

KNOTTING HILL

GET KNOTTED! OMEGAVERSE

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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Knotting Hill

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Get Knotted! Omegaverse Series

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Storm

MY EYES FLUTTER open in the warm morning sunlight, my alarm still beeping from its spot on my bedside table. I sigh and groan, my body feeling heavy and my head pounding. I roll over, the pain radiating through my body. I reach for my phone and snatch it up, turning off the alarm, which has already been snoozed twice.

“Ugh.” I pull my tongue from the roof of my mouth and sit up so I can grab the bottle of water and take a big glug. Glancing around the studio flat that I call home in the exclusive neighbourhood of Notting Hill, I need to get my body to move. Work is waiting, and I don’t want to be late. I like my job as a back-of-house medical receptionist, and it keeps me independent from my parents. They are both doctors, sharing a private practice not far from here. At twenty-five, I didn’t want to be still living with them and having them pay for everything, so I went out and got a job.

With their rivals.

Robb & Robb share the area with Rivers & Rivers, my parents. Do I think the Robbs hired me because I’m the Rivers’ daughter? Keep your enemies close and all that. It has crossed my mind once or twice, but mostly I think I got the job

on my own merit. I was able to rent this studio flat a few months later, and here I am, living my best life.

I realise I'm still wearing the pink skirt from last night, along with my pink lacy bra. I lie back in bed for a moment to gather my thoughts, taking a few deep breaths, but eventually, I push myself up and swing my feet over the edge of the bed, looking for my top.

I find it scrunched up under a pillow.

Not good.

It was Ladies' Night at one of the area's most exclusive clubs, *elite*, spelt with a small e to show you how pretentious they are. My friends and I may have indulged in one too many bevies, but it was fun and something I don't do as often as I used to. I don't have money to throw around anymore, but that's fine. I'm making it on my own, which has always been my goal and is important to me. As an omega in her mid-twenties, I should be thinking about settling down and finding a pack, but to be honest, I'm not that interested. A quick shag here and there suits my needs, and I have my trusty knotty vibe to take care of my heats. Who needs an alpha?

Okay, me, probably. I've never actually had a real knot. I feel engaging in sexual activity during my heat with a random alpha or someone I don't want to settle down with...I don't know, it feels icky. But that's just me.

I undress and head to the shower, smiling to myself at the small and cosy place I call home. The sunlight streams in through the windows, lighting up the room with a warm, golden hue. Outside, I can hear the sound of the streets in the distance. It is early Spring, and the air is still fresh, but the sun is warm through the glass. Located in an old brick building in the heart of the suburb, the flat is a tranquil oasis amidst the hustle and bustle of life in London. When you walk into the flat, the first thing you notice are the large windows that offer plenty of natural light, brightening up the entire flat, which is decorated with a light, airy colour scheme that gives it a cosy, inviting atmosphere. The walls are painted a soft white, and

the floors are a warm natural wood that adds texture and contentment to the space.

It consists of one large room with an open-plan kitchen, living room and sleeping area. The kitchen has modern appliances, including a fridge, an oven, and a dishwasher. There is plenty of counter space for food preparation and storage and is bright and inviting.

The living area has a comfortable sofa and armchair with a large area rug to complete the look. A large bookshelf filled with books and plants adds a nice touch to the living room. A flat-screen TV is mounted on the wall, perfect for nights in watching movies.

The sleeping area is located at one end of the studio flat. The bed is a comfortable queen size with a soft mattress and luxury cotton sheets. The headboard of the bed is upholstered in a light blue fabric, adding a touch of colour. A bedside table with a lamp gives a warm glow to the room, and a chest of drawers offers plenty of storage for clothing and other items.

The shower room is located off the sleeping area and is a small but functional space. A large mirror is above the sink, and there is a shower in the corner.

The best feature of the flat is the balcony, which offers a great view of the suburb. The balcony is furnished with a tiny bistro table and two chairs, perfect for enjoying a cup of coffee or tea in the morning.

I love it.

I was lucky to snatch it up when I did, only a few weeks after starting my job.

It was like my life fell into place all in the same season.

I take a deep breath and reach for my towel, walking naked through the small area, leaving the door open while I shower, trying to gather myself through my mild hangover.

As I step out of the shower and dry myself off, I take a moment to look at myself in the mirror. I take in my reflection—the memories of my night out still lingering on my face, the

slight dark circles under my eyes. I meet my green gaze, and I feel a sense of determination wash over me.

Like all others, I know that this day will be full of choices, but I'm determined to make the best ones. I take a few more deep breaths, and I head back into my room. I dress quickly in a white skirt and a cute short-sleeved white top with laces at the cleavage, which I do up and tie in a big bow. I brush out my long dark hair and tie it up in a high ponytail to keep it out of my face. Grabbing a light-weight pink cardigan from my wardrobe, I put it on, and slip my feet into skyscraper nude heels, making my way to the door after grabbing my phone and purse. I throw them haphazardly into my oversized white handbag, and I make my way out the door. I'm fresh-faced with no need for makeup, so I don't usually bother. I take care of my skin, and it glows.

Deciding to splurge one last time before I cut back on my spending for a bit, I aim for the expensive coffee shop on my way to work. I'll indulge in a pricey coffee and maybe a croissant before I fall back on the vending machine at work. It's not the best, but it'll do, especially as I'm in a hurry now. I usually try to take a flask of hot coffee and a packed lunch, but I'm running out of time now.

The early morning air is still cool, but the sun is warm on my face. I reach into my handbag, root around for my huge white Chanel sunglasses, and shove them on my face. I take a few more deep breaths, feeling most of my hangover disappear, before I begin my walk. I look around and take in the sights and sounds of the bustling streets. I'm starting to feel more awake and alive in the sun and fresh air.

I'm looking forward to the day ahead, despite my dodgy start.

Jonathan-Pierce (JP)

SITTING in a corner in the coffee shop, too early in the morning for my liking, trying to get rid of my hangover, my gaze trails up her long legs, visible under the short skirt, over her peach of an arse and lingering on her slender waist for a moment before travelling up to take in the gorgeous face of the omega ordering a coffee.

“She’s mated, you arse,” Josh, my pack beta informs me, running his hand through his dark hair. He is the exact opposite of me in temperament and looks. He is moody and brooding and a realist that is kind of irritating on occasion. I’m wealthy enough not to have to deal with realism much. I want, I have. Simple. Does that make me a dick? Of course it does, but at twenty-eight and unmated with no future prospects on the horizon, why the fuck not? I’ll grow up when the time is right. For now, I like my charmed life, and it *loves* me.

“So? I can look, can’t I?”

Josh sighs heavily and goes back to brooding into his latte macchiato.

Russell, the other alpha in my small but well-rounded St. Luc pack, snickers. He is more like me. From a well-off family initially, since joining me, he has doubled his modest

trust fund. Like I said, my charmed life loves me. I know the market, and I play it to my advantage. It helps that my dad is an investment banker. He taught me everything I know, hoping I would follow in his footsteps to become a junior partner at his firm by now. But why work when I can do this for fun and be fucking good at it?

Which brings me back to last night and my more than killer hangover right now. Tearing my eyes from the off-limits omega to take a gulp of my hot, black coffee, which was pathetically expensive for what it is. The party I held at *elite* last night was a raging success. It started about eleven after Ladies' Night ended and went on til three. It's now quarter to nine, and I've had about two hours of sleep.

If that.

I did take home a pretty omega who was entering her preheat, and we banged like bunnies for a while before I rang her a taxi and sent her on her way from our four-bedroom townhouse on Lansdowne Crescent. No way did I want her sticking around for her heat. Not my scene at all. When I enter my rut every quarter, I use the *OmeGas4Hire* service and that suits me, just fine. It's no strings, no emotions. Two things I'm not ready for.

"So, why am I up at dumb fuck o'clock?" I ask Josh, who called us here at this ungodly hour. My eyes are gritty, my head is banging, and I could do with falling back into my pit sooner rather than later.

"You wouldn't know dumb fuck o'clock if it bit you on the arse," he grouses. "Try being me for a week. You'd probably end up a crying heap on the floor."

"Hard pass, thanks. I definitely wouldn't trade places with the moody, insomniac beta with a caffeine addiction."

"Ouch," he growls, but he doesn't take offence to any of it. He knows who he is, and he owns it. It's why I like him so much. What you see is what you get. He is a good balance that is needed between Russ and me, what with us being too much alike for anyone's good. The world can only handle one of us at a time, and Josh reminds us of that.

“You know my friend Elle?”

I nod, eyes narrowed as I recall the fiery redhead with the big tits.

“Well, her friend Charity, you’ve met her, small, blonde and a bit too perky? Yeah, anyway, she is on the market for a pack.”

I blink as that hits me right in the guts. I let out a low growl. “And?”

“Calm your tits,” he huffs. “I’m not suggesting for one second we express an interest in Charity, *but...*”

“But nothing.”

“But we are knocking on a bit. You’re both twenty-eight, and I’m not far behind. Do we really want to be looking for a mate when we’re in our mid-thirties or older? Any unmated omegas will be fifteen or so years younger than us, and that’s just a hard pass *for me*. I won’t have anything in common with them, and neither will you two. So glare at me all you like, I’m putting this on the table to talk about. Nothing more, yet.”

“Humph.” I slouch into my chair and pick up my coffee, taking a big gulp while I think. He’s not *wrong*, but this wasn’t the time to bring it up.

And I’m not ready. It’s not what I want.

“I hear you,” I say after a minute and giving him the respect he deserves even though I feel like telling him to fuck off with it at this precise moment. “But it’s not what I want right now.”

“Me either,” Russ adds, which I knew he would. He is as big a commitment-phobe as I am.

Before Josh can argue, I add, “Look. I know that at some point, this will be a done deal. But seeing my parents in an ice-cold mating they were forced into, was not fun for me growing up. Whenever this happens, it has to be right, not something I’m rushed into because I’m pushing thirty.”

“Yeah, I get that,” Josh says, staring at his coffee. “However, I don’t want us to miss out on a great omega

because we weren't looking. You know?"

"Yeah, I know." I chew my lip. "I'll think about it."

He nods and relaxes his shoulders slightly. "I need to get to work."

"Ah, yes. How is the little bookshop doing?" I give him a smirk to irritate him.

He snorts and stands up. "Fuck off."

Giving us the finger, which makes me snicker, he leaves. I love teasing him about it, but truth be told, he is minted. His BoHo bookstore on Portobello Road buzzes from morning to night. He hit the market dead on and is reaping the rewards.

I watch him shove the door open, letting in an attractive brunette dressed all in white except for her pink cardigan. I give her a once over with a critical potential mate's eye and dismiss her. Not out of anything being wrong with her, I'm just knackered.

"Come on," I say to Russell, standing up and picking up my to-go cup. "I need sleep."

He yawns, running his hand through his hair. He has a similar colouring to Josh, which makes me stand out more. I know it, and I use it.

We head out of the coffee shop into the fresh Spring air, where we are waylaid by my Mum's old friend, Mrs Figg and her annoying as fuck Cockapoo that doesn't like the sight of me one bit.

Three

Storm

THE FIRST TIME I stepped foot into this coffee shop a few years ago, I could already smell its heady flavour, as if the room itself were brewed in the finest of beans. Every inch of the shop is filled with a feeling of grandeur, a unique mixture of warmth, luxury, and elegance. It felt like the kind of place that only the elite could afford to enter.

The walls are adorned with a rich tapestry of art, and modern abstract canvases. A piano sits in the corner. I don't know if anyone ever plays it, but it looks good. Everything is carefully arranged to give the impression that this is not just an ordinary coffee shop but an experience to be savoured.

The barista shows a touch of luxury in his appearance. He is wearing a crisp white shirt with a sleek black apron. His hair is slicked back, and his eyes have a glint of mischief in them as if he knows some secret that no one else does. He smiles politely as I approach, and I give him my order of a latte macchiato and lemon muffin.

I turn as I feel eyes on me, but when I glance around, I don't see anyone looking. I do see JP and Russell St. Luc leaving. I'm pretty sure it was Josh who let me in earlier. He is less obvious than the alphas. No less of an omeganiser,

though, which is a shame. He's cute and brooding. They all have a bold reputation which is a huge turn off for me. Most of my friends and half the omegas in the area would be drooling all over them if they were in my shoes now, but not me.

I smile at the sexy barista and take my to-go coffee with a sultry smile. He returns it, but he doesn't mean anything by it. He's Italian and a flirt. He is already giving that slow smile to the woman behind me.

I snatch up my muffin and turn on my heel, taking a sip of the scorching hot liquid.

Opening the door, I step out, returning my sunglasses to my eyes from the top of my head as I turn into the sun. But then something small and furry rushes me.

"Eep!" I shriek as it brushes past my leg. I take a step back from it, only to find that the arsing creature has ducked behind me. I trip in my six-inch heels, knowing that I'm about to land on my backside with coffee all over me, when the overpowering scent of apple pie hits my nose, and I gasp.

A strong hand goes under my elbow, knocking my coffee upwards. I spin, trying to keep my balance, but the coffee is a goner. As I fall against the body which tried to save me from the killer furball, I scrunch up the cardboard cup of my latte macchiato, popping the lid clean off to dump the contents on my would-be saviour.

"Ah!" he cries as the red-hot coffee goes all down his chest.

"Shit! I'm so sorry, that fucking dog!" I glance viciously at the Cockapoo at my feet, wagging its tail, its eyes on my muffin.

The one in my hand, that is.

"Fucking hell! What the fuck?"

I draw my eyes back to the apple pie alpha and grimace. Of all the alphas in all the world, I just threw my coffee all over JP St. Luc.

It immediately gets my back up when his furious eyes bore into mine, the colour of cornflowers in summer. Pretty...

I shake my head, vowing not to be swayed by his good looks. Clearly, his attitude isn't as attractive.

"Sorry," I say, taking a step back as he lets me go and starts patting at his coffee-stained white t-shirt. "The dog got in my way."

"Or you got in his way!" the old lady whose fluff-nugget nearly tried to end me, yells.

Like it's my fault.

I glare at her, not taking any crap from this old bag. She looks like a bulldog chewing a wasp.

"JP!" she shrieks, making more of a scene than we already have. "Do something about this!"

He shoots her an incredulous glare.

I might've known she'd be with him. Probably his mum.

"Look," I say to him, ignoring her by turning my back to her. "I'm really sorry. I'll pay for the dry cleaning..."

"Yeah, you fucking will. Can't you watch where you're going?"

Our gaze locks.

He is furious.

But so am I.

How dare he blame me for this *after* he tried to save me? He knows it was that dog that tripped me up.

"Send me the bill," I grit out.

"Where to?" he spits.

"Storm Rivers at Robb & Robb."

"Fine."

After yet more intense glaring, I huff and storm off, feeling a twinge in my ankle, but I keep going, one fist clenching around the mostly empty cardboard cup, the other practically

squashing my muffin. Tears prick my eyes suddenly. That was a horrible encounter, a horrible situation that I've been blamed for that wasn't even my fault. I can feel the gaze of the two alphas and the dog lady on my back as I stalk away, so I lift my chin higher.

“Fucking asshole. Hope your knot falls off.”

I feel marginally better after this, even though I wish I could've said it to his face.

I know I've got coffee all down my clothes, but he didn't care about that, did he? Noooooo. Well, he should've just let me fall on my arse, and he would've been saved from the incident. He is to blame, really. Wanker.

There wasn't a chance in hell I would go for him anyway, but I didn't care. *Now* I will warn any and all omegas away from him and his pack.

I pause outside the building that houses the doctor's offices. I blink back the tears. I have a feeling this is about my hangover. Under normal circumstances, this wouldn't bother me as much. Inhaling deeply, I bite the top off the muffin that somehow made it through the incident intact. Taking a step forward as I see a patient enter the building, I realise I'm late.

“Fuck.”

I may be sunny and friendly and try to get along with everyone, but JP has wound me up the wrong way, and now I'm late for work.

Alluring scent or not, he can get knotted.

Four

Russell

BLINKING MY GRITTY EYES, I'm not really sure what the fuck just happened. I usually have a bit more about me, but I'm that hungover I'm surprised I'm standing up. Bringing the cardboard cup of cappuccino to my mouth, I take a ponderous sip.

Watching JP say goodbye to the old bat who waylaid us and caused all of this mayhem, I flick my gaze to the omega stalking away. She smells like cherries. Fresh, ripe and juicy. It hit my nose the second JP grabbed her elbow to stop her from falling on her arse.

It has consumed my somewhat dull senses, taken over and woken me up slightly. I only half heard what Josh was saying about mating. I know it wasn't immediate, so I kind of tuned out. I'm not interested in that right now. I like playing the field. I like the option of being able to stick my dick into a hot omega in the ladies' room of a club and then have it fall into her friend on the way out.

Like last night.

I smile at the memory but then get interrupted.

“Fuck’s sake,” JP mutters and stalks away in the opposite direction.

I turn and fall into step next to him.

After a few seconds, when it all seems to catch up in my foggy brain, I whack him on the chest with my free hand. “What the fuck was that?”

“What?” he growls, plucking the coffee-stained tee away from him in distaste.

“You didn’t need to make her pay for your fucking dry cleaning. It was your fault she spilt it on you.”

“Well, it was Mrs Figg’s dog’s, actually.”

“*You* reached out to save her.”

“I wasn’t going to let her fall on her arse and dump coffee all over herself.”

“What?” I’m confused now. Doesn’t take much today.

He huffs, but when he turns to me, his eyes twinkle. “Didn’t you see her? She was fucking hot, but it was more than that. It was instinct to reach out and try to save her, but when she threw it all over me, there was something there.”

“Meaning?”

“The fire in her eyes when I got angry with her. Fuck. It was hot.”

“Okay, I’m slow on the uptake today. You’re going to need to explain this to me.”

He lowers his voice, almost conspiratorially. “Haven’t you noticed that the omegas we’ve been hooking up with lately are...” He pauses, searching for the right word. When he finds it, he pulls a face. “...*too easy*?”

I frown. Thinking about it, yes, they are, but that’s what makes it so much fun. There’s no work. “Sure, but...”

“It’s boring,” he interrupts me. “They fawn all over me, and you as well, I suppose, I’m finding it very dull.”

I ignore the backhanded insult. I don't think he meant it badly, but he is being profound on a major hangover, so his words are weird to my ears. Is he having an existential crisis? I would expect that of Josh, not JP. I didn't realise JP had it in him.

"Dull." I ponder this word. He has a point if you think about it. I figured it was fun to have it be easy, but now he is making me think about shit, and my head hurts too much for that.

"Yeah, dull. They are dull. We don't even have to buy them drinks. They buy them for us. I mean, what's up with that?" He shakes his head in disbelief.

"I quite like that."

"Pah," he sneers in disgust, which shocks me out of my hangover a bit more than this conversation already has. "That omega back there, Storm – even her name is sexy, she had fire. She was furious, and I wanted to see how far I could push her."

"So you did all of that just to rile her up?" I have to ask because I'm starting to flag again, and I need it spelt out.

"Yeah." He gives me what could only be described as a shit-eating grin. "Did you see her face when I told her she had to pay for the dry cleaning? Her scent hit the back of my nose like a fucking cloud of sweet, cherry-burst perfume. Fuck." He looks back over his shoulder in the direction she went and stops walking.

"Uhm."

I seriously feel a bit astounded by this revelation. I didn't bat an eyelid, really, when I figured he was being a dick. But this is, well, the only word for it is *new*. But weirdly, he has made me think about shit I didn't want to think about. I was happy in my fugue alcoholic state, just taking it one sip of cappuccino at a time. I didn't want to think about the cherry omega with the legs that went on for miles, and the cute top with the bow that I can now only think about tugging on with my teeth to expose her cleavage. I didn't particularly want to

have a hard-on this early in the morning. Not that it's something I haven't dealt with before, but now this is over something I can't do anything about.

“Don't you want the chase? The thrill of the hunt?”

I blink as he carries on walking, leaving me behind until I catch up.

I can honestly say that before he said those words, no, I didn't want that. I like an easy life. I love that I don't have to work, having watched my dad work seventy hours a week to give our family everything he could provide, I know for sure that is not what I want. JP has helped me increase my trust fund to a state where I don't have to work. However, he makes it sound so enticing. Especially when it is attached to the cherry omega. Storm Rivers. It *is* a sexy name to go with a sexy omega.

“So, what are you saying?” I ask slowly.

He turns around and walks backwards, jabbing his finger in the direction of the way we came. “I want to chase that omega down and claim her.”

“What?” Okay, I'm saying that a lot this morning, but he is messing with my head. “Does that mean what I think it means? Did you just make a declaration?”

He gives me a wicked smile before he turns around and marches off. “Maybe.”

Five

Storm

I'M in a state when I hurry up the three stone steps and push open the door to the doctor's office.

It's an oasis—a serene and shadowy haven of healing in the heart of a bustling district in London. The decor is a combination of modern minimalism and classical beauty, with a hint of mystery and a touch of romance.

The walls are painted a soft white and adorned with a series of oil paintings in muted, earthy tones of oranges, reds, and deep purples. Through the tall, frosted windows, the hustle and bustle of the city outside are barely audible in the peaceful room.

The main area of the doctor's office is a spacious and luxurious space. A large mahogany counter is situated at the back of the office.

The waiting room chairs and small sofas are upholstered in white leather, which are kept immaculate. On the wall to the right is a large, antique gilded mirror. The warm, golden frame is accented with intricate carvings and seems to lighten the mood of the room.

An oval coffee table is placed in the centre. Art magazines, a selection of books, and a few health leaflets are arranged on the table.

The floor of the office is covered in soft, white carpet, which is steam cleaned twice a day.

The lighting in the room is subdued, yet bright enough to create a warm and comfortable atmosphere. A few lamps are arranged around the room, primarily for ambience. The natural light that reaches the office comes from the tall, frosted windows.

It eases my anger almost immediately. It's such a peaceful and calming atmosphere where the wealthy come to discuss their health issues with some of the best doctors in the city.

I slip through the concealed door to the left of the reception area and grimace at my clothes. I'm going to have to sit here until lunchtime when I can race home to change.

As luck would have it, which pretty much sums up my day so far, Dr Angela Robb is there, looking through a folder, her glasses perched on her nose. She is middle-aged, pretty and well-made-up. She is basically my mum but with blonde hair instead of dark.

"Storm," she says, looking up and removing her specs, her face horrified when she sees my coffee-stained top. "What on earth happened?"

"A wayward Cockapoo," I murmur, embarrassed.

"Oh my," she says, snapping the folder closed and crossing over to me. "Are you okay?"

"My ankle hurts a bit, but otherwise, I just smell like the inside of a coffee maker." I attempt humour, but I'm not feeling it.

I drop my bag and half-eaten muffin on the table and the squished cup in the bin.

"Sit," she says, indicating the chair. "Which ankle?"

I sit down and gesture to my right ankle. "It's fine."

“I’ll be the judge of that,” she says sternly and crouches down next to me, taking my shoe off. I expect some sarcey remark about the height of my heel, but she doesn’t say a word as she pokes and prods, turning it left and right. I grimace, but it really doesn’t feel that bad now that I’m sitting down.

“Not broken, but rest, yes,” she says, standing up again.

Angela is so nice. Not at all the rancid cowbag that my mother calls her. Never let it be said that Gloria Rivers didn’t know how to hand out an insult.

“Thanks.” Thinking we are done, I slip my shoe back on and swivel in the office chair to face my desk.

She sits on the desk, scrutinising me.

“Everything okay?” I ask, meeting her blue-eyed gaze.

“Do you remember Mrs Johnson?” she asks, dropping her voice to a whisper.

I nod.

“Well, we’ve lost her,” Angela huffs.

“What?” I squeak, placing my hand on my heart in shock. “Oh, my God, that’s terrible. She seemed so sprightly last week. What happened?”

She gives me a puzzled stare. “Oh, wait, sorry, I mean, she left the practice, not that she died,” she corrects herself with an apologetic twist to her lips.

“Oh! Wow, okay, good, that’s good. I mean, not good, but good...” Mrs Johnson is ninety, but she is a well-preserved ninety that only money can buy. She is fabulous. I love her visits. She always entertains with stories of who she hung out with in her youth, and the gorgeous men she dated *and* married. I will be very sad when the day does arrive that she departs this earth. However, it wouldn’t surprise me if she lived forever. She has that eternal vibe working for her.

She pats my hand. “Sorry for scaring you, dear. I know you’re fond of her as she is of you.”

I smile and nod.

“Why did she leave?” I ask curiously. Clearly, Angela is going somewhere with this.

She purses her lips and glances over her shoulder. “Well, I wonder if I might impose on you to find out?”

I frown. “You want me to ring her and ask?” I’m not sure that’s the done thing. It’s a bit rude. Mrs Johnson has the right to do whatever the fuck she wants.

“I want you to find out if she went to Rivers & Rivers.” Her gaze goes steely, and I gulp. It is the first time she has ever mentioned my parent’s practice to my face. My heart sinks. So she *did* hire me to be involved in some sort of medical espionage against my parents. Signs of the rancid cowbag are showing, to my utter disappointment.

“Uhm,” I stammer, my face going hot and sweaty. “I’m not sure...”

“Just casually, you know. I don’t expect you to go through your parents’ files!” She lets out a shrill laugh.

My eyes go wide. I think she is expecting that, wholly and completely.

“If you could go over there and just see?”

I have two options here. Tell her to get knotted, which would lose me a job I really enjoy and need, or do as she asks and fall into the trap of being a spy in my parents’ midst.

“Have a think, hmm? And while you do, why don’t you go home and change? You must be very uncomfortable.” She rises and gives me that lovely smile.

“Sure,” I murmur, glad she gave me a minute where I don’t have to answer her. Talk about Sophie’s Choice. Okay, I’m being dramatic, but come on. This isn’t fair.

She is asking the impossible, yet I know she will find a reason to sack me if I don’t do this. It might not be today or tomorrow, but I’ll be out the second I make even a slight infraction.

She smiles again and leaves the reception area to go to her office, leaving me to pick up my bag and stand up, walking

out with a heavy weight on my shoulders, my encounter with JP St. Luc all but forgotten.

Josh

THAT SCENT.

Cherries ready to burst as you bite into them.

I can't help but think now about her nipples. Are they like cherries?

Brushing past the omega as I let her into the coffee shop has spun my head around like crazy. She was beautiful, like a poem about a lazy summer day by the lake.

I step onto Portobello Road, and I'm immediately enchanted. I love the hustle and bustle of the marketplace. The sun shines down brightly, cheering me up a bit.

My bookshop is nestled at the end of the road. Opening the door, I'm immediately wrapped in a comforting atmosphere: the warm, wood-panelled walls, the inviting shelves of books, with titles ranging from the oldest classics to the newest bestsellers.

The shop is already bustling with customers, browsing the shelves and chatting with Elle, my manager. Some are leafing through the stacks of books, no doubt looking for that special one to take home with them. Others are browsing the front window displays of books, some of them from centuries past.

There is no theme in here, except books—every kind, from every era. Sometimes I still can't believe how well it turned out. It was an idea I had back at university and started out on Portobello Road with a market stall, selling second-hand books that I collected from all of my mum's and gran's friends.

With a luck that doesn't usually befall the likes of me, one of Gran's reading club buddies handed me a rare copy of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. I had no clue until a collector came ambling past and paused to peruse the stall.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Obviously, I offered the entire fortune the book brought in to Gran's friend, but she refused it, telling me to use it to follow my dreams. I have never been so touched and grateful for anything in my entire life, and I probably never will be again.

So here I am, making more money than I ever thought possible, down to the kindness of an old lady who will be remembered by me as my Guardian Angel; God bless her soul.

I stand back and take everything in. The walls are lined with books of all ages, sizes, and colours. Paintings of classic authors hang at regular intervals, and the shelves are lined with books from all genres.

The floor is carpeted in a deep red shade. There is muted lighting and lamps, casting a golden light which illuminates the store. A large fireplace stands in one corner, and the mantelpiece is adorned with a collection of items I've collected on the market stalls outside: an antique clock, a collection of ceramic figurines, and a tiny wooden boat.

The atmosphere of the store is comforting. Despite being busy, there is a feeling of peace, acceptance, and joy. Everyone is happy to be here, moving around the shop with books in hand, deep in conversation or with a contented smile on their face.

"Hey!" Elle says, a bright smile on her face. "You're late."

“I know, sorry,” I murmur, hurrying over and placing my coffee on the counter. “Got waylaid by two arseholes who can’t handle their booze and lack of sleep.”

She snorts and rolls her eyes. “Lucky you. Everything okay, though?”

“Yeah, fine.” I sigh. Elle is my best friend outside the alphas. I tell her everything, so this decision is something that I should probably mention to her. “Just got stuff on my mind about Charity.”

She frowns. “Charity? What about her? The St. Luc’s aren’t going to make a play, are they? No offence, but she’s not really your style...” She chews her lip, not wanting to betray her friend if it turns out we did want to mate with her, and she got in the way of that.

I smile and let her off the hook. “No. Not Charity, but someone, you know?”

She nods knowingly, relieved she didn’t step in it. “You getting broody there, tiger?” She punches me on the arm. She hits like a pro boxer.

“Oww,” I mutter, rubbing my arm, which is going numb. “You know me, I brood.”

“This is different! This is exciting!” She claps her hand in glee.

“Don’t get your hopes up. Trying to convince the two Lotharios will be virtually impossible. I think JP only listened to me earlier to shut me up.” I’m not bitter. I know my packmates. And that’s why I brought this up *now* when it’s a mere, passing thought. Not an immediate need that has to be dealt with. I’m giving them time to get used to the idea, time to realise that we do need to start thinking about this. Advanced notice with big decisions is always the best way. I learned this a long time ago when I first started hanging out with them. They’ve been tight since school, but I met JP about seven years ago on a night out, and we hit it off. Two years later, he asked me to join him and Russell as part of his pack, and I readily accepted. They both bit me on each wrist to bond

us together as much as possible. It has its downsides as that bond is fierce. My quieter side nicely offsets JP's pep. Or my brooding, as everyone loves to point out.

Elle snickers. "They're lucky to have you know them so well."

"Thanks."

Further conversation is put on hold as we are inundated with customers, so we focus our attention, and soon, I'm lost in the world I adore, brief thoughts of the cherry omega flitting in and out, making me smile and determined to track her down, so I at least know her name. I'm not as easy as the alphas to impress. They'll go after anything with a pussy and a pulse. I'm more choosy, although I do get tarred with the same brush as them, to my ire. I enjoy the company of omegas, and they're a necessity during the rut. Not that *I* have a rut, but the pack bond with the alphas affects me during theirs. I become overly horny and need to have sex as much as they do. I do try to plan in advance and find someone I can go through it with, and it being an experience we both enjoy, but know that a future probably isn't in the cards, so I never go back twice. Using the service that JP and Russ do, doesn't sit right with me. Not that I'm judging, you totally do you. It's just not for me.

So this is probably where my reputation takes a hit, but in all honesty, I try to have the best intentions, and I've never had an omega complain or expect more. It's just what people see from the outside, so I try not to let it get to me.

But Cherry – for lack of a better name, isn't just an omega I want to have sex with. That's how I know she's different. Special.

And complicated.

SEVEN

Storm

AS I SLOWLY MAKE MY way back to the flat, I decide there is only one way to confront this, and that is head-on. Yes, my mother and father will say I told you so and demand that I leave the job immediately, but that's none of their concern. I have bills and rent to pay, plus I actually do like it there. Well, I did. Angela has moved the goalposts, and now I'm not so sure. Still, the fact remains that jobs don't grow on trees, and I need a certain level of salary to be able to afford the rent on my flat, never mind everything else. I have to stay, which means I have to do this.

Pushing open the door to my building, I take the stairs up to the first floor and open the front door. I kick off my shoes and strip off the cardigan. Pulling on the laces of the top to loosen them, I whip it off, along with my skirt and curse myself for wearing white. I go the opposite way, which also sort of fits my mood now and choose a pair of black pants, a vest top and a black cardigan over the top. I slip into a pair of black ballet flats, wondering how things would've played out if I'd left the house dressed this way earlier. I might not have tripped over a Cockapoo and lumbered myself with a double dry cleaning bill. Speaking of, there is one on the way to my

parent's practice, so I gather up the stained clothes and then scoop my phone out of my bag to ring my mum.

She answers after two rings.

"Everything okay?"

"Yes, don't panic. Are you free, though? I need to ask you something."

"You can never be too careful, living on your own. You really should move back in with Daddy and me."

"Nope. Are you free?"

I love her, but I'm not going back there to live off their money. I'm sure a lot of people would, but not me.

She sighs and gives up. "I'm just about to go into a consult, but I'll be free in about half an hour."

"Okay, it'll take me that long to get there."

"See you in a bit. You sure everything is okay?"

"Yep."

We hang up, and with grim determination, I head back the way I came but turn left instead of right and walk in the opposite direction to Robb & Robb. I could catch a bus there, but I need the fresh air and time to kill. My ankle feels fine in my flats, so I breathe and try to enjoy the walk.

About twenty uneventful minutes later, I come across the dry cleaner and drop my clothes off, wondering how much it'll cost to do JP's t-shirt as well. Remembering him, it fires up my anger again. He was so rude. I've never been spoken to like that before. It made me angry and upset. I push it aside again as I now have my mother to deal with, and I don't need to go in there looking flustered and anxious. It's going to be bad enough without that.

When I reach Rivers & Rivers Private Practice, I gulp and shove the door open, propelling myself forward to basically stop myself from turning and running away.

I smile at Miriam, my parents long-serving receptionist and give her a wave.

“Go right through, dear,” she calls back, indicating the door to the right.

I nod and punch in the code for the door, waiting for it to click open before I turn the handle and with sweaty palms, feeling like I’m marching to the gallows, I head into Gloria Rivers’ office.

It is much like the waiting room, with all pastels and watercolour paintings. No less luxurious than Robb & Robb, but a more Zen feeling with trickling water features and soft meditative music.

Mum looks up as I knock on the open door. “Storm!” She rises to give me a tight hug. “We’ve missed you.”

“Is Daddy here?”

She shakes her head. “He had an op early this morning.”

“Okay. Can I sit?” I am so nervous; this is bordering on ridiculous.

She frowns. “Of course. Storm, you’re worrying me.”

“Sorry, it’s nothing to do with me, rather a ninety-year-old Mrs Johnson.” I park my rear on one of the white leather visitor’s chairs as Mum sits down again, taking her glasses off and giving me a searching stare.

She blinks. “Who?”

Either she is good, or she has no idea who I’m talking about. I don’t know how to play this. She has a super poker face. Pity the same can’t be said for me. I know I’m hot, sweaty, and probably red in the face, about to splutter and choke on my words. Espionage is not for me. I’m just no good under pressure.

“Mrs Johnson,” I croak. “Fabulous lady, you’d know her if you had any idea who I was talking about.”

Mum purses her lips. “Start at the beginning, Storm. You’ve lost me.”

I cringe. I’d much rather she had some clue or spared me this agony. I scrunch my eyes up and blurt it out. “She left

Robb & Robb, and Angela wants me to ask you if she came here.”

I'm greeted with a stony silence, which does nothing to reassure me that it's safe to open my eyes.

Eight

Storm

I HEAR the water feature bubbling away in the corner of the room—the soft music lulling me into a false sense of security.

“That hideous viper!”

My eyes fly open at my mum’s insult, reacting just in time to slap my hand over hers as she reaches for the telephone.

