

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR
CREA REITAN



HOUSE
OF IGARASHI
PART II
THE HAREM PROJECT

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DRAGON FIRE FANTASY

CONTENTS

1. [Bronte](#)
2. [Hadley](#)
3. [Hadley](#)
4. [Bronte](#)
5. [Bronte](#)
6. [Hadley](#)
7. [Hadley](#)
8. [Bronte](#)
9. [Bronte](#)
10. [Hadley](#)
11. [Bronte](#)
12. [Hadley](#)
13. [Hadley](#)
14. [Bronte](#)
15. [Hadley](#)
16. [Bronte](#)
17. [Bronte](#)
18. [Hadley](#)
19. [Hadley](#)
20. [Hadley](#)
21. [Bronte](#)
22. [Hadley](#)
23. [Bronte](#)
24. [Hadley](#)
25. [Hadley](#)
26. [Bronte](#)

[Species Index](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Books by Crea Reitan](#)

[The Harem Project](#)

[Knotty & Sweet Omegaverse](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Where To Find Me](#)

Thank You

House of Igarashi, part 2

The Harem Project | Book 5

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Welcome to The Harem Project. Unfortunately, this is a work of fiction. This world isn't real. Yes, I'm very sad about that.

This is a paranormal romance meets urban fantasy. What's the difference? The part of the world this story focuses on is that of the paranormal, making it largely a paranormal romance. However, it's set within the backdrop of our current world where the supernatural live side by side with humans, though they do so in secret, which also makes it an urban fantasy.

In this book, you will find monsters of all kinds. This is a monster story featuring demons filled with dark, carnivorous hunger; sea monsters that are anything but harmless mermaids; aerial monsters that bring about storms of gargantuan proportions; elemental monsters that can manipulate the earth into beasts; storm monsters that are the embodiment of natural disasters; and much, much more.

There are murderous organizations in this story. Those set on exterminating monsters as they see them as abominations. There are moments of torture, extreme fear, immense pain, abduction, and murder. This story specifically takes a look at bonding with new lovers (a lot of them) set on the backdrop of our main female lead feeling self-made guilt over the murder of her sister by the Division of Silence.

Please note that this story is told equally from the female lead, Hadley, and a male lead, Bronte. That means this story is going to be equally mm and mf/mfm/mmf/etc. This is not strictly Hadley's story but a story of family growth, bonding, and love. As well as loss, grief, pain, and fear.

This series has a lot of characters to try and keep track of. For your convenience, family unit diagrams can be found on my website.

This is a polyamorous romance, a whychoose reverse harem that isn't revolving around a single female who gets all the males' attention. There are other relationships that are just as important as those between the men and the single female, and all are featured.

If anything that you just read bothers you, it isn't what you're interested in, or you find might be triggering, please do not read this book. Otherwise, enjoy Hadley and Bronte's story of family, friendship, and revenge.

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Bronte

THE BLINDING LIGHT MADE ALL THE HAIRS ON MY BODY STAND on end. It was accompanied by loud sounds of high voltage. Those unmistakable *ZAPS* that never let up as they hit over and over and over again. The sounds were broken up by explosions, but nothing fell around us. With as hot and bright as the light was, I thought everything was just disintegrated upon contact.

Then it started to clear. I wasn't sure who was screaming but I had a feeling it was me as I leaned over Koh. Arms circled me, even as I struggled to get closer. To throw myself on him and beg him to breathe. Because he wasn't. His eyes were open and vacant as he lay perfectly still. Blood soaked his shirt where the knife was buried in his chest. He was all watery and inconsistent, but I think that was just my tears.

"Stop, Bronte," Saar growled in my ear as I tried to thrash from his arms. His grip became a bear hug, somehow stilling me as I made the most pathetic sounds I've ever heard. I didn't look away from Koh. I couldn't.

"Someone call Hadrian," Saar barked. "Get them here immediately. See if we can get the Nashs and Aves to hunt the mountain and the air. I need someone alive."

My shaking was so bad that I thought Saar was likely holding me up more than preventing me from falling on Koh. He murmured in my ear but I didn't hear his words this time. I

didn't hear anything besides the *whoosh* in my ears as I stared at Koh.

Kohara was dead. My husband.

I was shuffled from Saar's hold to Aratiri and Notus's. They squished me between them and I knew I wasn't the only one trembling. And though my sobbing might be the loudest, I wasn't alone there either.

Minutes felt like they were extended. The air was still heavy with the fury of a dozen storms. Clouds hung low in the sky, rumbling with angry thunder. The mountain shook; the air whipped around us, biting our skin.

"Jesus fuck," Hadrian said as he strode into our broken family. We were huddled close together, hanging onto each other in little groups. Hadrian took a look around before spotting Koh on the ground. He swore again.

A second later, as if from thin air, Cobalt and Lazarus walked into our camp, followed by the rest of the Malak family. Neither of the Nephilims touched Kohara for a minute as they stared at him. I watched as they exchanged looks before glancing at Hadrian.

"How long?" Lazarus asked.

"Less than five minutes," Saar answered. I glanced his way, trying to figure out if that was true. Had it really only been five minutes? It felt as though it'd been a year waiting here. Watching the body of our husband.

Raiden heaved again before sagging against Saar's legs. He groaned, closing his eyes for a minute before looking at Kohara. I was sure his red-rimmed eyes were both because he was dry heaving and the situation surrounding us.

Lazarus took a deep breath, wrapping a hand around the handle of the blade still in Kohara's chest. "Ready?"

"I really wish I knew where Grenade was," Cobalt muttered, but he nodded. I had no idea what that meant.

"On three," Lazarus said. "One. Two." He paused, taking another deep breath. "Three." Steadily and carefully, he pulled

the blade straight out.

I held my breath to keep the bile from surging up as more blood seeped from the wound. It should have gushed but I was thinking there might not be much left. His shirt was sopping.

As soon as the blade had been removed, Laz set it aside and both Nephilim placed their hands flat on Koh's chest, one each over his gaping wound. Another bright light lit the area and, try as I might to watch through it, it burned my eyes and I had to close them.

It was fucking difficult to not watch. But you cannot look into the holy light of a divine monster for long unless you want to lose your eyesight. I did not. Even with everything in me demanding I not take my eyes off Koh, I couldn't force my eyes to stay open.

Their light burned my skin. Which, somehow, I had enough presence of mind to realize how ironic that was. Nephilim heal, but their touch burns like hell's fire. I swear, after what had to be ten minutes, I thought my skin was going to peel off entirely.

Voices sounded all around me. Maybe they were speaking to me, but maybe not. I wasn't sure, and I didn't even try to pay attention. The only thing I could think about was the possibility that I would never speak to Koh again. What was the last thing I'd said to him? I hope it was that I loved him. That I would always need him.

My lip trembled as I bowed my head to Notus's shoulder, fresh tears falling from my eyes. What if I'd said something awful? What if the last thing I said to Koh had left him not knowing that he meant the world to me? How can I live with myself?

"Shh," Arat said from behind me, his lips pressed to my ear. "I know for a fact that you didn't say anything mean to Koh."

Apparently, I was rambling out loud. "How do you know?" I asked between breaths.

“Because you don’t have an unkind bone in your body, baby. Every single one of us, and everyone we know, will always know that you are without a doubt the kindest, most loving person to walk this earth.”

I wasn’t, though. I could be better. If only Koh would come back, I would be.

“You are,” Arat insisted. Whether he was reading my mind or I was still spitting words out, I didn’t know. His body pressed tightly to my back, holding me to him. Folding us into Notus’s lap. “I need you to see yourself like the rest of us do, baby. I promise, you’re the best person we’ve ever known.”

A gasp made me spin my face into the light and force my eyes open. The bright glow was now a much gentler shimmer, emanating from where their hands were pressed to Kohara’s chest. I wasn’t sure who had gasped, but I stared at Koh.

Did his chest just rise? Was he blinking? Did his mouth move?

When his chest fell, I sucked in a breath, my eyes becoming impossibly round.

“What the fuck?” Koh croaked.

Hearing his voice made me sob all over. He was alive. He was fucking alive.

“Shh,” Laz said, gently pushing him back as he tried to get up. “Lay still, hot stuff. Still got some damage to repair.”

Koh grunted. I watched as he grimaced. Twitched. Swore. Gasp as his eyes went wide. This time I was sure many, many minutes passed before both Nephilim sat back.

Kohara didn’t move as he worked to calm his breathing. Finally, he opened his eyes again and took a breath. When he tried for one too deep, he let it out with a huff of pain. His hands went to his chest. “What happened?”

Lazarus reached for the blade and held it up.

My husband’s eyes went wide. The hand on his chest shook as he rubbed the spot where it had been. Maybe a

phantom ache? Muscle memory of it being lodged there, immediately taking his life?

He closed his eyes and turned his head. “I don’t want to see it,” he whispered.

Laz nodded. Hadrian reached for it, and Laz handed it over.

“You’re going to be sore for a while,” Cobalt said. “Probably a long while. We pieced together all the—eh, torn bits, but it’s going to take some time to regain your strength.”

Kohara nodded. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Cobalt smiled, resting his hand on Kohara’s forehead. “Of course. Call if you feel weird at all. Even an uneasy feeling that something’s wrong. Alright?”

Kohara looked up with a frown.

“They’re obviously playing with new toys. We can’t be sure that they didn’t do something to their knives too,” Lazarus said. “It felt normal, but I’d rather be safe than sorry.”

“We’ll check on you tomorrow,” Hadrian said.

Kohara nodded, closing his eyes as his hand fisted over his chest. I stared at him, wondering if it was too soon to take him up in my arms to make sure he knows how much I love him. It is, right? Cobalt said he’d be sore for a while.

The Nephilim split up. Cobalt went to Tempest to tend to his wound. He was a scary ashy color that I’d have noticed sooner if Kohara hadn’t been dead.

“I knew you wanted an excuse to touch me,” Tem said, his voice weak.

“Always, stormy pants,” Cobalt said, his smile not quite genuine.

Lazarus stopped at Tara’s back. Their glows were softer this time, Cobalt’s brighter than Lazarus’s but neither of them bright enough to force me to look away as it overtook the area. My eyes flitted from one injured husband to the other, unsure where to focus my attention. I needed it to be on all of them.

“Shh,” Arat said again, brushing his lips along the shell of my ear. “They’re okay now.”

“But I—”

“I know, baby, I know. We’ll hug the fuck out of them in a bit. But right now, we need to let the glow sticks do their thing.”

A snort came from behind us, and I glanced up to look at Hadrian. He’s their one and only seraphim. A class of angel that’s really high and strong. With a glow so bright it can melt metal. I’ve seen him do it and heard stories about how he was with the Wyns almost a year ago trying to find their wife.

We’ve had a lot of kidnappings. Daemon’s new wife, Aves’ husband and new wife, Wyn’s new wife, and three of our friends. I was almost beginning to think it was a rite of passage. I was glad for no more kidnappings. But this.... I’m not sure this was any better. Because those times, we’d managed to get them all back with none of them dying.

I swallowed thickly and continued to watch as the Nephilim moved between my injured husbands. They spent the most time with Kohara and Tempest, of course. Once Raiden stopped trying to throw up the contents of his empty stomach, he seemed to recover quickly. Tara had been in his net longer, though, so that shit had burned into his skin.

He insisted it was just a flesh wound, but I wasn’t so sure. I saw what it did to him. It forced him from his monster. It made him into a man again and then continued to eat at him. I hadn’t gotten a good look at his back yet, but I’d caught glimpses. It was bad. He was going to be scarred.

Hands on either side of my face forced my attention away, and I was staring into the dark eyes of Notus. They were filled with concern as he looked at me. “Are you hurt, Bronte?”

I shook my head. Mentally, maybe. Emotionally, fuck yes. But not physically.

His fingers rubbed over my skin. After several moments of staring into my eyes, he rested his face on my forehead. “Arat, check him.”

“I’m fine,” I whispered.

But Arat did as Notus requested. His hands roved all over my body with a business-like touch, examining every inch. Satisfied that I was, in fact, in one piece, he pressed to my back again and wrapped his arms around my stomach.

“You’re scared, yeah?” Arat whispered.

I nodded.

“Everything’s okay now. Our husbands are... alive. We’ll be fine,” he assured me.

That wasn’t the fear that filled me. I knew that it was over. For today, anyway. I knew we were safe. But the fear of losing even one of them, husband or wife, sat heavy on my shoulders. It had bothered me since the monster came in for sanctuary last week. Just a little niggling feeling that filled me with breathless fear.

But it must have been an omen. I’d been convinced that the worst thing in the world to happen would be if I lost all my husbands and wife. But losing even one of them would be devastating. Crippling. I won’t survive that. Not a single one of my family was expendable.

“Laz,” Notus said. “Come here, please?”

The shiny man stopped at my side, and his hand landed on my neck. A gentle touch. He hummed quietly, a warmth spreading through my body.

“I’m fine,” I said, slinking into Notus and Aratiri’s holds. “Not hurt.” But as the warmth spread, the pounding behind my eyes eased. I hadn’t even noticed that was happening. The overwhelming thoughts of all my husbands and wife dying blurred, and I sighed.

“That’s better,” Laz said. He pressed his lips to my temple, leaving me with a light kiss. “Relax, honey. Everything is okay now.”

“We have heaven on our side,” Arat said, and I could feel him wink.

I tried to muster a smile, but all that left me was a sigh. Arat and No arranged me in their arms; they tucked me in tight and with hooded eyes, I watched the rest of my family.

Gale had Hadley wrapped tightly in a blanket in his lap. He sat pressed against Raiden's side with Zilan on Raiden's other side. Though Hadley was primarily in Gale's arms, Raiden and Zilan leaned in close, taking comfort in each other.

Tara and Neph were sitting with Tempest, who was still lying on his side, his head in Neph's lap. Tara curled around him, also using Neph's thigh as a pillow. Nephele carded his hands through their hair while my two injured husbands looked like they were asleep.

That left Kohara, still not having moved from the ground. Saar knelt at his side now, his hand resting over Koh's. They were talking quietly, a smile tugging at Saar's lips. I could see his tension, the fear in the way he held himself.

And the Malaks surrounded us. A ghost, a seraphim, two angels, and a human while their two Nephilim continued to move around my family, checking on injuries and just making sure we were okay.

It was only when I heard a noise in the forest behind me that I shifted my gaze. Though my eyes had been hooded in lazy drowsiness, they widened. The trees were gone. No bodies even littered the ground anymore. The only thing left behind was smoke rising from the ground.

I felt the heavy charge still lingering in the air from whichever bit of storm had done this. Overhead, a deep rumble of thunder filled the silence. And in the distance, I heard the howls and the thud of large paws.

My heartbeat picked up once again.



Hadley

SOMETIMES YOU DON'T KNOW HOW STRONG YOU ARE BECAUSE you've never had to use your strength. My actions weren't an intentional attack so much as me reacting out of fear. When I saw Kohara drop and the death that overtook him, I was immediately transported to a place where I witnessed Essen's murder.

I hadn't actually been there. And really, I'm not sure I even have the full truth about how she was killed. I only know that she was, and it was at the hands of Silence. But seeing Kohara murdered when I was standing *right here* was something I could just not handle.

Everything building in the sky fell into my hands as I screamed. The only thing I saw clearly was Kohara. No one else. There were voices, other screams, the movement of my men. But I could only see the death of my husband that I hadn't been able to stop.

The irrationality of me being the one who should have stopped it from happening because I was there this time didn't matter. There was even a little voice in my head reminding me of that. Oddly enough, it had Reba's voice. Something I'd have to consider later.

But when Kohara didn't move, every kilowatt of energy I pulled from the air, I sent back up with a furious pain that rained back down in a lightning storm so ferocious that I melted the trees and everyone around us.

When it cleared, nothing had changed. Kohara was still dead. Tempest was on his way to joining him. Taranis was very injured, and Raiden was trying not to be sick. Bronte was losing his shit and if I hadn't already been heartbroken, seeing him fall apart would have done me in.

I swayed on my feet; everything in me drained from the lightning I'd just released. Yet, I could still feel it lingering over my skin. Waiting for another command. Wanting to discharge again.

The next hour was a bustle of bright light activity that I only barely understood. Tears ran down my face as Gale wrapped me in a blanket after the Nephilim restored Kohara's life. I remained in that tight cocoon as they continued to move around my family, touching and soothing and healing as they went.

The rest of the Malaks stood guard around us. Waiting. Expecting something else.

What came was the sound of haunting, threatening howls. When we stilled to listen, those sounds were followed by the loud, heavy thuds of giant paws on the barren mountainside.

I wasn't sure which beast was more frightening. The enormous wolf with a scared face. The black beast that was part man and wolf. Or the wolf with a faint glow that shimmered through the colors of the rainbow.

However, there were three smaller beasts that suddenly appeared in our midst. One with eight tails, the other two with seven tails apiece.

"Kitsune!" I exclaimed under my breath.

One of them heard me and turned in my direction. I swear, it smiled a foxy grin and gave a damn wink. He turned and slinked through our huddle before hopping up on Bronte's lap, where he was squished between Notus and Aratiri.

I could hear his strange purr from here as he settled, tucking all his tails around him and looking up at Bronte with his ears back.

“You think you’re cute, do you?” Aratiri asked, raising a brow.

Bronte sighed, relaxing his tension once again and running his fingers through the kitsune’s fur.

“Who is that?” I asked as, before my eyes, the other two kitsune turned into men. It was magical to see. Like they walked out of their fox skin fully formed. I recognized them, though names escaped me.

“Eight tails is Miller,” Gale said, nodding in Miller’s direction. “Sirius. And curled in Bronte’s lap is Lev. They’re good friends.”

I nodded, not sure if he was meaning Lev and Bronte were good friends, or these kitsune in general. Of course, my thoughts stuttered away as the three enormous wolves paused at the perimeter where the Malaks surrounded us.

“What a cute puppy,” one of the angels said, making a clucking sound as he stared at what was obviously an Anubis.

“Puppy,” I scoffed as the Anubis snapped at the angel’s hand.

Raiden chuckled. “That’s Kormak. Fenrir wolf is Edison. And the elemental rainbow pup is Astro.”

Astro’s eyes turned to Raiden, narrowing. Raiden smirked, giving him a wink.

“If you weren’t clearly injured, I’d bite you,” the Astro/dog said.

My eyes widened. Dogs can’t talk!

Whatever expression I held made Astro and my guys, who were wrapped around me, laugh.

“One of my strengths of being in this form is I can still communicate,” Astro said. “Since it takes a while to come out of it once I’m here, it’s convenient.”

“That’s... nice,” I said.

He gave me a wolfish grin and sat like a regal royal dog, curling his tail around his paws as he turned his attention to

where Miller was talking to Saar and Hadrian. Deciding that was a good place to focus my attention, I tuned into their conversation.

Saar was still crouched on the ground by Kohara's side, his hand never leaving Koh's. Hadrian and Miller knelt with him, Miller gently patting Kohara's leg.

"None left," Miller said. "Whatever strike you dealt them last, left hide nor hair behind." Saar's eyes flickered to me before looking at Miller.

"Did you find their vehicles?"

Miller shook his head. "No, but we weren't looking for them. Deciding that getting to you and securing your perimeter was more important, we figured we'd turn back and find their transportation later."

"We're assuming someone didn't just drop them and run," Hadrian said. "Knowing that they were going to die."

Saar frowned.

"No," Tara said, and I glanced at him. His eyes were still closed, his face buried in Tempest's hair. "They were trying to take me when they got me in that net."

"This needs a wider discussion," Hadrian said at last. "But one during which you're home safe and secure, and healing."

"I can tell you that your vehicles are right where you left them," Miller said. "Though I only gave them a brief once over, I don't think they were messed with."

The surrounding air lit with a thousand streaks of lightning again. I looked up, enjoying the charge of the air against my skin as the rolling gray clouds moved quickly.

But the clouds suddenly dropped from the sky. Starting with an enormous thundercloud, it came like a missile to the ground, a loud whistle following it. Coming straight toward us.

I tensed, fear skyrocketing in me again. It happened so fast that no one reacted before the now much smaller mass suddenly pulled back and a man dropped to his feet. He

brushed his fingers through his flame red hair and shook out his limbs before smiling at Saar.

“Ana,” Saar greeted.

“Anakin Aves,” Gale murmured in my ear. I was thankful for the name tags he was providing. I just needed him to go back and tell me who the Malaks were, and we’d be good to go.

Anakin nodded. His smile started wide but deflated as he crouched down on Kohara’s other side. He brushed a hand through Koh’s hair on his forehead, a haunted look passing through his eyes.

“You okay?” he asked.

Koh gave him a wry smile. “Yes, and even if I wasn’t, you really didn’t do anything at all.”

Anakin laughed, but the sound wasn’t at all genuine. “I have a guilt complex now.” He said it offhandedly, but I realized he was serious when he gave Hadrian a bemused look. “Anyway, we found a couple perched not far from here, kind of staring as if they didn’t know what they were doing or what they should do. Shy froze them and Gannon is dragging them back to The Harem Project. Any luck on the ground?”

“Our wife fried the mountainside,” Saar said.

Eyes turned to me. I hadn’t realized anyone figured out that I’d been the cause of that. I smiled sheepishly. “Sorry? It was a reflex.”

“Later, I’ll question your reflexes,” Miller said, amused. “But making yourself safe was the number one priority.”

“There were a lot,” Saar said, frowning. “So many that we were fucking outnumbered.”

“Twelve storms outnumbered,” Astro murmured, shaking his head. The other two wolves were gradually working their way out of their monster, stuck somewhere between the two right now. I watched in fascination for a minute before turning back to the conversation.

“We should get you off the mountain,” Anakin said, glancing up at the sky. The clouds swirled as the storm became menacing. “Idris is feeling a little uneasy.”

“Idris?” I asked, catching Anakin’s eyes as they flashed my way. A smile touched his lips, but it was Raiden who answered.

“Thunderbird,” he said, nodding to the sky. “That’s why the storms are still circling and have been. We called for the Aves when we called for Nashs.”

I sighed. “It’s nice that you have friends like this,” I whispered.

“Yes, *we* have great friends,” Gale agreed. “They’d have come just as quickly if you called.”

I thought about pointing out that if I called, it would be because something would be wrong with one of them. So, of course they’d come. We weren’t friends yet, but I thought we would be in time. Right now, I wasn’t in a huge hurry to make friends. I was still struggling with the friends I had. And ‘had’ may be past tense.

“You ready to get down the mountain?” Hadrian asked.

Saar looked at Kohara before turning his attention to Tempest and Taranis. He sighed, running a hand over his face.

“We’ll stay with you,” Hadrian said, resting a hand on Saar’s shoulder.

“Same,” Anakin said. “We’ll cover you from the sky. Gannon and Shiloh will be back and join up when they’re done.”

“When we get to the bottom, we’ll hunt around for their transportation,” Miller said. “And likewise, we’re right here, honey. Not going anywhere.”

My chest ached for a minute. I’ve always thought that these were the kind of friends I had. When in crisis, they came running and never left my side. I supposed that now I needed to consider that the kind of crisis I was presented with might define the type of friends I should call.

Which seemed really unfair. Perhaps there weren't any ride-or-die people in my life. Also unfair, I shared something happy and a 'friend' shit all over it. I'm not sure I want that kind of friendship.

We forced our injured to remain where they were. Kohara, Tempest, and Taranis didn't complain, though Raiden was largely unimpressed. It took the threat of Edison pinning him to the ground for him to remain there. Though, he didn't stop scowling.

Astro prowled around and the angels remained looking outward while everyone else tried to pack up what was left. We did a bunch of mumbling that we should just leave it at this point. We'd lost so much of it in the winds we'd created, anyway.

"You must have spent a fortune on this gear, though," Aden, the Malak's human husband, said.

"It's just money," Aratiri said.

Aden snorted. "As someone who came from absolutely no money, I'm not sure 'only money' has the same connotation to me as it does you."

Arat smiled. He took Aden's chin in his fingers, giving him a flirty smile. "Sweet boy, I'll give you three companies and you'll never have to worry about money again. Yeah?"

Aden flushed and pulled away. "N-no. No! That's not necessary. We have money too, you know."

"Yes, I know you do. But clearly there's still a part of you that worries financially. I can make that a non-issue," Arat said. His expression said he was completely serious.

Aden must have seen that too. He swallowed, eyes wide. He blinked several times, shaking his head as if he were trying to force the thought away. "No, Aratiri. I don't need your—"

"If you say charity, I'm going to sweep you away in a fucking hurricane, boy," Arat growled.

Chuckles moved around the group. Lazarus stopped behind Aden and wrapped an arm around the front of his

shoulders, pulling Aden's back to his chest. He kissed the side of his head. "You know, monsters live a long time. Gaining wealth is easy for us. And giving it to those we care about is likewise easy."

"I don't need—We have plenty of money," Aden argued. Insecurity flashed across his face and he turned his head to look at Lazarus. "Don't we?"

Laz pressed a kiss to Aden's lips. "Yes. Not as much as Arat, but plenty."

Aden looked at Arat with narrowed eyes. "How much money do you have, exactly?"

Arat winked.

"Enough to buy the country," Anakin teased as he walked by.

Aden's eyes widened. "The whole country?"

Aratiri rolled his eyes. "No. A handful of states, probably."

"Like, states? United States *states*?"

Arat's nod was absent. Then he frowned. "I haven't looked at my portfolio in a while but yeah, last I knew."

Aden blinked at him a few times before shaking his head. "That's a stupid amount of money."

"Agreed," Aratiri said before a smile brightened up his gorgeous face again. "So I won't miss the companies I give away."

"Table this conversation," Hadrian said, clapping Arat on the shoulder. "We're about done here and need to get your husbands to the bottom of this mountain."

"At least it'll be somewhat smooth now," Cobalt said. "You know, since it's bare as a baby's ass."

Eyes flickered to me, and I flushed. "Sorry," I murmured.

"Don't be," Raiden said, stepping up to my side and wrapping an arm around my shoulders. "Whatever was going

on today, Silence will think twice about our strength. Even if that's not inherently a good thing, it's also a good thing."

I sighed. That's what I was afraid of. Yes, they'd see that we're a lot fucking stronger than they give us credit for. But I now just put a target on all storms' heads. We are a force to be reckoned with. I mean, not only did we take out all their little henchmen, but we basically just stripped a mountain clean of everything.

Guilt settled in my chest again. Especially as I watched Kohara being helped to his feet. He staggered, grunting from how much he hurt. Tempest too, his hand on his side as he scowled at the ground. Taranis didn't look worse for the wear, but he also didn't wear a shirt to keep his blisters from being irritated.

I took a shaking breath and headed along the path following Astro. Guilt was heavy but that also fed into the ever-growing anger that hadn't left me since Essen's murder. It was already personal with my sister's death. But now it was fucking intimate.

I *needed* to do something.



Hadley

IT TOOK A LONG TIME FOR US TO REACH THE BOTTOM OF THE mountain. It was slow going with Kohara and Tempest's injuries, especially since neither were willing to be carried. Although, by the time we reached the bottom, Kohara was pale and sweating. I think if Saar had really pushed it about an hour ago, he'd have given in.

Since we'd lost the majority of our belongings in the storms we created, we folded down the back seat in Saar's car to lay Kohara and Tempest with a bunch of pillows and blankets. I was sure that under normal circumstances, they might have argued.

But right now they hurt and were tired.

Raiden rode with his brother and the injured husbands.

"We'll meet you at your house," Hadrian called. Miller agreed. But Anakin said he was heading home and that they'd stop by when we've had a chance to rest.

The ride home was quiet. I was in a car with Zilan and Aratiri. We didn't talk as we unnecessarily squished into the front seat, needing to feel each other. No words were shared, just body heat.

The drive took longer since Saar drove slowly, not wanting to cause too much unnecessary movement with our precious cargo. We remained on a conference call for the entire ride,

connecting our four vehicles. And still, only silence passed between us.

When we arrived home, Gale, Raiden, and Bronte headed to the third floor where they shoved all the furniture in the big living area between the four bedrooms so that it was all pressed against a wall. They then hauled out all four mattresses from the bedrooms and pushed them together against a corner, covering them in blankets, pillows, and anything else soft.

Saar and Raiden helped Kohara shower. Bronte and Nephelē helped Tempest get cleaned. And I helped Taranis. I didn't think he needed help, but I needed to feel him. Then again, I think he spent more time washing me than he let me run soap over him.

It was a quiet, tender moment we shared as my fingers brushed over his skin, being extra gentle and careful on his back. The way he touched me was almost reverent as he stared at me under the spray of water. I might have shed a few more tears as the fear finally slipped away. But I had plausible deniability since we were under the shower.

We brushed our teeth as Taranis air dried and we made our way out of Saar's bathroom. He didn't put any clothes on but I grabbed a t-shirt and shorts from Saar's closet as we walked through it.

Tempest was already on the bed, curled up and eyes closed with Bronte wrapped around him tightly, careful not to touch his injury.

Taranis dropped onto the mattress, not caring in the least that there were Malaks and Nashs in the room. The man had no shame. I also didn't think he even realized he was naked. It's just what he did.

He dragged himself further up the bed and he stopped at Bronte's back, shifting so he could curl there, his arms and legs slung over Bronte. I arranged blankets but then paused as Saar helped Kohara to the bed.

Koh didn't drop like Taranis did. He moved much slower. Stiffly. Crawling up the bed to lay down with a deep sigh. I wrapped him in blankets next.

"Come here, wife," Kohara said, lifting his arm and the blankets for me to slide in. I bit my lip, not wanting to hurt him. Wanting to help... do something. But when he opened his stormy eyes to look at me, I nodded and wedged myself between him and Tempest.

He settled, his hand pushing under my shirt to splay across my bare skin. He sighed into my hair, taking a deep breath and pressing his lips to my head.

"Are you alright? Do you need anything?" I asked.

"No, Had. Just lay here with me. Okay?"

I nodded, turning in his arms to press my face to his chest. Gently, of course. Words were on the tip of my tongue, wanting to tell him I was so scared. That I tried to act quicker. That I was sorry. But I knew he needed sleep. Not conversation. And I knew that it would turn into him and others reassuring me and that's not at all what I wanted.

So instead, I closed my eyes and listened to the murmurs around the room. More of my men curled up on the beds with us. Eventually, there was a head on my ass, and another body wrapped around my legs. Blankets were piled high as the sun set outside, bathing the room in a soft orange glow that lulled me into an exhausted sleep.



I WOKE A FEW TIMES THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT TO MOVEMENT. Sometimes on the bed and sometimes others within the room. Quiet voices filled the night with soothing sounds and I had a feeling they weren't just my men. Maybe I was partially asleep, but I was sure that there were animals curled with us on the bed too.

The whole thing must have left us all drained. The curtains were drawn over the large folding accordion doors that led

onto the third-floor balcony. There was the constant white noise of a fan within the room, making the curtains flutter.

I yawned, opening my eyes to find a kaleidoscope of colors within rainbow eyes staring over me. I gave a start, nearly jumping up.

Astro, still a dog, chuckled from where he looked down at me. “Relax, Hadley. You’re safe.”

Kohara chuckled, pulling me closer to his chest. Then he winced, sighing in frustration before loosening his hold on me.

“You need some Advil?” I wasn’t sure if that actually worked on monsters. I’ve never taken one, but it seemed to make humans feel better. Dallas lived off it some days.

He grinned, opening his eyes to look at me. At my back, Tempest buried his face in my hair, taking a breath and sighing, too.

“No,” Kohara said, his voice low and thick with sleep. “Just gonna take me a bit to get rid of this soreness.”

“But you’re okay?”

His fingers brushed my cheek as he looked into my face with a tender smile. “I’m good. Promise.”

“Time to wake up, storms,” a voice said into the room, quickly followed by delicious food smells. Around me, several groans followed. I think it was a toss up between hunger and grouchiness at being awoken.

When I stifled my own grumble and pulled myself up, I found that the enormous room had quite the gathering of people, and they weren’t all Malaks and Nashs. Self-consciousness at waking up to virtual strangers made me flush.

A cold nose dipped to my neck, right below my ear. I swatted Astro away, glaring at him. He gave me a wolfish grin before bounding over our heads and landing with light feet on the floor half a dozen feet away from the mattresses. I didn’t even hear his paws hit.

“Show off,” I muttered. He looked back, winked, and sauntered off. I watched as he lay at Miller’s feet, looking at

me smugly. Miller chuckled, rubbing Astro behind his ears.

“Look at you making friends,” Tem teased as he eased himself into a sitting position. The smile in his voice fought against the wince as he moved. “Fuck.” He reached for his ribs and hissed. “I swear, it feels like I’m tearing something when I move. Where’re the glow sticks?”

Lazarus shook his head as he crossed to us, dropping to his knees on the bed. With his hand around Tem’s neck, manhandling him in a way that almost looked sexual, he very gently touched the wound. Tempest grimaced, his hands holding Lazarus’s wrist so tightly that his knuckles turned white. Closing his eyes, he breathed with heavy exhales while Lazarus softly poked around.

“Still hurt to the touch?” Laz asked, his voice low.

Tem nodded. “You sure everything is tied up in there?” he asked, strain in his voice.

“Yeah, babe. Lay down a minute. Let me see what I can feel, hm?” Tem nodded, letting Lazarus guide him down, so his head was in my lap. Koh shifted next to me, offering Tempest his hand. Tempest gripped him with the same vice-like hold he’d had around Lazarus’s wrist a minute ago.

I enjoyed watching my men interact with each other. Learning all their quirks and unique relationships. But I was seeing that even the relationships they had with their friends were kind of intimate. From the teasing and flirty, rough behavior, to their gentle touches and deep concern.

My heart ached because once, I thought I had that too. Seeing what was right in front of me only emphasized what I had likely lost. Simply by being me and honest.

Lazarus sighed, dropping his hand and running his other through Tem’s hair. “It feels like you’re just sore, but when the witches get here, we’ll see if there’s still magic in you. That might be keeping the pain strong and cause other damage that I can’t feel. Physically though, you’re in one piece.”

Tem nodded. He’d broken out into a sweat from the pain. “Thanks.”

Laz continued to rub his fingers through Tem's hair for a minute, the concern and sympathy in his eyes bright. "I'm not going far, Tem. I'll be right here to make sure you don't fall apart."

My man smiled, though he didn't open his eyes. "I know. I appreciate you, glow stick."

Lazarus beamed a smile. Winking at me, he got off the bed. Now that he wasn't distracting me, the room smelled even more strongly of delicious food. My stomach growled in response. We hadn't eaten in... damn, has it been more than twenty-four hours? It sure felt like it.

While we lazily went through what must have been enough food to feed an army, more people filed into the large space. People I recognized from the gathering not that long ago. Friends of my men.

Tem had shifted to lay across Bronte. Mostly because I'd had to get up and pee. And while I was out, I dressed in my own clothes. Ones that fit. And something that made me feel more secure, a camisole to keep the girls from swinging around.

I joined the bed again where half of my future husbands were still lounging with a handful of others. They were all cuddled close together, offering comfort and support to our injured and stressed. Zilan took me in his arms when I joined them on the bed, my head resting on one of the sea monster's shoulders, who was sitting close. She brushed my hair and while I still didn't know her from any other stranger, her soft smile and soothing touch made me relax in Zilan's arms.

"This is Tide," he said after a few minutes. "One of my best friends." He kissed the top of my head.

A smile drifted over my lips. "Hi, Tide."

She laughed quietly. "Hello, honey. Rest. We're all close and won't go far."

"Except that you need a goddamn pool out back," someone else said.

"If we had a pool, you'd never leave," Saar countered.

“Besides, we have two downstairs - one of which is technically outside. Why would we need more out back?” Gale said.

“Because there’s a giant yard that needs to be filled with water!”

Laughter followed the quiet banter.

“Alright, since we’re all here, let’s talk,” someone said. I kept my eyes closed, not at all caring who was speaking. Once in a while, I recognized a voice, be it one of my men or someone else I’ve talked to regularly. But who was speaking didn’t matter. I only cared about the conversation that followed.

“The nets and a report as to what happened to the extent that we know were given to The Harem Project. Of course, when you’re feeling up for it, your words would be appreciated.”

“I’ll call later,” Saar said.

“Before we can have any real hypotheses, I think we need a little more to go on.”

“Especially since we found exactly a dozen vans, theoretically equipped to neutralize a storm waiting at the bottom of the hill.”

“We suspected that the nets were doing just that,” Raiden said. “They forced us from our monsters, leaving us helpless.”

“Aside from the final attack, we don’t get the impression that they were trying to kill us. Kidnapping was their M.O.” Taranis said.

“Does that mean we need to be concerned that storms are hunted, now?”

The question hung in the air for a minute before an answer was offered.

“I think we need to now acknowledge that everyone is public enemy number one to them. Species no longer matters. Silence made a strike after a year of no activity at all. And they came with new weapons and a battalion of hybrids.”

“But what do they want by dragging us away?” Nephele asked.

“You’re not going to like that answer,” a female said. “I can tell you from experience, that it’s nothing good.”

“I was always under the impression that they fucked with you because they didn’t understand banshees. What you’re capable of and what you can withstand. I didn’t think it was the same concerning storms.”

“Maybe we need to think about this in a different light,” a different female said. “ORKA tortured monsters when they didn’t understand. Which was more times than not. Do you suppose that whoever is in charge of Silence is doing the same? It supports why they were experimenting on Ady. And at the same time, testing Cobalt’s healing limits.”

Murmurs broke out, but it sounded like the voices were cursing under their breaths instead of adding anything useful to the conversation.

“I know that the mountainside was obliterated—and on a side note, the human populace is making all kinds of comical speculations about what happened there, including but not limited to, the apocalypse has begun—but were there any other new weapons left behind? Anything in the vans?”

“The vans were confiscated. My thoughts are pretty straightforward on this. They didn’t actually think they’d have any issues taking you out. Whether they relied on the sheer number of men they sent after you, they strongly underestimated the strength of storms, or a combination of both, I can’t say. But there’s no way they’d have just laid a bunch of new shit at our feet. So we can surmise that they *expected* to win and come home with the prize of twelve storms in their possession.”

“And the preliminary reports are that *there is* a whole lot of new shit from the vans. Some really fucking scary new shit.”

I took a breath, chills racing down my body. Zilan’s arms tightened around me in response.

“Okay, then they were going for abduction. I feel reasonably certain we can agree on that. Then the next question is—through these experiments, are they simply trying to gain knowledge?”

“I have a theory,” a woman said. The one I deemed was the banshee but still not inclined enough to know by opening my eyes to confirm. “What if they’re looking to make weapons out of us by learning how to control us? Ana said the aerial shifters they found were kind of offline. As if they were waiting for an order of some kind to proceed.”

“Controlling the scream of a banshee would certainly be a useful weapon.”

“Eliminate a species until there’s barely any left, using those remaining as guinea pigs for... a purpose we’re not entirely sure of yet. So why attack the storms now? They’re nowhere near extinction.”

“I feel reasonably certain that they underestimated the strength and nature of storms. They expected an easy out, if not in skill, then by overwhelming them. What’s left behind is going to be an eye-opener for them.”

I flinched as if those words had been an attack.

“Don’t feel bad about it, Hadley.” The use of my name made me open my eyes. Only when he spoke again did I see who was talking, though I didn’t know who it was exactly. “Believe me when I say that we will always act first to save those we love and be damned with the consequences and what they might reveal about us.”

His words were meant as a comfort. I knew that. And there was no doubt in my mind that he meant them. “I can’t help but feel storms will now have a bright red target over their heads because of what I just demonstrated.”

“Regardless of how you left the mountainside, that you weren’t being dragged back and they failed their kidnapping mission, was going to put a target on your heads, baby girl. With any luck, that episode will be followed by another stretch of radio silence from them while they regroup and think.”

“Maybe it’s not such a good idea to let them do that.” I shifted my attention to look at the next man talking. “Look at what they came out with after a year of being left to their own devices. I shudder to think what they’re going to do next.”

“While you’re not wrong, I’m not sure what you think we should be doing.”

The man shook his head. “I don’t know. I don’t have a suggestion or even the inkling of an idea. But I just feel like this is going to keep happening.” He looked at Kohara. “We were lucky this time. By the skin of our fucking teeth. We might not be so fortunate next time.”

His words hung heavy in the air as we all looked around the room. He wasn’t wrong. This might be the last time we see one of these faces. And what are we going to do to stop them?



Bronte

MY HEART HAS BEEN IN MY THROAT SINCE THEY ATTACKED US. I don't know that I've ever been so stressed in my goddamn life. Tem was still laying across my lap and I could feel every time he felt pain. His breath would catch. His heart would beat faster. And if it lasted long enough, he'd sweat.

I had thought that with Kohara dying, he'd be suffering the most right now. And while he was still sore, he said his entire body felt like it was bruised on the inside; Tem was in worse shape.

Our speculation concerning Silence never lulled, but I stopped paying attention a while ago. Instead, I was concentrating on how I could make Tem more comfortable.

"We need to take a break for a bit," Saar said as he crossed the room. He crouched down in front of me, leaning in to kiss my lips. "You're taking good care of him," he murmured.

While I appreciated the praise, my mind was too fucked with worry and fear to really take pleasure from it. Saar dropped his hand to Tem's head. Sighing, he looked over his shoulder.

He didn't need to speak. Veri, one of five witches of House Taika, joined us. She smiled at me before resting her hand on Tem's skin. Her smile turned into a frown. "Kell?"

Akello pulled himself to his feet, disentangling from Jasper. He joined us, his hands resting over Veri's. Because

neither of them were going to speak about what they were feeling, I studied their faces. Veri just continued to frown, but Akello's brows pulled together as he closed his eyes.

Panic rose in me as I tried not to grip Tem too roughly. He was hurting enough, but I kept feeling like he was going to slip away. Right through my hands like water in a sieve.

His lips were parted as he breathed heavily. I could almost feel his pain through his stiff and tense muscles as he gripped my hand tightly. His eyes closed and his Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed.

"Y'all have a big soaker tub in this hellhole?" Akello asked, raising his eyes to Saar's.

Saar smirked. "Only thirty or so."

I rolled my eyes. We didn't have *that* many. At least, I didn't think we did. It's not like I ever counted how many bathtubs we have.

Akello stood, resting his hand on Veri's head for a minute. He glanced at Lazer, their alchemist, and the two of them followed Saar into his bedroom.

"Is he okay?" I asked quietly, unable to help myself.

Veri gave me a gentle smile. It made my stomach flip with dread. "Tem will be fine, love. Nephilim can heal wounds, but they can't suck out magic."

"Then there is some still there?" Kohara asked.

Veri nodded. "It's subtle, but I think that's likely the point. Not to worry, though. We'll take care of it."

Tempest smiled, though he didn't open his eyes. His whispered 'thanks' sounded weak. Much weaker than when he'd woken up joking.

I worried my lip as my shaking fingers trailed featherlight over his skin. He had to be okay. He had to. My despair mixed with anger, though. While I was terrified, every single minute that passed, a pit of resentment grew. Why did people think this was okay? What idiot decided that they had the right to determine who lived and died? Who thought it was morally

and ethically okay to steal people, lock them up, and experiment on them like they weren't actual living beings?!

Though I shifted my focus from my fear for Tem, I watched as Saar helped him up and through the lobby door, where he disappeared.

He would be alright now. The witches would take care of him. And in the meantime, I'm going to stew in my fury.

Leaning back, I closed my eyes, trying to pay attention to the chatter around me. None of this was fair. More than a handful of people in this room have been physically hurt within the last year by people with absolutely no conscience. People who thought they were better than everyone else. That they could murder others and it was a heroic act.

Not for the first time, I wondered what Silence's end goal was. They've always acted as a cloak organization. Whoever was running it was hidden. The public didn't know. And I'd wager a bet that those who joined and worked for them didn't know either.

Then there was the idea that people were working for them at all. Ady told us that those who took her from ORKA were certainly in complete control of themselves. One had even appeared to show regret and second thoughts about handing her over. Not until they were walking into the Silence facility and it was too late, but still. Those were coherent thoughts. Not minds controlled like the aerial monsters the Aves found.

Feeling frustrated and restless, I pushed myself up and headed for Raiden's room. As soon as I entered the privacy of his suite, I began stripping clothes until I stood within the large shower and the cold water fell over me.

Wishing I knew how to meditate, I closed my eyes and turned my face into the water as it heated, trying to imagine the stress, worry, fear, and anger wash down the drain with the water. But the longer I stood there imagining it, the more ridiculous I felt.

Nothing about this was fair. More than anything, I had a growing urge to uncover the identity of the person/s in charge

of Silence and deal them a blow that they'd feel for a long fucking time. I'm not prone to violence or killing innocent people, but maybe that's what it would take to make them stop. Kill one of their loved ones, just so they'd see how it feels.

Maybe the supernatural world was heading into an all-out war. And maybe that's what's necessary to take down Silence.

Hands on my face made me open my eyes. Nephele gave me a soft smile and an even softer kiss. "Okay, love?" he asked.

My shoulders sagged. I was shit at lying and pretending so I shook my head. "I'm furious." Although the words and the anger backing them were hot, my voice shook with tears.

Nephele sighed, pulling me into his arms.

"Is Tem okay?" I asked.

"He'll be fine when the witches are done stewing him in a makeshift cauldron."

I knew he was teasing, trying to make me smile, but I couldn't find the strength to muster a laugh. A smile touched my lips but I could tell it wasn't anywhere near genuine.

Neph's arms wrapped tighter around me, curling his fingers into my hair and holding me close, hot water trailing over us. "We'll be okay," he murmured, pressing a soft kiss to the side of my head. "We're going to take the time to recuperate in peace and when we're feeling level-headed, we'll revisit the incidents of the day."

"And discuss retaliation?" I asked.

He didn't answer as he moved his hand from my hair and grabbed a bar of soap. Yes, Raiden was old-school and kept bar soap in his shower. However, it was handmade by our friendly witches themselves.

His hands moved over my back, down my ass, and the parts of my arms that he could reach since I wasn't going to let him go. He used the bar soap to wash my hair and then set it back on the ledge and wrapped me back up in his strong arms.

I closed my eyes, thinking that maybe I could imagine everything falling away now that I was being held by one of my husbands. Was meditation easier or harder with someone else present? I thought that maybe if I concentrated on his heartbeat and his breaths that maybe I'd be able to let it all go.

Emptying my mind was like fighting against a hurricane. But I forced my thoughts back on the rhythmic, living pulse that was Nephele. On his hands running down my back, grazing over my skin with the water from the showerhead. The hard planes of his body pressed flush to mine so even the drips of water couldn't quite make it between us.

His half hard dick against my thigh. It was all par for the course. When pressed against one of the people you love most, it's like your body can't help but turn on a little. Even when it was the most inappropriate of times.

