



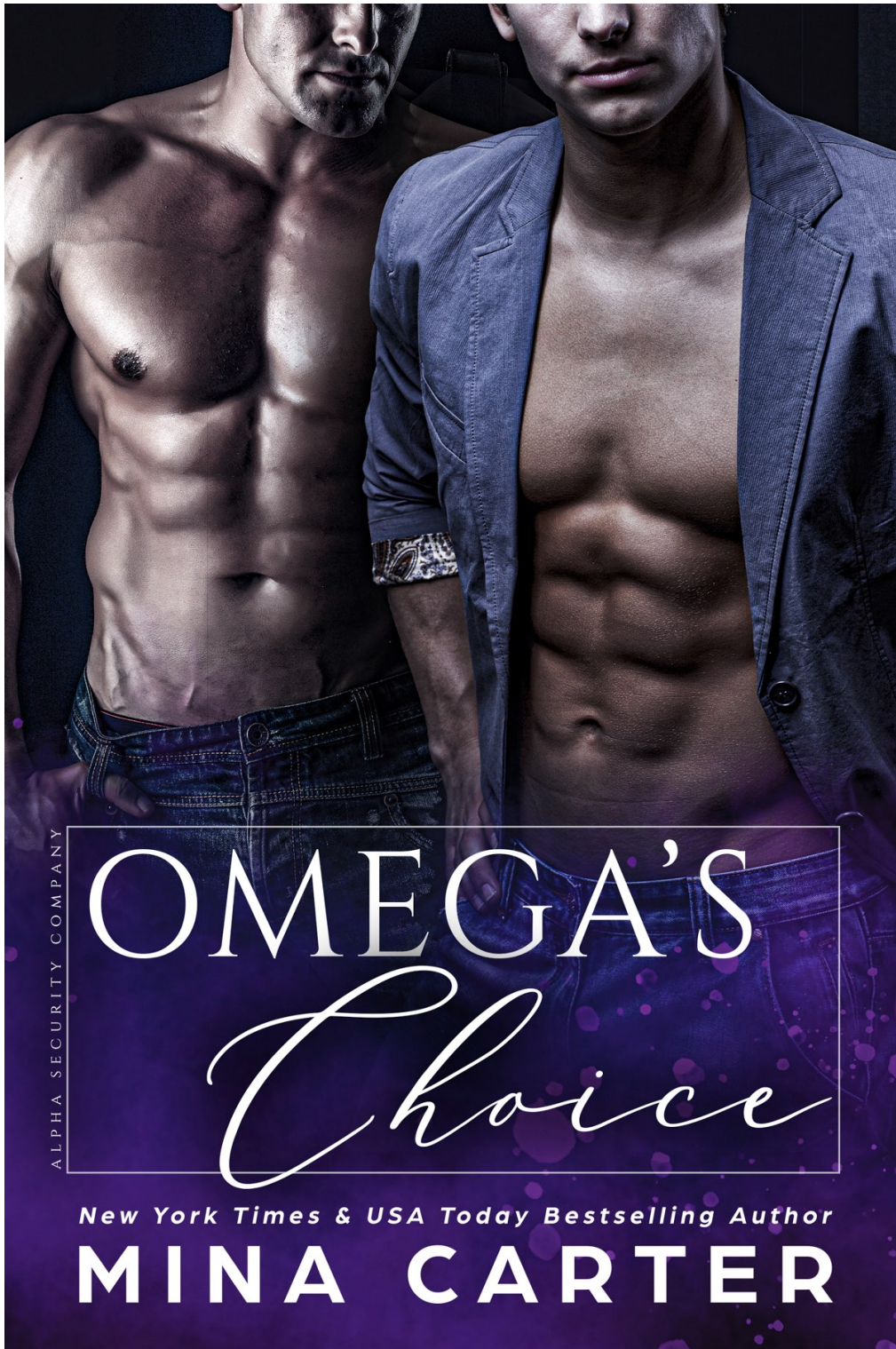
ALPHA SECURITY COMPANY

OMEGA'S

Choice

New York Times & USA Today Bestselling Author

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PROLOGUE

THALE

*B*ane and Willow's wedding was held a week after her heat had broken. Just long enough for her scent to have normalized again. Thankfully.

She wasn't my omega, but the scent of an omega just out of her heat was enough to send us poor unmated alphas into a frenzy. Fuck's sake, the week after Mason and Dante's omega, Neve, was in heat was always the worst. I about fucking rubbed myself raw in the shower with my own hands those weeks. And that was before I knew about Penny.

Standing in the church, listening to Willow and Bane take their vows, I slid a sideways glance at the other alpha. At least, I'd thought she was an alpha. Now, with the way she'd kissed me the other day when she'd been posing as my omega pet... I wasn't so sure. Either she was the best fucking actress out there, or her sweet submission as I'd had her pinned up against that wall in the club had been real.

My side twinged, and my lips quirked. Of course, just after that, she'd shot me. Full on fucking shot me. She was a feisty one. That was for sure. Whatever she was, I spent the rest of

the ceremony lost in my own musings. Mostly memories of her bent over the weight bench in the gym at work. Fuck, she had a cracking ass, especially in workout pants.

Then we were filing out, Bane and Willow at the door of the church as we moved past. I offered my congratulations to the happy couple, but my attention was already on the congregation outside. As soon as I was clear, I made my way to where Penny stood, her vivid fuchsia dress standing out in the crowd.

Said crowd parted before me and I stopped, realizing Penny wasn't alone. Bane's brother, the beta detective, was with her.

And he had his arm around Penny's waist.

I snarled, seeing red. "Get the fuck away from my woman."

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CHAPTER ONE

PENNY

Earlier that morning...

*M*y name is Penny Masterton and I am an alpha.

I sighed and looked at myself in the mirror. The woman who looked back didn't look at all like an alpha. Nature had cursed me with a petite, delicate omega-like build, something I constantly had to work against with endless weightlifting and strength-building workouts.

My lips compressed into a flat line as I leaned forward, readjusting the neckline of my gown. I was proud of my physique. I wasn't as big as a male alpha, but I was all sleek, hard muscle and conditioning. And all that work was completely concealed by this damn bridesmaid's gown.

I couldn't even say I hated it or that it was badly made. Willow, the bride, had excellent taste and her dressmaker... *fuck*, she should be in Paris working for a top designer or fashion house. Hell, she should be *running* a fashion house. I'd

certainly never thought such perfection could come out of Denning Heights of all places.

The gowns were all custom made, and mine fit perfectly. Draped like a Greco-Roman gown, it wrapped around my figure, highlighting my slender curves while baring my collarbones. The sleeves even covered my arms and my unit tattoos. That I understood. It was Willow's day and she had a very specific idea of how she wanted her wedding to look. But dammit all to hell... I looked like the bloody omega I was trying so hard not to.

It didn't help that my hair was caught up in an elegant updo, delicate rhinestones woven through the dark brown strands to hold it in place. I closed my eyes for a second, trying to ignore the fact that the pale length of my throat was on display. Why did fashion follow omega fashion so closely? Everything about it was designed to appeal to an alpha. Exposing the throat, exactly where an alpha placed their bite.

I much preferred high necklines, turtlenecks even, and usually wore them when on duty. I wasn't looking to attract an alpha's bite. Not a chance, and if any tried it, they would quickly find out that they'd bitten off more than they could chew. I was an alpha. Alpha through and through.

I closed my eyes as memories of the past assaulted me. The last time I'd been all gussied up like this had been for one of my many cousins' weddings. I'd been eight or nine and it was something like my twentieth wedding. Tiny and delicate as a child, my entire family had assumed I would eventually present as an omega like my older sister.

All I remembered were the pretty dresses, and all the grandmothers cooing over me, telling me it would be my turn soon. When I became a woman — became an omega — I

would have a pretty bonding dress for the day I became my alpha's property.

My eyes snapped open and I spared my reflection with a hard look. Not happening. I *am* an alpha. Through and through. No fancy gown is going to take that away from me.

The door opened behind me and the rest of the bridal party spilled through. Willow, the bride, was a delight in a confection of tulle, the fairytale gown rendering her ethereal in her beauty.

“You look gorgeous, Willow.” I smiled, offering the compliment sincerely. Yeah, I might be a rough-edged ex-army alpha, but I could still tell a sister she looked good. “You’ll knock Bane’s socks off and then some!”

She smiled, her laugh high and melodic as she clasped my hands back.

“Thank you and wow, right back atcha! Give us a twirl!” she ordered, stepping back and motioning with a French-manicured finger.

“*Seriously?* I’m a big, mean alpha and you want me to show myself off?”

I rolled my eyes but did as she ordered anyway, feeling the soft material of my skirts slide over my legs in a way that could only be described as sensual.

This—not the cut of the dress itself, but well-made, expensive clothes—were something I was missing out on as the rough and ready grunt I’d transformed myself into. I bought strictly off the peg, fast fashion that I could throw away when I couldn’t bear to look at them anymore.

“Big mean alpha or not,” Willow said. “You look wonderful. Doesn’t she, Chloe?”

The other member of the bridal party turned to me and smiled. Willow's sister was like a younger version of the bride, dressed in the same fuchsia as I was and with a bouquet in her hands. Mine was laid on a console table nearby, ready for me to pick up as we made our way from this small side room out into the gardens to walk to the church.

"She does. I wouldn't have guessed you were an alpha to be honest," she said.

I stiffened. I knew she meant no harm, but I'd spent a long time making sure people *knew* I was an alpha and never doubted my story. Giving a small nod, I let it wash over me and away. It was understandable that she wanted to view me as something other than an alpha.

She was an unbonded omega we'd rescued from now-dead crime lord Jaeg's trafficking network. The complex mission had involved both Willow and me going undercover... I yanked my thoughts away quickly. No need to go there or think about what had happened on that mission in a back corridor.

By all rights, Chloe should be a quivering mess who needed months of care and therapy. But she wasn't as broken as I would have expected her to be. Most omegas were spineless creatures with no thoughts of their own other than what the alpha or alpha pack who claimed her would be like. And after they were bonded, all their thoughts and opinions were simply parroted from their alphas. It was like the alpha-omega bond ensured they didn't have a single thought of their own in their heads.

Not Chloe, though... or Willow. Even though she and Bane were bonded, I'd seen her go toe to toe with him, telling him he was an asshole and that he was wrong. It was totally

un-omega-like behavior. It must be the suppressants she'd been on for years. Either that or she was unique among omegas.

Chloe turned to her sister, a frown between her brows. "Willow, are you sure you want to go through with this? You don't have to. We can leave now. Can't we, Penny?"

She shot me a hard glare, and in that moment, I knew she really believed that. That we could just walk out of here without any repercussions. It was as much a fairy tale as the wedding itself. As a bonded alpha and omega, Willow and Bane were already committed to each other. They didn't need a wedding, and to be honest, most omegas didn't get that. They got a bonding ceremony if they were lucky or from a high-society family. But even they weren't weddings.

Omegas had no legal status. They belonged solely to their alphas, so why go to the bother of a wedding and grant them a legal status they weren't normally entitled to?

"Absolutely." I nodded, playing into the ritual. I didn't get it, but it was tradition. With Bane's bite already on the side of her neck, there was no way she would ever be able to leave him anyway. She was bitten and bonded. The only way out for her was if Bane died or rejected her.

Even though I was many years away from the conditioning of my youth, I still shuddered at the thought of rejection.

Forced bonding was not the only nightmare an omega could face. It was a specter used on omega-potentials when they were still in childhood. The warnings never to go anywhere alone in case they presented without protection and were taken by force. Then a lifetime of being with an alpha they didn't want. But to be bitten and bonded but then rejected was a nightmare of a different class. Rejected omegas were

forced to live out their lives on the edges of society, dependent on an alpha who didn't want them for anything and forced to suffer heats alone... never able to bond again. No one deserved that hell on earth—a hell I'd been warned against years ago when a famous omega had been rejected by her mate. It had been all over the news at the time.