“Don’t ring her,” I beg.

“Oh, I’m going to do more than that,” she says, getting up and snatching up her bag.

“No! Mum, wait, she doesn’t know I’m here asking!” My panic spikes my blood, making it hot and painful in my veins.

She freezes, turning that hard gaze to me. “Meaning? You are here of your own free will?”

Wow. Okay, she is *incensed*. I’ve never seen her so angry before in my life. Not even when Daisy Marks tipped her juice bottle all over my head at lunch in Year 7. I’m terrified. My hands are shaking.

I quickly shake my head. “Sit, please.”

She is edging closer to the door, and I’m not comfortable with this level of anger, even if it’s not all directed at me.

She presses her lips together and sits, blinking at me to explain. “Yes, she wants to know, and she asked me to find out. She didn’t ask me to ask you outright. I did that on my own because I’m *not* spying for her with you or anyone else. But especially you. She will make my life very difficult if I don’t do something.”

“What difference does that make? You aren’t going back there to work for that vicious bitch.”

Ouch. Mum can give you an insult that will make your ears ring for weeks, but she never swears. Ever.

“I have to,” I say gently. “I have rent and bills, it’s close to the flat, which I love, and I like the job.”

She growls.

My heart pounds, but she visibly calms herself and drops her bag back under her desk. “You can work here,” she says.

“No. That is tantamount to moving back in with you and Daddy, and having you pay my way. It’s not happening. I’m staying with the Robb’s until or unless I’m forced to leave.”

“That doesn’t make me feel any better.”

“You haven’t answered my question.”

“You didn’t ask one.”

We lock gazes.

Okay, she has a point. I didn’t.

“Did Mrs Johnson come here as a patient?”

Mum’s eyes narrow to two slits, but her tone is softer now. “You know I can’t answer that, Storm.”

“I know, but please, for me?” I’m asking a lot. I know this.

“Patient confidentiality.”

I sigh.

“You know, if you worked here, you would have all the information you were looking for.”

I roll my eyes. “Nice try. I wouldn’t need it then and wouldn’t tell Angela anyway.”

“So you see my predicament.”

“Of course I do, but do you see mine?”

“Yes.” She darts her gaze to the door. “Close it.”

I leap up and hastily do as she asks before I sit again.

“I could get into so much trouble for this...”

“Then don’t!” I exclaim, feeling terrible. I didn’t even think about this before. I was only thinking about myself and my woes.

“I’m going to tell you the bare minimum, but you can’t tell Devila any of it.”

I frown. Well, what’s the point, then? I’m about to ask when she continues. “Mrs Johnson is currently not registered at this practice.”

It takes a moment, but I can read between the lines. She said ‘patient confidentiality’. She knows exactly who I’m talking about. Daddy is one of the city’s, if not the country’s, best Cardio-Thoracic surgeons. He works out of this practice, where my mum is a private physician, but he is mostly up at the private hospital treating patients. I’m guessing Mrs Johnson is under his care through the hospital. I hope she’s okay, but I can’t ask.

I lower my gaze, feeling awful. “Thanks.”

“I figured this might happen at some point when you started working there, and I’ve made peace with my decision to help you. But this is your one and only, Storm. Do you understand me? I love you, but I don’t owe *her* anything. Speak so I know we are on the same page.”

“I understand, and I’m sorry. I know this situation is beyond. I’m mortified that she asked me about this. I will definitely approach her with caution from now on.”

She reaches out to squeeze my hand. “I’m glad you did come to me and didn’t try to get this information in an

insidious or devious way. But you had better keep that woman away from me because if I lay eyes on her, I will flatten her for using you this way.”

She smiles, and I giggle. “Wish you’d done that to Daisy Marks’s mum.”

“I was *this* close. Your father stopped me.”

“What?” I ask, horrified, as I was only joking.

She laughs, so now I’m not sure if she was kidding or not.

Moral of the story: don’t mess with Gloria Rivers.

“Now, let’s make this visit more pleasant,” she says. “You know that bookshop on Portobello Road?”

I nod, knowing the one. She adores it.

“Can you pop in later? You’re closer than me. I ordered a book for Synthia’s birthday, and it’s come in.”

“Yes, of course. It’s the least I can do after this...”

“We say no more about this...it never happened.”

“Sold.” I want nothing more than to forget this whole day. It’s been a shitshow from the beginning to now. It can only get better, right? “What is it?”

“A rare copy of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. I’ve been waiting months for them to ring me to say they had sourced one, and they messaged me this morning.”

“Okay, how do I pay?”

She bends down and pulls her purse out of her bag. She takes out a black credit card and hands it to me. “Use this one. You remember the PIN?”

I nod. It’s my mum’s ‘spare’ card. It has my name on it so I can use it, but I gave it back to her when I moved out, not wanting to take anything from them, not even as a safety net.

“I’ll swing by probably tomorrow after work to pick it up. Will you be in?” she inquires.

“Yeah.” I don’t want to go into how I will have more nights in this month than I’d like due to coffee-stained clothes,

coffees I didn't get to drink and too much boozing last night.

Fun times.

I take the card and secure it in my purse before I rise and lean down to give her a quick kiss before I take my leave.

I hope Angela accepts my word that Mrs Johnson isn't at this practice. Not that I have any idea what she would do even if she were. Try to poach her back, probably. One thing has become quite apparent through all of this, though. Angela is wildly jealous of my mother. I have a horrible feeling that this is going to rear its head again and bite me on the arse when I least expect it.

Nine

JP

SHOVING open the door to my bedroom, which takes up the entire top floor of the three-story townhouse, I yank my t-shirt over my head and chuck it over the back of the desk chair. I stink, so I will have to take a second shower, but that can wait.

I feel a pang when I see the bed has been stripped and replaced with a fresh set. That means Sharon, the housekeeper, has been in. I usually do it myself after a night or several with an omega in my bed, but I was so out of it this morning, I figured I'd do it later.

But it's done now, so I flip up the laptop and sit in the chair.

I type Storm Rivers: Knotting Hill into the search engine and wait.

Nothing comes up with her specifically, but a doctor's practice comes up called Rivers & Rivers.

I frown. She said she worked at Robb & Robb, but surely Rivers & Rivers are her parents. I find that amusing, and a part of her personality that tantalises me. Trying social media instead, I type in her name. Clicking on her profile, I follow her, wondering what she will make of that. There are a bunch

of photos taken last night with her in *elite*, but it was definitely earlier on, not the debauched late-night howler that I hosted there. I wonder if she stayed. Not that it makes any difference. I wouldn't remember, and I was too busy flirting with the omega I brought home, anyway.

I stare at the photos entranced by her. She is dressed in a short pink skirt and a pink top that shows off her cleavage and her stomach. She is clearly having the time of her life, smiling and laughing with her friends. I need to know more. I want to know what that drink in her hand is. I want to know what perfume she uses to accentuate that cherry scent. Her favourite film, book, tv show, colour. I need to know how she tastes when you kiss her. Everything. I will make it my mission to find out the answers to all of these questions, and I think I know where to start.

Her friend. The one in the black dress. I recognise the omega because of the wolf tattoo she has on her upper arm. She works in the store where I buy my t-shirts. Ironic, much. I snicker, remembering Storm's face. I don't give a fuck about it. It cost me six quid in a sale. But she offered, and I jumped on it, knowing it was a sure-fire way to get her name, and I was hoping for her number. But she's too clever, too safe for that. Instead, she gave me her place of work.

It's a start.

I close the laptop and head to the shower, stripping off the rest of my clothes. My bed is calling to me, all fresh and inviting, with its dark green covers to match the carpet and walls, but this is more important. Besides, I need a new fucking t-shirt.

With a smug grin, I duck into the steaming hot shower, dreaming of the day when I get to bring Storm in here and rail her up against the tiles while she comes all over my cock.

Unfortunately, that gives me a raging hard-on that won't quit, not even when, with a grimace, I blast arctic water down on my head to make it go away.

Knowing I need to take matters into my own hands, I close my eyes and imagine her touching me, those delicate hands

reaching for my cock. I open my eyes and look down at myself. I cup my hand around the hard length of my cock, slowly stroking it as I fantasise about her exploring it, her lips pressed against my tip before she plunges her mouth over me.

My breathing grows ragged as I continue to stroke myself, imagining her lips on me, her tongue tracing circles around the head of my raging dick. My body trembles as I can almost feel her stroking my body, her hands exploring my innermost desires.

Groaning, I move faster, my hand tightly gripping my shaft as I feel the pleasure building up. I imagine her on her knees in front of me, her eyes locked on mine as she takes me deep into her mouth. I arch my back as I picture her tongue flicking down my length. It gets harder with each passing second.

When I finally reach my peak, my orgasm crashes over me as I let out a shuddering sigh, coming all over the cool white tiles in hot splats of pleasure.

The fantasy still lingers in my mind as I let out a deep breath. I smile as I proceed to clean up, and I step out of the shower, feeling refreshed and invigorated. I look down at my still hard cock and shake my head, feeling content in the knowledge that I have just pleased myself with Storm in mind. But nothing is getting rid of this hard-on.

It makes getting re-dressed tricky and uncomfortable.

Passing Russell's room on my way downstairs, I hear him snoring and leave him be. This is something I want to do on my own anyway. I don't really want Russ and Josh to know I've been hit in the heart by Cupid's arrow a few weeks too late. Not yet. I want to know more about Storm first, as much as I can, so that we can make a play for her armed and with serious intent. This isn't going to be some wishy-washy, half-arsed attempt based on who we are, like it usually is. No. She made it quite clear that she either doesn't know or doesn't care. She was fuming, not fawning.

I didn't know I liked that until today. And maybe I don't, really, except with her. Suddenly, everything is about her. I don't know if anything will come of this infatuation I have

with her, but I know I would deeply regret it if I didn't find out. It's not an option to walk away.

Heading away from the house and towards the bustling street where the Boutique is, I contemplate how this conversation will go. I can't just demand that she hand over all of Storm's information. I have to be casual and yet slightly sneaky, so she doesn't think I'm a weird stalker.

The day is warming up nicely now, and by the time I reach the shop, my head is clearer, and I'm chomping at the bit to find out all the things about Storm.

I shove the door open and glance around, making sure the friend is working today. She is, so I step further inside. She is with a customer, so I start to flick through some t-shirts, figuring I might as well pick one up while I'm here. This rack has ones in black with prints on the front, which isn't usually my style. I prefer plain, or with a snazzy splash of colour. However, I pause when I come across one that just seems to be fate.

I grin and pick it up just as Storm's friend comes over.

"Hey, anything I can help with?" she asks.

I look up, wondering where to start, but see recognition flash in her eyes. "JP, right?" she asks, scrunching up her cute nose. She's pretty and curvy, slightly goth looking with her long black skirt, black hair and Doc Martens.

"Yeah, hey, Cassidy." I grabbed her name from the nametag and let it flow freely from my tongue.

"How's things?" she asks.

"Good. You?"

"Yeah, great!"

I cringe. This isn't going in the direction I'd hoped it would.

"Hey, you know Storm Rivers, don't you?" I blurt out, needing to direct this conversation towards the whole reason I'm here.

“Yeah, we’re besties,” she says, with a smile. “You know Storm?”

I nod. “You were at *elite* last night.”

“Oh yeah, Ladies’ Night. I didn’t see you...” She makes it sound like she was looking for me, which sets off a red flag, which I promptly ignore in favour of getting more information out of her about her friend.

“I was there a bit later on with my pack, and John and Phil.”

“Oh, I did see Phil,” she says, clicking her fingers. “That was way late, though. I was on my way out. Such a bummer; it looked like it was raging.”

“It was pretty good,” I say modestly. “You should have stayed.”

“Ugh, I wish. Work. I was the last one to go. Storm and the others left about twelve-ish.”

I nod knowingly. “Yeah, I saw her this morning, getting coffee.”

She snickers. “I think we all needed that.”

“Yep, a few beers and shots will do that to you.”

She nods. “I always make the mistake of diving straight into the Chardonnay. Four glasses, and I’m anybody’s!” She lets out a flirty giggle.

I smile in return. “Suppose it’s easy for you girls to share a bottle.”

She shakes her head. “Oh, no. Storm and others drink Vodka tonics. But I don’t like the taste.”

“Ah, I see.”

Drink of choice: check!

“So you’re after anything else?” she asks, walking back towards the till.

“Uhm, no, just this,” I say, following her and placing the t-shirt on the counter.

She's drawn the conversation to a close, so to pursue it again now would be suspect, at best. I guess I'll have to come back tomorrow for some pants to go with my new t-shirt. And some shoes the day after that.

She nods and unhooks it from the hanger, chucking that in a big bag and then searching for the price tag. She scans it and then folds it up neatly, placing it in a bag.

"You out again later?" I ask, not ready to fully end this.

She shakes her head. "Nah, the girls are lightweights. I'm lucky if I can get them out twice a month. Storm especially. But we go around to her flat sometimes to watch movies and stuff. Love a good Rom-Com."

"Sounds good."

Movie genre of choice: check!

One thing that is becoming clear is that Storm seems to be the hub of this group of friends.

"It is. That'll be thirty pounds, please, when you're ready."

I baulk but flash my card at the reader anyway. I can't believe I've just spent thirty quid on a t-shirt with a pair of cherries printed on the front that I will probably never wear outside of the house. What the fuck am I doing?

"Thanks. Maybe see you around sometime?" she asks hopefully.

"Yeah, we should meet up, all of us. I'll send you a DM, see what we can organise."

She appears slightly disappointed that I mentioned everyone but takes it on the chin. "Okay, great."

"See ya." I pick up my overpriced cherry tee and walk out of the shop, armed with a little bit more knowledge about Storm, even if it is just her favourite drink and genre of movie.

I've worked with less.

Storm

SNEAKING BACK into the practice after seeing my mum, I figured I'd better leave the bookshop visit until after work. I finish at 4.30pm, so I should have half an hour to get to it before it closes, assuming it works regular business hours. Ignoring the disapproving glare of the receptionist, Sadie—who, by the way—wasn't even here when I arrived earlier, so she can get knotted, I sit at my desk and drop my bag to the floor.

Switching on the computer, I grab the pile of folders and get to work on the insurance invoicing, enjoying the numbers and the work.

I get lost in it, so when Angela says my name sometime later, I jump.

“Angela!” I exclaim.

“Sorry,” she says with that kind smile, which I know belies a hideous insect viper bitch. “You haven't taken lunch?”

“Oh,” I say, glancing at my watch. “Well, I was out for a while earlier, so I thought I'd work through.”

“Hmm. And how did that go?”

I shake my head. “I didn’t find anything.”

“Oh,” she says, her face falling into a crushing disappointment that makes me wonder if she was going to accuse my mum of client theft. “Oh well, then. No harm, no foul.”

I smile tightly as she brushes it off.

“But take your lunch, dear, okay?”

“Okay,” I murmur and click a few buttons on the mouse to lock the desktop PC while I’m away from my desk.

Angela drifts off again, so I snatch up my bag and head out of the door under the scathing glare of Sadie. I always thought she didn’t like me, but now it’s apparent. My little job that I loved so much isn’t so wonderful anymore. I just hope that Cheryl is back from her holidays soon. I think it’s another two days. I wasn’t really paying attention to her ramblings of Caribbean seas, so jealous was I of her. But she is fun and makes the time spent here enjoyable as we make up stories about the wealthy clients who sweep through here majestically, eyes shaded even indoors to create a mysterious air.

I scamper out into the warm afternoon sun and head towards Portobello Road to get my mum’s friend’s present.

Spending a bit too long eyeing up brightly coloured scarves on the market stall outside the bookshop, I eventually amble in, giving my eyes a second to focus on the dimmer light.

I draw in the scent of the books and smile. Reading is one of my favourite things, but I mostly read on digital devices now. But nothing beats the smell of a good book—especially the old and musty ones.

Glancing over at the counter, I see they are busy with customers, so instead of joining the queue, I wander over to the antique books section and peruse, with my eyes only, at the titles displayed. Not seeing anything that takes my fancy, I leave that section and edge closer to the counter, now making my intentions known that I’m waiting. The fiery redhead

behind the counter is talking animatedly with someone while the quieter man is rooting around underneath it, probably looking for an order.

“Can I help you, love?” the redhead calls to me. “You look a bit lost.”

“Sorry,” I murmur. “I’m here to pick up an order.”

“Oh, of course. Who’s it for?”

“Gloria Rivers.” I approach the counter now that I’m being dealt with and stand on my side as the redhead tells the man what to look for.

She beams at me. “Anything else?”

I shake my head and pull my purse out. “No, just that, thanks.”

I turn to the man as he rises, holding out a neatly wrapped package. Smiling nervously as he just stands there with the package between us, but not near enough for me to reach, I waiver. Have I done something wrong?

“Uhm...” I look at the redhead for help.

She snickers. “Sorry, looks like Joshy has a case of the dum-dums. Not surprising. You are gorgeous.”

I feel my cheeks go warm at the compliment. “Thanks. So are you.”

She laughs, and I cringe inwardly. I’m so lame.

Flicking my eyes back to ‘Joshy’, I recognise him now that I have a name to go with his face.

Josh St. Luc.

Eurgh.

I curl my lip at him in annoyance of his packmate, the apple pie alpha, who is a massive cock-nugget.

His eyes go wider as I practically sneer at him. I feel a bit bad. He wasn’t even there, but packmates get tarred together, as far as I’m concerned. Besides, the whole of Knotting Hill

knows that the pack beta is just as bad as the alphas when it comes to wedging their dicks inside omegas.

“Do you want to check it over first, hun?” Red Head asks.

“Yes, please,” I grit out. I have zero clue what I’m looking for, but I want this beta to know I’m watching him.

“Elle, there is a customer waiting. I’ll sort this out,” Josh says quietly, catching me slightly off guard.

Elle catches my eyes and grins. “Yep.”

She turns away from me to help the person next to me, abandoning me to the likes of the St. Luc with my mum’s book in his hand.

Glaring at him to get on with it, he places it on the counter and with shaking hands, which I find *almost* endearing, he unwraps the old book and, to my utter dismay, melts my heart when he strokes it lovingly before he picks it up carefully to hand it to me.

What a dick.

There I was, prepared to hate him in solidarity with this packmate, when he shows me a gorgeous side of him that makes me want to grab him and kiss him at the same time as knee him in the balls.

“Here,” he says quietly. “It’s in perfect condition for its age.”

The book hovers between us in his hands, but our gazes are locked, his brown eyes filled with something I can’t quite put my finger on. Admiration, maybe? Not for me, but for the book.

“Thanks,” I murmur, taking it and looking down as I place it on the counter in front of me. “Looks good.”

“Yes, it does,” he replies, croaking slightly. “I hope you love it.”

“It’s not for me,” I state. “It’s for my mum’s friend.”

“Oh.” His disappointment is almost as crushing as Angela’s. Fuck. What is up with people today? Or more to the

point, what is up with me upsetting people all over the borough today?

I sigh and wave my card at him to get a move on. I want to go back to work now, finish up my day and go home to snuggle in my nest and hope that tomorrow is a brighter day.

Josh

STUNNED.

I'm stunned into inaction by the very omega I've been daydreaming about all day since I let her into the coffee shop this morning. She is standing in front of me, talking to me, glaring at me as if she hates me, and getting impatient with my bumbling, but I'm like a deer in headlights. She has changed from all white with a splash of pink into all black, and she seems shorter than she did earlier, which leads me to believe she is wearing flats now. I'm curious why she changed, but who really cares? She is just as beautiful now as she was this morning. More so now that I'm staring into her glaring green eyes, taking in her exquisite features and long dark hair, still tied up into a high ponytail.

"Helloooo?" she waves her black credit card at me, which shows she comes from money. Although she doesn't appear stuck up or snobby, so she is down to earth and doesn't flaunt her wealth.

"Sorry," I mumble. "This has come full circle."

She frowns. "What has?"

“This book. It’s what gave me the money to start this bookshop.”

She blinks and presses her pink lips together. I inhale her scent, the fresh cherry burst, and force a smile on my face, hoping I don’t look like a constipated rat.

“That’s an interesting story,” she says eventually, but I can’t tell if she is actually interested or not. “Sorry, my mum bought it for her friend...you know...”

She chews her lip, looking a bit upset about it.

“No, don’t be! It’s going to a good home, I know it. Your mum comes in here a lot.”

“Yeah, she said. I didn’t know you owned this place, though.”

“Yep.”

It feels like I should regale her with tales of my endeavour, but I really don’t think she gives a shit.

But then her words resonate. “You know who I am?”

“Josh St. Luc. Or Joshy to the busty redhead.” A small smile plays on her lips. Those biteable lips.

“Yeah, and you are...?”

“Storm Rivers.”

“That’s a lovely name.”

Fuck. What am I doing? I sound like an old woman.

She snorts. “Thanks. So can I have the book?”

I blink. “Yes, yes, of course. Tell your mum I said hi.” I wrap it back up quickly and bag it, ringing it through the till and cringing when the price comes up, even minus the finder’s deposit.

Storm doesn’t bat an eye, though. She just slides the card into the reader and punches in the PIN code. “Will do.”

I want to say something to keep her here, but she is already putting her purse away and turns to walk off with a quiet, “See ya.”

“Bye,” I call out and then roll my eyes. This omega has turned me into a lump of boring clay. She probably thinks I’m a complete idiot.

I’m not a big talker anyway, but this has been an absolute disaster.

“So smooth,” Elle says, turning back to me, holding onto her laugh. “You really fancy her, don’t you?”

I nod, unable to form words again.

“Aww, bless,” she says, and pats my arm. “She didn’t even look twice at you.”

“Don’t be a cow,” I growl. “I was surprised to see her so soon.”

Elle gives me a curious look, so I explain about seeing Storm this morning.

“Pretty name,” Elle says.

“It’s perfect,” I murmur, practically drooling on my shoes as I watch Storm pushing the door instead of pulling it and then getting mad and swearing at it. She is a vision.

Elle watches her as well. I can almost hear the wheels cranking around in her meddling head.

“Don’t,” I say before she can start.

“I know I can find out stuff that will give you a leg up,” she says anyway. “I’m pretty sure that Mindy is friends with Karen, who hangs out with Cassidy; you know the omega who works at the Boutique near your house?”

“And?”

“Cassidy is friends with Storm. I wondered where I’d heard of her before. Check this out.” She pulls out her phone, and after a bit of tapping, she shows me some photos that were taken at *elite* last night of Storm, Cassidy and a bunch of other girls dancing and laughing.

“How did you make that connection?” I ask, bewildered.

She giggles. “The girlfriend network. Come on, Joshy. Keep up.” She elbows me and then turns to serve another customer.

“Wait,” I say, ignoring her conversation with the customer to my own detriment. “What can you find out?”

Elle glares at me and then turns back to the man in front of her. “Sorry, sir. Someone left their manners under the drinks table last night.”

The old man snickers, fortunately not taking offence at my rudeness. “Well, go on then, love. What can you find out?” he asks, his Cockney accent broad and gruff.

He leans on the counter as Elle giggles. “You name it, I’ll find it.”

“Suppose you’d better start with if she has a fella she’s ready to mate with,” the old man says.

“That’s a start,” I murmur, wishing this wasn’t happening in a quite so public way.

“Done,” Elle says and taps into her phone.

Me and the old man stare at her, waiting.

“Well, give it a minute,” she huffs. “The grapevine takes some time to warm up.”

“But I’m riveted,” the old man complains.

Elle’s phone beeps, causing my heart to skip a beat. I’m so nervous; it’s ridiculous.

“It’s your lucky day. She is single.”

Relief floods over me. If I were feeling all of this for a soon-to-be-mated omega, it would be extremely disappointing.

Elle blinks, searching my eyes before she bites her lip. “I could arrange drinks or something, all of us?”

It feels like my heart has been jumpstarted after the tension. I grab Elle’s upper arms. “Yes!” I practically shout in her face to the delight of the old man. I clear my throat and

force myself to calm down a bit. “Yes, please, that would be good of you.”

Elle rolls her eyes and purses her lips as she taps into her phone again. “Now we wait,” she says firmly, turning to the till to ring up the old man’s goods.

“Bummer,” he murmurs. “This was better than ’Enders.”

“Come back later in the week for an update,” I inform him, nervous energy along with the six cups of coffee I’ve had today already bouncing through my veins.

“Oh, I will, son,” he says and picks up his bag of books, giving us a wave as he leaves.

“Smitten,” Elle says dreamily. “Wish I had someone to moon over.”

“You aren’t short of admirers,” I remind her.

“Yeah, but none of them are mooning over *me*. So why should I moon over them?”

“I’m sure they’re mooning; you just don’t give them a chance.”

“Humph,” she mutters and turns her back on me, but she knows I’m right. I just hope she can pull off this drinks thing soon before Storm *does* get snatched up. There is no way that a pack isn’t sitting in the wings waiting for her to say the word.

I wonder what JP and Russell will think of her. It’s definitely worth finding out in case she turns out to be my one. She kind of has to be theirs too.

But this will come in good time.

First, I need to know her.

Twelve

Storm

MARCHING DOWN THE ROAD, wishing that stupid door had a sign on it telling me which way to push or pull, I try to put as much distance between the shop and me as quickly as possible. Besides, I've probably been pretty close to half an hour already, so I need to get back to my desk. I can't give Angela any reasons to be awkward with me now that I know she is capable of it.

When I see the practice in sight, my phone rings in my bag. I snatch it up and answer, "Hey."

"You will never guess who just came in here!" Cassidy practically bellows in my ear.

"Who?"

"JP St. Luc, and he was digging for information on you! I gave him a bit of a run around to make him squirm, but he is so into you. I didn't even know you guys knew each other. You've never said." She sounds slightly miffed at this.

"I *don't* know him," I huff. "And if I did, I would tell him to get knotted. He is a fucking prick."

"Wow, okay, fierce. Why do I have to kill him?"

I giggle. I love Cass so much. Everyone misreads her at first. She is sharp as a whip. Could've gone to med school like her parents, which is where her parents met mine, and why we have been friends since birth.

“It’s a long story. Can I tell you over frozen pizza later at mine?”

“Sold! See you in a bit.”

She hangs up without any pressure to fill her in *right now*. She is happy to wait for when I’m ready.

Feeling a bit brighter now that I’m seeing my best friend after this remarkably shitty day, with my head down, I get back to work quickly and quietly, not wanting to create any more waves in my wake than I already have today.

Today.

This day has been a long-arse piece of shit. It feels like I’ve been slogging through these hours for about a week.

At half past four on the dot, with no more interactions with Angela, and I haven’t even seen David Robb today, I creep out, giving Sadie a tight smile which she returns. Luckily for me, I checked the calendar and saw that Cheryl is due back in tomorrow. She can distract everyone with tales of her fabulous holiday of clear seas and white beaches, and I can live vicariously through her for a while.

Breathing in deeply as I step out into the late afternoon sun, it feels a little chilly, so I fold my arms and walk quickly back to my flat. I let myself in and dump my bag on the side table near the door. Knowing Cass will be here soon, as her Boutique closes at 4.30 as well today, I head straight for the freezer and pull out a frozen pepperoni, turning to the oven to preheat it. I make my way over to the bed and kick my shoes off, dragging my cardi off as well to change out of my work clothes into the baggy leggings and camisole top that I intend to wear to bed later. I don’t stand on ceremony with Cass. She’s seen me in worse and less and covered in vomit once back in high school when I thought it was a great idea to down

Sambuca shots on my seventeenth birthday, which I pinched from my parents' drinks cupboard.

Yeah, never, ever again.

My stomach protests even now when back in the kitchen, I slide the pizza onto a tray and into the oven just as the buzzer goes for downstairs.

Smiling, I check the little cam and see Cass waving at me, so I let her up and open the front door for her.

"I want to know everything!" she says, bustling in and making herself at home.

"Short version...I tripped on a Cockapoo coming out of the coffee shop this morning and dumped my latte macchiato all over him. He was extraordinarily angry and told me I had to pay for his dry cleaning."

"What the fuck is a Cockapoo?" she asks, scrunching up her nose.

"A small dog which is a cross between a Cocker Spaniel and a Poodle."

"Fuck's sake," she mutters. "Is the dog okay?"

"The dog is fine," I grit out.

"Just asking," she says defensively. "I mean, I can see you are okay, if not a little riled."

"Pissed off. JP is a real asshole."

"But an asshole who is interested in you," she says slyly.

"Doubtful. He probably just wanted to know where to find me in case I ducked out of the dry-cleaning bill."

"No. He is definitely into you. He came in to buy a new t-shirt. He picked up one with a fucking cherry print on it. Cherries. If that doesn't say he's thinking about you, then nothing does."

I purse my lips. I don't even know what to say to that.

"He was poking about a bit, looking for the scoop."

"You didn't tell him anything, did you?"

“Might’ve mentioned one or two things...he said he’d DM me so we could arrange to go out.”

I frown. “What? Just you two?” I feel unnaturally perturbed by that.

“No, doofus, all of us. But he meant you specifically. So shall we go and meet up? Could be fun?”

“I can’t afford it even if I did want to go. I spent way over my budget last night.”

“If you moved to a cheaper flat, you’d have more money. Or back in with your parents, even.”

“I don’t want to. I love it here, and don’t you start. I’ve already had Mum on at me again today.”

Cass shrugs, not willing to die on that hill. She still lives with her parents, and that’s great for her. But it’s not for me.

“He hasn’t even messaged yet, so you have time to think about it.”

“Look, you can go, but leave me out of it. I want nothing to do with him or any of them. Even Josh is a bit of a weirdo.”

“How so? I think he’s kinda cute.”

“Cute, yes, but a bit bumbling and just as much of a player as the alphas.”

“True, true. Anyway, enough about them. If you aren’t interested, far be it for me to push you on them. I just thought it was funny that he came snooping around.” She lets out a loud laugh. “It was so obvious!”

I giggle as well, feeling a bit flattered that he took time out of his day, even if it was to dig up information that he would probably use in my downfall.

“Put a film on, I’ll get the pizza.” I stand up and head to the kitchen. “Something with Hugh Grant. I’m in the mood for posh and gorgeous.”

“Hmm, wonder why?” she calls back but gets up to do as I ask.

I stick my tongue out at her back and then bend to open the oven and pull the pizza out. Not as big or tasty as a takeaway, but not bad for two pounds at the Co-op.

“Should we call the others?” Cass asks when I return with sliced pizza and a couple of cans of pop.

“Nah, too late now. I want to watch, forget, eat, and be with my bestie.”

“Aww,” she says with a big beam. “Me too.”

We share a smile before we dive in.

The night is perfect, with the cool breeze floating in through the open window and a light dusting of stars in the sky to illuminate the darkness.

After the pizza, we grab the soft throw blanket draped across the back of the sofa and settle down with a variety of snacks spread out – biscuits, crisps and a big bar of chocolate that I was saving for a day like today.

We sit back and watch in rapt attention, munching on snacks, sipping our drinks, and occasionally shouting out comments as the romance unfolds on the screen of the Rom-Com we’ve watched a thousand times.

“Stay?” I ask her when the film finishes, and we put on another one.

“You feeling needy?” she replies. “I know a hot alpha who will probably come over and share your nest with you.”

“Eww.” I almost gag at the thought.

“Yeah, I’ll stay,” she says. “Got any more chocolate?”

“Always,” I say and dive into the kitchen to grab the fun-sized bag of Mars bars.

Thirteen

Russell

I WAKE up in the early afternoon to the light streaming through my open window. My head feels strangely clear and refreshed, in stark contrast to the dreary, hungover feeling I had this morning. I feel lighter and more energised than ever before. Probably down to the dream I was having about Storm Rivers. She was standing under a waterfall on a hot tropical island with that top on with the laces. She was soaked, her hair down her back, her tits visible through the see-through fabric. Her nipples peaked and ready to suck. She beckoned me closer, and I waded through the pool at the base of the waterfall, gathering her to me as I kissed her deeply.

I groan and roll over.

“Fuck.” My cock is rock-hard. Not unusual, but I could really do with someone taking care of that for me—namely, an omega who smells like cherries and has tits I want to bury my head in between.

Hauling my naked arse out of bed, I stumble to the en-suite bathroom and turn on the shower. I’m so disgusting. I didn’t even have one this morning when Josh called his emergency meeting. I literally rolled out of bed and put last night’s clothes on.

Eurgh.

Even I'm repulsed by that. Storm probably thought I was a drunk hobo, *if* she even noticed me at all.

Stepping into the shower for a refreshing blast of hot water, the water cascades down my body like the waterfall from my dream. My thoughts linger on the dream and of her curves that I want to explore with my tongue and fingers. She has flitted through my dreams, causing a raging hard-on, but also a delicious distraction from the monotony of everyday life.

Monotony.

Since when?

Since she wasn't in it.

What was the word JP used?

Dull, that was it.

Dull.

Life is dull without Storm in it.

I didn't even speak to her, she didn't even look at me, but that scent, her body, her fiery attitude, and JP's unusual interest in getting her have riled me up, and I need to know more.

Desperate for a wank, but putting it off for now, I hurriedly get out of the shower and get dressed, more eager than ever to speak to JP. His room is on the next floor up, so as I climb the stairs, I can't help but feel the anticipation in my gut as I think about the conversation that lies ahead.

I rap lightly on his door, hearing a muffled, "Come in."

I shove the door open to see JP sitting on his bed, dressed in a really gaudy black t-shirt with a pair of cherries on the front.

"Fuck's sake," I mutter. "Where the fuck did you get that?"

He laughs. "Ah, well, now. Sit, and I'll tell you about my day while you've been snoozing."

He has a mischievous glint in his eye when he motions for me to take a seat, and I eagerly comply by sitting my arse down in his desk chair.

“Go on then. What did you get up to today?” I ask as he settles back down onto his bed.

“Tracked down one of Storm’s best friends, found out a couple of things about her and bought this ridiculous t-shirt that cost me thirty quid, but it was worth it. I’m just waiting an appropriate amount of time to DM Cassidy to suggest we all get together for drinks tomorrow.”

I narrow my eyes. “Cassidy? From the boutique up the road?”

“That’s the one.”

“How did you find that out?”

“Social media, my friend,” he replies, wagging his phone at me.

“Hmm.” I’m wildly jealous and pissed off that he went without me. What’s that all about?

“Hmm, what?”

“You didn’t think to bring me?”

“You were asleep. Besides, I didn’t see Storm.”

“No, but you collared her friend. She knows you now.”

“Yup.”

“What did you find out?” I know he wouldn’t cut us out of this. He knows that when we mate, it will be as a pack. I’m just worried that he isn’t taking this as seriously as I feel he should be and is after Storm for himself to use and discard when he no longer finds her fascinating. I’ve seen it done a thousand times, if not more. Christ knows why I’m even that bothered by the thought, but something about her has gotten under my skin.

“She drinks Vodka tonic and likes Rom-Coms,” he says.

I blink. “That’s it?”

“That’s all I could get out of Cassidy without it sounding like I was being a weird stalker,” he huffs.

“Fair point. You going to message now?”

He glances at his phone. “No. Tomorrow.”

I groan. “That’s ages away.”

“Why are you suddenly so interested? You barely looked at her and didn’t even speak to her.”

“I had this dream about her. Fuck...” I trail off, practically drooling again.

JP nods in understanding, a satisfied grin on his face. “I see,” he says, nodding appreciatively.

“So, what’s the plan? When do we tell Josh? When do we make our move?”

