



**KNOT**

*my Mate*

**ALICE CLYDE**

KNOT MY MATE  
The Solveig Pack III

ALICE CLYDE



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## KNOT MY MATE

**The fires of vengeance burn deep in my chest. I'm ready to claim my real identity and expose Callahan's true face to the world but my way is strewn with obstacles.**

Callahan managed to escape our trap but he shouldn't mistake our momentary retreat to be our defeat.

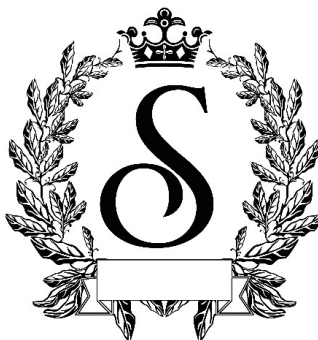
We're closing the net around him slowly, making sure he can never slip away again.

My mates and I are ready to fight him and his shadow army that has been disrupting the peace in our society. We'll never let the sacrifices of our ancestors and brave soldiers go in vain.

Victory looms close but can I make it out alive without losing my mates to the evil Black Widow?

The threads of fate have long bound me to my four mates and I am determined to protect them even if it costs me my life.

***This is the third and final book in the Solveig Pack series and takes place in an omegaverse universe with no shifters.***



Heat blazes through my veins, nearly blinding me to my surroundings.

“You’re going to be okay, Wildflower,” Julian’s gentle voice speaks in my ear. His arm tightens around my waist as he ushers me down a familiar hallway.

“Why do I feel so hot?” I groan as a hard throb pulsates through my core. “Why does it feel like I have lava flowing through my veins? Is something wrong with me?”

The initial shivers of pleasure have transformed into hot lashings that are bordering on pain.

“It’s natural,” Julian says in a gentle, soothing voice. “I feel the same way when I go into heat.”

“I want sex as much as a swim in a frozen lake.”

A rough chuckle escapes him. “I know you do, my darling mate. It’s going to be all right, though. We’re here to take care of you.”

Raiden steps forward and opens the door to my bedroom.

“Close the drapes,” Julian says in an authoritative tone from beside me. “Dim the lights as well. Her senses are going haywire right now, so we need to soothe her. Also, run a bath for her.”

“On it,” Caleb mutters and rushes past us.

Relief spreads through me. I’m glad Julian asked them to dim the lights. For some reason, my heat is making my senses go hyper-alert. The hallway lamps that usually give off a mellow golden glow to the surroundings seem too bright, making my eyes hurt.

“Come on, sweetheart,” Julian says, ushering me through the doorway.

The cool, dark surroundings of my room are a welcome relief from the harsh glare of the lamps outside. Only a single bedside lamp illuminates the space. Caleb and Raiden are moving in the corner, closing the drapes on all the windows.

Another breath rushes out of me. The familiar surroundings of my room instantly calm me.

Julian moves toward the bed and helps me sit down on the edge. “Feeling better?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I say, burying my face into an old cushion. The familiar scents lingering in the fabric further relax me. *My nest is making me feel better*, the thought crosses my mind, surprising me.

My nest...

I look up at Julian. Anxiety swirls in his lavender-hued eyes as he watches me.

“Is she okay?” Caleb asks, coming over to me. “If it feels too dark, we can light some candles.”

“Good idea,” says Julian before I have a chance to reply. “Tell Raiden to light some in the bathroom as well.”

“I’m on it!” Raiden shouts, hurrying inside the bathroom.

His loud voice grates against my hypersensitive nerves and makes me clap my hands over my ears.

“Don’t shout in front of her!” Julian hisses at once. “She’s sensitive right now.”

“Sorry,” Caleb mutters even though he hadn’t been the one shouting.



“Don’t just sit here!” Julian scolds. “Get some ice from the kitchen. We need to get the water as cold as possible.”

Caleb looks torn. His gaze tells me he doesn’t want to move an inch from me.

I feel the same way. He’s my alpha. I can’t bear for him to be away from me.

“Go!” Julian hisses through clenched teeth.

Caleb finally moves. With one last desperate look at me, he hurries out of the door.

“These clothes must feel uncomfortable,” Julian says in a soft voice.

I nod. “They’re too tight.”

“Let’s get them off you, then.”

With gentle hands, he lowers the zip in the back.

A cool draft skims along my naked skin, instantly bringing me relief from the inferno blazing inside me.

“Could you be nicer to them?” I whisper.

“No,” he says, starting to lower my dress. “Their teeny, tiny alpha brains malfunction the moment they get a whiff of a perfuming omega. Didn’t you see the way Gerald reacted to your scent? He forgot who he was for a moment. It’s the same with Caleb and Raiden. They simply want to rut you right now.”

“Don’t make it sound so gross,” I say as a sliver of anxiety snakes around my throat. “Gerald eventually got a hold of himself. I’m sure Caleb and Raiden want to help me too.”

“I’m sorry,” he says suddenly. He runs his fingers through his ash-blond hair. “I’ve done my research on the kind of heat that most female omegas go through. It’s going to be more intense and painful for you. You’ll be more sensitive too. Your perfume will grow stronger and spread everywhere. It’ll call out to every nearby alpha. Even betas won’t be able to resist themselves when your scent hits them. You’re going to be at

your most vulnerable during the next couple of days. I want to keep you safe, Wildflower.”

“I’m sure our alphas will keep us safe.”

“They will, but we have to make sure they don’t do anything to cause you any pain or discomfort. Your scent will drive them out of their minds, so they won’t always be in control of their actions. That’s why I must watch over you.”

His lavender eyes shine with sincerity as he gently pushes back a stray lock behind my ear.

Soon, my dress slips off my shoulders. I let it drop all the way to my lap, revealing my naked breasts to him. For the very first time, I’m not slammed by shyness and my usual awkwardness. My omega brain likes being open and vulnerable before my mate.

Julian’s gaze drinks me in, causing my stomach to tighten. Moving closer, he captures my lips in a searing kiss.

A moan escapes me as I wrap my arms around his neck.

His lips feel incredibly cool against mine but the pleasurable sensation is followed by a blast of heat that spreads through my belly. It’s so painful, I’m forced to break away. Breathing hard, I gaze up at him apologetically.

“Is the burning sensation getting unbearable?” Julian asks with a knowing look.

“Yeah,” I say, holding onto my aching, pulsing belly. “Your touch made my insides burn hotter. How can I have sex when I can barely kiss you?”

He chuckles. “Don’t worry, love. An ice bath will calm those bitchy hormones.”

“What are we waiting for, then?” I say. “Dunk me in the bath already.”

“I was going to wait for Caleb to come back with the ice, but I guess a cold bath will suffice in the meantime.” Moving closer, he easily hauls me into his arms.

My arms go around his neck as he carries me inside the bathroom.

The lush scent of vanilla and warm spices wafts over me the moment we step through the threshold. Several candles light up the space, giving off a soft golden glow to the surroundings.

Raiden straightens up and meets my gaze. “How do you feel? Too dark? Too bright?”

I shake my head and smile. “It’s perfect.”

Julian moves toward the bathtub and places me in the water.

A moan escapes me. The cool water instantly relaxes me and calms some of the fire raging inside me.

The bathroom door opens and Caleb walks in with giant bags of ice.

Raiden cringes. “Wouldn’t this make her too cold?”

“I’ve read that it helps female omegas cool off,” says Julian. “It’s important to let her soak in an ice bath to make her comfortable.”

Caleb comes over to the bathtub and tears one of the bags. Keeping his gaze on me, he slowly drops the ice. “Let me know if it starts feeling too cold,” he says cautiously.

The logical part of my brain balks as I let Caleb drop in the ice cubes. In my normal condition, I’d have frozen to death. At this moment, though, I feel wonderfully cool and relaxed.

Raiden reaches out and brushes his fingers over my cheek. His touch leaves a trail of heat but unlike before, it makes my pleasure rise.

“Better?” Julian asks.

“Yeah,” I say with a surprised grin. “I was getting scared I wouldn’t be able to have sex at all!”

Dark chuckles rise all around me.

“Oh, we’ll give you all the sex you want and more,” Caleb promises in a low, husky voice that sends a tremor through my core.

Julian’s nostrils flare as he loudly inhales the air that’s thick with my perfume.

The intensity in Raiden’s ice-blue eyes makes my heart throb harder. He reaches out and spreads his fingers around my neck. Moving closer, he presses his lips to mine.

I open up willingly, allowing him to sweep his tongue inside my mouth.

The heat rising within me doesn’t feel painful anymore. The ice bath brings back the pleasure I was aching for.

My fingers dig into his dark strands and pull him closer for a deeper kiss.

“Caleb,” I hear Julian’s grim voice. “Can we talk?”

“Now?” Caleb’s voice sounds strained.

“Now.”

I’m locked in a fiery kiss with Raiden but my curiosity piques. What could Julian want now?

Raiden breaks the kiss and looks toward the doorway. Julian is already pulling Caleb through the doorway despite his protests.

“What’s going on?” I mutter.

“No idea.” Raiden is about to kiss me again but suddenly halts. Caleb’s booming shout filters through the open door of the bathroom.

“What the hell do you want?” Caleb shouts, sounding aggravated. “Iris is in heat. She needs me right now.”

“You’re right,” Julian answers in an equally caustic tone. “She needs you to protect her. Right now, there’s another alpha only a few doors away. The staff keeping watch over the house hasn’t been notified of the situation and Callahan just got loose. Don’t you think you should be taking care of these things before you think about rutting her?”

“What the hell am I supposed to do about Dad? Tell him to get out while Mom’s still unconscious?”

“You’re going to have to do something,” Julian says, not backing down. “Iris’s perfume affected him enough to make him forget everything. Her scent will continue growing stronger. We don’t want Gerald or any other outsider getting a whiff of it.”

“Iris *needs* me,” Caleb’s voice borders on a whine.

“Raider and I will take care of her until you return. It won’t take long but you’ve got to make sure our home is secured against all outside threats. It’s your duty as her alpha and our leader.”

A noise of pure frustration leaks in through the open doorway.

“Julian’s so brave,” I whisper. “He’s messing with Caleb when he’s being driven mad by my scent.”

“He’s right, though,” Raider says in a grim tone. “The security guards around the house need to be equipped with proper gear while you’re in heat. Your perfume is both exotic and sweet. If it grows stronger, it’ll affect beta males too. We can’t let them come in here to cause a mess.”

“I’m worried about Caroline.”

He closes his eyes and rests his forehead against mine. “Me too.”

Pure bliss flows through me. His familiar citrusy scent washes over me, making me feel thoroughly safe and protected.

My eyes open as the sound of approaching footsteps grows louder.

“Hey,” says Julian as he comes to sit beside the bathtub. “How’re you feeling, Wildflower?”

“I’m feeling fine but I’m worried about Caleb. I don’t like him being so far from me.”

He chuckles. “He’s not going anywhere. I just sent him to take care of some things around the house.”

“It’s a good thing you considered the security of the house,” says Raiden. “We’ve been through your heats but your perfume was never as strong as Iris’s. We’d been able to keep a steady head while we helped you through your heat.”

Julian nods. “Her perfume will continue to grow stronger. Caleb needs to talk with the security staff before we start helping Iris. We’re all going to be vulnerable over the next few days. It’s of utmost importance to secure the house against all outsiders.”

“Thank fuck you chose him and not me,” Raiden mutters. “Even the thought of being away feels like pure torture. Her arousal smells so sweet, I want to lick and eat out her pussy this very second.”

My core clenches at those words. I can almost imagine the feel of his warm, velvety tongue on my sensitive nub. Suddenly, I can’t wait to get out of this bathtub and spread my legs for him to do just that.

“I want you both,” I say, reaching out to touch them. “Please, Raiden...Julian...I *need* you.”

Their gazes darken at the pleading note in my voice.

Raiden presses his lips against my neck while Julian leans in and licks at my earlobe. Their combined touches send a tremor through my clenching core, making me moan out.

All my thoughts and worries get erased as my mind solely focuses on their touch and the sensations running through me. I finally give in, letting my heat drown all my senses.

## Damon



My frustration heightens as I turn the car around to obey Caleb's command. He doesn't want me straying too far from our base and risk getting caught by the people who helped Callahan escape.

I can't believe how close we came to putting an end to the bastard. We got the evidence to indict him for all the crimes he committed but at the very last minute, we had to let him go to save our mother.

The only consolation we have is that Callahan won't be so cocky anymore. He won't forget the way Iris tortured him to confess the truth. She hadn't held back from hurting him and didn't give up until he was blurting out his sins.

Pride swells in my chest each time I think of the way she took him down on her own. We found him sprawled on the bathroom floor, out cold while she stood over him.

An unassuming omega took down an alpha.

My wildcat utterly humiliated him.

Her pretty face flashes through my mind, reminding me of the darkness I'd glimpsed in her eyes when she tortured Callahan. The monster within me sang out to her at that moment, recognizing the pain she'd been suffering through these past months.

A sudden groan escapes me as I feel a tightness in the front of my trousers. My cock has grown hard at the mere

thought of my mate. The ghost of her scent seems to waft over me, heightening my desire to consume her.

My foot steps on the gas harder. I want to see Iris this very second and make sure Mom's okay.

The thought of my mother sends a sliver of relief through me. Closing my eyes, I exhale a long breath. None of our soldiers got hurt during our confrontation with Callahan. Even though we were forced to let go of our enemy, our pack was safe.

Nearing our borders, I keep a lookout for any intruders. My searching gaze takes in our soldiers who are diligently patrolling the area surrounding our estate, making sure the Black Widow don't dare encroach on our territory.

Feeling better, I drive through the gates of the estate and hurry toward home.

Pure relief washes over me as I bring the car to a stop.

A cold breeze blows past me as I climb out and move toward the front steps of the mansion.

The scent of roses and lush berries wafts into my nostrils as soon as I step inside the hallway leading to the entrance hall. "Iris," I whisper and follow her addictive perfume.

Surprise flickers through me as her scent grows heavier and stronger. My wandering steps lead me up the stairs and down the third-floor corridor.

I wanted to check on Mom first but Iris's perfume is making me go hard again. My mouth waters as her sweet fragrance swirls around me, drowning all logical thoughts from my head. I simply want to kiss her and bury myself in her heat.

I'm so blinded by lust, I end up crashing into a wall.

"Watch where you're going!" An annoyed huff makes me look up in confusion.

Caleb is the "wall" I collided with. He's staring at me with a comically infuriated glare.



“What’s got your panties in a twist?” I mutter, brushing past him.

His fingers wrap around my wrist tightly, pulling me backward.

“Jeez! Leave me alone,” I shout, shaking his hand off me.

Caleb holds on, refusing to let go. “Come with me.”

“Where the hell are you taking me?” I shout as he drags me in his wake. “I want to see Iris. You have no idea how much I want to kiss her right now.”

“You’re coming with me to see Dad.”

“What? Why do we have to do that now? Am I the only one who can smell Iris’s perfume? *She needs me,*” I whine.

“Iris has gone into heat.”

“What?”

“You heard me,” he says in a grim tone.

Shaking his hand off me, I go to stand before him and grab him by the collar. “This isn’t the time to be joking around.”

His gaze burns with anger. “Do I look like I’m kidding?” he barks, throwing my arms off him and pushing past me. “She’s in heat and Julian and Raiden are with her right now.”

“Fuck,” I breathe, following him while my instincts compel me to turn around and follow Iris’s sweet perfume. “Why aren’t we going to her nest, then? She needs us too.”

“Julian threw me out,” he says in a low, angst-filled voice. “He wants me to take responsibility and make sure I get Dad out of here.”

“Dad? Why?”

“He reacted to her perfume earlier,” Caleb says through clenched teeth. “Punched me in the gut when I stood up to him.”

“That’s fucked up,” I say, running my fingers through my wild locks.

“I know,” Caleb says, walking down the stairs. “Dad eventually got a hold of himself, so things were okay. Julian says Iris’s scent will get thicker and stronger and it’s not safe to have another alpha in the house. I also need to warn the guards outside. They need to wear protective gear as long as Iris stays in heat.”

“Good,” I say, understanding the reason Julian sent my brother to take care of things. “Why don’t you go ahead and talk to Dad while I’ll go upstairs and wait.”

Caleb halts and turns around to face me. Moving closer, he grabs my wrist and forces me down the stairs. “I’m not going alone,” he says, dragging me alongside him. “You’re coming with me.”

“My cock’s so hard, it’s not even funny.”

“Same,” he hisses through clenched teeth and walks down the second-floor hallway.

Pushing the door to one of our guest rooms, he leads the way inside.

Mom’s sitting up in bed while Dad hovers over her with a deeply anxious look on his lined, aging face. “Are you okay, sweetheart?” Dad asks in a soft voice that I’ve never heard him use before.

Mom’s eyes screw shut as she gingerly holds the side of her head. “It hurts,” she moans.

Caleb and I move forward immediately.

“What’re you kids doing here?” she asks, looking confused. “Wait...where am I right now?” She stares around the corners of the guest bedroom with a baffled expression.

I sit beside Mom and take her hand in mine. “What’s the last thing you remember?” I ask.

Mom looks like she’s suffering from a horrible headache but she manages to speak. “I was coming back from the grounds,” she says slowly. “Julian and Iris were walking in front of me and they were being followed by someone in a

white suit. I was about to call them when a strange lady said Gerald was waiting for me by the memorial statue.”

“What?” Dad grounds out, looking furious. “I never asked anyone to call you back. We’d agreed to meet back in the house.”

“Instead of going to the memorial statue, she took me to the edge of the woods where another woman was waiting,” Mom says, her confusion slowly clearing away. “I didn’t find them suspicious because they looked like one of our guests. I was talking to one of them when I felt a heavy strike on the side of my head.” She brushes her hand over the injured area and looks toward me. “That’s all I can remember.”

Dad takes in a sharp breath, his silvery eyes blazing with rage.

“Honey, are you mad?” Mom asks in a low, worried voice.

Dad balls his hands into tight fists. “I’m mad but not at you, darling.” Leaning in, he gives her a gentle hug before straightening up. “You have no idea how worried I was about you. I’m just glad you’re alive and in my arms right now.”

“Of course, I’m alive,” she says, hugging him closer.

Dad loosens his hold on her and turns around to face us. “How did you know what happened to your mother?” he asks, glaring at us. “How the hell did she turn up like this?”

“We’ll explain everything to you but first, we must leave this house,” says Caleb. “We can talk on the way to your base.”

Dad raises an eyebrow. “You’re kicking us out?”

“Iris is going into heat,” I say in a grim tone. “We don’t want additional complications with you here. We’ll get the doctor to change route and meet us at your home.”

“Wait, what?” Mom says, looking between me and Caleb. “Iris is going into heat? You should be with her instead of being with us.”

“I went to her but Julian threw me out,” Caleb says through clenched teeth. “He wants Dad to get out of here

before Iris's perfume affects him."

"What about the guards and the staff around the house?" Mom says. "Have you notified them to take proper precautions?"

"Not yet," Caleb mutters.

Mom glares up at Dad. "Did you hear your son?" she demands, suddenly enraged. "Have you taught them nothing outside military strategies and shooting a gun? These boys didn't even prepare a proper nest for their omega. Can you imagine that, honey? An omega without a proper nest!" She lets out a loud huff, looking annoyed. "You're old enough to be leading men into battle but have absolutely no idea about how to run a home! I still have to take care of everything around here."

Throwing off the blanket covering her, she climbs out of bed.

"Get back in bed, darling," Dad says, looking alarmed. "You're still unwell."

"I'm fine enough to walk," she mutters. "Let's give them the space they need."

"Why don't we wait for Dr. Lafayette? Once he's made sure you're okay, we'll go home."

"Gerald!" Mom squeezes her eyes shut as another pulsing headache assaults her. "Don't be so foolish. I can already smell Iris's perfume in this room. You'll barely be able to control yourself when her scent grows stronger. I'd rather die than have my alpha pant for another omega. Especially one that's meant for our sons."

Dad's face flushes red. "All right, then," he says in a meek voice. "If that's what you want, honey."

"I can't have a second's peace with you guys!" Mom huffs and walks out of the room.

"Not a word to your mom about what happened earlier," Dad says, glancing between me and my brother. "I'm ashamed

of the way I behaved. I'll apologize to Iris and Julian when I see them again."

I hadn't been around to witness Dad's reaction to Iris's perfume but it had to be bad. I've rarely seen him looking so troubled and anxious.

"No worries," says Caleb. "None of us were prepared for it. Her heat came on so suddenly, we were all surprised."

"It's still not a good enough excuse for my barbaric behavior. I'm sorry, Son."

A sliver of pity flares inside me. Alphas become susceptible to an omega's perfume, especially when they go into heat. Our hormones go batshit crazy, making us lose all sense of what's right and what's not.

At this very moment, I'm struggling against the urge to fuck everything and simply go to Iris.

"Why the hell are you lot still hanging around here?" Mom's annoyed voice makes us all turn toward the doorway. She's standing there with her hands on her hips and swelling like a bullfrog.

Shit! She's spitting mad at us.

"Well? Do I have to drag you all out?" she demands.

"Ah, we were just coming," Dad says in a meek tone and hurries toward her. "Come along, boys."

Caleb and I follow him out of the room and let Mom lead the way downstairs.

"You're going to have to shop for food and stuff that you'll be needing over the next couple of days," Mom says as she marches forward. "You can't risk letting a beta in here while she's perfuming."

"Yes, Mom," says Caleb like the dutiful fucker he is.

"You've got to make sure she eats lots of meat and stays hydrated during these days," Mom says as she rushes toward the door. "An omega won't even know she's hungry until she

sees food. You've got to—" Mom stops midsentence and sags against the wall.

"Caroline!" Dad shouts, catching her immediately. "Are you okay?"

Mom moans but can barely utter another word.

Dad sweeps her in his arms. "Caroline, open your eyes, sweetheart. Please?" His voice is a desperate whine but Mom doesn't respond.

Anxiety spreads through me. We still have no idea what those bitches did to our mom. They could've injected her with a drug or poison.

"Let's get going," I say, taking the lead. "Come on, Dad. Let's take Mom home." Glancing toward Caleb, I add, "Call Dr. Lafayette and ask him to meet us at our base in Kinston Springs."

"On it," says Caleb. "I'll bring the car around, so just hang on for a few more minutes."

"There's no need to do that," I say. "My car is outside."

"Good," says Dad with a relieved sigh. "You're both coming with me. I need to know who's responsible for this shitshow. Whoever did this to your mother will meet our pack's wrath. No one gets away with hurting *my* omega."

Iris's perfume still lingers in my nostrils. I want to go to her and stay right by her side.

It's taking every bit of self-control to go against my omega's call but it's important for Dad to know the facts about Callahan. We're all going to be vulnerable during the next few days. Dad needs to take the lead to secure all our bases while we stay locked in our home with Iris.

Caleb squeezes my shoulder. "It's only a matter of hours," he says as if he's trying to convince himself. "We'll be back soon."

I nod and together, we follow Dad out of the house.



Chill from the icy water slowly seeps into my skin but it does nothing to dull the pulsing in my core. The incessant burning that made every touch painful has receded, leaving me with a hunger that only my mates can satiate.

“You’re shivering,” says Julian.

“I’m cold.”

“Maybe it’s time to get you out of the ice bath,” says Raiden. Bending forward, he easily scoops me out of the water and hauls me into his arms.

Water droplets drip down my body and onto his impeccable military uniform. My wet skin drenches his clothes but he doesn’t seem to mind at all.

I cling to him, relishing the heat radiating off him.

He carries me out of the bathroom and into my nest.

The familiar surroundings comfort me. The closed drapes and dimly lit space soothe my overhyped senses. I’m enveloped by the scent of oranges and bergamot that wafts all around me. Breathing in deeply, I let Raiden’s pheromones wash over me.

He lays me against the pillows and climbs over me. His legs straddle my thighs, locking me in place as he starts unbuttoning his shirt.

My tongue darts out to lick the corners of my mouth as he reveals his muscular pecs and hard abs. I let my gaze sweep over him and finally meet his ice-blue eyes.

The intensity blazing in his eyes makes my heart pound. His hungry gaze sends a thrill of danger through me, heightening my anticipation.

Warm lips press against my neck as the scent of chocolate and vanilla spreads over me. I inhale deeply, relishing Julian's delectable fragrance.

"I'll let him go first but I'm going to keep taking bites out of you," Julian murmurs as Raiden shirks off his shirt and lowers his body over me.

Julian's teeth graze against a sensitive spot on my neck, lighting my core on fire.

It's almost a relief when I feel Raiden's hands on my body. His touch sears my skin, drawing out a sound that borders on a whine.

"You smell so incredible that I'm not going to hold back anymore," Raiden says in a thick, husky voice. Before I can respond, his lips crash against mine in a possessive kiss.

I moan into his mouth as his tongue spears in deep, tasting me thoroughly.

For a moment, my gaze shifts toward Julian. He's staring right back at me as Raiden trails kisses along my neck.

I close my eyes against the heat spreading over my skin. My heart races in my heaving chest as Raiden lowers his mouth onto a nipple and sucks hard. His other hand plays with my breast, kneading and rolling the nipple between his fingers.

Deep groans escape me. My hunger grows, making me slide my hands all over his smooth, hard muscles.

Raiden hisses into my mouth and deepens the kiss.

A hard lump presses against my palm as I brush my hand over the front of Raiden's trousers.

Breaking the kiss, he looks into my eyes.



“Lose the pants, Mister.” My tone is almost a demand.

His eyes widen slightly, but then he’s chuckling away. “I like this confident, new omega,” he says, starting to take off his trousers. “Tell me what you need, baby. I’m here for you.”

I watch hungrily as he reveals his thick length to me. My tongue darts out to wet my lips as I swallow dryly.

Raiden leans in and latches his mouth on my nipple.

“Ahh,” I moan, clasping the back of his neck. My eyelids flutter in ecstasy as he sucks and nibbles on me. *Oh, goddess, yes!* My mind frantically screams as his thigh slips between my legs and his rigid cock nudges my belly.

My hand reaches down to touch him. His erection is hard and heavy, and ready to impale me.

“You’re so fucking gorgeous,” he says in a rough voice, cupping my pussy in a possessive grip. “And you’re *mine!*”

Groaning, I thrust my hips forward, desperate to feel the friction against his hot palm. His fingers slip inside my slick seam and swipe against my labia.

“Raiden,” I moan. “I need more...please...”

A smirk curves his luscious lips as he slips his fingers in deeper.

My breath hitches as my walls stretch against his digits.

“Keep going,” I groan as his fingers move in and out of me, stroking me until my body is squirming underneath him with shivers of pleasure. My core clenches and throbs, making me burn hotter than before.

My head is thrown against the pillow as my body tightens impossibly. My breathing turns erratic as my core clenches hard onto his fingers. I can’t take the rising pleasure anymore and let go, my mouth opening wide to release a breathless gasp.

Raiden pulls his fingers away. Thick, clear strings of my slick drip down his digits. Looking into my eyes, he licks the glistening juices coating the tip.

“How does she taste?” Julian asks in a husky voice.

“She tastes fucking exquisite,” Raiden replies in a deep voice. “I can’t wait to be inside her.”

“Hurry,” Julian whines. “I can’t hold on much longer. I’m too hard already.”

A wolfish grin comes over Raiden. “You’re going to have to wait your turn, Jules. This alpha needs to claim his omega first.”

“You’re killing me, you know that right?” Julian quips, gesturing at the tent forming in the front of his trousers.

Raiden chuckles throatily before fixing his gaze back on me. His blue eyes are clear and alert. My breath hitches in my throat, knowing what’s coming.

Raiden moves over me, covering my body with his. Reaching between us, he catches hold of his cock and rubs the thick head over my slick labia.

I moan at the sensation and spread my legs wider. Capturing my lips in a searing kiss, he rocks his hips forward. The head breaches through my tight opening, making my eyes open wide.

The tightness of my stretching walls combined with my running slick has him groaning in my mouth.

Raiden pulls out of me and suddenly, he plunges in with one hard, swift stroke.

I cry out from the sheer sensation of being stretched wide by his long, thick shaft. My fingers dig into his shoulders and hold onto him as he fills me to the brim.

Despite the rough penetration, Raiden doesn’t move for a while. His eyes are on me, closely watching my reaction.

His restraint despite his urgency makes me smile. No matter how much he wants to claim me, he’s making sure I’m okay.

My pussy clenches against his cock.

“You’re getting tighter and hotter,” Raiden groans through clenched teeth.

I move my hips voluntarily, wanting to feel the friction of his hot, hard rod buried deep inside me.

He stays still but reaches between us, finding my hardened nub. He strokes the sensitive mound of flesh, making my mind go blank with pleasure.

My hips arch into his hand as his cock slips deeper inside me.

“Fuck! You’re so hot and tight,” he gasps against my lips. “It’s incredible to be inside you.” Pulling out a little, he sinks back in.

“Harder,” I whisper, my hands roaming down his back to reach for his muscled ass. My hips rock back and forth, reveling in the feel of his hard cock sliding in and out of me.

“Iris.” Raiden’s groan is both a mix of pain and pleasure.

My insides clench harder at the sound of my name on his lips.

Raiden’s mouth clamps over my mouth just as I cry out, drowning the sound completely. Waves of pleasure crash through me, making my body shudder underneath him.

He kisses me deeply, thoroughly tasting every crevice of my mouth. I can think of nothing but his tongue in my mouth and his cock thrusting deep inside my core.

Soon, his thrusts become faster and harder.

“Raiden,” I moan out as his mouth latches onto a sensitive spot on the side of my neck. My insides are tightening in a familiar sensation but the build-up is far stronger in intensity than before.

“You’re so close, love. Come if you want to,” he says in a tight voice as he continues to thrust hard.

I groan into his mouth as a tsunami of pleasure crashes through me. My insides clench and pulse around his throbbing length while my body shudders underneath him.

“Yes!” Raiden howls as he thrusts harder into me.

His movements grow more desperate as he thrusts deeper into me. His teeth graze against the base of my neck, heightening my pleasure once more.

The tip of his cock swells in a familiar sensation.

Raising my hips, I swallow him deeper, eager to feel his knot inside me.

“Iris, fuck!” Raiden groans as his cock finally knots inside me.

I look up into his face, taut with strain, teeth bared, his skin glistening with sweat. My legs wrap around his waist, wanting to take him even deeper inside me. His pulsing rod drives me to the edge of another orgasm.

A growl escapes him as my walls clench tightly onto his cock.

Without warning, I feel Raiden’s teeth sink into my neck.

White-hot pain flashes through me, followed by pleasure so intense, I’m momentarily blinded by it.

An animalistic roar escapes him as he’s finally driven over the edge.

“Iris,” he roars my name as his hot seeds gush inside me. His massive body trembles over me as he empties himself fully.

His taut features gradually relax into a blissful expression as he looks at me with an unusually tender look. Brushing a stray strand away from my eyes, he stays buried inside me.

“You’re so incredible,” he whispers, pressing his lips to mine in a kiss. “I’ll always protect you no matter what. You’re mine. And I’m yours.”

Tendrils of warmth spread through me at those words. I can feel an intense bond with the man who’s still joined to me.

Leaning in, he licks at the throbbing wound in my neck. The swipes of his tongue feel soothing against the sting.

“You’ll be okay,” he whispers, continuing to lick and kiss the spot. “I’ll never let any harm come to you.

The sting gradually fades to a mild tingle. I smile as his vow takes root in my heart, telling me we’re bonded as mates.

A deep groan sounds from near me.

I’d almost forgotten about Julian’s presence beside me. He’s fully naked now, allowing me a glimpse of his hardened cock, standing erect.

“Are you exhausted?” Julian asks in a gentle voice as he moves away a few stray strands from my forehead.

I turn around and wrap my arm around his waist. “I am tired but I want you too.”

A smile blossoms on his luscious lips.

I’m surprised by my hunger. Raiden just made me orgasm several times but I’m greedy for more. My pussy is craving to take Julian inside me.

“You can have your turn,” says Raiden as he settles onto the bed beside me. “I’m going to be ready in a couple of minutes again.”

“Again?” I squeak.

Raiden grins. “Trust me, darling. You’re going to want more.”

Pure pleasure spreads through me. The greedy omega in me doesn’t feel an ounce of embarrassment. She’s hungry for her alpha’s knot.

Julian places his hands on both sides of my face, bringing my attention back to him. Leaning in, he kisses me.

Opening up to him, I let my tongue swirl around his languidly. The addictive fragrance of vanilla and chocolate envelops me, making me crave a brownie.

My perfume intensifies, the luscious scent of berries mixing with Julian’s vanilla. Slick dribbles down my thighs as my pussy starts throbbing and clenching.

“Shit!” Raiden growls through clenched teeth. “You’re both perfuming together. Makes me want to fuck you both right this second.”

“It’s all about Iris tonight,” Julian says in a deep, husky voice. “Don’t worry, Wildflower. We’ll never abandon you when you need us.”

A moan escapes me as I capture his lips once again.

Julian’s presence is like sunshine in my life. No matter what the situation is, I can always count on him to understand me and be by my side.

“Be a good girl for me,” he says, nipping my bottom lip playfully.

His hands grip my waist and raise me into a sitting position.

“On your knees, Wildflower,” he says, making me support my weight on both my knees and hands. Positioning me toward Raiden, he leans in and whispers, “Let’s give our alpha a show.”

Raiden’s cock is already semi-erect as he watches me.

Julian’s hand suddenly smacks my left buttock.

“Ow!” I cry out more from the sudden shock than the pain.

“You have such a beautiful ass, Wildflower.” Leaning in, he presses a kiss against the burning skin.

A moan escapes me as I squirm.

“Don’t move,” he orders and grazes his teeth over the sensitive skin. Lowering his mouth, he circles my bud with his tongue.

A shiver trembles through me.

My pussy throbs and clenches, aching for his cock.

“Stop teasing me,” I groan and raise my ass in the air.

Dark chuckles sound from behind me as his tongue moves lower.

“Your pussy looks like a pink rose from this angle,” Julian says, his nose skimming along my pussy lips. “Fuck! You even smell like one.”

His mouth latches onto my lips and sucks.

My mind nearly goes blank with pleasure as he spears his tongue through my folds, sucking and licking. Groans escape me as I push my ass against his face.

“I need you, Julian!” I cry out as my clit strums.

Julian’s mouth leaves my pussy and for a second, I’m scared he’s leaving me. Next moment, I feel his cock pushing between my legs.

My pussy is soaking wet and throbbing, eager to swallow him whole.

Grabbing my hips, he impales me with one long stroke.

“Oh fuck!” I moan as my body is pushed forward.

His cock stretches me so wide and is buried so deep, my head swims with pleasure.

His palm spans the front of my pussy, putting pressure on my clit, while making sure I keep my hips at a good angle for him to drive deep.

“You’re so fucking incredible,” he groans and latches his mouth on my shoulder. Half-biting, half-kissing, he sends me into a frenzy of sensations.

He moves slowly at first. I feel every inch of him sliding between my pussy lips before he slams in, balls deep.

My thighs tremble and my belly goes taut. His fingers against my clit make my eyes roll with pleasure.

It’s not long before his movements grow faster, harder, and more desperate.

His powerful thrusts shove me forward, making my breasts swing wildly.

Raiden’s gaze never leaves my face. The intensity in his ice-blue eyes further flames my lust, heightening my climax.

“You’re squeezing me so tight, baby,” Julian groans, continuing to thrust inside me.

I feel my pleasure gathering force until I reach the point of no return. A final circle on my clit is enough to throw me over the edge.

A wild cry escapes me as my inner muscles pulse and ripple against his cock. Pleasure cascades over me in waves, drowning all my senses.

Every muscle in my body goes taut as pleasure drenches me, over and over again.

“You’re mine, Iris!” Julian shouts from behind me as he slams deep inside me and shatters.

My body shudders against his as he continues to jerk against me, intent on emptying himself completely.

My breaths come out in short spurts as my heart pounds against my chest.

Julian wraps his arms around me and holds me against him. He gradually grows soft and slips out of me, leaving a stream of his white-hot essence running down my inner thigh.

Raiden comes forward and helps me lie back on the bed.

My chest rises and falls in an erratic pattern as I try to catch my breath. The feeling of utter bliss and satisfaction washes over me and I can’t wait to feel more of this.

“Where are you going?” I ask as Raiden climbs off the bed.

“I’ll be back, darling,” Raiden says in a gentle voice and walks inside the bathroom.

“How do you feel?” Julian asks as he tenderly kisses my cheek.

“I’ve never felt better,” I confess as a wild chuckle escapes me.

“It’s only going to get better.”

“I miss Caleb and Damon.”



“They’ve gone down to secure the house,” he says in a low, grim tone. “They’ll also make sure that they’re the only alphas who remain here.”

My heat-soaked hormones finally give me a moment of clarity and I’m reminded of Caroline. She’d been unconscious the last time I saw her.

“Is Caroline okay?” I ask.

“I’m not sure,” he says, gently stroking my forehead. “I’m sure Gerald will look after her. Don’t stress about her for now. Just rest before your heat makes you crave another round.”

Raiden comes back into the room with a folded towel.

Climbing onto the bed, he settles down beside me. “I’m going to clean you up a little,” he says, swiping the warm, damp towel along my inner thighs.

“Thanks,” I say gratefully. The sex was amazing but it also left my body feeling like jelly. I barely have the energy to move.

A tender look has come on Raiden’s handsome face as he gently cleans me up. Warmth surges through me as I watch my alpha taking such good care of me.

Safety steals through me and I can’t help letting my eyes close in utter bliss. *It’s really not so bad being an omega*, the thought flashes through my mind as I slip into a light doze.



Dad, Damon, and I watch with bated breath as the doctor checks up on Mom. She gained consciousness in the car but has continued looking sick and pale.

“She has a mild concussion,” Dr. Lafayette says in a low voice. “That’s the reason behind her dizzying headaches. I’m prescribing her some painkillers for now but it’ll take a few days for her to feel completely fine.”

“Do you think she could be affected by drugs?” I ask.

“I don’t think so, but just in case, I’ll take a blood sample.”

“Blood sample?” Mom’s face grows paler.

Dad’s expression cracks. He hates seeing our mom in pain.

“I feel fine except for this stupid headache,” Mom insists. “It’s all because of the bitch who hit me in the head. There’s no need for drug tests.”

“We want to be sure, Mom.”

“Gerald!”

Dad sits down on the bed and takes her hand in his. “We need to make sure you’re okay, baby,” he says in a low, soothing voice. “It’ll be over in a few seconds.”

“But—”

“Be a good girl for me, Caroline.”

Mom looks scared and conflicted but she obeys our dad and extends her arm toward the elderly doctor.

I hate seeing her in pain but we don't want to take any chances. The Black Widow mercenaries are cruel and unrepentant. They never back away from killing and maiming their prey.

Mom grabs onto Dad's arm as Dr. Lafayette pushes the needle into her skin. Her bottom lip trembles but she makes no noise.

We all breathe a sigh of relief when the doctor finishes drawing the blood and pulls the syringe away from her.

“Take this pill,” says Dr. Lafayette as he hands her a small white tablet. “It's a relaxant and will help you sleep.” Glancing toward Dad, he adds, “You need to make sure she rests over the next few days.”

Dad nods. “I'll take care of her.”

“See him out and come find us in Dad's study,” I whisper to Damon as the doctor prepares to leave.

I stand in the corner as Dad helps Mom lie down and covers her with a blanket. Seeing him taking care of her makes me miss Iris. Her scent lingers in my nostrils, reminding me of her every second.

It's taking sheer will to stay patient and not go running to her this very instant.

The pill shows effect within minutes. Mom's eyes grow heavy and soon, she closes her eyes and falls into an easy doze.

Leaning forward, Dad kisses her forehead and watches her with a tender look.

“We should talk,” I say after a while. “It's time you knew about the person who's responsible for hurting Mom.”

The gentle expression on his face subsides and gets replaced by a cold, ruthless grimace. Getting to his feet, he

silently gestures toward the door and walks past me.

Switching off the lights, I close the door behind me and follow Dad.

He leads me to the upper floors of the house and inside his home office.

The smell of coffee and cigars hit me the moment I enter Dad's study. Damon's already seated at the desk and focusing on the screen of an iPad in his hands.

"Attention!" The bite in Dad's voice makes Damon sit up straighter.

"Is Mom asleep?" Damon asks in a lowered voice.

I nod and take a seat beside him.

Dad walks around the desk and settles down in his chair. "It's time to explain yourselves," he says, throwing a menacing glare in my direction. "Who's responsible for hurting your mother?"

"Nox Callahan," Damon says without missing a beat.

His nostrils flare as he frowns at my brother. "Do you have proof to back up your claim?"

"Oh, yes," Damon says in an airy tone that makes Dad's frown grow deeper. "We've come with all the evidence you're ever going to need."

"Show it to me."

"Wait," I interrupt, snatching the iPad from Damon's hand before he can pass it on to Dad. "We must explain things to you from the beginning."

"You're testing my patience, Caleb," Dad says through gritted teeth. "Fucking tell me how Callahan is responsible for the attack on your mother."

I nod as his threat slithers down my spine.

"Do you remember the Black Widow attack on the mayor's residence three months ago?" I ask.

"Yeah..."

“That was the first time Callahan caught a glimpse of Iris,” I say. “He recognized her the moment he saw her and went after her. His obsession drove him to claim her right there. When he couldn’t have his way with her, he used the Black Widow to orchestrate an attack.”

Dad’s brows knit together. “He used the Black Widow?”

“You heard right,” says Damon. “He’s been the mastermind behind the Black Widow all these years.”

Dad’s ears have turned red. His expression is stoic but I’ve known him all my life. He’s on the verge of exploding with rage.

“We have the evidence to back our claim,” I say quickly before he can unleash his wrath on us.

“You better,” he growls. “If you’re wasting my time...if you think concocting some bullshit story is going to make me forgive you, you’re sorely mistaken. I’m going to thrash your asses if you can’t explain yourselves to me tonight.”

“Fine,” says Damon nonchalantly. “You can kick our asses but fucking give us the chance to explain.”

I’m secretly impressed by his relaxed attitude. He’s always been the one to stand up to Dad.

“Callahan has been the head of all investigations related to the Black Widow,” I explain. “He’s been using his position to cover their tracks as well as destroying evidence. Do you remember how he tried to kick us off the investigation with some bullshit accusation against us?”

“Yes,” Dad spits. “I remember.”

“That was his first attempt to get us off his trail and hide his connections to the Black Widow. He wanted to weaken us and use the opportunity to snatch Iris away from us.”

“He tried to bribe us,” Damon speaks up. “When we refused, he threatened to ruin us and destroy our pack. That’s exactly what he did that same day. He attacked our home and kidnapped Iris.”

“Iris was kidnapped?” Dad asks, looking confused.

We nod.

“We never told you anything about it because we were sure you’d be asking for fucking evidence to back up our claim,” says Damon. “It sucks when you refuse to trust your own sons, Dad. So, we didn’t bother saying anything to you and rescued her ourselves.”

“Let me get something straight,” Dad says, attempting to keep control over his anger. “Callahan attacked our base to kidnap Iris?”

“Yeah,” I say. “That was his intention all along. He used the attack as a distraction and stole her away.”

“But, why?” Dad mutters to himself. “Why would a man like him risk exposure for some insignificant omega?”

“Iris is not an insignificant omega!” I shout, unable to stay calm. “She’s our mate.”

“Also, Iris isn’t David Collins’s daughter,” says Damon. “She belongs to the Burton Pack.”

“What?!” Dad stares between me and Damon. “How can you make such a claim?”

“She’s Captain Hale Burton’s daughter,” I tell him. “She was stolen away from her parents during the attack on their pack several years ago. Her parents perished but she survived.”

“How do you know about this?” Dad demands. “The incident took place twenty years ago. You were barely ten years old back then.”

“Raider and I went to Fort Callahan,” I explain. “We used the tracking chip in Iris’s bracelet to find her location when she got kidnapped.”

“Callahan has always been obsessed with Rosamond, Hale’s mate,” says Damon. “That’s how he knew who Iris was the moment he saw her at the mayor’s party. He’s been trying to capture her since that night.”

I nod. “We discovered the shrine Callahan built for his dead crush there. We saw her paintings as well as old

photographs. He even has her old clothes stored away in there.”

“Raideen and Iris saw a portrait of Rosamond and Captain Hale,” says Damon. “They started investigating things from there. We’ve been busy gathering evidence against Callahan these past few months. However, none of that is going to be as convincing as the footage we’ve collected today. It’s going to tear away Callahan’s mask and expose his true identity.”

The anger on Dad’s face has ebbed away. He’s suddenly gone pale and quiet.

“Iris did seem kind of familiar when I first saw her,” he says in a quiet voice. “Caroline thought so too but we couldn’t figure it out. Rosamond...that’s who she resembles.”

“Did you know Iris’s birth mother?” I ask.

He nods. “Her father and I were friends.”

“Wow,” Damon breathes, glancing at me.

“Rosamond and Hale were killed during an attack by the Black Widow,” Dad continues in a low, thoughtful voice. “Callahan was Hale’s closest friend and vowed vengeance against the terrorist group. He’s been singlehandedly investigating them all these years.” Dad stares at me with a desperate look in his eyes. “Are you sure he’s the one responsible for their deaths?”

“Yeah. He’s the one who hurt Damon and killed countless innocent civilians in his thirst for power.”

“Do you have the evidence proving any of that?”

Damon gets to his feet and hands the iPad to Dad. “I’ve collected the feeds that you need to see. Follow them numerically and you’ll get an idea about what happened today.”

Getting up from my chair, I walk around the desk and stand behind Dad’s chair. From this position, I get a clear view of the iPad’s screen.

Dad clicks on the first video.

The video opens up and shows a feed of the entrance hall of our mansion during the gathering this afternoon. Damon comes over to Dad's other side and points at the screen.

"Do you see them?" he says, pointing toward Callahan and Iris. He's leading her through the crowd and has his arm wrapped around her waist in a possessive hold.

The mere sight makes a growl escape my throat.

We watch as Callahan leads her into a lone corner and forces a glass of wine into her hands. Damon zooms in, allowing us to catch the moment he mixes a mysterious powder into the drink.

Within seconds, Iris droops.

Callahan uses the opportunity to drag her out of the room and heads toward a deserted corridor.

"Check the next footage," says Damon and clicks on a different icon on the screen.

Now, we're presented with a feed where Callahan is dragging Iris up a flight of stairs.

Dad's expression continues to grow grim as he watches on.

"He forces her inside a bathroom next," says Damon and opens up another video. "Watch the way he treats her."

The next minutes are intense as we watch Callahan forcing himself on her. Iris pretends to be under the influence of the drugs he slipped her and attacks him when he least expects it.

Pride swells inside my chest as I watch her break his nose and turn it into a bloody pulp.

"He's hurting her," Dad says in an anxious tone as Callahan grabs her.

"Keep watching," Damon mutters.

Iris gains an upper hand when she climbs up on his shoulder. He tries to throw her off by banging her against the walls but she hangs onto him.



Grabbing a soap dispenser, she smashes the porcelain bottle against his head. When he doesn't go down, she hits him again, finally wiping him out.

"She's a fighter," Dad says in an appreciative tone as Iris stands over her fallen adversary. "But, this doesn't prove his connection to the Black Widow."

"We're not done," says Damon. "This is just a preview of the show we've prepared for you."

One by one, the footages show Callahan confessing to being the leader of the Black Widow as well as being the person behind Iris's parents' deaths. The feeds captured in the underground cell also show him calling off the attack on the middle school.

"This is the moment when they asked us to let Callahan go," Damon says, pointing to a corner of the cell where he, Iris, Julian, and Raiden are gathered together. "It happened as soon as the news declared that the terrorists were captured by the authorities."

The feed captured everyone's voices, so Dad has gotten a clear picture of the situation.

"They took your mother hostage," Dad guesses. "You had to let him go to save her."

"That's right," says Damon. "We didn't have a choice."

"That's the reason Raiden called for the bomb squad to sweep the mansion and the entire estate," I add. "He was taking precautions. I'm just glad it happened after all the guests left for the day."

A heavy breath escapes Dad.

"Too much to take in?" Damon asks.

Dad nods and clutches at his hair.

"Callahan's family has been secretly supporting the Order," I say, narrating the facts Julian dug up. "They built up a cult following over the years which led to the creation of the Black Widow. They're hell-bent on causing disruptions to destroy the peace in our society."

“Our ancestors gave up their lives to wipe out the Order and their inhumane ideologies,” Dad says through clenched teeth. “We celebrated our martyrs today. It’s our duty to make sure their sacrifices don’t go to waste.”

“You should’ve believed us when we said Callahan’s an asshole,” Damon mutters. “You never trust us.”

Dad lets out a sigh. “I *do* trust you but you have to understand there are repercussions to every accusation you make against a military official. A disciplinary hearing against you can make you lose your position as well as your power.”

“At least, hear us out the next time,” I say, meeting Dad’s somber gaze. “You could’ve known this shit much earlier if you didn’t keep insisting on seeing the evidence. We could’ve prevented Mom from being hurt.”

Grief settles on Dad’s face. His wrinkles deepen as he stares down at the desk.

A sliver of guilt spreads through me. He’s already feeling horrible about Mom. I don’t need to rub more salt in his wounds.

“I’m sorry,” Dad says in a sorrowful tone and looks up at us with tear-filled eyes.

Damon glances at me, looking completely baffled.

We’d never seen such a vulnerable expression on our dad. Tears stream down his face as his shoulders shake.

“Dad, what’s wrong?” I ask, alarmed.

“I’ve shared meals and drinks with the bastard who killed Hale and his family,” Dad says in a pain-filled voice. “I’ve invited him into our home and opened the way for him to attack my pack. He’s the reason our loyal soldiers died.” He brings his fists down on the table with such force, I’m surprised the wooden desk is still standing on its legs. “I’ve aided the murderer!”

“Dad, calm down!” Damon shouts, grabbing Dad’s shoulders. “You didn’t know anything about this.”

“That’s no excuse!” Dad bellows, breathing hard like an angry bull. “I’m going to fucking destroy him.” A rough sob escapes him and he’s suddenly, falling apart again. “Iris wasn’t even a month old when her parents died,” he says in a choked voice. “Her mother was found buried in snow. Her body was frozen by the time it was discovered the next day.”

“Do you have any idea how Iris ended up with the Collins?”

Dad shakes his head and brushes his tears away. “The baby was assumed to have been killed by a wild animal. There was no way a week-old baby could survive the snowstorm that night.”

“But, she lived,” Damon says. “Our wildcat survived.”

Dad takes several deep breaths and composes himself. “You should go to her,” he says, looking between me and Damon. “She needs you right now. In the meantime, I’ll take matters into my own hands.”

“You’ll help us take him down?” I ask as hope flares through me.

“I’ll destroy him,” Dad vows.

Damon grins and pulls me into a tight, suffocating hug. I stay in his embrace, finally feeling like we’re heading toward victory.



A soft, snoozing sound fills the darkened room. Iris lays sprawled among the pillows, fast asleep.

Raiden lies beside her, playing with a strand of her sunshine-gold hair.

“I’m heading to the kitchen to grab some water and snacks,” I say, glancing at him. “Do you want anything?”

“I just want her,” he murmurs softly. “Isn’t she absolutely perfect?”

“She is and I intend to keep her that way,” I say in a strict tone. “She’s going to wake up and want more sex. While we’ll be happy to give her what she wants, we have to make sure she eats and drinks something.”

Raiden exhales a long breath and shifts away from her. Climbing off the bed, he walks toward me and wraps his arms around me. His cock presses against my lower belly as he leans in to kiss my cheek.

“I want to have you so badly right now,” he whispers, his lips capturing mine in a hot kiss.

His citrusy fragrance cuts through the sweet perfume of summer berries. I inhale deeply, feeling drunk on the combined scents of my mates.

Raiden’s teeth sink into my bottom lip, making me yelp.

“Ow!” I moan, gingerly touching my stinging lip. Warm blood coats the tips of my fingers. “You can’t be biting me right now. I’m not in heat. *She* is!”

“But, you smell so good too.”

“You’re being hornier than her,” I mutter, pushing him away. Alphas are just as insatiable as omegas when they go into a rut.

Dark chuckles rise from him as he tries to grab me again.

I dodge just in time to escape him and run toward the door.

“Jules! Come on!” he shouts and bangs at the door just as I lock it from the outside. “Let me have you!”

“I’ll be right back!” I holler and run down the hallway to reach the stairs.

Raiden’s alpha instincts are fired up. Iris’s perfume is bringing out his animalistic impulses, urging him to chase me and take me.

A part of me wants to give in and surrender to my alpha but if we engage in sex, we’d both exhaust ourselves by the time Iris wakes up.

Iris is our main priority right now. Her heat is going to make her more sensitive emotionally too. We have to make sure she gets through this period without feeling ignored and abandoned.

Besides, we’ll have to stay alert and active to take care of her. Her heightened sexual drive will make her forget to eat and drink. I can’t let her come out of her heat feeling weakened and drained.

A cool draft skims over my naked back as I walk down the corridor. Raiden didn’t even give me a chance to grab a robe.

Letting out a sigh, I head toward the surveillance room.

The warm interiors of the newly-renovated tech room feel welcoming. Moving toward the LCD screens, I check the feeds coming in from the grounds surrounding the mansion.

The guards patrolling around the house are all wearing masks and face shields. Relief spreads through me. Caleb notified them of the situation before leaving with his dad.

Since Damon hasn't arrived yet, I'm assuming he's with Caleb and his parents. I'm desperate to confirm my assumption but there's no way I can call him. My phone, along with my clothes, is lying somewhere in Iris's nest.

Muttering a curse, I walk out of the room and head toward the kitchen.

My footsteps echo around the quiet hallways. Even though I'm alone, Iris's rosy fragrance follows me, constantly reminding me of her.

My jealous, possessive omega instincts make me want to guard her scent as well. Only my mates and I had the right to smell Iris's intoxicating sweet perfume.

Entering the kitchen, I make a beeline for the fridge.

I grab water bottles and rummage among the shelves. Apart from fresh stuff, there are tons of Tupperware containers filled with food.

A smile comes onto my lips. Our pack will never go hungry as long as we have Iris with us.

My grin broadens as I reach for a special box that got delivered yesterday. I'd ordered pastries from a barista downtown and had been planning to share them with Iris at breakfast.

Bringing out the box, I open it and stare at the fat pastries glistening with sugar glaze. My mouth waters at the sight.

Resisting the urge to stuff one in my mouth, I close the box. If I start on them now, it'll be hard to stop.

Grabbing the water bottles, I head back upstairs.

When I reach outside Iris's room, I take a moment to press my ear against the door.

Everything seems quiet inside.

Precariously balancing the box of pastries and water bottles, I open the door.

Raiden has gone back to bed. Lying beside Iris, he gently strokes her golden tresses. A look of absolute adoration lights up his handsome face as he gazes down at her.

“Is she still sleeping?” I ask, moving toward the coffee table in the corner.

“Not anymore,” Iris’s voice replies.

I turn toward the bed.

Sitting up slowly, she yawns and brushes away the strands falling on her face.

Her gaze fixes on the food and the water bottles I’ve just laid on the table. Grabbing a blanket, she wraps it around her body and climbs off the bed.

“I’m so thirsty!” she says, rushing toward me. Picking up a bottle, she unscrews the cap and starts gulping the chilled water.

Raiden comes over and grabs a water bottle too.

“Want some food?” I ask, opening the box of pastries.

Iris sinks into the couch and leans over the box. Her eyes light up with delight as she reaches for a custard-filled pastry.

“Mmm,” she moans after the very first nibble. Custard and cream slather her lips but she doesn’t bother wiping them away. Instead, she takes another big bite.

My stomach groans with hunger but Iris’s breathy moans and cream-smearred lips catch my cock’s attention. I’m instantly hard and craving for a taste of her mouth.

“Don’t you want one?” she asks, holding up a chocolate-covered éclair.

“I want you,” I say and lean in to swipe my tongue over her lips.

A moan escapes her as she stares at me with those beautiful emerald-green eyes.

“You’re the one I want to eat,” I murmur and nibble her bottom lip.

She drops the half-eaten pastry and suddenly lunges at me.

A chuckle escapes me as she pushes me against the couch and climbs onto my lap. Straddling my legs, she wraps her arms around my neck and captures my lips in a hungry kiss.

“You smell nicer than the cream and custard,” she whispers against my lips. “Why don’t I eat you instead?” She presses kisses against my neck and follows a downward trail to reach my chest. At the same time, her fingers wrap around my hardened length, pumping me.

My head falls back against the couch as I get lost in the pleasure she’s offering me. “Iris,” I groan as my balls harden.

I want to endure her sweet torment but if she keeps teasing me, I’m going to come soon.

Sitting up, I slide my arms under her thighs and haul her into my lap.

A squeak escapes her as she crashes against my chest.

“Sorry, love, but the couch is too small for what I have in mind,” I tell her and stand up.

She quickly throws her arms around my neck and hangs onto me as I move toward the bed.

Raiden shifts aside as I lay Iris on the bed and get on top of her. I’m surprised he’s letting me have her before him.

Iris pulls me down for a kiss before I can pay any more attention to him. Her heady scent wraps around me, heightening my desperation to be inside her.

Grabbing my erect cock, I rub the thick tip against her slick labia.

“I want you so badly right now,” she moans, jerking her hips upward.

Positioning against her entrance, I thrust in, plunging all the way into her wet pussy.



“Ooh!” she groans, closing her eyes as I bury myself balls-deep inside her.

Pleasure surges through me as her inner muscles pulse against my cock. Her walls are tight but smooth with slick, allowing me to glide in and out of her effortlessly.

Her legs wrap around my waist, pulling me closer against her.

“Julian,” she breathes, digging her nails into my shoulders. “Harder!”

I oblige, thrusting inside her as a relentless desire overwhelms all my senses.

Her nails scratch my back and shoulders.

The sting heightens my pleasure. She’s marking me, urging me to flood her with my cum.

“I have wanted you since the very first moment I laid eyes on you,” I say through clenched teeth as I slide in and out of her. “You’ve always been *mine*, darling.”

“Oh, gods, Julian...don’t stop.” Her walls clench hard and drench my cock in her slick.

“I love you, Iris, and that’ll never change,” I tell her. “Those alphas can bite and mark you all they want but I’ll leave my imprint on your soul, something no one can ever see or touch.”

“I never thought you were this possessive,” she moans, staring up at me with lust-glazed eyes.

“Oh, you have no idea,” I say, plunging in and out of her. “You’re mine now and I’m never letting you get away.”

My cock swells with the overwhelming need to release just as her pussy squeezes me tight.

“Julian!” She cries out, her body shuddering against mine.

Her climax drives me to the edge. My body jerks as pleasure pools deep in my belly. I shatter, letting my cum gush out in waves inside her pussy.

I have to hold myself up on my elbows while my cock is squeezed to the last drop. As the haze of lust slowly clears away, I realize the things I said to her. Every feeling I've had for her came swimming to the surface and I could no longer hide them from her.

I'm about to pull out of her when I feel a new presence behind me. "What are you doing?" I ask as Raiden comes closer to me.

"She'll never be fully satisfied until we take her together," Raiden says as he meets my gaze. "You have to fuck her well, Jules." Laying a hand on my back, he makes me stay between Iris's legs. "I'll fuck you while you fuck her."

"Wait, what?" I blurt.

Raiden chuckles. "I'll admit I watched this on a porn video when I was a teen and I've been curious ever since. Now that we have Iris, we can all finally participate in a train."

"A what?" Iris asks. The lust in her eyes is suddenly replaced by curiosity.

"It's exactly as it sounds," Raiden says with a deep, dark chuckle. "He'll fuck you at the same I fuck him."

"You're one kinky son-of-a-bitch," I say as a wild laugh escapes me.

Raiden gazes at Iris. "Would that be okay, love?"

Iris's cheeks burn pink. Meeting my gaze, she nods.

I slide my hands into her thick locks. "You're so fucking beautiful," I murmur. Bending my head, I deeply inhale her scent.

"Keep your attention on me," I say as a cold liquid trickles down my butt crack. The familiar sensation makes me moan out.

"Okay," she whispers watching me with anticipation.

My lips trail feathery kisses over her mouth, chin, and neck.

Soft moans escape her. Her pussy clenches onto my cock, telling me she wants this too.

“Let me put some on you too, darling,” Raiden says, dripping some lube on Iris’s left breast.

She moans as his hands glide over her breasts and nipples, slicking them up and massaging them well. Her pussy throbs against my cock, making me groan. Before I know it, I feel myself starting to harden inside her.

Leaning over Iris, I flick my tongue over her pebbled nipples.

“Julian...” she moans, pushing her fingers into my hair.

Raiden’s hand slides over my ass, sending jolts of pleasure through me. Positioning himself behind me, he pushes his tongue into my hole.

“Gods, Ray,” I groan.

“You’re so very tight, Jules,” he says, pushing his finger inside me. “I need to prep you before I can be inside you.”

The lube helps him push deeper inside me, stretching me wider. Shivers of electricity run all over me as I continue sucking on Iris’s nipple.

My balls harden from both my mates’ touches. My hips start rolling forward, making me thrust deep inside her.

The thick head of Raiden’s cock pushes at my tight opening. My mind is drowning in so much pleasure, I don’t even feel the usual discomfort as he plunges his entire length inside me.

Gripping my waist, Raiden slams his hips into me, forcing my cock to push deeper inside Iris.

I’m inside her and he’s inside me, joining the three of us together.

Raiden’s thrusts grow harder with each passing second.

I support my body on my elbows, making sure not to bury Iris under our combined weights. Sandwiched between the two, my body shudders with waves of pleasure.

The slapping sounds of our bodies combine with our groans and grunts, filling the still and quiet room as we each take our pleasure from the other.

My shoulders start hurting from having to support both my and Raiden's weights, but the pleasure coursing through me obliterates the discomfort.

My eyes squeeze shut against the mounting pleasure in my body.

"Ahh, fuck!" Iris cries out. "I'm coming."

"Don't hold back!" Raiden shouts, slamming his hips into me.

"I'm close too," I grate through clenched teeth. "She's getting so tight and you feel so good inside me, Ray. Oh, fuck!"

Iris's core tightens impossibly and next second, she's whimpering and cursing.

Her walls squeeze onto my cock, throwing me over the edge as well. Our bodies shudder together and the next moment, I feel my seeds gushing deep inside her.

My cock continues to thrust inside her despite emptying myself. Raiden continues to slam inside me, eagerly chasing his own pleasure.

His fingers dig into my hips painfully. With a loud groan, he thrusts deep inside me and shatters.

The force of his climax takes me by surprise and I suddenly collapse over Iris.

"Damn it," I curse, hurrying to get off her. "Are you okay, Wildflower?" I ask, looking down at her with worry.

"Yeah," she replies with a soft smile. "You didn't squash me."

Raiden shifts away and falls onto the bed beside her. "That was a blast," he says, looking thoroughly satisfied.

Iris chuckles uncontrollably as I gently pull out of her.

Without warning, Iris suddenly grabs my wrist and with a massive tug, pulls me down on the bed beside her.

A surprised gasp escapes me as she drapes an arm over my chest and buries her face in my shoulder.

A bigger arm slides over Iris and me, pulling us close together.

“I love you both,” Raiden says, resting his head against Iris’s back.

“I know you do,” Iris says with a chuckle. “And, I love you guys. I’d been so scared of going into heat when I first learned I was an omega. You guys are making it the best time of my life.

I laugh. It’s great to know she’s enjoying her first heat. She deserves this and so much more. I can’t wait for Caleb and Damon to join us.

A yawn escapes her as she nestles against me. She’s exhausted herself and is going for another nap. However, I know she’ll be awake soon and when she does, she’ll want me and Raiden to take care of her again.

It’s best to catch a nap so that I’ll be ready for her.

The promise of pleasure sends excitement coursing through me. The haze of sleep falls over my senses, making me close my eyes.



Soft groans escape me as I stretch my legs under the sheets. I'm no longer sleepy but keep my eyes closed against the morning sunshine.

Locked in my mind, I replay the intense sex between me, Julian, and Raiden.

Warmth floods my cheeks and neck. I'd never even imagined a position like that before. Both Julian and I were being fucked at the same time by our alpha.

As the memories rush back in, my pussy starts throbbing instantaneously.

Unable to suppress my sudden hunger, I reach for my pussy.

Julian's touch still lingers on my skin. He'd palmed my pussy in a possessive grip while pounding into me. His thrusts became deliciously hard and rough as Raiden rutted into him from behind.

A hitched breath escapes me as my touch turns into his.

I gasp as my fingers work on the sweet, sensitive nub of flesh. My thighs spread wide as my pleasure rises.

Keeping my eyes closed, I insert two fingers inside my wet folds. They're no match to my mates' fast-pistoning cocks but they still allow me to chase the pleasure I seek.

My breathing turns erratic as my whole body throbs with heightening pleasure. Pressing my head back against the pillow, I buck into my hand.

Warm slick slides down my wrist as my muscles tighten. I'm so close to reaching my peak, it almost hurts.

My fingers move in and out at a steady rhythm while my thumb rubs at my pulsing clit. And suddenly, my body is seizing with the force of my climax.

My thighs clamp tight as I ride my pleasure.

I'm panting heavily by the time the waves of ecstasy ebb. Feeling fully awake, I finally open my eyes.

Blinking, I become aware of the three pairs of eyes staring back at me.

"Caleb!" I breathe, reaching out to touch his face. "You're really here."

"Morning, love. We came home quite late last night. You were asleep, so we didn't wake you up." Leaning down, he captures my lips in a kiss that sends a current of heat through me.

When he moves away, I look up at Damon. His amber eyes glow with a predatorial look that sends my pussy throbbing again.

"I've missed you," I tell him.

He leans down and swipes a tongue over my lips.

I open up to him as his tongue pushes in and swirls around the sweet cavern of my mouth. Little moans escape me as his hand slides up my bare stomach to cup a breast.

My breathing stutters. Currents zing across my skin, making me yearn for my alphas' touch.

"You're hoarding her!" I hear Raiden complain.

"You had her the whole night," Damon snaps. "It's our turn now."

“Where’s Julian?” I ask, noticing he’s missing from the room.

“He went down for something,” Raiden says, glancing toward the door.

“Why don’t you let us take care of you, Wildcat?” Damon says, gently laying his hand over my stomach.

My body trembles at his touch. I’m acutely aware that I haven’t even brushed my teeth. The skin on my thighs is caked with dried cum.

I’m in desperate need of a shower but all I want to do is snatch up Damon’s offer.

“Your slick is so overpowering right now,” Caleb croons, his silvery eyes alight with hunger. “You can tell us what you want, darling.”

Raiden nods, sliding his hand over my thigh.

“Will you guys take care of me?” I ask in a small, pleading voice, wondering if they’d agree to help me while I look so sloppy. “I *need* you all right now.”

The hungry looks in their eyes make my heart beat at a frantic rate.

“Of course, we will,” Damon says. Turning my face toward him, he captures my lips at once.

Our kiss is slow and deep, our tongues sliding over each other in a languid dance.

“There’s no need to beg us for anything,” he says, continuing to kiss and nip at my bottom lip. “We’re all here for you.”