Willow smiled as she took her sister's hand in her own, squeezing it reassuringly. "I'm sure, love. Very sure."

She looked at me, the smile still in place, and I was struck by her confidence and serenity... her happiness. It made her glow from within.

"Now!" she announced brightly. "Let's get out there. Who knows, maybe one of you will catch the bouquet and we'll be celebrating another wedding very soon!"

"Not likely."

"I'm off men for good."

Both Chloe and I both mumbled at the same time. We caught each other's eye and grinned. Perhaps we had more in common than I'd thought...

*I*t was a short walk to the church nestled in the grounds, and even a grunt like me could appreciate the beauty of the setting. I could certainly see why this place had been voted the city's most romantic place to get married.

We walked through landscaped gardens, no doubt designed by someone with half an alphabet of letters after their name. A sense of calm and tranquility surrounded us. You'd never have guessed that we were still in the city.

Floral arches covered the path, the fragrant flowers scenting the air as the afternoon sun bathed us in warmth. I breathed in deeply, tilting my face up to bask in the sun.

The moment didn't last long. I didn't let it. It would be easy to fall into the romance of the day but the slight pull of the holster on my thigh under the skirts of my dress reminded me that I wasn't just here as a bridesmaid. I was on the clock. Looking around, I caught the eye of one of the guards stationed in the grounds.

We had unbonded omegas in the wedding party, and ASC had provided security for the event. That meant I had a 9mm in a thigh holster and zero respect for this beautiful dress if I needed to get to it.

It didn't take long for the three of us to reach the church. A small stone building, it was set a small way away from the hotel. My shoes crunched on the gravel surrounding it in a wide semi-circle, the small stones testing my balance in the slender heels. I wasn't used to wearing them anymore. When working, I wore combat boots or flats—apart from that recent undercover job, but we weren't even going to *think* about that. Not today.

The heavy scent of the lilies in our bouquets filled the air as the three of us stood in the tiny entrance foyer. Chloe and Willow stood together, and I turned away to give the sisters a moment as I approached the hotel's wedding organizer hovering by the half-closed door.

“Are we go or no-go?” I asked, nodding toward the door.

“We're all ready.” She nodded with a smile. “The guests have already taken their seats but we have one *very* jumpy groom. He's worried his bride isn't going to show.”

My lips quirked in amusement. I thought I knew Bane through and through. He was the asshole lawyer, a growly alpha who had a stronger moral compass than a regiment of nuns. Like Dante and Mason, he was one of the mainstays of the ASC.

Somehow, though, Willow had turned him into a giant teddy bear. He still growled, but she could calm him down with a look. And she was just as strong as he was. The idea that she wouldn't turn up...

“She’s more likely to hunt him down if he didn’t show.”

“Good. Sometimes these alphas need to know who’s boss.” She chuckled. “Okay, ladies, are we all ready? Is our gorgeous bride ready?”

Willow smiled from under her veil. “Absolutely. Let’s do this.”

Chloe took her place beside me as the organizer pushed the door open. I took a breath as the music started, swelling to fill the vaulted ceiling of the traditional little church as we started the walk down the aisle.

I squashed the urge to bolt as hundreds of eyes turned our way. I hated people looking at me and always had ever since I was a kid. I hated the eyes and the whispers when I hadn’t presented as an omega as expected. All those old insecurities hit me like a freight train, and my steps faltered.

Chloe shot me a look, hard as steel, and I read the “if you fuck my sister’s day up, I will *cut* you” plain as day. Lifting my chin, I shoved the feelings away. This was not the time or the place. I would deal with my shit on my own time, not during Willow and Bane’s day.

My skirts rustled around my legs and I altered the death grip I had on my bouquet. It was a bunch of flowers, not a live grenade.

I kept my eyes firmly fixed on a point on the wall above the altar, looking neither right nor left. The tried and tested tactic had gotten me through many parades and bollockings in the army.

I managed to block out everyone in the congregation most of the way down the aisle. They weren't looking at me now, not since Willow had entered the church. Their attention was all on the bride, as it should be, and I could breathe a sigh of relief.

A prickle of awareness lifted the fine hairs on the back of my neck before I could reach the safety of the front rows of seats. Someone was looking at me still. More than looking... their attention was *fixed* on me. Intent.

I made the mistake of glancing to the side. Straight into Thale Barnes' dark eyes. Thale was the fly in the perfect ointment of my job at ASC. I couldn't exactly call him my nemesis. That was too harsh and antagonistic a term for it. He was... *would* be a weakness. *If* I let him. I didn't intend to let him.

Tall and broad-shouldered, he filled his suit out in a way that left me weak at the knees. His short, dark hair was clipped close to his scalp with just enough length on top that you could see it would be curly if he let it grow. He wasn't a handsome man, not exactly, but a raw dynamism around his powerful, stocky form took my breath away every time I saw him and brought long buried instincts and feelings to the fore.

Not happening, I told myself firmly as I yanked my gaze away. Not today. Not ever. Especially not after our last

undercover mission where he'd kissed me—well, more than kissed me. Things between us could never go anywhere. Even if I'd wanted them to. He would discover... No, things between us just wouldn't work. I was hoping he'd gotten the hint on that. Shooting a guy tended to be a pretty big clue.

But no, he continued to watch me, making the skin between my shoulder blades itch all the way up the aisle until I reached my position to one side of the altar. Without calling attention to myself, I took a slight step back, putting one of the huge floral displays between me and Thale. Only then did I breathe a sigh of relief.

The ceremony was short but beautiful. Even I had to dab a tear from the corner of my eyes as Willow and Bane made their vows to each other. It was easy to see the love between them, and I was still smiling as I moved to follow them down the aisle.

The best man, Logan Shaw, moved at the same time and I froze slightly, waiting for Chloe to walk past me to take his arm.

“Oh no,” she murmured, a hint of mischief in her smile as she hung back. “He’s all yours, *alpha*.”

Logan Shaw was Bane’s brother. Until recently none of us at ASC had known Bane’s original name, never mind the fact that he had a family.

But Logan was his brother and a police detective the ASC worked with on occasion. Which meant I had to be polite *and* professional about this, even though something about Logan warned me to stay well the hell away.

Schooling my expression into a polite smile, I stepped forward to slide my hand onto his arm. As soon as I touched

him, a spark and a shiver rolled through me. I tried to ignore it as he looked at me suddenly, pretending nothing had happened. But it had, and that confused me even more. What the hell was that all about?

I was an alpha. Despite his size, and commanding presence, Logan was a beta—a powerful one nearly at the level of an alpha. So close that I found myself leaning in and trying to catch a hint of his scent. It was there, buried under his expensive cologne, cedarwood and cotton. I almost groaned as I caught it. It was perfectly masculine, and something within me sat up and took notice.

I shouldn't indulge my interest in him. I knew that, but it didn't stop me from sneaking looks at him from under my lashes when he wasn't looking. He was movie star handsome with dark hair cut longer at the front, so the messy spikes fell forward onto his face, and piercing blue eyes.

Those piercing blue eyes that caught me looking. I snapped my gaze away, heat in my cheeks, and ignored him for the rest of the walk down the aisle.

The church bells rang out around us as the happy couple emerged from the foyer of the church to a rainbow of confetti and rose petals. Willow squeaked, giggling as she took refuge in her groom's arms.

"I think," a deep voice said by my ear. "That's our cue to get out of the line of fire."

"Absolutely," I breathed, my breath hitching as he took my hand to lead me around the edge of the group crowding around to congratulate the bride and groom. Halfway around we were almost cut off by the movement of the crowd. Before I knew it, Logan looped an arm around my waist, protecting me with

his larger body from being squashed against the stone wall of the church.

Time froze as I looked up into blue eyes I'd assumed were cold. Indeed, they *had* been cold every other time we'd met, to the point I didn't think Logan actually liked me. Or, at the very least, he didn't like female alphas.

One thing I didn't think of, though, was the optics of Logan's arm still around my waist. Until I spotted Thale stalking toward us, and I gripped Logan's lapels, stopping him from moving away.

"Please," I murmured. "Pretend like we're an item. Okay?"

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CHAPTER TWO

LOGAN

*P*retend like we're an item.

Those were the last words I'd expected to come out of Penny Masterton's mouth, but no way was I going to argue with her. Not when it gave me an excuse to do what I'd been wanting to do since the first time I'd met her and haul her into my arms.

For a moment the world and everyone in it disappeared as the tiny alpha settled against me. For a split second as she smoothed her hands up my chest, warm even through the fancy suit jacket and shirt I wore, all that mattered was the delicate woman in my arms. That and the sudden catch in her breath as surprise flared in her eyes.

If I didn't know she was an alpha, if I couldn't smell the jasmine and burnt wood of her scent, I would easily have mistaken her for an omega. She was petite and delicate with that ethereal grace omegas had in the way she held herself that drove men—alpha and beta alike—insane.

In her case, though, appearances were deceptive. As soon as she moved, talked, it was obvious she was an alpha through

and through. Tough-talking and hard-edged, I'd been warned by my brother that she was a hard as nails army veteran who ate betas like me for breakfast.

Which didn't matter a shit to me. I wasn't anywhere close to the average beta. Everything about her challenged the primal maleness coded into my DNA and made me want to wrap my hand around the back of her neck and kiss the breath out of her.

Which was suicidal, I knew that. It didn't make the desire any less pressing or urgent. My official papers might say I'm a beta, and I might not have the heavy scent of an alpha or a knot, but I'm no fucking doormat. In the lottery of dynamic presentation, I had definitely ended up more on the alpha side of the beta spectrum. So close to alpha that I was very often mistaken for one.

It was a blessing and a curse.

A blessing because while I didn't have the punishing speed and strength of an alpha, I was also not victim to the same primal instincts they were—like the alpha rut. Women weren't terrified of me and I could be around omegas without becoming a mindless beast intent only on getting my cock inside a warm pussy, regardless whether or not its owner wanted me there.

And it was a curse because I had the perfect woman in my arms, nestled against my larger, harder—currently very hard—body, but I couldn't claim her as mine.

Or I could try, but that way led to bruises, mine, and the very real possibility that she would never talk to me again. And she'd be right not to.

I looked down into her beautiful eyes, resisting the urge to lift my hand and smooth the loose curls away from the side of her face. I had to face facts. She was an alpha, which meant she would never be interested in a beta like me.

Female alphas tended to join packs. And those packs were filled with other male alphas. If they allowed betas in the pack, they certainly wouldn't be ones like me. Betas who got to join packs were the ones who knew how to play the game, the ones who were closer to the omega end of the spectrum and who could act all submissive when they needed to. Not ones who couldn't help challenging every alpha he met for dominance.

Right now, though, all those thoughts washed away as I indulged in the fantasy that Penny was mine. I indulged in the temptation to pull her closer, burying my face in the fragrant curls that tumbled loosely from the top of her head down one side of her face.

I closed my eyes, holding in the groan that wanted to work its way free of my throat. She'd washed her hair in something light and floral. It didn't clash with her natural scent but instead wrapped around it into something unique that hit me on a visceral level. Blood and heat surged through me, and I was glad the way we stood had her angled slightly turned away from me. What kind of deviant was I that just the smell of her hair gave me a fucking hard-on?

Trying to distract myself, I lifted my head slightly and dropped a kiss on the top of her head. The soft, affectionate caress was something a man would do with his partner, someone he cared about, rather than the endless one-night stands, which were all I'd allowed myself recently. It rocked me to the core.

“So who are we trying to fool?” I murmured in a soft voice, shoving my thoughts away and getting into my role. No one was close enough to hear, and I needed to know what I was dealing with.

I didn't know much about her, other than the few comments my brother had made. And most of those were more to do with the fact she could handle herself in a fight, and that none of the alphas at ASC would spar with her anymore.

Which meant a shit load of history I didn't know could potentially blow up in my face. What if her family were here and wouldn't be pleased to see her with a beta? What if she'd broken from her pack and they were here? I could find myself surrounded by pissed-off alphas intent on claiming their female.

