her?”

He didn’t sound like he liked that option.

“No,” I said. “Don’t wake her. Do you mind if she just stays with you tonight? Shit got bad here and we need time to recoup.”

He was quiet for a moment before he spoke.

“I’d never make her leave, but you need to know whatever it is you’re doing is hurting her. She’s stressed out and misses you guys.”

“I know,” I said softly. “But we’re just trying to survive. It’s our life.”

He said nothing again.

“Can she stay?” I repeated. “You can bring her back in the morning after we call you or one of us can go get her.”

“She’s always welcome here,” he said.

“Thank you.”

“Is everything OK? With everyone? No one dead?”

“Everyone is fine.”

“Good. Anything you want me to tell her?”

“Just that we ran over and by the time we were done it was late and we didn’t want to wake her.”

He sighed. “OK. Got it. Any word on my shit?”

“I’ve picked up a few murmurings. I’m verifying that information. Once I have it, you’ll have it.”

“OK. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Take care of her,” I said in a rush.

“Always,” he answered before the line disconnected.

I stared down at the phone in my hand, something stirring deep in my guts. Not wanting to even have considered anything rushing through my mind, I looked to the stars instead and sent up a soft prayer.

“Lord, help us.”

Amen.

TWENTY-SEVEN



# COLE

Rosalie was not happy.

Hell, neither was I.

We'd managed to check E out of the hospital and get him home before Anson brought her back.

E wasn't talking to anyone. He wanted to be left alone and swore he hadn't taken too much of his meds on purpose. The look in his eyes and desperate tone in his voice made me immediately believe him.

He'd just been intent on calming himself.

I got it. I knew E. I knew the entire Celeste situation had fucked him up just a little bit more and that he needed time to sort through it.

*"Please don't tell Rosalie," he'd begged us softly, tears in his eyes. "I don't want her to know that happened to me."*

We'd agreed. It was set in stone.

We'd already been through the Macy kiss. The last thing we needed to deal with was Cock Gate.

Not that I thought Rosalie would be angry with E. It wasn't his fault. That bitch went into his room of her own accord while he was sleeping. I just didn't want my girl worrying about extra shit that didn't need worrying about, and I didn't want E worrying about her worrying.

"Rosebud?" I called out, knocking lightly on her bedroom door. She didn't even look at me. She kept her back to me at

her desk as she worked at her computer.

Cautiously, I went to her and rested my hands on her shoulders. She tensed beneath my touch.

“I’m sorry,” I said, bending down and kissing her temple. “We all are.”

“I gathered that,” she mumbled. “When you guys said you were.”

“Then why are you up here avoiding us?”

“Because I’m annoyed, Cole.” She turned to look up at me. “I’m angry that this is my life now. That I have a babysitter—”

“I thought you liked that dick bag,” I said.

She scowled at me.

“That *dick bag* is my friend, so have a little respect.”

*Fuck, I was only pissing her off more.*

“Sorry,” I muttered. “I just hardly get to see you anymore —”

“And whose fault is that?” she demanded.

“Rosebud, baby, I don’t want to fight. I just want to enjoy the time I get to spend with you. Can we do that? I’ll do anything you want to do. Name it and we’ll do it.”

She studied me for a moment. I really thought she’d tell me to take a hike, but instead, she sighed.

“I’d like to make a cake.”

I blinked at her. “OK. We can make a cake.”

I backed away as she got to her feet and went to the hall. I quickly followed, grateful we may be over our argument.

“What kind of cake?” I asked when we reached the bottom of the stairs.

“I don’t know. Chocolate?”

“I like chocolate,” I said immediately. “Maybe with, like, layers with that icing you make?”

She stopped and turned to me, a tiny smile finally on her lips. “OK.”

Fuck yeah. It was cake time.





OUR CAKE WAS GLORIOUS. Two layers with what Rosebud called a ganache layer of some frosting stuff that was absolutely delicious.

I wasn't sure where she learned to bake the way she did, but I would be there for it all.

"You'll make beautiful birthday cakes for our kids someday," I commented, taking in the beautiful chocolate monstrosity in front of me, my stomach growling.

She chuckled softly. "Think so?"

I wrapped my arms around her and hauled her back to my front and pressed a kiss to her cheek. "Absolutely, baby."

She rested her hands on my arms and I swayed with her, humming.

"What's that song you're humming?" she asked after a moment.

"Made it up," I answered before going back to humming again. If she liked it, I'd keep doing it. I was desperate to get her to be happy.

"I like it," she murmured.

"Then it's your song, baby." I gave her a gentle squeeze.

"Will you tell me what's wrong with Ethan?"

"He had a bad night last night. Had one of his anxiety attacks. It's why we didn't come get you. It was really awful. By the time things were sorted, it was late and Ass Hat said you were sleeping."

"Cole..."

"Sorry. *Anson*." I rolled my eyes, grateful she couldn't see me.

"I should go talk to Ethan—"

"No," I said sharply, pulling her back to me. "No, baby. He didn't want you to know he had one. If you go in there, he'll

know I told you. So please. Don't."

She let out a sigh but nodded. "Fine. But I'm worried about him."

"He's OK. He just wanted to rest."

She didn't say anything else, so I released her just as the front door opened and Fox and Enzo came in.

They both zeroed in on her immediately.

"Rosie," Fox said cautiously.

"Foxy," she answered.

He moved closer to her as Enzo glanced at me.

Fox grasped her hand and drew closer, his eyes fixed on her.

"I missed you," he murmured. "Are you mad at me?"

"No," she said softly. "I understand."

"You do?"

She nodded. "I do."

He breathed out and rested his forehead against hers. "I'm sorry we didn't get to have that bubble bath."

"Then make it up to me," she said, biting her bottom lip.

"I'm sorry too," I piped up immediately. No way in hell was I going to be excluded from potential make-up sex.

She let out a soft laugh as Fox groaned and released her.

Enzo moved forward and gave her waist a squeeze. "Did you make that cake for us?"

She nodded. "Sort of. Cole and I did it."

Enzo's lips quirked up into a tired smile. He'd been gone all day working on shit for his old man with Fox.

"How's E?" Fox asked.

"In his room all day. I checked on him not long ago. He's asleep," I said, watching as Rosebud cut the cake.

She doled us each out a piece before getting herself some. We went to the living room where we sat. Enzo took the recliner and Fox and I grabbed the couch. Rosalie immediately sat on Fox's lap, making me feel a little put out.

I knew we'd spent all afternoon together, but I'd been a good guy and hadn't pushed to fuck her in the cake flour. That had to earn me some kind of points.

I ate my cake, delighted at how fucking amazing it was as Fox and Rosalie fed one another.

Enzo smirked at me and shook his head, clearly watching them too.

It was when Rosalie licked a bit of frosting off Fox's lips that I knew I may be able to add a show to my dinner of chocolate cake.

The lick turned into a deep kiss within moments. Enzo reached out and grabbed Rosalie's cake before she dropped it. She didn't even seem to notice as he took it from her hand when she moved to straddle Fox's lap.

Fox had her stripped down in moments, his hands on her breasts as she ground against him, their lips fused to one another's.

"Fuck, that's hot," I said softly as she slid off him and went to her knees. I watched as she undid his pants and pulled his long, thick cock out and stroked him. He stared down at her, his lips parted.

And then she sucked him into her mouth, earning a groan from him that practically rumbled the length of the couch we were on.

As much as I wanted to join in, I sat back and continued to watch them, my cock growing harder by the second. Enzo seemed to be doing the same. I glanced over at him to see him pull his length out and stroke it. He caught my eye and gave me a lazy smile.

Fuck it.

I pulled my dick out and stroked it too, watching as my Rosebud pleased one of my best friends.

When she pulled off him, he let out a soft hiss and reached to bring her back to him, but she turned and grabbed the bit of cake that was left and smeared it all over his abs.

We all watched as she licked up his stomach while stroking his cock.

“Fuck,” he rasped as she ate the cake off his body.

OK. I was game. I grabbed the remainder of my cake and smeared the icing on my dick and waited. I was a patient man. I could hold out.

Enzo let out a soft laugh as Rosalie finished eating off of Fox. She followed Enzo’s gaze, her lips curling up into a sexy as fuck smile as she saw the frosting on my cock.

I gave her an innocent look, hoping it got me somewhere.

She immediately crawled to me and licked up my shaft, cleaning the frosting from my cock and sending flurries of goosebumps up my body. I tangled my fingers in her hair as she sucked my dick deep into her throat.

I nearly came in her mouth right then. I held my shit together though so I could enjoy her mouth for a little longer. Fox moved behind her and positioned himself before pushing forward.

She moaned along my cock as he thrust into her.

*Fuck, I’d died and gone to heaven.*

He thrust into her, jostling her against me, each time making my cock sink deeper into her throat.

*My Rosebud sure knew how to suck cock. Fuck.*

Enzo continued to watch us as he stroked his dick.

*Fuck, we needed E here.*

“Fuck her harder, Fox,” I garbled out. “I want her to scream with my cock in her throat.”



He picked up his pace, earning those delicious fucking moans of hers I loved. Within moments, she was doing exactly what I'd wanted and whimpering on my dick as she came on Fox's.

I couldn't hold back.

I filled her mouth with my release, groaning out her name.

"Fucking swallow me, baby. Fuck, please," I rasped.

She did as I asked, making me want to dive into her pussy and never come out.

Fox dragged her away from me and continued to fuck her, her back to his chest as he held her at the hips.

Enzo moved and stood in front of her.

"Open," he commanded, slapping his cock against her lips.

She obeyed, and he sank deep into her mouth and fucked it while Fox continued his work on her pussy.

I reached over and grabbed my phone and took a video I'd no doubt use later when I got horny and couldn't be with her.

She came again loudly, me capturing the entire thing on my phone.

That was good fucking footage.

Fox went onto his back and brought her with him. He impaled himself back inside her pussy. Enzo went to his knees and positioned himself between her legs.

Fuck it. I'd make a porno.

I stood and continued to record as Enzo worked his way into her pussy with Fox, each inch making her gasp and wince.

"Fuck, you're wet," Enzo murmured, reaching out and rubbing her clit. She jerked beneath him, making Fox growl softly.

Enzo leaned in and kissed her, creating the most delicious looking fucking sandwich I'd ever seen.

I continued recording and grabbed more cake as Enzo came up and pistoned into her with Fox.

I didn't know what the fuck I was doing, but I was going to do something.

Taking a bite, I watched until I decided Enzo needed cake. I swiped some onto my finger before I swirled it around her pebbled nipples.

Enzo immediately dove in and sucked it from her tits.

"More," he grunted.

I obliged and covered her tits in the frosting.

He wasted no time in licking it up, earning tiny squeals from her as he bit and sucked all in sync with his cock thrusting alongside Fox's in her pussy. He came up once he was finished, a dark glint in his eyes.

I put more cake on my finger and offered it to Enzo. He parted his lips and sucked my finger into his mouth as Rosalie came again amid a cry.

I wasted no time in making sure Foxy boy had some frosting on his lips. He'd typically shove me away, but he didn't this time, letting me put the sugary goodness on his fucking plump lips.

Girls loved his lips. I heard them giggling about him all the damn time. They looked even better covered in chocolate though.

I moved away and continued my job as cameraman while Fox and Enzo fucked our girl raw.

It was when Enzo leaned in, all of them caught up in the moment, that magic happened. He pressed his lips to Fox's, kissing him deeply before licking away all the frosting.

I fucking loved seeing Fox let go like that. He was always so uptight.

But he'd kissed him back after a moment of hesitation, his rhythm inside our girl picking up.

Enzo moved off Fox's lips and kissed Rosalie.

I couldn't stand it. I wanted in on the action too, so I put that damn cake on my lips and dove in.

Fox grunted against my lips as I kissed him, resisting me at first but finally caving and parting his lips for me.

I enjoyed fucking with the guys. They were beginning to loosen up, and I knew Rosalie enjoyed the show because her eyes were always on us.

I broke the kiss off and went to her. She fell into my kiss immediately, my hand on her tit as the guys fucked her.

“Fuck,” she choked out against my lips.

Enzo let out a groan the same time Fox did, both of them coming deep inside her as she met her release, her body trembling.

“Mm, baby,” I said softly against her warm lips. “You sure know how to show a guy a good time.”

She laughed softly and pulled me back in for another kiss. When Enzo moved out of her and stepped away, I was quick to take his place after handing him the phone, my cock sliding along Fox’s. He didn’t move as I fucked against him in her heat.

He twitched and groaned a lot, so I knew he was feeling it.

“Think I can make you come, Foxy?” I rasped as I pulled away from Rosalie’s lips.

He groaned again as I picked up my pace.

The thought excited me that I could get them both off with them doing nothing but taking it.

*New kink unlocked.*

I fucked harder. Faster. Deeper.

Fox’s breathing picked up as my Rosebud whimpered my name, her fingers twined with Fox’s.

*Mine. Mine. All fucking mine.*

Fox let out a husky cry, his cock twitching against mine before Rosalie followed, her chest heaving.

*Fucking victory lap.*

The noise of our slapping skin sounded out before it was my moan of pleasure as I fucked all our come deeper into her depths.

When I was done, I collapsed against her, breathing hard.

Her fingers raked through my hair, making me purr softly.

Enzo chuckled softly and turned off the camera.

“I sent that to myself,” he said.

I grinned at him from my spot with my head nestled between her breasts.

Finally, I turned so I could nuzzle against Fox.

“Man,” he grumbled. “You’re like a cat.”

“You like it,” I mumbled back at him. “I made you come.”

His cheeks reddened as Rosebud giggled.

I grinned and looked back to Enzo.

“I really fucking love cake,” I said.

*And another kink unlocked.*

TWENTY-EIGHT

## FOX

“This idea is fucking insane,” I muttered as we sat around Enzo’s office. Everything had been going to shit the last few weeks it seemed. Sure, E’s sugar was taking off like wildfire and the money was rolling in, my football career was off and running, and Rosalie seemed happy, especially after the cake incident, but past that, life was hot garbage. At least E had started becoming more social.

We made it a point to not talk about what happened with Celeste much. He acknowledged it and apologized to Enzo for ruining the evening, but Enzo had hugged him tightly and told him he hadn’t ruined shit.

After that, things in that aspect were better.

But here we were, plotting and planning.

“It’s the best we have. Bianca doesn’t go off campus. Ever,” Cole said as I passed the photo of the beautiful blonde off to E who sighed before handing it to Enzo. “So we sneak onto the Bolten campus and grab her. We take her back to the Ivanov warehouse and we wait for De Santis. He needs a show of power. We can’t just approach this like dogs with our tails tucked between our legs. We’ll look weak.”

“We’ll also end up dead if he doesn’t find this funny,” I grumbled. “You already know how we’d react if this were Rosie. And we know how Dominic De Santis works. He’s not to be fucked with.”

“Neither are we, and that’s why we need to show proof. We’ve gotten word out we’re gunning for those who wronged

us. They're top of the list after that implanted calling card. We need to show how strong and resourceful we are to the kings. This will work," Enzo said.

"Or we fucking die," E muttered, rubbing his eyes. "If I die, give Rosalie my letter."

"We're not going to die," Cole snapped. "It'll work out. We'll do it next Thursday, like planned."

I nodded. It really was the best option we had. Reaching out to Dominic De Santis was out of the picture. We'd tried and had gotten nowhere. He was gate kept like a national treasure.

So we needed to get his attention.

What better way than stealing his new trophy.

His wife.

"And what if shit goes south?" I ventured.

"Then we kill his wife," Enzo said, his dark eyes locked on mine.

I hated that fucking plan, but I nodded because what the hell else could we do.

"And the inevitable fallout from that move?" I waited, knowing I wasn't going to like the answer. I hated this was even a fucking option. I didn't know shit about the girl, but I knew she probably was just as innocent as Rosie was in all of this. It was fucked she may have to pay for loving someone she maybe shouldn't have.

"Then we really do kill them all and take over this fucking city. I'm tired of not being taken seriously. The fact my father has a target on his fucking head is pissing me off. We're seen as weak. We are *not* weak," Enzo said fiercely.

I sighed. "Fine. Let's just get it over with. I want to be able to come home to Rosie and not worry about this shit. She's getting antsy. It's been long enough. She's happy for now, but she's been homebound through most of this. It's not going to continue to sit well with her."

Ethan nodded. “I can’t keep diverting her attention from going out. She asked me yesterday to take her to the mall and I had to sidetrack her.”

“Yeah, with your dick,” Cole said, lifting a brow at him. “I watched you guys.”

“What do you mean you watched us?” Ethan asked, narrowing his eyes at him.

Cole smirked and shrugged. “Actually, me and Enzo watched you guys. You did it in the fucking garage. We have a camera in there.”

Ethan groaned and shook his head.

“It’s not like we haven’t seen you fuck her before. It was really beautiful. She looked like she really enjoyed it,” Cole said brightly. “I really think you’d have enjoyed the cake-capade in the living room with us. You ever taste chocolate dipped tits, E? They’re fucking glorious.”

Enzo let out a soft laugh and sipped his whiskey.

“I hate you,” Ethan grumbled. “You should have woken me up.”

Cole grinned and winked at me. I shook my head at his antics.

“Rosalie’s dad called today,” Enzo said after the teasing died down.

Cole rolled his eyes. I knew Cole was still sour over her father’s bullshit after the accident with Ian, but at least he’d stopped threatening his life. I called that progress.

“He wants her to come home for Christmas break,” Enzo continued.

“Not happening. What the fuck are we going to do? Sleep in a car in their driveway?” Cole scoffed.

“Well, I can be right next door,” I said. “You know, since my house is there.”

“No,” Cole said, shaking his head. “If family wants to see us, they can come here. That’s final.”



“You don’t get to decide that,” I said with a sigh. “She’ll be pissed if she can’t be with her family.”

“We’re her family.” Cole leveled his blue eyes on me.

“We are,” I answered. “But she has parents who want to see her. We can’t keep her from them.”

“Watch me—”

“I’ll talk to her,” Enzo interjected. “There’s no need to argue about it. With shit the way it is, it might be better if they just come here to see her. I’ll explain it to her. I’m sure it’ll work out. You guys are more than welcome to invite your families here for the holidays.”

“Fuck that. My parents aren’t interested. I haven’t heard from them since I moved here,” Cole muttered.

My heart went out to him. His parents really were assholes.

“Mine might be interested,” E said, shrugging. “Or not. My little brother and sister will probably want to open gifts at home, so it might not happen. I’m sure we’ll figure something out.”

“My dad will come here. I know he will,” I said. He was geared up waiting for me to call to tell him I’d been nominated for a Heisman. I was doing my damn best, but if I didn’t stop getting into shit with Enzo, I might die before I got the chance to make him proud.

“And we know the situation with my parents. So it’s settled. We’ll aim for here as long as Rosalie is agreeable.” Enzo drained his whiskey glass. “Now that we have a plan in place for De Santis, I think we’re ready to relax. Let’s find our girl.”

“Already on it,” Cole said, grinning as he stuffed his phone back into his pocket.

A moment later, a soft knock rang out and Rosalie poked her head in.

“Hey, baby,” I greeted her, taking in how perfect she looked in her tiny sleep shorts and tank top.

She gave me her sweet smile and came into the room and made a beeline for me. I shifted so she could easily perch on my lap before Cole intercepted her, making me silently curse his ass.

“Hey, Rosebud. I’m the one who text you,” Cole said, cradling her face.

“I know,” she said, jutting her bottom lip out. “But you were in my bed this morning.”

“And I’ll be in your bed tonight,” he said in a low, gravelly voice.

“You’re awfully confident for a man who wore my pink robe this morning.”

He chuckled softly. “And you’re awfully confident for a girl who is about to get fucked in all her tight little holes.”

Her cheeks flushed pink. “I hope you guys didn’t hole up in here and ignore me just so you can call me in to fuck when you’ve decided playtime is over with each other.”

“Are you mad, Rosebud?” Cole asked, cocking his head at her. “Because I love it when you’re pissed and you fuck me.”

“Who said I’m going to fuck you?” she challenged.

I cast a smile over at E who chuckled softly. I enjoyed watching Rosie giving it back to Cole. I knew how much it frustrated him when she challenged him.

On the other hand, I was beginning to think he enjoyed it and was starting to live for these moments.

She turned away from him and went to Enzo and slid onto his lap. She fixed her green eyes on Cole and cocked her head.

“Sassy little thing,” Cole muttered, backing away. “Fine. You’ll beg me soon enough, Rosebud. You always do.”

Her eyes twinkled as she leaned in and nuzzled against Enzo who wound his arm around her small waist.

“Are you antagonizing Cole, baby?” Enzo cooed.

“He’s antagonizing me,” she said.

He let out a soft laugh. I stared at her, noting how her pert ass cheeks were teasing me as they peeked out from beneath her tiny shorts.

I adjusted my dick in my pants. She caught my eye and a tiny smile cut her lips up.

She really was a sassy girl.

“We were talking about the holidays. Your parents want you to come home for Christmas,” Enzo said.

“I don’t want to.”

I blinked in surprise. “What? Really?”

She nodded and sat up, twisting her fingers in her lap. “It’s just, we have this beautiful home. I really want to decorate it for the holidays and celebrate our first real Christmas together. My parents can come here. We can have gifts and food.” She looked at me hopefully. “You can ask your dad to come too, Fox. It’ll be so much fun. Plus, there’s this Christmas showcase I signed up for. I’ve been working with Anson on some holiday songs for it. There’s going to be a concert and everything.”

“You’re in a showcase?” I frowned. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“You’re always so busy with football and the guys. I didn’t want to take any of your free time away with my stuff—”

“Rosalie, there’s nothing in this world that I want more than to spend all my time with you. I’d have liked to have signed up and done a song with you,” I said, feeling put out.

“I can ask Anson. He might be able to work it out if you really want to.”

I nodded. “Yeah. I mean, if you want me to.”

She widened her eyes at me. “Of course I do! I’d love to perform with you.”

“You can perform with him right now,” Cole called out. “We’ll watch.”

She rolled her eyes at him.

“Well, I’m all aboard on this holiday idea here at home,” Enzo said, relief in his voice. I knew the last thing he wanted was to have to argue with her about this shit. She was already upset she wasn’t allowed out anywhere. I really thought she’d want to go, but this worked out perfectly.

I was still a little salty about her not asking me to perform, but I was certain we’d get that sorted soon enough.

“And Thanksgiving?” she asked.

“We’ll stay home,” Enzo said. “Cole and I really can’t celebrate with our current family situation, but if you, E, and Fox want to go home, you’re welcome to it.”

She contemplated his words before she shook her head. “No. I’m not going.”

“Are you OK?” I asked, frowning at her. It was unlike her to not want to see her parents, even though they’d had a rough go of it last year. She’d seemed to reconcile with them and spoke to them often on the phone.

“I’m fine.” She offered me a smile. “My parents are taking a cruise to the Bahamas.”

“Oh. Well, my dad is going to my aunt and uncle’s. They invited me, but if you’re not going there, I won’t either. E?” I looked over at him.

He shrugged. “My family always does a massive dinner. They probably won’t notice I’m not there. I’ll stay home too.”

I looked back to Enzo. “Looks like we’re staying home.”

“Good. That works out perfectly,” he said, his voice low. I knew what he meant. It was around the same time as our plan to grab De Santis’s girl.

“So I can order in Christmas stuff?” Rosie asked brightly.

Enzo chuckled. “Of course you can. Use the card I gave you. Anything you want.”

“Anything?” Her eyes lit up.

“Anything.” He hugged her against him before his lips met hers.

They hadn't been getting along all that well lately, but this... this was nice. And a relief. As much as I hated to admit it, Anson was helping out a lot. He kept her occupied and her mind off things. Most nights, it was me or Cole with her since E had thrown himself into his work and Enzo was focused on keeping everyone safe and spent most of his time avoiding her and holed up in his office.

It wasn't long until Enzo had her stripped bare and sinking onto his dick while we watched them. I was longing to touch her, but I knew how Enzo had been lately and wanted to give them a chance to be together. The cake-capade was probably the last time he'd had sex with her and they'd argued twice since then.

I cast a look to E who nodded his head at me like he knew exactly what I was thinking. I got up and he followed as Enzo and Rosalie became lost in each other, their eyes closed with their lips on one another's.

I cast a glance back at Cole to see the torn look on his face before he sighed softly and got up, following us out of the room.

"I'm a patient man. I can wait," Cole grumbled as I closed the door softly behind us.

"They need this," E murmured. "You know they do. They've been so bad with each other lately."

Cole nodded sadly. "I know. I want things to go back to how they used to be."

"Me too," I said as we went into the living room. "And they will. We just need to get all this other shit out of the way."

"Do you really believe that?" Cole sank onto the couch beside me as E sat in the leather recliner.

"I really have to so I don't fucking choke on the fear," I said honestly. "I'm scared."

"I am too." E looked down at his hands on his lap. "Do you guys notice how happy she is when she's with Anson?"

Cole scowled but said nothing.