I feel Caleb and Raiden’s hands on my body. Even though I’m locked in a kiss with Damon, I’m acutely aware of their touches that light up my body with sparks of heat.

My moans of pleasure are drowned by Damon’s mouth.

“Get rid of your clothes,” I whisper. “I want to feel you all against me.”



My alphas obey me instantaneously.

As if in synch, they hurriedly take off their shirts and trousers.

It's now my turn to eye them hungrily. My gaze skims over their perfectly muscled bodies, wondering what great deed I committed to be blessed with such gorgeous men as my mates.

"Let me taste you too," says Caleb, capturing my lips in a searing kiss. His hard body presses against my naked skin, warming me up thoroughly.

A whiny mewl escapes me as he suddenly breaks away.

Keeping his eyes locked with mine, he moves to settle between my legs. His finger slides over the seam of my pussy teasingly.

My eyes mist at his touch. "Please, alpha," I whisper in a pleading tone. "Come inside me."

"You're so sweet and naughty to be calling me like that," Caleb says in a deep voice that sends shivers all over my skin.

His hands part my thighs as a mischievous grin comes onto his lips. "But, I'm just getting started, darling. I must taste every inch of you before giving you what you want."

Lowering his head between my thighs, he runs his tongue along my folds. "So sweet and floral," he hums appreciatively before diving back in.

Raiden and Damon settle themselves on my either side. Raiden turns my face toward him for a kiss while Caleb laps at my soaking pussy. Damon lowers his mouth on a pink-tipped nipple and sucks hard.

A loud moan escapes me as my head presses against the pillow in a bid to soak up the pleasure coursing through my body.

Caleb's breaths are hot against my sensitive clit as he peers up at me. "You're so ready," he says. Before I can utter a reply, he pushes my thighs wider to reach deeper inside my folds with his tongue and then, a finger.

“Mmm, Caleb,” I gasp, breaking the kiss with Raiden. For a moment, I stare into his ice-blue eyes. They’re already a shade darker by now. A glance at his thick, erect cock tells me he’s already wildly aroused by the situation.

Leaning in, he captures my left nipple, leaving me free to kiss Damon.

Their combined ministrations drown my senses in pleasure. My back arches off the bed without my conscious will and I realize there’s very little control left in me.

My feet are already up on Caleb’s shoulders. My hips twist and turn as his tongue laps at my hardened nub while his single finger slides in and out of me teasingly.

My core tightens and it’s not long before I’m coming and calling out their names. Desperately thrashing against the intense pleasure, I feel my body rising off the bed.

“Relax, love,” Caleb whispers as he and his brothers hold me down on the bed.

I’m soon gasping for breath.

A draft of cool air on my dampened thighs makes me realize that Caleb is no longer kneeling between my thighs. He has exchanged positions with Damon.

Warmth spreads over me as I see the way they share me between them.

A smile comes onto my lips. There’s no greater feeling than this.

Damon positions himself between my thighs. Bringing the head of his cock at my pussy, he rubs it all over my folds. The feel of the hot, hardened tip nearly makes me lose my mind.

“Stop teasing me,” I groan, lifting my hips to feel more of the delicious friction.

“Tell me how much you want me.”

“I’d do *anything*,” I whine. “Please, Damon. Don’t make me wait anymore.”

Positioning himself at my entrance, he thrusts in.

A loud moan escapes me as the thick head finally breaches through my tight opening. He rolls his hips and thrusts in harder, sliding deeper inside me.

I close my eyes against the intense feeling that edges between pain and pleasure as his girth stretches me wide.

“Let me touch you,” I say, looking up at Caleb.

He kneels beside me and presents me with his gorgeously erect cock. “Are you sure, babe? I can wait for my turn.”

“I want you now,” I say, reaching out and letting my fingers close over his hardened length.

“Yes,” he whispers, as I fist his cock in a firm grip and start pumping his shaft.

“Hold me too, babe,” Raiden says, guiding my left hand over his hardened cock.

My hands pump both Raiden and Caleb while Damon’s cock moves inside me. It feels incredibly good to be able to pleasure all my alphas at once.

The quiet bedroom soon fills up with our combined moans and gasps.

My core tightens with that familiar promise of intense pleasure. Damon’s hands clutch onto my swaying breasts and squeeze them hard, making me lose all control.

My mouth opens wide as intense pleasure crashes through me.

Taking the opportunity, Caleb slides his cock out of my hold and pushes the tip through my open lips. “Take me in your sweet mouth, darling,” he croons.

A drop of his salty precum touches my tongue. “Mmm,” I moan, opening my lips wider for him.

Damon continues to thrust inside me, carrying me to the peak of pleasure once more.

I swirl my tongue over Caleb’s thick head. He gently eases the rest of his length into my mouth until it hits the back of my throat.

My walls clench onto Damon's cock as my pleasure rises.

Growls escape him as his pace grows harder and faster.

I feel the top of his cock swelling inside me, knotting deep within me. Jolts of electricity zing through me, drowning me in pleasure.

The taut expression on Damon's handsome face borders on pain. He bares his teeth and lowers his mouth on my neck.

His tongue flicks out, tasting my skin. "You taste so fucking sweet, omega," he growls. "It makes me want to eat every inch of you while I fuck you."

A soft cry escapes me as his teeth sink into a spot at the base of my throat.

"Sshh," he croons, licking at the stinging, throbbing wound. "It'll be okay."

The pain miraculously heightens my pleasure, making my core throb harder.

Determined to give the same pleasure to my other alphas, I move my lips over the length of Caleb's cock and pump Raiden harder.

"Fuck, Iris," Raiden groans from my side. "I'm going to come too soon."

"Control, Brother," Caleb commands in a harsh whisper as he thrusts his cock deep into my throat. Next second, a growl escapes him. His eyes flutter close and he suddenly goes rigid.

His cock pulses against the membranes of my throat. At the same time, Damon's cock throbs within my tightening walls.

Their combined roars escape together as both Damon and Caleb shatter inside me simultaneously. Their deep, guttural groans throw me off the edge, making me lose all control.

Waves of pleasure cascade over me, making my body shake with the tremors of my intense climax.

Panting hard, both Damon and Caleb gently slide their cocks out of me.

My body still trembles as I try to catch my breath.

“Let me come inside you, darling” Raiden says in a voice that edges on a whine.

“Okay,” I say greedily.

Removing my hand away from his cock, he comes to settle between my thighs. “I don’t think I’ll last long though.”

Chuckles escape Caleb and Damon as they shift onto my either side and lie down beside me.

“I feel you, Bro,” Damon says with a blissful look on his handsome face. “Simply watching her is enough to make me lose control.”

“And those noises she makes when you’re inside her,” Caleb says in a gentle, appreciative tone. “They’re enough to make me come.”

“Come here, baby,” Raiden says as he pulls me up in a sitting position.

“Whoa! How long was I gone for?” Julian’s surprised voice sounds in the room. He’s standing at the threshold, holding a tall stack of pizza boxes and staring at us.

The smell of pizzas reminds me I’m hungry but my pulsing pussy has other ideas. I stay in Raiden’s hold as Julian walks into the room.

“Who said you could wear clothes?” Damon growls from beside me.

“Do you want the delivery guy getting a peek at all this awesomeness?” Julian quips back.

Damon climbs off the bed and approaches him. He towers over Julian with a threatening glare.

Julian scoffs and walks past him, looking completely nonchalant. Dropping the boxes at the foot of the bed, he winks at me.

“I thought you’d be hungry when you woke up,” he says with a chuckle. “That’s why I went down to order some food for you.”

My cheeks heat with embarrassment. “Thanks for that but I needed them more than food,” I confess, glancing up at Raiden.

“You can have everything that you want, sweet kitty,” Damon says, climbing off the bed. Moving closer to Julian, he grabs him from behind and hauls him up on his shoulder.

Julian laughs as he’s brought to the bed and thrown right next to me.

Caleb joins Damon in taking off his clothes while I watch.

Satisfaction spreads through me as he’s laid bare before me. People might think it’s odd for two omegas to be mates, but my relationship with Julian feels like the most natural thing in the world.

He’s mine too, after all.

“Pay attention to me,” Raiden says as Damon lays Julian on the bed and grabs a bottle of lube from the bedside drawer.

He blocks them from my view and kisses my mouth deeply, tasting Caleb’s essence that still lingers on my tongue.

“I want to watch them too,” I say with a pleading note in my voice.

“Does watching him get you horny?”

“Yeah,” I reply honestly.

He lets out a sigh. “I want all your attention on me, darling.”

“It will be. I’ll only be watching them.”

“As you wish, my sweet omega,” he says and turns me around so that my back hits his chest. In this position, I can clearly see Damon stretching and prepping Julian. Caleb’s leaning on a mass of pillows in the corner and pumping his thick erect cock.

It’s incredible to see them being ready for more. As the fragrance of vanilla intensifies in the room, I finally realize that our combined perfumes are what’s making the alphas so hot and horny for us.

I smile to myself, knowing my hungry pussy will always be tended to.

“Alpha...” I moan as one of Raiden’s hands palms a breast while the other caresses my pussy. His fingers slide against the sticky warmth that Damon left behind and buries deep in my core.

“You’re truly ours, Iris,” he whispers against my ear. His teeth gently bite the soft lobe as his fingers slide through my dripping folds.

My eyes flutter close as Raiden’s hot, rigid cock enters my core. My slickness combined with Damon’s essence makes it easy for him to glide in and out of me smoothly.

His hands grip my hips as he thrusts inside me hard and fast. My body arches against his chest as I try to contain the unbearable pleasure coursing through me.

For a fleeting moment, I open my eyes and spot Julian lying on his stomach only a few feet away. Damon positions his body over his and ruts into him hard and fast.

Our combined moans and groans fill the room.

I look toward Caleb and find his gaze stuck on me. His cock is erect in his grip as he pumps it hard.

Raiden’s hand moves up to palm a breast as he hits me deep inside my core.

An intense sensation comes over me as the tip of his cock swells against my tightening walls. The added friction is delicious, making me love my alpha’s knot.

Jumbled moans escape me as he keeps hitting me at a particular spot, causing tremors of pleasure to cascade down my body. My pussy throbs at the same pace as my frantic heart as I try to hold onto my pleasure.

“Aaah!” I cry out as all my control breaks. My body shudders against Raiden’s massive, hard chest. I gasp hard, trying to catch my breath.

From the sounds Damon is making, I know he’s close to his release too. His hips thrust into Julian’s ass, sinking him

deeper into the mattress.

The sight makes my pussy flutter and clench.

Raiden plunges his cock deep inside me and I suddenly feel the familiar tightening of my walls against his swollen tip. Pleasure drenches my senses as his knot buries deeper inside me.

Raiden is groaning and grunting wildly now, his powerful thrusts becoming long, hard strokes inside my soaking, dripping pussy.

His teeth graze along my neck and suddenly sink into my shoulder.

I cry out but he holds me in place, continuing to thrust inside me.

The pain from the bite only adds to my pleasure. Fireworks shoot across my vision as I hit my climax.

“I’m so fucking close,” he groans, clutching onto the swell of my ass. “Ahh, fuck!” Plunging in deep, he shatters.

His body jerks against mine as he empties himself inside me. The feel of his white-hot cum inside me almost makes me lose my mind.

His lips trail kisses along my wounded shoulder and neck as I lean against him for support.

“Nothing feels as good as you, babe,” he whispers against my ear. Pulling out of me, he gently lowers me onto the bed.

“You’re here just in time,” Caleb says through gritted teeth. A hard groan escapes him as he points his cock at me.

I close my eyes just as his cum shoots out, splattering my face and hair.

Damon’s grunts grow louder as he fucks Julian.

Julian’s hands grip the sheets as he takes his alpha’s powerful, dominant thrusts. His beautiful violet eyes are glazed with lust as he stares right at me.



I want to kiss him so badly right now but my body refuses to move. It's turned into a boneless heap and can only watch.

Damon and Julian cry out together as they reach their climax together.

Julian's cum splatters all over my breasts and stomach.

I'm glad to see that I'm not the only one still trying to catch my breath. Both Damon and Julian are red in the face and panting heavily.

"You were so damn amazing, love," Raiden says as he comes to lie down beside me. His words are followed by a loud grumble.

"Was that your stomach?" Julian asks with a chuckle.

"Yeah, sorry," Raiden says, grinning sheepishly.

A laugh escapes me. "How about we all take a break?" I suggest.

Everyone's gaze falls toward the stack of pizza boxes on the floor.

"Do we have any water?" Caleb asks. "I'm parched."

"Me too," I moan, finally feeling my body's other demands.

"Over there," Julian says, pointing toward the table in the corner. "Can you get me a bottle too, please?"

Caleb climbs off the bed. First, he grabs the pizza boxes from the floor and hands them to Damon. Then, he moves over to the table, grabs an armful of water bottles, and comes back to us.

"Here, darling," says Raiden as he gently wipes my inner thighs with a warm, wet towel.

"Thanks," I say gratefully, still lying among the pillows. My energy levels are so low, all I can do is wait for someone to hand me a bottle of water.

"You're going to choke," says Julian as I attempt to drink while lying down.

“I can’t move,” I groan helplessly.

He chuckles and comes closer to help me sit up.

Propped up against Damon, I finally get a chance to grab a slice of pizza.

“This pizza smells so good,” I say, inhaling the spicy, cheesy fragrance wafting from the still-warm slice.

“Didn’t you order us sodas and beers?” Damon asks.

“Of course, I did,” says Julian, opening the cap of his water bottle. “They’re still downstairs. I was going to get them but then, you had better ideas.”

Damon growls and wraps his arm around Julian’s neck, dragging him toward him. “You’re such a smart mouth,” he says in a deep voice that sends my heartbeat spiking.

Deep inside, I know Damon is being playful. His roughness won’t hurt Julian, but it still ends up sending a thrill of danger through me.

*Shit*, I curse silently as my pussy starts throbbing again.

I have the urge to grab my phone and search whether omegas can starve to death during their heat. My stomach grumbles as I tear into my pizza, telling me I need the fuel but my core won’t stop bothering me.

“You need more, don’t you?” Julian asks in a low, gentle voice so that I’m the only one who can hear him.

“Yeah,” I moan. “Sorry.”

He chuckles and shakes his head. “No worries, Wildflower. We’re prepared to take care of you. You don’t have to worry about anything at all. There’s plenty of food to go around and the house is secured like a prison. Even a fly will have a hard time finding its way inside without our permission.”

“Here, have another slice,” says Raiden, handing me more pizza.

“There are stuffed meatballs in one of those boxes,” Julian says, looking over at Caleb. “I know they’re your favorite.”

“Thanks, Jules,” says Caleb, his eyes shining with delight. “If only someone could go down and grab me a beer.”

Julian lets out a sigh. “You can be such a big baby, sometimes.” Despite his complaining, he’s smiling warmly. “I’ll go and grab the rest of our food.”

“Did you order brownies?” Damon asks as he’s about to walk out of the door.

“Obviously,” Julian mutters. “That’s the first thing I ordered.”

A deep sense of safety and warmth steal through me. My mates are right by my side. Every moment that passes by is proof of their utter devotion to me.

I breathe in deeply and look around at my alphas as they wolf down the food. Simply being here with them tells me that no matter what life throws at us, we’ll be okay.



My eyelids feel heavy as I blink them against the sunshine streaming in through the gaps in the windows. Doing a quick count in my mind, I realize it's the fourth day since I went into heat.

Shifting under the blanket, I try to sit up but realize that several arms and legs are wrapped around me.

I turn to my left and see Caleb. He's fast asleep with his face buried in the crook between my neck and shoulder.

Turning my head to the right, I see Damon. He's asleep too and holding me against him.

It's a while before I can move their heavy arms without waking them.

Julian is sleeping on Damon's other side. He is encased in Raiden's embrace and snoring gently.

A smile lifts the corners of my lips. It's the best feeling to wake up surrounded by my mates. Warmth washes over me as I reach out and touch Calen's silky dark strands. Next, I brush a finger over Damon's luscious lips, admiring their velvety softness.

They don't stir at my touch. My smile broadens as they continue sleeping soundly.

Happiness, like I'd never felt before, swells in my chest, making me feel like I can soar up to the ceiling like a hot-air

balloon. For the first time in my life, I feel complete. That gnawing emptiness I've felt most of my life has finally disappeared.

My hand comes to rest on a spot between my breasts. A warm energy pulses against my palm, making me feel amazingly peaceful. The more I look at my mates, the warmer it feels.

With a start, I realize what it is.

This sweet, fuzzy, warm feeling is the bond I've forged with my mates.

My fingers brush over the base of my neck and feel the unevenness of my skin. I can't even remember the exact moments when I got them. My heat kept me blinded to every sensation except for pleasure.

A tingling sensation runs through me as I remember the waves of cascading ecstasy I experienced when my mates knotted with me. My first heat was intense but I'm already looking forward to my next one.

A low grumble erupts among the gentle snoozing sounds. My hand settles on my groaning stomach.

*Did we even eat yesterday?* I wonder, trying to remember the last time we ate anything.

My gaze roves over the floor, taking in the empty pizza boxes and Chinese food containers. Empty beer bottles and soda cans litter the carpet. Used napkins cover every surface.

As the haze of sleep fades away, I realize we've all been living in a dumpster these past few days. Cringing, I carefully climb off the bed without waking anyone.

*Should I clean or cook first?* My mind debates as I look at the mess we've made.

In the end, my sore body makes the decision for me.

Tiptoeing around the pizza boxes and beer cans, I head into the bathroom.

The lights switch on automatically as I stand before the mirror.

Ignoring my jumbled, messy hair, I stare at the silvery-white bite marks that crowd the base of my neck as well as my shoulders. They stand out in sharp contrast against my pale skin, telling the world I'm mated and bonded to my alphas.

A powerful emotion erupts within me.

"I'm theirs," I whisper, staring back at my reflection.

Every person who sees these marks will know I'm no longer an unclaimed omega. I belong to Caleb, Damon, Raiden, and Julian and they'll burn the world to keep me safe.

Calming my pounding heart, I step inside the glass-walled stall and turn on the shower.

I breathe in a lungful of steam as jets of hot water cascade over me from four different showerheads. Moans escape me as I revel in the warmth soaking into my skin and muscles.

It takes me longer than usual to get through my shower. I take my time to clean between my thighs and wash the dried bits of cum stuck to my hair strands.

When I'm finally done, I walk out and grab a robe.

I'm in the middle of blow-drying my hair when a knock sounds at the door.

"I'm almost done!" I call out and switch off the hair dryer.

Opening the door, I find Julian at the threshold. He cracks a grin and leans in for a kiss.

"Mmm...you smell so good," he croons against my cheek. "Makes me want to eat you up for breakfast."

A chuckle escapes me as I push at his chest. "When was the last time you ate breakfast?"

He pretends to think hard. "Who cares as long as I get to have you?" He leans in again for a kiss but I dodge him. "Where are you going? Get back here!"

"I just took a bath!" I cry, jumping away from him.

“Oh, come on!” Julian quips, stepping inside the bathroom.

He’s stark naked. Bits of dried cum cling to his skin and his hair looks like an abandoned bird’s nest. Had we all forgotten to shower these past three days?

Julian’s stomach makes a grumbling noise. “Ooh!” he squeaks, looking surprised. “Looks like I’m hungry for pancakes, after all.”

“I love you, Ju,” I say, meaning it from the bottom of my heart. “I really, really do, but you stink right now.”

He laughs and steps closer with his arms thrown wide open.

“Oh, come on now,” he says with a creepy grin. “You know you want me to kiss you.”

A high-pitched scream escapes me as he lunges at me. Sidestepping him, I rush out of the bathroom and shut the door behind me.

“I only wanted to kiss you!” Julian whines from the other side.

“I’m hungry!” I holler at him. “Just take a shower and bring everyone downstairs.”

“What’s going on?” A different voice asks.

Glancing toward the bed, I see that Raiden has woken up. He’s staring at me blearily and blinking against the sunshine.

“It’s time for breakfast,” I say, moving toward the windows. Wrenching open the curtains, I start opening the windows.

“It’s cold,” Raiden complains immediately. Wide yawns escape him as he looks for a shirt.

The bright sunshine makes the mess seem worse. Bending down, I pick up a hoodie from the floor and throw it at Raiden. “Here, wear this.”

“Hey, that’s mine!” Damon’s voice speaks up next. Shielding his eyes against the sunshine, he sits up. “Close the

drapes, love. You're blinding me."

"Wake up, please," I say in the sweetest voice I can muster. "Julian and I are hungry. Won't you guys join us for breakfast?"

"Did someone say breakfast?" Caleb's voice inquires. He's still lying down with the sheet pulled over his head.

I snigger and move toward the door. "Julian's already in the shower," I tell them with a backward glance. "You guys better hurry before the food gets cold."

"Why don't you come back to bed?" Damon says, patting the spot next to him. "We'll order in some pizzas."

"I'm bored of pizza," says Raiden. "How about fried chicken?"

"I'll have pancakes ready by the time they deliver the food here," I say, grinning.

A huge yawn escapes Caleb. "I'll eat whatever you make us, love. Just don't push yourself too hard. We're fine eating takeout for a couple more days."

Damon and Raiden nod their agreement.

"I'm sick of takeout," I say with a pout. "Besides, I'm craving hot pancakes and crispy bacon."

"That *does* sound good," says Damon, ruffling his messed-up red locks.

"Good!" I say, clapping my hands together. "Meet me in the kitchen as soon as you're ready."

My muscles feel sore but it doesn't feel too bad. Despite barely sleeping or eating the past couple of days, I feel oddly energized and strengthened.

I finally understand why omegas feel superior to the rest of the population when it comes to sex and pleasure. Even an alpha will fail to keep up with their insatiable hunger when they go into heat.

*Thank goddess I have four mates*, I think with a smug grin.



Reaching downstairs, I follow the familiar hallways that lead to the kitchen. It feels like being home now.

A smile comes onto my lips as I enter the kitchen.

The sunshine streaming in through the clear glass windows makes everything gleam with a golden shine. At first glance, everything seems clean and mess-free but then, my gaze falls on the overflowing bin in the corner.

“Ugh!” I mutter, moving forward and pulling out the garbage bag. Takeout containers spill out and fall to the floor, making me curse again.

Frustrated noises escape me as I struggle to tie the ends of the overflowing bin bag. “I’m never allowing takeout in the house!” I hiss, finally managing to close the tearing bag.

Panting hard, I lean against the counter and stare at the ominous bag. It’ll be a sheer miracle if I can take it out of the kitchen without it splitting open.

Taking a deep breath, I proceed to drag it into a smaller den located near the kitchen. Large garbage trolleys line the darkened area. Locating the container for kitchen rubbish, I proceed toward it.

Opening the lid, I haul the massive bin bag and throw it into the box. It’ll get cleared away in the next two days when people come to collect trash from the house.

Dusting my hands off, I go back into the kitchen and finally breathe in the cool, fresh air. Warmth flows through me as I look at the familiar surroundings.

Moving toward the cabinets, I grab the ingredients needed for pancakes and get to work.

Soon, the kitchen comes alive with the smell of cooking pancakes. The addictive scent of frying bacon mingles with it, making my mouth water with anticipation.

“I’m starving,” I hear Julian’s voice as he steps through the doorway.

“It won’t take long,” I say, pouring beaten eggs into a greased skillet.

Coming to stand behind me, he wraps his arms around my waist.

I melt against him and prod at the setting eggs. My eyes close momentarily as pure bliss flows through me.

“Do you need me to help you with anything?” he asks after a while.

“Can you get the coffee ready?”

“Sure,” he says. Pressing a kiss on my cheek, he moves away.

Turning around, I see that he’s dressed in casual jeans and a sky-blue pullover. A silver cross dangles from his left ear. His luscious lips look pink and glossy, urging me to take a bite out of them.

Unable to hold back, I go to him.

Feeling my presence, he turns around to face me.

“Wildflower,” he breathes, stepping closer to me.

Throwing my arms around his neck, I capture his lips. Warmth seeps in through my clothes, making me press against his hard, muscular body.

Julian’s lips morph into a smile as he continues to kiss me.

The fragrance of vanilla and chocolate wraps around me, soaking into my senses and making me forget about everything for a second.

“What’s that smell?” Julian asks after a while.

That’s when I notice the smell of burning eggs.

“Shit!” I cry and jump away from him. Running toward the counter, I take the pan off the flames and stir the eggs vigorously. “I almost ruined the eggs,” I moan, continuing to scrape and stir.

Julian comes to me and peers over my shoulders. “They look a little hard-done but I’m sure they’re okay.”

“You think so?” I ask in a worried tone.

Grabbing a fork, he picks up a few eggy shreds and puts them into his mouth. He chews slowly and nods. "Not bad," he says. "This sort of hard scrambled eggs go really well with ketchup."

"Do you think I should make another batch?" I ask, ignoring the fact he enjoys ketchup with his eggs.

"Don't bother," he says bracingly. "They taste just fine."

I chide myself for getting distracted by my gorgeous mate. Putting the eggs into a dish, I focus on the rest of the pancakes.

"You need coffee," says Julian as he passes me a warm mug.

"Thanks," I reply gratefully and take a sip. The hot coffee smoothly slides down my throat and warms me up thoroughly. "Mmm...this is exactly what I needed."

Damon enters the kitchen just as I'm plating up the bacon.

"You're already done?" he asks, gazing at the spread on the table.

"Almost. Could you get some juice from the fridge, please?"

"Sure."

By the time Raiden and Caleb come into the kitchen, the table is set and all the food is ready to be eaten. I can't help but smile as my mates gather around me.

"I hope you guys are hungry," I say, taking a large sip of my coffee. "I made lots of food today."

"We're starving, darling," says Caleb as he winds an arm around my waist and pulls me against him. He kisses me briefly before stepping away with a grim look on his face.

That's when I notice Julian glancing at the others with an anxious look. The sudden change in his mood makes me wary.

"Is everything okay?" I ask.

Raiden takes my hand and makes me sit on a chair. "Everything's okay," he says, smiling warmly at me. "We just

wanted to talk to you before sitting down to eat.”

I glance up at Caleb again. “What’s going on?”

To my surprise, Caleb glances at Julian.

“We wanted to give you something,” says Julian as he steps in front of me. Caleb, Damon, and Raiden fan out behind him, watching me intently.

“Sure. What is it?” I ask.

Reaching inside his pocket, he brings out a small glass case. A luminous pink pearl is visible through the transparent lid but I have no idea why it’s an object of such anxiety to my mates.

“It’s an H-pill,” Julian says in a grim tone. “Do you know what it is?”

I shake my head.

“An omega has a 99.9% chance of getting pregnant after her heat,” Julian explains. “This pill will prevent you from getting pregnant if you take it within the first twelve hours after your heat subsides.”

I stare at the glass case in Julian’s palm.

“We’ve wanted a child since the moment we bonded as a pack,” Julian continues. “But, we all know that has never been in your plans.”

Cold washes over me as I stare up at my mates. “You think I don’t want kids?” I say slowly.

“You wanted to go to college and get a degree,” Raiden says in a gentle tone. “You’re still young. I’m sure you had hopes and dreams of a different life before you met us. We don’t want you to give up on them. We want you to be as happy as you make us.”

“We’re willing to wait until you’re ready,” Caleb says with a warm smile.

A mix of emotions rushes through me.

It's a dream to know my mates care so much about me. They're willing to keep their desires aside to make me happy. At the same time, I'm acutely aware of the change in my own feelings.

There was a time when I was determined to go to college to get a degree in computer programming. My desperation stemmed from wanting to move out of my parents' house and being financially independent.

Things changed drastically when I recognized Caleb and his brothers as my mates. My prerogatives transformed the moment I felt their love and devotion toward me.

It no longer matters if I have a college degree and whether I have a job that pays for my survival. As long as I get to stay close to my mates, I'm happy.

"I didn't have anyone before I met you guys," I say, trying to articulate the emotions rising inside me. "The reason I never thought of having babies is because I didn't think anyone would want me. So, I wanted to work hard and build an independent life. But things are different now."

"How so?" Damon asks.

"I want to live the rest of my life with you guys," I say, meeting their gazes. "I want to protect you and make you happy. I want us to be a pack."

Caleb's eyes widen. Julian and Raiden stare at me with surprised smiles while Damon swears loudly.

"Are you saying you want to give us babies?" Damon shouts, falling to his knees before me.

A chuckle escapes me as he grabs my hand and kisses the back of my wrist.

"I want babies," I say with a nod. "But, not right now."

The excitement drains away from Damon's face. Caleb looks disappointed while Julian and Raiden hold each other's hands.

Their disappointment sends a pang through me. I know they want a baby but it's not the right time yet.

“Callahan is still out there,” I explain in a low, grim tone. “As much as I want us to start a family, I don’t feel it’s the right time.” Reaching out, I take the glass case from Julian’s hand.

“Dad has promised to help us,” Caleb says. His silvery-gray eyes flash with anger. “Callahan won’t run free for long. We’ll destroy him and the Black Widow.”

“I don’t want my baby to end up like me,” I say in a bitter tone. “My parents died to protect me. They saved my life but left a hole in my heart that can never be filled by anyone else. I don’t want my children to endure the same pain as me.”

Julian kneels beside Damon. “We’ll never leave you behind, Wildflower.”

Damon rests his head on my knee. “You’re ours, Wildcat,” he says in a deep, growly voice. “You don’t have to be scared of anyone. We’ll always protect you and your children.”

Warmth surges through me as I caress his long crimson locks.

Damon straightens up and fixes his amber eyes on me. “So, you’re saying we’ll have babies soon?”

I give an enthusiastic nod. “Yep!”

A wild cry escapes him as he lunges at me and wraps his arms around me. Before I can adjust to his powerful arms, I feel several more arms trying to hug me.

Laughter escapes me. “Stop it, you guys!” I shout. “One at a time or I’m going to fall off this chair.”

My ass is suddenly hauled off the chair and I find myself in Raiden’s arms.

“You guys are crazy!” I say as unrestrained chuckles escape me.

“Crazy for you,” he says, kissing my forehead.

Warmth and happiness swell inside me, making me want to capture this moment for the rest of my life. I can’t wait to make them as happy as they make me.

I almost regret having to swallow the pill Julian gave me.

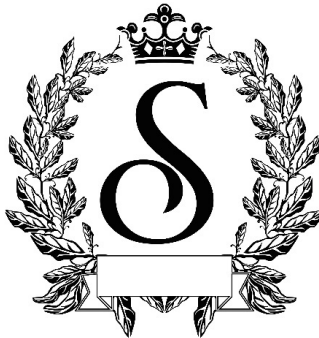
*Nox Fucking Callahan*, I curse internally as Raiden puts me back on my feet. He's the reason we're having to hold back from starting our family.

"Let's eat," Caleb says, ushering everyone to the table.

"Everything looks so great, I don't know where to start," Damon says with a chuckle but ends up filling his plate with bacon.

I swallow the H-pill and sit down at the table. Despite being ravenously hungry, I take the time to watch everyone loading up their plates and starting their breakfast.

It's hard to say whether it's my omega instincts or whether I'm just madly in love with my mates. Either way, I've never been happier than I am at this moment.



Stars twinkle down on me as the sky darkens. The sound of the gently crackling fire is amazingly peaceful. I inhale the cold, fresh air that's tinged with the distinct smell of roasting marshmallows.

"Try my specialty," Julian says, drawing my attention on him.

Dressed in a thick, overlarge hoodie and jeans, he looks like a breathtaking Abercrombie model from their fall catalog. Thrusting a tray at me, he watches me with an excited grin.

"S'mores?" I say, staring at the rows of Graham Cracker sandwiches stuffed with chocolate and marshmallows.

"They're the best thing about fall," he says, sitting down on the camp chair beside me. "Also, it's best to eat some because it'll be a while before the meat gets cooked." Following his own advice, he grabs two s'mores and stuffs them into his mouth.

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden are standing around a barbecue grill and watching over a mountain of sizzling meat. Empty beer cans litter the ground at their feet. Happy grins are etched on their handsome faces as they talk with each other and routinely turn and baste the rows of cooking ribs.

"The s'mores look great but I'd rather be eating some barbecued ribs," I say as the delicious aroma of grilling meat wafts over us.



Julian shrugs and bites into another one.

“It’s so peaceful,” I say, closing my eyes. “I wish we could do this every day.”

“I know,” he says with a deep sigh.

“I’ve always wanted to go camping somewhere,” I say, looking up at the clear night sky. “This is the closest thing to it, so I’m ultra-happy with this treat.”

“You’ve never gone camping?”

I shake my head and glance at him. “Delilah hates anything that messes with her clothes and hair,” I say with a chuckle. She used to make such a fuss anytime she got her dress dirty at the playground. I still remember the time she bit a guy for pushing her into a ditch. Memories of her annoyed face surfaces in my mind and a tinge of nostalgia washes over me. “My sister’s usually very calm but damn, she loses her mind if she gets any dirt on her.”

“Any idea where she could be right now?”

“Nope. But, at least, she’s with her parents. That’s the only thing that keeps me from worrying about her.”

“How can you still worry about her?”

“Even if we’re not related by blood, she’s been my sister for twenty years. You can’t switch off your feelings that easily.”

“I hate her.”

I squeeze his knee and lean in to peck his lips. “How about we go check on the meat?” I say, hoping to distract him. “They must be done by now.”

“Ugh! I’m not going near the grill. The smoke will get on my clothes and hair and I’ll smell like burnt meat.”

His expression reminds me of Delilah again. I laugh and peck at his cheek.

Getting off my chair, I make my way to the grill.

The smell of barbecued meat intensifies as I get nearer, making my mouth water.

“Dad’s already talked with the Burton pack,” I hear Caleb’s voice the moment I get close. “He sent me a text just now.”

“Any info on what they discussed?” Raiden asks in a grim tone.

“I need to know whether they’re going to help us,” Damon says in a low, deep voice. “That’s what’s important right now.”

“Dad’s asked us to meet him tomorrow,” Caleb replies. “It’s best to get all the details from him at a face-to-face meeting. Besides, let’s try to relax. I don’t want to make Iris and Jules anxious about anything right now.”

“Did you just say the Burton pack will help us?” I ask.

My alphas turn toward me in unison.

“We’re not sure about anything yet,” Caleb replies. “As far as I know, Dad has spoken to them about Callahan. We still need to meet up with him tomorrow and get all the details.”

“Do they know about me?”

Caleb glances at his brothers before looking back at me. A gentle look descends into his eyes as he approaches me. Coming closer, he wraps his arms around me and pulls me into a hug.

I cling to him as a strange emotion comes over me.

The leaders of the Burton Pack are my uncles. I’m desperate to meet them but also scared of being rejected by them.

“You’ll meet your real family soon,” Raiden says as Caleb moves away. His big arms engulf me in a warm hug. “They’ll be so happy to meet you.”

“Are you sure?” I ask in a low, worried tone. “What if they don’t want me?”

Raiden steps back and looks at me with a grim stare. “Who cares? You’re ours now, Iris. You belong to the Solveig

Pack. Their acceptance doesn't make any difference to how we feel about you."

"We'll never abandon you," Damon says, taking my hand and laying a kiss on my knuckles. "Not everyone's going to treat you like your adoptive parents. The Burtons are among the bravest packs in our country. They're also a tightly-knit pack. Did you know the entire family lives under one roof? Just wait till they find out about you. You're their niece and they'll love you."

His words make me feel better at once.

Pulling me closer, he captures my lips. The kiss is like a drop of hot cider that instantly warms me up on this cold, dark night.

"The ribs are almost done," Raiden calls.

"Call me when everything's ready!" Julian hollers back.

Damon chuckles as he meets my gaze.

"This is so much fun," I say, smiling up at him. "I can't believe you guys arranged all this for me." I gaze toward the fairy lights hanging from the tree branches nearby. "Everything's so much more beautiful at night."

"Let's go sit by the fire," Damon says, rubbing my hand gently between his. "I don't want you getting cold."

"Go ahead," Caleb says. "Raiden and I will bring over the food."

Feeling amazingly pampered, I let Damon lead me toward the bonfire.

The space around the fire is covered in rugs, blankets, and mounds of cushions. Packets of crackers, chocolate, and marshmallows are stacked in one corner with a crate of beer nearby. There are even bottles of the spiced cider I like to drink.

"This is so cozy, I might not want to leave," I say.

"We can stay here the whole night," Damon says, pulling me onto his lap.

The fragrance of sweet smoke envelops me like a blanket. Leaning against his chest, I sigh.

I might just take up on his offer to stay here the whole night. The fire is so warm, the cold isn't bothering me one bit.

Julian ambles over to us and sits down beside me.

"You could've left a few more of those s'mores for dessert," I say, eyeing the nearly empty tray in his hands.

"I can make more for everyone later," he says, biting into the last s'more.

"We've made so much food and you've filled up on those sweets," Caleb says, looking annoyed.

"This was just a small snack," Julian quips, grabbing a burger from the plate Raiden is holding.

"Hey!"

Julian grins mischievously and takes a large bite. "Mmm," he moans and nods. "This is so fucking good."

"Yeah?" Raiden asks, grabbing a burger himself. I watch him gobble the burger in a few quick bites. "Oh, goddesses," he says with his mouth full. "This *is* good."

Damon and I quickly grab a burger each while Caleb puts down a dish of barbecued ribs.

My eyes close in pure bliss as the soft meaty patty melts in my mouth. The smoky flavor lends it an amazing taste which I always miss in a homemade burger made on a pan.

Caleb takes care of us by bringing in more dishes like roasted corn-on-the-cob, potato salad, and coleslaw. His eyes are warm as he watches us enjoying the food he's prepared.

Wrapping my fingers around his wrist, I pull him down on the blanket-covered ground. "It's your turn to eat," I say, loading up a paper plate with ribs and coleslaw.

"Thanks," he says, picking up a saucy rib with his bare fingers.

I watch as he grabs the bone and pulls it out clean.

The sight makes my mouth water and I immediately grab a rib.

Looking over at Julian, I'm surprised to see the mountain of food he's loaded on his plate. His appetite is still roaring despite the dozen s'mores he polished off singlehandedly.

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden haven't held back either. They've all filled up their plates with ribs, burgers, and mountains of potato salad.

Fearing that I'd miss out on the food, I hurry to grab more ribs, burgers, and salad.

For a long time, we barely speak as we gorge on the delicious, hot food. The crackling fire and softly glowing fairy lights add to the warm ambiance, making me forget about all my problems.

"I can't wait for summer," I say, feeling very warm and full. "We'll have a barbecue every day."

Caleb pulls me onto his lap and wraps his arms around me. "Tell us what else you'd like us to do."

"I don't want much but we should always have a barbecue," I say, grinning broadly. "Barbecue at camping, barbecue at the beach, and barbecue at the park!"

Caleb's body shakes with laughter.

"You like it that much, Wildcat?" Damon asks, playfully twirling a thick strand of my hair around his finger.

"Yep! You can never go wrong with barbecue."

Caleb's fingers gently cup my chin.

Turning around on his lap, I wrap my arms around his neck and pull myself against him. His luscious lips curve in a smile as I lean in and capture his lips.

My breath hitches as I feel his large, warm hands cupping my ass to support me. The kiss sends tendrils of fire shooting through my veins. A moan escapes me as my core starts throbbing.

I deepen the kiss and nearly start dry-humping him.

“You two need to get a room,” Julian says with a laugh. “We’re still in our fucking backyard and the bastards in the surveillance room are watching you tongue our girl. I’m going to kill them if they start jerking off to her.”

A wild chuckle escapes Caleb as he breaks the kiss.

Panting harshly, I look up into his eyes.

The intensity in those steely-gray orbs takes my breath away. My heart and pussy throb at a tempo that sends blood rushing into my cheeks and neck.

Reluctantly, I slip off his lap and scoot away from the fire. I need the chilly breeze to cool down the inferno that’s been lit in my core. Otherwise, I was going to lunge at one of my mates and have them take me right here.

“This is the reason I tell them to go on a fucking vacation,” Julian mutters. “We can do nothing fun here.”

“We will, Jules,” says Damon.

“Yeah,” Raiden agrees. “We’ve found the guy responsible for hurting our brother. Callahan won’t escape. We’re tightening the net around him and this time, we won’t be fighting alone. We’ll have others joining in the war against the Black Widow.”

I hated hearing those names. They poked holes into the warm, safe bubble I build around me this evening, reminding me of the threat still looming over us.

“We’ll go on a long vacation after we’ve put the asshole behind bars,” Caleb says. “I promise.”

I nod encouragingly, hoping it’d cheer Julian up.

“Good times aren’t too far away,” I say, pushing a marshmallow between his lips. “Anyway, do you have any ideas where we could all go on our first vacation together?”

“I’d be happy with a trip to the fucking mall,” Julian mutters, angrily chewing on the marshmallow.

I understand his frustration. It gets tediously boring to stay here at all times. Frequent trips to the city would be great but

the Black Widow could launch an attack at any time, so it's not safe for us to venture out.

I silently agree with Julian. It'd be nice to go out and visit Ethan at his restaurant.

Raiden shifts closer to me and drapes a shawl over my shoulders. "It's getting colder. How about we head indoors now?"

I nod despite feeling like staying out here longer.

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden would be visiting Gerald tomorrow morning. I'm also sure keeping up with my insatiable hunger during my heat exhausted them all. They all need a good night's rest before rushing off to face their dad.

In the meantime, I'll go back to training hard. My heat has miraculously left me feeling stronger and more energized than before. It's time I prepared myself to face my enemy once more.



Yawning widely, I reach for the coffee mug set on the window sill. Sleep clings to my heavy eyelids, making me squint against the sunshine streaming in through the clear glass windows.

I take a sip of my hot coffee, hoping it'd help me feel awake.

My gaze falls on the wall-mounted clock. It's barely eight in the morning and my mates have already left the house. Even Iris has gone out to jog and practice her martial arts.

I'm about to take another sip of my sweet, creamy coffee when I spot her in the distance. Dressed in a cropped hoodie and black sweatpants, she's practicing a sequence of taekwondo forms.

Her pretty face is set in a look of intense focus. Every move she makes is precise and measured.

I'm a lazy ass but watching her makes me want to get out there and do some training myself. As the haze of sleep finally disappears, I become aware of the reason Iris is so focused on continuing her rigorous drills.

She wants to start a family with us but is being held back by the threat of the Black Widow. While I want her to feel safe with us, deep inside, I know she's right to be wary of the dangers surrounding us at the moment.



Callahan is not going to sit back and swallow the humiliation we put him through. He's biding his time for now but he will strike back at us soon.

Now that Iris's heat has subsided, Caleb and the others are preparing for a strike on Callahan. They want to attack him while he's weak and vulnerable. I'm worried about them going against a man like him but at least, they're not alone this time.

Gerald has seen the evidence we've collected and is convinced of Callahan's connection to the Black Widow. His support will help Caleb fight the coming battles but it's still going to be dangerous for us all.

Iris was right to choose the H-pill we offered. We can't start a family while such a threat is looming over our pack.

Iris lost her parents as a baby and I was abandoned and sold by mine. We've both endured the pain of being forsaken by the very people who were supposed to stay by our side. I can't allow our children to bear the same grief as us.

A heavy sigh escapes me. Draining the last of my coffee, I walk out of my room and head downstairs.

I'm moving toward the kitchen when the sound of a familiar voice makes me pause. *Is that Caroline?* My mind whispers as I walk toward the entrance hall.

"Morning, kid!" Caroline's voice greets me the moment I enter the room. A bright smile lights up her face as she comes toward me. Wrapping her arms around me, she pulls me into a hug.

"What are you doing here?" I ask as she pats my back.

Stepping away, she frowns. "I thought you'd be happy to see me."

"I am, but I wasn't expecting you." My gaze roves over her face, searching for signs of injury. "Are you sure you're okay, though? Caleb said you were suffering from a concussion."

"It was a mild one," says Caroline. "The headaches are completely gone now."

Relief spreads through me. Leaning in, I hug her gently and inhale her warm, familiar scent. “You have no idea how worried we were,” I whisper as a pang stabs my heart. “I was afraid we were going to lose you that day.”

She rubs soothing circles on my back. “I’m all right, Julian. It’s going to take more than a hit to the head to kill me.”

I step away and look down at her. She seems okay but I still can’t banish the fear flowing through me. I’d come dangerously close to losing her last week.

“Don’t worry,” she says in an insistent tone. “I’m okay.” Taking my hand, she leads me to one of the couches and makes me sit. “I came to see whether you and Iris would like to go out today. If I knew my visit would upset you this much, I wouldn’t have come.”

My ears prick up at the mention of going out.

“Wait! Hold up! Did you say we could go out today?”

Her grin widens. “Yep. Gerald’s agreed to it.”

“Wow,” I breathe. “How did you manage to make him agree? Caleb is such a hard ass when it comes to allowing me to step outside the gates. But, he’s not the worst. Iris is.”

“Iris?” Curiosity flashes in her blue eyes as she looks at me questioningly.

“She thinks it’s smart to stay here and avoid trouble,” I say, tattling to Caroline. “All she does is exercise and train all day. She’s worse than your sons, sometimes.”

Caroline laughs. “She’s one focused lady, huh?”

I roll my eyes. “You have *no* idea!”

Her smile dims momentarily. “Gerald told me about her. I couldn’t believe she’s the lost daughter of one of our closest friends.”

“You guys were close to the Burtons?”

She nods. “Gerald was friends with Hale and his brothers since their time in the military academy. We attended his

wedding and we were there when Iris was christened.” A heavy sigh escapes her. “We feel terrible about not recognizing her.”

“She’d been a baby.”

“Yeah, but that asshole recognized her.” Caroline’s gaze hardens. “I never liked Callahan but could’ve never imagined him to be such a demon in disguise.”

“So, Gerald told you everything?”

“I made him,” she says with a steely look in her eyes. “He had to explain why I was suddenly attacked by strange women for no good reason.”

A grim look settles on her face. “Caleb and the others have gone to discuss strategies with him and a few others today. Things will change the moment they make a move against Callahan. It’d really be too risky to step outside when that happens. That’s why I decided to use what little time we have to enjoy ourselves. I want to spend the whole day out of the house today and decided to bring you guys along with me.”

“Yes! Thank you!” I say, jumping on her and hugging her tightly. “You’re the best.”

She laughs and pats my back. “I knew it’d cheer you up.”

“I’m so glad you came!”

Caroline chuckles and ruffles my hair.

A gigantic grin comes onto my lips. This day just turned fucking epic and I’m going to make the best of it.

“So, any ideas about what we can do today?” Caroline asks.

I ponder for a moment. “How about we get brunch and then, go for some shopping?”

“Would Iris like that?”

“Oh, she’d love it,” I say as an idea takes shape in my mind. Before I can tell Caroline where we’re going, I hear a door opening and closing in the distance.

“Hello?” I hear Iris’s voice shouting from the kitchen.  
“Julian, are you up?”

“Come over here!” I holler from the couch.

Iris comes rushing into the entrance hall. Her cheeks are red from the cold winds outside. Strands of her hair are stuck to her sweaty forehead and neck.

Even in this state, I feel drawn to her. My heart races at the mere sight of her.

Rising from the couch, I stride toward her, grab her by the waist, and capture her lips.

She kisses me hesitantly before breaking away. “Why didn’t you tell me Caroline’s here?” she whispers. “I look like a complete mess right now. I haven’t even taken a shower yet.”

“That’s okay,” I say, chuckling. “She’s not going to judge you over this.”

Hitting my chest lightly, she walks past me and approaches Caroline.

“Hi,” Iris says with a sweet smile. “How are you feeling now?”

“I’m fine, sweetie,” Caroline says, spreading her arms wide. “Look. There’s not a scratch on me.”

“I’m glad. We were all so worried about you.”

Caroline smiles. “There’s nothing to worry about. I’m absolutely perfect. Do you think Gerald would’ve allowed me to step outside the house if I weren’t?” A curious expression comes over her. “What about you, though? Are you feeling okay after your heat?”

Iris nods enthusiastically. “I was sore yesterday but surprisingly, I feel fine today. It’s weird how energetic I feel.”

“That’s great,” Caroline says with a nod. “That’s how an omega should feel after her heat. The soreness disappears within a day and your body feels rejuvenated.”

“I’d love to keep talking to you but I’ve got to ask. Would you like some coffee?”

“That’d be nice,” Caroline replies with a surprised chuckle.

“I’ll be right back!”

Iris skips out of the room, leaving Caroline staring after her.

When she comes back, she has a tray in her hands. Setting it down on the coffee table, she sits beside Caroline.

“I made an apple and walnut cake yesterday,” Iris says, gesturing at the thick slices of cake on the tray. “It goes amazingly well with coffee.”

Sitting down on Caroline’s other side, I grab one of the slices. “Mmm,” I moan as the sweet, warm spices melt on my tongue.

“He obviously likes them,” Iris says with a chuckle.

Caroline picks up a slice and takes a bite. Her eyes widen a fraction before she goes for a bigger bite. “It’s delicious! What sort of spices did you add to it?”

“I used pumpkin spice with a dash of allspice. The flavors go really well together.”

Caroline nods as she takes a sip of her coffee.

“You should go take a shower and get dressed in something pretty,” I tell her. “We’re going out for brunch.”

Surprise flickers through her eyes. “We’re going out? Seriously?”

“Yep. All thanks to Caroline, we’re going out today. And can you guess where we’re going for brunch?”

“Where?”

“La Cucina!”

Her lips part. “Oh my gosh! Seriously? We’re going to Ethan’s restaurant?”

Caroline smiles confusedly at Iris's gushing excitement. She has no idea who Ethan is or what he means to her.

I've been curious about the guy she's been missing so badly. She says he's been her "only" true friend.

Jealousy flares inside me every time I hear her talking about him. I know she sees him as a friend but my omega instincts make me hate anyone who has a claim on her.

This is the perfect opportunity to check him out and make sure he knows Iris belongs to me and my mates.

"Are you sure you're feeling well enough to go out?" Iris asks after a while.

Caroline nods. "Don't worry, sweetheart. I feel great. They hit me in the back of my head which left me with a dizzying headache for a few days but that's all. My blood tests turned out fine. They didn't find any drugs or poison in my system."

"That's great," says Iris, smiling brightly. "I'm so sorry I didn't call you. My heat struck soon after we found you in the shed."

A shudder goes through Caroline. "I can't believe those bitches left me in that spider-infested garden shed. They could've left me anywhere but no, they had to leave in there. I hate spiders. They gave me the creeps." She rubs her arms furiously, looking angry.

Iris glances at me. Even though she stays silent, I know exactly what she's thinking.

We'd take spiders over a pack of explosives any day.

"I'll go take a quick shower and meet you back here," says Iris as she gets to her feet.

"Sure, sweetheart. Take your time."

"See you in a bit," she tells me and hurries out of the room.

"Who's Ethan?" Caroline asks the moment Iris disappears.

I sit next to her and let her see the frustration I've been hiding.

"He's her best friend," I say. "They've been friends since they were children. She even used to work for him at his restaurant. I hate the guy!"

"You shouldn't be worried about a beta," Caroline says in a low, conspiratorial tone. "You're far more handsome and desirable than any beta guy she could befriend. Besides, you've already bonded with her. I saw the bite scars on her neck."

I shake my head. "Ethan's not a beta. He's an alpha. I have a feeling he sensed her being an omega despite all the suppressors and blockers Iris's mom fed her. Why else would an alpha stay so close to a beta?"

"Plenty of alphas take betas as mates," says Caroline. "You should know that not every alpha is lucky enough to have an omega as their mate."

"Whatever. Caleb doesn't like him either."

Soft, humor-filled chuckles escape her. "You sound like a raging, jealous omega," she says gleefully. "You're crazily in love with Iris, aren't you?"

"It's not crazy to be wary of other alphas," I insist. "What if he steals her away? What if she realizes she'd been happier with him and leaves us?"

"That's never going to happen."

"But, what if—" I halt as she puts up her hand, silencing me.

"You're going to behave, Julian," she says with a stern look in her eyes. "You'll hurt her by being rude to someone she cares about."

My heart squeezes at the mere thought of Iris being hurt.

"Fine," I huff. "I'll be a good boy."

Caroline chuckles and pats my shoulder. "You should get dressed too."

“Will you be okay on your own?”

“I have coffee, cake, and my phone,” she says, picking up her cup. “Besides, I need to do some digging of my own. What did you say the restaurant was called?”

“La Cucina.”

She nods, grins, and starts typing on her phone. “Hmm, the place has great reviews.”

“I hate that,” I mutter.

She laughs and gives me a shove. “Get going. You’re wasting time by loitering here.”

Getting off the couch, I hurry upstairs.

On my way, I glance toward Iris’s room. The door is closed, so I have no idea what she’s decided to wear.

*It doesn’t matter what she wears, I decide. I’m going to make sure Ethan knows I’m not someone to be messed with.*

Making up my mind, I enter my room and throw open the door to my walk-in closet. There are rows of denim pieces, leather jackets, and designer stuff hanging everywhere.

My gaze falls on a flashy, glittering belt. I decide to grab it when my phone starts buzzing. Taking it out, I see Caleb’s calling.

“Hey, what’s up?” I ask, sifting through the myriad of shirts hanging before me.

“Has Mom reached there yet?” Caleb asks.

“Yep. She’s currently enjoying coffee and cake in our living room.”

“Is she taking you guys out with her?”

“Yep.”

“Did you agree to go?”

“Do you even have to ask?”

“I wish you and Iris would stay home,” he says in a low murmur.



I roll my eyes. Caleb's overprotectiveness never fails to get on my nerves. "We're going," I say in my strongest assertive tone. "And don't you dare call up Iris next and tell her to stay at home. She's excited to be going outside after weeks of being cooped up here."

A heavy sigh escapes him. "All right, then," he says in a defeated voice. "At least, dress down. Don't wear something that'll attract people's attention to you."

I glance at the rhinestone-studded belt I was hoping to wear and feel a sliver of disappointment curling in my gut. "Fine," I bite out. "Is that all you wanted to say?"

"I love you," he says in a hopeful voice.

"You're an ass, you know that?"

Soft chuckles sound in my ear. "I know you love that about me."

I struggle against the grin blossoming on my lips. Why did I have to like him so much when he was always trying to smother me?

"I'm hanging up," I say, struggling to sound grim. "Iris might've already gotten dressed by now."

"I'll see you soon. I love you!" With that, Caleb switches off the call.

Moving to the side, I pick out a casual plaid shirt and a pair of stone-washed jeans. They'll easily make me blend with the crowd of betas that throng the streets of downtown Winslow.

Unable to squash my rebellious streak, I grab the flashy rhinestone-studded belt and use it to tighten my jeans. The shirt I'm wearing is long enough, so no one would notice it. Grabbing a leather jacket, I head back into my room.

I don't bother with my hair but add a touch of gloss to my lips.

A knock sounds at the door as I'm checking out my reflection in the mirror.

“Come in,” I call out, continuing to eye myself critically.

“I’m ready to go,” Iris says in an excited voice and comes to stand beside me.

Stars seem to shine in her emerald eyes as she looks up at me. Her cheeks turn pink the moment she meets my gaze. “You’re so beautiful,” she says with a dazed look on her pretty face.

Warmth washes over me. She’s so innocent and honest, it hurts to even look at her.

Wrapping my arms around her, I pull her into a hug. The fragrance of roses wafts into my nostrils, making me inhale deeply.

Maybe it was a bad idea to be going to Ethan’s restaurant after all. I don’t want any strange alpha to even *look* at her. She’s too precious to be paraded around.

A strange epiphany strikes me. Is this how Caleb always feels?

“Do I look okay in this dress?” Iris’s voice breaks me out of my thoughts.

She’s wearing an off-shoulder white dress with large purple flowers on it. The silken fabric smoothly drapes over her body, accentuating her soft curves.

My fingers slide along the column of her throat and brush over the silvery bite marks at the base. Her exposed shoulders also bear the same marks. Iris has subconsciously chosen a dress that shows off her bond with her mates.

“So? Is this dress okay for brunch?” Iris asks, looking worried.

I smile. “It’s perfect.”

A bright grin spreads on her lips. “Thanks!”

Grabbing her hand, I lead her out of the room. We head downstairs and find Caroline leafing through a magazine.

She looks up the moment we enter the room.

“You guys look amazing together,” she says, coming to stand before us.

Iris blushes while I grin jubilantly.

“Shall we?” I say, offering my other arm to Caroline.

She takes it and nods. “Let’s go.”

Iris stays quiet but I can feel her excitement. She can’t keep the happy grin off her face as we settle inside the car waiting outside the house.

“Do you guys always have so many guards accompanying you?” Iris asks as the car moves through the winding path of the estate.

I glance at the fleet of six cars that follow us.

“This is quite normal,” Caroline explains from the front seat. “Gerald doesn’t feel I’m safe unless there’s a small army following me.” Turning around, she flashes us a sarcastic grin. “After the incident last week, he wanted to triple the security but I put a stop to it.”

A nervous chuckle escapes Iris.

I squeeze her hand and hold it in my lap.

My touch seems to relax her. Taking a deep breath, she looks out of the window and watches the distant hills pass by. Soon, her smile broadens and I know she’s happy to be outside again.

It’s close to noon by the time we reach downtown Winslow. The traffic is heavy, but I don’t mind.

“We’re right on time for brunch,” Caroline says as the car comes to a stop.

“I can’t believe we’re here!” Iris chatters in an excited voice. “I can’t wait for you to meet Ethan.” Opening the door to her side, she climbs out.

“I already hate everything about this place,” I mutter.

“Remember what I told you,” Caroline says in a warning tone. “Don’t be rude to her friend or you’ll end up hurting

her.”

Grinding my teeth, I climb out of the car and move toward Iris.

La Cucina is housed in a single-storied building. Standing in one of the cozy neighborhoods of our town, it matches the white-washed structures around it. A myriad of pink and purple flowers lines the sides of the restaurant while several more spill out from hanging pots set by the windows.

“It’s such a cute place,” Caroline says with a smile.

“The owner’s even nicer,” Iris says. “Let’s go say hi.”

Instead of going through the front entrance, we’re led down the street and into a narrow alley. Steam billows out of exhaust pipes lined against the walls as we move down the shadowed street.

Our guards follow us, keeping a lookout.

“Through here,” Iris says, opening a discrete door set against the wall.

I’m bombarded by a flurry of sights and sounds the moment I enter through the door.

“Who are you, Miss?” A lanky young boy asks as Iris confidently moves further inside the back room of the restaurant.

“Don’t you recognize me, Martin?” Iris asks with a chuckle.

“Iris?” the young man guesses, gawking at her from head to foot. “Whoa! You look different but so damn amazing!”

“Is Ethan in the kitchen?”

“Uhh...yeah...”

Caroline and I edge forward, taking care to avoid the bulging bin bags lined up against the wall. The younger man stares at us with wide eyes as we pass by.

“Hey, you can’t be here,” a female voice chides as Iris enters the vast kitchen.

I take the opportunity to study the clean walls and furnaces. Three chefs, one female, and two males are busily cooking on the flaming stoves while their helpers move around, replenishing prepared ingredients.

“It’s me, Nora,” Iris announces.

The tallest male chef comes to a sudden halt.

“Jacob, take over for me,” he commands, putting the pan down.

“Oh my gosh! I can barely recognize you!” The female chef gushes while she continues to vigorously stir her pan.

“Iris.” The male chef comes forward and stands before her.

“Ethan,” Iris breathes as a bright smile blossoms on her lips. “How have you been?”

“I can’t believe you’re here.” Bending down, he engulfs her in his big, powerful arms.

To my surprise, Iris stays perfectly still in his embrace. There’s no shyness or awkwardness in her.

The omega within me bristles with anger. I can’t bear to see a stranger touching her so intimately.

Moving forward, I grab her shoulder and wrench her away from him.

“Julian...” She looks dazed to see me beside her. Blinking, she looks back at the alpha. “Ethan, I want you to meet my mate. This is Julian.” Turning back at me, she adds, “This is Ethan, my best friend.”

I meet Ethan’s confused gaze.

“And that’s Caroline,” Iris continues. “She’s my other mates’ mom. She’s also our pack’s matriarch.”

“What are you talking about, Iris?” Ethan asks in a grim tone.

She chuckles. “I know it hasn’t been too long since we last saw each other but a lot of things have happened since then.”

“You’re...an omega,” Ethan says slowly, his gaze roving all over Iris. Reaching out, he caresses her shiny strands. “How’s this possible?”

“There’s so much that I need to tell you,” she says, grinning.

With a sudden move, he grabs her arm and pulls her closer to him. His gaze zeroes onto the silvery bite marks that adorn her throat.

“They bit you,” Ethan says in a barely controlled voice. His entire body vibrates with rage. “Who did this to you? Who forced you into bonding with them? Was it the same guy I saw back at the house?”

“No one forced her!” I shout, unable to stay calm. “She became ours willingly. Don’t act like someone stole her away from you when she’s been ours all along.”

Everything comes to a standstill in the kitchen. The other chefs have stopped cooking and are staring at us with wide eyes.

“You’re an omega too,” Ethan says, gazing at me with a confused look. “How can you be her mate?”

“I *am* her mate,” I shout. “She’s *mine*!”

“Julian, chill,” Iris hisses. “He has no idea what’s been happening with me.”

“Coming here was a bad idea,” I say, grabbing her hand. “Let’s get out of here.”

“What?”

“We’re going.”

“No, wait!”

Ethan blocks my path as I try to drag Iris away. “She won’t go anywhere with you,” he growls.

“Will you both calm down?” Iris says, starting to sound annoyed.

“She’s right, Julian,” Caroline says, coming to stand beside me. “You need to calm down and allow her to explain everything to her friend. In the meantime, we’ll go into the dining area and have a drink.”

“But—”

“Behave,” she hisses. The stern look on her face immediately makes me wary. Caroline is usually sweet and soft as a marshmallow but when she gets angry, she scares the pants off me.

Despite feeling annoyed, I take a step back.

“We’ll be in the dining room,” Caroline says, nodding at Iris. “Find us after you’ve had a good, long talk with your friend.”

Relief spreads through Iris’s face. “Thanks. I’ll see you guys soon.”

Caroline grabs my arm and pulls me out of the kitchen.

“What if he tries to do something to her?” I hiss as we walk out into the back alley.

“She trusts him,” Caroline says in a calm voice. “They’ve been friends since they were children. He won’t hurt her.”

“What if he tries to lay a claim on her?”

“Would you be swayed if another alpha came up to you and offered to take you as a mate?”

I scoff. “That’ll never happen.”

“Then, why do you think Iris will say ‘yes’ to that guy?”

“Because she’s known him longer than us,” I say, revealing my insecurities. “She’s always wanted to come back here to see him. She calls him her best friend. I should be her best everything. What if she abandons me?”

Caroline comes to a halt. “Neither Iris nor my sons will ever abandon you. Do you understand?”

I’ve always tried my best to suppress the pain of being abandoned by my parents. The wounds left by them still throb

in my heart. I hate being so weak and failing to move on with my life.

“We’ll never abandon you, kid,” Caroline says in a soft, warm voice as she gives me a tight, one-arm hug. “We love you.”

I look down at the woman who’s taken care of me since I was a child. She’s nothing less than a mother to me. Her embrace and soothing voice erase the pain that’d suddenly flared up inside me.

“Come on, let’s go inside,” she says, pulling me inside the restaurant. “The online reviews said this place always fills up at lunchtime.”

Feeling considerably saner, I try to calm my raging omega instincts. *Iris loves me and my mates*, I tell myself as we get seated at a table. *She’ll always be ours*.





“Come with me,” I say, grabbing hold of Ethan’s hand and pulling him out of the kitchen.

“Where are you taking me?”

“We’ve got to talk,” I say, continuing to drag him alongside me. “Let’s go into the locker room.”

Waitresses and kitchen helpers stare at us as we pass by, but I ignore them all. The moment we step inside the deserted locker room, I close the door shut.

A heavy breath escapes me as I stare up at my best friend. “Sorry about that,” I say, grinning apologetically. “I didn’t think Julian would go crazy like that.”

“Bloody omegas,” he mutters, leaning against the wall. Crossing his arms over his chest, he fixes me with a grim stare. “You can never predict what they do. They look pretty and sweet one second, and next, they’re raging mad like angry bulls.”

A giggle escapes me.

“What?” he demands.

“Nothing,” I say, still laughing. “I missed hearing you complain about omegas.”

He lets out a sigh. “You don’t have to laugh at me. I can smell you, Iris. You’re a damn omega too!”

“Yeah, I am.”

“How did this happen to you? I’ve never heard of a beta who transformed into an omega overnight.”

“Mom fed me suppressors and blockers all my life,” I explain. “She called them vitamin pills and kept giving them to me every day. When Damon took me away, I stopped getting my daily dose. My hormone levels rose, nearly killing me. That’s when Caleb rushed me to the hospital and the doc revealed that I’m actually an omega.”

Worry flickers in his eyes. “That sounds fucking insane... Are you okay, though?”

“I’m absolutely fine now. I even got through my first heat a couple of days back.”

His gaze falls on the silvery marks on my exposed neck and shoulders. Coming closer to me, he lets his fingers lightly trace over the healed scars.

“I’ve lost you forever,” he murmurs in a pain-filled voice.

“You haven’t,” I say in an assertive tone. “You’ll always be my best friend. I would’ve come to see you sooner but we were dealing with a dangerous situation. Things haven’t changed much but it’s under better control.”

Pain settles in his eyes. “I was never more than a friend to you.”

“What are you talking about? You’re my *best* friend.”

“You let some strangers you just met claim you.”

“It’s been a short time but I’ve gone through life-and-death situations with them,” I explain. “They recognized me as their fated mate the moment I started perfuming. My instincts recognized them too but I was too scared to acknowledge them. Caleb and his brothers are no longer strangers to me. They truly care about me.”

“I always believed you and I would end up together,” he says with a bitter chuckle. “I kept hoping you’d feel the same way and confess first. Maybe this is what I deserve for being an idiot. I should’ve worked up the courage to confess my feelings for you much sooner.”

Surprise and confusion spread through me. Ethan wanted *me?*

“Since when did you start liking me that way?” I ask slowly.

“Since sixth grade.”

“Seriously? I thought you liked Jenny Cornwall back then.”

He shrugs. “You’re the one who kept teasing me about her. I never liked her in the first place.”

“What about Nikki Felton in tenth grade?”

“I agreed to go to the dance with her because you refused to go,” he says. “Do you remember me asking you first?”

I think back to the time when we were in high school. Back then, the sheer headache of arranging a dress for prom seemed like an extravagant luxury. I saved up the money and bought myself the latest iPad that came out the next month.

Ethan lets out a frustrated noise and rakes his fingers through his dark hair. “I should’ve put in more effort to make you see how I feel about you.”

I stay quiet and consider what he’s saying. While it’s come as a surprise to know he’s had feelings for me, I wonder whether it’d have made any difference.

Deep inside, I know I could never feel the same way about anyone else.

Julian, Caleb, Damon, and Raiden captured my heart from the moment I saw them. I’m sure we all tried to deny the pull we felt toward each other but, in the end, we surrendered to it.

“Are they good to you?” he asks, breaking me out of my thoughts.