Tem was hurt. Badly. My mind should focus on that alone. Not thinking about dropping to my knees.

Neph's lips pressed against my jaw, and he sighed. "Need a release, honey?"

I shook my head, biting my lip to keep the words in. It was a lie, and we both knew it. His dick grew against my leg and I kept my eyes closed tightly to try to rein in my own arousal.

He chuckled. "I do. Want to help me relieve some stress?"

The whimper that left my mouth was pathetic. He drew me back and kissed me, his tongue taking over my mouth right away. And then he was guiding me down to my knees, where I braced myself on his thighs. I looked up through the spray of water as he dragged the head of his cock along my lips.

"Open."

I did, and he wasted no time meeting the back of my throat.

"That's it. Keep your eyes on me." His voice had already turned rough and husky. I groaned, nodding. Watching his face. His mouth open. His eyes dark, pupils wide.

He pulled out until he rested on my bottom lip. I flicked my tongue, tracing it along the slit and making his breath catch. Then he pushed in, a long slow motion until he reached the back of my mouth. "Ready?" he asked.

I nodded, and he pushed in deeper, breaching my throat until he was balls deep. Said balls rested against my chin. Neph groaned; the sound was a cord that reached my dick and made it throb with hot need.

With his cock so deep, I struggled to breathe. Unable to get a breath of air; he held it until my eyes watered, not that he could see that with the shower falling down over us. He removed his cock long enough for me to take one swallow of air before pushing back in.

Neph licked his lips when he lodged himself in all the way again. "I'm going to use your mouth, baby boy. You want me to paint your face or come down your throat?"

He pulled out long enough for me to say roughly, "Swallow."

And then he let loose. His thrusts weren't hard, but they bottomed out each time. I could only swallow half a breath every three or four thrusts. My throat burned and my jaw ached. My cock dripped with need and my balls hurt.

But the pleasurable sounds he made filled me with such hot arousal that my orgasm built too fast. I was nearly there, the only thing touching my dick being the patter of water. With every groan and praise leaving Neph's delicious lips, I shivered in pleasure.

His sudden dive into my throat had me choking. Neph's hand went to the back of my head, keeping me there as he blew down my throat. I swallowed as best I could, making him moan loudly. More dribbled down my throat as I stared into his eyes through the falling water.

And when he smiled at me, pleased, called me a perfect boy for taking his load and making him feel good, my orgasm spit out of me. I grunted, clamping my mouth around his

softening dick to hold him there, sucking down every last drop as I rode out my climax.

Neph dropped when I was finished and took me in his arms, holding me to his chest as he kissed me softly. “Love you, Bronte. So fucking much.”

I smiled, resting my face in his neck, and let the moment of peace hang over us just for a second. It would fall away in a minute as the reality of our life pushed it away. But right now, I felt good.

“I love you,” I croaked, my voice rough from the raw feeling in my throat. Then smiled at the sound and the feel, swallowing again. I could still taste him on my tongue.

“We’ll see what everyone wants to do,” Neph said quietly as we dried off. I wasn’t sure what he was talking about at first, since we hadn’t spoken for a while. Not beyond the sexy words while I was choking on his cock. He smiled when I looked at him, confused. “About retaliation. But for now, let’s just focus on getting everyone strong again.”

I nodded.

Being mad made me want to retaliate. When my husbands were whole once more, maybe I’d feel differently. But the burning need to hurt those responsible in the same way they’d hurt us just kept getting hotter.

When we returned to the room, the Taika kids were there with the Terra’s little girl—Linken. Although the Taikas had six kids, we rarely saw them. The five oldest, a set of triplets, and the two under the triplets in age attended a boarding school for witches, though I suspected that one of them wasn’t a witch at all. The youngest, only six, was homeschooled. He was human, with only a little bit of witchy affinity in him. Something that pissed him off to no end.

And why wouldn’t it? Five witch siblings and you can’t help but feel left out and different.

The triplets were sixteen, Otto, Kellishon, and Apricot. They looked exactly alike, which was saying something since

Apricot was female to the other two males. Still, I had a hard time telling the three apart. Then there was Rieen at fourteen and Tobi at ten. Their human son, Casper, was sitting with Linken, looking somewhat pouty. It didn't take me long to decide that it was because his siblings had been helping their parents with the brew that Tem had been laying in.

However, all thoughts of the Taika kids fled my mind when I saw Tem back on the bed. His color already looked better and the way he was lounging suggested that he felt better, too. I nearly cried right then and there.

He looked up, his stormy eyes meeting mine, and smiled. "Come here, love," he said, reaching for me.

With a choked sound that was far too close to a sob, I stumbled into the bed and curled up against him, taking him in my arms as best I could when, really, he was holding me. He always held me. All my husbands held me.

"You feel better?" I asked.

"Much, much better," he agreed.

With his words, the tension in me fell away. Not the anger, though. That remained burning hot! While I laid with my face pressed against his stomach, I listened to the Taika kids talking to Veri, Plum, and Akello.

"It's certainly witch magic, but there's a feel of something else there, too," a triplet brother, Kellishon, said. I peeked through cracked eyes to see him drawing something in a notebook while Rieen and Tobi peered in. Nearby, Casper continued to pout and scowl, his eyes shiny as he glared at his siblings.

"What is it?" Tobi asked, brushing her unruly hair off her shoulders as she peered into the notebook again. As the youngest witch, she was constantly asking questions. And as the child who considered himself the true middle child and father hen, Rieen shifted on his knees and pulled his younger sister's hair back, securing it with an elastic before settling on his butt again.

I smiled. Siblings were adorable.

“Hard to say,” Apricot said. “It’s dulled but you can feel the rimming of it around the witch magic.” She traced her finger over whatever Kellishon had drawn on the paper. “We can talk process of elimination to determine what our best guesses are.”

“So, how was it included in the spell to begin with? Thoughts?” Kellishon asked.

“Witches are the only ones who can truly cast spells that have a wide range of outcomes depending on our intent,” Rieen said. “So, it would have to be something that the knife was soaked in?”

“Unicorn blood,” Casper said, rolling his eyes and turning his back on his siblings. “It’s not a hard question.”

Most of the room turned quiet. His older siblings looked at him, the triplets with wide smiles. Otto moved to scoop Casper up and hug him tightly. “Well done, ghost boy,” he murmured before blowing raspberries in his neck.

“That’s the right answer?” Tobi asked, her brows knit together.

“Yes,” Apricot confirmed, grinning at Casper.

Around them, their parents smiled proudly.

“Why are you always over there when you can be schooling us on answers, Cas?” Kellishon asked, ruffling the boy’s hair when Otto resumed his seat with their baby brother in his arms.

I knew I was seeing something that happened regularly. Casper was insanely smart, memorizing everything he read and always focusing on witchy things. But his confidence was lacking because he didn’t share their magic.

We’ve seen it often. Whenever we ask the Taikas to come over for anything concerning magic, this exact interaction takes place. But when we’re together and the older kids are home from school, they are a lot like I always was with my siblings. Close. Laughing. Wrestling.

Casper shrugged, his eyes still glassy as he blinked away his unshed tears.

“I’m going to get you to tutor us one day,” Apricot said, tapping Casper’s nose. “Midterms are coming up. You free for a few late-night study dates, Cas?”

Casper rolled his eyes and crossed his arms.

I tuned out their conversation as I scanned the room for Calix, our resident unicorn. While unicorns are a notorious dark and dangerous species, to our knowledge, they’re not hunted. As I looked at Calix, his eyes narrowed at the kids’ conversation.

Unicorn blood had a lot of unique and useful properties. But taking their blood without consent usually meant that those properties came back on the taker. That their blood was used on a Silence knife and worked in favor of the magic within suggested that a unicorn was cooperating with them.

I could just see Calix’s thoughts churning as he stared at nothing. Others in the room murmured as the kids carried on.

“What if they’re not working for them by choice, either?” I asked quietly. Several looked my way. “Anakin said that the aerial monsters appeared offline. Maybe Silence has somehow found a way to control people.”

The kids stopped talking as the room fell into a thoughtful silence.

“That’s a horrifying idea,” Miller said, a severe frown on his lips.

But Anakin was looking at me, his dark eyes narrowing. “You know, you might be onto something. Though I don’t think that’s the case with everyone that’s working with them, it makes a lot of sense, given what we saw with the monsters in the sky.”

“Vacant,” Idris said, his usual serene expression hardening to something irritated.

“I’d like to make a request,” I said. Eyes turned to me and waited. “I want us to make an effort to find who’s running

Silence.”

“Why?” Saar asked.

I shrugged. No one was convinced that I didn’t have a reason, but everyone in this room knew that I couldn’t lie to save my life. It was best that I simply didn’t speak my motive out loud. I was sure others would be on board with my vindictive thoughts, but right now, we needed to find who was behind the trigger of the Division of Silence.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Iker said. “Finding out the origin might actually be insightful information.”

“Indeed,” Bastian said. “Identifying the source might give us some more cards.”

“While I feel this is more vengeance driven than anything, I don’t object,” Cobalt said. “However, if we’re going to focus on the ‘who’s’ of Silence, we need to dive deep and see who’s responsible for their torturous array of weapons.”

“That’s almost an easy ask,” Akello said. “All magic has a signature attached to it. While Plum, Torin, Seneca, Veri, and I can all produce the exact same spell, there will be... let’s call it genetic modifications in its code. Many combinations produce brown hair, even if the shade is slightly different. And like DNA, those codes can be traced back to their origin. The source of the code-writer.”

“So you’re saying that we can identify the witches involved with Silence,” Jennings said.

“Yes. We can,” Akello said, smiling wickedly. “Especially since we have the knives that hit both Tem and Koh in our possession.”

“This information cannot leave this room,” Calix said quietly. He looked at the kids for a minute before turning back to the rest of us. “Unicorn blood is unique among individuals. Using Kell’s genetic code metaphor—where DNA is a fuck tonalike between people and animals, with only an infinitesimal difference that separates one species to the next and less than that to determine families and so forth, unicorn blood *specifically* is the opposite. All of our codes are unique

to the individual, with only a few bases that are the same. And those basically dictate ‘you are a unicorn’ and nothing more.”

His words hung heavy on the air.

“How well can you read blood?” Akello asked.

“How well can you read magic?” Calix countered.

Akello smiled. “Let’s have a conversation over these knives later, hm?”

Calix nodded, but he didn’t share Akello’s smile. His eyes were still narrowed, his shoulders tense. He was angry.

I understood that. The more we learn, the more dangerous this game becomes. When you love eleven people with everything in you, you have a lot to lose. And I couldn’t lose any one of them.

We needed the game to end while we were all still whole.



Bronte

WE SAW MORE OF YONBE OVER THE NEXT WEEK THAN I THINK I had in the last year. My family and I didn't leave the top floor or the bed much. As much as I'd like to say it was filled with sexy time, it wasn't. While Tem and Koh were feeling better, they were still tired and sore. Tara was achy as well, though Raiden seemed fine once the magic was off his skin. But then, he hadn't been stuck under the net as long as Tara had been. Maybe it was the length of time exposure that upped the ante.

Which made sense. If you're going to incapacitate your captive, you're going to need to increase the pressure more and more until they're down and out. Tara was about at that point.

Then again, maybe it was in response to the victim's fight. Tara was certainly trying to get out of it on his own. Trying to fight the effects. Whereas Raiden wasn't because he has something like an allergic reaction to magic, his fight was already basically out of him.

Anyway, while we lounged around sticking close to each other, Yonbe fed us and cleaned around us. When he left the room for the fourth time on the eighth day we were holed up together, I said, "I think he needs a raise."

"Agreed," Saar said. "When we're moving around again, I'll up his pay by 15%."

“That’s a very generous raise,” Hadley noted. “I’ve never gotten more than four or six at a time.”

“Then you’re not as appreciated as you should be,” Aratiri said.

“Hm,” Hadley answered, closing her eyes again.

After a few minutes, Kohara got to his feet and stretched. “Okay, I need a break from laying down. My muscles are decaying. I can physically feel it.”

I snorted, not moving from where I had my face buried into Saar’s ribs.

“I’ll go with you,” Gale said through a yawn.

Wordlessly, Raiden and Notus followed.

“I think I’m going to shower,” Taranis said, rubbing his face. “Or go to the gym? I don’t know. I need to get up and move, too.”

He stretched his back as he moved, grimacing. When he paused at the door, leaning against it before continuing, Nephele and Aratiri followed him out. I was glad that we didn’t need to speak to know that we were always going to take care of each other.

A minute later, Zilan got up as well and headed for the stairs without a word. No idea what he was doing. Probably just needed a break from laying in bed. Yeah, I got that. And yet, I just wanted to lay here pressed against Saar’s side. Hadley was on his other side with Tem pressed against her back.

Since I’d been so irritated and unable to keep the growing aggravation inside without it seeping into my words, I’d been pretty quiet. While I knew life wasn’t exactly fair, I was drowning in my anger over how unjust this was.

We were literally doing *nothing*. Not a threat to anyone, human or supernatural. What the fuck had we done to even have caught their attention? How had they found us? I can’t imagine that it was by coincidence since they came prepared

for twelve storm monsters. But that still didn't explain how they knew where we'd be.

"I can feel you grimacing," Saar said, his fingers stroking through my hair.

"I'm not," I said, though he was probably right. No idea. "Just thinking."

"Loudly and filled with anger," he said.

I sighed. "Sorry."

"No need to be sorry. As long as you know that you're not to do anything stupid."

Snorting, I shook my head. "No. I wouldn't do that. I can't bear to be parted from you, so leaving to do something would be horrible."

"Good," Tem said, his hand reaching across to stroke my face. When I met his eyes, he smiled heatedly. "You know, I have an idea what might take your mind off things for a while."

"No," I said, narrowing my eyes. "You're hurt."

Hadley grinned.

"I'm fine now," he said. "Boiling in magic while being studied like a science experiment by witchlings has a way of healing a guy."

This time Hadley giggled. Saar smiled, too.

"You don't hurt at all anymore?" I asked, raising a brow in challenge.

"Not any more than if I had a strenuous workout at the gym." I thought about it, studying his face as his smile spread. "What do you think? Want to let me have your ass to work out some of my frustration?"

Did I? Fuck; his words went straight to my dick. Each word was another stroke, encouraging it to thicken.

I bit my lip to keep my groan in. It had been a couple days since the shower with Nephele. More than a week since I've

been used the way I need to be. But while my body was heating up, my eyes dropped to Hadley, and I caught my breath.

Was she okay with seeing that? I know she'd been in our orgy on the mountain—I'd even been with her for a bit—but I had no idea if she'd actually been involved in something that had, you know, two of us together. Like, dick to ass. How do we even know that she's okay with it?

Hadley was already smiling at me, but it grew as I continued to watch her. "You want them to yourself?" she asked.

My brows shot up. "What?"

She laughed quietly. "It's okay. I know you're used to being—"

"No!" I said, reaching for her hand and bringing the palm to my face. Panic shot through me quickly before I registered that she was still smiling. "It's not that at all."

"Bronte's concerned that you won't like watching me take him," Tem said, and my cheeks heated.

"Oh," Hadley said, her smile still wide. Her eyes were dark, filled with lust. "I'll enjoy that plenty, don't you worry."

The fist that felt like it was squeezing my gut loosened and I released a breath. "Really?"

She shifted from her position to lean across Saar's chest and kiss me. It was soft, lingering. Her tongue brushed the seam of my lips but when I opened them, she barely touched my tongue with hers before she pulled back. "How do you want to do this?"

I pressed my lips together. "However you want me."

Saar and Tem chuckled. Tem kissed the back of Hadley's head before getting up. I tracked him, studying to make sure he's actually not hurting more than he said he is. He opened a drawer in the bar and pulled out a tube of lube. Yes, we kept one in the bar drawers. Actually, I was fairly certain there were three or four stashed throughout the big room.

“Bronte would rather be manhandled into where we want him than say what he wants,” Saar told Hadley, while I continued to watch Tem.

“Not manhandled,” I said, though honestly, that’s fine, too. There’s something arousing about having your lover move you where they want you and then taking you until they’re sated. “And I want to be used for your pleasure.”

“But you don’t care how?” Hadley asked, not for the first time.

Taking my gaze from Tem, I looked at her. “No. I take my own pleasure from having someone use me for theirs. I really don’t have a desire outside that.” Tem made a clucking noise while Saar hummed. I rolled my eyes. “They act like this is a new thing, some days. When in reality, I’ve literally always been like this. In all aspects of my life, I’d rather have all decisions made for me.”

“All decisions?” Hadley asked, brow raised.

Tem dropped to the bed behind me, hand on my hip. I’d nearly forgotten about my raging hard dick until his touch burned my skin. Swallowing the groan, I nodded. “Yes.” My voice came out huskier than I meant it to. “Right down to what I wear would suit me fine. But I don’t want to be that kind of burden, so I dress myself.”

My words were kind of teasing. Honestly, if one of my husbands had ever expressed a desire to choose my clothes for me every day, I’d be more than happy to let them. The only thing I tend to do on my own, completely of my own accord, is leave the little love notes. Bring home something I know one of them would like. That kind of thing. Anything at all to put a smile on their face because their happiness makes me happy.

“You’re not a burden,” Saar said, frowning. “You’ve never been and never will be. Your needs don’t make you a burden.”

I shrugged.

He shifted out from under Hadley to grip my chin in his hand, forcing my eyes to his. His dark, stormy gaze was intent, even as he frowned. “We love to take care of you. Love that

you trust us to do so. Your happiness is all that matters to us, and we'll do anything to earn it.”

“Yeah, but—”

“No,” he cut me off, his voice firm. “Not once has any of us ever thought that you were a burden. Don't you dare think that.”

“Saar's right,” Tem said. I couldn't look at him since Saar still held my face. Not that I could turn my eyes away if I wanted to. His gaze held me captive. “There's nothing in this life better than seeing you smile when we've taken pressure off your shoulders. And while we know you prefer to never call the shots, we want you to know that if there's ever something you want, that we want to hear it.”

“I do,” I whispered.

“You don't,” Saar said. “Since you stepped foot into this house, you've never asked for anything.”

“That's why we're always asking what you want. It's not that we forget or don't believe that you would rather us make the decisions, so you don't have to. We never forget, nor dislike, that you want to be taken care of. But you've been here for more than a decade, and at least since I've been here, the most explicit desire you've ever expressed is asking for water over any other beverage,” Tem said.

I nodded. Pressing my hand onto Saar's stomach, I slid it up his chest. He let my chin go, moving his hand to the back of my head as he leaned in to press his lips to mine.

“I like being taken care of,” I said quietly. “To know that I can make my own choices but that I don't have to. That you'll be there to make sure I'm happy and safe and have everything I need. And for the record, I *have* told you what I like sexually. And that's just *not topping*.”

Tem and Saar chuckled, shaking their heads. But because I thought maybe they needed to understand a little more, I quickly pushed out the next words before I lost the nerve. “I like being vulnerable for you. To feel your need and desire, and knowing that I'm the one who put it there. I *need* to see

and feel that I'm making you feel so good that you *can't* contain yourself. That's what I need. I need to know that you love me and that you want me to feel good and that's why you strive to get me off, too. But that you do it because you want to, not because you feel obligated to in some necessary reciprocal idea. And I need to be held after, to be reminded that I mean something bigger to you than just someone to empty yourself in. That I'm a part of your heart and your life and that you're thinking of me. I just-I need to be wanted and loved. That's all."

I'm surprised when Saar pulls me forward. An 'oomph' leaves my mouth when I'm shifted off balance to land into his chest. I let out a laugh as I grip him. And then Tem's pressed against my back and Hadley around Saar as they hug me tightly.

"If you ever feel like that isn't happening, you need to say so," Saar said, his voice low in my ear.

I shook my head, melting into their hold. "I didn't tell you that because there's been a time when I've felt that way with you. Just that, that's what I want. You keep asking and I know why you do now, but I don't want anything more than to be wanted and loved. As much as I like to hear it, it means more when you show me. When I can feel it without words."

"Understood," Saar said.

We remained like that for several minutes before Tem shifted behind me. His fingers brushed my ass and I shivered as they slipped between my crack, grazing over my tight hole. I've never been one for foreplay. I don't like prep. I mean, I *like* the play of it when it's just that. Play. And when my partner wants it. But when I know we're getting to sex, I'd rather just have it.

Besides, I like the initial sting. I like the way I stretch and burn to the point where it's almost painful but right before it gets to that point, pleasure overtakes me.

Hands on my face pull me out of Saar's chest and Hadley's mouth seals over mine. We've remained naked for most of the time we've been on the third floor, not caring at all whether or

not our friends were coming and going. With the trauma of almost losing our guys, it really puts into perspective what's important. And modesty just isn't high on the list.

Hadley's the only one that kept clothing on but usually it consisted of short shorts and a tee. When I gripped her, she was still in her shirt. Kissing Hadley was incredibly different than kissing one of my men. She was softer, smaller. But she was just as demanding and dictating in our kiss as our men. There was something ridiculously hot about that. Knowing she was half my size but could control me like I was a damned kitten.

I wiggled against Tem's finger, still teasingly pressing against my hole. A whine built in my throat but was swallowed by Hadley as soon as it escaped.

Tem chuckled quietly and removed his hand, replacing it with the head of his cock, all slicked up. His hand took my hip, his knees shifting my legs apart. It was a little awkward to try and move while Hadley still controlled my mouth, but I wasn't about to release her.

However, my gasp was loud when the tip of his cockhead began to press against my tight hole. The pressure that built was different than normal, which was to be expected. Usually, I've had sex, minimum, once a day. With this many husbands, it just goes with the course. And I love that. I love being who they turn to when they need something that I'm able to give them.

It's also why I never care for prep. I'm usually plenty prepped as long as their dick is well lubed. And they always are. As is Tem's right now.

But it's been more than a week. So the sting when he finally breached the tight ring at my ass had me tensing and gasping in a way I haven't in a very long time. Tem's arm circled my waist, and he pulled me against his chest while he continued to push inside me.

"That's it, baby. Relax and let me have you," Tem purred in my ear.

I groaned at his words, reaching behind him to rest my hands on his thighs. My eyes closed as I let my head fall back on his shoulder. His hand was still wedged between us as he worked his dick inside me, which I appreciated, since it didn't allow him to just slam home. Not that he would. None of my husbands were sadists.

The burn as he pushed inside was intense. Harsher than I'm used to. It made my legs tremble, and my fingers to dig into his muscles. His other arm moved around my torso then, crossing my chest to hold me tight to him as he moved in deeper and deeper.

“Breathe, honey. You're taking me so good. You have no idea how much I love that you're giving me your body right now. Letting me have you first after this long dry spell.”

I shivered at Tem's words. My dick leaked a little more with everything he said. More and more he spoke, and my body reacted. Loosening for him, letting the burn of his cock pressing into depths that hadn't been touched in days spread and consume me. Mixing with the hint of pleasure that began at his words but was slowly picking up as he took control of my body.

A hiss left me as a mouth wrapped around my cock. Through hooded eyes, I barely register Saar's taking my dick to his throat. He's laying with his head between my legs and riding him is our gorgeous wife, watching with hunger in her eyes as she bounces hard and deep on Saar.

My groan is loud. My mind spins as every nerve ending in my body becomes a live wire. Hadley leaned forward, her hands against my chest. As much as I wanted to lean down and kiss her, between Tem finally moving inside me and Saar swallowing me, I knew if I shifted even a little bit, I'd fall over completely. Instead, I covered one of her hands with mine, keeping the other on Tem's thigh.

“You feel so good,” Tem huskily said in my ear. “Like your ass was made for me. And look at you in Saar's mouth. Look at how much pleasure he's taking from you.”

“Fuck,” I grunted, my balls drawing up tight. My eyes slam closed as my entire body is overcome with shuddering. Trying to hold tight so it’s not over too soon.

But it’s been so long.

“Let go, baby,” Tem whispered. His breath sent a trail of goosebumps over my skin. “Feed Saar your cum.”

“But... I don’t want-too soon.”

“Oh, sweetheart. We’re not going to let you off with a single orgasm. Go ahead and fill his throat and I’ll make sure you do again. I’m not anywhere near done with you yet. I’m going to keep this ass filled for hours.”

My moan is too loud to contain, and I do exactly as he said. My release is fierce as my eyes cross behind closed eyelids. My cock pulses and I gasp as Saar’s throat contracts around the head of my dick when he swallows my release. It only spurs me on as more shoots from my body.

And as Tem said, he doesn’t stop. Nor does Saar’s mouth on my softening dick, though his sucking is softer on my oversensitive flesh as he cares for me. He’s always enjoyed sucking on my soft cock once he’s emptied me. There’s been more times than I can count that he’s continued softly working me in his mouth while he lazily strokes his own rigid dick.

A silly, happy smile covers my mouth. Slapping skin and moans fill the air. Tem doesn’t stop rocking deep into me from behind, pressing against my prostate like a drum beat. But none of that matters. Because they’re doing exactly what I need them to.

Needing me. Loving me. Taking care of me. And using me for their pleasure.



MY FACE WAS STILL BURIED ON SAAR’S STOMACH AS I PANTED from where I eventually fell forward, Hadley’s hands in my hair as she continued to ride Saar. I swear, my dick forgot what

it was like to come, it's been so long. And the sting in my ass was a sweet misery I didn't want to fade away too quickly.

I took a breath, inhaling the scent of sex and Saar. I was close enough to his cock that I could also smell Hadley's release on him. The moan that tried to escape lodged in my throat. Nope. Time for a break. Tem was still not 100%.

Rolling away, I laid beside them. Then Hadley came down on top of me, making me smile as I hugged her tightly. Though she was facing the opposite direction, her head rested on my hip as her hand splayed across my sweat-drying skin.

We lay in the quiet, listening to the sound of a clock ticking somewhere. Feeling the breeze as it blew through the open doors, rustling the curtains. Hadley's fingers on my chest.

Glancing down, I found my wife-to-be tracing my Igarashi seal. The one my husbands and I share. It was a storm cell, like the eye of the storm, with the shadow of a monster inside. Anger spreading through what could be wings. Talons descending like whirling limbs of a tornado.

I couldn't wait to see the same one on her.

"We should get up and vacate the room for a while. Yonbe's been chomping at the bit to wash our bedding," Saar said, making no move to get up.

"He needs a raise," Tem said, as if we hadn't just discussed this.

"A big one," I agreed. "Maybe 20%."

"Done," Saar said.

Hadley grinned, her fingers still moving around my body along the lines of my seal.

Eventually, we pulled ourselves to our feet and headed into Saar's shower. Turning on the strip of rain heads along the center of his shower, we stood under the stream of hot water for a while, not cleaning or even talking. Just standing there, leaning against each other.

I knew my family was safe. Everything was okay. Everyone I loved most was under one roof.

But I also knew that I wasn't the only one lost in my head. I didn't know how to put into words what I wanted. What I needed to find peace again. I'm not a particularly violent person. Most of the time, I can find good in situations. But right now, all I wanted was for the people behind this to hurt as much as I did.

We didn't go back to hanging out in the wide-open space on the third floor. While we were in the shower, Yonbe had already gathered all the bedding and stripped it. There were just a couple high stacks of naked pillows.

So we headed downstairs and in the main kitchen. I wasn't all that surprised to find that Tara and Gale were puttering around.

"Yonbe is a fantastic cook," Tara said, "but I really need to fry something."

"Chop something into tiny pieces," Gale muttered, his knife flying through a couple carrots. That was all the proof I needed that they had the same frustrations I did.

I could almost pretend that it was any other day as my husbands slowly meandered into the kitchen and took seats around the island while we watched Gale and Taranis. Unlike most other days, there was no teasing banter and catching up.

When I said I wanted to spend every waking minute together for a period of time, this hadn't been what I had in mind. Maybe I'd taken our life for granted. By asking for more, I'd somehow called negative karma our way.

Hadley sighed. "I just can't make sense of it," she said in annoyance. "I know we've been speculating for days, but *what do they want with us?* What was their goal if they succeeded at abducting us? I get that torture and experimentation is a given, but *why?*"

Notus rubbed his fingers along her back, pressing his lips to her temple. But he didn't answer more than to try to soothe away her frustration.

“I don’t know,” Saar said eventually. “I think we’ve all been trying to figure that out.”

“Let’s say that they’ve somehow managed to ‘control’ people—as is loosely being suggested with the aerial monsters in mind,” Nephele said. “I think it’s evident that they don’t understand what storms are or how they operate. Otherwise, they’d have not tried to take us when we were together, but separate.”

“I’d like to believe that means they don’t have any storms working with them,” I said.

Nephele nodded. “I agree. But not the point at the moment. We were obviously mediocre on their list. Yet, they had enough gadgets to really do us some harm, as if they were preparing for a nightmare. So, do they think we’re ordinary and blasé, or are we a threat that they’ve been biding their time on?”

“Maybe the vans are just standard equipped with the goods,” Aratiri said. “In the same way planes and boats are. Life vests. Rafts. Floatation devices. Parachutes. When monster hunting, you carry around equipment that will serve you in the event that the worst monster is looking your way.”

I nodded, appreciating that answer more.

“We can also explain away the massive horde of hybrids attacking with the same idea. They simply tried to overwhelm us with numbers so there’s little resistance. And the nets were backup because, of course, we were going to go monster,” Nephele said.

“You know, this is neither here nor there, but I’m wondering if those nets would work on all species,” Tara said. He turned to look at us. “Could they have forced Ryker back? Or Koa?”

“That would be interesting to find out and I’m sure that someone at The Harem Project is looking into that answer,” Kohara said. “But I would be inclined to believe that it must work on many. How would they specify that it only makes a storm’s monster redundant?”

“They managed to get their hands on a willing unicorn so I suppose anything is possible,” Hadley said.

“Maybe,” Tem said. “We don’t know what happened to the person who took the unicorn’s blood. Nor do we know if it mixed with the magic because it couldn’t help it, holding onto some of its properties, or that was the intent. But I’m leaning towards the idea that whatever it was supposed to do, that wasn’t the full effect.”

“Why do you think that?” Saar asked.

“Because I find it hard to believe that two Nephilim wouldn’t have felt the presence of a unicorn’s touch coursing through my system had it been at full force,” Tem said. “Magic is sneaky if there’s intent behind it to keep it hidden. Unicorn blood is not subtle.”

“So there was just enough of a hint to keep it toxic, while the more powerful witch’s spell keeps it hidden?” Hadley asked.

Tem shrugged. “Maybe? Just a thought. I watched Calix’s expression when the witches said that there was unicorn blood mixed in. He went all dark and shadowy, and I knew he didn’t want to speak in the bigger audience more than he did. But I’m guessing there’s more to it than what he told us.”

“Is there a reason he wouldn’t tell us?” Hadley asked.

“Kids,” Gale answered. “They could repeat things without realizing they’re doing harm.”

For a while, the only sounds in the kitchen were those of cooking. Knives on cutting boards. The contents of pans being moved around. Utensils scraping and stirring. Liquid boiling. The aromas were picking up, too. I wasn’t sure what they were cooking, but my mouth was watering more and more as the minutes passed.

“We’ll head into Headquarters next week,” Kohara said. “I’m sure they have a lot that they’ve found out and maybe speculation that we haven’t thought about yet. Before we fall too deep into this dark hole of thought, let’s see what they have to report.”

“Good idea,” Saar said. “Maybe we’ll get some of the others to tag along. Share the information as widely as we can among our friends.”

Our group of friends kind of broke off into two different camps, though we shared information often and pooled together resources and ideas. There was Camp Fuck Up ORKA where Nash, Darkyn, Agni, and Aves were centered. Wyn had recently joined that fight after Jennings’ incident. And then there was Camp Annihilate Silence where Daemon, Malak, Savage, and our family concentrated. The others flitted between the two, depending on what was going on and where they were needed.

That being said, we were a whole. A collaborative with the intent that we’ll do whatever the bigger steps are together as one. We’re a force that will not be taken down easily when we’re together. And I know we were banking on that.

“I’m leaning towards the idea that they want to control us,” Hadley said. “I mean, everything we know about Silence says that their agenda is to extinguish every species that they deem too dangerous to exist. They didn’t come at us with the intent of killing us. And if they don’t want us dead, they want us on their team. What better way to force those to join you than to take their choice away?”

That made me sick to my stomach. We’re not talking slaves who are beaten and worked to the bone to avoid being tortured. That doesn’t work on a monster. We’d fight to the last breath.

The only way to make a monster obey when they didn’t want to was to take away their volition. To make them a puppet. To remove their will and thought, while still somehow keeping their body alive and operational.

If that’s what they’re doing with the shifting monsters, then the threat that Silence posed just got much bigger. Shifters weren’t complicated as species went. Everyone knows what a shifting monster looks like. But if they can control a storm or a nightmare, a banshee or an oni... the world is going to get a whole lot darker.



Hadley

A FEW DAYS LATER, WHILE WE WERE OUT OF BED AND TAKING showers, I returned to the third floor room to find it put back together as if it had never had four mattresses and all twelve of us sleeping there for more than a week.

“Yonbe works quickly,” Kohara said, amused, as he stood next to me. “Was probably getting tired of us all moaning in here, so he’s not so subtly hinting that it’s time to get back to normal.”

“I’m a little disappointed,” I said. “I was getting used to us sleeping in a dog pile.”

He chuckled, wrapping an arm around my waist. “You never have to sleep alone. You know that, right?”

Smiling at him, I nodded. “Yeah, I know. I really don’t mind sleeping alone. It’s nice sometimes.”

“I wouldn’t know,” he said, smirking. I grinned in return.

“I guess I just liked having us all together. Knowing that everyone was there and breathing.”

“Yep, I understand that,” he said.

Tem walked out of his room then. “We can always convert a room into a sleeping nest that fits us all,” he said. “Or build one.”

“I think this house is big enough. I still get lost over a month later,” I said.

They both laughed as Kohara turned me toward the stairs, though we took the lift down two floors. Today was the day that we were heading to The Harem Project. We were going to get a report on what they found and see what they thought was going on. What Silence's intent was and why. I didn't know if I was anxious, terrified, or excited. Maybe all three.

It felt as though everyone shared the same mixed emotions that I did. We gathered around the kitchen that morning, sitting close and squished around the table instead of spreading out around the room, as we ate the half a dozen quiches in silence.

This was a big moment for us. We were facing something that was traumatizing and still knowing that we weren't going to get any closure. All we had were guesses.

After we ate, we piled into three vehicles and followed Kohara.

The relocation portals didn't tell us where we crossed into. While I knew that signs saying 'Welcome to Ohio' would be a dead giveaway and be begging for human attention around the hidden in plain sight portals, it would have been nice to have some indication of what continent we'd just crossed into at least.

Sure, I could ask, but it wasn't all that important. Just a curiosity as I watched the early morning sun suddenly change to dusk as we crossed through the arch. Being suddenly surrounded by nighttime told me in what direction we traveled at least.

We parked in an underground garage that felt too crowded for the time of day. Though I supposed that most of The Harem Project operations are twenty-four hours, so that meant they were fully staffed regardless of the time of day. Which worked out well since their employees were all over the world.

Joining us were Juniper Daemon, Bryn Savage, and Lazarus Malak. I could tell a demon from a mile away so Juniper was easy to identify. And I already knew Laz was a Nephilim. How could I forget that, when he'd saved two of my husbands' lives recently. But all I knew about Bryn was that he was a *monster*. Something dark and terrifying. The darkest

of monsters could hide their kind from other supernaturals when they wanted. I didn't know if it was intentional on Bryn's part or not, but if I remembered correctly, I thought he was a fouke.

And if that was the case, I'd rather hang out with the demon.

We greeted our friends before heading into the building and following Koh through the hallways. Somehow we managed to squeeze into one elevator, though it was tight with a lot of groping hands. I didn't mind at all.

"That was closer than I'd like to be with you," Juniper said as we stepped out, looking at Notus with a bemused smile.

Notus smirked, waggling his eyes. "Sure it is, demon. I felt your hands."

Juniper rolled his eyes and turned to Koh. Kohara grinned and we followed him down hallways until he opened a conference room door. This one was bigger than the last one I accompanied him to. There were more than a dozen people already there, some I vaguely recognized from that first meeting. We gathered around the table, coming up a few seats short.

No one complained, we just sat on laps. I stifled a laugh when Notus patted his lap for Juniper, giving him a wink and suggestive eyebrow waggle. The demon sighed, shook his head, and urged Arat up. Aratiri happily sat in Notus's lap, giving him a kissy face before he settled and faced the table. I settled in Nephele's lap, giving up my chair to one of the others.

"I apologize, Kohara. I didn't realize you'd be bringing guests with your family," a man said.

Kohara shrugged. "No worries."

"Before we begin, I'd like to inquire that you're well? All of you?" the same man asked.

Kohara nodded, giving him a smile. "We're fine, Wayne. A bit of a road to get there, but I assure you, we're healed and good as new. Thank you."

Wayne nodded. He took a breath and shifted to the screen that covered the wall behind them. The lights dimmed as a projector came on and an image of the nets covered the wall. It was almost frightening how real it looked. As if it were three dimensional and hanging in the middle of the room.

“What we’ve found is that the magic attached to this is very deep, complicated spells. Witch’s magic, of course, which seems to be a major theme in our findings going forward,” Wayne said.

“Witch magic?” Nephele asked, shifting me in his lap. He narrowed his eyes. “Maybe we need to get a Taika on the phone so they can listen in.”

Saar nodded and pulled out his phone. We waited for him to explain before setting it on speaker and shoving it to the center of the table. “I have Lazer on the line. Torin and Veri are with him.”

Wayne nodded and repeated what he’d already told us before moving on. “From what we can tell, there’s strong magic ties. While we know that there are a few other species in the world able to imbue magic—fae, elves, and such—this magic is very clearly belonging to a witch based on the structure and residue.” He looked at Kohara for a minute. “And based on what you told me of the injuries you and yours sustained.”

Kohara nodded.

“As long as you’re touching it from the outside, it’s harmless. But when the inside touches you, that’s when the spells are activated. This explains why the aerial shifters were able to handle them without plummeting to their deaths, their monsters having been forced inside.”

“Another key takeaway is that the magic gets progressively stronger. From what we have ripped away from one, I think that there were deeper triggers within the magic,” this second man that wasn’t Wayne said and glanced at Taranis. “You were fighting to get up and call forth your monster, yes?” Taranis nodded. “With every surge of power you pulsed with, another layer of magic was activated. The

first was simply to put your monster away, which was default upon contact. The second was to render you breathless and weak. The third was to infiltrate your system. It was pulled off you at that point, but it looks like the next layer was slow-seeping poison.”

Taranis scowled.

“Does it function on other species?” I asked.

“We haven’t actually tried it on anyone but I think so. We can’t find anything that suggests or points to storms specifically.”

“What about the men that the Aves brought here?” Saar asked.

Wayne shook his head. “This is going to sound strange but it’s like they’ve shut down. A switch flipped and they’re offline completely.”

“Did you identify them?” Bronte asked.

Another man nodded. “We did. All three of them. Two of their families had reported them missing years ago. The third doesn’t appear to have anyone, so there’s no telling how long he’s been associated with Silence.”

“Is there any indication that they were forced into what they’re doing?” Saar asked.

I appreciated that he was repeating some of the things we’d talked about.

“It’s hard to say. What I can tell you is that whatever hibernating state they’ve reverted to is not natural. Whether they joined Silence voluntarily or were coerced, we don’t know.”

“But we’re making every humane effort to revive their coherent thought so that we can speak with them.”

“They dropped nets on us,” Tempest said. “I don’t think a little inhumane treatment is out of line.”

“Especially if it means answers,” Lazarus agreed.

“To be an opposing voice,” Juniper said. “If they weren’t there voluntarily and they cannot control themselves, then I’m not sure they deserve the inhumane treatment.”

“Damn demon,” Gale muttered.

Juniper smirked, sitting back, relaxed in his chair as he turned his attention back forward again.

“As Juniper states, we’ve thought the same thing. For now, we’re making every effort to remain humane. *For now*, that’s where we sit with that.”

“Tell us about the magic,” a voice from Saar’s phone said.

“It’s highly volatile, but it’s also complex. Like the witch knows what they’re doing but is incredibly sloppy. I actually don’t think that Taranis triggered the third round before it went off. But then, it might just be that our interpretation of it is wrong. Maybe it’s a timed release and not a trigger release.”

“Sloppy but complex,” the voice on the phone said. I could hear their frown.

“What else did you find?” Saar asked.

The screen flicked, and there was a whole array of things displayed. Some of which actually looked like weapons while others were inconspicuous, like a scarf and gloves.

While I wasn’t always sure which they were talking about, the things I heard were chilling.

“With a touch, can draw your blood out through your skin—no puncture wound necessary.”

“Can instantly render you unconscious.”

“Can lock you inside your mind, fighting your own worst fears.”

“Can pull your memories and play them as movies.”

The list of items went on and I found that I huddled further into Nephele’s hold. These weren’t just items of assault. They were all different kinds of torture. Psychological. Physical. Mental. Emotional. There was something revealed that

touched each mode of attack, one more terrifying than the next.

“They really wanted to incapacitate whoever they got their hands on,” I murmured.

“Yes,” one of the men said. “While a lot of it had the same magic signature as the net—volatile but sloppy work—there were some that were tight as a vault. No loopholes. No errors. Nothing that could break it—except a stronger witch, which we have.”

“Fortunately,” a voice on the phone said, different from the one who’d been asking questions.

The more everyone spoke, the more uneasy I became. What kind of person even thought to make a piece of fabric that sends electric shocks through your nerve endings and remains in your bones, causing incredible pain that can be controlled by a remote? Or a liquid that is absorbed through the skin and into the bloodstream, where it can make your blood clot, increasing the likelihood of an aneurysm, heart attack, stroke...

A knock on the door made conversation pause and the entire room turned to look as it inched open and a man stuck his head in. He flushed at the attention but looked at Wayne. “I’m sorry to interrupt, but there’s something that you need to see.”

“Now?” Wayne asked.

The man’s gaze flicked to Kohara before his gaze settled on Wayne. “Yes, Director.”

Severely frowning, Wayne stood to follow. As did Kohara, and then Bronte. Before I knew it, we were all following the man into the hall and a procession headed for the elevators. This time we took several, except that our family and three friends squeezed into one again.

“Don’t pretend you don’t like the cuddle, demon,” Tara teased. I smiled, but I think we all knew it was half-hearted.

My heart was racing already, dreading what we were about to see. I had to believe that it was unprecedented, that the

meeting was interrupted. Which meant it had to be important, right? Although I kept trying to convince myself that it wasn't necessarily a bad thing, I wasn't sure that my gut believed that.

We stepped out of the elevator on the ninth floor. The hall was lined with doors and long windows. As we passed the first one and I peered inside, the uneasy feeling that had settled in my stomach as we talked about the items found amplified. Inside was a half pulled curtain. The side I could see beyond showed a gurney covered in blood.

For a brief minute, I was terrified that maybe The Harem Project wasn't any better than ORKA or Silence. The fear of that weighed me down, prevented me from taking a breath. It wasn't until Nephele placed his hand on the small of my back to keep me moving that I realized I'd slowed way down.

“What's wrong?” he asked.

I shook my head. Oh fuck, what do I do if The Harem Project is just like them and my guys are all on board?

But then we stopped, and I heard the intake of breaths. I almost didn't want to look. Far too afraid of what I'd see and the potential for a disastrous future that I wasn't sure I'd make it to.

Nephele pulled me to his chest, his muscles stiff. He swore under his breath, and I couldn't stop myself from peeking around. Twisting in his arms, I shifted until I could see through the bodies.

The room beyond was just like the one I'd peeked into. There was a curtain, but this one bunched against the wall to reveal what wasn't hidden. It looked like any medical room might, but laying on the gurney was... unidentifiable.

“What—?” I asked, not sure what I was seeing.

It was a body, yes, but completely broken and bloody. There was a patch on their scaly legs that was rubbed bare but... in a very brutalized way. As if someone had taken a cheese grater and tried to peel them apart, layer by layer. They were bleeding profusely from all orifices. Missing a hand. Ribs sticking out of their chest.

Was their chest even moving?

Bile rose in my throat as my eyes continued to take in their appearance. In the hall, everyone was silent. Staring in horror.

“What happened?” Kohara asked.

“He was dropped on our doorstep,” the man said.

“Our doorstep?” Wayne said, voice sharp. “Explain.”

“Headquarters. In Louisville. Dropped at the glass doors, which are locked this time of night, and left for dead.”

“Is he going to die?” Bronte asked.

There wasn't an answer.

“By whom?” Wayne asked.

The man pointed through the window. There was a tray next to the bed, covered in things that were dripping in blood. But right there, clear as day, was a knife that everyone recognized all too well.

The solid-piece black material of a Silence blade.

“They're calling us out,” Wayne said. “But is it a threat or a warning?”

“My guess? Both,” Kohara said.



Hadley

I TRIED NOT TO GAG. TRULY I DID. BUT I COULDN'T LOOK away from the man stretched out, looking like anything but a person or a monster. He was a heap of body parts. Because I couldn't look away, I was almost choking on the contents of my stomach as it tried to regurgitate breakfast.

And also because my gaze was glued to the body, I saw when he moved. It was slight and the second he did, he was surrounded by people who seemed to come out of nowhere.

Turning my face into Nephelē, I felt the bright heat of a Nephilim, maybe several, beyond the glass. We were silent as we stood there, watching and waiting. Though I didn't watch. I couldn't. My eyes stung, my heart raced. All I could think was *that could be someone I know*.

The real problem wasn't any supposed personal connection to this man. And while his life was the primary focus right now, the message behind it was what needed more conversation.

Our meeting had been interrupted and when we filed out of the hall back toward the elevators, I thought for sure we were heading home so that they could focus on the newest development.

I was wrong. Once more, we piled back into the conference room, settling into silence as the gory image burned behind our eyes. I stared at the table, but all I saw was a broken body, bloody and raw.

“We’ve never hidden our sites,” a man said. “Any of them.”

I looked up, taking in the expressions around the table. Tension was rolling through the air and while I knew that, I wasn’t sure what the issue was. Silence hadn’t hidden any of theirs, either.

Someone swore, lowering his head into his hands.

“We need to work on security,” Kohara said. “Shut them all down temporarily.”

“All of them?” Wayne asked.

Kohara nodded, getting to his feet and pulling out his phone. “All of them. Lockdown. Pull reports of those inside the buildings and see if there’s been anything suspicious. Check all security footage.”

Wayne and a handful of others pulled out their cell phones as Kohara paced to the far end of the room to stare out the window, his phone to his ear as he spoke into it.

“What’s his job again?” I whispered to Nephele.

He chuckled. “He’s president of the department that monitors Silence,” he said.

I stared at Kohara, eyes wide. “I didn’t realize he was a big boss.”