Fury bristled along my spine. If that was the case, I didn't care how big and mean they were. If Penny didn't want to go back to them, I would take them all on myself to stop that happening.

“No time to explain. Incoming. Two o'clock,” she murmured and then giggled softly while turning in my embrace and lifting her lips as if for a kiss.

I was almost derailed by the sight of her there, expression soft, eyes darkened, and lips slightly parted. If I hadn't already been as hard as a fucking rock, I would be now. I'd even started to bend my head before I got it together.

My brother was ex-military, as were a lot of the guys I worked with, so I shifted my gaze in the direction she'd indicated without making it obvious what I was doing.

Just in time to see Thale Barnes barreling toward us like the god of vengeance and a bulldozer combined.

“Fuck,” I hissed. Barnes was not an alpha I wanted to tangle with. Not looking like that anyway.

“Exactly,” Penny snorted, sliding her hand up to stroke along my jaw just as Thale reached us. I almost lost it then, the temptation to lean down and claim her lips nearly overwhelming. Only the certainty that Thale would remove my spine from my body stopped me.

“Get the fuck away from my woman!” Thale snarled, his hands curled into tight fists at his sides.

I lifted my head to look at him. Thale Barnes was an absolute powerhouse of an alpha. Short for someone of his dynamic at just over six feet, he more than made up for it in width and sheer solidity. But Barnes wasn't just muscled. His frame had a denseness as if all that power and rage had been compressed into a smaller mass. And somehow that made him much more dangerous.

Even though I had a couple of inches on him, courtesy of the Shaw genes, I was no match for him. Not playing fair anyway. Not that I ever played fair in a fight with an alpha. Growing up with Will... Bane had knocked that one right out of me before either of us had hit double digits.

Before I could do or say anything, a warning growl rumbled from the back of Penny's throat.

“Your woman?” she snarled, and damn, I didn't think I'd ever been so turned on in all my life.

An alpha's growl was a control measure, just one of the weapons they used to control others and assert their dominance and standing in alpha society. Who was more powerful, who submitted to whom... that kind of thing. Of all

the dynamics, the alphas were the most primal. The closest to animalistic, especially when triggered.

And Penny was definitely triggered now. I almost felt sorry for Thale. *Almost*.

Without leaving the circle of my arms, she challenged Thale.

“Your woman?” she snarled again because he hadn’t answered. “I don’t fucking think so. Just because you say it doesn’t make it true!”

Thale reared back, his almost black-on-black eyes glittering. I seriously thought that was it, and they were going to rage out and take each other on, right here and now.

“Enough!” I snarled, making them both jump in surprise. Yeah, I was close enough to being an alpha that I could snarl, just not purr or growl like an alpha. Or knot an omega the way they could.

“This is my brother’s wedding,” I reminded them, not breaking eye contact with Thale, even though I read my own death in the big alpha’s eyes. “So if we’re going to do this, may I suggest we take it somewhere more private?”

Offering that to an alpha wasn’t the stupidest or most foolhardy thing I’d ever done, but it certainly ranked well up there.

Fortunately for me, my words seemed to bring Thale to his senses. He looked around, his expression settling. Then he shook his shoulders, like a rottweiler shaking water from its fur. Spearing me with another, dangerous look, he snarled again and then whirled on his heel to stalk away. A second later he was gone, swallowed up by the crowds of wedding guests.

Closing my eyes for a second, I took a deep breath and then looked down at her.

Relief slackened her expression for a second, and then she smiled. The unguarded expression took my breath away.

“Thank you,” she murmured, and I’ve never wanted to kiss a woman more in my life. “You really helped me dodge a bullet there. You okay carrying on the pretense all night?”

Fuck me. I was screwed. I wanted to crowd closer and tell her I wasn’t pretending, didn’t want to pretend, but I knew if I did, I risked the chance she would run like a skittish doe. That or punch me. Actually punching me was more likely.

So I kept my mouth shut and nodded.

“Of course. Anything to help a friend of my brother’s.”

THALE

Rage simmered, making itself at home in my blood and bones. The never-ending heat licked at my mind and soul, all focused on the beta holding my woman in his arms as they danced right in front of me.

Well, not exactly right in front of me. They were on the dance floor, which was in front of the bar I was propping up as I did my best to get drunk enough not to care.

I wasn’t doing too well on that front. Alpha physiology was too fast for me to get drunk and stay that way for long. Not unless I had enough alpha-enhanced meds in my system to drop a rhino anyway. So I brooded, my hand wrapped around a tumbler of whiskey as I ignored the dance floor.

If this wasn’t Bane’s wedding, I would have left already. Because it was, I was stuck. Bane would be upset if I left

early. Worse, his new wife Willow would also be upset, and the last thing I wanted was the pretty little omega upset at me. Not because I harbored any romantic feelings toward her but simply because I liked her as a person. She was my friend, and friends weren't shits to each other like that.

So I drained my glass and motioned to the bartender for another. As I turned back around, I caught the edge of a sultry perfume and found a woman in front of me.

"Hey," she said with a small, uncertain smile. Most of that I would put down to any woman approaching what was obviously an irritated alpha, but as I raked a hard look down her, my instincts sparked like a flare. She didn't move, but the suppressed tremble in her frame and the perfume told me all I needed to know.

She was an alpha-obsessed beta.

It was one of the gauntlets me and my brothers had to run. Often regularly.

Omeegas were rare, and most were matched with suitable alphas as soon as their dynamic presented itself. Omeegas like Neve, a dormant presentation who needed to meet her true alphas, and Willow, an omega who had successfully hidden herself for years, were rare.

Which meant often alphas sought out betas who looked and acted like omegas. Nothing could replace an actual omega, of course, but some just didn't care. Anything small and delicate, with holes they could shove their dicks into would do. Which was the opportunity women like the one in front of me looked for.

Some betas, especially nearer the omega end of the scale, were obsessed with sex with an alpha. They walked and talked

like omegas, even altered their appearance and mannerisms to mimic them, all with the hopes of catching an alpha's attention. There were even black-market cosmetic surgeries to help them look more like omegas.

Look but not become. No surgery could turn them into omegas.

I had no idea what drove them to do such a thing. Betas weren't built to take the alpha's knot they craved, and it could cause injury if the alpha in question wasn't careful. Many weren't but never faced charges. When questioned, they asserted that the beta had begged for the knot. That it was entirely consensual.

Given our ability to overwhelm both betas and omegas alike, I disagreed with the sense in that, but I didn't write the laws. That wasn't my issue right now. The woman in front of me, eyeing me up like a shark eyeing up its next meal, was.

Whoever said alphas were the biggest predators out there had never met this particular bunch of women. They were sure they should be something they weren't and railed at life, nature, and everyone else because they weren't.

"Not interested," I growled, paying more attention to my drink. I felt sorry for her. I really did.

She'd tried, her mannerisms and the way she was dressed were all bang on for the current omega trends, but she was way too tall and that little bit too heavy to be an omega. And I don't mean weight. I love curvy women. They're a delight to the senses, especially for a guy... but her frame was too stocky for an omega, without that delicateness that marked the rarest dynamic. Her perfume was obviously expensive and way better than what most obsessives I'd encountered wore. It was

near enough to an actual omega scent that in the dark, when drunk... yeah, maybe a younger alpha would be fooled.

Which was the point. To fool an alpha and get bitten. I had no idea what they thought would happen when the alpha realized. Fury wouldn't be the half of it if you woke up from a bender, convinced that you'd found and claimed your omega, only to find a beta in your bed. That could get a beta dead. Killed instantly in the towering rage that was sure to follow.

"Oh, you don't mean that, alpha," she purred in a husky voice, startling me.

Oh, this one was dangerous. The sound she made was near enough to an omega's purr to make even my cock twitch, and I *knew* what she was.

"Pull all the tricks you want," I growled in warning. "Don't care. Still not interested."

I wouldn't have been interested, no matter if she'd looked even a tiny bit like the woman who currently haunted my every thought. The alpha-struck were always bad news.

But she didn't get the hint, pouting and sidling up to me as she reached a hand out. I grabbed her wrist before she could make contact. Not hard enough to hurt her, I was angry but I wasn't that much of an asshole. Yet.

"Yes... alpha." She gasped and almost melted against me. I kicked myself as the scent of her arousal filled the air around me. Trust me to get a pain-whore to boot. Just my fucking luck.

"No. no. No 'yes, alpha,'" I pushed compulsion into my voice.

Normally I didn't like to do it, but given a shit-load of alphas were here at the wedding, most of whom were

unbonded, I needed to get her out of here and fast. Before she got hurt.

I yanked her closer and pinned her with my gaze. “You’re going to make your excuses to the bride and groom,” I ordered. “And then you are going to leave. Right now. Understand me?”

“Yes, alpha.” She nodded, her eyes unfocused and her jaw slack. I wanted to face-palm. Not only was she alpha-struck. She was extremely susceptible to compulsion—a dangerous combination.

“Tomorrow you are going to make an appointment with the Oakley Center,” I named an addiction center as I pushed the compulsion harder, to make sure it stuck. “And get help for your condition. Understand? Nod if you do.”

She nodded so hard her head almost fell off. I let her go and gave her a small push toward where the bride and groom were standing, chatting with some other guests, and then watched her as she walked toward them on unsteady feet.

“Hey, big man. What’s with the pretty little thing?” Zeke, one of the other alphas with the ASC, propped his elbow on the bar next to me and signaled for a drink.

“Alpha-struck,” I said in a low undertone, not wanting to advertise that fact too loudly. Some of the other alphas here didn’t work for the ASC, so I couldn’t vouch for their morals.

None of our guys would take advantage. I knew that, and if they did they’d have Dante and Mason as well as the senior alphas on the payroll to contend with.

“Shit,” Zeke winced, watching the beta with a worried expression as she talked to Bane and Willow. “In here? That’s like fucking chum in the water.”

I gave a short, curt nod. “I know. I don’t know which side she’s from, Bane’s or Willow’s. I’ll bring it up with Bane after the honeymoon.”

Zeke nodded, taking a swallow from the heavy tumbler the bartender slid toward him. His gaze swept over the dance floor and then stalled. I gritted my teeth, knowing what was coming next.

“Pen looks mighty familiar with that beta. That’s the cop. Isn’t it?”

I nodded, emptying my glass and motioning for another, all the while studiously avoiding looking that way. “Bane’s brother. Beta through and through.”

Zeke’s eyebrow winged up. “You sure? Way he acts seems like an alpha.”

“Yup, he’s a freak. Ask Bane.”

My words were short and sharp. I didn’t want to talk about, look at, or even think about Logan Shaw. Because that would lead to thinking about Penny and, more specifically, thinking about Penny outside the church, plastered all over the guy.

My free hand clenched into a fist so tightly my bones ached. Seeing them like that, I’d almost lost it. Especially after the last time I’d worked with Penny. Undercover. Me as an alpha and her pretending to be my omega.

I closed my eyes for a second, suppressing the groan as heat exploded through my body and settled in my groin. I was hard and aching in an instant, the need that ripped through me savage in its intensity.

Somehow that undercover op had led to us in a corridor in the club and a hot clinch designed to prove to Jaeg, the asshole

crime lord we were hunting, and his men that we were what we said we were.

“Oh fuck,” Zeke breathed, eyes wide. “They’re going for it right there on the dance floor!”

My head snapped around just in time to see Shaw twirl Penny around in a slick dance move that ended with her bent over his arm. Then he pulled her up, slid a hand into her hair and kissed her.

No, that wasn’t a kiss. That was fucking foreplay—an intent and a claim all in one. And a fucking finger up to me because that was *my* woman.

Rage ripped through me, and before I knew what I was doing, I’d slammed my glass down on the bar and was across the dance floor.

Ripping the asshole beta away from Penny, I threw him onto a table. I heard screams as drinks went flying and the table collapsed under him. I’d slammed him into it that hard, but I didn’t care.