I nod. “They’re extremely protective of me. I can’t imagine a life without them anymore.” A smile blossoms on my lips as I think of my mates. “I know Julian was kind of an ass back there but I understand the way he feels. It’s hard for

an omega to see their mate being monopolized by someone else. We're crazier than alphas, you know?"

An amused look comes over my friend. "Do you get madly jealous too?"

"Oh, yeah," I say unashamedly. "I hate it when an outsider even looks at Julian. Only I get to look at him. He's mine."

"Wow," he breathes, shaking his head. "You've turned into one of those crazy omegas."

I grin. "I know and I'm not apologizing."

He rakes his fingers through his hair again. "I could've never imagined so much would change the next time I saw you."

I nod. "I should've called you before coming to see you. When Julian said we're coming here, I got so excited, I didn't think about how you'd feel. A lot of things *have* changed and I should've given you a heads-up instead of appearing out of nowhere. I just wanted to surprise you, you know? It's been such a long time since we got to hang out together."

He shakes his head. "You can come to me anytime, Iris. We're not the sort of friends who need to call up the other person before meeting them."

"So...we're still friends?"

He exhales a heavy sigh and nods. "You're my best friend, Iris, and always will be. I wanted more but like I said, I should've taken the chance to tell you sooner."

Warmth washes over me. This is the reason I missed him the most during my days at Solveig Estate. He always found a way to make me feel better no matter the situation.

I can't help the tinge of regret though. Ethan deserves a wonderful mate, someone who can truly appreciate him for the person he is.

"Have you still been checking up on our house?" I ask.

"Not as much as I used to," he confesses. "None of the neighbors have seen your parents or sister since they

disappeared.” A grim look settles on his face. “They’re assholes for abandoning you but I hope they’re okay.”

A sliver of anxiety snakes around my chest.

Callahan must already know about them. There’s a possibility he could hurt them to get back at me.

“Call me if you hear anything,” I say in a low, somber tone. “It’s not safe for them to be out there right now.”

Curiosity flashes in his eyes. “What do you mean?” He stares at me closely. “You’re hiding a shit ton of crap from me, aren’t you?”

“Yeah,” I say, looking away.

“Don’t you trust me?”

“I do,” I say at once. “It’s just...I’m not sure it’s safe to tell you everything right now. There’s a mountain of crap for the public to be aware of but it needs to be handled responsibly.”

“Stop talking in riddles and tell me what it is.”

I shake my head. “Not yet. Just let me know if you hear anything about them.” Pushing off the wall, I straighten my clothes. “I’ve been resisting the urge to get in touch with you but Julian messed with my head this morning. He sprang up a surprise and said we’re coming here. I got so excited, I didn’t think things through.”

Ethan moves closer to me and holds my shoulders. His gaze is heavy with concern. “Don’t hide anything from me, Iris. I know I’m not as powerful as the Solveig Pack but I still want to protect you.”

Tears prick my eyes as I hug him tightly. “Same here, Ethan,” I whisper through the tight choke in my throat. “I want to protect you too.”

Stepping back, I brush away the tears from my eyes and smile. “Let me ask you the most important question.”

He nods with a serious look. “What is it?”

“What’s for dessert?”

“Iris!” he shouts, frowning.

I grin as he pulls at his hair. “Oh, come on!” I say, playfully hitting his arm. “I brought my mates’ mom to the restaurant for lunch. You’ve got to serve us the best shit you’ve got.”

He rolls his eyes. “What do you want to eat?”

“You have no idea how much I’ve been craving your tiramisu. I tried making it at home but it’s nowhere as delicious as yours.”

“You’re in luck,” he says, grinning. “It’s on the lunch menu today.”

“Yes!” I cheer. “Julian has a sweet tooth too and he’ll love it.”

“How does it work between you guys?” he asks in a low, curious tone. “I’ve never heard of two omegas becoming mates. It’s quite rare.”

“I don’t know,” I say, considering the question. “Julian’s always been the sweetest and kindest to me.”

He scoffs. “You’re calling that psycho sweet?”

A chuckle escapes me. “You need to get to know him.”

“No, thanks,” he mutters, crossing his arms across his chest.

“You’ll like him when you get to know him.”

“I doubt that,” he murmurs stubbornly.

I let out a sigh. “Fine, then. I won’t force you to like him. But, you’ve got to serve us the best food and drinks. My pride’s on the line.”

“You can count on that.” He smoothens his hair and pulls on his chef’s cap. “Get back out there. You’ll be getting the VIP service today.”

“Thank you,” I say, hugging him one more time. “Thank you for being my friend when no one else cared.”

“I’ll always care about you,” he promises. Stepping back, he walks out of the locker room.

Ethan leaves me with a bittersweet feeling.

A part of me wishes I could accept Ethan as a mate but I’ve always looked up to him as an older brother. It’s strange to even try seeing him the same way I see Julian, Caleb, Damon, and Raiden.

Shaking my head, I walk out of the room and go out of the restaurant through the back alley.

Nostalgia washes over me as I look toward the familiar shops lining the street. I’d spent years hanging out here with Ethan. Old memories surge in my mind, reminding me of a time when my life was so much simpler.

I slowly walk toward the front entrance of the restaurant. Recent revelations about my true parents and how they died weigh heavily on me. Callahan is still out there, biding his time until he can strike back at me and my mates.

This might be the last time I get to hang out freely like this. Taking a deep breath, I decide to have the best time today. I put on my biggest smile and enter the restaurant.

“Iris!” Julian’s voice calls me immediately.

I locate him and Caroline at a corner table and wave back.

The place is already packed with patrons and waitresses are walking up and down the rows, serving food and taking orders. I make my way toward our table and sit down.

“Is everything okay with your friend?” Caroline asks.

“Yeah. Everything’s cool.” I glance toward Julian. “What about you, though? Are you feeling all right?”

A sheepish look comes over him. “I’m sorry about earlier. Did he get mad at you or something?”

“Nope! Why would he get mad at me when you were the one being rude to him?”

He narrows his eyes. “So, he was still sucking up to you?”

“They serve really good bread here,” Caroline says loudly before I can reply. “But, is that all we’re having for lunch?”

I’m silently grateful for her interruption. “Ethan’s going to send us a feast,” I say, grinning. Glancing at Julian, I add, “There’s going to be tiramisu for dessert. You’re going to love it.”

I see an immediate change in him at the mention of dessert. He can be such a child sometimes! Chuckling softly, I grab his hand under the table and squeeze it tight.

Surprise flickers through his lavender-hued eyes.

Leaning in, I peck his lips. “Stop being mad already,” I tell him. “Don’t forget that it was *your* idea to come here.”

He lets out a sigh. “So, you’re not mad at me?”

I shake my head. “Of course, not. I’d have reacted worse if I saw you being friendly with a stranger.”

A smile brightens his beautiful face. His arm circles around my shoulders as he pulls me closer for a kiss.

Pure pleasure flows through me as he captures my lips. His familiar sweet fragrance wraps around me, making me forget about all my worries.

Someone coughs and loudly clear their throat.

Breaking away, I glance toward Caroline.

“You’re both perfuming in the middle of the restaurant,” she hisses.

“Oops!” Julian murmurs but he doesn’t look one bit embarrassed.

“Umm...” A nervous voice makes me look up.

Jason, a young waiter, stands at the table with a large tray in his hands. His face is oddly flushed as he stares unblinkingly at Julian.

“Hey, Jason,” I greet. “Is all this food for us?”

“Yeah,” he replies but continues staring at Julian.



“Are you going to serve it to us, young man?” Caroline asks, sounding amused.

Jason starts, suddenly realizing he’s been standing for a whole minute without doing anything.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” he squeaks and starts putting the dishes on the table.

“The food looks amazing,” says Caroline, staring at the plates of salads, bruschettas, and pasta. “I can’t wait to try everything.”

Jason hangs by our table, staring drunkenly at Julian until another waitress takes pity on him and drags him away.

Julian stays oblivious as he digs into some cheese-stuffed arancini balls.

“I *hate* to say this but the food is damn delicious!” he says, eagerly pulling on cheese strings from the half-eaten arancini.

Picking up my fork, I try Ethan’s spaghetti carbonara. It’s my favorite Italian dish and no one makes it as well as him.

We spend the next hour gorging on the delicious spread Ethan sent us. He even selected the perfect wine to go with the dishes. Even though he’s in the kitchen, I can feel his presence in the food he’s served us.

“I’m so full,” says Caroline, leaning back against her chair. “I think I’ll skip on dessert.”

“I’m full too but there’s no way I’m missing out on dessert,” says Julian.

One look at him and I know he’s thoroughly enjoying himself right now.

His face brightens the moment someone brings him a giant slice of tiramisu.

Caroline smiles at him affectionately and sips her wine.

I start missing Caleb, Damon, and Raiden. It’d have been amazing to have them here with us.

My mind strays over to the kind of things they're discussing with Gerald right now. A sliver of guilt snakes around my chest. They're working hard while I'm having the time of my life.

"Are you okay?" Caroline asks.

"I'm missing Caleb and the others," I say truthfully. "It'd have been nice to have them here with us today."

"I feel the same," she replies, looking thoughtful. "Gerald loves Italian food. Maybe I'll ask our hostess to pack us some food to take home."

"We should do that too," I say.

"Sure! Let's order an entire batch of this tiramisu," Julian gushes excitedly. "I can eat this stuff for days!"

A chuckle escapes me. Ethan's digging his way into Julian's heart with his food.

I can't help but smile. Julian might've felt jealous of Ethan but he'll eventually see how wonderful he is.

Despite his childishness, Julian is extremely perceptive. He'll soon understand that Ethan poses no threat to me or our pack.

Taking a deep breath, I sip my wine and stare fondly at my mate, and dream of the day when we can freely roam these city streets without fearing an attack.



Weak sunshine pierces through the mist that's settled over the estate's grounds. Cold air rushes past me, cooling my heated cheeks and neck as I force myself to run harder.

A smile comes onto my lips despite the strain on my body. It feels great to be pushing my limits and knowing I'm working toward strengthening myself.

A familiar figure in the distance catches my eye.

Slowing down, I come to a halt. The shifting fog makes it hard for me to focus, but a second later, a ray of sunshine falls on the man in front of a group of parading soldiers.

Raiden's familiar face comes into sharp focus as he draws closer.

Four rows of young men march to his commands. Dressed in his military uniform, Raiden looks breathtakingly regal. His broad and muscular stature adds to his allure, making me stare at him unblinkingly.

"He's so fucking hot," I croon to myself.

My alphas are handsome on any regular day but when they don their uniforms, they're transformed into irresistible men. The urge to run up to Raiden is almost overwhelming.

Breathing hard, I control myself.

As Raiden and his men draw nearer, I step behind a row of oak maples that line the path. Peeking from behind a thick

trunk, I watch my mate.

For the briefest second, our eyes meet as he passes by me.

My heart skips a beat as he flashes me a quick grin.

Before I can react, he's already marched past me.

Turning around, I watch the group heading toward the front lawn of the admin building. Raiden brings his men to a stop and they start on a sequence of drills.

Feeling like I've exercised enough for the day, I sit down on the ground and watch them.

Raiden commands the attention of every cadet as he conducts the drill. Pride and warmth wash over me. Once again, I marvel at my luck. Life snatched a lot from me but it's also made up by letting me have him and his brothers as my mates.

Military drills are always entertaining, so the hour flies by quickly.

Raiden finishes the drill and allows his men to disperse. They are stiff and disciplined before him but the moment they get away, their gait turns casual. By the time they move toward the dorm building, they're all loudly chatting among themselves.

"Hey," says Raiden, approaching me. "You didn't have to wait for me, you know."

"I know but it's so much fun to watch you guys."

Grinning, he moves closer to kiss me.

I melt against him as his arms come around me and hold me against his chest.

"Do you have to rush out soon?" I ask.

"Not today," he says, leaning down to nuzzle my nose with his. "Do you want me to take care of you before I leave?"

My cheeks heat up, making me look away.

Hooking his finger under my chin, he gently turns my face toward him. "You weren't so shy a couple of days ago."

“My heat made me crazy,” I say, blushing like the rising sun.

His chest rumbles with deep, low chuckles. “I’ve missed you,” he says, capturing my lips.

I open up to him, loving the way his warm, velvety tongue swirls around mine.

“Should we take a shower together?” he says, his gaze burning into mine.

My core throbs in response. There’s nothing more I’d like to do right now but I force myself to calm down.

“Let’s keep that in our plans,” I say shyly and step away from him.

A chilly breeze blows by, instantly making me miss his warmth. Digging my hands into my hoodie’s pockets, I stare up at him. “Julian and I came home late last night, so I didn’t get a chance to talk to you guys. Can you tell me what’s happening with the investigation regarding Callahan?”

A grim look descends into his ice-blue eyes. He looks around before grabbing my hand and leading me away from the admin building.

He stops near the row of bare maple trees. His gaze sweeps around the area carefully before settling on me.

“Callahan has gone into hiding,” Raiden says in a low, deep voice. “Even his secretary hasn’t been able to get in touch with him.”

“What?” Dismay surges through me. “How could he just disappear like that?”

Raiden shakes his head and holds onto my shoulders. “We haven’t lost him. He’ll resurface again and when he does, we’ll be there to catch him. In the meantime, we’ll start an official investigation and start collecting evidence against him. Dad reached out to several packs and most of them have agreed to help us out.”

“What about the Burton Pack?”

He nods. “They will help. Dad has told them the truth.”

Surprise flickers through me. “Did he tell them about me too?”

“Yeah.” A concerned look comes over him as he notices my paling complexion. I don’t want to worry him but it hurts to know that my dad’s family know about me but none of them reached out to me.

“Iris,” Raiden calls my name, giving me a gentle shake. “Let me finish telling you everything. Baby, your tears are hurting my heart.”

I swallow a painful choke. “I’m fine,” I say despite my heart cracking.

A deep sigh escapes him. “They want to meet you,” he says. “You have no idea what they’ve been going through since they learned you’re alive.”

“What?”

Raiden smiles. “You were in heat when Dad revealed everything about Callahan to them. The truth upset your grandfather so much, he nearly died of a stroke. His sons, your uncles, had to rush him into emergency that very evening.”

“Oh no. Is he okay?”

“Yeah, he’s all right but he wants revenge. Hale was his eldest son and he loved him. And, he loves you.”

A gentle expression spreads on Raiden’s face. His fingers brush away the stray tear that has fallen on my cheek.

“Your uncles wanted to meet you once your grandpa got better but Dad told them you’re in heat,” he tells me. “And if you want to know how much they love you already, you should check out the repair work happening in Dad’s home office. Charlie, your granddad, got into such a rage, he wrecked everything around him.”

“Wow,” I breathe.

“Yeah. That man has the worst temper. Your uncles are thankfully saner. We’re coordinating with them to flush out

Callahan and the Black Widow.”

It sucks to learn that the asshole has escaped but I’m too thrilled and excited about meeting my dad’s family to care about him at the moment.

“When can I meet them?” I ask.

“Anytime,” he says with a chuckle. “I’m sure they’ll clear their schedules to meet their lost niece.”

“Is my grandfather still in the hospital?”

Raiden scratches the back of his head, looking sheepish. “I’m not really sure.” Moving closer, he pulls me into a hug. “Stop worrying. The crazy geezer is alive and kicking. He’ll be galloping like a horse once he sees you.”

“You think so?” I ask, clinging to him.

“They’ll love you, Iris. I have no doubts about it.”

“Can I meet them today?”

A thoughtful expression comes over him. “I can call them and see if they’ll all be available.”

“I don’t mind going to their house,” I say at once. “My grandfather shouldn’t move around too much right now. I should go instead of them coming all the way here.”

“You haven’t even met them and you’re already worrying about them.” He shakes his head and pulls me in for another hug. “Do you have any idea how cute you are?” He showers my cheeks, eyes, nose, and lips with kisses.

“Stop!” I say as laughter chokes me. “I’m all sweaty and messy.”

“You still taste divine. Rawr!” He bares his teeth at me before leaning in to kiss me.

A moan escapes me as his teeth graze my bottom lip. Pulling me against his hard chest, he crashes his mouth against mine. His tongue sweeps in, tasting me thoroughly.

With a start, I feel him growing hard against my belly.

My core responds with a massive throb. There's no way to ignore my body's demands anymore. I want Raiden as much as he wants me.

"Let's get out of here," he says in a low, harsh whisper. "We can talk with the others later."

Too breathless with desire, I simply nod.

A gasp escapes me as he sweeps me off my feet and hauls me into his arms. "I can walk!" I squeak.

"Nope. We're running."

A wild laugh escapes me as Raiden sprints toward the house in the distance. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I cling to him while thoroughly enjoying the rush of cold wind as he dashes at top speed.

He uses one of the entrances that doesn't directly lead into the entrance hall. I have no idea whether Julian or the others are awake yet. The staircase in this corner of the house is rarely used by us, so I don't see anyone as Raiden makes his way up to his room.

"No one saw us coming in," he says, glancing down at me. "You're all mine today."

I chuckle as he opens the door to his room.

At once, my gaze falls on the wonderful paintings that adorn his space. The myriad colors enthrall me, urging me to take a moment to appreciate them.

Raiden doesn't allow me the opportunity as he crosses the room and takes me inside the bathroom. Putting me down, he hurriedly starts taking off his jacket.

An amused grin comes onto my lips as I watch him struggle to uncuff the sleeves of his shirt.

"Oh, let me!" I say, grabbing his wrist.

While my hands are busy with his cuffs and buttons, he takes the opportunity to loosen my hair tie. His fingers are gentle as he lightly spreads my hair around my shoulders.



Tendrils of heat flow through my veins at his innocent touch. It's a relief when I get to push his shirt off his shoulders, revealing his gorgeously sculpted abs.

A groan escapes him as I move closer and kiss his pecs. His head falls back as my lips find his nipple and suck. "Iris," he says in a throaty voice as his fingers dig into my hair.

His moans arouse me. I let my hip jerk against him, desperate to feel the friction against my clenching pussy.

"Fuck, Iris. I need you," he says with low, harsh pants. Next moment, his hands grip the front of my hoodie and pull it apart.

My surprised gasp mingles with the sound of tearing fabric.

I stare down at my torn hoodie, unable to believe he's done it again.

"What's your enmity with my clothes?" I ask, half-amused and half-annoyed.

Pulling me against him, he captures my lips.

I pound at his rock-hard chest out of pure frustration. His lips morph into a smile against mine as his hands slide down to cup my ass cheeks.

His delicious citrusy scent wraps around me as his touch lights up the fire in my core. I instantly forget about my torn hoodie and step away to get rid of my sports bra.

"Oh, let me," Raiden repeats my words with a mischievous grin. Next moment, his fingers slip under the straps and before I know it, he tears them off me.

"Ow!" I gasp as the tight, elastic material snaps against my skin.

Before I can complain further, he draws me closer, kissing me until I've forgotten why I'd gotten mad at him in the first place. My breasts press against his hard chest as he holds me against him.

Despite being locked in a kiss with him, I push my trousers down my waist. While I know he can buy me an entire wardrobe, I still don't want him ruining my sweatpants.

I moan into his mouth as he squeezes my bare ass cheeks.

"I'm in love with you," he breathes against my forehead.

"I love you," I say as he pulls away to gaze at me.

Tightening his hold on my hand, he leads me inside the glass-walled shower cubicle.

I turn on the knob and hold my hand under the steady stream of water pouring out of the overhead faucet.

"Is the water hot enough for you?" he asks as jets of water spray over his delicious body from three different showerheads.

"It's perfect," I say, turning to face him.

Water pounds on our backs and shoulders as we press our naked bodies together and kiss with a ferocity that washes away all my worries. This moment is all about him and me.

I'm left a breathless mess as he breaks the kiss and reaches around me to grab the soap.

He lathers up his hands and starts massaging my breasts, the flat of my stomach and down between my thighs.

A gasp escapes me the moment his fingers slide between my slick folds.

"You should be cleaning me up too," Raiden reminds me with a mischievous glint in his blue eyes.

"Uhh, yeah," I mutter dazedly. Water seeps down my lashes, blurring my vision as I reach for the soap. The slippery bar suddenly slides out of my fingers and falls onto the floor.

"Sorry!" I gasp, rushing to pick it up. A groan escapes me as I look up at him. "I'm such a clutz. I'm ruining our sexy shower."

Deep chuckles rumble in his chest. "You're enough to make it sexy."

His praise emboldens me. Grabbing the soap tightly, I lather it up between my palms and run the bubbles over the gorgeous, hard muscles of his chest, arms, and abs.

He watches me calmly. Water droplets cling to his eyelashes, deepening the blue of his eyes.

My heart tightens in my chest. Raiden is so beautiful. The kindness in his soul shines through his eyes, making my throat choke with a sudden tightness.

When we're both rinsed off, he pulls me in for a kiss. His tongue dances with mine before he starts nipping and pulling on my bottom lip.

From there, he trails kisses down my jaw, to my neck, and then my shoulder. His lips and tongue feel incredible on my bare skin, making me moan out.

Without warning, he spins me around.

Swallowing a gasp, I support my weight against the shower wall.

“Your ass is so pink, I’m reminded of a juicy summer peach.”

His words leave me feeling equally amused and aroused.

“Makes me want to take a bite,” he growls from behind me, running his palms all over my ass.

A thrill shoots through me “You do?”

“Yeah, bend over, love.”

Excitement bubbles up inside me as his palm spreads over my ass.

My core pulses from anticipation. “Oh God,” I groan as his tongue meets with the top crevasse of my buttocks and trails down to my tight rim.

Shivers of pleasure feather all over my body, weakening my knees. I have to lean against the shower wall to avoid sliding onto the floor.

His tongue circles my bud before dipping in briefly.

“Ow!” I cry out as his teeth suddenly sink into my fleshy cheek.

Next second, his tongue slides over the spot, soothing the sharp sting.

My head rests on the wall as his mouth moves lower. His lips catch my pussy lips and gently suck on them.

Moaning out, I push back against his face. I want more. I *need* more.

His tongue pushes between my folds while his hands grip my ass cheeks.

Hard moans escape me as my pleasure heightens and it only takes a few more strums of his tongue to unravel me. My hips buck against his face but he holds me in place as he laps up my sweet juices.

Desperate to kiss him, I’m about to turn around but he places a hand on my back. He’s silent but I can feel his command to stay put.

Straightening up, he pushes his chest against my back. His cock presses against the top of my ass, making me lose my mind.

Water continues to pour over us as he grips my hips and impales me with his cock in one satisfying thrust.

“Raiden,” I moan as he stretches me wide and buries deep inside me.

His body pushes me up against the wall, making my nipples press against the cool surface. His mouth descends on my shoulder, kissing and gently biting.

My clit throbs hard as his palm spans the front of my pussy in a possessive grip.

He moves slowly at first, plunging in and out of me in long, smooth strokes.

His slow but powerful thrusts shove me against the shower wall. My thighs tremble and my stomach muscles go taut. His thumb rubs over my nub, drowning me in pleasure.

Groans escape him as his movements turn faster and harder. His hips slap against my tender ass as his hands come up to grasp my breasts.

My climax knots inside me, gathering into a storm that threatens to unravel me. A final press of his thumb against my clit is enough to make me lose all control.

“Raider! Fuck!” I gasp out as my inner muscles pulse and ripple around his cock. Every muscle in my body tightens as waves of pleasure cascade over me.

Raider growls, his lips clamping against a sensitive spot on my neck as he thrusts in deep, the head of his cock swelling and knotting inside me.

My whole body trembles as he shatters inside me, filling me up with jets of his searing cum.

Breathing hard, he shudders against me.

My eyes are closed in pure bliss as he holds me tightly.

“Don’t let go or I’ll slide down to the floor,” I say as he starts to soften inside me.

His body shakes with chuckles. Holding me against him, he drops light, feathery kisses all over my neck and shoulders.

“I think I need to sit down,” I say, feeling my knees tremble. “No, wait! Maybe it’s better if I just lie down.”

Chuckling softly, he gently pulls out of me. His arms wrap around my waist and the back of my knees as he hauls me up.

A contented sigh escapes me as he switches off the water and takes me out of the bathroom. We’re both naked but his body is like a burning furnace, keeping me warm.

He drops me onto the bed before grabbing a towel.

Soon, he wipes me dry and hands me one of his t-shirts.

I watch him like a shameless perv as he starts drying off his body. The urge to lick every inch of his gorgeous body comes rushing back.

“I’m starving,” he says, putting on a shirt. “I hope someone’s started on breakfast or I’m chewing on raw bacon.”

I chuckle and erase the lascivious thoughts from my head. My alpha is hungry and needs to me look after him. The omega in me blossoms, eager to please him.

“I’ll go and check,” I say, jumping off the bed.

He catches my wrist before I can take more than a step. Spinning me back against his chest, he captures my lips in a soft, sweet kiss.

“I love you,” he whispers.

“I love you too.”



The heavenly smell of freshly brewed coffee hits me the moment I step inside the kitchen.

“Where have you been?” a familiar voice asks as I move toward the counter.

“Morning,” I call out cheerfully. “Have you been up for a while?”

“Yep.” Julian’s gaze sweeps over me. “That’s Raiden’s shirt,” he says, coming closer. “Where is he?”

“He’s on his way,” I say, pouring myself a cup of coffee. “We met on the grounds earlier and... got distracted.”

His eyes light up with mischief as he grins. “Distracted, huh?”

My cheeks warm as I stare into his glittering violet eyes.

He smirks. “The others would be so jealous. They’ve got meetings scheduled since nine this morning.”

I glance at the wall-mounted clock behind him. It was already close to eight-thirty AM now.

“Have they left?” I ask despite knowing they’re well on their way to the state military headquarters by now.

“Yep. They made breakfast too.”

“They did?”

“It’s mostly a ton of scrambled eggs but they’re great with some toasted bagels,” says Julian as I hurry toward the table.

My stomach grumbles at the sight of food.

“Hey,” Raiden says as he walks inside the kitchen.  
“Where’s Caleb and Damon?”

“They’ve already left,” Julian repeats. He tips his face up as Raiden leans down to kiss him.

Ignoring my hunger, I watch them. I wish I’d stop doing it but I crave the thrill every time I see them kissing. My pussy flutters as Raiden’s fingers clutch onto Julian’s ash-blond hair as he deepens the kiss.

My breath stutters to a halt as Raiden slowly moves away and looks into Julian’s eyes. As if in synch, they both turn toward me.

My eyes widen as I realize I’ve been caught staring at them *again*.

Loud chuckles escape Julian as he walks up to me and pulls me into a hug.

“You don’t have to look so scandalized, Wildflower,” he says, his body shaking with laughter. “We’re your mates. You don’t have to look away from us.”

Burying my face in his chest, I inhale his delicious vanilla and chocolate fragrance. Utter bliss and comfort course through me, making me hug him tighter.

“I’m starving,” says Raiden. “Come on, Iris. You must be hungry too.”

I am but something else has me worried.

Julian notices immediately. “What’s wrong?”

“I was hoping to have Caleb with me today,” I say in a low, anxious voice.

“Hey, I can take you too,” says Raiden. “Caleb’s not the only one who’s acquainted with the Burtons.”



“What are you guys talking about?” Julian asks, staring between us.

“Iris wants to meet her family,” Raiden explains. “Dad told them about her and they’re just as excited to meet her. They wanted to come and see her but she was in the middle of her heat.”

I nod. “My grandfather’s not well. I don’t feel good about wasting any more time seeing him. That’s why...I want to go see my family today.”

“Did you know they call him Crazy Charlie?” Julian asks with a snigger.

“Julian,” Raiden warns in a grim tone.

Slinging an arm around my shoulder, Julian pulls me against him. “Raiden and I will take you to meet him,” he says in a warm, gentle tone.

“You know my family too?”

“Everyone knows about the Burtons,” he says. “They’ve always been at the forefront, protecting our country. You should be proud to be related to them.”

“Sit down and eat something first,” says Raiden, spooning eggs on a plate. “I’ll call Simon after I’m done with my coffee.”

“Simon? Is he one of my cousins?”

Surprise flickers through my mates’ gazes as they glance at each other.

“You know about him?” Raiden asks.

“Yeah,” I say, lowering my lashes. “I read every online article I could find about my family. I know that Simon has a twin and an older brother.” A dry, sad chuckle escapes me. “I’ve been silently obsessing about them all.”

“Shucks,” says Julian, kissing the top of my head. “Now, I can’t wait to take you to see Crazy Charlie.”

“Jules,” Raiden chides again. “Don’t call him that.”

“Why not?” Julian mumbles. “Everyone calls him that.”

“Here,” says Julian, handing me a spoon. “Start eating. Let me know if you want some ketchup with your eggs.”

“No, thanks,” I say, hiding my dislike for the strange combination.

“We’re leaving the moment you’re done eating,” Julian says, coming to sit on the chair beside mine.

I grin. “Yes!”

Grabbing the spoon, I start shoveling scrambled eggs into my mouth. They’ve gone cold but still, taste good.

“You start eating too,” Julian says, gesturing toward Raiden’s untouched plate. “I’ll call Simon and see if his brothers are home.”

Raiden nods and gets started with his breakfast.

A spark of curiosity flares inside me. How does Julian know my cousins?

Taking his phone, he scrolls along the screen before making a call.

“Hey, assface,” Julian’s loud voice makes me look toward him. “How have you been?”

“Is that him?” I mouth the words.

Julian nods emphatically.

“I’m doing great. Just calling to see how your grandpa’s doing?”

He listens and makes a small humming noise. “Do you think he’ll be well enough to meet Iris? She’s desperate to see him after coming to know about his stroke.”

Something that Simon says makes him smile brightly.

“All right, then! We’ll see you guys in a couple of hours.” He switches off the call and looks at me with a broad grin. “Charlie’s home. In fact, the whole pack’s going to be there today. And, guess what? They’re all excited to meet you.”

A smile blossoms on my lips as warmth floods my chest.

Pushing my chair back, I jump to my feet. “You guys hurry up. I’m going to go upstairs and get dressed.” An excited shriek escapes me as I run toward the door.

“You haven’t even had your coffee yet!” Julian shouts after me.

“I don’t need coffee!” I holler, running out into the hallway.

A rush of excitement propels me up the stairs. My mind is a whirlpool of chaos, nervousness, and happiness. I have so many lovely dresses in my wardrobe but have no idea what would suit today’s occasion.

Entering my room, I head inside the walk-in closet. My hands sift through an array of gorgeous dresses hanging before me but none of them feel like...me.

In the end, I choose to wear one of my favorite jeans and pair it up with a casual shirt and a denim jacket. They look worn compared to the new clothes Julian bought me but I feel most comfortable and genuine in them.

Lies, betrayal, and deception kept me away from my family all these years. They should get to know the real me who survived the tragedy Callahan unleashed on my parents.

A knock sounds at the door. Glancing at my watch, I see that it hasn’t been more than fifteen minutes since I came in here.

Walking across the room, I open the door and find Raiden waiting for me. He’s adorned a jacket over his casual plaid shirt and looks ready to go.

“Where’s Julian?” I ask.

An amused grin comes over his lips. “He’s getting dressed.”

“He was already dressed.”

He shakes his head and grabs my hand. “Let’s wait outside.”

My curiosity comes rushing back as he leads me down to the entrance hall.

“How do you guys know the Burton Pack so well?” I ask.

“Julian and I were in the same military group as Simon and Oliver,” Raiden says. “We went through our training together. That’s how we got close to the twins.” A grin lights up his handsome face. “It’s been a while since I met them.”

“We’ve been more connected than I could’ve ever imagined,” I say.

Raiden nods. “My parents met you as a baby too. Imagine that! They’re angry at themselves for not recognizing you.”

“It’s not their fault,” I say. “My mom died twenty years ago. Their faces must’ve faded from their memories.”

“Yeah,” Raiden says with a dark look in his eyes. “Only someone as madly obsessed as Callahan would remember what a dead woman looked like.”

A breeze plays with the stray strands on my forehead as we walk out into the front lawn. I look up at the clear blue sky, enjoying the mellow warmth of the morning sunshine.

“He’s taking his time, isn’t he?” I say, glancing at my watch.

Raiden chuckles. “I’m glad Damon isn’t around today.”

“Why not?”

“He hates the twins.”

“What? Why?”

He lets out a sigh and looks toward the doorway before glancing my way. “Julian was close to the twins,” he says in a low, grim tone. “He grew up with us but ended up calling them his best friends. It made Caleb crazy with jealousy but he never acted out on it. Damon, on the other hand, ended up punching the twins several times.”

Raiden chuckles at my horrified expression.

“Don’t worry about it,” he says, squeezing my hand. “My brothers calmed their rage after Julian let them claim him as their omega.”

“What about my cousins?” I ask. “Did they want Julian to be their mate?”

“They’re pests but, no. I think they’d prefer a female omega.”

“Were *you* okay with them?”

He nods. “They’ll tease the crap out of you and make you mad, but it’s fun to hang out with them. You just need to get used to them.”

The sound of the front door opening has us both turning around.

Julian walks out, looking breathtakingly beautiful. He’s dressed in a silken navy shirt that’s paired with white trousers and a matching luxurious white coat. A choker, studded with sapphires, adorns his slender neck, attracting the eye immediately.

His ash-blond hair is styled to fall in waves. The thick strands fall into his lavender-hued eyes and perfectly frame his handsome face. As he draws in closer, my gaze zeroes in on his glossy pink lips.

“Close those lips, darling,” he murmurs, gently touching my chin. “You make me want to put something long, thick, and hard through them. Those Burton boys might be your cousins but I’d still kick their asses if they look at you the wrong way.”

I blink, staring up at my mate. “You’re so beautiful, Julian,” I murmur in a daze.

Raiden chuckles and moves forward to grab Julian.

My heart flutters as I stare at them. I’m supposed to be meeting my family for the first time today and they’re both making me hot and bothered.

I clear my throat loudly.

Breaking away, they both stare at me.

“We’re going to meet my family,” I say in a serious tone. “Would you guys *behave*?”

Julian saunters toward me and leans in until his eyes are at the same level as mine. “Are you going to punish us for being naughty?” he asks, wagging his perfect eyebrows.

His soft, husky voice feathers over my skin, sending a thrill of excitement through me.

“Would you stop?!” I say, pushing at his chest and flushing hotly. “You can’t keep distracting me like this. I’ll make a fool of myself on the very first meeting with my family. I want them to like me.”

“Don’t stress over it,” Raiden says as he takes my hand in his and leads me toward the car. “The very fact that you’re alive is enough to make them thank the goddesses. Trust me, darling. They already love you very much.”

Julian opens the back passenger door and I slide in. He comes to sit beside me and wraps his arm around my shoulders. His warm presence instantly relaxes me.

I lean against him as Raiden takes the wheels.

It’s a quiet ride as we drive toward Jersey City. Julian holds me in his arms but I keep turning around to look at the fleet of cars following us.

As usual, we’re being tailed by our security team. Julian looks completely unbothered but I still have a long way to go before I can get used to being followed by them.

“Have you ever been to Jersey before?” Raiden asks from the front seat.

“Nope. I never got a chance.”

“Remind me to take you to Papa Lopez’s,” says Raiden. “They serve the best barbecue in town.”

“I almost forgot about that joint,” Julian says, his lips curving into a grin. “Let’s get Simon and Oliver to join us.”

I listen to their banter attentively, trying to catch snippets about my cousins.

“We’re almost there,” Julian says, staring straight ahead. “That’s their mansion in the distance.”

I look in the same direction he’s gazing at.

A Victorian-style manor built from yellow stones stands on top of a low hill. I sway as the car climbs up a winding path. Security guards in maroon uniforms watch our progress as we get closer to the tall, gilded gates that fence the wide, lush surroundings of Burton estate.

Guards surround our car as well as the ones behind us.

“Relax,” Julian mutters as Raiden lowers his window and flashes his ID card at the guards.

The men take a quick look and stand back, saluting him.

My pent-up breath leaves out in a rush as the tall gates open before us and allow us to drive through them. I tap my feet uncontrollably as nervousness and excitement collide inside me.

Julian moves away from me and lowers the window on his side. “Si! Oli!” he shouts, hanging his head out and waving at someone.

Looking ahead, I see two tall figures waving back at Julian.

As the car draws nearer, I stare at the two tall men who look *exactly* the same. Even their clothes match!

“Your cousins are jerks,” Julian mutters as the car comes to a stop. “They’ve decided to confuse you from the moment you meet them.”

One of my cousins comes forward and opens the door at my side. I recognize him from all the photographs in the news articles I’d come across in search of my family.

I stare up at him speechlessly as he grins broadly at me. Strands of dark hair fall into his blue eyes, giving him a classic

bad-boy look. The buttons of his casual white shirt are open, giving me a generous glimpse at his impressive chest muscles.

“Hi,” he says, offering me a hand.

I take it and allow him to help me out.

“Hello,” I squeak. “I’m Iris.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Simon.”

“No, he’s not,” says Raiden, coming to stand at my side.

“You’re mistaken,” my cousin replies. “Has it been that long that you can’t even recognize me?”

“This is Oliver, the younger twin,” says Raiden, chuckling.

The young man beams at me, not looking the least bit ashamed at being caught out in a lie.

“So, you must be Simon,” I say, turning to look at the identical young man who’s standing with Julian.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“She looks exactly like our aunt, doesn’t she?” says Oliver.

“Yeah. Almost a doppelganger,” says Simon.

“Or a twin.”

My head moves to and fro as I glance at them. They look so strikingly identical that I’m having trouble remembering who’s who. Their matching clothes are also not helping.

“You guys need to tone down your bullshit,” Julian mutters, glaring at my cousins. “Can’t you see how nervous she is?”

My cousin leans forward, bringing his face directly before mine. “Are we scaring you, little omega?”

I shake my head.

He grins. “Good.” He pushes Julian out of the way and comes to stand beside me. His twin takes up my other side. “Let’s go inside. Everyone’s been waiting to see you.”



His twin glances at Julian and smirks. “She’s ours for the day, loser.”

Julian’s eyes flash with anger at once. A low growl rips out of Raiden’s throat.

My cousins laugh easily, not at all phased by my annoyed mates, and drag me inside through the tall front doors.

“You let us know if those two ever give you any trouble,” my cousin on my left side whispers in my ear.

“You’re family,” my other cousin whispers. “We’ll never let anyone bully a Burton.”

“Julian and Raiden are wonderful,” I say quickly, hoping they don’t misunderstand my mates. “Caleb and Damon are wonderful too. They’re the most amazing people I’ve ever met.”

My cousins start laughing loudly.

“Poor child! She’s completely smitten by them,” says the guy on my left.

“Are you sure about them, kid? Doesn’t Julian give you any grief?” my cousin on my right whispers. “I know omegas can’t stand anyone laying a claim over their alphas.”

I smile and shake my head. Rising on my toes, I lean into his ear. “Julian’s my favorite.”

My cousins’ eyes widen.

Chuckling at their surprised faces, I step back and capture Julian and Raiden’s hands.

“Are you okay?” Raiden asks, looking worried.

I smile at him. “Yep.”

We’re led into a vast, luxurious hall that’s filled with chic, crimson-colored furniture that is in direct contrast to the cream walls and curtains. Polished black tiles gleam beneath our feet. Vividly-colored and oddly-shaped vases dot every corner. I’m surprised by the influence of modern art on both the furniture and the décor.

My gaze falls on a gorgeous woman with long, golden curls. Four tall, elderly men stand behind her, watching me intently.

“Doesn’t she look exactly like our aunt?” one of my cousins asks as he sinks into a couch.

“Quiet, Oliver,” one of the men commands in a grim tone. “You’re making the child nervous.”

I recognize the speaker as one of my uncles. He’s Aldrich Burton, the eldest among his four brothers.

The beautiful woman steps forward and smiles warmly at us. I immediately recognize her as the Burton Pack’s matriarch.

“Hello,” she says, extending her hand toward me. “I’m Valerie, your aunt.”

“Hi. I’m Iris.”

“Welcome home, Iris,” she says. Moving forward, she folds her arms around me and pulls me into a hug.

The scent of ripe peaches wafts into my nostrils.

Stepping away, she takes my hand and leads me to her four alphas. “Iris, meet your uncles,” she says, gesturing at the men. “This is Aldrich, your eldest uncle.”

“Hi,” I say with a polite nod.

He extends a hand toward me.

Staring into his emerald-green eyes, which are similar to mine, I take his hand.

Aldrich’s hold is gentle as he shakes my hand.

“Meet your other uncles,” he says. Gesturing at his brothers, he mentions them by name. “This is Benjamin, Henry, and Daniel.”

They all come forward and shake my hand.

“This is so boring!” One of the twins shouts. “She’s family. Do we have to act so formally around her?”

“You should give her the time to get to know us by name, at least,” says a newcomer.

A tall, handsome man in a maroon uniform strides inside the room. As he draws nearer, I see that he’s closer to the twins’ age. It’s a moment before I recognize him as my eldest cousin.

“Hi, I’m Seth,” he says, introducing himself. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Iris. Also, I’m sorry about my brothers. As you can see, they’re a pair of assholes with zero brains.”

“Hey!” the twins protest at once.

“You call yourselves her family but you don’t even want her to recognize you properly!” Seth barks at them. When he turns to face me again, he has a warm smile on his handsome face. “It must be overwhelming to meet all of us at once.”

“Yeah, a little bit,” I confide with a nervous grin.

“Come on, everyone,” says Valerie. “Let’s settle down and have some coffee and cake. We have a lot to catch up on but first, we should get your grandpa in here.”

“We’ll go!” the twins announce at once.

“Have a seat,” says Seth and leads me to one of the couches.

Seth is built like a powerful alpha. He’s almost as big as Raiden and has the same kindness and warmth in his chestnut-brown eyes as him. I’ve barely known him for two seconds but I’m already growing to like him.

He sits next to me while Julian and Raiden join the others. Soon, I’m sitting with a cup of coffee in my hand while struggling not to look directly at everyone around me.

“That’s her, isn’t she?” A rough male voice makes me look up.

Charlie Burton, my grandfather, is standing before me. His face is heavily wrinkled. Wisps of thin, white hair cover his head. I’d call him a frail old man but the sharp intensity in his green eyes tells me he’s still a very fierce alpha.

I jump to my feet at once.

He moves closer, hooks a finger under my chin, and gently lifts my face. “You look so much like Rosamond but I can see Hale in you as well.”

“Grandpa,” I breathe as a powerful emotion slams me in the chest. Something primal in me can sense the deep-rooted connection I have with this man.

Tears gather in his eyes as he nods. “Yes, child. I’m your grandfather.”

A sob erupts from my lips. Before I know it, I’m hugging the frail man and bawling my eyes out.

“It’s okay,” he says, patting my back. “You’re home now. You’re with your family. This pack won’t let you down, child. We’ll never abandon you again.”

No one interferes as I cry and hug my grandfather. He smells like cloves and the warm scent helps to relax me.

It’s a while before I become aware of my surroundings. Everyone, including Raiden and Julian, is watching me nervously.

“I’m okay,” I say in a cracked voice. Brushing my tears away, I try to smile but the wound in my heart refuses to stop throbbing. It’s hard to believe a pack as big as this was waiting for me to find my way home.

“Sit down, dear,” says Charlie and helps me onto the couch beside Seth. “Tell us everything about you. We’ve tried to learn as much as we could about you from Gerald but we still have no idea how you ended up with the Collins.”

“I don’t know that either,” I say. “They’ve been the only family I’ve ever known.”

“We’ve been trying to find a connection through our brother,” says Aldrich. “But, so far, we have nothing.”

“What about my mom’s family?” I ask. “Do they know anything?”

Aldrich glances at his father before looking back at me. “I’m sorry, Iris. There’s no one left on your mother’s side. I’m ashamed to say this but everything she owned was lost in the attack that took your parents’ lives.”

“What do you mean by that?” Raiden asks in a grim tone.

“Hale and Rosamond shifted to a new house after their marriage,” Aldrich explains. “The bastards who attacked them robbed everything she had. Her clothes, her jewelry...even her bed and closet were stolen away. Their estate wasn’t heavily guarded which allowed them to carry everything away before help could arrive.”

I glance toward Raiden and know exactly what he’s thinking.

We both knew Callahan stole my mother’s things and set up a shrine for her in his own manor. He’s the twisted asshole who left none of her possessions behind.

“Her things are stored away in Callahan’s manor,” I say in a cold, grim voice.

“So, it’s true?” Charlie suddenly shouts. “He’s the one who murdered my son and his wife?” He’s on his feet and shaking his fist while his entire body trembles from the force of his rage.

“Dad, calm down.” Aldrich and his brothers are on their feet at once. “The doctors have asked you not to lose your temper or it’ll lead to another attack. Come on, sit down.”

My uncles help him down on the couch while he’s still angrily cursing. “But that murderer—”

“You’re scaring Iris,” Aldrich reminds him in a stern voice.

My grandfather glances at me. The rage in his eyes slowly dims. “I’m sorry, child,” he says in a remorseful tone. “I didn’t mean to upset you.”

I shake my head. “It’s okay,” I say. “I’m alright.” My gaze falls on my uncles as well as my cousins. They’re all

struggling to stay in control of their emotions despite the rage blazing in their eyes.

I finally understand what it means to be part of a pack. Even if you're dead, no one forgets you. They keep their fallen members alive in their hearts and feel the grief of loss no matter how much time has passed.

Tears trickle down my cheeks as I stare at everyone around me.

They're sharing my grief.

My loss is theirs too.

It hasn't even been an hour but I already feel a growing connection with them. They all want to avenge my father as much as me.

I take a deep breath before speaking again. "Raider said Callahan has gone missing."

"We'll go down to the depths of hell if we have to," says Seth in a low, deep voice. "He can't hide from us forever. We'll capture him and punish him for every sin that he's committed."

"I'll help you," I vow.

Surprise flickers in his eyes.

"I'm tough," I say with a grin. "I've already kicked his ass once. I'm willing to do it again."

"Yeah, we saw the clips that our dads showed us," says one of the twins. "You're one bad-ass omega."

A smile comes onto my lips at his praise. They're not too bad, after all.

"It's going to get very dangerous," Henry says in a low, warning tone. "Callahan's had years to prepare himself for the day he's caught out. He won't run without putting up a fight."

"We're ready to face him," says Raider. "And with your support, we're confident to win against him and the Black Widow."

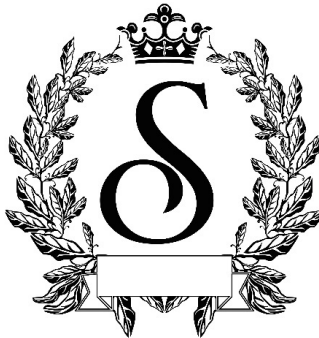
Charlie's back on his feet again. "I want that murderer's head on a spike!" he bellows, shaking like a leaf in a storm.

"Death would be an easy escape for him," I say, meeting his enraged eyes.

He breathes hard while his sons try to force him back on the couch.

"I like you, child," he says after he's calmed down. "You have the right idea about punishing a monster like him. Let's make sure he suffers for the rest of his life. Every breath he takes must be a curse to him. He should beg for his death."

I nod, understanding him perfectly. Rage and determination crash inside me, coursing through me like hot lava. Suddenly, I can't wait to go back home and start preparing for the battle to come.



“Enough talk about revenge and killing,” Valerie says, drawing my attention to her. “Iris, you must stay for dinner.”

It’s still early afternoon, so staying over for dinner would mean staying at their home for a couple more hours. I glance toward Julian and Raiden. They both look relaxed, as if it’s not the first time they’ve been invited to a meal by her.

“Did you think we’d let you leave?” One of the twins says with an evil grin. “You’re going to be living with us from now on.”

“Hold on!” Julian reacts at once. “Who said anything about letting her stay here?”

I’m sure my cousin is joking because I caught him whispering with his twin earlier.

“Iris, let’s go home now,” Julian mutters.

“Calm down,” says Raiden. “Oliver is pulling your leg and you’re letting him.”

It’s amazing how Raiden can tell my cousins apart. I can’t help but feel a twinge of regret. There’s so much I have to catch up on. It’d take me a whole lifetime to get to know each of my uncles, my cousins, my grandfather, and my aunt.

“Ignore my brothers,” Seth says in a low, gentle voice. “No one’s going to keep you a prisoner here.”

A chuckle escapes me while Julian continues to fume.



“How about I show you around?” Seth offers.

“That’s a wonderful idea,” Valerie says, smiling. “It’s a big house, so you’ll have plenty to see. This way you won’t get bored while I get dinner ready.” A worried look comes over her. “If I knew you were coming today, I’d have arranged for something nicer.”

“Don’t worry about that,” I say. “Being welcomed here by you and everyone else is awesome enough for me.”

“Let me take you to the room where your portrait still hangs,” says Charlie. “It’s one of the few things we salvaged from the ruins of your parent’s house.”

Surprise flickers through me. “There’s a portrait of me? I was just a baby back then.”

Charlie sniggers. “Your mother was fascinated by the amounts of portraits we had here. She adored them more than photographs. Hale indulged her fascination and they got quite a number of them done after they got married.”

A sense of realization dawns on me. This explains the two portraits of my mother that I saw in Callahan’s manor. She must’ve gotten more done during the days she was alive.

Seth helps Charlie up and gestures for me to follow them.

“Will you guys wait here for me?” I ask, glancing at Julian and Raiden.

Raiden nods. “Go ahead and don’t worry about us.”

“Maybe one of us should go with her,” says Julian, starting to get up.

Raiden grabs his wrist and pulls him down by his side. “Give her some space, Jules.”

“But—”

“She’s not going to get lost,” Raiden says with a light chuckle. “Besides, Seth’s going with her. She’s going to be fine.”

Julian’s discomfort reminds me of the time we went to Ethan’s restaurant. Simon and Oliver are his friends but he’s

still worried I'd choose to stay here with them.

He's being possessive but I secretly love it.

"I have my phone with me," I say, smiling at him. "Plus, this too." Holding my right wrist, I flash the gold bracelet Caleb gave me. The tracking chip inside it is our special secret. "There's no way I'll get lost and even if I do, you'll still know where to find me."

Relief floods his handsome face. "All right, then. I guess I'll see you soon."

I nod. "See you."

Seth holds Charlie's frail arm securely as he leads the way out of the living room area. Seeing him taking care of our old grandfather sends a rush of warmth through me.

I haven't been here long, but I can easily tell the Burtons are a tightly-knit pack. They're like the old-world packs we all fantasize about. Every member is taken care of and no one gets left behind.

My gaze roves over the innumerable family portraits that line the wall set against a grand staircase. They're all exquisite pieces, showcasing both the artist's talent as well as the Burtons' wealth.

I'm led through the second-floor corridor until we stop before a closed door.

"This used to be Uncle Hale's room when he lived here," Seth says as he moves forward to open the door. "Grandpa wouldn't let us change anything in there."

"And, wasn't that a good thing?" Charlie asks, glancing up at his grandson. "His daughter has finally come home. She gets to see the life he led before he was so cruelly taken away from us."

Walking through the door, I'm immediately surrounded by the scent of woody herbs.

"Did my dad smell like rosemary?" I say, sniffing the air.

Charlie's green eyes, so similar to mine, widen. "How could you guess that?"

"I can smell it," I say, walking further inside the vast room. "It's rosemary and maybe a hint of sage? The scent reminds me of the herbs my parents used to cook during Thanksgiving dinners."

"Do you mean your adoptive parents?" Seth asks.

"Yeah, sorry," I say. "I've lived with them my whole life, so it's hard to stop calling them my mom and dad."

"Gerald said they didn't treat you well." Charlie takes my hand and squeezes it. "I'm so sorry we lost you when you were a baby. It was our fault. All our fault."

"It's okay," I say. "They treated me fine. I never went hungry or cold. They took care of me when I got sick and kept me safe. Of course, they couldn't treat me as grandly as their own daughter, but they weren't cruel to me."

"You don't hate them?"

"I'm still mad about being abandoned by them," I say honestly. "But, really. I don't want you to imagine me being treated horribly by some strangers. Yes, life was tough. I had to work hard to get most things in life but it was okay. If Callahan found me instead of them, I'd be wishing for death."

A gentle smile comes onto Seth's lips. "You've grown up to be an amazing person," he says. "You're younger than my brothers but you're far more mature than them."

"She's adorable too," says Charlie. "Just like her mother." Taking my hand in his, he leads me toward a corner. "Look over there," he says, gesturing ahead. "That's you with your parents."

I glance toward the wall before me and stare at the grand portrait hanging there.

My mother stares down at me with a gentle smile while she holds a sleeping baby in her arms. Dad stands beside her and has his arm wrapped around her shoulders. His gaze is soft and kind too.

Tears prick my eyes as I stare at them.

I can only imagine the life I'd have with them if Callahan didn't snatch them away from me. His sick obsession with my mother broke so many hearts in this family.

Charlie's eyes are also filled with tears as he looks up at his son. A somber expression has settled on Seth's face as he stands quietly beside us.

I'm hit with another powerful emotion. It's not sadness or loneliness. A hint of sweetness pervades my sorrow. I no longer feel alone in my grief and misery. There are others who acutely feel my loss.

Miraculously, it feels like someone's spreading balm over my wounded heart.

A sudden buzzing in my pants alerts me to my ringing phone. Taking it out, I see that Julian is calling.

"Hey, what's up?" I ask.

"Raider and I are going out with Simon and Oliver," he says. "It's been a while since we visited the town, so we're planning to go hang out at some of our favorite spots."

Amusement washes over me. "You don't mind leaving me behind?"

"Seth's boring as hell," he says with a snigger. "I'm sure you're already wanting to go home right now."

I hear Simon and Oliver's chuckles in the background. They've taken my mates and established a boys' club. Maybe I should be the one to worry about my mates being snatched away from me.

"Fine," I say. "Just stay out of trouble and come back by dinnertime. Valerie invited us and we shouldn't be rude by turning up late."

"Okies! See ya, Wildflower!" The call switches off.

"They're not coming back for dinner," Seth says with a sigh.

"What are you talking about?"

“I’ll be surprised if they get home before midnight.”

Charlie chuckles. “Ehh, let the boys be boys.”

“Raider’s too responsible to do that,” I say. “I’m sure he’ll come back in time for dinner and bring the others with him.”

“We’ll see,” says Seth with a gentle, knowing grin.

“Let’s go take a walk outside,” says Charlie. “Let those kids have their fun. In the meantime, we’ll get to know our Iris.”

“You should be in bed, Grandpa,” says Seth. “The doctors said you should be on bed rest. You’ve already walked enough for the day.”

“What do the doctors know?” Charlie grumbles under his breath but still allows Seth to take him out of the room. “Back in my day, we’d get shot, get patched up, and then, go back to the battlefield the next day.”

“Well, you’re no longer twenty,” Seth reminds him.

I walk behind them, listening to their banter. Miraculously, it’s not at all awkward to be with them.

A nurse takes over for Seth when we reach Charlie’s room. I get a glimpse of the various medical devices that are stationed around his bed.

Despite his vivacity, my grandfather must be in terrible health. Why else would he need a nurse and all those monitoring devices in his room?

A sudden fear seizes my heart. Was I going to lose him just as I was starting to get to know him?

I wait until Charlie has been put to bed and Seth walks me down the staircase that we used earlier.

“Will Charlie get better?” I ask in an anxious tone.

“He’s close to hitting ninety,” Seth says. “He’s been great for his age but the news of Uncle Hale’s death left him in shock and disbelief. All these years, we thought he’d been killed by strangers and insurgents. It’s only now that we’re learning the truth behind his death.”

Anger darkens his handsome face. “Callahan was Uncle Hale’s best friend. Did you know that?”

I nod grimly.

“We’ve had that man in our home on various occasions. We were unaware of the truth and his diabolic character. The guilt, shame, disgust, and hatred we’ve felt are beyond words. It’s been even worse to know that you’ve been alive all these years and none of us had any idea.”

Seth walks along a corridor and leads me through an open doorway into the grounds behind the mansion. The afternoon sun shines on his dark chestnut hair as he turns to face me.

“Grandpa wasn’t able to handle the shock of it all,” he says in a gentler tone. “But don’t worry. We believe he’s going to get better soon.” A smile plays on his lips. “You said the very thing to stop him being anxious about you.”

“What did I say?” I ask curiously.

“You told him about the life you’ve lived,” he says, gently caressing my head. “It wasn’t glamorous but you grew up well. That’s what we’ve all been desperately hoping for. You’ve even found yourself an amazing pack to protect you. The Solveigs are among the most honorable military packs. You’ve truly taken away all of his worries.”

I can’t help but smile at him. It’s barely been a couple of hours since I met him but I already feel a growing connection with him.

“How about I give you a tour of our base?”

I nod. “Sure.”

He gestures at me to follow him until we come across a parked jeep.

I climb into the passenger seat while he hops into the driver seat without bothering to open the door. The whole vehicle vibrates as he turns on the ignition and drives forward.

“We have fully-trained soldiers on our base here,” Seth tells me as he drives through the vast grounds. “That’s why you’ll see more admin buildings than trainee dorms here.”

I enjoy the cool breeze blowing past me as I take in the red-brick buildings that dot the area. Young soldiers in maroon uniforms walk along the path we're driving through. They all turn to salute him as our vehicle passes by them.

After a while, I notice Seth driving through the front gates of the estate.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

"I thought you'd like a tour of the town too."

A smile blossoms on my lips instantaneously. "Seriously? I'd love that!"

Happiness and excitement bubble inside me as I look forward to seeing the town where my parents grew up.



It's close to seven P.M. by the time we arrive back at Burton estate. My belly is already full from the corndogs and ice cream Seth bought me while we were strolling in a park that late afternoon.

"I hope they've come back by now," I say as we enter the house.

"Hold on," Seth mutters, reaching inside his jacket and pulling out his phone. Scrolling across the screen, he taps it several times.

At once, sounds of loud hip-hop music and people screaming and cheering blare out of his phone. His thick eyebrows knit together as a frown forms on his lips.

"Is everything okay?" I ask.

"Look at this," he says, handing me his phone.

A video is playing on the screen. I take a closer look, recognizing Julian at once. He's sitting at a table with over a dozen empty shot glasses. His cheeks are a bright red and he's leaning against the couch with his head lolling backward.

Blinding streaks of green and purple dance over him in the otherwise darkened room. I catch sight of Raiden and the twins in the background, dancing in a crowd of young men and women.

“Oh my god!” I gasp.

Seth chuckles. “I told you they won’t be home for dinner tonight.”

“I can’t believe Raiden’s dancing like that,” I say, staring at the screen as he sways and bounces to the upbeat music. “And Julian looks like he’s ready to pass out.”

Seth takes his phone and pockets it. “Come on. Mom must be waiting for us.” Wrapping his arm around my shoulders, he ushers me inside the house.

We’re greeted by my Uncle Henry the moment we step inside the entrance hall.

“There you are, Iris,” he says, walking toward me.

I smile despite feeling worried about Julian and Raiden.

“We’ve been waiting for you,” Uncle Henry says, gesturing for me to follow him. “We were afraid you wouldn’t be coming back in time for dinner.”

“No way! I wouldn’t miss having dinner with you and everyone else. Thanks so much for inviting me.”

Uncle Henry effortlessly sweeps me away from Seth’s arms.

“You don’t have to thank us for anything,” says Uncle Henry. “We’re your family. You should be demanding everything from us.”

“Yeah, we’re lucky to have a sister among us,” says Seth as he follows us into the dining hall. “Mom’s always complaining about being the only lady in the pack.”

“I hope she likes me.”

Uncle Henry glances down at me. “It’s impossible not to like you, kid. You’ve made us so proud. We couldn’t do a



thing to help you while you were growing up, and yet, you've grown up to be such an incredible young woman."

Warmth washes over me at his praise. A smile comes onto my lips as we enter the dining room.

My eyes widen slightly as I take in the magnitude of the room we've stepped into. The family dining space in the Burton Mansion is huge and lavishly decorated with vases of flowers. More portraits adorn the walls, adding to the magnificence of the hall.

My aunt and my uncles are dressed in formal attire. They all stand up as I move closer.

"Come have a seat here, sweetheart," Valerie says, ushering me over to her. "I didn't know what you like to eat, so I had to call Caroline. She told me not to worry and to concentrate on dessert."

My cheeks warm immediately. "You didn't have to go through so much trouble. I can eat whatever you give me."

An amused expression comes over Valerie. "I'm told you're an excellent cook. Of course, you've got to have preferences."

"It's nothing like that," I say, feeling shy under everyone's gaze.

"Oh, what a bother!" Charlie shouts. "Let the girl sit down before you fawn over her."

I'm soon seated at the well-laid table and plied with helpings of everything. The food is delicious and the warm atmosphere further relaxes me.

Seth sits next to me while my aunt and uncles make sure I take second helpings of everything. The delicious food and my bulging tummy make me regret the junk food I ate at the park earlier.

I'm well on my way to enjoying my caramel brownie pudding and realize that no one's asked me anything about Julian and Raiden. No one even looks bothered as they eat their dinner.

“How about we watch a movie in the den?” Seth offers when we’re done with dinner.

“Do you think they’ll be out that late?”

He nods. “We might as well get comfortable.”

Guiding me to a new corner of the mansion, he leads me into a media room.

“What kind of movies do you enjoy?” he asks, switching on Netflix.

I get a glimpse of the action and anime movies that fill the screen of the TV.

“I don’t want to watch anything new and then get interrupted,” I say, giving it considerable thought. “How about we watch a Ghibli movie?”

“Sure. How about Howl’s Castle?”

“I love that movie!”

Seth grins, searches the movie, and lets it play on the screen before us. Handing me a cushion, he settles down next to me.

It doesn’t take long for us to get engrossed in the artistry and storytelling of the charming, old-world animated movie. I forget about the passing time until we’re close to the end.

Seth gets a call that makes him pause the movie.

He mutters a curse and switches off the call.

“They’re back,” he says in a grim tone. “Simon says both Raiden and Julian are almost passed out. They’re making the guards put them into your car right now.”

“Oh no,” I moan.

Seth chuckles. “It’s all right. I’m sure they’ll be fine in the morning.”

“What will your parents think,” I groan, hiding my face behind my hands.

He laughs. “My brothers are the masterminds behind this whole thing. Charlie knows it. My parents know it too. Simon

and Oliver used to be very close to your mates. They'd go out clubbing and hang out during their breaks."

His smile dims. "After Damon got captured by the Black Widow, the Solveig brothers stopped having fun completely," he says in a somber tone. "This is the first time they've visited us on a non-official matter in the past three years. It's all right for them to enjoy a little after the shit they've all been through."

The warm, fuzzy feelings I enjoyed the whole day disappear as I get reminded of the cruel torture Damon went through at the Black Widow's hands. "I want to *kill* Callahan for what he's done to Damon."

Seth nods. "I know how you feel," he says. "I want to make that man regret everything he's put our family through. The Burtons never forget and they never forgive."

I stare into his eyes. The fire raging in them mirrors my own hatred.

"I'm with you," I say, meaning every word.

"Come on, let's get you home now." Standing up, he stretches his long arms over his head.

"Can you tell me something before I go?" I whisper.

His eyebrow quirks but he nods. "Sure. What would you like to know?"

"How do you tell your brothers apart?"

A chuckle escapes him. "Well, that's a family secret. And since you're family, I'm going to tell you." Drawing closer, he dramatically leans next to my ear. "There's a tiny birthmark under Simon's left earlobe. Look for it and you'll know."

He winks at me before moving away.

Scrambling to my feet, I follow him out of the room. We walk across the empty entrance hall and proceed toward the lawn.

Our car is parked right outside the house. One of our guards nods at me before sliding into the front driver's seat.

Simon and Oliver lean onto each other and grin jubilantly at me.

I look for the birthmark on both of them, finally glimpsing it on my cousin on the right.

“You’re coming with us next time,” says Oliver. “We’ll take you to the best parties in town.”

“Sure, Oliver. I’d like that.”

Surprise flickers in both my cousins’ eyes.

“She knows?” Simon whispers, glancing at his twin.

Oliver stares at me. “Do you, Iris?”

“Of course, I know,” I say, smiling sweetly and hopping toward the car at the front. Opening the door, I glance over my shoulder and add, “I’m family, after all!”

“Shit! You told her, Seth?” Oliver shouts.

I snigger as my drunk cousins throw themselves at Seth. Sliding inside the backseat of the car, I stare at my mates who’re slumped against each other and heavily snoring.

The car pulls forward as I lean against the window and watch the grounds passing by. A feeling of utter peace steals through me.

Spending the day with my family seems to have healed a wound in my heart. The realization that I’m not alone and forgotten sinks deep into my bones, bringing me a comfort I never knew I needed.



I squeeze my eyes shut against the bright sunshine streaming through the gaps in the curtains. Sleep clings to my lashes, making it an effort to wake up.

“Ugh!” I mutter as my bladder forces me to sit up and climb out of bed.

It takes me an annoyingly long time to locate my slippers. Putting them on, I make my way into the bathroom.

“Shit!” I curse as the overhead lights switch on the moment I cross the threshold.

My head pounds mercilessly because of the stark brightness. It’s taking sheer patience to simply do my business without shouting curses at my old friends.

Simon and Oliver plied me with shots after shots of bourbon last night. Taking me and Raiden out for drinks had just been an excuse to make us talk more about Iris. A part of me already knew what they were up to but I still gave in.

I’d completely forgotten about the evil hangovers I suffered when I went out with those devilish Burton twins. They’re fun to hang out with but you were always left with the consequences.

Finishing up my business, I move toward the sink to wash my hands.

My pale face is reflected in the mirror before me. Red veins cover the whites of my eye and my lips are dry and cracked. I look as shitty as I feel.

Going back into the room, I look toward the snoozing pile of blankets on the bed. Iris is buried deep under the quilt but her rose and summer berry fragrance still lingers in the air.

Moving closer, I lean down and carefully remove the sheet away. The innocence on her pretty face makes me want to kiss her but I quench the urge.

She came home late last night because of me and Raiden. While we were asleep in our room, she stayed up to explain everything to Caleb and Damon.

Making sure she's tucked in, I head out of the room and make my way downstairs.

Familiar voices reach me as I get closer to the open doorway of the kitchen. Caleb, Damon, and Raiden are gathered around the table and talking between themselves.

Pure jealousy burns through me as I gaze at Raiden.

He's freshly shaven, showered, and dressed in neat clothes, looking like he went to bed early last night like a good boy. I, on the other hand, look like a hobo in purple PJs. He never suffers a hangover no matter how much he drinks.

"Hey, babe," says Caleb, coming over to me.

He leans in for a kiss but I turn my face away with a groan.

"What's wrong?"

A moan escapes me as a massive headache throbs through me. "I'm dying."

He chuckles and leads me toward the table.

"Aww, Jules," says Damon, pushing a chair toward me. "You look terrible."

"But, look at him," I say, pointing at Raiden and glaring. "He's just fine."

Raiden chuckles and grins. “I’m not the one who forced you to drink all those shots, so you can’t be mad at me.”

“You should’ve stopped me.”

“I did!” he says, grinning. “You’re the one who told me to chill and handed me a beer.”

Memories of our time at the pub come rushing back to me. The music and dark ambiance coaxed me into putting my guard down. Simon and Oliver kept ordering drinks and soon, I was floating in a drunken haze.

“Is there any coffee?” I ask, looking around the table.

“I’ll get you some,” says Caleb.