He shrugs, unusually coy all of a sudden. “I don’t know. We have to tread carefully. I’m sure she will sense that something’s up if we try anything too big too soon. Also, with Josh, maybe we wait a minute to see if she can get over the shitshow from this morning. I realise that I may have been a bit hamfisted...”

I snort loudly. “You think?”

He glares at me. “I was hungover and covered in hot coffee, not to mention Mrs fucking Figg was bending my ear about why my mum hasn’t answered her calls. I mean, how the fuck should I know?”

“Okay, okay, calm the fuck down,” I laugh. “This is fixable. This is *us*.”

My confidence picks him up, and he nods. “Exactly. But she is different. I can feel it here.” He punches himself in the gut. “I don’t want to fall into bed with her. I want to...”

His gaze fixes on mine as he lets out a slow breath.

“Sweep her off her feet?”

His eyes gleam. “Yep.”

We sit there for a few moments, just looking at each other, smiling as if we are sharing a big secret, which I suppose we are.

“It’s not going to be easy,” I point out. “You might’ve ruined it this morning.”

“It’s nothing we can’t come back from. Together we can do it. You’ll see.”

“So, when do we tell Josh?”

“When there’s something to tell. She doesn’t need all three of us swooping in on her. She’ll run a mile.”

I nod, the thought of the journey ahead making me feel equal amounts of fear and excitement. I have *never* felt this way about an omega before. I didn’t think I ever would, but JP is right, scent match notwithstanding, I’m sure she is meant to be ours.

“Tell me when you’ve messaged and what the plan is,” I say, standing up. As much as I want action on this now, so I can see her and speak to her, get to know her, we need to do this the right way.

He nods, and with that, I descend the stairs to my room, my head buzzing with ideas. I know that no matter how scared I am of commitment because of my past, I’m ready to take this chance for the omega I know fate has thrown in our path at this exact moment. I don’t know how I know.

But I know.

Fourteen

Storm

I WAKE up to the smell of freshly brewed coffee and smile. Sitting up, I see Cass already re-dressed from the casual clothes she keeps here to the clothes she arrived in, in the kitchen sipping a mug while she scrolls through her phone.

“What time is it?” I ask, yawning and reaching for my phone.

“Too early for you. I gotta get back and showered before work.”

I nod and see that she’s right. It’s way before my alarm is set to go off.

“But...” She has a gleam in her eyes, and I don’t like where this is going.

“What?” I ask, climbing out of bed and heading for the loo. Whatever it is, it can wait two minutes while I pee and brush my teeth.

She is waiting for me when I emerge. “So, you know Karen? Well, she is friends with Mindy, who is friends with Elle Edwards? Yeah, anyway, Elle is having a drinks do tonight and invited us.”

“Us?” I reach for a mug and pour the hot coffee from the filter pot.

“Yeah, me and you.”

“I don’t even know her.”

“The redhead with the huge boobs who works with Josh St. Luc?”

“Oh, her. She seems nice, but are you sure she asked for me as well?”

“You and Storm... see?” She shows me the message from Karen.

“Oh, weird. Maybe because I saw her yesterday? She must’ve made the connection. I didn’t, but I follow now. But I can’t tonight. I’m seriously on a budget now.”

“It’s nowhere fancy, just the pub down the road. Come in, have a couple of soda waters and a chat, and then you can leave.”

I consider this for a moment. “My mum is coming around after work.”

“Tell her to come tomorrow.”

I chew my lip. I want to. I really do, but my purse is crying and begging for me not to spend any more money on going out. “Okay, sounds like fun,” I say, ignoring the weeping and wailing from my bag. A couple of soda waters isn’t going to break the bank. “Wait,” I say, getting suspicious all of a sudden. “This doesn’t have anything to do with JP *or* any of the St. Luc’s, does it? It’s an odd request after yesterday.”

“Don’t be so paranoid. JP hasn’t messaged, and who cares about Josh anyway?” She shrugs to show her lack of concern over my plight.

Not that it’s anything major, I would just rather not go there and be confronted with them.

“Fine,” I huff.

“Awesome! See you after workie!” She grabs her bag and heads out of the door, way too chipper for this time in the

morning. “Oh, and don’t forget I’m out next week with my heat.”

I nod and wave, knowing my own is only a couple of weeks away. Always the week after Cassidy’s. It sucks because every season, which is basically every quarter, we don’t see each other for nearly two weeks.

Yawning again, I reach for the bread and pop a couple of pieces in the toaster, waiting for them to jump back out at me as I grab the butter from the fridge.

I figure I might as well get a move on and try to make up some time after disappearing yesterday for several hours. I can only hope to remain in Angela’s good books now and that this Mrs Johnson thing was a one-off and will blow over.

* * *

An hour later, I’m dressed not to kill myself should I come across any rampaging dogs or angry alphas. Black flats, definitely a must, with beige pants and a black top, plus the same cardigan from yesterday. I can look good at work and at the pub in this reasonably low-cut top.

Ringling my mum on my way out, she answers quickly.

“Storm, everything okay?”

“Yes, mum,” I drone. She always answers the same way, as if she is expecting disaster. “I’m going out later, so can we meet up tomorrow instead?”

“Yes, of course. Going anywhere nice?”

“Just to the pub.”

“Who with?”

“Cass and some other friends.”

“Any boys?”

I can almost *hear* the gleam in her eyes.

“Not sure. Not that I know of, and don’t start. I don’t want to mate yet.”

“I know, I know, but I want grandbabies before I’m too old to pick them up.”

I snicker. “That is decades away. I’m sure you will have grandbabies before then.”

“I better had do,” she sulks and hangs up.

I know she’s not really upset. But she was mated with me on the way when she was twenty-five, medical school be damned. She was having it all and no one, not even life, messes with Gloria Rivers. But she doesn’t realise times have changed and mating isn’t the be-all and end-all anymore.

My thoughts wander briefly to JP and his visit to Cass’s store yesterday. Did he really buy a top with cherries on the front? I don’t see why Cass would lie, but that is just a bit weird. His asking questions about me makes me a bit uncomfortable, but I know Cass wouldn’t have told him anything personal. I wish I hadn’t ended up on his radar, but now all I can do is ride it out and hope he goes away when he doesn’t get me in his bed.

Avoiding the coffee shop and its vicinity in case he is there, I duck into the practice nice and early, glad that Sadie isn’t here already.

Cheryl is, though, looking all gorgeous and tanned.

She shrieks when she sees me and rushes to hug me. We aren’t that close, just work buddies, but I return it anyway and let her regale me with her holiday stories, not letting me get a word in, not that I really want to anyway.

* * *

My mood is pensive and stays that way all day until it’s time to meet up with Cass, Karen and the others. I’m not sure what is dragging me down, but something is niggling at me. It is soon replaced by laughter and chatting as I catch up with some of the girls I haven’t seen for a while, and also finding myself drawn into a conversation with Elle.

She beams and gives me a hug. “I knew I recognised you,” she says knowingly.

“It’s like that round here. Everyone knows everyone or someone who knows you,” I say with a laugh.

“Yep. Did your mum like the book? She is fabulous. She comes into the shop all the time.”

“I haven’t seen her yet. Tomorrow.” I take a sip of my soda water and grimace. This is the pits. I can’t sit here sober while everyone else is getting merry. “I’m going to get a real drink,” I inform her.

She giggles. “That’s the way, girl. Catch up with you in a bit.”

Her words are laced with a mysterious tone which immediately makes me suspicious. Standing at the bar a few moments later, ordering a Vodka tonic, I totally get why.

“Hey,” a familiar male voice says from right next to me.

“Well, if it isn’t Joshy. Shoulda known.”

“Ouch,” he says, leaning on the bar and regarding me with those remarkable brown eyes. “Forgive me for yesterday?”

I narrow my eyes as the bartender hands me my drink. “Why, what did you do?”

Josh holds his hand up and pays for it, to my annoyance, but I accept it because I’m not standing here making a fuss when I can’t really afford the drink in my hand anyway.

“I was a bit of an idiot. I saw you earlier in the coffee shop. We crossed in the doorway. I didn’t expect to see you again so soon.”

Okay, he definitely appears smoother now than he did yesterday. I’ll give him that. Prepared suits him. He doesn’t think well on his feet. I don’t doubt for a second that Elle set this up. I slide my gaze over to her. She presses her lips together to hide her smile and turns away.

“But why would that throw you? Knotting Hill is a small place.”

“It threw me because your scent has caught my attention, and I was thinking about you all morning.” His voice has gone

husky, sexy even, and I mentally kick myself. He is a St. Luc.

Don't engage.

Back away now.

He will use you and leave you.

"Hmm," I murmur. "Well, see you around." I dart off like the Devil is on my tail, feeling his eyes boring into my back as I quickly drop my drink on a table and disappear down the corridor which leads to the ladies' room to gather my wits, and book an Uber to take me home. My hands are shaking, but I have no idea why. I get hit on all the time by random dudes everywhere, but there's something about Josh that has hit my panic button. Not in a creepy way, but in a he-has-the-capacity-to-hurt-me way.

I wash my hands, letting the cool water run over the insides of my wrists to steady my slightly spinning head.

When I push the door open, I stop dead.

He is waiting for me, leaning casually up against the faded wallpaper that is peeling off the wall in places. The low light makes it too dark to be comfortable.

"Don't run," he murmurs. "I want to see something."

"What?" I ask hoarsely, my palms sweating.

He swoops in, his hands cupping my face as he kisses me lightly on the lips, pressing his hard body against mine. My breath whooshes out of me as his kiss is the perfect amount of soft and firm, his tongue exploring my mouth deliciously when I open up for him. I can't help it. I place my hands on his waist, twisting my tongue around his, getting lost in the kiss when he pulls back, his eyes full of desire.

I gulp and pull away as Cassidy comes looking for me, stopping dead when she sees me with Josh.

She raises an eyebrow, a slight smirk on her lips. "Your Uber is here," she says and turns back to the pub, giggling away to herself as if she knows something I don't.

Josh frowns. "You're leaving?"

I clear my throat. “Yes.”

“Don’t,” he says, lacing our fingers together.

“I have to.”

“Let me see you again.” He traces my lips with this thumb before he cups my face again.

I shake my head and pull away. He lets me go, stepping back as I shove past him. I feel sick and hot all of a sudden.

I shove past the alpha standing at the top of the corridor, catching a whiff of apple pie, which makes me both ravenous and nauseous at the same time.

JP.

I can’t deal with him right now. I run out of the pub, knowing he is following me, and slip into the waiting taxi, relief washing over me when we pull away, putting distance between me and a potentially volatile situation.

I look back over my shoulder to see JP, Russell and Josh watching me drive away and wonder what in the hell that was, but glad to be away from the situation because it has become apparent that my heat is making an early appearance. All I need to do now is crawl into my nest and ride my knotty vibrator for the next five days or so until I can resurface, and hopefully, they will have forgotten all about this.

Fifteen

JP

GAPING at the omega driving away into the darkness, I turn to glare at Josh and backhand him on the chest. “What the fuck was that?”

He growls. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Narrowing my eyes, I take a breath. “You were kissing that omega.”

“And? What’s it to you?”

“It’s the same omega that I have decided I want in my life long-term. Same as Russell.”

I see Josh flick his gaze at Russ before he returns it to me. “And you weren’t going to tell me this because?”

“I know you’re pissed,” I start, because man, he is about to lose it big time and cause a scene as Elle wanders over, looking concerned. “But we were trying to figure shit out first. You came to us with the mating thing, and we didn’t want to get your hopes up, or whatever.”

“Get my hopes up? I wasn’t suggesting we mate...okay, well, I am now. Storm is special. I can feel it in my gut. You do too?”

“Yeah,” I say with a nod. “Go back to how you were kissing her.”

“That’s my meddling,” Elle says, as we are now joined by Cassidy. “Storm came into the shop yesterday. Joshy got all ga-ga over her, so I set up a cheeky meet.”

“That’s what I was doing too,” Cassidy says, blabbing our little secret.

I messaged her this morning, and she totally called me on my bullshit. I figured I might as well come clean with my intentions.

She and Elle share an amused gaze.

“Guess Josh is way smoother than you two,” Cassidy comments, folding her arms over her chest.

“Ha. He wishes,” Russell pipes up before I can. “We didn’t get a chance. She bolted. Josh made her bolt. Obviously, he kisses like a douche.”

“Ouch,” Josh grumbles.

“Stop! Everyone just stop!” I exclaim, running my hand through my hair. “This is a *disaster*. The idea was to get to know her, not kiss her and make her run away. You,” I turn on Josh, practically fuming, “You jumped the gun.”

“How was I to know...you didn’t keep me in the loop. I was working my own agenda, and kissing her was part of that.”

“Humph,” I growl rudely, and turn back to Cassidy. “What do we do now?”

“Nothing. I said I would help you, and I will, but she has bolted, and none of you are going after her. I will check on her.”

“Why did she run?” Josh asks quietly.

We all turn to Cassidy, who purses her lips. “She isn’t looking for a mate just yet. My best guess is that she got overwhelmed a bit. Plus, she is very vocal about you three and your womanising ways.”

Elle snorts, apparently in agreement.

“Look,” I say, going deadly serious. “I know we have a rep, which is unfortunate in this case, but nothing we can do anything about. I am serious about courting Storm. This has to be done right.”

“Then the first thing you have to do is keep your dick in your pants. All of you,” Cassidy says.

“Not a problem,” Russell says. “I honestly can’t think of being with anyone but her.”

“Aww,” Elle murmurs. “The St. Luc’s going all soft on us.”

I shoot her a filthy glare at her innuendo.

“I said I would help you get to know her a bit, but I’m extremely defensive, so if one of you steps out of line, I will string you up by your short and curlies. She is not another notch on your bedposts. Got it? Storm deserves to be happy, and I want her to be more than anything. That’s why I’m doing this. I saw how serious you were about it this morning, but I won’t help you get her into bed. I guarantee that you need to work for that honour, and she will make you. I’m almost looking forward to it,” Cassidy states.

She smiles gleefully, and that’s when I see *her* intentions. This is less about helping us and more about seeing us on our knees.

Well, not a fucking problem.

If that’s what I have to do to get to Storm, then it’s the very least I can do. I will go to great lengths to ensure that my pack has a fair run at her. If she rejects us, or it turns out it’s not in the cards for us, then at least I will know I did my damndest and didn’t walk away because it got hard. I don’t even know where this feeling has come from. It’s just consumed me. She has consumed me. It’s not just about her scent, which is definitely alluring and inviting and calling to me. There’s something about the chase and the fact that I know she won’t fall into bed with any of us. It makes me *need* to know her.

“If I have to beg on my hands and knees to get her to talk to me, to get to know me, I don’t have an issue with that,” I state to the utter shock of Josh and probably Russell. I can’t see his face, but Josh’s jaw is on the floor. “You?” I ask of him.

“Definitely,” he says. “We are on the same page, undoubtedly.”

“Fabulous,” Cassidy says. “Now go home. I will call you with your next instructions.”

I want to tell her to piss off, but I won’t. She is our ammo, and we need her. I have a feeling that Storm is a very complex omega, just by the little things I already know about her, like going to work for her parents’ rivals, for instance. We are going to need all the help we can get.

But I’m looking forward to this challenge more than anything else, ever. Not even the thrill of playing the market can compare to this. I know that our biggest obstacle is our reputation, but once Storm sees that we are serious, hopefully, she will look past it.

Only time will tell.

Storm

AFTER RUSHING UP the stairs to my flat, I burst through the door and slam it closed behind me. I have never been caught off guard by my heat before. Well, except for the first one, obviously. It has run like clockwork for the last four years with no deviations. This is an absolute disaster. What am I going to say to Angela? She will think I'm using it as an excuse to get out of coming to work, and things will be even more weird. I didn't see her at all today, which was bizarre. She usually comes into the office now and again, but not today. I know it's because of the errand I ran for her yesterday. It has to be.

Groaning as the cramps ripple through my abdomen, I strip off my clothes and flop into bed, curling up in my makeshift nest.

I'm hot and feverish, feeling miserable and exhausted. My throat is dry, my head throbs, and my limbs are heavy and aching. I pull the covers up around my chin, wishing I could disappear into their soft embrace. But no matter how hard I try to escape, the heat still follows me.

As I lie there, I need some kind of release, some kind of relief. I reach out for the one thing I've come to rely on during these times: my beloved knotty vibrator. It's long and thick

with a bulbous knot at the base, which simulates the real thing and eases my heat until I need it again.

I pick it up from the bedside drawer and hold it close, the smooth silicone cool against my feverish skin.

As I hold it, I can almost feel the healing wave that it brings. No matter how bad I am, I feel a bit better whenever I use it. If only I could keep this feeling of soothing pleasure forever.

I switch it on and press it against my skin. The vibration spreads through my body, letting the heat know it's about to be sated. It is so calming, so comforting.

I move it around my body, savouring the sensations. Reaching my pussy, I press it against my clit and buck, crying out as the pleasure reaches a peak, but I edge, drawing it back before I climax. Panting raggedly, I thrust it inside my pussy. Deep inside me, I feel it buzzing away, the pleasure curling around me like a wave. It is intense, but it also brings with it a sense of healing.

Thrusting and withdrawing, fucking myself with the vibe, with each wave of pleasure, my muscles relax, and the pain from the heat melts away. Knowing it's time, I finally hold still. The wave crests and crashes to shore in a climax that feels so good, tears seep from my eyes. I shove the vibrator further inside my pussy, stretching to get the knot past my entrance. My pussy clutches it instantly, and I feel the heat ease up, receding slightly to leave me more clear-headed and relaxed.

I smile and close my eyes as the vibrator hums away inside me, bringing me closer to another orgasm. Suddenly, JP's image pops into my mind.

"Fuck," I weep as the pleasure is too much. "Fuck you. I'm not coming to your face."

But it's too late. His face mingled with Josh's, the feel of Josh's tongue against mine, their hands splayed out over my hot skin. I cry out as the climax thunders over me without warning. My pussy clenches painfully around the knot,

gushing slick that pools underneath me, making me breathless as I shudder uncontrollably.

“Pricks,” I groan, wishing that hadn’t happened.

At least Russell St. Luc hasn’t made an appearance during my solo sex. I don’t need all of them in my face while I’m being knotted by a silicone dick, for fuck’s sake.

Groaning, I can’t help but smile though, feeling the warmth of my nest and the peacefulness around me. I know this is only the beginning of my heat and that I have several days to go yet, but at least Josh’s kiss, which is now kept in the wank bank, can help, maybe.

Sometimes.

If I want it to.

I drift off into a half-sleep with the vibrator still inside me, feeling relieved and entirely at peace, but also slightly anxious that the St. Luc’s are with me in my mind.

Seventeen

Storm

MY EYES SNAP open when I hear my phone ringing.

“Eurgh.” Everyone knows not to disturb me right now. What are they doing to me?

It’s been three days since my heat unexpectedly arrived, and while it’s easing off this evening, I still feel hot and feverish and in need of a knot every couple of hours. My first thought is it’s Angela, who, to my surprise, was very understanding about my predicament, but it’s too late for that.

I reach for it and squint with one eye at the screen.

‘Mum’

I answer it with a groggy, “If this isn’t an emergency, you can call back later.”

“Sorry, hunny,” she says. “But I need to come over tonight.”

“What? Why?” I groan.

“Syn’s book, hun. It’s her birthday tomorrow, and you still have it.”

“Oh, shite, yeah. Of course. Can you give me an hour to get halfways decent?”

“Done. How are you feeling?”

“Better today, thanks. I hope this isn’t going to become a thing. I need to know.”

“I know. Sometimes it happens, outside factors and all that. Have you been under any stress lately?”

“Not really,” I muse. “Unless you count the Angela and work thing.”

And the St. Luc’s.

“Okay, well, we will see what happens next season and re-evaluate. See if we can find a cause if it happens again.”

“Okay. See you in a bit.” We hang up, and I roll over to grab my freshly scrubbed, buzzy friend off the bedside table.

After taking care of my need again, fifteen minutes later, I’m in the shower, feeling refreshed and remarkably more normal. Hopefully, with this being an impromptu heat, it is a lesser one and will recede from tonight.

Once dressed in a fresh set of jammies, I strip the bed and dump the slick-covered sheets in the washbag to take to the laundrette. That’s the only downside to this place, but the laundrette is only on the next block, so generally speaking, it’s not that big of a deal. I usually handwash my delicates anyway, so I never run short of my underwear.

Soon, it’s time for my mum to show up, and she does on time, having probably been standing outside on the pavement for the last fifteen minutes, making sure to give me the full hour. Early bird down to a tee.

I let her up, and we hug quickly.

“You look good,” she says.

“I feel even better than when you rang. I think it’s going.”

“That’s good. You can get back to normal then. It’s a real drain sometimes being an omega.”

I nod in agreement, but I’m sure it’s way more fun when you have an alpha to ease your heat. Then I cringe. I cannot think about my parents that way. No, no. No.

“Here,” I say, crossing over to the side table and picking up the book and the black credit card.

She takes the book but frowns at the card. “Keep it, please. Just so I know you have something, anything, if you need it. You don’t have to use it, but I need to know you are taken care of.”

“That’s precisely my issue with this. I want to take care of myself.”

“Please?”

I figure it’s probably easier just to give in. I don’t feel as exhausted anymore, but I’m not a hundred per cent yet, and picking my battles is the best way forward for a few days.

“Fine,” I grouse and slip it into my purse. I don’t really want to leave it lying around in case I’m burgled or whatever. “Can you stay for a cuppa?”

“I need to get going,” she says. “But we can catch up at the weekend?”

“Okay.”

She waves the book at me, and then she is gone, leaving me alone for a few moments before my phone rings again.

“Cass,” I say when I answer. “What’s up?”

“You okay? I’ve been worried about you.”

“I’m fine. My mum thinks it might be stress or something.”

“Hmm,” she murmurs. “You sound better than you did the other day.”

“I feel it. It’s weird, but not complaining.”

“Definitely not. Three days is enough, in my opinion.”

“And mine.”

“Okay, well, I’d better go. I was just checking on you.”

“Thanks, babes. I’m good. Hopefully, be back at work the day after tomorrow.”

“Awesome. Let’s meet up before I disappear next week.”

“Definitely. I’ll message you.”

“Kay.”

We hang up, and then I feel a bit lost after all the activity of the last hour or so.

Glancing at the bed, I remember that I have to make it up again, so I set about doing that and perfecting my nest to crawl back into before I make some toast and a cup of tea to settle down to some TV for the night, trying not to ponder too hard why Cass sounded so strange and *why* she rang me today when she knows I’m in the middle of my heat. Well, supposed middle. Usually, she leaves me alone with a quick text to check that I’m still alive.

It’s odd, and something I may have to ask her at some point when we meet up. I almost got the feeling she was angling for something...but what?

Eighteen

Russell

I WAVE Cassidy over as she approaches the table we have in the dark corner of the pub, nowhere near Knotting Hill. We have business to discuss, which we don't want anyone eavesdropping on.

"About time," JP comments as she sits.

I'm friendlier and smile at her.

She grimaces at JP but then turns her bright grin to me before looking over at Josh. "So why am I here?"

"We haven't heard from you for a few days since Storm left the pub in a hurry," I say cautiously. "We were worried about her. Is she okay?"

"You could have asked me that over the phone."

"True, but we have other things to talk about."

She purses her black lips in stark contrast to her pale face. "She's fine. A bit under the weather, but fine."

I lean forward, catching a note in her tone. "Under the weather how? Is she okay?"

"She's fine. Just being an omega."

I blink and exchange a glance with JP. He appears as confused as I do until the penny drops.

“Oooh,” I say, understanding dawning. But with that understanding comes a ferocious, possessive emotion. “*Oh?*” I growl, which confuses JP some more.

He is a bit slow on the uptake.

“Why so aggressive?” Cassidy asks. “It’s a natural thing.”

“If she is in the middle of her heat, then that means some fuckwit alpha has his bulging knot inside her and forgive me if that makes me a bit pissed off.”

“Jealous, you mean?” Cassidy asks with a smirk.

“Grrr.” I can’t answer that. I’m so jealous, I want to march over to Storm’s and show that alpha what a real knot is, along with a close-up of my fist.

I feel the tension ratchet up a notch when JP finally realises what’s going on. In his usual laidback state, Josh broods some more into his ubiquitous cup of coffee.

“Calm your tits,” she giggles. “Storm doesn’t do that.”

I blink. “Do what?”

“She doesn’t take an alpha during her heat. You can rest easier knowing she isn’t banging away like a bunny while you sit there with your dicks in your hands.”

The relief that floods me is genuine and welcome. “Fuck,” I mutter. “Really?”

Cassidy nods. “She is special, no doubt.”

“Wow,” JP breathes out, suddenly alive next to me. The excitement in the air is palpable. “You mean she has *never* taken an alpha during her heat, or just doesn’t do it now? Or this time?”

“Stop with the questions. You’ve already made me spill more than the friend code would allow, and I only did it, so you didn’t go down there and make fools of yourselves with some possessive caveman attitude for no reason.” Then she

fixes me with a fierce glare. “But I hear some of you haven’t been quite so dick-in-hand as others.”

I sit up with a frown as JP and Josh turn their gazes to me as well. I squirm like I’m guilty, but I haven’t done anything. “Me?” I ask incredulously. “I have been the epitome of a saint.”

“Not according to my source,” she says sternly. “I said I would help you if you kept your dicks in your pants. I won’t unleash you on my best friend if you insist on acting like man-whores for the rest of your lives.”

“Back up,” I growl, getting pissed off at the accusation. “I haven’t done anything. Who is your source?”

We glare at each other for a few seconds. “I can’t say, but she saw you and Emma in *elite* last night with your tongues down each other’s throats and your hand up her skirt.”

“Emma?” I spit out and shudder. “Emma Franks?”

She nods warily as my temper has just shot into the red zone.

“Russ?” JP asks carefully.

“No!” I say, jabbing the table with my finger so hard, I think I might break it. “Whoever told you that is a liar and looking for trouble. Tell me right now who it was.” I wouldn’t touch Emma with a barge pole. Not anymore. Not since she cheated on me seven years ago before I became part of JP’s pack. We were serious, despite being so young. High school sweethearts and all that rubbish. I wanted to mate with her, and I thought that is what she wanted as well until she fell into bed with her brother’s best friend.

“Was it Emma?” I ask coldly.

Cassidy blinks. Her face has changed, so I think she knows she’s messed up, and that her ‘source’ has lied.

“Was it?” I ask, my voice getting louder.

She sighs. “Yeah, it was. I literally ran into her on my way here, and when she found out I was coming to meet you, she couldn’t wait to tell me.”

“It’s a lie,” I say quietly. “I said I wouldn’t do that to Storm, and I meant it, regardless of the fact that she doesn’t even know I exist yet.”

“Sorry,” Cassidy murmurs. “You know how the rumour mill is around Knotting Hill.”

The table goes quiet. I’m seething. I want to confront Emma about this and ask what the fuck she is playing at. She doesn’t get to fuck with my life anymore. Even if she didn’t know about Storm and how our pack is serious about her, she knew Cassidy was coming to meet me and deliberately messed with her.

“Let’s forget this and get back to ways we can get Storm to see us for who we really are,” JP says quietly, punching me lightly on the arm. His version of a hug. He knows that Emma destroyed me and that I have trust issues now. It’s why I saw red earlier when I thought about Storm with another alpha. Even though she is single and free to do whoever and whatever she likes, in my mind, she is ours.

“Romance,” Cassidy says. “She is a hopeless romantic. I’m not giving you ammo. Figure it out yourselves. But know that if you woo her like in the Romantic Comedy movies she loves so much, you will get her attention. I guarantee it.”

I nod stiffly, still fuming but trying to get over it to pay attention. “Is she allergic to anything?” I ask.

Silence at the table, but then Cassidy lets out a loud laugh. “No.”

“What are her don’ts?”

“Not telling you that. Figure this shit out for yourselves, boys,” she says, standing up. “I’ve gotta dash. Storm will be back in business the day after tomorrow. I look forward to your efforts and will drop a word now and again in her ear about how well you’re doing...or not.”

She laughs again, and with a waggle of her fingers, she’s gone.

“Well, this sucks. Now what?” Josh asks. “The only thing we know is that she drinks Vodka tonic, likes rom-coms and

her response to a kiss will make your knees weak.”

“Not a lot to go on,” I growl again, riled up now and being reminded of Josh’s kiss with her is aggravating me.

“Come on, lads,” JP says enthusiastically. I think he is enjoying this way more than we are. “If we put our heads together, we can get it together. Josh, you know her mum. Find out what Storm’s favourite song is next time you speak to her. Can you do that?”

Josh nods slowly. “I suppose...”

“And you,” JP homes in on me. “Get your head out of your arse and book an event at *elite* for two weeks’ time. We are going to give Storm Rivers the night of her life and show her we are her future mates.”

Buoyed by his well-known pep, I cheer up a bit and start to get excited. “Heart-shaped balloons and rose petals on the floor. That’s romantic, right?”

I receive two blank looks back.

My heart sinks again. “Right?”

Nineteen

Storm

AFTER HAVING A REALLY lazy last day at home, I return to civilisation five days after my early heat, feeling great and refreshed. All I did yesterday was sleep and actually rest while sleeping. I used the knotty vibrator a couple of times, just in case, but the need for a knot has abated, and I'm ready to face the world and work, again.

Deciding that I deserve a fancy coffee, I head out after getting dressed. I chose my ballet flats again and black pants with a fitted black shirt. It looks a bit chilly out, with a strong breeze, so I throw on a lightweight black coat before leaving for work.

On the lookout for dogs who want to trip me, betas who want to kiss me, and alphas who want to yell at me, I cautiously slip into the coffee shop, breathing in deeply with a smile.

Making my way to the counter, I weave through the tables and then freeze.

That scent.

It's like hot cocoa with marshmallows but way more intense, and it hits my nose in a vigorous wave of

deliciousness. It makes me want to change my order so I can taste this against my tongue and feel the sweetness slide down my throat.

I make the mistake of turning my head to see Russell St. Luc sitting at a table just to the right of me and a bit behind.

He stares at me, his expression filled with surprise, longing and something fierce and lustful.

I quickly snap my head back to face the front and march to the counter, ordering a black coffee so that I can taste the bitterness and not have to crave the sweet deliciousness that is now clawing at me.

Dammit.

Why did I come in here? I should've stayed clear. I should've known something like this would happen after last time. I thought all I had to fear was an overzealous dog, a beta who can kiss me so my knees go weak, and an apple pie alpha who yells at me.

I didn't count on the stealth alpha of the pack. The one I haven't even spoken to before, never mind kissed or dumped coffee on. Bad me for forgetting about him. I recall he was there at the coffee-throwing games, but he was still half-cut from the brief glance I gave him. I figured he wasn't a credible threat. Not like his prime, the illustrious Jonathan-Pierce, who can smell blood in the water from a mile away.

So I hear.

"Thanks," I murmur when the gorgeous barista hands it to me with a knicker-melting smile and grazes of his fingers over mine.

I raise an eyebrow and give him a sexy smile back, enjoying this bit of flirting. It's taking my mind off the imminent problem of exiting the coffee shop past the St. Luc pack ninja.

"Anytime," the barista says, his accent so fucking sexy, I want to climb his hot bod like a tree and see if that heady, dark coffee smell is coming from him or the machines behind him.

“Storm,” he adds in a way that makes me choke on my saliva. He points to his name tag. “Franco.”

“Hi, Franco,” I breathe like an idiot, getting lost in his dark eyes.

“Are you free later, Storm?”

I blink and splutter, feeling my cheeks heat up. “Uhm...”

“There’s this cute little bar down the road. Seven o’clock?”

Wow. Okay. He is forceful. And hot. And so fucking sexy.

“Sure,” I say, deciding what the fuck. I’m free and single, ready to mingle and all that. Why not with the super-hot barista who says my name in a way that makes me think of rolling thunder and flashes of lightning, with rain pounding down around us as we get drenched, locked in a kiss that heats us up?

I frown at the low growl I hear behind me. Franco glances over my shoulder, having heard it as well.

His eyes narrow. “Boyfriend?”

I shake my head, mortified. What is Russell doing? He can’t be growling at me, surely?

“Jealous alpha. You sure he’s not yours?”

“Not mine,” I grit out. “I’ll see you at seven.”

He smiles seductively, and I feel that drinks might not be the only thing on the menu. I turn and stride out of the coffee shop quickly, not trusting myself to say another word to Franco, and needing to get out of the suddenly stifling atmosphere caused by an alpha with a cloud over his head.

I’m several paces down the pavement when I hear my name.

“Storm.”

I turn and then really wish I’d carried on walking. “What?”

Russell gives me a curious look. “You should be careful around him. He asks out all the hot omegas.”

“What’s it to you?”

He hesitates. “Just a friendly warning.”

“Coming from a St. Luc?” I scoff. “I feel this is more like a competition.”

“Do you want it to be?” he asks, coming closer so that scent swarms me like bees in a hive. He drops his tone to one that is husky and sexy. “I have a feeling he would lose.”

I splutter. “Says you. Leave me alone. I can take care of myself.”

Spinning quickly, I hurry along as fast as my full cardboard cup of coffee will allow.

“Storm, wait.”

I ignore him, but I can hear him behind me.

“Storm.”

“Go away. I don’t need your warnings or your advice.”

“Be careful,” he says woefully. I know he’s stopped chasing me as his voice is coming from further away.

I falter and blink, coming back to reality from the hot sexy kiss in the rain, that hasn’t happened and probably never will. Russell has no right to tell me what to do, which makes me want to do it just to spite him. But spite him, why? Why would he care?

I shake my head, shoving all men out of my head in case I start thinking about Joshy’s kiss again. It’s time for work, and everything else can wait.

Twenty

Josh

“EXCUSE ME?” I blurt out, marching around the counter and grabbing Russ’s elbow to drag him further away from the nosey customers.

He came racing in here a few seconds ago, red in the face and spitting feathers.

He hisses. “You heard me.”

“I heard you say that Storm is going on a date with the guy from the coffee shop.”

Russ growls.

“Wow, okay.” It hits me in the gut. I guess the kiss meant more to me than it did to her. Although, in all fairness, she has no idea what we feel for her and was taken completely by surprise by my lips on hers.

It didn’t stop her from kissing me back, though.

But this stings.

I narrow my eyes. “Are you sure that’s what you heard?”

“I saw it with my own eyes, all the flirting. He’s a shark, and I told her so.”

“You spoke to her? What did you say?” This isn’t good. He would’ve reacted like a jealous prick and probably pushed her even further away from us.

“I told her he was after all the hot omegas, and she should be careful.”

I groan and rub my hand over my face. “You fucking wanker.”

“What? I wasn’t going to let her swan off with him.”

“So she said she wouldn’t go?” I’m getting confused now.

“No, she’s still going. I think.” He sighs. “But so are we. We are going to that *cute little bar*,” he says in a terrible Italian accent, “to stop whatever ideas that asshole has.”

I stop to think about this for a moment. Rationally. How can we turn up on her date to ruin it and still have her give us a chance? But on the other hand, what if she goes and ends up in bed with Franco? I mean, I’ve seen this guy at work. He is super smooth, extremely hot and *Italian*, and the women love him. The chances that she falls onto his cock are not that slim. Or maybe I’m being too harsh, and she will see right through him.

I sigh.

“We need to tell JP.”