My hands were still tangled in his jacket, so we both went down in the ruins of the table. I heard shouts of alarm and snarls behind me, but I didn’t care. Kneeling up, I wound my fist back, my target his face. The rage inside goaded me on. He was too pretty to be an alpha. I’d wreck his pretty face so Penny didn’t look at him aga—

Anger flared in his eyes and he blocked my punch with surprising strength, wrapping his hand around my fist as he twisted. His free hand caught me hard in the ribs, winding me. A second later his elbow smashed up into my jaw, and I fell backward, sprawling across the dance floor.

I flipped back up with a roar, my fists at the ready. Fucking sneaky-ass beta wasn't going to get a chance for that move again.

Logan was on his feet, his fancy wedding suit soaked from the drinks he'd landed in, but his pale gaze was hard on mine. If another alpha had looked at me like that, it might have made me pause for a moment.

But Shaw was a beta, I was an alpha, and no way I was letting such a challenge from a beta go unanswered.

Not ever.

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CHAPTER THREE

PENNY

I screamed as Logan was yanked away from me, and I landed on my ass right in the middle of the dance floor. It was part surprise, part pain from landing on said ass, and part fury as I watched Thale throw Logan across the nearest table.

I was on my feet in a heartbeat, surging forward. The table had broken under the weight of the two men, wedding guests scattering as Thale started to throw punches.

“*Barnes!*” I bellowed, trying to get in there, but Bane’s hard hand latched around my arm and yanked me back.

“Stay out of it, Penny,” he warned in a low voice. “This was always going to happen, and you getting in the middle will only make things worse.”

I tried to yank my arm away, panic threading through me as Thale wound his fist back.

“Logan’s just a beta!” I snapped. “Thale’ll kill him!”

Bane snorted. “I think you’ll find my brother is a tad more capable than you give him credit for. Especially when it comes to slugging it out with an alpha.”

I turned to find out he was right.

Logan rose like Poseidon from the sea, his hand clamped around Thale's fist and a snarl on his face. I winced as he twisted it and slammed his own fist into Thale's side. That had to have at least cracked ribs.

Thale was knocked backward onto his ass to sprawl in front of me and Bane. But he wasn't down and out, flipping back up with a roar to advance on Logan.

"No!"

I tore myself free of Bane's hold, racing forward to shoulder between the two men. They were both huge. How had I not noticed before how big Logan was?

"*Stop this!*" I snarled as I slammed a hand on both of their chests, keeping them apart. "This is a fucking wedding, in case either of you had forgotten, and you're making a fucking scene."

Instantly I found myself the center of attention of two highly charged, pissed off men. The potential for more violence swelled in the air and I braced myself. If it came to it, I would have to drop Thale first and then deal with Logan. I made that decision mostly because I knew Thale. I'd worked with him for months and had seen him train and in action so I knew his moves. But Logan was an unknown quantity. He would take more time and care.

Surprisingly, Thale folded first. Wrapping a huge hand around my wrist, he inclined his head. The soft stroke of his thumb against the inside of my wrist made me shiver, but then he let me go and stepped back.

"You're right. My apologies."

With that, he turned on his heel and stalked away, leaving me looking after him with my jaw gaping.

“Oh shit,” Logan groaned behind me, looking at his brother and beyond him to where Willow, the bride, stood with one hand on her hip. “Wil... Bane, I’m so sorry.”

Bane’s expression filled with fond affection and just as much frustration. “You’re a fucking tit. You know that? Of all the places...”

His gaze dropped to my hand, still braced against his brother’s chest. “Pen, I’m not going to say you know better, but —”

I sighed and closed my eyes for a second, feeling shame wash up from the tips of my toes right to the top of my head. Every woman knew better than to get between two men, and that’s exactly what I’d done—used Logan as a shield against Thale.

Because I knew Thale was interested. More than interested. The way he’d kissed me up against that wall while we were undercover...

“I’m really sorry, Bane. This is my fault,” I said in a low voice. Today had already had enough drama. It didn’t need me to add to it. “I’ll get someone to clean up, put this right.”

Even as I said the words, the venue staff were already there, setting the table to rights and cleaning up the mess. “I will, of course, pay for all the damage.”

“She won’t,” Logan declared, his voice as steely as his pale eyes. “I will. I’m not an alpha. I have no excuse for my temper getting the better of me.”

“And you think that’s what I did?” I snapped, arching my eyebrow. I wasn’t mad at him, but Thale had stormed out and

left me without a target.

He stilled, looking down at me. “No. Not at all, Penny. This isn’t your fault.”

“I’m gonna leave you two to deal with... whatever this is.” Bane motioned between us and stalked off to join his new wife.

Logan stepped closer, and I resisted the urge to step back. I knew he was a beta, but there was knowing something and there was what my instincts were telling me. Right now, after seeing him fight Thale—seeing the way he moved—my instincts insisted he was all alpha.

I glared up at him. “It *is* my fault.”

I didn’t need a knight in shining armor—or in this case, slightly stained morning dress—to ride to the rescue and save me. I wasn’t a damsel in distress. I was a kickass independent female alpha. The more I kept telling myself that...

“I was the one who asked you to help me. To pretend we’re a couple because I knew Thale was interested in me. It’s my fault he turned on you,” I insisted. Which it was. “If I hadn’t dragged you into all this—”

I stopped and took a breath, closing my eyes and pinching the bridge of my nose between my thumb and forefinger.

“Thank you,” I said, wanting... *needing* him to believe me. I had not intended for any of this to happen. I’d just wanted Thale off my back for a while. He was too forceful and unsettling. “Thank you for helping me and pretending to be my lover, even though it got you punched for it.”

He smiled, and the expression took my breath away, making me freeze on the spot. It wasn’t the benign look of a beta. It was the look of an alpha—a predator. His body heat

beat against my skin as he crowded me, lifting a hand to cup the back of my neck.

“Who said I’m pretending?” he leaned down to murmur against my lips.

Then he kissed me. It was hot, raw, and utterly blew my mind.

I’d been kissed before but never like this. Never like he owned me, body and soul, and the kiss let me know it. It was a brand and a claim all in one.

I whimpered, a soft sound of need escaping my throat, and clung to him. My hands wrapped around the lapels of his jacket as I tried to get closer, lifting my chin to offer more of myself.

His arms wrapped around me, and I was vaguely aware of whoops and catcalls. It was only when I broke away, stunned as I looked up into his eyes, that I caught movement in my peripheral vision.

Alpha instincts took over and I turned, snatching the object that had been thrown at me out of the air.

Only to find myself holding Willow’s bouquet...

THALE

The heavy beat of rock music poured into my ears, infiltrating my bloodstream and galvanizing my muscles. I grunted, taking the weight of the barbell, and pushed out a swift set of reps, feeling the burn toward the end.

Working off a hangover in the gym—followed by a large amount of fatty, fried—food was a tried and tested method of bringing myself back to human.

Just one problem. I hadn't been drunk last night. Yes, I'd consumed alcohol, but not in the quantities needed to get drunk with my alpha physiology burning it from my system practically as soon as it had hit my stomach.

I'd wanted to, though.

I'd wanted to wipe out the memory of what a fucking ass I'd been. Racking the weighted barbell, I dropped my head back to the bench with a groan. What kind of asshole started a fight at his best friend's wedding?

Me. I'm that asshole.

All because I couldn't bear the sight of Penny, a woman I had no claim on, in another man's arms.

"*Fuckfuckfuck,*" I groaned and rubbed a hand over my sweaty face.

I'd hightailed it out of there as soon as I'd realized, but the damage had already been done. I'd slammed the best man, a beta, into a table and broken it, spilling drinks over everyone and sending wedding guests scattering. But that hadn't been the worst part.

No, the worst part had been the looks on their faces. There had been no surprise, just resignation. Just another alpha kicking off, like we always did.

I closed my eyes for a second and then grabbed for my phone from the floor next to my water bottle and towel. Flicking the screen on, I opened my messages. I'd sent two messages this morning when common sense had kicked in. The first was to Bane.

Hey man. I'm really fucking sorry 4 last night. It was ur wedding & I was a fucking asshole. T.

It was still on unread. Not surprising since last night was Bane and Willow's wedding night. Even though they were a bonded couple, a wedding night was special. I didn't expect him to reply until late afternoon, if at all. If I were him, I'd be concentrating solely on Willow.

My eyes were drawn to the second text like a compass needle to true north. It was to Penny. The previous texts in the conversation were short. Mostly about meeting times and coffee orders. My last message was at the bottom.

Penny. I'm so sorry 4 last night. I have no excuses 4 my behavior. Pls forgive me. T.

Begging forgiveness wasn't exactly "hardline" alpha behavior, and some of my dynamic would take the piss out of me relentlessly for it. But since those guys were the kind of alpha who didn't believe omegas had any rights and were "built" to take alpha cock, however rough, I didn't care.

I'd made an ass of myself, so the only thing I could do was apologize and hope like hell she still wanted to have anything to do with me. Because one thing was for certain, I couldn't lose Penny from my life.

And part of that meant not harassing her to answer my messages, even though I wanted to. I'd apologized, which was all I could do for the moment. Taking a deep breath, I put my phone down, ignoring it as I ramped up the music in my earbuds and settled down under the bar again.

Reps and sets were marked by the burn of muscles and the steady *drip-drip-drip* of sweat as I worked myself to exhaustion. Just me and the weights, me challenging my own body to lift more, harder, faster... then slower as I tired so my muscles screamed at me.

The pain was good, though—a sign I was working my body, honing my strength and stamina. And it had the added benefit that while I lifted, there was nothing but me and the weights. I didn't have to think. Not about what my shift would entail today, not about last night... not about Penny in some other guy's arms.

And just like that, my concentration was broken. I growled and racked the weight. Rolling to a sitting position, I wiped the back of my neck and my chest with a towel.

No doubt she'd spent the night with Shaw. Rage wanted to push free at the idea, the alpha within snarling that she didn't belong to the pretty-boy beta. She was *ours*. Had been ours from the moment she'd sashayed up to me on that undercover op wearing a dress that should have been reclassified as a sexy nightie and pretended to be my omega pet.

A shudder rolled through me at the memory of her small, slender form pressed up against me. If I was honest, I had expected to really have to work to sell our act, which had been critical if we didn't want to tip anyone off that we weren't what we seemed and put ourselves as well as the women we were rescuing at risk, but I hadn't needed to.

Penny had played the part of a sweetly brattish omega to perfection. So much so, I'd had to check myself several times or she would have ended up pressed up against the nearest wall, impaled on my knot with my fangs in her neck.

Something that had very nearly happened in the back corridors of the club. I groaned at the memory of her lips soft with submission beneath mine and the way her hands had raked through my hair as she rode my hand almost to completion. The scent of her arousal, the way she'd yielded to

me... I'd started to slide into rut there and then. The only thing that had stopped me was being shot.

My side twinged in complaint at the memory. As a cockblocker, being shot was excellent. The rut had receded and we'd been able to carry on with the mission. I'd managed to skip any hospital time only because she was such a good shot. She'd hit me in just the right place for a through and through that my body had dealt with easily. As a method of libido control, it had worked but sucked. Zero stars, do not recommend.

However, it did raise another question. Only the presence of an omega would send me into rut, and we'd been in the back corridors of the club, well away from any of the women we were there to rescue. So how... why had I started to lose control?

I shouldn't have, not with Penny. Not if she was an alpha female. But what else could she be? There was no way a beta or, god forbid, an omega would be able to do half the things she could... my frown was so deep it threatened to cleave my head in two, giving me a headache in the process.

The shrill ring of my cell filled the air. I looked down and then grimaced.

My mother. Just what I needed.

Ignoring the call, I moved to the next bench and picked up dumbbells to start working on chest flys. It would stop ringing sooner or later.

The phone fell silent and I breathed a sigh of relief, busting out another quick set of twelve reps. I'd keep going, moving down weights until I could barely pick up a pencil. That trick got me out of paperwork a lot.