Several of my men looked at me, smirking at whatever expression I had pointed at Kohara.

“Sexy, yeah?” Tem asked. I caught his wink when glancing his way. “I love when he gets all business bossy.”

Saar nodded. “But he’s all business here. Doesn’t even allow fun in his office.”

Tem snorted. “You’re loud, Saar.”

Saar shrugged. “Whatever. I could be quiet for one time.”

“No, you can’t,” Bronte murmured, looking away when Saar turned his dark eyes toward him. Bronte licked his lips, fighting a smile as he stared at Kohara’s back.

I giggled, covering my mouth to hide the sound. Kohara turned, his eyes sweeping over us as he spoke into the phone. He rolled his eyes at whatever tell he saw in the way we were trying to look innocent as we watched him. A smile pulled at his lips before he turned his back on us again.

“Yep, sexy boss man,” Tem said, sighing.

“There’s one of those in every family,” Lazarus said. “You should see Hadrian go all legalese over the phone. Calm as fuck, while the other person fumbles and stammers their way through it.” He shifted in his seat.

Juniper chuckled. “Yep, Bastian too. It’s... chilling.”

We turned towards Bryn. He’d been silent, not saying a thing since our initial greeting. His brown eyes looking at us, amused. “We don’t have business types.”

“Doesn’t Koa own all of Brooklyn?” Aratiri said, frowning. “I’m pretty sure I’ve tried to buy like eight buildings from him and he just gives me this ‘I’ll eat your face’ look before Calix tells him he’s such a good boy.” He rolled his eyes.

Bryn laughed. “Okay, yes. Koa owns some shit. But we don’t see business Koa at home.”

“Leave work at work?” I asked, tilting my head.

He looked at me, a half-smile on his lips. “Something like that.”

“Koa is a Little, and he’s Little basically from the moment he walks in the door,” Nephele said. “Unless there are others around, anyway.”

“Oh!” I said, trying to remember Koa from the get together. I’m sure I saw him, but for the life of me, I couldn’t remember what he looked like right now. I couldn’t picture him.

“Calix is Koa’s Daddy,” Nephele explained, “and really the only one who cares for Koa.”

“Not true,” Bryn said. “We all care for Koa. He’s just not our... Little, I guess.”

“I meant caretaker, Bryn. I’m not questioning your love for him at all,” Neph said.

Bryn frowned, nodding. He turned away from the conversation, focusing on Kohara again. I raised a brow before looking at Neph. He smiled, shrugging. I had more questions, especially with Bryn’s response, but I thought it best not to ask right now. It was very obvious that he was through.

A phone rang, and I turned back to the table in time to see Wayne answer his cell. There must have been something in the way he sucked a breath that had the whole room quieting while he listened to whoever spoke on the other end.

Kohara turned from the window, watching Wayne. His lips pursed.

“Thanks. Let us know,” Wayne said, setting his phone down as the screen turned dark.

“What is it?” Kohara asked, pulling the phone from his ear and staring at Wayne patiently.

Wayne shook his head. “A family was just abducted. An entire harem.” He looked at Kohara. “Of humans.”

I was sure my expression matched everyone else’s. The unsettled silence felt like a heartbeat, pulsing with each second that passed. And then everyone was talking at once.

“Are we sure they’re all humans?”

“How do we know it was Silence?”

“What would they want with humans?”

“Where?”

“How long ago?”

“Anyone else?”

“Are there any ties to The Harem Project aside from their meetings?”

The questions buzzed around in my head, but for some reason, all I could picture was my sister. I didn’t know how it happened. Nor was anyone willing to tell me. All I knew for

certain was that she'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time. But a feeling in my gut said that Essen had somehow gotten in the way of something like this. She's been protecting someone. Because that's the kind of thing my sister would do.

I had no reason for this sudden revelation and nothing to base it on. In reality, I was probably way off. Maybe she'd simply walked in front of a car that one of their agents was driving.

"Hadley?" Nephela murmured, his lips brushing the shell of my ear.

The room came back to me as I took a deep breath. Questions were still being thrown out, but it didn't sound like anyone was trying to answer right now. I blinked around, seeing the stress, grief, and panic that filled the room. Phones were out as people talked into them while still talking into the room.

I brushed a hand over my face and looked back at Neph. He had his hair pulled back into an elastic, his perfectly manicured beard soft and shiny under the lights of the conference room. His stormy eyes looked at me with concern.

"You alright?" he asked, his fingers tracing along my jaw.

"Yeah," I said, shaking my head a little. I mean, 'yeah' was a lie. I don't think anyone was okay.

"Maybe they're just grabbing anyone they can reach after their failed attempt at us?" Gale's words cut into the room, pulling my concentration back. Biting my lip, I pressed my forehead to Neph's shoulder to listen again.

"Maybe humans are easier to manipulate than monsters," Lazarus said, a frown in his voice. If I wasn't mistaken, he had at least one human in his harem. A chill raced down my spine at the thought. "We thought humans were safe, but what if they're just the next species to experiment on?"

"To be fair, there are a ton of species that are stronger than humans in the mundane world," someone said. "And somehow, humans have outcompeted them all. Weapons, tools, fire... Arguably speaking, they are the higher species.

Although they're weaker on their own, fragile and intimidatable, they're resourceful and destructive with a deep desire to be the ultimate apex predator. Even among their own species."

Kohara dropped his phone into his pocket and let out a long breath. "Alright, we're going home. Keep me updated."

Wayne nodded as everyone stood. Our family and friends headed for the door without speaking and as before, we all stuffed ourselves into a single elevator. I was close to the demon this time and watched as he leaned into Tempest's hug, his eyes closed as stress lined his features. Bryn looked the same, his shoulder leaning heavy against Saar's. And Lazarus was behind Zilan, his head on Zilan's shoulder.

The duress in our little group was heavy. I could feel it like a storm brewing in the distance. Gaining mass and energy.

We stepped into the parking garage and headed for the cars.

"Be safe," Kohara told our friends. "As much as hiding isn't the answer, maybe lay low for a bit."

Lazarus nodded. Bryn rubbed a hand through his hair as he turned to his car. "You too, storms." Juniper paused behind Kohara's car. Koh stopped, resting his hand on Juniper's chest before moving past him but the demon stopped him.

"Don't do anything stupid," Juniper murmured. "Not without us."

My heart raced as I paused to watch them.

Kohara chuckled. "Your nightmare hungry again, June?"

Juniper's lips twisted. He rolled his eyes, but it was teasing. "Always. Ryker is insatiable. In many ways." Kohara laughed but Juniper still didn't let him go. He waited until Koh met his eyes again. "I mean it, Koh."

Kohara tilted his head. "I have no idea what you think I'm going to do, but rest assured, we know that together we're stronger."

“Together,” Juniper said. “Not just twelve storms. But twelve storms, six demons, six divine monsters, six Canidae, four Savages...” he trailed off, but I knew he meant all of them. Not one single family but all of their families.

Kohara rested his head against the side of Juniper’s for a minute. “We’re not planning anything right now.”

“Yes, right now. It’s later I’m worried about.”

“Noted.”

“And you’re not even denying it.”

Kohara smiled and then shocked me when he licked up the side of Juniper’s face, making the demon jump away as he swore, wiping at his face and glaring. Kohara grinned, winked, and rounded the car.

Juniper shook his head, frowning after Kohara. He turned, met my eyes, inclined his head, and headed for his own car.



I KNEW AS SOON AS WE STEPPED INSIDE THAT SOMETHING WAS different. I paused at the stairs and looked over the yard.

“What’s wrong?” Raiden asked, stopping at my side and looking with me. His question caused everyone to do the same and I could feel the tension increase and the energy zing between us.

And that’s when I felt it. The increase in storm energy. Low and humming in the air. I groaned, tipping my head back. Just as I spun to the door, it opened, the handle being pulled from Saar’s hand.

And there was my mother, her hands on her hips as her eyes immediately landed on mine. “Hadley Ann. Explain why you haven’t answered your phone in two weeks.”

I winced and suddenly my husbands weren’t staring in shock anymore but looking at me with wide smiles. When the shock wore off a minute later, I narrowed my eyes. “How did you find my address?”

She sniffed. "I'm your mother."

"That's not an answer, Mom." I moved through my men and let my mother pull me into a hug. Her stiff shoulders relaxed as she clung to me tightly and I knew without asking that she had been terrified for me. We'd lost one. And I knew all too well how easily it was to lose another. I'd almost lost two just over a week ago.

Something that I was going to have to tell her.

"Bring her in, Evie," one of my fathers said.

"Everyone is here?" I asked, internally groaning.

"Yep. All of your parents are going to hear how irresponsible you are not to call us. *After* you introduce us to your men."

I followed my mother in, glancing at said men to find them all trying to contain their smiles. They won't be smiling in a minute. I was sure of that.

I have nine parents. The mother that gave birth to me was Evelyn. But I also had Sidnee and Rolly. And then there were my six fathers: Nikolas, Forster, Marlen, Alan, Seth, and Benson. Although it's not hard to know who birthed my siblings and I since, you know, we grew there for nine months, there was never a paternity test for father. Based on my looks alone, I could go with either Benson or Nikolas, but then again, I've seen all our family's extended family and it's really no use trying to guess.

Not like it matters anyway. We're just a big family.

"First, I'd like to say that I have a very good reason for not answering," I said. "Primarily because my phone is off. We went away for a week vacation."

"That's fine," Dad said. "Completely understandable."

"But why haven't you turned your phone back on?" Pop asked.

"Well," I said, looking at my husbands. There was no getting around it so instead of trying, I just told them the truth. "Because we were attacked on the mountain and two of my

guys almost died. Actually, one did, but they have some Nephilim on speed dial and it could have been worse, I guess, but when we got home we just kind of holed up together while the trauma settled.”

Most of it I said in a rush, tears burning my eyes. Saying it out loud was like experiencing it all over again. I turned my face and when the sob in my chest built too thickly, I covered my face with my hands.

Arms circled me. At least two sets. Several deep breaths later, I managed to get myself under control and contain the tears.

No one spoke while I caught my breath so when I looked up to see my parents with wide, horrified eyes, my moms with shiny gazes, I knew they weren't mad at me anymore.

No. But they pulled me into their arms and hugged me so tightly that the tears I'd managed to keep contained came spilling out and I sobbed for the first time since we left the mountain.



Bronte

THE SUDDEN ARRIVAL OF HADLEY'S PARENTS MADE US ALL call our families to let them know what happened. Not only that we were okay but also that it was time for them to be careful. Given the world we lived in, we were careful anyway. But if storms were now a target, we needed to spread the word.

We let Hadley lead the discussion about what happened on the mountain, not sure how involved she wanted her parents to be. But it seemed that she had no problem telling them everything. Once that was evident, Kohara and Saar primarily spoke, sharing what information we had.

I didn't tell my parents a lot. Just that we'd had an incident and that they needed to be careful. We had reason to believe that Silence was now targeting storms. I didn't want them overly worried and to try to interfere or do something reckless. I just wanted them cautious.

Two days after Hadley's parents arrived, they were still here. Taking up a lot of the basement. Considering that's the only floor that had spare rooms, I wasn't surprised. They also took over the main kitchen, preparing feasts for each meal and overall taking care of us.

While Hadley seemed a little put out that her family had moved themselves in, she was also glad they were there. Her siblings stopped by too. One or two at a time throughout the last couple days.

I hadn't been back to work since we returned from the mountain. Kohara and Aratiri checked in their offices over the last few days, but otherwise, we remained together as a family. Although we all tried to keep a positive exterior and carry on with our lives as we normally would, I think there was just a cloud of doom hanging over our heads.

Dread pooled in my chest. Fear was always just under my skin. It made everything feel so charged. As if we were waiting for the next ball to drop.

Every day, every time one of our phones rang, we waited for someone to report another attack. Silence has struck somewhere else. Silence has killed someone. Silence is hunting this species or that.

There wasn't any news. Not on the harem of humans or the monster that Silence had dropped on The Harem Project's door, barely recognizable as a living thing.

That day, I had known when we were brought to the ninth-floor that it was going to be bad. It was the medical wing for the severely injured. The only thing I could hear as we walked was my own internal begging that it was no one I knew. Sure, selfish, but I was too raw right now to deal with another personal blow.

In that moment, relief made me feel like shit at not recognizing the person was quickly followed by ugly guilt that I even thought that. And then nausea at what I saw. I barely heard the words that followed as I shivered, Tara's arms wrapped around me as if he were holding all the shaking particles in my body together.

He probably was.

But it seemed the blows kept coming. A harem of humans! I still couldn't wrap my head around it. What did they want with humans?

The only answer that I could think of as a means to go forward was clear—we needed someone on the inside. But not a lowly minion. We needed someone on the top.

How do we get that person, though?

It's been long speculated that those in charge remain anonymous because they didn't want retaliation. They wanted to protect their families. Yeah, hypocritical.

Taking a breath, I tried to release my thoughts with the exhale. It was difficult to go through an entire day without falling down that dark and dreary rabbit hole. Looking over my shoulder and just waiting for more bad news. Another blow.

I was exaggerating when I said I couldn't get through a day without these thoughts. In reality, I couldn't get through a whole hour without them.

Curling up in a blanket on my balcony, I watched the overcast day. Living on an island meant it was usually sunny. Storms that come along usually do just that. Come and go, lingering occasionally around our house but ultimately disperse. I thought it was the mood of twelve storms plus Hadley's nine parents that were making the clouds gather and stick around.

A flitting thought that it's basically a beacon sitting over our house telling the world—and Silence—that a house of monsters live here passed through my mind. But what did it matter? It's not like we could just tell ourselves that everything was fine and it be that way.

Because it wasn't.

A hand tangling in my hair made me close my eyes. I took a breath, smelling the deep earth within the energy hanging heavy in the air as Raiden moved beside me. I knew it was Raiden without looking. The strong foundational energy that is the quake brothers is accompanied by a soft floral scent when it's Saar.

“What're you doing?” he asked.

I shrugged. “Sitting here.”

“Thinking dark and damning thoughts?”

I snorted, glancing up at him. “Why do you think that?”

“Well, if you’re on the third floor and catch a glimpse of the ocean in the distance, you can see it raging.” He looked down at me with a knowing smirk.

Sighing, I leaned back in the chair. “Yeah, well. Are your thoughts filled with rainbows and jewels?”

Raiden crouched next to me, pulling my face to his. “No. But everyone I love is under a single roof. I know where they are. I know they’re safe. Right now, that’s going to have to be enough to satisfy me.”

“How long are we safe here?” I asked, not really wanting the answer.

“How long until we’re followed individually?” he countered.

I scowled, glaring at him. Yes, the thought had popped up many times, but I’d violently shoved it away, unable to fathom that thought. But if you can’t take a dozen storms together, you sure as fuck can take them out individually.

“I know you don’t want to think about it. Neither do I. But right now, it’s a risk we’re taking. It’s a risk everyone is taking these days. Even humans. But unlike the clueless humans in the world, we at least know the threat is there and can prepare for it. The vast population cannot.”

“Are you saying that I shouldn’t worry because they have it worse?”

Raiden laughed, resting his forehead against mine. “No, Bronte. Not at all.”

“Then what?”

He shook his head against mine, his hand in my hair tightening. “I don’t really know. I guess maybe I just need us to pretend a little sometimes.”

“Pretend that life is normal and nothing is chasing us? That we get to enjoy our happily ever after now that we have our wife?” My tone was bitter because it wasn’t fucking fair. We *just* got Hadley. We shouldn’t have to face this shit right now.

We should have the chance to enjoy our family and grow together!

Raiden nodded. "Yes, exactly."

I humphed, making him chuckle. He pulled me to my feet, stripping the blanket from me before sitting where I was and pulling me onto his lap, the blanket settling around us. As much as I wanted to pout and stay irritated, I loved being in his arms. I loved being in all of my husbands' arms and my wife's. It's the only place I wanted to be.

A low rumble in the distance made me look at the sky again. Since there were trees in our backyard that were old and tall, I could barely see the horizon. Not enough to make out the ocean but just a hint beyond to the big storm cell looming. There were blue skies out to sea.

Sighing, I leaned back.

Closing my eyes, I concentrated on Raiden's mouth at my neck. Slow, soft kisses that he peppered over my skin. His arms wrapped tightly around me, holding me close against his chest. The heavy blanket draped over us, keeping out the cool breeze that came with the darkened sky.

Thunder rumbled overhead again. The threat of rain on the air.

"You know, you're one of the best things that's ever happened to my brother and me," he murmured.

I smiled. "Am I? What about everyone else?" I was teasing, of course. I knew we were all equally important to each other. Even though relationships differed, they were all just as vital and significant as the next.

"Saar and I have always been close as twins go, but there's been a missing link between us. We found that when we shared a lover together, it finally closed. But those moments were fleeting. Glimpses of what might lie ahead. And then you come along and give us everything. You can never know how much that means to us."

I smiled, letting myself relax entirely into his embrace. Meaning something to someone is the only feeling in the

world worth cherishing. Knowing that they love you, that you hold such a special place within them, is an entirely new kind of high.

“Why do you like sharing someone?” I asked.

He sighed. “No idea.” Chuckling, he grazed his lips over my neck, making me shiver. “It’s probably weird and unhealthy, maybe sick even. But it feels right. Like someone was always meant to be between us. Holding us both. Allowing us to take what we need from them at the same time and loving it.”

“I do love it.”

His smile against my skin made me grin wider. “I know you do. So do we. Maybe more than we should.”

I shook my head. “You’re not hurting anyone. There’s nothing wrong with taking pleasure how you want it.”

He chuckled. “I’m glad you feel that way. How about if I take some pleasure now?”

It’s like my dick heard him and reacted all on its own, chubbing up before the question was even finished. I nodded, immediately wondering how close the nearest lube was. I really needed to have one stashed every foot or so.

Before I could mention it, Raiden’s hand slid down my abdomen and cupped my dick through my shorts. A groan caught in my throat as he moved further south, cradling my balls in his hand and rubbing.

My hips bucked up. As soon as they left his lap, his other hand slid down the back of my pants, moving between my ass cheeks. Pressing against my hole. Teasing me.

Already, a string of pre-cum leaked onto my stomach. I could feel the dampness as I pushed between his two hands, my body not sure which it wanted more of. Meanwhile, his mouth never left my exposed skin over my shoulder and neck.

“I love how tight this hole is,” he murmured. “Want my finger, baby?”

I nodded and shook my head at the same time. It probably looked like I'd lost my mind, unsure what answer I was giving. Raiden chuckled, understanding immediately. I wanted penetration but only his finger if that's what he wanted. When the tip of his finger pushed past the tight ring of muscle, I released a frustrated breath.

Just in time for him to move his hand under my shorts and grip my cock in his fist. I whined, pressing the back of my head into his shoulder as he slowly—so fucking slowly!—moved his hand down the length of my shaft and then agonizingly relaxed back to the top.

“Raiden,” I whimpered.

He released me entirely with both hands and shoved my shorts down. Somehow keeping me on his lap, he placed a tube of lube in my hand before jutting us both up with his hips so he could remove his pants, too.

And then I had his dick pressed to my bare ass. I wiggled, adjusting him between my crack before moving my ass.

“Mm,” he hummed, holding me against him for a minute while I worked his hot, rigid dick against me. “Love your body. I want to wear it.”

A breathless laugh escaped me as I grinned, nodding. I shifted forward, just long enough for him to lube up. I heard the tube drop to the ground with a *thunk* before his hands moved me into place. The head of his cock immediately pressed to my hole, and I sucked in a breath as he pushed inside.

The initial sting made me grunt, and then he had both hands on my hips, pulling me down. The burn and discomfort made the whiny, pathetic sounds fill the air until he'd made his home within my ass. I settled on his lap and he wrapped his arms around me in a hug.

For a while, we didn't move. My dick throbbed. Now that the burn had subsided, all I could feel was full. Good, hot, full. His cock had its own pulse and I swear, I was so tight around

him, I could feel it. Feel the way my body molded around his. His heartbeat racing against my back.

“Slowly,” he said, his mouth never stopped moving against my neck.

My feet barely touched the ground. Since we were close to the railing, I braced them there instead. Which had my body weight taking him deeper. I tried not to get ahead of myself. He felt too good. So fat and long inside me, turning me inside out.

Using my leg muscles where my feet anchored on the railing, I pulled my body off his until he was completely outside of me. His cock held in place by my clenched ass cheeks. The muscles in my glutes worked to hold me up. Swallowing, I lowered myself down slowly. So slowly I felt like I was being skewered.

Legs shaking uncontrollably, I moaned as he filled me to the brink. I whimpered, shuddering as he finally impaled me fully.

“Again. That’s so good. How tightly you’re squeezing me.”

Shivering, I did as he said. Pulling myself up and off him, still slowly but not as slow as when I lowered myself down again. It was so damn intense I was barely breathing by the fourth repetition. My chest heaved as I struggled to breathe.

Raiden’s arms tightened, holding me there. In the place where he was so deep, I could taste his cum on my tongue.

“You’re fucking perfect, baby,” he breathed in my ear. “So good at pleasing me. Making me feel good.”

My dick throbbed with need at every word.

“My turn. Will you let me use your sweet ass, honey?”

“Yes,” I groaned. “Please. Fill me, Raid.”

“Always.”

He didn’t take his arms off me. Still holding me, vice-like, to his chest. But somehow, he managed long, drawn out thrusts

as I gripped him tightly. I stared into the gray sky where a streak of lightning flashed overhead. Feeling the way his body speared mine.

So deep. Stretching me so wide. Stabbing at my prostate as if he was slowly sinking a bayonet into his victim. Pressing hard into that spot. Cum pooled on my stomach, dripping down to the base of my dick and then further to my balls.

The blanket finally slipped off us completely and our lovemaking was on display for the storm overhead. Raiden pushed into me again, holding me there. Shoving me down, as if he were trying to get deeper.

Each time he did, I could feel my fear prodding at my mind. Trying to push its way through my arousal. Warning me that this could be the last time we're like this. That everything could slip away.

My inhale was shaky as tears stung my eyes. Raiden slid out, held, and then pushed back in, using his strength to skewer me deeply. I swallowed around the lump in my throat because I could feel that he shared the same fear. It was written there in the long, drawn-out rocking of his hips. How we gripped onto each other. How shaky our breaths were. How desperately we clung together when he pushed in deeper and deeper, holding there for several seconds.

"I love you," I said, a tear trickling down my cheek.

Raiden nodded. I felt his swallow. His fingers dug into my ribs, making the pain mix with the pleasure of his cock jammed tight against my prostate. He didn't answer for a minute, and I thought he was too choked up to do so. Too lost in his own fear.

When he answered the same, it was low. Filled with a panicking kind of fear. He rearranged his arms on me as he picked up his thrusts.

It was still long, slow movements punctuated by deep pauses, but he worked on our orgasms now instead of just feeling. Building mine until I was ready to combust. I didn't want to. I wanted to stay like this forever. If we could lose

ourselves in this world, in this moment, then nothing could be taken from us. We'd exist just like this.

But then his hand closed around my dick. While I generally get off without anyone or anything touching my dick, when someone did, it was immediately combustion. This time was no different. The strangled cry that left my mouth had my entire body spasming, my muscles stiffening.

And then his release followed in the middle of mine, filling my ass as his cock throbbed. I could feel his cum drip down my ass cheeks. The feel of it made another weak string of cum pulse out of me until I slumped in his arms.

Raiden's arms remained tight around my torso, holding me in place. Keeping his softening dick as deep inside me as he could while we caught our breaths. The sky finally opened, and a light drizzle of rain fell around us.

His hot breath on my skin made me shiver. The blanket had fallen somewhere, and I couldn't be bothered to reach for it or I'd dislodge Raiden. That wasn't an option. I loved this closeness.

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes and let my body relax into him. I could feel his heart pounding against my back. It made me smile, knowing that I made him feel that way.

"Love you," he murmured, pressing light kisses to my sweaty skin. "So much."

"So much," I agreed. There weren't words for how much. And that's why the pang in my chest was so deep-seated and not at all being dislodged. I'd lost a husband. For real. Koh had died. It was a fucking miracle that the Nephilim had been able to bring him back.

But I'd lost him.

That knowledge was rooted in my heart like a thorn. Each beat was an ache, reminding me that this was all fragile. That our time together wasn't guaranteed. We weren't immortal and could die at any moment.

I'd never be whole again.

“Stop,” Raiden murmured in my ear, biting on the shell. “I know you’re scared. We all are. But don’t lose yourself in your fear, Bronte.”

“I’m trying not to,” I answered. My fingers dug into his thighs as I tried to keep my shaking to a minimum. *I was trying*. Really. But the most unsettling feeling of everything slipping away was right there. As if it hung just out of reach. Teasing me that it was coming.

And yet, what were we doing but waiting for that moment? Waiting until we had to fight for our lives again and hoping it wasn’t going to happen. That Silence would move on.

We all knew that wasn’t going to happen.

“Hey.”

I shifted to peer through my open doors and into my room. In doing so, I dislodged the head of Raiden’s slack dick and became completely empty. No, I didn’t pout. At least, not out loud.

I had one of the few bedrooms that you didn’t enter via the massive closet. Instead, there was a sitting room outside my door. Notus stood in the doorway, his arms crossed as he looked at us with a smile. “Want to watch a movie with us?”

“Yeah,” Raiden said. “We’ll be down.”

“Hadley’s family is going out for a while. So it’ll just be us. A little family time,” Notus said. “Meet you downstairs.”

I nodded, shifting so I could get out of Raiden’s lap, but he didn’t let me go. “It’ll be okay, Bronte. I don’t know how and it won’t be next week, but this will pass. We’ll find a solution. I promise.”

“How can you promise that?”

“Because we only *just* became whole and I will stop at nothing to keep us that way. Not one of us will. We know the threat now. We won’t be caught unaware again.”

Swallowing, I nodded. “I hope you’re right.”

“No, that’s not enough. I need you to believe in it.” Raiden shifted me on his lap, turning me so he could cup my face in his big hands. “I know it’s hard, but don’t you dare let in any doubt. We *will* survive this. All of us. Understand?”

The determination in his eyes made me smile. It wasn’t just that, though. He believed it. My heart gave a pang, the thorn lodged there reminding me that even this moment could be fleeting. But I believed him. With him being so sure, it was hard not to commit to the idea that our future could have a sunny outlook.

Maybe there was a new day after the storm. That the storm hadn’t even started yet was another story.

I nodded. “Okay.”

“Good.” He kissed me, pushing his tongue into my mouth and kissing me hard. Making sure I felt his certainty. His promise that we’d protect each other, come hell or high water. He kissed me until I wasn’t sure I was breathing anything but him.

“Come on,” he murmured. “Let’s get cleaned up and go downstairs.”

By ‘let’s clean up,’ Raiden really meant he’d clean us both up. Because that’s just the kind of guy he is. Sweet. And totally a slut for aftercare when I’m all wrung out.

We found our men and lady in the cinema, already curled together over the chairs. They were all single person loungers, but not one of them held a single body.

Raiden kissed my temple and urged me towards Arat and Neph where a third big man could not, but did manage to fit in the chair with them. They wrapped around me, tucking a blanket in the sides so that we were cocooned together.

Saar had Hadley in his arms, laying bridal style over his lap, her head tucked on his shoulder. Tem and Koh were back to chest. Notus and Tara were actually spread across the floor, tucked together like spoons. Raiden squeezed into a chair with Gale and Zilan in the same way I did. Not at all challenging the chair’s durability.

I wasn't sure who had the remote, but the screen that hung down on the wall lit up with a movie. I didn't watch it, though, because I didn't care what was on. All being together was what I wanted.

"You know, I'm questioning why we chose chairs in here," Gale said. I glanced at him to see the three of them shifting. I snorted in amusement. "Why not loungers or a big bed that stretched across the room so we can fuck comfortably?"

"You mean watch a movie?" Notus asked.

"That's what I said." Gale bit into Raiden's shoulder, making him laugh.

"We can make that happen," Saar said.

"Or somehow make both an option?" Tem suggested. "We have friends here regularly enough and I'm not sure a fuckfest among friends is necessary to keep them close."

"Depends on the kinds of friends," Taranis said.

"Astro might need new content," Hadley piped in.

I laughed, as did my husbands.

"I see you're warming up to the erotic channel idea," Tem said, leaning forward and grinning at our blushing wife. "We'll talk later, princess."

Hadley covered her face, burying it in Saar's neck.

"Besides, Tem definitely meant we watch games and shit in here with our friends," Gale said. "So yeah, maybe keep the chairs too."

"That's not what I said. I'm sure we can get the Nashs for a little swinger party," Tem said.

"Nah, they don't do lady bits," Koh said. "But maybe the Taikas?"

"We're not really talking about this, are we?" Neph asked.

"Hell yeah we are," Taranis said, grinning widely. "And why not? We're all very... close." He winked.

I liked this kind of banter. The kind that was easy and familiar. Teasing. For just a minute, I could pretend that everything was right in the world.



Bronte

THE FEELING OF DOOM DIDN'T LIFT OVER THE NEXT COUPLE days, but at least it didn't get heavier either. I wasn't sure if that was good or bad anymore. Like a dull ache that remained sitting on my soul. A shadow that hung overhead.

Or maybe it was the storm clouds that remained gathered over the island like a bad omen.

Yes, that was being a little superstitious considering that it was our heightened energy that drew them in and kept them there. Still. The human weather people were having a field day predicting why they hadn't left the island in days.

Today was my first day back at work and while I was anxious to go, I also dreaded it. We hadn't reopened all our sites for public access. Security was tight everywhere. More cameras installed. Appointments needed where there hadn't been any before. And we were also working in teams instead of individually.

That last piece was a little frustrating. In all honesty, there wasn't enough to do for two AMs to be on shift at a time. It's not like we put out television ads or billboards to get people in the door. In fact, we were rather selective about who we invited in. Carefully picking those we thought would be open to and a good fit for a harem.

So what were we going to do with two of us there? File tablets into the cabinets? Since everything was electronic, there wasn't any true busy work.

I snorted bemusedly as I tucked a sticky note into Saar's clean apron pocket. He'd brought a bunch home to get washed and usually picked the one on top to bring with him. Since his keys were in the pocket, I figured he'd be taking that one.

I found Hadley sitting on the counter in the kitchen, Tara between her legs as they kissed slowly. Gale moved around them, running a wet cloth over the counter. He paused when I walked in, picked up a plate with a cover over it, and brought it to me, kissing my cheek when he stopped.

"Morning, sunshine," he said.

I smiled in return. "Morning, Gale. You look like you're in a good mood."

"Tara's going to let me fuck his ass again." He winked, which was the only indication I had that he was joking, since his tone was completely normal.

Tara snorted, turning his face to glare at Gale. "Not happening." Hadley hid her smile by biting her bottom lip. "You're bending over for me, windy."

"You already know I take it like a pro," Gale said, grinning cheekily as he brought the cloth to the sink and rinsed it. "Definitely not scared of a little dick, mate."

Tara rolled his eyes, turning his attention back to Hadley. She smiled sweetly, pretending not to be amused at all.

"It's hot," I said, stuffing half a sausage link into my mouth. "Really, it is. If that's any consolation."

"It's not, but thanks," Tara said, winking at me.

"What's not?" Tem asked as he walked into the kitchen.

"Consolation that me fucking Tara is hot," Gale said. "You missed it, so we should have a repeat. I bet we'd get some good views on your things."

"Accounts," Tem said, tilting his head to think about it as he accepted the plate from Gale. "You're right. The pained arousal as he tries not to like it will certainly be good thirst traps."

Tara sighed dramatically.

I grinned into my plate, glancing at Tem when he kissed my temple. “Morning, love.”

“Morning.”

“So, what’s the plan today?” I asked, looking up at the faces in the room. Although I’ve been working on pushing all the negativity into the back of my mind, the pit in my stomach never goes away. And as we start to head out of the house again to live our lives, my anxiety is making me all twitchy. I’m going to get gray hairs and stress lines in my forehead.

It’s hard enough when we’re huddled under one roof not to get all apprehensive about what’s out there and when they’ll strike next. But with everyone going about their daily routine, I think I’m going to start having palpitations.

“Sleep,” Tara said.

Gale snorted, rolling his eyes.

It’s an ongoing joke between them. Taranis likes to pretend he sleeps all day, but neither of them do.

“Going to head to the wildlife reserve on the Big Island and take some pics. Got a new apparel shipment from one of my sponsors,” Tem said.

I bit my lip. Out of everyone’s jobs, I was most concerned with Tem’s. It took him everywhere. Alone.

Perhaps I wasn’t the only one concerned, though. Gale tossed the cloth into the sink when he’d finished wiping the counters clean and looked at Tem. “Want some company? You had plans for me anyway, yeah?”

Tem nodded while taking a sip of his water. Based on the amused smile, I was pretty sure he thought the same thing I was. Gale didn’t want him going alone where him getting abducted with no one there to witness it was a real possibility at this point.

I sighed in relief anyway.

“Me, too,” Tara said. I looked up to find him holding Hadley against him. A comfortable, relaxed embrace as they looked at us all. It made me smile.

“Alright,” Tem said, shrugging. “I don’t mind the company at all.”

“What about you, Had?” I asked.

She shrugged. “I *could* work. Or I could hang out with my family.” She paused, and I knew she didn’t want to do either. Her family was still here, though we didn’t see much of them until the evenings when we came home and they’d kicked Gale and Tara out of the kitchen so they could cook. Otherwise, they were using the kitchen in the basement that has the deep freezer.

“Want to come to work with me?” I asked.

Hadley looked at me, her eyes lighting up. “Really? I can do that?”

I nodded, shrugging. “We’re already teaming up for safety. I’ll just tell them it was ‘bring your wife to work day’ and they didn’t get the memo.”

“You’re not going to get into trouble though, are you?” she asked.

“No.” I chuckled. “Not at all. Trust me, no one will care at all that you’re there.”

Her smile was beautiful. “Yeah, I’d love to come with you.”

For the first time in weeks, my smile was wide. It felt normal and good to have my smile back. I haven’t felt it since the mountain.

We left a little while later after Hadley stopped by the basement suites to tell her parents she was heading out to work with me and not to worry that she was gone. Then we climbed into my car and drove the short distance to my usual site.

I was teaming up with Miller today. There were plenty of AMs on roster for the two-a-shift diagram, but we were bouncing all over the place depending on who was willing to

take more shifts and who wanted to keep their normal location, etc.

“Hey, Wolfy,” I said when we walked in. Miller grinned, getting to his feet and wrapping me in a hug. We were close with the Nashs, Lev being one of my best friends. But they were all like siblings. Or, I don’t know, something better than siblings. You know, people you choose to be close with because you click.

“Hey, sweetheart. How you doing?” he asked, pulling Hadley in for a hug. She laughed as she fell into him, grinning at me as he wrapped her in his big arms.

“Good,” Hadley said, smiling. “You?”

“Good, baby girl. Wolves are all good.” He winked at her before rounding the desk to take a seat again. He had a whole breakfast spread out, and he dug in.

“The wolves eat like eight times a day,” I told Hadley. “High metabolism or some shit.”

Miller nodded. “Yep. The wolf in me has a stupid amount of energy. I have to eat a horse a day to keep him fed and my strength up or I’m basically a kitten.”

“He even purrs,” I said.

He winked at us. “Sure do, sweetheart. Sure do.”

Hadley smiled between us. It felt good to feel normal for a while. Like nothing bad was happening around me. This was a normal day, and we were just hanging out with a friend. At work.

The three of us gathered on the couches as we talked about whatever came up. It wasn’t until three hours into the shift that someone in the back buzzed for an AM.

“I got it,” Miller said, getting to his feet. “Man the door.”

I nodded, watching as he disappeared down the hall with a tablet in hand. Hadley leaned into my side, burrowing into me and smiling contentedly. I loved her little sigh. Before she came, I swear I’d dreamed of that sound.

“Thanks for coming with me,” I said.

She didn’t look up, but her smile widened. “This is nice.” She bit her lip before sitting up and looking at me. “I’ve been thinking lately that the career I’m in is no longer where I want to be. While I love my spreadsheets, I’m just... bored. I don’t feel like I’m doing any good.”

“Don’t you help kids get financial aid so they can go to college?” I asked.

Hadley laughed. “Yes. But even so, I want to be a part of something bigger. Tem saves the environment with his sexy picture donations.” I laughed. “You complete families. I play with numbers all day.”

“Saar plays in the flowers all day,” I said.

She grinned. “Yes, but I think he likes his job though I admit, it’s almost funny to imagine a big man like him arranging flowers.”

“It’s really adorable,” I said, smiling. “He knows all the flowers, their meaning, what their color symbolizes, and all sorts of fun things. Watching him work is almost as much of a high as watching Koh work.”

“What about Arat? He’s a big boss man. Do you ever see him work?” she asked.

“Oh my gods, watching Arat work is like watching kinky porn. His voice is all low and smooth and hypnotic as he commands the world like puppets. He’s a wet dream.”

She laughed, covering her face as her cheeks reddened. I smiled further, loving that look on her. “The way you talk about him... but isn’t he not one of the guys you’re *with* with?”

I shrugged. “I’m with them all in some way. But if you’re talking sex, yes. Except,” I tilted my head. “Maybe? At our orgy, he said he wanted to maybe see where we go or something.” I knew the something, but I didn’t want to get into details. “Then we were attacked and holed up in the house and —” I shrugged, trailing off. Biting my lip.

I hadn't thought to think about it. It just hadn't come up since we were attacked and shut down into crisis mode. Maybe he'd said so in the heat of the moment? And then with Koh and Tem and Tara and Raiden down, priorities shifted?

"You should ask him," she said.

"Mm," I answered, shrugging. "Maybe. He's still my husband regardless, so I don't suppose it really matters." The look she gave me made me laugh. "What?"

"Tell me how this family was built," she said, settling into my side and looking up at me. "From the beginning. Tell me everything."

"Yes, do tell," Miller said as he came back into the room. "I love sappy story time."

"Everything okay out back?" I asked.

He nodded, joining us on the couch again. "Yep. He was hungry. I brought him a sub, and now he's munching away as he answers invasive questions."

Nodding, I turned back to Hadley. "Well, Raiden and Saar started our family. They have some weird sandwich fetish and like to share a lover. Strange, since they don't share anyone but me and... you?"

Hadley grinned. "Not yet."

"Mm. Well, they wanted to share a family, anyway. Taranis came first and I hear it was a stressful nine month stretch until I joined that consisted mainly of jerking off together. You know Tara doesn't bottom—unless you missed that."

She laughed. "I think I've heard it mentioned."

"Even I know he doesn't bottom," Miller added.

"Yeah so, handies. Their stories are pretty funny but that they immediately accepted Taranis really emphasizes that family and love are boundless and doesn't follow a specific blueprint.. We know how we fall and are happy to be there. However the cards lay. Just because there's no sex shared doesn't mean our love for each other is any less. The world could take a lot of lessons from polyamorous families."

“And poly friend packs,” Miller said, grinning like a canine. “It’s not bad or unnatural to tell your friends how you feel about them. Show them what they mean to you.” He shrugged. “Wolves are pretty needy when it comes to touch, so we snuggle up with our friends when our pack isn’t around. And even when they are. Because touch, to us, means you’re important to us. And we like to feel that connection, to make sure you know it too. But the world thinks it’s weird that people tell their friends they love them. Hug their friends too much or hold hands with them.” He rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, it’s a rough world out there,” Hadley said, her voice turning soft and introspective. “A lot of close-minded people.”

Miller nodded. “Tell me about it.”

A minute passed in which I watched Hadley’s face. Eventually, she turned back to me with a smile. “Anyway.”

“Anyway. I came next and married them all. I don’t think I sat for weeks unless it was in a lap before Gale and then almost right away Zilan followed.” Smiling at the memory of when Gale walked into our lives. Just the peace and surreal feeling that he brought. It was almost overwhelming when Zilan came soon after. Before Gale, or I even, had settled, a third storm in a short handful of weeks made us six.

“We had only a handful of months before Aratiri joined us. And while it was good, he was just *ours*, it wasn’t the immediate charge that came between him and any of us. It was a strange year that followed because he kept waiting for the easy, innate *shock* of physical need to surge between us—any of us. But it didn’t come until Notus. It was nice to see Arat finally get the rush he was waiting for. Even if I was a little stumped at why I didn’t have it with either of them and yet, my heart was bursting at the seams to have them here.”

“Packs don’t need a reason to fit like they do,” Miller said. “Some stars shine brighter, but not everyone sees the stars the same way.”

“Poet,” I said, grinning at him.

Miller smiled in return. “We don’t all fuck, either, honey,” he told Hadley. “You’ll find it’s actually really rare to find a household that’s all a big fuckfest and shares equally.”

Her brows knit together. “Really?”

He nodded. “Just in our close-knit crew of thirteen families, just shy of half are equal opportunity lovers. Otherwise, we fall like connect the dots.”

“Huh,” she said. “I didn’t realize that.”

“It actually makes for stronger bonds, I think,” Miller said. He looked at me. “Who are you closest with, B?”

I tilted my head to think about it. “Koh,” I said, frowning. “I’ve never been in his bed. You know, sex and all, I mean.”

“I didn’t realize you’re close with him,” Hadley said. Then she smiled. “But then, I’m still learning.”

“Things have been a little off since the mountain,” I said. “And the newness of you being here and us focusing on getting to know you, but yeah, in-house, Kohara is my bestie.” I grinned when she laughed at my use of the childish word.

“Exactly. And mine is Kormak. I spend at least an hour a day cuddling my dark god of a pup, but I’ve never, ever been sexual with him,” Miller said. “You find closeness in different ways. Sex doesn’t equate to intimacy and love. It’s a way to express it sometimes but sometimes, it’s just a cherry on top. And other times still, you don’t even know it’s not there.”

Hadley smiled, leaning against my shoulder as she closed her eyes. “I like that.”

I smiled at Miller. Yep, I liked that, too.



Hadley

“NOT QUITE A YEAR LATER, NEPHELE AND TEMPEST JOINED US almost simultaneously. It was quite the trip,” Bronte said, his hand absently stroking my arm as he leaned his head against mine. “I honestly didn’t know where to go. I felt them both like a drug. Different drugs, but both calling me in a fucking wild direction.”

I felt him shiver. Sharing a smile with Miller, we waited for him to continue.

“It’s kind of funny. The way we connect physically makes up rings where I connect them as a center. They’re stationary with me, though the one with Saar and Tem didn’t close until Kohara joined us almost exactly a year after Tem and Neph. The rings don’t rotate, but they’re all there. Completely closed circles.”

He looked down at me, smiling. His eyes shined with a happiness that I could nearly feel come off him as if it were his body heat.

“But I think you’re going to be the new center. The one that everyone touches.” He paused, laughing. “I didn’t mean ‘touches,’ Just that everyone...”

“Yes, touches is right enough,” Miller said, smirking.

“When did you move into the house?” I asked.

“We began building it right before Notus joined us. The third floor was supposed to all be guest suites. Or maybe kids’

rooms. But you know... we kept growing.”

The mention of kids made me tilt my head as I stared at the table. Their profile didn't mention the subject a lot. Like mine, it was left open. 'We can discuss offspring.'

“We're going to have kids,” Miller said, likely knowing exactly where I was in my head. When I looked at him, he was grinning. Yep, he knew. I couldn't stop smiling in return. “But not for a while yet.”

“The world is too scary a place right now for them,” Bronte said, nodding.

“If you wait for a safe world to live, you're going to end up a hermit, sweetheart,” Miller said.

I hated how true that was turning out.

We spent the rest of the day talking about nothing and everything. While I knew they were both technically working, it was relaxing and laid-back. I enjoyed watching them take care of anyone coming in (via appointment) or returning from the back with what they were doing.

Maybe this wasn't the greater good I wanted to be a part of, but even from the outside, it felt more fulfilling than what I was doing. I know that wasn't fair. My job was helping people. Without financial aid, so many kids wouldn't get to go to college. They'd not be able to further their education. Hell, most people that go to college get student loans.

But it just didn't feel like enough anymore.

At the same time, I was no longer chomping at the bit to rush out and kick Silence in the balls. Don't get me wrong. The bright, hot fury has only magnified since the mountain. But the losses hit me differently.

I will always miss Essen and I won't stop doing whatever I can to make sure no one loses their sister. But there's something even more raw about losing your husband/s. Maybe it felt different because I had been there to witness it. Because someone wasn't telling me that Kohara was dead, killed by Silence. I'd seen it with my own eyes.

I'd felt the pain of his death, saw it repeatedly whenever I closed my eyes. Like I was living it again. Over and over.

However, there was also a new peace in me. We were together. Alive. And while I knew we all wanted to do *something*, we weren't going to rush in with a half-cocked plan where some or all of us didn't make it out with our lives.

That meant I needed to find something in the middle. Helping kids get financial aid for college wasn't enough. Running ahead to kick Silence in the nuts was too much. Would helping facilitate happily ever afters be the balance for me? Or was there something else that was calling, and I just hadn't heard it yet?



MY PARENTS STAYED FOR ANOTHER COUPLE DAYS. THE morning they left, Gale and Tara had made an expansive brunch that we all sat around eating together. It was relaxing and happy. We sat in the dining room laughing and talking with the sun warm on us through the big windows.

And then we walked them out.

My mom wrapped her arms around me, hugging me to her. "You best never again keep me guessing, child," she warned.

I squeezed her tighter. "Sorry, Mom. Really. I swear I just hadn't turned my phone back on."

She patted my cheek. "Be safe. Be extra careful. Promise me."

The words were on the tip of her tongue. I could almost hear them though she didn't say them. *I can't lose another daughter.* Swallowing the thickness in my throat, I nodded. Seeing my family always brought tears to my eyes because forever there'd be an empty chair. It was probably why I didn't talk to them or see them as much as I used to. That emptiness was more profound when I did.

"I promise," I said, my voice quiet so it wouldn't shake. "You promise, too."

“Of course, sweetie. We will be careful. Keep our heads down and watch out for our friends and families.”

I hugged her again before hugging the rest of my parents. With nine mothers and fathers, there was no such thing as a short goodbye. So, what was likely forty minutes later, my parents drove off in two vehicles.

After I watched them drive away, I headed inside and upstairs. My phone still wasn't on. I dug it out of my bag, one of the few bags that had remained within the campsite, and held the power button until the screen lit. Then I set it next to my computer and headed for the bathroom.

I washed my hands and face, brushed my teeth, and threw my hair into an elastic before changing into leggings and a shirt. When I returned to my closet/office/whatever room, Neph was leaning in the door, his arms crossed over his chest.

Shifting my direction, I headed for him. When I was close enough, he pulled me into his arms. “Not working today?” I asked.