“Not it,” Russ says quickly, almost as if he was waiting for me to say it.

“You’re a dick, you know that?”

He grins and shrugs. “Look, all I know is that we have our plans for Storm, and we can’t let her go out with this knobber until we see them through. If we seriously can’t get her to love us, then we will have to let her go, and she can bounce up and down on Franco all she likes. But until then...” He pauses, a stricken look on his face.

“What?”

“It just suddenly struck me that she might not love us.”

“You’re only realising that *now*?” I baulk. He is such a dumbfuck.

“Not that I’m not realising it, but it’s hitting home that we might lose her before we’ve even got her. We need to act quicker. Two weeks is too long.”

I consider his words. He’s not wrong. But turning up on her date might only push her straight into Franco.

“Okay, we need to speak to JP.” This at least gives me some time to figure out what we can possibly do about this predicament that won’t end badly for us.

“We will have to wait. He went into the city at the arsecrack of dawn to see his dad. Something about his thirtieth trust.”

“Oh yeah, shit. I forgot about that. Dammit. Well, it’ll have to wait. Go home, think of something that we can do that won’t put Storm off us for life, and I’ll do the same. Maybe when we get to JP later, we will both have some ideas.”

He nods and heads off, leaving me to return to Elle and the old man who came in the other day.

“All right, son?” he asks. “How’s the fair maiden?”

“Not mine, not yet,” I grouse.

“But they kissed!” Elle exclaims. “That has to mean something.”

“Ah, kisses,” he says with a nod. “Better than sex.”

Elle and I exchange an amused glance at his comment.

“She likes you, boy. She wouldn’t have kissed you if she didn’t.”

“He didn’t give her much choice,” Elle says with a laugh. “Kinda swooped in and claimed her.”

He frowns. “Did she kiss you back?”

I nod, feeling like such a fucking idiot. I’m glad there is no one else listening to this. I want to quietly lower myself to the floor behind the counter and stay there for the rest of the day.

“Well, then, there you go.” He grins. “Send me a save-the-date card!”

He waves and also leaves, thankfully. “This is a disaster,” I groan.

“It’s not great,” Elle says sympathetically. “But at least you know she’s not been avoiding you. I think you need to confront this head-on. Go and speak to her. She works at Robb & Robb.”

“I can’t go and speak to her at her place of work. It’s not like this place where *everyone* seems to get involved.”

“So, wait for her lunch break.” She shrugs.

“Like a fucking lap dog?”

“Do you want her or not?” Elle demands fiercely.

“Want,” I murmur, suitably cowed by her attitude. Man, she is bossy. Has she always been this way? “Why are you so invested anyway?”

“Because she’s a lovely omega, and you like her. More than like. You’re *fascinated* by her, and that isn’t something I see every day, Joshy. You’re smitten.”

“Smitten.”

It’s better than *obsessed*, which is where my mind went. But it is quite accurate. I can’t get our kiss out of my head. The feel of her tongue twisting around mine. Her lips pressed against me, her hands on my waist, her breasts soft next to my chest. Her scent consumed me as I tasted her, and almost wept with longing.

My cock goes rigid in my pants, and I clear my throat to try to clear my head. “I’ll be back in a little bit,” I mutter.

“Good choice,” Elle says determinedly.

But I’m not going to see Storm. Not yet. I can’t exactly turn up at her work with a raging hard-on. No, I’m going to see Franco. Talk to him, man-to-man. Maybe he will back off if he knows we are trying to mate with her.

But as luck would have it, when I arrive at the coffee shop fifteen minutes later, he isn't there.

All is not lost, though, as I catch sight of someone else and plaster a smile on my face as she looks up from her table and waves.

“Josh!” Gloria Rivers calls out. “Can you join us? I want to tell you all about how Syn nearly died when she saw the book!”

“Definitely,” I say, planting my arse on the seat next to her. “I’m so glad she loved it.”

Twenty-One

Storm

POSITIVELY ANNOYED WITH RUSSELL, but a little bit excited about Franco, I enter the building for work to see Sadie already there this time. She is smug and irritating with her fake smile.

“Ugh,” I mutter under my breath, but then smile when I see Cheryl. “Hey, can I ask you something?”

I place my bag down and sit, rolling my chair over to hers so Sadie can't hear our conversation.

“Course. What's up?” She settles down for some goss, which I may end up giving her if I'm not careful.

“Your prime knows the St. Lucs, right?”

She nods. “Tim went to school with JP and Russ. Why?” Her gaze goes sly.

“Are they as dickish as they seem?”

She snorts. “Oh, my. Yes, they love a good bonk. But they're good guys deep down. Tim wouldn't still be friends with them if they were complete arseholes. You interested? I could set you up!”

“No!” I say horrified, not having expected such enthusiasm. “It’s just that Josh...” I glance around to make sure no one is listening. “...kissed me the other night. Out of the blue! But I’ve also had a bit of an encounter with JP. He was quite mean.”

Cheryl frowns. “Mean, how?”

“I tripped and spilt coffee on him, by accident obviously, and he yelled at me and told me I had to pay for his dry cleaning! Can you believe it?”

She blinks. “That’s it?”

I nod emphatically.

“Oh. That sounds more like he was trying to rile you up rather than him being mad at you. Did he ask for your name and number?”

“I gave him my name and this place to send his dry-cleaning bill to,” I admit reluctantly.

“Ahahahaha!” she screams with laughter, clapping her hands together while Sadie glares at us. “Oh, Storm. You fell right into that trap! He’s into you.”

“No,” I say, shaking my head. “He wasn’t very nice. And just now, I made a date with Franco from the coffee shop, and *Russell* tried to warn me off. I mean, what the fuck, right?” I huff.

Cheryl shakes her head. “You realise that all of this makes you sound incredibly dumb. One of them yells at you so you give him your name and place of work. Another one *kisses* you, and another warns you off from a hot Italian with a bod that rocks. How was the kiss?”

I groan softly. “So good, but their reputation definitely precedes them. They aren’t into being serious, and I don’t want to be another notch for them.”

She gives me a sympathetic look. “Yeah, I hear you. Do you want me to find out their intentions? I could ask Tim; he’d be super casual about it...”

“No, please don’t do that,” I say desperately. “I’ll deal with it on my own.”

“If you change your mind, I’m happy to help.”

“Thanks,” I murmur and then roll back to my desk before Sadie starts hissing at us.

“By the way, good on you for getting a date with Franco. He’s *hot!*” She licks her finger and places it on her arm, making a sizzling sound. “But watch your back with him. He’s also a massive player. Probably worse than JP.”

“Oh, I know. It’s just for funsies. I don’t expect anything from him.”

“Tell me all about the sex tomorrow.”

“There will be no sex,” I point out.

She looks perplexed. “Then why are you going out with him?”

Good point. Maybe there will be some sex. It’s been a while. I’ve only seen action with my vibrator for a few months.

“Ah,” Cheryl says. “You’re thinking about sex with him now, aren’t you?”

I snicker and feel my cheeks heat up. “Maybe.”

We go quiet as Angela comes into the office. She ignores me completely and has hushed words with Sadie before leaving again.

By that time, Cheryl is already engrossed in her filing, and I’ve got a stack of invoices that won’t pay themselves.

* * *

Later that night, dressed to bowl Franco over in a pink dress with thin straps, a low cleavage and a waterfall skirt, I head out for the short walk to the bar, armed with a purse stuffed with condoms – can’t be too careful – and an anxiety level that is practically shooting off into space. I change my mind three times before I force myself to walk past the coffee shop with the bar in question in my sight.

Pushing the door open, the sounds of a packed bar whoosh out, sending my nerves into a tailspin. But I soldier on now that I'm here. I spot Franco by the bar and roll my eyes. He is talking to a pretty, petite blonde who is looking up at him with doe eyes. She is young and stupid. She's already fallen for him like a ton of bricks. I know that this is nothing, just a bit of fun, and I'm pretty sure I'm only here to get Josh's kiss imprint off my mouth. It's been there for days, taunting me.

If one thing is clear after my conversation with Cheryl, it's that I can't be mooning over the St. Luc beta. He comes as a package and with baggage in the form of his rep. Although, who doesn't have baggage? Well, me, for a start. I'm fairly baggage free—no serious boyfriends who broke my heart or unrequited loves. Nope, just me doing my thing and enjoying myself, waiting for the ones who will sweep me off my feet in a gesture worthy of Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts. I have no doubts in my mind that I want a pack, not just one alpha, although both are socially acceptable. But I want to be surrounded by love and feelings that fulfil my every want and need.

I gulp and realise that maybe I'm more ready for something serious than I thought. Watching Franco flirt with the blonde, I know that being here is a waste of time. I'm about to turn and leave when he looks up, and his eyes light up. He smiles that sultry, sexy smile that has swayed a thousand women, probably more. He abandons the blonde, who glares at me with a furious expression, and weaves his way through the crowds to greet me with an air kiss on both cheeks.

“You are beautiful,” he murmurs.

He's not so bad himself. He's dressed all in black, with a tight tee and sexy jeans.

Ah, fuck it.

Tomorrow I can worry about the future. Tonight, I want a hot alpha, who does indeed smell like the richest coffee beans, between my legs as I ride him into the dawn.

Twenty-Two

JP

“WHERE THE FUCK HAVE YOU BEEN?”

Stepping through the front door that I’ve literally just opened, I pause. “Excuse me?”

Russell and Josh are standing in the entrance hall, glaring at me, arms folded.

“I was with my dad in the city, remember, we talked about this...the terms for my full trust when I turn thirty? Any of this ring a bell?”

“Shut the fuck up and listen,” Josh growls.

“Whoa, tiger, who bit you on the balls?” I ask with a laugh at his stinky attitude. I’m in a rather good mood. I managed to foil my father’s plans to delay my trust, and I’m feeling really happy about that. Not only did I stick it to him, but I will also get the rest of the trust fund, ensuring that I can take care of Storm and my pack for the rest of my life and theirs. Should she come around and see that we aren’t walking dicks, of course. Which, granted, may take some convincing. I frown as Josh punches me on the shoulder.

“What?” I snarl.

“Did you hear a word I just said?”

“No,” I admit.

“Fuck’s sake!” Russell roars. “We need to move. NOW!”

Startled by the aggression from my pack mates, I turn around as they march out of the house, fully expecting me to follow it seems.

“Will someone tell me what is going on, please?” I ask, following them like a lost puppy. What the fuck is that all about? I gather my wits and shove past them on the pavement, hauling them both to a halt to glare at them in annoyance.

“Storm is currently on a date with Franco, the hot Italian barista,” Josh snaps. “So, unless you want him to have his cock inside her for the rest of the evening, I suggest we get a move on to stop that cluster fuck before it even starts.”

“Wait. What? Franco? Where the fuck did this come from?”

“I overheard them making the date this morning,” Russell says.

“And you didn’t think to stop it?” I roar, suddenly getting in on the urgency.

“I tried. She completely sacked me off. Not that I blame her. You two have not exactly shown your finest hours,” he huffs.

“Hey, that kiss was perfect, and she knows it,” Josh says angrily.

“Where?” I thunder.

“The bar down the road,” Russell says, shoving past me to head off in that direction.

“How do we stop this?” Josh asks.

“Fuck knows,” I mutter, my mind racing. Franco is as bad as, if not worse, than us. Well, past us. Present us are doing remarkably well, considering none of us has had pussy for over a week. That’s probably why everyone is so fraught. I know it’s getting to me. But I will endure it for Storm and

know that when I ram my cock inside *her*, worlds will collide, and I'll be able to come inside her like a fountain of spunk bursting out of a pressurised pipe.

I can't help but snicker at the mental image, which doesn't go down well with these two arseholes, who need to lighten up slightly.

"She won't fuck him," I say confidently. "Cassidy said she isn't easy. No way Franco will be able to get between her legs. That's why she is special and why we are not making any headway with her. She doesn't want a man-whore; she wants substance and romance. We have it to give her when she lets us. This is her timetable, and we will do whatever it takes for her."

Almost ceremoniously, I shove open the doors to the bar to announce our arrival.

It is heaving. I grimace at the number of bodies between us and the bar. "Do you see her?"

"There!" Russell says, being two inches taller than Josh and me, placing him around 6 foot two. Bastard. "She's already with him. He's whispering in her ear. She's giggling, grrrr..." He is about to elbow his way through the crowds when I stop him.

"What is your plan?"

"To introduce Franco to my fist, that's what."

"You can't do that. Storm won't appreciate it."

"How do you know? Maybe she is having a shit time and wants someone to help her?"

I glance over at her. "Yeah, nope on the shit time," I point out as she smiles and places her hand lightly on his arm.

He beams at her.

It's sickening. And we are standing here watching it like cock-nuggets. "Think!" I snap. Violence isn't the answer, but neither is going over there and trying to lure her away.

I watch as Josh marches over to them and groan, but I inch closer, wondering what the fuck he is going to say. It's too late now; he's already saying it loudly and in a tone that says he is extremely upset and worried.

"He's a fucking genius," I murmur.

"Storm!" he cries. "What about our kiss the other night? I've thought of nothing else since then. I thought it meant something; I thought we were together." He stops to glare at Franco in disgust.

Franco raises an eyebrow and steps back. I didn't figure he would be the one to fight for a shag when he probably has someone else lined up as a backup.

"What?" Storm asks confused, giving Josh a filthy glare. "What are you talking about? It was one brief kiss. It meant nothing. Franco, don't listen to him."

"Nothing?" Josh asks, his wounded expression almost breaking my heart. "How can you say that?"

"Uhm," Storm says, glancing around and noticing everyone watching her. Her cheeks turn an adorable pink, and she lowers her eyes. "What is this?" she mumbles.

"I think you two have some issues to sort out," Franco interrupts. "I'll see you later, Storm." He slips off into the throng of people, to her dismay.

It fires up those engines that I know are simmering under the surface. "You dick," she hisses and throws her drink in Josh's face.

I wince but make a note to tell him I'm pleased he took one for the team.

"How dare you?" she grits out, places her empty glass on a table, and shoves her way past him and several people, including us, to burst out of the door, her dress swishing behind her.

"That was..." I start, but Josh gives me a scathing glare while he runs his hand through his soaking-wet hair.

"Necessary," he growls and follows Storm out of the bar.

We are quick to catch up.

“Go away!” Storm bellows as he catches up with her. “You had no right to do that. I’m not your girlfriend. You don’t get to be jealous.”

“We don’t,” I say, drawing to a stop beside them. “But we are. We are jealous fools of any man who gets to spend time with you that isn’t us. You have bewitched us, Storm Rivers. We are going to prove to you that we are three men you can rely on and need in your life.”

“What?” she asks, desperately looking around. “Why? You don’t even know me!”

“Then let us get to know you, Storm.”

We lock gazes, the tension searing the air between us.

“Let us know you, and have you know us back. We want you, Storm, and we are willing to do whatever it takes to make you ours.”

Twenty-Three

Storm

“YOU’RE ALL FUCKING CRAZY!” I exclaim, pulling my gaze away from JP’s piercing blue eyes.

Josh takes a step forward, drawing my attention to him. “Crazy for you,” he says, a triumphant gleam in his eyes.

I narrow mine in fury. *How? That has to be a coincidence, right? He couldn’t possibly know...unless someone told him.*

I back away slowly. “You need to stay away from me,” I say. “I don’t want anything to do with you. We are not compatible.”

“We are, more than you know, Storm, and we will prove it,” JP says, gripping Josh’s arm to stop him from following me. “You’ll see, Storm.”

“Whatever,” I growl and turn to walk quickly away, hoping they don’t follow me and find out where I live. Unless they already know that as well.

With my hands shaking with trepidation, but also something else that is lurking under the surface that I don’t want to acknowledge even for a moment, I focus on the anger that they ruined my date and my plans for a good shag. I’m

sure Franco knows what he's doing in the sack, and I'm disappointed I don't get to find out.

With a sigh, I kick off my shoes when I enter my flat, and smile at the memory of throwing my drink in Josh's face. As far as swills go, that one will go down as one of Knotting Hill's best. I'll make sure of it.

* * *

The following Monday, after a weekend of hiding out in my flat, eating, watching movies and sleeping, not wanting to set foot outside in the pouring rain, I know that I have to make a move to work. The sun is weak, the clouds scudding along the pale blue sky with the cool wind. The weather seems to fit my mood as I make my way to the coffee shop in the hopes of seeing Franco to apologise. Nothing will come of it, but what Josh did was so rude, and I won't be a party to it.

I practically skid to a halt when I see Russell leaning casually up against the wall next to the door, his black sunglasses perched on his face, even though the sun is hardly glaring this morning.

When he spots me, he straightens up and smiles shyly, holding out a takeaway cup of coffee to me.

"No!" I say, holding my hand up. "Just no!"

Ugh! Why? Why are they stalking me? I can't even grab a coffee and issue an apology *on their behalf* without them lurking in the shadows. Okay, out in the open, but still.

"Please?" he asks, taking a step closer.

"No. Leave me alone."

I turn and walk as quickly as my mid-sized heels will allow in the direction of the doctor's office.

With my head down against the wind that is blowing directly into my face, I don't see Josh until it's too late.

He is outside the practice with a lemon muffin, probably in the hopes that I would've accepted the coffee from his packmate.

“I’m telling you the same as him,” I say, all anger at this setup leaving me. I just don’t have the energy. “No. Leave me alone. I don’t want this.”

“What is it you don’t want, Storm? Tell us so we know. We are trying here to be the men we know you deserve.”

“Stop,” I beg him. “Please. I don’t know what I want anymore...” I bite my bottom lip, the sudden tears welling up, taking me by surprise. “Please just go.”

I rush up the steps and push my way into the office with a thundercloud over my head.

Sadie looks up and then glances at her watch with a disapproving tightening of her lips.

“Fuck you, Sadie,” I yell, not even caring that there is a patient waiting. “I’m not late. I’m two minutes early, you fucking cunt.”

I practically kick my way into the back office, thankful that Angela or David wasn’t there to hear my horrible outburst.

“Well, well...” Sadie stammers, completely taken aback by my verbal attack.

I ignore her and dump my bag on the floor, kicking my chair around so I can sit down and hope the floor swallows me up, but it spins around and around, which further exacerbates Cheryl’s snickering fit. She is snorting behind her hand and not making it easy for me to keep a straight face.

I ignore her as well, and with my head held high, I get the chair to stop spinning and sit, rolling it up tightly against my desk. Luckily my back is to Sadie, but I can feel her livid glare on me. She doesn’t have the balls to say anything to my face, but I’m fairly sure Angela will be hearing about this, if not from her, then from the client in the waiting room.

Guess I’ll be going to work at my parent’s practice after all, now.

“Wow,” Cheryl says. “No words necessary, but here, this came for you.” She rolls over to hand me a white envelope

with my name scrawled in an elegant script on the front.

I frown. “What is it?”

She shrugs. “How should I know?”

With a shaking hand, I open it, half expecting to see my P45 inside, which tells me I’m fired.

Instead of the earnings tax form, I see a cheque. Pulling it out, with Cheryl practically breathing down my neck, my frown deepens when I see it is issued from England’s premier bank, where only the elite can afford to keep their money. Dropping my gaze to the bottom, I see a fancy signature. Taking in the amount for twenty pounds, I turn it over and glare at the pink post-it note stuck to the back.

For your dry cleaning
JP

The initials are large, with a little heart in the P adorning a smiley face.

“You have got to be kidding me,” I growl.

“Oooh,” Cheryl says. “He’s paying for your dry cleaning.”

I throw the cheque down and shove it over to the back of the desk. “He can fuck off, the fucking wank...head!”

“Huh?” Cheryl asks. “Wank is a verb; I don’t...I don’t get it.”

“You don’t have to get it, *Cheryl*; it’s a fucking insult.” I am steaming mad. I’m *convinced* there is steam coming out of my ears. “Sorry,” I mutter. “I’m being a proper bitch today.”

“No apology necessary to me,” she says with another snort behind her hand. “JP has really gotten under your skin.”

“They all have, and not in a good way,” I complain. “I know I’m being awful, but they’re coming at me and turning my head all around. They’re supposed to be the bad guys. The ones I can turn away from and not look back. Why have they changed the rules?”

“Maybe they haven’t, hun. Maybe you have?”

She glides back over to her desk and gets to work, leaving me to contemplate what she said. I don’t think I have changed the rules, but something has definitely changed. I think I’m being so against them because there is no future with them. They will get what they want and then leave me. I can’t let them in when I know I want more in my future, and I want it *now*. I’m ready to share my nest with my mates, but I know it can’t be them.

With a heavy sigh, I get on with my work in the hopes that I still have a job once Angela finds out about my outburst.

Twenty-Four

Storm

AS THE END of the day rolls around, I lift my head up from my desk, not happy that Angela didn't collar me about the incident yet. I worked all through lunch in case the St. Lucs were lurking, hoping it would give Angela the opportunity to call me out about my behaviour.

She didn't, and now I'm left hanging on by a thread overnight to see what happens tomorrow. If I weren't a nervous ball of anxiety, I would go and confront her, but that just isn't me. I'd rather stew in my own unease than face down the inevitable sacking that is headed my way.

"Cheryl," I murmur when we reach the door.

Thankfully Sadie has already fucked off with her face like a bag of spanners after this morning.

"What's up?"

"Will you check for me? Outside?"

"Check for what? To see if Sadie's prime is waiting for you?"

Her seriousness sends a bolt of panic racing through my blood. "Err, *no!*" I say, horrified. "But also, *yes*, now that you

fucking mention it! I meant the St. Lucs.”

She giggles. “Give me a sec.”

She disappears through the door, and I watch, wringing my hands. When she gives me the thumbs up, I breathe out in relief and head out myself, keeping a close eye out in case she was being a bitch and fooled me.

Luckily for both of us, she didn’t.

I scamper off down the street, head down, clutching the handle of my bag, when I hear a woman’s voice call out, “Storm?”

I stop and turn to it, not having recognised her. A pretty blonde omega saunters up to me, her blue eyes wide and innocent, a smile on her face.

“Hi, I’m Emma,” she says. “Can we talk?”

“About what, Emma?” I ask. “I’m kind of in a hurry.”

A hurry to get indoors where no one can find me.

“It’s about Russell St. Luc.”

I frown and start walking again.

She keeps in step with me, forcing me to ask, “What about him?”

“I heard a rumour that he was there last night when Josh broke up you and Franco. I don’t know what’s going on with you and the St. Lucs but know that Russell climbed out of my nest this morning. I don’t want you to get hurt, you know...”

I stop walking and turn to glare at her. Is she for real? “And?”

She blinks, slightly taken aback that I haven’t started wailing in disappointment at her words.

“Well, just, you know, we’re together again, and I don’t want anything fucking it up. Do what you want with Josh and JP, but Russell is mine, ‘kay?”

She folds her arms defensively, glaring expectantly at me.

“Fine,” I say eventually when it becomes apparent she wants me to say something. “He’s all yours. Have all three of them. My give a fuck fairy is on strike.”

Her eyeballs nearly pop out of her sockets. “Great,” she splutters as if she has no clue what else to say. “I just wanted to clear that up.”

“Good for you. See ya.” I stalk off, marching up the pavement, desperate to get away from this woman who has crushed whatever hope I might’ve had about them. They haven’t changed one single bit. Russell crawled out of Emma’s nest to greet me with coffee this morning. I mean, What. The. Fuck?

“What the fuck are they playing at?” I grumble as I stub my toe on a crooked paving stone, cursing loudly to the amusement of the pack of young buck alphas standing outside the newsagents.

Could this day get any worse?

Don’t answer that, Storm. You are asking for trouble.

I practically run the rest of the way home and shut myself into my flat, leaning against the door as my bag drops from my shoulder to the floor. Tears spring into my eyes, and I brush them away. Ever since the St. Lucs came into my life because of that fucking Cockapoo, my life has been ruined, and revelations about myself have sprung up that I’m not ready for.

There is only one clear thing in mind that I have to do now.

Bending down to snatch my phone out of my bag, I call my mum.

“Everything okay?” she asks as usual.

“No!” I wail. “I need help.”

“What with?” She remains calm in the face of my anguish.

“I need you to help me find a pack to mate with.”

Silence.

“Mum? Are you still there?”

“Yes. I’m just a bit gobsmacked. When did you decide this?”

“Just now, but really, it’s been brewing for a while. I think it’s why I haven’t really tried to find anyone to be serious with. I’ve been avoiding what I really want, telling myself that I wasn’t ready. But I am.”

“And you want my help to find you a pack?” Her hesitant tone tells me she doesn’t quite believe her ears.

“Yes. Will you help me?”

“YES!” she bellows in my ear. “Yes, I will help you. In fact, I know just the pack! When do you want to meet them?”

“What?” I ask, not quite keeping up. “You know of a pack waiting to mate?” Something is really suss about that, like she was secretly looking and hoping I’d come around.

“I do. Let me make some plans, and I’ll get back to you!”

She is so excited, I shrug and go with it. “Awesome,” I mutter. “Can’t wait.”

Twenty-Five

Russell

JP COMES BURSTING into my bedroom like an angry pitbull. “You need to talk to Emma right the fuck now!”

I look up from scrolling through my phone. “I don’t want to. Why?”

“Tim Jackson just rang. His omega, Cheryl, works with Storm and just saw Emma march over to her and start speaking to her about something. If this is even remotely in the same *hemisphere* as what she did with Cassidy, you need to shut her the fuck up!”

I sit up. He is absolutely incensed. I’ve never seen him so angry before. Not that I can blame him. If Emma is meddling again, then she definitely needs to be shut up. I just don’t want to be the one to do it. I swore to myself that I would never speak to her again after what she did to me, and despite being in several local messenger chats seeing as our friend circles overlap, I’ve been true to that promise.

“Can’t you do it?” I ask hopefully.

“No,” he growls. “Your mess, you clean it up.” He bangs my door closed again, storming off up the stairs to his room.

“Fuck,” I mutter and glance at my phone. With a sigh, I open the messenger app and find Emma in the list of participants. With a grimace, I stand up and dial, taking the stairs down to the kitchen quickly. I think I’m going to need a drink after this.

“Hi, Russ,” she says a few rings later. “What’s up?”

“You know exactly why I’m ringing. What did you say to Storm?”

“Storm?”

“Storm Rivers, a few minutes ago.”

“Oh, that,” she giggles. “Just a chat between girls.”

“What did you say?” I grit out.

“I told her to stay away from you. I want you back, Russ, and I’m going to get you. You know you still want me.” Her tone has changed, completely shocking me. She is fucking delusional. “Join me outside.”

I swerve away from the kitchen towards the front door and yank it open. Emma waves at me from across the street, where she is leaning up against the small red-brick wall that separates the pavement from the park. She trapped me. I’ll fucking kill JP when I get my hands on him. I hang up and storm over the road, stopping in front of her, ready to end this once and for all.

“Stop spreading lies about me and stay the fuck away from Storm. Do you hear me, Emma? I’m not fucking about. This is serious, and you are being a complete bitch. Back the fuck off and stay away from me.”

“Ooh,” she says, pursing her lips. “So aggressive.” She blows out a breath and looks to the side. “Look, Russ. I know I fucked up, and I’m sorry. I still love you, and I want you back. I just want to make sure that no one is messing with this. I know we can work it out.”

“Fuck right off,” I scoff incredulously. “You don’t love someone and then cheat on them.”

“There were extenuating circumstances,” she says.

“I don’t give a flying fuck!”

“It was my first heat. You were out of town with the boys, and I didn’t know what else to do. Tony was...there,” she says in a hurry.

My blood runs cold, and I close my eyes. “Why did you never tell me this before?”

“Because when you found out, you wouldn’t even look at me, never mind talk to me.”

“If you cared at all, you would’ve found a way, text, email, letter, had someone tell me. You know I would have listened under those circumstances, Emma. But it doesn’t change anything. And it sure as fuck doesn’t mean we can pick up where we left off now. I’ve moved on, and you mean nothing to me anymore.”

Tears prick her eyes, the oldest trick in the book and one I realise now she used to do all the time. “Please, Russ. I’m sorry. I was so embarrassed; I didn’t know how to tell you the truth.”

“Emma, I’m going to say this one last time, and I swear to God you need to hear me. Don’t fucking mess with Storm. Our pack is serious about her, and you have just royally fucked things up. If we don’t come back from this, I will make sure your life is a living hell. Are we clear?”

She blinks, anger replacing the crocodile tears. “I don’t know what you find so fucking fascinating about her anyway. She was with *Franco* the other night. What kind of desperate whore do you have to be...”

I let out a loud growl with serious intent. I’ve never, ever used it to force submission from an omega before, and I hope to never again. She stops talking and bows her head instantly, the omega inside her cowering to the alpha in me.

“Stay the fuck away from Storm and stop spreading these lies about us. Do I make myself clear?” I hiss.

She nods slowly, her hands trembling. “Yes.”

Without another word, I give her a look of disgust and turn to walk back to the house, practically kicking the door off its hinges with my anger.

“Sorted?” JP asks, standing with his arms folded in the entrance hall, Josh at his side.

“Sorted in as much as she will shut her mouth. Storm is another issue altogether,” I say with a sigh and rub my hands over my face as I kick the door closed behind me.

“We need to do damage control, and fast,” Josh says.

“Agreed,” JP says. “But first, we need to find out what Emma said. Did she tell you?”

I shake my head. “Just that she didn’t want anyone getting in the way of *us*.” I sneer, getting angry all over again.

JP sighs with me. “So we can probably assume she told her you shagged or something.”

“Probably.”

“Great. Just great.” He turns and stalks off into the kitchen with Josh behind him.

I join them, and we sit around the table despondently as we try to come up with something that can fix this mess, knowing that it will take mountains.

Twenty-Six

Storm

“Wow.” Cassidy looks at me with her black-eyelinered eyes and lets out a breath.

“Yup.”

“You sure?”

I nod. “Yeah. This whole thing has made me realise what I want, what I’ve been denying to myself for a while.”

“Are you going to tell the St. Lucs then?”

I glare at her. “No. What do they have to do with any of this?”

She purses her lips. “Don’t you want to get to find out?”

“No. So what if they say they’ve changed? What if they get bored of me when they’ve got me and cheat on me or ditch me? I can’t, Cass.”

“So, you’re holding their pasts against them? Forgive me if I’m wrong, but weren’t you about to shag Franco last night? Hmm. You weren’t too bothered about his past?”

“That’s different,” I huff, seriously getting annoyed with her. “That was just a shag. Long term...I can’t see myself with

the St. Lucs, just like I wouldn't see myself with Franco. They're good for a night and then bye-bye."

"You're missing my point..."

"Which is?" I practically growl.

"That you were going to shag Franco and then not look back. How is that different to what the St. Lucs used to do? And believe me when I say it is *used* to."

We glare at each other for a long few minutes.

I heave a sigh of epic proportions. "Okay, you've got me there. But I'm not trying to court anyone or trying to convince them I've changed. And you know I don't sleep around that much. Franco was a knee-jerk reaction. I doubt I would've gone through with it. I nearly walked out, but he saw me first."

"A knee-jerk reaction to what?"

I pinch my nose, trying not to remember.

"Storm..."

I scrunch my eyes shut. "Russell's scent, okay? It threw me completely off with how enticing it was."

"So, you smelt the alpha and then decided to jump on another one to get it out of your nasal passages?"

"In a manner of speaking."

She snorts. "Oh, this is good stuff. You couldn't make it up."

"Fuck off."

We exchange a smile, but then she goes serious and looks away. "I have to confess something."

"Let me guess. You've been helping JP and his crew get to me?" I ask sardonically. I mean, *someone* had to tell them what my favourite song was. It's old, and a stab in the dark just isn't possible.

Her gaze shoots back to mine. "How did you know?"

"They know some stuff. I can only imagine it was you. Plus, you were trying to get me to go to drinks with them, *and*

I bet you had something to do with Elle's drinks thing before my heat."

"Hear me out..."

"No," I say, not angrily, but fed the fuck up of the St. Lucs. "I can't look past the number of omegas their dicks have gone in. Even during a rut, that's way more than I can fathom. And it's not even about the sex. It's about the fact that players don't change. They look for challenges and then get bored when the challenge is over."

"I don't think that's the case here, but I'm out. You've made your feelings clear, and I won't say another word, for or against." She holds her hands.

"Thanks," I say, taking it at face value and dropping the subject. "So, who do you think my mum has lined up?" I snort to get the night back on track.

She lets out a loud laugh. "Oh, my God! I cannot wait to see. They'll be perfect for you, though. I know your mum. Nothing less than the best for her baby. I wonder if she's got more than one? Like a runner-up?"

I giggle. "I wouldn't put it past her."

"Aww, Stormy Rivers, all grown up and ready to mate." She gets a bit teary. "Please don't ditch me when you're all loved up."

"Don't be daft. We are besties for life and the afterlife."

She grins, happy with my reassurance.

But the cloud scurries back over my head when I think about Emma.

"What is it?" Cassidy asks, sensing the mood change suddenly.

"Do you know an omega called Emma? Blonde, pretty?"

She nods slowly. "Emma Franks? What did she do? Whatever it is, do not believe a word of it. She thought I was getting it on with the St. Lucs, and she clam-slammed me so fucking hard, I thought she was about to get physical. She told

me she and Russell were hooking up in *elite*, but I know it's not true."

I blink at that info dump. "What? Why did she think you were getting it on with them?" The pang of hurt I feel over that startles me, but I push it back.

"Because I was meeting them in secret to talk about you."

"Oh." I chew my lip. "She's lying then?"

"What did she say?"

"She said that Russell climbed out of her nest this morning. But then he was waiting for me at the coffee shop."

"And how did that make you feel?"

I roll my eyes. "What is this Psych 101? To be honest, I don't know. Sad, I guess that I was right about them."

"It's not true. I confronted him about her the other day, and he was mad. Like flaming mad and upset and worried about how it would affect things with you. There is no way he was lying. She is. She is toxic."

I gulp. I guess it doesn't matter anyway. "Film?"

"You know it." She bustles about getting us one lined up while I make us sandwiches and crisps, not having much else in. I really need to go shopping. Soon. Tonight, though, I want to forget about my impending sacking from Robb & Robb, the St. Lucs, Franco, Emma and everything else crappy that has happened over the last few weeks.

Twenty-Seven

Josh

I LOOK up from my notebook, where I'm sitting on my bed.

"It's 2AM," I say quietly.

"Can't sleep. Have you even tried yet?" JP says.

"Nope. Won't bother for another hour."

"I need to get pissed," he says, coming in and flopping down on the bed.

"No one is stopping you."

"I'm stopping me. When I drink, I get horny."

"Hornier, you mean."

"Whatever."

"Get a sex doll." I go back to my writing. I don't need JP's anxiety over not getting shagged, aggravating my own. Not that I'm anxious over the shagging. It turns out I don't need it. I just need more coffee.

"Eww," he exclaims, sitting up. "Is that what you do?"

"Nope, don't need to."

“You are so fucking blasé about everything, aren’t you? Just sitting there all broody and shit.”

I shrug. “Not about everything.”

“No, Storm riles you up. Man, you did good the other night, breaking her and Franco apart. Oscar-winning performance.”

“Wasn’t acting. It hurts.”

Silence.

“Shit. Yeah, I guess it would.”

“Not helping, so if you have anything poignant to say, say it, or go get some sleep.”

“Neither you nor Russ has asked about my dad.”

I look up, eyes narrowed. “You told us.”

“But you didn’t ask what his plan was.”