“New message,” my earbuds announced. “From Mom. Thale Eugene Barrington. I know you’re there. Pick the phone up now.”

I sighed. Fuck’s sake. Miriam Victoria Barrington, nee Barnes was relentless. No, that was the understatement of the century. The last thing I wanted today was to have to deal with my mother.

Once she got me on the phone, she wouldn’t let me off until I’d agreed to at least three of the endless parties her social set threw and probably a blind date with a “nice, suitable girl,” aka a shy, introverted girl with good breeding my mother could bully for the rest of her life if she was unlucky enough to get me to marry her.

But if I didn’t answer her calls, it was highly likely she would call the ASC switchboard. I just knew she would. And once she got on the phone to them, she would gossip. About me. And then everyone would know all the embarrassing little details my mother delighted in telling people. It was one reason I’d taken my grandmother’s name on my dynamic presentation. The less people linked me with the ridiculously wealthy, high-society Barringtons the better. It wasn’t that I was embarrassed about my background. I just wanted to make my own way in life.

The phone rang again and I steeled myself before tapping an earbud to answer.

“Hey, Mom. What do you want?”

“Is that any way to speak to the woman who sacrificed her figure to give birth to you?”

I couldn’t help the eye roll, glad this was a voice rather than a video call. My mother always harped on that my brother

and I had ruined her figure, when in reality an exercise regime tougher than mine and a surgeon on call ensured she could be mistaken for a teenager from behind. Turn her around and it was a different matter. She had that telltale ageless perfection that marked an excellent cosmetic surgeon and many, many procedures.

“I’m at work, Mom. You just pulled me out of a meeting.”

She hadn’t, but she didn’t need to know that.

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I forgot about your little job!” she trilled an insincere laugh.

She’d never taken my job seriously. As far as Miriam Barrington was concerned, anything less than the colonel rank the golden boy of the family held simply wasn’t worth bothering with.

“What do you want, Mother?” I asked, barely keeping the anger out of my voice.

I was used to this game of old. The more irritated I sounded, the more she’d needle me, trying to make me blow up. My mother was the worst possible version of a rich, spoiled omega who always had to get her own way.

“We’ve been invited to the Harlow-Jennings wedding this weekend,” she announced. “I’ve accepted on your behalf...”

The groan welled up from my very soul. I knew what the next part of the sentence was going to be already.

“Plenty of girls from suitable families will be there. Good families. It’s about time I became a grandmother, so you will attend,” she ordered imperiously. “I will ensure you have a date. Perhaps one of the Elliott daughters. They’re betas, but the youngest hasn’t presented yet, and they’re due an omega in that line. If you make a good enough showing, and she does

present, maybe the Elliotts will consider you for her bond mate. An omega daughter-in-law,” she rhapsodized, off in her own little world.

“I’m on duty this weekend.” My voice was hard as I replied. I had no idea if I was on duty or not. If I hadn’t been, I sure as fuck was now. “And if I was going, I’m more than capable of finding my own date.”

“Yes, I’m sure,” she said airily. That tone said my choices would never be good enough. “But—”

“If you want a daughter-in-law and grandkids, tap Warren up,” I cut her off, throwing my brother right under the bus, which was the best place for him. He and his colonel’s bling and braid. I’d like to say we just had a bit of sibling rivalry going on, but my brother was an asshole of the highest order.

“I—”

“Sorry, Mom, got to go,” I said as Zeke appeared in the doorway. His expression grave, he jerked his thumb up toward the ceiling. The universal signal that the bosses wanted to see me.

“I... what about the—”

“I’ll call you later. Bye,” I said right over her and then cut the call.

Levering myself to my feet, I headed over toward Zeke.

“Meeting in fifteen,” he said. “Bosses do not look amused.”

I nodded. Great. First my mother and now this. Today was going down the shitter for sure.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PENNY

Working the day after a wedding was never a sensible choice, but working for the ASC wasn't your typical nine-to-five, clock-in, clock-out job. And I wouldn't want it to be.

I loved the unpredictability of my job. It was high energy, high stakes, and it fulfilled that part of me that needed the rush of speeding at a hundred miles an hour or the adrenaline jolt of combat.

Without it... if I'd been in one of the nice "safe" admin jobs the army had suggested when I was discharged, I'd have been bored stupid in a month and probably hitting up alpha bars just to start a fight and get some action that way.

Alpha rage, check. I had shit-tons of that. Just not right now when my head felt like a woodpecker was carving designs into the side of my skull. I winced in the bright overhead lights of the garage under the ASC building and grabbed my bag from the back seat of my truck.

Sunglasses helped with the headache as I strode for the elevators. I didn't care that wearing them indoors made me

look like an asshole. It was that or snarl at anyone who crossed my path.

Worse, I couldn't even blame alcohol for it. My alpha physiology purged alcohol from my system almost as quickly as I could drink it. Unless I went for one of the alpha-centric fortified spirits, drinking was just expensive and landed me in the ladies half the night, peeing as my body filtered the stuff out.

No, my headache was all emotional stress-based. Go me. Every system had a weakness. While I could, and would, have gone toe to toe with Thale last night for being an asshole, the fact that we'd almost ruined Willow and Bane's wedding day—the fact that I'd let my friends down and upset them—had about knocked me on my ass.

I'd spent half the night tossing and turning and then the other half waking up from nightmares where I was stripped naked in front of everyone, my secrets laid bare for all to see. I could handle alcohol but lack of sleep did me in every time.

It hadn't helped that Willow had deliberately thrown her bouquet at me. Me of all people. Scary Penny, the mad female alpha. I wasn't unaware that my colleagues called me the goddess of war, or that men crossed the street as soon as they recognized me.

I sighed as I leaned against the wall in the elevator, letting my guard down for a moment. If they knew the truth, it would be a completely different matter.

I reached up to scrub my hands over my face. I couldn't tell them. Couldn't tell *anyone*.

A growl in the back of my throat, I shoved my hair off my face. It was getting long and I hated it in my way. It didn't hurt

that the undercut gave me an aggressive look—a red flag for anyone looking that I was not a person to be fucked with.

At least here, at work, I wasn't surrounded by hordes of cooing grandmamas, all telling me I was destined to walk up the aisle next and casting curious eyes at Logan.

Heat washed over me again at the memory, hell, the sheer idea of bonding myself to Logan. I barely knew the guy, after all.

Well, okay, maybe I did know him a little.

I knew his kisses were hot enough to weaken even my knees, and beta or not, he made everything female within me sit up and take notice. I should want to pin him down, dominate him, and make him take my bite. Start a pack of my own. But all my instincts wanted him to pin me instead...

I shoved that thought away and straightened up as the elevator pinged for my floor. An alpha never willingly submitted to domination. It just wasn't done.

The door opened, and I found myself face to face with Killian Burton, a former underworld enforcer with a lethal reputation. His grim expression made my heart sink.

“Meeting with Mason and Dante,” he ground out, the big scar across his throat making his deep voice sound like rocks crashing into each other.

“Just let me drop this off at my desk.” I indicated the bag over my shoulder. “And I'll be right there.”

To my surprise, Killian followed me to the corner cubicle my teammates laughingly referred to as my “office.” I hadn't been assigned the preferential spot out of the goodness of anyone's heart or because I was female but because I'd beaten all challengers fair and square on the sparring mats in the gym.

As per usual, Killian didn't speak. A big brute of an alpha, I hadn't had a lot to do with him before. We had different skill sets, so we were usually put on different assignments. The undercover operation into the crime lord Jaeger's network had been the first time we'd worked together.

"Making sure I get to the meeting?" I asked with a chuckle as I dumped my bag under the desk. No need for lockers at ASC. No one would go through my stuff. Mostly because they were decent guys but also because they knew I'd pound them into dust while sparring if they did.

He shrugged. "Called to the same meeting. Makes sense to go in together."

Huh. Killian wasn't the sort to need moral support. I kept my mouth shut and led the way back to the elevators to head up to the briefing room.

The doors had closed behind us when he cleared his throat.

"What?"

He wanted to ask something. That much was obvious. My head was still splitting, so I wasn't in the mood for idle chitchat. Not that he was the type to gossip.

"Grapevine said you've taken up with a beta. Bane's brother. And Thale got into it with the guy."

I sighed, closing my eyes for a second. I really didn't have the patience for this shit.

"I—"

He held his hand up, cutting me off, but any anger I felt dissipated at his next words. "Just, well I know female alphas like... well, they prefer packs, and if you're putting a pack together, I'd like to put my name in for consideration."

I froze. I may even have made a very unalpha-like squeak. Killian, the Devil of Denning Heights himself, wanted to be part of my pack. I wasn't even aware he was... *fuck*, he'd never given even a tiny hint he found me attractive. Not a look or a comment. Nothing.

It wasn't like I thought he was into men or anything like that, not that there was anything wrong with that, but he seemed the sort to be more interested in the typical soft and delicate omega. Which was not me. Definitely not me.

He looked down, staring at his boots for a moment, and then speared me with a hard gaze from crystalline blue eyes. "Of course, if I'm not to your taste, I understand."

"I—"

For a moment I couldn't get my words out, speechless that someone like Killian was interested in me. I looked him over again. He was handsome as fuck, in a hard-edged way, and danger clung to him like a second skin. If I was looking to put together a pack, he'd have been on my dream list. But... an image of Thale and Logan fighting filled my mind.

"I'm not looking to put together a pack... not at the moment," I added quickly, trying to smile and soften the blow. "But if I do in the future, I'll let you know."

He gave a curt nod, pushing off from the back wall of the elevator. For a second I thought he was going to try and change my mind, perhaps pin me up against the wall and try to kiss me or something, but he simply held his arm out to indicate the open door.

Shit. I'd completely missed the ping announcing our arrival.

“Err, thank you,” I murmured, sidling out of the small space as quickly as I could and striding toward the door to the briefing room while trying to maintain my composure.

A pack. Me? Fuck. That would have been laughable if Killian’s expression hadn’t been so damn serious.

I nodded to Mason and Dante, already seated as I arrived, and took a seat around the other side of the room away from the door. You could take the girl out of the army, but you couldn’t take the army out of the girl. I always preferred to have my back to the wall and a clear line of sight to all entrances and exits.

Leaning back, I suddenly remembered I was wearing my damn sunglasses and snatched them off my face. Mason’s lips quirked as I put them on the table in front of me.

“Rough night, apparently?”

I nodded, levering myself up from my chair and heading over to the coffee pot. Caffeine, I needed caffeine. It would help calm me down, or wake me up, or something. I definitely needed something.

I was mid-pour when the door opened again. The tingle down my spine warned me a half second before Thale came into view.

He paused as he saw me, just for a split second, but then he walked into the room, his spine stiff.

My heart lurched and a wave of guilt washed over me at the message I’d left unanswered on my phone this morning. I turned away, chewing my lip as I finished pouring the coffee.

I hadn’t answered him, but what did I say? He might as well have declared his intent to bond and bite me in front of everyone, calling me “his woman” like that. One sexy clinch

in a club corridor didn't mean we were soul mates, even if it had been the most erotic encounter I'd ever had.

My mug full, I ran out of excuses and turned back around, only to find that Thale had taken the seat opposite mine. I sat back down, trying not to notice he'd just had a shower and his dark hair was still damp, revealing little curls he must usually brush out.

He caught me looking, holding my gaze until I snatched it away, my cheeks burning.

"Okay," Dante said, leaning forward with his hands rested on the table. "Now we're all here, we can start. First off, Thale and Penny," he looked at us both, his expression forbidding.

"Whatever the fuck last night was all about, sort it the fuck out. While you were wedding guests, you were also both representing the company, and I don't expect behavior like that from our operatives in public. Do I make myself clear?"

The heat on my cheeks became an inferno. I knew we'd broken company rules. ASC was essentially a private alpha army, something that was definitely skirting alpha law. We were allowed to operate so long as we didn't call attention to ourselves. Last night definitely counted as calling attention to ourselves.

I nodded, catching the same movement from Thale out of the corner of my eye. We'd fucked up, and I knew we'd fucked up, no argument on that.