I knew what E was talking about. I'd seen it a lot over the last few weeks. I'd even noticed they had a secret handshake. Even I didn't have a secret handshake with her and we'd been best friends since we were kids, give or take a few years.

I was jealous over it. I knew I was. It fucking sucked she was getting so close to him, but I had to admire him. He hadn't fucked up yet. It gave me hope that he wouldn't.

As for finding information for him, we hadn't found shit, but he didn't seem fazed by it. Enzo's contact came up with nothing but fluff. Enzo had beaten the shit out of him for wasting his time and told him he'd better bring something substantial back to him so he wouldn't hunt him down and kill him. We didn't tell Anson that though.

Anson was cordial and accepting and just said to keep trying and he'd continue his side of the bargain.

"She's happiest with us," Cole finally said.

"She *was* happiest with us," E corrected softly. "We've not exactly been the guys she fell in love with. Our lives are a mess."

"At least she's not fighting us as much on leaving the house," I muttered.

"No, because she gets to spend all that time with Ass Hat," Cole said. "Who I still hate. Like, I fiercely hate that motherfucker."

"You can't deny he's doing a good job," I said. I hated him too, but it was what it was.

"Yeah, well, even angels fucking fall. When he does, I'll be there to gut him like a fucking fish." Cole's expression darkened.

I nodded. If Anson stepped one fucking toe out of line, I'd be at Cole's side, ready to help him.

So I prayed he wouldn't just because I knew how much hurting Anson would hurt Rosie.

And knowing that made me sick to my stomach.

TWENTY-NINE

# ROSALIE

“**Y**ou’re leaving?” I frowned at Enzo. Another week went by, and overall, things were going OK with all of us. He wasn’t withdrawn so much, but he definitely wasn’t how he once was.

“We’re going to a club to do some business,” he said, sliding his leather jacket on.

“You’re the son of Anthony De Luca, who has a hit on him, the heir to a mafia dynasty with probably a hit on *you*, and *you* get to go out and I can’t?” I stared at him, irritation flowing through me.

“That’s right, Sunshine.” He approached me and placed his hands on my waist. “I love you. I can handle myself. You, my pretty little thing, would be in danger.”

I ground my teeth. “I only want to go have dinner with some friends—”

“With Anson,” he corrected softly.

“Well, he’d be there, but also with Cassie, Lance—”

“We’re close to ending this. I promise.”

“What kind of business are you doing at a club?” I stared up at him, taking in how handsome he looked as he gazed back at me, his eyes seemingly darker than usual. “I-is it a strip club?”

“No, babe. It’s not a strip club. I helped fund the opening of this place. I bought into it. I have an office there—”



“You have an office here.”

He sighed. “I have an office there. I have customers there.”

“Enzo, what are you selling?” I had an ugly suspicion and it made me sick to my stomach.

“I’m selling the American Dream, baby,” he murmured. “I’m selling comfort and freedom.”

I swallowed, knowing this conversation wasn’t going to lead anywhere good.

“Fine.”

“Fine?” He raised his dark brows at me. “It’s not fine, but I swear to you it will be. Trust me.”

“I do trust you. I just... I’m worried, Enzo. This isn’t how I want our life to go—”

“Shh.” He silenced me with one of his deep, soul penetrating kisses before he nipped my bottom lip. “I love you so much. I’ll be safe. I’ll keep the guys safe. When I get home, I’ll come see you.”

“Promise?”

“Yes. I promise. Be good tonight. Call or text me and the guys if you need anything, OK? We’ll come right home.”

I sighed. “Fine.”

He kissed me again before releasing me and leaving, not casting me a backward look. The others were already out waiting for him in his Escalade. Anson had texted to tell me he was five minutes out. I flopped on the couch and stared at the ceiling until there was a knock on the door. Sighing, I got up and answered it to find Anson looking windswept with takeout food in his hands.

“Hey,” he said as I stepped aside to let him in.

“Hey. Smells good.”

“I got Chinese on the way. I should have asked you, but I figured I could always order a pizza if you didn’t want this and just let the guys eat it.”

“No, it’s great,” I said, leading him into the kitchen.

I watched as he unpacked the food. Tons of food.

“I didn’t know what you’d want,” he said sheepishly, like he’d been reading my mind. He opened the first container. “Chicken?”

I nodded and took it from him and grabbed the chopsticks before snagging us a couple of plates. He handed me fried rice and I sat at the island and ate quietly with him beside me.

“What’s wrong?” Anson asked after several minutes.

“Same shit, different day,” I muttered before eating more food. I didn’t want him to attend my pity party. It was bad enough that I was a guest of honor at it.

“Rose, come on.”

“Rose?” I chuckled softly at that.

“Sorry. I haven’t settled completely on your name,” he answered, giving me a smile. “Seriously, though. You’re so down in the dumps these days. I hate it for you. What can I do?”

“Break me free of my prison?” I sighed and dropped my chopsticks onto the counter. I wasn’t feeling like food. I turned to look at him to see him studying me, his blue eyes dark.

“I could break you free,” he murmured. “If you’re willing to take the steps.”

“What do you mean?” My heart beat faster.

He bit his bottom lip. “Tell me what you envision your future to look like.”

I blinked. “Uh, I don’t know. Singing?”

“No.” He shook his head. “Don’t question what you want. Tell me exactly what you see for yourself.”

“Death,” I whispered, chills racing over my body. “Tears. Heartache.”

He blanched at my words.

“It’s all I’m told will happen to me if I leave this place. I’m overprotected. I need to breathe. I worry that something is going to happen to one of the guys. It seems like death is all that’s around me. That and more trauma than I can shake a stick at.”

He blew out a breath. “OK. Let me rephrase that. What do you want for yourself in the future. If you didn’t have this horsemen shit hanging over your head, where would you be? Close your eyes and see it. Tell me what you see.”

I did as he said, envisioning myself on stage in front of a cheering crowd. “Singing on stage in front of thousands of people. Living my dreams. Traveling the world.”

“What else?”

I worried my bottom lip for a moment. “Happy. Children. No more fear. Married.”

“Who are you married to?”

I crinkled my brows. “I-I don’t know. I want to say Fox, but this life... I can’t choose.”

“Are there others with you?”

I nodded, smiling. “Jamie. She’s a famous clothing designer. She comes to my shows and helps dress me since I’m terrible at it. My parents are there. They’re so happy for me. And... you.”

“Me?”

I opened my eyes and looked at him, my heart in my throat. “You.”

He smiled and cocked his head at me. “You see me in your future?”

I nodded and looked down at my hands. “Is that bad?”

His warm fingers moved beneath my chin and lifted my head so our eyes met.

“No,” he answered softly. “Can I tell you something?”

I nodded, his fingers still beneath my chin.

“I’ve seen myself there since the moment I met you. I just knew we were going to be involved in one another’s lives.”

“You did?”

He nodded wordlessly. “Rosalie?”

I swallowed hard, my breathing shallow. “Yeah?”

“Are you happy?”

“I used to be. Now I’m worried.”

His hand moved, his knuckles raking along my jaw. The motion sent shocks of electricity through my body. The moment passed as his hand fell away, leaving cold in its wake.

“What if I could give you your dreams?”

“I... I don’t know.”

“I can make you a star if it’s what you want. I can give you the freedom and future you long for. I can put you on a stage so you can sing for crowds and on a plane so you can travel. All you have to do is tell me yes, and I’ll make it happen.”

“How?”

“Well, most of it will be your talent, but I’m good at what I do. We can make a demo. We can send it off. I can represent you. Be your manager. Your agent. Whatever you need me to be. I can take care of the business side so you can have what you want. It’ll get you out of here. You’re too fucking good for Mayfair. It’s just a rest stop for you right now.”

“You think I could be a star?”

“I fucking know you could be. Look at this.” He pulled his phone out and thumbed through it before showing me a video of me singing on campus that day with Ethan. People were in awe of Ethan in the comments too, but almost all of them were freaking out over me. In a good way. Thousands of comments.

“I’m viral?” I asked, staring at him, my heart banging hard.

He chuckled. “You’re viral, LeeLee. Over a million views since it was posted by someone on campus. And look at the

response. People love you and that's not even a finished song. Imagine what it could be if we could get it there."

"You'll help me? You'll stick by me?" Fear washed through me. There was no way in hell I could do this alone. With my guys busy doing what they were doing, I didn't have anyone but him.

"All you need to do is say the word. We can push this. It's your call. I'm here whether you want to pursue it or not. We're friends. There's nothing in this world that's ever going to change that. You're stuck with me."

I offered him a smile. "Friends?"

"We can get matching tattoos if you don't believe me. I think I still have some room on my left wrist."

I let out a laugh. "Deal on the friends."

He raised his brows. "And the matching tats?"

I shrugged. "I don't have one, but I don't think I'd hate it."

His smile grew bigger. "Oh, LeeLee. Bad girl. Then let's do it. Friends, tats, the future. What do you say? I need to get out of this fucking place too."

I contemplated what he was saying to me. "Promise you won't leave... me?"

He made an X over his heart. "Cross my heart. We'll make more videos. Record a demo. Work on more music. Get you on stage more. There's so much we can do if you're in."

*In.*

It could change everything.

But I needed it. I needed to have my dreams come true. If my guys loved me the way I thought they did, they'd support me.

*Or I could lose everything.*

"Don't let fear stop you," he whispered. "Let it make you stronger."

I nodded. I wanted to be stronger. I wanted to make the guys proud. Make my parents proud. Maybe if this could happen for me, the guys wouldn't need to be involved in this life they were buried beneath. Maybe I could save them this time instead of them always saving me.

I could change our lives.

"I'm in," I said softly.

"Then let's get started." He offered me his hand, his blue eyes twinkling.

I hesitated for a moment before I slipped my hand into his and let him pull me to my feet.

Every new adventure began with a single step. A single promise.

This was mine.

THIRTY

# COLE

We'd been at the club for nearly two hours when I sat forward and frowned.

"What?" Fox asked.

"Is that... De Santis?"

"What?" He shifted and followed my gaze as a group of men came into the VIP section and settled in.

Enzo hung up his phone call and zeroed in on the guys as if he was expecting them. I had no doubt that phone call had been a tip.

"Enzo?" I called out.

"It's them. They're here," he said, shock in his voice.

Immediately, I was on my feet and going to the balcony, Enzo at my side as Fox and Ethan stayed in our seats in the darkened corner.

"They brought her. She's here," Enzo said softly.

I stared in the direction he was looking. He was right. The blonde bombshell dancing with all eyes on her had to be the kings' girl.

"We need confirmation," Enzo said.

"On it." I pushed away from the balcony and moved downstairs. I went and waited on the edge of the dance floor. Watching. Waiting.

The blonde finally stopped dancing and moved to the bar.



It was go time.

“Hey,” I said, moving to stand beside her.

“Hey.” She tapped her fingers on the bar as she waited for her drink.

I was just going to dive in.

“What’s your name?” I made sure to give her body a long, hard look to make her think I was interested.

Her smile shook. “Bianca.

*Fucking bingo.*

“Pretty. I’m Cole.” I offered her my hand to shake and she did.

“Nice to meet you.” Her blue eyes took me in, curiosity in them.

“Are you here with anyone tonight? Pretty girls like you shouldn’t be alone in places like this.”

*God, I sound like a fucking douche.*

“Because of creeps?” She cocked her head at me, her eyes narrowing.

She was a smartass.

I liked smartasses. Mostly.

I grinned. “Yes. Because of creeps. So are you alone?”

“I’m not. My friend is in the bathroom. My husband is upstairs. He’s probably watching you right now.”

I fucking bet he was. Hopefully, I’d appear to just be another douche hitting on his girl. I’m sure there wasn’t a shortage of them.

“Husband? Aren’t you a little young to be tied down?”

“We’re unconventional.” She glanced back to the bar.

“I hear that.” I raked my fingers through my hair. This was her. There wasn’t a doubt in my mind.

“Are you here alone?” she asked.

“No, doll. I’m not alone. I’m here with my boys.”

“Picking up chicks?”

“Hardly.” I let out a loud laugh.

“Picking up guys?” A smirk cut her lips up.

Definite smartass. Christ, she was me with tits.

“You’re funny. I like that. But no. Not guys either. Just out having a good time. So, what’s your husband’s name?”

“That’s random.” Her smirk turned to a frown.

I was losing her. Beautiful and smart. Just like my Rosebud.

“Not really. What’s his name so I know who to congratulate, when I meet him, for snagging such a beautiful girl?” I threw her a wink. Those usually made girls cream their pants.

“Dominic.” Her lashes fluttered.

“De Santis?” My heart jumped hard in my chest. *Double fucking bingo.*

She licked her lips. “You know him?”

“We haven’t formally been introduced yet. But we will before the night is over.” I placed a twenty on the bar. “It’s on me. Be safe out there, Bianca. Don’t go anywhere alone. Plenty of creeps out there.”

“Thanks,” she called out, sounding confused.

I made my way back to Enzo who was now lurking in a darkened corner off the dance floor.

“It’s her,” I confirmed the moment I reached him.

He nodded. “We need to grab her.”

“I have an idea. Do you have that new strain E’s working on?”

“Of course.”

“Drop it in the drink.”

I waved a shot girl over and handed her a twenty. “See that hot blonde over there in the red dress? Send her this drink from me,” I said, nodding to the last drink on her tray. Enzo discreetly dumped some of the new sugar into the glass. “Tell her it’s from Dominic.”

“OK.” She flushed as she looked at me before turning to go back to Bianca.

“Tell the guys,” I said. “We’ll grab her as soon as we can.”

Enzo hit send on his text.

“We’ll split up. I’ll make sure we have the getaway.” And with those words, I left, knowing we were about to finally enter the fucking ring.

I just hoped it wasn’t going to kill us.

Rosalie would be pissed.

THIRTY-ONE

# ENZO

I watched as Bianca stumbled along behind her friend to the bathroom. I cast a quick glance upstairs where there was some heavy activity going on. Fox had paid some asshole to make a scene with the kings.

Poor fucking random guy might end up dead tonight because I doubted Dominic De Santis just let anyone dump his fucking drinks.

Quickly, I made my way to the hallway where the bathrooms were to see Bianca leaning against a wall, sweat dotting her face.

I blew out a breath and cracked my neck.

It was now or never.

It had to be now because this was just too damn perfect. We'd planned on hitting the campus in just a few days. This was a miracle and fate. I wasn't going to spit at it.

"You look unwell," I said as I stopped in front of her.

With unfocused eyes, she reached out for me. My heart held a pang of sympathy for her, Rosalie flashing through my mind. *This could be my girl. This could be someone preying on her just like I'm doing to Bianca.*

I pushed the nausea away. There was no turning back now. We'd come too far to be bottom fucking rung.

"I-I'm really dizzy. C-can you get my husband?" She let out a soft whimper and squeezed her eyelids closed.

“Of course. You want to sit down?”

She nodded, wincing. I held my hand out to her, and she took it, allowing me to lead her down the hall away from people.

My heart pounded in my ears.

*I had her. I fucking had her.*

She stumbled, and I caught her around her tiny waist and helped keep her upright.

“Is there an office back here?” she slurred out.

“Yes.” I pushed the back door open, the cool night air hitting us. I led her down the steps and Cole pulled up in my Escalade and jumped out.

He grabbed her around the waist. She immediately lashed out, hitting and kicking him, screaming.

Fucking hell.

Cole hefted her into the back of the Escalade as he tried to fight her off. I got into the driver’s seat, my heart in my damn throat.

*We have her. We fucking have her.*

“We going? Enzo?” Cole shouted as he tried to restrain her.

“One minute.”

*Where the fuck were Fox and E?*

“For fuck’s sake, where are they?” Cole grunted as Bianca landed a solid hit to his face.

“They’re here,” I said as Fox and E rushed at us, another guy held between them.

“Fucking go. He was following us. Knocked his ass out,” Fox said, slamming the door closed behind him.

Fuck.

I put the Escalade into drive and squealed us out of the parking lot as Bianca continued to struggle against Cole, her

sobs ringing out in the back.

“Jesus fuck, help me. She’s wild,” Cole yelled as she landed a kick to his chest. E dove in and grabbed her wrists and they both struggled with her as Fox worked on the unconscious guy.

“Don’t. Stop. Please,” she wept, twisting and turning.

“You’re making it worse on yourself, doll,” Cole grunted as he managed to get her ankles secured.

E got her wrists tied and grabbed some duct tape.

“Please,” she sobbed. “Don’t—”

“Sorry,” E said, his voice betraying him as his sorrow crept through as he placed the tape over her plump, trembling lips. E didn’t stop. Quickly, he secured the unconscious guy with Fox as Cole wiped at his nose.

E jammed a needle into the guy’s neck, earning another sob from the girl.

*Vincent Valentino.*

The poetic one.

“You aren’t going to kill him yet, right, E?” Cole muttered as E sank back in his seat. “No. It’ll just keep him knocked out so he’s easier to handle. He punched Fox in the face right before we knocked him out. Nearly put him on his ass.”

“She’s De Santis’s wife?” Fox demanded.

“That’s what she said. Judging by the rock on her finger I’d say it’s the truth,” Cole said. “Plus, one of his henchmen came looking for her. Pretty sure she is married to Dominic. Definitely not a decoy.”

“Knock her out,” I said gruffly, making a left and glancing back at E.

He hesitated for a moment before he slid forward with another needle in his hand. “I really am sorry, peach. This might hurt a little.”

A muffled cry left her as E's needle sank into her neck before silence descended around us.

“Wasn't expecting one of her fucking guys. This might be a problem,” Cole said, coming to sit in the passenger seat.

I nodded tightly.

It just might fucking be.



THIRTY-TWO

# FOX

This was a fucking nightmare. Not only did I really not want to kidnap some mafia heir's wife, but I also didn't want to take one of her guys with us. But we were forced to when he rushed at us and punched me in the face.

Now I'd have the blackening eye to explain to Rosie when I got home. She was already worried about everything. Coming home injured would only add to it all.

Tonight was supposed to be an easy night. We sell some drugs. Make more connections. Have a few drinks. In and out. Easy.

Nothing ever ended that way for us.

In the big scheme of things, this was a blessing because it meant we wouldn't have to break onto the Bolten campus and snatch her, something Cole was more than prepared to do.

At the same time, we now had two people kidnapped and were holed up in one of Ivanov's new warehouses.

Enzo was tense. It oozed off him with every movement.

The memory of him killing Gavin was alive and well in my mind. While I understood why that had to happen, what we had in this instance was a million times worse if it didn't go to plan.

And so far, it fucking wasn't. Enzo was making the call to De Santis after taking his number from his wife's phone. He put it on speaker, and it rang. My breathing was fast. This shit was way too stressful.

“Hello?” A deep, Italian-accented voice came on the line.

“Dominic De Santis,” Enzo said into the phone. “I wish I could say it was a pleasure to finally speak to you, but I’d be lying.”

I knew it was go time. Enzo had to show his strength.

“De Luca,” the voice snarled back. “Where’s my wife? Where’s Vincent?”

Enzo closed his eyes briefly before answering. We stood watching him as E checked on our prisoners in the main room.

“Both out cold at the moment.”

“I’m not the fucking guy who shot your shit up.” There was a soft plea in Dominic’s voice that surprised me. I figured he’d be a complete hard ass. Everyone we’d spoken to said he was a monster.

“Sounds like something someone who shot my shit up would say when I have his hot as fuck wife and best friend, doesn’t it? I mean, you see my predicament, right?”

“What do you want? I can prove I’m not the guy.” Dominic let out a shaky breath.

Enzo locked eyes with me for a moment, sending my heart pounding harder as Cole stared at the floor, his hands clenched into fists.

“I want you to die, De Santis. It’s not like I’m asking a lot. Give yourself up to me and fucking die. It’s simple, really. Your life for your wife’s. I won’t be able to release the other one. Unless, of course, you’d rather die for him instead of her. A soul for a soul.”

“The lords did the shooting. They lied and left our calling card. I was at my fucking wedding reception when it happened. We’re at war with them over a bunch of shit. It wasn’t me who did that to you.” He let out a frustrated snarl.

Enzo nodded, going in hard.

“Your life for hers, De Santis. Or his. Your choice. I must say it would be a shame to lose her though. She really is

beautiful. And this dress. Her tits are real, huh? Fucking nice.”

I cringed at Enzo’s words. I knew Bianca was beautiful, but I hated hearing Enzo speak about her like that when we had our Rosalie at home.

“Don’t you dare fucking touch her. I’ll come to you. Where are you?”

“The warehouse on Ninth and Broadway. I’ll make it nice and easy for you. First floor. No weapons. No cops. You show up with any of those things, and I’ll kill them both on sight. Capisci?”

“Capisco,” Dominic answered tightly.

“Within the hour. My finger is getting itchy. Tick tock, De Santis.” Enzo disconnected the call and swallowed. “It’s time to fucking pray.”

“So what are we doing?” Cole tugged at his hair and looked to the open door to where Vincent and Bianca were.

“Whatever we have to. If shit goes south, we kill them. We don’t know that we can trust them, so we may as well be prepared for the worst. I assume it’ll happen because of how fucking deep we’re in this now. We’d kill anyone who took Rosalie.” Enzo sighed.

“We didn’t think this through,” I snapped. “This is fucking nuts. I told you guys I thought it was better to just go onto the Bolten campus and talk to them.”

“And risk dying?” Cole snorted.

“We’re risking dying anyway!” I practically yelled. I breathed in deeply to calm myself. “Fuck. *This is fucked*. You guys know that, right?”

“I’m aware. I’m not worried though. Either we gain an ally or we start fucking taking over this city. Whichever way this goes down, we’re winning. Get your fucking head in the game, Evans. We have a girl at home who needs us. She’s sitting with some cocksucker who I still have reservations about. He’s waiting for us to fuck up.” Enzo glared at me.

I ground my teeth, hating his fucking attitude. “Then let’s get this over with. When this is fucking over, I’m marrying her.”

“The fuck you are,” Cole snapped, glaring at me. “We agreed. No one is.”

I shook my head at him. “I want to know she’s safe. I’ll fucking take her away from this shit if I have to.”

“You won’t be leaving,” Enzo said softly. Dangerously. “You vowed, Fox. You don’t walk out on us.”

“Why? You’ll kill me too?” I demanded.

“I would never hurt you,” Enzo said, coming to stand in front of me. “But my mercy has limits. You’re one of my best friends. I love you. You’re my brother. We’re all in. We’re in too deep. Even if you left, your name will get out after this. If De Santis wants a war with us after this, you know he won’t stop until he finds you. It could be at the ends of the earth. But he will find you. If you’re with Rosalie, he’ll find her too. The only way Rosalie is leaving is alone.”

I swallowed hard at his words, the pain at knowing they were true burning my chest. He was right. I was in too deep. If I wanted to leave, I should have done it before we came here. Before all of this shit.

Enzo reached out and cradled my face. “We’re in this until the end. I’m sorry. The only way we leave is in a body bag.”

I clenched my jaw and nodded stiffly.

“You deserve better,” he said softly, leaning in and pressing his lips to my forehead. “I will burn in hell for eternity for what I’ve done to your life by involving you in mine. But I love you. I fucking do. And if you’re at my side, I’ll always be at yours. That’s what my love will bring you. So are you still in?”

I nodded, my throat tight. “I’m in, brother.”

“Good. Let’s go take what belongs to us.” He backed away from me and left the room, leaving me behind with Cole.

“We promised one another, Fox,” Cole said, his voice shaking. “You don’t break a promise. We all love her.”

“I know,” I murmured. “I’m sorry.”

“I know. Just... don’t fucking tell me you’re doing that shit again. Don’t make her choose. Promise?”

“Promise,” I whispered as he stepped closer.

“Whatever happens tonight, we’re going home to her. I fucking swear we are. Head in the game.”

“Head in the game,” I repeated, using words we used to say to each other before a game in high school. Words I still told my team at Mayfair.

“Let’s go.” Cole pushed past me, and I followed.

It was just the fucking position I was in now.

THIRTY-THREE

# COLE

“E asy, Bianca.”

Her blues eyes snapped to me and widened.

*Yeah, I'm the prick from the club.*

Her body trembled as the guys joined me. This wasn't exactly what I had planned for the night. It was never fun for me to kill women, and I really fucking hoped it didn't come to that tonight because Bianca was way too fucking beautiful to be taken from this world. The world needed more beauty in it and I was sure it would dim a little if she were gone. Just like my Rosebud.

“We're going to take the tape off, if you promise to not scream,” Fox called out. “OK? Nod for me.”

She nodded and he stepped forward. Quickly, he tore the tape from her lips, earning a gasp of pain from her before she let loose with a fucking scream that made my ears want to bleed.

“For fuck's sake,” Enzo snarled as Fox surged forward and put the tape back into place over her mouth.

She struggled against her bonds, her glare fixed on us. I had no doubt in my mind she was plotting each of our very painful deaths.

“Bianca. Come on now,” I said, hoping to calm her a bit. “Doll, this isn't going to get us anywhere. We only want to talk, OK? Talk to us, and things might go better than you



expect. So we're going to take the tape off again, and you're going to be good. Right?"