“Figured it doesn’t matter if you satisfied his requirement.”

“Christ,” he mutters and rubs his face.

“Okay, tell me. What did he want you to do?”

“He wants me mated and with either a baby born or one on the way with my mated omega before my thirtieth birthday.”

I try not to gape because that would ruin the broody persona I’ve got going on. “What?” I ask, instead appearing puzzled. Man, his dad is a knob.

“Yeah.”

“And you told him what exactly that made him happy?”

“I told him we were serious about Storm, and we’d be mating any day now.”

I groan loudly. “Why did you do that? We are about as far away from that as we were two weeks ago!”

“I know, but Dick-dad was so fucking smug, like he knew it wouldn’t happen and he could delay it for another five years. I wanted to show him he was wrong.”

“This is not good, JP. What if we get her, and she finds out about this? It will look seriously bad.”

“I know,” he says. “Which is why I have to figure out a way to tell her without it sounding like we’re only doing this for that reason.”

“Like we don’t have enough against us, and now this. Dammit, JP. You should’ve mentioned this before now.”

“Mentioned what?” Russell asks, leaning in the doorway, dishevelled and nowhere close to sleep. I don’t blame him after the Emma thing. Fuck. This is all such a mess.

JP fills him in while I glower at him.

“Between you two, your outside factors are fucking this up. I’m the only one making headway with her. Maybe it’s time you two backed off and let me take the lead on this. I can get her to come to me without all your shit getting in the way.”

Two furious alphas glare at me, but I know I’m right.

And so do they.

Gloria has given me a wealth of information to be cracking on with, I just don’t seem to be able to get anywhere near her to try. And it’s not like I’m *keeping* it from JP and Russ, but this is stuff that is tailor-made for me by her mother, who knows me. She doesn’t know them.

Inspiration then hits me. “You need to meet her parents. It’s the only way.”

“How so?” JP asks, ignoring my previous statement in favour of the one he prefers.

I sigh and come clean as well. “I saw Gloria the other day in the coffee shop. We chatted about stuff. Storm mostly.”

“And?”

“And her mum likes me. She told me a few things to try.”

“Like the song?” Russell asks.

“Yeah, it’s her favourite song. She is a big fan of Madonna’s earlier works.”

“Does she like 80s music in general?” JP asks curiously.

“Yeah.”

“Mixed tape!” he bellows, leaping off the bed.

“Way ahead of you...” I lean over to the bedside table and drag the old cassette out of the drawer. I had to ransack my parent’s attic for this and something to mix it and play it on. Luckily my mum doesn’t chuck stuff out lightly.

“You were going to do this without us?” Russell asks, getting annoyed.

“No, I was going to tell you when it was ready. I don’t need you hounding me night and day. It’s not easy to get this shit together, you know.”

“This is good!” JP says, clearly not bothered about my secret gift. “This is really, really good.”

“Yeah, I know, so please don’t fuck it up. Keep your ex-girlfriends and dads away from her until we can stand outside her window and play this for her.”

“Yes, done and done,” JP says, punching Russell on the arm to agree. “This is going to be so good. But I have a better idea than playing it outside her window....”

Russell and I sit back and listen to JP’s idea, which, I have to admit, is pretty fucking fantastic. It can take everything else we know and have planned and roll it all into one, and she will be swept off her feet, no doubt.

We’ve got this.

Twenty-Eight

Storm

I'M DITHERING.

I don't know what to do about the situation with Sadie. Do I confront Angela and demand to know what's going on, or do I leave it and see what happens?

I glare at the practice from a hundred feet away but then jump when a car slides up to the curb next to me. The window slides down silently to reveal David Robb.

"Everything okay, Storm?" he asks, his jovial face slightly concerned.

I always thought he was nice, but now I'm wondering if he's the same as Angela: a snake.

"Uhm, yep," I mutter.

"You sure?"

I nod.

"Okay, see you inside." He slides the window back up and drives off, turning down a side road which leads to the parking at the back of the practice.

Inhaling deeply, on the look out for prowling packs, I put my head down and motor forward, stamping up the steps and

shoving the door open.

My heart is hammering in my chest.

It leaps into my throat when I see Angela hovering.

“Oh, Storm,” she says. “Might I have a word?”

I nod and gulp, knowing this is it. Sadie is already here, gloating like a fuckhead. I give her a filthy look just to make myself feel better. She sneers and ducks her head as Angela passes by with me trailing after her. She pushes open the side door, and I follow her down the corridor to her office.

“Close the door, please,” Angela says, sitting on the edge of her desk.

I do as she asks and then sit in the chair she indicates with her glasses which she has removed, to peer at me closely.

“About yesterday,” I start, gathering my courage.

“Never mind that,” she says, waving her hand. “It was a bit unprofessional with a client waiting, but you made her day.” She smiles tightly.

“Oh, still. I’m sorry,” I mumble. “So, I’m not fired?”

“Fired?” she asks in surprise. “Why no, of course not.”

“Oh, thanks.” I am shocked and relieved. That doesn’t last long, though, when she leans forward.

“I wonder if I might bother you for another *errand*.” She doesn’t even bother to phrase it as a question.

My heart sinks. Here it is. “Hm?”

“I wonder if you might grab a screenshot of your parents’ new patients over the last month.”

I blink.

She doesn’t move a muscle.

I swallow, but my mouth has gone dry, so I cough and splutter, waving my hand around as I panic when I can’t breathe.

“Here,” she says, handing me a bottle of unopened water.

I take it from her and break the seal, ripping the cap off and taking a big gulp. “Sorry,” I gasp. “Sorry.”

She shrugs and smiles. “I believe I’ve been quite accommodating about your outburst to poor Sadie yesterday. Perhaps we could call this *quid pro quo*, hm?”

Suddenly, my anger flares up, and I know exactly what I have to do. Without even thinking about it, I stand up and shove the water in my bag, which I sling over my shoulder with more violence than I anticipated. It swings dangerously close to Angela’s face. She rears back and stands up.

“No!” I say loudly, so there is absolutely no doubt. “No, I will not spy on my parents for you. I shouldn’t have done it last time, and I *will not* do it now. Threaten me with a firing all you like; it doesn’t matter. I quit.”

I don’t even wait for her to say anything. I spin on my heel and march out of the office, hastily walking down the corridor to the back office, trying not to cry. My whole life has just crashed down around me. Without a job, I have no money, and with no money, I can’t keep my flat.

Fuck. Fuck. Keep moving, girl.

I roll into the back office like a cloud of thunder and stride over to my desk. I snatch up the cheque that JP sent to me, knowing I’m going to need every penny. I smile sadly at a shocked Cheryl, who probably assumes I’ve been sacked, and with my middle finger stuck up at Sadie, I storm out of the office and, with trembling hands, shove open the door to the practice, stumbling down the steps as tears fill my eyes.

I sniff and then slam into someone who is built like a brick wall.

“Fuck,” I mutter, sniffing again.

Only this time, I freeze.

I get a lungful of apple pie with Chantilly cream, and I groan inwardly.

“Storm,” JP says quietly, grasping my shoulders gently. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” I blurt out. “Just go away.”

He drops his hands instantly and takes a step back.

I surprise both him and myself when I suddenly fling myself at him, wrapping my arms around him and sobbing wildly into his t-shirt.

“Fuck, I’m sorry,” I snort. “I’m all about ruining your clothes.”

“Hey,” he says, pulling me closer. “You can ruin every item of clothing I have it makes you feel better.”

“It makes me feel worse. Now I have to pay for m-more d-dry cleaning, and I don’t have a j-job!” I shriek at him, my mood erratic now that the implications have set in. “I need to fix this. I need to go back in and fix this...”

I turn, but JP grabs my elbow. “Slow your roll, beautiful. You are in no state to fix anything. Tell me what happened?”

I open my mouth to blab all but realise I can’t. I can’t put myself in that position with the Robbs. They will get in so much trouble if the ethics board finds out about this, and that will come back on me. I’m a nobody; they are influential people in this community. Panic spikes my blood, and I lean my forehead against JP’s chest, breathing in his calming scent.

“I just quit my job,” I mutter.

“Trouble?”

“You could say that.”

“Then you did the right thing.”

“Easy for you to say, Richie-Rich.”

He snorts. “She’s funny too.” His tone is sweet and gorgeous and lulls me into calming down slightly. I clutch his t-shirt and then pull back, glaring at it.

“You’re a dick, you know that?”

He glances down and chuckles. “Reminds me of you and will even more now that your scent is all over it.”

“My snot and tears. You’re going to have to wash it.”

“Nope.”

“You’re gross.”

“Want to go home?”

I nod. “I’m okay. Thank you, but you don’t have to walk me home.”

“Drink then?”

I shake my head. “I need to bury myself in my nest until I work up the guts to find another job.”

His heart starts to pound under my hands, still resting on his chest at the mention of my nest.

“Let me take you home. Make sure you get there safely,” he croaks.

I don’t even have the energy to argue with him. I nod and let him lead me away, his arm around me as I rest my head on his shoulder.

It sends a bolt of fear through me how natural and how perfect it feels.

I pull back and say, “It’s okay. I can take it from here.” I dig around in my bag for a tissue, finding a pocket packet and pulling one out.

“Let me take care of you, please, Storm. I can’t just walk away knowing you’re upset. I know you don’t believe us, but we are serious about wanting to know you.”

I gulp and ignore him, walking in the direction of my home, realising I’m leading him straight to my abode, but I don’t care right now. I’m feeling sorry for myself, angry, sad, and panicked about what I’m going to do.

When we arrive at the front door of my building, I punch in the code and shove the door open.

“Thanks,” I murmur.

“Anytime,” he replies.

Our heated gaze meets.

His bright blue eyes are wary and serious.

My breath is coming in soft pants.

He lets out a soft growl.

The purr that escapes me is uncontrollable.

Taking one step forward puts him in my space. He crushes me to him, holding me tightly as his lips bruise mine, a kiss so fierce I respond to it with a driving desire, clinging to him desperately.

I stumble backwards, pulling away, and without thinking, just feeling, I grab his hand and lead him up the one flight of stairs to my flat.

It takes an eternity.

Struggling with my key, I eventually get it unlocked and kick it open, throwing my bag on the floor. I turn around and pull JP closer to me again. He hesitantly reaches for me, cupping my face before he swoops in with an expert kiss that sends a rocket of lust shooting through me. Kicking the door shut behind him, he walks us back into the flat, his tongue twisting around mine in an erotic dance that I never want to end.

Withdrawing slightly, I struggle out of my jacket, letting it drop on the floor. I rip open my blouse, popping a button or two, to expose my breasts to him encased in a lacy bra that makes him moan in desire. It fires up my arousal. I drag him back to me, pressing my lips to his again, cupping the back of his head as I rise on my tiptoes to get even closer to him. He is tall, about six inches taller than me. I feel small and delicate next to him. Even more so when with a loud growl, his hands circle my waist, and he lifts me up. I wrap my legs around him as he slams me up against the wall.

His breath is ragged when his palms brush over my nipples. I'm purring wildly, wiggling to get my pants undone so he can touch me properly.

"Fuck," he groans when my hands brush over his rock-hard cock.

It is straining to get to me, and I want it. I don't care about anything except the lust coursing through my veins.

“Storm,” he rasps, grasping my waist again.

He lifts me off him, placing me on my feet. I reach for the button and zip on my pants, but he places his hand softly over mine, a serene smile curving his sexy lips.

“No,” he says. “Not now. Not like this.”

“What?” I ask, shaking my head in confusion.

“I’m showing you the man I want to be for you, Storm.” He removes his hand and takes another step back.

“But I’m here, ready,” I splutter, never having been turned down by an alpha or any man before in my life during sex. What the fuck is this? Another game?

He shakes his head. “I want you. Christ, you have no idea. But when I take you, I want it to be because you really want it, not just because you are in a bad place.”

“I’m fine,” I exclaim.

He sadly cups my face. “No. Our time will come, Storm, and when it does, it will be spectacular.”

He drops his hand, and with a lingering look back at me, he leaves my flat and me, half-clothed, horny as fuck and flaming, lividly mad.

Twenty-Nine

JP

IN A DAZE, a state of pure disbelief at myself and my actions, I walk away from Storm's flat and back towards the house on Lansdowne Crescent. I'd shown up as part of our plan to be in Storm's face wherever she turned so that we would or could eventually wear her down. I did not expect her to come storming out of her place of work in tears. But it was the best thing that could ever have happened. I showed her.

I proved to her that I could walk away from her because the timing wasn't right for us. She thinks I'm a walking cock, and prior to that day when she dumped coffee on me, I'd agree with her sentiment. But now...I haven't had sex since the night before that, nearly two weeks ago. Okay, when I think about it like that, it doesn't sound *so* bad, but for me, it is. Two days was my max prior to now, and that was only because I had the flu. I could do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, so I did. Why waste the opportunity? The time to mate would present itself when it was ready. And, fuck, did it. Moments before, I was explaining to Josh that I wasn't ready to mate, and then I got slopped on and punched in the heart at the same time.

Fate.

I have no doubt at all that it is fate.

I stumble down the road, blind to everything and everyone around me. All I can focus on is getting as far away from Storm as I can. I hate that I had to walk away, but I would've ended up regretting sleeping with her now, and she most definitely would've, and our chance would have been blown. I can't do that to myself or my pack, or her. She deserves better than for me to be thinking with my dick and not my heart.

I groan when my cock twitches in my pants. I get now why Josh went in for that kiss as soon as he could. She is perfection. She tastes like her scent, just as I knew she would. Fresh cherries that burst with flavour as you bite into them.

“Fuck. Fucking fuck.”

I hunch my shoulders and keep walking faster until I reach my house and come to a grinding halt.

“Oh, you have got to be kidding me,” I hiss, seeing the navy-blue Mercedes idling at the curb.

My dad's driver waves to me, and I wave back before I practically punch the front door off its hinges. I did not need him here today. But it's not *entirely* unexpected. I knew he'd come sniffing around. He doesn't believe for one second that I'm to be mated soon, and why would he? I've given him no reason to. I just hoped it would be a bit later when we had more to go on with Storm.

“JP,” he booms when he sees me.

He is lurking in the entrance hall, checking out the décor, looking for something specific. A woman's touch, no doubt.

“Dad. What's up?”

“I was around, so I thought I would come to meet the omega who tamed my wayward son.” He smiles ingratiatingly, which pisses me off further.

“Storm doesn't live here, yet. But I've just come from hers.” So far, it's all true.

“Hmm.”

“You don’t believe me? Smell me.” It’s out of my mouth before I can stop it.

I expect him to turn his nose up, but he takes a curious step forward and inhales. He closes his eyes and smiles slowly. “Cherries. You said. Doesn’t mean she’s ready to be your mate, though.”

“Look, she is going through something right now. I’d rather not drag her down here to meet you. We will announce when we are ready, okay?”

“Problem?” The way he says it almost makes me feel like he is hoping there is.

“Nothing we can’t handle.”

“Well, don’t dally, son. Your twenty-ninth is in four weeks. You are running out of time.”

“I don’t need to be reminded, and time isn’t a factor. We are all good.”

“We’ll see,” he says and brushes past me. “Sooner rather than later.”

I don’t bother answering. I just let him go and then drop my head into my hands. This is a disaster. I need a drink. Waiting a few minutes for him to leave, I hesitantly open the door to see the car has gone. Closing it behind me, I head in the direction of the bar where Storm met Franco. It’s nearly eleven. It’ll be open by the time I get there.

A few minutes later, I shove the doors open and aim for the bar, where I order three shots of Scotch, neat.

The bartender places them in front of me, and I pick up the first one, throwing it down my throat and relishing the burn. Slamming the upside-down shot glass on the bar, I pick up the second one, only to be interrupted by a blonde omega I recognise vaguely from out and about.

“Third one for me?” she asks, her big blue eyes wide and flirty as she leans on the bar.

“Nope.” I glug the shot and place the glass upside down next to its friend.

“Saw you come in. Everything okay?”

She places her hand on my arm. I freeze and glare at it. Looking back up into her face, I see the intent swimming in her heated gaze. This isn't the first time she's tried it on. I dismissed her the other week at *elite* to take her friend home instead. I can't even remember her name.

I stink.

Seriously, I get why now Storm is so put off by our behaviour.

“I'm good,” I say and shake her hand off my arm.

It must be my lucky day, though, because the doors bounce open and in swoops my Guardian Angel in the form of a gothed-out omega whose best friend I'm trying to mate with.

“There you are, darling,” she purrs. “Started without me?” She bustles her way between the blonde and me, giving me a half hug that makes me chuckle inwardly.

“Here,” I say and shove the third shot towards Cassidy. “Sweetheart.”

“Thanks! Bottom's up!”

Cassidy downs the shot in one gulp like a champ and slams the upside-down glass on the bar.

“Let's go.” She takes my hand and drags me away, giving the blonde a smug smile as we leave the bar.

“I'm not finished. You took my last shot,” I complain.

“It's not even lunchtime yet, and tough titties. Sandy is a viper, and she wants you. She has made no secret of that. You're lucky I saw you from across the road on my way into work.”

“Thanks,” I mutter.

She scrunches up her face. “So, what's up?”

“Nuthin',” I lie, scuffing my shoe on the pavement as I stuff my hands into my jeans pockets. “Storm.”

“Things not going well?” she asks sympathetically.

“Things not going, full stop,” I point out.

She sighs. “Look, I promised her I would back out, but consider this a parting gift. She is going to karaoke tonight with the girls and me. You know the place?”

I nod.

“She is bummed out, so we’re treating her to a night out to forget her woes. Be there or be left behind. It’s all I’ve got for you, buddy.” She punches me on the arm, and with a nod, she crosses back over the road, leaving me a bit fuzzy in the head after two shots with no food and wondering what the hell we are going to do later.

I guess it’s time to call an emergency meeting, because time *is* running out, and not just for my dad, but for us as well. If we don’t lock this down soon, our chance will be gone.

Thirty

Storm

IT'S NEARING 7PM when the girls call for me on their way to the karaoke bar. It's a fun night out, and I'm in serious need of some fun. I have no money to spare, but Cass said she had this, so I agreed. I know I'll pay her back one day, but for now, I'm accepting charity because being jobless will soon mean I'm homeless.

I check myself in the mirror quickly before I leave the flat. I look good in a tight black dress with cutout sides which don't leave a whole hell of a lot to the imagination, and high black heels. Not that I'm on the prowl, I just want to feel good about myself for a few minutes before reality crashes down around me.

The time with JP earlier has left my head and heart in an utter mess, and I don't know what to think. I don't *want* to think. I just want to drink and sing.

* * *

An hour later, slightly merry and not butchering Dancing Queen by Abba with Cassidy and our other school friend, Meredith, we blast out the lines and return to our seats to a round of applause and catcalls.

I beam, happy with my performance and let Cass lead me to the bar for more Vodka. I take my glass and walk back over to the table we are sitting at, only to find myself greeted by an alpha with a big smile.

“Hey,” he says. “Saw you up there. I’m Alfie.”

“Storm,” I say with a small smile, taking a sip of my drink and sliding my pert arse onto the high stool. He stands next to me, leaning on the table while he chats about himself. I nod and answer questions when required to, my heart not really in it when the lights go dim.

I look up at the hush and see Josh on the stage holding the mic. “This is for Storm,” he says with a sexy smile. “It’s from all of us, but the other two can’t sing for shit, so you’ll have to make do with just me.”

I swallow and look to Cassidy on my other side for help.

She doesn’t provide it.

She shrugs and giggles into her glass.

My heart pounds as the opening beat to my favourite song, ever, resounds around the hushed bar. He has the attention of every single omega, beta and some of the alphas in the place.

He is dressed in a tight, short-sleeved black shirt and black jeans. The shirt shows off his hard body and well-defined arms. He is something to look at, that’s for sure, but when he starts to sing, I nearly fall off my stool.

“Swaying room as the music starts. Strangers making the most of the dark. Two by two, their bodies become one.”

“Fuck me,” I mutter as Cassidy turns to me, her eyes wide.

“Man can sing,” Cass comments, stating the fucking obvious.

He has everyone entranced with just three lines to a song sung by a woman back in 1985. How? Fuck knows, but he has pretty much bowled me over.

“Uhm,” I stammer as the bloke next to me starts getting a bit annoyed.

“Want a drink?” he asks, cutting over Josh’s singing.

I nod, just to get rid of him, but he returns too soon with another Vodka tonic, which he must’ve overheard Cass ordering for me earlier. I take a sip without even registering the taste or the action. My gaze is focused solely on Josh.

Suddenly, it overwhelms me. My throat goes thick, and tears spring into my eyes. The fact that he’s done this is beyond beautiful, but I just don’t know what to do or say. I slide off the stool, grabbing my small bag, and head towards the door of the bar, stumbling out into the cool evening and shivering. I wrap my arms around myself and look for a taxi to take me home.

“Hey,” the alpha who chatted me up says, following me outside. “Where are you going?”

“Home,” I mumble.

“Want some company?”

I shake my head, suddenly worried about this guy. He seems the pushy type.

“Come on, let me come back to your place. We can have another drink and maybe some fun.”

“No, I don’t want to,” I say, searching frantically for a taxi.

“Look,” the alpha says, grabbing my arm tightly. “I bought you a drink. You owe me something.”

I’m about to start screaming for help because I can’t get free from this douche bruising my arm when Russell St. Luc appears next to him and slaps his hand around the alpha’s throat.

“The lady said no, you piece of shit,” he growls, squeezing tightly so the alpha’s eyes bulge. “Now fuck off and don’t speak to her again, and if I see you lay a hand on her again, I will show what a real alpha looks like. Got it?”

I blink rapidly as the alpha nods and hurries away when Russell lets him go.

Josh and JP have joined us, but it's too much. This day has just been too much. I lock gazes with JP, feeling the irrational hurt and anger that he walked out on me earlier bubble up. I back away from them and hail a taxi that, to my relief, stops and lets me in. I tell him to hurry the fuck up and get me out of here. I can't think. I can't breathe. All the air squeezes out of my lungs as I take shallow pants in alarm.

I think I'm having a panic attack.

Thirty-One

Russell

I WATCH as Storm once again leaves us staring after her. One of these days, we are going to have to do something to make her stay.

I turn back to JP and Josh when I hear a car pull up to the curb behind me. I turn to see Storm scramble out of the taxi, her breath ragged. She rushes up to me, grabbing my shirt front and dragging me to her, her other hand going up the back of my neck. She pulls me closer, pressing her lips against mine, thrusting her tongue into my mouth in a kiss so fucking sweet, I want it to last forever.

She pulls back and murmurs, “Thank you.”

Then, she is rushing back to the taxi and driving off, leaving me breathless and stunned by the kiss.

“Err,” I stammer.

“Yep, kissing her will do that to you,” JP says, slapping me on the shoulder. “Her hero.”

“Fuck off,” I grouse, but pretty pleased with myself. I feel my phone buzz in my pocket, so I pull it out and stare at the screen.

“Mum?” I ask, answering it straight away.

My blood runs cold when she hastily says, “It’s your dad, Russ. Get to the hospital quickly, you know the one. He’s had a heart attack.”

She hangs up, and I’m left listening to the dial tone, not computing her words.

“Russ?” JP asks, clicking his fingers in front of my face.

“Uhm...it’s my dad. I have to go...”

“Go where? What’s happened?”

“The hospital. He’s had a heart attack.”

“Fuck,” Josh says, grabbing my arm, “Come on.” He shouts for a taxi, and they bundle me inside, but I can’t respond to their queries.

“Which one, Russ?” JP asks, squeezing my arm.

“Hmm?” I look up at him.

“Which hospital?”

“The private one near the park.”

“Go,” Josh says to the driver.

I’m numb.

I’m not sure what to expect when I get there.

I don’t even really know what this means.

At some point, JP and Josh have helped me out of the taxi and up to the level where my mum is waiting. As soon as I see her, drawn and pale, I snap to a little bit.

“Mum,” I murmur when I hug her. “How is he?”

“He has to go for a triple bypass. Whatever that is.”

“They didn’t tell you?”

“He explained,” she sighs. “I-I didn’t understand.”

I nod. “Okay, well, let’s find out. Who is his doctor?”

“Stanley Rivers,” she murmurs and goes to sit down.

She is in shock, barely aware of anything that's going on.

"Sit," JP says. "We'll find out what's going on."

I nod, torn between helping my mum and taking responsibility for this situation. But I need a minute. My dad and I, while not super close like Josh and his dad, we aren't cold like JP and his. It's a middle ground. Normal parent, youngest son relationship. He worked all hours, and still does, to provide for his family, but he was always there when it counted. Birthdays, school plays, Under 12's football. I stopped playing after that. I thought I was too cool, but that meant that I didn't see Dad. It's my fault for not making sure I spent more time with him.

Tears prick my eyes, but I sit beside Mum and take her hand. "JP and Josh are going to find out."

She nods.

"Did you ring Boden?"

She nods. "He is on holiday. He's on his way back whenever he can get a flight. There's bad weather..."

I grimace. It doesn't surprise me that Boden is away again. My older brother and his pack love their holidays abroad to every party island they can find.

It's only as I sit there processing that I register what she said. "Stanley Rivers?" I murmur. Storm's dad. I know this because of the research we've done on her.

She nods. "Yes, your dad has been seeing him for a while with angina, but we didn't expect this."

"He is the best in the city," I assure her.

She gives me a weak smile. "I know."

I return it, and we sit in silence again.

Josh appears with two steaming cardboard cups. "I bought you both some tea," he says. "JP is talking to his old school friend who works with Dr Rivers. We'll have something for you soon."

I nod and accept the cup he's holding out, and so does Mum. She squeezes my hand and tries to gather her strength. "I'm glad you have them. They're good boys."

"Yeah," I agree.

Time ticks away. JP's friend comes to explain what he can about Dad's case, and this time I make sure that Mum understands the procedure, asking the pertinent questions.

"It's going to be hours," I murmur. "Why don't you try to get some sleep?"

She nods and curls up on the soft leather sofa. I know she won't sleep, but at least she will rest.

I lean my head against the soft stuffing of the armchair, glad this private hospital provides decent waiting rooms, and sigh. I want to think about Storm's kiss and what it means, but I think I'm supposed to focus all of my thoughts on Dad. I can't help it, though and place my fingers to my lips with a smile.

JP and Josh have gone home to get a change of clothes for me so I can stay here with my mum.

"Who's the omega?" my mum asks suddenly into the silence.

"Hmm?" I lift my head to look at her.

"Cherries," she says. "That's not your scent."

I snort. "She is special."

"Is she? You're serious about her?" I hear the cautious tone and know it's because of Emma.

"Yeah, we all are."

She sits up, startled. "Oh?" Her curiosity almost makes her look like her usual self.

I grin, and for one moment, we share the exciting news before reality crashes back down.

"When do I get to meet her?"

"Not until we make it official. It's complicated." I sigh.

Mum gives me a knowing nod. “She doesn’t want to risk herself.”

I shake my head. “We have given her no reason to trust us, but we are trying to do everything we can to show her we’ve changed.”

“Good,” she says. “That’s good.” She curls up again, and this time, I think she does drop off eventually, so I close my eyes and try to do the same, dreaming of Storm’s lips on mine.

Thirty-Two

Storm

I'VE LOST count of how many days I've been holed up in my nest, avoiding the rest of the world, including Cassidy. She went into her heat, and I didn't even speak to her before, but my emotional state was, well, in a word, raw. Being accosted on top of quitting my job, throwing myself at JP only to be rejected and having the pack serenade me in public has short-circuited my brain, and I needed a reset.

When my phone rings next to me, I glance at it and then answer, switching it to speaker, so I don't have to lift my head off the pillow.

"Everything okay?" Mum asks before I've even said anything.

"No," I say and then burst into tears.

I know she's been waiting for this moment. This is her time to shine.

"Tell me what's happened," she says briskly, her down-to-business head on.

"I quit my job and will soon be homeless," I sob. I'm not telling the rest of the stuff. It's inconsequential but just added to an already shit day.

“Hmm. Do you want to tell me why you quit?”

“Angela is a rancid cowbag.”

She snorts prettily. “Well, I know that. Anything specific?”

“She wanted me to do more spying. I told her to get knotted.”

“Good for you.”

I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop, but to my surprise, it doesn’t come.

“I take it you are free on Thursday then?”

I blink. “Yep, guess I am. Why?”

“I’m arranging a luncheon. It was during your work time lunch hour, but now time is of no consequence.”

I gape at her. *Lunch hour*? What century does she live in? Lunch half a bloody hour, more like.

“What’s it for?”

“To meet a prospective pack.” I hear the excitement in her voice.

I sit and snatch the phone up. “What? Already?”

“I’m not sitting around waiting for you to change your mind, dear. Be at the house on Thursday at twelve and wear something pretty, not adult film star-esque, hmm.”

“Uhm, okay...” I’m sideswiped. Glancing at my phone, I realise that Thursday is the day after tomorrow.

“Excellent. You are going to love them.”

“Okay.” I don’t seem capable of anything else. Hopefully, I will have more to my chat on Thursday. I wince and then suck it up. “Err, Mum...”

“You start on Friday at 8AM sharp,” she says and hangs up before I can humbly thank her for giving me a job.

I snicker and put my phone down, flopping back to my nest. I knew days ago that this was what I had to do. I don’t have time to pratt about looking for another job right now. The

rent is due next week, not to mention every other bill due on the first of the month.

I absolutely adore her for not forcing me to ask and yelling I-told-you-so in my face. She is the best mum, ever. And this isn't forever. It's my plan to look for something else immediately, but this eases the financial burden for now.

My thoughts drift to this pack she has lined up. I wonder who they are. I know better than to ask. Mum loves surprises. She wouldn't tell me even if I begged. She knows I would go and do my own research and probably find something to dislike about them before I've even met them. Mum is also big on first impressions. She will make sure everyone is on their very best behaviour. I snort in amusement as I think about some big bad alphas cowing to her demands. She doesn't take any bullshit and can sniff it a mile away. All of this leads to the conclusion that they will be good guys, so I'm not worried. My concern is what to wear.

My pretty white top that got coffee all over it was delivered by the dry-cleaner yesterday after I rang them to explain I couldn't get there. They charged me a bit more than I'd have liked, but no way was I emerging from my nest to walk the forty minutes round trip to get it.

Climbing out of bed, I break the plastic and decide this entire outfit is perfect. It's flattering, pretty and, with the pink cardigan, is gorgeously feminine.

"Sorted," I mutter and then head to the kitchen for coffee before I flop on the sofa to watch TV until my brain goes numb.

Thirty-Three

Storm

CLIMBING out of the taxi outside my parents' massive house near the park, I wobble slightly on my high, thin heel but steady myself when I place my other foot down and gulp. I am nervous about this blind date but also a bit excited. I haven't heard anything from the St. Lucs since the karaoke night, so I'm guessing that maybe they've moved on.

Fine.

I will too.

I knew they would get bored, and that is why I didn't let them in.

Mum is waiting for me with a smile when I push open the front door, probably peeking through the windows to see me arrive.

She gives me a once-over with an approving nod and leads me into the dining room, where I nearly burst out laughing. When she said 'luncheon', I thought she was being a sophisticated, posh older lady, but she seriously meant it. I think they call this High Tea in places like Harrods.

I blink when I take in the pack, already assembled like good little boys, dressed in smart shirts and pants.

I recognise one of them and focus on him with a small smile.

“Storm, this is the St. Michaels pack.”

“Hi,” I say awkwardly and move forward as my mum gives me a gentle shove. They are all really good-looking and friendly enough. Their prime, who introduces himself to me as Anthony, takes my hand and kisses my knuckles. I feel a slight shiver at the gallantry but nothing more.

His scent is...basic. I don't like thinking that because they all seem really lovely and friendly, but when we sit down, I feel like I'm wasting my time. When I think about JP's scent or Russell's, I can describe it in vivid detail and almost *taste* it. Here, I've got lemon on the prime, coconut on the one I vaguely know, cinnamon on the other and baked bread on the last one.

“Will you excuse me?” I ask after about ten minutes of idle chit-chat.

“Of course,” Anthony says with a smile.

I return it and make my way slowly out of the room, so I don't look like I'm making the Great Escape.

I find my mum and dad talking in earnest, hushed tones in the living room.

Dad looks up and smiles, coming over to give me a hug and a kiss. “Miss you, Stormy, but I've got to go. Please come back and live with us, this house is too empty.”

“You assume I'm not getting together with this pack,” I point out.

“Hah,” he says with a knowing laugh. “I know you too well. They aren't for you.”

Mother snickers as well, making me laugh. “So why them?”

“Okay, you've got me. My first choice wasn't available.” Her eyes cloud over momentarily. “But this isn't about finding you a pack right now, more like showing you the options. So, the second choice is a no?”

I nod. “Sorry. We’ll try again when the first choice can make it.” I’m only saying it to appease her. I know after this who *my* first choice is, but I need to get up the guts to admit it out loud. Right now, it’s floating around in my head, poking at me to yell it from the rooftops, but I can’t. Not yet.

“Gotta go,” Dad says, and with a wave, he rushes off.

“Me too,” I say, chewing my lip. “Do you mind?” I point back to the dining room.

“Of course,” she says. “I’ll catch up with you later.”

I nod and slip out into the entrance hall, tiptoeing, so my heels don’t clack on the expensive, white marble tile.

Pulling my phone out when I reach freedom, I start walking and ring for an Uber to come and pick me up. I want to put distance between me and my parents’ house.

* * *

Twenty minutes later, I walk into the coffee shop. Franco is working, which sort of freaks me out, but he smiles and beckons me forward.

“Did you sort out your boyfriend issues?” he says, that sexy accent making it sound like a panther’s purr.

“Not my boyfriend,” I point out. “But no, not really.”

“Shame. I was looking forward to trying again.”

“Sorry, Franco. I’m taking myself off the market.”

“Bummer,” he murmurs. “Usual?”

I nod and watch him prepare me a latte macchiato, which I scoop up when it’s ready and turn to leave, only to see Josh standing in the doorway, looking like he’s been hit by a truck.

Thirty-Four

Josh

NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME, this omega has made me feel like a deer in headlights. I don't know why, but I wasn't expecting to see her, which is just idiotic because she comes in here all the time. To see her talking with Franco was a kick in the nuts, though. Not that I think she was flirting with him or anything, but it still brings back the hurtful words from the pub.

"Hey," I say awkwardly when the two of us just stand there, staring at each other. I think she is just as dumbstruck as me.

"Hi," she says softly, and it melts any reservations I had over trying to engage her in a conversation.

"Can we talk?"

She nods to my relief but doesn't say anything as I lead her out of the coffee shop. We find a bench in the park opposite and sit, enjoying the warm afternoon sun.

"I'm sorry we haven't been around much after the karaoke," I start, knowing I need to get that out there. She probably thinks we've given up on her, which definitely isn't the case, and I don't want her thinking that.

She shrugs and takes a sip.

“Are you okay after that guy...”

“I’m fine. Honestly, it wasn’t a big deal, and Russell played hero, so...”

I nod. This is pathetic as far as conversations go. I decide to dive in and tell her the truth. “About that. Russell’s dad is in the hospital. That’s why we’ve not been around.”

Her eyes go wide. “Oh, shit. Is he okay?”

I shake my head. “Not really. But he’s in good hands.” I smile.