Coming back to the table, he presents me with a mug of black coffee. I stare at it with distaste, knowing he hasn’t even bothered adding any sugar to it.

*Still, it’s coffee,* I tell myself and take a sip of the bitter beverage.

The cooled, unsweetened coffee makes me feel worse.

“What are you all eating?” I ask, glancing at their nearly empty plates.

“We ate cereal and boiled eggs,” says Damon. “Do you want us to fix some for you?”

“Nah, I’m fine,” I say. “It’s better I don’t eat anything right now.”

“Is Iris still asleep?” asks Raiden.

“Yeah.”

“Good. Let her rest,” says Damon, looking worried. “She must’ve been exhausted after hauling both your drunk asses home last night.”

“I know.”

“You’re not eighteen anymore, Jules,” Caleb chides. “You can’t let Simon and Oliver push you into doing stupid shit anymore.”

I want to reply with a sarcastic retort but my pounding head stops me. He's always been jealous of the twins despite knowing we're simply friends who have fun together.

Lowering my head, I pretend to drink the abysmal coffee he's brought me.

Caleb and Damon get on with cleaning the table and putting the plates into the dishwasher. Raiden scoots closer to me and squeezes my hand.

His ice-blue eyes are filled with concern. "Are you sure you're going to be okay?"

"Yeah," I say in a deflated tone. "This isn't the first time I'm hungover after a night out with Simon and Oliver. I just wish I could see their sorry faces too."

"I'm glad Iris is related to a family who's close to us. Callahan is our common enemy and together, we're stronger than him. This time, we won't miss our chance."

"Yeah. We're not fighting aimlessly in the dark anymore. We know who's behind the Black Widow now."

"We'll be meeting Aldrich and the others later in the week," says Damon. "I'm hoping we can discuss tactics to flush Callahan out in the open. I can't wait to catch the bastard and pay him back for what he's done to us."

Caleb comes over to me and hugs me. Laying a kiss on my cheek, he whispers, "Rest up. We'll catch up this evening."

Surprise flickers through me. "You guys will come home early tonight?"

"We still don't have any leads that can point us to Callahan's hideout," he explains. "That's why we'll finish with our usual duties and come back home to you and Iris."

"Let's make it a movie night," says Damon as he elbows Caleb out of the way. Leaning down, he captures my lips. His sweet, smoky fragrance envelops me, bringing me a hint of warmth and comfort.

"Sounds great," I say, hoping I'd feel better by the time they get back home.



One by one, my alphas kiss me and leave the kitchen.

A heavy sigh escapes me as I take another sip of the cooled coffee. While it's nice to enjoy this quiet, peaceful moment, I know it's the calm before a storm.

"Hey, are you feeling okay?" a sweet, familiar voice asks from the doorway.

Looking up, I see Iris coming toward me. She's dressed in one of my old sweatshirts. Strands of her golden hair fall into her eyes as she yawns widely. It looks like she's just woken up and come downstairs to find me.

A flicker of warmth surges through me. Despite feeling ill, I immediately feel happy to see her.

"My head aches," I moan.

"Have you been awake for a long time?"

"Nah. It's barely been half an hour."

"Aww, you do look awful," she says, her gaze roving all over my face. "Are you still hungover from last night?"

"Probably."

"What about the others?" she asks, looking around.

"Raiden's fine," I mutter, trying not to sound annoyed. "No matter how much he drinks, he's always fine in the morning. He already left with Caleb and Damon. I would've stayed in bed but I had to get up to pee. I hate my life."

Moving closer, she caresses my head.

Her touch is soft and affectionate. I lean into her and close my eyes. Her rosy scent envelops me, calming me instantly.

"My head hurts," I moan. "Coffee's not helping either."

"Did you eat anything?"

"No. I feel pukish."

She rubs soothing circles on my back as I lean against her.

"I hate seeing you like this," she murmurs. "You should always be smiling and planning your next mischief. I'm not

letting you drink next time.”

A chuckle escapes. Iris is so damn sweet to me. Just being near her is enough to make me feel better.

“Let me make you a hangover sandwich and some hot, fresh coffee,” she says after a moment’s thought. “It’ll make you feel better.”

“I don’t want a sandwich. Can you make me pancakes?”

Her eyebrows rise high on her forehead. “Didn’t you just say you were feeling too sick to eat?”

“Didn’t you say you wanted to make me feel better?” I quip back.

A chuckle escapes her as she playfully hits my arm. “You can be such a brat.”

I flash her a bright grin but next second, I’m moaning and clutching at my head. That darned headache is back again.

“Just sit tight,” she tells me and hurries to grab the ingredients she’d need for a big batch of pancakes.

A dreamy haze comes over me as I watch Iris make breakfast. Her pretty face is set in a determined expression as she mixes the batter with all her strength. She’s intent on making me feel better.

Iris doesn’t know it but a new kind of fear has taken root in my heart.

There’s no way I can ever lose her. And, it’s not just me.

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden need her equally. She completes us and we’d be lost without her. I don’t even know how we lived before she entered our lives.

It’s not long before the kitchen fills up with the smell of cooking pancakes. The delicious aroma is enough to perk me up.

“I’ll make coffee,” I volunteer and move toward the counter.

Iris throws eggs into another pan while the coffee starts dripping into the jar.

The smell of freshly brewed coffee spreads through the air, giving me the kick I need to feel alive.

A big mound of pancakes greets me when I go back to the table.

“Let’s eat,” I say happily, grabbing two plates.

While I’m loading our plates with pancakes, Iris cuts a big portion of an omelet.

“I would’ve been happy with just the pancakes, you know?” I say.

“I know but just give the eggs a try. They’re the best thing to eat to cure a hangover. It’s got cheese, bacon, and everything else you could be craving.

“That does sound good,” I say, taking a bite of her special omelet.

“So, how is it?” she asks, watching me intently.

I nod, chewing through the warm, cheesy eggs. “Really good.”

She beams. “Eat up!”

Before she knows it, I have my pancakes drenched in syrup. For the first fifteen minutes, I don’t think about anything and simply stuff my face with the feast she’s made me.

“That hit the spot,” I say, leaning against my chair. My hand rests over my warm, full belly as a feeling of absolute contentment washes over me.

“Are you feeling better now?”

“Yep, your pancakes have saved my life.” I take a deep swig from my mug. “And hot coffee with cream and sugar is the elixir I needed to feel alive again.”

Soft, amused chuckles escape her as she shakes her head at me.

“I’m glad,” she says slowly. Her smile dims and her expression grows grim. “I’m wondering if I could talk to you about something.”

Setting my cup down, I give her my whole attention. “What’s on your mind?”

“Is there a way to hack into a weapon supplier’s database and check the ammunition they’ve been supplying to various buyers over the last two decades?”

Her question takes me by surprise. “What would you do with that sort of data?”

“Callahan must be purchasing weapons and supplies to equip the Black Widow,” she explains in a low voice. “He must be generating a massive bill for them. If we could get access to their database, we can check their buyers. That information could lead us to his hideouts.”

I’m silent for a long time. Her concept of using data to track Callahan is exceptionally smart but it needs more thought and planning.

“That’s a great idea but we have no idea who he’s using to buy his shit from,” I reply. “He might even be buying from overseas suppliers. To hide his own trace, he could even be using a third-party purchaser. There could also be more than one person he’s employing for his schemes.”

Her mouth forms a firm line. I can see her frustration rising. She’d been hoping to use my access to the military databases to find some information on Callahan but I’m presenting her with obstacles.

“It’s nearly impossible to hack into those servers,” I continue. “They have exceptional security. It hurts to say this, but their security measures are far more sophisticated than government ones.”

“Shit!” she hisses, kicking at the table’s leg. “So, there’s no way to find out where he’s hiding?”

“Hey, take it easy,” I say, gripping the edge of the table to prevent it from rattling the empty dishes. “We can use your idea to find a simpler solution.”

“It was a lousy idea to begin with.”

“No. no. It was a brilliant idea, Iris.” A bright grin spreads on my face. “You just said it.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You talked about Callahan buying weapons and supplies.”

“So?”

“So? Think about the other stuff he must be buying for the Black Widow.” I lean on the table and fix my gaze on her. “Food. He must be buying a ton every year to feed the bastards.”

Her eyes slowly light up as realization finally dawns on her. “We could check with mass food suppliers, especially those delivering to military bases like ours.”

“There, you go.” I hold up my hand.

Leaning across the table, she slaps it hard and grins.

“I bet those people selling canned soups and peas have crummy security,” she says with a grin.

I laugh and nod. “Let’s hope so. It’s still going to take a while to sift through the data and find what we’re looking for. There are plenty of organizations who order food in bulk.”

“It’s not just food. We need to look at stuff that’s regularly ordered by a military pack. That way, we can trace the Black Widow’s hideout.”

“It’s the best plan of action I’ve heard since we lost that asshole.”

“Let’s keep it to ourselves for now,” she says, lowering her voice. “I don’t want to get anyone’s hopes up before we have something solid in our hands.”

I grin, loving the idea of working on a project with Iris. It’ll be a shot in the dark but we might just end up finding something that could help Caleb search for those ruthless terrorists.

“Should we get started?” Iris asks, effortlessly reading my mind.

“Yep. Let’s go.” Despite feeling tired, I get off the chair and follow her out of the kitchen. We’re losing time and every day that passes by, brings us closer to an attack that could hurt hundreds of innocents.



My gaze roves over the document before me when I hear the sound of familiar voices calling my name. Julian stirs beside me and looks toward the doorway.

“It’s them,” he says, grinning. “They’re home.”

“Let’s go meet them,” I say, pushing back my chair. “I don’t want them to see what we’re up to yet. We’ve got hold of a ton of data but it’ll take a few days to sort through them.”

Julian moves toward the door, opens it, and walks out. “We’re here!” he hollers and gestures at me to join him. “Let’s go downstairs before they come up here.”

I nod and follow him down the corridor. My fingers move to rub at my itchy eyes and it’s a moment before I realize we’ve spent hours on our hunt for Callahan’s hideout.

Glancing down at my wristwatch, I see that it’s close to eight P.M.

*Wow, we even missed out on lunch,* I think with a wry chuckle.

Julian brought lots of snacks and drinks to the tech room earlier today, so we didn’t even need to step out for anything except to use the bathroom.

“Where were you guys?” Damon asks the moment he spots us near the staircase.

“Right here,” Julian says with a bright grin. Skipping ahead, he launches himself at Damon and captures his lips.

Damon’s fingers slide into his thick ash-blond strands as he deepens the kiss.

My heart flutters as I stare at my two mates. Their passion burns hot enough to make me moan out.

“There you are, darling,” Raiden says, rushing past Julian and Damon. Coming closer, he grabs my wrist and tugs at me.

“Where are we going?” I ask as he leads me away from my kissing mates.

“Downstairs,” he says. “We’ve got everything you could want from movie night.”

“Movie night?”

“Sorry, I forgot to mention,” Julian says from behind me. “The guys planned to watch movies tonight.”

“Oh.” A sliver of relief spreads through me at the announcement. They have no idea that Julian and I are trying to track Callahan. A casual movie night is a perfect distraction to keep everyone from worrying too much about the threats looming over us.

Reaching the entrance hall, I see Caleb walking through the entryway. Both his arms are loaded with a mountain of takeout packages.

I rush toward him at once and grab some of the bags.

“Thanks,” he mutters. “I can’t believe my brothers left me behind to carry all this stuff.”

I chuckle and sniff at the boxes in my hands. “I’m smelling Chinese food.”

The annoyed expression vanishes from Caleb’s face as he smiles. “There’s Chinese food for you, fried chicken buckets for Raiden and there’s pizza and beer for the rest of us.”

“Wow,” I breathe, staring up at my mate. “Are you sure all this food is just for us?”



“Yep. It’s going to be our very own private party,” he finishes with a wink.

Raiden and Julian come forward to help him and together, we carry the food upstairs to my room. It makes me amazingly happy to have all my mates in my nest.

Damon walks into the room after a while, carrying plates, glasses, napkins, and cutlery.

Within minutes, we’re ready to start on a movie marathon.

“Have you guys decided what to watch?” I ask as Damon loosens the tie around his collar.

“I’m hoping for some gore and horror.”

“Ugh! No,” Julian mutters. “I’m not watching people getting gutted and mutilated. It’s way too repulsive.”

“It’s just a movie, Jules,” says Damon.

“Let’s watch The Godfather,” says Caleb. “It’s a classic.”

“It’s so boring, it makes me snooze,” Damon says with a roll of his eyes.

“How about Schwarzenegger’s Terminator movies?” Raiden says with a hopeful glance at his brothers. “You guys have always loved that one.”

“Yeah, but we’ve watched it way too many times,” says Julian. “How about we watch Tangled? I truly believe it’s the best romantic movie ever made.”

Damon and Raiden break out in loud laughter while Julian glowers at them.

“You’ve watched it a million times, Jules,” Caleb says. “How about we watch something else for a change?”

“What about you, Iris?” Damon asks, turning his amber eyes on me. “What would you like to watch?”

“I’m good with everything you guys mentioned,” I say with a smile. “I don’t even mind horror. Just not a fan of too much gore, you know.”

I feel everyone’s gaze on me.

“Tell us what *you* want, darling,” Caleb says in a suddenly deep, husky voice. Moving toward me, he hooks a finger under my chin and gently lifts my face. “You don’t always have to do what we like. You’re allowed to have a choice too.”

“Seriously. I can watch any genre as long as the story is good.”

I feel a different pair of arms sliding around my waist. Sweet, smoky hints of hickory wash over me, and I instantly know it’s Damon.

“We want to watch your favorite, Wildcat,” he croons in my ear.

I stare up into Caleb’s silvery eyes. “Are you guys sure? My favorite movie is kind of old.”

“Old is gold, babe,” Damon whispers in my ear.

I take a deep breath and turn around to face him. “Are you ready to hear it?” I say with a challenging stare.

Damon chuckles. “Surprise me, Wildcat.”

“The Sound of Music.”

Silence falls over us.

I glance around at my other mates and take in their looks of surprise.

“I knew you guys wouldn’t be able to watch that movie,” I say with a chuckle. “It’s old and frankly, a children’s movie. My parents used to play it after we finished our Thanksgiving dinner. We’d be too full to move or do anything else, so we’d settle in our living room and watch this old classic. It became my and Delilah’s favorite holiday movie.”

A rush of sadness overcomes me as old memories flicker in my mind. I still can’t help but miss my sister and my parents.

Taking a deep breath, I swallow the sudden, tight choke in my throat and attempt a smile. “That movie’s too silly, right?”

Julian rushes past Caleb and almost pushes him away as he engulfs me in his long arms. His warm chocolaty fragrance

reminds me of freshly-baked brownies that have just come out of the oven. Inhaling deeply, I melt against him.

“We love you so much, Wildflower,” he croons. “Nothing you like or love is silly to us.”

A teardrop slides down my cheek but I quickly brush it away before anyone can see it.

Three warm bodies close in on us and I realize that Caleb, Damon, and Raiden are hugging us both. More tears slide down my cheeks, but it’s not from sadness. Happy emotions rush through me and their intensity is enough to make me cry.

“All right, then,” I say, sniffing and brushing away my tears. “Let’s watch the movie.”

“On it,” says Julian, stepping away.

He grabs the TV remote and starts searching for the movie while the rest of us sit down on the carpeted floor and gather around the coffee table.

“This is the good life,” says Damon, breaking into a can of beer. “I’ve needed to chill out like this for a while now.”

“Yeah, me too,” says Caleb, opening the buttons of his shirt.

“Found it,” says Julian and turns on the movie. “I remember watching *The Sound of Music* a long time ago but can’t remember what it’s about anymore.”

“Yeah, same here. Although, I remember a lot of singing,” says Caleb.

Julian settles down among the mound of cushions I’ve arranged on the floor. “Yay, pizza,” he gushes, reaching for a slice. “This is exactly what I needed after a day’s hard work.”

I pinch him lightly.

He immediately becomes alert and glances at our mates, but they’re all busy sipping their drinks and looking toward the TV. There’s no way you can ignore Julie Andrew’s voice as she starts singing the opening notes.

“Be careful,” I whisper, glancing at Julian. “They can’t know what we’re up to yet.”

“Sorry! You want some pepperoni off my pizza.”

I chuckle. “Thanks, but that’s okay. I’ve got my potstickers to keep me happy.”

Warmth wraps around me as I look toward my mates. They’ve all loosened their shirts and ties and started eating their favorite food. Their focus is on the TV screen as they munch and drink.

The movie is so sweet and charming that it’s impossible not to relax and feel comforted by the scenes in it.

I break into the first Chinese food container and grin like I’ve found gold. A dozen perfectly-shaped dumplings are arranged inside the box. Sesame seeds and chopped scallions are generously scattered over them.

Picking up my chopsticks, I pick one up and take a bite.

“Mmm,” I moan as soft meat and flavorful juices burst into my mouth.

The potstickers are still hot, making it the perfect dinner treat.

“Let me have some of that,” says Julian, grabbing a drumstick from Raiden’s bucket. The crunch of the crispy coating is loud against the mellow voices speaking from the TV.

“Now, I feel like having one too,” I mutter. “May I, please?”

Raiden grins and pushes the bucket of fried chicken toward me.

“You guys can have some of my dumplings and noodles,” I say, gesturing at the open containers on the table.

“Thanks,” says Caleb, grabbing a piece of orange chicken. “These are so addictive, I can’t just eat one.”

I chuckle. “I know. Help yourself!”

Soon, we're all sharing our food and getting a taste of everything that's on the table before us.

The movie plays out, eventually drawing everyone's attention toward it. My mates have a smile on their faces as they watch the children singing with Julie Andrews.

I'm feeling incredibly lazy and comfortable after stuffing my face with all my favorite food. Since Caleb is sitting beside me, I lean against him.

Next moment, he wraps his arm around my shoulders and pulls me against him.

A hum of pure satisfaction rises from my lips as his heated skin warms me up instantly. I nuzzle my face against his hard chest and turn toward the TV.

The hours slowly trickle away.

We occasionally move to grab some food or drinks, but the rest of the time, we're focused on the movie playing out on the TV before us.

Julian sighs audibly as the last scores of the movie play out. "I want our children to sing too," he says, fixing his lavender eyes on me. "Also, we've got to have at least seven kids."

"What?" I gasp. "Seven?"

"We should have eight at the very least," says Damon, his eyes shining with intensity. "There are four of us, so we each get to have two."

"We're talking about kids, not potstickers!" I cry out.

Caleb shakes with laughter as he squeezes me against his chest.

"You guys are scaring me," I mutter, moving to stand up but Caleb draws me back against him. Leaning in, he sniffs at my neck while his hand trails down my left breast.

"I don't feel tired enough to go to bed yet," he whispers against my ear.

“Neither do I,” says Damon, his amber eyes shining in the darkened room. “How about we make *one* kid tonight?”

I hear movement in the corner. Julian and Raiden are staring at me too.

The intensity in their eyes sends my heart fluttering. My pussy throbs, kindling a desire only my mates can satisfy.

Caleb slips his arms under my thighs and with a sudden move, hauls me up in his arms.

A squeak escapes me as I hurry to wrap my arms around his neck as he stands up.

Julian, Raiden, and Damon circle around him as he carries me to the vast bed in the corner.

Raiden lays out the pillows while Caleb patiently holds me in his arms. The heat radiating off his silvery eyes has me squirming. I need him and the others touching me, kissing me, stretching and thrusting into me...

The promise of pleasure makes me moan out.

“Here, we are,” Caleb says in a low, husky voice as he lowers me among the cushions.

“Doesn’t she have way too many clothes on?” Julian quips.

“Should I go ahead and rip them off?” Raiden says, grinning cheekily.

“Don’t you dare,” I say with a mock scowl.

He chuckles and reaches forward to unbutton my jeans. Together, he and Julian peel them off my legs.

Damon shifts closer and helps me take off my hoodie.

“Let’s get rid of this too,” says Raiden, his fingers digging into the waistband of my panties.

Warmth pools into my cheeks as he bares me completely.

“You’re so ready, darling,” Caleb croons, leaning in. His lips capture mine in a searing kiss, taking my breath away.

My fingers curl over this massive shoulder and feel the touch of his naked skin. Surprise flickers through me as I realize he's taken his clothes off too.

"Caleb," I moan softly as he lowers his body onto mine. The touch of his bare skin soothes my heated flesh, making me close my eyes in bliss.

A new pair of lips descend on mine as Caleb's mouth moves lower to trail down the column of my throat.

The scent of vanilla and chocolate wafts into my nostrils and I instantly know it's Julian who's enthusiastically kissing me.

My arms wrap around his neck as Caleb swirls his tongue around my belly button.

"You taste so good," Julian whispers.

The scent of burning firewood mingles with Julian's fragrance. Damon's crimson locks brush against my cheeks as he moves down to kiss me.

"Ah, fuck," I hiss as Caleb's mouth settles over my pussy. His tongue languidly swirls over my pulsing nub, sending tendrils of heat spreading through my body.

A warm mouth descends on my left nipple, making me moan out loudly.

"You taste so damn sweet," Caleb groans, lapping at my pussy. "Reminds me of all the sugared rose petals mom used to put on her cake."

"Can you not mention our mother right now?" Damon growls.

A chuckle escapes me but soon, I'm moaning again as Caleb's tongue pushes through my folds.

Raiden's teeth graze over my right nipple while Julian's big hand cups my left boob and thoroughly kneads it.

Lashes of sweet, hot pleasure thrash through me.

My hips jerk upward but Caleb holds me down. Unable to bear the mounting pleasure, I let my fingers sink into Julian's

lush hair.

Damon's tongue probes into my mouth, kissing and tasting me thoroughly.

Their combined ministrations are making me squirm and moan, reminding me of the intense sensations I felt during my heat. My teeth sink into Damon's lower lip, forcing him to break away.

"Wildcat," he whispers hoarsely, staring into my eyes. "You're turning into quite a vengeful kitty, aren't you?"

"I need more," I manage to say between the heavy moans escaping me. "Please, alpha. Help me, please."

"I can never help myself when she gets that look in her eyes," Raiden says with a torn expression on his handsome.

"And her voice," Julian groans. "It makes me want to give her my soul."

"She doesn't need your soul, Jules," Damon says with a chuckle. "She needs your cock."

"Alpha," I call out. "Please..."

"I'll take care of you, love," Caleb says with a promise in his voice.

My gaze falls toward him as he parts my knees and positions himself between them. His eyes burn with a hunger that makes my insides clench emptily.

Caleb lowers his boxers and takes his massive length in his hands. A few strokes are all it takes for his cock to become fully erect. Leaning closer, he rubs the head all over my juices that are leaking down my thighs.

Damon lowers his mouth to kiss me, blocking my view.

I acutely feel it as Caleb probes between my pussy lips before thrusting into me.

"Oh, fuck," I moan into Damon's mouth.

I'm suspended between pain and pleasure as Caleb stretches me to my limit and buries into me.



My mouth opens wide, no longer able to kiss Damon back as Caleb takes up my whole attention. Breaking away, he watches his brother thrusting into me before glancing back at me.

“You look so beautiful like this, Wildcat,” he whispers in my ear. “Your lips are so soft and luscious, and when you open up like this, I want to put my cock in that sweet mouth.”

I moan, both from his words and the force of Caleb’s long, smooth strokes.

Reaching out, I brush my hand over the bulge that has formed at the front of his pants.

A mischievous spark lights up his amber eyes. With lightning-quick movements, he takes off both his trousers and boxers.

My mouth waters at the sight of his thick, erect cock. I turn my face toward him, silently inviting him in.

“You’re so very sweet, love,” he says, prodding his cock at my lips.

Opening up willingly, I let him slip half his length inside my mouth.

“Oh, goddess in heaven,” he groans, closing his eyes in bliss. “There’s nothing like the feel of your wet, hot mouth, darling.”

His praise sends a rush of warmth through me, urging me to swallow him deeper.

“You’re such a good girl,” he croons as his fingers slip into my hair and gently grip my strands. “Ohh, fuck...that’s it, babe. Take it all in.”

The tip of his cock hits the back of my throat but I barely have a chance to focus on the discomfort. Caleb’s slow but powerful thrusts send shockwaves of ecstasy through me, keeping my mind blinded to everything else.

For a moment, my gaze falls on the two naked men who’re positioned beside me.

Raiden and Julian are watching me with rapt attention. The fiery passion in their eyes makes me hunger for their touch too.

My gaze falls on Damon again. A tortured look screws his handsome face as he fucks my mouth with slow, measured strokes. He's desperately trying to stay in control and not hurt me. Precum coats my tongue, filling my senses with the scent of sweet hickory.

At the same time, my insides clench onto Caleb's cock. The delicious friction sends tendrils of pleasure shooting through me. If Damon's cock wasn't filling up my entire mouth, I'd be moaning loudly.

I meet Caleb's silvery eyes.

"You're so close, love," he says in a deep, strained voice. "Let me give you my knot." His thrusts grow harder and rougher with each word, driving me to the edge of a climax.

Supporting his weight over me, he plunges in deeper, hitting that particular spot that has me unraveling within seconds. The tip of his cock swells and locks inside me, sending my mind reeling with pleasure.

Stars bloom behind my closed eyelids as my whole body trembles from the force of a massive orgasm.

"Iris, fuck!" Caleb shouts, thrusting in deep before he shatters completely.

"Ah, fuck! I'm coming too!" Damon roars, filling my throat and mouth with his white-hot seeds.

Caleb buries his head against my neck as his body shudders against mine. My walls squeeze him tightly, making sure he empties himself completely.

My chest rises and falls as I struggle to draw in enough breath. I swallow most of Damon's cum but a thin trickle slides down my chin.

A gentle expression settles into Damon's amber eyes as he gently pulls out of my mouth. Leaning down, he wipes a tear from my cheek and captures my mouth.

Caleb remains buried inside me while I stay locked in a kiss with Damon. He gradually grows softer and it's surprisingly comforting to have him inside me like this.

"Come on, guys," Raiden groans. "You've hogged her to yourselves for far too long. Let us have a turn with our sweet omega."

Caleb raises his head and looks toward Julian. "Do you want me to take care of you, Jules?"

Julian shakes his head. "I want her."

A smile blossoms on Caleb's lips as he glances at me. Pulling out of me gently, he leans in to kiss me.

Julian moves forward as Caleb shifts away from me.

"It's my turn now," Raiden says at once.

"No way! You can wait for your turn," Julian quips back.

"Jules," Raiden growls.

"Look at me," Julian groans, gesturing at his fully erect cock. Thick veins line his gorgeous dick, making me hunger for him.

I don't care who takes me first. They're both my mates and I want to satisfy both of their needs.

"Together," I say in a low voice because my heart's still pounding heavily in my chest. "Take me together."

Julian slides his hands into the sweat-soaked tendrils of my hair and looks down at me with a gentle look in his violet eyes. "You're so sweet, I want to fucking eat you up."

Warmth pools in my cheeks as he leans down to skim his nose along my exposed neck.

"Hand me the lube," he says, his lips moving against my sensitive skin. "Wildflower's being quite ambitious and enthusiastic, but I need to make sure we don't hurt her."

The bottle of lube drops down on the bed beside me. Julian straightens up and glances at Raiden. "Let's prep her, first."

Raiden nods and helps me into a sitting position.

In the meanwhile, Caleb and Damon have taken up their places among the pillows. Leaning against the headboard, they watch us with darkly gleaming eyes.

Raiden's lips trail feathery kisses over my mouth, chin, and neck while Julian pours the lube over my butt crack. The cold liquid sends a shiver through me.

I feel Julian's slick fingers starting to probe and stretch into my tight channel. My pussy flutters and clenches, wanting him to keep going while Raiden smothers me with his kisses.

"I need you both," I whine.

Raiden brushes a thumb over my bottom lip as he stares into my eyes.

"Come here, baby," he says gently.

Pulling me closer, he takes his length in his hand and rubs the thick head all over my slick-covered pussy lips.

My arms go around his neck as he positions himself at my entrance.

My slippery channel, still slick with Caleb's essence, allows him an easier entry as he thrusts into me.

Pleasure flows through my veins as Raiden plunges in with long, slow strokes. Moans escape me as I hold onto him while his big, muscular body slams into me.

Julian's groan sounds in my ear. One of his hands grips my waist as he prods his thick head against my tight bud.

"Hold still, Ray," Julian says in a commanding tone. "Let her relax while I get inside her."

Raiden comes to a halt but my walls continue pulsing against his hot, hard rod.

A groan escapes me as I feel Julian's cock slide inside me. He uses short thrusts to stretch me wider, ensuring he doesn't hurt me. The lube helps him in his efforts because, with one final plunge, he buries himself inside me.

“Fuck! She’s getting tighter,” Raiden says through clenched teeth. “She feels so damn good, I doubt I’ll last long.”

Rough, breathy chuckles sound from behind me. “Same here, Ray. It feels incredible to be inside her.”

My mind wraps around the fact that the three of us are joined together. It’s an extraordinary feeling to have them both inside me. Their resounding groans of pleasure are like the cherry on top of this delicious cream pie.

They both start moving inside me.

Hot, electrifying pleasure drenches my mind and senses. Closing my eyes, I revel in the feel of my mates connected to me.

It takes us a while to get into a rhythm, but soon, Julian and Raiden’s thrusts become harder, squeezing my body between their hard, muscular bodies.

The slapping sounds of our bodies combine with our groans and grunts. My muscles start straining from taking the force of both their bodies but the pleasure coursing through me obliterates the discomfort.

My eyes squeeze shut against the mounting pleasure in my body.

“Ahh, fuck!” I cry out. “I’m coming.”

“Don’t hold back!” Julian shouts, slamming his hips against me.

“I’m so close too, love” Raiden grates through clenched teeth. “You’re getting so tight and you feel so good. Oh, fuck!”

My core tightens and the next second, I’m whimpering and cursing as waves of intense pleasure cascade through me. My walls squeeze onto Raiden’s cock, making him groan out. Our bodies shudder together and next moment, I feel his searing cum gushing deep inside me.

Julian slams into me from behind, pushing me against Raiden’s massive chest as he shatters completely.

I stay leaning against Raiden while Julian's body trembles against mine. Breathing hard, he rests his forehead against my shoulder. "That was just...just..."

"It was fucking great," Raiden finishes for him as he drops kisses onto my head. "You're absolutely beautiful and delicious, darling."

Amused chuckles escape me as I struggle to draw in my breath.

"Are you okay?" Julian asks as he gently pulls out of me.

Glancing back, I nod and offer him a smile. "A little sore but all good."

Raiden pulls out of me and helps me lie down on the bed.

"Are you okay, Wildflower?" Damon asks, staring down at me with a worried look.

"You look so tiny and delicate. I'm always scared we'll end up hurting you," Caleb says in a gentle voice.

"I'm fine, guys," I say, still catching my breath. "A little tired but it's nothing that won't be solved after a good night's sleep." I pat the bed beside me, inviting my mates to lie down beside me. "Please, hold me," I whine.

Caleb and Damon lie down on my either side. Their powerful arms tangle around me in a gentle hug, soothing and comforting me.

I crave nights like these when I can sleep with all my mates in my nest. My eyes flutter close as pure bliss flows through me.



The sound of a familiar ringtone breaks me out of a heavy doze. Reluctantly opening my eyes, I slowly sit up and look around the room.

Caleb's already out of bed and hurrying toward the coffee table in the corner. Frantically rummaging among the empty food containers that litter the surface, he finally pulls out his cell phone.

Damon stirs beside me. Yawning widely, he scratches his bearded chin and looks toward Caleb as well.

Caleb clears his throat before answering the call. "Griffith," he says in a deep voice. "What's up?"

I can't hear anything but notice the way Caleb's expression hardens. "Escort them inside the house and guard them until I come downstairs." Switching off the call, he lets out a heavy exhale.

"Is everything okay?" Damon asks amid soft snores.

Caleb glances at me with a somber look in his eyes. "Ethan's here."

Surprise flickers through me. "What's the time?" I ask, glancing toward the windows. "It's still kind of early, isn't it?"

"He's not alone," Caleb says in a low grim tone. "The Collins are here too."

"Wait, what? My parents are here?"

“Your sister’s here too.”

“Wow,” Damon breathes, raking his fingers through the unruly locks of his dark crimson hair. “They’ve come to us on their own.”

“They’ll be inside the house within minutes!” I gasp, scrambling to climb off the bed. In my haste, the sheets get tangled around my legs and I end up falling on Damon’s lap.

“What’s with all the shouting and jumping around?” Julian mutters in a slurred voice. “Some of us are trying to sleep here.”

“Julian, wake up!” I call out. “My parents are here.”

“Sure,” he mumbles sleepily without bothering to open his eyes. He’s held tightly in Raiden’s arms and looks utterly cozy in his embrace. It’s only a few seconds before he starts snoring again.

“You go ahead,” says Damon as he helps me untangle the sheet from around my ankles. “They’ll eventually wake up.”

“I need a shower,” I say as panic starts building inside me. “They can’t see me like this.” I gesture at my wildly tangled hair and crusty eyes. There’s dried cum on my face as well as my thighs.

“Don’t get so worked up about it yet. Take your time and get dressed. In the meantime, we’ll go meet them,” says Caleb, rummaging among the scattered clothes on the floor. “Just make sure they wake up by the time you’re done.”

Raiden and Julian are sleeping so soundly, I don’t feel like disturbing them. Deciding to give them a couple more minutes to snooze, I grab a sheet and start wrapping it around my body.

“It’s cold!” Julian mumbles in his sleep and tugs at the blanket.

Damon chuckles and hands me a black shirt. “Take this, love.”

“Thanks,” I say, taking his shirt and donning it.



Climbing off the bed, I move toward Caleb who's already dressed in the clothes he'd been wearing yesterday.

"They look creased," I say, uselessly smoothing his shirt over his shoulders.

"Damn it," he groans. "Damon, let's head back to our rooms and put on something decent. I don't want to look like a slob when I meet the Collins."

"Fine," says Damon, shouldering his trousers. He hasn't bothered putting on any clothes and is stark naked. There's not a hint of embarrassment on his handsome face.

Caleb draws me into a hug. "Don't worry about anything," he says, kissing the top of my head. "I won't let them hurt you again."

Pushing away from him, I stare into his eyes. "Be nice to them," I say in a worried tone. "We should allow them to explain their reason for running away like that."

"You still want an explanation after everything that has happened?" Damon growls.

I nod. "How can you be mad at them?" I ask, cracking a smile. "If they hadn't left me behind, you wouldn't have come after me. You wouldn't have kidnapped me and brought me here. They're the reason we found each other."

Caleb groans. "That was such a shitty start to our relationship."

"Be grateful we had a start," says Damon. "Imagine what would have happened if David Collins and his wife followed the contract and sent their daughter to us. We'd have never met Wildcat and would've never known the happiness she's given us."

"That would've been a tragedy and something I don't even want to think about," Caleb says, looking disturbed.

"They might already be here," I say, giving Damon a little push. "Go. I'll catch up in five minutes with the others."

Pressing a kiss on my cheek, Damon follows Caleb out of the room.

I hurry inside the bathroom, take off Damon's shirt, and head straight into the shower cubicle.

Hot water gushes out from the shower heads, drenching me within seconds. Using a copious amount of soap and shampoo, I hastily wash my hair and body.

The steam and the sweet fragrance of the soap awaken me thoroughly, allowing me to think of the situation.

I still can't believe my family is here. Ethan's accompanying them, so should I assume he caught them and forced them to come here?

Or, have they been genuinely worried about me and asked Ethan to help them find me?

The questions churn in my mind, suddenly making me feel sick to my stomach. Switching off the water, I rush out of the shower and grab a towel.

Without bothering to blow dry my hair, I walk back into the room and get dressed. My wet tendrils drench my t-shirt but I can't waste another second. I have to know the answers to all my questions.

Going to the bed, I shake Raiden. "Raiden, honey," I call out loudly. "Please, wake up for me."

He shifts and groans but manages to open his eyes.

"What's up?" he asks, blinking blearily at me.

"My parents have come here," I say in a low, worried tone. "Can you get dressed and come downstairs with me?"

Rubbing his eyes, he sits up immediately. "Are you serious? They've come here?"

I nod. "Caleb and Damon have gone downstairs to meet them. I need both you and Julian at my side. I can't face them without you guys."

Anxiety clouds his ice-blue eyes. "Are you okay?"

I shake my head. "I don't know."

He glances down at our snoozing mate. “Julian, babe. It’s time to wake up,” he says loudly and shakes him violently.

“What the fuck’s wrong with you?” Julian shouts, punching Raiden blindly. “Leave me alone.”

“Nope! We’re going to have to get going right now.”

“Why?” Julian groans, turning away from him. “Are the Black Widow attacking us again?”

“Iris’s parents have come to take her away. If you want her to stay, get up!”

“What?!” Julian finally opens his eyes. He looks around wildly until his gaze settles on me. “Iris...you’re still here.”

“No one’s taking me away,” I say, lightly punching Raiden’s arm for scaring Julian like that. “He said that to make you wake up.”

“Ugh!” he mutters, kicking Raiden. “Why would you give me a heart attack like that?”

“My parents are here, though,” I say.

“Wait, what?”

“They’re here.”

His violet eyes widen. “Are you serious?”

I nod. “They’re downstairs right now.”

Julian’s expression grows grim. “Of course, I’ll go with you. I have a bone to pick with them as well,” he shouts, throwing the blanket away. “I’m going to give them a piece of my fucking mind for breaking your heart. No one gets away by hurting *my* mate.”

Muttering curses, he jumps off the bed and heads to the door.

“Julian!” I call out, rushing to stop him. “Get dressed, first.”

He halts in his steps and looks down, realizing he’s fully naked.

“Here, take these,” says Raiden, throwing him the clothes he’s gathered from the floor.

“These are Damon’s,” Julian mutters, holding up a dark pair of slacks.

“Just wear them,” Raiden says, putting on his clothes. Thankfully, his jacket covers up his creased linen shirt, so he doesn’t have to rush out to find better clothes.

“Don’t be rude to them,” I warn, glancing toward Julian. “Let’s wait for them to explain themselves.”

A challenging expression spreads on his face. “Do you think they can explain their behavior? They abandoned you out of pure selfishness.”

“Still, can you at least try to be calm?”

He scoffs at me before turning away.

My heart sinks, knowing he has no intention of being polite to my parents.

Raiden pulls me closer and wraps his arm around my shoulders. “Come on. Let’s go see them.”

Julian marches forward and leads the way downstairs.

Familiar voices reach my ears as we get closer to the entrance hall.

“They came to see me at the restaurant last night,” Ethan’s voice floats toward me. “Since it was late, I brought them over today. I hope I didn’t make a mistake by bringing them here.”

Standing at the threshold of the room, I gaze at my parents and my sister.

Seeming to notice my presence, they turn their eyes on me.

“Iris!” Delilah shrieks. Before I know it, she’s left Mom’s side and is hurling herself at me.

Her weight nearly throws me backward.

“Hey, slow down,” I say as she tightly hugs me.

“You’re okay,” she says in a choked voice. “Those men were refusing to tell us whether you’re all right.” Suddenly breaking away, she rakes her gaze all over me. “You look... different.”

“Of course, she does,” Julian snaps. “She’s an omega too.”  
Confusion flickers in her eyes.

“You shouldn’t be touching her,” Julian says in a tone I’ve never heard him use before. It’s bordering on violence. Shifting closer, he sandwiches me between him and Raiden.

“Get over here, Delilah,” Mom commands in a tight voice. “There’s a lot you don’t know yet.”

My sister rounds on Mom. “What are you talking about? What else do I not know?”

“Get back!” The threat in Mom’s grim voice is enough to make her retreat.

I meet Dad’s gaze. His eyes tear up and a hurt expression spreads over his aging features. Dressed in a bomber jacket that does nothing to hide his bulging tummy, he looks painfully familiar and endearing.

My heart clenches.

“What the hell are you people doing here?” Julian asks in a venomous tone. “Aren’t you done hurting her? She doesn’t need any of you. From now on, we’ll be the ones to look after her.”

Dad shakes his head. “We didn’t think she’d end up in so much trouble because of us.” He glances at me with a sad look. “I’m sorry, sweetheart. We never meant for you to get hurt.”

“You’re lying!” Julian shouts.

“Jules,” Raiden warns. “Let’s hear them out first.”

“Why?” Julian demands. “Do you want them to lie their way out of treating Iris like crap?”

“Julian, please,” I beg. “Give them a chance.”

He scoffs and glares at Mom and Dad. “Go on, then. Let’s hear your excuses for abandoning your daughter. Oh, wait. Iris isn’t really your daughter, is she?”

My parents turn pale while Delilah stares at them in confusion.

“You know?” Mom whispers, meeting my eyes with a fearful gaze.

“The man who killed Rosamond recognized me,” I answer in a quiet voice.

Mom’s knees suddenly go weak. If Dad didn’t catch her in time, she’d have sunk to the floor.

“Come on, honey. Have a seat here,” Dad says, struggling to get her to the couch. “Delilah, come help me.”

My sister gives me a confused look before moving forward to help Dad.

Mom sags against the couch, looking so ill that I feel a sliver of guilt curling around my gut.

“Does Ethan know anything about Callahan?” Caleb asks me.

“No,” I reply. “I didn’t think it was safe to tell him about that.”

“Good.”

“Tell me about who?” Ethan asks immediately. “Who’s Callahan?”

“That’s none of your business,” Julian mutters rudely.

I take a deep breath and look at the people around me.

Mom seems to be going through a panic attack while Dad and Delilah desperately try to calm her. Julian’s already marched forward and is having a heated argument with Ethan. Raiden has also left my side and is speaking to Caleb and Damon in the corner.

Confusion and chaos reign over everyone.

“Stop!” I shout at the top of my lungs. Breathing hard, I stare at everyone. “We’ve all got things to explain to each other,” I continue in the same loud voice. “But, we’ve got to start somewhere, right?” I gesture toward Dad. “Why don’t you start by telling us why you abandoned me?”

“Abandon you?” Dad says hoarsely. “We were trying to protect you. We’ve always tried to protect you, sweetheart.”

“You have to explain more,” Damon says in a grim tone. “You stuffed her with suppressors and blockers her whole life, hiding the fact she’s an omega. Your daughter always had the best of everything while Iris had to be content with her scraps. You’ve always treated her unfairly. You even abandoned her the first chance you got.”

“You’ve got it all wrong,” Mom says in a weak voice. Her face has gone disturbingly pale and she’s clutching at her chest. “It’s true that we didn’t give her the same shiny things as Delilah. It might even seem like we were treating her poorly, but everything we did, we did it to protect her.”

“Protect me from whom?!” I shout, frustrated with their excuse.

“The man who killed Rosamond and Hale,” Dad says in a low, strained voice.

“You knew who killed them?”

Dad shakes his head. “To this day, we have no idea who killed them. That’s the reason we tried to hide you. Each day that passed, you started resembling Rosamond more and more. We didn’t want your parents’ murderer to find you and kill you too. That’s why we concealed your designation and let you grow up as a beta. We taught you to work hard and to defend yourself.”

“If all that’s true, why did you abandon her?” Caleb asks in a grim tone.

“We didn’t mean to abandon her,” Dad says, starting to look frustrated. He wipes at the bald patch on his head and meets my gaze. “It’s true that we took an enormous amount of money from Mr. Solveig and his brothers. Neither you nor

Delilah had any idea about it. Back then, that was the only way to get Delilah into the academy.”

Silence falls over us as we all pay attention to Dad’s explanation.

“We’d planned to disclose our arrangement when she graduated but the situation changed,” Mom says in a low, halting voice. “Delilah fell in love with an alpha who visited the academy some time ago. He comes from one of the most influential families in the country and promised to take her as his mate.”

“We didn’t know about Delilah’s relationship until the evening of her graduation,” Dad says. “That was the very first time we met her mate. Mr. Solveig approached us on the very same evening. Delilah ended up hearing our conversation about the contract we’d signed with him and she went crazy.”

“I still can’t believe you tried to sell me to these strangers,” she says, glaring at her parents.

“We were never going to sell you,” Dad says.

“Then, how were you going to pay them back?” I ask in a cold tone.

Dad takes a deep breath. “I sold our nut butter factory to a foreign investor. We were going to give away most of the money to pay our debt and settle down in a smaller town.”

“So, you had the money and decided not to pay them back?”

Dad shakes his head. “There was a technical hitch during the transfer of the property,” Dad explains. “It’d take another few months of waiting to get it through.”

“We got scared when Mr. Solveig asked us for the money right away,” Mom says, glancing at Caleb. “We didn’t have it yet. If he forced Delilah to go with him, we’d be helpless to do anything.”

Delilah nods emphatically. “I didn’t want to leave you behind,” she says in a sincere tone, glancing at me. “I hated Mom and Dad’s plan to leave without telling you anything.”



“Then, why did you?” I ask in a broken voice. “Why didn’t you take me with you?”

“Oh, honey.” Dad comes over to me and pulls me into a hug. “We’re so sorry to make you go through so much pain. It’s all our fault. You didn’t deserve to be punished for our mistakes.”

“We didn’t think they’d come after you,” Mom says. “They might come asking you questions about our whereabouts but it’d be useless because you knew nothing. We were determined not to contact you until the factory was sold and we had the money in our hands. We never expected them to capture you. I mean...you’re just a kid, after all. What could they get out of you?”

I stay silent, absorbing their explanation.

“We thought you’d be okay with Ethan keeping you company,” Dad says. “None of us expected the Solveigs to come after you for that money.”

“Did you forget about the clause we put in there?” Caleb says through gritted teeth. “Your next-of-kin would be charged with paying your debt.”

“I can’t believe you’re a military pack!” Delilah shouts. “You’re acting like the mafia. You couldn’t even wait a fucking day before attacking my sister. You’re all a bunch of perverted alphas who just needed an excuse to breed a young woman. It never mattered whether it was me or any other girl as long as you had someone to extort.”

Delilah marches toward me and pulls me away from Dad. “I’m taking you with me,” she says, grasping my wrist tightly. “You don’t have to be scared of them anymore. I have come prepared to take you away. My alpha has this place surrounded. They won’t dare to hurt us.”

I stare at the rage swirling in my sister’s eyes. The look is so familiar, it makes me miss her even more. She’s misunderstanding my relationship with Caleb and his brothers, but I’m loving her fiery zeal with which she wants to protect me.

“Who do you think you are?!” Julian shouts, stomping toward us. “How dare you threaten to take our mate away?”

I stand in front of Delilah before he can get any closer to her.

He’s no longer looking at me. His glare is directed at Delilah. “She’s *mine*,” he hisses.

“Iris is *my* sister,” Delilah hurls back.

He scoffs. “You were all too happy staying away these past months. What’s made you remember her now?”

“We didn’t know what you and your pack did!” Delilah shouts. “We were told not to contact anyone from town for our safety. We assumed Iris would be safe while moving on with her life. She had her taekwondo practices, her job at the restaurant, and her plans to go to college.” Her voice suddenly cracks and she’s heaving and trying to swallow a choke. “We didn’t think she’d be kidnapped and forced to stay here.”

Delilah has misunderstood the situation but it feels good to see her standing up to Julian and the others.

The young beta kid who’d been brought to this mansion that first night had been frightened and heartbroken, wishing like anything for her family to come back for her. I wanted them to come and fight the alphas who took me away unfairly.

Lost in my thoughts, I don’t realize the moment when Delilah and Julian start pawing and scratching at each other. I’m pushed out of the way as they start scrabbling like angry cats.

“Shit!” I mutter, wondering how to get between them without getting swatted or scratched.

“David, do something!” Mom shrieks from the couch, looking scared.

Dad stands beside me, looking as lost as me, wondering how to stop two angry omegas from hitting each other.

Raiden finally makes a move and bodily lifts Julian off the floor and carries him away.

“Lemme at her!” Julian shouts, fighting against Raiden’s hold.

I jump at my sister and hug her tightly. “Calm down, D,” I say, holding onto her with all my strength. “You have misunderstood the situation. Things are different from how you’re imagining them. They did kidnap me but they never hurt me. Julian has been my best friend since the moment I met him. He’s really sweet.”

Delilah glances at me. “Are you telling the truth?” she asks, panting heavily.

“Yeah. He’s the sweetest and gentlest guy I’ve ever met.”

“Him?” she scoffs, gesturing at Julian who’s still struggling with Raiden.

“Fudge you too!” Julian barks from his corner.

“Enough, you two!” I burst. “Chill, already.”

“How were you able to stay off the radar these past months?” Damon asks in a slow, calculating tone.

“Disappearing the way you did takes a lot of planning. Staying hidden takes even more help and strategy. And how is your daughter able to threaten us without an ounce of fear? Who’s backing you guys right now?”

“She’s mated to Lachlan Oldenburg,” says Dad. “They’ve helped us escape the day after you confronted us.”

The mention of the name instantly causes a stir among everyone.

Surprise floods me as I stare at my sister. I knew she was talented and deserving but she managed to catch the eye of the most powerful military family in the country!

The Oldenburg pack has descended directly from the royal line. Their ancestors ruled the country at one time. They’re also among the few royal packs who supported the rebellion that brought the monarchy down.

“Try acting like a big guy now,” Delilah jeers, grinning evilly.

“D, stop already,” I whisper. “Julian is just worried you’ll take me away.”

“I *will* take you away from these evil assholes.”

“They’re not evil.”

“I can’t believe they brainwashed you to this extent.”

“They’re my mates, D!” I say, raising my voice. “I love them. Stop saying you’ll take me away from them. It’s stressful for both me and them to hear you say that.”

Delilah’s blue eyes widen. “You’re mated to them?”

I nod and grin nervously.

“Oh, my goddess!” she gushes, hugging me tightly. “It’s hard enough to believe you’re an omega but you’re mated too?”

“I guess I can’t let you take all the blame for the pain Iris went through,” Caleb says. “I’m also responsible for hurting her.”

Everyone turns around to look at him.

A grim expression has settled over his face. “I shouldn’t have been so hasty,” Caleb says in a lowered voice. “We should’ve given Delilah and her family a little more time. Instead, we scared them into running away.”

“Caleb, you don’t have to—” I start to say but he holds up a hand, silencing me.

“It was wrong of me, Iris,” he says in an angst-choked voice. “I shouldn’t have treated you the way I did.”

“You’ve apologized for it already,” I say, hating the pain in his silvery eyes.

“I should apologize to them too,” he says. “I forced them to run away and kidnapped you to punish them.”

Damon wraps an arm around his shoulders but his gaze is on me.

“Don’t expect an apology from me, Wildcat,” Damon says. “I don’t regret bringing you here.”

Julian looks calmer now. “I guess it was my fault too,” he says. “I wanted to start our own little pack and didn’t want to wait any longer. I’m the one who pushed Caleb into pressuring Mr. and Mrs. Collins.”

Walking up to him, I wrap my arms around him. “Everything’s okay,” I tell him. “We’re together now. It won’t be long before we’re able to start our family.”

“I love you,” he whispers, burying his face against my neck.

“I love you, too.”

It’s a while before he allows me to step away. Red veins cover the whites of his eyes. I’ve never seen Julian looking so emotional before.

“You explained the reason why you left Iris behind,” Caleb says in a deep voice, fixing his gaze on Dad. “Our aggressive behavior caused you to worry about Delilah and her future. You were trying to protect both Delilah and Iris.” He nods slowly. “I suppose I can understand your stance, but there’s something else we’d all like to know.”

“Sure,” says Dad. “We’re willing to answer all your questions today.”

“How did Iris come to you?” Caleb asks, voicing the question that’s been plaguing us.

Silence settles over the room.

I’m barely able to breathe as I wait for Mom and Dad to reveal the truth behind my identity. A tinge of fear mixes with my anticipation and I’m suddenly wondering if we’re about to open another Pandora’s box with that question.



Delilah grasps my arm and stares at me anxiously.

Today's the first time, she's facing the fact that I'm not her actual sister. Her confusion and mad fight with Julian proved to everyone that she was highly possessive of me. She even came prepared to fight the Solveig pack to free me. Delilah has been willing to risk everything for me today.

Ethan walks over to us. "There's so much you've been keeping from me," he whispers.

"There's got to be an explanation for all this," Delilah says in a cracked voice. "Iris is my sister. There's no way she belongs to another family."

Her tear-filled blue eyes send a pang through me. Mom and Dad kept the truth from her too.

"Mr. Collins," Damon calls out in a grim tone. "Can you help us make sense of what happened to Iris?"

Dad wipes his face and joins Mom on the couch. They're holding onto each other, looking completely shaken up by our question.

"Come on," says Ethan, ushering us toward a nearby couch. "Let's calm down and listen to what they have to tell us."

Delilah's hold on my wrist tightens as she meets my gaze.

The three of us sit down on a couch while the Solveig brothers come to surround us. Julian joins them and is instantly pulled into Damon's arms.

"Where do I start?" Dad asks, looking at Mom with a vulnerable gaze. "Will anyone understand what we did?"

"Dad, don't be scared," I say at once, hating how frightened they look. "Just tell us how you found me."

"Do you trust everyone in this room, honey?" Mom asks in a slow, halting tone.

I glance at Ethan and Delilah before looking toward my mates.

"I trust everyone here," I say in my sincerest voice. "You can trust them too. They've protected me with their lives while you went away without a word. You guys can say you were protecting me, but be honest. It was naïve of you to think I'd be okay while you disappeared without a word to me. You should've known how worried I'd be. How could you think I'd be able to go on with my life after you disappeared like that?"

"Honey, we—" Dad starts to speak but I hold up a hand, stopping him.

"The man who killed my parents came after me and the only reason I'm sitting here with you is because of them."

I take a deep breath to get rid of the choke in my throat. "Caleb, Damon, Raiden, and Julian are my mates. We're been bonded for life. There's no one I trust more than them." Hooking my fingers into the neckline of my sweatshirt, I give them a glimpse of the silvery bite marks that adorn my neck and shoulders.

It's a while before anyone speaks.

"All right, then," Dad says in a grim tone. "I'll tell you everything."

Silence descends over the room as Dad starts narrating the heartbreaking tale of my separation from my birth parents.

"Betty was Rosamond's closest friend," Dad says, squeezing Mom's hand. "They grew up in the same

neighborhood and went to the same high school.”

Surprise spreads through me. I always assumed my birth mother to have been from a wealthy pack like the Burtons.

“Rosamond was brought up by her grandparents after her parents died in an accident,” says Mom. “They didn’t have the money to send her to a fine omega institution to train her, so she went to the same public school as me and the neighborhood kids.”

“How did she get to know someone like my dad?” I ask, unable to contain my curiosity.

“I got to know Rosamond after I started dating Betty in college,” Dad says. “That’s how I became friends with her.” He lets out a deep breath. “Well, one day, my dad left me in charge of an order sent by the Burton Pack. They’d ordered crates of our peanut butter for their men and I was supposed to handle the transaction.”

“Unable to stay away from him, I went to the factory to see him,” Mom says with a soft smile playing on her lips. “Rosamond tagged along with me that day. Hale was there, talking to your dad. One look was all it took for them to know that they belonged together.”

“That’s where they met for the very first time?” I ask, unable to suppress the desperation I feel inside me. “At the nut butter factory?”

“Yeah,” says Mom. “Not the most romantic setting but they were hooked to each other since that day. Hale was determined to have her as his mate. He didn’t care where she came from. He gave zero crap about her not having proper omega training at an academy. A great many omegas were left gnashing their teeth when he married and mated Rosamond.”

“The Burtons couldn’t find a relationship between you and my birth parents,” I say. “Why is that?”

“Rosamond flew to California soon after she met Hale,” Mom says. “We nearly lost touch for the next few years. She came back to town and sent us an invitation to her wedding but we couldn’t attend because I’d just given birth to Delilah.”



A sad look comes over her. “My postpartum days were spent recuperating. Your dad didn’t leave my side over the next couple of months. Rosamond probably got busy with her pack duties as well and we didn’t stay in touch after that.”

“The Burton pack had no idea about our relationship with Rosamond,” Dad says. “It’s one of the reasons we were able to keep you safe from them.”

Confusion flickers through me.

“Why would you keep Iris from her family?” Caleb asks. “Wouldn’t she have been safer with them?”

“Let him explain what happened next,” Mom says in a grim tone. She suddenly sniffles and Dad spends the next few minutes hugging and kissing her.

I’m sure everyone is as desperate as me to hear what happened next, but we all stay quiet, giving them the space they need. It’s becoming clear that whatever happened still upsets Mom.

Dad takes a deep breath before continuing. “Betty got pregnant with our second child after that. Delilah was about three years old back then. This pregnancy was even more difficult than her first. At one point, I thought I’d lose both Betty and our unborn child.”

A teardrop streams down Dad’s aging face.

“The doctor walked out of the OT and told me Betty was barely hanging on and that our baby didn’t make it.” His voice wavers as he suddenly breaks down.

Mom holds on to his shaking shoulders and whispers soothing words in his ear.

Delilah and I look on anxiously. We’d never seen our dad cry before. A terrible sense of helplessness washes over me at the sight.

“They wouldn’t even let me see my dead child,” Dad continues in a pain-filled voice. “Betty was still fighting to survive and wasn’t conscious. I thought she was going to die too. It was late at night and I was shouting like a maniac, so a

nurse took pity on me and laid the unmoving baby in my arms. I held it and cried, and somehow, I found myself driving with it in the middle of nowhere.”

Mom rubs his arm as he wipes his tears with the back of his hands.

“At some point, I must’ve run out of the hospital and gotten into my car.” He shakes his head and goes silent again.

We wait with bated breath, hoping he’d continue with his tale.

Dad looks up but his gaze is focused far into the past.

“I was on a deserted highway, making my way to hell, probably,” Dad says in a clearer voice. “That’s when something came into my view and I hit the brakes just in time to avoid crashing into it. At first, I thought it was a deer. The bright headlights didn’t allow me to see clearly at first.”

“Then, came the pounding of fists on my car’s window. Lowering the glass, I found myself staring at Rosamond.”

I gasp. “My mom was there?”

“She was there with you,” Dad says. “Opening the door, I got out and realized she was in a more shocked state than me. There was a wild look in her eyes, her clothes were covered in grime and soot, and she held her baby in her arms.”

“She gave me the baby and told me to take it away,” says Dad, meeting my gaze. “Rosamond told me not to give the baby to anyone, that I must hand her back only to her or her mate. ‘I had no idea you’d be in this car but thank the goddess you were!’ she said. ‘There’s no one I trust more at this moment than you and Betty. Listen, David. You can’t trust anyone. You can’t even trust a member of the Burton Pack. I don’t know who’s come after Hale, but it’s someone close enough to know the security measures we have around our home.’”

“I told her to get into the car with me, that we’d sort everything out in the morning, but she refused. ‘I must get back to Hale. He’s out there, fighting the enemy. I managed to escape with Iris to keep her safe. Now that I know she’s in safe

hands, I can go back to help Hale.’ Rosamond even smiled at me as she turned around to leave.”

“Were you close to the base that Hale was managing at that time?” Caleb asks.

Dad nods. “The road was about a mile away,” he says. “Not too far but not close enough for me to realize what was happening there. Rosamond insisted she had to go back, that I must do everything to keep Iris safe.” A shudder goes through him as he covers his face with his hands. “I should’ve never let her go that night.”

“It’s not your fault, David,” Mom says, squeezing his hand. “You couldn’t have known.”

“What happened after that?” Ethan asks, keeping his gaze on Dad.

“The news of the attack on the Burton estate was all over the place the next day,” he says. “I noticed it first in the newspaper that morning. The hospital called me to tell me that Betty was recovering and that she was out of danger, but I couldn’t leave the house. Iris was still with me and I had to wait until Rosamond came to get her.”

“But she never came back,” I say. My voice is a bare whisper as the story plays out in my mind.

“It was close to noon when the news revealed her death,” Dad says, looking at me. “I’m so sorry, honey. She couldn’t come back for you. The news reported Rosamond to have died from hypothermia that night. She never managed to get back to Hale.”

My heart clenches despite having known how Rosamond died. It still hurts to know that my mother died to save me.

“What did you do after that?” Raiden asks.

Dad takes a deep breath and lets his shoulders drop.

“I buried our dead baby and went back to the hospital with Iris in my arms,” Dad says. “Iris was born only a week ago, so the nurse and doctor didn’t realize that the baby I came back with wasn’t truly ours. They said that spending a night with

the newborn in my arms caused a miracle. That it was the closeness with her father that brought her back to life. I went along with whatever reason they made up and gave Iris to my wife.”

“I should’ve probably given Iris to her family but how could I trust anyone?” Dad asks, gazing at every person in the room. “A small army had attacked Hale’s home that night. The mercenaries called themselves the Black Widow and identified as a radical group, intent on spreading terror among the masses. No one knew who was mobilizing them. Rosamond told me not to trust the Burtons or anyone close to them. How could I hand her baby over to them when she died protecting her? Left with no choice, I decided to raise her as my daughter.”

“What about you, Mrs. Collins?” Julian asks. “Did you know Iris was your friend’s baby?”

“No,” Mom replies. “I had no idea. David didn’t tell me anything. I think he wanted to bear the burden of that terrible secret until he died.”

“You must’ve known she wasn’t your baby at some point though,” Julian presses on.

“Iris was about four years old when doubt started creeping in my mind,” says Mom. “She looked nothing like me, my mate, or our daughter. One day, I was going through my old photos and caught one where Rosamond was posing with a group of children in our old neighborhood. That’s when I realized that Iris was her spitting image.”

“Betty confronted me that day,” Dad says, lowering his head.

“He told me I was being crazy,” says Mom. “But eventually, I wore him down and made him tell me the truth. Do you know what the craziest part about the whole thing was?”

“What?” I ask.

“I didn’t feel sad when he said I’d truly lost my baby,” says Mom with a humorless laugh. “*You* were my baby. That’s

what my mind and heart believed. I couldn't bring myself to feel sad because I had you."

"I find that hard to believe," says Julian. "If you really thought of Iris as your own daughter, how could you treat her this way? You gave Delilah the best of everything while Iris lived on her scraps. You wouldn't even tell the world she's an omega!"

Mom fixes him with a familiar look. That's how she usually looks when one of us asks her a stupid question.

"Didn't we just explain ourselves to you, kid?" Mom says in a grim, stern tone. "The person who killed Hale and Rosamond was still out there. With each day that passed by, the child looked more and more like her mother. We had to protect her identity. An omega child garners too much attention in our society. There was no way we could allow her to get recognized by someone who wants to hurt her."

"We even packed up and moved here to Winslow," says Dad. "I commuted to Jersey City every day to run our factory but I never let Iris step foot in that town. We couldn't let the Burtons know of her existence. Putting her on suppressors was our way to conceal her designation. We didn't do it out of spite or meanness. Iris needed to grow up the way most betas do. She had to work hard for everything she desired."

Mom nods her agreement. "Omegas are rare and precious. Our society is designed to protect and cherish them. Alphas are naturally gifted with physical strength and leadership capabilities. They don't need anyone's help to climb up in the world. Us, betas, though? We must fight for every scrap. There are no handouts for us. That's how we get strong and make our mark in society."

"Betty's right," Dad says in a grim tone, fixing his gaze on Julian. "As an omega, you've always been sheltered. You would never understand the life of an ordinary beta. We treated Delilah the same way and gave up everything to ensure a bright future for her. Iris, though, was different. Someone was out there, waiting to kill her. We didn't know who. The

best we could do was to equip her to be strong enough to face a future when we were no longer there to protect her.”

“Dad, don’t say that,” I say as the full implication of their choices is revealed to me.

“Iris could never be given the same things we gave Delilah,” Mom says in a cold, hard tone. “Her life was always in danger. Her resemblance to Rosamond was fatal. The man who killed her parents only needs one look at her to recognize her.”

Her words send a chill down my spine. She has been a hundred percent accurate in assuming Callahan’s motive. Even if she’s unaware of his identity, she’s been protecting me from him all this time.

The grim looks that have settled on my mates’ faces tell me that they’re thinking the same thing.

“I was the one who took you to your first Taekwondo class,” Mom says meeting my gaze. Tears pool in her eyes. “Do you remember the day, honey? We wanted you to be able to protect yourself when we were no longer around to do that. Whatever we did, even though it may sound harsh, we did it to protect you, sweetheart.” She chokes on a sob. “Did you truly hate us all these years?”

I shake my head. “No. I never hated you. These past months, I wanted to hate you, but I couldn’t. You guys are my parents. You’re the only family I’ve ever known. You abandoned me but a day didn’t go by when I didn’t miss you.”

Delilah throws her arms around me and hugs me tightly. “You *are* my sister.”

“We left you behind so you wouldn’t be caught up in our chaos,” says Mom. “We thought it’d be best to let you go on with your life instead of following us into an unknown future.” Frustration flares on her face. “We had no idea it would turn into such a mess.”

“I was hasty,” says Caleb. “At the same time, you guys left without considering the consequences of leaving Iris

behind. Both our actions have led Iris to get into danger but they have also brought her to us.”

“Yeah, we can’t regret bringing her here,” says Damon.

“We can’t imagine our lives without her,” says Raiden.

“We’ve loved Iris since the moment we met her,” Julian adds, staring at me with emotion-filled eyes.

While they echo each other’s sentiments, I simply sit and think about the lengths my adoptive parents went through to protect me. Every decision they made was for my benefit.

Delilah might’ve received all the material stuff but I got the most thought and affection from them. I was the one who was always on their minds. That counts more than new clothes and gifts.

Getting off the couch, I walk toward my parents.

Tears stream down my face as I stand before them. “I’m sorry,” I say in a choked voice. “I’m sorry for everything you had to go through to protect me.”

Mom and Dad get to their feet and pull me into a hug.

I feel their warm bodies tremble and shudder from the force of their sobs.

They’re the reason Callahan was unaware of my existence for all these years. It’s because of the way they brought me up, I could fight against him. Mom and Dad taught me to survive in the harshest situation without feeling weak and depressed. The life of a beta taught me to keep fighting despite my vulnerabilities.

The memory of my first night in Solveig estate rises in my mind. Forced into that dark, grimy storage room, I’d felt bewildered and unable to believe my parents had abandoned me. Fear and desperation clawed at me, and I wanted nothing more than to be reunited with my family.

Mom and Dad are finally here for me. Even Delilah came prepared to fight for me.

Intense gratitude washes over me, calming my mind.

I'm not alone anymore.

Caleb, Damon, Raiden, and Julian are always by my side. So are my real family as well as my adoptive family.

Callahan would have to go through them to hurt me. And, he'd have to go through me to touch them.

My determination to capture him gets stronger. My birth mother died protecting me while my adoptive mom made sure I lived and trained hard. I won't let their sacrifices go to waste.

*I will eliminate Callahan from all our lives, I silently vow to myself.*





My brothers and I watch as the Collins family gathers around Iris and hugs her. Tears stream down their faces as they embrace each other. I'm glad to see them being reunited but a sliver of guilt wraps around my chest.

David and his wife *had* asked me for more time to repay the debt.

We'd already waited three years for Delilah to graduate from the academy. Julian wanted us to start a family as soon as possible. It had been my idea to pressure the Collins so I could give my mate the very thing he desired. My haste stemmed from my insatiable need to please him.

The past leaves me feeling confused.