He shook his head. “I cut my hours for a bit. Don't tell him, but we don't want Tem going out alone anymore. We're arranging our schedules to stalk him.”

I laughed. “As long as you're prepared to be in some sexy pictures, I don't think he's going to care.”

Neph was one of the older men in my new family. He, Notus, and Kohara all hovered somewhere around a decade older than the youngest, which were Bronte and Tempest, their birthdays being a week apart. It was in these moments where I was in his arms that I could feel the difference. There was something strong and settled about him. Sure. He held me with both security and reverence, sighing into my hair with hot breath.

My phone must have finally caught up. Several minutes of a variety of different notifications filled the air. When they finally stopped, Nephela laughed. “What was that?”

I smiled up at him sheepishly. “Despite having been scolded by my parents, I was still feeling rebellious. I only

now turned my phone back on.”

He laughed again, throwing his head back. The laugh lines around his eyes made me smile fondly. So sophisticated and handsome.

Nudging me toward the phone, he urged me to see if there was anything important I should attend to. It’s been what, two and a half weeks since I’ve basically gone radio silent?

There were the expected emails and voice messages from work, checking to see if I was intending to come back from leave. A whole lot of spam calls and texts. So many social media notifications, I just groaned and ignored them all.

And finally, willing myself not to be tense as my finger hovered over the chat box that held my friends, knowing the last thing I’d sent them was a photo of all of us in our bikini thongs, I wasn’t sure I wanted to look. The little red bubble said I had a ton of missed messages. Red with a dot inside, meaning more than they’re willing to put a number to.

I must not have been hiding my tension that well. Neph came up behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist and resting his chin on my shoulder.

His presence gave me a little more courage, and I opened it. There were enough missed messages that the app didn’t immediately bring me to the top where I’d last left off. I scrolled until I found the picture I sent. All our asses on display were hot enough. Then there were the slick, smooth backs of muscle and sexiness.

The looks that Tem had somehow captured as we looked at each other. Touched. Kissed. Admired. There was no way you could miss the emotion in it. Yes, there was heat and desire, but it would take an idiot to only see the more carnal emotions.

Tapping the screen to put the image back into the chat and not taking up the entire screen (though I think I’m going to have Tem take one all vertical like so I can set it as my home screen), I began sorting the messages.

[Reba] Hot damn, Hadley!

[Reba] Are you sure you won’t share?

[Dallas] Where are you? Not that I care when there are ass cheeks to look at, but you're clearly somewhere beautiful.

[Reba] So. Many. Ass cheeks!

[Dallas] I volunteer to bite one or two.

I snorted in amusement as their banter went on. It was probably twenty minutes of their texts when they realized I wasn't answering.

And a day later when they realized that neither was Simms.

They continued to ask for me to answer for a few days, and then Simms suddenly left the chat. Silence followed for twenty-four hours before Reba brought her back in the chat. But I could read the tension in their messages now. The almost strained responses as they waited for me to answer, assuming that it was because of Simms that I wasn't.

I mean, that had initially been the reason I turned off my phone. I didn't want to deal with her.

When ten days had gone by, their worry started. Asking if I was okay. If something had happened. And while I might have thought it was a dig at one of my guys if Simms had been asking, I didn't get that impression from Reba or Dallas. Especially not when they asked how close I was to the disaster on the mountain.

Then there was a threat to call my family. A grin broke out across my face.

"Reba called my mother," I said, laughing. "No wonder she came here furious."

Neph rubbed his soft beard against my neck, making my eyelids droop in silly pleasure.

My mother must have told Reba I was okay, but I also got the impression that she was informed there'd been some kind of emergency that kept me away. Her last message was three days ago.

[Reba] I'm here, Had. Take all the time you need. I just need to know you're okay now.

[Dallas] We love you. So much.

[Simms] Please be okay.

Tears filled my eyes with Simms' message. But I already knew that an apology wasn't going to be enough from her, not that I think I'd get one that she'd actually mean. You don't change dumb, close-minded mentality overnight. She might be afraid for me and not want me physically hurt, but she was never going to support my life choices.

And I wouldn't hide them, either. There was no poly closet. This is my life and I'm going to live it with my eleven husbands.

I pulled up the keypad, and my thumbs hovered again. Neph kissed my neck. "Come sit with me," he murmured.

Nodding, I let him pull me into my room, where we curled up on the couch. Once we were situated, I pulled my phone back out again and switched it on. The message screen was still up, and I stared at the last few texts.

Finally, I settled on something basic.

[Me] I'm here and fine. Sorry I didn't message back.

Immediately, two bubbles dropped that they read the message and then right after, two sets of dots as Dallas and Reba began typing back.

[Reba] Thank fuck. I was scared out of my mind when your mom said you were in an accident on the mountain.

[Dallas] OMG I almost pissed myself when you weren't answering, Had!

Tears stung my eyes as I quickly tapped at my keyboard.

[Me] I'm sorry. I turned my phone off after the pic because we were on a family vacation. And then... something happened and I just never turned it back on.

[Reba] Really makes you think about what's important to you.

[Me] I swear, it's not because you're not important to me!

[Reba] No, no. Not what I meant. To almost lose someone you just found...

[Dallas] I can't imagine how scared you were.

"What exactly did your mother tell them?" Neph asked, kissing my shoulder as he read the texts.

"I was just wondering that," I said, wiping the tears from my cheeks.

[Me] Terrified. But we're okay now. Trying to get back to life.

Reba's dots blinked for several minutes. When they kept disappearing and reappearing, I knew she was trying to say something, but didn't want to fuck it up. Or say the wrong thing. Finally, it came through.

[Reba] I love you, Hadley. You're my best friend. I don't care if you want to marry 80 guys, I'm never, ever going to judge you. Please, please don't ever disappear again. I haven't cried so much or been so scared in my entire life.

That did it. Tears tracked down my cheeks, blurring the next messages that followed. Dallas added something of the same. And then Reba some more.

[Me] Thank you. It means a lot.

[Reba] When can we get together?

[Dallas] We miss you. And I really need a hug to know you're okay.

I nodded. The words 'soon' were on the screen, but I paused. Silence was now abducting humans and since we didn't know what about certain people were putting them on their radar, it was best to keep anyone of any association away so as not to draw attention to them. I wouldn't put my friends at risk.

I erased 'soon' but ended up retyping it. I wasn't sure what else to say. Soon wasn't defined by any specific length of time, at least.

Simms' bubble dropped and though I waited for her to say something after I said bye to Dallas and Reba, she never did.



Bronte

LAYING ON THE MASSAGE TABLE WITH TARANIS OVER ME, kneading into my muscles, I stared at the floor, trying not to groan too loudly. He'd noted that I was feeling tense lately. And then Zilan had. When Raiden did as well, I decided that I needed a massage.

Normally, I'd just have called in our guy and he'd have booked a day for all of us, but Tara said he'd happily dig his fingers into my skin. He wasn't professionally trained, but he was good at seeking out my knots and kneading them away. Sometimes, when he hit just the right spot with exactly the fingers and pressure I needed, I was sure that he was watching tutorials on how to do it right.

While we were all trying to live our lives as normal as possible, I continued to look over my shoulder everywhere. My shoulders were always stiff as I waited for the next bomb to drop.

Always waiting.

At this point, I didn't think they'd come after us again. Not directly. Though I had no idea how many of their agents they sent our way, I knew there'd been a lot. A whole lot. And twelve storms took out an entire mountainside. The island still wasn't normal since we were being rocked by harsh waves and storm clouds loomed overhead as if they were permanent fixtures.

‘Weather anomalies’ the human forecasters said. They were having fun deciding what they meant. No less than two dozen doomsday predictions were attached to the events, too.

When his finger dug into my shoulder, pushing at the knot that was right under the edge of my shoulder blade, I groaned something dirty. Taranis chuckled.

“That’s it, sugar,” he murmured. “Let me know what feels good.”

Shivers raced over me. I couldn’t help it. I could turn to goo when one of my men praised me. Seriously. It’s a problem. Because it doesn’t matter where we are, what we’re doing, or who’s around. One of them tells me I’m being good at something, and my dick is instantly trying to stab its way out of my pants.

Even the comments that aren’t necessarily praise, like just now. Taranis appreciating my moan and commenting on it was enough for me. *Good pet. Moan to tell me I’m doing a good job.*

I was a slut for pretty words.

His thumb painfully worked out that knot. It sent twinging aches through my arm as well as a deep satisfaction as the knot was loosening.

“There we go. Let it out. No need to hold onto the tension, sweet boy,” Tara continued to murmur softly.

And the longer he talked with his low, deep voice, the harder I became. When he moved around me and I could see the way his long dick hung against his leg (because Tara was *always* naked if he could help it), my cock really took excessive interest.

Gripping the sides of the table, I slammed my eyes closed. This is supposed to be relaxing. *Relaxing*. Not arousing. There is a difference, though right now I’m having a hard time remembering that.

Taranis was suddenly on top of me, laying his long, hard body along mine. I laughed as he hugged me beneath him, kissing my shoulders and neck before laying still.

“What’s wrong, sugar?” he murmured. “Why so stressed?”

I sighed, letting the laughter die out of me and the smile fade. “I keep waiting for it all to be taken away.” Because it almost was. We were so close to losing everything.

Each of my men was everything. My men and my wife. Losing even one wasn’t an option. How do you recover from that?

The answer was simple—you don’t.

And we hadn’t almost lost one, but two.

I swallowed thickly, shaking my head a little. Taranis sighed. “Honey, we’re going to be okay. We’re teaming up where we need to. Never alone.”

“That’s not going to make a difference,” I said. “We survived because there were twelve of us who fed off each other and created our own energy. We’re an unyielding force, Tara. *Together*. But we’re spread out now. I keep having nightmares where I’m going to come home one day, and someone won’t walk in the door when they’re supposed to.”

Taranis sighed again. He kissed my skin softly, over and over, until I was almost humming in pleasure again.

“I don’t want to keep living with this fear,” I whispered, even as my body shivered with building arousal.

He nodded almost imperceptibly. For a while, we didn’t speak. Didn’t do anything other than this. Cuddling together and just enjoying each other’s company.

“Come on,” he said at last, slipping down from me and patting my ass. “Get up. Let’s go see what everyone’s up to.”

It’s Saturday finally, and no one works on the weekend. It was one of the rules we established early on to make sure that we always had days to spend together uninterrupted by responsibility. That’s also why we have Yonbe so we don’t spend so much of our time maintaining this monstrosity of a house.

Slipping my shorts on, I followed Taranis to the stairs and into the drawing room. I wasn’t all that surprised to find the

majority of our family already there. Sometimes, we were just drawn to being in the same room. Needing that comfort and closeness.

I sat in one of the big armchairs. Arat got up from where he'd been lounging and nudged me over so he could join me. A smile spread across my lips as I leaned into him, and he pressed his lips to my jaw.

"Hey, sweetcake," he whispered. "Feels like months since I've held you."

I grinned. "No, but I missed you, too."

"Mm." He continued to nuzzle into me, and I let myself melt.

No one was doing anything in particular. Zilan, Gale, and Saar came in a minute later, completing our family in the room. Saar smiled as his dark gaze flitted over us. I could see him relax a little. Hell, I think we all relaxed a little.

Koh's phone rang, making him get up to answer it. He walked to the far side of the large room, disappearing into the rounded alcove where the baby grand piano sat while he talked.

"What's going on today?" Saar asked as he dropped onto the couch next to Raiden.

I loved to see them next to each other. While I doubt that they plan it, their hair is almost always the same length and style. As is their facial hair. When they're standing together, it can be near impossible to tell them apart. Which I find a little amusing at times because it should be easier than when you're just seeing one.

"Tara rubbed me all over," I volunteered.

"I did," Tara agreed, winking in my direction. He sat on the bar top, legs spread. Balls sitting on the cold granite, dick like a third leg. He'd been at least wearing underwear when Hadley first got here, but I think being forced to wear clothes for a couple weeks while Hadley's family was here had been the last line. He hasn't worn anything since, unless he left the house.

“I was reading for a while,” Hadley volunteered, shrugging. “It’s nice to just turn my mind off for a while and lose myself in a book.”

“Very,” Notus agreed. “As is watching mind-numbing television. Binging a series of nonsense has been my morning.”

“Anything good?” Raiden asked.

Notus shrugged. “Nope. But there’s tons of sexy moments with an array of couples. Despite what I think the show is supposed to be about, it seems to me that we’re just waiting to see how everyone gets others in bed.”

“Why not just watch porn then?” Gale teased.

“Or Astro’s channel?” Tem asked. Hadley flushed, turning her face into Zilan’s shoulder.

I loved her blush. It was so damn pretty.

Notus nodded, as if he was thinking about it. “Yeah, maybe I’ll check it out. Hadley, want to join me later?” He winked at her increasingly red face.

“You’re not really going to do that, are you? You’re friends. Won’t that get awkward?” she asked.

My head tilted as I considered it. I mean, we’ve all watched his videos when he first created the account to support him. It’s easier to grow an account when people see that there are already a bunch of subscriptions. He had eleven just in this household. And I mean, if we’re paying for it, why not watch it? Am I right?

“I think there’s some disassociation involved when you watch your friends’ dirty videos,” Tem said. “In the same way as when they look at my photos online. I still subscribe to Astro’s channel and he donates to my causes.”

“Just think of the crossover audience you could gain if you make guest appearances,” Hadley said before she winced. “Okay, I didn’t think that sentence through.”

We laughed.

“The point is, you don’t really pay attention to the fact that you know the person in the video,” Tem said. “You’re just admiring their... art.”

“Art,” Arat snorted, a grin stretching across his face.

Kohara came back, his face tense as he looked around at us. His eyes touched everywhere, in an almost desperate look.

“What’s wrong?” Saar asked, patting the cushion next to him.

Kohara dropped, letting Saar pull him close. I watched as he deflated and let Saar tuck him into a hug. We waited in quiet until Koh spoke.

“In the last week, more than a hundred humans have been abducted from all over the world, and while that’s no surprising thing, at least a hundred have been confirmed to have been taken by Silence. Many of the others are suspected of being taken by Silence, but those are speculation.”

“I don’t get it,” Arat said, his lips still hovering over my skin. “I just don’t understand what they want with humans.”

When Koh didn’t answer, I knew that he had more. So did Saar. He rubbed Koh’s hair, carding his fingers through it before encouraging him. “What else, hun?” he murmured.

Koh scowled. “When they’re done breaking the humans to death, they’re being discarded. Almost always at Harem Project doors or close by.”

“Maybe you have it wrong,” Hadley said, her eyes narrowed. “Maybe they weren’t trying to send a message when they dropped off the monster, but trying to frame the company. Drawing the attention of the humans. Maybe encourage ORKA that the monsters are killing humans and leaving proof. And giving them a target to point their anger at.”

Koh’s mouth opened a couple times before he frowned. “That’s a reasonable explanation. Except that there’s also evidence that they’re experimenting on the humans.”

“That doesn’t mean that they’re not playing into the agenda that Hadley laid out,” Notus said, leaning forward.

“Two birds, one stone. They’re fulfilling their itinerary and also creating a target.”

“But, to date, has The Harem Project even actively worked against Silence?” I asked. I mean, sure, we gather information and survey what’s going on for a time when we’re ready to make a move. But to my knowledge, I don’t think any organization has actually done anything outright.

Which is both cowardly and maddening.

“What kinds of experiments?” Saar asked. No one really liked to acknowledge that the world was fine to look the other way and let them go about hunting and killing off species as long as they weren’t pointing their direction at yours.

Before anyone could answer, Yonbe appeared in the door, holding a large tablet. Saar got to his feet and crossed the room to look. I watched his features closely as they tightened into anger.

“Turn the perimeter fence on,” Saar said.

Yonbe’s brow rose before a wicked smile curled up his features. He nodded at Saar before turning away, leaving the tablet with him. Saar watched the screen, shoulders tight as he stared. Minutes passed. Ticking by stupidly slowly as we waited.

When he relaxed, a dark, satisfied smile touching his lips, he took his seat once more.

“Share with the class?” Gale said impatiently.

Saar turned the screen around. It was still a live feed, and we watched as a small group of hybrid shifters moved through the outer stretch of our property. A blinding light grew in the middle of the screen, growing until it nearly overtook it all. When it died down, the body that was still standing was fried, frozen in place.

But there was no question what we were looking at. Only agents of Silence walked around in hybrid states. Which was curious, for sure. But that curiosity didn’t matter as my heart raced.

They were on our property. They were looking for us.

“Easy,” Arat murmured against my cheek. He shifted me in his arms so he was holding me tightly. “They were obviously just doing some recon since there were only a few of them. We took out hundreds on the mountain.” He paused. “Dozens anyway. A few were not here with the intent to kill.”

No. They were looking for information. Weakness.

Our property was cut through in several plots with high voltage. So high that it could keep enormous extinct Cretaceous creatures trapped. We rarely had need of them, but once in a while when we wanted to keep predatory animals out, we’d flick them on. The charge that filled the air alone was enough to discourage anyone or anything.

“I can’t do this anymore,” I said, leaning forward and wrapping my arms around my stomach, feeling sick. “I need to do something. I don’t want to sit here and wait for them to attack us again and hope that we come out alive.” My gaze flicked to Koh. Then Tem, before staring at the floor. “I can’t take this kind of daily stress!”

Silence followed my frustrated outburst. Arat leaned forward, pulling me back into his arms and holding me in a grip so tight that I could barely breathe. It was what I needed, though. That little sting of discomfort and struggle to take a breath helped clear my mind of the overwhelming fear that was starting to take hold.

Still, no one spoke. I didn’t look. Didn’t want to see the way they were watching me. Instead, I closed my eyes and tried to will away the doom that was hanging over us. Plead with whatever watched over monsters that they’d make the Division of Silence take interest elsewhere, even if that was a gutless request.

I needed my family safe. I needed us to live.

“You’re right,” Saar said at last. I looked up to find him watching me. Everyone watched me. But to my surprise and relief, it wasn’t with pity. There was a low note of determination there. Agreement.

“We’re done sitting around as sheep. Time to show them that the monster that hides under lamb’s wool isn’t just fresh meat,” Saar said.

A different kind of fear filled me. Fuck. Now what?!



Hadley

I THOUGHT I'D FEEL GOOD TO HAVE A PURPOSE THAT REVOLVED around moving against Silence. That's what I'd wanted for years. For more than three long years since they took my sister from me.

But now that we were all in agreement that that's what we were going to do, I was scared more than anything. Not scared to face them. Not even scared with the idea that I might die, too. But scared that I'd survive and some of my husbands wouldn't.

I've only been with them for almost ten weeks and already I cannot imagine living without even a single one. How would I survive that? Living without my sister was hard enough, but these men had my heart. They owned every piece of me.

The house was filled with nervous tension and excited stress. We didn't have a plan yet, per se, but that we were all committed to this meant we've been throwing out ideas every evening after dinner.

We were moving forward, though without a real time frame. We said 'soon' so to me, that meant within the next couple months.

I couldn't explain the feeling of that. It felt like a timer ticking down to an unknown outcome, though understanding it was going to be dark and dangerous. As if we were certain that it might all end, everything about our relationships—

especially those building with me—have been kicked up into hyper speed and recklessness.

That's how I found myself pressed against the landing in one of the stairwells with Kohara as he pinned me to the wall for our first time together. Romantic? I suppose it depends on your definition of the word.

My chest was against the wall, my leggings at my ankles. My face was sideways as he kissed me over my shoulder, working his fingers into my sex. Fingering me. Making room.

I could barely kiss him like this as he held me there, stationary. Motionless. Unable to do more than breathe and give my body to him, a high in and of itself.

Satisfied that I was ready, he pulled his hand from me and grabbed my hip. He took my bottom lip between his teeth as he lined us up, making me stick my ass out for him. The blunt head of his cock pushed against my throbbing heat and I groaned, trying to move my body.

“Still,” he growled.

My breath caught at the sound. A fresh wave of need melted down my body, leaving everything inside me tingling with desire.

Koh had paused with just the head of his cock inside me. Waiting for me to listen. How was I supposed to hold still when he was torturing me like this? I groaned, frustrated, but tried desperately to do as he wanted. Freeze in place.

As soon as I did, he thrust up inside me, bottoming out as much as he could in this position. A cry lodged in my throat as my eyes went wide. He covered my mouth with his again, locking me in a rough kiss as he claimed my body for his own.

His thrusts were quick and deep, pulling out until it was just his head and then slamming into me roughly again. His hand didn't leave my hip, assuring that I stayed where he wanted me. Never giving my aching body a chance to relieve the strain on my stretched muscles that were trying to hold me up.

He caught my breath, not allowing me to take a proper breath. Never releasing my mouth from his kiss.

I trembled, trying and failing to grip onto the smooth wall. When Koh found my hands moving, he took them both in one of his and pinned them over my head.

Restrained, unable to do anything but give into the pleasure he was feeding me, I stopped trying to hold in the raw need that escaped me through some embarrassing sounds. His hand on my hip tightened, becoming almost bruising as he gripped me.

But then his hand moved around, slid over my stomach and down. At first, he splayed his fingers over the lips of my sex, spreading them wide. I gasped, unsure why it felt different. But then they moved, his middle finger landing over my sensitive clit and making me jump.

There was no leading up to it. He didn't take his time with a slow build. His rubbing was insistent. Authoritative. Demanding my orgasm reach the surface and forcing it out of me.

I wasn't strong enough to even try to keep it in. It crashed over me in a hot wave as I cried out into his mouth. I couldn't move, my tongue now trapped within the biting grip of his teeth as I rode out my climax, his finger never stopping the stimulation on my clit.

So rough, so dirty and overpowering. I had no choice but to submit to the compulsory pleasure that continued to stir inside me at his touch.

And then, he released inside me. Immediately, it dripped down my legs when he pulled back after his first shot. Several more times, he emptied himself; his finger on my clit stilled but didn't move from me.

My chest heaved as we finally stopped moving. He wrapped an arm around my waist, allowing me to give my weak muscles a rest as we leaned against the wall, gasping for breath.

I swallowed, my eyelids dropping as I came down from the almost violent high. When he pulled us from the wall several minutes later, his cock dropping from my body and making a quiet *slap* against his leg, I giggled.

“Beautiful sounds you make,” he murmured against my skin. I flushed.

He released me, and I took a minute to gather my composure before pulling my leggings back up. I couldn't even find it in me to care that I still had his cum dripping from my pussy. It filled me with a sick satisfaction. Feeling his claim from the inside out.

When Koh kissed me in a long languid kiss and then continued down the stairs, I realized I'd been going up, but for the life of me, couldn't remember where I'd been heading or what I thought I was going to do.

Stopping on the second landing, I headed into my rooms. Pausing inside my personal lobby with books and lots of comfortable seating, I looked around. Trying to memorize each detail right down to the wood grain on the shelves. How the lighting in here was serene but never too dark to read. The cushions on the built-ins were thick and soft, with fabric that you couldn't help but want to rub your hands over.

To my right, I walked into my closet-turned-everything room and wandered around. Looking at my boxes stacked against the walls under the hanging bars. My computer on the vanity desk. The center bank of drawers that held my clothes, art supplies, and other random things.

My en suite was to the left, on the same wall as the door from the lobby. A water closet with a bidet as well as a toilet. There was a large shower with a bench along the back. A large rain head at the opposite end, all tiled in exquisite quartz.

I also had a deep soaking tub in front of the window overlooking the backyard and the long sink and countertop across from it. The room was as big as my bedroom in the city.

Running my fingers along the surfaces, I turned and headed back into the closet to stare at my computer. I haven't

touched work in weeks. Haven't even responded to their inquiring emails, texts, or phone calls. A no call, no show quit was not something I wanted on my employment record, but being so unsettled with what I wanted to do in the future, I couldn't bring myself to care very much.

It's not exactly that I didn't care, but if I was going to die soon, I didn't think spending my days with spreadsheets was how I wanted to spend the last minutes. Of course, thinking that I was going to do it was like challenging the universe to make it happen.

That's certainly not what I wanted. But if it meant surviving and losing any of my husbands, I think I'd rather die than live a day without them.

"Morbid thoughts," I mused as I turned to my sitting room. The rounded balcony off the room let in a lot of light between the windows and double doors. The sun streamed across the hardwood floors, shimmering and glittering beautifully. Across from the outside balcony were the double doors to the inside balcony that overlooked the ballroom on the first floor.

While the outside was gorgeous, I was enamored with the ballroom. Leaning on the rail of the balcony, I peered down into the empty room. The outside walls were lined in tall, magnificent windows made of leaded glass. The sun shining in made patterns all over the floor, only outdone by the large dome skylight above.

I stared into the empty room for a while, imagining myself a princess and attending balls with my charming prince. Princes. Many Prince Charmings. Eleven to be exact. And we spun around the floor while a grand orchestra played from the stage at the opposite end of the room. Changing partners in a complicated stunningly choreographed dance in which we all enjoyed each other.

With a sigh, I moved back into the sitting room, which was still largely empty. I had a couple easels set up with drying canvases (though they were plenty dry by now) and coverings over the beautiful floors. I poked my head into the kitchen in the corner and just stared at the unused space. It was a full

kitchen, though small. I knew I could open the fridge and find everything to make myself a full lunch, whether that be a filled sandwich wrap or a stirfry.

Smiling softly, I moved back through the space and into my bedroom, where my large bed sat up on a platform, three steps from the ground. It faced a seating area with two wide couches, and beyond, windows and doors to the big round balcony facing the backyard.

There was art on the walls, mostly photographs. While I admired them all the time, this was the first time I realized that each was showing me something about my husbands. A flower stand with exquisite flowers and a storefront blurred in the background. Though I still hadn't been there yet, now that I looked closely, I was sure that the image was taken right outside Saar's flower shop.

The image of the engine on a plane wing was likely referring to Aratiri, our pilot. Maybe it was even his plane. There wasn't enough of it in the picture to be sure.

The litter of puppies bundled in blankets, probably not more than a week old, was Nephele. I was even more sure when I saw a couple had their paws wrapped in bandages of some kind. When I looked closely, I could see a hand cupping one of the puppies in the background, the pup curled up and fast asleep.

The perfect rocking chair that I'd thought was just an image of a country estate was probably something that Raiden had made by hand. When I stepped closer and saw all the fine detailing on the surfaces, I was sure. Especially since there was a painted rock by the curved bottom of the chair.

There was also a series of offices. I've been to Kohara's so I recognized that lordly office with the enormous heavy wood desk and big leather chair. The room was furnished with dark colors, made all the darker from the bank of windows behind the desk, shedding brilliant light inside the dark room.

A second office I guessed belonged to Notus. It wasn't large, but there was a bank of monitors and I could just make out the familiar grid of a spreadsheet. I grinned like a little girl

to see them and was even more convinced that it was Notus' office. There was a coffee mug on the desk and a jar of sharpened pencils.

Biting my lip, unable to get the silly smile to fade, I moved to a third office. Because there was a bank of books behind the sleek, modern desk, I assumed it was our live-in writer, Zilan's. There were two large, curved monitors and a curved keyboard. The rest of the desk was filled with to-go coffee cups and scattered papers.

And then there was the office that looked like someone's living room - Bronte's waiting room at The Harem Project. A wall filled entirely of cupboards that I knew had photo albums, tablets, brochures, and a host of other informational objects for The Harem Project. The seating area had a large, curved couch that faced a big flatscreen television. There were cushions and pillows, blankets, a tray on the hassock with magazines and a little metal elephant. The desk looked more like a table with a single, comfortable chair behind it.

I knew that the breathtaking image of a waterfall must be one of Tempest's projects. A location that he'd been raising money to conserve and protect. And while I could guess that he took all the images since there was an incredible artsy quality to them. Maybe I ought to suggest that he also sell pictures. The angle, lighting, and subject matter might be everyday objects and scenes, but they were stunning.

Lastly, there was a wall of images from the house. The kitchen, primarily but also the gym, one of the pools, the garden, the pantry filled with rows and rows of food. This was Gale and Taranis's domain. Their stay at home life captured in a series of images that proved neither of them slept all day.

“Had?”

I turned to my name to find Neph and Arat in the door. They were beautiful in very different ways. Where Arat looked like an everyday business tycoon in his sleek suit, Neph was wearing scrubs. His hair was long and loose while Arat's was styled just perfectly right. Neph had a full beard, neatly kept, while Arat was clean-shaven. Their eyes were a similar shade

of gray and while their smiles were nothing alike, they were in that they were gorgeous.

“What’re you doing?” Arat asked, leaning against the doorframe with his hands in his pockets.

Shrugging, I glanced at the prints hanging around my room. “Realizing that these were all about you.”

Both men grinned. “Tem spent a lot of time trying to portray something important to us in tasteful and interesting ways. Strangely enough, it’s our work most of the time,” Neph said.

I nodded. “We spend a lot of our lives working, so I get that. It’s nice to think that everyone is happy in their careers.”

“We are,” Arat said, shrugging. “It would be a very long life if we weren’t.”

Which only emphasized that I needed a different career path. The thought of remaining in financial aid for the rest of my life made me scowl.

“Want some company?” Neph asked.

I smiled, nodding, and turning from the images. “Always.”

I watched them walk in, two of the sexiest men I’d ever seen. I was sure that all my men were in the top eleven hottest guys in the world. I wasn’t the least bit biased. Just stating a fact. There’s simply nothing more gorgeous and mouth-watering than a storm.

Neph paused at the image of the puppies, smiling. “Those were adopted out pretty quickly. A stray mama that we took in off the street. She had some beautiful babies.”

“Was she adopted, too?”

He looked at me, smiling. “Yep. She went home with one of her pups, actually. A little girl that was very attached to her mother.”

“That’s sweet.”

Nephele nodded before moving to sit next to Arat, who was perched at the end of my bed where he watched me. I

wouldn't say his look was heated, exactly. But it was sensual - dark, with a sinful little smile.

I'm not sure what it is about that man. He's worth like a billion dollars (probably more) and while he looks every bit CEO, he's also breathtakingly gorgeous. He could be a model. He was sharp, sleek lines, confidence, and sex appeal.

Next to him, Neph looked a little more down-home sexy. A man who cares for animals. I can see him visiting farms and taking care of their livestock. He'd be one of those men walking around with low hanging jeans, shirtless, and dropping down with his ass out to get you to smile.

And, you know, become a little hot and bothered by him.

"How's work?" I ask, moving closer to them.

Arat reached for me as soon as I was within grabbing distance. His hands on my hips, he pulled me between his legs. "Normal," he said, shrugging. His dark eyes dropped to my lips, and then my neck, down my chest. "Getting ready to offload some businesses and restructure another."

"Why?" I asked.

"Always changing my portfolio. Sell when something is at its peak and buy when they're in the ground." His gaze met mine again. "That's how you grow big and strong in the business world."

"You don't ever lose the ones that are already dying?"

Arat nodded. "Yep. Sometimes. Hazard of purchasing dying corporations."

"Don't let him fool you. He rarely loses them anymore," Neph said.

"I don't," Arat conceded. "Because I have a tried-and-true business model that tends to work for most industries. But it's still a risk. The corporate world can change quickly. It's about employing people who can stand on their feet without needing micromanagement and keeping ahead of the constant change."

He pulled me closer, his hands wrapping around my hips to rest on my ass. His smile climbed up his face, always sexy.

“What about you? How’s work?”

I humphed. “Dunno. Haven’t signed back in for days. Weeks, maybe.”

“Still unhappy?” Neph asked.

Nodding, I shrugged. “The pay is good. The hours are good. And I like my spreadsheets. But I just feel so unfulfilled in it now.”

Arat’s fingers kneaded into my ass cheeks as he looked up at me. “What do you want to do?”

“He’s got every business you can think of. If not, he’ll purchase one for you,” Neph said.

I laughed, letting my head fall back. Neph pressed against my back a moment later, as Arat’s face buried in my stomach. Bringing my hands to his head, I carded them through his hair. “I don’t know,” I said quietly. “I kind of feel professionally lost right now.”

My head tilted with Neph’s encouragement, his mouth landing on my skin. Arat’s hands left my ass, but I felt him pull Neph against me, his hips to my butt. His hard planes against my softer ones. His erection pressing into my soft flesh.

Neph pulled my shirt up, so Arat’s mouth touched my bare skin. I closed my eyes, feeling them against me. Letting myself take this moment to enjoy them.

“Had,” Neph murmured, his tongue trailing up the side of my neck.

I nodded. My clothes were pulled off quickly and then I was reaching for both of them, trying to strip them, too. One article of clothing at a time dropped to the ground, and I wasn’t sure where to touch first. Chests. Thighs. Asses. Cocks.

Arat pulled my mouth to his, kissing me deeply as he shifted me towards the bed. “What do you want?” he asked into my mouth.

“Anything. Everything,” I answered, trying not to add on ‘before it’s too late’ on the end of that.

He helped me onto my bed, positioning me on my hands and knees. He dropped down, burying his face in my pussy and lapping. A long moan filled the room as I shook. When I opened my eyes, Neph was there, kneeling on the bed in front of me.

I nodded, wanting him close. Arat pulled from me, not spending too much time down there. Needing to be inside me. I knew that's what his impatience was because I felt it too. If we made it out of this alive, we'd take more time to touch and explore. But right now, we just needed to come together. To feel it all.

Neph tapped his cock against my mouth. When I opened, he did it again. Tapping against my tongue. I laughed. He pushed into my mouth at the same moment that Arat thrust into my entrance. I cried out around Neph. His hand on the back of my head, gentle but firm, didn't allow me off him as I tried to rein in my body at the sudden intrusion.

They both paused. Arat stretching me wide and Neph doing the same. Sitting so his dick was at the back of my throat but not pushing down. Resting there. Feeling me swallow and groan around him. Moaning. Attempting to beg for them to move.

When I gained some semblance of coherence, I could hear them kissing. Hollowing out my cheeks, I sucked deeply on Neph, causing him to pull back and swear.

That's when they started to move. Matching each other, thrust for thrust. My head spun with need as I tried to keep my attention on sucking dick. I was decent at it, I thought. But it was difficult to keep pace at all when I was being taken from behind too.

The feel of Arat inside me, hitting me deep in the most sensitive places, I was dizzy from it all. Drooling. Moaning. Their grunts filled my ears. Their lips licking at each other, and their bodies slapping against mine.

It was all too much, and I shuddered through my sudden orgasm as it overtook me like a heat wave. Burning my body from the inside. Making me clamp down on both ends and

sending them both into erratic plunges that were no longer simultaneous and soaking me through with their releases.

I collapsed on the bed, breathless.

We lay in bed for a while before our phones went off. My heart leapt into my throat, but Neph rolled from the bed and dug through our discarded clothing until he found his phone. “Dinner,” he announced.

Releasing a sigh of relief, I kissed Arat’s lips and pulled myself free. We moved through my shower quickly to rinse ourselves of the sweat and cum with minimal touching and dressed before heading downstairs.

The rest of our men were squished together on the round seats at the kitchen table that was really too small for all of us. Especially with eleven big men. Plates were already prepared, and we took seats where there were empty spots.

We ate in silence for a while before conversation about what we did today overtook the meal. It was quiet and comfortable. I found myself sitting back and listening, just enjoying their voices. Their smiles and their laughter. How they interacted with each other. Never talking over someone and I swear, everyone was engaged in whatever the individual talking was saying.

There weren’t many families like this. Where even the simple amusement of a flower mishap had an entire room of twelve paying attention, commiserating and laughing. I smiled, staring at them all with my heart pounding in my chest.

This could all end any day. If not by our impending retaliation, then because we know that Silence hasn’t forgotten about us. It was hard to accept that many of us left the house during the day because there was always that possibility that they wouldn’t be coming home.

Sure, that could be said about any profession and any trip. Silence was just the newest danger.

When the plates were cleared and loaded into the dishwashers, we moved into the family room beyond the

kitchen and curled together among three couches. This was where we threw out ideas about getting at Silence.

For a minute, no one spoke as the seriousness of the coming conversation settled over us.

“I think our best bet is concentrating our efforts on finding their headquarters and focusing our attack there. While taking out any of their facilities is going to hurt them, it’s going to be a more devastating blow if we hit their brain,” Nephela said.

“Probably not a fatal blow, but I like the promise of what that could afford us,” Kohara said.

Neph shook his head. “No. I think the only outcome that’s going to be fatal is if we find all their arms and destroy them entirely, simultaneously.”

“Probably,” Notus said, frowning. “Though I have my doubts that even that kind of attack would kill the entire organization. Maybe they’d just rebuild.”

“And thus we need to find out who runs it and make sure we take them all, too,” Neph said.

“That isn’t a conversation for now,” Saar said. “Our goal is to send a very clear message. They made a mistake in targeting this family. That if they’re going to mess with us, they better kill us all. Or step the fuck back and leave us alone.”

“Not that leaving us alone is really going to serve them any good purpose,” Kohara said. “Our retaliation aside, we won’t back down when our friends need us in the future. Or when we finally have a plan to move forward and remove them from power.”

Which brought up the question—who was going to prevent the Division of Silence from rebuilding later? Or another organization from rising in their wake?

I listened as I snuggled into Raiden’s lap, not participating since I really didn’t have anything to add, but wondering what a future without Silence would look like. And who was powerful enough to keep them from coming back.

I must have dozed off while the conversation continued. I can't say it was a peaceful sleep, even if short. Because nothing is peaceful within my unconscious anymore. Every dream has a touch of nightmare. Of impending doom. Lingering just in the distance is a sign that signals the end.

Still, I'm so tired from the stress of it all that I manage to nap in Raiden's arms. Even while I'm asleep, I can feel him there. His strength and promise of safety. Affection and home. So while my dreams are abstract, making me tingle with fear and dread, I'm also aware that it's not real. It's just a dream.

It might come to pass soon, but it wasn't happening right now. I was in that weird dream state where I knew I was dreaming and still couldn't get out. Aware that I was asleep but still afraid of what loomed ahead.

I awoke as I was being laid down.

"Shh," Raiden whispered. His lips brushing my forehead as he pulled my blankets around me. As I shifted under them, I found that he'd already stripped me down to my underwear.

"You don't have to leave," I murmured.

My room was dark, and I thought I'd napped longer than I initially thought. How late had it been when we began talking about Silence? Or maybe I'd just slept for a couple hours? But I was still exhausted. My body worn and my brain filled with fatigue.

I heard the shuffling of clothing, and a minute later, Raiden was crawling into bed behind me. "All clothes off," I said sleepily. "Want to feel you."

Raiden complied, pulling his underwear off, and then mine. He pressed against my back, holding me firmly to his chest. His lips grazed my skin and I briefly wondered if it was wholesome to potentially have sex with four men in a single day. I mean, they were all mine, so that made me less of a ho, right?

His arm over me lay along mine, and he twisted our fingers together. I wiggled my ass into his crotch, enjoying the

feel of his cock hardening. His lips continued to softly kiss along my skin as I encouraged his hips to rock against me.

Somehow, and I'm going to claim magic, he shifted our bodies enough that he could slide inside me. Okay, as wet and ready as I was for him, maybe I am a ho. I don't care in the least, but it was worth the absent thought that drifted through my mind before it was shattered when he pushed in deep.

Our breaths filled the room. I gripped his hand tightly, our bodies shifting so our lower halves were twisted with my hips almost against the bed, his upper leg between them as he pushed inside me. Over and over, slow and deep. But our upper bodies are still entwined on our sides as he holds me close.

And thus we remained for hours, long after the moon began its descent back toward the opposite horizon.



Hadley

DECIDING TO BE A DAMN ADULT, I CONTACTED MY BOSS TO LET them know that due to some family emergency in which my husband nearly died, I was going to continue my leave of absence. I apologized for not being in contact sooner, of course, but when it was done, I felt better about it once I had the conversation out of the way.

I didn't tell him that I might not come back at all. Though that was a very real possibility. Since I worked per diem based on my own schedule, I wasn't someone whose shift needed to be covered. That being said, they were also short staffed at work, and I could take all the hours I wanted. So, I felt a little guilty.

However, more than anything, I wanted to spend time with my family. The words 'while I could' were always subconsciously tacked onto the end of that thought, but I never allowed myself to think it outright.

Though my men still worked, they were working less hours. Part of that was we alternated joining Koh to learn what we could about Silence and accompanying Tem so that he wasn't alone in the middle of nowhere, tempting fate to take him away while no one was there to witness it. And also, we were spending as much time together as we could. Even doing little things, like sitting in the steam room not talking.

I'd set up an easel outback and was getting ready to paint when Neph and Tem joined me.

“Painting the yard?” Tem asked as he stopped at my side and kissed my head.

Shrugging, I glanced around with a critical eye. I’ve already painted the yard several times, so I certainly wasn’t opposed to something new. In fact, I’d love something new. I could focus on the clouds hovering and drowning out the sun. That was new, in regards to my landscapes.

“Nothing in particular,” I told them. “Painting puts me at ease, so thought I’d welcome some peace, you know?”

“Do you ever paint people?” Neph asked.

“Meh. I’m not great at faces, though bodies aren’t too difficult.”

“Really?” Neph asked.

Tem shook his head. “Oh no.”

I glanced between them as Neph’s smile turned wicked. He joined Tem next to me, wrapping his arm around my waist. “Want to paint us?”

Tilting my head, I was trying to figure out why the mischievous smile. It seemed like an innocent enough question. “Okay,” I answered.

His smile shifted to show his teeth. “Naked?”

“There it is,” Tem said.

I laughed, feeling my face heat. “I haven’t actually painted nude models before.”

“Good,” Tem answered, pulling his shirt over his head. “This should be reserved for your husbands anyway.”

Without hesitation, Tempest pulled off the rest of his clothing and stood a few feet beyond the easel. “How do you want me, princess?”

“That’s a loaded question,” Neph mumbled, not taking his shirt off.

“Well.” I looked around before glancing at the house. “Think we can find an elegant lounge chair or something?”

“Yep, I know just the one. You decide where you want us,” Tem said as he walked back toward the house, grabbing Neph on the way by. “You’re taking your clothes off, Nephele. I want to see her paint our cocks.”

My face burned at his words, and I turned to walk away from my canvas to find the right location. There was a little spot that was hidden within a small cluster of trees that I waved them to put down the chaise for. We spent a few minutes adjusting it and then bringing my easel and paints out.

When Neph still hadn’t taken his clothes off, Tem rolled his eyes and pulled Neph’s shirt over his head. “Stop being shy. She’s seen your dick, hot stuff.”

Neph rolled his eyes in return, letting Tem strip him down until he was bare in front of me, too. Tem turned back to me with another gleam in his eyes. “While I’d like to see you paint our dicks in all sorts of aroused states, how about our first one is while we’re hard, hm?”

Nephele’s eyes widened. “How quickly do you paint?”

I laughed. “A landscape can be done relatively quickly because I’m practiced at it. This... not so much.”

He grumbled, setting a glare on Tem. “I’m not in the mood for torture.”

“A little pain will do you some good.” Tem winked at him. “Besides, I think we can enjoy our wife right after. Put our aching cocks to good use and fill our woman.”

Heat raced along my spine as Neph looked at me, waiting for my answer. I nodded. Always ready for one of my men. Two of them? Yes, please.

In response, Neph licked his lips, watching me with dark eyes. “Alright, fine. How do you want me?”

He’d been right. That was a loaded question. And the answer was sooo many ways! But deciding that this was a fun idea and I didn’t want to pass it up, I moved around my canvas to my naked men, enjoying how their dicks were thickening and lengthening before my eyes with every step closer I got.

Talk about the feeling of power in that. I gestured for them both to sit and lean back comfortably. Close. Neph sat on the left, a leg bent and foot on the edge, his arm around his shin. Tem sat on the right under Neph's arm, which was thrown over the back of the chaise. Tem's hand on Neph's thigh, his legs situated slightly bent, resting on a stump close in front of him.

They looked at each other, sweet and sexy smiles on their lips. I loved how good they looked sitting there. As far as I knew, they weren't lovers. But their comfort with each other was total. Even as their hard cocks pressed against their stomachs. The way Tem leaned in, his arm was close to Neph's dick.

I licked my lips and backed away. "Hold that," I murmured, feeling the way my body responded.

"I may need a fluffer," Neph said quietly.

Amusement flashed in Tem's eyes. "No, you don't, big guy. Just know that our woman is watching us. Staring at our naked bodies. Each brush stroke on her canvas is a caress. And soon enough, we'll bury ourselves inside her."

Neph groaned, pre-cum dripping down his head. "That's an image," he grunted.

"I want your sweet faces back," I told them, hearing how breathy and low my voice was.

"And if she keeps talking to us in that tone, I'm going to come undone," Tem said, trying to bring his expression back to something more meaningful than flirty or dirty.

I didn't know what they were thinking, but I watched them as they stared at each other. Watched as their expressions changed as if they were having silent communication that I couldn't quite hear. Their dicks leaked, a bead of pre-cum dripping down the length of Neph's dick, while Tem had a string of it connecting his abdomen to his cockhead.

I wasn't sure if they were actually thinking about my brush strokes across their bodies but watching as their dicks flexed, jumping periodically, and the way their balls moved on their

own, I was breathing heavily in a puddle of my own arousal as I tried to paint them.

My method was generally losing myself in what I'm looking at so that I barely see what I'm actually painting. Too busy studying the light and shade, the lines and curves and colors to watch what I'm doing; then before I realize it, I've usually finished.

But I barely noticed when I finished this time. I was too busy staring at the love and camaraderie between my two men while they sat there on display for me. Admiring their shoulders and the length of their chests. Neph with a smattering of hair across his, while Tem was smooth and bare. The tone of their muscles. The rise and fall of their breaths. Their lush lips.

Their dicks were comparable in size, but Neph's was thicker than Tem's, though Tem's balls looked fuller. Heavier. I licked my lips as I studied the way they looked at each other. And it was there that I lost myself for a while longer.

It wasn't just the fondness of family I saw. But their strong love and friendship. Partnership. Dedication to each other and everyone in our household. With hints of teasing. The glow of dirty thoughts as they passed through their eyes. The slight curve of Tem's lips into an amused smile while Neph's expression was open and affectionate.

Swallowing, I looked back at my canvas to see that it was done. I didn't do the entire surroundings. Even the sides of the chaise faded. But I captured their faces, their bodies, the looks in their eyes. The comfort in their position and arousal in their bodies.

A memory on canvas that I fell in love with the more I looked at it.

"I'm done," I said, my voice hoarse from my own desire, heavy breathing, and not speaking for so long.

"Thank fuck," Tem said. "I think I'm going to explode. He's over here giving me sex eyes and shit."

Neph laughed. "Sure I am."

Though I was smiling at their banter, I hadn't looked away from my canvas. As if I were looking for some spot that needed just a bit more, but everywhere just looked... perfect. I felt them come up on either side of me as they looked at the canvas in silence.