She continued to glare at me.

I nodded. "Go on. Take it off."

Fox removed the tape again.

"I'm sorry about that," Fox said, wincing. He probably meant that too. I was already sorry and we hadn't even really gotten down to business yet.

"Fucking assholes. Do you even realize how *fucked* you are once my husband gets here?" Bianca snarled at us, her pretty face twisted in anger.

"I think it's him who's going to be fucked," I answered back, giving her a smirk. We needed to be in control of this situation. We were all well aware of how fucked we might be.

"W-who are you?" Her voice shook as she looked at us each in turn.

"My name is Fox," Fox said before nodding to each of us. "This is Enzo, Cole, and Ethan."

"The horsemen," she said softly. "You're the leader." She locked her gaze on Enzo.

"We all lead in one way or another," Enzo said, kneeling in front of her and pushing a blonde wave away from her face gently. "But yes, I suppose I am."

"Are you going to kill me?"

Enzo studied her, his head cocked. "You're really beautiful. I'd honestly hate to hurt you, but yeah, I'm going to kill you if De Santis doesn't show."

Fear swept over her face. "What about Vinny? Please don't hurt him."

"Vincent Valentino. A king." Enzo clicked his tongue. "Well, my dear, he's part of the problem, and the deal I struck with your husband dictates he dies."

“What? No. *Please*. Dominic wouldn’t want that. H-he wouldn’t make that deal! *I* don’t want that. I’ll do anything you want. Just let him go.” She grew frantic, her blue eyes wild. I hated that for her because I didn’t really think she was a bad person. In a way, she reminded me of Rosebud. That may have softened me a bit with her, and that wasn’t a good thing.

I had to get back into my role.

“Anything?” I called out.

Ethan sighed, and Fox shot gave me a look that said he’d make sure I never had kids if I went there.

“Anything. With or-or for any of you,” her voice wavered.

She wasn’t that kind of girl. The idea made her panic. I could appreciate that. I wasn’t that kind of guy though. Well, I wasn’t now. A year or two ago I’d probably have really entertained the idea. My world was Rosebud now though. I wasn’t about to throw that away on a desperate plea.

“I don’t know how the kings do their negotiations, but I don’t fuck my hostages,” Enzo said, giving her a once over. “Although, in another life, I may have taken you up on your offer. You really are so damn beautiful.”

*Well, he said what I was thinking.*

“You’re married too.” She glanced to his hand.

Enzo smiled. “Something like that.”

“Then you know what it would feel like to have her taken from you. That’s what you’re doing to me.”

Those words made my chest constrict a little. We were all too well aware of what that fucking feeling felt like. It wasn’t a place I cared to visit.

Enzo reached out and wiped the tear from her cheek. “I know exactly what it’s like. I’ve lived that particular horror a few times already. I don’t much care for it.”

“The kings didn’t do what you think they did. Dominic didn’t order the shooting. It was Hail. *Mikhail Ivanov*. He’s the son of S-Sergio Ivanov, head of the Bratva.” She gave us a

desperate look, the fear flashing in her eyes. “He pinned it on the kings so you’d take them out and clear the way for the Ivanovs. Hail is a monster. *He* did this!”

“The thing is, we’re all monsters,” Enzo said gently. “Unfortunately, when one monster attacks another, we fight to the death. Everyone is a liar. We don’t know who’s telling us the truth. Even if you’re being honest, De Santis is still a threat. Best to cut the head off the snake than risk it biting me when I’m not looking. We put our trust in family, and you, Bianca De Santis, are not our family. I hope you understand.”

“I’m not lying. I swear I’m not. What do you want me to do? Please. I’ll do it.” She let out a sob. “You don’t have to do this!”

Enzo stood and walked away from her.

“What we want you to do is watch and learn,” I said softly as Fox stepped forward and pressed the tape back over my mouth.

Tears rushed over her cheeks and tape as she sobbed so hard her damn chair shook.

I glanced over to E to see how he was holding up. He was silent, his body tense, as he stared at her with a strange look in his eyes.

*Don’t fucking freak out, E...*

“I sincerely hope you learn from this and take the second chance De Santis is going to give you to pick better men to fuck,” I said, looking back to her before I followed Fox back to the room with Enzo.

I glanced back to see E talking to her. Leave it to him to try to comfort someone in times like this. But if it kept him from losing his shit, I’d embrace his tender heart.

“E is going to lose it,” Fox muttered, tearing his gaze away from E and Bianca.

Enzo sighed. “I know. I’m hoping he doesn’t, but it’s a possibility. We can’t fucking drug him if he does. So if it

happens, Fox, you take him outside. Put him in the car. Whatever you have to do.”

Fox nodded tightly.

“He’ll make it through,” I said softly, really fucking hoping he would.

“We still doing this?” Fox asked. “I mean, she’s telling the truth.”

“Well, in case De Santis doesn’t want to play, we should use this time to get as much information as we can,” Enzo said. “I think we’d get more from Vincent than her at this point. From what I’m seeing, she probably knows as much about their inner workings as Rosalie knows about ours.”

He had a point.

I glanced back to see E had backed away from Bianca who was still sobbing.

“Let’s get this shit over with. I want to go home,” Enzo said with a sigh. “Head in the game.”

We followed him back out to the main room.

Vincent groaned in his chair, his eyelids cracking open.

*Perfect timing.*

I tugged the tape from Vincent’s mouth. He let go of a round of curse words as Bianca continued to sob. Enzo reached out and grabbed Vincent by the hair and tugged his head back, his knife positioned at his throat.

Vincent swallowed, his gaze fixed on Bianca.

“One of you is going to die tonight. Pretty sure it’s going to be you,” Enzo said, his blade digging deeper into Vincent’s flesh.

When the first drop of blood oozed out, Bianca went nuts, rocking in her chair and screaming behind her tape.

“Is that a fact?” Vincent winced, his voice thick.

With an easy move, Enzo glided the blade over Vincent’s throat. A thin, red line trickled blood. Enzo was a master with

knives and was so precise it didn't cause much harm past a bit of blood. But it was a dangerous warning that he wasn't playing.

I glanced to E to see how he was holding up. He wasn't watching. His eyes were glued to Bianca.

*Good.* It was a better fucking view than what we had going on.

Enzo released Vincent. His head fell forward. Bianca shook harder.

"We don't need to make her watch," E said, his voice soft.

"How will she remember if she doesn't get to see?" I asked, hoping to drive home the point that we really were crazy and would fuck their world up. But I meant it too. It was a good lesson to learn.

"I agree with E. She shouldn't see this," Fox called out. He shot me a scathing look. "It's bad enough you sent her the drink and drugged her."

*Dick. Calling me out like that.*

I let out a scoff and looked to Bianca. "Sorry. I thought we figured this mess out. You don't want to listen to us argue over killing him, do you?" I took the tape off her mouth so she could answer me.

"Get the fuck away from her!" Vincent shouted. "You piece of fuck!"

Creative. I liked it.

"Tell your lover boy goodbye before he passes out from the pain," I instructed.

"Vinny," she wept. "Vinny."

"I'm not going to die, B."

Quickly, Enzo spun the knife in his hands and shoved it deep into Vincent's thigh. He didn't bother pulling it out.

I wasn't expecting that, but Enzo was always a little unhinged when he had knives and a victim.

“Fuck!” Vincent let out a groan. Blood dripped onto the dirty concrete at his feet.

Bianca let loose with a scream that almost made me cover my ears.

“Here’s what we’re going to do,” Enzo said, ignoring her screams as he pulled out another of his knives and twirled it easily while circling Vincent’s chair. “I’m going to ask you questions, and you’re going to answer me. If I think you’re telling the truth, I won’t stab you. If I think you’re lying, it’s going to hurt.”

“Don’t. Please.” Bianca begged from her chair, rocking it again.

“Shh, doll. Just watch. I don’t want to have to hurt you too.” She was getting too wild. I pulled my gun out and dragged it down her chin and over her pert breasts. I felt like a fucking douche doing it. “You be a good girl and just listen like I told you, OK?”

She glared up at me through her tears but went silent.

“Did Dominic De Santis order the hit on me and my crew?” Enzo demanded as he continued to twirl the knife.

“N-no. Fuck,” Vincent said, his voice tight. “Ivanov did.”

Enzo stabbed his other leg earning another scream from Bianca and one from Vincent.

Enzo nodded thoughtfully before he clicked his tongue before he unearthed another knife from his jacket. “Why did we find a kings’ calling card at the scene?”

Vincent swallowed thickly.

“Ivanov was pissed that Dom took Bianca from him. Hail was out for re-revenge. Bianca had an arranged marriage to Ivanov.” He paused to drag in a breath. “He abused her. She came to us for help. Dom fell in love with her. We all did. Dom m-married her to keep her safe.”

Enzo pressed the blade to Vincent’s throat as Bianca continued to cry out.

“I’m not fucking lying, you goddamn psychopath. If you’re going to keep fucking stabbing me whenever I tell the truth then fucking kill me,” Vincent snarled. “I’m not a fucking human pincushion. Prick.”

Enzo let out a soft chuckle and backed away.

“So you’re swearing the lords are behind the attack?” Fox asked.

“That’s what I fucking said. This is Ivanov’s way of getting you fucks to clear the board for him. You’re playing into his hand. Fucking goddamn newbie asshats.”

*Fuck him. I wasn’t a fucking noob.*

I let my fist fly and clocked him in the face. His head snapped to the side.

“Be *nice*, Valentino,” I said. “There’s no need for name-calling.”

Vincent spat blood at my feet and gave me a glare.

*Yeah, he wanted me fucking dead.* I believed if he got free he might just make good on it too. Finally, someone worth fighting.

“Fuck you, pussy. Kill me if you don’t believe me, but you’d best bet it won’t be the last time you hear my fucking name. The kings are more than just me and De Santis.”

“Oh, we heard,” Enzo said. “That fucked up old man of De Santis’s, Matteo. We know all about him. Which brings me to my next question. Actually, it’s Ethan’s question.”

E finally stepped forward. “Do you know a girl named Macy?”

Vincent looked confused. “M-Macy? I don’t know, man. I know lots of girls. You’ll have to be more specific. Did she have big tits and an ass that didn’t quit? Was she into being fucked in public? Red hair? Blonde? Fucking purple? Details matter, cunt.”

The guy was a dick. E was already struggling. Fuck this guy calling him names. I punched him in the face again.

“You hit like a bitch.”

*Prick.*

I punched him two more times, my knuckles cracking against the bones in his face. Enzo stepped in and stopped me.

“Do you know Macy or not?” E asked again.

“I *don't know*.” Vincent was silent for so long I wasn't sure he was going to answer. Then he let out a laugh.

“What?” Fox demanded, stepping forward.

“I only know of one Macy. Matteo De Santis grabbed her near the Mayfair campus. He put her in the palace. He forced her to suck Dom's cock. When Dom tried to help her, Matteo had her brains blown out to teach Dom a lesson about weakness. Dom knows her better than I do. It was him who had to wash her brains off his face.”

Fuck. Fuck. FUCK.

I looked to E to see his body shake.

He let out a breath and licked his lips. “Macy is dead?”

“If that was your Macy, she is, unless she can survive a bullet to the skull,” Vincent said.

“That's too bad,” Enzo's voice held a note of sadness in it.

Turning away, E ran his hands over his face, a muscle thrumming along his jaw.

*Come on, E. Don't lose it. Head in the game, brother. We'll get this sorted...*

“Dom tried to stop it. He tried to help her. He's not his father,” Vincent added. “If you stupid fucks would listen, you'd realize you're being set up. The kings want to take Matteo De Santis down as much as you do. He's the biggest fucking monster there is.”

Enzo shook slightly before he surged forward and slammed his blade into Vincent's shoulder. Vincent let out a loud cry, his face twisted in pain.



“We’re all fucking monsters,” Enzo said before stepping away without bothering to take his knives out of Vincent’s body.

Blood dripped freely from him and pooled in small puddles at his feet. His face grew paler by the second. Little dots of sweat began to bead on his forehead.

If De Santis didn’t get here, he’d die.

Enzo turned to me. “Kill him.”

I blinked at him in confusion.

“No. No. No!” Bianca screamed as she rocked violently in her chair.

E swept forward and pushed his needle into her.

“I don’t want you to see this, peach,” he said gently. “Sleep. It’ll be over when you wake.”

Her head swayed for a moment, her eyes growing glassy as E’s drug took hold.

“I love you. Forever my B,” Vincent called out to her, his voice wavering.

Her eyes closed and she was out.

And that meant it was go time.

THIRTY-FOUR

# ANSON

I got up from the couch as the horsemen trudged into the house later that night looking like they'd been in an explosion.

“Rough night?” I asked, stepping into the kitchen as Cole wiped at his eyes. They were all covered in ash and soot, their faces black and their clothes burned.

“You could say that,” Fox muttered.

I clicked my tongue and looked behind me. “Rosalie went to bed about an hour ago. You should be safe.”

“You touch her?” Cole demanded, glaring at me as he tore the rest of his shirt off and pitched it into the trash can.

“All over,” I said, eyeing him. “Couldn't keep my hands off her. You'll be happy to know she returned the favor.”

“Fuck you,” Cole snarled, stomping toward me.

Enzo shoved him back. “Go take a damn shower. It's been a long night. I don't feel like fighting.”

Cole gave me the finger. “Fucking prick asshole babysitter.”

I shook my head as he left the room and looked to Enzo. “Probably none of my business, but what happened?”

“We met Dominic De Santis tonight,” he said.

“I take it did not go well.” Everyone knew Dominic De Santis. He was a fucking legend in our world. Ruthless. Cunning. Murderous. I hadn't had the pleasure of meeting

him, but his name was something to be feared, just like his old man's. He was the heir to a massive mafia syndicate.

“Well, he pulled out a grenade and tried to blow us all up, so I'd say not,” Enzo muttered.

I nodded, impressed. “And yet you all survived. I'd say you did well.”

“Barely. Cole played hot potato with a live grenade that could have killed us all. The fucking warehouse burned down and we almost died,” Fox said sourly. “I'm going to shower.” He left without another word, leaving me with Enzo and Ethan.

“I'm actually going to go shower too,” E said softly. “Was Rosalie OK tonight?”

“She was OK. She misses you. She hates this,” I said, gesturing to them.

Ethan sighed. “I know. Thank you for being here with her. She needs someone like you.”

I smiled. “Well, she has me, so it's all good.”

He nodded and clapped me on the shoulder before leaving the room.

“I need a shower too, but I'd like for you to stick around,” Enzo said. “I'd like to talk.”

Enzo De Luca wanted to talk to me. That was new.

“Sure. I don't have anything planned.”

“Good. You can hang out in here. I'll be back.” He didn't say anything else before he left the room.

It was just as well. I assumed I was going to get an earful when he got back, so I went to the couch and sank back onto it, waiting for him to summon me.





I SAT on the leather couch in Enzo's office as he poured us drinks and handed me one.

I sipped at it, eyeing him.

He'd changed into something more casual. Dark sweatpants and a t-shirt. His black hair wasn't style in his usual faux hawk. Instead, it was a bit of a mess on his head. His dark eyes were bloodshot, and he genuinely looked like hell.

He sat in his wingback chair and drank deeply before grabbing the bottle of whiskey he'd brought with him and refilling his glass.

"Want to talk about it?"

"Not really," he muttered. "Suffice it to say, it blew up in our faces. But thanks for the tip earlier."

"NICE PUN," I said, drinking again. "And you're welcome."

"How did you know?" He eyed me, a frown on his lips.

I knew what he was asking. He wanted my source. He didn't trust me.

I finished my drink, and he poured me another.

"I have connections. Word got out. An angry ex of one of the kings threw a piss fit tonight. My connection let me know where the kings were skipping off to. And since I'm aware of your situation, I decided to be helpful."

"What is my situation?"

I studied him for a moment. "You need to show what you're capable of. I'm not new to this shit, man. I grew up on the streets. I know what it takes for a man to survive."

I didn't mention Rosalie telling me anything about what was going on though. Not that she gave away a hell of a lot, but still.

“Who is your source?” he asked again.

“I’m not giving that information away. You should know better than to ask.”

We eyed one another in an epic staring contest.

He finally sighed. “Figured I’d try. I’d beat it out of you if I had the energy.”

“And I’d fight you back if I had the energy.”

He was quiet for a moment before he scoffed. “Listen. I appreciate what you’re doing with Rosalie. And helping us tonight. Thank you for all of it.”

“But... ?”

“But shit is bad here. Real bad. And don’t think I don’t notice things too.”

I raised a brow at him and drank again. “What things?”

“Don’t play dumb with me, Beyers. You want my girl.”

I let out a soft laugh. “We’re doing this again?”

He nodded and sat forward. “We are.”

“Fine.” I nodded. “I’ll lay it all out for you. I think Rosalie is... amazing. She’s what perfect looks like to me. I know how much she loves you assholes though. I have never tried to change her mind on her feelings. If anything, I encourage her more than I should, all things considering.”

“But you think she should leave.”

I sighed. “It’s not easy to sit here and tell Lorenzo De Luca that his girl is sad and needs more than he can provide. I might end up dead.”

He chuckled softly. Tiredly.

We were both quiet for a moment before he spoke.

“You don’t need to come out and tell me how much you care about her. I already know you do, so we can cut the shit. We all know you do. There’s no reason why a man like you would want to dedicate every waking moment to a girl unless

there was something there. So I get it. I know it's there. We're human, even if I fucking hate your feelings."

I wasn't going to deny shit, so I simply stared back at him. I had a feeling he wouldn't want to hear it anyway.

"This stays between us," he finally said.

I frowned, wondering what the hell he was going to tell me.

"Our lives aren't great. I know she's sad and unhappy. I know she doesn't want this life. But I *want* her. We all do, and we're too selfish to let her go." He paused and licked his lips. "She'll never leave us on her own. There isn't a doubt in my mind she'd stay by our side through thick and thin. She's demonstrated her strength to us before. And her love. This life is dangerous though. It could kill her." He focused completely on me. "If the moment arises where you can take her, do it."

"What?" I frowned.

He sighed. "You know that moment between a man and woman before they're together? The tension? The heat? The closeness? If she leans into you, *lean into her*."

I blinked at him. "You want me to steal your girl?"

*This was un-fucking-believable.*

He was quiet for a moment. "If you have an opportunity, take it. She has to want it too though. I don't want you making a move on her and then her not being in the same head space you are. Then we're out a fucking nanny for her."

I scoffed at him, anger boiling through me.

"You really want me to take her? And do what? Kiss her? *Fuck* her?"

He winced at my words and said nothing. He didn't need to. I could tell they were making him sick. He didn't want anyone to touch her let alone do those things with her. This was a man who wasn't in his right mind and burdened with fear and stress. This wasn't the Enzo De Luca I knew.



I shook my head at him. “No. She’s my friend. I can’t do that shit to her.”

He gave me a surprised look.

“Yeah, I care about her so fucking much. Maybe it’s even more than care, but I’m not going to make a move. So you get your shit together and do your own fucking dirty work. I’d be a fucking thief, and the last thing I do is steal. You want to break it off with her, then fucking do it. I’m not one of your men. I don’t jump when you snap your fingers. She’s a goddamn person, De Luca. If you don’t love her, fucking tell her.”

He stared quietly at me for a moment. “You’re wrong. About that last part. I do love her.” He got up and went to his desk and rifled around inside it for a moment before he came back and opened the velvet box. Inside was a massive diamond ring.

“I want to marry her. We made a pact a long time ago that none of us got her. That didn’t stop me from buying this for her when I saw it a few months back. I knew it was her ring. It belongs on her finger. I just... can’t.”

I stared at the massive rock, my heart in my throat. *She had no fucking idea...*

“She thinks you’re all too busy for her,” I said, tearing my focus from the ring and staring at Enzo. “She thinks everything is going to hell.”

“She’s not wrong.” He closed the lid. “Everything is going to hell. I’m lost. I really am. I want her more than anything, but I know how bad this world is. How dangerous it is. If I lost her because of it...” his voice cracked and he looked away from me, his Adam’s apple bobbing. “I’d never forgive myself if she died because of my shit. I need you to take her away from this.”

“She has me to look out for her now,” I said fiercely. “She’s not going to fucking die. I won’t allow it. Get yourself sorted, De Luca, and don’t ask me to do this fucking shit again. If I take Rosalie, it’s because she wants me to take her.

Not because I'm playing your fucking pawn. She deserves better than that. If she never makes a move on me, I'll never make one on her. I respect her and our friendship. You'd be wise to do the fucking same." I got to my feet, irritated out of my mind. "I will make her a star, but it's her choice whether she wants to include you and the horsemen. Not mine. Not yours. Don't pin that shit on me."

He rose to his feet and stood in front of me. "You're right. I shouldn't have. My head is fucked right now. She does deserve better. I'm out of line. Tonight has just been a shit show. I-I..." his voice faltered.

"I'm not taking her from you," I said, breathing out. "I don't know what kind of man you think I am, but you're wrong about me. I care enough about her to let her make her own decisions. I can promise you one thing. If she's with me, she's safe. People know better than to fuck with me. If you'd have done your research, you'd know that by now."

"I know who you are, *Archangel*," he said softly, turning away from me and grabbing the bottle of whiskey.

I watched him pour another drink and slurp it down before he handed me the bottle.

"Fucking sit. Let's get to know each other since you're so adamant about being her new best friend."

I took the bottle and drank straight from it, my eyes locked on his.

He chuckled softly and sat. I followed suit and handed the bottle back to him.

"Your life is just as dangerous as ours," he started. "Underground fight club? You ran these streets."

"Ran?" I snorted. "I still run these fucking streets. My life isn't dangerous. It's people who cross me that have the issues. No one fucks with me. When I say she's safe, I mean it. She could safely leave here with me and have a life outside these walls and those at Mayfair."

He was quiet for a moment. "OK."

“What?”

“OK. Just... give me a week or two. Let this shit with the kings settle. Once I have a better idea of what’s going on, you can take her out. Not often. Maybe once a month or something.”

I nodded. I was agreeable to that. “And the others?”

“Cole will be the one who has an issue with it. I’ll talk to him.”

“Fine. Just keep me updated.”

He was quiet again for a few moments. “You’re a better man than I thought you were.”

“So are you.”

He laughed. “I’m really not. I’m a monster. The shit I’ve done...”

“We all are. Just what kind is what matters. Believe me, I’ve done some fucked up shit too. I still have a heart. Just keep yours. That’ll make the difference.”

“I don’t know if I have one left,” he murmured, taking the bottle and drinking straight from it.

“You have Rosalie. She’s what matters. Stay focused on her. Don’t fucking hurt her.”

“Pain is inevitable in our world.” He drank again.

I snorted. “If you hurt her, I’ll break your fucking face, De Luca. That much I promise you.”

“Same, Beyers.” He handed me back the bottle.

I took it and drank deeply. “I can’t fucking drive. I’m too buzzed.”

“Stay in one of the guest rooms and have another drink. Pass out on the fucking couch. I don’t care.” He reached over to a box and opened it and pulled out a joint. Or at least I thought it was. I watched as he sparked it up and took a deep drag.

“Want some?” he asked, blowing out the smoke.

“Weed?” It didn’t smell like weed. It smelled... sweet.

“Sugar,” he said, offering me the stick.

I’d heard of sugar. It was all over campus and the streets it seemed. I took it from him and puffed on it, inhaling deeply. The high was instant. Everything became clear and any tension in my body drifted away leaving me to feel so light and free.

“Wow,” I murmured, staring down at the sugar.

“You like it?”

I took another hit and blew out the smoke before handing it back to him.

“That’s good shit. It’s hard to get. Seems to be a shortage.”

He chuckled and smoked more. “We just need more pushers.”

“You’re the sugar daddy?”

He shook his head. “Not really. E is the sugar daddy. He’s the one who makes it. I’m just an investor.”

*Fuck, was there anything De Luca didn’t have his damn hands in?*

“Don’t fucking tell Rosalie. She doesn’t know.”

I scoffed. “You guys are self-sabotaging, you know that? You’re ruining your own lives keeping this from her. She needs to know.”

“She’d lose her fucking shit. Not happening.” He sat forward. “And if you fucking tell her—”

“I’ll go to sleep with the fishes. Cement shoes. Unmarked grave. Got it.” I waved him off. “But you need to tell her. It’s not my place, but if she asks, I’m not going to deny it.”

“Righteous prick,” he muttered. “I can see why she loves you.”

I swallowed hard at his words but said nothing. *It was just a figure of speech.*

“I need to get to bed,” he said, sighing. “I have a long day of damage control tomorrow.”

I nodded and got up.

“Come on.” He offered me the rest of the sugar. I took it and finished it off and followed him upstairs.

“Here. Sleep in this room. Feel free to lock your door in case Cole finds out you’re here. He’s in a bad head space and might shoot you in the face while you’re sleeping.”

“Great,” I muttered, stepping into the room.