If I hadn't acted like the world's biggest asshole and ordered Damon to bring Iris to our home, would we have ever known of her existence?

My brothers and I are madly in love with Iris. She holds our pack together and completes us. I can't even imagine how we'd all be living without her.

"Are you feeling the same things I'm feeling?" Damon whispers as he leans against me.

"I feel bad about kidnapping her but at the same, I can't bring myself to regret it."

“How can you regret bringing her into our lives?” Raiden whispers.

“We’re the reason Callahan got to know about her existence,” says Damon.

“He could’ve spotted her in the middle of the street too,” says Raiden. “She’d have been in worse trouble without us. Stop thinking about the past. None of us can change it. Just be glad that we found her.”

I nod, silently agreeing with my youngest brother.

Julian stays quiet, so I look around my brothers to spot him. To my surprise, he’s no longer in the room.

Loud hip-hop music suddenly blares in the room.

The Collins break free and Delilah scrambles toward the couch she’d been sitting on. Grabbing her phone, she answers the call.

“Hey,” she says breathlessly. “Yeah, I’m okay.” She keeps nodding emphatically as she answers each of the caller’s questions. “Yeah, my sister’s here. Yeah, she’s okay. Yeah, we’re all safe.”

I walk toward her. “Are you speaking to Oldenburg?”

She narrows her gaze but nods.

“Let me speak to him,” I say, extending my hand toward her. A sigh escapes me when she doesn’t obey me. “I want to invite him over to our house. Please...let me talk to him.”

Distrust is etched on her face but she hands me the phone. We’re going to need Iris to explain everything to her so that Delilah can stop thinking of us as villains.

“This is Caleb Solveig,” I speak into the phone.

“Lachlan Oldenburg,” a stiff male voice answers me.

“Pleasure,” I say curtly. “Since you’re already here, I’d like to extend an invitation.”

“What?” Surprise laces his voice.

“I’m sure you’d feel more at ease by being closer to your mate,” I say. “Delilah still has a lot to catch up with her sister, so it’s going to be a while before she says her goodbyes. You can come here and wait with a cup of tea or brandy. Your choice.”

“Oh...err...” The young man clears his throat loudly. “Yeah, okay. Thanks, I guess?”

Even though we’ve never directly interacted with each other, I know him and his family. He’s the youngest son among the Oldenburg pack. They’re the most powerful military pack in the country and command great respect. If we can bring him on our side, we’ll be able to form a stronger alliance against Callahan and the Black Widow.

Handing the phone back to Delilah, I move toward Iris.

Relief spreads through me as she easily leans against me and allows me to kiss the top of her head. Her delicious fragrance wafts into my nostrils, calming me instantly.

“Are you okay?” I ask, holding her close.

She brushes the tears clinging to her lashes and nods.

“You need more time with them,” I say. “That’s why I asked Delilah’s alpha to come here. He must be a tight ball of anxiety, worrying that he’s putting his mate in danger by letting her be among us villains.”

She stares up at me. “You’re not a villain. I guess you were impatient about starting your family but that doesn’t make you a bad guy. Give me more time with her. She’ll see how much you’ve fought to keep me safe.”

Hugging her closer, I lean down to kiss her gently and sweetly.

She melts against me and lets out a soft moan.

A bright smile curves her lips as she steps away from me and turns toward her parents.

“How about I show you guys around?” she says. “Also, does anyone want coffee?”

There's an instant murmur of agreement from Ethan and her parents.

"Can we wait until Lachlan gets here?" Delilah speaks up. "He's so worried about us all."

"Sure," Iris agrees instantly.

Raiden calls up one of our guards at the main gate and instructs him to escort our guest to the house.

Everyone is starting to look calmer. Mrs. Collins still looks pale but her husband is right by her side and holding her hand. I'm hoping that spending more time with Iris will soothe their worries for her.

It barely takes ten minutes for Lachlan to appear at our door.

The youngest Oldenburg is closer to Delilah and Iris's age. Dressed in their customary green uniform, he marches inside the room and makes a beeline for his mate.

His keen gaze sweeps over Delilah, making sure she's perfectly okay. Once his inspection is over, he pulls her into his arms and kisses her.

"Aww!" Iris croons, watching them. "Is that him? Is that her mate?"

"Yes, that's Lachlan," says Mr. Collins with a soft smile.

Lachlan gazes around the room. A look of recognition settles in his eyes when he sees me.

"First Lieutenant Oldenburg," I call out and extend my hand toward him. "Welcome to our home."

He hesitates but grasps my hand firmly.

"Come and meet my brothers," I say, turning him toward my brothers. "This is Damon and Raiden."

He nods at them before glancing at Delilah. "Is everything okay here?"

"Yeah, everything's great. It's just that I still need to hear a good reason why Iris should stay here."

“I’ll give you all the reasons, but you’ve got to calm down first,” says Iris. She grins at Lachlan and offers him a hand. “Hi, I’m Iris.”

He shakes her hand gently and smiles hesitantly.

“I’m taking Delilah and my parents into the kitchen for some coffee,” says Iris. “My mates and I haven’t had a sip since the moment we woke up today. Would you like some too?”

“Sure, if it’s not too much trouble.”

Iris wounds her arm around Delilah’s and tugs. “Come on. I’ll show you around.” Gesturing at Ethan, she adds, “You should come and check out my new kitchen. It’s massive and has *everything*.”

Warmth flares inside me when she says the words “my kitchen”. She’s finally starting to think of this place as her own home.

“Mom. Dad. You guys should come too.”

Mr. and Mrs. Collins glance at me.

“It’s all right,” I say at once. They both need to see that Iris is living in a safe home. Looking around the place would make them see that we’re capable of taking care of all her needs.

Silence falls over us the moment Iris and her family leave the room.

“I called you here for another reason,” I say, taking a seat near Lachlan.

“Yeah?” A grim expression settles on his face. “What reason is that?”

“Now that Delilah and her parents have made contact with Iris, they’re going to be in danger,” Damon says, sitting down right next to Lachlan. “Since you’re her mate, we’re here to give you a heads-up.”

“Why would she be in danger?”

“Delilah can explain everything to you later, but here are the facts,” I say in a low, grim tone. “Iris isn’t David and Betty Collins’s daughter. Her father was a leading alpha from the Burton Pack. The person who murdered him is after Iris. He’s one of the most dangerous men out there and won’t hold back from using her adoptive family as leverage to lure her into his trap.”

I wait for him to absorb the shock of my words. If Delilah had been unaware of the truth, he’s most definitely ignorant about it too.

“Who’s after Delilah’s sister?” Lachlan asks after a while. “Maybe, I can help keep her safe.”

“Have you heard of Lieutenant Colonel Nox Callahan?” Raiden asks.

He nods slowly. “I think so, but I haven’t had any interaction with him.”

“Well, he’s the mastermind behind the Black Widow,” says Damon.

“What?” He stares at us with wide eyes. “What’re you talking about?”

I nod. “You heard that right. We’ve figured out the person who’s running the terrorist organization. I’m sure there are others among our ranks who’ve been helping him, but he’s the real leader. We need to capture him and bring him to justice.”

“I haven’t heard anything regarding this matter,” Lachlan says, looking troubled. “Wouldn’t packs like mine be aware of information like this?”

“Yes, but we want to keep our knowledge among trusted allies only,” Damon explains. “We’re still unaware of the people who’ve been helping Callahan, so we want to keep our group as tight-knit as possible. The Burton pack knows what we know and they are fully supporting us.”

Lachlan is quiet for a moment. “The last Black Widow terror attack happened on the same day as your pack’s Remembrance Day.”

“You’re right,” I say. “If you remember, the terrorists surrendered without any confrontation with the authorities. That’s because we had Callahan in our grasp that day. We forced him to call off the attack.”

“My father was here that day,” he says slowly. “He knows nothing about the things you’re telling me.”

“How about we show you proof?”

Lachlan’s eyes widen.

“We need you on our side, brother,” says Raiden, grinning. “How can we do that if you don’t trust us?”

Damon slides closer to Lachlan and takes his phone out. “Take a look at this,” he says, scrolling across the screen before giving it to him.

The sound of familiar voices rises from the phone. Damon is showing him the clips from our time in the underground chambers where we’d chained Callahan and interrogated him.

Iris’s voice rings in my ears and is followed by Callahan’s screams as she tortures him.

Lachlan watches the clips with shocked eyes. His fingers tighten over the phone as he stares unblinkingly at the scene where Callahan is calling off the attack on the school.

“I do recognize him,” Lachlan says, keeping his gaze on the phone’s screen. “He’s the same guy who has been in charge of investigating the Black Widow’s whereabouts. I know him because he was conducting the rescue operations on a mall attack three years ago.”

“Were you there?” Damon asks in a grim tone.

“Not me,” says Lachlan, handing back his phone. “But, my sister was there. She was among the civilians who were captured by the assholes.” His gaze focuses on Damon. “You went in there to free them, didn’t you? I think I finally recognize your face now.”

Damon’s gaze darkens as memories of that awful day flash before his eyes.

“Thank you,” Lachlan suddenly blurts.

Surprise flickers through my brother’s eyes.

“You sacrificed yourself to save her and the others,” Lachlan says. “I could’ve lost my sister that day if it weren’t for you.”

“There’s no need to thank me,” Damon says through clenched teeth as pure hatred swirls in his amber eyes. “I was just doing my job. If you really want to do something worthwhile, get your pack to help ours in bringing down the bastard who’s been responsible for countless innocent deaths.”

Lachlan nods. “My fathers and I were unaware of the truth until now. Our pack has always sided with justice. If you remember our history, you’ll know that we’ve always supported equal rights for everyone despite a person’s designation.”

“We do,” I reply. “Your help will be greatly appreciated. Our numbers are small because we don’t want sensitive information spreading to our enemies. We want to capture Callahan in one swift strike. It’s the only way we can dismantle the organization that has threatened our peaceful society for years.”

“Most importantly, though,” Raiden interrupts. “You have to keep Delilah and her parents safe. They are Iris’s weakness and she is ours.”

“I understand,” says Lachlan. “Don’t worry. I’ll keep them safe.”

Relief spreads through me as I watch Lachlan relaxing in our presence.

“Can you forward me those videos?” Lachlan asks. “My dads won’t need any convincing when they see it.”

“Sure,” Damon replies.

“Help us set up a meeting with them,” I say. “We can discuss strategies to strengthen ourselves against Callahan’s threat.”

He nods. “I can do that for you.”



“Hey, do you guys smell that?” Raiden asks, sniffing the air.

The warm fragrance of cooking pancakes wafts into my nostrils.

“Someone’s making pancakes,” says Lachlan, looking toward the hallway that leads into the kitchen.

“Let’s go,” says Damon, getting to his feet. “I need food as well as coffee.”

“Join us,” I say, gesturing at Lachlan.

“Yeah,” he says, finally giving us a genuine smile. “I need coffee too.”

The day started in the most unexpected way. My brothers and I were rearing to accuse the Collins for abandoning Iris but it turns out that they were all trying to protect her.

The phrase that the truth is stranger than fiction is so damn apt in our case.

We finally have the answers we’d all been desperate for. The Collins had no nefarious motive for bringing up Iris as their daughter. They were just trying to protect their friend’s baby.

A relieved smile curves my lips when I realize how happy Iris must be right now. She finally has her family back again.



My stomach growls loudly as I lead Ethan and my family into the vast kitchen.

“I’m guessing you haven’t had any breakfast yet,” says Ethan.

“No,” I groan, making a beeline for the coffee machine on the counter. Switching it on, I stand back and look over at my friend and parents.

“So, what do you think? It’s nice, isn’t it?”

Mom and Dad take their time gazing at every corner of the gleaming kitchen while Ethan strides in and starts inspecting the oven and stovetops.

“Posh stuff,” he mutters, moving toward the fridge.

“The kitchen in Lachlan’s mansion is just as big,” says Delilah, plopping onto a chair by the dining table. “Of course, I’ve only gone there when he makes me hot chocolate at night.” Her cheeks turn pink as she grins happily. “Other times, we eat in the dining hall with everyone else.”

“Forget about the friggin’ kitchen!” Mom snaps. She seems to have recovered from the shock of revealing her secret and is steadily gaining back her usual no-nonsense attitude. “Tell us about the man who killed Hale and Rosamond. Who is he?”

“He used to be my dad’s friend,” I say. “Well, my birth dad.”

The sound of Ethan rummaging among the top row of the cupboards interrupts me. Glancing toward him, I find that he’s gathered several ingredients from the fridge and placed them on the counter.

A small chuckle escapes me.

Ethan has taken up on the job of making breakfast for everyone.

“Hey, do you need any help?” I ask.

“Nah. Just answer Betty’s question,” he says, waving at me. “I’ll listen as I cook.”

“I hope I’m not putting you in danger by revealing these facts to you,” I say as a sliver of worry settles in my gut. “What if he comes after you?”

Turning around to face me, he flexes his arm muscle. “I’m a big guy, Iris. Let him come at me. I’ll give him a taste of my fist.”

Delilah giggles and receives an immediate glare from Mom.

The scent of coffee spreads in the room. Reaching toward the coffee machine, I grab the flask and take it to the table.

I pour coffee for everyone and then take a seat at the table.

“Callahan was my father’s friend,” I say, narrating the tragic tale that ended with the murder of my birth parents. “He’s a sick asshole and became obsessed with my mother. There wasn’t much he could do, though. She was already mated to my father.”

Mom’s expression grows grim as I narrate the story.

“Unable to give up on his sick obsession, he used his shadow army to attack my dad’s base. The strike left several soldiers dead and injured.” I look toward Mom and Dad. “You guys must remember the carnage he left behind. TV reports and newspapers must’ve talked about it all.”

“That’s how I learned of Rosamond’s passing that morning,” Dad says, still looking distressed. Gazing at me, he captures my hands. “Did I sin by not giving you up to your family?”

I shake my head. “You did the right thing, Dad,” I say despite knowing how unfair and painful it had been for Charlie and my uncles to think I was dead. “Rosamond specifically told you not to give me up to them. You respected her dying wish and watched over me to this day.”

“I don’t even want to talk about this anymore,” Delilah mutters, pouting. “Iris is *my* sister. She’s *family*. End of discussion!” Pushing her chair back, she gets up and flings her arms around me. “You’re the best sister in the whole wide world. Anyone else in your shoes would’ve been a jealous bitch. But, you never cared, did you? You always had my back and fought the bullies who hurt me.”

Ethan scoffs as he beats batter in a large bowl. “Iris is stupid,” he says. “I told her a million times not to help you. She never listened to me.”

“You were always jealous of me,” Delilah shouts, pointing a finger at him. “You always wanted to hoard her attention.”

Ethan’s face flames at the accusation. His gaze flickers toward me.

He’s silently telling me not to tell her about his confession. A funny noise escapes me as I try to school my expression.

Delilah is quick to judge the situation.

“Wait, you know?” she asks me as a grin spreads on her impish face. “You know he likes you?”

Now, it’s my turn to be embarrassed. “Forget about it,” I mutter. Grabbing my cup, I pretend to drink my coffee to hide my face.

Delilah laughs, returning to her old self. Clearing her throat, she fixes me with a serious look. “I guess you needed an experience like this. Mom and Dad never let you go

anywhere. They wouldn't even let you apply to an out-of-state college. You needed to be independent to find yourself."

"What are you talking about?" I mumble.

"You got yourself four mates," she says. "Not one, but *four*."

"Be honest, honey," Dad says in a lowered voice. "Do they treat you well?"

"They do," I say in my sincerest voice.

"Even that odd male omega?" Delilah questions.

"He's not odd," I say at once. "He thought the worst of you guys because he assumed you abandoned me. Can you blame him for it?" I look toward my parents. "I never felt an ounce of regret or jealousy when it came to the way you treated Delilah, but it hurt like hell when you left me behind without a word or an explanation. You can't imagine the pain I went through."

"We're sorry, sweetheart," Dad says in an anxious voice. "It was our fault for thinking you'd be safer away from us."

Tears gather in my eyes as I think back on those awful days right after Damon brought me here.

"Julian was so kind to me," I say. "He protected me from Caleb's anger and looked after me. We fell for each other even before we knew about my true designation."

"What about the others?" Mom asks. "They must've been pissed off at us."

I nod. "Caleb was. He was angry about being deceived and cheated." A heavy sigh escapes me. "Even then, he wasn't cruel to me. I passed out when my hormones started emerging because I'd stopped taking those stupid pills. He rushed me to a hospital without any delay."

"Did he come to find out about your designation that day?" Delilah asks.

I shake my head. "I kept it a secret."

"When did they get to know?"

“Caleb and the others invited me to a party,” I say. “That was the night Callahan saw me and recognized me. He used the Black Widow to stage an attack while he came after me. My mates protected me that day. I guess it was while we were returning home that they caught my scent.”

“That’s what we were always afraid of,” Mom says, clutching my hand. “Your resemblance to Rosamond is uncanny. Whoever killed her would recognize you at a glance.”

“He’s a dangerous man,” I say. “Did you hear about the recent attack here?”

“Yeah,” says Mom. “Of course, we didn’t know you were living here at the time.”

“Callahan kidnapped me that night.”

A loud clatter makes me jump.

Ethan is scrambling by the countertop with a bunch of paper napkins as he tries to clean up the egg he’s dropped.

“You were fucking kidnapped by that psycho?” he shouts, continuing to wipe the eggy spill.

“He didn’t just kidnap me. He got dangerously close to biting me and raping me that night.”

A gasp escapes my mom while Dad and Delilah stare at me with horror-stricken looks.

“Thankfully, Caleb and Raiden were there to rescue me,” I say, quickly finishing the story of that horrible night to relieve them. “I’d probably be dead if they didn’t get to me in time.”

“Were you okay, honey?” Mom asks, looking anxious.

“They rushed me to the emergency room while their own home was burning,” I say, remembering the events of that awful night. “Julian nearly died fighting the men who infiltrated into the house to capture me. Caleb, Damon, and Raiden barely slept over the next few weeks as they scrambled around to secure our home and protect me from another attack.”

“Wow,” Delilah breathes. “I can’t believe the shit you went through over the last couple of months.”

“I feel the same,” says Ethan, drawing my attention to him. “How could you get through this shitstorm on your own? You should’ve shared some of this with me.”

“I wasn’t on my own,” I say, hoping they’ll understand why I have fallen so deeply in love with my mates. “Julian was right beside me. Caleb, Damon, and Raiden always made me feel safe and protected.” I glance toward my family. “There *were* times when I missed you terribly but Julian was always by my side, making sure I was never lonely.”

“I guess they’re not that bad,” Delilah finally relents.

A chuckle escapes me. “Give them a chance, especially Julian.”

“How does it even work between you two?” Delilah asks. “I can’t even imagine sharing my mate with another omega.”

“I felt the same way when I first met him,” Ethan confesses as he turns toward the stove. “But, he’s damn possessive of her. He was ready to maul me when he first met me at my restaurant.”

A gentle sizzle sounds in the room as Ethan ladles batter onto a big pan.

“Caleb, Damon, and Raiden are my lovers and mate,” I say with a smile. “But, Julian? He’s my soulmate.”

Surprise swirls in Delilah’s vivid blue eyes. Relieved smiles blossom on Mom and Dad’s faces.

“They’ve realized how special you are, sweetheart,” Dad says, squeezing my hand. “I’m glad to see how happy they make you.”

The smell of pancakes soon fills the kitchen.

Ethan is still at the counter. Holding a knife, he skillfully chops up a pineapple.

We sip our coffees quietly for a while. I’m sure everyone is mulling over the things I’ve revealed to them.

When the first batch of pancakes is cooked, I speak up again.

“You must stay hidden until Callahan is caught,” I say, gazing at Delilah and my parents. “Caleb has tried to find you guys but failed. Things should stay that way until we’ve cleared up this mess.”

“No way!” Delilah groans. “I was planning on so many things in my head right now. You’ve got to come visit me in my new home. And, I can’t wait to take you to the academy with me when we have our next reunion. I want everyone to see the transformation you’ve had! Oh, I can’t wait to see the jealous looks on some of their faces when they see we’ve *both* bagged alphas from among the best packs.”

I can’t help but giggle at her enthusiasm. Some of the omegas at her old school were epitomes of mean girls.

“We’ll do all that but not right now,” I say with a sigh. “You guys are in danger. I’m sure Callahan is looking for you too. He’ll come after you just so he can use you against me. He’s still obsessed with my mother and will do anything to catch me.”

Mom’s face is a mask of stone-cold fury. “I’d like to get my hands on that bastard,” she says through clenched teeth. “I’ll never forget what he did to Rosamond and her family.”

“You’ll get your chance, Mom,” I say. “Let us catch him first.”

“She’s right,” says a familiar voice.

Looking toward the doorway, I spot Caleb.

His gaze sweeps over the kitchen and falls on Ethan in the corner. An amused look comes over his handsome face as he glances back at me.

“Oh, you’re here too!” Delilah rises from her chair and flings herself at Lachlan.

Damon and Raiden stride into the kitchen and make a beeline for me.



“We smelled pancakes and followed the trail,” Raiden says with a grin.

“Ethan makes the best food,” I say. “You guys are finally going to get a taste of his talents.”

Ethan turns around and offers me a mock salute.

Lachlan looks a lot more comfortable than before. He settles down on the chair beside Delilah and accepts the coffee she pours for him.

Our kitchen is huge but these big alphas are easily taking up all the space here. I look around, hoping to see Julian but he’s not with them.

“Where’s Julian?” I ask. “He’d be the first one here if he smelled pancakes.”

“He wasn’t with us,” says Caleb. “I thought he came in here to be with you.”

I shake my head. “He hasn’t been here.”

“I’ll go look for him,” says Damon. “Don’t start without us.”

“Don’t worry,” Ethan answers him. “I still have loads of pancakes to feed everyone here.”

Damon flashes me a wink before he leans down to peck my lips. “I’ll be right back.”

I nod and playfully squeeze his ass.

The look of desire in his amber eyes intensifies. “Don’t tease the wolf,” he whispers and takes a gentle bite of my earlobe.

Pleasure shivers through me.

“Please bring Julian here,” I whisper urgently. “I’m starving.”

Pecking my cheek, Damon walks out of the kitchen.

I move toward Ethan. “Are you sure you don’t need my help with something?”

“I’m going to work on the mixed berry compote,” Ethan says, tossing me an apron. “Can you watch the pancakes until then?”

“Sure,” I readily agree. “I’m also going to fry up some bacon. We love our bacon here.”

“Go ahead,” he says. “Don’t throw away the grease after you’re done. I want to use it to make some eggs.”

“Bacon grease?” Delilah mutters. “Ew.”

“Don’t mind her,” I whisper to Ethan as he bangs a pan on the stove. “She has no idea what it takes to make a dish legendary.”

A chuckle escapes him. His familiar smile puts me at ease immediately.

Looking over at my parents, I see that they’re quiet but not as nervous as before. Delilah has turned all her attention to Lachlan while he talks to Caleb and Raiden about heightening security around his base.

Working with Ethan reminds me of our high school days when we hung out at his grandfather’s restaurant. He practiced cooking while I played along as his helpful sous chef.

Thinking back, I realize that even though life hadn’t been perfect, I’d still been happy.

Mom and Dad bore the burden of my tragic past and protected me from the people who killed my parents.

Back then, it had been so much easier to worry about money and finding a way to afford college. Nothing has been as painful as learning the way my parents died.

The fire of revenge doesn’t just burn the sinner. It ravages the one carrying it within their heart.

I’m almost grateful to my parents for not telling me the truth for so long.

“You’re letting them burn!” Ethan’s shout breaks me out of my thoughts.

“Shit!” I mumble, scrambling to flip the pancakes.  
“Sorry!”

Ethan grabs the ladle out of my hand as I uselessly try to flip the pancakes with it.

“You’re still in shock, Iris. Go and sit down,” he says with a sigh. “I’ll finish up here on my own.”

I don’t argue with him and go back to the table.

The heavenly smell of pancakes makes my stomach growl loudly. I sip my second cup of coffee, impatiently waiting for Damon and Julian.

They come in just as Ethan is placing a mountain of pancakes on the table.

Since there isn’t enough space on the dining table, they join Caleb and Raiden by the counter.

It’s pure relief to see that everyone has finally gathered together.

Grabbing a plate, I rush to fill it with pancakes and bacon. Everyone else follows me while Ethan watches on patiently.

The scene playing out before me seems surreal. I have to pinch myself to make sure I’m not dreaming right now.

My family, my best friend, and my mates are right here by my side, sharing a delicious breakfast. The happiness bubbling inside me is enough to choke me up with tears.

Lowering my head, I keep eating. If anyone saw me crying, they’d immediately start fussing.

Hiding a sob with a little coughing, I get back to my meal and continue devouring Ethan’s delicious food.



My neck and back ache as I hunch over the laptop screen and type out the last few lines of the code. Once completed, the program will help us analyze the mountain of data that Iris and I have collected to trace the Black Widow's hideout.

Taking a deep breath, I run the program and lean against the backrest of my chair. My eyes burn from exhaustion but the screen before me shows several errors.

A part of me wants to take a break but I don't want to delay perfecting this program. The sooner we get to Callahan, the faster we can all move on from the tragedies of the past.

Iris has spent most of the day with her family. She didn't get a chance to be alone with me but I can tell she's gone through an emotional rollercoaster since the moment she woke up.

I have hated the Collins family since Iris came to live with us. They abandoned her and let her bear the brunt of Caleb's anger. I hated them more when I realized she wasn't given the same things as their omega daughter, Delilah.

It was only after hearing their story that I understand what they've gone through to protect Iris. They protected her all these years after going through the heart-wrenching pain of losing their own baby.

David and Betty truly brought her up as their own daughter. They took every measure imaginable to keep her

hidden from Callahan. Their efforts kept her safe and turned her into the fiery, brave woman that we've all fallen in love with.

I can only be grateful for the measures they took to keep her safe. Callahan is a dangerous man. I shudder to think what he'd have done to her if he got to her before us.

Rubbing my itching eyes, I straighten my back and work on the code until it's working seamlessly.

I nearly doze off as I wait for the program to finish running.

Jerking awake, I blearily look toward the screen.

A small list of different localities is displayed on the computer screen before me. They're all the places that have been ordering bulk supplies of food, toilet paper, common medicines, etc. All their orders are similar to those that are acquired by a military base.

The program automatically delists any known military base and governmental institution from the record, so what I'm left with is a listing of all non-governmental organizations that could potentially lead us to the Black Widow.

My gaze sweeps through the list and focuses on the name of a town near Jersey City. The location has me intrigued because Callahan's pack also originates from the same area as the Burtons.

"Could this be their lair?" I mutter to myself.

Pulling my chair closer to the desk, I type in the name of the town and run a search on it.

From the topmost articles, I learn that Kentville is an abandoned town. No one has settled here in the last hundred and fifty years.

My suspicion heightens when I see that this area is well-connected to major highways. This town should be a prime location for a settlement but it's been abandoned for years.

Why?

The few images available on these sites show a vast region that is dotted by crumbling buildings and surrounded by hills and thick woods.

Kentville is eerily similar to the area where Fort Callahan stands. Abandoned and kept isolated, it's the perfect place to hide a secret army.

The only thing that concerns me is the lack of any solid structure. Judging by the amount of food that gets delivered here every month, this place should be housing at least four-five thousand men.

Callahan must have some building or manor nearby to house these men. Not only that, but their lair must also contain an arsenal filled with guns and bombs. Where could he be hiding all that?

A sudden knock startles me out of my thoughts.

"Julian, are you there?" Iris's low, cautious voice sounds right outside the closed door.

"Yeah, I'm here. Come in."

Opening the door, she walks in. Her gaze immediately falls on the open laptop before me.

"Have you been here the whole day?" she asks, coming to a halt. "I haven't seen you around since the time we had breakfast. Did you even eat lunch and dinner?"

I hadn't even thought of food. "What about you?" I ask. "Have *you* eaten dinner?"

"No. I wanted to grab something and that's when I thought of you." A worried look comes over her. "Are you okay? You haven't answered any of my texts the entire day."

"I've just been busy."

"Busy with what?"

"Nothing."

"Julian!" Coming closer, she places her hands on both sides of my face and leans in.

Her palms are so warm, my eyes nearly flutter close from the comfort of her touch.

“Are you still mad at me for forgiving my family?” she asks, drawing me out of my momentary bliss.

“What? No, I—”

“I know they messed up when they decided to leave me behind but they were trying to protect me by not dragging me into their mess with Caleb,” Iris says with a desperate look on her face. “Please, Julian. Can’t you give them a chance for my sake?”

Iris has misunderstood me completely.

I’ve indeed been up here since breakfast but it wasn’t out of anger or jealousy. I knew she needed time to catch up with her family, especially her sister.

Lachlan took Caleb to his home so that he could introduce our pack to his dads and reveal the facts about Callahan and his association with the Black Widow. Damon and Raiden also went to join the discussion which freed me up enough to come here and work on the program that can help us locate the bastard and his army faster.

Before I can find a way to explain myself, Iris leans in and smashes her lips against mine.

My eyes widen and I go completely still for a moment.

“I love you,” she whispers, her lips moving against mine. “I’ll always love you.” Her fingers clasp around the back of my neck as she pulls herself against me and captures my lips once more.

Her heady scent wraps around me and the taste of her sweet mouth sends fire singing through my veins. My arms tighten around her, eager to feel her soft weight and warmth against me.

My cock throbs, erasing my mind from all thoughts.

“I need more,” I say, sweeping my tongue along her bottom lip.

A heavy moan escapes her.

Sliding my hands under her shirt, I revel in the feel of her smooth, silky skin against my palms. She leans in to kiss me again but my mouth latches onto a spot on her neck.

“Oh, gods,” she groans, her fingers digging into my shoulders.

I want to touch and taste every inch of her skin. A sudden hate for the clothes separating our skins flares inside me and all I want to do is rip them to pieces.

And, that’s exactly what I do.

Grabbing the front of her shirt, I tug hard enough to rip the buttons.

A surprised gasp escapes her as she stares down at her torn shirt.

“Why do you guys keep doing this to me?” she moans. “You keep ripping my favorite clothes to bits.”

A rough chuckle escapes me as I take savage pleasure in tearing off larger chunks of her shirt until she’s completely bared before me.

A sardonic grin comes onto her lips. “So, you’re not mad at me anymore?”

Leaning in, I lightly nibble on the soft skin of her neck. “I was never mad at you, Wildflower.” Before she can pull away, I unhook her bra and quickly pull it away to reveal her gorgeous, red-tipped breasts.

“Wait, you’re not—” Her words get drowned by a loud moan as I swirl my tongue over a perked-up nipple. Closing her eyes, she arches her neck as I suck and kiss her delicious mounds.

“Should we go back to my room?” she manages to blurt through the moans escaping her.

“No time for that, love.” Sliding my arms under her thighs, I stand up.



A gasp escapes her as she tightens her arms around my neck.

I carry her to a corner and lower her feet on the ground.

“Julian?” she whispers, glancing at me with lust-glazed eyes.

“Face the wall,” I command in a rough voice.

She readily obeys and juts her hips out. Her obedience further fans my fiery lust.

Stepping behind her, I wrap my arms around her and start fiddling with the buttons of her jeans. The moment they pop open, I slide her pants down her long legs and help her step out of them.

“No panties?” I say, staring at her smooth ass.

“I forgot to put them on this morning,” she moans. “I was in a hurry, remember?”

My hand slides between her thighs and cups her sex.

Her head falls back against my chest. A groan escapes her as she rubs her ass all over my hardened lump.

Warm honey coats my fingers as I delve between her pussy lips. She’s so damn ready for me.

“I want to feel your skin on mine,” she says, thrusting her hips back at me. “Get rid of your clothes or I’m going to have to go at them with a pair of scissors,” she threatens.

“You’re not moving from this position,” I say, caging her between the wall and my chest. Pulling off my hoodie, I proceed to lower my trousers.

My erect cock prods at her naked ass cheek. “Happy?” I whisper, closing the distance between us.

“Mhmm.”

In an instant, my hands are on her hips, gripping them tightly as I position myself at her entrance. Her slick lips allow my thick head to prod in, but I still have to thrust in hard to fully slip into her tight channel.

A cry escapes her as my thick length stretches her wide. Her fingers scratch the wall as she arches her back against my chest.

My throbbing balls scream at me to thrust inside her again but I give her a few moments to get used to me. When I feel her walls starting to clench onto my dick, I slowly plunge in and out of her and soon, she's moaning and following my rhythm.

It's pure elation to be inside her. For long minutes, I revel in the feel of her tight, hot pussy. Nothing brings me more pleasure and comfort than being buried inside her balls-deep.

I love her desperately and that scares me.

There's no way I can ever lose her. I'll fight an entire army to keep her safe and close to me.

Iris's moans break me out of my thoughts. She's pushing back against me, letting my cock plunge deep inside her. Every thrust makes her soft ass jiggle, urging me to pummel inside her faster and harder.

She tightens against me impossibly, nearly taking my breath away.

Clenching my teeth together, I thrust in, intent on making her come before I take any pleasure myself.

It takes only a few more of my hardened strokes for her to come undone. She clenches and pulses around me as she loses all control.

I hold onto her hips as she slumps against the wall, her breathing coming out in harsh pants. "Iris... Wildflower... I love you," I manage to say before surrendering to the blinding pleasure that ravages me.

Her walls continue to pulse against my thickened cock as my cum shoots out. My body shudders against hers as I continue thrusting inside her until she's milked me to the last drop.

Panting heavily, I gently pull out of her but the next second, I realize she's sinking to the floor. I hurry and grab

onto her waist before her knees can hit the ground.

“Are you okay, darling?” I murmur, steadying her.

“Yeah,” she says, turning around to face me.

A soft smile plays on her luscious lips as she reaches up to brush the stray, sweaty strands out of my eyes.

“Will you tell me what you’ve been doing here the whole day?” she asks.

Pulling her into a hug, I hold her against me for a while.

“I don’t want to ruin the moment by going into it,” I whisper in her ear. “Let’s go to bed and order pizza. Then, I might feel like talking about it.”

She chuckles and nods. “Sure, let’s do that. It’ll be a while before Caleb and the others get back home.”

“They’re still with the Oldenburgs?”

“Yeah.”

“Perfect. I get to have you all to myself tonight.” Leaning down, I sweep her into my arms.

She giggles as I carry her out of the room.

I think of the discovery I’ve made but we can talk about it tomorrow. For now, I just want to enjoy the moment we have with each other.



The sheet slides off me and pools around my waist as I sip up. Yawning widely, I scratch my face and look around.

The bed beside me is empty. My gaze roves all over the room but I don't see Julian anywhere.

Climbing off the bed, I walk toward the bathroom and stand outside the closed door. "Julian, are you in there?" I call out.

There's no answer, so I push open the door and peep into the bathroom.

An empty room greets me, confusing me. Where could he be?

I turn toward the ornamental wall clock in the distance. It's barely seven A.M. It's highly unusual for Julian to be awake this early.

Grabbing a robe, I put on my slippers and walk out of the room.

A familiar figure comes into sight the moment I turn around a bend in the hallway. He has his back toward me but I recognize him easily.

"Damon!" I call out loudly.

He turns around to face me. His amber eyes shine brightly as a broad grin curves his lips. "Wildcat, hey!" he greets, opening his arms wide.

I skip ahead and fling myself in his arms.

My feet lift off the ground as he hauls me in his arms and captures my lips. A wild chuckle escapes me as I hang mid-air while being kissed thoroughly.

Damon's kiss leaves me dazed for a moment. When he puts me back on my feet, I stumble and end up back in his arms.

"What are you guys doing?" Caleb's voice calls from the other end of the corridor.

Steadying myself, I look around Damon and find Caleb and Raiden walking toward us.

"When did you guys come back last night?" I ask.

"It was quite late," says Raiden as he leans in to peck my lips. "We found you and Julian sleeping in his room, so we didn't wake you up."

"Where is he?" Caleb asks.

"He's probably still asleep," says Damon.

"No. He's not in his room," I tell them. "That's why I came out to check on him."

"Let's look in the kitchen," Raiden suggests. "He might've gone there to get some coffee."

"This early though?" Raiden asks with raised eyebrows.

Caleb chuckles and captures my hand. I follow him and the others along the corridor and down the staircase.

While I'm still in my PJs and wrapped in a woolen robe, Caleb and his brothers are already dressed in their uniforms. Their gold-trimmed black attires make them look impossibly handsome and regal.

My feet suddenly halt as the distinct smell of cooking eggs and bacon wafts into my nostrils.

"Do you guys smell that?" I ask.

"Smells like someone's cooking breakfast," Caleb says, glancing at me.

“Could it be him?” Raiden says with an amused grin.

Without speaking another word, the four of us tiptoe toward the kitchen and peer through the door.

To our surprise, we find Julian at the stovetop, stirring something vigorously. His back is turned toward us, so he has no idea we’re spying on him.

“Are we sure it’s him?” Raiden says with a choked chuckle. “There’s no way the real Julian would wake up this early to make us breakfast.”

“Haha. Very funny,” Julian says wryly and turns around to face us.

“What are you doing, Jules?” Damon asks, stepping up to him and pulling him close for a kiss.

Julian lets him peck his lips but pushes him away the next second. He goes back to the pan, stirs at the scrambled eggs, and switches off the flame.

Moving toward the counter, I see two sheet trays filled with baked waffles.

I’m as surprised as my mates to find Julian ready with breakfast this early in the morning.

“Still think we’re not dealing with a clone?” Raiden whispers in my ear.

“Stop acting like I’ve never cooked you anything,” Julian retorts with a scowl. “Grab some plates and help me put everything on the table.”

Caleb immediately steps up to help him out.

Raiden leads me to the table while Damon pours me a mug of coffee.

Soon, the table is filled with dishes of waffles, eggs, and bacon.

“Eat up!” Julian says, gazing at us with a serious look.

“You’re freaking me out,” Raiden says as I proceed to fill up my plate with food. “Will you tell us what you’re up to?”

“I’m not up to anything. Just eat.”

“You woke up early to make us breakfast and you’re not touching anything! You weren’t even hungry but you bothered cooking for us,” Raiden retorts.

I cut into the waffles and take a bite. They’re slightly dry because they’re the frozen stuff we usually buy at the supermarket, but Julian has done a great job in heating them thoroughly. Pairing them up with chocolate syrup and whipped cream makes them taste almost as good as freshly-made waffles.

Glancing up, I see that Julian is still stubbornly standing at the head of the table. Even though he’s been forcing us to eat, he hasn’t touched his plate.

My mind goes back to the moment I found him in the tech room last night. His laptop had been open before him. He told me he’d been busy but I didn’t believe him. I thought he was being aloof because he was mad at me for spending too much time with Delilah.

“Let’s finish our food,” I say in a defeated tone. “He won’t tell us what he’s up to until we’re all done eating.”

“Have you at least had coffee?” Caleb asks.

“Of course, I had coffee,” Julian replies. Exhaling a heavy sigh, he finally sits down and starts to eat.

It takes a short time for the five of us to finish off the waffles, eggs, and bacon. I’m on my second cup of coffee when Julian finally decides to speak up.

“How busy are you guys?” he asks, glancing at his alphas.

“I can spare some time if you want to talk,” says Caleb. “But I would have to visit the headquarters to have an official meeting with the rest of the Oldenburg alphas.”

“I have an hour to spare and then, head out for conducting drills,” says Raiden.

“I have a shit ton of paperwork to do, so I’ll just procrastinate and hang out with you, babe,” says Damon, grinning mischievously.

I meet Julian's gaze. "You were working on something last night, weren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Is it about our secret project?"

He nods. "I might've cracked it."

"What are you guys talking about?" Damon asks, looking between us.

"Julian and I have been trying to track Callahan's whereabouts," I confess.

"We have people searching for him," Caleb says at once. "It won't take us long to find him."

"I know," I say. "It's just that I feel uncomfortable about the whole thing. He knows you're aware of the truth now. He's hiding because he knows he doesn't have much time before he's caught. I'm scared he's planning an attack that would cause chaos and death on a scale we've never seen before."

"You can't let a bastard like him scare you this way," says Damon.

"I'm not exactly scared of him," I say. "I'm just worried what he'd do next that would cause more innocent people to lose their lives. That's why we've been trying to track the whereabouts of the Black Widow. They're a massive unit. Callahan has to feed them, train them and arm them. If we could trace their location, we'd have a way to find him."

"It's all been her idea," says Julian. "I just managed to nail down one possible location."

"Hold up," says Raiden. "You guys need to explain some more. How have you been able to trace the location of their hideout?"

"Iris wanted to hack into weapon suppliers' archives to find out who they've been selling and delivering to," says Julian. "But those fuckers have some of the world's best hackers protecting their servers, so it'd take us a long, long time to crack their codes even if we manage it somehow. I thought of a simpler solution. Why don't we look for bulk



food suppliers who send out similar orders to that of a military base?”

“It was so much easier to find the data we need,” I say, thinking of the mountain of information we got from the many food suppliers in and around Winslow.

“And, you found one that orders the same kind of supplies as a military base does?” Caleb asks in an excited tone.

To my astonishment, Julian nods.

“How?” I ask. “There’s no way you could’ve gone through all that data in a single day.”

He chuckles and leans toward me. Knocking on my forehead lightly, he grins. “Of course, I wouldn’t do all that hard work on my own. My lazy ass would rather write up a code and let it do all the work for me.”

A rush of excitement flares inside me. “You were working on the code yesterday?”

“Yep.”

“Oh my god! You got it to analyze and compare the data we got hold of?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Yes!” I cheer, throwing my arms around his neck. The sudden movement nearly topples me off my chair. Thankfully, Damon is quick and steadies my chair before I can crash to the floor.

“Easy, kitty,” he croons, kissing my neck.

A shiver runs through me, almost making me forget the reason I got so excited.

“The program spit out a list of locations but I got interested in one,” says Julian, bringing my attention back to him. “The location is quite close to Jersey City.”

“The Black Widow made their appearance with the attack on my family,” I say, guessing the reason behind Julian’s interest in that particular town. “They were close enough to

attack the mayor's mansion as well. So, their hideout has got to be close to both Winslow and Jersey City.”

“Exactly. It's close to Callahan's family home too.”

“How can you be sure it's the Widow's hideout?” Caleb asks in a grim tone.

“I couldn't sleep last night,” Julian says. “After Iris fell asleep, I went back to the tech room and stayed up researching the address I found. Most of the areas in and around Kentville belong to a man who's a long-distant relative of the Callahans'. There's no way it's a coincidence.”

“Let me get this straight,” says Raiden. “This place that you're talking about has been ordering food supplies in bulk?”

“Yes,” Julian replies.

“It could easily be a hospital or some kind of home for the elderly.”

“Except, it's not,” says Julian. “You'll be surprised to know that the town has been abandoned for over a hundred years. There are no solid structures anywhere. Why would anyone order such huge supplies of food to a place where no one lives? Doesn't it make you suspicious?”

“Yeah, but if no solid structures are standing there...”  
Caleb falls quiet, glancing at Julian.

“You're wondering where all those bastards are living, huh?” Julian easily guesses why Caleb is hesitating.

“Yeah,” Caleb confesses. “There's got to be at least a thousand men living there if that place really is the Black Widow's hideout. Callahan has to accommodate them somewhere.”

“Underground bunkers,” I blurt.

Four pairs of eyes stare at me.

“I watched this documentary sometime back where the armies created underground bunkers to protect their soldiers from nuclear strikes,” I say without missing a beat. “These places were big enough to store large quantities of food and

water and ran on solar-powered batteries. You can have an entire army camping in there for months.”

“Kentville has belonged to the Callahans for over a century,” says Julian. “The place is surrounded by hills and woods, just like the place where Fort Callahan stands. It’s isolated, yet well-connected to major highways. You can easily hide men and weapons in such places.”

“I still can’t believe how they’ve been hiding right under our asses all these years,” Raiden says, looking both frustrated and excited. “Someone should’ve gotten a clue about them a long time ago.”

“Traitorous officers in power have been manipulating the authorities for decades,” says Caleb. “Callahan has been erasing evidence related to the Black Widow for years now. Even if someone got close enough to discover them, he probably got rid of them and any proof they might’ve attained. I’m sure he hasn’t been alone in these operations. There must be others who’ve been helping him.”

“I guess we need Dragonfly to do some digging for us,” says Raiden.

While others nod their agreement, I look at them with confusion. “Who’s Dragonfly?” I ask.

“Dragonfly is a miniature drone that Julian built,” says Raiden with a fond grin. “It’s amazingly handy for spying on people from a distance.”

“Is that how you got all those footage of Fort Callahan?” I ask.

“Yep. Dragonfly did all the hard work for us. It spied for us and took all those photographs and videos.”

“I was thinking about going out there,” says Julian, looking toward our alphas. “Anyone wants to come along?”

“I’ll go!” I volunteer at once.

“No way,” Caleb says. “It’ll be too dangerous to send you there.”

“Please?” I whine.

His expression stays the same even when I pout.

“If you fall into Callahan’s hands, he can manipulate us in every way that he wants,” says Damon. “We’d do anything for you, Wildcat. He knows that as well as you. We can’t risk letting you get so close to the enemy.”

“It’ll be the same if he captures Julian,” I argue back.

“He won’t be going alone,” Damon says. “I’m going with him.” He glances at Raiden. “We’ll leave you to take care of everything at home.”

Raiden’s expression hardens. “Don’t worry. I’ll look after Iris and our men.”

I look toward Caleb. “Is it okay for Julian to be going out there?”

Caleb moves toward me and leans down to kiss my lips. “He’s the best at handling a drone,” he says. “He’s sort of essential for this job.”

A sudden idea clicks in my head, erasing my momentary disappointment. “Will you be free this afternoon?” I ask, directly staring at Raiden.

“Sure,” he says. “As long as nothing comes up.”

“Can you take me for some target practice?” I ask. “I’ve been meaning to ask you this for a while now.”

“Do you know how to use a gun?” Damon asks.

I nod. “Ethan’s dad taught us,” I reply. “I’m not exactly great at it but I want to work on it. I hate having to sit back while you guys are going out there to search for Callahan.”

“It’s a great idea to arm yourself,” Caleb says with a nod. Glancing at Raiden, he adds, “We should get our darling some weapons.”

“Oohh!” Damon croons, his amber eyes shining with excitement. “I want to get her a dagger. She was so great at handling Callahan with the one I gave her that day.”

“I still can’t believe you tried to hack off his dick,” Julian says with a groan.

“Well, we were all out of ideas,” I say with a shrug. “And it worked, didn’t it?”

Chuckles rise all around me, making me grin like an idiot.

“All right, then,” says Damon, getting to his feet. “Let’s get going.” He moves close to me and captures my lips in a kiss.

My fingers grab onto his massive shoulders as his tongue sweeps in, sending hot lashes of pleasure throughout my body. I press against him, deepening the kiss.

By the time he releases me, I’m panting like I ran a mile at top speed.

One by one, I’m hugged and kissed by my mates. Their familiar scents wrap around me, comforting me.

I’m a little disappointed to see them all leaving but realize that I can use the time to go to the gym and train with some weights. It’s important to hone my skills when the biggest battle of our lives is so close to the horizon.



The skies are a murky gray as we drive through the empty road. A thin mist clings to the barren woods that fence the badly-maintained highway, reminding me of the place where Fort Callahan stands.

Kentville has been set up in the same kind of surroundings, further assuring me that my suspicions are right. The Black Widow are hiding somewhere close by.

“Fucking hell!” Damon curses from beside me as the car jostles heavily due to the potholes on the road. “This ride’s gonna fucking crack my ass.”

“Buckle up,” I say in a grim voice. “The roads won’t get any better.”

“How do you know that?” he mutters through clenched teeth. His gaze is focused on the road ahead as he desperately tries to avoid the numerous potholes and cracks in the aged asphalt.

“The highway leading to Fort Callahan had been in the same condition,” I tell him. “The authorities don’t bother fixing anything since the towns are abandoned. As far as the Black Widow are concerned, they probably leave them like this to discourage any trespassing cars. It’s almost a defensive barrier to keep strayers from encroaching on their territory.”

“How much longer do we have to drive?” he asks. A hint of anxiety laces his voice. “According to the GPS, we’re

already inside Kentville.”

I glance down at the map on my phone and see that we’re nearing the address where the deliveries are usually made. “Almost there,” I mumble.

My spine prickles as we get closer to our destination. It’s impossible not to feel vulnerable in this desolate place.

“Let’s get off the road here,” I say. “There could be cameras around the delivery point, so I don’t want to risk them seeing us.”

Slowing the car down, Damon drives us off the road and creeps along the uneven ground until we’re inside the woods. He positions the car behind a thick tree trunk and cuts off the engine.

“What now?” he asks.

“I get Dragonfly out and take a look around,” I say.

“It’d be a difficult job,” he says in a grim tone. “Flying the drone over these woods won’t give you good visuals. If you go at a lower height, the tree trunks will block your view as well as make navigating a pain-in-the-ass.”

“I know,” I mutter, handing him my laptop.

He switches it on while I grab my equipment bag from the backseat. Opening it, I take out the miniature drone and start setting it up. It takes me a while but I make sure it’s in perfect condition to fly.

“Are you getting the feed?” I ask.

“Yeah,” Damon replies.

Pushing the door open, I climb out and walk around, looking for a good spot from where I can navigate the drone. As Damon said, it’s going to be a challenge for Dragonfly to survey these dense woods.

A cold breeze rattles the bare tree branches overhead. The noise immediately makes me wary, making me stare into the dark shadows clinging to every corner of the woods.

I set Dragonfly on the ground and use the controller to start it up.

The blades come alive, lifting the miniaturized drone into the air. It hovers in front of my face, barely making any noise.

The risk of crashing the drone against a tree trunk is exceptionally high, so I stay alert. My gaze is glued to the viewing panel as I make it fly through the gaps among the closely-growing trees.

“All I see is trees,” Damon’s voice reaches me.

“Patience,” I say as Dragonfly flies deeper into the woods.

Twenty minutes crawl by and I still haven’t spotted anything that could point toward human presence. We should’ve gotten a clue by now.

Despair and doubt start creeping inside me.

I almost start thinking about giving up when a series of low beeps grab my attention. The sounds indicate that Dragonfly has detected radio and electromagnetic interference.

“There’s a communication network here,” I holler excitedly. “As well as cameras! We’re at the right place.”

I hear the sound of the car door opening and closing. Dried leaves and twigs crunch loudly as Damon stomps toward me with the laptop in his hands.

“I still don’t see anything,” he groans. “It’s just trees everywhere.”

“It’ll be hard to spot cameras among the foliage,” I say. “But there’s no doubt that they’ve been set up around this place. We’ve got to be careful so as not to be seen. It’ll be hard to escape this place if we alert the enemy.”

“So, what do you want to do now?” he asks. “Should we pack up and leave?”

“No way. Now that we know they’re here, let’s dig around some more.”

The footage on the viewing panel doesn’t change much but the continuous low beeps are proof that the woods are



covered with electronic devices.

“Let’s go over there,” I say, moving toward a sloped hill. “Maybe we’ll be able to see something there.”

“Watch where you’re going!” Damon says, grabbing my arm as I stumble on a loose pebble.

“Thanks,” I say, steadying myself. “How about we take a break from surveillance and look around ourselves?”

“That’s a better idea.”

Using the controller, I command Dragonfly to come back to me. The moment it lands on the ground, I pick it up and take it back to the car.

Leaving our equipment in the backseat of the car, we head in the direction of the hill.

Damon suddenly halts in his steps. “Do you hear that?” he whispers urgently.

I strain my ears, picking up the sound of crunching leaves in the distance. It could either be the prowl of a stray dog or a wild animal. Or it could be the sound of an approaching person.

“We should hide,” I say, looking around wildly.

“Over here!” Damon grabs my arm and drags me alongside him.

We barely have a few seconds to dive behind a grove of silver oaks when the sound of approaching feet gets closer.

Damon’s amber eyes silently signal me to stay still and quiet.

The sound of men’s laughter reaches my ears next.

“I got off from the way she was squealing,” a man’s voice breaks the silence of the woods. “I didn’t even have the time to grab my dick. I was already hard and coming in my pants.”

“You said it,” a different voice speaks up. “Omegas are a different breed of creatures altogether. So beautiful and so soft. And yet, their pussies can a massive load of fucking.”

“Do you think we’ll ever get a chance to touch one?” a third man speaks next.

“We must prove our loyalty to the master, first,” says the second guy. “Maybe then he’ll allow us to have the same pleasure our commanders get to enjoy.”

I stare at Damon. We can both guess what these men are talking about.

My heartbeat picks up. Anger, hot and swift, flares inside me as the men laugh and jeer, commenting on a poor female omega’s plight while they watched one of their commanders raping her.

“Ugh! It’s so fucking cold today. When are the deliveries due, Jack?”

“It’s almost time, so stop complaining,” his companion snaps.

The grumble of a truck’s engine sounds in the distance. Staying hidden behind the tree, both Damon and I peer out.

A large truck soon comes into view. The logo of the company that delivers food here is clearly marked on the side.

“See, it’s right there,” one of the men shouts. “They’re never late with their deliveries.”

About a dozen men in black camo outfits move forward and wait for the truck to get closer.

Damon gets his phone out and cautiously extends his hand so that he can capture the view. With Dragonfly out of reach, this is the only way we can gather some evidence to back our discovery.

An elderly man in a red beanie climbs out of the truck.

“Hurry up,” one of the Widows commands.

The old man unlocks the shutter at the back, lifts it, and steps aside.

I catch a glimpse of several wooden crates that are neatly stacked inside the truck. Three men get up to grab the boxes and then, start handing them out to their companions.

The boxes of food are carried away deeper into the woods. There must be an entrance close by that allows them to transfer everything to their underground lair.

I wish I could follow them and locate the spot that's so well hidden from outsiders.

"Where are you going, Morris?" a male voice speaks up.

"Gimme a break, Frank," his companion answers. "I need to take a piss."

"Wait up! I need to pee too."

I feel Damon stiffen beside me as the sound of footsteps grows louder. Next second, I catch the scent of a sweaty beta male, and know we're done for.

"Hey, who—" A middle-aged guy gasps as he stares right at us with wide eyes.

His companion bumps into him from behind and makes him curse out.

Damon and I use the momentary distraction to leap out from behind the tree and run toward the direction of the main road.

"Hey, stop them!" a male voice shouts from behind us.

We've barely made it a few feet when gunshots ring out, shattering the silence all around us.

"Shit, get down!" Damon shouts, pulling me down just as bullets whiz over our heads.

When the thunder of gunshots recedes, I scramble back on my feet and follow Damon. My heart pounds as I run through the labyrinth of tree trunks.

Twigs snap and heavy footfalls follow us closely as we weave through the woods.

Fear flows through my veins like icy water. I can't even allow myself to think of the outcome if we get caught by these men. We have to make it out of these woods and let Caleb know where the Black Widow are hiding.

Damon grabs my wrist and drags me behind a thick tree trunk.

My heart thuds against my chest as I pant and stare at him.

He presses a finger to his lips, silently asking me to be quiet.

Clutching at my chest, I will my heart to slow down so that I can draw in enough breath. Unluckily, I can't stop wheezing and panting.

"Where'd they go?" a male voice shouts from nearby.

"Keep searching!" commands another voice. "They couldn't have gone far."

"We have to find them," says another. "One of them was wearing a military uniform. We can't afford to lose them. If Master finds out, we'd be losing our fucking heads."

Curses are muttered in every direction.

I hold my breath, praying we'd get out of this situation alive.

The men talk loudly and shoot their guns in random directions. It's pure torture to stay put behind the tree trunk, hoping no one sees us.

The faint rustle of falling leaves catches my attention.

A few dried leaves flutter in the air and then, swirl in the breeze before falling into a wide hollow at the base of the tree. Taking a deep breath, I crouch down and gently feel among the mass of dead leaves.

To my surprise, I feel my hand sinking into the leaves.

I keep my ears strained, making sure no one is close by as I move away the blanket of leaves. Damon nudges my ankle with a questioning glare but I continue my inspection until I've found what I'd been hoping for.

There's a wide hollow spot under the tree's root.

My instincts tell me to hide there but to do that, I'd have to remove more leaves. The rustling noise would be enough to

draw the enemy's attention, leaving us open to danger once again.

"I think I saw someone over there," a voice calls out.

"Let's go check it out!"

Several others agree and soon, the footsteps recede as the horde stampedes in a different direction.

"Fuck," Damon breathes, leaning against the tree trunk. "That was close."

"Help me," I say, digging at the mound of leaves that fill up the hollow under the tree. "We can hide in here until they decide to give up."

"I'll keep a lookout while you dig," he says, peering out from behind the tree.

My ears strain for the sound of footsteps, but thankfully, those men don't return.

"Do we hide here or risk going to our car?" I ask after a while.

"That truck hasn't left yet," says Damon. "They'll be on high alert as long as it's here. Let's hide for now and hope they don't find our car."

I dig into the leaves until there's enough space for the two of us to fit in. Breathing heavily, I look into the pit and cringe.

It's going to be cold, hard, and dirty.

Out of choice, I step in and curl up among the rotting leaves. Damon grins and settles down beside me, almost spooning me against him.

"What's that?" I gasp as something hard prods against my ass.

"Something that you're going to have to take care of later," he whispers in my ear.

"Damon," I moan. "You're fucking crazy! We don't even know if we'll make it out of here alive. How the hell could you get aroused in such a situation?"

His breathy chuckles send a rush of warm air into my ear, tickling me. Grabbing handfuls of leaves, he showers them over us, effectively hiding us under a blanket of red, orange, and brown.

The smell of wet earth wafts into my nostrils. Cold seeps in through my clothes but Damon's warmth keeps me comfortable.

His hand slides over my stomach and trails lower.

"What the hell are you doing?" I hiss as his hand settles over my crotch.

"You feel kind of hard and heavy too," he whispers. "How about I just..." His hand digs through my waistband, reaching lower.

"Stop!" I gasp, slapping his hand. "This is not the time."

"We're stuck here, aren't we? How about we kept each other warm until we can get away from here?"

The scent of smoke and firewood gets stronger as he hugs me tighter. His strengthening pheromones start affecting me, and I'm secretly glad because it distracts me from the mind-numbing fear that's clouding my senses.

"Just stay quiet," I admonish while secretly enjoying his dry-humping.

Warmth rushes through my veins, driving away the chill that seeps in from the cold, hard ground underneath me.

From time to time, we hear shouts and gunshots. At times, they sound closer, but mostly, they're quite far away.

The sound of a revving engine in the distance makes me glance at my watch.

Two hours had crawled by now.

"Sounds like the truck's finally leaving," Damon whispers.

"Yeah."

“That’s good. They’ve probably checked it thoroughly to make sure we’re not on it.”

“How long do we have to stay here?”

“We can’t risk it until nightfall,” Damon says in a grim tone. “They’ll be keeping watch over this area, hoping to catch us.”

“They sounded scared when they couldn’t find us,” I say slowly. “Maybe their fear will keep them from blabbing about us to their leader.”

“That’s true. We can only hope they’re all cowards who’re too afraid to lose their heads.”

“They’re the Black Widow,” I mutter. “There’s not a drop of bravery in their blood.”

Silence stretches over us. No matter how much I strain my ears, I don’t hear any footsteps or voices.

A part of me wants to get up and stretch my aching legs but it’s still too damn risky. The men who spotted us earlier could be keeping watch.

Thankfully, Damon’s presence helps me stay sane. It helps me remind myself that we’ve both got to get out of here alive so that we can warn Caleb about the Black Widow.

The hours crawl by.

Evening falls and it’s not long before the woods come alive with the relentless buzz of insects. The air grows chillier. I squirm in the tight space of the hollow but it does little to soothe my cramping, aching legs.

“Should we make a move now?” I ask when darkness falls over the woods.

“Not yet,” says Damon. “We should wait a couple more hours.”

“It’s freezing in this hole,” I mutter, squirming against him. “I don’t even want to think about the things crawling over my legs. We’ve waited for hours now. No one’s around anymore, so let’s just get out of here already.”

“I’m not risking your life.”

“Damon, please.”

He wraps his leg over my hips and pulls me closer. “Just a little longer, babe. After that, we’ll go home and make love to our omega.”

A chuckle escapes me. “Do you think we’ll have time to do that? We’re going to have to alert Caleb and the packs that are supporting us. We can’t delay spreading the news about the Black Widow’s location. Who knows what they’ve been planning during the past couple of weeks? Bastards like Callahan rarely decide to sit back and give up on their vendetta.”

A heavy sigh escapes him. “I know. We’re going to have to march into battle as soon as we’re out of here.”

“Have you had any texts from Iris?”

“Yeah, but I lied and told her we’re busy.”

It’s my turn to sigh. “I said the same thing each time she asked me what we were up to. I hate lying to her.”

“If she knew the truth, she’d be driving out here herself.”

A smile comes onto my lips as I think of her. She’s so brave and kind. There’s no doubt in my mind that my wildflower would bait her life to protect us.

We both fall quiet again.

At one point, I almost fall asleep.

The sound of rustling leaves and snapping twigs jerks me awake. I blink wildly, looking around in the darkness.

Damon’s groans sound close by. Concentrating on the sound, I focus on the moving figure before me. He’s stretching his arms over his head and bending to the side.

“Can we go now?” I ask, sitting up slowly. “Ach!” I gasp as my muscles protest the smallest of movements. “Everything hurts.”

“Sshh. We have to be quiet.”



Everything is pitch dark around us. Taking his phone out, Damon turns on the flashlight.

“Be careful,” he says as he helps me to my feet. “It’s slippery on this slope.”

I follow him, making sure to step lightly over the fallen leaves.

“Do you know which way to go?” I whisper.

“That way,” he says, pointing to my right. “Thank fuck we have compass apps on our phones these days.”

It’s slow going as we trip over loose rocks and jutting tree roots along the forest floor. We don’t dare to switch on our cellphones to illuminate our way in case anyone’s keeping watch over the area.

After nearly an hour, we’re able to find our way back to the car.

Pure relief floods my body as Damon unlocks the car. Opening the door, I slide in and switch on the heat immediately.

“We have everything we need,” I say, gazing at the laptop in the backseat of the car.

“Nothing’s more important than our lives right now,” says Damon as he switches on the ignition. “Hold tight.”

My heart pounds hard as the car starts moving. We creep through the uneven terrain of the woods, desperately hoping no one’s watching us.

Damon doesn’t switch on the headlights until we reach the main road.

The moment we leave the woods behind, he steps on the gas and speeds down the dark, deserted highway. The massive potholes make the car jostle and lurch dangerously, but he doesn’t slow down. At times, I hit my head against the roof of the car, but I don’t complain.

The sooner we get out of this godforsaken place, the safer we’re going to be.

“The hell—” I gasp as the car comes to a sudden halt, nearly flinging me against the windshield. “What the hell are you doing?” I shout, glaring at Damon. “Why did you stop here?”

“We’re finally out of that hellhole,” he says, flashing me a grin.

To my surprise, he loosens his seatbelt and then, proceeds to do the same to mine.

“What are you doing, Damon?” I ask as he forcibly starts pulling me off my seat.

“I need you,” he purrs. “I can’t hold back any longer. Won’t you help me out, darling?”

A thrill shoots through me as I look into his eyes. There’s a dark intensity in his gaze that makes my heart pound.

Closing my eyes, I take several deep breaths. Something primal takes over me as I realize we’re finally safe. My cock hardens in my pants and suddenly, I *need* Damon’s touch to remind me what it is to feel alive.

Damon must sense the shift in my emotions because a wolfish grin lights up his beautiful face. The look in his amber eyes suddenly makes my stomach clench.

Lunging forward, he throws himself on me.

His mouth crashes onto mine while his hard, muscled body presses me against the seat. The heat from his body seeps into mine through the fabric of my linen shirt. My chilled skin warms up in no time, making me moan into his mouth.

The fact we’re cooped inside this car in the middle of a highway does nothing to lessen the throbbing heat spreading through my belly. The fear I’d felt all day melts away, bringing me alive to Damon’s touch.

“I’ve wanted to kiss you like this for hours,” he says in a deep rough voice that reverberates through me. “Fuck! I want to bite you, Julian.”

A throaty chuckle escapes me as my fingers dig into the soft strands of his crimson hair. I don’t care what he does to

me as long as he keeps touching me like this.

His hands graze along the sides of my body while his kisses consume my mouth. He pulls my shirt out of the waistband of my trouser and with one rough movement, tears it.

A gasp escapes me as the buttons ping off my chin. Damon's mouth clamps onto mine once again while I struggle to calm my pounding heart.

His hands sear my skin as they slide over my bare stomach.

Breaking off the kiss, I open the buttons of his uniform.

A shudder runs through him as I place my palm on his bare chest.

Lowering my mouth, I trail a line of kisses along his breastbone while my hand keeps caressing his muscular pecs.

"Jules," he groans, throwing his head against the backrest. "Gods, I've been craving your mouth for so long."

His hands come to hold my face as he leans forward to capture my lips once again.

Heavy moans escape me, but Damon's hungry mouth devours them all.

Damon's lips trail kisses along the side of my neck while his fingers slide into my hair. His teeth nip and suck at the sensitive skin but the pads of his fingers are tender against my scalp.

The contrasting sensations drive me mad with need. My hips jerk against him, hitting his hardened erection.

"Please, Damon," I moan as my fingers unsuccessfully fumble with the buckle of his belt. "I need you."

His hot breath feathers against my ear as a harsh chuckle escapes him. "You're always so distracted, acting like you don't want me, but then you act this way. What exactly do you want from me, Julian?"

His hand brushes over the hardened lump at the front of my trousers, causing a jolt to shudder through me.

Staring deep into my widened eyes, he easily opens the buttons of my jeans and pulls them down.

I barely breathe as his hand slides through the waistband of my boxers and gently cups my balls. A loud moan escapes me as I lean in to capture his lips.

“I’m so glad you were with me today,” he murmurs against my ear while his hand slowly pumps my erect cock. “Being back in their den awakened so many demons inside me. They wanted me to walk out of our hiding spot and charge at them with my gun. Kill as many of those fuckers as I could. You’re the only reason I stayed sane.”

Warmth washes over me as he says those words. The omega in me feels heartened to hear that he still needs me, that I’m just as important to him as Iris is.

“I’ve always been there for you,” I say in a strained voice. “I love you, you crazy fucker.”

Rough chuckles escape him as he stares into my eyes.

A hot flush creeps over my cheeks and neck. My body forgets about the cold night and my mind is aware of nothing but the hard throbbing in my balls.

“I want you, Damon,” I beg in a hoarse voice. “Please...”

Pushing his seat backward, he lowers his trousers.

My eyes greedily watch as he pulls out his thick, lengthened cock from the confines of his boxers.

“Come here,” he says in a commanding tone. “Wait,” he adds just as I’m about to slide toward him. “Get rid of all your clothes.”

I take off my torn shirt that’s caked with dirt and dried leaves. My knees bump hard against the dashboard as I try to get rid of my jeans that pool around my ankles. Suppressing a groan, I massage my kneecaps while Damon stares at me with an amused look on his handsome face.

*He's having fun watching me make a fool of myself*, I think with a hint of annoyance. Still, I fail to take my eyes off his erect cock proudly facing me.