Biting my lip, I waited for them to speak. Anything. Was it shit? I tilted my head to try and decide.

"Jesus, that's fucking hot," Neph said.

I sighed in relief.

And then their hands were on me.

I wasn't sure whose mouth was on me nor whose hands were touching me where. Mouths passed over mine, taking turns or stealing me from each other as they stripped me bare.

Then I was on the ground on top of Neph, my body splayed against his while I tried to regain my balance. Behind me, Tem kept me pinned as he ran his dick between my legs.

Neph grunted, his hips thrusting up. "Fuck, Tem. Keep doing that and I'm going to fuck you, too."

Tem chuckled, low and sensual, the sound making me and Neph both groan. "Sure you are, big guy."

"You can," I managed. "I don't mind being part of your threesome. It's hot."

Neph grinned against my cheek. Again, we both shuddered as Tem rubbed the length of his dick along my crease from behind, likely against Neph's exposed length too.

"We're not actually lovers," Neph said at last, though his voice was thick with need. "But that might fucking change if he doesn't stop teasing me."

And then we both complained as Tem backed away, making him laugh. But our complaints were lost when Tempest replaced his dick with his mouth. And I knew, even as he began licking me, that he was lapping his tongue against the underside of Neph's dick too.

Nephele gripped me tight, his hips jerking up every other minute. “Are y-you sure you’re not lovers?” I stammered out.

“Things change,” Neph grunted. His legs widened under me, making mine spread too. I felt Tem’s tongue deeper now that I was split open for him. I’d likely have been hot with embarrassment at the exposure, but my skin was burning with need instead.

“Fuck, keep doing that and I’m going to be over before we begin,” Neph cursed.

“What’s he doing?” I asked, trying to shift to look. I swear, his mouth never left my pussy for more than a couple seconds, so I couldn’t imagine.

Neph gripped me tightly, not letting me up so I could look. I wanted to pout but the sound Neph made went straight to my core, making all my muscles tight with desire.

“Playing with my asshole and squeezing my balls,” Neph answered.

I shivered at the image. And while his ministrations never let up on me, it was that picture adding to my arousal that had me moaning.

“You up for a little double stuffing, princess?” Tem asked.

“Yes!” I almost shouted.

They both chuckled and Tem moved back. Again, Nephele and I both complained at the loss. “Up,” Tem said, patting my ass. I shifted onto my knees as he grabbed Neph’s dick and stood it up for me.

Looking between my legs, I admired Tem’s hand around Neph’s cock for a minute. His weeping dick that had left a puddle of cum on his stomach. Wiping it with my fingers, I brought it to my mouth and licked them clean.

Tem’s other hand grabbed my throat, twisting me around to seal his mouth over mine. Sharing the taste of Neph on my tongue. When he released me, only to put that hand on my hip and push my body onto Neph’s cock, I asked, “Are you sure you’re not lovers?”

“It’s not that we haven’t before,” Tem said as Neph finally breached me. I sucked in a breath as Tem continued to lower me. “We joined this family pretty much right on top of each other. And we did fuck around throughout the first year or so. But we found our relationship more emotional lovers than physical after a while.”

Tem’s hand left Neph’s dick when I was pretty well seated, but his fingers went to my entrance. Sliding in with Neph’s dick as he slowly tried to stretch me wider.

“It’s because we’ve been staring at each other fucking hot for what felt like two days,” Neph said through his teeth as he thrust up into me. “It’s not something we’re opposed to,” he huffed, taking a minute to concentrate on driving home instead of talking. “It’s just not something that happens anymore.”

I grunted, nodding. My body slumped forward, my weight resting on my hands that splayed across Neph’s chest. He continued to drive home, making my eyes roll with each thrust as he drove straight into my pleasure spot. Tem’s fingers never stopped moving with Neph’s cock. Pushing against my walls.

It wasn’t until Neph swore, his hips bouncing hard into me that I realized that Tem was still stimulating Neph as well. I groaned, twisting around to look over my shoulder.

He was. His hand curled around Neph’s balls but his hand moved, pegging his hole with every one of Neph’s upward thrusts. My throat dried at the sight. So goddamn hot.

Tem’s mouth took mine as he shifted forward, and I felt his cockhead replace his finger. Neph paused in his movements as Tem began working his cock inside me along Neph’s.

I turned forward, my eyes locked on Neph’s. His mouth hung open, his pupils blown wide as he stared at my face. His fingers clenched my hips. “Holy fuck,” he grunted, his hips giving a sudden jerk.

My breath was pushed out of my lungs as the stretch burned through me. Stinging as if my body was being pulled in two.

“You okay?” Tem asked, his lips at my ear.

I nodded. That might have been a lie. But when he started moving, I was writhing in his hold. His hands held my hips, not allowing me to pull up and off them, while he began slowly pushing up into me. Over and over, easing more of his thick dick inside.

There was no rhythm to Neph's movements anymore. He was erratic and vocal about how tight it was. How hot. The kind of pressure that Tem's dick against him caused him. Most of the time, he was a bit incoherent. His words tumbled out of him illogically.

Tem watched him with amusement, a smile on his lips as he kissed my neck and shoulder.

"You're enjoying making him come undone, aren't you?" I accused.

"More than I can even say. Look how hot he is right now."

"He's always hot," I countered, my breath catching on the last word as he pushed inside me harder.

Tem grinned. "He sure is. But there's something so fucking sexy about making him lose all his inhibitions and being unable to help himself."

That's true enough. I watched Neph with him, my moans filling my head as they worked me together. Though I don't think it was conscious on Neph's part at this rate. He very obviously wasn't seeing us anymore as he moved wildly. I think it was only Tem not giving him enough room to truly move that he hadn't come yet.

With his hand around my neck again, Tem pulled my face around and kissed me breathless. "I'm going to fuck him now, alright?"

I nodded. "Want me to—"

"Stay right there. You're not moving. Just ride him. Let him get lost in your body, princess."

Grinning, I nodded. Tem slowly pulled out of me, and Neph calmed down. But only for a minute. I shifted, twisting

again, so that I could watch Tem. I looked in time to see his cockhead disappear into Neph's ass.

Neph hissed, his hips slapping upwards, making me gasp. His hands gripped me harshly. Tem moved us so that Neph's ass was no longer on the ground but over his bent legs. That had me so that I was practically kneeling to stay on.

When Tem was halfway in, I turned back to Neph. He couldn't move much at this angle, Tem having changed the position enough that he no longer had purchase. His eyes were still wide, his mouth opening and closing without sound. Though his hands on me were digging, the rest of him looked relaxed.

His legs shifted under me, widening, and I knew he must bottom pretty regularly. I wasn't sure if he was always this blissed out during sex or if it was stemming from the overstimulation Tem caused him until this point.

"That's it," Tem said, shifting closer to me. His chest pressed against my back, and I knew he was buried deep.

"This is so fucking hot," I muttered, grinding down on Neph's dick. Neph moaned loudly, trying and failing to move his hips beyond a wiggle.

Tem nodded. "Ready to feel him lose it?"

"Yes. So ready."

"Hang on, baby," he said in my ear.

I leaned forward, planting my hands on Neph's chest again. When I was settled and braced, Tem started thrusting.

The noises that came out of Neph were erotic. Carnal. Uninhibited lust and arousal. Though he had no leverage to move, he still managed to thrust inside me harshly, slamming into my g-spot over and over until I was crying out.

Tem never stopped. He didn't let up, his hand on my shoulder kept me balanced. I wasn't sure where his other hand was, but I knew he was hanging onto Neph tightly. It felt like we were in a marathon. We weren't allowed to finish until we reached the finish line.

Except that the end kept changing. Not remaining still. And we chased it with Tem behind the motor, driving us on. Only when he commanded that we come, did I think that he was holding the trigger. I came down with a screaming crash. Everything in me shattering almost audibly. But I could barely hear it over Neph's roar.

Then we collapsed on the ground into a heap, Tem's strong hold keeping us tightly together. Many, many long minutes passed as the sun set on the horizon, beyond the clouds as shadows stretched across the grass. I shivered as the air cooled.

"I just remembered why we don't fuck," Neph said, his voice a raspy croak.

"Why?" Tem asked.

"Because every time we do, you fucking murder me and bring me back. Over and fucking over again."

Tem laughed. "You're welcome."



Bronte

THE BASEMENT POOL WAS A LONG RECTANGLE WITH A CURRENT for those who like to swim laps without having to turn around every so many feet. They could be turned on and you just swim against the jets. There were several speeds and while I thought it was a good stress reliever sometimes, I also had this niggling feeling like it was wasting time. It wasn't. Swimming was a phenomenal full-body exercise.

I rarely lasted long in the chlorine pool. Climbing out and flicking the jets off, I headed outside through the firepit and toward the round saltwater pool. Usually it was warmer than it was today but that's because we've been hiding under a heavy cell of storm clouds for weeks now. The sun just hasn't been able to penetrate the thick layer.

Even so, I dropped into the pool and closed my eyes, letting the cool air brush against my wet skin and pebble in the chill. Hawaii was rarely anything but a tropical paradise but there were days when it could be downright cold. Especially when the sun hasn't shined in a while.

We were heading back into The Harem Project in a couple days to see what news Koh's team had gathered. And also to see what kinds of weapons The Harem Project had.

While we knew Silence was expanding their arsenal with a whole array of nightmarish weapons, I shuddered to think that the rest of the world was sitting pretty and turning their head in the opposite direction. Wanting peace. Pretending that if

they looked the other way and didn't get involved, they'd have peace. They'd be left alone.

They were stupid.

While part of me wanted to let them die if they weren't willing to fight, the louder part of me understood. Until the last year or so, we'd also been just as content to ignore the world and carry on as if nothing was happening.

We didn't pretend it was safe. We never once imagined it was anything but hostile. But not being hunted meant those we cared most about were alive.

Until we did something to gather attention. Or maybe, our numbers alone did that.

Our mistake. Something we understood now, even if a little late. But we were ready to do something and while there wasn't a lot that could take down a group of storms our size, we weren't invincible. Eventually, storms run out of energy and die out.

We didn't want to be the ones to die first.

But all that was for a future me to think about. Right now, with my family all home, safe under a single roof, I was pretending to relax in the pool. There was not a relaxed bone in my body but I was sure as fuck pretending.

The worst part was this sense of knowing it would all end. When we moved out, ready to strike against Silence, we would not be coming home the same as when we left. I tried desperately to convince myself that we'd not be fundamentally changed. It was one thing killing a mountainside full of monsters who were bent on abducting or killing us, whichever outcome they could get.

It's another entirely walking into a place with the sole purpose to murder everyone inside. Knowing that they weren't attacking first.

True, they weren't innocent. I'm sure that everyone in that building has blood on their hands. But it would be the first time ever that anyone in my house has moved with violence against anyone. Even knowing it's necessary. Knowing that if

we leave their attack unanswered, we would welcome more attention. That didn't change how difficult this was. How the knowledge that we're going to be killing people in cold blood really fucks with your head.

“Sweet butt.”

I opened my eyes to find Zilan fully clothed as he stood at the edge of the pool. Smiling, I shifted my body onto the surface so I could see him more clearly. “Hey, Zy.”

“What are you doing out here all alone?”

Shrugging, I slowly moved myself through the water toward him. “I'm relaxing. Can't you tell?”

Zilan laughed. “Sure you are. I don't hear a note of distress in your voice at all.”

I hadn't realized my tone reflected my inner turmoil. But of course, it did. I was always known for wearing my heart on my sleeve.

Sighing, I shrugged again. “Okay, I'm pretending to relax. Floating on water is relaxing, isn't it?”

He chuckled. “Sure, hun.”

I watched as Zilan reached over his head and pulled his shirt off. His pants fell next before he hooked his fingers under the waistband of his underwear and shoved them down while he kicked off his shoes. Once he'd divested himself of his socks too, he climbed into the pool and waded over to me.

His lips were soft as he kissed me, his hand tangling into my wet hair to hold my mouth to his. “What do you need to relax, baby boy?” he murmured.

For this whole thing to be done and behind us. We all survive. Unscathed.

Swallowing, I shrugged. There wasn't something that could relax me right now. No matter how hard I tried or how badly I wanted it.

I was too scared of the unknown. The future outcome that felt more dooming than anything.

The hand that wasn't in my hair twisted with my other, our fingers tangling together. I closed my eyes, resting my temple against his shoulder as we floated in the water quietly.

"Remember when we decided on three pools?" Zilan asked.

I cocked my head slightly. "The blueprints that I was helpless to read?"

His smile was beautiful. Reminiscent. "Those only showed two pools. But Arat insisted we needed a third in the yard."

"We never built that one."

"No. He settled on enough hot tubs that we could each have our own."

I snorted. We had three. Not that many.

"I wasn't sure why he needed so many. Sure, a hurricane likes water and gathers energy from being out to sea, but why all the pools here?" he mused.

"Because he wanted us to have plenty of space," I said. "And the more pools we had, we had to increase the square footage to make that happen."

"He was afraid that we'd get sick of each other. That even with all the space in the house, we'd get annoyed with being on top of each other and so he was determined to make sure we each had our own separate place to decompress on our own."

"We don't get tired of each other," I said.

He smiled, pressing his lips to mine again. "We don't. But sometimes I think he's still worried we will."

My brows knit together. "Why?"

"I think because his parents didn't stay together. Their harem was only five deep, but they couldn't stand being so close all the time. I believe Arat's biggest fear is that we'll split if we find ourselves in forced proximity too often."

Frowning, I said, "I love being around you every single day. I would never get sick of it. My biggest fear is coming

home but someone else not making it. What if the last thing I told them wasn't how much they meant to me? What if I didn't remind them how much I love them?"

Zilan suddenly righted me in the pool so quickly that my arms flailed as I tried to find my equilibrium. I hadn't caught my breath from my heart slamming in my chest when his mouth covered mine. Kissing me fiercely, his fingers digging into my back.

"Right now, we all have that fear," he said into my mouth, his hands dragging down my body to move my legs so they'd wrap around his waist. "But know that our biggest priority will always be making it out alive. Together. All of us."

"Yes," I agreed. The word sounded choked.

But there were things out of our control. When the sun rises and falls. The breeze and the vastness of the ocean. Who we fall in love with. The type of storm you're born as.

When it's time to die.

I swallowed the lump in my throat.

Zilan cupped my face in his hands as I clung to him. "We've cheated death already, and our Nephilim will be on standby. We *will* make it out together, Bronte. Do you understand me?"

While his words were fierce and assuring, I didn't miss the fear in his eyes. The way they glistened with unshed tears that he refused to acknowledge.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I nodded.

"We will come home when we're done. When we've accomplished our goal of striking a devastating assault, however that might be. All twelve of us. And we'll sit together in one of these pools, right on top of each other, and finally laugh our terror away."

"Not in separate pools," I said.

He smiled, shaking his head. "Never in separate pools. Because we belong together. We're better together. Being apart

is never an option. Something that Arat has come to learn. And you will, too.”

“I know that—”

“Yet you keep thinking about losing someone.” He wasn’t wrong. But hearing the words spoken out loud felt like a punch in my heart. I gasped, trying to catch my breath. “We won’t, Bronte.”

“How do you know that? How can you be sure?”

“Because it’s not an option. We all come out alive or we all die in there. That’s it. There is no in between.”

His words were harsh and yet, they felt somewhat freeing. I laughed, and it sounded a little hysterical, even hearing it bubble out of my mouth. It continued to fill my ears as I gripped Zilan tightly. Wanting it all to go away. Needing desperately to skip ahead into the future and after the incident has finished. Whatever the outcome might be.

Zilan was right. It had to be an all or nothing. Any other option wasn’t worth living through.

His mouth covered mine, swallowing my hysterical laughter. While Zilan always kissed me hard and claiming, there was something rougher in it right now. His hand tangled in my hair tightly, holding me firmly there as he kissed with teeth and tongue. His other hand went down my chest, over my stomach, around my back, and up again. Feeling me everywhere.

“I need inside you,” he said, giving away that he wasn’t as calm and confident as he let on. I nodded, and he shifted me around him, letting the water buoy us from going under as he moved to bring his cock to my ass.

His mouth sought mine again as I gripped his shoulders under my hands, ready for the sting. It came as he shoved inside, not being slow or careful as he normally would. I grunted into his mouth. His hand gripped my thigh, allowing him the position he needed. His other wrapped firmly around my waist.

“I love you,” Zilan said, dropping his mouth to my neck. His bites on my skin were hard, making my dick twitch every time his teeth sank into my flesh. “I loved you the second our eyes met, Bronte. I’ll always love you.”

I wrapped my arms around his neck, hugging him to me. His embrace tightened, though his bites continued. As if he were marking me physically so that even if death took us, they’d see that I belonged to someone. No one else could have me. I was marked so thoroughly that death itself couldn’t touch me.

“Love you, too,” I said, choking on my words. “I can’t be without you, Zy.”

He shook his head. “Never, baby. Never, ever going to happen.”

But he didn’t feel that. Though there was a fierce conviction in his voice, his hold on me told a different story. He was scared. Internally freaking out in the same way I was. Desperate for each second to matter. To store a bank of memories that would transcend death.

Tears stung my eyes as I clung to him. His teeth sank into the soft spot on my shoulder, and I hissed. He didn’t let go this time as he pulled his cock out and shoved up into me hard. I gasped, my fingers digging into him.

His breath was ragged, even as he didn’t let me go. I was sure that he had broken skin now, even as he held me harshly in his mouth while he fucked me hard. I ground my teeth, closed my eyes, and hung on. His dick splitting me open, filling me with him.

And then I was flung backward. My legs didn’t release around him, even as Zilan pulled my arms from his neck. My head went underwater as his hands landed on my hips. Before I had regained my position, he was fucking up into me. Holding my hips, he used his arms to pull me off and slam home. Over and over as I tried to suck in a breath underwater, my lungs filled.

It's a good thing I am water. That I can control the world of water. Otherwise, I likely would have drowned. But instead, the high of not being able to take more than a bubbled breath of salt water had my arousal peaking. The way he was controlling my body meant I hadn't been able to pull myself up. The muscles in my stomach felt more like sponges than actual muscles.

And then he was pulling out of me. Zilan didn't pull me to the surface, though. He spun me under water until my hands were on the ground and his dick in my ass again. I cried out underwater, more saltwater filling my lungs. It took everything in me to keep my monster from breaking through and commanding it to find us air within the water so we'd not drown.

Lack of breathing made my orgasm explode. My body wrung and tensed, convulsed. My arms went weak, and I nearly slammed my head into the ground before Zilan pulled me up.

This time, he got my head above the water. We were at the edge now and he bent me forward, his arm resting on the side where he pushed my head as he continued to slam into me hard. I coughed, sputtered. Desperately tried to catch my breath as Zilan rammed me until I was once again seeing stars.

Though I rarely touch myself during sex, because I like how stupidly drunk I get in the whole ordeal enough that it makes me come undone without touch, I gripped myself hard. Willing my body to hang on.

Zilan suddenly stilled, his breathing ragged. He didn't move for a minute. I knew he wasn't done yet. But he never took breathers.

Just as I was going to turn my head to look at him, he curled around me, burying his face in my hair. He shook in such a way that I thought he was crying. It brought tears to my eyes. Letting go of my aching dick, I reached back and took a handful of his hair. I gripped him tightly. Needing to hug him.

Without a word, he pulled out of me and urged me out of the water. Dropping one of the lounge chairs flat, he pushed

me down on my stomach and followed, burying himself inside my ass as he came down on top of me. He circled me in his hold, kissing my neck softly as his rocking turned to sensual and intimate from the harshness that had been in the pool.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

I shook my head. “Don’t be. I love everything you do with me.”

His laugh was quiet. Almost bitter. His hold shifted so that one of his arms was across my shoulders. He pressed his face into my hair, breathing me in.

“I’m scared,” he whispered. “I keep thinking that if I say it out loud, not giving the universe an option, that we’ll come home together.”

I swallowed thickly. “I’m scared too.”

“I know. And I’m sorry I broke down. That’s not what you need. I—”

“Zy.” He paused when I interrupted him. Even his movements as he buried himself in my ass. Using his weight to remain deep. “I know that I am the neediest one in this household. And you’re all very accommodating to my desires. But when you need something, you’re allowed to say so. I can be whatever you need me to be.”

“Can you?” he asked, his voice quiet.

I nodded. “I can.”

He didn’t move for a minute. When he did, he kissed my shoulder and got up. I rolled so I could see him and the wrecked expression made my heart clench in my throat. Zilan joined me on the lounge again, but this time next to me. Where I’d rolled to my side, he was now flush against my front.

“I need you to hold me for a minute,” he said, his brown eyes staring into mine. Letting me see how terrified he is.

Swallowing, I pressed tightly against him and wrapped myself around him. Slinging my leg over his hip and bringing him tightly to me.

Zilan clung to me. Shaking. Breathing heavy. I gripped him with everything in me, completely shook by this turn of events. No one has ever shown me anything but their strength. Because I'm always the one taken care of. I imagined that they took their needs to each other. when it came to the more vulnerable aspects of themselves

Not to me.

I was both scared out of my mind right now and somehow warmed. Probably because he's still getting what he needs from me and that's always what makes me feel good. And if he needs to be held and comforted for a minute, for an hour, for however long, I could do that.

Eventually, Zilan took a breath. The tension throughout his body relaxed and suddenly our positions were reversed, and he pulled me into his arms. He kissed me softly all over my face and I basked in the attention and affection. When he paused, I opened my eyes to find him looking at me.

"Are you okay?" I asked, brows knit together. I brushed the soft stubble of his face with my fingers. The wrecked expression was gone. The fear was buried again. All that I saw now was his love for me. And something else that I wasn't quite able to identify.

He nodded, a smile touching his lips. "You're..." his voice trailed off. Then gave a slight shake of his head, as if he didn't know what to say.

"Did I do it right?" I asked, a new concern blossomed inside me.

Zilan chuckled, resting his forehead against mine. "You're my entire world, Bronte. Thank you. I just needed comfort for a minute."

"I'll give you whatever you want. All you have to do is tell me," I said.

He hugged me tightly, pressing his lips to mine. Letting me feel how much I meant to him. "I know. I won't put that kind of pressure on you again, though."

“It’s okay,” I said. “I don’t mind, as long as you tell me what you need. Tell me what to do. I liked holding you when you needed it.”

“Did you?”

“Yes. I want to be here for everything. Including when you need to take a breath and let out your stress and fear.”

He didn’t answer for a minute, but when he picked his head up, he was smiling again. “I can do that.”

“Now you can hold me, though,” I told him. Him being scared had me completely and utterly fucking terrified.

Zilan wrapped around me tightly, pressing me into the lounge, and we laid there like that until the sun went down.



Hadley

I SAT NERVOUSLY ON THE SAME COUCH I'D BEEN ON WHEN I last video chatted with my friends. Reba and Dallas would be calling soon. I wasn't sure about Simms. She was apparently happy I wasn't dead, but that's as much as she's said over the last week and a half.

The conversation where I explained the truth of my life played through my mind all too clearly. While Reba and Dallas had been surprised, they'd recovered fairly quickly. Simms. She had not. Her gaping face stared at me through the screen. But I'd have dealt with her silence anytime over the conversation that followed.

Because I was nervous, Notus and Taranis sat on the couch across from me. The sight of them leaning companionably against each other reminded me of the painting of Nephele and Tempest. My cheeks heated at the image that flashed behind my eyes.

They were sitting close, but in a much more romantic position. Notus leaned back in the corner with Taranis's back against his chest. Notus had his phone in hand as he scrolled, but Tara had a book. I watched Notus's fingers move across Tara's chest absently.

Tara wasn't naked right now. He wore jeans that were low on his hips but the only reason he was dressed right now was because we were heading to The Harem Project to talk about Silence in a couple hours. He needed to be dressed for that.

They must have felt my gaze on them because both sets of stormy eyes glanced up from where they were looking.

“You okay, sweetheart?” Notus asked.

I nodded. “Haven’t really talked to them in a while,” I said. Texts here and there, yes, but I haven’t had a conversation with them in weeks. I was sure they’d been talking to Simms, so I could only imagine the things Simms was telling them. It made my stomach flip uncomfortably. She couldn’t sway them, right?

“We’ll be right here,” Tara said, giving me a sexy smile.

Sighing, I relaxed a little against the couch. Just as I was pulling my legs under me, the messenger rang on my laptop. Taking one last deep breath, I clicked the ‘accept’ button and a second later, Reba and Dallas’s faces popped up on my screen.

They were grinning widely. Their smiles looked genuine. And they appeared to be in good moods. Was there tension in their shoulders? Hesitation in their eyes?

“It’s so good to see your face!” Reba said.

“I was serious about the hug, though,” Dallas added.

Tears were already stinging my eyes to see them. I laughed and it sounded watery. “We will get together soon. I promise.”

“You can invite us there,” Reba said, grinning mischievously. Dallas’s eyebrows waggled.

I laughed again, wiping at my eyes. “Sure. You can come here. But they’re all mine. All of them.”

Reba sighed dramatically. “Fine. But just so you know, I’ve been dreaming about glorious ass cheeks.”

Tara snorted. My gaze flickered up to see him grinning into his book.

“Okay, tell us you’re alright,” Dallas said. “We’ll talk sex with eleven men later. Reba said your mom was frantic when she called back.”

I winced. “I’m going to be as honest as I can, but... there are other things I have never told you. And I’m not really at

liberty to tell you. Especially not when I'm nowhere near close enough to keep you safe." Yep, they both looked at me with wide eyes. Now that those words were out, I couldn't take them back. I chewed the inside of my cheek as I debated how to explain without actually telling them anything.

"So, I'm not from... America." That was technically true. "My family, both parents and my few, found family, are... well, for an easily understood analogy, we're hunted."

"Why?" Dallas asked, moving closer.

I pressed my lips together while I tried to find a reasonably true explanation. Because of what we are? It made me think of the holocaust. Jews were exterminated simply for being born who they were. These types of genocides are throughout history. That word seemed the most appropriate, I supposed, even though it barely scratched the surface.

"Genocide," I said, trying to keep my voice even. I didn't want it to sound like a question.

Both of their jaws dropped as they stared at me.

"So, we went camping. Family vacation and all. The first one of all twelve of us together. While we were there, the government entity who is trying to destroy my people sent a bunch after us on the mountain."

"The same mountain in Hawaii that suddenly died?" Reba asked carefully. "The one stripped bare from an unknown occurrence?"

I swallowed. No sense in lying now. "Yes. That mountain."

Neither answered for a minute as they watched me. I wasn't sure if they were waiting for me to elaborate or if they were working out questions in their minds. Eventually, Reba said, "I'm glad you're all okay."

Letting out a breath, I closed my eyes for a minute. "The truth is, we weren't okay. Two of my men nearly died. Another two were injured pretty badly." I paused as the lump in my throat prevented me from talking. "In the aftermath, I simply forgot about my phone in lieu of what was happening. So,

when I say it's not because you're not important, I didn't mean —”

“Stop,” Reba said, cutting off my words. “We get it. Thank you for telling us more than you're probably allowed to. I appreciate your candor and honesty. You're all okay now? Healing well?”

I glanced beyond the screen to the men sitting on the couch opposite me. They were no longer looking at their phone or book, but watching me. A smile touched both of their mouths.

“Yeah,” I said, my gaze on Taranis. “Everyone is healing well.”

“But you're scared, yeah?” Dallas asked. “Scared that they'll come back? It doesn't stop, does it?”

I shook my head. “No, their hunting of us doesn't stop. And yes, we're worried about them coming back. They've already tried, but we have a security system that has prevented them from getting close.”

“I'm so relieved you work from home,” Dallas muttered, closing her eyes as I looked back at the screen.

“Anyway,” I said, “I just wanted you to know that it was actually very serious—the reason why I didn't answer. And not because...” my voice trailed off for a minute.

“Because of Simms?” Reba asked, her voice clipped.

I gave her a smile I didn't feel. “Yes.”

“She's been vague about her conversation with you, but it's been very clear that she has an issue,” Reba said. “What happened?”

I shook my head. “She doesn't agree with my choice in lifestyle.” Shrugging, I tried not to show how much it bothered me.

“What did she say?” Reba asked, eyes narrowed.

“Doesn't matter,” I said. “As you said. Circumstances make it obvious what's important in your life. And who is important. I'm not going to hide my life because she doesn't

agree with it. So, if she doesn't want to support me, then I don't need to associate with her. That being said, please don't let what's happening between us come between your friendship with her."

Although we were on screens, I could tell that they shared a look. Neither said anything in response to my request. Reba pursed her lips as Dallas narrowed her eyes.

"So, what's new with you?" I asked. "Work? Boyfriends? Hookups?"

I could tell that they didn't want to move on yet, but eventually, Dallas started telling me about the guy she was getting together with. 'Just someone to scratch the itch, you know?'

For the next hour, I listened to them talk, and we laughed as we always did. As easy and comfortable as it was, and while our friendship didn't feel any different, Simms's absence was there. A constant void when I was sure I wasn't the only one who knew exactly what Simms would say during certain discussions. We even waited a beat to hear the words that never came, though her voice said them in my mind.

Notus, Taranis, and my phones pinged at the same time. I waited for one of them to look before giving me the nod that we were getting ready to head out.

"I need to go. We'll do this again soon?" I said.

Both nodded, grinning widely.

"And you're going to invite us out there," Reba asked, though 'asked' might have been stretching it. It was a statement.

"Yes. When things calm down," I told her. Or, better yet, we might go there. Somewhere not associated with our family and hopefully, Silence won't take a look at either of them.

We disconnected. Setting my laptop aside, I stood and stretched my back. My arms were still over my head as Notus and Taranis circled me, wrapping me in their arms.

“Genocide,” Taranis said. “An ugly word and yet, it’s entirely accurate for what Silence is trying to do.”

“And in some cases, has succeeded,” Notus added.

“Did I say too much?” I asked.

Their lips brushed over my skin on my neck and face. I closed my eyes, gripping them tightly to me.

“Maybe more than was necessary. Especially if they try to do an internet search since there’s no genocide happening on the islands of Hawaii. But it’s fine,” Taranis said.

We headed downstairs and loaded into the vehicles. Koh was already at his office so we stuffed ourselves into only two for the short drive. Our names were at security and Koh met us on the thirteenth floor landing. With a smile and several kisses going around as he greeted us, Kohara led us to another conference room.

Once, I don’t think he would have greeted us so intimately at his work setting. But we were all feeling a little more desperate these days. A timer ticked above our heads, though we weren’t sure when the countdown would end. It was there. We could hear it and feel it. We just couldn’t see it.

The room wasn’t just filled with The Harem Project suits today. There were also a large handful of our friends. Juniper and Bryn were back. Joining them were Hadrian Malak, Kormak Nash, and some others I didn’t recognize right away. One was a sea monster—a mermaid. I forgot the Darkyn’s name but he was a jaguar if I wasn’t mistaken. Then there was a dragon and a thunderbird. Oh, and Kiley Taru. I don’t even remember why I know her name.

“Coen, Akello, and Lieke are on the phone,” Hadrian said, nodding toward a conference speaker in the middle. On cue, three voices spoke in greeting.

Our group spent a minute spreading around, hugging and greeting those who had come.

Saar eventually looked at the Darkyn. “When I suggested a few friends, I didn’t mean the entire gambit, Iker.”

Iker smirked.

“Who are you trying to leave out?” the dragon asked.

Saar sighed, shaking his head. “No one. We just don’t want anyone getting in too deep when we don’t know what we’re doing yet.”

“That’s fine,” Bryn said. “Strength in numbers, gorgeous.”

We settled in, taking up chairs two at a time as we crowded around. “Should have chosen a larger room,” Koh muttered after a minute, shifting Tem in his lap so he could see around him.

“I’ll sit still,” Tem said, winking over his shoulder as he wiggled his hips.

Koh nipped at his neck before they settled and looked at the screen ahead.

A map appeared, and I knew right away that this wasn’t a map of the human world. This was the world of supernaturals. There were white dots placed at intervals that almost looked like a pattern.

“I think we’re missing at least two,” Kormak said, frowning at the map.

“We think so too,” Koh said. “We’re already running surveillance in those areas while we look for any building that fits the script.”

“Maybe don’t focus on the building but what’s in the area,” a voice from the phone said. “ORKA goes underground when needed. I’m willing to bet Silence does too. And what better way to hide in plain sight than not being in plain sight?”

Koh nodded. “Noted. We’ll relay the suggestion.”

“So, we’ve determined that one of these two buildings is their headquarters based on the activity. Though there hadn’t been any noted abductions in the past several months until recently, they never go to either of these places,” one of the suits said as he used a laser to circle two dots on the screen. “Except that in both instances, humans have been dragged into both. Never any monsters.”

“Which has the harem of humans?” Iker asked.

The suit indicated one of them. “This one easily has 85% of all the humans taken. But again, no monsters.”

They talked about the buildings for a while and what they’ve seen around them. I stared at the map, trying to see something that wasn’t there. Or see something that was there, and no one thought to look at. Not that I knew what I was looking for. Maybe there was nothing else to see.

“Your plan is to hit one hard, isn’t it?” Bryn asked after a while.

At first, my family didn’t say anything. But eventually, Koh nodded. “Yes. We’ve been leaning toward taking out their headquarters if we can identify it with reasonable confidence.”

“And then what?” the dragon asked.

“Go in, guns blazing,” Koh answered. He shrugged. “We need to figure out which facility our target is before we begin a plan. Planning will depend a lot on the individual location.”

“When are we planning this?” the thunderbird asked.

Saar shook his head. “No, Idris. There’s no ‘we’ in this.” His voice was quiet, but his words hung loudly in the air.

“What do you mean?” Kiley asked, frowning.

“I mean that while we appreciate your help with preparing, and we will absolutely accept all the help we can get in the following days or weeks, however long—this is something we’re doing alone,” Saar said.

“Alone,” Hadrian echoed.

Several of my men nodded in agreement.

“We know we’re being somewhat reckless in doing this,” Kohara said. “This is a direct retaliation from their attack on us. We can’t ask you to put your lives and families in danger for that cause.”

“You’re not asking,” the dragon said. “We’re still with you.”

“As you would be with us,” Juniper added.

Koh smiled, resting his head against Tem’s back. “Yes, I know, and we would be. But for now, I’d like to concentrate on this plan where we’re working alone.”

His statement felt like nails in a coffin. I can’t say that I’d have turned down the help of these people. Together they’re nearing a hundred strong. Alone, we’re just a dozen. I swallowed, sinking back into Raiden’s lap and taking a deep breath.

“I think we can agree to that—” Kormak began.

The dragon snorted under his breath. “No, we can’t,” he mumbled.

“As long as you’re in radio contact the entire time,” Kormak continued. “And understand that if you break radio contact, we’re there; whether you like it or not.”

Saar frowned. “That’s not—”

“Here’s the thing,” Kiley said. “You will let us help you and therefore, you cannot stop us from tagging along. So, you agree to the constant communication throughout, or you don’t get a say in whether you do this alone or with a whole lot of angry backup.”

For a small woman, her words were glacial and hard. Demanding obedience and agreement.

Saar chuckled. “Fine. Radios. But you stay the fuck away.”

“Sure,” Juniper said. “Ryker isn’t at all hungry. I’ll let you tell him he doesn’t get to eat.”

Koh laughed. “Done, June.”

Nightmares were nearly extinct. I was sure that this one would be careful. Not that I knew him at all. Maybe I was completely off base here.

But the conversation continued as they discussed operations that revolved around twelve individuals. Twelve storms.

And only twelve.



Bronte

WE SPENT A LOT OF THE NEXT TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN THE conference room, only leaving for short hours at a time to eat, shower, or take quick naps. There was a constant rotation of Harem Project guys as well as someone from our friends' families at all times.

It was sometime late at night when we determined our target. The facility with the most humans. There was reasonable belief that it was the headquarters of Silence, even with the humans present.

My stomach churned whenever I tried to imagine what they were doing with humans. What they did to monsters was bad enough, and we weren't defenseless. Humans, though. They were basically declawed kittens in the hands of monsters who meant them harm.

Some of us have been home for a few hours and just crawling out of bed. I wasn't in my own bed, even though I was alone. I couldn't remember the last time I actually slept in my bed. Too lonely. And my husbands' beds smelled of them, even when they weren't there.

Opening my eyes, I stared at the ceiling as the afternoon sun peeked determinedly through the curtains. Even though I'd only slept for a couple hours since two nights ago, my eyes were wide open.

We had a plan of sorts. That meant we had a real deadline. And while my fear had been simmering just beneath the

surface for weeks now, I was oddly calm. Still afraid, but there was a numbness to it now, too. As if I gave in too deeply to the fear, I'd be able to do nothing else.

The quiet of the house should have been unsettling. I liked to hear noise these days. To hear my men and wife moving around. Living. Breathing in our space.

But I heard nothing. Not from Tara's bed, anyway.

With a breath, I rolled to my side and slid out. My feet hitting the ground left a *slap* hanging in the air. It felt too loud, like I could feel the sound over my skin. I was quiet when I went into his ensuite and moved absently through a shower and brushing my teeth. I was still moving without focus or attention while I dressed in whatever clothes I pulled from his closet, not seeing if they were mine or his.

When I finally blinked, pulling my mind from the distracted place inside me, I found that I was standing in the ballroom. While I say this about many rooms in my house, the ballroom was probably one of my favorite rooms.

We've held so many celebrations here. New Year's. Birthdays. Holidays. Friendly gatherings. I'd had visions of getting married in here. I could see it when I closed my eyes. Flowers and vines decorating the space in light colors, emphasized with pops of blue and green. Rows of our friends watching. And our wife gifting the bouquet to the next family.

We'd gather in a big group hug and just breathe each other in. Exchange vows and pledge our life and love to each other. Again and again. I could marry these men over every single day and it would never lose its deep meaning.

Then we'd file outside for the celebration. There'd be more food than you could ever eat all of. There'd be a long, winding, snaking table that we'd all sit together at. We'd dance and laugh well into the night. Maybe even sleep under the stars.

Hands on my hips made me jump, and I spun to find Aratiri smiling at me. With my heart in my throat, I smiled in return.

“Hey,” I said.

He brushed his fingers across my face. “Hey,” he answered, voice quiet. “What’re you thinking?”

My gaze wandered around the room, but the vision had already faded. Shaking my head, I brought my attention back to him. “Just of all the times we’ve had in this room. All the good memories.”

“We’ll be making so many more,” Arat said, pulling me against him.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, letting our foreheads touch as he held me close. Our bodies swayed in the quiet, as if we were moving to phantom music.

“Yeah,” I agreed, not hearing any conviction in it.

“You don’t think so?” he asked.

I was shit at lying, so I just shrugged. While I didn’t want to say I didn’t think so, there was a part of me that thought we weren’t going to make it out of that building alive. And while I didn’t fully give into that doomsday prediction and held out hope that we were going to be well enough prepared for whatever we found there, the fact that we were going to be surrounded *inside* a dangerous facility felt a little final to me.

Arat sighed, one of his hands moving up my spine to rest between my shoulder blades. “We *will* come home.”

I nodded, still not trusting my voice to sound convicted with my confidence.

He smiled a little. A quiet, sure smile. “Do you know why I believe that?”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because our happily ever after hasn’t even started yet.”

My brows knit together. “It hasn’t?”

He chuckled. “Hadley’s here, yes. But our family hasn’t even settled into having her yet. We’re still learning each other. Finding the right pattern and happiness. Remember how long it took us to learn to live with Notus?”

I grinned. He was a bit of an eccentric diva when he arrived. It was a hilarious and yet frustrating year that continued well into the time that Nephele and Tempest joined us. And then one day, everything just clicked, and it was as if we were trying to stand right outside the happy zone instead of shifting, just slightly, until we all aligned as we were always meant to.

“I don’t think Hadley will take nearly as long to be a part of us, but the point is, we’re not there yet,” he said. “And therefore, we *will* come home.”

“I’m not sure that the laws of the universe will bend to that reasoning, but it’s a good enough one,” I said.

“Besides that, there’s you and I that have only just begun,” he said, pressing his lips against mine until I sighed against his mouth. “I sure as fuck didn’t just open my eyes to what I’ve had in front of me this entire time to lose it before we get there.”

My arms tightened around him as my heart gave a squeeze. I swallowed the lump in my throat. “What if that’s not enough?” I whispered, finally letting a little of my fear through.

“We’re going to make it enough.”

“I can’t help but think that maybe we do need some help,” I admitted.

“We’re going to have plenty of help. While The Harem Project hasn’t been focusing on weapons, our friends have some tricks up their sleeves and we’re pulling out all the stops.”

That’s not what I meant. He knew that. But while none of us were going to argue that twelve was not all that large of a number in the field, I was confident that we all agreed that this was our fight. Silence had targeted our family and while coming at them with greater numbers to show our unity, we weren’t ready to pull our friends into the line of fire yet.

Then again, the Daemons were already there. Surely we could at least bring the demons with us?

I didn't suggest it. Because if we don't survive, I sure as fuck wanted them to go on and live long, healthy, happy lives.

"Alright," I said.

Arat chuckled again. "Trust me, baby. Everything will be fine."

He held me firmly in his arms as we danced quietly around the room. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I could hear a band playing. Maybe an orchestra, with someone singing as we swayed to the rhythm.

As we left the ballroom, I wondered if he really was that certain of the outcome or whether he was just that good about putting on a front for me.

Back at The Harem Project, most of my family was littered around the table, working in smaller groups. Quiet chatter filled the room, and I caught snippets of conversations concerning weapons, time of day, number of agents, countermeasures, layout.

I paused next to the map that was being constructed and stared, impressed. "How are we sure that's what the inside looks like?" I asked as I sank into a seat next to Akello.

He grinned at me. "Penetrating radar mixed with some strong magic," he said, winking. "We have nodes surrounding the building, some mixing frequencies into their own surveillance, and others sending in probing waves that bounce back for us to gather data."

"It's pretty impressive," Plum said, grinning widely. "Was ridiculously exciting to create this and see it succeed. I bet they're scrambling inside to try to figure out what the sudden rush of magic noise is coming at them from all sides."

"Including underground," Akello added.

There were still large sections of the building across four floors and several basement levels that were dark, but as I watched the screen, walls grew up. I pointed. "What happened here?"

Plum pushed a laptop toward me and I studied the screen that literally looked like lines scanning across. So many of them, moving like a heartbeat. Sometimes growing taller while others dropped down. Plum pointed to one particular blip in the lines where they shifted up dramatically before suddenly dropping off.

“This is what a stairwell shows as. This technology works best through soil and pings off metal at certain depths that you program in. But with some well-placed magic, not only do we get by their magic thresholds, but we also move through concrete, steel, and wood while noting the layers we make it through. Because we’re surrounding the entire building, the signals cross and line up within the program. That’s how it’s finding and confirming walls, doors, stairs, and other areas,” Plum explained.

“This is stupidly incredible,” I said, feeling a bit of hope blossom inside me. “We aren’t going in blind.”

“We were never going to let you go in blind,” Akello said, sighing in exasperation. “Though we shouldn’t let you go in alone, either.”

“It’s only our confidence in your strength that we’re agreeing to sit out,” Fable said as he took a seat with us. He leaned back in his chair, spreading his arms across the back of mine and giving my hair a gentle tug.

“But the second you stop answering us, we will be there to storm the place with you,” Akello said.

I smiled, not bothering to argue with them either way. Because I couldn’t decide which end of the argument I was on. There was no way we’d lose if we all went together. But with greater numbers on our end meant the higher probability that someone would get hurt. It meant that not only would my family be a target with the Daemons, but every other family, too.

Bottom line was that we needed to win. It didn’t matter how we made that happen. As long as we all left in one piece, together, breathing, that’s the only outcome that was an option.

Akello, Plum, and Fable spoke about the layout and hypothesized what was in each room. Coming up with possible scenarios that we might find everywhere we came. Every ten minutes, another room would come online. There were pockets here and there that remained empty and Plum said that there must be something in those rooms that was causing too much interference. Be it technology or magic, she couldn't say.

By the time I left around three that morning to head home, I was starving, but also felt more hopeful and confident about this mission than I had since we agreed to it. The floor plan was almost complete. Even with the holes, I didn't have any doubts that we'd make it through with confidence in each step.

Around me the entire day and into the night, more discussions and strategies were coming together. Preparations and weapons. An agenda that we would aim for.

Stepping into the house, I took a deep breath. Inhaling the familiar scents. Clean and fresh was always the base, but there was that electric charge that hung on the air, too. The one that said 'this house belongs to fucking storms' loud and clear.

With a content smile, I headed into the kitchen, raiding the fridge to see what I could snack on. I was famished and couldn't remember the last time I ate something. I pulled out a food container and popped the lid, not caring what was inside. It heated in the microwave for a few minutes as I pulled off my hoodie and pants, dropping them on the floor by my discarded shoes to take care of later.

Hot container in hand, I grabbed a spoon and headed into the TV room that we rarely set foot in. I dropped onto the sectional and pulled the cover off, letting the red sauce and cheese aroma fill my lungs. My stomach clenched with hunger, and I dug in, ignoring how it burnt all surfaces of my mouth. Well worth it, even though I barely tasted it.

After a handful of bites, I reached for the remote and clicked on the television. Flipping until something remotely interesting came up, I inhaled the contents of the container. I was just finishing when a shadow stood in the door.

Kohara looked spent. He smiled at me, blinking sleepily.

“Hi,” I said, sitting up. “Want something to eat? There were more of these.” I held up the container as an indication.

“No,” he said, his voice exhausted. He pulled off his suit jacket and dropped it at the end of the couch before sitting down beside me and pulling me against him. He sighed into my hair, burying his face in the side of my head. “Just sit with me a while, hm?”

I nodded, shifting so we’d get comfortable laying together on the couch. He wrapped around me, draping his leg over my hip. Pressing his face to the back of my head. His arms holding me securely like a harness.

Kohara took a deep breath and settled.

“Are you okay?” I asked quietly.

“Yep. Just need to rest a while.”

I smiled, nodded, and snuggled back against him letting this perfect moment of peace envelope us.

“Missed you,” he murmured.

My smile widened. I reached up behind him and pulled the blanket down, letting it fall over us how it fell. Kohara sighed again and I could already feel him falling into sleep. His muscles relaxing. His body becoming heavy against me.

Once, we used to cuddle like this weekly. Just spending time together. Talking. Playing video games. Unloading whatever was on our minds. With the excitement of Hadley and then the upheaval of our peace because of Silence, it’s been a while.

And yeah, I could feel the absence of these moments loudly now that he was here. “Missed you too,” I whispered, closing my eyes.

I sent out a silent plea to the universe that this wouldn’t be our last.