She returns it shakily. “You don’t have to say any more. I understand. I want to thank you for the other night. It was, well, startling at first. I was caught completely off-guard, but the more I think about it, and I can’t stop...the more I realise how absolutely perfect it was.”

She is rambling, which is adorable.

Everything I was feeling about how awkward and horrible this interaction is, disappears, and I take her hand carefully, lacing our fingers together. She lets me with a small smile and lowered eyes.

“I’m glad. I was worried it might be over the top, but we thought we needed to get your attention in a *good* way.”

She snickers. “You did that. But I can’t sit here pretending that everything is okay. Can you take me to Russell and JP?”

I fall in love with her at that moment. She is concerned about our pack, and that is the most precious thing in the world to me. It will mean everything to Russell.

“Yes, they’re at the hospital.”

She chews her lip. “What can I expect?”

“He’s had two heart attacks, and they’re planning a triple bypass. They couldn’t do it the other day; he wasn’t stable enough.”

“Fuck.” Then her eyes go wide again. “I could ask my dad. He’s the best in the country.”

“We know. He’s already on the case,” I reassure her as we stand up. “But thank you. That means so much.”

“Good. That’s good.”

We walk hand-in-hand with no other words between us to the road where I already have a taxi waiting to take me to the hospital.

Sliding inside, she cuddles up to me, sipping her coffee every now and again. I want to tell her how I feel about her, but it’s premature. I don’t want to do anything to scare her off. The need to know what is going through her head is clawing at me, but I know I did the right thing telling her about Russell’s dad. She needed to know that before anything else. If for no other reason than to know we didn’t forget about her.

Soon we are pulling up outside the hospital, and I help her out of the taxi. She pauses to throw her empty cup away and shoots me a worried glance.

“Will he be mad that you told me? That I’m here? What about his family?”

“He will be thrilled to see you.”

It’s all I need to say to appease her concerns. She takes my hand again, and I feel like I’m the king of the world as we stroll into the hospital. As soon as we get to the first floor, she leaves me, unlocking our hands and going straight to Russell, who couldn’t be more surprised to see her. She wraps her arms around him, and he returns it quickly, finding my gaze over the top of her head, questions in his eyes.

I shrug and join JP on the far side of the waiting room.

“How the fuck did you manage that?” he asks, a smile playing on his lips.

“Fate.” I gaze at them, still embracing. “She is our fate, and fate is sick of everyone dicking about. She was placed in my path at the exact right moment.”

“No kidding,” he murmurs, his eyes also on Russell and Storm. “You did good, kid.”

I snort. “Yeah. I think she’s coming around.”

His face clouds over and I know why. He has to tell her about the trust fund issue. It's not going to go down well, at all.

I slap him on the shoulder. "Best to get it over with."

He nods. "I'll drive her home in a bit. I'll tell her then."

"Good call."

We sit back in silence then, contemplating the shit that is going to hit the fan, but I'm hopeful that coming clean before we've gone further will go a long way.

Thirty-Five

Storm

THE ATMOSPHERE in the private hospital waiting room is one of anxious anticipation. Everyone is waiting for news about Russell's dad after suffering a heart attack. It is a tense and heavy atmosphere, the air thick with the sound of murmuring, the movement of people shuffling in chairs and the occasional rustling of papers.

I stare at the wall opposite the couch I'm sitting on with Russell. The walls are a light beige, and the furniture is clean and polished. It is impossible to hide the nervousness and worry emanating from the people near me. Some sit quietly, hands clenched in their laps, while others pace back and forth, unable to sit still, eyes darting from one person to the next in search of some reassurance.

The waiting room feels small and stuffy, the atmosphere heavy with unspoken questions and emotions, and though no one speaks of it, each person is acutely aware of the stakes of the situation.

The only sound to break the tense silence is the occasional beep of a machine, or the soft whir of a fan as it circulates the still air. Every so often, a nurse will stride by, briskly walking

and taking notes as they go, their presence a reminder of the gravity of the situation.

The clock seems to tick slower than usual, and the seconds drag on as everyone waits for some word, anything, to break the silence.

What seems like hours later, with my head on Russell's shoulder, we finally get some news.

My dad strolls up to Russell's mum. If he sees me, he doesn't acknowledge me, which I didn't expect him to do anyway. This is people's lives at stake. It's got nothing to do with us.

Russell hastily stands up and joins them.

"He is critical but stable," he says to Russell's mum quietly.

She nods, trying to hold back the tears.

I chew my lip and fold my arms, leaning over to brace myself in case there is anything worse than that to come.

They continue talking in hushed tones, but I feel dad has lowered his voice after his initial sentence so that I heard him.

He continues providing more details and information on the prognosis as they listen attentively.

The atmosphere relaxes, the tension and worry slowly dissipating as Russell and his mum smile at each other. I sigh in relief. I've never been around sickness and death before. This is a first of what I hope is very few. I'm not cut out to be so anxious and on edge.

JP sits down next to me and smiles. "I'll take you back home. You can change and get something to eat."

"I'm okay. I want to stay here."

"Go," Russell says, coming back over. "It's just going to be us sitting around some more."

"That's okay."

“I adore you for saying that, but really, it’s boring as all fuck. Take a break. You’ve been here for six hours for a man you don’t even know.”

“I want to be here for you.” Even though I could do with going to change out of this too-pretty-for-hospital outfit, I get the feeling he is trying to push me away. My lower lip quivers slightly, but he crouches in front of me.

“Storm, you being here for the past few hours has given me strength that was waning and the ability to keep hanging on for my mum. You have been everything to me. I’m not pushing you away, I’m telling you to take a break.”

I cup his face and lean forward to press my lips to his for a moment. “Are you sure? My feet are killing me.” I smile to show I’m joking. Sort of. These shoes are murder. “I’ll change and be right back.”

“Perfect.” He smiles and rubs his thumb along the line of my lip, teasing me.

I nod and stand as he does too. JP takes my hand and, with a slight smile at Russell’s mum, whose name I found out is Carole when we were introduced a few hours ago, I let him lead me downstairs and to the entrance. Expecting to wait for another taxi, I’m mildly surprised when he carries on walking to the car park and stops in front of an old Jaguar that is so low-slung, I know I’m going to struggle to get in with these shoes on. Shrugging, I remove them and open the door when he unlocks it, getting in with ease in my bare feet.

“Fancy,” I half-mock him. “Daddy’s?”

He snorts. “Dad doesn’t drive himself anywhere anymore. No, this is mine. I don’t drive it often, but taking taxis everywhere is a bit of a pain sometimes. All that waiting around.”

“I don’t drive at all,” I say, suddenly wishing I did so I could take this baby for a spin. It roars to life with a sound that sends a shiver down my spine.

“Do you want to learn?” he asks, pulling out of the space.

“Nah, not really. I live and work in Notting Hill. I don’t really have a reason to drive anywhere.”

“Good enough reasons. It’s why I don’t bother much as well.”

“What do you do for a living?” I’m curious. I don’t know much about any of them, except the really big stuff.

“I don’t work. I make money on the markets.”

It takes me a few seconds to realise he doesn’t mean a stall on Portobello Road.

“Oh, you are a fancy fucker, aren’t you?” I say with a giggle.

He laughs. “I have my moments.”

The atmosphere on the way home is decidedly less intense than it was in the hospital as we chat about mundane things. I’m trying to avoid discussing the kiss we shared. I wonder if he is doing the same.

A few minutes later, he is pulling up outside my flat, and he cuts the engine.

“Do you want to come up?” I ask. My tone is slightly seductive and inviting, and he hears it.

Tension fills the air as he deliberates for a few seconds. His gaze meets mine, a small smile playing on his lips.

“Yes,” he says quietly. “I’d love that.”

Thirty-Six

JP

STORM LETS me into her flat and immediately drops her shoes and bag on the floor near the door. I take in the small space and decide it suits her. I didn't really notice any of it the last time I was here. I was too busy denying my cock a release it desperately needs.

"I'll be a few minutes," she says, disappearing behind a dressing screen and into the bathroom. She closes the door and then shouts through, "Make yourself at home."

I suppose that means I should sit down on the couch, but instead, I amble around looking at everything until I end up faced with her bed. I lick my lips as the door to the bathroom opens, and her head sticks out. "Turn around," she murmurs.

I chuckle and turn to face the opposite way. I hear her moving about and start with one of the items that I wanted to bring up. "I don't know if you've found something yet, but I know the manager at *Omegas4hire*, and she is looking for an Admin assistant. I could put in a good word for you if you want?"

She snickers. "I appreciate that, JP, but I'm not going to work for a place where you've stuck your dick into half the workforce. Thanks, but no thanks."

I let out a loud laugh, mostly because I'm shocked at her words. "Fuck," I mutter, still staring at the wall away from her. "That bothers you, does it, Storm?"

"What do you think?" she murmurs, her voice husky, which makes my cock stand to attention. "Turn around."

I'm momentarily frozen to the spot, but I force myself to turn around, not knowing what to expect.

When I see her naked body, curled up in her nest, I let out a soft pant. She is propped up on her elbow, a small smile curving up her full red lips.

"I want to pick up where we left off."

"So do I," I growl, prowling closer. "Are you sure you want this?"

"Are you?" Her eyebrow is arched.

"Oh, I know I want you. Do you want me? Us? This isn't just an itch to scratch after the tension of the last few hours?"

"I'm not like that," she points out what I already know. But I had to be sure.

I kick off my shoes and pull off my t-shirt, showing her my washboard abs. She licks her lips enticingly and crooks her finger, beckoning me towards her. A thrill runs through me as I show off my body. Her eyes are taking in every inch of me.

Her gaze is electrifying, and I can feel the heat of it on my skin. She licks her lips enticingly, and a wave of desire washes over me. I step forward, drawn in by her sultry gaze.

As I drink in her beauty, the air between us is thick with anticipation and desire. She is absolutely stunning, her curves are captivating, and her body is inviting.

I crawl onto the bed with her, feeling the heat radiating from her. My heart beats faster as I reach out and brush the back of my hand against her soft skin, feeling the warmth of her body. I've shagged a lot of women, but I have never been so nervous about committing this act before. This isn't just about getting my dick wet or appeasing the rut. This is about

making love to an omega I want to mate with in the future. My stomach is twisted with anxiety and eagerness to touch her.

She leans in, her lips inches away from mine. I inhale her sweet, fresh cherry scent, and a tingle runs through my body as I look into her eyes. The energy pings between us. I want to feel her lips against mine.

With a sense of urgency, I flick the button on my jeans, desperate for the feel of her hands on my skin, wrapped around my cock. She reaches out to explore my body slowly. I rasp as her hands move over me, skimming over my abs and up my chest, her fingers tracing circles along my collarbone.

I feel myself melting into her. Her hands move lower, and I groan as I grow harder and harder with each touch. I want more; I want to feel every inch of her. I become lost in her as I surrender to her will.

Moving my lips towards hers, I kiss her deeply. Her tongue explores my mouth eagerly, tasting me as she draws in my scent. Growing dizzy with pleasure, I explore her depths. Our kiss seems to last forever, and I fall deeper and deeper under her spell.

She moves her hands to my waist and pulls me closer, pushing against me as she traces my body with her feather-light touch. I can scent her arousal, as well as my own. I need to feel her body against mine.

Surprising me, Storm leans in and bites my bottom lip, her teeth grazing my skin. I grunt, my cock twitching in pleasure, my heart beating faster.

Moving back to strip off my jeans quickly, I return to her soft embrace, claiming her mouth with mine as I reach up to cup her breasts and squeeze her nipples in the crook of my thumb. She moans softly into my mouth, lying back so I can mount her. I can't wait another second. I need to feel her slick coating my cock as I slide into her.

With an inward groan, I murmur, "Do you have protection?"

"Don't you carry it with you?"

“Usually,” I admit. “I never have sex without it, but with you...I want to feel you.”

“Every time?” she asks curiously.

“Every single time. I’m safe.”

She considers my words carefully. I know she won’t get pregnant because she isn’t on her heat. That’s how it works for an omega, but I understand she has to think about the other stuff.

When she opens her legs wide, inviting me to drive my hard-as-iron cock into her sweet haven, I let out a low growl and accept. She responds with a purr that sends a thrill up my spine. It’s possessive and exciting, showing me that I’m hers and she is mine.

I lend a thought to my packmates, but I know they wouldn’t begrudge me this time with her, as I wouldn’t with them. We will all come together when the timing is right.

We move together, our bodies intertwined in a passionate embrace. It is exhilarating and beyond anything I have experienced before. If I didn’t already know she was my mate, this love-making would’ve convinced me. My desire grows more and more intense, as does her arousal. She arches her back and coats me with slick, verging on a climax that is going to grip my cock with the force of an omega desperate to be claimed. I want her more than I have ever wanted anything before.

She screams my name, gushing slick over my cock as she comes intensely. I groan when her pussy clutches my cock just as I knew it would. I continue to pump into her, slamming against her hips deeper, faster, with more intensity than I thought possible.

“Fuck!” I roar. “Storm!”

“JP,” she screams, shuddering underneath me as her climax tears through her body. “Yes!”

I grunt, shooting my load into her. I can’t knot her, I’m not in my rut, and it’s my biggest regret to date. I want that with her more than anything.

Soon.

I know in my heart now that it will happen.

But I still need to tell her the thing that has been weighing on me...but not yet. I don't want anything to ruin this moment.

Thirty-Seven

Storm

I LIE beside JP in my bed, his skin against mine, feeling peaceful and tranquil in the afterglow of our lovemaking. His body heat is warming my skin, the solidness of his chest pressing against my cheek, and the weight of his arm around my waist is comforting and gives me a sense of feeling safe in his arms. His scent is an intoxicatingly sweet torture that I want to taste.

The feeling of blissful contentment that had overwhelmed me during our lovemaking still lingers in my body. His passionate embrace has coaxed out a desire I have never known before. I want more of him, more of this feeling. I want to explore his body and soul even deeper and find out what else we have to discover between us.

My mind races with a million thoughts, and my heart races with a million feelings. I want to allow this moment to last forever, and yet, I'm already eager to experience him all over again. I want to be the one who drives us this time, to take control, to explore the physicality of our pleasure with an even closer connection.

I gently reach for his hand and intertwine our fingers, his skin warm against my own. I relish the feeling of our bodies

being so close, so intimate.

“I want to ride you,” I whisper, surprising him, my lips brushing against his skin.

He growls his response, tightening his grip on me and pulling me closer. His scent and warmth spread throughout my entire body.

I slowly shift and roll onto him, straddling him. His beautiful blue eyes sparkle in the moonlight, capturing my gaze and holding it with a passionate intensity. I move closer, my lips finding his with a tenderness and desire that is flooding me as I feel his cock stirring underneath me.

He kisses me back with the same intensity and passion. Our tongues duel with each other, weaving a passionate course that seems to last forever. My desire for him deepens with every kiss, every caress. My heart races in anticipation as I mould my body with his, my hands moving up and down his body, discovering places and sensations new to me.

His hands are everywhere, trailing over my body with a gentle touch that is both arousing and comforting.

I reach for his engorged cock, a soft moan escaping my lips. I tease myself with the tip, rotating it over my slippery clit. He groans with frustration, needing to be inside me. He lifts his hips, trying to control the rhythm, but this is my turn. Edging myself with his cock, I eventually guide him inside me. I sink onto him with a low moan, which turns into a purr as he fills me up, stretching me wide. He is a good size and seems to fit inside me like he was made for me.

“Fuck, yes,” I purr as I melt into him, my body and soul now one with his.

“Storm,” he growls, grabbing my hips as I ride him slowly. “Fuck, you feel so good.”

I steady myself with my hands on his rock-hard chest, arching my back as the pleasure courses through me, sending wave after wave of ecstasy straight to my pussy. I climax quickly, drenching his cock with my slick. He inhales deeply, a low rumble rising out of his chest as he lifts me up slightly and

holds me in place so he can thrust deep into me as I ride the thrill of my orgasm intensely.

He doesn't last much longer.

He thrusts high and then grunts loudly, releasing his seed into me.

I didn't have to think too hard about him wearing a condom. I accept that he has always been safe, and so have I. But this is different. I needed to feel him inside me bareback. I wanted to feel every millimetre of him. I know he's thinking the same, panting through his climax.

"I've never felt this way before," he says cautiously, almost as if he speaks too loudly, the moment will shatter.

"I haven't either," I admit, leaning forward to place my head over his heart.

"Fate," he murmurs, tangling his fingers into my hair.

"Mmm."

I sigh and then sit up. "I should get showered and changed so we can get back to the hospital."

He nods, disappointed, but he knows I'm right. "When you're ready, we'll swing by ours, and I can do the same."

I nod and climb off the bed to hastily shower and get dressed into a pair of black joggers, a white tee, a black hoodie and my pink trainers. Nice and comfy for sitting around in.

Re-dressed himself, he grins and takes my hand, kissing my knuckles before we head back down to the Jag to drive to his house.

It takes minutes at this time of night, and soon, we are pulling up outside a huge and fancy townhouse that must've cost an arm and a leg. Play the markets, indeed. He must be jolly good at his little hobby.

"Nice," I murmur as he leads me up to the massive black front door. He pushes it open to reveal a beautiful entrance hall that is similar to my parents'. White marble floors,

chandeliers, antique furniture and a grandiose staircase with a mahogany rail leading to the upstairs.

“I’ll be as quick as I can. Kitchen is through there if you’re hungry.”

I nod and take a step forward, only to come to a halt as a man pushes his way through the kitchen door.

“Ah, JP,” he says.

I can see in the dim light that he is middle-aged, very well-dressed and posh. He has the same colouring as JP, so I assume it’s his father.

“Dad,” JP says warily. “What are you doing here?”

“Waiting for you,” he says. “The housekeeper let me in. I was dissatisfied with our conversation the other day. I wanted to pursue it a bit further, but it appears you have bought the omega in question directly to me.”

His shrewd blue eyes land on me with intense interest. I shift uncomfortably as he steps forward and reaches out for my hand.

He grazes my knuckles with his lips before he releases my hand a few seconds later than I’m comfortable with.

“Cherries,” he murmurs. “What’s your name, dear?”

“Dad, this is Storm Rivers. Storm, this is my father, Christopher St. Luc.”

“Storm. What a beautiful name for a beautiful omega.”

I’m starting to feel a bit creeped out. I think JP realises how uncomfortable this is for me because he moves in a bit closer, putting his arm around me.

“So,” Christopher says, his eyes never leaving me. “You are the one who tamed my son.”

I press my lips together, not sure how to answer that.

“About time too. The clock is ticking.”

“Dad,” JP hisses, which draws my attention to the electric current running through the air between them.

“What does that mean?” I blurt out.

“Well, JP turns twenty-nine in a couple of weeks. So you need to be mated and bearing a child for him in the next few months.”

“What?” I blurt out, mortified. “What is this?” I turn to JP, looking for answers.

“His final trust is contingent on this proviso. Did he not mention it?” I glare at the old man for a moment. He is smug and knew this was something that would pull the rug out from under me.

But then the implications of what he has said hit me, and I spin to JP, stepping back from him. “What?” I spit out. “This is all about money?”

“No, Storm,” he says calmly, putting his hands out. “I was going to tell you. I meant to earlier. It’s why I drove you home, to have this conversation with you, but we got sidetracked...”

“Don’t!” I say, putting my hand up to stop him. “Do not lie to me. Fuck, I’m so stupid. I *knew* there was something off about this. I knew the St. Lucs wouldn’t settle down so suddenly. I’m so fucking stupid.” I shake my head, holding back the tears as I race to the front door, dragging it open and escaping into the night.

“Storm, wait!” JP calls after me. “This isn’t what you think, I swear...let me explain.”

I don’t reply. I pick up my pace and keep running as fast as I can back towards the comfort of my flat where I can cry in peace and solitude about what a fucking idiot I’ve been, what a fool they’ve made of me.

Thirty-Eight

Russell

I STUMBLE through the door of my home, almost too exhausted to keep my feet beneath me. I've been at the hospital with my mum for days, dreading the inevitable moment when I had to leave. But knowing that my dad is going to be okay, helps. I'm too tired to even think about what happened to JP and Storm. I thought they'd come back, but they didn't, so I suspected they fell into bed at Storm's. I don't have any bitterness about it, I'm glad they spent some time together. My mum forced me to come home for a little while, so here I am. The house is quiet, and in that moment, I'm relieved to be able to retreat and to stop thinking, even if it's just for a while.

I drag my feet towards the bedroom, keenly aware of the comfortable embrace of the bed that is waiting for me, even as my thoughts turn to Storm and the perfect shape of her lips, her hands wrapped around my shaft. With a sigh, I strip off my shoes and clothes, feeling the fatigue set in as I slide beneath the covers.

Closing my eyes, I let my mind drift away. My heart rate has been steadily rising ever since the thought of Storm's hands around my cock crossed my mind. Her mouth sucking me off is a fantasy I hope to become a reality very soon. Lying in my bed, my breathing becomes quicker and heavier with

every thought of Storm sucking me off. My body tingles in anticipation.

My bed sheets are cool to the touch, the fabric lightly grazing my skin as I writhe on them. My body is screaming for satisfaction. I shift slightly, feeling the material of the cotton sheet rubbing against my growing erection. It feels good, but I want more. I want Storm's hands around my cock.

I reach out, grabbing my dick with my left hand. I feel the warmth of my skin as I caress it. My heart beats faster as my hand moves up and down the shaft. I imagine all the different things that Storm could do to me. I think about her tongue lapping up the pre-cum that is dripping from the tip of my cock. I think about her lips wrapping around the tip, and the sensation of her mouth sliding up and down my length.

My right hand joins my left, and together they become a blur of motion. I start to pant. The sensation is overwhelming as I fantasise about all of the things Storm could do to me.

My right hand moves faster, my left hand gripping the base of my cock. I feel the sensations intensify with every stroke. I'm getting closer and closer to the edge. My left hand moves slowly up and down the shaft now, with my right hand working faster and faster. My breathing becomes heavy, and my heart pounds. My orgasm is coming, and I know it's going to be intense.

I let out a moan as the warmth of my orgasm builds within me. My whole body tenses as the pleasure overwhelms me. My muscles contract, and my breathing is ragged. I let out an exclamation as the intense pleasure of my orgasm washes over me. I spurt out my cum all over the sheets, but I don't give a shit. I'll take care of it later. My body shudders as the sensation subsides all too quickly. I lie there for a second, allowing myself to take in the moment, my breathing gradually slowing, until I finally drift off to sleep, my body still humming with pleasure to dream about Storm and all the things I can't wait to experience with her.

* * *

I groggily open my eyes, struggling to make sense of the faint knocking on the bedroom door. I ignore it, but the sound persists. Glancing at the clock, I groan when I see the time. 6AM. Why? I've been asleep for about two hours.

“What?” I call out, beyond irritated.

The door opens and a cautious head pokes around.

“Josh,” I growl. “What do you want?”

He looks dishevelled, his hair sticking up in places, but there was no mistaking his presence.

“Hey,” he says. “JP is waiting for us in the kitchen. We have a problem.”

“What’s wrong?” My stomach flips at the anxiousness of his tone.

Josh sighs. “JP and Storm had a... disagreement last night.”

I groan and bury my face in my hands. Of course. Of course they fucking did. He told her about the trust, and she threw a shitfit, and now we've lost her. “Fuck’s sake. We need to fix this.”

“It’s a bit worse than that,” Josh mutters. “It was Chris who told her.”

It takes a moment for that to sink in.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me?”

“Nope.”

“Jesus fucking Christ!” I roar and fling the sheets back, only remembering then about coming all over them—tough shit. I’ll clean them up later. Right now, this is so dire, I feel ill.

Josh nods. “Yeah.”

“All right. Let’s go.”

I get dressed quickly and follow Josh to the kitchen, where JP is already waiting. He is pacing back and forth, his face pale and tight with worry.

JP stops pacing when he sees us. “Storm found out about the trust fund agreement,” he says. “To say she’s not happy is a vast understatement.”

“And why didn’t *you* tell her? Why was it your dad?”

He sighs and runs a hand through his hair. “When I took her home, we had sex. Amazing fucking sex that was off the charts hot and sensual. I was going to tell her. The words were on the tip of my tongue, but she sidetracked me with her naked body and come-on. I’m weak, and I needed her, so I told myself I’d mention it later.”

“And later never came.”

“Or it did,” Josh interrupts. “But from Chris.”

“That fucking prick,” JP growls. “He was lying in wait. Fuck this shit. We need to go over there.”

“Why didn’t you already?” I ask, pouring out some much-needed coffee.

“I chased her halfway down the road and then came back to yell at my dad. I then figured she needed time to cool down, and we could all go over there today.”

“Oh, so she kills all of us and not just you?” I snort.

“Something like that,” he grouses.

I shake my head. “I’m tired. And to be honest, I’m tired of fighting. Maybe this just isn’t meant to be.”

JP and Josh both turn to me in shock. “No! You are tired and talking through your arse. Go back to bed. Josh and I will fix this.”

I let out a heavy sigh. “No, if you’re going over there, I’ll come.”

“Don’t sound so enthusiastic or anything,” Josh moans. “Anyway, we need the big guns. You two wait here. Russ, go back to bed for a bit. I’ll be back later with all the ammo we need.”

He doesn’t even wait for an answer, he just fucks off, so I follow him to the entrance hall and then back up to bed. I

can't.

I just cannot do this today.

I'm emotionally and physically drained.

As much as I want her, she is going to have to make it easier for us because this has been an uphill struggle. I know she's worth it, but today, I don't feel it.

I place my coffee mug down and fall face first into bed, turning away from the cum-stained sheets to fall into oblivion.

Thirty-Nine

Josh

MARCHING down the street towards Gloria Rivers' house, which is around the corner, I thank God that I remember her address from the few times I've posted stuff out to her when she couldn't get into the store. I have no idea if she will be in or if she will even see me at her home, but enough is enough. Like Russell, I am tired of fighting for this thing with Storm. I know it's meant to be, and I *will* keep fighting, but it's exhausting.

Seeing the house loom into view, I hasten my pace, cursing when my phone rings. I pull it out of my pocket and see it's my dad.

"What's up?" I ask, answering it quickly.

"Just wanted to check in. How're things going with the omega?"

"It's not," I say with a sigh. "I'm on my way to fix it."

"Anything I can do to help?"

I snort. "Sorry, Dad, but fathers are somewhat responsible for her doing a runner last night. I've got this. Stayed tuned."

"Fair enough," he says. "Just thought I'd offer."

“I know. Thanks.”

We hang up, and I’m so glad my dad isn’t like JP’s. Christopher has always been nice to me, insofar as being *nice* is to him. But I had a feeling this was going to come back and bite us on the arse in a big way.

Drawing in a deep breath, I walk up the path and press the buzzer.

Moments pass.

I hear the intercom click on. “Hello?”

“Gloria, it’s Josh St. Luc. I know it’s early. Could I possibly...”

I don’t even get to finish my sentence when the door is flung open, and Gloria is there, beckoning me inside.

“Oh, thank God,” she says. “Is Russell’s dad okay?”

“He’s going to be fine.”

“Good. Now sit. I need to set you boys up with Storm. I know she has her reservations, but...”

“Wait,” I say. “Storm is seriously pissed off with us right now. Christopher St. Luc stuck his oar in, and now she thinks we were only after her to get JP’s final trust when he turns thirty.”

“And why would she think that?” she asks, her shrewd eyes narrowed with something akin to anger.

“Because Christopher made her think that. It’s not true. This all came up *after* we decided we wanted to be with her. But JP delayed in telling her and got stung. Badly. And all of us in the process.”

“Yes, I can see that this especially would rile Storm up like nothing else. She is very peculiar when it comes to money.”

“Peculiar, how?” I’m intrigued.

Exasperated, she says, “She is obsessed with making it on her own. She won’t even take a safety net from her father and me. I worry about her. And then, of course, she fell in with the

Robbs, and we all know they're drowning in debt..." She takes in a deep breath and plasters a smile on her face. "Never mind that. How can I help?"

"Give me ammo. As much as you can, that will fix this. You know we are right for her."

"I do. Okay, here's what you need to do."

I listen intently to her plan, my eyebrows going up as she lays it out play-by-play. She's really thought about this. Or, probably, she knows Storm that well, she doesn't need to think. That's how well I want to know her.

An hour later, I'm on my way back home, armed with our last shot. If this doesn't work, we are fucked. Well and truly fucked, because there is nothing left in the tank.

All we can do now is go over there and do what Gloria has instructed and hope to fuck Storm sees the truth and lets us in.

Once and for all.

Forty

Storm

I WAKE up to the sound of birds chirping outside my window. I groan and roll over, my head pounding with a dull throb. I'd been crying all night before I fell asleep. My eyes are puffy and dry. My pillow is still damp with tears, but I have to get my act in gear. Today is the day I start at my parents' doctor's practice in my new—temporary—job.

Taking a deep breath to steady my nerves; the anxiety nearly makes me groan. How could I be so stupid to fall for the St. Lucs? I knew, and I stayed away, but then a few kisses and a pretty song later, I'm falling into the pit of despair I knew they'd cause me.

“Fucking wankers.”

JP has some fucking nerve trying to use me to get his money. How dare he treat me this way. Or anyone, for that matter. He deserves to have his knot fall off like I originally wanted.

Growling, I get up and stumble to the bathroom, my head still pounding. I quickly pee and brush my teeth before washing my face. I run a brush through my hair, practically scalping myself with the vigour brought on by the sheer anger I feel. My heart races in my chest, and I try once again to

steady my breathing. I don't want to end up having a mini panic attack again like I did after the incident with the pushy alpha, but not only that, I need to prove to myself and my parents that I'm capable of taking care of myself. I won't be taking that date to meet my mum's first-choice pack. Not now. I'm too heartbroken to even contemplate mating with anyone right now.

After getting dressed in a smart work suit, I hastily make myself a packed lunch and grab my travel mug for my coffee. I slip my feet into my trainers and shove the high heels into my bag. I have a twenty-minute walk, which I'm not doing in heels. Wolfing down some toast, I grab the handle of my bag, swinging it over my shoulder, and I head out of the door, praying that none of the St. Lucs are lurking, hoping to convince me to change my mind.

Not a chance.

I walk quickly and with purpose, luckily not coming across anyone I know and breathe out a sigh of relief when the practice comes into view. I pick up my pace. I'm out of breath and a bit sweaty by the time I shove the door open and hurry across the waiting room, feeling the serenity of the space wash over me. I quickly stop to change my shoes and then march up to the counter where Miriam is already sitting, waiting for me with a big smile. Nothing like Sadie. I won't miss her sour face, but I feel a pang over Cheryl.

"Come through," Miriam says. "Dr Gloria is out on concierge today, and Dr Stanley is operating all day, so it's just you and me."

I return her smile and duck through the door. I'm almost relieved my parents aren't here to hover over me. At least now I can get the first day over with and move on.

Miriam shows me to my desk and says, "You're a godsend. I loathe invoicing, and I hear you're a whizz with it. Here." She hands me a stack of folders about as tall as me. Grunting, I drop them on the desk and knock over a photo.

"Sorry," I murmur and straighten it, only to grimace at it with menace. A fucking Cockapoo is glaring back at me,

almost as if it knew I'd knocked the picture over.

"Can't seem to get away from the fuckers," I mutter.

"Hmm?" Miriam asks. "Oh, that's Sadie, my Cockapoo."

I snort with undisguised mirth before I press my lips together. "Sorry, I know someone called Sadie, and she is not as likeable as a Cockapoo."

Which is not saying much.

Miriam snickers which makes me think she knows *exactly* who I'm talking about.

I know then that despite the nepotism, I've made the right choice coming here while I get back on my feet.

I settle in at my desk and begin to go through the daily routine. I answer the phones occasionally, make my way through the massive stack of invoicing and generally try to be as helpful as possible to Miriam, who is efficient and organised, easy to get along with and generally a delight to work with.

Soon, I forget all about JP's betrayal and the St. Lucs as I get lost in my first day in a new job, which goes by surprisingly quickly.

I feel a sense of accomplishment when I head back out. I know my mum gave me this job, but I know I did it well, and that means everything to me.

As I walk home that evening, the air cooling down after a warm day, the sense of well-being leaves me. I feel alone and like I'm going to be alone forever.

"Fucking wankers," I mutter again, but it's the only thing that makes me feel better.

I lock myself in my flat when I arrive home and turn to the TV. I need a comforting movie that won't make me lose hope in finding a pack or love.

Forty-One

Storm

LATE THE NEXT AFTERNOON, wallowing in my shitshow of a life, I hear the buzzer go. Frowning, knowing I should ignore it because it's probably the St. Lucs, I get up to answer it anyway.

My frown etches deeper when I see who it is. I push the button to speak.

“Franco?”

“Storm. I know this is rude, but can I come up? I need to talk to you.”

Confusion hits me. “What about?”

“It's personal.”

He peers into the camera guilelessly. He doesn't look like a psycho predator, but there again, I know his rep.

“I don't want to have sex with you, Franco,” I state clearly.

He snickers. “No, I get that. But this isn't about that.” His face turns serious, his usual sexy smile not in sight.

I chew the inside of my lip and then shrug. I push the button to let him in and then open the front door to wait for him. I stand sentry, arms folded as he runs up the stairs, not in

a rush, but in that manly way, that is decisive and proves they're in great shape. I cast an eye over his hot bod, and groan inwardly.

I'm weak.

"What is it?" I ask to deflect.

He smiles. "Can I come in?"

I shake my head. "Not until I'm convinced you aren't here to accost me."

"If you really thought that, you wouldn't have let me up."

Okay, well, he has me there. I don't need to worry about him. He seems like a lost little puppy.

"Fine, come in, say what you need to and then leave."

"Got it."

I step back and shut the door, following him to the sofa where he seats himself and sits forward, elbows on his knees.

I sit on the armchair and pull my legs up, curling up as I wait. He has gone nervous, and that is rather interesting.

"Wine?" I ask eventually, indicating the open bottle of Rosé on the table.

"Yes, thank you."

I get up to fetch another glass and pour some wine into it. I slide the glass over the coffee table to him and curl back into my chair.

"Please know that I'm desperate, or I wouldn't have come here."

"How did you even know where I live?" I blurt out.

He looks up and meets my gaze. "I'm Franco. I know everything around here."

I snicker at the arrogance but concede he is probably right.

His face creases with worry, and his voice is soft with emotion as he says his next words. "My grandmother. She is not well. Her heart. I wanted to ask you to talk to your father."

I go still.

I have absolutely *no* idea what to say.

“Uhm...”

“I know this is a lot to ask you. We have the money, but they say we have to pay through insurance, which we cannot get for her.”

“What do you need from him?”

“An appointment to see if he can help. That’s all.”

I gulp. He is obviously very close to his grandmother, or he wouldn’t be here asking me this. “I honestly don’t know if I can help.”

“Please just ask him to see us. We will pay him for his time.”

We stare at each other for a few more moments, but then I make a decision. If Dad says no, he says no. But if he says yes, a woman’s life might be prolonged, and a family’s suffering will be eased.

“Okay,” I say with a nod, my high ponytail bobbing.

He swoops at me, giving me a crushing hug. “Thank you. Thank you.”

“I’ll just ask,” I say, pushing him away. “I have zero influence over anything.”

“I understand. That is all I ask.”

I smile and lean forward to pick up my glass as he sits back down and picks up his as well.

We both take a sip, and then, a noise cuts through the silence. It sounds like something hitting the window of my balcony. I stand up, startled, and Franco follows.