Damon slides back against his seat and pats his bare thigh. Every cell in my body hums as I climb onto his lap, placing my knees beside his hips.

His hands sweep up my spine, tugging me against his chest. My heart thunders in my chest as he presses his lips to mine. A warm feeling spreads through me, sweeping away every reason why we shouldn't be doing this in the middle of a darkened road.

Giving up all control to my alpha is a natural instinct for me. I trust him completely.

I revel in the heat of his body, the soft velvet of his tongue, the hardness of his muscular chest, and the way he slides his finger into my tight hole, stretching and loosening me up.

He smears me up with a warm, sticky liquid and it takes a moment for me to realize he's using drops of his precum to smoothen and lubricate my channel.

His cock is a hot, throbbing rod against my belly as he works me up.

Shifting slightly, I align the head of his cock against my opening. I don't even care if it hurts me. We've spent way too much time trying to accept the fact that we could die today.

I need him inside me right now.

A hard groan escapes me as Damon slips inside me. His fingers grip my thighs tightly before thrusting his hips upward.

I gasp out as his cock surges deep inside me, stretching me beyond belief. "Oww!" I gasp, tightening my arms around his neck.

"Relax, Jules," Damon's voice rumbles in my ear.

I bite into the hard flesh of his shoulder as the pain from his rough entry starts receding. "What're you stopping for?" I

grind out, wanting to feel the delicious friction of his cock pounding inside me.

His hands grab onto my asscheeks before slamming his hot, throbbing rod deeper inside me.

Pleasure chases away the pain, sweeping my mind of every thought.

All I feel is his warmth, the smell of his scent, and the pulse of his heated shaft plunging inside me. My head falls back, giving him more access to my neck.

Damon's lips kiss and suck on a sensitive spot while my erect cock presses up against his belly. I place my hand flat against his muscled chest, feeling the hard pounding of his heart beneath my palms as he plunges inside me.

"Ahh!" I cry out as he drives me to the height of pleasure. Fire courses through my veins, heating me up thoroughly. Sweat trickles down my back as I gasp and pant.

My balls go rock-hard, pleading for me to lose against the cascade of invigorating sensations.

Damon's hand wounds into my locks as he meets my lust-glazed eyes. My pleasure becomes unbearable as he pounds into me at a relentless pace.

He's driven me to the point of no return.

I can't hold on any longer and let the pleasure drag me under. My vision goes dark for a moment as my body goes taut. Next second, I come hard.

My release splatters all over his chest and stomach but he continues to thrust inside me, chasing his own pleasure.

I tumble on his chest, gasping for air as my body shudders with the force of my orgasm.

Damon lifts my face and captures my lips in a fiery kiss. He devours my moans, continuing to thrust inside me.

Suddenly, he breaks away and roars. "Mate!" he cries out, his hands gripping my ass cheeks tightly, keeping me in place as his cock throbs and pulses against me.

A moan escapes me as I feel his fiery cum gushing deep inside me. Gasping wildly, I slump against him and hold onto him tightly.

It's a while before either of us moves or talks.

"Hey," he says in an unusually soft voice.

"Mhmm." He's still buried inside and it feels incredibly safe and warm to stay connected to him this way.

His hands are amazingly gentle as they pat my back. "Don't fall asleep, Julian."

"I'm just resting my eyes a little."

He chuckles and caresses my back. "I know you're tired, but we've got a job to finish. We need to inform both Caleb and Raiden. You know we've got to raid that place tonight."

I raise my head and look into his warm amber eyes. "I just know that the moment I let go, you guys will run into danger."

"It's our job to keep people safe, Jules. You know that better than anyone."

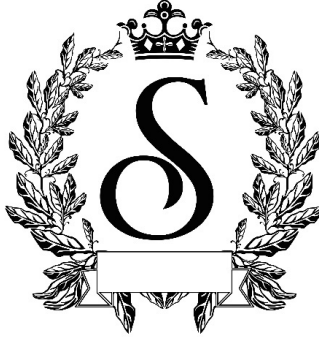
I want to be selfish and keep my mates close to me, but know that it's not an option. We can't allow the Black Widow to hurt any more innocent people.

It takes extreme willpower to lift my ass off him. His cock slides out of me, making me feel hollow inside. I settle back on my seat and don my torn, dirty shirt.

Damon's hurriedly buttoning up his uniform as well.

The moment he's done, he grabs his cell phone.

"Caleb?" he speaks in a low, grim tone. "We've found the Black Widow's hideout."



I try my best to focus on my Kindle's screen but my gaze keeps sliding toward the phone beside me. It's been hours since Julian and Damon last sent me a text.

They both told me they were fine, but I couldn't get rid of the heavy, nagging feeling in my gut all afternoon. I tried searching for the abandoned town online, hoping that knowing where they were would make me feel relieved.

Unfortunately, that didn't help matters one bit. There was very little information on Kentville available online. The few available photos showed acres of overgrown woods all around it and nothing else.

The sky outside the windows has already turned dark. They should've returned home by now or let us know what they were up to. Even Caleb and Raiden hadn't received any updates from them.

My mind starts replaying a horror scene of Julian and Damon getting caught by the Black Widow. While we're waiting for them to come home, they're going through horrific torture. Those attackers could've snatched their phones and used them to reply to us.

"Stop thinking the worst," I tell myself. "They're going to come home soon."

The sound of the opening door has me looking toward the entryway. Dropping my Kindle, I jump off the couch and run,



hoping Damon and Julian have finally come home.

My feet come to a skidding halt as Raiden steps inside the room.

“Oh, it’s you,” I say, unable to hide the disappointment in my voice.

Raiden detects my anxiety at once. “What’s wrong, Iris? Why do you look so pale?”

“It’s Damon and Julian,” I say, staring up at him. “They’re not home yet. Do you know what’s taking them so long?”

He reaches inside the pocket of his jacket and pulls out his phone.

“There haven’t been any updates since noon,” he says.

“They should’ve been back home by now.”

Raiden nods as a grim expression settles on his face. “I’ve been so busy, I didn’t get a chance to think about them. Now that you’re mentioning it, they should’ve been back by now. There’s no point in staying there after sunset. It’d get too dark for a drone to capture footage.”

“Right? Kentville is an abandoned town. It must be pitch dark there.”

“They might have found something,” says Raiden. “Or maybe they’re following someone. Don’t worry just yet. I’m sure they’ll come home soon or contact us.”

I try to dispel the anxiety gnawing at me but fail.

“Didn’t you say you wanted to practice shooting?” Raiden says, breaking me out of my thoughts. “I wanted to take you this afternoon but got caught up in work. How about we go now?”

I take a deep breath and consider his offer.

“Come on, stop worrying,” Raiden says, wrapping his arm around my shoulder. “Damon won’t let anything happen to Julian. Besides, if you come with me, it’ll keep you distracted. If you stay here, you’ll keep worrying about them.”

He's right about the last thing. I need a distraction to keep me busy until Julian and Damon come home.

"All right, then," I say with a nod. "Let's go."

Raiden flashes me a grin and suddenly catches me around the waist.

A gasp escapes me as my feet lift off the ground. "What are you—" He drowns my words by capturing my mouth in a searing kiss.

A sigh falls off my lips as I melt against him.

His citrusy scent wraps around me, comforting me immediately. The feel of his warm, velvety tongue around mine sends heat shooting through my veins. I revel in the feel of his hard muscles that are pressed up against my soft curves and close my eyes.

I give myself completely to the kiss, letting it erase the anxiety that has been nibbling at me the whole day.

"Feeling better?" Raiden asks, his eyes shining with mischief.

I'm back on my feet and staring up at his beautiful face. A smile comes onto my lips as I hug him.

"I've missed you so much," I say, resting my face against his chest.

A deep purr rumbles in his chest. "I missed you too," he says in a gentle voice. "It's so hard to concentrate on work when all I want to do is be with you. It takes me longer to finish my work because I can't stop thinking about you."

His words send waves of warmth through me.

Straightening up, I look up at him. "Are you sure you want to go to the firing range now?" I ask. "You must want to relax after having a hectic day."

"Being with you is relaxing enough," he says, grinning. "Come on. I'll honestly feel better knowing you can protect yourself if the need ever arises."

I nod. "I want to be able to protect you too."

He hugs me before proceeding to grab my hand and leads me out of the room.

“Raiden, wait,” I say as he leads me toward the door. “Shouldn’t I get dressed in something better?”

“You look beautiful, Iris,” he says with a sincere look in his eyes.

A chuckle escapes me as I punch him playfully. “I meant if I should get dressed in proper shoes and clothes that don’t flap around too much,” I say, pointing at the big woolen poncho I’m wearing.

His gaze sweeps over me. “You should be fine in them.”

“Will you lend me your gun?”

“Of course, darling. What’s mine is yours.” Taking my hand, he places it over the front of his trousers. “This gun and all the others that belong to me belong to you.”

A loud snort escapes me.

Bringing my hand up, he kisses my palm. “Shall we?” he asks, leading the way through the door and out into the darkened grounds of the estate.

The chilly night air makes me think of Damon and Julian again. Silently praying for them, I follow Raiden as he guides me toward one of the buildings situated behind the trainee dorms.

Stepping aside, he opens a glass door that leads inside a vast empty lobby.

“Is no one else around?” I ask, looking at every corner of the atrium.

“Nah. Everyone’s gone home for the day,” he replies.

Our voices echo in the quiet hall as we move toward one of the elevators. We wait for the steel doors to slide open and then, step inside.

Pressing a key on the side panel, he comes to stand beside me.

The elevator jerks slightly and surprisingly, starts descending.

“Is the shooting range in the basement?” I ask.

“Yeah. It allows our cadets to practice without disturbing anyone. The extra space allows them to train here daily.”

When the doors slide open, we step out into a smaller lobby. Our footsteps echo loudly all around us, making it feel like someone’s following us.

I instinctively grab Raiden’s hand as we pass through the empty hallways.

“Here, we are,” says Raiden, leading me inside one of the glass-walled stalls that make up the firing range.

I take a deep breath as Raiden pulls out a gun from inside his jacket and hands it to me. “Ready?”

It’s been a while since I touched a gun, so I give a nervous nod.

Putting the gun down on the counter, I pick up a pair of noise-eliminating headphones and fix them around my head.

Raiden watches me as I carefully pick up the gun and slip the thumb safety back, proceeding to lift it to my shoulder level.

“You’re doing good,” he says, gently touching my arm so that I’m holding it out at a straight angle. Stepping away, he presses a button on the side wall.

A faint vibrating sound erupts around us as the gears start working. The target sheet pulls away to a designated distance and stops.

I take my time to focus on the target before pulling the trigger.

The gun vibrates hard in my hand, followed by the dull bang of the recoil. My arm and shoulder shake from the recoil and it takes serious effort to keep them steady as I keep pulling the trigger.

I stop when a dry click signals an empty magazine. Lowering the gun, I glance at Raiden.

“You’ve been out of practice but I’m sure if you train daily, you’ll get better in no time.”

“I know,” I mutter. A hint of disappointment washes over me. I should’ve asked Raiden to train me with a gun much earlier.

Raiden presses another button on the wall to collect the punctured target sheet. Unhooking the sheet free, he holds it up so we can see the clean bullet holes in its surface.

“You got one shot at the stomach and two on the shoulder,” Raiden says slowly, holding the sheet up. “This is really great, babe.”

A hollow chuckle escapes me. “I missed several shots completely.”

“Hey, this is a good start,” he insists, putting the target down. “A few weeks of practice will significantly improve your aim.”

Lowering my head, I give a small nod.

He lets out a long sigh and places his hands on my shoulders. “Come on, cheer up. I have a surprise for you.”

“Huh?” I stare up at him at once. “What surprise?”

“I know Damon wanted to go all out on getting you a knife, but I decided to get you something that you can practice with right now.” He brings out a sleek black-handled knife and places it on my palm.

“Wow,” I breathe, pulling out the blade and admiring the polish on its steel surface. “Thank you!”

“How about we meet up tomorrow and I can teach you how to fight with it,” he offers with a smile that sends my heart pounding against my chest.

“Definitely! I can’t wait to try it,” I say excitedly and make a few slashes.

“You don’t need to put in too much strength,” he says, unable to help himself. “The blade is sharp enough to cut through skin and muscle with minimum effort. You just need to learn to aim it at the right points.”

A wicked grin curves my lips. “Oh, I know a thing or two about the right points.”

His grin matches mine. “You’re so sexy when you get that look on your face.” Circling his arm around my waist, he pulls me against him and captures my lips.

Warmth washes over me as he kisses and tastes me thoroughly. It takes sheer will to keep holding onto the knife in my hand and not let it clatter to the floor.

“Mmm,” I moan as he suddenly breaks the kiss. Wrapping my hands around his neck, I try to pull him closer but he chuckles and shakes his head.

“Hold on, Iris. My phone’s ringing.”

“Dang!”

He laughs and takes his phone out. “Hey, it’s Damon.”

“Oh!”

“Hey,” says Raiden, answering the call. “What have you guys been up to? Do you know how worried Iris has been?” The mild annoyance on his face slowly fades away as he listens to Damon attentively.

“Is he okay?” I ask desperately.

Raiden gives a nod but continues looking grim as he listens to whatever Damon is saying.

“What’s going on?” I ask when he finally hangs up the phone.

“They’ve found out the Black Widow’s hideout,” he says with an ominous look in his eyes. “We’re going after them tonight.”



*“They’ve found out the Black Widow’s hideout. We’re going after them tonight.”* Raiden’s words keep replaying in my head as he pulls me alongside him.

A screeching alarm echoes all around us, shattering the stillness of the deserted grounds. Red and white lights flash in every corner, nearly blinding me. Men in combat gear are filtering out from the nearby buildings. Their shouts and cries pierce through the night, making me stare all around me in a daze.

“Iris,” Raiden’s sharp voice brings my focus back on him. “Iris, get a grip.”

“You have to go out *now*?” I ask desperately.

“I’ll explain everything to you,” he says, tugging on my wrist once again, forcing me to keep walking as he leads me back to the house.

Raiden lets go of me as soon as we’re through the door.

“Do you guys even have a plan?” I ask, my voice rising with every syllable. “Damon just informed you about this. You can’t just go after a militant group like the Black Widow without a solid strategy.”

“Iris, calm down,” he says in a deep voice that reverberates through me. “We aren’t going after them on a whim. We’ve been planning a strike on them for weeks now.”

“What do you mean? You didn’t even know where they were hiding until that phone call from Damon half an hour ago.”

“Listen to me.” The hint of dominance in his voice forces me to swallow my words and pay all my attention to him. “We’ve all been planning for a moment like this. When we set out to ally ourselves with the Burton pack, we made sure to plan for an event like this. We knew that we’d have to launch an attack the moment we got hold of Callahan or the Black Widow’s whereabouts.”

My heart pounds in my chest, making it difficult to breathe properly. Fear flows through my veins as I contemplate the idea of my mates heading into danger without a moment’s thought.

The cry of sirens pierces through the thick walls of the mansion. I hate its relentless wailing, signaling danger and warning.

“Are you leaving me behind to fight them?” I ask, staring up into his grim eyes.

“No. You’re the one who’ll be leaving.”

“Huh?”

“I am staying back to command the trainees,” he says. “Since the Black Widow’s location is closer to Jersey City, we’ll be gathering all our troops at the Burton estate. The entire raid will be coordinated from there. We’ve decided to send both you and Julian to them for security. Mom is also being shifted there at the moment.”

“Where *is* Julian?” I shout as my frustration rises.

“He’s with Damon,” Raiden explains calmly. “They’re both coming here to escort you to Burton Mansion.” Placing his hands on my shoulders, he looks deep into my eyes. “Breathe, Iris. Everything’s going to be okay.”

I want to believe him but I’ve already seen what the Black Widow is capable of. They have arms and ammunition that are at par with our military forces. Callahan probably knows all our weaknesses and would happily use them against us.



“Your parents and Delilah are also going to be there,” Raiden says, giving me a warm smile.

“What? Why?”

“The Oldenburgs have joined us,” he says. “They’re also gathering their forces as we speak. Burton pack’s estate will have maximum security during this time, so Lachlan will be sending Delilah and the other members of his pack there.”

I will myself to breathe and think through the things Raideen is telling me.

There’s a calmness in his face and manner despite the urgency of the situation. I think of the hours they’ve spent in meetings with the other packs. As my panic gradually recedes, I realize that they’ve been well-prepared for an event like this.

“Are you going to be okay on your own?” I ask.

He nods. “Don’t worry about me. The Black Widow have no idea what’s about to hit them. They’ll be too busy protecting their own asses to even think about coming this way. Still, it’s always a good idea to have backup. That’s why I’m staying here to protect our home.”

“I’ve been worried about Damon and Julian the whole day,” I grumble. “I wish they told me what they’d been up to.”

Raiden chuckles. “I’m sure they had a reason.” Taking a deep breath, he wipes his face of all humor. “Listen, Iris. I’ve got to go and take up my post now. Damon wants you to pack up some fresh clothes for him and Ju. Oh, and he said you should pack up whatever food’s there in the fridge.”

My frustration spikes. That last request must mean they’ve been starving the whole day.

Moving closer, I wrap my arms around Raideen. “Be safe, okay?” I say in a small voice.

He buries his nose in my shoulder, massaging soothing circles on my back. “Don’t worry about me, love. I’ll be fine.”

I hug him tighter, unable to voice everything I’m feeling at this moment.

My mates are going into battle, and there's always a chance they'll sacrifice themselves to protect others. I am probably being selfish, but I can't bear to lose them. They each hold a piece of my heart and without them, I'd be an empty, broken shell.

Raiden gently breaks my hold and steps away. His eyes are full of emotion but he doesn't speak a word.

For a long minute, we simply stare at each other.

Raiden is the first to snap out of the trance. He gives me a grim nod before turning around and jogging out of the hallway.

The sound of the siren is awfully loud in my ears. I walk into the entrance hall, and suddenly the vast room seems to close in on me.

I sink onto my knees, breathing hard.

*Pull yourself together, I chide myself. You can't fall to pieces and make a pathetic mess of yourself.*

A hint of shame washes over me.

I should be roaring at my mates and telling them to march ahead and decimate the army that killed my parents and hurt countless innocent people. They need me to be strong at a critical time like this. I can't let them watch me fall to pieces.

Taking a deep breath, I stand up. My mind slowly clears up, allowing me to think of the tasks Raiden gave me.

Racing across the hall, I take the stairs to reach the upper floors.

Entering each of my mates' rooms, I gather fresh clothes, jackets, and socks. Since it's particularly cold tonight, I make sure they have plenty of clothes to layer up before heading out again.

Next, I proceed into the kitchen and open the fridge. There are plenty of leftovers that can be heated up and plated, but I doubt Damon would care about that. So, I take out bits of roasted meat and cooked vegetables and set out to make sandwiches with them.

The task is monotonous but helps to keep me grounded as the sirens continue screeching. Sounds of men's shouts and moving vehicles filter in through the kitchen windows, driving in the point that we're all heading toward a battle.

"Iris!" a familiar voice calls out my name as I'm packing the last of the sandwiches.

"Over here!" I call out, running toward the doorway.

"Iris!" Julian's voice grows closer. "There you are!"

Pure relief washes over me as my gaze falls on my mate.

Julian rushes forward and hugs me tightly. "Gods, I've missed you so fucking much."

Tears stream down my cheeks from sheer relief. "You have no idea how worried I was."

"Same here, Wildflower. At one point, I didn't think we'd make it back home to see you again."

"Why?" I push at his chest, forcing him to let me go. "What happened to make you think you won't make it back?" I demand as anger chases away my momentary joy.

"We almost got caught by the Black Widow," he says, flashing me a grin.

My gaze rakes all over him, inspecting every inch of his exposed body. There are mild scratches on his arms, face, and neck, but they're not too bad. Dried mud mars his pale skin and torn clothes while brown leaves and twigs stick out of his dirt-covered hair.

That's when I notice the smell of wet earth and rotting leaves that wafts into my nostrils.

"What have you been doing?" I ask, staring at him.

"Hiding from the bastards," he says, looking suddenly angry.

"Jules!" Damon's deep bass floats toward us. "Where'd you go? Where's Iris?"

“We’re here!” I call out and glance toward Julian. “I’m almost done packing up the food. Go back to the entrance hall and wait for me there.”

A moan escapes him. “I’ve been starving the whole day. I could eat a horse if you’d serve me one.”

A chuckle escapes me despite the gravity of the situation.

“Iris,” Damon’s voice makes me look toward the corridor.

He’s in the same state as Julian. Every inch of his body is covered in dirt and leaves.

A wide grin brightens his handsome face as he strides toward me.

Wrapping his arms around me, he lifts me off my feet and hugs me tightly.

“Welcome home,” I say before his lips crash against mine.

His firewood scent mixes in with the earthy smell of the mud that sticks to his clothes. Warmth floods my chest, chasing away the anxiety that’d been weighing me down the whole day.

Julian clears his throat loudly. “Aren’t you supposed to be hurrying us all to Jersey City right now?” he says.

Damon gently puts me back on my feet and steps away. The flash of happiness is wiped from his face. His amber eyes turn a shade darker as he stares down at me.

“We don’t have time to lose,” he says in a low, grim voice. “We’ve got to get out of here right now.”

I nod. “I’ll join you guys in a few minutes.” Turning away, I hurry back into the kitchen.

I pack up the remaining sandwiches into a large paper bag and hurry back into the entrance hall.

Both Damon and Julian are out of their wet, messy clothes and are rushing to get dressed. A part of me wants to tell them to go take a shower but the urgency of the situation makes me stay quiet.

“Come on,” says Damon as soon as he’s done changing into his fresh clothes.

“Don’t you want to arm yourself?” I ask.

“We’ll have an entire battalion following us,” he says with a grin. “They’ll handle anyone that dares to come in our way. As for going into battle, I’ll gear up at the Burton estate.”

“Is that the food?” Julian asks, staring hungrily at the bag in my arms.

“We can eat in the car,” says Damon. “Come on. It’s time to go.”

Julian and I follow him as he leads the way out of the room.

A cold night breeze brushes past my cheek as I step outside. The sirens are no longer blaring. A heavy silence has fallen over the vast grounds. I look toward the rows of armored cars that are lined up near the lawn. Their tinted windows don’t allow a glimpse inside but I know they’re filled with our soldiers.

The severity of the situation strengthens my resolve to stay strong.

I follow Damon and Julian as they lead me toward the car.

“You should sit in the back with Julian,” I say. “You can get some rest and eat something while I drive.”

“It’s sort of fitting that Iris leads us into battle,” says Julian. “She’s the catalyst that brought us to the Black Widow’s doorstep.”

Damon steps away from the front passenger seat. “Go ahead, Wildcat. Let us hear you roar.”

A snort escapes me as I open the car door and slide behind the wheels while Damon and Julian settle down in the backseat.

Focusing on the path ahead of me, I start up the engine and step on the gas.

Next moment, the rumble of at least a hundred engines starts up. A look at the rearview mirror shows me the fleet of cars following right behind me.

I think of Raiden. He must be watching us leave through the surveillance cameras right now.

I can't help but worry about leaving him behind. Most of the trained soldiers are leaving with us. He'd have to stay alert to make sure he keeps himself and the young trainees safe.

"Mmm...chicken and mashed potato sandwiches," Julian moans from the backseat. "So, so good."

"Mine's got roasted veggies and steak," Damon says through a mouthful of food. "I bet mine's better than yours."

"Yeah?" Julian challenges and takes a bite out of the sandwich that Damon's holding.

"Oi!" Damon roars, moving his hand away from Julian's chomping jaws.

They bicker and fight over the sandwiches. I can only imagine the cold and hunger they suffered through to get us the information about the Black Widow's hideout.

The sound of a closely-flying chopper alerts me. Looking toward the dark sky, I stare up at it. Blinking flashes of red and blue at its tail-end give me a glimpse of the Solveig pack's emblem.

I swallow hard, squashing the panic I'd felt at its sudden appearance.

The sound of the chopper disappears as it flies further ahead of us.

Glancing backward, I find Julian and Damon locked in a fierce kiss.

Amusement flares through me and I can't help but smile at them.

My own emotions have turned as volatile as theirs. One second, I feel brave, and the other, I can't stop worrying about my mates.

The hour-long ride flies by quickly.

Jersey City's familiar skyline comes into my view as we cross the border and drive into town.

The streets are mostly deserted at this hour but I see several checkpoints being set up by the local law authorities. More choppers fly overhead, all heading toward the direction of Burton estate.

"I can't believe we're almost there," Julian says in a low, grim tone. A depressed expression spreads over his handsome face as he tightly holds Damon's hand.

Anxiety, that's not my own, slams my chest. I glance back at Julian and realize that I'm feeling his emotions. This is the first time I'm experiencing the effects of our mate bond.

"It's going to be okay," I tell him. "Damon and Caleb will have a whole army backing them up."

"They had a force behind them the last time too," says Julian. "Damon was still captured and taken away from us." He raises his eyes and looks directly at me. "No one can imagine the pain I suffered through when I thought I'd lost him forever."

"It'll be different this time," says Damon. "We don't have a single traitor among us."

"You thought so last time!" Julian snaps at him. "You never know what's going to happen when you walk into danger like that."

The tops of Burton Mansion soon come into my view. Armed men in maroon uniforms fence the path that leads up to the estate.

Julian's rising anxiety starts affecting me but I fight against it.

Damon needs encouragement before heading out to battle. Worrying about us will end up distracting him. I can't let him think about anything but coming back to us alive.

More armed men surround the estate. Bright headlights illuminate the whole area like it's daytime. I can't believe how

quickly they've been able to gather such forces within a matter of hours.

"You guys must have planned every detail of the attack in advance," I say, glancing back at Damon.

"Oh, yes," he says, his amber shining with a dark light. "Destroying the Black Widow has become a personal matter for both our pack and the Burtons. I don't think we've ever had a pack cooperate with us at such levels of comradery."

I slow down the car as we get closer to the house.

"I wish I could go with you," Julian mutters.

Bringing the car to a stop, I turn around to face my mates.

"So, you're going to leave me behind?" I say in a grim tone and stare right at Julian.

A torn expression spreads on his face as he grips Damon's wrist harder.

"I'll come back to you, babe," Damon says, pressing his forehead against Julian's. "In the meantime, Caleb and I need you to look after Iris for us. Can you do that?"

"Of course," Julian replies in a strained voice.

Loosening his grip on Damon's wrist, he moves away and climbs out of the car.

Taking a deep breath, I follow him.

"Come here," says Damon, pulling me into a tight hug.

I cling to his shirt and deeply inhale his familiar scent. As with Raiden, all the words seem to disappear off my tongue and all I can do is stay still in his warm embrace.

"Stay by his side," he says, glancing toward Julian.

"Don't worry. I'll always take care of him."

He gives me a bright smile. "Good. Now, I can go fight those bastards without a care in the world."

"I'm going to kick your ass if you get hurt," Julian snaps.

Damon chuckles and pecks his lips.



Julian's expression doesn't change, so Damon pulls him into a hug. Glancing at me, he opens an arm, gesturing for me to join them.

Moving forward, I fit into the space beside Julian.

Damon wraps his arm around me, squashing me against him and Julian.

Their bodies are so warm, I can't help but sigh. I'm hating this moment as much as Julian but I have to stay strong. Damon can't see me looking sad or weak. I won't let him get distracted because of us.

"Damon," a familiar voice calls out in the distance.

Damon's hold loosens, allowing me to step away and look toward the direction of the house.

Seth, my eldest cousin, walks up to us. His maroon combat uniform makes him appear dangerously formidable.

"What are you still doing here?" he asks in a grim tone. "Our dads are waiting for you at the west-side bay. Caleb is already in position and I'm about to join him."

"I'm about to go," says Damon.

I grip Julian's hand tightly, silently asking him to stay strong.

"I guess I'll see you both when this is all over," Damon says, giving us a somber nod.

"See ya!" I say, forcing a smile on my lips.

"I'm going with him," says Seth, focusing his attention on me. "Stay safe until we get back."

I nod. "Be careful out there."

Both Seth and Damon climb into the car.

The fleet of vehicles follows their car, swiftly passing us by.

"I hate being left behind like this," Julian says in a low, angst-filled voice.

“I know how you feel,” I say, squeezing his hand. “But you can’t let them see your sadness. Their focus should be on their men and the fight they’re about to face. We can’t let them worry about us.”

He lets out a heavy breath and nods.

“Come on, let’s head inside the house,” I say, gesturing toward the towering mansion before us. “It’s too cold to be standing out here.”

Julian relents and allows me to lead him inside the mansion. He’s too emotional to think clearly but we have all been waiting for a chance to go after Callahan and his shadow army.

Despite worrying about my mates, pride swells in my chest. Caleb, Damon, and Raiden never back away from sacrificing their lives to protect the innocent. If I was as trained and equipped as them, I’d be heading out to fight too.

The fire of vengeance burns in my chest.

The moment I was so desperately waiting for has finally arrived. We’re about to destroy the Black Widow. Callahan can no longer hide from the world. He’ll have to pay for the sins he’s committed against me and my pack.

We’re bringing the fight to Callahan this time.



At this very moment, our troops are steadily gathering in and around the woods that surround the abandoned town of Kentville. The moment we're in position, we'll storm the Black Widow's lair.

My men stand against the cold, howling wind that sways the overhead tree branches. Their eyes gleam with determination as they stare right ahead, waiting for my command to move forward.

Despite our growing numbers, the woods are silent. The only noise comes from the passing wind that rustles the bare tree branches.

Damon told me about the way he and Julian were spotted and hunted earlier today. He mentioned the men being fearful of their appearance. It looks like he'd been right to assume they'd hide the information from their leaders out of fear.

The Black Widow punish failure with death. It's not too surprising to see they'd kept Damon and Julian's appearance a secret from their commanders.

No guards are patrolling these woods, allowing us to gather here without any resistance. Their ruthlessness finally becomes their weakness, allowing us to use it against them.

"Callahan's estate is secured," Damon's voice sounds through my earpiece. "We're ready to attack on command."

“All units stand your ground,” Aldrich Burton’s command comes in next. “We’ll begin exactly at three hundred hours sharp.”

We’re almost ready to launch an attack on both Callahan’s base as well as the underground bunkers that run throughout the wooded areas of Kentville.

The Burton pack has been planning for an opportunity like this for weeks now. We’ve spent hours discussing tactics with them. With the added support of the Oldenburg pack, we’re confident in winning against the Black Widow.

We just have to make sure none of these insurgents, especially Callahan, escapes our net tonight.

Security guards are usually at their weakest during the early hours of dawn. We decided to take advantage of it to launch our surprise assault.

I check the watch on my wrist. The time to attack is only minutes away.

Moonlight shines on a tall, dark figure in the distance. I recognize Dad even though it’s dark and he’s standing with his back toward me.

He’s standing further ahead of us and keeping a watch over the spot that Damon specified. This will be our point of assault tonight.

Even though I’m commanding my own men, he’s still the one to be leading us through the attack tonight.

The thunderous roar of chopper blades cuts through the silence of the night. Looking up, I see at least four helicopters hovering over us.

I glance down at my watch and watch the last minute tick by.

Even though I’m ready for it, my body still jolts violently as loud explosions erupt all around me. The men around me stiffen, their expressions turning stony as they wait for the next command.

It takes only a few minutes for the enemy to show its face. Drove of men in black clothing filter out from all directions. Their cries are punctuated by the steady roar of gunshots from both our side and theirs.

I stay back with my battalion's command sergeant and watch the progress of our soldiers. Their enemy is formidable but our surprise assault has successfully achieved to cause chaos among them.

The Black Widow doesn't have anyone commanding them and it can be seen in the way they're running and shooting in random directions. The choppers overhead fly low and rain bullets on them, taking down dozens of their numbers in a matter of seconds.

It won't be long before we've subdued them all.

Reaching for my earpiece, I tap the knob that would allow me to get in touch with one of the commanding sergeants of Damon's troops.

"Captain Solveig," he answers in a grim tone.

"What is the status of Callahan mansion?"

"Not good, Sir," the man replies. "The men of the estate refused to follow Major Burton's commands to vacate the premises and attacked us with full force. Our soldiers are fighting to take charge of the estate and the mansion. I'm sure we'll win against them but the chaos will allow some of the insurgents to escape."

"Report to me when you've taken hold of the place."

"Yes, Sir."

I switch off the earpiece and concentrate on the battle taking place before me. While I'm glad to be destroying the rebels that form the backbone of the Black Widow, I'm worried we'd still end up losing Callahan.

It's paramount for us to arrest him. He's the mastermind behind the whole operation. No one will have as much information about the Black Widow as him. We *need* to

capture him to dismantle this nefarious militant group once and for all.

The stench of blood mingles with the fumes of gunpowder. Many of the trees have caught on fire from the explosions. Fire and smoke rage all around us.

Blood, fire, and ashes.

This is the price we pay when we march into any battle.

The blood soaking the soil belongs to both the enemy and our soldiers. It is always heartbreaking to think of the loyal men we'd be losing after everything is over.

"All to protect the innocent," I murmur to myself as gunshots and explosions continue to erupt all around me.

"Captain Solveig," a panting man's voice makes me turn around.

A young man, his face barely recognizable from dirt and sweat, is staring up at me with wide eyes.

"What's wrong?" I ask, my voice heavy with dominance.

The soldier swallows. "Fresh enemy troops are coming this way. I ran all the way here from the southern section of these woods to warn you. They'll be upon you within minutes."

A rain of bullets suddenly hit the trees near us.

I grab the young man by the collar and force him down on the ground as a chopper flies overhead, shooting at us. It only takes me a moment to realize that it belongs to the enemy.

The men around me lie flat on the ground to avoid being hit.

Our helicopters turn around, ready to attack the enemy chopper.

I switch on my earpiece and command the men to move toward the bunkers. Since we'd taken down most of the insurgents hiding there, we could use the underground passages to protect ourselves while the aerial helicopters engaged in battle.

Gasps of pain and shock sound all around me as several men get hit by bullets. Gritting my teeth together, I run forward without stopping to help them.

I hate leaving my men behind but the battle isn't over yet. It's paramount to save the soldiers I can to keep fighting.

Detecting the hatch leading into the underground chambers, I lead the men through them before climbing in myself.

At least, a hundred men fan out along the wide hallway before me. Everyone's slowly progressing forward, their weapons at the ready.

While we'd mapped out the terrain of Kentville's woods, the underground bunkers were a mystery to us. We had no idea how far they stretched and who could be hiding here.

I look up as footsteps sound on the iron-wrought ladders that lead down to these hallways. More of our soldiers are heading down here to protect themselves from the bullets and missiles being shot by the enemy chopper.

The sound of explosions and gunshots is heavily muted in these underground hallways. Keeping my gun raised before me, I slowly proceed through the well-lit corridors and take note of the place.

The bunkers are very well-maintained. There's good ventilation as well as proper illumination, making it the perfect place to hide an army.

We get attacked from time to time by the few cowards who're hiding down here instead of fighting like their comrades. My soldiers gun them down as we progress ahead. We're not taking any prisoners just yet.

"Captain Solveig!" I hear someone calling for me from a different direction. "Come and check this out."

My soldiers part away as I stride forward. Soon, I come across a wide, high-ceilinged room.

My mouth parts slightly as I stare at the array of weapons that are on display here. From semi-automatics to missile

launchers, the fucking bastards have it all.

My gaze roves over the section that has an impressive variety of hand grenades. Picking one up, I rotate it to the side and catch sight of our military seal.

“Callahan, you traitorous bastard,” I curse under my breath. His rebels have been using the weapons that *our* military issued out to him.

Rage, hot and swift, flows through me. I can't believe they've been using our weapons to kill our own citizens.

“Get our men to guard this place,” I bark out a command. “Gun down any fucker that tries to get in here.”

“Yes, Sir!” the men chorus.

One of the sergeants follows my command and sets up a formation before the weapons room. Taking the rest of my men, I move deeper into the enemy's lair to see what else they've been hiding down here.

Most of the rooms we come across belong to the men who've been living here. Untidy beds and messy clothes strewn on the floor are a testament to their haste as they clambered to get dressed and run out to fight.

A gunshot suddenly alerts me but I'm too late to dodge it as the bullet brushes past my arm. A searing pain flares in my flesh but I grit my teeth and gun down the bastard that'd dared to fire at me.

Gunshots ring out in the hallway as my men fire at the enemy horde that's made an appearance. I take cover behind a pillar and shoot at the insurgents.

The pain in my arm makes my eyes water but I keep firing, intent on killing every man that's dedicated his life to destroying our peaceful society. My vision grows red as I focus on decimating the small army that's decided to stand up against me and my soldiers.

It's a while before the hallway grows quiet again. The air is heavy with the smell of gunpowder.



Taking deep breaths of the choking air, I look around at the droves of men that lie dead before me. A few of them belong to us, but most of the corpses belong to the Widow.

A familiar pang goes through me as I take in the fallen bodies of my loyal men. The loss always hurts. I'd rather take another gunshot wound than deal with the grief of losing another soldier.

"Are they keeping more weapons in there?" one of the soldiers asks. "Most of the enemy were either hiding or running out to fight us. These men were specifically staying behind to guard whatever's inside that vault."

Staring ahead, I see his point.

A large steel door with several bolts comes into my sight.

Avoiding the corpses that litter the floor, I step forward and gesture at my men to open the door. My imagination takes hold as they work on it. Was Callahan using the vault to store bombs or something more sinister?

My men push open the door, giving me the first glimpse of the secrets that hide behind it.

A dimly lit high-ceilinged space greets me. Keeping my gun raised before me, I step further inside and stop.

*What's that smell?* My mind wonders as my gaze settles on the life-sized cages that fill up the vast chamber.

It takes another moment for me to realize what the cages are holding.

Women in rags fill up the cages. I didn't see them immediately because they're all pressed against the back of their enclosures. Wide, terrified eyes stare back at me, sending a chill down my spine.

"Captain, do you smell that?" A young soldier whispers.

I nod, understanding the strange smell that reminds me of moldy, rotten cakes.

"They're omegas," I say, lowering my gun.

The gesture has no effect on the terrified women that watch me apprehensively. I'm about to tell my men to not storm inside the room, but it's too late. They've already marched in, guns at the ready, and staring blankly at the captives.

"Keep your voices down," I command.

My alpha instincts react to these women's pain and trauma. I can only imagine what they must've gone through at the hands of their cruel captors.

I look closely at them, taking in their torn, worn clothing. Bones stick out from their malnourished bodies. Even their hair and skin are caked with dirt.

Anger and pity rise inside me. These omegas have been treated like animals by the Black Widow. I can only imagine the abuse they suffered at their hands.

As I walk through the path between the cages, I notice several pregnant omegas. Their protruding bellies look horrible against their skinny, bony bodies.

Walking into this room has given me a glimpse of our dark history when omegas were treated like mere toys. Alphas like Callahan took advantage of their weaknesses and abused them like it was their birthright.

"Captain, there are children here too," a nearby soldier whispers.

Half a dozen cages are filled with young omegas. Most of them are girls but I spot a few boys among them. Their thin, drawn faces tell me about the abuse they've been suffering since they were born.

"What should we do with them?" one of my men asks me.

"We should leave them here for now," I say in a lowered voice. "The explosions and gunshots that occurred earlier must've scared them. I want someone down here who can handle victims of abuse and trauma."

"These women and children need a lot of care and protection," says the beta soldier beside me. "I'm scared to

even imagine the kind of life they've led here."

I nod. "We'll let them be for now and sweep through the rest of the bunkers."

The sergeant nods and barks out my commands. One by one, the men walk out of the room, leaving me behind to make a promise to these omegas.

"I will come back for you," I vow silently.

This is the Black Widow's vision for our world and society. They want to bring back the practice of abusing omegas and ruling over the beta population.

My ancestors fought to protect the rights of such innocent people. They shed their blood and gave their lives to birth a society that protected the weak and rewarded the hardworking despite their designations.

A beta in our society is allowed to be as influential as an alpha. Their hardworking nature allows them to overcome their weaker physical capabilities. I am proud and willing to protect a world where we give them the opportunity to flourish.

*I'm going to destroy the Black Widow*, I vow, leading my men to kill any rebel that comes in our sight.



The rustle of sheets makes me turn toward Julian. He's been distracting himself by bundling up in a blanket and watching a K-drama series on his phone.

"I watched half the season's episodes but have no idea what happened in the story," he says, dropping his phone.

"Same here," I say, gesturing at the Kindle in my hand. "I keep reading the same sentence over and over again."

He lets out a huff. "I hate waiting like this," he says, looking both frustrated and angry. "I wish we could get live feedback about what's happening out there."

My frustration is at its height too. It's close to three in the morning and we have no news about what's happening at the raid.

My aunt welcomed us into her home but she looked terribly anxious herself. Both her mates and her sons were out there, preparing for the battle to take down the Black Widow.

Carol, Delilah, and my parents came to the house an hour after we did, but everyone's mood was the same. We were all worried for our mates. By the end of the evening, my aunt ushered everyone to their allotted guest rooms.

"Iris," he says, prodding my ankle with his socked feet. "Let's have sex."

I stare at him. “How can you even think about having sex at a time like this?”

“It’s the only thing that will stop me from worrying.”

A wry chuckle escapes me. “You could be eating me out and I’d *still* be worrying.”

“This sucks,” he says, throwing a cushion on the floor. Next, he proceeds to bundle up a sheet and flings it away too.

“Is yeeting stuff helping you?” I ask with an amused chuckle.

Before he can reply, a subtle knock sounds at the door.

“Who could that be?” he mutters, climbing off the bed.

I sit up straight and wait as he opens the door.

“Is Iris here?” a familiar voice floats inside the room.

“Yeah,” Julian replies, stepping away. “Come in.”

Delilah walks inside the room, looking all around until her gaze falls on me.

“I guess you guys couldn’t sleep either,” she says, glancing at us.

“No,” I say in a depressed tone. “We’re exhausted but unable to sleep.”

She nods and sits down on the edge of the bed. “I tried watching movies but nothing’s helping to take my mind off Lachlan.”

“I know,” says Julian. “We tried that too.”

“What about Mom and Dad?” I ask.

A frown twists her mouth. “They’re bickering.”

“What are they arguing about?”

She rolls her eyes. “They’re trying to blame the other for approving my relationship with Lachlan.”

“Why? He’s so loving toward you.”

“That’s not the issue. They’re finally understanding the risk that comes with being part of a military pack.” Her expression darkens. “Mom and Dad know it’d tear me apart if anything happens to Lachlan.”

I grip her arm tightly. “Don’t even mention things like that. Don’t even think about stuff like that. Lachlan and everyone else is going to be okay. It’s just a matter of a single night. They’ll all come back in the morning.”

Tears fill her bright blue eyes. “You think so?”

I nod emphatically. “Absolutely. They’ll all be okay. They *have* to be okay.”

“Do you guys want hot chocolate?” Julian calls from a far corner.

Standing by the small kitchenette, he holds up packets of hot chocolate premixes.

I glance toward Delilah and find her nodding.

“Yep! We’ll have hot chocolate,” I shout. “Thank you!”

“Yeah, thanks,” says Delilah, grinning at him.

Relief spreads through me. Julian and Delilah are finally getting along with each other.

We settle down on the couch beside the coffee table and watch Julian tinkering in the kitchenette. The smell of hot chocolate spreads in the air, comforting me at once.

Coming back with our drinks, he hands them to us.

I grab mine eagerly and place my palms around the warm mug. The smell of chocolate instantly makes me smile at my mate.

Julian seems to understand and grins back.

“I wish we could have some marshmallows,” Delilah says, staring at me with puppy eyes.

“I’m not going to my aunt, asking for marshmallows at three in the morning,” I say in a strict tone.

“Please? Pretty, please?”

“Nope.”

Julian chuckles and sips his drink. “This hot chocolate is really crappy,” he says. “Marshmallows could make it better.”

I try not to roll my eyes at these spoiled omegas and take a sip from my cup. “It’s not so bad,” I lie, avoiding meeting their gazes. The consistency is quite watery but that’s to be expected. A good hot chocolate needs to have real cocoa and cream in it.

Delilah yawns and sets her mug down on the coffee table. Pulling her legs up on the couch, she leans against the backrest. Slowly, her eyes fall closed.

“Should we try to sleep too?” Julian suggests, staring at my dozing sister.

“We could try,” I say and put down my cup.

I spread a blanket over Delilah before joining Julian.

Together, we settle down among the pillows. My tired eyes close as soon as I rest my face against Julian’s chest. My brain finally seems to shut down, allowing me to escape into a light doze.

It feels like I’ve just closed my eyes when I hear a high, piercing scream. Someone shouts my name while violently shaking me.

“What’s going on?” I mutter through a dry mouth.

“Wake up, Sis,” Delilah’s voice registers in my mind. “There are news updates on the raid that’s happening in Kentville.”

“Wait, what?” It’s a struggle to open my heavy eyelids and make sense of what Delilah’s saying. “What news updates?”

She forcibly makes me sit up and thrusts her phone in my face. “Look!” she shouts. “They’re covering the story on the news.”

“What’re you guys shouting about?” Julian groans from beside me.

“There’s news!” Delilah says, proceeding to pull him into a seating position.

I stare at the phone screen before me and see a news article with a headline that reads, “Black Widow terrorists killed in a clash with the military.”

Rubbing my eyes, I sit up straighter and scroll through the photographs in the article. They’ve all been taken from the air and show various sections of the woods.

Several parts of the wooded area are burning. Rising smoke and ash blur most of the scene. However, in some places, we get glimpses of corpses in black clothing.

“Is it over?” I ask, scrolling through the little text that accompanies the article.

“I don’t know,” says Delilah, sitting down next to me. “But, we have hope. They wouldn’t have allowed reporters to get in there if they were still fighting with the terrorists.”

“That’s true,” says Julian slowly. “At least, we can keep an eye on the news to learn more about the situation there.”

I look toward the windows. Pale sunshine streams in through the closed curtains, telling me it’s already morning.

“Let’s go downstairs,” I say. “Carol and my aunt might’ve gotten some news by now.”

“Can you believe we finally managed to get some sleep?” Julian whispers as I pull on my sneakers.

“We stayed up past three last night,” I say, straightening up. “I’m guessing our brains just switched off from worrying too much.”

“I don’t even care about what’s happening out there,” Delilah says as we head out of the room. “I just want to know if Lachlan’s all right.”

“Same here,” Julian mutters. “I just want to know that my mates are alive.”

We walk into the main hall downstairs and don’t find anyone there.



“Let’s check the kitchen,” says Julian, walking into a different hallway. He’s better acquainted with the house than me, so Delilah and I follow him.

We find Valerie and Caroline inside the kitchen. They’re sitting at the kitchen island and sipping on coffee. The heavy bags under their eyes tell me they haven’t slept through the night.

“Hey, kids,” says Caroline, attempting a smile at us.

“Morning,” Julian and I chorus.

“Are you guys hungry?” my aunt asks.

I shake my head. “Don’t worry about us. We’re fine. We just came in to check on you guys. Did you hear anything about the operation?”

“No, honey,” says Valerie, looking anxious. “We haven’t heard a word yet.”

“News reporters are aware of what’s happening,” says Julian. “They’re starting to release photos and articles online.”

“Really?” Caroline says, her eyes widening. She scrambles for her phone that’s lying on the table and feverishly scrolls across the screen.

Valerie is also just as desperate. Picking up her phone, she starts checking through the news sites as well.

“There’s barely any information,” Caroline says, sounding frustrated.

“We know,” says Delilah. “We’re just hopeful that the worst is over. Otherwise, they’d never let reporters get close to the site of the raid.”

“That’s a sensible assumption,” Caroline says in a grim tone.

“Why don’t we go into the den and turn on the TV?” Valerie suggests. “We can keep flicking through the news channels and gather what we can until we hear something useful.”

“That’s a great idea,” says Caroline. Turning toward us, she adds, “Why don’t you guys grab some cereal and milk and come with us?”

“I’m not hungry,” Delilah mutters.

“Did you eat anything last night?” Caroline questions.

“No, I was too worried to eat anything.”

Stepping closer to Delilah, Caroline pulls her into a gentle hug. “I know you’re worried about your mate. We’re all going through the same thing, you know? It’s important to take care of ourselves while our alphas are out there, fighting to protect us all. We can’t let them come home and see us being weak and ill. Can you imagine how horrible they’d feel to see us like that?”

Delilah swallows hard and nods.

My stomach churns from worrying about Caleb and Damon, but I know we all have to try and eat something. Opening a nearby cupboard, I bring out a box of cereal.

Valerie grabs some bowls and a carton of milk for me.

It takes only a few minutes for me to fill up the bowls with cereal and milk.

“I’ll grab us some coffee,” says Julian.

“What about Charlie?” I ask my aunt. “Wouldn’t he want some breakfast too?”

“It’s Saturday, so Charlie is going to go through his usual routine,” she explains. “He’ll wake up, go for a walk in the grounds, and then get dressed and head out. He always has brunch with his old pals at a diner downtown.”

“Hold up,” I say. “Does grandpa even know what’s happening?”

A guilty look flashes through my aunt’s face. “He has no idea,” she says in a lowered voice. “He’s been doing so well lately that we decided not to tell him anything. We didn’t want to stress him out.”

A gentle smile comes onto her lips. “He’s been so happy since the day he met you, Iris. The old man can’t stop talking about you. He was insisting on having you over for dinner this weekend, but of course, we couldn’t agree.”

She lets out a heavy sigh. “I can’t wait for this threat to go away. Charlie and my mates deserve a little peace after the grief they’ve suffered all these years.”

Caroline squeezes her hand. “It’ll all be okay soon.”

Valerie blinks back her tears and nods. Taking a deep breath, she puts on a brave smile. “Come on, then. Let’s go watch some TV.”

We carry our bowls of cereal and follow her.

I can’t help but think of the ordeal Valerie and her pack has been going through. It couldn’t have been easy for them to face the truth about what happened to my birth parents. They had no idea that the man who killed them had been my father’s best friend.

I’m desperately hoping Callahan and his shadow army would be destroyed once and for all. It’s the only way my aunt and her pack would have some peace.

Reaching the den, Valerie proceeds to turn on the TV while we settle down on the comfortable couches that fill up the room.

“This looks like it,” says Caroline, standing beside Valerie.

“We can’t see a thing,” Julian says, gesturing at Caroline to move away.

When they shift, I catch a glimpse of burning treetops and a smoky sky on the TV screen. The bold headline underneath it reads, “Poisonous Widows in our backyard.”

“They’ve revealed it’s the Black Widow’s hideout,” says Delilah, sounding excited.

“Yes. And, it does look like the battle is over,” says Julian.

Valerie turns up the volume and we eagerly listen to the report being narrated.

“The military carried out a covert operation to cease the rebels that call themselves the Black Widow,” a female voice reports. “We have no information on how the raid was conducted or who was involved, but we can be sure of one thing. The notorious terrorists who’ve been responsible for countless deaths over the past few decades have finally been apprehended.”

It’s a relief to hear that the military was successful in winning against the Black Widow, but we still can’t unwind ourselves.

“I wish they’d report about the death tolls,” says Julian, rubbing his thighs and looking anxious.

“Let’s give them more time,” Caroline says in a grim tone.

“At least, we know the Black Widow was defeated,” says Valerie, trying to sound hopeful. “We won!”

“Yeah,” I say with a nod. “We won.” *But, it won’t be a victory if any of our mates got hurt or...* I can’t even allow myself to think of the word *dead*.

The hours crawl by.

Our cereal bowls are left untouched. The only thing we help ourselves to is coffee and lots of it.

“We have received reports that most of the insurgents are either caught or dead,” A female reporter says. She’s standing in the middle of a badly-destroyed wooded area and gesturing at the scene behind her. We catch glimpses of local authorities who’re busily carrying away sealed body bags and conducting ground investigations.

“Hell, yeah!” Julian cheers.

“Sshh!” we hiss at once.

“Our forces have sustained casualties as well but since this was a carefully planned raid, the numbers are minimal,” the reporter narrates. “From the information that we have received, one of the commanding captains was shot.”

Cold spreads over me at those words.

Both Caleb and Damon are commanding captains of their units.

“Captain Caleb Solveig is said to have sustained a gunshot wound,” the reporter says. They flash a photograph of him on the screen, leaving no doubt that they were talking about my mate.

“No,” a sob falls from my trembling lips.

Delilah wraps her arms around me tightly. She holds me as my whole body shakes.

“This can’t be,” I whisper, unable to process the news that Caleb is dead. “He can’t be dead!”

I turn my teary, blurred eyes toward Julian. He’s sitting straight, but his expression is frozen.

“Caleb,” I whisper. “He can’t be dead.”

“They said he was shot,” Delilah says, holding me tightly. “We don’t know if he’s truly gone. Please, Iris. Don’t fall apart just yet.”

I shake my head, unable to trust her sense and logic.

There’s no way someone like me could ever hope to have a happy future. I’d always have an empty hole in my heart, no matter what I did.

Caleb’s face flashes before me, making my heart squeeze up. I clutch at my chest, unable to quench the pain that’s flaring through me.

“We need to wait for Gerald to call,” Caroline says in a broken tone. “He’ll know...he’ll know if our son is truly...” A sob chokes her words and she breaks down.

Julian reaches for her and holds her trembling body in his arms.

My worst fears have come true. I’ve lost a piece of my heart in my pursuit of vengeance. Why couldn’t it be me who was dead? Why did it have to be a good man like Caleb? He could’ve done so much for the world if he was alive. It

should've been a useless person like me who was taken away. Not him!

A loud ringtone blasts in the room, drawing all our attention toward a phone on the couch.

Julian wipes his tears and grabs his phone. His forehead creases as he stares at the screen.

"Who's calling?" I ask in a choked voice.

"Damon," he whispers.

I brush away my tears and rush toward him.

Julian swipes at the screen and holds up his phone. "Hey," Julian says.

"Why do you look like that, Jules?" Damon's deep voice sounds from the phone.

Julian's eyes squeeze shut as he starts sobbing uncontrollably. Holding onto him, I look toward the phone in his hand.

Damon's face is grimy with dirt and dried blood. Thick bandages are wrapped around his head and his arm is hanging from a sling. He looks badly injured but at least, he's alive.

"Wildcat, you too?" he says, looking confused. "Why are you guys bawling your eyes out? I know I got a teensy bit hurt but it's nothing that won't heal."

"Caleb," I manage to say through the painful choke stuck in my throat.

"What about him? He's okay too, you know?"

I feel Julian freeze beside me.

"What'd you say?" I whisper, staring at Damon with wide eyes.

"Caleb is okay," he says, looking more confused now. "I mean...yeah, he got hurt, but again, he'll recover from it."

A spark of hope flares inside me. "Caleb wasn't shot, then?"

"Oh, you know about that? Who told you about it?"

“For fuck’s sake, Damon!” Julian bursts. “Is Caleb alive or not?!”

“Of course, he’s alive!” Damon says, looking thoroughly confused at his outburst. “What’s gotten into you guys?”

Delilah shoves herself between me and Julian. “The news said that he was shot,” she says, staring at Damon’s baffled face. “It broke your omegas.”

He rubs his forehead, looking helpless. “Iris...Julian... look at me. Caleb’s okay. It’s true that he was shot but he’s fine.”

“Let me talk to him right now!” Julian demands.

“He’s kind of busy, so he asked me to make the call.”

“Not good enough,” Julian says and I nod vehemently from the side. “I want to see him right *now*.”

“He uncovered a nasty secret that Callahan was hiding in the bunkers,” Damon says in a low, grim tone. “Over a hundred omegas were found caged down there. There are children among them too.” He lets out a heavy breath. “Caleb doesn’t want this news to be reported to protect those poor souls. He wants to get them to a safe location without attracting the media’s attention.”

The news that Caleb was okay finally registers in my mind. The shock I felt earlier is still working through me, not allowing me a moment’s respite.

“Some of the women are pregnant,” Damon continues. “We still need to know whether they were kidnapped or whether they’ve been bred by the Black Widow. Caleb wants to get to the bottom of what was being done to them. You won’t hear from him until he’s sorted through this shit.”

“What about Callahan?” I ask in an urgent voice.

Damon’s expression darkens. “He managed to escape.”

“Fuck,” Julian curses. “Again?!”

“We stormed his house and guess what happened? The Black Widow charged at us. At first, we thought they were

regular betas of his battalion, so we were wary about attacking them. We should've known the bastard would never pay an honest soldier. He can only breed rebels and fucktards. The men defending his estate were the Widow in disguise. He used them to keep us distracted and managed to escape.”

“He was your main target,” Julian says, looking frustrated. “How could you let him go?”

“Don't worry, Jules. He won't run far. We've barricaded the entire area. He'll be caught the moment he steps out of his hideout.” Damon grins. “The Black Widow is destroyed. Keep watching the news. Caleb and Seth's team discovered bunkers full of weapons as well as a cleared area in the woods that's been hiding assault helicopters.”

“Are you sure this is the only place they've been hiding in?” I ask.

“No, but this place is their headquarters. I'm sure interrogating the captured rebels will reveal more answers. For now, we're sure that we have taken down most of their numbers. And just wait until we've caught Callahan. I'll personally make sure he vomits out all the information.” His amber eyes gleam with a dark intensity as he grins manically.

“All right, you two,” Caroline says, moving toward us. “It's time I got to say hi to my son.”

Julian hands her his phone and glances at me.

“Caleb's okay,” I say as a smile blossoms on my lips.

“He's okay,” he echoes and throws his arms around me.

I hug him tightly, pouring out all the grief I suffered in those short minutes.

Julian grabs my chin and captures my lips in a searing kiss.

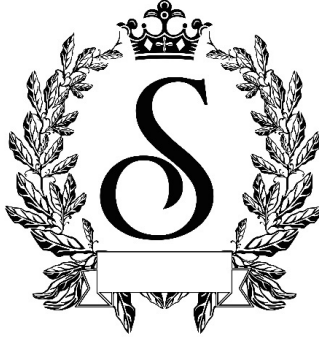
Opening up to him, I surrender to his sudden need and hunger. It's not just him who's desperate to feel some warmth and connection after the awful night we spent together.

“You guys need to get a room,” Delilah says loudly. We can hear Caroline and Damon's voices in the background but



we ignore everything around us. We keep kissing each other.

At this moment, I don't even care that Callahan escaped. We can go after him another day, but today, I'm just grateful to know that my mates, my pack, and my friends are safe.



Julian's lips trail down my neck, eliciting a loud moan from my lips.

"Your mom-in-law is still in the room!" Delilah's shriek breaks through the haze of lust blinding all my senses.

Breathing hard, I push at Julian's chest.

He raises his head, his eyes burning with an intensity that sends both my heart and pussy throbbing. Climbing off me, he straightens up and grabs my wrist. "Come on."

I'm easily pulled to my feet. Before I know it, Julian bends before me and hauls me over his shoulders.

I catch Delilah's open-mouthed expression as Julian carries me out of the room. His urgency sends sparks all over my body, heightening my hunger.

Julian races up the stairs and carries me into our room.

A relieved sigh escapes me. No one's going to interrupt us now. We both need to touch and devour the other to let go of the anxiety that's been gnawing at us since the moment Damon left us last night.

The sheer relief to know that everyone's okay is enough to make us this desperate.

Putting me down, Julian shuts the door.

I barely have the chance to catch my breath when Julian grabs me and slams me against the wall next to the door.

A gasp escapes me as pain flares up my back but I bite my lower lip and proceed to grab his collar.

“Did that hurt?” he asks in a rough voice, reaching between us and cupping me through my jeans.

“Yeah, and it felt so good,” I say, grabbing his shirt and pulling it.

In my mind, I visioned myself tearing his clothes off like Raiden had done so many times to me. His shirt stubbornly clings to his body, making me realize my physical strength will never match my alpha’s.

A knowing grin spreads on his beautiful face. Grabbing his shirt, he pulls it over his head and throws it away. “Is this what you wanted, darling?”

“Uh-huh,” I moan, greedily eyeing his lean muscles and flawless skin.

Hooking his fingers into the waistband of my jeans, he pulls me closer and pulls down the zipper.

I shimmy my hips, desperate to get my trousers off me.

Julian’s hand slides over my cotton panties. Rubbing over the seam with his thumb, he teases my pussy lips, causing me to moan out.

Desperate to feel his fingers on my bare skin, I pull my panties down my legs.

“I’m glad you’re not wasting time, love,” he whispers in a husky voice that shivers over my skin. Chuckling, he slides his hand over my naked pussy, cupping it in a possessive hold. His luscious lips twist into a naughty smirk as he stares into my eyes. “Tell me what you want, Wildflower?”

My eyes close in pure bliss as his thumb rubs over my sensitive nub while his fingers bury deep inside my core. My walls throb and pulse, making me moan out my reply. “Julian, please.”

“Please, what?” he teases, his fingers sliding in and out of me.

“You!” I gasp, panting harshly. “Now!”

Reaching out, I cup him between his thighs. My palm feels his hardness through the layers of fabric between our skins. His hot breath brushes over my neck as his eyes flutter close.

“No more games, Wildflower,” he says, breathing harshly.

With a sudden move, he spins me around and presses me against the wall. The sound of his zipper being pulled down is loud in the quiet, still room.

My insides throb, making me grip the wall before me.

Gripping my waist, he positions his cock at my entrance.

I stay still as his thick head prods through my slippery pussy lips.

A cry escapes me as he thrusts hard, plunging inside me balls-deep.

Julian groans, his hands coming to grip my hips. “It feels so good to be inside you, Wildflower,” he croons as he pulls out and slams back in again, filling me up completely. “You’re so slick and wet, I barely have to do anything.”

I thrust my ass back, eager to feel the hot friction of his cock sliding against my tight walls. “Harder, Julian,” I moan, wanting him to keep thrusting into me without stopping. “I need you so much right now. Make me forget everything that’s been eating at me since last night. Both Caleb and Damon are okay. There’s nothing else I want at this moment.”

A rough chuckle escapes him as he plunges inside me. “You don’t even want me?” he teases.

I want to reply back with a snarky comment but my rising ecstasy obliterates my vocabulary. Loud moans escape me as his thick, hard cock takes over my body. Pure pleasure lashes through me, blinding me to everything except the heat flooding my veins. I rock back against him, impatient to reach my high.

“Ah, fuck,” Julian groans, thrusting into me harder and faster. His hands slide under my shirt, grabbing my soft

mounds.

Suddenly, I wish I'd taken off my bra earlier.

Somehow, Julian seems to understand my craving for his bare touch. He pushes his hands through the underwire of my bra and grasps my breasts, kneading and massaging.

It feels so good to have his searing touch on my sensitive flesh that I moan out loudly. My walls tighten around his pulsing rod. I'm so taut that a brush of his hand against my pussy is enough to unravel me, causing me to lose all control.

"You're so tight right now," he says through clenched teeth as my walls pulse against his hard erection.

"You can come too," I say through a harsh pant.

"Not until I've made you scream some more, love," he says, thrusting into that particular spot that's making me moan out his name.

My insides tighten again, promising greater pleasure than the one I experienced just a minute ago. I close my eyes, surrendering to the fiery pleasure that courses through me.

"Julian!" I cry as he thrusts deep inside me, shattering me once again.

He lets out a groan as his body shudders against mine. Jets of his white-hot cum flood my core, filling me to the brim, and then streaming down my thighs.

Julian's hot breath fans the fine hair on the back of my neck. A ragged groan tears out of his throat as his lips press into my shoulder. Pulling out of me gently, he bends down and picks me up in his arms.

A sigh escapes me as I bury my face in his warm, hard chest.

He carries me to the bed and lays me down among the pillows.

"Lie down with me," I croon, looking up at him with needy eyes.

Climbing in beside me, he pulls up the sheet, covering both our bodies with it.

I snuggle into him and breathe in his delicious scent. A sudden craving for hot chocolate rises inside me but my need for sleep wins over it. Wrapping my leg around his thighs, I slide my arm over his chest.

Julian holds me against him as my heavy, tired eyes finally close.

It feels like I've just sunken into sleep when a loud knocking jolts me awake.

My eyes fly open. Heart pounding against my chest, I sit up and stare at the door. "Who is it?" I ask.

"It's your fucking sister!" Delilah's voice filters inside the room.

"Ugh! What does she want now?" Julian groans, pulling the blanket over his head.

"Open up!" Delilah shouts, banging on the door.

"Hang on," I holler, climbing off the bed and grabbing a shirt. "I'm coming."

Opening the door, I step aside.

Delilah's gaze rakes me from head to foot. "You guys were boning, weren't you?"

I scratch my face and glare at her. "Why'd you come?"

"Don't you dare get mad at me," she warns, shaking a finger in my face. "I came to give you guys your phones. You were so busy eating each other's faces off that you didn't bother bringing them along with you. That hulky guy has been badgering Caroline and Valerie since this morning. They finally got annoyed and sent me up here."

I fight through a huge yawn. It takes me a moment to realize that the "hulky guy" she's talking about was Raiden.

"Did Raiden call?" I ask her as my senses finally awaken.

She rolls her eyes. “I think so. I need more time to memorize their faces and names. It’s hard enough to deal with *one* alpha. I can’t believe you’ve got three. Plus, an omega!” She shakes her head and makes a funny face. “I get tired from just thinking about it.”

“I love my mates,” I say, grinning. Holding out my palm, I gesture for her to hand me my phone.

Delilah pads further inside the room and pokes Julian’s shoulder.

He turns away and shows her his back but she continues poking and teasing him. I let her do it, hoping she can wake him up faster.

Taking my phone, I check the notifications.

There are several missed calls and texts from Raiden.

“What is it?!” Julian roars, finally sitting up and throwing the blanket away. “Iris? Iris, where are you?”

A dismayed expression comes over him as he stares at an impishly grinning Delilah.

“I’m over here,” I say, waving at him from the couch.

Julian glares at Delilah and stomps over to me.

“What is she doing here?” he huffs, sitting down next to me.

“Raiden has been calling us,” I say, dialing his number. “He’s been trying to reach us for hours.”

“Iris, thank goddess!” Raiden’s relieved voice sounds from my phone. “Are you guys okay? Where have you been?”

“We both fell asleep,” I say. “We were so relieved after Damon told us that everyone was okay that we came up to our room and just slept.”

“Yeah, right,” Delilah interrupts loudly. “They were boning.”

Julian gives her the stink eye as he snatches the phone from my hand. “What about you, Ray? Is everything okay at

home?”

“Yeah, everything’s quiet here,” he says, yawning loudly. “Now that I’ve heard the sound of your voices, I can take a long nap myself. It was fucking nerve-wracking to sit here and wait for news. Caleb got shot during the raid but at least, it’s not bad enough to take him down.”

“What’re you talking about?” Julian demands. “Isn’t Caleb recovering at the hospital or something?”

“Didn’t you hear about the caged omegas?” Raiden asks.

“Yeah, we did,” says Julian. “I know Caleb wants to take care of the matter himself but please tell me that he’s ordering people to get the job done. Don’t tell me he’s sustained a bullet injury and is walking around, commanding people all over the place.”

“I’m sure someone gave him first-aid,” says Raiden.

“First aid?” Julian scoffs. “He was fucking shot!”

Even though I’m quiet and intently listening to the conversation, I feel the same way as Julian. Caleb should be resting right now. How can he move around when he’s injured?