Bronte

BY THE NEXT MORNING, KOHARA AND I WERE BOTH BACK IN the conference room, though we attended to different things. Koh was deep into gathering as much information as he could, making sure we went in with all eyes wide open. And me? I was obsessively memorizing the layout of the building.

The magic sonar, or whatever it was, had finished scanning in the wee hours of the morning. Akello and Plum had gone home when I left. This morning, it was Seneca here.

“There are still some black spots,” she explained and pointed out a few as she shifted the screen around. A three-dimensional image floated between us and she walked us to the first shaded room that we couldn’t get a read on. “I wouldn’t say avoid them, but definitely go in guns blazing.”

“With the safety on,” I said.

She looked at me, raising a brow. “No. Keep the safety off, Bronte. Just don’t get trigger-happy.”

The layout gave us a good look at what we were going up against. It showed bars where there were clearly cells. It even gave us approximate furniture. Cabinetry, toilets, desks. It was all stupidly useful information.

While the rooms were just empty images, the toilets and cabinets and whatnot jutting out of the floor or the wall as if they were part of it, we could almost imagine what was going on in the rooms. It also left a sour taste in my mouth when we

focused on the rooms with what were unmistakably hospital beds.

More than anything, we knew that they weren't there to nurse someone's injuries. They were there to cause trauma beyond your imagination. Ady and Cobalt would be the first to tell you the kinds of things that happened within those walls. The things they've seen and been through are enough to give me second thoughts.

I'd rather die in those walls than be trapped alive.

Although there were a dozen other things that I could be doing, I spent most of the day virtually moving through the building, room by room. When I finished one tour, I took another. Then another. By the fourth complete circuit, I was anticipating what I'd see around the next corner. Without realizing, I was also imagining what those rooms were used for based on the furniture in them.

"Office," I murmured, turning in a slow circle. I'd blown the 3D image up so it was lifelike and let the rooms move around me as I shifted the screen forward or back. This wasn't an important office, though. It had three desks and a bunch of filing systems.

Backing out, I headed to the third floor, where all the offices reminded me of Kohara's. Big. Filled with what was likely expensive furniture. Important people.

I'd almost suggested that we do the same kind of read on several other buildings, just to see what was inside. Maybe the knowledge would solidify the idea that this one was headquarters. Or show us one that was a better target and use of our time.

Seneca said the pings are still going on around the building. Not with the intent that they'll get a read on the empty rooms that won't form, but so the suspicion about what's going on gives them something to focus on. They'll be changing the frequency sometime today. Just to keep Silence busy so they don't have time to focus outwards.

Koh had shown me into an empty office close by where I could blow the map up a little more and walk through the different rooms of the Silence building. Seneca left me alone as I wandered through the hologram over and over again.

I moved through office after office of important people, trying desperately to determine which was the president. The man in charge. The person responsible for the organization. But at least in this hollow version, they all looked the same. A couple had desks in the corner. A handful had a fireplace and seating area around it. One had a whole bunch of bookshelves.

There were big offices with banks of computer monitors on their desks. One that had a long table filled with multiple computers—that's what it looked like anyway. Hard to see when it just appeared as part of the wall. Two had closets, but it was hard to say what was inside them.

While I didn't stop moving through the different floors, I focused a lot of time on the top one. Determined to make an educated guess as to which rooms we needed to focus on.

"If we storm to the top and take the big wigs out, that brings everyone to us. If we start taking out from the ground floor, the top guys can get away," I murmured to myself, shifting my focus to exits.

There were half a dozen staircases and a set of double elevators. The elevators were easy enough to sort. Hadley could give the fuse box a nice electrical kiss and shut them down quickly. But if we block the stairs, that's taking at least six of us away from the whole.

Six on their own and halving our number. I frowned as I moved between the staircases.

We could lock down the building from the inside once we made it there. Focus on the doors first and seal them. But there was the fact that we simply didn't know who was in charge of Silence. What kind of monster they were.

Did they have wings and could simply fly away? Could they walk through walls? Move through electrical circuits? Fall from the fourth story and land light as a feather?

Frowning, I thought about the other option. Like The Harem Project, our doors were set up to connect all facilities to the few main business buildings within cities. Headquarters and the others that are set up to concentrate on other departments of the agency.

How would we find those doors in this kind of model? Maybe there were tunnels in the basement that led between the buildings. Maybe there were portals that presented as walls. They could escape. Or call in reinforcements.

“Hey, sugar.” I looked up to see Taranis and Notus in the door. They had take-out containers in their hands. “Hungry?”

I shook my head, my gaze flicking back to the semi-transparent walls around me. Notus moved into the room, walking through the holographic walls and grabbing my hand to pull me out of the image. “We’re not giving you a choice. You’re going to eat.”

Sighing and trying to hide my smile, I let him bring me to the side of the room as Tara entered. The door slowly swung shut, and I watched it while they doled out food between the three of us.

“Learning anything good?” Tara asked.

I shrugged. “Making all kinds of assumptions and also freaking myself out that this is a decoy.”

Notus chuckled. “Eat. Let’s talk about something else for a while.”

As soon as the first bite hit my mouth, my stomach growled and clenched in hunger. Clearly, I needed to do better about eating. I hadn’t even noticed I was hungry until I tasted it. I shoveled half a container of pasta down before I looked up for a breath. Notus and Taranis watched me, amused. Eating a lot slower than I was.

Sighing, I sat up straighter. “Sorry. Didn’t realize I was hungry.”

“We’re all working hard, but you need to take care of yourself, too,” Notus said. “Or we’re going to tell on you and Saar will make you stay home.”

I glowered at him. Childish! But I didn't doubt him at all. I'd have also threatened the same thing and followed through with it, too.

"Not intentionally," I said, pouting as I pushed another bite into my mouth.

Both of them grinned. We ate in silence until the food was gone. Honestly, I probably could have eaten a couple more containers. I was hungry. Plus my monster was restless and wanted the fuel. Knowing we were on the brink of unleashing again.

Taranis moved closer to me, straddling my crossed legs and keeping me stationary as he framed my face with his hands. I had to look up at him in this position, craning my neck to see into his dark eyes.

"Do not work yourself so hard, Bronte," he said, voice low and crackling like a fire. "We need our strength for the main event. That means you cannot be draining yourself in the days leading up to it. Understand?"

He was right. His words made me aware of the exhaustion in me. It suddenly felt like a weight on my muscles, dragging me down. Making my eyelids droop.

Taranis smiled. "That's what I thought. How about taking a break and heading home for a bit?"

I shook my head. "No. But I'll go home at a reasonable hour and go to sleep. All night."

He raised a brow.

"As much as I can," I amended. He knew as well as I did that this was suddenly feeling real. It made sleeping soundly for any length of time more difficult.

His lips met mine, and I closed my eyes, letting myself get lost in his kiss.

Taranis was a strong monster, filled with fire that raged for days. And like my monster, his was screaming to get out. Worked up because of our high-strung emotions. I could

almost feel his monster thrashing around inside him. Taste the smoke as it filled my lungs.

But his kiss was deep and slow, his tongue licking against mine as he held me still, his hands on either side of my head. Angling my face upward as he devoured me.

When he sat in my lap, he pushed me away from the wall so that he could be flush to me. Pressing his dick to my stomach before grinding into mine. I gripped his sides, holding him. Feeling the way his body burned through his clothing. A furnace. Wildfire.

His mouth left mine, swollen lips and panting. My eyes fluttered open as I looked into his deep gray ones. Tara wasn't smiling, just looking at me. His gaze trailing over my face as if he were memorizing every detail.

As I thought it, I realized that's what he was doing. Committing every line of my face to memory. Just in case. A lump formed in my throat as I stared back.

He sighed, leaning his forehead against mine. "Honesty," he said. "You doing okay?"

I shrugged. "I'm scared that we'll go in there and only half of us are going to come out. That's the crux of everything that's been moving through my mind these last several days."

Tara nodded. His weight leaned into me harder and No's hands wrapped around us from behind him.

"We're all scared of that," Notus said quietly. "But we also need to keep in mind that we're not just going in and presenting our necks. We're going in prepared to fight. With the intention of killing everyone in the same way that they've killed. Indiscriminately."

"That sounds easy enough," I said.

They both chuckled. My big, muscly men were heavy like this, leaning against me when I had nothing behind me for a brace. My abdominal and oblique muscles were beginning to ache. But I didn't complain. I kept my arms tightly around Tara, my hands fisted into Notus' shirt behind him.

I couldn't explain the desperate need to touch them all that burned inside me. It was frantic and half mad, impatient and impulsive. While I tried not to let the pressure and fear overcome me, it presented as an anxious need to be touching. To be near. Especially when we were in the same room.

"What are you thinking?" Tara asked.

"How needy I am," I admitted.

He chuckled. "You're not needy."

"Any more than usual," Notus amended.

A smile touched my lips. "Thanks for always taking care of my needs."

Both of their grips on me tightened. "Don't do that," Tara said, his voice dark.

I stiffened. "Do what?"

"Thank me like you won't be able to later. This isn't the end."

His words caught in my throat. While I didn't realize I was doing it, I really was. I wanted all of my husbands, and my wife, to know that I appreciated everything about them. And how they've always treated me. That I love them so thoroughly that I'd do anything for them at all. Anything.

"Bronte," he warned.

"Okay," I whispered. "Sorry."

He sighed, pulling back to look at me with a disapproving frown. Though I kept one hand right where it was, I brought the other around to run over his body. I tried to tell myself, 'this isn't me committing him to memory for the last time' while I touched him, there was still a darkness clinging to my mind that kept whispering, 'maybe it is.'

"I love you," I said. When he opened his mouth, I quickly cut in, "I'd tell you that regardless of what tomorrow holds. It's nothing new."

Tara's eyes narrowed. Behind him, Notus chuckled. "Nice finding that loophole, B."

I smiled innocently at Tara, blinking my eyes as if I had no idea what Notus was talking about. Tara sighed in frustration. His hands moved up my back before pushing into my hair, taking a rough hold and tilting my face up to him.

Again, he kissed me with abandon. Licking so deeply into my mouth, his tongue nearly reached my throat. I moaned. The sound seemed to spur on Tara as he rocked his hips forward, grinding his dick against mine. I'd half softened, but I was always quick to get hard. I'd say it was a sickness but I think it was just a desperate need to always give everyone I love a piece of me so that I can feel their pleasure.

Notus reached around and pulled up my shirt. Tara broke our kiss long enough to let him and held back while Notus pulled his off, too. When both were discarded, Tara's mouth covered mine again, his hands once more gripping my head so that he had me right where he wanted me. Where he could kiss deeply and thoroughly. Steal my breath and replace it with his.

Notus pulled us apart. He slid me across the floor after tossing Tara a lube packet. I was on my back in no time, Notus yanking my pants off. And then my underwear followed. He looked at me, hovering over my naked body as he studied me. Maybe also committing me to memory.

His eyes met mine and he smiled. While Tara got himself ready, Notus shoved his pants down his thighs where he knelt next to me on the ground. Wrapping a hand around his own dripping dick, he gave me his other. Taking my cock in his hand. Flashing me a smile, he turned his attention to Tara as he stroked us.

Notus was a lot like Tara in that I could feel his fiery monster inside him. But where Tara was always unhinged and ready to run rampant, set the world on fire, Notus was dormant. Watching. Waiting. And when the world least expected it, he'd explode with molten fury. Nothing would stand in his path.

I think his monster scared me deep down. While we loved each other deeply and used to hang out and play video games often, I didn't seek a lot of physical contact with him. Now

that I'm thinking about it, with his hot hand stroking my sensitive cock that throbbed in his touch, the reason was probably that. His monster scared me in a very strange way.

Before I could get too lost in that thought, Tara was on his knees. He pushed my legs up, dislodging No's hold on me, and I wrapped my arms around my thighs to give him proper access to my ass.

"Mm," he said, tracing a finger over my hole. "So fucking perfect."

Notus shifted to look, and I watched as a lazy smile climbed his lips. I held my breath when he reached out and touched me, too. A soft slide of his finger from my taint to my hole where he paused and pressed gently. My eyes fluttered closed on a groan.

His touch disappeared, replaced by Tara's cock. He pressed down, using his body weight to break the seal. I grunted as he entered me, closing my eyes as the burn spread like the fire he is. Part of me was sure that he helped strengthen that sensation.

"Fucking hot," Notus said.

I opened my eyes in time to see him stand. Gripping Tara by a fistful of hair, he shoved his cock down Tara's throat. I could see the bulge there, the perfect outline of his thick dick spreading Tara's trachea. Tara choked, his body giving a sudden lurch forward and sinking his cock deep within me.

Clutching my legs tightly, I gasped. He didn't give me time to adjust. I didn't think he had it in him. His hand fumbled until he found mine. Gripping me hard, he railed me like a piston while Notus did the same to his throat.

The room was filled with slick, slapping sounds that were only drowned out by everything coming out of my mouth. It felt so good to be owned like this. To have Tara using my body to feel good. To chase his pleasure. My dick throbbed so painfully, my eyes rolled in my head. Jaw clenching together.

Already, Tara was moving off rhythm. His thrusts became wild. He pegged my prostate over and over, hard. Stabbing

me. My eyes watered with the force of it. At the flooding of my orgasm as it sat right under the surface. Begging for release, but too overwhelmed to actually let go.

Even through Tara's shuddering release, mine was still clinging to the edge of the cliff. I whined, my head thrashing back and forth as I begged for it to come. To flood like a storm.

"Bronte," Notus demanded. "Look at me."

My attention snapped to him. He was still fucking into Tara's mouth with harsh strokes but his dark, lusty eyes were on me. "You ready?"

"Yes," I gasped. "Please."

"Come with me, sunshine. On three. Alright?"

I nodded wildly, willing myself to listen to him. For my body to do as he says.

"One. Two." I held my breath, staring into his eyes. The seconds seemed to tick by slower. "Three." He shoved in deep, holding a gagging, grunting Tara still. Tara's nose buried in Notus' neatly trimmed bush. I swear, I could see his dick pulse in Tara's throat. It was so tight. So. Tight.

My orgasm came roaring out of me as I suddenly threw my legs out, my muscles going stiff as it pounded. Light burst across my vision until I lay limply on the ground, my mind slipping into a sleepy daze as a smile climbed over my face. You know, as one does after a mind-numbing orgasm.



"I DON'T THINK KOH INTENDED FOR US TO USE THIS ROOM IN that way," I said, breathlessly.

Notus snorted, rubbing his stomach as Taranis continued to lick my cum from my abdomen. "It's not like he'd be surprised to learn that we did."

"Nor would he disapprove," Tara said against my skin. He paused. "Probably."

Sighing, I closed my eyes and appreciated feeling my muscles ache the way they did. Since Silence's attack, my happy life of being fucked daily—sometimes multiple times—had been disrupted. My body thrummed in a dull throb reminding me of this.

But it brought a smile to my lips. These were the moments that mattered. Stolen minutes where we enjoy each other with a mess of looming darkness up ahead. These memories we created were everything.

It made my heart stutter and my chest hurt. Tears stung my eyes, and I blinked them rapidly away. Arat was right. We *would* come home. All of us together. There was no other acceptable option.

After a while in which we just lay together, naked and holding hands, we eventually dressed again. Tara left me with a lingering kiss before he walked back out of the room with our empty takeout containers, Notus on his heels, and I went back to the 3D diagram taking up most of the room.

I moved through the top floor again before stopping in a room that continuously grabbed my attention. I wasn't sure why. There was nothing special about it. Big desk, yes. Two chairs in front of it, yes. There was a small table by the door, something you might see in a home where you rest your keys. Otherwise, the room looked bare and empty.

There was nothing here. I'd looked over and over, moving around it as if I were actually inside it. But all I could see were these few pieces of furniture.

Dropping to my ass, smirking at the way I winced at the twinge of pain, I sat in the middle of the room and looked around. My eyes traced the exact size and shape of the desk. The big, comfortable chair behind it. The equally comfortable looking chairs in front of it. Their exact positions in relation to the desk. Their height and bulk. From that, surmising their weight and ability to move.

As I sat within one of the projected offices and looked around me, I thought about something else. The people we saw come and go according to reconnaissance were just the

worker drones. The hybrid beasts and agents who did the upper's bidding.

I scowled. That could mean a few things. There actually weren't any important people at this location. There was another means of coming and going that we weren't seeing. Or it was all a ruse. Every bit of it. This building could just be a decoy.

Standing again, I frowned and ran my hand through my hair.

As far as I knew, there weren't any people making any concentrated effort to move against Silence. So why would they need decoys? Would they even think to make decoys when the entire supernatural world does everything in their power to stay far away from them so as not to gain their attention?

"I feel like we're missing something important," I said to no one. Which was fine. Because I had no idea what it was we were missing. Or even if my reflections and fretting were something to be concerned with. Maybe they've already addressed or negated my worries, but I didn't know because I've been alone with the rendering of the building all day. And most of yesterday, too.

With that thought, I picked up the computer and closed down the model. Leaving the room, I headed back to the conference room where everyone else was. I set the computer back on the desk with Seneca. She was with Torin and their human, Jasper, as they continued to look at the sonar reports.

"Find anything else?" I asked, peering over their shoulders.

"Not yet. We just recently changed the frequency so we'll see," Torin said.

I watched for a minute longer before nodding and straightening. It wasn't all that late, but the sun was certainly setting on the horizon. I was tired. Every muscle in my body was exhausted from stress and lack of sleep.

Stopping at Koh's side, I leaned into him so he'd wrap his arm around me. He kissed my temple but kept talking until there was a natural break in the conversation.

"Alright?" he asked.

Taking a breath, I nodded. "Think I'm going to head home," I said.

He smiled. "Good. Take Gale with you. He's overtired and getting grumpy."

Gale snorted. "Fuck you, boss man."

Koh grinned. I peered around him at Gale and I could definitely see his grumpiness in the way he scowled at the screen in front of him. Arms crossed over his hard chest. His short hair, which wasn't nearly long enough to look a mess, was ruffled.

I nodded, kissing Koh's cheek and moving to Gale. I tugged on his arm until he gave up and stood, dropping it around my waist. He didn't lean on me, but I could feel how tired he was, too. Wordlessly, he let me lead him from the room.

Grabbing a set of our keys on the way out, we headed for the parking garage and home. Still without speaking, he led me this time. Through the garage, up the stairs, and into the kitchen. He fed me something from another food storage container from the fridge. Since he and Tara have also been at the office, I figured it was Yonbe cooking for us. Making sure we ate.

He needed another raise.

When I was well fed, Gale pulled me to the stairs again. Every step felt heavier and heavier, but I let him pull me along. Stripping our clothes as we headed into the shower. Neither of us washed, just stood under the hot water for a while.

We got out and dressed in bed pants before collapsing and falling to sleep as soon as our eyes were shut. The sun hadn't even completely set yet.



Hadley

I MADE A CONCENTRATED EFFORT TO TEXT MY FAMILY AND friends often. While I told myself I was just being better about maintaining the relationships in my life, I knew I was making sure everyone knew that I loved them in case I didn't get the chance to say so again in the near future.

We continued to spend most of our time at Kohara's office, shuffling through the tasks and information that they were gathering on Silence. I wasn't sure which part had my attention more, but a growing need to find a way to give us more bang when we were going to be severely outnumbered had a large part of my attention.

Except that I was learning to live my life in snapshots. Sweet moments documenting the beginning of our lives together in case it ended before it really began. As I lay in bed, I thought back on them, letting those moments follow me into sleep so that they drifted in and out of my dreams.



SURROUNDED BY FLOWERS, SAAR WORE LOW SLUNG PANTS AS he pulled at weeds. I watched on the deck for a while, just admiring the way his skin glistened with sweat. While there wasn't direct sunlight with the clouds hanging low and dark overhead, that didn't stop his skin from shimmering.

I leaned against the rail as I watched, smiling in admiration. All families seemed to have a 'head of house' and harems truly tended to embody that. With so many differing personalities and opinions, it really took a level mind and logical sense to get everyone on the right page and harmonious.

While I always imagined that task to be daunting and frustrating, Saar did so with the ease of a man born into that role. Sometimes he settled arguments without anyone realizing he'd done so until I sat back and just grinned. He'd winked at me, knowing just what I figured out. Saar was the peacekeeper, but he was fair and decisive.

He was also kind and hardworking. Took a lot of our stress on his own shoulders to take care of it. I've seen him do so with No's frustration with his car. Too irritated to get it fixed, Saar had it done while Notus was at work, so he didn't have to.

It was little things like that. Things that he didn't have to take on, but did. Because he loved his husbands. And making their lives easier meant he was taking care of them. It was fulfilling to him.

I knew this because one of my fathers was the same way. My mom used to get so irritated at having to do laundry. Daily. All day. So instead of letting my mother fixate on chores, he outsourced. Hired someone to come in and just do laundry every other day.

He followed this up with cooking and cleaning services, too. When I asked him why one day, he smiled and nodded toward my mom. "She loves to stay home and take care of you kids. It's a full-time job in and of itself. It's not fair to ask her to do everything around the house."

"But we can all do it, too," I said.

"Sure. But isn't it better when we can spend time together instead?"

I nodded, watching my mom as she greeted the laundry helper. "Besides. Look at the way your mom smiles when the

weight of something trivial to us is taken off her shoulders.” His smile was just as relieved and happy. And also filled with pride.

Saar was the same way.

I made my way to him. He looked up with a smile. Resting my hand on his shoulder, I dropped to my knees beside him and started pulling weeds alongside him.

“We can always hire someone for this,” I said. “You shouldn’t have to weed the flowers.”

He chuckled and sat back on his heels. Wrapping an arm around me, he smiled and kissed the side of my head. For a minute, we just looked at the garden. Filled with wonderful smells and gently dancing flowers on the low breeze.

“I do hire someone,” he said. “They’re here every week. Sometimes I just need something to keep my hands busy and not think for a bit.”

I knew that, actually. They hire out all the chores they don’t want to do. And yet, especially in the last week, I’ve seen every one of my men doing something menial. Like dusting a pristinely clean piano, just to keep busy and turn off their constant worry.

A flower pressed under my nose, and I opened my eyes. Saar smiled again, a sweet, swoony look on his handsome face. He held a tulip to me. I closed my eyes to take in the scent before looking at him again.

He rested his forehead against mine and we stayed like that for a long time surrounded by flowers and just being together.



THE KETTLE WHISTLED, AND I PULLED IT FROM THE BURNER, quickly turning it off. With a spoonful of honey and a tea bag in my mug, I poured the boiling water in before setting it back on the stove. Then I stared into my cup, watching as the water slowly turned darker. Tinted orange. Citrus and honey in heavy steam filled my lungs.

A hand on my hip made me look up. Gale smiled. It was small and tired as he moved behind me, wrapping me in his arms and resting his head against mine.

“Hungry?” he asked.

I swear, he wanted to feed us all. All the time. Except... yeah, I was hungry.

Grinning, I nodded. “Yep.”

He kissed my cheek and moved away. While my tea steeped, I watched him move through the kitchen. He handed me a bowl and then tossed herbs and seasoning mixes at me. I laughed, trying to catch them and dumping them on the counter before another came at me.

Then he moved me along the counter and boxed me in again while he handed me the little jars. We poured and tossed and mixed different seasonings, herbs, and salt into a bowl before he pointed to the fridge. “Grab the chicken strips?”

I nodded as he scooped up spices and put them away. We met again, and he covered my hands in gloves before doing his. Together, we peeled open the chicken and dropped it into the mix. It was slimy and kind of gross as we massaged them together. Making sure they were evenly coated and covered completely.

Then he brought me a rack on a baking sheet. I laid out the strips as he peeled his gloves off and turned the oven on. The chicken went in, and we turned to cut other things. Grapes, dried cranberries, walnuts, scallions.

By the time the chicken was done, we had a large bowl full of a weird variety of foods. Gale had me mix it together while he shredded the chicken with forks and tossed it into the bowl. Lastly, he pulled out mayonnaise, a big spoon, and moved behind me again.

Took me long enough to figure out we were making chicken salad for sandwiches. With his arms around my waist, his mouth brushing soft kisses to my shoulder and neck, I scooped out mayo, and dumped it into the bowl. I mixed it,

adding more until there was the right consistency before leaning back into his arms.

Together, we made sandwiches, wrapping them in parchment paper before stacking them in the fridge. We shared one, feeding each other instead of ourselves while we sat on the counter in quiet.



I LAY ON MY BACK WITH MY FEET ON THE WALL, A BOOK IN MY hands as I read. Zilan was a good writer. Filled with plot and romance, angst and so much damn emotion, it wasn't surprising to find that he's a bestselling author.

Though reading was never one of my preferred pastimes, when I found out that Zilan was a writer, I decided to pick one up. This one was wrestling and though those damn outfits or whatever left nothing to the imagination—and I've never seen an actual woody while watching a match in clips online—there were sensual and tension-filled moments on pages. It was hot.

A shadow fell over me and I looked up to see the writer himself. He grinned down, his brown eyes made dark by the lack of lighting in the room.

“Enjoying that?” he asked.

I nodded, grinning at him. “Just read the docking scene.”

He smiled widely. “Yeah?”

“It's not something I paid much attention to but how many storms do I have uncut?”

Zilan chuckled, positioning himself next to me and mimicking my position so his feet were on the wall with mine. “The twins, Bronte, and Tem.”

“And this is something you've witnessed?” I asked.

His grin was wicked. “Yes. When I need to see something, I ask for volunteers to act it out for me. Our men are all about helping further each other's careers.”

I laughed, pressing my shoulder to his. “Why not just do it yourself?”

“I have. But that’s telling me what it feels like. Sometimes I need to see it as a third party non-participant so I can properly describe it.”

I imagined him watching and thought about how sexy that was. Shaking the thought away, I asked, “And the sports? Do you ask them to play that out, too?”

Zilan laughed. “No. They’re not into playing sports though they’ll watch with me from time to time.”

He reached for the book, and I released the side I was holding. After skimming the page I was on, he smiled. “This is one of my favorite parts,” he murmured. “Dylan realizing that maybe there’s something beyond his obsession with wrestling that has nothing to do with the sport itself but being close to another man like that.”

I licked my lips, nodding. Being inside the character’s head as he struggled almost made it feel like it was my struggle. For a second, as my eyes moved over the lines, I thought I was hearing them in my head. But as Zilan turned the page, I realized he was reading it out loud. His voice low.

No wonder the character voices sounded like Zilan. He was a damn good narrator.



THERE WERE PLACES TO WATCH MOVIES ALL THROUGH THE house and I flitted from room to room as the days passed to try to create memories of each room. I didn’t want to forget them. In my last moments of life, I wanted to live in these moments. Having spent some of these too-short days throughout my new home with my men.

I stepped foot into the TV room at the front of the house off the kitchen. The room that always felt hidden away. With a bowl of popcorn, I sat on the sectional and stared at the

television blankly. Movies seemed like such a waste of time. But what else would one do in this room?

Popping a blown kernel in my mouth, I savored the uber buttery flavor as I chewed and stared at the still blank screen. My eyes flitted to the door when Notus walked in. He was shirtless, showing off the full sleeve that moved to his pectorals on his right side and the half sleeve on his left.

His chest was covered in dark hair that trailed down his hard abdominals, disappearing into his jeans. His lips curled slightly as he picked up the remote off the table and sat beside me, offering it to me.

I took it, pointed it at the console, and flicked it on.

Notus leaned in close, wrapping his arm over my shoulders and tucking me into his side. I offered him popcorn, and he took a couple kernels.

“I think it needs more butter,” he said after a minute.

I looked up at him, eyes wide, only to find him smirking at me. Grinning, I settled back. “Only have one life and I like uber buttery popcorn.”

Notus chuckled. “Fair enough.”

Flipping through the channels, and then the different streaming apps we had, I found nothing that grabbed my attention at all. I’d run out of popcorn twenty minutes ago.

At the point of giving up, Notus took the remote from me. He backed out of the streaming app and opened another, scrolled for a minute before settling on something and tossing the remote aside.

“What’s this?” I asked as he pulled me further into his lap.

“Something mindless but interesting enough.”

I nodded as the narrator’s voice spoke quietly. Soothingly. He talked about the aerial view of the rainforest and the inhabitants that had been there centuries ago. What they could find beneath the dense jungle if only they had the manpower and money.

Yep. Dead cultures *were* interesting, but I don't think it was the subject matter that I cared much about as I cuddled into Notus. It was the company. I closed my eyes as I breathed him in, his strong arms around me, his fingers gliding over my leg, as the narrator's smooth voice filled the room.



THE LIBRARY WAS ONE OF MY FAVORITE PLACES. NOT JUST because of the books—which I loved, despite not wanting to read often—but because of the library feel. Peaceful. Filled with information and stories and lifetimes.

There was a sense of tranquility in a library. I could just stand there and look around, feeling a smile on my lips without intending to smile. A pull into the stories and characters that you can almost feel they're so alive.

But I didn't make it to the library. As I passed through the luxurious reception hall, running my fingers along the marble walls and pillars, I paused as I watched Arat walking down the grand stairs, his phone held up.

At first, I thought he was taking a picture of the domed ceiling three floors above, but when he changed the angle of his head and his expression, I realized he was taking selfies. Biting my lip, I tried not to giggle.

He still heard me, though. His gaze snapped to mine, and a grin spread across his face. "Come here, wife," he said.

I loved when they called me wife. I wasn't, but that's only because we hadn't gotten there yet. Right now, I thought it was just that other things were too pressing. Our wedding shouldn't be rushed and yet, I wanted to be officially theirs before we did this thing.

Moving across the ornate floor, I climbed the stairs until I met him. He wrapped an arm around me, remaining a stair higher, and angled the camera to take our picture. And then another. When he licked the side of my face, making me laugh and cringe away, he took another.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

Arat shrugged. “Cataloging our life,” he said. It was nonchalant and offhanded, but I knew as well as he did that he was feeling the pressure. Feeling the end right ahead.

When my smile fell away, he kissed my lips, and I heard the camera shutter sound from his phone. I smiled into his mouth.

“It’s going to be fine,” he said quietly, dropping his hand to wrap around me.

Everything in me wanted to believe him, but I wasn’t sure I could. I was a realist, and I knew we were going up against odds that were severely stacked against us.

“Stop thinking that way,” he said, as if reading my mind. He nipped my lip before nuzzling his nose against mine until I laughed again. “Really, Had,” he said quieter, “we will be fine. You know how I know that?”

I shook my head. “How?”

“Because our love story isn’t done yet. And we might be at a disadvantage going in, but we’re fighting for something that they’re not.”

“What’s that?”

“Each other. They’re going to be protecting themselves above all else. We’re going to do everything in our power to make sure those we love most are not harmed. And in that desperation, we will be unstoppable.”

The conviction in his voice made me smile. I wasn’t sure I believed it still, but he was right. In our drive to protect our family, we will call more and more energy to us. Artificial from their electricity. And natural as the storms will gather in the area, concentrating overhead.

“Smile,” he murmured. When I did, staring deep into his eyes, he snapped another picture.



Hadley

“FAVORITE SHAPE.”

I laughed. “Favorite shape?”

Neph grinned. “Yeah. What’s your favorite shape?”

We’d been laying in bed for the last few hours, asking random questions. Learning about each other. I thought about the question and shook my head. Who had a favorite shape?

“Uh, star, I guess. It can have as many points as you want it to and no one is going to judge it.”

“Mm. I’m going to go with a circle. It’s always round and never ends.”

“Favorite article of clothing?” I asked.

“Ah. Underwear. It keeps my junk in place and not sticking to my thighs.”

I laughed. “I like socks. Never been a fan of my feet being bare.”

“Favorite animal.”

“Oh, a red panda. They’re so goddamn adorable.”

“Wolf. They’re peaceful, but will rip your throat out if need be.”

“Favorite destination.”

“That I’ve been to or want to visit?”

“Been to.”

“Hm,” he answered, thinking about it. “I guess, Easter Island. It’s like taking a step back in time; seeing everything that’s there from an entirely different and lost civilization.”

“On the same note, I’d say anywhere in Europe. Their history is so vast and filled with angst. Everywhere you look, there’s something new to learn.”

“Favorite person.”

I looked at him, brow raised. Neph grinned. “Outside of this house. You’re not allowed to choose favorites here.”

“I don’t know that I really have a favorite. I love my family and my friends.”

“My grandpa.” He looked back at the ceiling. “Doing little things like fixing the car, floating in the pool, watching fishing on television. Taking a nap after a holiday meal. I’d soak up all those little moments that weren’t anything big and yet I remember them all.”

That’s what I was doing these days. Soaking up moments that weren’t important and maybe meant nothing in the big picture. They didn’t unveil something huge or lead to a monumental or pivotal point in our relationships. But they were the little grains of sand that built the sandcastle.

“Favorite dance.”

“Electric Slide.”

I burst out laughing. “Why not the Macarena? I bet you can shake your hips real sexy like.”

“I can.” He waggled his brows. “Need another demonstration of my rocking hips?”

Grinning, I said, “Mine is the rumba. It’s all sensual and romantic.”

“We’re talking ballroom dancing, huh?”

I shrugged. “Any dance. Dancing is dancing.”

“Favorite insect.”

Scrunching my nose, I shook my head. “Insects are yuck.”

“They serve purposes.”

“Fine. Honey bee.”

“Same.”

“Favorite... object.”

“I have a bottle cap that Arat tossed at me the first week I was here. His smile. The flirty tone. The way he looked at me.” He paused. “I kept it. Just as a silly token reminder.”

“That’s cute.”

He turned his head to smile at me. “I have a lot of little things like that. But that was the first one I kept.”

“Mine is a blanket that my mother made me when I was a baby. There are a ton of pictures of me wrapped in it over the years. It’s one of the few things I make sure to bring with me wherever I go.”

He smiled, taking my hand in his. “Favorite time of day.”



I NARROWED MY EYES AT THE ROCK. IT WAS FLAT-ISH. ABOUT the size of a tennis ball in width. But as I stared at the little thing, and then looked at all the painted ones around the room, I couldn’t help but wonder how he got such fine detail in such a small space.

Canvases were large. The ones I used, anyway. This was far too small. And yet, as I watched Raiden’s hand move with precision while he drew a nighttime landscape, some people just had a knack for working in small spaces.

And apparently, without looking at something for inspiration.

“It doesn’t have to be anything specific,” he said quietly.

“And therein lies the problem. My mind is a complete blank unless I have something in front of me to paint.”

His stormy eyes looked up, meeting mine. A smile on his gorgeous face. “So paint me while I paint the night.”

“This is far too small a canvas,” I said, frowning at the rock.

“Not so. It doesn’t have to be detailed. I bet you can make it obvious that it’s me without every minute line and curve.”

I grunted, not at all agreeing. But with that, I stared at Raiden as he continued to paint. Stared at the way he looked down at the rock. How his focus concentrated on the little space. The exact way his fingers moved in the tiniest lines.

Licking my lips, I used these tiny brushes that were too small to hold, and dipped it in paint. At first, I couldn’t concentrate on painting at all. Too frustrated with the small area for it to become an escape. But before I knew it, Raiden was looking at me and I blinked back into the moment.

He reached for the rock, turning it so he could see it. When his eyes met mine again, he was beaming. “Perfect, baby girl. Amazing.”

I flushed at his praise, looking at the rock again. It was primarily an abstract figure, all color juxtaposed together with little to no defining features at all. And yet, in the shape of his face, the falling of his hair, his concentration on his task. It was clear that I captured Raiden.

Smiling, I looked up at him again to find that he was watching me. He cupped my face, leaning in to give me a kiss. “Amazing,” he murmured.



THE WATER SPLASHED, SOAKING ME AS I LAUGHED. A MOMENT later, Bronte surfaced behind me, wrapping his arms around me and kissing my neck. His command of water made him move quickly and sleekly, like a seal. He was at one end of the pool where he jumped in and before I’d fully taken a breath, he was wrapped around me.

I reached back and tangled my fingers in his hair, feeling the way his lips curved against my skin. We'd been messing around in the pool for a while. Jumping and splashing and just acting like flirting teenagers.

Turning in his arms, I wrapped my arms around him, leaning against his chest. Stretching on my toes so I could brush my lips against his.

Bronte leaned back, so he was floating on the surface, keeping me on top of him. We continued to kiss as I sprawled across his body, his hands moving along my ribs and down to my hips and thighs before moving back up my body.

I'd learned in my short time with them that when Bronte said he didn't take control of any situation, he meant *any* situation. Unless I gave him direction, he waited for me to move us around. To take what I wanted from him.

So I continued to kiss him, shifting on top of him until we were almost sinking underwater. He grinned into my mouth and let us sink. I barely caught my breath before my head dipped under. And then his mouth was on mine again while we continued our kiss surrounded by water.

There was a heady feeling to it. Not being able to take a breath while our mouths were locked together and water threatened to surge into our lungs. Not being able to get enough. To get closer as he pulled me against him and I wrapped my legs around his waist.

Bronte pulled our heads above the surface long enough for us to take a quick breath before bringing us back underwater, where we kissed more. Deeper. Longer. Sweet, tender kisses that made my heart race and my mind fog.

The rush of playing with pushing the limit to how much breath you could hold while kissing, both of which made my heart race, was a wild ride that I happily got on over and over again as Bronte continued to let us take quick breaths before bringing us underwater again. To the point where I was lightheaded and wrapped around him like he was a lifeline.

When I blinked my eyes opened, we were back to floating on the surface. My head on his chest as he ran his fingers through my hair. I fluttered my lashes to shake the water droplets off before shifting so I could look at him.

Bronte smiled. A face so sweet that never lost its innocence. I sighed, sliding up his body to press my lips to his again.

“Never gets old,” he murmured, wrapping his arms tighter once more.

“Never,” I agreed. And we went on kissing as if there wasn’t a care in the world.



THE NIGHT WAS CHILLY AS I WRAPPED MYSELF IN A BLANKET and sat in front of the firepit. My men, those who were home, were in the spa tubs or the steam room but since I’d spent most of the day in the water, I was ready to let my skin lose the wrinkles for a while.

It wasn’t cold, but the hot water I stepped out of last made me shiver as the air stroked my bare skin. Pulling the blanket tighter, I flicked the dial on the fire to increase the flame a little more. Leaning back into the couch, I listened to my men talk quietly and laugh.

They were far enough away that I didn’t hear their words. Only the quiet murmur of their voices. It was enough. To know they were near. I stared into the fire, my eyelids getting heavy.

I must have dozed, for I was startled when a body sat next to me. Taranis smiled through his full beard. It wasn’t long, but it was thick and soft. I couldn’t help but brush my fingers through it any chance I got. Now was no different as I reached for him.

His smile widened as he pulled me closer, bringing me into his naked lap. Always naked. I half thought that he should just walk into Silence without clothes. Maybe we all should. It

would stop everyone in their tracks and make them think we'd lost our minds.

Inwardly, I snorted at the idea as I gazed into his eyes. My fingers flexed in his beard, the soft strands still damp against my fingers.

“Tired?” he asked.

I shrugged, letting my body go limp in his arms. He chuckled. “No. And yes.”

“Stress,” he murmured, nodding.

Yep. That would do it. I wasn't physically tired. Well, a little. Swimming all day would do that to you. But more than anything, I was mentally exhausted. Stress. Dread. Fear. It was building, even as I tried to concentrate on these men in front of me instead of the unknown that lies ahead.

“When this is over, I'm going to take you to a volcano. Stand on the rim. And we'll watch it bubble and quake.”

I raised a brow. “Oh yeah?”

He chuckled. “Yes. To feel its power and know that no matter how humanity tries to move around it, like any other natural storm, it cannot be stopped. It cannot be outdone or controlled. The only thing you can do is prepare to evacuate and watch in awe as it covers everything in its path.”

“You're not a volcano,” I pointed out.

“Nope. I'm a wildfire. And I can burn an entire state to the ground when left unchecked. Especially when I have something to protect.”

“What you're saying is, we're all forces to be reckoned with.”

“Alone, we're deadly. Together, we're invincible.”

“The storms we possess, I agree.” Before my mind, a glimpse of watching Kohara fall to the ground, lifeless, flashed before my eyes. “But we're just vessels. We aren't infallible.”

“Incorrect. We are the heart of the storm. A beautiful disaster, unfettered chaos.” His smile was wicked. “And ready

to let the world feel our power. We're not being ambushed this time, Hadley. We're not gaining strength as we go in an attempt to survive an attack. We're going in fully cocked and angry."

"Unleash the storms," I murmured, letting a smile climb up my face.

Taranis nodded. "So, we're visiting a volcano when we're done. Maybe I'll even invite Notus along. Hearing him talk to lava as if it's a harmless human newborn is a riot. And also makes me question his sanity."

I laughed.



OUR LEGS TANGLED TOGETHER; OUR FINGERS LINKED AS WE faced each other. We were in Koh's room, sitting among his ridiculous number of blankets that rose around us like a nest. He only wore bed pants. It was the first time I'd seen him out of a suit in days. Too many days to count.

He shifted closer, one of his legs wrapped around my ass. His fingers flexed in mine as he looked at me, a small smile on his lips.

"Okay, I got one." He nodded. "Would you rather give five blowjobs a day OR have anal sex only once every two months?"

Koh's brow rose as his expression turned amused. "Blowjobs. I don't mind giving them anyway."

"So what you're saying is anal is that good that you don't want to wait?"

He laughed. We'd been playing 'would you rather' for an hour. Our position got closer and sweeter, even as our questions became dirtier with every passing one.

"Yes." He grinned. "Would you rather have sex blindfolded or handcuffed?"

"I feel like you're just fishing for information now."

He shrugged, his handsome face giving nothing away.

“I think I’d try either. Both will give a heightened feeling for the moment by cutting off one of your senses.”

“Not how you play the game, Had. Gotta choose.”

Sighing, I said, “Okay, blindfolded.”

His fingers stretched, flexing into mine as if they could connect more. His smile remained soft, and his eyes never left mine.

“Would you rather have sex in an extremely haunted place or an extremely dirty place?”

“Haunted all the way. If ghosts want to watch, then they can.”

“What if they want to touch?”

“We’ll have to set boundaries beforehand.”

I laughed, shaking my head.

“Oh! Would you rather always finish blowjobs with coming in their mouths or facials?”

Koh tilted his head. This was the first question that he took several minutes to consider. I laughed at that. It seemed like an easy question but apparently, he really enjoyed both.

“I’m realizing that we should have established a number of passes early on,” he said.

I laughed again. “Really that hard to decide?”

He nodded. “While there’s nothing like feeling a throat constrict around your cockhead as you let loose and they swallow it, there’s also something carnally satisfying to see your lover painted in your cum. Either way, you’re marking them. Making them reek of you. What do you think? Which would you choose if you had that choice?”

“Swallowing is less messy,” I said.

Kohara laughed, his eyes closing. “Practical answer. Figures.”

I shrugged. “Less clean up means you can start again later. Or better yet, have a sneaky snack and move on, none the wiser.”

His eyes heated up. “Would you rather loudly orgasm after every time you coughed or sneezed?”



“THIS ONE,” I SAID, SHIFTING MY PHONE SO TEM COULD SEE it.

He snorted then squinted. The woman is facing the sun, wearing nothing but a shirt. She has her back to the camera and the shirt open wide, letting the sun show her curves through the shirt.

“But instead of the chick, I can just see the shape and outline of your half-hard cock.” I smiled, triumphantly.

Tem barked a laugh. “The world has seen enough of that already.”

“Not true. They keep coming back for more.”

He shifts his phone to show me an image. The man is laying on his back in a field of grass. The camera must be at his chin and it’s looking down his body. Between his pectorals, over his abdominals, the sheet that’s casually draped over his crotch is positioned just so that it’s covering his dick and yet, there’s a slight teasing gap where the sheet doesn’t touch his stomach and you can just barely see under. Too bad the lighting is such that you can’t actually see anything.

“Yep, that’s a good one.”

We scrolled in quiet for a minute before turning our phones almost simultaneously toward each other. Mine was a play off the one I’d just shown him but there was nothing covering his body. Just the low light with the sun nearly set in the background and he was holding out his boxers, clearly saying he was naked.

Tem's was a man with his hands up, braced on a rock arch. His entire body flexed and on display, his ass framed by a jock strap.

"Yep, do that one."

He grinned, pulling his phone toward him. Tem was looking for more poses and while we were actually trying to find multiple people in the same image while it remained tastefully sexy, we weren't having much luck. So we'd resorted to single images where he could add more people in.

"And the second man in front of him, clearly naked and peeking over his shoulder. You can see his hip, nothing on him, and his arm curling up their back," I said.

"Perfect. Taking notes."

I sighed, shifting to lay my head against his shoulder as I scrolled through more. He didn't say anything as he moved his hand to rest on my thigh. Keeping me close. Letting us share each other's body heat.

These moments need to last forever. Just in case forever had an expiration date.



Hadley

SWEET MOMENTS TURNED INTO INSATIABLE HUNGER. A desperate need to touch and be touched as fear and uncertainty became a familiar skin. This evening, we would be moving out. We would be making our stand. While the sweet moments never stopped, they were loudly punctuated with frantic need to be as close as possible.

I started out the morning with two of my husbands. Notus and Taranis took turns licking me and each other. Stuffing their dicks in me. One of my favorite moments was forming a triangle, our heads connected to another's crotch. As good as Tara's mouth was on me, watching Notus swallow Tara's cock was what really had my blood pumping in my ears.

I loved being a part of their play. It was obvious that they'd been together for years. In the way they moved and touched and teased. Their quiet moments of whispered affection and heated praise.

I would imagine when you join lovers who've been together for years, it would be easy to feel like a third wheel. And while that always tickled the back of my mind that it was bound to happen, it never felt like that in reality.

They brought me into their wild, passionate, lingering sex. Never once letting me feel out of place or as an afterthought. While their focus on each other never lessened, their focus on me never felt less than either.

And when we were cleaned up of sweat and cum, we headed down to the spa on the basement level where their tattoo artist was waiting to mark my body as belonging to House Igarashi. I chose my thigh and relaxed in the chair as he continuously stabbed at my leg until I was gritting my teeth.

Wrapped in plastic and a bit of magic to make it heal quickly, we headed into The Harem Project for the final time. I mean, not *final* final. But you know. Final in this capacity. Today was the day we were heading out.

Our friends were waiting. With this many together, we no longer fit inside a conference room so we'd taken over a convention room instead. Objects were being handed out all around. The hum of voices filled my head as I momentarily tuned into the conversation around me.

Meanwhile, I stood there with my pants around my ankles and Akello on his knees, his hands on my thigh. Not the newly marked one but the opposite. I looked down as he did his thing.

"These are conductors," Akello said as he strapped a band to my bare leg. Was I embarrassed to have my pants down in a room full of people that weren't my men? Yeah, a little. But with the amount of time we spent together in the past several days, they may as well be our family. With as much sleep as we lost, they had too. Tirelessly preparing for this mission right by our sides. "It'll hold energy, drawing it out and making it sharper. It basically amplifies what you're already doing."