Dante grunted, obviously satisfied with our response. "Moving on. Thale, I know you're running lead on the Danny Stone protection detail, but I'm reassigning Penny and Killian to you. We've seen a spate of high-profile omega kidnappings

recently, and I don't intend for us to get caught with our pants down and lose a VIP client like Stone."

I frowned. "But I thought no one knew Stone is actually an omega?"

Danny Stone was one of the biggest rock stars on the planet, but his public image was carefully curated. Charismatic and with a powerful presence, everyone assumed he was an alpha, and he and his PR team had played into that for years. No one apart from his close circle and his protection detail knew he was, in fact, an unbonded, and very rare, male omega.

My heart lurched. And they wanted to put me in a room with the guy? This was not going to go well, not at all.

Thale cleared his throat. "No, they don't, but we can't assume they don't with this new risk. They took Senator Davies' daughter. Didn't they?"

Mason nodded. "Right from her bedroom."

I frowned. "What am I missing? Davies' daughter is... what, twelve?"

"Eighteen," Thale said, his expression troubled. "And an omega presentation the family were trying to hide."

My back thumped against the back of my chair. "Huh. So someone broke through a senator's security to snatch the girl."

He nodded. "Twice. The first time to discover she'd presented at all."

"How about medical records? The hospital that confirmed the early presentation?" I asked. The senator was from a high-society family, so they'd have the very best medical care. Dynamic presentation checked and double-checked by experts. And that led to a lot of paperwork.

“Eckhart Vale,” he replied, naming a very exclusive and famously high-security medical center.

“Shit.” I wrinkled my nose. There went that theory. Eckhart Vale wasn’t the type of place that ever had its patients’ details compromised.

“Exactly,” Dante rumbled. “And she’s not the only case. There have been others, which means we need to assume nothing and beef up security around our vulnerable primaries, including Danny Stone.”

I nodded even though my stomach sank. I didn’t want to be anywhere near an omega, especially one like Danny Stone, who had to have gone through his presentation over a decade ago. He wasn’t a new omega. At his age he would know his body, know his instincts. As such, he was the last person I wanted or needed to be around.

But to argue would only draw suspicion, and I couldn’t afford that, not around Thale. He was already too interested in me and paying way too much attention. Actually, so was Killian, even though I hadn’t realized it. I flicked a glance at the big, dangerous-looking alpha, but his gaze was fixed on Mason and Dante.

“I’ll take the opposing shift to Thale and Penny,” he announced. That was the thing with Killian. He didn’t take orders often. Instead, he listened and then organized himself around what was required. Sometimes inventively.

Thale nodded. “Appreciate that. Pen and I will take the night shift tonight, give you time to get your team in place.”

My phone buzzed in the pocket against my leg and I fished it out, zoning out as they made arrangements.

A new message had popped up on my screen from a number I didn't recognize.

Hey, it's Logan. I really enjoyed your company last night. I'd love to see you again. Do you fancy joining me for a coffee sometime? Shaw.

I sat, frozen in place. Seriously, this could not be happening to me. Three hot guys, two of which made me tingle in all the right places, hitting on me in the space of two days? Either I'd slipped into some alternate reality, or I'd fallen in my heels yesterday and hit my head, dropping me into some kind of dream fantasy.

"Penny? Do you need to go home to pack anything for an overnighter?" Mason's voice was a little louder than normal, like he'd already asked me that once.

Guiltily, I shoved my phone away in my thigh pocket and looked up.

"No, boss, I'll just need to grab my bag but then I'll be good to go."

LOGAN

Penny had left me on read.

I glared at my phone screen as though I could force her to answer my text just through the power of my mind. Alas, that was not a beta power, and the nearest alphas got to mind control was using compulsion in their voice.

I sighed and put my phone down to pay attention to the paperwork on my desk. It seemed to multiply like rabbits whenever I left the office.

My desk phone rang, a shrill demand for attention, and I picked it up without lifting my eyes from the case notes I was reading.

“Shaw.”

“Shaw, it’s Griffiths,” the gruff tone of Denning Heights’ chief of police announced. “Got a bit of an issue brewing over at the alpha station. They’ve called for a liaison officer, so get yourself over there and sort it out.”

The phone went dead before I could answer. I looked at the receiver for a second.

“Of course, sir, nice to speak with you as well,” I muttered under my breath before I replaced it.

Chief Griffiths was a brusque old coot, totally old school, and he’d never made any pretense of the fact he didn’t like me. The fact that I was not only the son of his old nemesis but also the only one of his officers who could stand up to alphas—*true* alphas not these *Repre*-wannabes—pissed him off no end. He’d tried to throw me off the force several times, insisting I was an alpha in disguise, but each time my mandatory blood tests came back the same.

I was a beta, through and through.

At least, that’s what my DNA said. And he couldn’t argue with science, so I kept my job.

A frown creased my brow as I gathered up my notes. I knew the department had corruption, but as yet I didn’t have enough proof to point the finger at anyone. Griffiths was high on my list to check out, though. No way were girls were going missing the way they were, their files being closed down, and he didn’t have something to do with it.

But right now, I needed to get my ass over to the alpha station. The last time I'd been called in like this, I'd found my brother's bosses in a cell. I hoped it wasn't something like that or, my heart lurched, Penny in a cell.

The idea of her caged that way sent a bolt of fury through me so complete that I grabbed the edge of my desk for support. If they'd locked her up, I'd tear the place apart to get her out, alphas or not. They wouldn't keep me from her.

A soft knock at the door brought me back to my senses, and I straightened up. "Come in."

I'd expected it to be Lucy from the admin team with something she needed me to sign, but it wasn't. My smile dropped a little at the sight of the slender brunette who walked through the door.

"Kelsey. What are you doing here?" I asked, confusion lacing my voice.

As well it might. We'd split up three weeks ago and I'd been doing my best to avoid her calls. Much the same as it appeared Penny was doing to mine...

"I thought you might be hungry." Kelsey gave a shy smile and pulled a bag out from behind her back.

My heart sank. It was from my favorite restaurant. A very expensive favorite restaurant. The kind of restaurant reserved for special occasions like birthdays and promotions. Not for takeout lunch. Certainly not for takeout lunch for someone you weren't even seeing.

"Kelsey, you really shouldn't have." I shook my head, feeling guilty.

She really was a lovely girl, if a little alpha-focused. I knew she'd always wanted to be an omega. She'd never told

me in as many words, but she dressed in copies of the latest omega fashions and emulated their mannerisms.

But at the end of the day, it didn't matter whether she was a beta or an omega. Once I'd tasted Penny's kisses, I'd known instantly there would never be another woman for me. Something about the tiny alpha just called to me on a visceral level. I couldn't imagine, actually felt sickened by the idea of, kissing someone else.

"But... this is your favorite. Isn't it?" Kelsey asked in confusion, frowning at the bag as if it were its fault this meeting wasn't going as she'd planned.

"It is." I rounded the desk before she could sit down and make herself comfortable. "But, Kels... we split up. Remember? You shouldn't be spending your money on me. You definitely shouldn't be spending money at The Parlor for me."

She tilted her head back to look up at me and I felt even more of a shit when I saw the tears in the corners of her eyes.

"I thought... maybe... we could try again?" she whispered, her lower lip trembling slightly.

Even a week ago, this show would have gotten to me and weakened my resolve. Even though I knew she really only favored me because I was as close to an alpha as she was going to get, I might still have given in.

Taking the bag, I put it down on the desk and took her hands. "Kelsey, you're a lovely woman and we had some great times together, but I'm sorry, the answer is no. I don't want to get back together."

Hurt shone in her eyes and the lip tremble got worse.

“But why not? Wasn’t I good enough? Not...” She ducked her head, color on her cheeks. “I’m not omega enough for you. Am I? I can do better. I promise.”

I almost barked out a laugh. If only she knew the truth. I didn’t want an omega.

“It’s not that at all, Kelsey. The truth is...” Shit, should I be telling her this? What if she went all loco on me? But she deserved the truth and I needed to man up and tell her.

“I’ve met someone else, Kelsey.” I kept my voice as low and calm as I could, watching her reactions. “It’s over for us. It has been for a long time.”

It had been over from the moment I realized she was trying to get me to bite her. In that moment I’d known there was no future for us. Not long after that, I’d met Penny. It was like the universe and fate itself had agreed with me.

Kelsey jerked back like I’d struck her.

“When were you planning to tell me?” she demanded, her voice shrill.

“We split up,” I reminded her. “We’re not a couple anymore, so we’re free to see other people.”

“That’s...so cruel! I—” She paused on a sob. “I thought you just needed a little break and then we’d get back together. You didn’t even give me a chance before you leaped into bed with someone else!”

I blinked. There had been no leaping into bed yet, but I managed to stop myself from correcting Kelsey. She’d managed to string herself a little fantasy around our breakup not being as final as I had thought it was, so I didn’t want to give her anything else to twist into hope that we were going to get back together.

“Kelsey,” I said in a gentle voice, herding her toward the door. “I’m at work. You probably shouldn’t come here again.”

“I-I won’t!” she turned and hissed at me. “Wouldn’t want to see you with my replacement!”

And with that she stormed out the door, slamming it behind her hard enough to rattle the glass. I was surprised she didn’t shatter it.

Shaking my head, I turned to pick up my notes and spotted the bag from The Parlor.

“Shit.”

It was too late to go after her, and she’d probably misinterpret the gesture anyway. With a sigh, I tucked my case folder under my arm and picked up the bag. I would drop it off for the admin team to enjoy. No way could I eat it, even if I did have the time.

Rooting my cell out of my pocket, I checked my message to Penny again and my heart leaped as I saw her typing. But then, as if she knew I was watching, it stopped.

It didn’t start again.

Disappointment rolled through me, but I resolutely clicked out of my messages and called The Parlor to pay for the meal Kelsey had brought me and have her money refunded. She already thought I was an asshole. I wouldn’t take her money as well.

No matter what she thought about me right now, I really wasn’t that much of an asshole.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THALE

True to her word, Penny was ready to leave within five minutes. I eyed the bag over her shoulder as she walked across the garage to join me.

“Are you sure you have enough in there?” I asked, offering a small smile. Anything to ease her thunderous expression. She was already mad at me, and now Mason and Dante had lumped us together.

Great.

“Look, I meant what I said in that message,” I said when she stopped in front of me. “I was an ass, and when I’m an ass, I apologize.”

She stared at me steadily until I felt the need to fidget under her scrutiny. How had I thought she was anything other than a hard as nails alpha? Suddenly my thoughts that she was really an omega pretending to be an alpha vanished. She was just a good—a very good—actress. That was all. I needed to remember that.

Not that I thought she was acting now. No, the fact she was utterly pissed with me came over loud and clear.

She grunted in the back of her throat. “You must have to apologize a hell of a lot.”

It was an insult, but given the humor dancing in the backs of her eyes, I’d take it.

“Yeah, quite a bit. Truce?” I held out a hand for her bag, wondering if she’d let me take it or pound me into the ground for daring to insinuate that she couldn’t handle her own bag.

To my surprise she handed it over without complaint.

“What the fuck!” I blinked as the bag nearly hit the concrete floor, only saved because I tightened my grip at the last minute. “What the hell have you got in here? The kitchen sink?”

She grinned at me over her shoulder as she walked around to the passenger side of my truck. “Just the essentials: underwear, makeup, some spare socks.”

“Spare socks made of fucking rocks,” I grumbled as I loaded it up in the trunk and then headed around. A glance sideways told me she was already buckled in, so I started the truck and we headed out.

The drive to Danny Stone’s was a short one, so there wasn’t much, if any, conversation on the way over. Most of the alphas on the teams were always groaning about what gossips and chatterboxes women were, but Penny definitely bucked that trend. She wasn’t like any woman I’d ever known. That was for sure.