“It’s a critical issue,” Raiden says in a grim tone. “I don’t like that he’s pushing himself but it’s important to get those women and children to safety before Callahan or one of his associates gets to know about it. We don’t know whom to trust right now, so he’s taking care of the matter.”

“Can we come home now?” I ask anxiously. “I don’t like being away from you.”

“You should stay with the Burtons for another week,” Raiden continues in a grim tone. “You and Julian would be safest there. There’s a possibility of attacks from the Black Widow mercenaries who’ve been hiding in other parts of the country. The probability is low since we confiscated a shit ton of their weapons and assault machinery from the underground bunkers in Kentville. Still, we’d like to be a hundred percent sure before moving you guys from the safe house.”



“So, we’ll have to wait a whole week to see you again?” I groan.

He chuckles. “Don’t sound so sad, darling. You know it’s equally hard for us to stay away from you guys. We’ll all come by to see you in a few days.”

“Really?” I say as a grin blossoms on my face. “You guys will come here to see us?”

“Yep. Let’s go out for brunch or something,” says Raiden, his tone sounding lighter and happier than before.

“We could go to Old John’s diner,” Julian pipes up. “It’s been ages since we went there.”

“Oh, yeah,” says Raiden. “I love their steak and hash browns. And they serve the best pecan pie in town.”

“I can’t wait to see you,” I say, smiling like an idiot. “I miss you so much already.”

“Aww, I miss you too, babe.”

I catch Delilah smiling at us from the corner. Her blue eyes are warm as they land on me. She’s silent but I know she’s happy for me.

I smile back at her.

It’s good to talk and plan about brunches. The Black Widow is finally destroyed and it won’t be long before Callahan is caught too. It’s only a matter of time before he and his shadow army are obliterated from our nation.

I take a deep breath and feel the oxygen expanding my lungs. It’s been a while since I felt so carefree. I can’t wait to reunite with my mates and all my family from the Burton Pack. It’s finally time for us to celebrate our victory against the man who’s harmed us for so long.





The momentary relief that came with knowing my mates were safe faded away in the next few days. Caleb, Damon, and Raiden have stayed in touch with us but each time we spoke, I could see the anxiety and exhaustion on their faces.

The local news channels are loaded with aerial footage of the woods that were destroyed during the military's raid. Through the large gaps among the treetops, we got clear images of the grounds that were used to train the mercenaries. We also got glimpses of the array of assault vehicles and aircraft they hid in the surrounding areas.

The military and local authorities are discovering new vaults every day, containing massive arsenals of guns, grenades, and other weapons. We all knew that the Black Widow was powerful, but could never imagine they were as well-equipped as our military.

The entire nation is shocked and shaken by these findings. The demand to know who's behind these operations has been so vocal and in places, violent, that the military was forced to reveal Callahan's name.

My mates and I are secretly glad.

The more people know about him, the harder it would be for him to hide. The words "Black Widow" and "Nox Callahan" are being used synonymously by news reporters. The media is displaying the asshole's face everywhere and

urging citizens to report to the authorities the moment he's sighted.

A smile lights up my face each time I see a reporter or an online article about Callahan. We've finally destroyed his shadow army and exposed his true face to the world. It won't be long before he's captured and forced to pay for his sins.

"Do you realize they haven't mentioned anything about the captured omegas?" Julian asks from beside me. "It's already been three days since they were found but the media has no idea about them."

I nod. "Caleb has been protecting them all," I say in a grim tone. "He's doing his best to keep their secret and making sure they're safe from omega traffickers and those who want to capture them again. It's just that he looked so pale last night. He needs to take a break and rest."

"I know," Julian says, looking worried. "He was shot for crying out loud."

"The military has unearthed documents that reveal the traitors who've been helping Callahan and the Black Widow," a news reporter's voice draws my attention back to the TV. "These powerful officials have been helping these violent insurgents to stay hidden and protected. They had no qualms about the innocent people who've been dying at their hands for so long."

"Finally!" Julian shouts, looking furious. "These bastards need to be arrested immediately."

"Most of these officials have been taken into custody," the news reporter continues. "Every law enforcement agency is eager to interrogate them but they'll have to wait until the Solveig pack and Burton pack have conducted their preliminary investigations on these men and their connections to the Black Widow and Nox Callahan."

Relief spreads through me at the news. My mates, as well as my uncles and cousins, were doing an impressive job of cleaning up the traitors who've hiding among them.

Both our phones suddenly chime together, indicating incoming texts.

Julian and I grab our cell phones at once.

“They’re coming here,” Julian says in an excited voice, staring at me. “Can you believe that? We’re finally going to see them!”

My lips curve into a happy smile as I read the text that Raiden sent me.

*I have both Caleb and Damon with me, the text reads. We’ll be there in five minutes.*

“How do I look?” Julian asks, running his hands through the thick locks of his ash-blond hair.

“Beautiful as always,” I say, leaning in to kiss his luscious lips.

“Come on,” he says, standing up and stretching his arms over his head. “Since they’re here, I’m sure we can get out of here for a couple of hours.”

The prospect of leaving the house makes me smile excitedly. I’m tired of worrying about my mates and staying cooped up in the den with the TV on all the time. A breath of fresh air feels like a lavish luxury at the moment.

Getting off the couch, I follow Julian out of the room.

On the way to the entrance hall, we meet Caroline. Despite looking exhausted, she’s dressed in a neat pantsuit. Her sunshine-blond hair is sleek and straightened.

I look down at my plain hoodie and brush away a stray lock of hair from my eyes. Standing next to her, I look like a troll who just emerged out of its hole.

“Hey, you guys,” she greets, smiling brightly at us. “Did you hear about it too? Caleb, Damon, and Raiden are almost here with their dad.”

“Raiden didn’t mention anything about Gerald,” says Julian, moving closer to hug her. “But it’d be great to see him too. I’ve missed having all of us together under one roof.”

Caroline moves toward me and pulls me into a warm hug. “You look like you’ve lost weight in these past couple of days,” she says, her mouth turning down. “Have you been eating at all?”

“I eat when I remember to eat,” I confess. “I wish we could all go home. Valerie’s been extremely welcoming but it’s awful without Seth and my cousins here.”

Caroline caresses my shoulder. “I know it’s hard, sweetheart. Trust me, I *know*.”

“Delilah’s been lucky to be able to go back home with her mate,” I say, pouting.

Caroline squeezes my hand. “It won’t be long now,” she reassures me. “They know the names of the traitors now, so the other packs can join in the fight now. I’m sure those rebels are being hunted as we speak. Our packs won’t be under strain any longer. I have a feeling they’re all coming to take us back home today.”

“Oh wow! Really?!”

Caroline grins. “Let’s not get our hopes up too high,” she whispers, leaning against me.

I’m unable to suppress the excitement flooding through me. Julian grabs my hand and tugs me alongside him as we head for the front door.

The roar of a truck reaches me the moment I step outside.

A large black vehicle with the Solveig Pack’s emblem comes to a screeching halt right outside the door. The combined scents of my mates’ pheromones waft toward me, sending waves of warmth washing through me.

I’m running down the steps before they’ve even opened the door.

Julian’s right beside me but I reach Raiden first and throw my arms around his neck. His arms wrap around my waist as he lifts me off my feet and captures my lips.

His heady citrusy scent envelops me, igniting a blazing fire deep in my core. Pushing my tongue between his lips, I

urge him to kiss me harder.

I'm a breathless mess by the time Raiden sets me down on my feet. Leaning against his chest, I look toward Julian who's being hugged by both Caleb and Damon. Further away, Caroline is locked in a kiss with Gerald.

Beaming, I stare up into Raiden's ice-blue eyes. "I've missed you so much," I confess without any hesitation.

A warm smile lights up his handsome face. "Me too." Wrapping his arms around me, he pulls me into another hug and buries his nose in the crook of my shoulder. "It's been pure torture to be apart from you these past days. I can't wait to take you home and show you how much I've missed you."

His hands slide down my waist and cup my ass. The look in his eyes intensifies as he stares down at me.

My cheeks heat up as he tugs me against his hard body. A moan escapes me and suddenly, it feels like there are too many layers of clothing between us.

"Wildcat!" A deep voice growls in my ear, making me jump.

Turning around, I see Damon's grinning at me.

My smile fades away as my gaze roves over his injuries.

Dark bruises mar his face. His lips have a deep cut that looks terribly painful. A thick slab of bandage covers a spot on the right side of his forehead and his left arm hangs from a sling.

"How could you've gotten hurt like this," I accuse, my voice cracking.

"Oh, it's nothing," he says, wrapping an arm around me. "It'll all go away in a few weeks."

I cling to him, soaking up his sweet, smoky scent that reminds me of a bonfire. It'll take days for him to heal fully but at least, he's right here with me. At least, he's alive.

His fingers slide around my neck.

I lift my face to him as he leans in to kiss me.

“You taste so, so sweet, my kitty,” he croons against my lips. “I want to take a bite so badly.”

Rising on my toes, I playfully nip at his bottom lip.

His amber eyes come alive with an intensity that makes my heart pound against my chest. My core throbs with need. If Caroline, Gerald, and a handful of marching soldiers weren't around, I'd have begged him to take me right here.

Damon's breath leaves him in a rush. “Thank fuck we're taking you home today,” he mutters in my ear.

My smile broadens. “Really?! We're going home today?”

He nods as Caleb steps up beside him.

My gaze roves all over him but I can't spot a single injury on him. His uniform hides the gunshot wound that he sustained on his arm. He looks completely fine other than the exhaustion dulling his face.

Moving closer, I hug him carefully. “How badly does it hurt?” I ask, looking up into his warm silvery eyes.

“It was hurting a little before but after seeing you, I can't even remember which arm got shot.”

“Come on!” I say, pouting and hitting his chest. “You're being so cheesy. Stop kidding and tell me the truth.”

“Being cheesy is this alpha's signature move,” Julian says with a chuckle.

Caleb locks his arm around Julian's neck and pulls him closer. “You think I'm cheesy?” he whispers in a throaty, husky voice as he nips at Julian's ear.

“You heard what I said,” Julian says, staring back at Caleb with a challenging grin.

Soft chuckles escape Caleb as he buries his face against Julian's shoulder.

Warmth floods me as I watch my mates being together once again. The anxiety I've felt over the past few days lifts off me, making me feel lighter than ever.



I want to hug my big, hunky mates all at the same time and never let them go.

“Aww, Wildcat. Don’t cry,” Damon’s voice whispers in my ear as he wraps his arm around my shoulder. “There’s nothing to be sad about anymore. We’re all fine.”

I shake my head. “I’m not sad. I’m just so, so happy,” I croak, swiping at the tears that wouldn’t stop streaming down my face.

Julian moves forward and tugs me against his chest. His arms tighten around me as big sobs escape me, turning me into a heaving, gasping mess.

“My sweet darling,” Caleb calls out to me as he gently caresses my back. “We’re so sorry to make you worry.”

“Yeah, we’re sorry,” Damon says in an anxious tone. “Please, stop crying.”

I feel a pair of large arms wrapping around me and Julian. “Everything’s okay, sweetheart,” Raiden’s voice sounds from behind me. “There’s nothing to worry about anymore.” His chest rumbles with deep purrs, soothing me.

“This is her first time being left behind,” says Caroline from nearby. “I’d like to tell you it gets easier with time, but I’d be lying. It’s pure torture to wait for your alpha to come back from a battle.”

“Is anyone hungry?” Julian asks, looking around at everyone.

“I’m starving,” says Gerald. Coming closer to Caroline, he pulls her against him. “Do we bother Valerie or just head into town for some breakfast?”

“I’d *love* that,” says Julian, making puppy eyes at Gerald. “It’s been *so* long since these guys took me out to a restaurant.”

An amused expression comes over Gerald. “Well, kiddo, you just come with me and Aunty Caroline. We’ll buy you whatever you like.”

Julian's face brightens like the sun. "Yay!" he shouts, happily skipping toward Gerald and Caroline. Throwing his arms out, he hugs them both. "You guys are seriously the best."

Gerald ruffles Julian's hair with an affectionate look in his eyes.

I can't stop smiling at our reunion. Our pack is finally together!

Julian skips back toward me and hugs me tightly. "Let's go! I'm starving." Grabbing my hand, he pulls me toward the parked truck.

He helps me climb into the back. Caleb, Damon, and Raiden follow right behind us while Gerald and Caroline settle into the front seats.

My excitement surges as the truck starts moving. Sitting next to me, Caleb wraps an arm around my shoulder. Julian, Damon, and Raiden take up the narrow bench on the other side.

"You need to catch up on some sleep," I tell Caleb. "You're already severely injured. If you keep going this way, you'll end up falling sick."

He lets out a heavy sigh. "I know," he confesses in a tired voice. "It's just that I can't trust anyone with the safety of these omegas. From what we've learned, many of them were kidnapped by the Black Widow. I wish I could ask them for more information but they're all traumatized from being captives. They need more time to open up to us."

"Where are you keeping them?"

"In a facility that's close to our base," he says. "I have my soldiers protecting them day and night. Hopefully, we'll be able to send most of them back home. Even then, they'll need months of therapy to go back to their old lives. I wish I knew what to do with the ones who've lived all their lives with the Black Widow."

"Are you saying they kidnapped them as babies?"

Caleb shakes his head and lowers his forehead between his hands. “Some of the omegas were born in captivity. I believe the Black Widow has been breeding them for several years. They probably sell them off to shady alphas and high-class brothels. Trafficking omegas is a lucrative business if you can get away with it.”

I glance toward Julian. He’s sitting with his legs sprawled over Raiden’s thighs while staying locked in a kiss with Damon. Just imagining how he’d be lost if Gerald hadn’t rescued him as a child sends a painful spasm through my chest.

“He was a bundle of nerves when Dad brought him to us,” Caleb says in a lowered so that only I can hear him. “It takes years of patience and love to erase the trauma these children face at the hands of their abuser.”

“You must find out about the people who’ve dealt in such cruel businesses with the Black Widow,” I say through gritted teeth. “They must be punished too.”

Caleb nods and exhales another heavy sigh. “I’ll do my best to give them justice.”

I squeeze his knee and kiss his cheek. “There are more battles to be fought, Alpha,” I whisper. “That’s why...you’ve got to rest and recharge your strength. You can’t get ill when so many innocents are still depending on you.”

His hand comes to rest on my head. “Thank you for reminding me about that. I guess I’ll take the next few days off. Since the other packs are finally onto what’s happening, we can afford to step back a little.”

I stare at him. “Are you serious? You’re staying back tonight?”

His smile lights up his handsome face. “Yeah.”

“Julian!” I call out, unable to contain my happiness. “Caleb’s staying home tonight.”

Julian breaks off his kiss with Damon and glances at me. He’s completely pink in the face as he grins. “We’re having all

our alphas with us tonight. I'm going to have them all listen to *my* commands for a change."

"Oh, yeah," Damon growls and recaptures Julian's lips.

My core throbs at the mere sight. I suddenly feel like I can skip breakfast and head straight to my nest with my mates.

The truck slows down, jerking me against Caleb.

The narrow shutters along the truck's side give me a glimpse of the town's traffic. From the closely-rising structures, I know we're close to the central part of the city.

"We should take time off to come here sometime," I say, looking back at Caleb. "It'd be nice to get to know the town where my parents grew up."

"Of course," says Caleb, squeezing my hand. "We can invite Seth, Simon, and Oliver to come with us next time. They'll know the best places to hang out here."

My chest swells with happiness. I can't wait for everything to settle down so we can finally do all the things we've been planning for so long.

The truck comes to a stop.

Raiden moves ahead and opens the door for us.

I stand up and hop down the back of the truck. Looking around, I catch sight of the glass-walled diner that they've been talking about.

A large brightly-colored plastic ice cream cone is stuck on the roof of the building. A sign just below it reads "Old John's".

Most of the tables by the windows are already full. Hoping they have some space for us, I walk toward Caroline and Gerald.

Julian runs from behind me and grabs my hand. His smile makes me want to kiss him but I squash the urge and hurry behind Caroline and Gerald as they enter the diner.

The smell of roasted coffee wafts into my nostrils the moment I step inside. Breathing deeply, I look around at the

vast restaurant. Even though it's a weekday, the place is crowded with families enjoying their brunch.

"Over there," says Julian, tugging me alongside him. "That table's going to fit us all in."

He leads us to a wide table with lots of chairs. Sunshine streams in through the glass windows, illuminating the corner brightly.

I get seated between Damon and Raiden while Julian grabs the other corner with Caleb. Gerald and Caroline sit on the opposite side and grin at all of us.

The smell of French toast spreads all around us, making my mouth water. I don't even have to look at a menu card to decide what I'm having today.

A young waitress comes to our table and hands out menu cards.

"Could I get a hot mocha, please?" Julian asks, flashing our waitress a big smile.

The young woman looks struck as she stares dumbly at him. "Uhh-huh," she says, nodding enthusiastically.

"I'd like a steak and eggs," Gerald says in a deep voice, his gaze still perusing the menu.

I'm sure it's not often that the waitress hosts a table of alphas and omegas. Her cheeks turn a pale pink as she stares at me for a long moment. "You're really pretty," she says with a shy grin.

I don't know who's more embarrassed between the two of us. My cheeks warm at her compliment and it's an effort to simply thank her and not say something weird or awkward.

The waitress leaves after we've all ordered our food.

"How about we have a party?" Caroline says, glancing around at us. "We all deserve a break after the ordeal we went through to destroy the Black Widow."

"You've got to be patient, Honey," says Gerald. "We still need to dismantle all their operations. We've been successful

at destroying their most prominent base but we still have a lot of their numbers to clean up.”

“Callahan is still out there,” Damon says, his eyes gleaming with dark hatred. “The bastard owes me. Let me get even with him and I’ll personally help you set up a party for our boys, Mom.”

“I’m with him,” says Raiden. “There’s a lot that Callahan owes us all.”

“Fuck him,” Julian hisses. “Let’s not ruin our time together by talking about that asshole.”

I want to ask Caleb if there’s anything I could do to help the rescued omegas but decide to stay quiet for the time being. Julian’s right. This is a rare opportunity for all of us and we can’t let this moment get overshadowed by anything related to the Black Widow and Callahan.

Our table is soon filled with all the incredible dishes we ordered earlier.

The French toasts I requested look delicious. They’re covered with generous mounds of whipped cream and drizzles of maple syrup.

Picking up my fork, I taste the cinnamon-sprinkled cream. “Yum,” I exclaim, feeling thoroughly happy.

“Darling, mind if I ate some of your bacon?” Caleb whispers in my ear.

“Nope!” I reply, pushing the plate of bacon toward him. “I knew we’d all want some, so I ordered extra.”

“That’s my smart omega,” he croons, pressing a kiss to my lips.

Beaming, I start digging into my food.

“Could we have some syrup for the table,” Julian calls out to a passing waitress.

“Kiddo, we just started eating,” Gerald says, his eyebrows rising to the top of his forehead. “How can we be out of syrup already?”

“Raiden finished most of it,” Julian quips, looking smug.

“Yeah, right,” Raiden scoffs. “I finished all the syrup because I can’t eat my Mexican steak sandwich without some.”

“Maybe, it was Damon,” Julian says, pointing his fork at his mate.

“Hey,” Damon growls, circling his massive arm around Julian’s delicate neck.

I can’t help but chuckle as they bicker like little children between them. Caroline and Gerald struggle to hide their grins while Caleb tries to make peace between everyone.

I’m almost done with my food when a piercing shriek makes me drop my fork. The restaurant is filled with kids who often burst out in peals of laughter or loud cheers, but something was disturbing about this scream.

Before I can recover, the child’s cry pierces through the noise of the crowd once again.

“What’s wrong with that kid?” Gerald says, looking over his shoulder.

I almost go back to finishing my food when the loud shout of a stranger makes me look up. A guy in the far distance is facing a tall man who’s got a struggling child in his arms.

“Let her go, you fucking asshole!” the man shouts. “Put her down or I’ll fucking break your hands for touching my daughter.”

The commotion is enough to draw the attention of the whole diner. Everyone’s gone quiet and is watching the dad cursing at the other guy who’s holding onto a crying, squirming child.

The man holding the girl looks chillingly familiar. His tall frame is shrouded in a black trench coat. A beanie is pulled low over his forehead while thick, dark beard covers his cheeks and chin. His disguise nearly conceals his identity but those bottomless, black eyes give him away.

“That’s Callahan,” I say, rising from my chair.

“What?” Caleb hisses, standing up beside me.

Gerald and my mates push their chairs immediately and stand up to take a closer look at the stranger.

“Please, let her go,” a woman cries out, extending her arms toward the child.

“Get away!” Callahan shouts, easily backhanding her and sending her sprawling on the floor.

“How dare you!” the father roars and rushes forward.

To my horror, Callahan whips out a gun and shoots him.

Several gasps sound in the diner as everyone watches in horror.

I’m so shocked, my hands go up to cover my mouth.

“No, Robert,” the woman’s voice shakes as she crawls on the floor to reach her husband. Blood drenches his shirt and dribbles onto the clean floor as he squirms on the floor.

“Someone call 911!” the woman shrieks but her voice cracks. “Please, someone. Help us.” Tears roll down her cheeks as she tries to stop the bleeding wound on her husband’s chest.

My body trembles as I watch the horrific scene playing out before me. The child’s mother cries out for help but no one dares to speak up or do anything.

“What’re we waiting for?” Damon hisses. “Let’s grab him before he can hurt someone else.”

Caleb’s already a step ahead of him. He’s marching forward with a gun in his hand while Damon follows right behind him.

Raiden and Gerald stay on the spot, shielding me, Julian, and Caroline with their bodies.

“Don’t you dare get closer or I’ll blow her brains out,” Callahan warns, pressing the gun to the sobbing child’s head.

“Have you no shame?” Damon shouts. “Why do you have to keep hurting innocent people to save your ass? Put the kid



down and come fight with some real alphas.”

“You have fucking destroyed my Widows!” Callahan hurls. “Do you think I won’t have my revenge? I’ll take the thing that matters to you the most. I will snatch your rose away from you forever. Let me have her and I’ll let the girl go. Refuse, and I’ll put a bullet in her head.”

“No, please,” the child’s mother pleads. “Please, let Leslie go. I’ll do anything. I’ll give you all my money to buy roses. Please...please...just let her go.”

My heart cracks at the sound of her pitiful sobs. She has no idea that Callahan is demanding for Caleb and Damon’s “rose”.

Taking a step back, I dig into the purse dangling from my side. My hand brushes over a small glass bottle and I instinctively grab it.

“Julian,” I whisper, showing him the bottle of tiny white pills.

His eyebrows pucker as he stares at the bottle and then, at me. He shakes his head. “You’re not going out there,” he hisses.

Pulling on the cap, I tip out some pills. “Take one,” I say, extending my hand toward him. “We can’t let Callahan use his compulsion on us.”

His face hardens. Reaching out, he takes one of the tiny white beads.

I take a pill and grind it between my teeth. Callahan thinks he can use violence to get his way but I’m going to prove him wrong.

Skirting around Gerald and Raiden, I walk forward.

“What is she doing?” Gerald asks in a worried tone. “Tell her to get behind us!”

“Iris!” Raiden’s strained voice sounds close by. Before I can take another step, I feel strong fingers coming to grip my arm.

“Let me go,” I say calmly.

“No way!” Raiden says, holding onto my arm firmly. “We can’t let him have you.”

“Are you willing to see that child die?” I ask, staring into his eyes. “We both know that Callahan won’t care if he kills her.”

“We’ll figure out a way to save her,” Gerald says in a strict voice. “Just stand back with Julian and Caroline.”

“He won’t negotiate with you,” I say, meeting Gerald’s grim gaze. “Besides, we don’t have any time to lose. The child’s father is bleeding out on the floor. He’ll die if we can’t get him to an emergency unit right away.”

“Leave it to us, Iris,” Raiden says, looking at me with angst-filled eyes. “This is not your responsibility.”

“You and your brothers are always willing to sacrifice your lives to protect others,” I say. “Why can’t I do that too?”

“This is not the time to argue with him, honey,” Caroline says, looking deeply anxious. “Please, just come back to me.”

“I’m sorry,” I tell her, meaning every word.

“You’re our heart,” Julian says, stepping up before me. “We can’t let anyone hurt you. Wildflower, please. Let Caleb and Damon handle this.”

“Walk this way, Rose,” Callahan’s sinister voice sounds aggravatingly loud in the quiet dining hall.

The waiters and diners are staring at him with fearful eyes. The ones with children are holding onto their kids tightly. No one’s daring to make a move.

“Come here!” he suddenly barks, injecting fierce dominance in his voice.

The command shivers over me but the pill I took protects me. His dominance doesn’t affect me, allowing me to keep my free will.

Callahan still thinks he can command an omega to do anything he wants. Didn’t he already learn his lesson the last

time he tried to attack me?

“Let me go, Raiden,” I say in a calm tone. “You know I can fight him.”

“He’s armed.”

“He won’t kill me right away,” I say. “I’m sure he wants to make me suffer. Just let me get that kid away from him. We can figure out what to do after he leaves this place.”

“Iris, I can’t let you go.” His face twists with pain. “Please, step back.”

“Come here!” Callahan barks, pointing his gun at the child’s mother. “Or, it’ll be her turn next.”

“Can you ever forgive yourself if that innocent man dies while you stand here and watch?” I ask in a hard voice. “Do you think we can ever be happy with the death of a child hanging over us? Maybe you can live with yourself, but I can’t. If you don’t let me do this, I’ll reject you.”

“What?” Raiden’s voice is barely a whisper as he stares at me with wide eyes.

“It’ll break me but I will reject you and your pack,” I say in a loud, stern voice. My heart shatters as I speak the words, but it’s the only weapon I have to use against my mates so they’ll let me go.

Raiden’s grip loosens. I feel the intense pain he’s feeling through our mate bond but I swallow it down.

No matter what sacrifices I have to make, I won’t let Callahan win again.

“Iris,” Julian calls out but he doesn’t make a move to grab me.

Both he and Raiden know I’m not making an empty threat. Desperation clouds their eyes but they don’t make a move to stop me.

“Let her go,” I say, meeting Callahan’s dark, soulless eyes.

The deathly silence of the hall easily carries my voice over to him.

An evil smirk spreads on his face. “Come to your alpha,” he commands.

He’s so confident in his physical capabilities that it clouds his judgment. I defied his commands, fought him, defeated him, and even tortured him during our last meeting, but he still thinks he can win over me.

“Iris,” Caleb calls out as I walk past him.

“You’ll know where to find me,” I whisper, raising my wrist and forcing a smile. The gold bracelet that hangs there contains a tracking chip that’ll allow him to locate me no matter where Callahan decides to take me. “It’s going to be okay.”

“Iris...” Caleb’s face is a mask of desperation that sends pain coursing through me but I keep walking toward my enemy.

“I’ll come with you willingly if you let her go,” I say when I’m finally standing before Callahan.

Baring his teeth, he sneers at me. “Come closer, bitch.”

I obey, moving to stand directly in front of him.

Throwing the child away, he grabs me. His powerful arms circle my shoulders, roughly pulling me against him.

“Don’t try anything,” he warns, pressing the muzzle of his gun against the side of my head.

I raise my arms to show my surrender. “I won’t,” I say in a lowered voice. “Just take me wherever you want.”

His face presses against mine as he whispers. “Be a good omega or I’ll blow your pretty face off.”

I cringe as his hot breath blows against my neck. Before I know it, he’s biting hard on the shell of my ear. Gritting my teeth, I press my lips together, refusing to make a sound.

There’s no way my mates would stay back if they knew he was hurting me. If they attacked Callahan, he’d happily shoot them. A gunfight in this diner would inevitably end up injuring or killing innocent bystanders.

Dark chuckles sound in my ear. “I’m going to enjoy making you scream, Rose,” he promises, licking at my burning ear.

A warm liquid trickles down my lobe. He’s bitten me hard enough to make me bleed. I shake my head, hoping my long strands would cover up my injured ear.

He holds his gun in one hand while the other holds my wrist in a painful grip. “Don’t even dare to follow me,” he says in a warning tone as he stares at Gerald. “I’ll kill her the moment you try to take her away from me.”

I don’t dare look back at my mates. The devastation on their faces would crumble my resolve.

I take a deep breath as Callahan starts shoving me toward the door.

The busy street outside the diner is filled with people but no one spares a second glance at us. He keeps the gun pressed against my side, effectively hiding it from view.

As he drags me to the parking lot, all my thoughts are with the man who got shot trying to save his daughter. His sobbing, pleading wife reminded me of my own mother who ran out into a snowstorm to save my life. I can’t let Callahan do the same thing to another family.

All I can do is hope that my sacrifice won’t go in vain and that the man’s life would be saved.

*At the very least, I saved one little girl’s life,* I tell myself as fear starts creeping in.

Callahan’s repulsive scent alerts my senses. A deep intuition urges me to get away from him but I resist its call.

This part of the city is jostling with people. It’d be very easy for him to hurt an innocent bystander to make his escape.

I *need* to get Callahan away from here. He’s already taken too many innocent lives. I can’t let him kill more people when we’re so close to capturing him.

*Caleb, Damon, and Raiden will come after me,* I tell myself, hoping to strengthen my resolve. *They’ll never let*

*Callahan take you away from them. Just hold on until they can help you.*

“Get inside,” Callahan barks, shoving me into the front passenger seat of a car.

I climb in and secure the seatbelt as he slams the door shut.

My fingers grip my knees as I force myself to stay calm as Callahan climbs in beside me. His revolting scent fills my senses, making it nauseating to sit so close to him.

The car starts moving down the street. I look back at the diner, hoping for one last glimpse of Caleb, Damon, Raiden, and Julian. They’re nowhere in sight, abiding by Callahan’s threat.

The weight of my cellphone buried deep inside my hoodie’s jacket reassures me. I don’t know how long I’ll be able to keep it but for now, it’s another weapon that I can use against the man beside me.

*I just need to get him away from here,* I chant in my head, hoping I’d stay alive to see my mates again.



The car speeds up as Callahan drives past the city's boundaries.

I'm a bundle of tight nerves as I glance at the rearview mirror. To my dismay, I don't spot a single black military truck behind us. Only a few SUVs are following our car onto the highway that's leading out of Jersey City.

Back in the diner, my goal had been to lure Callahan away to a place where there were no civilians present. Once I got him there, my mates could grab him and lock him up. It's crucial to have Caleb, Damon, and Raiden close by for my plan to work.

*Maybe they're concealing themselves in one of the cars that are following us,* I tell myself.

I'm desperate to use my phone to contact them but decide that it's too risky. All Callahan would have to do is grab it and toss it out of the window.

I glance sideways and take a close look at my kidnapper.

Thick, graying stubble covers most of his face. His unkempt appearance tells me he hasn't had the chance to shave over the past several days. A beanie and the hood of his jacket keep his forehead concealed. The facemask hanging at his chin completes his disguise.

This is the reason he could walk into a diner filled with patrons and stay unrecognized. Did he know we'd all be there

or was it just a coincidence?

Curious, I decide to ask him.

“How did you know I was going to be at the diner?”

He glances down at me before staring ahead. “Of course, I didn’t know where you’d be,” he says in his deep, scratchy voice that grates on my nerves. “I was catching a bite to eat when I saw the entire Solveig clan walking in through the door. The temptation to shoot Gerald in the back of his head while he canoodled his omega was overwhelming but I had to prioritize. You’re the only prize I care for right now. The Solveig pups will lose their minds over failing to protect their omega and it’d only be a matter of time before they lose all interest in commanding their troops. It’d be a slow but sure way to destroy the pack that dared to stand against me.”

Cold washes over me as he reveals his inner thoughts to me.

I can’t believe how close we’d all come to getting hurt today. For the first time, I’m realizing why Caleb had been so anal about keeping us at Burton Mansion under tight security. He knew there were too many threats lurking around us at the moment.

“What do you plan to do now?” I ask him.

“I’m going to beat that sass out of you,” he says, sneering at me. “An omega never questions an alpha. You’ll need to be disciplined but that’d come after I’ve punished you.”

I’m so used to Callahan’s threats by now that I’m not even shocked by his response. “So, you’re going to continue on your path of destruction?” I ask, unbothered by his threat.

“As much as I can, Rose,” he says. “I will gather those who’ve managed to escape the raid and forge ahead with my destiny. We must go back to our roots. We should abide by our designated places in society. Breaking nature’s law will inevitably backfire on us.”

My rage flares at his words. “Nature didn’t ask you to be cruel to betas and omegas,” I say through gritted teeth.



“Nature meant for you to use your elevated strength and capabilities to help the weak, not bully them into submission.”

“An omega shouldn’t even be educated,” he mutters in such a low voice I think he’s talking to himself. “Education rots their brains and they start thinking they’re an alpha’s equal.”

My mind sways to the omegas Caleb rescued from the Black Widow’s lair. He said some of them lived their entire lives in captivity. I can only imagine the kind of brainwashing they must’ve endured.

Hatred courses through my veins as I glare at the alpha beside me. There’s no way I can let him escape. One way or another, I *will* stop him today.

My renewed resolve clears my mind. Taking a deep breath, I sit straighter and start strategizing my attack.

My gaze focuses on the gun he’s still gripping in his hand as he drives. He probably feels the sight is enough to scare me. Too bad he has no idea that I’m armed too.

The combat knife that Raiden gave me some time back is safely strapped to my right leg. It was the last gift he gave me before I left Solveig estate and I’ve been carrying it with me ever since that day.

The car moves onto a deserted road. Thick woods fence the badly-maintained path. A few broken signs along it tell me that it leads to an expressway that connects to Chicago. Callahan is probably using this sparsely-used lane to avoid the check posts on the main routes.

Being part of the military, he’s fully aware of their strategies to catch fugitives. After years of hiding the Black Widow in these woods, he knows the best pathways to move around town without being spotted.

I can’t let Callahan reach the expressway. We’d come near civilians once again and he’d use them to shield himself. I have to do something while we’re still on this isolated road.

Despite the knife in my possession, my greatest weapon would be the element of surprise. It’s the only way I can

escape Callahan without getting pinned and maimed by him.

Keeping my eyes on him, I slowly bend forward.

My fingers slide inside through the hem of my trousers and brush over the hard hilt. Making sure Callahan's gaze is fixed on the road, I gently pull the knife out of its sheath.

My heart pounds against my chest as I sit in my seat with the knife gripped in my hand. This is the only chance I'd get to make a move against him. My entire future depends on this one strike.

A part of me is tempted to drive the blade into Callahan's throat. He'd never see it coming and it'd be a sure way to end him permanently.

But I can't do that.

A quick death isn't something he deserves after inflicting so much pain and cruelty on the world. He must be captured alive. It'll be the only way to bring him to justice and let the world see him being punished for his crimes. It'd also be the only way we can destroy every remaining member of the Black Widow. The information Callahan is holding will be invaluable to destroying the rebels completely.

Taking a deep breath, I harden my grip on the knife and strike at Callahan's wrist. The incredibly sharp blade cuts through his skin and flesh like butter.

"What the—" It takes a moment for him to realize what I'd done. Blood spurts from the thick, deep cut, drenching his hand in crimson.

My strike has the effect I was hoping for.

The gun slips out of his grip and slides down to the floor. While his gaze focuses on the wound on his hand, Callahan loses control of the wheels.

The front tires sink into a particularly deep pothole, making the vehicle jerk violently. The car continues at high speed and flies off the road.

My eyes widen as I see a broad tree trunk coming closer at a dangerous speed. I duck but the crash that comes sends me

colliding against the car's door.

A scream of pure shock escapes him as the collision sends him crashing against a rapidly inflating airbag.

I use the momentary distraction to unclasp my seatbelt and throw open the door to my side. A spot on my forehead throbs painfully, making my eyes water.

"Don't you dare run!" Callahan's roar follows me as I sprint toward the woods.

Blood dribbles into my eyes as I run toward a group of closely-growing trees.

At one point, I trip over loose pebbles and fall to the ground. The burning in my knees tells me I've scraped them badly but I don't stop to inspect the injury. Getting back on my feet, I continue running.

Reaching the trees I'd been aiming for, I crouch behind their thick trunks. The knife is still gripped in my hand. My whole body shakes as I put it back in its place and reach for my phone.

My fingers tremble as I hit Caleb's name on the recently-called list.

"Iris?" Caleb's hushed voice sounds in my ear.

I'm so happy to hear his voice that I almost burst into tears.

"Where are you, Iris?" Caleb asks in a strict, grim tone.

I swallow the choke in my throat and answer. "In the woods. Where are you?"

"We're close by," he says. "According to the tracker signal, we'll reach you within five minutes. Here's what I'd like to know. Did Callahan take you down an unused road after leaving the city's boundary?"

"Yeah," I say, nodding. "The road connects to an expressway that leads to Chicago."

Caleb's breath rushes out loudly. "Thank fuck," he mutters. "That means we're on the right track."

I hear shuffling noises in the background and a different voice speaks up. "Iris, are you okay?" Raiden asks. "Where's Callahan?"

"I used the knife you gave me to attack him. He crashed the car and I managed to escape into the woods."

"Good girl," he says in a voice thick with pride. "Very well done."

His praise makes me smile despite the numerous aches and burns flaring in my body.

"Hang on, love. We'll reach you any minute now."

"Where the fuck are you?" Callahan's shriek pierces through the haze of momentary relief. "Come out or I'll fucking kill you, bitch." To make his point, he starts shooting in random directions.

My hands jump to my ears as the loud bangs echo all around me.

"Iris!" Raiden's voice sounds through the phone but I disconnect the call.

The woods around me are so quiet, I can hear the crunch of leaves under Callahan's boots. Did he hear me talking to Caleb and Raiden?

My panic rises as his footsteps get louder. Deciding it's not safe to stay in the same spot, I rise on my feet to retreat deeper into the woods.

"Stop right there or I'll fucking kill you!"

Callahan's bark makes me halt immediately. Slowly turning around, I face him.

He's holding the gun in his left hand. Blood drips down his right wrist, soaking the forest floor. Baring his teeth, he strides toward me.

Taking a step back, I get into position and wait for him to get close enough.

The moment he comes in my range, I launch myself in the air and kick out at his face. My attack hits right on target,

making Callahan stumble backward.

He shoots at me but my sudden attack has messed up his aim.

Grabbing the knife from its sheath, I strike him before he can get his bearings. The blade slashes across his chest and left arm.

He emits a shriek as I kick him in the back, sending him sprawling on the rough ground. The gun slips from his hand and skids further away.

“How dare you attack me, omega?!” he barks, pushing off the ground.

“How dare you fucking touch me, you disgusting piece-of-shit?” I shout back. “Did you think you could get away with the crimes you’ve committed? You killed my parents and hurt my mates. You’ve killed hundreds of people. No one will ever forgive you. As for me, I’m going to make sure you spend the rest of your life behind bars.”

“Not before I throttle your neck and send you to meet your mother.” Standing to his full height, he gives his head a violent shake.

Despite his threats, I can see he’s having trouble keeping his gaze on me. The car crash must’ve disoriented him and the lethal injuries I inflicted on him are slowly but steadily weakening him.

The sound of vehicles reaches me from the direction of the road. Through the gaps in the foliage, I glimpse a fleet of black military trucks.

*They’re here!* My mind silently cheers.

Callahan stares at them in shocked horror.

Running past him, I grab the gun that’s lying on the ground.

“Do you have the guts to kill me, Rose?” he asks, staring at me with rage-filled eyes.

“Of course, I have the guts to kill my parents’ murderer,” I say, holding the gun with steady hands. “But, no. I’m not going to kill you right this minute. However, make one wrong move and I *will* maim you for life.”

“Kill me,” he whispers, glancing at the trucks that are drawing nearer. “Kill me right now!”

A scoff escapes me. “Why don’t you do that yourself? The men who worked for you could commit suicide on the spot to prevent being captured. Why don’t you have the courage to do the same?”

Callahan’s expression finally changes. That infuriating self-righteous glare melts into a look of plea.

“I shot your father in the back,” he says, forcing himself to grin. “He didn’t even see me coming. He died thinking I was his friend. Doesn’t that make you mad, Rose?”

My teeth clench together but I maintain my stance. No matter how much I hate him, my need for revenge can never outweigh the need to destroy the Black Widow completely. It’s crucial for Caleb and Raiden to arrest him and interrogate him about every little detail of their activities.

Raising the gun toward the sky, I fire a shot.

“What the fuck have you done?” Callahan shouts. “They’ll find us.”

“I know.”

Stepping away, he attempts to run but I aim at his feet and fire the gun.

He jumps and stares at me with wide eyes.

My lips curl into a smirk. “Did you forget what I said? Or do you think this weak omega can’t shoot a gun?” I ask. “One more move and I will destroy your knees. You will have so much fun dragging your ass all over your prison cell.”

The sound of heavy footsteps steadily approaches us.

“Iris!”

“Iris! Where are you?!”

Caleb and Raiden's voices ring through the woods, echoing all around me.

"Over here!" I shout back.

My mates come into my sight the next second.

"Iris," Caleb breathes, rushing toward me.

Raiden follows close behind.

A group of heavily armed men in black camo outfits filters out behind them. Keeping their guns aimed at Callahan, they surround him.

"Oh, thank goddess!" Caleb whispers as his arms engulf me in a hug. "You gave us such a scare, Iris. You have no idea about the hell we lived through this past hour. Don't ever do this to us again, my darling."

He's squeezing me so tight, I can barely breathe.

I can feel his anxiety and fear through our mate bond. Understanding his raw emotions makes my heart clench.

"Let me hold her," Raiden's voice is on the verge of cracking.

Caleb gives me one last rib-snapping squeeze before letting his brother hug me.

Raiden's hug is gentler than Caleb's but he peppers my cheeks, eyes, nose, and lips with kisses. "Don't do that to me again!" he says in a strained voice. "Don't surrender yourself to anyone ever again. I'd die without you, Iris. Nothing would matter without you. So, please...don't ever leave me like that."

Tears gather in my eyes as his pain bores into my heart.

"Raiden, let her go," Caleb says in a low, warning tone. "She's hurt."

Raiden's arms fall away from me immediately.

"Shit," he curses, his gaze roving all over my face. "You're bleeding."

“It’s nothing,” I say, grinning. Despite the throbbing pain on my forehead, I can’t help but smile broadly.

Callahan is already in handcuffs and being dragged away by the soldiers.

“I will fucking kill you the next time I get my hands on you, omega,” he screams, kicking at the men who’re holding onto him firmly. “I will mutilate your face so badly, your mates won’t be able to recognize you. I will—” He gasps as one of the soldiers hits him in the head with the end of his rifle.

“Shut the fuck up,” the beta roars.

Callahan falls quiet but spares me one last glare as he gets pushed forward.

I grin back at him victoriously.

“Oh, come here,” Caleb says, drawing me back into a hug. “You’re forbidden from being so brave from here onward. It’s your alpha’s command. Do you understand?”

I can hear the frantic beating of his heart as I rest my cheek against his chest. He’s still overcoming his anxiety about losing me. “Okay,” I readily agree.

“We should call Damon and tell him,” Raiden says. “Julian must’ve driven him crazy by now.”

Caleb gets his phone out while Raiden wraps his arms around me.

“Hey,” Damon’s anxious voice answers the call.

“Iris is okay,” says Caleb. He sounds like he’s still unable to believe it himself. “We got Callahan too. And Iris...she’s safe. She’s with us.”

“Are you serious?” Damon asks in a tight voice. “Julian’s right here beside me. He’s so close to a breakdown, I can’t even bear it anymore.”

“Julian!” I shout out, hoping he can hear my voice through the phone. “I’m all right.”



“Iris?” Julian’s voice is heavy with disbelief. “Is that really you?”

“It’s me,” I say. “Do you have so little faith in me? You know I’ve been training day and night for this fight. There’s no way I’ll lose to Callahan or one of his fucking Widows.”

A stuttering breath leaves him. “Iris, you...you...I hate you so much right now.”

I know he doesn’t truly mean it but hearing it still sends an ache through me.

“Can you not say that? Because, Julian, I love you.”

“You said you’d reject us!” Julian shouts in a pain-filled voice. “How could you threaten us like that? Did you even think about us? Are outsiders and strangers much more valuable to you than us? Do we mean nothing to you?”

This is the first time I’m hearing Julian speaking to me with such anger. Pain lances through me as he lashes at me. Tears prick my eyes and it’s not long before I start sobbing.

“I was scared too!” I shout at him.

“Then, why did you do it?” Julian demands.

“I did it because I’m a part of this pack too! It’s my duty to protect our people too! You, Caleb, Damon, and Raiden can’t always be the ones to risk your lives for me. I love you too! I have the right to protect you too!”

Tears stream down my face as I glare at Raiden and Caleb.

Raiden silently strokes my hair while his lips press kisses all over my neck and shoulders.

“So, Iris is really okay?” Damon asks in an uncertain tone.

“If I were a ghost, would I bother speaking to you through a phone?” I ask with a hollow chuckle. “I’d teleport to where you are and kiss you right now.”

“Fuck!” he breathes. “You’re really alive, then.”

“Where are you guys right now?” Julian asks.

“Close to the borders of this town,” says Caleb.

“Bring her home right now!” Julian shouts. “Don’t waste a second. I won’t believe Iris is okay until I’ve seen her and smacked her ass.”

I brush my tears away and pout.

“Stop being mad at him,” Raiden says in a gentle voice as he draws me against him. “He’s been worried about you.”

“Well, we’ve all been worried,” says Caleb with a sigh. “Damon,” he says in a louder, commanding tone. “We’re bringing Callahan. Prepare an appropriate cell for our guest. He’ll be staying with us for a long, long time.”

“Oh, goodie!” Damon says with a dark chuckle. “I don’t know who I want to see first. Iris or Callahan.”

“Damon!” I shout, angry that he’s already making jokes while I’m still struggling to get over Julian’s hurtful words.

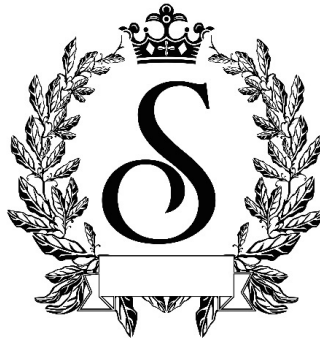
“Okay, fine. I’ll kiss *you* first. Happy, my wildcat?”

“Why’re you guys still chitchatting?” Julian asks in an annoyed tone. “When are you coming home?”

“Right,” says Caleb. “We’ll see you guys in a few hours.” Switching off the call, he drops the phone in his pocket.

“Are you ready?” Caleb asks, grinning at me.

I nod. “Let’s go home.”



My heart's still pounding against my chest. It's hard to breathe as my lungs still refuse to draw in enough breath after my outburst.

"Hey," says Damon, grasping my shoulder. "Calm down."

I throw his hand off me. "How the hell do I calm down? How could Iris do something like that to me? How could she just walk away like that?"

"She was trying to save that little girl and her dad," Damon says in a low, deep voice.

"What about *us*?" I shout. "Doesn't she know how *our* lives would be ruined if something bad happened to her? I thought you guys were insensitive for leaving me behind during your missions, but her? She's worse!"

"I understand how you feel," he says, drawing me closer to him. "But you've got to try and understand her feelings too. She's someone who's always taken care of everyone around her. It was only recently that she figured out her true designation. She's lived all her life thinking she's a beta. It's not something she can switch off easily. And, let's be real. Would we have fallen head-over-heels for her if she was any different?"

"No," I mutter with a pout. "But, still. Maybe it's all my fault. I shouldn't have encouraged her to train with Raiden."

Now she thinks she's as powerful as him. Iris is a fucking omega, Damon!" I burst out, pushing him away with anger.

"Oww!" he gasps, massaging his side. "Don't take your anger out on me. This poor boy's still injured."

"Oh, I have half a mind to beat you up too," I shout, staring at all the bandages covering him. "Who told you to get hurt like this? Does no one care about my feelings? It hurts me when you all come back broken and beaten."

Damon wraps his good arm around me and brings me against him in a gentle hug. "I'm sorry," he says gently. "Damn bastards surrounded me and thought they could take me down. I showed them who's the real alpha."

A wry chuckle escapes me as he continues to brag.

I thought Iris would stay by my side while our alphas went out to fight. Who would've thought she'd jump headfirst into danger leaving us all behind?

"I still can't get over the way she threatened to reject us," I say in an angst-filled tone.

"You have to understand something, love," Damon says in a gentle voice as he presses me against him. "Iris is our mate but she has the right to carve her own place in this world. She was willing to risk her life to save that innocent child. Not just that. She was willing to risk her life to protect the honor of our pack."

A heavy breath escapes him. "I understand how you feel, Julian. I really do. At the same time, just imagine what would've happened if Callahan killed that kid and her father right in front of us. That kind of dishonor would've left a mark on our souls. Iris was also protecting us at that moment."

I stay silent, listening to the steady beat of Damon's heart. Despite my anger and disbelief over what Iris did, I know it'd have left a deep scar in my alphas' hearts if they failed to protect the people in that diner this morning.

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden were raised in a military pack. They were taught about their duties from the moment they

were born. Failing to protect innocent lives when they'd all been present at the scene would've crushed their hearts.

"Why does she have to be *so* good?" I whisper.

"She's our mate," says Damon. "Of course, she's the best omega in the world. She's brave and can kick anyone's ass. My balls are going hard just imagining how she walked straight into danger like that. I want to taste and bite every inch of her soft body and make her shout my name."

Gently pushing at his chest, I step away from him and stare up at him. "You're crazy. How can you even think about sex when your body's still broken?"

He shrugs. "Where there's a will, there's a way."

A snort escapes me.

"There it is," he says, tracing my lips with a finger. "You're finally smiling."

Closing my eyes, I breathe out a sigh. "I'm too exhausted to stay mad," I confess. "I just want to see her, touch her, and make sure she's fucking breathing."

His amber eyes are warm. "Caleb said they'd be home within the hour. I've also got to make sure we're ready to accommodate Callahan by the time they return." His gaze turns dark as a sinister grin curves his lips. "Payback is going to be so, so sweet."

Damon is a master at torture. I have no doubt he'll force Callahan to blurt out every detail about his shadow army and how they operate. More importantly, we'd be able to catch every last traitor who'd been helping him these past two decades.

"Come on," says Damon, grabbing my wrist. "Let's get on with it. Caleb's going to make sure he puts Callahan into a cell the moment he returns. You can meet Iris sooner if you hang around with me."

"You don't have to convince me," I say, walking beside him. "It'll be better to stay busy instead of overthinking about every small thing."

“Great! Let’s go,” he says, leading me out of the house.

A chilly breeze blows by as we step outside. Even though it’s barely three, the sun’s rays are already weakening.

Damon walks into the admin building and notifies two of his beta sergeants to prepare for the prisoner being brought in. He doesn’t mention Callahan’s name during the entire time he’s giving out commands.

*Does he think we have traitors in our pack?* I wonder silently.

Nox Callahan is a high-profile criminal who has evaded suspicion for almost two decades. Without Iris, we’d have never known he was the mastermind behind the feared insurgent group. Without her, we’d still be victims of their terror and cruelty.

It’s important to conceal his whereabouts. We can’t risk any of his supporters barging in here to free him. Only the most trusted of our men would be allowed to get close to him.

“Captain Caleb’s here, Sir,” a beta soldier informs us. “His truck has entered the premises. He asked you to meet him at the front of Jacquard Building with Sergeant Fisher.”

“Got it,” says Damon with a quick salute. Glancing at me, he gestures toward the door. “Let’s go see her.”

The building Caleb mentioned is the one that holds all the detention cells in the basement. Every inch of it is monitored and only select personnel are allowed inside the premises. It’s the safest place on our base to hide a criminal like Callahan.

My anticipation rises as I follow Damon out of the room.

“Don’t look so serious, darling,” he says, glancing down at me. “I’m worried about Iris too, but let’s not scare her, okay?”

I scoff. “I’m the last person she’s scared of.”

“Don’t you want it to stay that way?”

I roll my eyes as Damon digs his elbow into my side. “Fine,” I say with a heavy sigh. “I won’t be mad at her but it’s

hard to calm my anxiety. I've got to see her and make sure she's okay."

"She's okay," he says bracingly. "You heard her on the phone."

We stop outside Jacquard Building and wait.

It's not long before we spot a fleet of black trucks approaching us. My heartbeat spikes as I wait for them to come to a stop.

The door of the first truck opens and Caleb climbs out of it. He salutes Damon from the distance and signals to the men behind him to open the second truck.

Raiden climbs out next and turns toward the truck. Next second, I see him helping Iris out. Grabbing her by the waist, he lifts her and easily sets her down on the ground.

My lungs expand fully the moment I see her.

Iris's searching gaze roves over the soldiers assembled around me and Damon. A broad grin spreads on her face the moment she sees us. "Julian," she gushes, breaking into a run. "Damon—" Her knees give way, suddenly making her fall flat on her face.

"Shit," Damon curses, running toward her.

It's not just him. All the soldiers around us immediately rush forward to help her.

"I'm okay!" Iris shouts, promptly getting back on her feet. Her cheeks redden with embarrassment as she steadily limps toward us.

"Did you see that?" I hiss at Damon. "She can't even walk properly. Oh, I'm going to give her such a scolding she'll never dare do anything dangerous again!"

"Oh, Julian!" she shouts, throwing her arms around me. "I'm so sorry about everything. Please, don't be mad at me."

The moment her rose and berry fragrance hits me, I forget what I'd meant to yell at her. Breathing deeply, I soak in her addictive scent as her soft curves mold against my hard body.

I want to stay mad at her but damn it! Pure euphoria flows through me as she hugs me tightly. I'm just so fucking glad to have her back alive and in my arms.

"Damon!" she croons excitedly, hugging him next.

I take the opportunity to study her as Damon lifts her with one arm and captures her lips in a deep kiss. My sweet omega's clothes are torn and scratched up. I catch glimpses of scraped arms and knees through the gaps in them, understanding why she fell down while trying to run toward us.

"Stop that!" I say, swatting at Damon. "She's hurt."

"Huh." Damon glances down at me while Iris makes an annoyed noise.

That's when I notice the wound on her forehead.

"You're bleeding," I say, pointing at her temple.

She gingerly touches the spot and grins. "Don't worry about this. It doesn't hurt much."

The men around us shift. Next second, they go back to their positions and grip their weapons with stony expressions.

A group of soldiers marches forward, dragging a prisoner between them.

Callahan finally appears before us and it's a sight to behold!

He looks even more bloodied and wounded than Iris. His hands are cuffed behind his back and he moves with a slow, staggered gait.

"Did you do that to him?" Damon purrs.

"Yeah. Raiden gave me a knife and I used it on him to escape.

"That's my kitty," Damon croons, his eyes gleaming with lust and fascination. "You've prepped my gift so nicely."

"Gift?"



He gestures toward Callahan who's chewing on his tongue and glaring at us.

"I'm going to take my sweet time with him," Damon says with a manic look in his amber eyes. Gesturing toward the soldiers, he adds, "Take him away."

"We'll see you guys after we've settled him in the guest suite," says Caleb. Gesturing toward Damon and Raiden, he walks inside the building.

Damon and Raiden follow the soldiers escorting Callahan. The armed guards standing around us break away and walk behind their commanders, leaving me and Iris standing at the entryway.

It's almost unbelievable to see Callahan being escorted inside the building. I've desperately waited for this moment but now that it's happening, it feels oddly surreal.

"Everything's all right now," Iris says, drawing my attention to her.

"We should go home," I say, grabbing her wrist.

"I *am* home," she says, smiling at me brightly.

"You're hurt, Wildflower," I say in a lowered voice. "Stop torturing me already and let me take care of you."

"So, you're not mad at me anymore?"

"Of course, I'm mad."

Wrapping her arms around my waist, she squeezes me tight. "I'm sorry to make you worry," she says. "Please forgive me."

When I continue to look grim, she rises on her toes and pecks my lips. "Come on! Callahan's been arrested. There's no threat upon us anymore."

A sigh escapes me.

The threat that has loomed over us for so long, is finally gone. With the Black Widow destroyed and Callahan in our grasp, it's finally over.

“Come with me,” I say, tugging on her hand.

Iris limps by my side, so I walk slowly. A cool evening breeze blows by, lifting the stray strands on my forehead. It’s been a while since I felt so light and free.

I glance at the woman beside me.

I’m still processing the fact that Iris is right beside me and alive. Her hand is warm against my palm, reassuring me that she’s real. Adrenaline ebbs from my system, suddenly leaving me feeling exhausted but relieved.

“Are you okay?” she asks as we climb up the steps to the front door of the mansion.

I shake my head and push open the door.

The familiar sight of our entrance hall brings me a sense of familiarity and comfort. With Iris by my side, I finally feel like I’m home.

“You look exhausted,” she says, staring at me worriedly.

“I’m fine. It’s you who needs to rest.” I gesture toward the hallways that lead to the staircase. “Let me take you upstairs. Your wounds need to be washed and looked after. After that, we’ll order some food and sleep for a week.”

A giggle escapes her. “Now, *that* sounds like a plan.”

She groans with every step on the stairs. Despite the look of pain, she seems happy. And, that ends up making me feel happy.

*I’m just a sucker for her*, I realize with a shake of my head. She’s had me wrapped around her pinky finger from the moment I met her.

Unable to take her little groans, I bend down and sweep her into my arms.

Gasping loudly, she hurries to wrap her arms around my neck. She grins and kisses my chin. “Thank you!”

Reaching the third-floor landing, I carry her to her room.

“It feels like we’ve been away for ages,” she says as I set her down on the bed. Grabbing some of the cushions, she hugs them tightly. “I hope this is the last time we’ll have to take shelter somewhere else.”

Kneeling before her, I start taking off her shoes.

“I can do it,” she says, pulling her legs away from me.

“Just stay still,” I say, grabbing her ankles gently.

After taking off her shoes and socks, I move to unbutton her pants. Soft groans escape her as I peel off her trousers, revealing the numerous cuts and scrapes she’s sustained on her legs.

“I’ll go get some water and medicines,” I say, rising to my feet. “Just hang on for a few minutes.”

“I’m okay,” she says, smiling gently. “Take as much time as you need.”

Unable to believe her, I hurry out of the room and go into my room.

Opening my closet, I walk in and reach for the large first-aid kit sitting on a shelf. It’s got everything I’d need to take care of her wounds.

Next, I go into the bathroom and grab a large glass basin and a heap of fresh towels.

Armed with all the necessities, I head back into Iris’s room.

I find her sitting on the edge of the bed and poking at a large wound on her knee.

“Don’t touch that!” I shriek, running into the room. “You can infect it.”

Iris chuckles. “Nah, it’s not that deep. Just a flesh wound.”

“Stop it!” I chide, putting down the basin and the first-aid kit on the floor.

“That’s huge,” she says, eyeing the box.

“It’s got everything from salves and ointments to syringes,” I say, grabbing the bowl and walking toward the bathroom.

“Why the hell do you have syringes?” she hollers as I fill the basin with hot water.

“For tetanus shots!” I shout back. “You’re going to need one.”

“No way!”

A chuckle escapes me. Lifting the heavy basin, I head back into the room.

“Are you serious about me needing a shot?” she asks with a pout.

“Yep.”

Kneeling before her, I add drops of antiseptic liquid into the water. “This is going to sting,” I warn, dipping a towel in the solution and wringing it out. “Just bear with it, okay?”

“I’ll be fi—” Her words are swallowed by a hiss as I gently dab at a particularly bloody wound on her left knee.

Pressing her lips together, she stiffens up.

“How did you get your knees and arms scraped so badly?” I ask, hoping that talking would distract her. “Tell me how you got in this state and how you got away from Callahan.”

“Raider always told me I had to use the element of surprise to win against an alpha like Callahan,” she says, looking thoughtful. “He’s never humored me into thinking I could take on an alpha in a fair fight. That was his lesson from the very start.”

Surprise flickers through me. I had no idea Raider had trained her into taking proper precautions in a direct fight.

“Callahan wasn’t expecting an attack from me, especially when he was holding onto his gun,” she continues. “I had Raider’s knife with me, so I waited for an opportunity to use it. We were passing through an abandoned road that’d get us

on an expressway to escape town, and I decided it was time. I slashed his wrist and made him crash the car.”

“Whoa!”

She grins. “I was ready for the impact but he wasn’t,” she says, barely feeling the sting of the antiseptic as I clean her right leg. “Still, I couldn’t avoid getting injured. I got this from the car crash.” She points at the nasty wound on her forehead.

I stand up and move to sit beside her on the bed. With gentle, measured movements, I carefully take off her shirt. Her elbows, wrists, and palms are scratched up too, so I proceed to clean up those cuts.

“And these ones,” she points at her elbow. “I was dizzy while getting out of the crashed car. My head throbbed and my eyes were all blurry. I fell down a couple of times and ended up with these. The forest floor is horrible. It’s rough and has sharp stones lying everywhere.”

“I know,” I say, thinking of the awful time Damon and I spent in the godforsaken woods of Kentville.

Taking a cotton ball, I wet it with more antiseptic and lean in to start cleaning the cut on her forehead.

“Oww!” she gasps. “It stings.”

“Does it? Maybe I should’ve started out by giving you the shot,” I say, teasing her. “These stings would feel like kisses compared to that.”

Her face pales at once. “Do I have to take one?”

“I’m sorry, love.”

“Fine,” she huffs with a resigned look on her pretty face.

I spend the next hour putting band-aids on every wound I can see. Her arms and legs look like a canvas that a toddler had fun decorating with stickers.

“These band-aids are ridiculous,” she says with a chuckle. “Do you really use this Disney princess stuff on Caleb, Damon, and Raiden?”

“Oh, Damon insists on them. Raiden likes the flower-patterned ones. Caleb, though...he hates it all.” Just imagining the grumpy look on Caleb’s face makes me laugh out loud.

Iris joins in my laughter. “Raiden is so damn sweet!”

“They’re all sweet for you,” I say, chuckling.

“And you?” she urges as I break open a syringe out of its package.

“Especially me,” I mutter. Her grin disappears as she watches me prepare the shot. “Ready?”

“No.”

“It’ll be over in a second.”

Closing her eyes, she fists my shirt. “Let’s just get this over with.”

Focusing my attention, I pierce her skin with the tip of the needle and push the plunger. Iris bites her lower lip and stiffens up, but she doesn’t utter a sound.

“All done,” I say the moment I draw the needle away from her.

“That hurt,” she says with watery eyes.

“Hopefully, this will stop you from jumping into a dangerous situation again,” I say in a grim tone.

She gives a sober nod.

“Here, put this on before you catch a cold,” I say, handing her a shirt.

“Thanks.” Soft groans escape her as she dons the shirt. Every movement hurts her.

“I’m so sleepy,” she says, failing to suppress a yawn. She moves further up on the bed and lies down among the pillows. “I’ve missed my nest.” She rubs her face against a cushion and inhales deeply.

“I know you’re tired but you should eat something.”

“Please, let me take a nap,” she says, closing her eyes. “I’ll eat something as soon as I wake up.”

A part of me wants to keep insisting that she eat something but I hold myself back. She must be suffering the aftereffects of adrenaline withdrawal too.

“Fine, you can relax,” I say.

While she settles down on the bed, I put away the used towels and decide to take a nap myself.

Taking my shoes off, I climb into bed and slide under the covers beside her.

Her eyes are closed and she doesn't move when I wrap an arm around her.

“I love you,” I say, kissing her forehead.

A soft snore tells me she's already drifted off to sleep. Stroking her soft golden strands, I watch her slumbering.

“She's finally home,” I whisper.

It's hard to forget the nightmarish hours when she was missing. We came too close to losing her today.

It takes me a while to fall asleep. I keep opening my eyes, making sure Iris is really snoozing beside me and that it's not a dream.



Pure glee spreads through me as I watch our men force Callahan into the interrogation chair before us.

“Fucking let go of me!” he howls, struggling against them as they secure steel bands around his wrists to keep them locked to the armrest. Blood smears the polished metal surface, the crimson gleaming under the glare of the overhead bulb.

“When did you give her a knife?” I whisper to Raiden.

“Just before I took her to Burton Mansion,” my brother replies. “She still needed more practice with a gun, so I decided to arm her with a combat knife.”

“Thank fuck you had the brains to do that,” I say, eyeing the thick cuts on Callahan’s wrist, arm and chest. “You should train her into getting better with a knife. I have a feeling she’ll be great at wielding one.”

“You can’t do this to me!” Callahan shouts. “You cannot hold me until I’ve been proven guilty.”

Caleb steps forward. Leaning forward, he rests his hands on the chair’s armrest and looks directly into Callahan’s coal-black eyes.

“No one knows you’re here,” Caleb says in a voice that’s barely a whisper. “The soldiers who came with us to capture you are some of our most loyal men. They obey us. None of them will tell the world that you’re here with us.”



Callahan tilts his head back, about to butt it against my brother, but Caleb is faster. He moves away just as Callahan brings his face forward with a jerk.

“Behave,” Caleb says, injecting heavy dominance in his voice. “You’re no longer the master who commands the Black Widow. You’re just a traitor.”

“I’m not a traitor!” Callahan barks. “It’s you! Ignoring nature’s hierarchy will bring chaos to the world. Do you not see it happening already? Betas are rising in ranks in the military. They’re controlling powerful executive seats in companies. They’re ruling the world! The goddesses blessed *us* with the power to rule, not them. We should be the ones in power, not them.”

“Only the worthy deserve to be in power,” Caleb says. “You can never justify your stupid, ancient ideals to the world when you go around killing innocents to prove them. Bastards like you deserve to rot in hell.”

“You’re making a big mistake,” Callahan screams.

“You’re wasting your breath on him,” I say, glancing at Caleb. “He’ll need to be thoroughly taught and trained on what’s right and wrong. It’ll be a hard task to get through his thick skull but I’m sure that with a little patience and a lot of torture, he’ll finally learn his lesson.”

I grin at Callahan, enjoying the way his face turns pale.

He’s the demon who’s haunted my dreams until now. Each time I closed my eyes to sleep, his masked face would appear to torture me until I woke up, sweating and screaming.

My unconscious mind kept replaying the horrific torture I suffered at his hands. I was rescued from his clutches three years ago but could never forget the atrocities he and his men inflicted on me.

It was only recently that I’ve been able to enjoy some peaceful moments. Iris’s presence has helped me keep the nightmares at bay. The need to protect her has made me stronger than the demons haunting me.

And now... Callahan is bound and bleeding before me.

It's incredible to think that I have to thank Iris for this wonderful gift. She handed him to me in this state. She's the one who conquered the demon that's been torturing me for years.

Iris is an omega. She was born with the natural weaknesses of her kind, but that didn't stop her from fighting back against the man who murdered her parents and killed so many innocent people. My wildcat is proof that our designations mean nothing. It's our actions that matter the most.

If a beta in the military proves his capabilities, I'd gladly follow his command.

It's weak-minded alphas like Callahan who fear the rise of a beta. Their fickle pride matters more to them than the well-being of their troops.

"Enough chitchat," Raiden says in a grim tone. "We need to know whether there are any other traitors who're hiding among us. The lists we compiled might've missed a few names."

Caleb nods and fixes a piercing glare on Callahan. "Tell us their names," he commands in an even tone.