I nodded as he stood, bringing the waistband of my leggings with him. As if I were one of his kids, he shifted his hands in the elastic around behind me and pulled it up over my ass. As he situated my leggings, I bit my lip not to laugh.

Akello realized what he did after a minute and paused, his hands still on my hips. Then he swore, and took a step back. "Good thing we stopped having kids," he muttered. "I dress people without realizing I'm doing it."

"Should I call you Daddy?" I asked, batting my lashes at him.

Nearby, his human said, “Yes. Please do, Hadley. The way he blushes is fucking hot.”

Akello glared at Jasper, but Jasper just licked his lips, raising his eyes in challenge. He sighed and gave me a flat look. “Don’t call me Daddy.”

“Yes, Sir,” I said, dropping my voice to something sensual.

True enough, his cheeks got this adorable shade of pink. He wiped a hand over his face and turned away. “That’s it. I’m leaving you to the dogs.”

Laughing, I grabbed his arm and pulled him back. “Alright, alright. I’m done. You can dress me and swat my bottom and I won’t even call you Daddy.”

He groaned as those around us laughed under their breaths.

“I love how you just fit right in,” Veri said, winking at me. “Like you’ve always been here.”

I shared a smile with her before looking at Akello again. He was watching me, smiling softly, too. “So do I.”

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I turned back to the matters at hand. Right now, that was weaponry.

Though The Harem Project has been watching Silence for ages, they haven’t actually been working toward challenging them. It was something they determined they’d do when they were convinced that they had all the knowledge about them that they were going to get.

Clearly, there was always something to learn.

But because of that, we’d had to turn inward for weapons and defense. Our friends didn’t let us down. While we knew that what strengthened one species might not actually work the same when attached to another, we’d still been testing different ideas.

Dragon scales resisted penetration by man-made objects. Some claws, like those of other dragons, could tear through. And dragons also shed pretty frequently. Fable and Julian collected all their scales and together with the Valkyries, fashioned some armor for us.

Storm monsters were big. So big that we could spread across the sky. Our hybrid forms, while still formidable, weren't nearly as effective in devastation. We were handicapping ourselves by going into a building enclosed on all sides. And thus, we happily accepted the armor.

With other magic and blessings and weapons, we were loaded to the gills. Almost to the point where moving was going to be a challenge.

“You remember the layout?” Liev asked. “Where you're going first?”

Bronte nodded. “I could walk through that place blindfolded.” His face, usually filled with smiles and youthful innocence, was showing his age now. He was hard lines, brows set, eyes determined.

It made my heart beat harder and I had to turn away.

Javan stood in front of me. All darkness and tattoos peeking out of his t-shirt. Hinting at a body that was barely flesh-colored anymore. He took my face in his hands and studied my eyes. We'd only hung out a couple times, but I knew he was a fierce protector. I could see in his dark eyes that he was less than pleased that we refused to let him join us.

He didn't say anything for several minutes. Around us, we continued to prepare. Weapons were again being explained, for probably the dozenth time. Objectives and agenda being gone over *again*.

Since meeting him, I've learned a little more about what a fouke is. A stalker. A big beast that is made up of shadows and bad omens, more ethereal than solid. Like a black hole—but not in the same way a void is. Because a void is just that. A dark empty place commanded by the monster it is. But a fouke is something more. The things you find in their depths is that of demons so harsh, it'll break your mind.

Letting go of me, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a chain. On the end of it was a stone, swirling and empty. Pulling in light. He draped it over my neck and settled it on

my chest. Once again, his hands cupped my face before falling down to my neck as he stared at me.

“You going to eat me?” I asked at last.

His lips curled in a half smile. “Sometimes, I think maybe we could all share one woman, Hadley.”

My eyes widened and he laughed. Kissing my forehead, he backed away. Stuffing one hand into his pocket, he tapped the stone at my neck with his other index finger. “I’ll feel your distress. And while I’ve only been making this for a week, I have a limited amount of essence stored in it to respond with any given strength. I can react on my own, depending on how I feel your stress level is. But if you need a quick and vicious blast, put your hand around it and say my name. Okay?”

I nodded. “Thanks, Javan.”

He smiled, small and unassuming before kissing my cheek. His lips lingered there for a minute before he sighed and pulled away. Glancing around the room, I was comforted that we all had our little friendship circles within the big one. Coen was talking to Bronte, hugging him fiercely. There was a length of knotted vines in Bronte’s hair.

Juniper held Zilan’s face in his hands much like Javan had been holding mine. While Zilan was grinning, his hands were tense in Juniper’s shirt. Juniper looked at him with a very serious expression.

The big Aves, Gannon I think, held Tem and Arat in a tight hug, one under each big arm. And they hugged him fiercely. Two of the Malaks and a sea monster were crowded around Notus. There was a shimmering plate at No’s throat. The Malaks’ human was hugging Notus hard from behind, his face buried in Notus’ shoulder.

Raiden was wrapped around a group of guys. I recognized the always smiling demon, Ellis. The unicorn, Calix. An angel and seraphim from the Malak house, Tobiael and Hadrian. And the light-featured thunderbird, Idris. They had Raiden between them, their arms cooked together as if they were

having a team powwow. But their eyes were closed. Their expressions stressed.

Arms wrapped around me from behind. I knew without looking that it wasn't one of my guys. Not just because they were all in front of me, being loved by their friends, but because this one smelled like smoke and wishes.

Yarak kissed the side of my head as I leaned back into him. Tears should be blurring my eyes but right now, I think I was a little numb. Too afraid to even cry at this point.

"It's going to be okay. We'll be on call. Waiting for the word."

"You don't think we can do this," I said.

Akello took my hand on one side, and Maryn on the other. "You can," Akello said. "We have complete confidence in you or we'd not give you the chance to try this on your own, Hadley. While we respect your wishes, we sure as fuck won't stand aside and let you walk into a suicide mission if we thought you'd not make it out."

"But things happen that there's no way to predict," Maryn said. "And while we'll try to help from the sidelines, we're also ready to storm the place if needed."

"You will all come out alive," Yarak said. "Anything else is not an option."

As much confidence as I had in my men and me, there was something incredibly reassuring knowing that we had a monstrous backup on standby.

"You've got armor," Yarak said. "And I may or may not have had a little bit of fun with it while the Valkyries were assembling it."

I glanced at him, raising a brow. He just smirked. Out of all supernatural creatures, djinns were notoriously quiet on details about their species. I would guess that his men knew more about him than the average person since they were together, but even then, I was sure Yarak had secrets.

“He did,” Maryn said, sighing in exasperation. “Was a right pain in the ass and getting in the way.”

“Don’t pretend that you don’t crave my company, woman,” Yarak said.

Maryn rolled her eyes. She looked at me with a deadpan expression. “Yarak is of the mind that every relationship needs a dick to be complete.”

“Sure, they do,” I said, making Maryn raise a brow and Yarak grin widely. “But who said it needed to be attached to man? I’ve seen silicone cocks that would put some men to shame.”

Akello laughed loudly as Yarak took a step back. “The fuck?” he said. I looked back in time to see him yanking Gale forward. “You letting silicone show you up, bro?”

Gale looked at me, confused.

I smiled sweetly and looked back at Yarak. “I said ‘some men.’ Not my men. They aren’t lacking in their pants, Yarak.”

While Gale grinned widely, Yarak narrowed his eyes. “I don’t like what you’re implying.”

Raising my arms, I tried to look all innocent and shit. “I’m not implying anything. Are you feeling a little self-conscious?”

Javan’s hands landed on my shoulders again, a wide grin splitting his dark face. “I love how uncomfortable you make him. We will certainly reconvene this conversation when we have more leisure time.” He eyed Yarak. “Now I’m questioning how endowed the djinn are.”

Yarak’s eyes blazed brightly. When he breathed out, smoke drifted from his nostrils.

“That’s kind of sexy,” Akello said. “Do you do that in the bedroom, sweetheart?”

He growled and turned away, stomping off. I chuckled, reaching on either side of me to take Maryn and Akello’s hands again. They gripped me tightly and for a minute, the four of us stood there, not speaking.

I supposed the seriousness of the moment made Yarak decide that he'd let his indignation go for now as he came back and hugged me forcefully. "Despite that you're wrong and I'll show you when the time is appropriate just how wrong you are, you will be coming back and we'll continue this conversation."

Because my hands were occupied, I rested my face on his neck and just breathed him in. Javan's hand went into my hair, gently clasping it. With them surrounding me, my tears were momentarily dislodged.

This couldn't be goodbye. It just couldn't.

Too soon, we were all pulling away from each other. Our little groups split up and my men and I gathered close. We were always very near, touching and affectionate. But right now, it felt like we were on top of each other.

"One more thing," Lieke said as he came toward us with a bouquet in one hand and a small bundle of paper in his other. "How about a marriage contract, Igarashi?"

For the first time in what felt like months, I think we all smiled together. I didn't even read it, not caring in the least what it said. When we passed it around, I signed it without hesitation and passed it on. Lieke handed me the flowers and I turned to exchange some quiet moments with my men in which we promised the stars and moon, shared some kisses, and silent longing as we clung together.

More than anything, in this moment, I refused to believe it would be our last together. I wasn't sure what the difference was, but I was sure, right then, that come hell or hybrid monsters en masse, we'd be coming home. One way or another, we'd be coming home and get a chance to celebrate our marriage as it deserved to be honored.

"Before we leave, hand your bouquet over," Kohara said, kissing my cheek.

Without giving it much thought, I headed straight for the Agnis. Yarak's eyes were wide when I placed it in his hands,

giving him a smirk. “You should probably have two. One for your family and one for your enormous ego.”

He snarled at me, grabbing me by my waist and pulling me to his chest. He held me for a minute before whispering, “Thank you, Hadley,” and letting me go. “Hurry home, okay?”

I nodded, turning back to my guys. It wasn't until we were on our way down to the cars that I remembered what the bouquet symbolized. I bit my lip for a minute, wondering if I'd made a mistake. But with Bronte's hand in mine, I didn't think I did.

Not thinking about it at all meant I reacted on instinct. Even if that instinct was to give Yarak a hard time. I didn't take that back. House of Agni would get their completion next. I was sure.

More sure than I was that we were going to survive today.



Bronte

I ALMOST WISHED THERE WAS STATIC IN MY EAR JUST SO I could hear that there was someone on the other end. I knew there was. An entire convention room of people were listening. Waiting. But the silence made my skin crawl.

The sonar frequency had been changing regularly, scrambling what they were getting on the inside. Two days ago, it had been changed to edit the security feed. We didn't try to hack it, although eyes on the inside would have been great. But we weren't willing to take the chance that we'd alert them that something was coming.

Instead, we'd settled on their videos repeating scrambled feeds. The Harem Project had some stupidly incredible technology that seamlessly married videos together so that it looked like one simple loop.

We parked more than a dozen blocks away and moved through the streets as absently as possible. Stopping at windows and pausing inside stores. We decided that the middle of the day on a Thursday was when we were going to do this. Our plan was to step foot inside around eleven that morning. We hoped that it gave us the highest likelihood of the important people, and greatest number of people, working.

Attacking a building in the middle of the night was well and good, but it wasn't likely that we were going to find who we were looking for. It also seemed a little cowardly. We

weren't there on a rescue mission. We were there to kill murderers. The more, the merrier.

"Where are you?" a voice asked from the other side of the line. I sighed a breath of relief at hearing someone there.

"Looking at the building," Saar answered.

"We should have given you chest cams," someone else muttered. "Being blind is infuriating."

I grinned, already knowing that that was Iker. A damned control freak, that one.

"Relax. We got this," Saar said.

No one responded. At first, I was frustrated with the following silence. Because I wanted to hear their reassurance. But I also knew that we were keeping the feed quiet. One, so no one could pick up on it. And two, so as not to distract us.

"There," Hadley said, pointing.

Our first goal was to disable the security. To jumble the feed and shut down the emergency responses, whatever those may be. To do that, we needed to attach one of our little boxes to a direct line.

"I got it," Raiden said, plucking the box from Zilan's hand and walking over. As my blood rushed in my ears, I had to remember that we were each heavily relying on our strengths. As a quake, Raiden's was ground vibration. He'd know firsthand if someone was nearing, giving him every possible second to get it done.

But I still watched, terrified. Tense. Waiting for a shot to come from nowhere and strike him down. The three minutes it took him to attach it and come back to us had me almost passing out from fear.

Clearly, I needed to better manage my stress. This was going to be a long day.

"Ready," Saar said. "You copy?"

"Copy," someone answered. "When you open a door, we'll shut it all down."

I nodded, even though I wasn't the one answering. There were half a dozen doors on the outside. And many windows that opened. Our goal was to lock them all down to prevent anyone from going out or coming in. *Before* we made too much of a commotion. And thus why we chose a time of day that was right between breaks. Too early for lunch, but far too late for breakfast.

"All indicators say the feed is scrambled. Proceed when ready," someone said. It was difficult to distinguish voices when they sounded so far away. Probably because my heart was loud in my ears right now.

For a minute longer, we watched the doors we could see. There were three from this angle and while we couldn't see what was happening on the inside. We wanted to get to the door unnoticed. Inside unnoticed. Set the system to shut down, locking all the doors and exits—both physical and magical—before anyone took note that we were there.

It was a long shot. Something we already knew. But that was our goal. And we figured that a door within a stairwell seemed the best possible scenario for that.

I knew where this stairwell led on all floors. What we'd find beyond. And while we assumed that the biggest dangers were going to be the worker bees and that we ought to take them out, we really wanted to focus on whoever was on the top floor.

Everything we were doing was a guess as far as who was involved. Who was in charge. But it was an educated guess that we were willing to take a chance on. This was the best opportunity we were going to get.

And we couldn't blow it.

This needed to go right. It needed to go well.

Time didn't matter. We would continue to gather strength the longer we went. Gaining power and energy from everything around us and each other. That wasn't the issue.

Our only concern was the unknown. We were naïve enough to think that they'd let all their new secrets go when

we took possession of their vans back at the mountain. They had more secrets. And I was sure that many of them, if not all, were just as deadly as we were.

Then there was the knowledge that we were pretty well handicapped inside.

“Maybe we ought to take off the roof,” I said absently.

A chuckle came from the headset, and I smiled ruefully. Arat took my hand, smiling. “While that’s not a bad idea, I don’t think we have time to work that out right now, baby. You okay?”

I nodded. “Just letting all the things that could go wrong run through my mind. Nothing big.”

He pulled me to his side and wrapped his arm around my shoulders. Kissing my cheek, he nuzzled his nose to me. “Relax, Bronte,” he murmured. “Everything will be okay. We’re together. We’ve got each other’s backs. And we will win this battle.”

I took note that he didn’t say we’d come out unharmed. Just that we’d come out victorious. I nodded, choosing to keep that negative part inside. I was convinced that we’d come home. All of us. Just not in what condition that would be in.

“No outside activity,” Saar said. “Ready to move forward?”

My fingers brushed the wreath of thorns around my head from Coen, lending me the strength of an ogre. I also had a pocketful of kitsune fur from Lev. He said I’d know when to use it, though since he didn’t elaborate, I had no idea what that meant. And from my human friend Jex, I got a blushing kiss on my cheek. Remembering the way he flushed like a lobster, I grinned.

Knowing my wife and husbands had gifts just like mine from their friends, I took a breath and nodded with everyone else. There was no water around here. No ocean or even an underground aquifer. My strength was going to have to be supporting my lovers with energy and using the array of weapons I had strapped to my person.

We walked as naturally as possible while Saar and Kohara talked business. Fake business, but business in the sense that it wouldn't look suspicious as we moved toward the building. The door was unlocked, which I found a little suspicious. Weren't stairwell doors usually secure?

But then, who was stupid enough to attack a group of unapologetic murderers that were single-handedly and unobstructedly bringing the supernatural world to heel?

Twelve storms with a chip on their shoulders. That's who.

We filed into the wide stairwell and closed the door behind us. For a minute, we listened. Waiting to see if we heard anyone in the stairwell. No doors opened and closed. No noise within the cement column of stairs.

Kohara nodded. Taranis hacked away at the metal protective cover to the wires that ran along the wall before Notus secured the box of earth magic to them. He glanced back at us, waiting for our readiness.

Saar nodded, and Notus flicked the switch.

"We're inside and attached," Saar whispered.

A confirmation on the other side of the radio let us know that they copied. We watched the box. The green light was solid and bright. Waiting for our friends on the other side to tap into the feed and shut it down.

Above us, the red light on the alarm flickered before going out completely. The emergency exit sign dimmed. A charge hummed in the air as they wrestled with the magic in the walls.

I glanced at the door as I heard it bolt shut. Not a single bolt, but several, securing it in place. I imagined that all around the building, similar sounds were happening.

Holding my breath, I waited to hear the alarm sound. Even knowing that it had been disabled. Still, raised voices would alert that something was amiss. The doors were locked. They were trapped. They couldn't get out.

When several minutes went by and we heard nothing, I first wondered if anyone was inside. Did we just trap ourselves inside an empty building? The idea that we just walked into a snare made an ugly pit form in my stomach. I swallowed through it.

I jumped when I heard a door open above. We all looked up in one motion, listening to the footsteps on the stairs echo in the cold, empty room. Another door opened and closed. Silence followed.

We exchanged looks. Relief washed over me that there were people in the building.

“Proceed with caution,” someone said on the other end of our speaker.

“Fourth floor,” Saar murmured. I nodded and followed with my husbands and wife. We moved as quietly as possible, trying not to let our boots make too much noise as we swiftly took the stairs to the top floor.

We paused, catching our breaths. Hadley put her hand on the wall, right over a light switch. The lights overhead buzzed as lightning flashed in her eyes. Static made her hair stand on end as she gathered what was there for her to take without dimming the lights and swallowing the electricity completely.

“Where are we going, Bronte?” Saar asked.

I swallowed. We’d been debating for days which offices to hit first. Primarily because I couldn’t make up my mind. This wasn’t surprising, since I hated making decisions. I hated taking charge. I didn’t do this in any part of my life. Ever.

Saar took my hand and squeezed it while he cupped my face with the other. “I know,” he murmured. “This is a lot of pressure. But I know you can make this decision, doll. Gut instinct. That’s all we need.”

Taking a deep breath, I closed my eyes and walked through the hologram of the building again. Ending in the unremarkable office. I nodded. “Take a right out the door. Four offices down on the right. But really, I think we need to take them all out.”

“We’re going to,” Zilan said.

Saar kissed me softly, and I could feel his pride. “Nice job, Bronte,” he murmured into my mouth. “Good, amazing man you are.”

I shivered at his praise. He kissed me again, punctuating each with another compliment. He continued this until Raiden pulled him away. “Focus.” He grinned at me, winking, as he steered Saar back towards the front.

Several deep breaths later, my head cleared from the haze of love and warm, squishy feelings enough to focus on the task at hand.

“Ready?” Kohara asked.

We nodded, and he silently opened the door.

Just a crack. Enough to listen to the sounds beyond. But there was very little. No movement. A distant clacking of keys. A low murmur of a voice, probably on a phone call since we couldn’t hear another answer. No footsteps.

He nodded, slipping through the door. One by one we followed and as I suggested, we took a right. Peering into the first door, we found it empty. Across the hall, we found the same. As the third and fourth doors were showing still empty rooms, disappointment settled over my shoulders.

This was a fail. No one was here.

I wanted to pout. To throw a tantrum. But then I had to remember that we were moving toward a destination. The office that I couldn’t help but focus on when I was memorizing the building layout. It was just up ahead.

We paused outside a door where there was unmistakably a person inside. There were curtains drawn over the windows so we couldn’t see in. A brief silent debate went through us as we determined whether to kill him now or come back for him. Many looks were exchanged before we settled on moving forward.

Another empty office. And then two with people in them on the other side of the hall. Both we passed in favor of the

door I wanted. The office I was determined had to be something. It was slightly cracked, barely ajar, and we paused out of view of the windows.

Taking a breath, we braced ourselves with weapons in hand.

This was it, the moment we'd been waiting for. To see the face of and murder the asshole behind the Division of Silence. To put an end to one person so we could undo everything he's built. To kill him before he has a chance to retaliate.

We'd gone through several arguments about whether to keep him alive. How badly did we want answers? But ultimately, it boiled down to the idea that if he's alive, there's a chance he could escape and return to power. And while the world was already dangerous, if he's on a warpath, ready to really lay waste in his anger, we didn't want to give him that chance.

And then there was the idea that we'd like to kill him slowly. To torture him like he's condoned and encouraged for years. For generations. Make him suffer. Track down those important to him and force him to watch them go through the same treatment he's put countless others through.

Ultimately, we decided to kill him upon sight. Instantly. No questions. No conversation. Leave him without a chance to retaliate as we were doing.

Energy buzzed under my skin. Outside, thunder rumbled in the sky. A threatening, ominous sound that shook the windows of the building.

Saar reached for the door handle and looked back at us. *Ready?* he was asking.

There was a moment where I was sure we took a collective swallow before nodding. Yes, we were ready. Ready for whatever monster was behind the door. Ready for our first of many kills today. Ready to look into the eyes and make sure that the monsters he'd set out to destroy had come for him instead.

Saar threw the door open, and we surged through it.



Hadley

WE WERE EXPECTING ONE OF A VARIETY OF SCENARIOS. I suppose the higher ratio of rooms that were empty leading up to this point should have tipped us off that it was a bigger possibility that our target wouldn't be here than they would. It didn't stop the disappointment. The resentment or the anger that followed.

"That's bullshit," Bronte said.

Zilan rested a hand on his shoulder as Arat moved through the room. There was a computer on the desk and another under it. He plugged USB drives into both and turned them on.

"Plugged in," he said. A voice on the other end confirmed that we were heard. We waited a few minutes until it was confirmed that they were in.

Once again, we listened for any indication that someone knew something was going on. Trying to leave the building. Maybe attempting to open a window. Or even that their computers were just hacked.

"I'm beginning to think no one works here at all," Gale said, frowning. Likely thinking the same thing I was. Their inattention was concerning.

"I think this is a decoy," Bronte said quietly. "There's nothing to find here."

"There is," Saar said. "There are humans that have been kidnapped and are being experimented on. Even if we don't

cause the damage we hoped to, we will make a difference in their lives.”

Bronte nodded, his attention sweeping the room. His eyes were dark today, reflecting the storm that he was. But, right now, his hair was light in color. His ability to change those two features meant I would never stop admiring him. Finding something new.

Now though, it was his frustration and disappointment that I felt the most. I moved closer and took his hand. He looked at me, gave me a sad smile, and looked at the rest of our husbands. Waiting for direction while his hand stayed in mine.

“Let’s proceed as planned,” Saar said.

“Good idea,” a voice through the radio said. “I breeched their security cameras. The building is full of people.”

“We’re sure this is Silence, correct?” Kohara asked.

I frowned. Shouldn’t we have confirmed that a long time ago?

Several chuckles met my ears through the radio. “More than sure. Kill on sight.”

We turned toward the door where Raiden, Taranis, and Notus were waiting. Staring into the hall.

“We can make quick work of the two down here,” Tara said. “Keep moving forward. You’ll never be out of sight while we take care of them and catch up.”

Saar nodded, even as I bit my lip. I didn’t think splitting up, even this little distance, was a good idea. I didn’t want it. Too many things could happen. What if a barrier fell from the ceiling, cutting us off?

Bronte squeezed my hand, and I released a breath. Nodding. Several of my men were holding weapons of various kinds. It was... disconcerting. Seeing it only emphasized that we weren’t violent people. It was only reminding myself that these people had sent a whole damn army of men to kill us that had me moving forward.

Bronte held a long range taser in his hand. Gale and Notus had large, compact rifles. Large in that they were long, but their barrels were thin. Kohara, Saar, and Raiden were holding some space age guns that reminded me of a kids' show. They had suspended rings around them that glowed.

The rest of us could use our storms inside. Arat and Tem with the force of their wind. Zilan would freeze the damn world and then Taranis would set it on fire. Me? I was going to send thousands of volts through their motherfucking bodies until I could see their skeletons through their skin with the glow.

My fingers flexed. Ready. There was a quiet yelp from one room. But no sound from the second. Then Tara, Raiden, and Notus were with us again. Walking with their backs toward us. Protecting the way we came. The rooms ahead had people. There were voices.

Kohara took one as Saar burst into the one directly across from it. In this fashion, we made it through the mostly empty top floor. By the time we headed into the stairwell, I was feeling okay about this. There wasn't time to think about the blood on our hands. Especially not with my heart racing in my chest. Drumming so loudly that it almost overtook my thoughts.

We'd cleared one floor.

"What's on the third?" Saar asked.

Bronte explained the layout and that it was part offices, conference rooms, and then there were rooms that had gurneys in them. Tables. Storage. Also, a few that were basically computer banks. "I think their security hub is on this floor," he said. "We should probably take that out first."

"Tell us how to get there," Saar said.

I listened as Bronte explained the left, right, second door directions. And then told us every room we'd encounter along the way. I wasn't the only one grinning at him when he finished. He paused, looking at us all before his face flushed. "What?"

Raiden took his chin between his fingers. “You’re a fucking amazing man, Bronte. That mind of yours is incredible.”

Bronte flushed further, licking his lips. “Thanks.”

Raiden kissed his lips, short but claiming, and let him go. He turned to his brother. “Ready.”

Saar nodded, giving Bronte the same adoring look that everyone else was. Affectionate and proud. I took Bronte’s hand again as we filed into the stairwell once more. Moving efficiently but quietly, we moved down to the third floor.

There was a dramatic increase in noise beyond the door, for which I was thankful. Still, it didn’t sound as though anyone was alarmed. Part of me thought this entire organization was incompetent if they hadn’t figured out that they were trapped, had been breached, and were now being hunted. And then I had to remind myself that this same organization had some sick fucking weapons that they weren’t afraid to use on people.

The idea that we were being led into a cage never let up. As often as I tried to shush the voice in my head, it was still there. Nagging and making me sweat.

“Ready?” Saar asked.

I was going to hear that word in my sleep. But I nodded as my men did. If we stalled too long, I think we were all going to back out. Storms aren’t violent. We just aren’t.

Licking my lips, I rested my hand on the metal door, ready to send currents through it. Zilan touched the handle as they crowded around, the twins and Neph holding their weapons at the door. The three of them nodded and Zilan pulled it open.

My body was pressed between the door and the wall, but I could see through the gap where the door hinged at the frame. I was looking into a junction where the hall split in three ways; left, right, and straight. It was a busy space. There were a dozen people who suddenly spun toward the door and froze.

One put his hands up, eyes wide. Another two pulled out their own weapons. It happened quicker than I could keep

track of. My hand touched the doorframe and sent a visible streak of electricity through the air, slamming into the chest of one of the men with guns.

He dropped his weapon and clutched his chest. Before the other could get a shot off, the twins shot simultaneously, and he went down as well. We moved into the hallway, killing everyone moving about their business.

“Murderers,” I murmured under my breath as I caught a woman running away. As soon as I touched her, I let the charge in me unleash. Her teeth rattled in her head as her muscles seized. Her hair stood on end. “Murderers,” I reminded myself as she fell to the floor in a heap, her body burnt from the inside.

These weren't people. They were workers who supported an organization bent on killing other supernaturals. Their lives are forfeit to that cause. We didn't stop to ask their names or what their rolls were. Just as the humans that were pulled from their lives weren't given those courtesies. We didn't ask who made the weapons or if they knew about the torture that went on below their feet. Just as they didn't ask why an army of hybrids attacked a peaceful family on vacation in the mountains.

They didn't ask the names of the people they killed. Didn't take any notice that they were tearing families apart. Killing sisters and daughters.

There comes a time when you can't let your conscience get in the way. *Everyone* knew the Division of Silence's only agenda was to destroy and eliminate species that they deemed 'too dangerous to exist.' And anyone who signed on with them was just as guilty of those crimes. Their burdens were shared.

Keeping this in mind, I never hesitated to light up someone's ass with the force of my monster. It grew bigger, pushing out of my body and taking over my movements. People were fighting back now, but not quickly or loudly enough to cause much of a scene before we took them out. Our goal was to stay as discreet as possible, and therefore make as much damage as we could before we were truly challenged.

That moment would come.

But hopefully not before we hit the security office with minimal obstacles.

I spun when Raiden sucked in a breath. A man came out with something that looked comically far too big to be inside a building. He'd blow the entire side off.

"Blow him away," Saar said, yanking his brother away.

Aratiri and Tempest moved forward, their bodies not at all solid and made of flesh. Arat had gills and very long, freaky arms, while Tem was made of smoke. A burst of wind shot down the hall, sending the half a dozen people backward and slamming them into the wall.

I shoved forward, placing my hands on the metal frame of a door and loading it with electricity. I could feel the way it followed the wires in the wall like blood through veins. But there wasn't a steady heartbeat making them move. It was rage and endless energy that I took from my husbands, as well as from the electricity running the building.

It grappled with the people on the ground before consuming them all. Where they were heaped gave my currents enough surface area to fry. Jumping from one body to the next. Each wearing metal. Earrings. Belt. Rivets on their shoes. The monstrous weapons.

Pulling my hand away, my guys pulled me down the hall. We were close to the security office now.

"Check in," someone said in my head. I jumped, glancing around, uneasy.

"We're good. Watching our wife light some men's asses up," Kohara answered.

"Sexy as hell," Notus muttered, winking at me when I glanced in his direction.

Since I was slightly disoriented from using so much energy, it took me a minute to realize who they were talking to. When quiet laughter filled my ears, I remembered the radio

links. Letting out a breath, I rubbed my hands on my legs to dry my sweaty palms.

“Pace yourself,” Arat murmured in my ear, his hand circling my wrist. “We’re only on the third floor. We have two more, plus the basement levels to take care of. Don’t overdo it so soon, love.”

I nodded. “I need that reminder more frequently.”

He smiled and kissed my cheek. “Will do.”

Maybe others finally got the message that they should stay in their offices. We went unhindered for the last hundred feet before we stopped at the security room door. But Bronte wasn’t looking at the door right now and his distraction made the rest of us look at him.

“What’s wrong?” Saar asked.

“That room is one of the dark ones,” he murmured, taking a step forward. “One of the rooms the sonar couldn’t penetrate.”

Kohara took his arm and pulled him back. “Security first. We’ll head there after.”

Bronte bit his lip, staring at the door. He nodded, but couldn’t seem to look away. Kohara pushed himself in front of him, not allowing Bronte to move out of sight. But his fixation on the opposite door had us all hesitating. We looked between the two, a clear unspoken debate that we shared.

“What do you want to do?” Arat asked.

Bronte shook his head. “You know I hate decisions.”

Arat wrapped an arm around Bronte’s waist from behind, pressing his lips to the shell of his ear. “Yes, and normally, we’re all about letting that go. We enjoy taking care of you until you’re a happy, sighing, gooey mess in our arms.” Bronte blinked, his eyes relinquishing his steadfast focus on the door to look over his shoulder. A smile touching his lips. “But you memorized the building, baby. If you don’t want to make a decision, that’s okay. But we need to know exactly what

you're thinking and feeling right now so we can make it for you."

"I love you," Bronte said in answer.

Arat's smile was sexy as fuck. He kissed Bronte's cheek. "Love you, too. And while I'd like to tell you endlessly how much, now isn't the time or place for that. Talk, baby."

Bronte took a breath. He glanced at the security door and squinted. "Logically, I think we need to secure that room first. But I've been staring at this room for so long, sure that there's something important in there."

"What's your gut saying?" Kohara asked.

The pained look on Bronte's face would have had me giggling, except that I knew this situation was serious. And Bronte really was struggling. He wanted to be taken care of. Loved and spoiled and cherished. He *didn't* want responsibility outside of his work. And that's the life he lived.

These moments were harder for him than most people would understand.

Movement behind the security door had us turning around just as the doorknob turned. "Decision made," Raiden said, raising his weapon. I had half a mind just to lay my hands on the door and fry their asses behind it. Only knowing that I'd likely fry the entire computer system that our friends were currently sweeping through made me stop.

The door pulled in and before anyone could fire, Zilan dropped to the ground, his body shuddering. His mouth foaming. We stared in shock for a second before my men acted and stormed the room. While I stood frozen, staring at Zilan as his muscles spasmed.

"No," I screamed, dropping to my knees and grabbing him. Was he having a seizure? What was happening? I ran my hands over his body, putting his head in my lap so he'd not knock himself out while he convulsed. And because I was touching as much of him as I could, I found the little pin that stuck in him and could feel the magic pulsing.

Tears stung my eyes. “Help,” I cried as I tried to grip it.
“Fuck, someone help.”



Bronte

IT HAD BEEN GOING SO WELL. ZILAN'S FALL HAPPENED IN slow motion and all I could do was stare as my husbands surrounded him and our wife fell to her knees beside him. Chaos broke out. There were lights and sounds and the building trembling.

I was sure that everyone knew we were here now. There was no alarm. We'd successfully shut that down. And hopefully, our friends had moved through their computers quickly enough that they had stalled if not cut down outside communication.

But I was still frozen. Staring at the mayhem happening in front of me. There were more men in the security room than I thought was possible. Not a dozen, though. We should have easily eliminated them.

The soft click shouldn't have penetrated the ruckus in front of me. Between Hadley's pleading for help and Zilan's pained grunts as he uncontrollably spasmed on the ground. The echoing blasts of weapons and yells of men. The distant voices in my ear that I could barely concentrate on. I shouldn't have heard it.

But as if I were only attuned to that one thing, the soft *click* had me holding my breath. Slowly, I turned, heart racing. With my back stupidly to the threat behind me, I stared at the door to the room I couldn't see within on the magic sonar hologram.

The door wasn't shut securely anymore. It was cracked open. Darkness loomed within. With a taser in hand, I touched the trigger. Feeling the crackle of energy as it surged forth, ready to come crashing out.

I took step toward the door and it moved slightly, as if caught in a breeze. My heart raced as I continued forward, reaching out my hand. My fingers brushed the metal of the door and I waited for something. A jolt of magic. Static from all the energy in the air. But there was nothing. Just the cool metal under my fingers.

I shoved it open and peered into the dark room, waiting for the light of the hall to penetrate the abyss inside. Slowly, my eyes adjusted and as soon as I could feel shapes, the sheer amount of magic within the room made me take a step backward. My breath caught, and it took me several struggling attempts to inhale.

When I finally managed to focus, I found that there were eyes in the room. Watching me. A low growl in the air. The eyes moved. They grew. But I couldn't look away. Couldn't figure out what I was looking at.

Then it was too late.

The snarl that ripped through the air had me scrambling backward, but I wasn't quick enough. I stumbled, fell to the ground hard and my taser went flying. My back slammed the floor, knocking the air from my lungs. In that moment, the thing was on top of me. Its claws digging into my chest.

Pain streaked through my body as I tried desperately to regain the ability to breathe. Its spit dripped, falling onto my neck as its big teeth hovered over my face. The saliva burned. It was enough of a shock that I managed to catch a breath.

I shoved at him. Struggling to keep him away, even as the feel of fire on my neck and its claws in my chest made me delirious with pain. A pulse around my head and then strength coursed through my body. With more power than I had, I threw the thing off me.

“I owe you, Coen,” I gasped as I quickly flipped to my hands and feet.

“No, you don’t,” came his quiet reply in my ear.

The thing should have been shoved through a wall with all that force. But it twisted in the air and landed against the wall with four feet. The wall cracked, gave way in some places, but it used its animal agility to spring off and land nearly on top of me.

I threw myself sideways, reaching desperately for my taser. With my fingers barely on it, claws ripped through my back and I cried out. When it gave a loud, pissed off growl and released me, I knew someone had done something to intervene.

Without looking, I lunged for my taser. Grasping it in both hands, I rolled onto my back, crying out again when I landed on my newest war wounds. Blinding pain made my vision blur as I pushed myself up.

The thing was circling with Hadley, her hands filled with lightning. She looked like an ethereal god, surrounded by black clouds and streaks of light.

That thing... looked like some weird hybrid monster. Not a Canidae or even a feline but a combination. Its claws looked prehistoric. And the horn on its head? What the fuck was that?

The irony that they were hunting monsters ‘too dangerous to exist’ and then creating their own was beyond hypocritical. Hysterical laughter bubbled up inside me but it lunged at Hadley and all humor left. She sent volts through it, her hands raised as a dozen streaks between her hands surged into the monster.

Its screams were deafening. The air was so thickly charged that I could barely move.

“My wife is badass,” one of my husbands muttered through the radio. I could hear the strain in his voice and was pretty sure it was Gale but with my ears popping, it was hard to tell.

I was horrified when that thing pushed forward, eyes blazing in fury. With more effort than I thought I had strength for, I raised the taser and squeezed the trigger. A little star shot out of the end and dug deep into the ribs of the thing. Its face spun toward me. I smiled, turned the dial to the red zone, and hit the button.

Smoke of burning flesh instantly filled the air as the thing made the most horrendous sound. I could feel it grating on my bones. I stared, my chest heaving as I continued to fry the damn thing.

When Taranis came barreling toward me, I was so distracted that I dropped the taser again. A blast of heat hit my back, making me careen forward. I gripped my side, not sure when I managed to gain that injury and rolled, ignoring the sting from the deep wounds on my back.

Taranis dove, knocking me backward. We crashed into the wall as a new fucking beast that I'd never seen before landed where I'd been. It was covered in fire but didn't seem fazed at all.

"You okay, sugar?" Tara asked, his hand wiping frantically at my head.

I nodded and he pulled me to my feet. Trying to keep my groan in, I grabbed for my taser and took aim at this new thing. Tara pulled it from my grip and let the new dart fly. It landed in the side of the thing's head.

It was quick. It was already airborne in a pounce toward us when Tara hit the button. While I caught my breath behind him, I looked around. Zilan was in the doorway of the security office, still down but no longer convulsing. I hoped that meant he was okay and not dead. The thought of that was too much and I had to turn away. Gale was bleeding. I was pretty sure Neph had a broken leg.

"We aren't doing well," I whispered.

"We're fine," Tara said, shoving his back into me and pinning me to the wall. "All fine, sugar. Catch your breath."

We weren't fine. Hadley's scream of fear and fury made us both snap our heads to the side and caught the moment another fucking thing landed on Tem's back. By the way his body arched and his eyes widened, I knew it wasn't good. Tears blurred my eyes.

And then the building shook and dread settled on my shoulders. This was a stupid idea. We were just twelve people. And we were dumb to cripple ourselves by locking a whole family of storms inside a building where we couldn't truly let our monsters out.

The lights flickered. In the distance, screams rattled the windows. Screams of people and... screams of monsters. Big monsters.

"No," I whimpered. "We can't take anymore."

The door to the stairs flew open, dropping from its hinges, and out poured a dragon. Fire blazed in its eyes and from its jaws as it screeched in fury. It was far too big for the space and yet somehow, fit fluidly.

Moving around the walls and ceilings as if gravity wasn't a challenge. It ripped the monster from Tem's back and locked its jaw, shaking it until we heard its bones pop like kernels exploding. He went for the other monsters I missed, taking them all out. Chasing the last when it tried to run away. And then it went through the rest of the floor, lighting fires and filling the air with screams.

I slumped when another body walked through the door. Torin, looking like a fucking god. Pristine in his suit and frowning in disapproval.

He moved through the rubble and blood, stopping at Tem first. I watched with fear as Tem took a deep breath and a fierce shudder before slumping into Torin.

"Come on, sweet pea," Torin said, pulling Tem to his feet. "Take a breath." He leaned Tem in Raiden's arms before moving to Neph.

Torin frowned. "The Nephilim are outside." He shoved something to Neph's mouth. Neph grumbled and fought

him but swallowed whatever it was. “Don’t be so proud. Swallow it. I know you know how to swallow.”

Although he tried to keep it in, laughter burst from Neph’s mouth. He closed his eyes, leaning his head back against the wall. “Thanks.”

He quickly cleaned up Gale before kneeling next to Zilan. Torin was a damn beast. He came from a line of some of the most powerful witches in the world. While he made it his business not to use his magic much because he didn’t want that kind of attention on him, when we began this war, there was no doubt that he’d be there to pick up the pieces.

My eyes stung as I watched him rest his hand over Zilan’s chest. There are only three witchy bloodlines that can control magic the way he can. And you always know when a witch comes from one of them. Their eyes glow an eerie green.

As Torin’s did now. He pulled the magic from Zilan’s body and it rose in a sickly gray cloud that had a screech all its own. Zilan jerked. He suddenly rolled over and vomited before he swore. “What the fuck?”

“Charming,” Torin said.

Zilan looked over his shoulder. His eyes widened as he shoved himself away, rolling into Kohara’s feet.

Torin toyed with the magic. Yes, he was using it like silly putty. Manipulating it and squishing it. Listening to it scream. When he was done, he frowned and clenched his hands around it. It popped like a bug, guts bursting and dripping to the floor with a *splat*.

I shivered.

We sat there in silence for a minute. But only our silence wasn’t actually silent. The dragon, which I realized was either Fable or Julian, was still terrorizing the third floor. The floors below us were filled with screams, roars, shattering glass. And the building continued to shake.

“The demons are here, aren’t they?” Saar asked.

Torin smiled, getting to his feet and brushing his suit off. As if he was covered in dust, the goo from the magic wiped away. “Ryker is hungry,” he answered.

Saar sighed as he looked around. “Thank you.”

His smile was smaller this time. “We were prepared to let you do this on your own, Igarashi. But sometimes, strength is knowing when to ask for help.”

“I would have, but we were doing this in retaliation. Not for some noble cause. We wanted to cause them pain as they did us,” he argued.

Torin touched his arm. “Honey, if you wanted to do this because it’s a fucking Thursday afternoon and you’re bored, we got your back. Just as you have ours.”

I jumped when the dragon rounded the corner and paused.

“You’re pretty badass, Jules,” Kohara said, resting a hand on the dragon’s long snout. Julian snorted, a puff of smoke filling the hall, but closed his eyes as Kohara rested his forehead against him. “Thanks for rescuing us. Feeling like foolish damsels right now.”

“Don’t,” Torin said as he headed for the stairs. “Despite how it feels, you were doing pretty damn well. If you’d have heard us warn you about the things coming your way, I think you’d have fared better. But when it was clear that you couldn’t hear us, that’s when we joined in. Not because you couldn’t handle this. But because you didn’t have all the information you needed to succeed anymore.”

I rubbed my face and winced.

“Torin,” Tara said, causing our royal witch to pause. “Check Bronte?”

His eerie green eyes landed on me, and I paled. “Always playing with big monsters, hm?” he asked as he came back into the hall and moved towards me. “I always knew you were a size queen.”

Hadley giggled as my skin heated. He cupped my face, grinning at the way I continued to flush. “You’re truly

adorable, Bronte. Come tell Papi where it hurts, hm?" He winked, and I pushed him away.

"Stop mocking me," I grumbled, crossing my arms. The way it pulled at all the different puncture wounds had me hissing and wheezing.

Torin's teasing stopped as he pulled me near, and his hands went to my chest. He moved behind me and I could feel his fingers touching the wounds. Jolts of pain streaked through my body, and I swayed on my feet. Fuck, that hurt. Especially when he touched there! I lurched forward, gasping. My vision darkening completely.

He caught me before I did a face-plant. "Shhh," he hushed soothingly. "You're okay. Gimme a minute. I need to feel them all."

"Just admit you have a torture kink," I bit out.

Torin chuckled, but I barely heard it when he pressed against a particularly tender spot and burning pain overtook me. When I came back, clearly having lost consciousness or something, I was heaving for breath as he held me up. Still touching all my claw wounds and sending rivulets of pain through me.

"I'm glad you asked for help," he murmured in my ear. Disoriented and sweating from pain, I blinked blindly as the faces of my husbands and wife slowly came back into focus. I had no idea what he was going on about. "We'll always be here when you need us."

Letting my head fall back on his shoulder, I concentrated on his poking and prodding. My body was beginning to feel numb. The pain was dissipating. Still there as a constant thrum in the back of my mind. But much more bearable.

"There you go," he said. "Did I miss anywhere?"

"I don't know. I think you added a few more," I said.

He chuckled. "I didn't know where to concentrate first," he admitted. "So I might have missed one or two. I dulled the pain, so if there's somewhere that still hurts like you've been stabbed repeatedly, tell me."

I shifted my body, taking inventory of my aches and pains.
“No. That’s it.”

“Good,” he said, gently pushing me into Taranis’s arms.

“Thanks, Torin.”

He looked back at me and winked. “Alright, storms. I think it’s time to rejoin the hell you’ve started and see what’s in the basement.”



Hadley

THERE WAS ANOTHER DRAGON COILED WITHIN THE STAIRWELL. If the one that basically ate the third floor was Julian, then this one must be Fable. I mean, I probably could have figured that out all on my own because his eyes were fucking intense. Simply stunning.

“Hey, hot stuff,” Aratiri greeted Fable as we slipped by his sleek body, running his fingers along the smooth scales as he went.

I couldn’t help it. I’d never touched a dragon before. So I trailed him, my fingers following the path Aratiri’s left behind. Fable watched me, those eyes penetrating into my soul.

Smiling, I kissed his long snoot and whispered a ‘thanks’ as I passed him. I heard him sneeze behind me. Grinning, we stepped out onto the ground floor.

The acrid scent of blood filled my lungs, and I coughed. The smell was nothing in comparison to the sight. I paused, eyes wide as I took in the massacre. The enormous sphinx lying down the center of the open corridor was licking her paws of blood. I shuddered and stepped around. Far away from the claws.

“You didn’t find what you were looking for,” Lazer said as the doors opened and Lazarus, the oni of Darkyn that I could never remember his name, Bastian, and Ryker stepped inside. The doors clanged shut behind them, echoing in the space. I could hear the secure locks settling into place.

Lazarus went to Nephele, who was sandwiched between Kohara and Raiden as they helped him down the stairs. Without speaking, he tended to Nephele's broken leg.

It was too much to concentrate on the way we hurt. The only thing I could think about was that no one had actually died.

"No," Saar said, sighing in frustration. "Either they knew we'd come for them or... I don't know. Dumb luck that no one was working?"

"Maybe we're giving them too much credit," Yarak said, wiping his hands on his pants, leaving bloody streaks behind. I swallowed at the sight. "We know that they have several facilities. It's silly to think that they work out of the same one all the time. It's more likely that they have offices in all of them."

"We killed a handful from the top floor," Kohara said, frowning. "We found more abominations than we did men from the top, though."

"I suspect we'll find more downstairs," Bastian said. "Whatever mutants they were creating, they had to start somewhere."

I winced at his words. He's right. They didn't start out that way. They were probably innocent people at one point. But what had they been made into?