“We keep extra sweats and shit in the dressers. Take your pick. You have your own bathroom attached. I’ll make sure it doesn’t get too loud up here. No promises.” And with that, he left me alone.

*Too loud.*

The last thing I wanted to do was listen to any of the horsemen fuck Rosalie.

I closed the door, clicked the lock, and moved deeper into the large, furnished room, high off my ass and the alcohol intensifying it.

*Better safe than sorry. Cole probably will try to kill my ass.*

After changing, I laid in the large bed and stared at the ceiling.

Tonight had been a shit show.

I’d promised to make Rosalie’s dreams come true while Enzo offered me mine.

I’d turned it down.

Fuck.

I knew she deserved so much more than something like that. I didn’t want to ruin what I had with her. She was one of my only true friends. I valued that.

But if she came to me, I’d not stop her.

I wasn’t called archangel for nothing.

THIRTY-FIVE

# ROSALIE

**M**y stomach rumbled as I fluffed my curls. Quickly, I dotted on my favorite lip gloss and left my room, eager to find something for breakfast and to see my horsemen since no one came to visit me last night. My heart was in my throat with worry, but I'd been fortunate to eventually fall asleep after watching movies with Anson last night.

“Oh shit,” I gasped, colliding with Anson outside my door.

His large, warm hands reached out and caught me at the waist as I fell backward, his dark hair a wild mess.

“What-what are you doing here?” I asked, taking in his clothes from yesterday.

“Hangover,” he said, wincing. His hands stayed on my hips for a moment longer before he released me.

“Hangover?”

He nodded and scratched his head. “Yeah. Uh, Enzo and I had a few drinks in his office. I was too buzzed to drive so he let me stay over.”

“Oh. OK.” That was a massive surprise. I knew how much the guys didn't like Anson. With the exception of my Ethan. Ethan loved everyone. Mostly.

“Well, I'm going downstairs,” I said awkwardly.

His lips quirked up in the corners. “Funnily enough, so am I.”

I chuckled and relaxed, him falling in step with me as we went downstairs.

“So the guys were home last night?”

“They came in about an hour after you went to bed,” he said.

I exhaled, relief rushing through me.

“Do you want to practice today?” I asked. “We have the Christmas showcase coming up.”

“Uh, yeah—”

“What the mother fucking hell?” Cole shouted, rising to his feet as we hit the bottom step. Ethan looked from Cole to Anson, confusion on his face as he slowly got to his feet, his lips parted.

Cole surged forward like a tidal wave, and Anson immediately shoved me behind him as Cole reached us.

Cole’s hands landed hard on Anson’s chest, sending Anson back a step. Anson’s hand moved to steady me behind him as I stumbled, my foot aching from where he’d stepped on it.

“What the fuck are you doing upstairs? Why the fuck are you here with her?” Cole’s chest heaved as Ethan moved to his side.

“I was sleeping,” Anson said calmly. “And I’m with her because you aren’t.”

Wrong thing to say. Both Ethan and I sprang into action as Cole’s fist made a beeline for Anson’s face.

Ethan must have read me, because instead of separating the pair, he dove for me, pushing me back before I could get between them.

“No. Stay back,” he whispered urgently as he moved me away from the fight in our living room.

Anson dipped and dodged Cole’s hits but never struck him back.



“Piece of shit! Fucking Ass Hat mother fucker!” Cole’s fist made contact and got Anson in the jaw.

“Stop it! Cole! Stop!” I shouted, trying to get past Ethan who continued to hold me back. “He didn’t do anything! It’s not like that!”

My words fell on deaf ears as the two continued to go at one another, Cole more than Anson.

“Don’t make me hurt you,” Anson growled as Cole lunged forward again. “I don’t fucking want to hurt you, Scott.”

“Fuck you, bitch,” Cole spat.

Anson blocked another attack, but I could see the anger growing in him.

And then he lashed out, his fist connecting with Cole’s face. Cole stumbled back for a moment before sweeping forward, this time both of them throwing punches with most of them connecting.

“Ethan! Make them stop!” I cried out, struggling against him.

“Stay back,” he grunted, pulling me back as I tried to surge forward.

“What in the hell?” Fox came into the room with Enzo, both dashing forward and getting between the brawling alphaholes.

Fox held onto Anson as Anson’s chest heaved.

“Stop. Cole. Knock it off,” Enzo commanded, shoving Cole back. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“Fuck!” Ethan lifted me off my feet as he moved me away from the unfolding catastrophe in front of me.

Cole had drawn his gun and had it leveled on Anson.

“I said I’d fucking kill you. Did you think I was joking?” Cole glared at Anson, his hand steady.

Fox stepped in front of Anson, blocking him from Cole.

“Cole, put the fucking gun down,” Fox snapped.

“Move the fuck out of the way, Fox,” Cole said in a dangerous voice.

I twisted my fingers in my hair, my pulse thundering in my ears.

“Cole. Enough.” Enzo reached out for the gun, but Cole jerked it away.

“I’m not in the fucking mood, Enzo. Get out of the fucking way.”

“Cole,” I wept softly. “Please.”

He didn’t even acknowledge me as he continued in the standoff.

“Pull the fucking trigger,” Anson taunted. “You think you’re the first asshole to shoot me?”

“I’ll be the last,” Cole snarled. “Fox. MOVE.”

“Cole, stop. Relax,” Fox called out.

“What happened?” Enzo demanded, not moving out from in front of Cole.

“I was in here with E. Rosebud came downstairs with this asshole who said he slept over with her. And now he’s going to fucking die.”

“He didn’t—” I started, but Enzo gave a slight shake of his head at me, silencing me.

“Cole. Last night after you went upstairs, Anson and I went into the office and drank for a while. He was too drunk to drive, so I told him he could stay here in the guest room. That’s what he did. I walked him up there myself. He didn’t touch Rosalie. Right, Sunshine?” Enzo looked over at me for confirmation.

“He didn’t touch me. I came out of my room and found him coming down the hall. I ran into him. I didn’t even know he was here. Cole. Please,” I whispered, my face damp with tears.

Cole let out an angry snarl and handed his gun to Enzo who quickly took it away.

“Since when are you and Ass Hat bff?” Cole asked Enzo, disgust all over his face.

“We aren’t. But he’s Rosalie’s friend,” Enzo said softly. “And we need to respect that.”

Cole shook his head, a muscle thrumming along his jaw. “No. No, fuck that and fuck you for thinking it. We both know why he’s really here. He sees her as a fucking conquest—”

“You don’t know shit about me,” Anson snapped at him. “Always running your fucking mouth but never using your head—”

“Listen here, motherfucker—”

“ENOUGH!” Enzo shouted. “Cole. Office. Now. Anson. Take Rosalie and go.”

“The fuck he’s taking her!” Cole stormed forward, but Enzo shoved him back.

“Let her fucking go,” Enzo growled at him. “She’s scared and needs to be out of this fucking house away from your crazy ass.”

“I’ll go with them,” Ethan said immediately. “I can go, right?”

Ethan looked to Anson who nodded tightly.

“See? Problem solved.” Ethan steered me far out of reach of Cole who finally fixed his focus on me.

Worry swept over his face as he took me in.

“Rosebud—”

I shook my head at him. I didn’t know who the hell the monster standing before me was, but it wasn’t the guy I loved. Or maybe it was and I was just now seeing him for the first time.

“Rosalie. Baby. Please. Come on—” he called out to me as Ethan led me from the room.

“Leave her to cool off. We need to talk,” I heard Enzo saying.

A moment later, Anson joined us outside.

His lip was split and his eyes were downcast.

“Anson—” I reached out for him, and he took my hand and gave it a squeeze.

“I’m fine, LeeLee. Let’s get something to eat, OK?”

I nodded wordlessly as he released me and went to his car and unlocked it.

“I’ll ride in the back,” I said softly to Ethan who was staring back at me with worry on his face.

He said nothing as I climbed into the back and settled in, my heart in my throat. Seeing Cole lose it like that scared the hell out of me. I knew he was my dark star and capable of terrible things, but maybe I’d never really wanted to believe it. Even with the Juliet stuff, I pushed it out of my head, hoping my suspicions weren’t true.

“I’m sorry,” Anson said moments later as we drove into town, Ethan beside him in the front. “I shouldn’t have said that to him.”

“You shouldn’t have,” Ethan agreed, sighing. “But he didn’t need to react that way. Enzo and Fox will get him sorted.”

Anson nodded tightly. “Rose. I’m sorry if I scared you.”

I remained silent.

He had scared me. There were things about Anson Beyers I didn’t know, but if he were going to be my friend, he’d need to start talking. He was a fighter. He’d learned it from somewhere.

I hated secrets.

And I knew he had them.

THIRTY-SIX

## ETHAN

Rosalie was quiet as we pulled into a diner well outside of the city. I opened the door and helped her out. I didn't bother with keeping my distance. The entire car ride all I'd wanted to do was wrap her in my arms and make sure she was OK.

We'd had an awful night last night. I'd learned Macy was murdered by Dominic's father. And we'd nearly been blown up when Dominic set off a grenade in a last ditch attempt to save Bianca and Vincent.

Cole had heaved the grenade across the warehouse, but it didn't matter.

Shit went south real quick and we were lucky to still be alive.

If Enzo had any question about the strength of Dominic De Santis, I think it had been erased after the night we had.

"Are you OK?" I asked, taking her hand in mine.

"I'm fine." She offered me a sweet, tired smile as a flicker of sadness washed over her face. "Really. I am."

I didn't want to push the subject, so I wound my arm around her waist and followed Anson into the diner.

We grabbed a booth near the back, and I slid in beside Rosalie as Anson sat across from us.

"Your eye and lip," Rosalie said, wincing as she took in Anson's face.

He sighed. “Occupational hazard of being a smartass, I suppose.”

“It wasn’t right.” She looked over at me. “What the hell is happening to everything?”

Her question caught me off guard.

I licked my lips. “It was just an overreaction. It didn’t mean anything—”

“He’s always flying off the handle about Anson. I’m getting sick of it. In fact, I’m getting sick of a lot of damn things.”

I tensed, my heart jumping into my throat. “Sweetheart, it’s just been a bad couple of days. We’re all tired and stressed. Cole worries, you know? He didn’t mean—”

“Ethan. He had *a fucking gun* pointed at Anson *in our house!*”

I snapped my mouth closed. She had a point I couldn’t argue.

She shook her head at me. “I know you’re trying to defend him, but no. Not this time. And Anson.” She swiveled her head and looked at him.

“Yeah?” He raised his brows at her.

“You know how he is. Why did you poke the damn bear?”

“In my defense, I didn’t think he’d pull out a gun. I thought maybe he’d call me a name and punch me, two things that don’t bother me much.”

Rosalie sighed and shook her head. “I’m going to the bathroom. When I get back just ... god, I don’t even know. Figure out how to get along.”

She got up and left the booth and headed to the bathroom. I frowned after her, wondering if I should follow in case someone tried to grab her.

“She’s fine. We’re the only ones in here,” Anson said, pulling my attention away from her. “We’re way outside of the city. No one followed us. She needs the space.”

I relaxed and nodded.

“I’m Betty. I’m your waitress this morning,” A middle-aged woman said, smiling down at us, her notebook and pen ready. “What can I get you?”

“I’ll take a coffee. Black,” Anson said. “And the breakfast platter. Orange juice.”

Betty quickly scribbled down Anson’s order and looked to me.

“Uh, Same,” I said. “And make it two. We have another one with us.”

“Sure,” she said, smiling. “I’ll be back in a few.”

I watched as she scurried off before focusing on Anson.

“I need to fix this,” Anson said.

“Aside from the obvious, why?” I cocked my head at him, my anxiety poking its head up. I was still riding high on it from last night, so I wasn’t surprised when I felt the familiar wave creep over me.

He scoffed. “We’re friends. She’s just ...” He sighed and ran his hand down his face. “Have you ever met someone that you just mesh with? Like, there’s no need to be anyone else when you’re with them? They accept you as you are without question?”

I nodded and gave him a small smile. “Rosalie.”

He visibly swallowed. “Rosalie.”

“Do you... love her?” I asked, the words sour on my tongue.

“You guys keep asking me that,” he said, chuckling softly. “I’m going to tell you what I told Enzo. I’m not here to steal your girl. I’m really not. I see so much talent and potential in her. So much fire. I genuinely want to help her succeed. She and I...” his voice trailed off. “We’re a perfect duet.”

“A perfect duet,” I murmured. “She’s easy to love.”



He let out a sad laugh. “She is. But I know where her heart is. I think you guys would do well to remember it too. Might make all of this that much easier.”

“I think the guys just need confirmation. Sometimes we get a little nervous because we know we’re fucking things up with her. We know she deserves more than we give her. We’re trying to get there. It’s just... hard,” I finished lamely. “All I know is that she’s everything to me and the guys. We love her endlessly. She’s not a passing fad or anything like that. She’s Rosalie. She’s our girl. She always will be.”

“I respect that, but she needs to soar. She can’t do it in a cage, E.”

His words hit me hard in the chest as our eyes locked. “I can’t let her go,” I whispered, my chest constricting with the words. “I-I can’t. I should, but I just can’t.”

He nodded sadly. “I get it, but she’s not happy right now. If you want to keep her, you need to make some changes. If she comes to me and asks me to take her away, I’m going to. We’ve already discussed making her a star. It’s what she wants. Would you stand in the way of that?”

I contemplated his words. Singing was her dream. I’d be a real asshole to stop her from having her dreams.

“I wouldn’t,” I finally said.

“I didn’t think so. Even Fox may go pro and leave. In fact, I bet he will if he doesn’t get killed first. Would you stop him?”

“No.”

“Then don’t stop her. Let her life progress as it needs to. Get your shit sorted with whatever you’ve got going on. Let her get hers sorted. She wants so much in this world. It kills me to see her hurting over having to decide. So don’t make her choose. Give her the freedom to go and be happy. What’s that saying? If you love something, let it go. If it comes back it was meant to be. Or something.”

“Do you think she’d come back?” I stared down at my hands twisting together on the table.

“Ethan, I don’t think she’ll ever forget her way home, no matter where her dreams take her. She loves you all. Rosalie will always come back for you and the guys. There isn’t a doubt in my mind.” He sat back and surveyed me.

I hated to admit it, but Anson was an all right guy. If only Cole could see that. If Cole continued to fail in that respect, it might push Rosalie away because she could already feel what a good person Anson was.

Or seemed to be.

And he loved her. He didn’t even need to tell me outright. It was in his words. His actions. The look in his blue eyes. It tore my heart apart, but Rosalie was easy to love. He gave a damn about her happiness. It wasn’t just how she looked. It was her soul. He saw it like we did.

“You must have all sorts of women beating down your door,” I commented.

He smiled. “None I want to invite inside.”

Fair enough. Worrying, but fair. He was holding out. That put a little anxiety back into my bag of fears, but I had to trust him. He wasn’t the guy to steal her. He’d make sure she wanted to be stolen first. That was the point he was making.

Fucking noted.

Rosalie came back into view, and I cleared my throat.

“Hey,” I greeted her. “Better?”

She offered me one of her smiles and brushed her lips against mine. “No, but I’ll get there.”

I kissed her back, aware Anson was watching. My heart skipped as I wondered what it would be like if he just joined us. I knew Cole would forbid it, but I wasn’t against it. She could use someone like him. Not to take her away, but to be with her too.

I deepened our kiss, wishing we could stay like that forever. I wasn’t the kind of guy to jump balls deep into PDA, but I wanted to test something, so I pushed down all those insecurities I had and went for it.

She broke away from me, breathless, her cheeks red.

“Ethan,” she murmured, glancing at Anson who was now staring down at his phone.

“I don’t think he minds, sweetheart,” I said softly, going in for a second kiss.

She hesitated for a moment before kissing me back. When she pulled away again, she looked to him once more, but he seemed engrossed in the message he was sending.

Our PDA seemed to not affect him one way or the other.

Our breakfast arrived then, and we dug in, the mood lightening.

And after spending the entire day with Anson and Rosalie, I came to a decision. An alternative to letting Rosalie go or sending her away for her own safety. I just needed to get the guys on board with it.

That was going to be the hard part.

THIRTY-SEVEN

# ROSALIE

After my day with Ethan and Anson, Anson dropped us at home and sped away. He'd been quieter than he usually was, and I knew the incident with Cole had upset him.

Ethan took my hand in his and led me to the backyard where he pulled me onto his lap on a patio chair.

"I'm sorry about today," he said as I rested my head on his shoulder, his arms around me.

"It's not your fault."

"I know. I just... I hate seeing everyone like this. I feel like we're balancing on the edge of forever and doomed to topple in the wrong direction."

My breath caught in my chest at his words. Hearing him admit my fears was startling.

"I'll catch you if you fall," I whispered, going up and kissing along his jaw.

His arms tightened around me. "I know you will, sweetheart."

I breathed out and went back to resting my head on his shoulder.

"Sweetheart?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you... do you like Anson?" He sounded unsure as he said the words.

“Of course I do. We’re friends.”

“I mean... do you *like* like him.”

My heart skipped as I silently contemplated his words. “I won’t cheat on you, Ethan—”

“God, no. I didn’t mean it like that. I just meant that maybe he’s a good guy and he cares about you too. That maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if he, um, joined us.”

I sat up abruptly and stared at Ethan like he’d lost his mind.

“What?” I swallowed hard.

He winced. “I just thought he’d be good for you—”

“You’re good for me. Cole is. Enzo is. Fox is. I’m happy, Ethan. I am. I know I may not seem it, and there are some aspects I’d change, but I’m not even considering adding someone to what we have. We’re a mess. I care about Anson a lot. He is a good person. He’s sweet, kind, caring, smart, talented, beautiful...” I sighed. “But Cole hates him. He pointed a gun at him today. Fox doesn’t like him. Enzo is... harder to read. And our life is too complicated to bring someone else into it. Besides, he’d probably laugh at the suggestion. I don’t think he’s really interested in me like that. We’re just friends.” I licked my lips. “I don’t want to lose him. Ever. He’s...”

“Pretty fucking perfect,” Ethan finished softly.

I stared at him, wordless.

“You can say it. He’s everything we aren’t. He gives you what we can’t these days. He’s there for you. We’re just fucking off in the background. Hell, I even kissed someone else.” He looked down. “The fact you even want me after that and me telling you I didn’t want kids throws me for a loop. I see you as pretty fucking perfect too, Rosalie. And two perfects could really make something incredible.”

“What aren’t you saying?” I frowned at him.

He sighed. “I don’t know. Life has just been a shit show. I don’t want to lose you. Ever. You mean everything to me and

more. I want to go to sleep and wake up with you in my arms forever. I want to kiss you and hold you when you're sad. I want to share in all your smiles and laughter. I want to be at your side as you take on the world and win. I'm just... fucked up. Sometimes I think I drag you down. That my issues shouldn't have to be your issues."

"Ethan—"

He reached out and took my hand and pressed his lips to my fingertips.

"I have to tell you something. I'm tired of all the secrets. All the lies."

"What?" I asked, my heart jumping a mile a minute.

"I-I've been getting high."

I swear my heart stopped. I stiffened in his arms.

"Macy and I came up with a new designer drug. Her brother died from an overdose and she was desperate to save lives. Just like I am. So we put our heads together and came up with sugar."

"*You're* the sugar daddy?" I said, my voice a rasp.

He nodded miserably. "It's what I do locked in the basement. I hate keeping it a secret from you. I hate all the fucking secrets."

I didn't move. I didn't speak. My head was spinning inside as I came to terms with what he was saying.

"It boils down to not wanting to lose you. I don't want to lose you, and I'm scared I will if I keep these secrets. I make the drugs. I try them. They're non-addicting. I'm... obsessed with it. All day long it was one of the only things on my mind. I was desperate to get back here and work on a new batch. I want to save people, sweetheart."

"But at what cost?" I finally said, my voice low and shaking.

A stricken look crossed his handsome face. "*At what cost.*"

“I know it’s hard for you, Ethan, but look at what’s happening—”

“I know,” he said. “I know, OK? I’m just... fuck. I’m a mess. I’ll always be a fucking mess. I’m a drug designer. An addict. A shitty fucking boyfriend. A dealer. A panic-stricken bitch who doesn’t have an ounce of desire to have children with the one good thing I have in my life. What the fuck is the matter with me, Rosalie?” His voice cracked as he stared at me, his eyes glistening. “And five fucking minutes ago I was suggesting you get with Anson as a way to distract you from all the shit going on. I’m a disgusting piece of shit. The guys would kill me if they knew I’d just suggested that to you. But fuck, I can’t get shit out of my head. I’ll do it with you if you want. The three of us. How fucked up is that? If it meant I got to keep you, I’d fuck you with him.” A tear slid down his cheek. “If you told me you loved him too, I’d do it, Rosalie. I would. It’s like buying your love with cock.” He snorted and shook his head.

He was being erratic. His body was trembling. Worry crept through me.

“Last night we almost were killed. De Santis. You know him, right? Everyone knows him. We kidnapped his wife and his best friend.” He let out a soft laugh. “He came in with a grenade and rescued them. Threw the grenade at Cole and he caught it. *We almost fucking died*. Cole managed to throw it before all the gunshots went off. Then everything exploded. The entire warehouse burned down. We’re in it deep. We might get murdered in our sleep. I’m surprised Enzo let us leave the house today. We’re on a hit list. I know we are. Everyone wants us dead. Fuck.”

He blinked rapidly, his chest heaving.

“I can’t stand keeping it from you. I can’t. It’s killing me inside. Enzo says not to tell you. You deserve to know. We’re monsters. A few weeks ago, Enzo shot a man in the head. Killed him. He had a baby on the way, but he was hired to take out Enzo. His family. His parents. Enzo killed him. He’s dead.” He let out a bitter laugh.



I felt like throwing up. Ethan just kept going though, his body trembling harder with each confession.

“And Macy is dead,” he continued. “De Santis confirmed it. His father kidnapped her. She was probably raped before she was murdered, but he watched her die. She’s dead. Macy is fucking dead. She was my friend. She was a good person and this fucked up world took her!” He let out a strangled sob. “We can’t even lay her to rest. She’s in a fucking garbage bag somewhere. She’s fucking dead!” His wild green eyes locked on mine. “It could be you next, sweetheart. I can’t sleep at night because I’m so fucking worried about it. It could be you, baby. I’d die. I’d kill myself to stay with you. Fuck.” He let out another sob.

I’d remained wordless this entire time, but I needed help. He was losing it.

“Breathe,” I said gently as he quaked. “Breathe, Ethan.”

“I’m going to lose you,” he said, bringing us to our feet. He walked away from me as I stood watching him. “We’re all going to fucking lose you. They’re going to take you from us. We’re in a war we can’t fucking win. You need to run, baby. You need to go if you want go with Anson. Just... leave. Don’t tell any of us. I don’t want you to go though. Fuck, I don’t. I’ll miss you. I’ll be sicker without you.” He tugged violently at his hair.

“Ethan—”

He let out a cry and grabbed a patio chair and heaved it. I let out a squeak as it bounced against the grill and knocked it over. He didn’t stop there. He began tearing apart everything, his face a mask of grief and worry.

He heaved another chair and it crashed through the sliding glass door, sending shards of glass glittering into the night. I screamed out, calling for help as he grabbed a shovel and began smashing it against the glass patio table, sending more shards flying.

“Ethan! Help! Someone!” I shouted. “E-Ethan! Stop! Please! Ethan!”

He was too far gone. He continued to hit anything he could. I rushed to him and tried to grab his arm, but he let out a snarl and shoved me away. I tripped going backwards and toppled over the upended patio chair and smacked my head on the grill, making my ears ring and stars dance in my vision.

“Rosie!” Fox was at my side as I sat up, wincing.

“Help him,” I managed, noting my elbow was bleeding from where I’d smacked it on the patio and a glass shard cut it.

Cole and Enzo must have arrived when Fox did because Cole looked to me, his blue eyes crazed, before he shoved Enzo and launched himself on Ethan. His fist collided with Ethan’s face, sending Ethan stumbling back. He fell to his ass, the shovel leaving his hands.

Cole was on him in an instant. Enzo joined in and grabbed Ethan’s arms, pinning them down as Cole injected him with his meds.

Ethan went limp, my name on his lips before silence descended.

“Get her out of here,” Enzo snarled. “Fox. Now!”

Fox lifted me into his arms and hauled me out of the wreckage and brought me straight to my room.

He sat me on the bed without saying a word and went to my bathroom where he turned on my bath.

I felt numb inside at everything that transpired. My heart hurt at all the ugly truths. At Macy’s death. At Ethan’s heartbreak and stress. At his fear. I stared numbly at the wall.

“Rosie.” Fox kneeled in front of me. “Baby.”

I focused on his face. His beautiful face. My angel. My best friend. My... everything.

He was doing so many bad things. But he was so good. My heart hurt more.

“I have a warm bath going for you. Are you OK?” His brows crinkled. He reached out and brushed a curl away from my face. “Baby?”

I blinked. “Please go check on Ethan.”