"I don't know anything," Callahan mutters, looking away from us.

Reaching into my pocket, I take out a small remote control. A merry tune comes to my lips as I press a button on it.

"Argh!" Callahan gasps as his body jolts against the chair.

"Did you like that?" I ask, grinning.

Callahan breathes hard and glares up at me. "You cannot do this to me," he says through clenched teeth. "It's wrong! I demand a trial!"

"A trial will waste time," says Raiden. "We can't let the traitors escape while you're spilling bullshit in a court of law. We're going to handle you and your followers ourselves."

“You claim to be such proponents of justice,” Callahan shouts, spitting at us. “Are you willing to torture an innocent man? Aren’t you committing a crime right now?”

It’s our turn to laugh.

“You? An innocent man?” I blurt in between loud guffaws. “Have you forgotten what you did to me, you fucking bastard?” My laughter fades away, giving way to the rage I’ve held inside me for years.

Stepping forward, I grip his chin and stare into his soulless eyes. “I will remind you what you did to me and my loyal soldiers. You beat us, cut us, and burned us. You broke our bones and our minds. We were barely left with our humanity.”

My fingers wrap around his throat and squeeze until he’s struggling against his restraints. Fear spreads in his eyes as he starts wheezing.

“There’s no escape from this hell for you”, I tell him, continuing to throttle him. “The world will assume you to be lost and dead. No one’s going to come looking for you here. It’ll just be you and me.”

Loosening my grip on his throat, I move away and press on the remote.

Our naked eyes can’t see it but electricity flows through the metal chair, electrocuting him. His screams echo around the closed room while his body jolts from the shocks.

I wait for half a minute before switching it off.

Callahan’s screams turn into soft sobs. He’s gasping for breath and leaning heavily against the chair.

“Gonzales, Hogan, and Walker,” he blurts between heavy gulps. “They’re the ones you want.”

Surprise flickers through me. I glance at my brothers and see the shock reflected in their eyes.

None of us believed Callahan would crack this easily. We thought a zealot like him would have to be tortured repeatedly for answers.

Caleb signals at me and Raiden and walks out of the interrogation room.

The moment the door is shut, he turns toward us.

“This is good enough for now,” he says in a lowered voice. “Let’s investigate these men before doing anything. Callahan might be trying to distract us with false names but something tells me he’s telling the truth.”

I nod. “He’s an asshole and a coward. It won’t take much to crack him.”

“Yeah,” he says with a heavy sigh. “For now, we’ll get someone to patch up his wounds. There are still a lot of things I’d like to ask him, so it’s important we keep him safe and well until then.”

“Are you serious about keeping this a secret?” Raiden asks as we walk down the hallway.

“Yeah,” says Caleb, looking ahead. “We need to squeeze every last detail about the Black Widow from him before letting the other authorities take over. Until then, we’ll tell everyone that he escaped.”

“People will keep fearing him,” says Raiden.

“I know, but it’s not like we’ll keep Callahan here forever,” I say. “The public will soon see him behind bars.”

Caleb nods. “He’s used to being in command. I doubt anyone’s ever treated him the way we have. He lost to Iris because he couldn’t wrap his head around the fact that an omega can be strong and clever enough to defeat an alpha. His spirit is already broken. I’m sure he’ll crack easily and we’ll have all the information we’ll need within the week.”

“I agree,” I say, heading inside the elevators that would take us up to the ground floor. “We’re the ones who have to be quick enough to make use of the information we wrench out of him.”

When the doors close, Raiden glances between me and Caleb. “So, it’s finally over?”

I can’t help the big smile that spreads on my lips.

Caleb nods, grinning at us. “Callahan is in our hands and the Black Widow is destroyed. Iris is safe and at home. The war is finally over.”

“Is anyone feeling hungry?” I ask.

“Me,” says Raiden. “How about we order some pizzas? We can spend the rest of the evening chilling with our omegas.”

“Sounds like a plan,” says Caleb. “You guys go ahead. I need to speak with the custodians. We need to limit the number of people who can come here. I’ll take care of the matter and meet you guys back at the house.”

“All right, then,” I say, slapping his shoulder before walking out of the elevator.

Raiden steps in beside me and together, we walk out of the building and head toward our home.

Twilight is setting in. A cold breeze blows past, scattering stray strands across my forehead. For the first time in a long time, I breathe in deeply. The frigid, fresh air fills my lungs, giving me a sense of freedom that I’d yearned for years.

“I hope Iris is feeling okay,” Raiden says as we walk across the grounds. “She hurt her legs bad enough to trip and fall earlier.”

“Did she complain about anything on the trip back home?”

He shakes his head and gives me a look. “You know Iris. She wouldn’t complain even if she was in pain. Sometimes, she acts too mature. Too brave. It makes me proud of her but also gives me anxiety.”

A chuckle escapes me. I feel the same way about her.

I hate seeing her hurt. At least, I have a ready outlet for all my frustration now. Callahan will pay for every scratch he’s inflicted on Iris.

Reaching the house, we push open the door and enter the entrance hall.

“Everything’s so quiet,” Raiden says, looking around. “It’s almost like no one’s home.”

“Let’s check the kitchen.”

To our surprise, the kitchen is empty too.

“Maybe they’re in Iris’s room,” says Raiden. “Julian could still be patching up her wounds.”

“Damn. How bad is it that he’s still tending to her?” I ask as a sliver of anxiety wraps around my throat.

We race down the hallway and up the staircase to reach Iris’s bedroom.

Opening the door, we rush inside and come to a skidding halt.

Iris and Julian are in bed. Their arms are twined around each other’s necks as they snooze deeply.

“They’re sleeping...” Raiden says, staring at them.

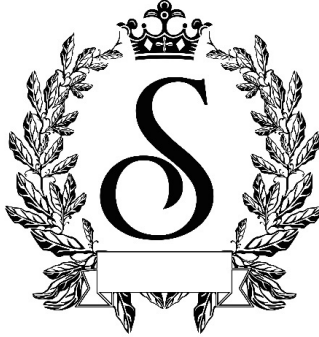
Relief spreads through me at the sight. They’re both safe and sound. And if Iris is snoring like that, she isn’t in too much pain.

“You know what?” I say, loosening the buttons around my collar. “Pizza and beer can wait. I need a nap first.”

Raiden chuckles but follows me. We’re both undressed within a few minutes and climbing under the sheets to join our mates.

He ends up on Iris’s side while I lie down beside Julian.

Sleep comes to me easily. Sheer relief spreads through me as I realize that there’s nothing to worry over at this moment. We’ve finally eliminated the dangers threatening our pack.



I stretch out my legs under the sheets as the haze of sleep slowly fades from my senses. The hard body pressed against me from behind feels like a furnace. Yawning widely, I turn around and come face to face with Raiden.

“Morning, darling,” he says, flashing me a grin.

Blinking in surprise, I stare at him. “You’re here!”

“You guys were already asleep by the time we came home,” he says, gently swiping a lock of hair behind my ear.

Wrapping my arm around his chest, I draw closer to him. “Oh! What’s that?” I gasp, feeling something hard poking at my lower belly.

Lifting the blanket, I look under it while Raiden chuckles uncontrollably.

He’s wearing nothing but a pair of boxers. “This early in the morning?” I ask with an amused grin as his erection digs into my belly.

“Sorry,” he mutters, pecking my lips.

“It’s nothing to be sorry about,” I croon. Using my elbow to support my weight, I raise my body to get closer to him.

His ice-blue eyes widen as my hand reaches between us and rubs over the hard lump at the front of his boxers. “Iris,” he groans. “What’re you doing?”

“Taking care of you,” I say, sliding my hand through the waistband. “I’ve missed you so, so much this past week.”

“Uh-huh,” he groans, closing his eyes.

His hardened length is searing hot against my palm. Wrapping my fingers over his thick girth, I pump him.

“Everyone’s sleeping,” he says in a hoarse voice.

I glance at my mates who’re sleeping around us. On my other side, Julian is firmly locked in Damon’s arms. Caleb is on Damon’s other side and gently snoring.

“Well, we’re going to have to be quiet, then,” I say, looking back at Raiden. Before he can discourage me, I lean down and start pulling his boxers down his legs.

“Iris...” He whispers as I remove the blanket and climb on top of him.

“Sshh,” I whisper and lean down to capture his lips. My tongue tangles around his, deepening the kiss.

His hands wrap around my shoulders, pulling me closer to him.

Warmth floods my belly, making me moan into his mouth.

Breaking away, I look into his eyes. His kiss has left me breathless. Panting, I unbutton my shirt.

The look in Raiden’s eyes intensifies. His gaze skims over my naked curves, urging me on.

Shifting slightly, I position my entrance along his erect shaft.

“Iris...” he groans, squeezing his eyes shut as my slick, wet pussy lips swallow his length inch by inch.

My insides tighten against his thick cock, making him groan again.

Laying my hands flat against his chest, I start moving my hips. His hardened length plunges deeper inside me, hitting that particular spot that has my entire body trembling with pleasure.



I keep my rhythm slow and steady at first, but it's impossible to maintain it. My core pulses and throbs with jolts of intense pleasure. I chase the ecstasy, letting my hips sway and roll.

My breathy moans mingle with Raiden's groans. The bed creaks and shakes with our urgent rhythm. It's getting so loud, I'm sure my other mates will wake up soon.

The thought of them waking up to this scene makes my insides throb harder.

"You're so very tight," Raiden says through clenched teeth. "You're killing me, love. I don't know how long I can stay quiet when you're bouncing up and down my cock like that."

His hands slide over my stomach to reach my heaving breasts. He kneads my soft globes, further intensifying the fire burning in my core.

My head falls back as my pleasure heightens and it takes just a few more thrusts of Raiden's cocks to make me lose all control.

My body tightens impossibly. Next second, the dam keeping me in control breaks. Waves of pleasure cascade over me, drowning all my senses in pure ecstasy.

Panting hard, I slump over Raiden's chest.

His arms come around me, locking me against him as he continues to thrust into me.

The sensations from my orgasm have barely subsided before I feel the onset of another gathering strength. My walls squeeze and pulse as the head of Raiden's cock swells.

"Oh, gods," I groan as his knot locks deep inside me, sending shivers of fiery pleasure coursing through me.

"Iris!" Raiden roars, shattering inside me.

Fireworks burst before my eyes as another massive orgasm tears through me. My body shudders against his as he empties himself inside me.

My breathing turns erratic as I collapse on his chest.

His softening cock feels incredibly warm inside me. The feeling is precious and makes me want to stay this way for a while longer.

“A very good morning to you guys too,” a familiar voice speaks up.

Pushing off Raiden’s chest, I straighten up and look toward Julian.

He’s sitting up and leaning against Damon’s chest. Caleb is also awake and lying on his side. They’re all grinning at us but the hot intensity in their gazes makes my insides throb again.

Letting Raiden’s cock slide out of me, I climb off him.

“Did we wake you?” Raiden asks. There’s no trace of embarrassment on his handsome face as he cheekily grins at his brothers.

“You know you did,” Julian mutters. A moan escapes him as Damon leans down and catches his earlobe between his lips. “Now, you’ve got us all craving for some love.”

Damon slides off Julian’s shirt and lays a hand flat against his navel.

Julian’s moans grow louder as Damon’s lips descend on the curve of his neck.

My insides throb with desire at the mere sight. Glancing toward Caleb, I find him staring right back at me.

“Would you like me to take care of you?” I offer with a shy smile.

Sitting up, he opens his arms wide. “Come here, love. You have no idea how much I’ve missed you over these past several days.”

Warmth spreads through me as he smiles at me.

I move over to his side of the bed and gently settle down on his lap.

“Are you cold?” he asks, wrapping his arms around me.

I shake my head. “My hot alpha is keeping me warm,” I say, pecking his cheek.

The sight of thick bandages wrapped around his upper arm dampens some of my excitement. “Does it hurt?” I ask in a somber voice.

“It hurts to move it,” he says, softly brushing my hair with his fingers.

“Then, I must take extra good care of you,” I say, capturing his lips.

His good arm circles around my waist, pulling me against him. His masculine scent envelops me, leaving me feeling drunk on him. I almost don't hear the breathy gasps and groans coming from nearby as Damon takes Julian from behind.

“I want you to relax,” I say, pressing on Caleb's chest and making him lean against the pillows by the headboard.

Despite the loud, enthusiastic sex happening right beside us, Caleb and I keep our attention on each other.

Settling between his thighs, I lean down to press a kiss on his erect cock.

A moan escapes him.

“That's it,” I say. “Just relax while I take care of you.” Wrapping my fingers over his thick length, I slowly start pumping him.

His silvery eyes shine with an intensity that sends my heart slamming against my chest. He watches me as I lower my face and wrap my lips around his tip.

A hiss escapes him the moment I suck on him. “Iris, love,” he groans as I swallow a few more inches of his throbbing cock.

My hand cups his heavy balls as I move my mouth up and down his length.

Caleb can barely sit still as I suck and lick his hardened length. Rough groans escape him as his hips jerk, pushing the tip of his erection deeper into my throat.

I'm uncomfortable but his deep, uncontrollable moans drive me on to pleasure him harder. My fingers wrap around the base of his cock, rubbing and pumping while my mouth swallows him deep into my throat.

Salty bitterness coats my tongue, followed by the flavor of his delectable natural scent. Eyes closed, he chants my name like a prayer.

"Fuck, Iris," he moans. "Your mouth is so hot. If you keep going this way, I'm going to come in your sweet mouth, Babe." His fingers dig into my hair and tangle into my strands as his hips jerk controllably.

I continue my ministrations, eager to take him to the edge of pleasure and beyond. It's not long before his moans turn into harsh pants.

I swallow him as deep as I can, letting his throbbing cock pulse against the soft membranes of my throat.

His fingers pull at my strands, causing a delicious tingle to spread over my scalp.

"Iris!" he roars as his hips jerk hard, making his balls slap against my chin. Holding my head between his hands, he lets go of all control and shatters in my mouth.

Bursts of his thick, hot cum splash down my throat, filling my mouth with his creamy, salty essence. It's difficult to swallow the streams of his release with his cock still buried deep in my throat, so I let some of it dribble down my chin

It's become difficult to breathe but it's hard not to enjoy the way my strong alpha is unraveling before me. His handsome face is flushed red. Eyes squeezed shut, he struggles to draw in enough air to fill his lungs.

It's a while before he opens his eyes and looks down at me. The tender look in those silvery orbs sends a flood of warmth through me.

“Come here, darling,” he says in a soft, deep voice. With gentle moves, he withdraws his cock out of my mouth and pulls me against him.

His whole body is still trembling from the force of his orgasm. Sprawled against his chest, I can feel the rapid beats of his heart.

“You’re so wonderful, darling,” he purrs, stroking my hair. “I can never get enough of you.”

A smile curves my lips as he praises me. I nestle against his chest, enjoying the delicious heat radiating from his skin.

As I become aware of my surroundings, I find Damon and Julian slumped on the bed next to us. They’re both heavily gasping and panting. The fragrance of vanilla and burning firewood reminds me of roasting marshmallows.

I breathe deeply, soaking in their combined scents.

Warmth courses through me as I look all around me. My mates surround me and complete my nest. Mornings like this are a rare treat and I want to make the best of it.

“You look so good with his cum on your lips,” Julian croons, reaching out to brush his thumb over my bottom lip.

Keeping his gaze on me, he flicks out his tongue and licks the wisp of cream from his thumb.

My eyes widen. A moan escapes me as my core starts pulsing with need once again.

Julian’s luscious lips curve in a knowing grin.

“Come here, babe,” Damon calls, capturing my wrist. “I know you need us to take care of you.”

My cheeks burn, but I nod.

Caleb’s deep, rough groans made my insides clench emptily, flooding my pussy with slick. I need my alpha to take care of me.

“I thought it was my turn,” Julian mutters.

“Nope, I get to go first,” says Damon.

“I woke before you, so it’s my turn first,” Julian says, sticking his tongue out.

“You can take your turns together,” I say in a shy, barely-audible voice.

Julian sits up straighter. Coming closer, he hooks a finger under my chin and makes me look up at him.

“You can always tell us what you want, Wildflower,” he says in a deep voice. His violet-hued eyes shine with intensity. “You must never hesitate to let us know because we’re always happy to take care of you.”

“I need you both,” I say as my cheeks turn hot.

He grins. “That’s my good girl.” Leaning in, he captures my lips.

I open up to him, letting his velvety tongue sweep in. The sweet scent of vanilla and chocolate envelops my senses, fanning the fire that’s been lit deep in my core.

I feel a warm hand sliding over my shoulder and down my arm. The deep purrs sounding near my ear tell me that Damon’s right beside me. A shiver runs through me as his tongue licks at my lobes.

Damon’s hand slides down my belly to reach between my thighs.

I moan into Julian’s mouth as Damon’s fingers part my pussy lips. My body trembles with anticipation as his thumb brushes over my sensitive nub.

“She’s already so wet and slippery,” Damon whispers.

Julian breaks the kiss and stares deep into my eyes. “Are you sure you want to take us both at the same time?”

I nod enthusiastically. They worry about hurting me but it’s a rare treat when I have both my mates buried deep inside me.

“Pass me the lube,” Damon says in a low commanding voice.

Julian picks up the bottle lying on the bed and tosses it to him.

“Bend forward, love,” Damon purrs in my ear while his hand lays flat against my back.

I obey and bend down on my knees.

A moan escapes me as the first drops of the cool lube touch my sensitive skin. Damon’s fingers start working me, smearing the slippery liquid along my rim.

“You look so beautiful, Wildflower,” Julian says in a deep voice, drawing my attention back to him. Reaching out, he sweeps a long strand of hair behind my ear while Damon’s fingers stretch my tight channel.

“Oh,” I whisper, my body trembling with the sensation of Damon’s fingers pushing deep inside me.

“She’s dripping all over my hand,” Damon says in an appreciative voice. “Wildcat is such a good darling. She’s always ready to have us.”

Julian smiles. Holding my shoulders, he raises me up and captures my lips in another searing kiss.

I fail to kiss him back with the same intensity as deep moans escape my lips. Damon’s thick cock is slowly pushing through my tight bud and entering me inch by inch. My core squeezes hard, hungry for a cock.

I don’t have to wait for long though.

Julian holds his length and guides it along my entrance. His hands slide over my hips as he pulls me closer to him.

A cry escapes me as Julian suddenly thrusts into me, sliding deep inside my slick pussy.

“You’re so fucking tight, love,” Julian says through gritted teeth. “Gods, you feel so damn hot and incredible.”

Damon’s hand tightens over my waist as he pulls out and thrusts in again, slipping deeper inside me. The stretch makes my pussy pulse and squeeze against Julian’s cock.

Groans escape me as I feel my insides stretching to their limits. There's a slight discomfort in the beginning but it soon ebbs away as Damon and Julian thrust into me at a steady rhythm.

Pleasure zings over my skin and drenches all my senses. My head falls back against Damon's chest, giving Julian full access to the column of my neck.

Leaning in, he kisses and nibbles on the sensitive skin, heightening my pleasure.

My body is securely sandwiched between my mates as they plunge deep inside me. I always crave to be in this position because it gives me the most incredible feeling of being safe and warm.

"I'm so fucking close," Damon grates through clenched teeth. His lips press hard kisses along my shoulders and neck as he thrusts into me harder and faster.

"Her tight pussy is gripping me so hard, I feel like I'll come any second," Julian says in a strained voice.

Pleasure coils tight in my core and it only takes a few thrusts for it to unravel me. My lips part in a cry as pure ecstasy floods my senses.

Next moment, Julian and Damon thrust into me, and with a roar, shatter deep inside me. Their groans border on pain as they hold me tightly against them while my body clenches and milks them.

It's a while before I can catch my breath and open my eyes again.

Damon and Julian hold me between them tightly, keeping me upright. Even then, my head falls onto Julian's chest as I pant heavily.

Damon kisses my neck and pulls out of me gently. His arms support me as Julian slides out of me and brings me onto his lap.

I slowly turn around and face Damon. There's a hint of pain in his amber eyes that he's struggling to hide. That's



when I become aware of the way he's holding his left arm.

The haze of lust slowly lifts off my senses.

"You're hurting," I say, meeting his gaze.

"Don't worry about it, Wildcat," he says, flashing me a bright grin.

"Are you okay?" Caleb asks, sitting up straighter.

"Yeah," Damon says but the slight furrowing of his brows tells me he's lying.

"You should've taken it easy," Julian says, looking anxious.

"I'll be fine after I rest," Damon says, pecking my lips.

"Do you want me to get your meds?" I say, instantly worried about him.

"It's fine," he says bracingly. "By the way, is anyone hungry? I'm starving. How about we order some food and not bother putting on our pants for the rest of the day."

Raiden and Julian chuckle but I know he's trying to change the subject.

"You should take care of it," I admonish. "Broken bones aren't a joke. What if you cause further damage to them? What if they don't heal properly? I'm not hearing any excuses from you. I'm going to go get your meds and—"

My rant is suddenly cut off by the shrill ringing of a phone.

Caleb immediately sits up and grabs his phone from the bedside table. Julian, Damon, and Raiden look alert while Caleb checks the flashing screen.

"It's Dad," says Caleb. Swiping across the screen, he answers the call. "Hey, Dad. What's up?"

"Where are you right now?" Gerald's deep voice filters out of the phone.

"I'm upstairs," Caleb replies in a grim tone. "What's wrong, Dad?"

“Everything’s fine. It’s just that your mother and I are inside the house already. It’s quite late in the day. Why isn’t anyone downstairs yet?”

Raiden immediately jumps out of bed and hastily starts sifting through the clothes that are lying on the floor. Damon groans and curses, but is climbing off the bed too.

“There goes our plan to stay in bed the whole day,” Julian moans.

“You guys go stall them,” I say, climbing out of bed and grabbing my shirt. “I need to clean up before I can see them.”

“Hurry up, love,” says Caleb, putting his phone away. “Mom probably wants to see you the most. She was extremely upset after you got taken away by Callahan yesterday.”

“We should’ve let Iris speak to her last night,” says Raiden, buttoning up his trousers.

“She was asleep, so I didn’t want to wake her,” says Caleb.

Raiden nods and continues to get dressed.

There’s no way my mates’ parents can see us in this state. “I’ll see you guys downstairs!” I shout, hurrying inside the bathroom.



Closing the door behind me, I proceed toward the shower stall but a glance at the mirror stops me. The myriad of band-aids covering my body makes me think twice about taking a bath.

It won't be good to get the bandages wet just yet.

Releasing a sigh, I grab a toothbrush.

A glance at the spotless mirror gives me a glimpse of my pale face that's riddled with small cuts. Caleb's cum coats the corner of my lips and chin. That's when I become aware of the sticky mess between my thighs.

With a groan, I realize it's going to take me more than five minutes to get ready.

Putting the toothbrush down, I proceed to clean up the rest of my body.

It takes close to almost half an hour before I'm presentable again.

I paired a long-sleeved shirt with dark denim trousers that hide all the cuts and bruises on my arms and legs. Despite using heavy makeup on my face, the bandage on my forehead draws all attention to it.

When I head back to my room, it's empty. Even Julian didn't hover around.

The bed is a mess but it makes me smile. I struggle against the urge to clean it and walk out of the room.

Familiar voices reach me as I approach the entrance hall.

Walking ahead, I enter the vast, luxurious hall, and spot my pack.

“There she is,” Caleb says, moving toward me. “Are you okay?” he whispers in my ear as he leads me to the center of the room. “It took you a while to get downstairs.”

“I’m a little sore but otherwise fine,” I whisper back.

“Oh no!” Caroline gasps the moment she turns her bright blue eyes on me. “You’re hurt!” Getting up, she hurries toward me and gingerly touches the bandage on my forehead.

Caleb almost gets pushed away as she pulls me into a tight hug.

Next second, she pulls back and glares at me. “Do you have any idea how worried I was?” she shrieks, shocking me into silence. The softness of her pretty face recedes and I suddenly find myself staring at a very pissed-off omega.

“How could you do this to me?” she shouts as tears spill from her eyes. “How could you just walk away with an evil monster like Nox Callahan? You’re lucky to have escaped him with your life but that doesn’t excuse the fact that you threatened to cut us all off just for a chance to do that asshole’s bidding!”

Her anger silences me. The tears that won’t stop pouring from her eyes make my heart ache.

I can’t believe how deeply she’s come to care for me. A part of me always craved to be part of her pack, but I never thought it would happen this soon.

“Did you even think what my sons would suffer through if something happened to you?” she asks, her voice cracking. “It’s impossible to move on from a dead mate. They’d have lost their will to live. Don’t you know how much they love you? Don’t you know how much *I* love you? You’re a daughter to me and Gerald. How could you forget that so easily? Tell me the truth, Iris. Do we mean nothing to you?”

“I—”

“Caroline, give the poor girl a break,” says Gerald. He’s already beside her, wrapping his arms around her shoulders. “Don’t you see she’s in tears too?”

Intense gratitude washes over me as Gerald tries to calm her down.

Caleb pulls me against him as I silently shed tears. Sadness and joy clash inside my chest, leaving me utterly speechless.

“I’m sorry,” I’m finally able to blurt out. “I just wanted to save that little girl and her dad. Whatever I did, I did it to protect them. I’m sorry to have made you worry about me this way, but I didn’t have a choice. I couldn’t bear to sacrifice those innocent lives to save myself.”

To my surprise, Gerald beams at me. “Spoken like a true Solveig,” he says, thrusting his chest out. “She’s the perfect mate for our boys. Don’t you think so, darling?”

Caroline scoffs. “She’s just like your sons and you!” she snaps, hitting his arm.

“Come on now,” Gerald cajoles. “Iris was so brave and made us all so proud of her. She caught the most notorious criminal of our times, darling.”

“I’d rather have her safe!”

Unable to hold back, I walk toward her and fling my arms around her. “I’m so sorry,” I say, hugging her tightly. “I hate it when you’re mad at me.”

“I’m not mad, honey,” Caroline says in a gentler voice as she rubs my back. “I’m just unable to believe what you did yesterday. What you did was brave, but I need you to remember that my alpha and I would always protect you. You never have to put yourself in danger like that.”

I hug her tighter. “I know that. It’s just...I wanted to protect you guys too. Offering myself to Callahan was the only way to make him walk out of that diner. My mates couldn’t do anything when there were so many unarmed civilians around them. I had to get Callahan away to a place where they could handle him properly.”

Stepping away, I brush my tears away.

A gentle look descends into her blue eyes as she stares up at me. Reaching out, she caresses my cheek with the back of her hand. “You’re really something,” she says, finally letting a smile blossom on her lips.

“Do I smell pineapple cake?” Julian speaks up, drawing all our attention to him.

Caroline chuckles. “Yes, there’s cake.”

“Yes!” Julian cheers, jumping off the couch and moving toward the heap of packages that cover the coffee table. “I knew I smelled caramelized pineapples.”

“Don’t bring it out now!” Caroline says, walking toward Julian to stop him.

“But I’m starving!” Julian moans.

“I’m guessing the kids haven’t eaten yet,” says Gerald. “How about you set up everything in the dining room while I talk with them?”

“I’m glad I brought over some food,” Caroline mutters to herself. “Iris, honey. Will you help me with some of these bags, please?”

“Raiden, help your mother,” Gerald says in a commanding tone. “I need to have a talk with her, sweetheart,” he says in a gentler voice as he glances at Caroline. “She’ll be along in a while.”

Caroline nods and gestures toward Raiden to help her with the massive packages that are heaped on the table before us.

“What is it?” I ask as Caroline and Raiden leave the room.

Gerald gestures toward the couch, so I take a seat with Caleb, Julian, and Damon.

“We’re not going to publicize Nox Callahan’s capture,” Gerald begins in a grim tone.

Surprise flickers through me but I stay silent and let him continue.

“We’ll be interrogating him over the coming weeks,” says Gerald. “Every name he takes, every fact that he blurts out will need to be examined thoroughly before we take any action. I’m sure he will try to confuse us and lead us astray with false leads, that’s why we must conduct our own investigations to confirm the truth.”

“What about the Burton pack?” I ask.

“They know,” Gerald replies. “The Oldenburgs are also involved in our investigations. However, these three packs are the only ones who know about the situation.”

I glance toward my mates. They nod at me, wearing the same serious expression as their father.

“The media will report him being sighted in various towns all over the country,” says Damon. “At times, they’ll even blatantly say how useless the military packs are.”

Caleb nods. “We can’t let the public get hold of Callahan before we’re done cleaning up our ranks.”

“Is it all going to be okay, though?” I ask, suddenly feeling anxious.

Gerald smiles, his deep-set eyes warming up as he gazes at me. “Thanks to you, it’ll all be okay,” he says. “You’re the sole reason we were able to capture the traitor.” Taking a deep breath, he sits down on the couch. “Don’t tell Caroline I said this, but I appreciate the bravery you showed yesterday. Not many would offer to sacrifice themselves to protect people they don’t even know.”

“Don’t encourage her, please,” Julian mutters.

“Don’t give her a hard time over what she did,” Gerald says, fixing his attention on Julian. “She risked her life for us. We should be grateful for the sacrifice she made.”

“She’s not a soldier,” says Julian.

“But she definitely has the heart of one,” Damon says, pressing a wet kiss on my lips.

Warmth blooms on my cheeks as I meet his intense gaze.

Julian releases a heavy sigh. “I’ll never win against you guys.” Getting to his feet, he stretches his arms over his head. “I think I’ll go into the dining room, have some cake, and talk to Caroline.”

“He’s going to tattle on us,” Caleb says as he watches Julian stride out of the room.

“Let’s go join them before he does any damage,” says Gerald, looking suddenly nervous.

I choke on a laugh as I watch my mates and their dad hurrying toward the kitchen. It’s ridiculous how these big, badass alphas are so scared of Caroline.

I take a deep breath and follow them.

It’s always a treat to gather in the family dining room. We rarely use it unless the whole pack is together like this.

The long mahogany table before me is already laden with casseroles of salad, mashed potatoes, pasta, and roasted slabs of meat. A beautifully iced pineapple cake takes prime spot among the rest of the dishes.

Julian’s gaze is transfixed on the cake and I know he’s simply waiting to devour most of it.

“Come on in,” Caroline calls out to us.

I sit down next to Julian and impatiently wait as Caroline starts serving the food.

“Everything looks so good,” I croon, picking up my knife and fork.

“I can’t wait for dessert,” Julian whispers, glancing at the cake.

I chuckle. “Just try the pasta,” I say, putting a spoonful in my mouth. “It’s so cheesy and delicious.”

“Nah, I’m saving space for cake.”

Shaking my head, I try out the salad next. It’s a simple green salad but tastes delicious nonetheless.



“You should eat more,” Caroline says, loading my plate with the third helping of pasta. “You need more meat too.” She adds an herb-encrusted drumstick beside the mound of cheesy pasta.

A wide smile spreads on my face. I love being taken care of like this.

It’s not long before my belly feels wonderfully full and warm. Looking around me, I soak in the atmosphere.

Everyone’s talking, laughing, eating, and drinking.

*The only thing missing are some kids*, I catch myself thinking.

The thought refuses to leave me, my mind showing me visions of little toddlers sitting on my mates’ laps.

A deep yearning takes root in my heart. I want to have babies and expand this wonderful pack of ours. Caleb, Damon, Raiden, and Julian would make amazing dads for my babies. Caroline would become the cool grandmother who’d spoil them rotten while Gerald will be the one to tell them stories about all the battles he’s won.

The threat that loomed over us is finally gone. Callahan has been beaten and his shadow army destroyed. They can never do anything to hurt me or the people closest to me.

My babies will never fall prey to my enemy again.

Suddenly, I can’t wait to grab my mates and drag them all to my nest so that we can get on with the task of making babies immediately.



*Six months later*

A dazzling blue sky stretches overhead. Hot, bright sunshine streams down on me, warming me up thoroughly. The smell of roses and raspberries lingers in my nostrils as I walk through the busy cobbled street.

“I didn’t expect the weather to be so good in Edinburgh,” Iris says, looking excitedly up at me.

“Scotland’s wonderful in summer,” I tell her, glancing at the people who’re struggling not to gawk at me and my mate.

A cool breeze blows by, spreading her long golden tresses around her shoulders. Dressed in a summery white dress, Iris looks breathtakingly beautiful. With the sun shining down on her, she almost seems to shimmer among the crowd of tourists.

“I love walking through these streets,” she says, looking at the beautifully preserved architecture around us. “Too bad we’ve got to hurry back to the hotel with grocery stuff.”

“It’ll be even more amazing when we’re on the road to the Highlands,” I say, smiling down at her. “The sights and sceneries will be gorgeous in this weather.”

An excited look descends in her eyes. “I can’t wait to explore the Highlands!”

“I see a supermarket over there.” I point toward a far-off sign. “Do you see it?”

“Yes! I see a Tesco over there.” Her grin widens. “Let’s grab what we need and hurry back.”

I nod and watch her skip ahead.

Inhaling deeply, I think of the last six months that flew by in the blink of an eye.

Caleb, Raiden, and Damon have finally been able to clean up the traitors filling up powerful positions in the military. As Gerald predicted, Callahan tried to distract them with false allegations against good officers, but their thorough investigations eventually led them to the right criminals.

It took longer than we expected, but the Solveigs, Burtons, and Oldenburgs finally wrenched out the cancerous traitors from their hiding holes. The Black Widow is completely dismantled and its leader is counting his last days in a high-security prison.

Gerald and Carol gifted us a Euro trip to celebrate this momentous win. Thanks to them, I am finally getting the vacation my mates have been promising me for *years!*

“Julian, hurry up!” Iris calls out from the entrance of the supermarket.

“Coming, darling!” I holler, increasing my pace.

Reaching her, I wrap my arm around her waist and lead her inside the shop.

“They have some pre-prepped stuff here,” Iris says, gesturing toward a corner aisle. “Shall we take a look? I’d rather pack our lunch than eat at gas stops.”

“That’s a great idea. It’d be awesome to stop by a brook and have a picnic there. There are some amazing spots on our way to Inverness.”

“Oh, I can’t wait!” Iris says, her green eyes shining with excitement.

Leaning down, I peck her lips and swipe my tongue over her bottom lip.

She blushes and quickly looks around. When she sees no one's watching us, she leans in for a deeper kiss.

"I'm so happy," she whispers, resting her cheek against my chest. "I seriously can't believe we're all here in Edinburgh!"

A chuckle escapes me. "You said the same thing when we were stuffing our faces with croissants in Paris."

"I know," she says, hugging me tighter. "I never thought I could be so happy."

I kiss the top of her head and savor her sweet scent as it wafts into my nostrils. Warmth floods my chest as she keeps telling me how happy she is.

Iris still has no idea what she means to us all. She's the glue who renewed the bond we share as a pack. Her shy smiles and unbreakable spirit healed the wounds that my mates and I have sustained for so long.

Damon is happier than he's been in a long, long time. His demons don't show up as often as before and it's all thanks to Iris. Callahan's capture was the catalyst that led him to get back the semblance of his old, cheerful self.

Raiden has been painting almost every day since we've been on this trip. Our hotel rooms end up smelling like oil and paint but the smile on his face makes it bearable.

Caleb has also been noticing these changes in his brothers. Seeing them happy has relieved him of the overwhelming burden of caring for his younger brothers.

Iris extracts her arms out of my hold and proceeds to grab a trolley.

"These marinated chicken drumsticks look so good," Iris says, crouching down to grab a bag of pre-prepped stuff. "Let's take a couple of these. Oh! Look, they have cheese-stuffed meatballs that are ready to be cooked in the oven."

Raiden has been craving spaghetti and meatballs since we left home, so these will be perfect for him!”

She exclaims with excitement each time she discovers something interesting. Since we opted to rent a luxury apartment instead of a hotel suite, we have a fancy kitchen where Iris can create her magic. The added space and freedom make up for all the room service we could’ve gotten at a posh hotel.

“Let’s grab some salad too,” Iris says, leading me toward another aisle.

“Hey, hold on. Didn’t Damon say he needed a new toothbrush?” I say as we walk past the section selling personal hygiene stuff.

She comes to a halt. “That’s right,” she says, chuckling. “I almost forgot about that. Let’s buy the toothbrush before I forget again.”

While Iris checks out the various options on a nearby shelf, my gaze falls on an entire section selling women’s sanitary products. I spot the brand that Iris usually uses and pick up a box of tampons.

“What’re you doing over there?” Iris asks, walking toward me.

I show her the box of tampons. “Aren’t you due in two days?” I ask. “Isn’t it better to keep some handy if you get your periods early?”

A strange expression comes over her.

“Are you okay?” I ask, wondering why she’s gone so still.

With a sudden move, she grabs my arm, looking alarmed. “What day is it?”

“Err... Thursday?”

“What day, damn it?”

“Sixteenth of July... Iris, are you okay?” I ask, worried about the sudden change in her.

“July? It’s July?”

I nod, wondering why she's suddenly being so frantic about the day. Wracking my brain, I try to remember whether the date is of any importance to us.

"Oh. My. Goddess! Julian...I...I..." She slumps against me weakly, looking alarmingly pale.

"What's wrong, darling?" I ask, starting to worry about her. "Are you okay?"

She stares at me with wide eyes. "I haven't had my periods for the past two months."

"Huh? Is that bad?" I ask confusedly.

"Julian," she says, grabbing me with both hands. "I didn't get my period for two months straight." Her wide eyes and urgent expression finally set off a light bulb in my head.

"Wait...are you...could you be..." My heart is thundering so loudly, I can barely hear myself speak. "Iris, could you be pregnant?"

"I don't know..." A look of wonder fills her pretty face as she places a hand over her belly.

My gaze fixes on the spot where her hand rests. No matter how much I stare at it, I don't make out a bump.

"Should we grab a pregnancy kit?" Iris asks, her eyes shining with eagerness.

A million thoughts race across my mind as I nod.

"I think need some juice too," she says.

"Okay," I say mechanically and race toward the section that's selling fruit smoothies and juices. Grabbing an armful of orange juice cartons, I run back to her.

She looks extremely nervous as she unscrews the cap on one of the cartons and starts gulping down the juice. Her eyes tear up because she's forcing herself to drink too much, too fast, but she keeps going until she's emptied the whole packet.

Gasping for breath, she stares up at me. "Are you okay?" she asks, rubbing my arm. "You don't look so good."

“I feel so damn nervous,” I confess, meeting her gaze. “Do you have any idea how long I’ve been waiting for a moment like this? I’m even afraid to hope you’re really pregnant.”

She presses at her belly and I immediately stop. “Don’t do that.”

“It’s okay,” she says, placing my hand over her lower belly. “Do you feel that? It’s barely noticeable but it’s a bump.”

My eyes widen as I feel the roundness in her lower abdomen. Her belly is usually quite flat from all the rigorous training she keeps up with, so even a small bump is noticeable to the touch.

Staring at me, she takes a deep breath. “Are you ready to find out?”

I nod, still scared to feel excited or happy.

“Any idea where’s the restroom?”

“Over there,” I say, gesturing toward a sign in the far-off corner. “Should I come with you?”

She sniggers. “Just wait outside.” Snatching the pregnancy kit out of my hand, she marches toward the restrooms.

“Is everything okay?” a female voice sounds from behind me.

Turning around, I see a young woman wearing a white apron with the supermarket’s logo.

“My mate might be pregnant,” I say, pouring my nervousness onto the stranger. “Are these home pregnancy kits any good?”

She nods earnestly. “They’re quite reliable,” she says, flashing me a bright grin. “My sister used one of these last year when she missed her period. It told her she was pregnant within three minutes!”

“It took just three minutes?”

“Yep! You’ll know if you’re going to be a father within minutes.”

My heart pounds with a powerful emotion.

A dad? Me?

I’d wanted to have children for years now. In my mind, I always imagined protecting a child and giving it everything my own parents failed to provide for me.

The sound of the door opening has me looking toward it.

Iris steps out, staring up at me. Tears stream down her face as she rushes toward me.

I stumble backward as she collides with me. Wrapping her arms around me tightly, she sobs hard.

“Iris, what’s wrong?” I ask as anxiety snakes around my neck. “Did you get a negative result? It’s okay if you’re not pregnant. We haven’t even been serious about it, so it’s all right, sweetheart.”

I stroke her back gently. Disappointment weighs heavy in my chest too, so I know exactly how she feels.

“It’s not like we were trying or anything,” I say, hoping to comfort her. “Omeegas are most likely to get pregnant after their heat. It’s absolutely okay if you’re not pregnant right now. I love you, Wildflower. So, please stop crying.”

“I can’t—stop crying—” she blurts between hiccupping sobs. “I *am* pregnant, Julian!”

“What?!” Grabbing her shoulders, I force her away from me to stare at her. “Say that again,” I demand in an urgent tone.

She brushes at the constant streams of tears pouring from her eyes. “I’m pregnant.”

I blink, too shocked to say anything as my mind processes the fact that she *is* pregnant.

“Julian,” she calls my name loudly. “Say something!”

“I’m going to be a dad?”



“Well, we should still see a doctor to be a hundred percent sure,” she says, smiling through her tears. Moving closer, she rubs my chest. “You’re not breathing, sweetie,” she says, looking worried. “You need to breathe, honey. It’s all okay.”

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden’s faces flash in my mind’s eye. They’d want to know about this precious news as soon as possible.

“Are you okay?” Iris asks, drawing my attention to her.

Pulling her closer, I capture her lips. There’s so much I want to tell her but my dazed mind can’t figure out the right words, so I pour all my emotions into the kiss.

Iris stumbles a little when I finally release her.

My arms reach for her instantly, steadying her on her feet. “You’ve got to be careful, love,” I say as a new fear arises within me. She’s so petite and fragile. With a new life growing inside, I have to be extra careful to make sure she’s always safe.

“What’re you doing?” Iris asks as I take my phone out of my pocket.

“I’m calling Caleb,” I say. “He and the others must know about this too. I can’t be the only one freaking out. They all must come here so that we can protect you and the baby.”

A baffled look comes over her. “Why don’t we see a doctor, first? Once we’re a hundred percent sure, we can tell them.”

“Caleb,” I say the moment his voice answers my call. “You need to come down to the supermarket near Royal Mile right away. Bring Damon and Raiden with you as well. I’m sending you our location right away.”

“Hold up,” Caleb says in a low, tight voice. “Is everything okay?”

“Iris is pregnant.”

“What?! This is not something to kid about,” he says in a grim tone. “How do you know that she’s pregnant?”

I hear Damon and Raiden's voices in the background, all asking him what's going on.

"Fine. If you don't want to come, I'll take Iris to a doctor myself!" I say.

"I didn't say we're not going to come," Caleb says instantly. "So, it's true, then? Iris is pregnant?"

"She used a pregnancy test from the pharmacy section," I tell him. "She has missed her period for over two months now. Iris is sure she's pregnant, but wants to double-check with a doctor."

"Okay, stay right where you are," he says in a grim tone. "We'll be there within ten minutes."

"What did he say?" Iris asks after I've switched off the call.

"He didn't believe me the first time I told him," I say with a chuckle. "He's coming here with Damon and Raiden. I don't think it's safe to walk outside with all those tourists crowding the streets. From now on, we'll take a car everywhere."

"It's okay," she says. "I feel fine enough to walk around."

"Come on," I say, wheeling the trolley for her. "Tell me what else you need and I'll grab them for you."

"I can pick up a bag of lettuce on my own, thank you very much," she says, snatching up a box of salad from a shelf.

"Still, I'd like to help."

She rolls her eyes at me and walks ahead, but I watch her closely. I love Iris with my life but she tends to be lax about her own safety. There's no way I'm letting her out of my sight until she's had our baby.

Thankfully, it doesn't take too long for Caleb, Damon, and Raiden to reach the supermarket. Iris is still buying more groceries when they burst into the aisle and surround us.

"Is it true?" Damon asks with a wild look in his amber eyes.

Iris smiles brightly and nods.

A heavy breath escapes him as he gently leans in to hug her.

“It still feels kind of unreal,” Raiden says, moving forward to kiss her.

“Let’s visit the doctor,” Caleb says in a low, grim tone. “I made an urgent appointment at the military hospital here, so someone is waiting to check up on her.”

“I’ll be so disappointed if it’s not true,” Iris says, looking glum. The sadness in her pretty eyes sends an ache through my heart.

“We’ll put a baby in you one way or another,” Damon vows in a gruff voice. “There are four of us, Wildcat. If babies are what you need, we’ll give them to you, love.”

“I really want this baby,” Iris says in a cracked voice. Her hand rests protectively over her belly. It’s only been minutes since she learned about her pregnancy and she’s already so emotional about it.

I take a deep breath, knowing my own emotions are all over the place.

Raiden grabs the trolley and wheels it toward the check-out counter while Caleb, Damon, and I lead Iris out of the store.

“I’ll go get the car,” says Caleb. “Just wait here.”

“The parking lot’s right there,” Iris says, gesturing toward the row of cars. “I can walk.”

“No, babe,” Damon says at once, wrapping his arms around her in a gentle embrace. “You shouldn’t be moving around too much.”

An amused look comes over her. “Are you guys going to be this way the whole time I’m pregnant?”

“This is nothing,” I tell her. “The moment we know you’re pregnant for sure, we’re going to swathe you in bubble wrap and keep watch over you twenty-four-seven.”

“Please tell me you’re kidding.” She stares at us with an amused grin but we keep straight faces. We’re going to protect her and our baby with everything we’ve got.

Raiden walks out with the grocery bags and hurries toward us. By the time he reaches us, Caleb brings the car to the shop’s entrance.

“I’ll sit in the front with Caleb,” Raiden offers, proceeding to open the back passenger door.

I get inside the car first, followed by Iris and Damon.

“We should hire a bigger car,” says Raiden as he settles in the front seat.

“Yeah,” Caleb agrees. “I’ll look for one after we go back to our apartment.”

Iris leans against me as the car drives forward. She usually likes looking out of the windows, but she’s quiet and thoughtful, barely bothering to look at the sights passing us by.

It’s not long before the car stops outside a grand but ancient building. The crest of the royal family greets us as we step out of the car.

“Captain Solveig?” a stranger calls out to us.

“Dr. Campbell?” Caleb queries.

“Yes, that’s me,” the elderly gentleman replies and walks toward us. “Is this our patient?” he asks, gazing at her.

“Yes, this is Iris,” says Caleb. “We’d appreciate it if you could check up on her.”

Dr. Campbell nods and gestures for us to follow him.

He leads us through the front entrance of the ancient building that houses a hospital. The interior halls and corridors are surprisingly well-lit and filled with modern amenities. Nurses and patients loitering near the reception area keep staring at our group as we move toward a flight of stairs.

“This way,” says Dr. Campbell as he walks down the second-floor corridor. “My office is just down this hallway.”

Opening the door to a room, he walks in.

A middle-aged nurse in a pale pink uniform greets the doctor and hands him a clipboard.

“Miss Iris, please have a seat here,” he says, gesturing toward the chair that’s closest to his desk. While he checks over the document that the nurse handed him, the rest of us settle around Iris.

“Are you a pack?” the nurse asks, gazing at us curiously.

“Yes,” Caleb answers. “We’re all a pack.”

“I’ve never seen a pack with two omegas before,” she says, staring between me and Iris with an open-mouthed look.

“Yes, it’s rare,” I say shortly and look toward Dr. Campbell. “Sir, could you run the tests that can determine whether our mate is pregnant? As you can see, we’re all foaming at the mouth to find out.”

“Of course,” says the doctor and fixes his gaze on Iris. “When was your last period?”

“I skipped them two months in a row without noticing,” she answers in a low, grim tone. “That’s when I wondered if I could be pregnant and used a home pregnancy kit to test myself.”

“They’re fairly accurate these days,” the doctor says with a mild smile. “Have you experienced any discomfort lately? Nausea, loss of appetite, digestive issues...”

Iris shakes her head. “I didn’t feel anything,” she says in an anxious tone.

Raiden grabs her hand and squeezes.

She takes a deep breath and continues. “I feel a bump coming up,” she says, placing her hand against her stomach.

The doctor nods. “You’re close to the end of your first trimester, so you should start feeling it. However, if we have to be absolutely certain, we must conduct a blood test.”

“Sure,” Iris says readily. “But, how long do we have to wait to get the results?”

“You’ll have them by this evening,” says the nurse.

“All right, then. Let’s do this.”

Dr. Campbell gestures at the nurse. Walking to a nearby cabinet, she brings out a box and comes back toward the doctor’s table.

We watch her as she opens the box, takes out a syringe, and starts preparing to draw Iris’s blood.

Iris’s lips press together as the nurse approaches her. Our mate hates needles.

She holds onto Raiden’s hand tightly as the nurse positions the tip of the needle on her arm. Her eyes squeeze tightly as the nurse starts drawing her blood but she doesn’t utter a sound.

“All done,” the nurse announces and steps back.

Iris’s breaths stutter but she doesn’t let the nurse notice anything.

“You can go home and wait for the results,” says Dr. Campbell, glancing at Caleb. “She’s going to be okay but if she feels any discomfort, let me know immediately.”

“Of course,” Caleb says with a nod. “Thank you.”

We all rise together. Raiden and Damon position themselves on Iris’s side while Caleb and I follow behind them.

Both Damon and Raiden are walking with stiff, measured strides. Their gazes scan over the patients and nurses hanging around in the ground-floor lobby.

The realization that Iris is pregnant with our child is finally taking root in my mind. A fierce need to protect her overcomes me and I glare at anyone who dares to even glance at her.

“Stop staring at people like that,” Iris admonishes Damon. “You’re making everyone feel uncomfortable.”

Despite her chiding, Damon and Raiden continue walking down the hospital hallway with the sternest expressions on

their faces. They're making sure to keep everyone away from our mate and our unborn child.

"Let's cancel the trip," Caleb says in a lowered voice so that only I can hear him. "We're not going anywhere until her test results come back."

"Yeah," I readily agree. "We're going home the moment we know for sure that she's pregnant. She'll prefer to be in her nest with our child growing inside her. We must make sure she's comfortable and safe."

Caleb nods, his silvery eyes mirroring my sentiments perfectly.



Soft music floats around me, relaxing me. Standing at the window, I stare out at the golden lights that highlight the towers of Edinburgh castle in the distance.

Even though my blood test reports are still pending, I'm positive about being pregnant.

On our way from the hospital, I made Caleb buy me a dozen pregnancy tests.

I've already gone through half of them, with each stick confirming that I'm pregnant. There's no doubt in my mind anymore but we're still waiting for my test results to start a celebration.

The mere thought that our baby is growing inside me sends waves of warmth washing over me. Happiness bubbles inside me but at the same time, I think of the massive responsibility that we'll soon be shouldering.

"You'll always have me and your fathers at your side," I murmur, resting my hand on my belly. "We'll always protect you and love you no matter what."

Bending down, I pick up my phone from the window sill.

Scrolling across the screen, I look for the news article that I'd bookmarked earlier. Opening it up, I stare at the gaunt man's photograph that highlights the piece.



Nox Callahan stares back at me with black, hollow eyes. Dressed in prison overalls, he looks like a common criminal. All trace of arrogance has been beaten out of him, leaving no mark of the elite alpha he'd once been.

My gaze traces over the lines that announce his lifetime imprisonment in one of the most secure prisons in our country. He'll never hurt another innocent person. The rest of his miserable life will be spent in a dark cell. He'll never be a threat to me or our nation again.

It's a sobering reassurance as I look forward to welcoming my first child into the world. I think of my parents and the sacrifice they made to protect me. For the first time, I understand them completely.

I'd happily sacrifice my life for my mates and my children too. They're so precious to me, I can't imagine a life without them.

"Iris, honey, dinner's ready!" Raiden's voice calls out, breaking me out of my thoughts.

Turning around, I catch a glimpse of the dining table in the distance. Caleb and Julian are setting up the plates and cutlery while Damon carries a huge pot of cooked pasta from the kitchen.

A smile comes onto my lips as I go toward them.

"The pasta smells great," I say, looking at the mountain of saucy spaghetti that Damon has cooked for us.

"Wait, till you see the meatballs!" Raiden calls from the kitchen. Next second, he steps into the room with a large tray filled with baked meatballs. "Just look at the cheese that's oozing out of them."

"Very nice," I say, grinning.

"Wine for everyone," Julian announces, filling up crystal goblets with red wine. "And for Iris, we have chocolate milk!"

A snort escapes him as I see him pouring chocolate milk into a posh glass.

We're all about to sit down to eat when Caleb's phone chimes.

Suddenly, all heads turn toward him.

"It could just be a stupid, useless text," Caleb mutters as we stare at him.

"Hurry up and check what it says!" Julian urges.

Reaching inside his pocket, he pulls out his phone while we wait with bated breath to see if the result of the blood test has come in yet.

Caleb's head whips up and he stares at me directly. His eyes blink rapidly and suddenly, his silvery orbs are swimming in a sea of tears.

"What is it?" I ask in a barely audible voice.

He stuffs a fist in his mouth, staring at me with tear-filled eyes.

"Give it to me!" Julian huffs, snatching Caleb's phone out of his hands. "Shit, it's true, then," he mumbles, staring at the phone. "Our wildflower is really pregnant."

"Are you serious?" I ask in a high-pitched voice, staring between Julian and Caleb.

Caleb nods, strides toward me, and sweeps me into a hug.

"I love you so much," he whispers in a deep, choked voice that reverberates through me. A combination of pain and intense happiness slams into me through our mate bond. All I can do is pat and rub his back, trying to soothe his overflowing emotions.

Damon, Raiden, and Julian come close and engulf both me and Caleb in their arms.

"You've made me so happy, Wildflower," Julian says in a choked voice. "I'm going to be a daddy and it's all thanks to you!"

A wild chuckle escapes me. "You should thank the baby for that."

“You’re our hero, Wildcat,” says Damon, pressing a kiss on the top of my head. “I love you.”

“Should we be squeezing her like this?” Raiden asks in a low, uncertain voice. “What if we hurt the baby?”

At once, the arms around me loosen.

My mates step back from me immediately, looking at me anxiously.

An amused giggle escapes me. “It’s okay,” I say, laughing. “I’m fine.”

“We shouldn’t do anything that puts the baby at risk,” Caleb says in a grim tone. “Come on, Iris. Sit down and eat your dinner. You shouldn’t go hungry. I don’t want our baby starving because of our carelessness.”

“Hey, it’s okay,” I say as Raiden ushers me toward the dining table. “I’m not that hungry.”

“You should still eat,” Damon says, handing me a fork.

“What about you guys?” I ask, staring at my mates.

“You should eat first,” says Caleb. “My brothers can watch you while I’ll go and book our tickets.”

“I don’t need to be watched!”

No one responds back but they all gesture at me to start eating. Heaving a sigh, I dig into my pasta.

The food is delicious but it’s funny how they’re all watching me intently.

“I’m not going to choke and die,” I tell them. “Please, stop being weird and join me for dinner.”

“We must be prepared,” Damon says, looking unusually serious.

They’re being impossibly protective but it makes me smile.

I quickly finish my food but my mates don’t allow me to leave the table.

“You should eat more, Wildflower,” Julian says, ladling two meatballs on my plate. “The baby will need plenty of nutrients to grow strong and healthy.”

“It’s my baby too,” I say, grinning. “Of course, it’ll be strong and healthy.”

“Our flights back home are booked,” Caleb announces, walking back into the kitchen. “We’ll be able to leave tomorrow afternoon.”

“Oh no,” I say, feeling a stab of disappointment.

“We’ll take more vacations when the baby grows up,” Caleb says with a smile. “For now, we should head home and let Dr. Lawson take a look at you.”

I think of the female alpha doctor who’s been taking care of me since I met my mates. She’s the only doctor I trust with my life.

“She’s great but she’s not an obstetrician,” says Julian. “We should opt for a specialist for Iris’s pregnancy.”

“I’m sure she’ll recommend us the best OBGYN,” I say and take a sip of my chocolate milk. “Mmm, this tastes really good.”

“Would you like some more, darling?” Raiden asks.

“Yes, please!”

Raiden promptly goes to the fridge and takes out the carton. Coming over to me, he fills my glass to the brim and flashes me a smile.

“Thanks,” I say, taking a big sip of the chilled milk. Who knew chocolate milk tasted *this* good?

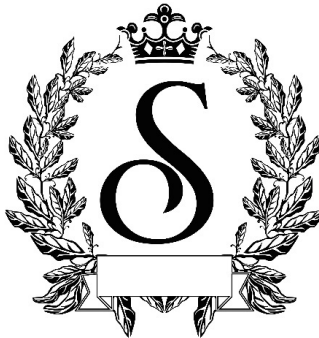
“We’re buying more of this stuff when we get home,” Caleb mutters.

Lowering my head, I hide my smile. My mates are just so, so sweet. They already spoil me rotten but I’m sure they’ll go the extra mile during my pregnancy.

Pure love flows through me as I look at my mates. Warmth bubbles in my chest, making me feel so light and

happy that I feel like I can float up to the ceiling like a balloon.

*Your dads are the most amazing people in your life, I silently tell the baby inside me. They will always protect you and love you.*



### *Six months later*

The voices around me are filled with happiness and excitement. They're exclaiming blessings and congratulations, filling me up with elation and joy. It has only been a day since I delivered my baby girl into this world but she's already being showered with so much love.

My gaze falls on my four mates. Heavy dark circles rim their eyes. Their faces look pale and gaunt. While I struggled through a prolonged delivery, they stayed by my side without eating or sleeping.

Their angst-filled eyes proved their desperation as they helplessly tried to get me through the hardest, most painful moments of my life. Their psychological and emotional pain rivaled mine.

My poor mates look utterly exhausted but they're all smiling now as congratulations pour in from our friends and family.

Julian walks over to me, sits down on the edge of my cot, and leans against me. "I need some coffee," he whispers.

"You do look tired and sleepy," I reply in a lowered voice so that only he can hear me. "You haven't slept in two days now. Why don't you take Caleb and the others home tonight?"

He straightens up immediately, looking alert. "There's no way we're abandoning you and our baby."

An amused chuckle escapes me. “You’re not abandoning me,” I say, shaking my head. “I’m allowed to leave tomorrow, so just come back in the morning and pick us up.”

“We’re not going home without you,” he says stubbornly, pecking my lips.

Loud, raucous cheering grabs both of our attention and we look toward my twin cousins. Simon holds the baby and sings a nursery song while his twin, Oliver, jumps and dances around them. My baby looks like a tiny bundle of blankets in his massive, powerful arms.

“What the hell do they think they’re doing?” Julian mutters, marching over to them at once.

“You need to be careful with her!” Julian admonishes, snatching the baby from his friend’s arms.

“Hey, she likes it!” Simon quips at once. “Look! She’s smiling.”

“She was born yesterday,” Julian says caustically. “She has no idea what she’s smiling about!”

Simon and Oliver get into a stupid, mock argument with Julian. They’re teasing him mercilessly but Julian is in no mood for their shenanigans. He’s too exhausted.

I look toward Gerald and Caroline, hoping they’d be able to convince Julian to go home and take some rest. They’re both holding onto each other, smiling through their tears as they watch Julian whispering soft, soothing words to the baby.

“Do you want me to take my brothers out of here?” Seth asks quietly.

“Of course, not,” I say, grinning up at my eldest cousin. He’s dressed in his maroon uniform, looking dashing and handsome. “Simon and Oliver are the only ones who’re not bawling their eyes. They’re silly but they make me laugh.”

A warm smile spreads on his face as he glances down at me. “Caleb, Damon, and Raiden cried too?”

I nod, glancing at my alphas who’re talking to my uncles in the corner. They look just as exhausted as Julian but they

were able to handle the high-pressure situation better than him.

“When is Charlie getting here?” I ask.

He glances down at his wristwatch. “He should be here soon. Is there anything I can get for you?”

“Nah, I’m fine. The baby’s healthy and I get to be here with all of you,” I say, smiling. “I’m already feeling better.”

“There are loads of chocolates over there,” he says, gesturing at the heap of colorful boxes beside the bouquets. “You should help yourself to them. Mom said chocolates will make you feel better.”

“Thanks for the flowers,” I say, glancing at all the beautiful bouquets that fill every corner of my hospital ward. “Oh, and the balloons and the toys. They add so much color and character to this place.”

“I’m glad you like them,” he says, grinning. “Have you thought of a name for the baby yet?”

Picking up the small book from the bedside table, I hand it to him. “We’ve been going through the list since last night.”

“It’s interesting how you guys could live without knowing the sex of the baby these past months,” he says, flicking through the book of baby names. “I’d have caved in and asked the doctor to tell me.”

“I wanted it to be a surprise,” I say in a grim tone. “Also, I wanted the baby to be here before we started making too many plans for him or her. You know how it is, don’t you? The moment you know it’s a boy, you start charting out his career in the military. I didn’t want that for my baby. I wanted us to accept the fact that it’s our baby, foremost. Everything else is secondary.”

“Are you happy it’s a girl?”

“Honestly? I just wanted the baby to be healthy,” I say, telling him the truth. “The gender didn’t matter to me.”

“That’s great, Iris. I’m so proud of you and your mates. My brothers and I are uncles now, all thanks to you.”



The opening door has both of us looking toward it.

Charlie and my aunt, Valerie, walk in together and come toward me.

“Grandpa!” I greet. “You came!”

Charlie caresses my head and leans in to kiss my cheek. “Of course, I came. If these old bones would’ve allowed me, I’d have come to see you last night.”

Julian walks over to us with the baby in his arms and holds it toward Charlie.

The old veteran’s eyes fill up with tears as he reaches out to caress the baby’s cheek gently. “Oh, she has your eyes,” he croons, crying and laughing simultaneously.

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden come over to my bedside. Holding my hand, Damon sits down on the bed and watches as Julian hands the baby to Charlie.

Charlie easily holds the baby and brings it against his chest in a gentle hug. “Oh, she’s such a sweetheart,” he croons. “Such a dear little perfect thing!”

Warmth floods my chest as I witness the scene. It’s a real privilege to see the baby in her great-grandfather’s arms. Tears stream down my cheeks as the Burton Pack gathers around them.

I could’ve never imagined the happiness I’m feeling right now. Intense gratitude courses through me as I think of both my birth parents and adoptive parents. They sacrificed so much to keep me alive and bring me up so that I could have this moment in my life.

“Oh, darling,” Damon says. “It’s all right. Don’t cry.”

“I know,” I say, grabbing a bunch of tissues. “It’s just... I’m so happy I can’t help it.”

Wrapping his arms around me, he brings me against his chest. His warm firewood scent comforts me at once. Leaning against him, I watch my dad’s family cheering for our baby.

A nurse walks inside the room and stares at everyone nervously. I'm sure the sheer number of alphas is intimidating the poor woman.

"Hi," I call out, hoping to make her feel at ease. "Is it time for my medicines?"

"It's the baby," she says, nervously glancing at Damon. "It's time for her nap."

The Burtons immediately quiet down.

"It's time to go, everyone," Valerie calls out in a commanding tone. "The baby needs her rest now."

"Oh, come on!" Simon says. "We didn't even get a chance to play with her yet."

"She's a baby," Julian mutters. "You're going to have to wait a couple of years to be able to play with her."

"Nah, she's our niece," says Oliver. "I bet she'll grow big enough within a week and play soccer with us."

A snort escapes me while Julian glowers at them. He's usually much more relaxed with the twins but today, he's at his wit's end.

"You've got to take him home," I say, glancing at Caroline. "He's cranky because he's too exhausted."

"I doubt he'll listen to us," Gerald says with an amused look on his aging face.

"Damon," I say, grabbing his wrist. "Please, take him home with you."

"It's only a matter of a day," says Damon. "Don't drive us away, Iris. We'll go crazy missing you and the baby. Let us stay and we'll all go home together."

A defeated sigh escapes me. "Fine," I huff. "You guys can stay but you've got to make sure you guys eat and sleep."

"Stop worrying about us," says Raiden. Coming closer, he leans down and captures my lips.

A tendril of heat curls around my belly. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I pull him closer for a deeper kiss. My body is still weak but it's hungry for my mate.

Raiden's gaze intensifies as he pulls away from me. "You need to rest too, love," he says, winking at me.

"When's Mom and Dad coming over?" I ask him.

"They'll be here this afternoon," says Damon, squeezing my hand. "Your mom's making you loads of food, so she'll leave the house at noon. Ethan, Delilah, and Lachlan will also be joining them."

"That's great! I want the baby to meet her aunt and uncles."

Damon and Raiden smile and kiss me. The animosity they felt toward my adoptive parents has receded over time.

It takes another half an hour for the baby to be laid in her bassinet and for the room to clear out. Only Julian, Caleb, Damon, and Raiden are left with me.

"How're you feeling, love?" Caleb asks.

"A little tired," I say honestly. "I think I need a nap myself."

"You have to take care of yourself too," he says, leaning down to kiss my forehead. "Our baby needs you to be strong for her."

"What about you guys, though?" I ask. "Why don't you catch a nap too?"

"It won't be safe if we all sleep," says Julian at once.

"There's an army out there," I say, recalling the guards that are guarding this floor as well as the entrance to the hospital. "We're all going to be fine."

"How about we take turns?" Raiden suggests. "One of us sleeps while the other three guard Iris and the baby."

"That's not a bad idea," I say immediately, hoping at least one of them would be able to catch us some rest. Scooting on

the other side of the bed, I pat the empty space beside me.  
“Come on, Julian. Nap with me.”

His stubbornness finally cracks.

Moving closer, he climbs into bed and lies down beside me.

Within seconds, he starts snoring.

“Poor Julian,” I moan, feeling worried. “He’s exhausted.”

“I know,” says Damon, caressing Julian’s ash-blond locks.

“Lie down, darling,” says Caleb. “We’ll tuck you both in.”

I obey and turn toward Julian, watching him snooze deeply.

“We’ll be over there,” says Raiden, gesturing at the couch in the corner. “Call us if you need anything. All right?”

“Sure,” I say with a nod. “Thanks.”

Caleb, Damon, and Raiden move to the couch.

Just before I close my eyes, I take a good look at my sleeping baby. She’s the most adorable little lady in the whole, wide world and I’m in love with her. Her restful face immediately calms me.

My gaze falls on the bouquets and the baskets full of goodies my family left me. My cousins filled the room with dozens of balloons and stuffed toys in a bid to cheer me up. My lips curve into a broad smile. *They’re tokens of love for both me and my baby*, I think as my heart swells with happiness.

Once upon a time, I’d felt alone and exhausted. My days of struggling to grasp the future seemed like an uphill climb. I never even allowed myself to dream of a pack that’d take care of me and protect me. Scars from dark memories of the past remain in my heart but right this moment, they seem to fade away.

I look toward my sleeping angel. She holds my heart in her tiny hands now. *You will have all the love and protection in*

*the world, I silently vow to her. You will always be loved and cherished by your mom and your dads.*

I think of my birth parents again and thank them for watching over us, for deep down I know we're protected and loved by those around us and by those who're no longer with us.

This moment feels like the happy ending I'd always fantasized about, but it'd be wrong to term it that. There's still so much life for me to explore with my mates and my baby. We have a lifetime of memories to make and cherish.

This is my happy beginning.



**Dear reader,**

I hope you enjoyed the final book in the Solveig Pack series. If you did, please leave a review on the book so that other readers can pick it up and enjoy it too.

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