“So, Danny runs on superstar time,” I explained as we arrived, unloading her bag from the back of the truck at the same time as mine and slinging them over my shoulder. “Which means he’s probably just waking up. He’s an insomniac, so nights can be rough for him.”

“He’s unbonded, right?” she asked, jogging to keep up with me.

On most women, that would have been sexy as fuck or a hot freaking mess, but Penny jogging? Serious dangerous with an edge of “I’ll kick your ass without breaking a sweat.” It was functional and efficient, just like the woman herself, which I appreciated more than she knew. I was sorry I’d never seen her in uniform, but then, if I had, I’d never have been able to keep my hands off her and probably would have gotten bruises to boot.

“Unbonded, yes.” I nodded as we walked up the garden path toward the house. Without looking I knew the cameras would be focused in on us, the team already in the house on high alert.

“He’s been looking for a pack for a while, but none have ever been right for him. And there’s the security aspect, of course. The less people know what he actually is, the better.”

She nodded as we reached the door, waiting for one of the team inside to verify our identities and let us inside. “So he can’t exactly advertise for a pack openly then.”

“Nope. But he’s going to have to soon. He’s overdue for a heat phase and the docs have already warned him that this one will be rough.”

“Shit,” she breathed, sympathy on her face as the door opened up to reveal Hayden, one of our operatives, armed to the teeth. His hand was on his weapon, his gaze already moving past us to any possible threats that might have snuck through the gates after us unseen.

Penny didn’t pay him any mind, still looking at me. “I saw my sister go through heats unaided. It was hell for her.”

“Oh? Your sister is an omega?”

I hadn't known that about her, and I filed the information away carefully. But I had no time to dwell on it as we stepped into the home of the most famous rock star in the world.

I watched Penny out of the corner of my eye as we walked through Danny's place.

It was large and opulent, exactly as you'd expect the home of a rock star to be, filled with marble and expensive show pieces of furniture. I knew they were all courtesy of an interior designer, and Danny barely noticed the place. But Penny sure did, her eyes going wide as she looked around.

Another piece of the puzzle slipped into place. She hadn't had money growing up. I didn't think she had, but her exact origins were hard to place. Like many ex-military personnel, she didn't have an accent, and again like most of us, she was highly adaptable to any kind of mission Mason and Dante threw our way.

I'd seen her in everything from business casual right through to posing as a surfer when needed. Deliberately I avoided thinking of that night in the club when she'd posed as an omega. That way led to questionable decisions and me on the edge of my control.

But that didn't mean I wasn't going to try and find out more about the enigmatic woman at my side, through whatever means that wouldn't get me bruises necessary.

So her wide-eyed reaction to sheer luxury was telling, and I filed that away as well, bizarrely pleased that she hadn't come from the same world as I had—the world the Barringtons and families like that inhabited, where power and

status was everything and money solved any little problem that might crop up.

“Danny’s usually in the family room near the deck,” I said in a low voice, leading her that way.

I’d been leading Danny’s protection detail for months, so I knew every inch of the house like the back of my hand as well as Danny’s habits.

“He likes the family room because it opens onto the pool, and it’s near the kitchen,” I added. “He’s a total waterbaby and literally *all* he thinks of half the time is food.”

She chuckled. “Sounds like someone I’ll get along with.”

“Yeah?” I couldn’t help the interest that filled my voice. “You like to swim?”

I knew Penny liked food—all alphas did—but she was particularly fond of expensive chocolates. So much so it was common knowledge in the office which was the best brand and type to bribe her with if you needed something done fast.

But I’d never seen her swim, not even when we’d had to pose as surfers. Mostly that had consisted of walking around a beach with boards, looking like we fit in. But I should have seen it then. She had the tight litness of a swimmer.

“Uh-huh,” she nodded. “Love the water. I’m cancerian so it’s like coming home.”

Today was turning out to be a right boon of information, and I wasn’t even having to dig.

“I’m Aries.”

She pursed her lips, sliding me a sideways look that I struggled to interpret.

“Is that good or bad?” I asked. I didn’t really know that much about astrology, other than what my star sign was.

She shrugged. “It makes sense with how you are.”

I didn’t get a chance to ask her what she meant by that as we entered the room at that point and Danny spotted us. I’d protected Danny for months, so I was well used to his flamboyant and dramatic nature. But he didn’t like strangers, so I wasn’t expecting his cerulean gaze to latch immediately on to Penny.

“*Darling,*” he drawled, on his feet in a heartbeat. “What delight have you brought me?”

I watched in surprise as he sauntered over to Penny, the silk dressing gown he wore open to reveal his chest and the fact he had on nothing else but low-slung yoga pants. Also silk.

Normally he didn’t take to new people, especially new alphas. I totally understood that. It was hard to be comfortable around people who could remove your free will with a growl or hook into the needs dictated by your DNA and make you react like an animal, purely on instinct, whether you wanted to or not. It was the reason he used high-end suppressants prescribed by a *very* exclusive doctor his management team had sourced.

But I saw no sign of awkwardness as he looked Penny up and down. I just blinked in surprise, stunned into silence. I’d expected him to blank her like he did every other alpha I’d brought in. It had taken him weeks to warm up to any of us, me included, so it totally blindsided me when he stalked—actually stalked—toward Penny.

“You are utterly gorgeous,” he crooned to her, wrapping himself around her. “Where have you been all my life?”

She froze, her gaze cutting to meet mine as he ran his nose and lips down the side of her neck, fucking scenting her of all things.

Jealousy ripped through me in a scarlet wave, and I fought back a growl, my hands clenched into hard fists at my sides. My gaze was locked on to the pair of them, to where he grazed her skin with his lips. If he tried to fucking bite her, to mark her, I didn’t care that he was a VIP under my protection. I’d fucking rip him apart on the spot.

I lost control of the growl, and a dangerous rumble filled the room. Penny’s attention shot to me again and her lips compressed. She moved like lightning. One second she stood there passively in Danny’s embrace, and a second later she’d spun him around and had him in an armlock facing away from her. Her steely gaze was locked on to my black-on-black one.

“Go and get yourself under control,” she ordered. “*Now!*”

Her bark held a shitload of compulsion and I nodded, already turning for the door before I realized what I was doing. But when I did, I kept on walking. She’d alphaed me, actually alphaed me, and I couldn’t believe hot fucking hot it was...

PENNY

Shit. I’d seriously thought there for a moment I was going to have to get between Thale and Danny to stop the world’s most famous rock star from getting his face smashed in. I’d never seen Thale look so angry, not even last night with Logan.

I made sure to keep my eyes on him as he stalked out of the room, my weight balanced and my hold firm on Danny in case I needed to shove him to safety.

“I’m sorry about him,” I said as soon the door slammed outside in the corridor, indicating that Thale had done as I’d ordered and fucked off outside to get his head together. The last thing we needed on a high-profile job like this was for one of us to lose it and attack the client. “He’s been a little... wired recently.”

Wired wasn’t the half of it, but I didn’t need to be airing any dirty laundry to Danny Stone, who was more gorgeous up close than he was on the screen. But he didn’t do anything at all for me.

Worse, having an armful of very amorous omega, even one as stunningly perfect as Danny, had completely freaked me out. Especially on top of recent events.

I was used to Cameron Sinclair, Neve’s kid, following me around like a puppy giving me puppy dog eyes. After his mom had been kidnapped and he’d seen the ASC in action, he’d left college and joined us on a gap year for work experience. Which meant every time his team was in the office, he was hitting on me. Or trying anyway.

Kid hadn’t worked out his alpha growl didn’t have any effect on me. I’d lost count of the number of times I’d introduced his face to the sparring mats before Hayden, the lead alpha on his team, had told him he was just embarrassing himself. Now he just mooned from afar.

But Thale losing it, the messages from Logan, and Killian trying to put his name in the hat if I was starting a pack made me want to sniff myself carefully. I hadn’t changed my perfume recently and inadvertently picked up one filled with

pheromones or something. Some high-end perfumes contained actual omega pheromones, which were supposed to make a woman irresistible to any dynamic.

I wondered if they had one that did the opposite. If so, I needed it for sure.

Danny straightened up and turned to look at me, his blue eyes dark with heat as he looked me over. “He’s pissed because given half a chance, I’m going to steal you from him.”

I couldn’t help the bark of a laugh that escaped me. “Oh, honey, you are so barking up the wrong tree. I’m not his, and I am *totally* my own person. No one owns me. No one has any claim on me.”

He stalked toward me again, and I let him, holding his gaze with a hard one of my own. If he wanted to play alpha pissing games, we could totally do that. Here and now. Game on.

He stopped right in front of me and his scent, violets and leather, washed over me, teasing my senses. It was lighter than I’d have expected for an omega, muted somehow. Must be the suppressants. Which was... sensible if he didn’t want anyone to know what he was. Given his manner and charisma, everyone thought he was an alpha anyway.

But his scent did nothing for me, not like Thale’s woods after the rain and bitter orange, or even Logan’s faint cedar and cotton and his cologne. Not even when he leaned in, his lips right by my ear.

“I know what you are,” he whispered.

I froze, my heart thundering in my chest as the box in my head where I kept all my deepest darkest secrets burst open.

He couldn't know. No way... how could he know the secret I wouldn't even think about in the safety of my own mind?

"Yeah," I scoffed. "An alpha. I got news for you, handsome, that isn't a secret."

He pulled back to look at me, his soft smile one of sympathy. "It takes one to know one, my love. You're an omega, just like me."

If there was a level beyond freezing with fear, I'd reached it. I was paralyzed, fear rolling through my veins as Danny uttered the words I daren't.

Omega. I was an omega.

I'd *always* been an omega deep down, before the army, and now I was just fucked up. But I was still an omega. I knew that truth down to the very marrow of my bones.

And... *fuck*. If that got out... if *Thale* found out.

I felt sick, hot waves washing through me as my stomach clenched and heaved. This was it. I was going to throw up right here and now on Danny's expensive as fuck marble floor tiles that probably cost more than my wages for the entire year.

Danny's eyes were locked on my face, and to my mortification, he saw my glance toward the door Thale had gone through.

"Awww, sweetheart. He doesn't know. Does he?" Danny ran his fingers through his hair. "Shit, no, he can't or he'd already have bitten you."

I dropped down into the nearest seat, a huge leather couch, my legs suddenly unable to bear my weight.

“No. He doesn’t know. How can he know when I don’t even know myself what the hell I am?”

Danny crouched in front of me, reaching out to take my hands in his. Instead of the condemnation I’d expected, his expression was one of sympathy and understanding.

“I know what you are, sweetheart. You’re like me. An omega so close to alpha that we get mistaken for one. And you’re even closer to that alpha line than I am. Practically over it, in fact.”

I snorted.

“Don’t be daft. That’s not possible. I’m an alpha, tested and got the certs to prove it.”

Danny’s eyes almost glowed as he reached up to smooth the heavy fall of my hair back from my face. His touch wasn’t flirtatious or seductive anymore but more like the touch of the older brother I’d never had. I appreciated the change more than he could ever suspect.

“I know just as well as you do, Penny, that there are ways and means of getting a dynamic certification if you need it,” he said quietly. “You’d need to talk to a friend of mine, Serena Lawrence, for that.”

I lifted my head in surprise. Serena was a famous omega activist, fighting to make conditions better for the oft-abused dynamic I was terrified of being.

“You know Serena Lawrence?”

But of course he did. Danny Stone was famous. He moved in that kind of world.

He nodded slowly, his thumb sweeping over the inside of my wrists. Why couldn’t I find *him* attractive? No one would

think anything of the alpha I was supposed to be forming an attachment with another “alpha.” We could form a pack and then no one would ever need to know I was... we were *both*... different.

“The problem is, people tend to view the dynamics as set in stone,” he continued, his deep voice low and almost hypnotic. Such was their allure and the reason omegas were often the only people who could calm down a raging alpha.

“They’re not?”

He shook his head. “They’re not the straight line most people think they are.”

Turning my hand over, he drew on my palm. “They’re not a straight line. Alpha, beta, then omega. Think of them more like this... Alpha.”