He parted his lips. “He’s fine. I want to make sure you’re OK.”

“I’m fine. Please. Check on Ethan.”

His Adam’s apple bobbed, but he nodded and left the room.

Slowly, I got up and went into the bathroom, peeling my clothes off as I went. I grabbed a bottle of wine from the small fridge and opted to drink straight from the bottle as I slid deep beneath the warm water and bubbles.

I let the warmth hug me as I drank.

I needed to get away from this nightmare, if it was only for a moment.

THIRTY-EIGHT

# ENZO

“He’s out,” Cole said, rubbing his eyes. “He’ll have a hell of a black eye tomorrow, the stupid fuck.”

I nodded and handed him a drink. Fox had grumbled and gone to bed after Rosalie told him she wanted to be alone. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t concerned about her mental well-being. I didn’t know what went down in the backyard, but it was something major. Ethan losing himself like that always came from being triggered. I was itching to find out what happened, but if she’d turned Fox away, she’d surely turn me away.

“You didn’t need to punch him in the face,” I said, settling in my chair with a bottle of whiskey.

“He fucking lost his shit and hurt Rosalie. When he wakes up, I’m going to punch him again,” he grunted. “Fuck that shit. It’s one thing to do that shit with him, it’s quite another when she gets harmed because of it.”

I sighed. He was right. I’d been dealing with getting Cole to calm down all damn day over Anson staying the night. Had I not been drunk and fucked up from meeting De Santis, I knew I’d have never let him stay. I didn’t like him, but he’d done right by us so far. That didn’t change the fact I wanted him to fucking disappear and for Rosalie to not gravitate to him.

Guilt kept creeping through me at my suggestion to him. I’d fucked up and wanted to beat my own ass for my bullshit

about taking Rosalie away. It was the alcohol talking. The bad night. My fears about her getting hurt.

I needed to talk to her.

And I needed the guys to not find out what I'd tried to do.

I needed to be punished though. Bad.

The last person I was going to tell was Cole though. And clearly not Ethan. But Fox. He was my last hope, and I was planning on telling him what I'd done just to get it off my chest. I'd probably end up matching Ethan for black eyes, but I deserved that.

We drank in silence. A lot. My head was spinning and I was feeling angry.

Angry that our lives were this way. That I was compelled to live like this. That I might lose the one fucking thing in this world that made me feel worthwhile. That sometimes I wanted that because I felt like I deserved it.

"I need to get laid," Cole groaned, slamming back another drink. "But we know that's not going to happen since Rosebud is pissed at me."

I grunted.

He looked over to me, a half-assed smile on his face. "Want to suck my cock, buddy?"

I let out a huff of laughter and drank more. We fucked around on occasion with Rosalie when things got hot, but we'd never gone that far. I wasn't saying it was off the table, but it wasn't on either. It was in a state of *whatever the fuck happens* limbo somewhere near the floor.

"Or bend over for me. I just need to come."

I drank again. "We both know I'd never bend over for you. You'd bend over for me."

He stood and unzipped his pants. The move made me chuckle.

"What the fuck are you doing?" I dared ask, my vision blurry.

“I’m fucking wasted and hornier than two rats stuck fucking in a wool sock behind a heater in hell while the devil jerks off on them. I need to come. So either fuck me, pretty boy, or watch me jerk off.”

He didn’t get his button undone because there was a knock on my door.

I raised a brow at him. “Too bad, so sad, you fucking weirdo.”

He growled and sat back down before grabbing a bottle of whiskey and drinking down more. I got up and went to the door when it didn’t open.

I found Rosalie staring back at me, her eyes bloodshot.

Quickly, I opened the door wider to take in how beautiful she looked in her black silk nightie. This wasn’t going to help Cole’s cause. Or mine because fuck, I wanted to come too.

But I also needed to be punished.

I reached out without a word and drew her into my arms. She came willingly and clung to me, her small body shaking as she cried.

“What’s wrong, Sunshine?” I whispered.

Her fingers twisted in my button down.

“I love you,” she whispered back. “I love you so much.”

My heart jerked.

“I love you too,” I said, holding her tightly. “Why aren’t you in bed? You’re exhausted. It’s nearly midnight.”

“I had to check on Ethan.”

Of course she did. I’d checked on him not long ago and he was fine.

We were both quiet for a moment before I pulled away from her and tilted her chin up.

“E is fine. He’ll be fine. Promise.”

She nodded, her lips parted.

I thumbed her bottom lip. “It’s been another bad day, Sunshine. I’m sorry for that.”

She said nothing as she watched me with those pretty green eyes.

“Cole is miserable. He’s sorry.”

“I know he is,” she said, her gaze darting to Cole deeper in the room on the couch.

“Do you forgive him?”

She licked her lips, making my cock ache with want.

“I don’t know—”

“Let him make it up to you,” I said softly, backing away and taking her hand. She didn’t fight me. She let me lead her deeper into my office, the door clicking closed behind her.

I led her straight to Cole who was still on the couch, his head resting on the back as he stared up at the ceiling.

“I brought you something,” I called out.

He lifted his head and stared at Rosalie. I moved behind her and held her at the shoulders, my lips at her ear.

“Knees. Now,” I commanded softly. I gave her a gentle push downward and she obliged, going to her knees before Cole.

“Good girl,” I said, raking my fingers through her hair. “Be my perfect ray of sunshine and help Cole. He misses you.” I tightened my fingers in her hair, earning a soft gasp from her. I locked eyes with Cole as she reached out and finished undoing his pants for him.

He licked his lips, making my need for both of them take a front seat to whatever the fuck was the matter with me.

“Fuck,” he groaned as I pushed her head down so she was swallowing his cock. He kept his eyes locked on mine as I directed her on his dick. “Fuck, that’s so good.”

“You like that?” I murmured. “You like when our good girl sucks your dick?”



“Fuck yeah,” he said breathlessly, his eyes still on me.

“Take your shirt off.”

He sat forward as I continued pushing Rosalie’s head up and down on his dick. A moment later, his shirt was gone, leaving his bare torso exposed. He groaned softly again, his abs tight, as I moved her head faster on him.

I pushed her down further, relishing in the way she resisted me until she broke, taking all of Cole’s cock into her throat. I knew she couldn’t breathe. Her small body quaked as I kept her head down on him.

“I’m going to fucking come like this,” Cole gasped out.

No he wasn’t. I wouldn’t let him.

I pulled Rosalie off his cock, earning a soft protest from him as I dragged her away. She wordlessly followed, her chest heaving as I led her to my chair and sat her on my lap.

Cole kicked his pants off, his eyes glued to our movements as I spread her legs and ran my hands up her bare thighs. She rested her back against my chest while I explored her.

“No panties. Someone isn’t such a good girl,” I murmured in her ear.

She remained silent as I ran my finger along her damp slit.

I pulled my finger away and grabbed the alcohol and took another deep drink. I wanted to be blitzed out of my fucking skull.

I could smell alcohol on her. She’d drunk before going to bed.

Gently, I sat her forward and tangled my fingers in her hair and pressed the bottle of whiskey to her lips.

“Drink,” I instructed.

She tried to jerk away, but I forced her forward.

“Now,” I whispered.

She parted her lips and I poured the whiskey into her mouth. She swallowed, coughing after, her chest heaving. I

knew she didn't like whiskey. But I wanted her pliable like I was. I needed this. If I had her forgiveness for a night, I might be able to make it through the fucking week.

I pushed the bottle back to her lips and forced her to drink more. And more. And more. Finally, I let her lay back against me, and I finished off the rest of the bottle while Cole continued to eye us, his own bottle drained.

"How do you feel?" I asked, running my fingers back up her thigh.

"The room is spinning," she whispered. "I feel tingly."

"Mm, good, baby. Maybe you can do us a favor."

"I'm really upset with you. We need to talk."

"I'm really upset too. That's why I need this to happen. I need this tonight. Can you help me? I feel like I'm drowning here."

She licked her lips and shifted against me, her glorious cleavage on display for me.

"We should talk. I need to talk," she said.

"We'll talk another time. Soon."

"Promise?"

"Promise," I affirmed. Without another word, I spread her legs wider and pulled her nightie up so Cole could see her.

His eyes zeroed in on her bare pussy as he slowly stroked his cock.

"Touch yourself for Cole," I said in her ear.

She hesitated.

"Do it."

Her fingers drifted south and she slid them through her folds, seeking her clit.

"Fuck, I love when she fingers herself," Cole said breathlessly as he continued to stroke himself slowly. With his other hand, he grabbed his phone and recorded her. I knew she

hated when we recorded her, but it made for fantastic spank bank material when she was pissed at us and holding out.

“Make yourself come,” I instructed. “Faster, Sunshine.”

She moved her fingers faster, her breathing picking up.

My cock ached to be buried inside her heat. I wrapped my hand around her delicate throat and squeezed, loving the way she wheezed as she tried to breathe. It was the control I had over her. I fucking loved the control.

“Faster. I’m not going to let you breathe until you come,” I growled in her ear.

Her fingers worked quicker as she struggled beneath my hold, my hand tight around her throat. I knew she was running out of air. Her body tensed before she gave a slight tremor.

I released her as she came, a low moan expelling from her mouth as she dampened my pants with her pleasure. She breathed in and out hard, her body limp as her hand fell away.

“Such a good girl,” I cooed in her ear. “Let’s go help Cole now.”

I lifted her easily and she swayed, all the alcohol taking its hold on her. Quickly, I removed my clothes and went to the couch where Cole was watching us. He put his phone down.

I laid on the couch and held her hand. Cole got up and helped her stand straight. She was really wasted, her swaying letting me know she wasn’t far off from passing the fuck out on us. That was OK. We’d take care of her.

Once I was situated, he helped her straddle me.

His eyes locked on mine as he stroked my dick for a moment before guiding her down onto it.

I let out a soft chuckle as he winked at me. He climbed behind her and pushed her flat against me.

I thrust up into her, earning a soft moan from her. Tilting her chin to me, I kissed her deeply, tasting the alcohol on her soft lips.

*Yeah, she was fucking toasted.*

I continued to fuck up into her heat, our lips fused to one another's. I didn't pay much attention to Cole until I felt his tongue lapping at us as I fucked her.

A low groan came out of me as his tongue moved along my cock, nipping and licking at me, before it disappeared as he licked at her.

Fuck, I was toasted too. The room was spinning. I almost needed to hold onto something so I didn't fucking fly away.

Her tightness felt so good as I continued my work on her pussy. I'd have already come if I wasn't so wasted.

Cole buried his face in her ass and ate her as she let out a gasp and another moan. I wasn't sure if he was going to burrow into her tight little asshole or if he was going to join me in her pussy, but I didn't fucking care. I just wanted him to fuck her with me.

He pulled away from her and lined up.

*Fuck yes.*

His cock nudged my ass. I grunted.

I felt his dick against my asshole as he leaned over her and smiled down at me.

"I could fuck you so hard right now," he said softly.

"You better be talking to her," I growled.

He let out a soft chuckle and moved away. I slowed my movements long enough for him to get his dick wet and push against her pussy. Guess we were fucking her together here.

She gasped as he pushed forward into her tight confines.

I knew it always hurt her.

And I fucking loved that.

Because she trusted us enough to let us.

Once he was buried inside of her with me, we fucked her, jostling her small body between ours.

Her soft cries echoed around us as we fucked.

Touched.

Kissed.

I didn't fucking care if I was kissing Cole or her. I loved them both. And it wasn't exactly the first time. Shit like this tended to happen when we were together.

Not so much with Fox and E, but Cole was always daring and willing.

He bit my lip, making me hiss at him before I bit him back. He wasted no time in turning Rosalie's head so he could claim her lips. We fought over her, forcing her to kiss us back and forth as we plundered her heat.

She came hard with a cry, her body trembling between ours as we continued to burrow into her, urging her to come again.

And she did.

Again.

And again. Calling our names.

Until she was motionless on my chest, her breathing deep as we stayed buried inside her.

"She passed out," Cole said breathlessly, slowing down.

"Don't tell me you're going to stop." I thrust up into her again, my cock sliding against his.

He chuckled softly. "I won't if you won't."

"Fuck no." I fucked her deeper with him.

His lips found mine again.

Just me and him with our girl passed out between us, unconscious.

Fuck it.

One night of it.

It's not like we'd never kissed before.

I kissed him back, our tongues tangling and wrestling for the lead. Neither of us would grant it to the other, so it was

open mouth, tongue to tongue, teeth nipping at one another every now and then.

He let out a soft cry, his cock twitching against mine as he came long and hard.

“Oh fuck,” he cried out softly as his release rushed out of him and into her. He groaned against my lips, making my cock ache even more.

When he finished, he stay buried deep within her. I fucked her slowly, drilling his come deep inside her as he kept his eyes locked on mine.

“Deeper,” he rasped. “Fucking get her pregnant for me. Push my come as deep as you can get it.”

I pushed deep, making her moan softly in her passed out state.

“Like this, brother?” I asked breathlessly.

“Fuck, just like that,” he choked out. “You’re going to make me fucking come again.”

I liked that. I wanted him to. I wanted our releases dripping from her hot pussy all night long. The idea of a baby appealed to me. She wouldn’t leave us then. I wouldn’t want her to leave. I’d kill all the motherfuckers in this world to keep her and the baby safe. We needed this.

I fucked her harder until Cole groaned again, coming once more inside her. I followed, my release shooting deep into her hot channel with him.

It was the best fucking orgasm I’d ever had.

I lay breathless beneath them both, her still passed the fuck out. I raked my fingers through her hair and swallowed hard.

“We should get her to bed,” I finally said.

“Together,” Cole murmured.

I nodded, my throat tight. “Together.”

THIRTY-NINE

# FOX

Rosalie had been exceptionally quiet.

And Ethan barely came out of his room.

Enzo was more pensive and spoke often to his father and would disappear late into the night without telling us where the fuck he was or what he was doing. When asked, he'd drink and pretend he couldn't hear us.

Then there was Cole.

Rosalie barely said two words to him since the gun incident. I knew he'd fucked her though with Enzo.

Guess it hadn't warmed her up any to him.

Overall, the house was tense.

Rosalie was getting packages delivered daily. Loads of Christmas stuff arrived and we'd carry it in for her. She hadn't opened the boxes though, and that's how I knew she was really lost. She loved opening packages. We were constantly getting things she'd order online delivered to the house. New books, music stuff, even stuffed animals. She'd tear into them like it was Christmas morning, her green eyes sparkling and a smile on her face. Now she simply walked past all the packages with her head down.

I couldn't snap her out of it either. She was just so damn withdrawn.

I sat beside her at the kitchen island that morning as she ate her breakfast. She'd not said a word to us, opting to simply



eat and stare out the same window Enzo was looking out from his spot in front of the sink.

Cole shot me a worried look as E wandered into the room.

“Morning,” he murmured, casting a look to Rosalie. She was too lost in whatever she was thinking about for her to answer him.

It was Saturday. Thanksgiving had come and gone and we’d not even bothered making a dinner. It wasn’t what we’d planned, but that’s just how it worked out.

It fucking sucked.

I sighed and reached over to give her thigh a squeeze. She didn’t even acknowledge me.

I was fed up with it all.

“Rosie, can you please just talk to me?”

“I’m late. I’m meeting Anson for practice this morning for the showcase.” She pushed her bowl of cereal away and got to her feet. “He should be here any minute.”

“Babe, it’s Saturday. I actually get to be home today. Can we spend it together?” I sounded like a complete pussy-whipped bitch, but I was desperate to get her to open up. “I’m sure you sound incredible already. Or maybe I could join you? You said you were going to try to get me in so I could duet with you—”

“You’re too busy kidnapping and killing people to be in the showcase. How would you ever find the time?”

Silence fell over the room. Enzo turned slowly, a dark look on his face.

“What did you say?” I asked softly, my body tense.

“Do I need to repeat it?” She tilted her chin up. “I said—”

“We heard what the fuck you said,” Enzo snarled, storming toward her. He grabbed her by the arm. “Where the fuck did you hear that shit?”

Her bottom lip wobbled.

Enzo gave her a gentle shake. “Who the fuck told you that shit?”

“I did,” E said, getting to his feet and coming forward.

Cole cursed softly.

I simply stared back at her, my heart thrumming hard in my chest. Her eyes glistened.

“It’s true though,” she said.

“That’s why you had the meltdown?” Cole scowled. “Really fucking nice, E.”

“Don’t you dare get mad at him for finally telling me the fucking truth!” Rosalie shouted, wrenching her arm away from Enzo. “I’ve been begging for you guys to talk to me for weeks now! You’re always out at clubs and coming back with injuries. I’m sick of being lied to! I’m sick of being under house arrest for shit I don’t even want to be a part of!” Her chest heaved as she yelled.

“You wanted us,” I said softly. “You love us.”

“And this is us, Sunshine,” Enzo finished.

A tear slid down her cheek. “I don’t want this. I don’t want you hurting people. Killing them. I want you here with me. Safe. I want *us* back.”

“We’re not kids anymore, Rosalie,” Enzo said. “This is what a life with us looks like.”

She shook her head and backed away as there was a knock on the door. A moment later, Anson came into the kitchen. He stopped and took in the scene.

*Fuck, she was going to go to him.* Her gaze darted to him, her face displaying her heartbreak.

He reached for her, his brows crinkled.

It all happened in slow motion.

“LeeLee?” he called out, the worry evident in his voice.

And she went to him.

She fucking went to him and buried her face in his chest.

His gaze darted to us as we sat and watched, none of us moving, not even Cole.

It was killing me inside. Fucking shattering me. She was my girl. My Rosie, and yet, she was seeking the comfort of him. Anson fucking Beyers.

He wrapped his arms around her small, trembling body, his gaze still on us.

Where I expected to see a challenge was only sadness. Where there should have been triumph and cockiness, there was only worry.

I fucking hated it. I hated him.

“Please, let’s go,” she whispered through her tears. “Take me away.”

“OK,” he answered without question.

And if I thought for one fucking moment he was working for us I was dead wrong.

He worked for Rosalie. She owned him as much as she owned me. As much as she owned all of us.

“Don’t go,” Cole called out, his voice quaking. “Rosebud. We’ll talk.”

She didn’t even look at any of us as she untangled herself from Anson and left the room, leaving him behind. The front door opened and closed as he stared back at us.

“I’ll talk to her,” Anson said. “And bring her back tonight.”

“Don’t bring her if she doesn’t want to come,” I whispered, the words nearly choking me.

Enzo nodded. “Whatever she wants. Do it. I don’t fucking care what it is. Just... keep her safe.”

Anson nodded. “Of course.”

“If you fucking touch her...” Cole choked out. “If you ... if she...”

“I’m not going to take her from you,” Anson said firmly. “I promise that’s not our relationship. It’s not my intention. Ever.”

E said nothing as he stared at the floor.

Anson turned and left without another word. A moment later, we heard the roar of his car as he left with our girl.

“Why’d you tell her?” Cole finally asked. “Huh, E?”

“Because she deserves to know.” His jaw trembled. “I don’t want to keep secrets from her.”

“Then how about fucking telling her about Celeste on your cock? Huh? Why not tell her that fucking secret since you’re so into spilling them!” Cole yelled.

“Hey,” I snapped, getting to my feet. “Don’t fucking start with that shit, Cole. Don’t fucking make him feel like shit because we’re all fuck ups here.”

“It’s fine,” E whispered. “I should tell her. It’s just... I’m so ashamed.”

“You have nothing to be ashamed of. She’s a dumb bitch who got too ballsy,” I said to him. “Fucking chin up, Masters. No shame. Got it?”

He locked his green eyes on me and nodded, his jaw still quivering.

Cole let out a snarl and pitched his bowl into the sink. Enzo hadn’t said a word.

“What are we doing? Just fucking letting her go? We’re pushing her into that fucker! How can you guys not see it! We’re losing her!” Cole’s blue eyes were wild.

I didn’t want to acknowledge it, but he was right. If shit didn’t change, she was as good as gone.

“Would it be such a bad thing?” Enzo shouted back. “For her to be with someone who could get her out of this fucking life?”

“Don’t you dare fucking say that shit.” Cole got into his face. “Fucking take it back, De Luca.”

They glared at one another.

I didn't even know what to do. I felt like my life was crumbling and I was stumbling over the broken pieces, trying to stay upright. Nothing made sense except I loved her. I loved her with everything I was. I couldn't have a life without her in it. We were meant to be together. Always. I vowed it to her when we were kids. I meant it now.

"We need to fix this," I said. "That's all there is to it. We can tell her what's going on or just try to answer her questions. But if we keep going the way we are, she'll go. I don't want her to go. I know you guys don't either. Even you, Enzo."

He backed away from Cole and sighed.

"I don't want her to go either," he said softly. "I love her. She's it for me."

"Me too," I said.

"Me too," E added softly.

Cole sank onto the bar stool at the counter. "And me. So what do we do?"

"Let's give her the day," I said. "Let's just... do what she wants. Answer her questions. Remind her how much we love her."

"With cake?" Cole asked softly, a note of hope in his voice.

"If it takes cake and kissing you fuckers, I'll do it," I said.

Enzo let out a soft laugh.

"Me too," E said. "Let's make our girl smile again."

"I'm in," I said, looking to Enzo.

He nodded. "I'm in too."

"You fucking know I am." Cole stood. "Should we order a cake or make it? I can't remember all the stuff she did to it."

"Fuck it. Let's learn and surprise her," Enzo said, moving to the drawer that housed the cookbooks. "Which book was it in?"

Cole joined him and they rummaged through the drawer, looking for Rosalie's cookbook.

"It'll be OK," I said to E who sat on the stool Cole had vacated. I sat beside him. "You know that right?"

"All I know is that we're fucked if it isn't." He gave me a sad smile. "I'm sorry for telling her."

"That why you freaked out that night?"

He nodded miserably. "I couldn't hold it in any longer. Shit's been weird since. I want to fix it, but I feel like a failure. I already told her I didn't want kids. I'm failing her every fucking direction I go. I don't want to fail her. She's the one constant in my life that drives me to wake up every morning. I didn't think it was possible to love someone this much until I met her. Until I had her. I don't think I can let her go."

"I know." I sighed. "Me too, E."

"So let's just hope this works. It'll work, right?" He looked at me, hope in his eyes.

"It'll work."

It fucking better, that was all I knew. I was just as tired with fighting as everyone else.

I didn't want a temporary fix though. I wanted something permanent.

I just wasn't sure how we were going to find it.

FORTY

## ANSON

We worked for hours in the practice room. Rosalie seemed to be on a mission to keep herself distracted from what went down with the horsemen. I hadn't asked or pressed her about it. If she wanted to talk, she knew I was here for her.

But I'd seen the pain and devastation on their faces. Whatever it was hit hard.

I had to admit, her performance was incredible. She was throwing everything she had into it. So much so, I needed to stop her.

"Hey," I interrupted her during *O Holy Night*. The way she was nailing those notes was making me reel.

She faltered as I stopped the music.

"God, is it complete shit?" she asked, her green eyes wide. "I know I'm a little slow—"

"No. No! It's fantastic. Really amazing. That's why I stopped you."

She frowned at me.

"It's just I think we should rest. I don't want you to overwork your voice."

She sighed, her frown deepening, but followed me off stage.

"It's been hours," I said gently, turning to her. "You're wearing yourself out. Or close to it. I can hear it when you speak."



Her gaze shifted to the floor, but I was quick to draw it back to me.

“Look at me, LeeLee,” I murmured. “Talk to me.”

“We just fought today.”

I sat on the edge of the table and focused on her. I took her hand in mine and pulled her closer.

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

She pursed her lips for a moment. “It’s just... I know what they’re doing when they’re gone. I don’t like it. I don’t like being lied to and having them keep secrets from me. But at the same time, now I wish I didn’t know because it’s breaking my heart.” She visibly swallowed.

“I see.” I reached out and brushed a curl away with the hand that wasn’t squeezing hers. I tucked the curl behind her ear. “Then we need to find the silver lining, don’t you think?”

“Is there one when it comes to murder and kidnapping? Drugs? Violence?”

“There’s always a silver lining,” I said without missing a beat. “I’ll help you find it. How does that sound?”

She sighed. “I don’t even want to think about any of it right now.”

“You can’t avoid it. You need to face it and figure out what you’re going to do.”

She nodded. “You’re right. But... I just want to be distracted right now. That’s all.”

“OK. How about this? I’ll distract you with anything you want and then we’ll figure out the silver lining after. Deal?”

Her lips curled up the smallest bit. “I’d like that.”

“Then you have yourself a deal.”

“Anything?” she asked. “We can do anything?”

I hesitated. The guys didn’t want her out past the campus, which was understandable. Considering all the shit they were

into, I got it. They just didn't realize I ruled this city before they arrived. At least the underground. I was a king.

Fuck it.

"Anything," I confirmed. I'd deal with the fall out later. They did say to give her anything she wanted. I'd have done it anyway, but it was nice to add that argument in my mind when considering things.

"Tell me what you're hiding from me," she said softly.