"I need to see the other rooms that the sonars didn't make it through," Bronte said.

Plum shook her head. "You don't, honey. More of the things you already saw. Different, but more of the same."

Bronte looked sick. He was still staring at nothing while he wrestled with that information when Lazarus put his glowing hands on Bronte's wounds. Witches couldn't heal, but they could cover pain. A Nephilim is an instant health pack. Like in a video game. A few minutes and you're completely revived.

As long as you haven't been dead long.

The thought made me glance at Kohara. We were really lucky that the Malaks had made it to us on the mountain in time. So fucking lucky.

“Let’s go,” Bastian said. “Ryker is getting antsy.”

I glanced at the nightmare as a chill fell through the building.

“Depending on what we find, let’s not kill right away. Employees of Silence, yes. But I want to see these beasts, if we have a chance to look at them in a contained setting,” Nephela said, walking once again.

“Everything secure outside?” Saar asked.

The oni nodded. “Yep. We’re in touch with our guys back at base. They’re monitoring the computer systems. From what we can tell, none of the other buildings have been tipped off.”

“Keep us posted, Tyrus,” Saar said. “I’ve realized I don’t have the concentration to listen to the radios and watch what’s going on around us.”

“No problem,” Tyrus said, falling into our ranks as we headed back to the stairs and made our way down a floor.

“There are two lower levels,” Bronte said. “I think that the bottom houses the cells. And this one”—he looked at the door with a look of disgust—“is where they experiment.”

“Then let’s stop here first,” Yarak said, pushing the door open. “Kill whoever’s left working. We can bring the monsters—or humans—from the bottom level out after.” I watched in awe as he spread out and slipped into the shadows, disappearing from sight.

A moment later, someone screamed. A sound that was shrill and filled with terror. The fear turned to pain before it was choked off.

Movement was suddenly everywhere as we filed through the door. The dragons, both of them, slipped inside and took off in different directions. But I was too busy watching Ryker as his black tendrils of death reached out like tentacles and slithered along the walls.

“Don’t hurt anyone behind bars or locked in rooms,” Bastian said, his voice firm.

Ryker gave a single nod of his head.

I slowly moved forward, careful to avoid his cold touch. Akello fell into step beside me. “You hurt?” he asked.

I shook my head. “Mentally, probably. Physically, I’m fine.”

He smiled, draping an arm over my shoulders. Akello opened his mouth to say something when the words died on his tongue as we came to a stop, looking through a glass wall. On the other side were shifters, frozen in their hybrid forms. They looked like soldiers lined up in rows, their heads down and eyes closed. Coming out of the backs of their necks were wires that connected them to the ceiling.

A lump formed in my throat as I stared.

“The Aves’ observation might have been right,” Taranis said quietly on my other side. “They’re programmed.”

“They’re living, aren’t they?” I asked.

“Hard to say,” Akello answered.

“See what you can find for vital monitors, Koa,” Tyrus said.

“Looking now,” a voice in the radio said, who I assumed was Koa.

“There should be... dozens,” Tyrus said.

“Bingo,” Lazarus said, and we all turned. He was several dozen paces down the hall, staring through another pane of windows, his hands flat on them. I was almost afraid to look. But I followed, Akello’s arm still firmly around me. It wasn’t just for my comfort. He was shook, too.

This glass window stretched the entire length of the rest of the corridor, looking into interconnected rooms. Inside were various states of... humans. And monsters. Sometimes, two in a room—one of each.

They were bloody and cut open. Tubes, wires, and harnesses coming off them. Monitors showed they were alive, but they weren't moving. Their eyes closed. The human in front of me was covered in what looked like burns.

Further down, the room was in tatters. The monster lay in a heap on the floor in the far corner. Glass was broken. A dead body in a lab coat close by.

"Turn around," someone whispered.

As if possessed, I did. Bile rose in my stomach as I looked at what resembled a science fiction novel. Large liquid filled cylinders with embryos in various states suspended.

"They're breeding something new," Plum murmured.

This can't be real. It was too sick.

"They can't control the monsters that exist, so they make ones they can," Zilan said in disgust. "What happens when they break through their leashes? They're creating new monsters that they'll later destroy."

"This is sick," Lazarus muttered. "What the actual fuck?!"

"You don't understand."

We spun at the voice. A man stood in the doorway at the end of the hall we hadn't made it to yet. I wasn't sure he was aware of the monster behind him, though. The dragon, coiling, eyes a hot fire that danced in the darkness.

"What don't we understand?" Bastian asked, his voice calm and chilling. Ryker's black arms reached for the man.

The man looked at them warily. "That can't be controlled," he said, pointing at Ryker with a frown. "These can be. With a beast compelled to complete obedience, there will be order in the world."

He stepped aside as one of Ryker's arms toyed with his hair. There was no doubt that he was afraid of the nightmare. Of the situation he found himself in.

"Are you the mastermind behind this fucked up place?" Saar asked. His voice hard.

The man rolled his eyes. “Of course, not. I’m just a worker.”

“Who has no issues with sending some species to extinction while creating other apex predators,” Bastian said.

He shrugged. “I understand that there are ethical and moral dilemmas on both sides.”

“There is only one side, and it’s not a dilemma,” Plum snapped. “You’re experimenting on and murdering innocent people. You’re creating new people and controlling them. How the fuck do you explain how this is morally okay?”

It was like talking to a wall. He stared at Plum with a frown. “We’re creating life to take the place of those species who have outgrown the world we live in.”

“No. You’re murdering species minding their business and creating mindless drones,” Lazer said.

“That’s... not exactly it, but I suppose I can see where you’re coming from,” he answered.

Bastian patted Ryker on the forearm. “I think we’re going to take this one alive. Care to scare him for a while?”

Ryker nodded.

For the first time, there was true fear in his eyes. He spun around to run but came face-to-face with Julian. And then the many arms of Ryker’s death touch surrounded him, swallowing him whole.

“What do we do about this place?” Saar asked. “Leaving it as is, isn’t an option.”

“These can’t be freed,” Taranis said, still watching the wired hybrids.

“And *these* need to be... disposed of,” Plum said, glaring at the things suspended in fluid.

“If this is what we find in this facility, I’m sure the others look similar,” I said. “What do we do then?”

No one answered as we considered this.

“We’re setting up a door in a nearby coffee shop that’s in-house owned,” a voice said from the radio. “Start getting the victims out. If you can’t save them, a quick death is better than anything they’ve been through already.”

Tyrus nodded.

“I found the vitals,” a voice said. Koa, maybe? He was working on the computers. “There are far more here than I care to tell you about. A quick read through tells me they’ve been implanted with some kind of radio frequency. And they’re remotely controlled.”

“Fuck,” Taranis said, taking a step back. One of the hybrids had opened his eyes and was staring at Tara.

“That was me. Sorry,” Koa said. “Just wanted to see the controls. As much as this isn’t going to sit well with anyone —”

“They need to die,” Gale interrupted, his voice flat. “Don’t they?”

“Unless you want to take the time to try and remove the implants one by one before someone realizes that we’ve compromised their facility and that you’re still inside,” Koa said. “There are a few models here, but it looks like the implants are... deep within the brain. It’s not a quick process, in or out.”

“Fine,” Bastian said. “What can you tell us about what’s in the rooms next door? How many of them stand a chance of getting out alive and recovering?”

There was silence for several minutes before Koa answered. “Take them all, but I suggest Ryker do a transport if he’s up to it. Maybe Ty or Yarak can handle a couple of them, but it’s better safe than sorry. Ryker can eliminate them without blinking an eye.”

“Heartless killer,” Tyrus said, nudging his elbow into Ryker’s side, winking at him.

Ryker’s eyes were depthless as he turned them on Tyrus. The smile that lifted his lips was chilling.

“They’re good friends,” Akello said close to my ear, chuckling. “There aren’t many that will tease Ryker, but Tyrus lives in the dark, too.”

I shivered, wrapping my arms around my middle to try to keep my heat in. To stop the trembling of fear when I knew the demon wasn’t going to hurt me.

“Let’s head downstairs,” Saar said as he moved swiftly to the door where Julian was still sitting in the dark on the other side. I wasn’t even going to ask how he got in there.

The lowest floor wasn’t anything spectacular or surprising at all. Cells upon cells, and as we suspected, most of which were occupied by humans, though there were a fair bit of monsters there, too. It wasn’t hard to determine that we were looking at shifters.

“In there,” one of the humans said, pointing to a door that I probably would have missed.

What was inside would give me nightmares for the rest of my life. It was a breeding room. There were glass cells with human women in various stages of gestation being kept like cattle. Their eyes were wide, terrified. Tear stains ran down their cheeks. They were bruised and cut up and I didn’t even have to ask where those wounds came from.

I swallowed, turning away.

“This was a good decision,” Bronte whispered. “Even if we couldn’t do it on our own. I’m glad we did it.”

“Me too, baby,” Arat said, pulling him close as we all stared in horror for far too long.

Plum took my hand and pulled me from her husband. “Come on. I think we’re going to have to see if we can gain their trust. Monsters aren’t going to be seen as safe and especially not men.”

I nodded, wiping the tears from my eyes.

“Someone grab Seneca and Veri. And the Taru women. We need a gentler voice right now,” Plum said.

“We shouldn’t get Maryn, then,” Tyrus snorted. “That woman is not gentle.”

“And that’s why there are no men in their beds. They’re too weak,” Plum quipped, turning her back on Tyrus.

Tyrus’ eyes turned dark. Beside him, Ryker laughed. A low sound that rumbled deep in his throat. He reached for Tyrus, bringing the oni to him with his arm around his waist and several of those death tentacles snaked around his body.

“Called you,” Ryker murmured, still laughing quietly.

Taranis pushed me gently into the room, and I stopped at the door of one of the women. She had a very significant bump. Slowly, I pulled the lock on the door and opened it, keeping my eyes on her.

“Hi,” I whispered, crouching down, so I was eye level with where she was huddled on the mattress on the floor. “My name is Hadley. What’s yours?”

“Celia,” she whispered.

“Want to get out of here, Celia? I can bring you somewhere safe.”

Her chest rose and fell with her fear. Her eyes darted to those gathered at the door. Biting her lip, she looked back at me.

“I promise you, not a single one of my men will hurt you. Ever.”

“They’re all yours?” she whispered.

I smiled. “No, not all of them. But a lot of them. Those that aren’t are good friends. As soon as we get you out of here, we’re going to take this place down. Bury it in the ground.”

“What about the monsters?” she whispered.

“The world is full of monsters, Celia. Some bite while others protect.” I stood and offered her my hand. “We’re going to keep you safe.”

Her hands trembled on her stomach before she slowly got to her feet and placed her hand in mine. “Thank you.”

I think I just found what I want to do with my life.



Hadley

THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS WERE A WHIRLWIND THAT FELT A LOT like the days leading up to our botched yet successful strike against Silence. We had lost one of the pregnant women. When Koa started yelling in our ears to get out, she had been so afraid that she ran in the opposite direction. Straight into the awakened hybrids.

We got out and Ryker took the entire building to the ground. Watching it fold and spark, burst into flames and moan like the ground was being forcefully pulled apart was like nothing I'd ever seen before. I had one of the last women wrapped in my arms as we watched it happen. We watched Ryker standing in the middle of the street, a monster like no other, destroying the building before our eyes.

I swear, I could see faces in the darkness of his death touch. Hear the screams echo. I was more than a little disturbed when Tyrus *walked out* of Ryker's black reach.

Of course, that had really pissed off his family. Iker took him by the throat and said something low and fierce. I might have been afraid for him, except I could read the fear in Iker's face. Tyrus wrapped his arms around Iker, smiling when his husband couldn't see, and watched Ryker do as I said he'd do. Bury the building until there was nothing left but an empty stretch of land.

"Just like old times," Ady said, coming up beside the nightmare monster and threading her fingers in his. He didn't

have a face right now. Just a head. A body lined with spikes and death. “Let’s go home.”

But we didn’t go home. We brought all the victims we freed back to The Harem Project. Ryker followed because he had a whole bunch that he hadn’t eaten—or whatever it is a nightmare demon does with them—within his, uh, arms? I wasn’t sure about the anatomy of his particular monster.

The woman I helped along stared at us all. When I settled her into a room, she grabbed my hand. “What are you?” she asked. Her eyes fierce. Afraid but brave.

“I’m a monster, too,” I told her, smiling. “I’m a storm.” Holding up my hand, I let lightning dance along my fingertips.

“Monsters don’t get along with other monsters,” she noted.

“Oh no. We do. But like every species and culture, there are tyrants who want to control everything. Who want to eliminate those they think are less than or too much. Who want to create the superior race. And just like those places within the human world, there are groups of monsters who won’t let that happen.”

“Why me?” she asked, her hand on her stomach. “What did they want with me?”

“My guess is your womb. They’re trying to create something specific, though we’re not sure why a human is necessary for it.”

She nodded. “They did horrible things,” she said, frowning. “They-this wasn’t a choice.”

“I know,” I said quietly, resting my hand over hers. “You’re safe here. I swear to you. No one will hurt you and you’ll get all the care and protection you deserve.”

“For how long?”

“Until you feel safe enough to head back into the world,” Zilan said behind me. He remained in the doorway. “I recommend you stay here throughout your pregnancy, though. As Hadley said, we don’t know what they were trying to do and therefore what they created with you.”

“A baby,” she said, eyelids lowering.

“You’ve met the demon, haven’t you?” Zilan asked, brow raised.

The woman’s face turned ashen. “That’s—But I don’t—”

“Probably not a demon,” I said soothingly. “But we don’t know yet. Will you stay a while?”

She nodded. “Yes. Will you visit, Hadley?”

I smiled, patting her hand again. “I will,” I told her as I got to my feet and headed for Zilan. “But it’s been a long day. My husbands and I are going to head home.”

Her eyebrows shut up. “Husbands? With a ‘s’?”

Laughing, I nodded. “Yep. Sometimes a woman needs multiple men to keep her happy.” I winked. She looked at me wide-eyed for several minutes before bursting out laughing.

“Go, you.”



WE WENT HOME AND FOR SEVERAL DAYS, JUST LIKE AFTER THE mountain attack, we laid together in the third floor sitting room with four mattresses pushed together. For the first couple days, we didn’t talk much. Nor did we speak to anyone outside of our household.

(Except my mom because she wouldn’t stop calling, and I didn’t want her to show up again.)

“Think it’s safe for another vacation?” Bronte asked.

Taranis snorted. “If you want another orgy, all you have to do is say so, sugar.”

I grinned. Bronte blushed so hotly I swear I could feel it, even though several bodies lay between us.

“Actually, I’d like a trip where we can come home by choice after,” he said. “You know, in one piece. Happy memories.”

“Sure, baby,” Arat said. “Where do you want to go?”



WE WENT TO A RESORT. WE RENTED A LARGE HOUSE ON A beach, smack in the middle of a ton of other people. Not that we thought it would discourage Silence. I was sure that they wouldn't care in the least about the number of people around if they chose to come for us. They'd probably just take the humans, too.

But once again, as with the last time Ryker took down a Silence facility, their activity went cold. Nothing. No more kidnappings. No more attacks. I was sure that they were going to turn their attention to Ryker specifically. And I wasn't the only one who thought so.

When I voiced this while we were laying on the beach, baking under the sun six days after our retaliation attack, my men agreed with me.

“Our friends know the price of getting involved,” Saar said quietly. “That was one of the reasons we didn't want them to be. We were already a target.”

“To be fair, I think the Daemons have been a target a lot longer,” Kohara said. “Ryker, especially, but they also have the only known living banshee. Something that Silence has made no secret that they want to possess again.”

“Yes. That doesn't negate the fact that we all know that Silence will be looking in our directions more vigilantly. But we're prepared now. As are our friends. We won't be easy targets,” Saar said.

“And perhaps more importantly, The Harem Project has decided that they're going to up their concentration on the Division of Silence. No more passive watching and learning. They know it's time to take a stand. That means the development of weapons. Counterattacks. Increasing protection and our safe house facilities,” Kohara said.

“What if that's not enough?” I asked.

“What do you mean?” Kohara asked.

“They’ve moved to humans and humans are unaware of what’s out there. They’re living blindly, not knowing that there are worse dangers in the world. That they need to be looking over their shoulders for something worse than a mugging,” I said.

I wasn’t sure which part of the things I saw shook me more. The robot hybrids. Beasts that were working on tearing us apart. Maybe the fetuses of new monsters. Or perhaps the women kept for breeding. Could also be the bodies that looked like they were trying to be tied together.

The images resurfaced in my sleep several times in the last week. Sometimes I was observing just like I had when we stormed the place. Sometimes I was watching it all happen. And sometimes I was the victim.

“Telling the world that monsters are real could have some very negative consequences,” Kohara said.

“Yes. More organizations like ORKA, which is not at all what we need when we have bigger fish to fry,” Gale said. “Though, arguably, they’ve proven themselves to be more than just an irritating gnat.”

Sighing, I shrugged. “I don’t have an answer. And I’m not saying we should just go out and wave a flag that says ‘monsters are real, so be careful of dark corners.’ It’s something to consider. Because they’re wild game that doesn’t know they’re being hunted. They can’t protect themselves if they don’t know.”

“They can’t fight back if they don’t know the threat is there,” Tem added.

The words hung heavy in the air for a while as we lay there. Tem stood, and I watched as he set up his camera before laying back in the group. I could hear the quiet *click* of the lens every few seconds as it captured picture after picture.

At first, I thought we were contemplating what our conversation had been about. But it didn’t take long before the

quiet sound of the ocean lapping at the shore was mixed with kisses. Quiet moans. Heavy breaths.

“We should have chosen a nudist beach,” Taranis said. “We’d already be naked.”

“Dramatic,” Notus muttered. “You’re wearing a thong.”

I giggled, turning into Bronte’s side. He was still lying on his back, watching the clouds above. Though I didn’t miss the way his cock was thick and protruding from his bathing suit. He smiled, then shifted so he could bring his arm under me and pull me closer.

I leaned against his chest, resting my hand against his taut stomach. Already behind me, our husbands were getting spicy and Bronte’s grin stretched across his face.

“So,” I said.

He turned his gray-blue eyes to me. Their shade has been closer to a typical storm’s since the attack. More gray than blue. And his hair has been darker, no longer the light blond but a dark brown. It was interesting to see him change like a chameleon before our eyes. Once, I might have thought it was based on mood, but he’d stayed blond and blue-eyed right up until we hit Silence. And I know for a fact that those weeks leading up to it weren’t bright and sunny for any of us.

So it must have been something else that made his finer features shift in color. Maybe he knew what they were. But maybe he didn’t. I didn’t ask. He was breathtaking, regardless of what he looked like.

“What would you like?” he asked.

It was on the tip of my tongue to put the question back on him, but I already knew his answer. He wanted to be used. He wanted to be commanded. To be handled.

But I also knew that he liked pleasure.

Smiling, I slipped my fingers down his stomach and traced his hard dick through the thong that he wore. All of us were in thongs from another of Tem’s brand sponsors. There were thicker bands that reminded me more of a jockstrap than an

actual thong. The way they also framed their ass cheeks instead of just slicing between them.

For me, it was a simple thong, but with a thicker elastic around my waist. I was topless, but only because we were tucked inside a little private area that our rented house afforded us. Though there were plenty of people down on the beach and they were likely staring up at the group of mostly naked people getting dirty.

I didn't care. Let them watch.

Bronte held my eyes as I traced the length of his cock. It stretched up, bouncing slightly as if flexing to see me. I grinned, stretching myself to press my lips to his. "Do you have any objections to being sucked?"

His eyes darkened. "No. But you don't have to."

"I really want to see how you take pleasure when it's just you receiving it."

His lips pressed together, but he didn't argue. I shifted on the towels beneath us, knowing that it wouldn't be long before sand got in some uncomfortable places. Even though we had like eighty towels laid out and stacked three deep. Sand was demon's torture.

I pressed kisses to his chest, licking his sun-warmed skin. Pausing at his nipples, I bit one to listen to him grunt. His hands stayed where they were, not touching me at all. Letting me do whatever I wanted to him. It was both trusting, and also spoke very loudly to how he wanted to be touched.

Leaving his chest, I slowly dragged my tongue down his stomach. Feeling the ridges and dips as his muscles flexed and relaxed, dancing under my touch. I continued further south, moving over his thong to bite at his cock through the thin material.

He grunted, his hips coming off the ground. I wrapped my mouth around him through the material, sucking lightly until he was making the most delicious sounds. Then I took pity on him and pulled the material away, revealing his delicious cock.

It was uncut, and I spent a minute moving the skin around his head. Pulling it back and playing peek-a-boo with his slit. Bronte snorted in amusement when I started making kissy faces at it. Winking at him, I finally put my mouth over him. Licking up his slit and pulling the skin back so that I could feel around his fat head.

Bronte groaned, his fingers loosely lacing into my hair. As I swirled my tongue around the top of his length, I wondered what it would take to get him to find his own pleasure with my mouth. How much would I have to push him?

Bringing my mouth lower, I took more of him, shifting my body so that I could press the flat, hot surface of my tongue against the underside. I hummed when I had him in the back of my throat. Above me, Bronte swore, his legs shifting to give me more room.

I smiled, taking that as an opportunity to touch his balls. I took them in my hand, feeling how heavy they were. How full. I touched his taint with my thumb, making him swear again, his hips coming off the ground.

Bobbing my head, keeping a gentle suction on his cock, I moved my mouth over him. Flicking my tongue over his head as I came to it and going back down with the flat of my tongue along the underside.

Gently, I squeezed his balls. Massaging them in my fist. Mesmerized how they seemed to jump in my grip.

When Bronte's hand left my hair, I looked up at him. He watched me with dark eyes until his attention caught beyond. Before I could come off him and turn around, warm hands landed on me.

"You know," Gale said in my ear, "Bronte would really rather be ridden than you sucking his dick."

I blinked at Bronte, hollowing out my cheeks a little more. He sucked in a breath, gritting his teeth as his legs began to shake.

Gale chuckled. "Keep going and you'll have him thrusting."

Something must have glimmered in my eyes because Bronte's widened in alarm. Grinning around him, I buckled down and sucked with everything in me. He held out for a solid minute, swearing, but then he was thrusting hard. His hands didn't touch me now as he gripped the towel beneath him, but he shoved up hard, hitting the back of my throat and going further before slamming his ass back into the ground.

And then he coated my throat as I hummed around him while sucking like a vacuum. He swore, nearly coming up off the ground entirely. When he fell back and I released him with a *pop*, he was almost glaring at Gale. Probably for telling me.

"I wondered what it would take," I said, bending down to lick more of his cum that continued to leak.

"Not fair," Bronte said. "You can't tell my secrets."

Gale smirked and pulled me away. He pulled me into his lap after pulling my thong off. I sat with him, his length pressing against me. His hands under my ass as we gently rocked together. His cock between my folds, sliding slickly over my clit. Sending jolts of lightning through my veins.

Our moment alone didn't last. Neph was at my back before too long, climbing into Gale's lap with me. He wrapped around, holding me close. Not kissing my skin or anything. Just breathing me in.

More and more, we took these quiet moments. Little intimacies that might otherwise go forgotten but were made all the more important because of recent events.

Gale reached between us, shifting us enough so that he could slip himself inside me. I sighed as I sank down on him, enjoying the way he had to spread my walls wider to fit inside. That delicious pressure that came from dicks that were just too big; but really, they're perfect.

The three of us rocked together quietly, just holding onto each other.

Although the words never left my mouth, the absolute certainty that I loved these men more than anything filled me with such warmth that I had to catch my breath. I mean, I think

I knew the moment I read their profiles. From the very first images of their faces staring up at me via the app.

These were my men. This was my forever.



Bronte

I WAS ALREADY PANTING, MY BODY WRUNG OUT. AND YET, there was nothing better than these moments. Where we were all naked. All together. All sensual. I enjoyed watching my husbands who don't typically fuck, just touch and fondle. Sometimes actually have sex.

Because it's not that we were against it. We didn't have paved lanes that we were forced to stay into. Our relationships were always natural. There was no force involved. We fell however, and while we were never opposed to switching it up, it's not something that tended to happen.

Maybe we needed more orgies to blur those lines. I could already see bridges connecting us where maybe there was a physical gulf before. Kohara and Zilan were wrapped around each other, cuddling as they caught their breath. Murmuring quiet words. Smiling. Stealing kisses.

I've never once seen them together. Nothing more than a hug from time to time.

I picked myself up onto my hands and knees, glancing around for some water. I was parched. Dehydrated. Needed some fuel to keep going. Because I sure as fuck wanted to keep going.

Reaching the cooler, I dropped down beside Notus and took the bottle he offered me. With a tired 'thanks,' I opened it and drained the whole thing. There really was nothing better

than cold water. Though since the sun was so hot that most of the ice melted, it could be colder.

Dropping the bottle into the bag with the other empties, I stretched my back and turned. No sooner had I done that, than I was met with a chest and strong arms around me.

“There you are,” Saar’s deep voice said. I shivered at his words. As if he’d been hunting me down. “Feel like being stuffed, doll?”

I shivered, nodding. Twin sandwich. Fuck, yes, please.

Saar stood, pulling me to my feet. I stared into his face, studying every line. Not because I was afraid that I’d lost him. But because I’d missed him. How can you miss someone when they’ve only been a few feet away? These days, I found it was quite easy.

A body pressed behind me and I didn’t have to look to know who it was. Not just because of Saar’s question, but because I’d know Raiden’s touch anywhere. Hell, I know all my husbands’ touches. Even those I don’t touch often.

Now that we were together, they kissed me. Saar taking my mouth; Raiden kissing along my jaw. They shared my mouth, trading off seamlessly as one hot mouth replaced the other.

“Gotta prep for this,” Raiden said against my skin.

I grimaced. “I’ve already had dicks in my ass,” I argued.

“How many?” Saar asked.

“Three.” I sniffed. “I should be left wide open now. Probably won’t close for a week.”

“Funny,” Raiden said, and I felt his hand move to my ass. I can’t say whether or not I was disappointed that when he pressed his finger to my hole, it was already tightly sealed again. As if the ring immediately closed up when Tem pulled himself out of me twenty minutes ago. “Feels like you’re still virgin tight, babe.”

On the one hand, I just wanted dicks in my ass. Unless we were simply dedicating time to foreplay sex only, I wasn’t

huge on wanting it. Prep was all well and good, but I had many dicks to ride and they came frequently. Pun intended. So between the lube always in my ass and their cum, not to mention how they used my hole and stretched me for them, I think I did pretty well.

However, there was also a part of me that appreciated that my body sprung back tight again. I really did like that initial burn.

Raiden wasn't going to let me out of it. He pressed his fingers to my ass, sliding two inside me right away. Scissoring and pulling on me in a rather uncomfortable manner. I stared at Saar with narrowed eyes.

He laughed, kissing my lips again. "You know how we like it," he murmured.

His voice, low and rough, made me shiver. I nodded, ignoring what Raiden was doing back there, and focused on Saar instead. "Together," I answered.

He smiled, but there was a different kind of amusement in it. "Yes, but it's not really about us. It's about you."

I frowned. "While I'm in no way saying I don't like this and don't want it, I have to question that. You have some weird twin kink thing."

They both chuckled. "Yeah," Saar said. "But it's still not about us. We can share whoever. We have a lot over the years before we settled down to build our family."

"Though finding someone to agree to two big dicks is a bit of a challenge," Raiden interjected. "They take a look and have second thoughts."

Saar flashed me a grin as Raiden nearly shoved his entire hand in my ass. I made a face, causing Saar to laugh. He kissed along my jaw, his fingers digging into my ass cheeks as I squirmed uncomfortably. The least Raiden could do was stroke my prostate. Fuck's sake.

"While there's a sense of peace and rightness that we don't find outside of sharing," Saar said, "it's about you because it's only you that brings it to us. Feeling the way you wrap around

us. How much pleasure we bring you. Knowing that we're the only ones that do so... it's perfect."

"We know that you're not opposed to others double penetrating you, but our husbands are a bit impatient. They'd rather dive in," Raiden said.

"Something you've reinforced," Saar said.

I shrugged, sniffing again. I felt them both smile against my skin.

"So we know that we're the only ones who do this to you," Saar said, pressing his lips against mine. My heartbeat sped up, thrumming excitedly. Knowing what's coming. "This is ours."

They dropped to their knees in unison and their hands on me shifted so that Raiden was holding me up and Saar was working his cock in. When he was deep inside, my head back on Raiden's shoulders, his arms shifted under my legs so the back of my knees hooked over his forearms. Gravity and being folded in half brought my ass tight down on top of him and he settled in deep.

He kissed my neck as he gently rocked his hips, using our position so that I'd swing out and bump back into his body, my ass swallowing him whole.

And then there was more pressure, and I sucked in a breath. Waiting for the sting. It didn't take long for it to overtake me. My mouth dropped open as I was pulled wide apart. My breaths came in short bursts as I held my breath.

Deeper and deeper. Wider and wider. The burn turned into a jolting pain at the stretch. I groaned, my muscles tightening until my twins were murmuring in my ears. Telling me how good I feel. How no one makes them feel the way I do. How special these moments are between us.

I'm gasping when they begin to thrust and I swear, it's as if I have three prostate buttons inside me as they move. A thought that almost makes me laugh if I had the breath to because every time I think it, I know I've thought it in the past.

I love how they fill me. Stretch me so full that I'm sure they're going to rip me in two. That maybe I've already begun to tear.

That's why the sting hung around, even as the intense pleasure tried to chase it away. Because I became over sensitive in these moments when they were both driving into me. Sometimes with synchronization and other times in opposition. But always in a way that I knew they were working off each other to build my pleasure. Not theirs. Mine.

A moan fell out of me, and their mouths closed over my skin. Raiden's hands touched me everywhere, sliding over my leaking cock, tweaking my nipples, holding my hips. And Saar held me at the angle that allowed them maximum penetration and pleasure.

"So good," I said, the words slipping free before I could stop them.

"It is," Saar agreed. "Perfect, tight body. Letting us stretch you wide."

"Break you open," Raiden said. "I swear, you're so tight around us that I can feel your orgasm building."

"The heat coursing through you. Your pulse as it increases more and more."

"How you're teetering on the edge. Just waiting for that last little push."

"To come crashing down," Saar hummed.

They licked up the sides of my neck before biting me, and that's all it took. Their exact harmonization in all that they do. And when I let loose, Raiden's hand quickly slicked over my cock as I spurted all over myself, I felt them both fill my ass. And I'm pretty sure they did that in unison as well.

Weird fucking twin thing. The most amazing feeling in the world and I was almost pouting when they let their dicks slip out of me. Even as I struggled to take in another breath.

My heart raced unevenly as I closed my eyes. Saar and Raiden continued to kiss along my sweaty skin, and I had to wonder if they were also getting mouthfuls of sand. The beach

wasn't the best place for an orgy. Though I really liked the 'all together' aspect of them.

Not that it was really together. I was going to need to request a train at some point. Not sure how that would happen since we don't have a linear or circular love, um... nest? Pattern? Whatever the proper term for that would be. However, the idea of it made me excited. My cock even twitched, trying to rally again.

But it was drained. My balls were in direct conflict with my dick.

"What are you grinning about?" Saar asked, his voice low and husky. Still filled with sex and heat. I shivered, my smile growing more.

"Just how much I love being the filling between you two," I said. It wasn't a lie. I thought about that often.

Raiden snorted, licking along the side of my neck. "That's not at all what you're thinking."

"What makes you so sure?" I asked.

His hands were on my hips, bringing my ass against his semi (I had no idea how it was still even a little hard right now). He nipped at my skin, dragging his teeth as he went. "I know you too well. Who else's dick are you thinking about right now?"

"I should be offended," Saar said, bringing his mouth to mine again.

I moaned into him, letting my body sag completely between them. "Answer, doll. Tell us."

"No *one* in particular. I was just thinking we should make a train. A daisy chain. But then wondering how it would work. And also, how stupidly hot it looks in my head," I said.

"So hot," Hadley agreed.

My eyes flickered open to find her stretched out across No's chest, her legs tangled with Gale's. Saar, Raiden, and I weren't that far away. We could topple over and be within

their body heat easily. My smile turned softer as I looked at my family.

This was mine. Everything I ever strived for in life.

“I think we can convince some cross over,” Tem said. “I’d totally try Tara’s ass.”

“Not a fucking chance,” Taranis said.

“Aw. But you let Gale,” Tem pretended to whine.

“That was a onetime thing,” Tara said, his voice set. “And it was followed by an attack by Silence. Not saying it’s a coincidence or anything, but bad things happen when I bottom.”

We laughed.

Raiden pushed against my back and Saar gave in, laying back on the ground and taking me with him. Raiden spread me over his brother in the position he wanted before climbing on top of me, settling his half-hard dick between my butt cheeks as he continued to kiss along my shoulders. His hips rocking, rubbing my spent dick against Saar’s.

Saar’s wasn’t as soft as it should be either. Damn twins. Not that I was complaining. They could use me however they like. It was my favorite thing in the world, to be used for their pleasure. For the pleasure of any of my husbands and wife.

“That’s a stretch,” Tem said. “I think you’re making excuses.”

“No, really, let’s talk about this lineup,” Hadley said. “If Tara is caboose, then Notus comes next, right? Then... Arat?”

“Yep,” Arat said. “Neph follows. Then Bronte. But that’s where it gets tricky.”

“No, it doesn’t,” I said. “Then Tem, Koh, Saar. Let Hadley share the twin sandwich with Raiden, followed by Gale, and Zilan.” Picking up my head, I gave Hadley a big grin. “You’re the next fulcrum, Had!”

She laughed, nodding. “I like that.”

“But the question is, are we sharing holes or do we get both?” Raiden asked, his mouth against my skin.

“I haven’t tried both, but I guess I’m down for anything once,” Hadley said. “I’m not going to say the back door is always open when I think the front is best, but we can see what happens.”

“Perfect wife,” Notus purred.

I sighed. Perfect family.

My body was sore in all the right ways. I wrapped my arms around Saar as he and Raiden worked their cocks against me in complete unison. It was weird when they went all twin, because I was sure it wasn’t a conscious decision. They just did and fell in total synchronization.

And I’ll be damned if they weren’t magically waking my body up again. It would still take a bit, but my dick was winning the fight with my balls.

“I think we should try it,” Tem said. “And also, I want pictures.”

“You’re not posting them,” Notus said with an exasperated sigh.

“No. I think we should turn one of the rooms into a sex nest. Filled with mattresses and pillows. I’ll develop some of our sexy pics and hang them,” Tem said. He hummed for a minute. “We can bring our toy boxes in there, too.”

“Wait,” Hadley said. I glanced up to find she sat and looked around at us all. “You have toy boxes? Why didn’t you say so?”

“Are you already tired of dick, sweetheart?” Neph asked. “Need something else?”

She rolled her eyes, tossing someone’s thong bikini at him. Neph laughed and looked at her with a grin. “No. But maybe I’ve lived a very vanilla life. Eleven husbands is the only spice I’ve had.”

There was a moment of silence before I started laughing and buried my face in Saar’s neck. “They’re going to ruin you,

Had.”

“Pretty sure that’s what I signed up for.” There was a moment of rustling and then quiet fell around us.

“We have toys but we almost never use them,” Saar said, shrugging. “We’ve never really felt the need or desire to.”

“Doesn’t mean we can’t have a little fun together,” Neph said. “With so many body parts under one roof, the toys get forgotten until random conversations like this one.”

I tried to contain the moans that were building in me with a hard dick against my struggling one and another running between my ass cracks, rubbing my aching hole that I couldn’t imagine had actually closed again. They moved slowly, sensually. Never stopped their kissing.

This was perfect.

“Also, I think I know what I want to do with my life,” Hadley said, breaking the tranquility of beach sounds and sexy skin-on-skin.

“What’s that?” Koh asked.

“I want to help the victims of Silence. Like those we rescued. If we keep moving forward, don’t give Silence time to catch their breath, we’re going to be retrieving so many. I want to be there. I want to help them get to safety and make sure they’re taken care of.”

“We can make that happen,” Kohara said. “But while we want to move quickly and keep striking them while they’re wounded—”

“Assuming they felt that blow at all—” Zilan interjected.

“We’re not really in a position to hit as hard as we need to. And we’re still not sure exactly how many facilities and satellite locations they have,” Kohara said.

Hadley sighed. “What you’re saying is we need to wait.”

“Waiting sucks, I know,” Kohara said. “But yes, we need to wait. All we met was physical force and we know that they have weapons we haven’t even dreamed of. Not only do we

need to keep our reconnaissance up, but we need time to prepare and equip ourselves.”

“That’s not to say you can’t do exactly what you want,” I said, shifting my head so I could see her. My voice was breathy as I spoke, since the twins really didn’t want me to enjoy the aftercare right now. They weren’t done with me. Which left me a bit giddy, anyway. “The Harem Project has a ton of sanctuary programs that are always looking for staff. And even if we’re not making rescues, I think that there will always be some that come in.”

For the first time in a long time, I remembered the man that had showed up on our doorstep. How beaten and battered he was. Being freshly stripped from his family. The only survivor of a brutal attack.

“Yeah,” she said. “That sounds good.”

“Alright. Life choice made. Now let’s get back to relaxing,” Notus said.

“And sexing,” Tara added.

“Can you even get it up again, firecracker?” Gale asked. “You could let me use that ass instead.”

Taranis snorted. He rolled over and grabbed his cock by the base. “Come over here, Gale. Sit.”

Gale snickered. “That’s not a threat, Tara. We’ve been over this. I’m all about switching.”

“Yes, but you like it all gentle and sweet when you’re riding. I’m going to rail you like a fucking piston. Come. Here.”

For the first time in their banter that carried on, Gale hesitated. He looked at Tara with narrowed eyes and pursed lips. Tara shifted so he could look at Gale. “Not such a big talker now, are you?”

“Hm,” he hummed in answer. He sized Tara up, eyes slitted as he studied Tara’s dick. A bead of pre-cum pearled at the top and Tara rubbed it into his fat head with his thumb.

“Come on, typhoon. Get your precious hole over here before I get up and come to you. I’m giving you a chance to control a little of this game before I break you.”

His voice made my insides turn to molten. I bit my lip, my hips rocking up against Raiden’s. He smiled into my shoulder, still sensually sliding his dick in my crack. Brushing my sensitive hole with long, erotic strokes. Saar’s hands closed on my ass cheeks and pulled me hard against him.

Yep, balls lost that battle. Dick was thickening.

Movement overhead made me crane my neck in time to watch as Tara dove across bodies to tackle Gale to the ground. Gale laughed, even as he struggled to get away. “I’m not into rough,” he said, laughing as Tara pushed him onto his stomach.

“I’m not into being dicked. Now you’re going to let me return the favor. Aren’t you?”

Gale grimaced, but I could see the tick of worry in his eyes, even as he stopped pushing Tara away. He folded his arms under him and closed his eyes, burying his face in his elbow. Tara lubed up before pressing his fingers into Gale’s ass, beginning with two.

I couldn’t see Gale’s face, even as I watched. Though I tried. I hated when they hurt. Saar’s hand moved between our bodies and took our dicks together, making my eyes flutter. When I managed to open them again, Tara was pushing his dick into Gale. I groaned at seeing it, swearing I could feel it, too.

But no, I wasn’t feeling Tara. Raiden was sliding home. Stretching me with a renewed sting. A burn and stretch that made me pant. How the hell can I feel like that again?! Even as I couldn’t tear my eyes away from Tara and Gale.

As soon as Tara was seated, he lay his body down and pulled Gale’s arms up, linking their fingers as he murmured into Gale’s ear. Gale nodded, his face pinched, eyes closed.

Tara gave a single snap of his hips, and Gale tried to pull free. I swallowed as I watched. A part of me wanted to stop

them. But Tara was all talk. He rested his forehead at Gale's temple and took him slowly. Holding his hands and using his body until Gale was moaning under him.

I closed my eyes as other sounds infiltrated my focus. More moans. Slapping of bodies. Words of lust and cursing.

But I pushed it all away as I focused on the twins. I liked it every way they gave it to me. Deep and hard. So full that I was sure my hole wouldn't close properly for days. Slow and sweet.

Or moments like right now, where it was all about feeling good together. Getting lost in a moment that had been so close to never happening. I gripped Saar tightly with one hand and reached over me to tangle my hand in Raiden's hair.

"Love you," Raiden murmured, kissing along my jaw.

"Love you, too," I answered. "More than anything."

Saar took my mouth, and I lost myself in the pleasure they gave me. Family was everything. And I was never, ever letting this go.

SPECIES INDEX

The Species Index has been removed from the digital copy of *House of Igarashi* due to Amazon claiming that it's causing a conversion error.

Due to this issue, it can now be found on my website, [here](#).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Here we are, the fifth book within this series. Yes, I know. I had to split Igarashi in two. While I'm not opposed to chonky books, this was going to be way too big to put into a single book. I would never short change the relationship growth and building in any pairing's so with eleven men, the super long story was necessary to do the Igarashi's justice.

I love this world a little more every time I visit. I could very easily just live in it. I have eight families planned (not including the two that are strictly for patreon - Nereus already complete) but I could easily just keep going. By the time I'm through with the eight families, we should have a resolution to ORKA and the Division of Silence so I'm not sure exploring other families is necessary. I mean, it might just be all fluff and smut, but oh the idea that we could continue to complete families is always a possibility!

And with this book, we will have three total Harem Project books this year. Well, I gave you a bit of a hint for House of Agni but I'm not giving you anymore. But suffice it to say, this one is going to be a surprise!

I really need to call out my entire beta team and my PAs for their constant boost to my work. Not just with their reading and feedback, but also with their encouragement. Their hunger for the next books. And keeping me consistent. I get nervous when I introduce new themes and thankfully, my tireless team eats it up every single time. Please know how much your support and constant cheering means to me.

And now, for my amazing patrons (I have 28 now - I'm freaking screaming inside)! To name a few: Jennifer M, Rosa, Lauren, Sarah, Shyla, Kylee, Jennifer B, Gina, Miriam, Jenny W, Heather, Fawn, Terriann, and Carrie. You know how much I love chatting with you and spoiling you with extra goodies. I spend far too long shopping, I'll have you know. And I get so

giddy when it's time to send you sneak peeks early. Thank you for being a part of my team and supporting me in all the ways you do!

And then there's my readers who have been tirelessly recommending House of Daemon since its release in November 2021. It has consistently been my number one seller for all that time and only fell to second when I released my omegaverse book and later, my sexy monster book. However, my readers didn't let me down and as soon as I released House of Aves, The Harem Project was flying high again as it does with each new release. I cannot express how much it means to me that you love this world as much as I do and you've made them such a success. I hope you enjoy this installment.

For the next book, House of Agni, click [here](#).

Only available on Amazon. If you read it anywhere else, it has been pirated/stolen!

BOOKS BY CREA REITAN

THE IMMORTAL CODEX

Immortal Stream: Children of the Gods

Mortal Souls

The God of Perfect Radiance

The Hidden God

The God Who Controls Death

Gods of the Dead

Gods of Blood

Gods of Idols

Gods of Fire

Gods of Enoch

INFECTED FAIRY TALES

Wonderland: Chronicles of Blood

Toxic Wonderland

Magical Wonderland

Dying Wonderland

Bloody Wonderland

Wonderland: Chronicles of Madness

The Search for Nonsense

The Queen Trials

Veins of Shade

Finding Time

Neverland: Chronicles of Red

Neverwith

Nevershade

Neverblood

Nevermore

OTHER/STANDALONES

Hellish Ones Novels

Blood of the Devil

House of the Devil

Harem Project Novels

House of Daemon

House of Aves

House of Wyn

House of Igarashi, 1

House of Igarashi, 2

House of Agni (2023)

Brothers of Eschat

Unsolicited

Equipoise (2023)

Paranormal Holiday Novel

12 Days

Satan's Touch Academy

A Lick of Magic

Fae Lords

Karou

Sweet Omegaverse

Alpha Hunted

Knot Interested

The Princess and Her Alphaholes Anthology (excerpt of Wrecked)

Wrecked

Hell View Manor

Stroking Pride (A Sons of Satan Novel)

A Tale of Steam & Cinders

Terror

Haidee (A Ladies of the MC Novel - 2023)

MM NOVELS/SERIES

For Puck's Sake

Shiver (2023)

THE HAREM PROJECT

STANDALONE INTERCONNECTING NOVELS

***These are a series of standalone polyamorous stories with content not suitable for those under 18 years of age due to graphic scenes and situations.*

House of Daemon on [Amazon](#)

House of Aves on [Amazon](#)

House of Wyn on [Amazon](#)

House of Igarashi, 1 on [Amazon](#)

House of Igarashi, 2 on [Amazon](#)

House of Agni on [Amazon](#)

KNOTTY & SWEET OMEGERVERSE

SERIES OF STANDALONE NOVELS WITHIN A SHARED WORLD

***These are a series of standalone polyamorous stories with content not suitable for those under 18 years of age due to graphic scenes and situations.*

Alpha Hunted on [Amazon](#)

Knot Interested on [Amazon](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Crea lives in upstate New York with her dog and husband. She has been writing since grade school, when her second grade teacher had her class keep writing journals. She has a habit of creating secondary, and often time tertiary, characters that take over her stories. When she can't fall asleep at night, she thinks up new scenes for her characters to act out. This, of course, is how most of her meant-to-be-thrown-away characters tend to end up front and center - and utterly swoon-worthy! Don't ask her how many book boyfriends she has...

When not writing, Crea is an avid reader. Her TBR pile is several hundred books high (don't even look at her kindle wish list or the unread books on her tablet). Sometimes, she enjoys crafting; sometimes, exploring nature; sometimes, traveling. Mostly, she enjoys putting her characters on paper and breathing life into them. Oh, and sleeping. Crea *loves* to sleep!

WHERE TO FIND ME

My Facebook page

My Patreon

By becoming a member of my patreon, you will be gaining access to exclusive stories, bonus scenes, first looks at cover reveals and projects, discounts on my store, swag, merchandise, and so much more!!

My Private Reader's Group: Crea's Godlings

This is an adult group. No drama. No judgment. No bullying, shaming, or being an ass in general. No one outside the group can see what you like, post, or comment so you're free to do as you please (as long as it's group appropriate - hot, half-naked men are allowed!). Here you will be the first to find teasers, new-release announcements, games, giveaways, and more!

My Instagram

@creareitan

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THANK YOU

Thank you for reading about Hadley and Bronte as they complete their family of storms. I know it's a little touch and go there at the end, but I always deliver the happily ever after - it might just be rough getting there. Get ready for more Harem Project with the next book!

Would you be so kind as to take a moment and leave a review? Reviews play a big role in a book's success and you can help with just a few sentences.

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Thank you!!

Crea Reitan

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