“Wait here,” he says, holding up his hand and placing his wine back on the table. He crosses over to the balcony and opens the doors as I stand there, hovering between waiting and going to investigate.

“Was it a bird?” I call out.

He sticks his head back inside with a broad grin. “Not a bird.”

“What was it then?” I stride forward, drink still in hand, to discover that my balcony is covered in rose petals of all different shades, having been thrown up in a bag which exploded in a burst of gorgeousness.

“What the fuck?” I ask, moving to the railing to peer over. “Oh, for fuck’s sake.”

Looking back up at me are the St. Lucs. Well, I think it’s them. It’s hard to tell around the shiny heart-shaped balloons and bouquets of aromatic flowers that I can smell from here there are so many.

“Him?” JP growls, whacking a balloon to the side when he claps eyes on Franco. “You are mad with me, so you go to him?”

“Piss off,” I growl, deciding on the spur of the moment to dump the rest of my wine on him, to Josh’s silent delight. “This isn’t what it looks like, nor is it any of your business. What are you doing here?”

“Last ditch effort,” Josh calls up, trying not to laugh, and gripping JP’s t-shirt roughly. “If you still want us to fuck off after this, we will go.”

I grit my teeth. A crowd is forming, elbowing each other and capturing this cringe-fest on social media. Franco is snickering behind his hand like it’s the most entertaining thing in the world.

JP runs his hand through his damp hair and pulls himself together with a clenched jaw. “Storm Rivers,” he says formally. “I know this is a shitshow, and I’m sorry. It’s not what you think, at all. My father is a douche canoe, yeah, you heard me,” he says over his shoulder to the growing crowd with their phones held up. “He royally screwed up what is undoubtedly the best thing that has ever happened to me and to us. I don’t give a shit about the trust. I just want you. If you are worried in any way that this is about the money, you don’t need to be. So we have something to say. All in, cards on the

table.” He takes a deep breath, and with a smirk that makes my heart skip a beat, he says. “We’re just a pack, standing in front of an omega, asking her to mate with us.”

I press my lips together to stop from laughing. Not because it’s funny, but because it’s so corny, I can’t fathom why they thought that would work.

“You’re going to have to do a lot better than that,” Franco calls down. “I’m not seeing any tears of joy up here.”

“You, shut the fuck up,” JP snarls.

“Okay,” Russell says. “If that didn’t get you. Gentlemen, we have to move to contingency.”

I peer down, curiosity getting the better of me. “What’s the contingency?”

Josh bends down to press the play button on an old Boombox that he got from who the fuck knows where, and my heart stops when the old song, *In the Still of the Night*, by *Boyz II Men*, blasts out.

JP and Russell step back to allow Josh centre stage as they start to sing. With his hand over his heart, he belts out the lyrics.

Du-du-du-du-du; sha doop shobe doo

Sha doop shobe doo

Sha doop shobe doo

Sha doop shobe doo

In the still of the night

I held you, held you tight

Oh, I love, love you so

Promise I’ll never let ya go

In the still of the night

“Wow,” Franco says. “That’s smooth.”

I giggle, tears springing into my eyes. “You’re a bunch of arseholes.”

Josh stops singing. “Does that mean yes or no?”

“It means, I’ll see.”

“We know how hurt you are over the trust, but we are ready to prove ourselves, Storm. We wanted you to know how much we love you,” Josh says.

“We’ll always be here for you,” JP adds.

“You’re our everything,” Russell says.

He holds up the bouquet of flowers and then launches them at the balcony, hitting a surprised Franco in the face with them. As I snort with laughter, I’m convinced that was on purpose. I pick them up from the floor, my head screaming at me to accept this, but my heart is still bruised from being put through the wringer. Not just with them, but with everything.

The men are smiling up at me, and I can see the love and respect in their eyes. I feel my heart swell with emotion as I watch them start singing again. They are trying to put a smile on my face and let me know that they are sorry for this mess, which has caused me distress.

The pack sing the song until the last note fades away. As they finish, I know this is one of the sweetest gestures anyone has ever done for me, and it will stay with me forever. It has taken a lot of courage for them to come here and do this, knowing the whole of Knotting Hill will have heard about it by nightfall, not to mention witnessed it on social media. The experience of being serenaded by the pack while standing on the balcony of my first-floor flat is one of the most beautiful, profound moments of my life.

“Ask me again!” I call down.

JP steps forward. “We are just a pack, standing in front of an omega, asking her to mate with us.”

“Come up,” I say with a big smile and disappear into the flat to buzz them up. “You’d better go,” I say to Franco.

He nods, his face earnest. “Please speak to your father as soon as you can.”

“I will,” I promise him and watch him leave, as the St. Lucs run up the stairs, the anticipation in the air palpable.

Forty-Two

Storm

“WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?” JP asks, giving Franco a death stare as they pass on the stairs.

“It means, I’ll see. I want to trust you, but my head is a bit mashed, and I need a minute to think.” I turn and head back into the flat, the three of them following me into the small space. Their scents overwhelm me. Apple pie and Chantilly cream, along with hot chocolate and marshmallows, is nicely complimented by Josh’s subtle aftershave. It does things to my body that I don’t think I’m quite ready for, but I know it is going to happen anyway. It’s physical. I can’t stop it, even if I wanted to, which I don’t. I want to experience them all together. I want to see if what we have is real.

I take a deep breath, trying to quell the butterflies in my stomach. I’m excited but a little bit scared. I have never done anything like this before. I know the night ahead will be an adventure.

I try to focus on the positive aspects of the night ahead - the chance to explore my sexuality in ways I’ve never imagined before, the thrill of the unknown that lies ahead, and the opportunity to make new memories with my chosen partners.

But as the minutes tick away, the tension builds as it becomes apparent that they are thinking all of the same things, my nerves begin to intensify. Tonight, I'm going to open myself up to three men, a thought that both fills me with anxiety, but also excites me beyond belief.

I move across to the bed and face them.

"You don't have to do this," JP says, taking charge but still stalking me slowly.

Russell and Josh join him, their eyes devouring me. The intensity of it sends a tingle of pleasure through me.

JP steps forward, his body inches from mine, his eyes lingering on my body.

"I want this," I reply huskily. "I need to feel if this is real."

"Like a test run," Josh murmurs.

My cheeks heat up as he voices what I'm really thinking.

JP and Russell chuckle.

"Only if you really want it, princess," JP says.

"I do."

He smiles and gives me a gentle kiss on the cheek. Russell and Josh follow suit, their hands briefly brushing mine.

The three men move toward the bed, taking charge, JP taking the lead. I follow, feeling the heat of their desire as they gather around the bed.

Now is our chance to explore all our fantasies. I know that anything we want is within reach and that tonight, all of our boundaries will be tested.

I watch as JP climbs onto the bed and lies back, his eyes fixed on me. I feel a surge of excitement as I see the desire on his face.

Russell and Josh take their places near JP.

Licking my lips with nervous anticipation, I climb onto the bed, positioning myself in front of them.

JP reaches out and touches my face, his fingertips lightly tracing my cheek. He smiles, his eyes asking if I'm ready. I nod, my heart pounding in my chest.

My bedroom is shrouded in the growing dark, the dim light coming through the windows. I lie in the middle of my bed as the three men undress me slowly. It feels strange, but I let them shed me of my clothes. My sheets are soft against my naked skin.

The three men loom over me as they strip off their clothes. I admire the way the light plays off their toned physiques as they remove the last of their clothing.

They are smoking hot. Their cocks are engorged and ready for me, all three above average size. It makes my mouth water, and slick to pool at my entrance.

The alphas catch the scent and let out soft growls, but they come no further. Not yet. I allow myself to take in the sight of them for a few moments before feeling the excitement of what was about to happen overwhelm me.

JP crawls up the bed towards me. His hands lightly trace the curves of my body as he strokes my skin, his lips grazing my neck and sending shivers down my spine. He claims my lips, his kiss deep and passionate. His fingers dance over my body, exploring every inch as he kisses me. The sensation of his hands on me is intoxicating, and I feel myself melting into him.

Russell joins us, his lips replacing JP's as he kisses me fervently. His hands move lower, caressing my breasts and stomach as he kisses me. My body responds to his touch as a low moan escapes my lips. He continues to kiss me as his hands move lower, exploring my legs and hips before reaching between them.

Josh moves up to join us when Russell lets me go. His hands trail over my body, exploring every inch as his lips claim mine. All of their hands are on me now as they each discover my body in their own way. They work in perfect harmony, each of their touches igniting a fire within me.

Russell's mouth moves down my body, his tongue tracing a path over my stomach. His fingers dance over my inner thighs before finally reaching my core. I gasp as my body responds to his touch, my hips instinctively rising to meet him. His tongue traces small circles, flicking and teasing my clit as he tastes me. I arch my back, inviting JP and Josh to suck my nipples into aching peaks. Russell adds his fingers as he expertly pleasures me. I moan in delight, squirming against the overwhelming sensation of having three men making love to me.

Russell removes his fingers from my pussy so JP can thrust his inside me, finger-fucking me until I cry out with longing. He explores my depths as he goes back to kissing me. His expert touch sends pleasure coursing through my veins, and I cry out as my body begins to tremble.

Josh's lips claim mine again. I'm coming closer and closer to the edge of my climax. With one final thrust of his fingers, JP sends me into a frenzy, my body shaking as I reach an orgasm, my head spinning as pleasure rushes through my veins.

Without speaking, JP sits me up. His touch is gentle yet firm, and it sends shivers down my spine. He kisses my palm and then moves up my arm, sending sparks of pleasure through my body.

Russell moves behind me and begins to caress my back, sending waves of pleasure that course through me. His hands are strong and sure. My desire mounts again with each touch.

Josh comes forward and wraps his arms around my waist, pulling me close. He kisses my neck hungrily, his lips sending waves of ecstasy zooming through me.

The heat builds within me as each man explores my body. The pleasure is intense, and I want more.

I quiver with desire as the sensations grow stronger. Their hands are everywhere, teasing and tantalising me with pleasure.

Russell moves his mouth to my neck, kissing and caressing me. He reaches around to cup my breasts, pushing them up into two mounds for JP to suck on. He tugs my nipples between his teeth gently, sending a deep lust pouring through my veins. I purr loudly, needing more of this. He growls in response, his mouth moving lower, sending shockwaves of pleasure through my body, which is on fire with desire. I want all of them inside me.

I hear myself begging for it.

“Please,” I whimper. “Please, I need you, all of you.”

JP lowers his mouth to my pussy and sucks my clit into his mouth, groaning as he tastes my slick.

“Fuck, you taste so good,” he murmurs, his breath tickling my inner thigh.

Josh and Russell’s hard bodies press against mine. I’m completely lost in the moment.

JP rises up, his mouth wet with slick. I lean forward to kiss him, running my tongue over his lips.

The other men allow him to push me back as he settles between my legs. He moves his mouth to my neck with a soft growl, but he knows it isn’t time yet. He eases his enormous cock inside me, sliding in slowly, feeling my slick coat him. The sensation is exquisite. I cry out in pleasure as he moves slowly and deliberately. His thrusts are passionate and intense. My pleasure spirals out of control, and my pussy clenches around his cock as I climax loudly, his name on my lips.

“JP!”

He growls and rams into me harder, deeper, ravaging me now. It doesn’t take long for him to orgasm. He slams against me before he unloads into my pussy, filling me with his cum.

He is quickly replaced by Russell. Everyone is caught up in the hedonism of the moment. Each of us needing the other desperately. Every one of his long, steady thrusts with his huge cock sends me further into ecstasy. I become lost in our pleasure.

When Josh presses his fingers against my clit as Russell pounds into me, I buck underneath them, screaming their names. The sensations are overwhelming. My orgasm rips through me, sending waves of pleasure through my body. I'm clawing at them to be closer, purring like a wildcat.

"More!" I pant. "More!"

Russell fucks me as JP and Josh hold my ankles in place, lifting my legs up so Russell can bury himself even deeper. I scream as my pussy clutches his cock so tightly it hurts. But the pain is filled with pleasure. He grunts loudly, shooting his load before a low, possessive growl escapes him.

He withdraws, making room for Josh, which sends me into a frenzied state of bliss. I'm full of cum, and my pussy is so wet he slides in easily with a loud groan. I know that I will never forget this moment for as long as I live.

Josh hammers my pussy with his stiff, wide cock, which rubs me in all the right places.

I buck again, losing my mind with the number of times I've come under their attention.

"Fuck," I gasp.

"Storm," Josh pants. "Fuck, you feel good. Fuck."

"More," I cry out. "I need all of you."

The other two descend on me, kissing me, alternately thrusting their cocks into my mouth.

Josh buries his dick as deep into me as he can before he shoots his load and withdraws quickly, sweating and panting as he lowers his face to my pussy.

"Creampie," he rasps.

I moan and do as he asks, gushing slick and cum onto his face as he buries it against my pussy.

"Jesus," JP pants. "Fuck."

"Oooh," I moan as Josh starts all over again, tongue fucking me, lapping up the product of our pleasure, before JP returns to me, this time letting me ride him as the other men

ravage my writhing body in a tangle of mouth, tongues and limbs.

This has been one of the most pleasurable and intense experiences of my life, and I know that they feel the same.

Forty-Three

JP

STORM SMILES SLEEPILY as she sees me putting my pants on. “Morning.”

I return it and lean down to kiss the top of her head. “Go back to sleep, princess. It’s early.”

“Where are you going?”

“Coffee.”

“Ah. Go, good knight, go.”

I snicker and sit on the bed to put my shoes on.

She yawns and turns over, cuddling up to Josh, who is more than happy to take my place next to her. One of us took turns on the couch, which wasn’t ideal, but this bed isn’t big enough for the four of us. As soon as Storm gives us her approval to mate, we will ask her to move into our house. I am under no illusions that she has one hundred per cent forgiven us. Well, me, specifically. We ambushed her, I will admit to that. I did not expect her to invite us up, and I did not expect to end up in her bed. Instinct took over, which proves to me who she is to us, but it’s now up to her to decide. I will walk away with a broken heart if she decides we aren’t for her. But I’m

hopeful. What we shared last night was something beyond my wildest dreams.

We have been through so much, and yet, here we are, in her bed, safe and sound. I turn to Storm, who looks back with a sweet smile.

“It’s good to have you here,” she murmurs.

Feeling a wave of warmth and contentment flow through me, I reach out to squeeze her hand, and then stand up. I haven’t felt so happy, ever. I thought I was happy living my life the way I wanted to, but I was only kidding myself.

This right here is true.

Josh clears his throat. “This is the first night in many, many nights I’ve slept more than two hours.” His voice is thick with emotion. This is huge for him.

Storm eyes him curiously but doesn’t question him. “It feels like everything is finally starting to work out.”

Russell looks up and kisses her shoulder before saying, “Took us a while, but we did it.”

I smile, relieved that we are all finally together. I think of all the hardships we have faced, all of the obstacles that had stood in our way, ourselves and our actions mostly, but we persevered and now we might end up with everything. I won’t pressure her. She doesn’t need that from us.

“I’ll be back soon.”

Josh and Russell get up as well, stretching and yawning, and follow me into the kitchen. A sense of calm and peace, a feeling of knowing that things are finally going to be okay settles over me.

“Stay with her. Don’t leave her alone to forget about us and change her mind.”

Josh looks alarmed. “Do you think she might? Change her mind?”

“She hasn’t made up her mind yet. I haven’t heard the words. Until then, we do whatever we can to make her life

easier and happier so she can't live without us.”

I set off to the coffee shop down the street. The day is beautiful, the sun warming me, and birds are singing in the trees.

Luckily for both Franco and me, he isn't working today. I might've ruined my bliss at seeing his face this morning. Although I would've also felt the need to brag about where I'd come from, even though the scent of cherries is all around me.

I place my order, choosing a variety of baked goods to go with the coffee, tapping my fingers on the counter as I wait.

When the order is ready, I do a balancing act to carry the four coffees and baked goods back to the flat, enjoying this sense of domesticity. It will be better when we have her at home where we can wait on her hand and foot, be at her beck and call and worship her the way she deserves.

Using my elbow to press the buzzer, my heart stops for a moment as no one answers, but then the door opens, and I'm let up to Storm greeting me at the front door to her flat.

“You're a god!” she exclaims, grabbing the bag and pulling a coffee out of the cardboard holder.

“All black,” I call as she makes her way to the kitchen.

“That'll do,” she says with a smile.

Josh and Russell descend on me with gusto, grabbing their coffees, and I kick the door closed, shutting out the world.

I gather my courage by taking a sip of hot, bitter coffee and approach with caution.

Storm glances up from eating her muffin. “What's up?” she asks suspiciously.

“Do you have any questions?” I venture.

She gives me a puzzled frown. “About what?”

“The trust,” I mutter.

Josh and Russell groan, knowing I've just waved the red flag, but I need to hear what she has to say about it now that

she knows I'm giving it up.

"Oh." She looks down, and my heart sinks.

The silence is deafening for a moment, but then she sighs.

"I don't expect you to give up your inheritance for me. That's selfish, and that's not who I am. But it does still raise the question of why you didn't tell me before we had sex the first time."

"I know." I place the coffee on the kitchen counter. "I had two things to tell you that night. About the job and this. You sort of sidetracked me with your hot naked body." I smirk so she knows I'm not gaslighting her.

She giggles. "Okay, I take full responsibility for that, but *you* should've made time to tell me, especially before your dick dad did."

I press my lips together. She has his card. "I know. After we had sex, I knew I was in love with you, crazy as that sounds. I've never been in love before, but with you, I knew. I knew I couldn't live without you, that I didn't want to. I was afraid that you would think exactly what you did, but it was cowardly not to tell you straight away. Can you forgive me?"

She casts her glance at Josh and Russell, who are staring at me, utterly dumbfounded.

She drags her gaze to mine. "I can tell by these two, who look like they've been hit with a dead fish, that you've never said anything like that before. It makes me want to believe you."

"Want doesn't mean you do."

"I do," she says. "I know what I felt last night. I know you felt it too. All of you. This is fate. We are meant to be together. However, I choose to believe that you wouldn't be here if this were just about money. All the effort, all the chasing when every other omega in the area would drop their knickers for you, and probably have, in an instant."

"Well, not *every* omega," I mutter, my cheeks going unnaturally hot at the mention of my salacious behaviour.

Storm takes my hand and kisses my knuckles, reassuring me. *She* is reassuring *me*, which is something I have never had before. It's not something I thought I'd ever need, but it means everything to me.

“You are the sweetest, most beautiful omega in the world, and I don't need anyone but you. You know that, right?”

She nods. “I do. I think you have all proven yourselves.”

“Does that mean what I think it means?”

She smiles, picking up her coffee, murmuring, “We'll see.”

I chuckle and pick up my own coffee again. “I'll take it.”

No matter her hesitations in jumping in feet first, I feel complete and content in my own skin, and I know that I have finally found a place where I belong, just as I know the others, including Storm, do too.

Forty-Four

Storm

I LIE IN MY NEST, surrounded by my men, dressed only in JP's ridiculous cherry tee. We haven't moved out of my nest all day. We have been lazily making love between sleeping and eating. It's been bliss.

Josh is next to me, his hand stroking my hair. His breath is soft on my forehead. On my other side, Russell's lips are pressed against a place on my neck just below my ear, his hand running down to rest on my hip. JP is at my feet, his fingers tracing circles around my ankles. We are happy with the silence. We've said all we need to for now. I know that I don't need to go over it again. I *do* believe what JP says about the trust. I also mean with all my heart that I don't want him to give it up. Mostly because it's not for me to decide that for him, but just a teeny part of me wants him to stick it to his dad. I don't even feel guilty about that. He's not a nice man.

It is a gorgeous early spring evening, and a warm wind blows through the trees, causing the blossoms to flutter down to the pavement like petals. The world outside is quiet and peaceful. I look out of the window to see the sun setting, casting a gentle orange light around us.

My heart suddenly thumps wildly as I nestle back between Josh and Russell. I know this is it. I have found my true happiness. I realise in that moment that I can depend on these three men for the rest of my life and that I would never walk alone again. Their love and support enfold me like a comforting blanket. I know in my bones that this is where I belong. The sun slowly sinks below the horizon, its golden light slowly giving way to purple as it disappears. With Josh, Russell and JP by my side, I feel like I've stepped out of my life and into a fairy tale. The world seems more vibrant and alive.

My phone buzzes on the bedside cabinet. I reluctantly disentangle myself from the men and lean over to grab it.

Cass has sent me a text.

I open it up and snort at her opening words.

How fucking rude, bitch. You get serenaded without me? And WTF is this...?

I wait a second before a screenshot of one of the videos taken last night by some random stranger, appears with a big red circle around Franco's face, with arrows pointing at him from every angle.

Giggling, I reply.

It's not what it looks like.

That's what they all say.

Seriously. It's a long story.

Fine. But how come I have to see the St. Lucs being romantic dickheads on social media?

Sorry, it's been a whirlwind. How r u?

Good. Decided I'm a one alpha omega.

Wut?

You read me!

Fuck. Who?

Steve.

Your heat bonking buddy?

You know another Steve?

Congrats, babes. I'm thrilled for u.

Am I meant to be thrilled for u?

I tap my finger on the screen as I look at the St. Luc pack currently curled up in my nest with me.

Yes.

Fuck! Yeah! Get it, girl!

I'll catch up with you 2morrow. Gotta calk my dad.

Calk.

FFS. CALL

Three laughing emojis follow that from Cass.

That autocorrect bitch needs a fucking name.

I don't even hesitate.

Sadie.

Dad. Officially Dad.

I laugh out loud and lean over Russell to climb off the bed. "I need to make a quick call. I'll be right back."

They don't question me as I head to the kitchen, which I appreciate. I'm not sure Franco wants me to blab about his request to anyone.

I dial my dad and wait.

He answers in two rings. "Storm. Everything okay?"

"You been taking lessons from Mum?"

He chuckles. "I'll take that as yes."

"Yes. But I need to speak to you. Not about me. Are you free in the morning?"

"Early. Can you be at the practice by 7AM?"

"I will be there."

"So glad you're working with us, Stormy."

"I'm grateful, but it's temporary."

"Doesn't have to be. We won't interfere."

"I'll see." That seems to be my go-to answer for getting out of replying to things lately. But I know that my 'I'll see' to the St. Lucs is me being coy. I want them. I want what they're offering me. And when the time is right, I will mate with them.

"Humph."

"See you in the morning, Dad."

"See you, Stormy."

We hang up, and I return to the men with a small smile playing on my lips. “Ask me again.”

JP looks up from where he is flicking through his phone. He sits up straighter. “You sure?”

I nod.

Standing in my bedroom, clutching my phone, dressed in a cherry print tee that barely covers my arse, my stomach twists into a knot of anticipation.

JP smirks. That sexy, wicked curve of his lips that makes me want to kiss him.

“We’re just a pack, standing in front of an omega, asking her to mate with us.”

I watch as the three men drop to their knees in front of me.

“Yes.”

I drop to my knees as well. I’m flattened to the floor, one of my alphas ripping at my tee, another kissing me deeply as my beta pushes my legs apart.

Bliss.

I’m floating on a cloud of pure bliss.

Forty-Five

Storm

STARING at my reflection in the bathroom mirror, I pull my hair into a ponytail, and I'm ready to go. Suddenly, I hear a loud thump coming from the living room.

Frowning, I creep past Russell and JP, still sleeping in my nest. Moving quietly past the screens that cut off my bedroom from the living area, I see Josh is already up, bustling around the room, looking for something.

"Josh?" I ask. "Everything okay?" I grimace inwardly as I sound like my parents.

Josh looks up from his task and gives me a warm smile. "Hi," he says, his voice soft and gentle. "I wasn't sleeping, so I figured I'd get up and tidy the place. We've descended on you and made a mess of your flat."

I feel a rush of love for him and take a few steps closer. "You don't have to do that."

"I do. Those two are pigs." He grins, indicating the bedroom.

I giggle and look around. It's not *untidy* as such, just too small for all of us and our stuff.

“You ready to go?” he asks.

I nod, looking back at him. “Yeah, I’ll just grab some coffee.”

“Already done. Also, a croissant from the coffee shop.”

“You seriously need to stop feeding me all these gorgeous pastries. I’m going to fill this flat all on my own if you don’t.”

“There’d just be more of you to love.” He gives me a sassy smile.

“Fuck off,” I reply good-naturedly.

He crosses to the kitchen and picks up my coffee and food. “I’ll walk with you.”

I shake my head. “You don’t have to do that. It’s twenty minutes away.”

“I’ll catch a taxi back. I have to go to the bookshop today anyway. Elle is going to kill me as it is for abandoning her.”

“You’re close?”

He nods. “Yeah, she is my best friend outside of these two. Maybe more like an annoying, little sister.”

I smile. “That sounds great,” I say. I reluctantly pull on my coat and slip into my trainers, shoving my heels into my bag, which I scoop off the floor of the bedroom, pausing to kiss the heads of my two sleeping alphas.

Slinging my bag over my shoulder, Josh and I slip quietly out and head into the peaceful morning. The streets are quiet, the only sound being the occasional burst of birdsong, a bus here and there, with a few cars. Nothing like the usual bustling vibrance of the neighbourhood. Sipping my coffee, which Josh alternates holding with the croissant, we take the same route I always do.

Josh and I quickly fall into an easy conversation, talking about his bookstore and more about Elle. I’m not jealous, just curious.

Before I know it, we have arrived at work. Walking and talking with him has made the commute fly by. I turn to him

and smile. “Thanks for walking with me,” I say, feeling a wave of appreciation wash over me.

He returns my smile and places a gentle kiss on my forehead. “Anytime. Either JP or Russell will be here when you finish.”

“No, that’s not necessary.”

He takes my hand and squeezes it. “It is. We promised to protect you, and we will.”

I’m incredibly lucky to have them in my life, despite me thinking the opposite not that long ago. I know they will always be there for me, no matter how early or late it is. I hug him before heading up the steps to the practice, still feeling the warmth of Josh’s embrace. Turning, I wave goodbye and then head inside to have this talk with my dad. My stomach clenches unexpectedly.

I take a deep breath, taking a moment to swap my shoes. Bracing myself for the conversation to come, I move further inside the building. I see my father sitting in the waiting area, looking through a patient folder.

He looks up and smiles. “Stormy. What’s up?”

He is straight down to the point, which tells me two things. His head is on work, and he needs to go. This makes it more difficult—more pressure to get it out there.

I force a smile and sit down next to him. “I have something to ask you. I know this is going to be awkward, but I said I would.”

His expression grows concerned. “Do I need to be worried?”

I shake my head. “Not about me. But an old lady who needs your help.”

His concern turns to curiosity. “What do you mean?”

“There is this guy, Franco, he works at the coffee shop. His grandmother isn’t well with her heart, but she can’t get insurance. They have the money to pay for a consult and more,

but the practice won't see them without the insurance. Could you bend the rules for him, them?"

There, I've said it. I've done my bit. It's now up to my dad.

He frowns. "Storm, you know this is extremely unethical."

"I know!" I exclaim, dropping my head into my hands. "But I said I'd ask, and I have."

He sighs and looks away. "Pass my number on to your friend. I'll talk to him and then decide. Okay? I'm not promising anything."

I peek out from between my fingers. "Really?"

"This once."

I seem to be hearing that a lot from my parents lately. I'm abusing their positions, and I hate myself for it.

"I'm sorry."

He takes my hand and squeezes it. "Don't be sorry, Storm. You have such a big heart, so compassionate. I would expect nothing less from you to help a friend in need." He leans forward to kiss my forehead and then stands up. "I have to go. Tell him to leave a message if I don't pick up later. I'll ring him back."

I nod, knowing he will.

"Thank you, Daddy."

He grins and bends down to grab his briefcase and the folder, which he stuffs inside. "I'll see you tomorrow. I'm in all day unless there's an emergency."

"Lunch?"

"You know it."

I smile, and the awkwardness of this conversation is gone.

* * *

True to Josh's word, Russell is waiting for me at home time. "We have something special planned for tonight," he says,

stooping to give me a thorough kiss despite the fact that my mother has walked out right behind me.

I hear her snort into her hand and pull away quickly.

“Russ, this is my *mum*. Gloria Rivers, this is Russell St. Luc.”

“Charmed,” my mum murmurs as Russ grins at her. “I see Josh took my advice?” She raises her eyebrow as I gape at her.

“You?” I hiss.

She shrugs. “Me. I adore Josh, and I know he wouldn’t be packmates with idiots. The St. Lucs were my first choice for you, and it seems I was right.”

She winks and strolls away, waving as she makes her way to her car.

I shake my head. “Honestly, I don’t even know why I’m surprised.”

“She has been invaluable.”

I narrow my eyes. “Insider info...not fair.”

“Hey, we needed the big guns. You were extremely difficult to pin down.”

I laugh and take his hand, linking our fingers together. “Tell me more about this surprise. I prefer non-surprises.”

“Noted,” he murmurs, halting our slow progress to kiss me again in the middle of the pavement for all of Knotting Hill to see.

Forty-Six

Storm

THE PACK'S SURPRISE, which turned into a non-surprise, which disappointed JP, is something they have been planning for the past few weeks. Or at least some of it.

As we walk up a couple of steps to the fancy restaurant, I'm filled with anticipation. My high black heels are sexy and strappy, my dress is black and floaty to my knees but tight and low over my cleavage. My hair is loose around my shoulders, and I feel amazing. The compliments from the guys have made my year. An omega could get used to this.

"Gorgeous," JP whispers to me again.

"You already said that," I point out, but seriously, keep them coming.

"I will say it every day a thousand times. You are gorgeous."

A smile stretched across my face as we stepped into the restaurant, my confidence growing with each head that turned. I could almost feel the whispers rippling throughout the room and saw the cameras raised to capture our entrance. JP holds one of my hands while Russell holds the other, and I wish I had a third to link fingers with Josh. I see the questioning

glances and hear the hushed remarks, but I stand tall, knowing I'm with three of the most incredible men ever. The St. Lucs don't even seem to know anyone else is in their presence, their focused attention solely on me. My heart fills with love and joy at their attentiveness.

We are led to a private room at the back.

"Away from prying eyes," JP murmurs suggestively.

My heart skips a beat at his husky tone, wondering if he is going to try something sexual out in public. I mean, I wouldn't say no, probably, depending on the circumstances.

My breath catches in my throat as I step into the room and see the small table that has been set for four. It's illuminated by a single candle, which sends a warm, romantic light across the dimly lit room. Josh pulls out a chair for me to sit on.

I take in the scent of roses mixed with a hint of champagne and smile as small appetisers are served on delicate plates. The champagne flows from the bottle like liquid gold. Its cold bubbles mix with the flavour of the food on my tongue, making it even more delicious. The service is nothing short of extraordinary, even more attentive than the intimate care of the pack.

The warmth of love hangs in the air, a palpable energy that can be felt by all. Russell and JP sit on either side of me, and Josh opposite. With his blue eyes twinkling, Russell reaches for a single white rose from the centre of the table, a symbol of their affection. With shaking fingers, I bring it closer to my face, inhaling its sweet scent.

"This is perfect," I murmur.

"Would this have won you over?" Russell asks with a soft smile.

I pretend to ponder his question, narrowing my eyes as I think it over. "Hmm. No."

JP chuckles at my response before offering me a small box with a mischievous glint in his eye. "How about now?"

I shake my head, feeling overwhelmed by their gesture. “No, you didn’t have to do that.”

His mouth curves into a grin. “We did, so suck it up, buttercup and open the box.”

I release an exasperated sigh before slowly taking the box and opening it to find a beautiful necklace with a heart-shaped diamond charm hanging from it.

“Wow,” I murmur, lifting it so that the facets twinkle in the candlelight. “This was not...necessary.”

“Don’t you like it?” Josh asks.

“I love it,” I exclaim. “But it’s too much.”

JP takes my hand and kisses my palm. “Anything for you, princess.”

“You are wicked.”

“But we are turning your head, and that was our devilish plan.”

“Arseholes,” I murmur with deep affection, tears springing to my eyes.

Laughing at each other, JP rises. I scoop my hair over my shoulder so he can clasp it around my neck. I pick up the diamond and admire it.

“The night isn’t over,” Josh says. “After this, we have one more stop to make.”

“You have to tell me,” I complain. “I don’t want someone jumping out at me, or worse.”

“We are going to *elite*,” JP replies. “We are going there because it is the hub of our little community, and I want *everyone* to know that we are yours, you are ours and that the St. Lucs are off the market for good.”

I blink, taking that in. As far as announcements go, they’ve pretty much nailed it. “But didn’t the viral video of you singing to me accomplish that?” I’ve watched it, along with hundreds of thousands of other people. I do not look my best. I wish they’d warned me.

“No, you didn’t give us a straight answer,” Russell says. “*This* is a statement.”

“It’s definitely that,” I murmur. “You ready for this?”

JP’s steady gaze meets mine. “Are you?”

“I asked you first.”

He presses his lips together, trying not to laugh. “Oh, we are more than ready, princess. We cannot wait.”

“Then neither can I. Let’s go.”

We climb into a taxi for the short drive to *elite*. It is buzzing already, and it’s only 8PM. The loud music thumps through the doors.

I aim for the back of the queue, but JP grabs my hand. “VIP, princess.”

He leads me to the front of the queue, where there is a small line consisting of two people waiting to get in. The Doorman lets them in and then us, to the complaints of the waiting club-goers in the not-so-VIP queue.

“Fancy fucker,” I mutter, but draw JP to me to give him a kiss.

He takes full advantage, wrapping his arms around me, his tongue duelling with mine.

We move to the dance floor, once again, with all eyes on us. I feel a ping of anticipation as we stop. JP moves behind me, pressing his body close to mine, moving to the music, his hands on my hips. I sway against him, things heating up dramatically. I’m electrified with pleasure, a daring thrill and an intensity I never thought I’d experience.

The music is loud and pulsing, the lights flashing as the people dance. I feel a wave of excitement as I look around, taking in the sight of the beautiful people around us, enjoying the night and feeling the energy of the evening. I’ve been here a few times, and the atmosphere has always been electric. Tonight, feels different, though, as if there is an extra energy in the air.

JP's cock is digging into me as he moves behind me. He is wearing a sleek black suit, his blue eyes dark and intense. Russell and Josh move in, dressed in similar black suits. They form a triangle around me. They all look smoking hot, and I'm proud that they're mine. They smile at me, and I feel a surge of pleasure rocket through me. I know something exciting is going to happen, and I want it. I'm ready for it.

JP presses his warm lips to my shoulder, kissing and nipping me gently. I'm intoxicated by his touch.

His hands explore my body as they all move in closer. My heart races, a thrill of anticipation mixed with a daring sense of something new. They are shielding me from view, their arms around me, their hands trailing over my body as we dance ever closer.

Every nerve is electrified as their hands move hungrily over my body. I gasp and moan, the intensity of their touch in such a public place more than I could've imagined.

We move in a slow, sensual rhythm.

JP's hands drop to my thighs. He slides up the dress, slipping his hand between my legs.

"Fuck," I breathe when his fingers brush over the lacy material of my knickers.

"Do you want this, princess?" he whispers in my ear.

"Yes," I pant, so, so ready for him to touch me in my most intimate place while everyone around us is none the wiser. I find I don't even care if anyone *is* the wiser. That's what makes it so hot. "Fuck, yes."