I stared back at her, dumbfounded at the request.

She reached out and cradled my face. "Tell me your secrets. Who are you, Anson? I see the cuts on your knuckles. The bruises. The tattoos you try to keep hidden beneath your sleeves. I want to see you. I want to know you. I know you can fight. No one has ever been able to rival Cole. But you can. I want to know your secrets."

"You really don't," I whispered, feeling like Jell-O beneath her touch. "I'm not a good guy."

She shifted closer. "Then show me the bad guy so I can know *you*."

*Fuck.*

Enzo's words washed over me from the night I was with him in his office.

*The tension. The pull. If she leans into you, lean into her...*

I rose to my feet and placed my hands on her hips as she stared up at me.

"Tell me," she pleaded softly.

I was too close. Too fucking close.

I was desperate to grasp onto something so I'd stop falling.

Tumbling into this beautiful girl.

*Fuck, LeeLee...*

She didn't lean into me as I leaned into her. She simply stared up at me, pulling away the slightest bit so she could maintain eye contact.

The door opened to the practice room and she jumped away from me like she'd been burned. Her cheeks reddened, and she quickly busied herself with putting her music back into her folder.

"Anson, I've been looking for you," Alice Landry called out.

I closed my eyes for a moment before exhaling.

"Hey, yeah. I got your message earlier," I said, turning to her and fixing a smile onto my face. "I've just been busy practicing with Rosalie."

Alice glanced to Rosalie and a sneer crossed her face before she quickly righted it.

"Well, it looks like you're done now, so how about we have Rosalie step out into the hall so we can talk?"

I opened my mouth to tell her no, but Rosalie slung her bag over her shoulder.

"Rose—"

"I'll wait in the commons for you," she said softly, her gaze darting to Alice who was standing entirely too close to me.

*Fucking damnit.*

I watched her leave, the door clicking closed behind her.

"You're avoiding me," Alice said immediately.

I moved to my bag and began loading my stuff into it. The last thing I felt like doing was having it out with her here when I needed to get back to Rosalie.

"Anson," Alice called out.

I turned to her. "What do you want from me?"

"I'd like it if you'd stop pretending to give a shit about that girl—"

"That *girl* is the next fucking big thing," I snapped.

Alice rolled her eyes like she tended to do when she was challenged. She closed in and pressed her hand to my cock

over my jeans as I stared down at her.

“You’re not fucking her, are you? She’s with Fox Evans. She’d never leave him for you.”

I ground my teeth. “I’m not fucking her.”

I shoved her hand away and continued to stuff my shit into my bag.

“You don’t call me anymore. You don’t come over—”

“That’s because I fucked you a couple of times and realized you’re a cold, heartless bitch,” I snapped, turning to her.

Her lips parted several times as she stared back at me. “I saved you from the streets—”

“*I am the fucking streets.* You may have helped me out here a few times, but I assure you, I got where I am because I’m fucking good at what I do. If I weren’t good at things I *do*, you wouldn’t be in here trying to beg me for my cock.”

Her cheeks flamed red. “She’s not the girl for you. I see the way you look at her. You don’t tell anyone about your life. You keep everything a secret—”

I laughed softly, coming to a decision. “I know she’s not the girl for me. She’s too fucking perfect for someone as flawed as me. But that doesn’t mean you’re the girl for me either. The next time you interrupt one of my practices, have a good fucking reason past your jealousy and getting your pussy stuffed. I told you before, it’s over. I meant it.”

I stormed past her and left the room.

I’d had a few weak moments over the years with Alice. She always wanted more, but I never did. Mostly because I wasn’t the sort of guy who wanted to make plans for a future with a girl. I knew I wouldn’t hang around for long, especially once I found out who killed my mom and sister. So long-term wasn’t for me. I wanted out of this city almost as much as I wanted to know who the fucking monster was who took my family from me.

Something changed in me when I met Rosalie though. I fucking wanted to stick around for her. For whatever she needed or wanted. It was one of the leading factors as to why I'd gone to her guys for help. I knew they needed someone to keep an eye on her. I could be that guy.

And now I was.

I was sticking around.

I caught sight of her in the commons and went to her.

She rose from her seat, her brows crinkled.

"Everything OK?" she asked, those pretty green eyes doing something to my fucking heart.

"Yeah. Yeah, I, uh, was thinking... do you want to get out of here?"

"I don't want to go home," she said immediately.

"Good because it's the last place I want to take you. Do you trust me, LeeLee?"

"Yes," she answered without batting a lash.

"Then how about hearing some secrets?"

"Is it dangerous?"

"Yes."

She nodded. "Good. I heard I'm good at that stuff."

My bad mood dissipated as I nodded for her to follow me.

She didn't know what she was asking for. That was OK. She'd learn soon enough.

FORTY-ONE

# ROSALIE

I stared at the passing scenery as we sped down the streets. I'd taken off my necklace and left it in the locker I had in the music hall, and powered off my phone. I knew I could be tracked. I didn't want to be found tonight.

I had no idea where Anson was taking us. I didn't ask. My trust in him overruled everything else. My anger at the guys helped too. If they could keep secrets, so could I.

Not that what I was doing was a secret. I was certain they were panicking as they tried to track me and realized I wasn't trackable.

We pulled into a parking lot. There were a lot of people in the area, all of them looking like this was just an everyday event for them.

Anson put the car in park and got out. He came to my side and opened the door and offered me his hand. I took it and let him help me out.

"What are we doing?" I asked.

He reached out and fluffed my hair before adjusting my dress so my cleavage was more exposed.

"Stay close to me," he said, moving away and twining his fingers through mine. He'd never held my hand like that before, and definitely never walked with me like that.

"For tonight, if anyone asks, you're my girl. You speak to no one. It's a dangerous place."

"OK, but what is it?" I asked, keeping pace with him.

“Where I grew up. This is where my secrets are.”

I swallowed thickly and let him pull me into a building that was clearly a club. People stared at us as we passed. He ignored them and led me to a hallway at the back where a large man with a scar over his eye stood guard.

“Archangel,” the man said in a deep, growly voice. “Business or pleasure?”

“Both, my friend,” Anson said.

The man chuckled and pushed the door open. A dimly lit set of stairs greeted us.

*What the hell had I gotten myself into?*

Anson gave my hand a tug and led me down the stairs.

“Ani?” I asked softly.

“Shh, LeeLee,” he murmured.

I swallowed and snapped my mouth closed.

He pushed the door open at the bottom of the stairs and it was a whole other world. Hundreds of people were gathered beneath fluorescent lights. The noise was deafening as the people cheered while two men beat on each other in a ring set in the center of the massive room. I looked up to see there was a balcony all the way around with people milling around, cheering and waving money.

It was an underground fight club.

Or sex club. Because someone was snorting cocaine of a woman’s breasts as another guy fucked her on a table.

I kept my eyes down as the man fucking her locked eyes with me.

We came to a stop and Anson wound his arm around my waist and cinched me to his side.

“Archangel!” Someone called out.

Anson nodded in the guy’s direction, a smile on his face.

“Mother fucker! What are you doing here? I thought you were too busy to grace us with your beauty,” the guy said,



coming to a stop next to us. He was young, easily the same age as us. His dark hair was a mess, and his brown eyes surveyed me with curiosity.

“I wanted to give my friend here a tour,” Anson said. “LeeLee, this is my best friend Ryder. Ryder, this is LeeLee.”

“Ah, the infamous songbird,” Ryder said, smiling at me. He was a good looking guy. I imagined him and Anson, together, created quite a stir with the girls.

“It’s nice to finally meet you. Anson talks about you a lot.”

“He does?” I looked to Anson who winked at me.

“Yeah, says you’re going to make it big someday.”

I smiled at Anson who shrugged. I loved that he had that much faith in me.

“So, you fighting tonight?” Ryder asked, turning his attention back on Anson.

“Yeah, if you don’t mind keeping an eye on my friend here.”

“Wait. What?” I looked to Anson in confusion just as one of the guys in the ring fell to his knees, completely beaten to hell. He plummeted forward and lay still on the mat as the other guy danced around and people cheered.

I was pretty sure he might be dead. Men grabbed his limp body and hauled him out of the ring.

I turned to Anson. “Uh, did you just say you’re going to fight?”

“It’s fight night, Lee,” Ryder said brightly. “Huge turnout. He’d make bank tonight. The only competition is that guy who just won. You don’t have to get knocked out. You just need to last three minutes. Your boy here is undefeated.”

I looked up to Anson who didn’t seem phased at all by any of it.

*This was his secret? He was an underground fighter?*

I guessed that explained a few things, like how he could hold his own against Cole or why he was always so brave.

He'd have to be to be surrounded by this.

"I already signed you up. The moment I saw you come in, I knew you were in," Ryder said, grinning at him.

Anson laughed.

"Do you need to warm up?"

"I need to change. Can you watch LeeLee for me for a minute?"

Ryder clapped him on the shoulder. "You know I will."

Anson turned to me. "I'm going to change. I'll be right back, OK? Don't move. No one fucks with Ryder either. You'll be safe with him." He leaned down and swept his lips across my cheek. The moved stunned me.

He leaned in further, bringing my body flush against his, his hand low on my back.

"It's best to pretend here, LeeLee. You're a beautiful girl. No one fucks with what's mine. If they think you're my girl, you'll be just fine." He withdrew and gave Ryder a nod before disappearing into the crowd.

Ryder immediately moved closer to me.

"He's a good guy. Anson," Ryder said as another guy got into the ring and got pounded on by the younger man who'd beaten the previous one.

"He is," I agreed.

"Once he's on your side, he's there forever. He's the best friend a guy could ever have. He's honest. Loyal—"

"You don't have to sell Anson to me," I said, turning to him. "I already know he's great."

Ryder grinned. "Well, since we've arrived to that conclusion, I'll add something else. He gives a damn about you. He doesn't bring outsiders down here. This is his world.

So if he's letting you in, that means something. Don't betray that trust."

"I would never," I said solemnly.

Ryder surveyed me for a moment before nodding and turning back to the fight which ended with a spectacular knockout. The same young guy won again.

"Who is he?" I asked as the guy held his bare, bloody fists in the air.

"Dimitri Makarov. He's a street kid. He's coming up in the world. Hell of a fighter. Runs with his own crowd. He's being eyed by Matteo De Santis as an up and comer. Big deal. I've heard the kid is refusing to join up. Makes me think he might make some waves in the near future. It would be nice to shake up the assholes around here."

I nodded. This world was insane.

After Dimitri left the ring, three more fights went down and Anson still hadn't returned. I was beginning to get nervous.

I kept looking around for him, noting some of the creepy men in the crowd who stared back at me. On instinct, I moved closer to Ryder as he cheered for another fighter.

A man locked eyes on me, making me shiver. His gaze raked over me, and he licked his lips.

*Gross.*

The fight ended and a man got into the ring with a mic. He'd been announcing fights since we got there.

"Next up is Dimitri Makarov! He's undefeated tonight. Let's hear it for him!" Dimitri stepped into the ring.

The crowd erupted into cheers for the guy before it quieted.

"Tonight, he will fight the undefeated underground champion! Your favorite fallen angel! Heeeeeere he is! The Archangel!"

The place erupted into so much shouting and screaming, I had to cover my ears.

I watched as Anson stepped into the ring, shirtless. I'd never seen him like that. Low slung shorts, his immaculate abs on display and sleeves of tats.

My lips parted as I stared at his back.

*Black angel wings.*

A massive back tat greeted me.

This was a completely different Anson than the one I knew. My heart jumped into my throat as the bell dinged and people screamed.

I watched in horror as Anson fought Dimitri. It wasn't like it was with Cole. He didn't hold back completely as he duck and dodged, his hits landing perfect and clean. It was clear he was undefeated for a reason as he moved smoothly through the ring.

Bare knuckles. Blood. So much blood as his fist connected with Dimitri's face. Again. And again.

Body shots.

Dimitri swung back, and Anson blocked it before getting struck in the jaw. It didn't seem to faze him as he stepped it up.

I covered my mouth as I watched Anson land a well-aimed hit to Dimitri's face, sending him to his knees.

He could have finished him right then and there, but he opted to step back as the guy swayed on his knees and they began the countdown.

The guy didn't get up. He stayed on his knees, his face battered to hell and back. His blood was all over Anson from the fight.

"Still undefeated! The Archangel!" The ref shouted, holding up Anson's arm.

Anson stared out at the crowd, his face expressionless as people roared their excitement around him. Money was

passed. Drugs were taken. And I stared back at him as he zeroed in on me.

The moment he was released, he stepped down and approached us, people clapping him on the back and calling his name as he passed.

*Archangel! Archangel!*

He stopped in front of me and offered me a smile.

“Why are you crying, LeeLee?”

I didn’t even realize I was crying. I threw my arms around his neck, grateful he wasn’t dead from fighting and clung to him. He wound his arms around me easily.

“I hate your secret,” I choked out.

He chuckled softly. “I know.”

I pulled away and he immediately wiped away my tears.

“You have blood all over you,” he murmured.

I looked down to see my sundress had Dimitri’s blood noticeably on it. I winced but didn’t really care. I was just glad Anson hadn’t met his demise in the ring.

“I was worried about you,” I said.

“Ah, LeeLee. You don’t ever need to worry about me,” he answered, his hands still on my waist. He leaned in, his lips at my ear. “Let’s get out of here. What do you think?”

I nodded as he pulled away.

He twined his fingers in mine and waved Ryder off before leading me through the crowd.

“Archangel! Your money,” a man called out.

“Shit,” Anson muttered, stopping. He released my hand and turned to the guy and listened as the man made a big show of bringing out a wad of cash.

I stood awkwardly off to the side.

“Hey, pretty girl,” a soft voice said into my ear. I jumped and swiveled to see who was next to me.

It was the man who'd licked his lips at me.

"You're way too pretty to be down here with the rest of us. I bet you're worth a lot of money."

"I-I'm really not," I said, looking over to Anson. The crowd had filled in and he was getting further from me. Panic set in as I backed up and tried to move closer to him.

"We fuck all the new girls when they come down here. Pretty sure I haven't felt your pussy yet, red," the man said.

I let out a cry as he moved closer, his arms around me, his lips on my neck.

I bucked against him, shoving him in the chest as he ground himself against me.

It didn't last long.

He was snatched away quickly, a guy I didn't know jumping in and ramming his fist into his face repeatedly. Ryder quickly joined in before Anson breezed past me. A circle had formed around the fight.

Anson moved fast.

Ryder backed off and came to my side as Anson and the guy I didn't recognize beat the shit out of the man who'd touched me.

*He was going to kill him.*

Over and over, Anson's fist met the guy's face until the guy was on the ground. Then they kicked him, jostling his body.

Finally, the man who'd given Anson the money intervened, stopping the fight.

Anson didn't fight it. He simply stopped, his chest heaving, and turned to me. The guy groaned on the ground, letting me know he wasn't dead.

The guy who fought next to Anson gave the man on the ground one final kick before bending down and saying something to him that made the man quiver and whimper out what I thought was an apology.

Anson shoved through the crowd and stopped in front of me.

He cradled my face in his bloody hands, his brows crinkled, as he raked his gaze over me.

“You OK, LeeLee?”

I nodded. “A-are you?”

“I’m fine,” he said. “Did he fucking hurt you?”

“Just scared me. I’m OK.”

A muscle popped along his jaw, but he nodded as the guy who’d fought with him came to his side.

“Let’s go. This place is a fucking madhouse,” the guy said.

Anson surveyed me for a second longer before releasing my face and taking my hand. He pulled me through the crowd. It parted easily for him as he led me out of the fight arena with the new guy behind me and Ryder behind him.

We didn’t stop until we reached Anson’s car in the parking lot.

He opened his trunk and grabbed a shirt from the back and tugged it over his head.

“Thanks for helping,” he said to the new guy.

The guy nodded and glanced at me. “This her?”

Anson nodded. “Rosalie, this is my little brother Trent. Trent, this is Rosalie.”

I held out my hand nervously. “It’s nice to meet you.”

He looked down at my hand for a moment before chuckling softly and shaking it.

“Thank you. For that,” I said when he released me.

“No problem. I enjoyed kicking that guy’s teeth in,” Trent answered, smiling. He looked a lot like Anson. Tall, muscular, handsome with dark hair and sparkling eyes.

Anson moved to my side and opened the door.

“You guys coming?” he asked.

“Thought you’d never ask,” Trent said, sliding into the backseat. Ryder went around to the driver’s side and slid into the back, closing the door behind him.

“Are you sure you’re OK?” Anson asked, staring down at me.

“Positive. I’m fine.”

“I fucked up. I looked away. That guy has always been a creep. A stupid fucking creep. I’m sorry—”

“I’m fine. Really.”

“Promise?”

“Promise,” I said softly.

He gave me a sad smile. “Let’s get something to eat.”

“You have blood all over you. So do I...”

He chuckled and went to his trunk again and pulled out a hoodie and brought it back to me.

“Wear it. It’ll cover the blood.”

I quickly tugged it over my head. It was massive on me and covered the entirety of my dress. It looked like I’d just put on a sweater and no pants and decided to just face the day.

“Perfect,” he murmured, the look in his eyes doing something to my stomach. “Hop in.”

I did so, watching as he closed me in.

“If you thought that was a good time, just wait,” Ryder called out. “We’ll show you how the other half lives, Lee.”

I smiled, not entirely put off by the idea. I enjoyed the excitement stirring deep inside me. It had been so long since I had a truly happy moment that made me feel the way I was.

Anson slid behind the steering wheel just as I looked down at my powered off phone.

“Ready, LeeLee?” he asked.

I dragged my gaze back to him.

“Ready.”



The car roared to life and we shot out of the parking lot.

I wasn't ready to turn my phone back on.

Not yet.

FORTY-TWO

# ANSON

I quickly washed the blood off myself in the men's bathroom at a diner outside of the city. I'd left Rosalie at the table with Trent and Ryder, noting the worry on her face as I told her I'd be back.

Seeing some prick touch her had boiled my fucking blood to the point where all I wanted to do was kill. It took every ounce of willpower I had to stop. I'd killed people before. It wasn't something I enjoyed doing, but you don't grow up the way I did and not learn to take a life when you needed to.

The problem with me was while I managed to contain myself most of the time, when I slipped, I fell hard. And people usually died beneath my wrath.

It was one of the reasons I was known as Archangel on the streets. My mother used to call me angel when I was a kid. It was the name I answered to until the last time I saw her alive.

I was wrathful after.

The water dripped off my face and I wiped it away. Blood had splattered in hot, sticky dots onto my face when I'd beaten the shit out of that prick who had touched Rosalie tonight. Anger was still alive within me, simmering just beneath the surface.

The only thing that stopped me from killing him was knowing Rosalie wouldn't want to see that. I wouldn't want her to see me lose it like that. It was bad enough that I'd let her into some of the darkness in my world.

But I trusted her.

And I wanted her to trust me.

My phone buzzed in my pocket and I pulled it out to see Enzo's name on the screen. Sighing, I answered it.

"Hello."

"Where *the fuck* are you with my girl?" he demanded softly into the phone. I could hear the barely controlled rage edging his voice. I knew her phone was off so they couldn't track her. Seeing her remove her necklace and leave it in her locker made me think there was a tracker in that too.

"We are at a diner outside of the city."

"Why wasn't I updated?"

"Because we were busy." I rubbed my eyes.

"You took her this morning. I want to know what the fuck you did all day and into the night with her."

I sighed. There was no use in arguing with him. If I did, he'd cut me off and she'd be all alone. I didn't want that.

"We went to the practice room and were there for hours. She just kept singing. I had to talk to a professor and she hung out in the commons and waited for me. Then we went for a ride and I showed her where I grew up." It wasn't really a lie. I did grow up on those streets. "We met up with some people I know and now we're having a late dinner."

Enzo was quiet for so long that I pulled the phone away from my ear to make sure we were still connected.

"Is she OK?" he finally asked.

"She's good, man. I think she had a decent day."

"Was she happy?" The vulnerability in his voice gripped my heart.

"I don't know. She was upset. She hasn't said much about anything. She has smiled a few times."

"Good," he said thickly. "Good."

"So any news for me? It's been weeks. I've gotten nothing."

“I’d say you’ve gotten a lot,” he answered.

I sighed.

He was quiet again for a moment.

“I have a lead. It’s small. I didn’t want to mention it in case it wasn’t anything. I’ve been pushing to get someone on it.”

“Tell me,” I said immediately.

“Bring my girl home safely and we’ll talk.”

“Deal,” I said softly. “When do you want her home?”

“I want her here now, but I know she’s upset. I’m willing to give her a few more hours as long as you stay in touch with me. The guys are going nuts because we couldn’t reach anyone.”

“I’m sorry about that. She turned her phone off and I left mine on silent. I was focused on her, not phone calls.”

“Just get her home safely,” he said gruffly.

“I’ll see you soon.”

We said our goodbyes and I stuffed my phone back into my pocket before taking a final look at myself in the mirror.

I went out to find Rosalie sitting right where I left her across from Trent and Ryder. She slid over for me in the booth when she saw my approach. I sat beside her and offered her a smile which she returned.

“Sorry,” I said. “Did you guys order?”

“Yeah, got you a burger basket,” Ryder said.

“Did you get anything?” I looked to Rosalie.

She nodded. “I got chicken tenders and fries.”

Good. I wanted her to eat.

“How’s school?” I looked to my brother who shrugged.

“Fucking lame.”

Ryder chuckled. “Do you remember that time in high school when we stole old man Reynold’s Buick and took it joy

riding all night?”

I laughed. “Of course I do. He was so pissed at us. We left that pack of hamburger under his seat.”

Ryder slapped his leg. “He came into my trig class and bitched me out while gagging. That shit was so ripe I could smell it on him.”

Trent snorted, and Rosalie cracked a smile.

“You did that?” she asked.

“We got into a lot of shit together,” I said, shaking my head.

“He’s lying. We were perfect sweethearts in school.”  
Ryder grinned.

The laughter continued, Ryder and Trent telling stories of us growing up. Rosalie laughed and smiled at their tales. Once we’d finished eating, I paid our bill and led everyone out.

“Drop me at home?” Ryder asked. “I gotta be up early for work.”

“What do you do?” Rosalie asked.

“I work over at the Ivory Post.”

“The printing place?” Rosalie turned and glanced at him from the front seat.

He nodded. “Yep. Been there since high school.”

“Trent?” I locked eyes on him in the rearview mirror.

“School. I need to get back,” he said. I nodded and drove to Ryder’s place, the music blaring as we rocked out. Once we’d dropped him off, I took Trent back to Bolten. I got out and stood with him at the back of the car.

“How’s it going?” I asked, knowing Rosalie couldn’t hear us.

“Not great. This shit is fucked, Anson. I fucking hate the lords. Having to play along and do despicable fucking shit ain’t working for me.”

“De Luca might have a lead for me. Once I drop off Rosalie, he said we’d talk.”

Trent looked to the car. “She’s a nice girl. It’s too bad she’s wrapped up in this shit.”

“I know,” I muttered.

“The lords are looking at her,” he said, lowering his voice.

I bristled at his words.

“It’s just talk right now, but she’s on their radar. I’ll keep you updated.”

“You fucking better,” I growled.

“Be careful,” he said. “You’re getting too invested in her.”

“I care about her.”

“I know.” He shrugged. “I get it. She’s beautiful. Talented. All the things you like, but she’s also the horsemen’s girl. The last thing I want to do is fight them and all this other bullshit because you couldn’t keep your dick in your pants.”

“It’s not like that with her,” I snapped at him.

He raised a brow at me. “Keep telling yourself that. I saw the way you looked at her tonight. You almost killed a man for her.”

“So did you.”

He smiled. “I knew you’d be sad if anything happened to her. Figured I’d lend a hand.”

I snorted at him. “I appreciate that.”

“I know.” He grinned. “I’ll let you know if anything changes. Let me know what De Luca tells you.”

We bid each other good night and I slid back behind the driver’s seat and pulled away from the school.

“That’s a big campus,” Rosalie murmured.

“Yeah, it’s expensive too.”

“It looks it. Do you pay for Trent to attend there?”

I nodded. “Yep. One of the best educations he can get.”

“You didn’t go there?” She fixed me with her stare.

“No. I went to a shitty school in the inner city.”

“But it took you places,” she murmured.

“That it did,” I agreed, glancing over at her. We were both quiet for a moment. “What do you want to do? We might be able to squeak a few more hours in if you aren’t ready to go home.”

“I don’t know.” She stared out the passenger window. “You pick.”

I contemplated it for a moment before coming to a decision. I turned the car onto a side street and headed to a place I thought she might like.

The city lights gave way to country roads. I turned down a narrow dirt road and drove through the trees, her not questioning our destination. When we reached a small clearing, I parked the car and got out and went into my trunk and grabbed out the blanket I kept in there before I opened her door.

She stepped out, looking around.

“What are we doing?”

“Follow me,” I said. “And watch your step on the trail.”

She followed me into the darkness through the trail, still not questioning me much. When we reached the end of the trail, it gave way to an open expanse of beach, the water lapping gently at the shore.

“Wow,” she murmured as I laid the blanket out on the sand and offered her a spot. She sank onto it and stared up at the night sky. “This is beautiful.”

“You like it?”

She nodded, her focus on the stars. “It’s beautiful. I didn’t know this place existed.”



“It’s a dark park,” I explained. “No lights or electronics are allowed out here. It’s always quiet. I’m actually surprised there aren’t more people out here. But it’s just as well. I like when it’s like this.”

“Me too,” she said, going onto her back and staring up at the sky.

I lay beside her, both of us quiet for a long time.

“Ani?”

“Yeah?”

“What do I do? About everything?”

“What your heart tells you. What is it telling you?”

“To love them,” she whispered.

I smiled at her words. They didn’t fucking realize how lucky they were.

“So love them, LeeLee. There’s nothing wrong with loving someone.”

“Even if I don’t agree with what they’re doing?”

“You can love someone but not their actions,” I said gently, rolling over to face her. “Everyone makes mistakes. I think we’re all just trying to find our way.”

She nodded. “I don’t want to leave them.”

“Then don’t. Just accept that maybe this is how it will be. If you accept that, then it opens up a hell of a lot of new doorways.”

“I’m just so mad at them...”

“Be mad at them, Rose. Let them know you’re mad. But you gotta communicate. If you guys don’t, no one will be able to save anyone.”

“They keep secrets. I’m always asking. They just don’t want to include me.”

“No offense, but that might not be a bad thing. If you don’t know anything, then you can’t be blamed for anything,” I said.

She sighed. “You do have a point.”

“So just love them if you love them. Until you can’t any longer. I just don’t think that day is today,” I said gently.

She rolled over to face me. “I don’t think it is either. I love them so much.”

“Then tell them that.”

She smiled at me beneath the moonlight. “Can you take me home?”

“Of course,” I murmured.

She reached out and cradled my face. “Thank you, Ani. For tonight. For every day that you’re there for me. I appreciate all you do for and with me.”

My heart stumbled in my chest as she leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss on my cheek before pulling away.

“It’s my pleasure, LeeLee,” I murmured. “Always.”

And that wasn’t a lie.

I’d always be there for her. Do anything for her.

I’d fallen in her net and wasn’t going to bother struggling to free myself.

And that could really fucking hurt in the end, but she was worth the pain.

FORTY-THREE

## ENZO

I watched on the security cameras as Anson pulled in front of the house. He walked around to Rosalie's side and opened the door for her and helped her out. She wasn't wearing what she'd left in. Her pretty sundress was replaced by an oversize hoodie.

The guys had gone to bed an hour ago after we all spent hours moping around and brainstorming ways to get her happy with us again.

Cole had drunk until he couldn't stand and E had gotten high on sugar before disappearing into his room.

Fox had simply wandered off, so much turmoil on his face it made my heart splinter. I'd gone to his room to check on him, but he'd fallen asleep with his laptop on his lap, his story open. I'd taken it and placed it on his bedside table before going back to my office.

And now I watched as Anson walked Rosalie to the front door. They stopped in front of it and spoke. Guilt at spying washed over me, but I turned the sound on to hear what they were saying.

"I had a lot of fun today," Rosalie said, looking up at him. "Thank you for your honesty."

He offered her a smile. "You're welcome, LeeLee."

"No offense though. I'd rather not do it again." She winced. "That was just... too much."

He laughed. "OK."

She sighed and looked to the door. “I guess it’s time.”

He nodded. “Remember what we talked about, OK?”

“I will. I’m just... scared.”

“Don’t be. You’re not alone. Don’t forget that.”

I watched as he reached out tucked a curl behind her ear, entirely too close to her on my front step.

I knew what I’d said to him and had regretted it immediately that night, but now as I saw how close he was to her, I was sick to my stomach at anyone but us touching her. Cole would murder him if he saw what I was witnessing.

Rosalie didn’t lean into his touch when he cradled her face for a moment. Instead, she smiled and backed away, putting distance between them.

I breathed out.

I’d just seen what I’d needed to see.

She wasn’t leaning in. Even with him clearly showing how much he cared, she pulled away.

Deep down inside I knew I’d been battling those worries. That she’d lean in. That she’d embrace his touch and close the distance. That she’d accept that he was better for her than we were, even with the bullshit he did on the side with his street fighting. I knew he’d done odd jobs on the streets. Enforcing. Drug running. Fighting. He’d settled on fighting more and committing crimes less, but the fact remained, Anson Beyers was a fucking boss and really did own those streets.

He’d cleaned up his act a lot though. So he had that going for him while we continued to fuck up.

The front door opened and they entered the house. I breathed out, ready to face whatever she threw at me.

I stepped out of my office and met them in the kitchen. Her green eyes locked on mine, making my heart quiver.

Wordlessly, she put her head down and walked past me and went upstairs.

I sighed and nodded for Anson to follow me.

“No issues tonight?” I asked as I got us both a drink.

“None worth mentioning,” he said, sitting on the leather sofa and taking the drink I offered him.

“I assume you handled it?” It was hard to not be intrusive with him when all I wanted to know was who needed to be killed.

“Naturally.”

I nodded and took a drink.

“You had information for me?” he pressed, taking another drink.

“Yes. It’s not much. I talked to one of my contacts. His name is Drake. He’s a lord.”

Anson narrowed his eyes and sat forward.

“He mentioned he’d heard a rumor some time ago about Matteo De Santis.”

“A rumor?” Anson crinkled his brows. “Like he’s the fucker who killed my mother?”

I shook my head. “No. Well, not really. That he had someone he cared for before he had a wife. His marriage was arranged to Dominic’s mother. He went through with it. Let his one true love go. That’s when he turned cold and bitter. Whether he let her go freely or he killed her, I have no clue. Rumor was he fathered children with her but no one could confirm it. Some say she cheated on him and that was what made him bitter. At any rate, Drake might be the one you’ll want to talk to.”

Anson said nothing, so I forwarded Drake’s number to him. Drake had his hands in all sorts of pots it seemed. When we’d gotten word to him about Macy’s murder, he’d gone radio silent on us. I assumed he was dealing with her loss. When I called him for this, he’d seemed back to normal. I hadn’t questioned it because it didn’t seem right. We were all dealing with her loss in our own way.

“Thank you. I appreciate that,” Anson finally said. He finished his drink and got to his feet.

I followed, grateful we weren't going to spend the rest of the evening pretending like we liked one another. All I wanted to do was go upstairs and see Rosalie. Maybe try to clear the air.

“Thank you for taking care of her today,” I said when we got to the front door.

“Of course. No problem,” he said. “Just know she's struggling just as much as you guys are. If you're honest with her, she'll accept that. It worked for me.”

“She knows what you do?” I asked softly.

“She knows. She didn't hate me for it. Might be worth trying.” And with those words, he opened the door and stepped out into the night.

I looked to the stairs and took a deep breath. I was in such turmoil inside. On one hand, all I wanted was her. Every fucking ounce of her. On the other, I knew my kingdom would come crashing down if I didn't get shit sorted. I knew she didn't want this life. It frustrated me to no end, but I understood her point of view.

It just hurt.

Maybe because I expected her to just accept my life because she loved me. Knowing she didn't or couldn't kept eating at me.

But fuck it.

Maybe going upstairs could soothe our wounds.

Or create new ones.

Because I was upset. Upset at her accepting Anson without question and denying me.

That couldn't go unpunished.

FORTY-FOUR



# ROSALIE

The air changed in the room as I laid with my back to the door. I didn't roll over or give my intruder any idea I was awake or knew he was there.

Moments later, a warm body slid into bed behind me and wrapped his arms around me, the rings on his finger letting me know who was in my bed.

*Enzo.*

He didn't say anything for a long time as he held me against his bare torso.

When he spoke, his voice was soft.

"I love you, Sunshine. I'm trying to be a better man for you. For all of us. It's hard for me to see you growing away from us. At the same time, I know how important it is for you to experience life on your terms." He was quiet for a moment. "I killed that man because he had my name on a list. He had my parents' names. Soon, he'd have yours and the guys. It broke me to kill him knowing he had a family, but he'd have done it to me had he gotten the chance. You need to know I'd do anything for you and the guys to keep you safe. Anything," he whispered.

I swallowed hard, a tear sliding from my eye.

"Except leave this life," I answered back softly.

"You never just leave this life, Sunshine. I wish you could see that. My father would die. So would my mother. It would kill me if something happened to them. You know how close

we are. This is what I was born into. I can't just walk away from it."

"And you won't let anyone else."

"The guys and I made a vow to one another. *All in*. That means something to us. When Ethan told you what was going on, I was angry. I didn't want you to know because I wanted you to remain my pretty, innocent girl. I don't want you washed away in this shit. I want you to always be my perfect girl. My sweet girl. Knowing the dark, twisted shit we have to do isn't something any of us want to tarnish you with."

"You're letting Ethan use drugs. You're letting him make them." My throat ached as I tried not to cry. I cried too much. I hated that I did, but it was all I could do. Screaming wasn't an option. "You know how he is, Enzo!"

I rolled over to face him. "Don't you fucking love him? Don't you care about him? He's going to end up dead, and all you'll have left is the fucking money he made you—"

He was on me in a heartbeat, pushing me onto my back, his hand covering my mouth.

"Don't you ever say shit like that again," he hissed as he loomed over me, perfectly positioned between my legs. "You know how much I love E. He's my fucking brother. He's everything to me. This shit is what's keeping him sane. It's what's holding him together. Not letting him do it would put him in an early grave. He's a fucking mess. I'm trying to save him just like I'm trying to fucking save you."

We stared at one another for a moment, the tears trickling from my eyes.

"Fuck, Sunshine," he growled. "*Fuck*. I don't want to fight with you. I fucking love you. Why can't that be enough? Tell me that I'm fucking enough for you. That we are. That you can just accept us as we are. I want you back. I want your smile and your laughter. Your love. I fucking miss you. I need. . . I need you to look at me the way you look at Anson." His bottom lip trembled. "Accept me how you accept him."

He removed his hand from my mouth and stared down at me.

“I see the way you two are together.”

“He’s my friend,” I whispered.

“You care about him. Tell me I’m wrong.”

I swallowed. “I can’t.”

His dark eyes swept over my face. “Do you love me, Rosalie? Still?”

My heart hurt.

“I-I do. So much,” I choked out. “I just want us back too. I miss you. You’re changing Enzo. I hate it.”

“I know. I hate it too.” He brushed his lips against mine. “But I’m yours, baby. Fucking realize you’re my whole world. I love you. I love you more than anything I’ve ever loved before. Nothing is ever going to change that. You know that, right? Tell me you feel the same. That we’re it for you. If you tell me that, I’ll make sure you have every fucking happiness in the world. Every wish. Every dream. Just whisper it to me and I’ll make it yours.”

“I just want you,” I said, sniffing. “Just you, Enzo.”

“You have me, baby. All of me. You just need to accept me.”

I nodded. I wanted him. Without a doubt, I wanted him. I wanted my horsemen.

“Promise you’ll be more honest? That you won’t lie to me anymore?”

He kissed me, his lips crushing mine. I parted my lips for him, and he dove inside, deepening the kiss. When he broke off, I was gasping for the breath he’d stolen from me.

“I’ll do my best, but understand that sometimes you’re safer not knowing. Can you accept that?”

“I’ll do my best,” I whispered.

His lips crashed against mine again, his dick pressing against my heat. I ground against him, desperate to feel more of him.

“Tell me what you want,” he said between kisses. “I’ll give it to you.”

“You.”

“What part of me, baby?”

“Your heart. Your soul.”

A deeper kiss.

“You fucking own both, Sunshine.”

Another kiss.

“Tell me what else. What do you want me to do to you?” He ground his cock against my wet pussy, making me moan softly.

“Your mouth. Please,” I rasped.

“Where do you want my mouth? Tell me.”

“My pussy. Please. I want you to make me come in your mouth.”

“Oh fuck, baby.” He bit my lips hard enough to make me cry out before he sat me up and removed my nightie. Once he had me on my back again, he brought my panties down my legs.

“Hold onto something,” he murmured, looking up at me from between my thighs. That was the only warning I got before he dove in and lapped up my pussy, making me moan his name.

His expert tongue flicked and licked my clit, earning cries of pleasure from me as I twisted my fingers in the bedsheets. It seemed to only encourage him because his flicking and licking turn to sucks and bites, each one more pleasurable than the last as he slid a finger deep inside me.

Then two, hitting a spot that made my eyes roll back in my head.

I cried out when he sucked against my clit again, coming in his mouth so hard I saw stars. He lapped at me, bringing me slowly back down to earth before he kissed my pussy and nibbled and sucked his way to my breasts, losing his pants along the way.

I tangled my fingers in his hair as he bit my breasts, leaving his mark on me. It hurt so good that I wasn't about to push him away. If anything, I tightened my grip on his hair, forcing his face deeper against my breasts as he continued to mark me.

When his lips met mine again, he pushed forward, filling me in one painful thrust that had me arching against his hard body.

“Oh fuck, Sunshine,” he whispered in a shaky, gravelly voice. “Baby. Mm.”

“Yes,” I rasped, bucking my hips up to meet his movements. “Please. More.”

“You're my dirty girl, aren't you?” He slammed into me hard. “Oh god, baby. Your pussy is so fucking tight. So good.” He trailed his kisses down my jaw and onto my throat where he nipped and sucked, further marking me.

“More, Enzo. So much more,” I said breathlessly.

He pounded into me harder. Faster. I dug my nails into his back, earning a low groan from him.

I came in a burst of garbled shouts, my pussy clenching onto his cock.

“Holy fuck,” he choked out, his cock twitching deep inside of me, filling me with his release.

We laid tangled up in one another, both of us breathing hard.

He rested his forehead against mine as was his way.

“I love you. I will always fucking love you.” He breathed out.

“I love you too.”

“We’ll be better. I promise.” He kissed me deeply before breaking off and rolling back onto the bed and gathering me in his arms. He held me tightly against him.

This was what I’d been missing. This was the Enzo I knew. The one who loved me and wanted me.

“Tomorrow will be a better day,” he said into the darkness before he placed a kiss on the top of my head. “Promise, Sunshine.”

I closed my eyes, holding his words close to my heart.

FORTY-FIVE

# FOX

Rosalie came downstairs with Enzo the following morning as the rest of us sat in the kitchen. His hand was twined with hers.

Cole glanced at me through his hangover and widened his eyes. E sat up straighter.

“Good morning,” Enzo called out, kissing Rosalie’s temple and releasing her hand. He went to the fridge and pulled out the milk and grabbed bowls from the cupboard before pouring cereal into them.

“Hey. Morning,” I answered, eyeing Rosie.

She came to me immediately and slid onto my lap at the kitchen table and wound her arms around my neck.

“Morning,” she murmured, kissing my cheek.

“Rosie.” I breathed out, squeezing her waist. “Is everything OK?”

“Yes.” She kissed my lips, earning a soft growl from me. I fell into her kiss easily, eager for her. This was a complete one eighty from yesterday. I’d been worried about her since she’d left with Anson. It had been pure hell waiting for her return. When we couldn’t track her and she didn’t answer her phone, I nearly had a heart attack.

But she was here now.

That was all that mattered to me.

“Rosebud?” Cole called out tentatively.



She unwound her arms from my neck and got up and went to him.

“I love you,” she said softly before giving him a gentle kiss. He practically melted into a puddle of goo for her as he gazed down into her eyes.

“I love you too, Rosebud.”

She moved away from him before he could drag her closer and went to E who stared at her with his green eyes luminous.

She slid onto his lap and nuzzled into his neck.

He closed his eyes and let out a breath, his arms wrapped firmly around her.

All the tension he'd been carrying left his body, leaving behind the E I once knew.

I looked to Enzo who offered me a quick smile. I didn't know what magic he worked, but he'd done something. I honestly thought she was going to walk out on us. Losing her would fucking gut me. I vowed again last night that there was no way in hell I'd ever let her go. It would take death to move me from her side. I'd do whatever I had to do while I was on this plane to keep her as my girl.

Enzo brought her cereal over to her and placed it on the table before taking a spot for himself and eating. Cole joined us at the table as Rosie unwound her arms from E and began to eat.

He locked eyes with me. The smile on his face made my heart feel like it was going to burst. He'd been bad last night. I knew he'd barely been holding it together because he blamed himself for everything that had gone down. Eventually, he'd wandered to his room and remained there.

Rosalie finished eating her cereal and pushed the bowl away. She cleared her throat.

“I'd like to talk to you guys,” she said.

Enzo pushed his empty bowl away and nodded. “OK.”

I swear to fuck I'd scoop her into my arms and keep her there if she said this was her way of saying goodbye.

*Never letting her go. Ever.*

“What’s up?” I asked, eyeing her.

She nibbled her bottom lip for a moment before speaking. “I’m not happy with what you guys are doing. You know that. I spoke to Enzo last night. He made me understand some things. I still don’t like them, but I get it. This is me telling you guys that from now on, if something is happening, I want to know. I don’t like Ethan making, using, or selling drugs either.”

“They’re not addictive, sweetheart,” E said weakly. “They help me—”

She quickly turned and brushed her lips against his. “I know. I get it. I just don’t have to like it. If you promise me that you can control this, I’ll believe you. But if something goes wrong, if you get hurt, you’ll break my heart. If I think for a second you’re changing or doing too much, you have to promise me you’ll quit and try to find alternate means of helping yourself. Promise me, Ethan.”

“I promise,” he said softly. “Swear it, sweetheart. Whatever you want.”

She nodded. “OK.”

She turned back to the rest of us. “No more lies. If I ask, I want to be told. I get keeping the scary stuff from me, but if I need to know, please tell me. Don’t think I can’t handle it. I’m serious. I’m sick of how things have been around here. I’m here because I love all of you. It’s what keeps me here. I don’t like being pushed away. I know we all have busy schedules, but please. Try. I promise I will too.” She breathed out. “I went out with Anson last night. I met people he knew. I had fun, honestly. He kept me safe. Him and his friends. I want to be able to have more freedom.”

“Rosie, you can’t right now. With the hits out on the De Lucas—” I started.

“I know. I’m compromising. If things are going OK, I want to be able to go out. You guys can come with me. Anson can take me. I just need to get out of this house and off campus sometimes. If you promise we can try to work something out, I promise I’ll relax a little more about it.”

“Agreed,” Enzo said, his voice soft.

I studied her for a moment. I wasn’t always around because of my football schedule, but if the guys promised to keep her in check, then I suppose I could loosen the reigns a bit too.

“Fine,” I agreed.

“I hate that fucking jackass, but if it’ll make you happy, then I’ll see what I can do. I can’t guarantee it, but I will try,” Cole said.

“I’m OK with it,” E added.

She smiled. “OK. So. I think that’s it. No more lying and sneaking around. Honesty. Always.”

“Always,” I murmured, staring into her green eyes.

That earned me the biggest grin from her in return.

And that was it. I’d do whatever she wanted to see that damn smile.





TWO DAYS later I was in the practice room with Rosie belting out Christmas songs. She'd gotten me into the showcase with her as a way for us to spend more time together. We were dueting *Baby, It's Cold Outside*. I wasn't a Christmas music fan, but in the last hour, I'd fallen completely in love with anything to do with it as long as she was with me.

"Fox, your range is incredible," Anson called out as he stopped pacing. He'd been listening to us duet and hadn't said much as we worked through things. I was grateful because the last thing I wanted to do was tell him to go fuck himself while I was with Rosie.

I waited for what I knew was coming next.

"But you need more emotion. It's great, it's just missing something." He moved to the small stage and picked up a mic and restarted the music.

He nodded to Rosie and they sang their verses.

I had to admit, he sounded damn good with her, and I knew I was dropping the ball. I didn't spend as much time singing as they did though. My time was spent elsewhere.

I wasn't going to admit that to him though, so I jumped in and cut him off, taking over my part.

He smirked at me and backed away as I poured my heart into that stupid-ass song.

Rosalie's eyes lit up as I belted out the lyrics, matching her perfectly.

"There you go. Just like that," Anson said, clapping. "That's what I'm talking about."

The song ended and I pressed my lips to Rosie's before grabbing my bottled water and taking a sip before offering it to her. She took it and drank as Anson continued to talk.

"If you guys keep it up, you'll be ready in no time. That does remind me. LeeLee, you'll need to get some outfits for

the stage. Performers for the showcase typically do black, green, and red.”

“I can wear anything that color?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yeah. Dress. Skirt. Sweater. Whatever you want. You’re performing your solo. Two duets. And the group performances. So three or four outfits so you can change. Of course, you don’t have to change if you don’t want to. It’s just my recommendation to add some flare to your performance.”

She nodded. “Absolutely.”

I hated that she was on board with his ideas without questioning them.

“Does the outfit stuff go for me too?” I asked, trying act interested even though he could fuck off for all I cared.

“Yes. You’re doing the duet and the group number, so it’s your call if you want to change. I’d say you don’t have to.”

Good. I didn’t want to.

“Our time is up, so we best get out of here before Cassie comes in. She gets mad if anyone goes over,” he said, jumping off the stage and stuffing his music into his bag.

He hadn’t seemed fazed one bit by me joining them. Nothing on his face suggested hostility. And I think I hated that more because he was just so OK with everything to do with Rosalie.

I wasn’t quite sure what he was playing at, but even I had to admit they got along well. Too well. Like her and I used to, before life got hectic.

It made me miss those times all over again.

She squeezed my hand.

“Earth to Foxy,” she called out softly.

I came back to reality and smiled at her before snagging her bag and putting it over my shoulder. Quickly, I kissed her temple and took her hand, dragging her out of the room, Anson behind us.

“You’re free,” I said to him when we made it to the hall. “I’ll take it from here.”

“Really?” Rosalie’s eyes lit up.

I couldn’t resist kissing her, so I did, deepening it so everyone passing knew who she belonged to.

When we broke apart, Anson had already left. I smiled at that, and smiled even wider that she didn’t seem to mind his absence.

Classes were over for the day, so I led her to my Jeep and helped her into the passenger side before getting behind the steering wheel.

Instead of going right to our house, I went left as we pulled out of the parking lot.

“Fox?” She looked over at me.

“You need outfits,” I said, smiling over at her. “Figured we could get you some.”

Her eyes lit up and she wiggled in her seat. Seeing her that happy warmed my heart.

When we reached the stoplight, I quickly sent a text to Cole letting him know what we were doing and where we were going.

By the time I’d parked the Jeep on Main Street where all the boutiques were Rosie loved, Cole was already there, leaning against a parking meter.

Rosalie laughed softly and got out of the Jeep. He was quick to reach out and check her chin, a grin on his face.

I knew he hated my no PDA with Rosalie in public rule, but it was important.

She laughed at him as I wound my arm around her waist and led her into the first shop.

Anything she wanted, she’d have it.

FORTY-SIX



# COLE

It was a good day.

Rosebud got everything she'd wanted and then some. I made sure to get her everything she even glanced at.

I even bought her a purse that looked like a whole-ass chicken. She'd laughed at it and that was all it took. She was now the proud owner of a chicken purse.

I pulled into the garage in my spot and was out of the car in moments and opening Rosebud's door.

"Cole," she gasped as I tugged her out and tossed her over my shoulder. Fox laughed and cut the engine. I couldn't keep the smile off my face as I took her into the house and laid her on the couch and loomed over her.

"What?" She smiled up at me, her red hair spilling around her.

"You're fucking beautiful," I murmured, my heart fit to bursting. "I had fun with you today."

"I had fun with you guys too," she said, moving her hands up to touch me. I practically purred as she raked her fingers through my blond hair.

I kissed her wrist before diving in to kiss her lips, grinding my hard cock against her warm center.

Enzo cleared his throat from somewhere across the room. Irritated, I lifted my head to see him standing next to Vander Veer, Celeste on his other side.

Immediately, I was on my feet and blocking Rosalie from view even though she was still completely clothed. Ten seconds longer and I'd have had her naked beneath me, my cock buried straight to my balls in her warm depths.

"Hey. I didn't know we had company," I said as Rosalie sat up behind me. I shifted so she was still blocked.

"I texted you," Enzo said, a note of annoyance in his voice.

"Sorry. We were busy," I muttered as Rosalie stood behind me. I tried to block her again, but she stepped around me.

"Hi," she greeted Vander Veer, her cheeks red.

"Well, hello there. I'm sorry to interrupt," Vander Veer said with a chuckle.

Her cheeks darkened further as he approached. He took her hand in his and kissed the top. "You're a beauty. My goodness."

"Thank you," she murmured.

I wrapped my arm around her waist as Celeste eyed me. The last thing I wanted was that bitch trying to crawl all over me. She was lucky her ass was still alive after the shit she'd pulled with E. I knew Enzo only let her back in because we needed her old man for weapons, but past that, fuck that bitch.

"Hey, man, help me carry Rosie's stuff in," Fox said, coming into the room. He slowed to a stop, his face darkening as he glared openly at Celeste. She had the decency to duck her head.