He pushes my knickers aside. I tremble in their arms as Russell and Josh move even closer. I arch my back and wrap my arm around and the back of JP's neck, relishing his mouth over my jugular. I wonder if he's going to bite me. I wouldn't even say no. I want it. The omega inside me knows her future mate; is responding to him. I let out a soft purr, which vibrates my throat, causing him to growl softly. It's possessive, and when his teeth graze over my skin, I nearly climax without any added pleasure.

JP lightly touches my pussy, sliding his finger over my slippery clit.

I gasp, but Russell's mouth muffles it as he kisses me, his hand cupping the back of my neck. At that moment, JP thrusts his fingers inside me, and my knees buckle.

But my men are there to hold me up. JP fucks me relentlessly in the middle of the dance floor with his fingers coated in my slick. This public claiming of me in every way except the bite is so hot.

I moan in delight when Josh's fingers join JP's and then Russell's. The pleasure builds until it finally breaks free through me, making me shudder with lust. I'm trembling, a light sheen of sweat on my skin as my orgasm shivers through me.

My climax is intense. It lasts a few moments before it melts away. There is a wave of relief as my tension fades and a sense of satisfaction as the pleasure lingers. The pack withdraw their fingers, releasing me from their sexy embrace. JP pushes his slick-covered fingers into my mouth, and I lap at them until they're clean, smiling shyly with a mixture of awe and love.

JP returns my gaze and smiles wickedly, his eyes twinkling with the shared pleasure and excitement we have just experienced. I know this isn't where it will end. He will require my services to him in public somewhere, sometime in the future. I'm happy to oblige. This was daring and thrilling. I got off on that as much as I did the finger-fuck. He took a fantasy I never knew I had, and made it come to life in the most sensually perfect way possible. He leans in and kisses me, his lips lingering on mine, tasting my cum. I grab Russell's hand and suck his fingers into my mouth, cleaning them as well, enjoying his growl of pleasure, before I do the same to Josh. We are all still breathing heavily, the air around us filled with the scent of sex and my pleasure. A sense of wonderment falls over me as I look around the club, the lights and the music rushing back to me as I feel a sense of contentment and joy. This has been an intense, thrilling

experience, and I can't wait to up the ante next time. It's a game, fulfilling fantasies which I love.

I pull the pack closer to me, making sure they all hear me when I murmur, "I love you."

Forty-Seven

Storm

A WEEK OR SO LATER, after the pack had to go back home, if, for no other reason than they were driving me crazy in the enclosed space of my tiny flat, I'm walking to work alone today. I miss their company, but it's also refreshing to just be quiet and have my thoughts.

I'm greeted by a familiar face though when I arrive, to my surprise.

Cheryl is hovering, her hand white knuckling her bag as she paces up and down outside my parents' practice.

"Hey," she says, marching up to me when she sees me. "Can we talk?"

"Everything okay?" Right, that's it. I'm turning into my mother.

"Noooo!" she wails and flings her arms around me.

I hug her back but then pull away and lead her over to a bench near the entrance with a big flowerpot next to it.

We sit, and she drops her head into her hands.

I rub her back and ask, "Did the pack do something to upset you?"

She glares up at me. “No. This isn’t about them. It’s about that witch Angela.”

“Oooh,” I murmur and remove my hand from Cheryl. “What did she do to you?”

“It turns out they are in debt up to their ears, and she hasn’t paid me this month. I mean, what the fucking fuck? Sadie as well. She has stayed to cooperate, whatever that means, but I’ve walked out before things went sideways for *me*. The auditors are there; the ethics board are crawling all over the place. It’s doomed. DOOMED, I tell you!” she roars in my face, tears streaming out of her eyes. “What am I going to do? I haven’t been paid, and now I have to find another job which isn’t going to pay me for another month after that!”

“I know, babes. Well, I didn’t know about the Robbs. That’s shocking.” But it all makes sense now. It makes all the sense that Angela didn’t bother me about my parents’ clients *until* she needed me. I was the ace in the hole, supposedly. But why would she think I’d ever betray my parents to help her? She is delusional.

Well, desperate, obviously.

“Do you want me to see if my parents’ can offer you something?”

Her eyes go wide, and she grabs my arm. “Would you? I loathe being *that* friend, but I’m freaking out.”

“I’ll ask, but I honestly don’t know if they have anything. There’s Miriam here already and me.”

“I’ll do anything. I’ll be their brew bitch. I don’t give a fuck.”

“You could ring the temp agency in the meantime,” I suggest.

“I have. They don’t have anything. And I can’t live like that, not knowing what’s coming in when. I need stability, especially now.”

“Now?”

She sighs. “I’m pregnant. It’s why we went away the other week. It was my heat, and we decided that was the time. And now this happens. I need every penny between now and then and the benefits... fuck.”

I hesitate. She sounds so frantic. I lick my lips nervously. “Is there something else you want to say?”

“What do you mean?” she asks, rooting around in her bag for a tissue, which she finds and blows her nose.

“Anything. I’m here if you need to vent.”

She sighs heavily. “Jason got laid off. It was coming; we knew it but didn’t expect it quite so soon. He’s been looking for a job, but his trade is niche, and there are so few jobs. He’s widened his net, but you’ve seen where we live. We need all five salaries coming in to afford the fucking place, along with everything else.”

I silently agree. They live in a gigantic eight-bedroom mansion, which is bigger than my parents’ and the St. Lucs’ put together.

“Fuck,” I mutter. It doesn’t even cover it.

“Yeah.”

“Okay, wait here. I’ll see if my mum is in and if she can help.” I’m doing a shitload of relying on my parents to bail everyone out, including me, lately, and it’s starting to suck. Since when did I become the go-to problem solver of Knotting Hill?

“Thank you, Storm. I’m so sorry about this. You’ve got such a big heart, and you’re such a good friend.” She flings her arms around me again.

That’s my problem. Everyone keeps saying I’m so compassionate. It’s not a bad thing, but I need to work on not being so easy to come to with every woe under the sun. I’ve got my own shit going on. Like, what am I going to do about moving into the St. Lucs house. I know they expect it. I half think they stuck around in my teeny studio flat to prove that we needed to be somewhere bigger. No one has mentioned it yet, but I feel it’s coming, and I’m trying to avoid thinking

about it. It's not that I don't want to be with them. I do. I'm crazy in love with all of them, which is bizarre, but so amazing that I feel myself well up every time I think about them. But being in love hasn't changed my need for independence.

I glance over my shoulder at the practice and realise with a sigh, that went out the window when I asked my mum for a job. I'm fooling myself and using it as an excuse to get out of moving in with them.

I stand up and, with a tight smile at Cheryl, which has nothing to do with her, but my own issues, I head into work and grin at Miriam, a genuine smile as she waves at me. She's brilliant. And the fact that she named her Cockapoo Sadie, just makes me love her even more.

"Is Dr Gloria in?" I ask her, feeling weird using that, but 'mum' is hardly professional.

"Yep, just got in about ten minutes ago."

"Thanks." I unlock and push open the door that leads down the corridor and rap lightly on my mum's open office door.

"Hey," I say when she looks up. "Any jobs going?" Might as well just dive in there. Everyone appreciates a non-bush-beating conversation, I think.

She peers over the top of her specs at me. "For whom?"

"Cheryl Jackson. She worked with me at Robb & Robb."

Mum blinks and takes her glasses off. She leans back in her chair and sticks the tip of her glasses arm into her mouth as she searches my gaze intently.

"Anyone who wants to get away from that viper is more than welcome here. Can she file?"

I nod. "Like it's a military operation. She'll overhaul the system in less than a week, and you'll wonder how you survived without it."

"Perfect. We actually need someone to start making all the archived files digital on the new system. Can she do that?"

"Yup."

“Hired. Thanks. You saved me the job of asking Miriam to find someone.”

“Thank you. I’m eternally grateful, and so is she. Uhm, but fair warning, she is newly pregnant, so expect a request for Mat Leave in a few months.”

She snickers. “Noted. But you know we don’t discriminate here.”

“I know. Did you know about the Robbs?”

“Being in debt? Yes.”

“And you didn’t think to tell me?”

“Not my place.” She shrugs.

“Suppose not. Just glad I got out of there before the practice got overrun.”

“Hmm.” Mum squints at me, and then with a slightly upward turn of her mouth, she puts her glasses back on and goes back to work.

No?

Did she?

No...

She wouldn’t.

Would she?

“Wasn’t me,” Mum says as I back out. “But I do know who it was, and no, I’m not telling you.”

“Was it...”

“Wasn’t Dad. Go now.” She makes a shooing motion.

I smile and leave her in peace, going back outside to tell Cheryl the good news.

“Oh, my GOD!” she bellows in my face. “Thank you so much, Storm! I owe you big.”

“Thank my mum, not me,” I reply, laughing at her sudden tears. “Don’t be silly,” I add, pulling her to me for a hug.

“Hormones!” she cries, laughing through her tears. “Fuck, I’m a mess.”

“You’re gorgeous. Now come inside, wash your face and go meet Miriam. She’s ace.”

Forty-Eight

Storm

LATER THAT WEEK, I return from work to find the pack assembled in my flat and looking rather shady.

“What?” I ask, fear gripping me that something has gone terribly wrong with our love bubble. I already feel ill. My heart is beating erratically, and a sheen of sweat is covering my brow. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say I was going into a spontaneous heat, but that can’t be right, can it?

I clutch my head, letting my bag fall to the floor as the stress of this situation suddenly gets the better of me.

“Storm,” Josh says, reaching me first as he is closest.

I drop to my knees, my head lolling against him when he wraps his arms around me.

“Call an ambulance!” JP states as he drops to his knees next to me.

“No,” I croak, trying to find his hand through the steamy haze of my eyes. “I’m okay. Heat...I think.”

“Your heat?” Russell asks, joining us on the floor. “Are you sure?”

“Sure enough,” I mutter. “Nest.”

“Balls to this,” JP states, getting up. “You are coming back to ours. That was our plan anyway. We can make you more comfortable there than here with all of us.”

I don't argue. I let Josh pick me up and carry me to the sofa as JP and Russell search for a bag to shove some of my stuff into while Josh places a cool cloth on my forehead that he retrieved from the bathroom.

“Bedside drawer. Need it.” I wave in the general direction.

I hear it slide open, and a grunt of surprise. “This?” JP asks, wagging my knotty vibrator at me.

I try for a giggle at the absurdity of the action but fail. “Yeah.”

“I have a feeling you aren't going to need it,” he says.

“You feel it too?” Russell mutters.

“Yeah.”

“What?” Josh asks, still focused on me.

“Storm's heat has brought on our rut. It's fate telling us to stop screwing around and mate already.” JP crosses over to me and kneels beside the sofa. “Are you ready for that, princess? I need to hear one way or the other before your heat addles your brain, and all you can think about is my knot bulging inside you.”

“Hey, and mine!” Russell exclaims from the bedroom.

I manage a giggle this time. “Yes, I'm ready. This is definitely a sign. I won't deny fate. She can be a real Sadie when she wants to be.” I snort hysterically at my own joke, which none of the males gets, but who cares. It's funny to me, and that's all that bothers me right now. I think I'm falling faster into this heat than ever before. I sober up quickly, knowing the pack needs double confirmation. “Yes,” I say clearly. “I'm ready to mate with you.”

“Then we definitely need that,” Josh says, reaching out to grab the vibe from Russell, who joined us to hear my answer. “Brooding insomniac beta, ain't got a knot.”

“Aww,” I say, tears welling up as I lean forward to cup his face. “You’ll use a knotty vibrator on me to ease my heat?”

“Obviously,” he scoffs. “I’m not being left out.”

“Nooo,” I wail, “never!” I shower his face with kisses, which makes him laugh. He waggles the vibe again and gives it a nod of approval. “I mean, it’s not as big as my cock, but it’ll do.”

I burst out laughing, causing him to glare at me. “Oh-kay, *big boy*,” I purr. “Your cock is bigger than the Knotmaster 3000.”

JP and Russell are in hysterics which lightens the mood after the heavy-arse question they served up to me.

But I’m ready.

I’ve never been more ready in my life.

I lie back with the cool cloth on my face, barking instructions to the men on what to pack, and soon we are ready to get going.

“Wait,” I moan when a cramp grips my stomach with a gut-churning twist. “How are we getting there? Taxi isn’t going to cut it.”

“Fuck, no,” JP growls, going seriously aggressive at the thought of anyone, even hapless taxi drivers getting anywhere near me in my heat state. “I’ll go back for the car.”

I nod, grateful that I don’t have to brave public transport. Not to be a big head but an omega in heat will definitely affect any and all alphas within a wide circumference, and who knows out of that many alphas, which the not-so-decent ones are.

JP kisses the top of my head and disappears. We hear him clattering down the stairs, and I can picture him sprinting back to his house to get the Jag. Unfortunately, it’s a two-seater, so Russell and Josh will have to hoof it back anyway.

“You guys can go now if you want,” I say as we wait. “Then we might all be back together.”

“Not leaving you,” Russell says shortly. “And fuck that, we’ll take a taxi. There’s hardly a shortage of them around here.”

“True,” I murmur and lie back.

I must’ve fallen into a doze because I’m being jarred awake by JP racing back into the flat, out of breath and skidding to a halt next to me. I shut my eyes again after glaring at him, so sleepy now, that I just want to sleep while someone gives me a knot. How perfect would that be?

I hear him instruct the other guys to sort out the luggage, and then I feel his arms around me as he scoops me up off the sofa, cradling me and whispering words of praise and encouragement to me.

“You’re doing great,” he murmurs. “You’re a good girl, so strong and beautiful.”

I open my eyes and gaze into his. “Say more of the things.”

He chuckles. “You into praise kink, princess?”

“Sounds like you are,” I retort.

“Only with you.”

“Same. You are unlocking quite a few desires I never even knew I had.”

“Like fucking in public?” he asks, his tone husky and seductive.

“Mmmmm.”

He lowers his tone further. “I want to fuck you in a place where anyone can see us. Would you like that, princess?”

“Yes,” I moan, only now realising we are already at the car. I don’t even remember coming down the stairs. He’s good with distraction. He helps me into the car, growling at everyone who comes near us. I close my eyes and lean back against the headrest, wishing he would hurry the fuck up so I can build a nest while I still have some kind of sense about me

before I curl up in it and then ask them to join me and ravage me.

I sigh happily, glad when JP finally says, “We’re here.”

Forty-Nine

Russell

WE SETTLE Storm into the guest bedroom down the hallway from mine and Josh's rooms. She stumbles around, building her nest, growling at us whenever we try to help.

"I've got this," she snaps as I hand her another blanket, one we brought with us from her place.

She strips off her clothes, sweating and red-faced, moving around the room as she creates a masterpiece in the corner of the room, furthest from the door. Her underwear is pink and so cute, but I want to rip it off her savagely so I can bury my cock deep inside her. The rut is clawing at me, begging me to claim her. I fidget, which catches her attention, and she softens.

"I won't be long," she says.

I nod, knowing I can't ask her to hurry the fuck up. This is a process, and one she needs to get right, or it will mess with her head.

"Can you bring me something of yours, please? Each of you."

My heart swells with love and warmth at her request. We battle to get out of the door fast enough to do her bidding, scattering to our own rooms to find something to give her. I

settle on my much-loved dressing gown. Plaid and comfy as fuck, it's green and dark blue and will be soft against her sensitive skin.

I arrive back as Josh is handing her his old stuffed teddy, which he keeps on his bed.

She grins and takes it from him, placing it on her pillows. She turns to me and takes the dressing gown from me, putting it on and holding the fabric up to her nose. She inhales deeply and sighs happily.

Of course, JP returns with the cherry tee.

Soon, she is happy and content, crawling into her nest with the words we have been waiting for.

“Please join me.”

We strip off our clothes in record time and dive onto the mountain of duvets, blankets and pillows.

“No more waiting,” she says, giving us the green light to devour her.

I'm nervous as fuck about the mating, but I know it's what I want, what I *need*, and I can't wait to bite her and have her return the claiming.

My fingers glide down her body, travelling over every inch. She gasps as my hands dip lower, her body trembling in anticipation. Josh teases her with soft kisses, sending a shiver rippling over her skin. JP's hands caress her inner thighs, his lips gently kissing and licking her skin. She is responding to our touch. Her breath becomes faster, soft pants as she writhes, trying to get closer to us.

I drop my mouth to her pussy and suck her clit. Storm cries out in pleasure, her hips bucking against my face as I tease her. My tongue swirls and flicks, tasting her sweet slick and exploring every inch of her. I gently graze my teeth over her sensitive skin, driving her to the brink of ecstasy.

I lift my mouth from her core. My hands move up her body to wrap around her waist, pulling her closer to me. I feel the heat radiating off her body when I move in closer. My hard

cock presses against her, needing to get to her. I wrap a hand loosely around her throat, kissing her with an intensity that makes my cock twitch. JP drops between her legs, his mouth finding her clit. I lose myself in the sensation of her climax as JP ravages her with his mouth, his tongue working faster and harder.

Then Josh moves in. His fingers slip into her wetness. She moans as he strokes her inner walls. He teases her with his gentle touch, increasing the pressure as he circles her swollen clit. His other hand moves to her nipples, pinching and pulling at them in a delicious rhythm.

Storm gasps as JP devours her clit, his tongue tracing circles around her until her body begins to shake with pleasure. Josh moves his hand to her hip as his fingers plunge deeper into her, his movements as perfect as his timing. She cries out as waves of pleasure wash over her body, her orgasm so powerful it brings tears to her eyes.

I'm in awe of her.

She is magnificent.

I'm watching all of these movements, so aroused by her, I'm momentarily stunned into inaction.

JP moves his mouth away, to her vocal protests, but he is making way for me. I know he wants to be last to bite her, and that's fine with me. I want to be first.

I loom over her, gazing into her glazed eyes and slide my cock inside her.

"Fuck," I groan, feeling her slick drench me. "Fuck, Storm."

I thrust hard and passionately, hearing the slurping sound as I pound her wet pussy, giving her what we both need. She arches her back, her nipples pink and ripe, inviting me to bite them. Josh gets there first, though, while JP trails his hand over her stomach and lower until his fingers find her clit.

I grunt, slamming into her as JP teases her into a state of frenzy. She cries out, coming all over me.

I growl, burying my cock deeper into her pussy. “Storm, I need you.”

She purrs loudly, writhing underneath me, wrapping her legs around me. JP removes his hand, and he and Josh help Storm into a sitting position. She is falling fast into her heat. Soon she will crave the knot and have nothing else on her mind until she gets it. I pull back, withdrawing from her hot haven and sit back. She crawls into my lap, wrapping her legs around me. She smiles sweetly, already showing signs of exhaustion. I guide my cock back into her, knowing I’m seconds away from detonating a load of cum into her womb. She moves her hips, and that’s all it takes.

With a low, possessive growl, I shoot my load and tangle my fingers in her hair, drawing her closer. I inhale her fresh cherry scent and bare my teeth, grazing her before I bite down sharply at the same time my knot bulges inside her, locking us together for the next few minutes, ensuring my seed stays inside her where it belongs.

“Fuck!” she roars, shuddering through another climax. “Fuck, Russell, harder.”

I oblige, clamping down until I draw blood. She purrs frantically, clawing at me as her pussy clenches tightly around my knot, claiming my body and soul.

I release her, my mouth dripping with blood, and tilt my head in invitation.

She nuzzles me softly, kissing me, sucking my skin into her mouth before she nips me hard enough to make my cock jerk inside her.

I groan when she opens her mouth wider and bites me harshly, her purr vibrating from her throat through my body, pushing me to the edge of another climax. But I just hover there, unable to come again so quickly. It’s like being left on the precipice of a cliff, not knowing if you are going to fall or be rescued.

“Fuck!” I roar, wishing my balls would cooperate and give me another orgasm.

Storm releases her bite and drops her forehead to mine. The edge vanishes, and all that's left is our two bodies joined together in this intimate act that has *never* felt this fantastic before.

“I love you, Storm,” I murmur. “You are perfect.”

Fifty

Josh

I CAN'T HELP MYSELF. I want to touch her, to run my hands over her body and feel her warmth against my skin. I scoot closer, my longing to be nearer to her increasing.

JP and Russell are watching me watching her, which is arousing me further in a way. I reach out and touch her lightly, my fingertips barely grazing her. I can feel the heat shimmering off her skin. She is feverish and sleeping, curled up in her nest after mating with Russell. I move my hand up her arm as I start to trace her outline, my other hand following suit. I watch her as she sleeps, taking in her beauty, her peacefulness, and the way her hair frames her face.

She stirs under my movements but settles again a few moments later. I flit my fingers down to her neck, tracing the bite there, the jagged mark that is the sign of her mating with my packmate—a stark reminder of the passion that had consumed them both. I want to kiss the mark, to feel her marred skin against mine, but I hesitate, afraid that I will wake her when she needs to rest.

But my desire is stronger than my concern. I lean forward, my lips gently brushing against the bite. Her skin is hot against mine. A surge of electricity runs through my body, making me

shiver in delight. I need to feel her in my arms, her body pressed against mine, and without thinking, I pull her closer, wrapping her in my embrace and burying my face in the crook of her neck, inhaling her scent that makes my mouth water.

Making sure I have the knotty vibrator nearby, I place my mouth below the mark Russ gave her and bite down gently.

She purrs on instinct, her eyes opening. She turns her head toward me and smiles. “Don’t just sit there. Ravage me.”

I chuckle. “As you wish, my queen.”

“Mmm. Yes, and don’t you forget it.”

I kiss her softly, my lips finding the mark once more. She moans softly. I harden against her, my own desire growing more and more. Moving my hand down her body, my fingertips tracing circles around her belly and down to the apex of her thighs. I tease her with my touch, my lips finding her neck again and trailing down to her collarbone, her soft skin against my own.

“Do you want me to bite you?” I murmur shyly. It’s not the same for a beta to bite an omega. It won’t bond her to me in the same way it will an alpha, but I still want my mark on her, and I want her to mark me as well.

“Of course,” she says in surprise. “You have to.”

I love her so much. She never makes me feel less than the alphas. Not that I think that about myself, but sometimes, like now, during the mating, it’s hard not to feel a bit inferior when my body is not equipped to ease her heat.

I reach for the vibrator and switch it on. The low hum fills the room. Her breath quickens as I trail it down between her breasts. The desire in her eyes spurs me on when she rolls onto her back to give me an all-access pass to her body. Leaning forward, I kiss her.

Moving the vibrator slowly down her, it traces the curves of her body. She trembles under my caress as I tease her with its vibrations. She gasps softly, her body responding to the pleasure. I move the vibrator lower, rubbing it over her clit, making her squirm with her arousal.

“Please,” she begs. “More.”

I thrust it inside her, my hand moving faster, and her breathing grows ragged.

The vibrator hums and pulses inside her as waves of pleasure cascade through her body. She cries out as her orgasm sweeps over her, her body shaking uncontrollably from the intensity of the pleasure. I thrust it deeper into her, so the knot expands her pussy and slides inside, past the pool of slick dripping from her entrance. She groans with feral contentment, arching her back as the knot eases her heat.

“Tell me when to remove it,” I murmur.

“Mmm. Not yet.”

She wriggles and writhes as the vibrator brings her to another climax. I watch with fascination as her pussy clenches around the knot, tightening its hold on the knot.

Once the tremors have settled, she pants, “Now. I need you.”

Pulling it out of her, I move it away and crawl up her, positioning my cock at her entrance.

I slide inside with a guttural groan, savouring the feel of her. I’m glad that JP and Russ are keeping their distance right now. I need her all to myself. I thrust, burying my cock balls deep into her. She wraps her legs around me, forcing me even deeper.

“You feel so good,” she gasps when I withdraw suddenly and then slam back into her.

I do this a few more times before her pussy clutches desperately at my cock. Storm climaxes intensely, riding my dick as she brings her hips up to meet my thrusts. I cover her body, placing my hands on her hips to hold her in place. With my breath hitching, I nuzzle her neck and then bite her quickly, tasting her blood coat my tongue.

She cries out, and I release her, not wanting to cause her any pain. My bite won’t have the same pleasurable effects as the alphas, so short and sweet is what’s best for her. She fists

her hands in my hair and kisses me, driving her tongue into my mouth to taste her blood. She moves her mouth from mine to my neck and clamps down quickly. I shoot my load unexpectedly, firing off jets of cum into her slick pussy with a loud grunt of satisfaction. Storm releases me with a tired smile. I drop a soft kiss on her lips and then withdraw, leaving her to rest again before JP has his turn with her.

Fifty-One

JP

I PULL Storm closer to me, feeling her heat against my body. She has rested and eaten and is in a lucid period. This is what I was waiting for. I need her to have her wits about her when I claim her as mine.

I run my hands up and down her back, teasing the arch of her spine and pulling her hips towards me. Storm moans softly as my fingers find their way to her pert arse. I press my palms against her bare skin and squeeze. She shivers beneath my touch, her breath coming in short, shallow gasps.

My desire is burning within me. I want nothing more than to ravage her with my hands and mouth. I want to explore every inch of her body, to make her moan with pleasure, at the same time as I want to fuck her senseless and knot inside her. The need, the rut, is screaming at me, but this isn't about me. It's all about Storm.

I move my hands to cradle her breasts. She gasps as I cup them, the sensation sending a wave of pleasure through her. I suck one of her ripe nipples while I tweak the other one, enjoying her reaction to my touch. I grind my teeth gently over the bud in my mouth, teasing her with a sexual bite.

“Yes!” she pants. “Harder.”

I chuckle at her eagerness. “Patience, princess.”

She growls her response, before it turns into a purr and the scent of her slick hits my nasal passages.

“Fuck,” I groan. “I want to worship you, and you’re making this difficult.”

“Maybe that’s my plan.”

“You’re a goddess.”

My mouth finds Storm’s, my lips pressing hungrily into hers. I explore her mouth with my tongue, running it along her teeth, making her shiver and push herself closer to me. Tasting her and savouring the flavour of her, Storm moans into my mouth, her body responding to my touch as if it has a will of its own. She runs her fingers through my hair and drags me even closer, letting out a sigh of pleasure as our tongues tangle together.

Moving my hands lower, tracing circles around her thighs, she quivers beneath my touch. My own desire is increasing with each passing second. I can’t hold out much longer.

My fingers move lower, until they find their way between her legs. Storm gasps when I touch her, her body arching in response to my caress. I rub slow circles against her sensitive flesh, sending waves of pleasure throughout her body. She purrs and writhes beneath my touch. I increase the pressure on her clit and make her moan louder. She trembles, twisting against the sheets in pleasure. My desire intensifies as I pull back from our kiss.

Storm’s breathing is coming in short, shallow gasps, telling me she is close. Wickedly, I pull my hand away with a smile.

She grunts in annoyance, pulling me closer to her. I position myself at her entrance and guide my cock inside her with a soft groan of intense pleasure. I increase the force of my thrusts, pushing deeper and harder until Storm screams in desire. She cries out as her arousal reaches its peak, and her body convulses when she climaxes with a ferociousness that pleases me. Smiling in satisfaction, I feel my own orgasm building inside of me. I pound into her with more strength. My

cock is soaking wet with her slick and the cum of the other men. My body tenses. I know it's time. As my pleasure reaches its crescendo, I bury my face in Storm's neck. I bare my teeth and bite down harshly on the other side of Russell and Josh as I shoot my load into her, my knot inflating inside her to lock our bodies together.

"Fuck!" she screams. "Yes!"

She shakes underneath me as her climax rockets through her ruthlessly, unwaveringly, as I mate with her in a way that I will never forget as long as I live. I release her with a growl and slam my lips against hers, kissing her and forcing her to taste her blood in my mouth.

She fists her hand in my hair and moves my mouth away from hers. She nuzzles my neck before she bites me, claiming me, making me hers forever.

When she lets me go, we lie there for a few moments, relishing in the afterglow of our mating. I kiss her forehead, rasping with exertion.

"This moment is perfect," I murmur.

"Mm. I love you."

"I love you, princess. You came into my life like a..." I smirk. "...storm and swept me off my feet. I will treasure and cherish you forever."

"Pretty good with the words, aren't you?"

"Only for you. I don't want you to ever worry about how we feel about you. We will reassure you every single day, we will renew our mating at every heat, and when your belly swells with our child, whichever it may be, we will cherish you both for eternity."

"Fuck," she says, tears seeping out of her eyes, reaching out for Russell and Josh. "I love you all so much. This is perfect. This is everything I dreamed of. This is exactly how I needed it to be. We have all shared something beautiful, something that only we could understand, and I couldn't be happier or more at peace."

Russell kisses Storm's forehead and snuggles in close, even though my cock is still buried deep inside her. Josh also joins in, making this a tangle of limbs. My heart swells with love. This is only the beginning, and I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with her and the pack.

Fifty-Two

Storm

THE SUN IS high and bright, the air balmy and welcoming. It has been several weeks since I mated with the St. Lucs and moved fully into their home. *Our* home. I have made my mark all over the house, which I mainly did to piss off Christopher, who has come sniffing around more than once to see if I'm actually mated to his son. I think it has seriously annoyed him on a level that is surprising, but we just find it amusing. But despite his attitude, I'm elated to be with my fated mates. Even more so as I've just come from work, and my mother has confirmed what I have suspected. I am joyous and in awe of the world around me as I stride towards Josh's bookstore on Portobello Road. My anticipation is mounting, and my heart soars with each step that I take, knowing what I have to tell my mates.

The streets are full of life, the sounds of laughter and conversation filling the air. People of all ages are out and about, browsing the wares of the various vendors that line the street. There is an energy in the air that is palpable, almost as if it is reacting to my untold news. I smile as I make my way down the street, but then I see the one person I didn't really want to see. However, now that the opportunity is here, I'm going to take it.

Emma Franks.

She looks over and sees me approaching, her blonde hair looking like it has been freshly styled, her face expressionless until she sees me.

With a voice tinged with anger, she says, “Storm. I heard that you and Russell are together. I warned you to stay away from him.”

I nod, instantly riled up by her. “Yes, we are, so you can threaten me all you like; I’m not going anywhere. You and Russ are over.”

Her lips curl into a smirk. “Just wanted to see if it was true. I heard he was with you, but then I saw him out at the party the other night.”

I let out the mother of all scoffs. She seriously doesn’t know? How can she not know? The whole of Knotting Hill knows by now. “Oh, really?” I drawl sarcastically. “I highly doubt that. We are mated, I’m living with them, and they haven’t left my side or my nest in several weeks, so you can try your hardest to break us up, but it will *never* happen. Do yourself a favour and forget all about this delusion you have and get on with your life instead of trying to mess up everyone else’s. It’s sad. Pathetic, even. We are adults, not in high school anymore. I don’t have time for this bullshit, and I don’t have time for you.”

Her mouth agape, she can do nothing but stare after me as I shove past her to enter the bookstore, glad to see my mates already here.

“Fine,” she spits to my back as I enter the bookshop. “Have him. You two deserve each other.”

I snort. Which part of that does she think is an insult? Then, I sigh, relieved that she is gone from our lives. I have no energy for drama.

The air inside the bookshop is thick with the smell of old paper and leather. The walls are lined with books, some new, some old. It is an enthralling place, and my mood lightens even more.

I see Josh talking to an old man at the counter, laughing with Elle about something. JP and Russell are also there, talking and laughing together. I'm overwhelmed when I think that this is my family now.

I clear my throat, and all heads turn to me. My mates' eye light up when they see me.

"Hi," I say, overcome with happiness.

"What's this news?" JP asks, his eyes alight with anticipation. I think he already knows but is waiting for me to say something.

I incline my head, asking them to follow me so we can talk in private.

"Oooh," the old man at the counter says. "*Big news.*"

I snicker. "What's it to him?"

"Jake is invested. He thinks our lives are better than EastEnders," Josh explains.

I smile at Jake and decide, what the hell. I don't know him, so telling him won't affect me either way.

"I'm pregnant!" I exclaim loudly so Jake and also, Elle can hear me.

"Fuck! Yes!" JP says, crushing me to him. "I knew it!"

I grin and pull away, turning to Russell to hug him. "How's your dad?" I whisper.

"He's great. And will be thrilled with this news. You are so amazing, so perfect, so special. I love you, Storm St. Luc."

A tingle of excitement goes down my spine at my new name. I still can't get used to it. "I love you too. All of you."

I turn to Josh, who sweeps me into a tight embrace, kissing my neck and fussing over me.

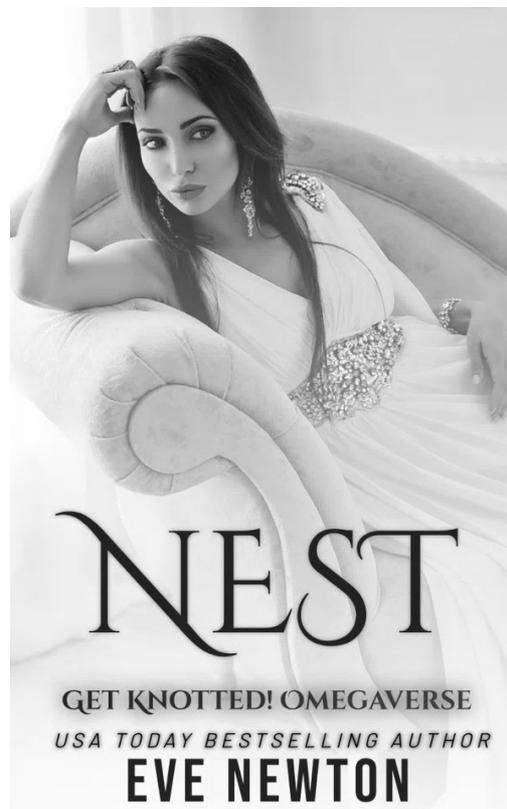
I catch Jake's eyes, and he gives me a double thumbs up with a massive grin and a sassy wink. I giggle and give him a nod in return, happy to have made his day, it seems.

I look around the store, feeling my heart fill with warmth; I have never felt so free and full of love and life. I know that no matter what happens in the future, I will always have this moment to look back on and remember; a moment of discovery and connection and how beautiful life can be when you have the right people to share it with.

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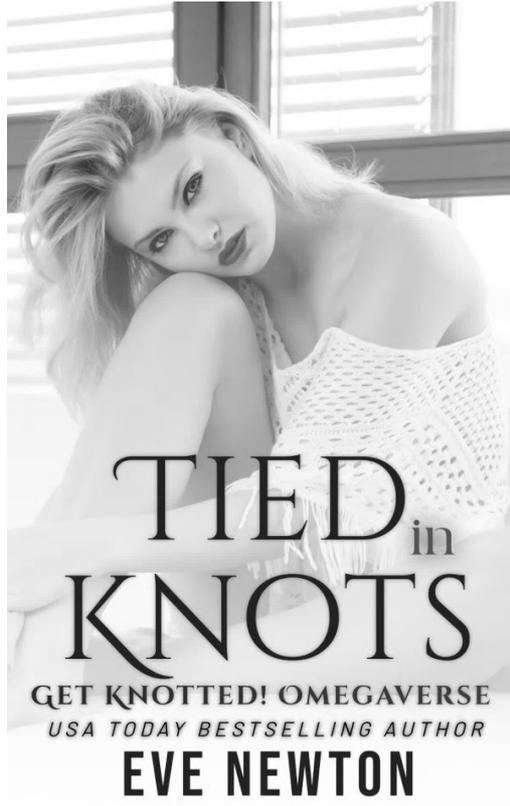
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