"Get it later," Enzo said. "We're about to do some business."

I sighed. Of-fucking-course we were. Vander Veer was a cockblock.

"Raincheck, baby?" I asked, looking to Rosalie.

She eyed Vander Veer as he backed away.

"Yeah. I'll make something to eat," she said softly.

"Maybe some cake?" I asked hopefully.

She chuckled softly. “Go. Before you get yourself into trouble.” She turned her focus from me to Vander Veer. “It was nice to meet you, Mr... ?”

“Vander Veer,” he said. “I didn’t catch your name.”

“Rosalie,” she answered, her gaze darting to Celeste who was looking at a spot past us. I thought maybe she was looking at Fox, but when I turned to look, it was E who was standing silently in the room, a hard glare on his face.

“Well, it was wonderful to meet you, Rosalie. I hope we can get to know each other in the future.”

She gave him a smile that didn’t quite reach her eyes as he released her hand. Quietly, she stepped away, but not before casting a final look at Celeste. Fox caught her before she left the room and brushed his lips against hers, his touch lingering on her. I knew he was wanting to go conduct business just as much as I was. Rosalie reached for E and took his hand and led him with her when she left the room.

Leave it to my Rosebud to sense something was off. She probably just saved E from a complete fucking meltdown.

“Meeting. Office,” Enzo said, his eyes darting from E’s retreating back to Celeste. “Celeste, you can hang out in the living room.”

She shot him a sweet smile that made me want to kick her in the twat.

I moved forward as Fox went to the office, but not before he cast me a look that told me to take care of this bitch.

“Listen up,” I said coldly as Enzo and her old man left the room. “Stay the fuck in here. You don’t move. Got it?”

“Why?” she asked, reaching out and placing her hands on my chest. I shoved them away, and she gave me a pouty look which may have worked on asswipes, but I wasn’t that guy.

“The fuck is the matter with you?” I snarled at her. “Have you no shame after the shit you did?”

“It was just a bit of fun. I learned my lesson,” she said, shrugging. “Can’t fault a girl for trying.”

I shook my head. “Stay the fuck in here. You move, I’ll kill you myself.”

“We both know you won’t, Cole,” she said, batting her lashes at me. “I’ve been talking to Enzo a lot lately. He’s the sweetest. I know you guys need me on the inside. I’m helping. I’m the only one you have that’s on the inside of the lords.”

“Fucking double agent bitch,” I said, stepping away from her.

“Maybe. But I’m all you have, so I say you should probably embrace me a little more.”

“The last fucking thing I’d do is embrace you, you fucking nut job.” She clearly didn’t know about Drake, and clearly we all needed to have a chat about why the fuck we were going to use her. I didn’t trust her as far as I could throw her.

“I bet I could do all the things your girlfriend won’t.” She winked at me and backed away.

“Fuck off,” I snapped at her. “I highly fucking doubt that. She’s not just my girlfriend. She belongs to all of us, so back the fuck away from anyone you’ve set your sights on in this house. Next time you get choked, I’ll make sure it gets finished.” I shoved past her and went to the office, irritated out of my mind.

Enzo had a lot of fucking explaining to do.

FORTY-SEVEN

# ETHAN

It took everything I had to control myself as I sat at the kitchen island watching Rosalie pull out things to bake with.

“Cole really liked the chocolate cake,” she said thoughtfully.

“I heard it was a good time,” I answered tightly, my mind on the disgusting excuse for a human in the next room. I kept envisioning myself choking her until she stopped breathing.

“Do you think he’d like carrot cake?”

“Carrot cake is my favorite,” I said distractedly, listening as our TV turned on.

“Really?”

I forced myself to focus. I wasn’t going to be able to do this.

“Ethan?” She crinkled her brows at me. “Are you OK?”

“No,” I whispered. “I’m not.”

She was at my side in an instant.

“What’s wrong?”

I swallowed thickly, my hands shaking.

“Baby, I’m sorry. I need to be alone for a few minutes.” I got up abruptly and went to the basement and locked myself in my lab. Quickly, I rummaged through my stash, looking for the right drug to help me. I’d been experimenting a shit ton lately and had come up with something that completely

numbed the body. It wasn't as potent as the paralysis drug, which I was still fine tuning per Enzo's request.

I pulled the correct strain of sugar out and doled some out on the table before doing a line of it and sinking back in my seat, my body buzzing before everything swirled around me, leaving me in bliss.

I fumbled with a box filled with sugar sticks and took one out, lit it, and took a deep hit that just sent me higher.

I blew out the smoke and stared up at the ceiling, the calm washing over me. The tension and anxiety left my body, leaving me in a completely blissed out state. I reached for a bottle of Jack and drank deeply, just wanting to bury myself before the memories of that bitch touching me buried me.

I closed my eyes for a moment and woke up to Fox shaking me.

"Hey. E." He looked like he had two heads.

And pretty eyes.

*Had Fox always had such pretty eyes?*

"Your eyes are really fucking blue," I mumbled.

"You're really fucking stoned," he said, kneeling in front of me. "Vander Veer left. Rosie said you came down here."

"She OK?" I slurred.

"She's fine. She made a carrot cake and her and Enzo are currently ordering takeout. Do you want to come upstairs?"

I rubbed my eyes. "Do you think she'll do that thing with the cake Cole liked so much?"

"It's always a possibility," he said gently. His two faces looked sad. "How much did you take?"

"Snorted a line. Smoked a stick. Drank this bottle."

Fox winced.

"I'm drunk. I hate being drunk." I sat forward and groaned. "Fuck." I opened my eyes and stared at him. Our faces were close.

“You really do have pretty eyes,” I said tiredly. “So fucking blue. Little flecks of gold.”

“Your eyes are pretty too, E. Do you need help upstairs or do you want to just stay down here for a bit more?”

“I want to go upstairs. I want to try the cake.”

“You’re really wasted. I’ll stay down here with you for a little longer if you want to sober up.”

I breathed out and cradled his face, his stubble rough on my palms.

“Don’t tell her what happened to me, OK? I know we promised no secrets and all that, but please. Don’t tell her that one. Where-where that bitch t-touched me. I’m so... ashamed.”

“E,” he murmured as my hands fell away from his face.

I fell back against my chair, my head spinning.

He leaned in and grasped my chin, forcing me to look at him.

“You have nothing to be ashamed of. We won’t say a word, OK? We promised.”

I smiled sadly at him. “Thank you.”

“Of course. Close your eyes, OK? It’ll take them an hour to settle on what to order and another half hour for it to get here. Drink this.” He pressed a bottle of water to my lips and I drank deeply. He wiped the water from my lips.

“I love you,” I mumbled. “All of you. I’d be dead if it weren’t for you guys.”

“I love you too,” he answered gently, raking his fingers through my hair. “Sleep it off. I’ll come back and check on you, OK?”

“Save me cake?”

He chuckled softly as he got to his feet and pushed the ottoman beneath my legs. Enzo had really decked the place out in comfort. There was a leather couch and TV in here along



with a small kitchenette and fridge. And a healthy stock of drugs and alcohol. We often stayed up late into the night and sat around the table drinking, getting high, and packaging sugar. Except Fox. Fox never smoked.

I admired that.

I knew he had to keep up his shit for football. He had dreams. I had. . . drugs.

Whatever.

I closed my eyes and dozed off, letting the spins take me away.





TWO HOURS later I woke up feeling better and managed to stumble up the stairs, the alcohol hadn't worked through my system enough that I could nearly function.

I zeroed in on Rosalie sitting on Cole's lap in the living room, reading a magazine while he talked to the guys. I didn't even catch what the conversation was about. I just knew I wanted her and needed to feel her so I wouldn't lose my damn mind.

I took up the space on the couch next to Cole and leaned in and pressed my lips to Rosalie's when she looked at me. I silenced her before she could speak, her lips parting and allowing me entrance as I deepened the kiss.

Letting the guys watch wasn't something I did a lot of. I typically liked my alone time with Rosalie, but I wasn't opposed to doing it with them. I just liked to savor her a bit longer.

Tonight was different though. I didn't care who watched me.

I didn't even bother moving her off Cole's lap. I pushed her down, my lips still pressed to hers, as I pushed down my sweatpants. Fumbling with her nightie, I finally pushed it up and slid deep into her heat without fanfare.

"What the fuck, E?" Cole said as I buried myself inside her, both of us laying across his lap. He didn't try to move us as I thrust into her heat, but I felt how hard he was.

"Ethan," Rosalie whispered against my lips.

"Shh." I silenced her with another kiss, my hips bucking into her harder as I fucked her.

I was in charge. Me. Not some random chick making me hard. This was me and Rosalie. I was in control here.

I fucked her harder, her whimpers against my lips.

Cole groaned. I shifted so he could get his dick out. He wasted no time, stroking himself as I continued to slam into

Rosalie on his lap.

I was glad this was the chaise longue end and the oversized ottoman was in place because we'd have been incredibly limited on space had it not been.

It didn't take a genius to know Fox and Enzo were still in the room and watching the scene unfold silently.

Good.

I wanted them to see I wasn't some bitch.

*I'm in control...*

*I make the rules...*

Cole stroked his cock as I fucked Rosalie on his lap, the sounds of her soft gasps and our slapping skin the only noises in the room.

Her pussy tightened a moment before she cried out against my lips, her release making her small body quake beneath mine.

I ran my lips along her jaw. To her neck.

I sucked the delicate flesh, desperate to leave my mark on her to prove I was in fucking charge. I did it over and over again, sending blooms of pink and purple along her pale flesh.

I pushed her straps off her shoulders and freed her breasts as I continued to jostle her beneath my hard rutting of her pussy.

Her hands gripped my t-shirt.

I wanted her to touch me, but I also wanted to not be touched. I wanted to feel my control. Reaching out, I pinned her arms over her head, drilling into her harder. She whimpered and tried to adjust to move away from me, but I continued my onslaught.

"E-Ethan," she gasped.

I covered her mouth with mine, my balls drawing up as she tried to break free beneath me. I knew she wanted to touch me.

To slow me down. For me to make love to her in the gentle way I often did.

I wasn't that man in this moment though.

I needed it like this.

She cried out, her pussy tightening once more.

The heat of my impending release blanketed me and I slammed into her three more times before I came hard inside her.

Cole groaned softly, finishing with me as I lay breathing hard over her.

I stared into her green eyes.

"I love you," I whispered.

She licked her lips. "I love you."

I gave her a gentle kiss, my head spinning a bit. I felt relief. I felt stronger.

I didn't apologize.

A first for me.

I glanced over to Cole who gave me a dazed smile, his release glistening on his bare abs, his shirt pulled up.

"That was hot as fuck," he said.

"I'd like some cake now," I answered.

He grinned.

"Me fucking too."

I looked down to Rosalie, so sweet and innocent beneath me.

"Let's have some cake," she said softly, cradling my face.

Damn right.

I was in charge.

FORTY-EIGHT

# FOX

I watched Cole with a smile on my face as he slid a book in front of Rosie's face in the kitchen a few days after the incident in the living room with E went down. She had to wear a turtleneck to cover the marks he'd left on her skin, but now she sat in the kitchen with her tiny shorts on and a tank top, leaving those marks exposed.

Enzo and I had done nothing but watch that scene with E unfold, both of us surprised. I knew E was hurting from what Celeste had done to him, but if he could find a healthier way to cope with it, I wasn't going to stop him.

When we'd questioned Enzo on him talking to Celeste and her joining our cause, he remarked with, "*Keep your friends close and enemies closer.*" He'd cited it was always good to have a secret weapon.

It just sucked it was her.

"What's this?" Rosalie asked, looking down at the book with a bemused smile on her face.

"This, my pretty little flower, is a cookbook with over two hundred cake recipes. I found it online. I really think we should pick a cake and bake it."

Rosalie let out a laugh as Enzo came into the room. He glanced over at Rosie and Cole before looking at me.

"He gave her the book?"

I chuckled. "Yeah."

“I’m thinking red velvet. Ooh, or how about we make several different cakes and then layer them?” Cole was off and running as he flipped pages over Rosie’s shoulder.

E wandered into the room and grabbed a box of cereal.

“What’s up?” he asked, looking over to Cole and Rosie as Cole continued to list his favorite cakes while she laughed.

“Cole gave Rosie a book with cake recipes inside it,” I said, chuckling softly.

I had to admit, it was pretty fucking hot watching E fuck Rosalie on Cole’s lap. We’d even eaten cake afterward, Cole smiling like he’d just won the lottery.

“Nice,” E said. He grinned over at them as he poured his cereal. A moment later, he was on Rosie’s other side, pointing out flaws in cake designs and offering his opinion.

“Imagine what it would be like if this were a wedding,” Enzo mused, sitting next to me at the kitchen island.

“Too bad we’ll never get to know,” I answered, sadness coming over me. I still envisioned my and Rosie’s wedding day. She’d look like a princess in her ballgown, a crown atop her head and her pretty face hidden beneath a veil. When we were kids, she had a book she kept clippings in of pretty wedding dresses and cakes she liked. Even at twelve, she knew what she wanted.

It hit me hard that she’d never have her dream wedding. It was my understanding that little girls often dreamed of that sort of thing.

Enzo sighed. “We could compromise.”

“How?” I turned away from the laughter at the table and focused on him.

He studied me for a moment before speaking. “I know you want to marry her. Hell, I know Cole and E do too. But you... you’ve always been her first choice.”

I said nothing at this. I knew he meant that Rosie had been mine before theirs. We had a history. She’d been my girl since the moment I pulled on her red pigtail years ago.



“Hear me out though.” He cleared his throat. “I need a wife. An heir. It could give her a wedding. We’d still be a family.”

“But she’d be yours,” I said softly, my chest aching at the possibility of her not being mine. Not having my name.

*Rosalie De Luca...*

“She’d be *ours*,” he corrected softly.

“And what of her safety? Being the wife of a mob boss sounds dangerous. Ask your mother.” I knew I sounded bitter, but I couldn’t help it. I was bitter.

Enzo stared back at me. “I just thought it might help. I know she’s in danger. I hate being constantly reminded of it. Honestly, it should be you who takes her and runs off. Gives her the house, the family, the marriage. I just... I need these things. Eventually, they’ll have to happen. My father knows how I feel about Rosalie, but when it comes down to it, I need the stability of a strong marriage. It’s our traditions. Even my mom was arranged to him.”

“She was?”

He nodded. “To be fair, he already loved her and got lucky, but still. My father mentioned it to me a few days ago when we spoke. Emilio has been pushing it. I don’t want it to be anyone else but her. If it’s not her...” his voice trailed off.

I understood what he was saying.

He’d have to take a wife. It wouldn’t be Rosalie if I didn’t let her go. I knew it all boiled down to my blessings because Cole and E would give her to him without much of a fight as long as the promise of her still being theirs too held.

“My father is allowing me to choose. For now. He said I need to get it out of my system.” Enzo chuckled softly. “He adores Rosalie, but he knows we made an agreement. He knows I stick to my word.”

“You’d leave to marry another?” I asked, the sickness churning low in my guts.

“I don’t want to,” he said, sighing. “I haven’t told Cole and E. I’m telling you because you’re the guy in charge when it comes to this stuff with her. If you tell me no, I’ll understand.”

I frowned. “I don’t want to lose her. If you leave, it breaks us all apart.”

“Don’t you think I don’t know that?” Sadness washed over his face. “All this time I’ve been worried about keeping her safe, when in reality, I’m going to lose her anyway if we don’t come to an agreement. So if we’re keeping her, I need to marry her. I’m sorry.”

I looked back over to her. She must have sensed me because her eyes locked on mine and she smiled, sending joy through my fucking body.

She was so happy between E and Cole who were having a disagreement on frostings. I couldn’t take her joy from her. I just fucking couldn’t.

I turned back to Enzo, my throat tight.

“Ask her,” I said, my voice wavering. “You have my blessing.”

“Fox,” Enzo reached for me, his hands shaking. “Fuck.”

I nodded, my eyes stinging.

“For Rosie. I want her with me, and if that means I have to give her to you, so be it,” I said softly.

Enzo pulled me in for a tight embrace. “Thank you, brother.”

I said nothing as I hugged him back, my heart broken.

It would be OK. She’d still be mine. She just wouldn’t have my last name.

Rosalie Evans wouldn’t exist. Ever.

And that fucking sucked.

FORTY-NINE

# ENZO

I sat in the office later that night staring at the diamond ring I'd give Rosalie. I was the happiest I'd ever been, but something just kept looming over my heart.

Maybe it was all the danger. Maybe it was my back and forth on everything over the last few months. Wanting her safety. Wanting her to stay. Needing her to go so she could be safely away from us.

The diamond glimmered in the light from the fire as I stared down at it.

I wanted to do this though. Maybe it wouldn't solve anything. Maybe it would make everything worse. I'd seen the look on Fox's face. He was devastated, but he loved me just like he loved her and he knew hard choices needed to be made if we wanted to keep her.

My phone rang, pulling me out of my troubled thoughts of how the fuck I was even going to propose.

My fears if she'd tell me yes. What I'd do if she said no.

"Hello?" I answered the phone, grateful for the distraction. It didn't come in the form I wanted.

"Lorenzo." My father's voice greeted me.

I sat up straighter. "Father. Is everything OK?"

"No. I need to pass along some information."

I waited for a moment as I heard him shuffling some papers, my pulse roaring in my ears.

“I need you, son.”

My heart thumped hard in my chest.

“A body has been recovered. Near the lake.”

I balled my hand into a fist as my breathing grew shallow.

*Juliet.*

“I’ve taken care of the intricacies involving it. Croft is making issues with it. The body has been moved. It will not be found. Anything about the girl will be destroyed. But he knows. Croft knows it was his daughter, and he’s even more hellbent on ending all of us.”

I said nothing, my mind racing.

“He has increased the hit money. He’s gone to De Santis. He’s gone to Ivanov. He has opened it to anyone who can kill me. Your mother. *You*. He needs to die. Croft needs to go. I don’t care how you do it, just get it done.”

“Of course,” I said, my voice wavering. “I will take care of it, Father.”

“Lorenzo,” his voice was gentle. “I love you, son. I know these times are hard on you. You’re young and with a lot of responsibility. You’re in love. You have your entire life to look forward to.”

“She means everything to me,” I whispered, Rosalie my immediate thought and concern. “I-I want to ask her to marry me. I have the ring. We don’t need to arrange a marriage for me.”

I knew he was going to bring up the arrangement again. I couldn’t. I... just... fuck. No.

He went silent on me for a moment before he spoke, his voice holding a note of sadness in it.

“Listen carefully to me. Rosalie is the most beautiful, sweet, perfect girl. We adore her. She is talented beyond compare and has the potential to make a life for herself.”

I held my breath as I waited for him to say what he was going to say.

“A safe life. *A meaningful one.* Had I had half a brain when I was younger, I’d have left your mother in that library on campus where I met her when we were nineteen. I’d have not fallen in love with her. My father, your grandfather, was a strict man. Your grandmother was kind and caring. She reminds me of your Rosalie. It was her begging my father to arrange my marriage to your mother that won me the woman of my dreams. I was already deeply in love with your mother and her with me. I feared the arrangement I knew was going to come on my twentieth birthday. But I got your mother. I got what I wanted most.” He paused for a moment as I breathed out.

“Lorenzo, I regret every single day of my life dragging your mother into my hell. Your mom wanted to be a painter. A baker. A potter. She wanted to see the world and dance beneath the stars. I have only brought her heartache. I have brought death to her door. I love your mother more than I’ve ever loved anything in my life and I’ve given her what I could. But the one thing I should have given her most was her freedom.”

“What aren’t you saying, Father?” I whispered.

“Do not ask Rosalie to marry you. If you love her, *free her.* She will never be safe with you. Matteo De Santis...”

“What of him?” I asked thickly, my eyes burning with the tears that were threatening to spill. I wiped hastily at them.

“We were once friends. Good friends. Best friends.”

The news made me blink. I had no idea.

“He loved another too. A woman named Delilah. He got her pregnant at eighteen. He tried to make it work. He tried to keep her away from his monster of a father. Carmine De Santis. Evil, wicked man. The De Santis family has a tradition. The father gets to fuck the bride before the groom. Matteo was desperate to keep her away from it all. Carmine found out about the family Matteo was building. He threatened to have her and Matteo’s children murdered if Matteo didn’t fall in line.”

My guts churned with this information. My father had never divulged such things to me before.

“Matteo was desperate. He was going to run away with Delilah. He didn’t care if he had to sleep in the streets. He just wanted his family.”

“Then what happened?” I asked hoarsely, already knowing how this story was going to unfold.

“It was either he give up Delilah or she would be killed. He made plans to run. She came to me. Begged me to help her. She knew Matteo would die. Carmine would kill him and just fuck someone else and create a new heir. It would be an inconvenience, but one he was willing to endure.”

“You helped her escape,” I whispered.

“I did. Her and her children. I set her up in another state. Matteo hated me for what I’d done. We fought. Our friendship ended. But I cared for Delilah. She was your mother’s best friend. And her children. I loved them too. Matteo agreed to marry the arrangement his father made. He grew cold and wicked, just like those before him. I blamed myself for it because in the end, that life caught up to Delilah. She couldn’t stay away. She returned to the city several long years later. Matteo went to her. He went to his family. He already had a son with his wife, but he was prepared to leave it all behind for Delilah. It never happened. She was murdered with her daughter when someone close to him found out his intentions. I don’t know who it was, but Carmine found out. The hit was ordered. Delilah and her daughter were killed. The whereabouts of the remaining children were never known.”

I swallowed hard and stared at the flames in the fireplace, my mind racing.

“Love in our world is useless, Lorenzo. That’s why I’m telling you this story. It tears us apart. It makes us monsters. Let Rosalie go. Open her cage and let her soar. Love her enough to set her free.”

My bottom lip trembled with his words.

“You’re a strong man. I know you will do what’s right when the time comes. Just don’t wait too long.”

I sniffled and wiped hastily at my eyes, hating his fucking words but knowing they were true. I’d been beating back these thoughts for months now, and he just confirmed my biggest fears.

I exhaled, trying to focus. Trying to be strong when all I wanted to do was crack.

“Father.”

“Yes?”

“How many children did Delilah and Matteo have?”

“Three. A son Alessandro Archangelo, and twins. Gianna Francesca and Tomasso Giovanni. The sons have never been found.

My jaw quivered with this information.

*Fuck. Fuck. FUCK.*

“Lorenzo.”

“Yes?”

“I can arrange your marriage to Celeste Vander Veer. A marriage of convenience. Her father has already approached me with the offer. Let her die in place of your Rosalie. Because she will die. The monsters always hunt the weak, and our women are our weakness.”

I was going to throw up.

“I’ll-I’ll—”

“You have some time. Not much. Consider it, my son. In the meantime, enjoy what time you have left with her because I promise you, it is limited, regardless of your decision.”

“I will,” I whispered.

“Please let me know when you’ve completed your task with Croft. Emilio will be on standby if you need him. Be well, my son.”

“And you, Father.”



The line disconnected. I stared down at the diamond ring glinting in the firelight for so long the image began to blur. I loved Rosalie. I'd die for her. I'd do anything in the fucking world for her. Even the ugly things I didn't want to do. The painful things. The things that would change us forever.

I let the tears slide down my cheeks.

I'd come to a decision.

I might be able to salvage some of our lives. I might have a way to tear down kingdoms and replace them with empires.

I placed the ring back into its box and slid it into the secret compartment in my desk drawer before bringing out my cell and making a call.

"Hello?" a deep voice greeted me.

"*Archangel*," I said softly into the phone. "I have information for you."

**To Be Continued in...**

*On The Edge*. **Get it here: [On The Edge](#)**

Thank you for reading *As We Fight*. Please consider leaving your review.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the alphas. You guys always pull through for me.

To the Discord group... Did you follow the breadcrumbs?

Mister K.G. Thank you for all you do. You are my Cole.

And to the readers... you guys are the best and mean the world to me. <3

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Affectionately dubbed Queen of Cliffies, Suspense, Heartbreak, and Torture by her readers, USA Today and International Bestselling author K.G. Reuss is known mostly for making readers ugly cry with her writing. A cemetery creeper and ghost enthusiast, K.G. spends most of her time toeing the line between imagination and forced adulthood.

After a stint in college in Iowa, K.G. moved back to her home in Michigan to work in emergency medicine. She's currently raising three small ghouls and is married to a vampire overlord.

K.G. is the author of the Black Falls High series, Kings of Bolten, the Boys of Chapel Crest, The Everlasting Chronicles, Emissary of the Devil, The Chronicles of Winterset, and many more with a ridiculous amount of other series set to be released.

Sign up for her newsletter to stay updated on all the things happening in her freakishly ghoulish world. <https://tinyletter.com/authorkgreuss>

Can't get enough? Visit her website at [www.kgreuss.com](http://www.kgreuss.com) or join her reader group at [www.facebook.com/groups/streetteamkgreuss](https://www.facebook.com/groups/streetteamkgreuss).

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