He put his finger on my palm near the fleshy part of my thumb and then drew a line across my palm.

“Beta.”

His finger slid up to just under my middle finger.

“Omega.”

“That’s just a crooked line.”

He shook his head and then slid his finger back to the starting position.

“It’s a triangle,” he explained. “We already know some betas can express more alpha or omega traits. But it’s the same with us.”

I stared down at my palm as my world view reset. All my life I’d been taught that you were either alpha, beta, or omega. There was no cross-over, no in-between.

I looked him in the eye, searching for something, anything, that would indicate this was a joke. That a TV crew was going to jump out of a cupboard somewhere and my confusion, shame, and my secret would be out for everyone to see.

But there was nothing. Just sincerity and something else—a crushing loneliness that I knew only too well.

“Oh, Danny,” I breathed.

The thick walls of defense around my heart cracked, and I moved forward, hauling him into my arms and hugging him like my life depended on it.

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CHAPTER SIX

THALE

Jesus fucking Christ. I'd almost flattened Danny Stone, the guy who paid my wages.

I paced the length of the patio at the side of the house, well out of sight of the family room windows, my hand shaking when I shoved it through my hair.

What the fuck was *wrong* with me? I'd almost torn Danny apart on the spot. All for touching Penny. For holding her like I wanted to... for running his lips against the soft skin of her neck and inhaling her unique jasmine and burnt wood scent.

Instantly I was back in that corridor in the club, Penny's slender form filling my arms. I groaned, my eyes closed as I dropped my head back at the sensual onslaught of the memories. The way she'd felt against me had been perfect, her lips alternating between sweetly soft and submissive and demanding. I knew what it felt like to run my lips down her throat, to feel the heady rush of her rapid heartbeat under the skin. To know her heart thundered like that for me because of what I did to her as my fangs ached to drop. To strike and bury themselves deeply so I could claim her.

I drew in a shuddering breath as I dragged myself back to reality to separate fact from fantasy.

Okay. I forced steel into my spine. I could do this. I could totally do this. Game face on. I knew Danny liked alphas, all omegas did. And Penny was a female alpha. Of course he was going to be fascinated with her. They were only slightly less rare than what he was—a male omega.

More than that, female alphas often joined packs or created one around themselves, so if I wanted her, I was going to have to share her.

The idea of sharing her made the primal alpha, jealous bastard that he was, rage in fury. She was *ours!* Ours alone and we would bite her, claim her, knot her in her nest... I shook the thought away. I couldn't ever knot Penny. She wasn't built for that like an omega, and I would hurt her if I tried.

The thought of hurting Penny made my blood run cold. No, I would never do that. There were toys specially built for alpha males if I needed to knot something. If I wanted her, I would accept what we had and be happy.

It would be enough.

I would learn to share.

I just never thought it would be with fucking perfect fucking Danny Stone. For a moment I was frozen in place, facing the door to go back in. Plain, heavy wood, it mocked me.

How could I compete with a fucking omega for an alpha's attention? Omegas were our weakness, designed by nature to be utterly irresistible to alphas.

They were probably fucking in there right now. I didn't know any alpha who could resist an omega once they'd set

their sights on them.

But the sight that met my eyes when I walked back in was not the one I expected. Instead of catching the two of them *in flagrante delicto*, their clothes scattered over the floor as they went at it on the couch, they were going for it alright, but not as I expected.

They sat side by side on the big leather couch in front of the TV, attention fixed on the screen as they clutched video game controllers in their hands.

Surprised, I looked at the screen. It was some kind of first-person perspective game, a fantasy one. Penny was playing the biggest orc I'd ever seen while Danny's character looked to be a wizard or an acrobat. I wasn't sure which.

As I watched, their characters were fighting a fire dragon that was stomping a town. Or trying to anyway. The two of them worked together to bring it down in such a slick manner I knew they were both used to playing the game.

As soon as the dragon hit the floor as a huge, fiery corpse, they whooped and jumped up, hugging each other. Even though the embrace was nothing like the sensual one earlier, my instincts roared to the front. Red mist descended over my vision, and a second later I'd yanked her from his arms, shoving him hard to land on the couch as I half carried her, half dragged her out of the room.

She didn't fight me, stunned surprise on her face for the split second it took me to kick the door shut behind us and pin her up against the wall in the corridor.

"Thale!" she gasped, her hands curling around my upper arms.

I just growled in response, dropped my head, and crushed her lips beneath mine.

It was a hard kiss, nothing soft and gentle about it. I'd expected her to fight, but she didn't. Instead, she melted against me with a soft sigh of surrender. My growl became a groan as I tilted my head and deepened the kiss.

I didn't give her any quarter, parting her lips with a hard sweep of my tongue. I needed to taste her again, my desperation that of an addict chasing that next hit. I needed her like I needed air to breathe. More than I needed air to breathe.

She opened up for me, and the claws on my arms became softer. They became a caress as she swept her hands up my arms and across my shoulders. An ache swept through me, the need to feel her delicate hands on my skin almost hijacking my attention.

But nothing could compare with the feeling of thrusting my tongue past her lips, feeling her submit and then softly respond to me. Heat blazed through me as her taste exploded on my tongue and held me in thrall as I kissed her like a starving man. Like she was water and I was dying in the desert. *I was a dying man in a desert...*

I broke from the kiss, my breathing ragged as I looked down at her.

"I know I have to share you, but it will *not* be with Danny fucking Stone."

PENNY

Thale had kissed me. Again.

And again he'd scrambled my brains until I didn't know which way was up or even what my name was. Despite all my assertions to myself that I wasn't going to give in to him again, that we were *not* going to be repeating the epic lapse in judgment I'd had on the undercover op, as soon as he pinned me against the wall, all I could think about was his lips on mine again. His hard body pinned me and his tongue drove into my mouth to claim ownership.

I closed my eyes and my head thumped back against the headrest as I waited in Thale's truck for him. Our shift had ended, and he had to hand over to Killian, the next team leader.

And shit, *that* had been awkward as fuck as well. What did I say to a guy who'd offered to pack up with me? A scary as fuck guy who'd offered to pack up with me. A scary as fuck guy who'd basically told me he found me attractive enough to fuck.

I mean, Thale was dangerous. I knew that. I'd seen him in action and worked with him long enough. But there was dangerous and there was lethal, and the Devil of Denning Heights was definitely the latter.

I put it from my mind and concentrated on my cell. Logan's message still sat there, and I read it again. I could still feel Thale's kisses on my lips as the memory of Logan's filled my mind, and I groaned aloud.

Why did that make me hot? That both of them had kissed me... and I wanted them to do it again? Both of them. Maybe even at the same time.

The startling realization made me blush, a hot wash over my neck up over my cheeks and right into my hairline. It wasn't unusual for female alphas to have more than one lover,

to have a pack, but it was nothing I'd ever considered for myself. I didn't think any guy would actually find me attractive enough for that. But recent events had proven me wrong on that. Startlingly wrong.

I know I have to share you...

Thale's snarled words came back to me, and I looked at my cell again. I made a snap decision and messaged back, my thumbs flying over the screen.

I'd love to but I have conditions.

I hadn't expected a reply straight away, but as soon as I sent the message, it flicked to read and then I saw the little dots in the corner that meant Logan was typing.

Of course. I wouldn't have expected otherwise.

My breath punched out of my lungs at the reasonable reply. But how long would he continue being reasonable once I laid it all out on the table?

Would you still be interested if I was also seeing someone else?

I held my breath as I sent the message, watching the indicator flick to the little tick that said Logan had seen it. I nibbled the edge of an already ragged fingernail.

He wasn't typing. Why wasn't he typing? This was not the time for him to wander off and make a coffee or something! Not when my nerves were hanging by a thread here.

Finally the little dots appeared.

Yes. I'm interested in you, Penny, but I don't own you. I know that. I'd just like to be part of your life.

Well, shit.

I sat back, staring at the screen in surprise. That had been easier than I'd thought. It seemed too easy.

I'd like that too, I replied. Where would you like to meet? Perhaps dinner instead of coffee? Tomorrow?

The front door of the house opened and Thale strode out, the shadowy figure of Killian closing it behind him. I swallowed, trying not to let my nerves get the better of me. Of the two men I wanted in my life, Logan was the far more reasonable.

Thale was a different matter. An alpha through and through, he would be protective and possessive. And he'd already told me that he knew he had to share me...

I looked at him as he climbed into the trunk.

"You said you know you'll have to share me," I said bluntly. There was no point beating around the bush. "Did you mean that?"

He half turned, giving me a hard look filled with heat. "As long as it's *not* Danny Stone. Yes, I meant it."

I couldn't help the small smile that curved my lips. "Why? What's wrong with him? He's fun and handsome and—"

My words were cut off as Thale reached forward, latched a hand around the back of my neck and hauled me across his lap. I worked with alphas every day, but sometimes even I forgot how damn strong they were.

"He's an omega," Thale rumbled a growl against my lips that turned me to mush right there in his arms. "I can't compete with an omega."

I blinked in surprise, my hand on the center of his chest as I pushed away a little to study his expression.

“You’re jealous.”

“Yes,” he bit out, his hand tightening on the back of my neck. “And no. He’s an omega. I don’t want to be an omega. I’m jealous that he can command your attention in a way I can’t. He goes into heat and I’ve lost you.”

Jealous and possessive—it made heat build in my veins. All I wanted to do was kiss him again, but I held off.

A male omega was out, which lead to another point. “If we’re doing this, the same applies to a female omega. I don’t want one in our pack.”

He shook his head. “I only want you.”

“So not Danny Stone. Killian asked if I was forming a pack,” I said, testing the waters.

I needed to know if he was serious about this because a jealous alpha was a dangerous thing. I had no doubt that Logan could look after himself, especially after the wedding incident, but the last thing I wanted to do was put him in serious danger, especially because of me. If he got hurt, I would never forgive myself.

Thale’s eyebrow shot up into his hairline. “Killian? Fuck, you like living dangerously. Don’t you, beautiful?”

“He asked me!” I protested. “I didn’t even know he liked me. You know, *that* way.”

Thale chuckled, his thumb stroking down the side of my neck. The soft touch made me shiver. “I promise you, *any* guy who looks at you is thinking that way, Penny. You’re stunning.”

I bit my lip, watching his face. His eyes were leaching to black, and I knew he was aroused. I could smell the thickening

of his scent in the close confines of the truck cabin.

“So it’s Killian then?” he asked, looking up at the house in consideration. Then he nodded. “I can live with that.”

“It’s not Killian. At least, he’s asked, but I don’t find him attractive. I mean, he *is* handsome,” I said and then realized I was gabbling as I tried to put my thoughts in order. “He’s handsome but I don’t find him... there’s no spark.”

“Ahh... okay, good. Who is it then?”

Shit. This was it.

“Shaw. I have a dinner date with him tomorrow.”

“Shaw? Logan Shaw?” he demanded, his voice dropping to a growl as his grip on the back of my neck tightened.

Suddenly I realized the danger I’d put myself in. I was half lying over the lap of a very big, very dangerous alpha who might fly into a rage. I might be some kind of weird omega-alpha cross—after Danny’s explanation I had no fucking clue *what* I was—but even at my most alpha, I was no match for Thale if he seriously wanted to cause me harm.

“Thale?” I whispered, sliding my hand onto his chest warily. My entire body was tense and ready to fight. I hoped I didn’t have to. “Say something. *Please.*”

His gaze sharpened on me, like he was refocusing, and I saw the battle raging in his eyes.

Then, finally, he nodded.

“As long as I get you as well. You don’t give him anything I don’t get.”

I offered a small smile, almost boneless with relief.

“You’ve gotten more kisses so far,” I admitted.

“Good,” he growled, and the muscles in his arm bunched as he pulled me closer to claim my lips again.

This time I knew what to expect, and I melted against him, parting my lips eagerly for the first thrust of his tongue.

Thale kissed like he fought. Hard, fast, and dirty as fuck. I still don't know how I'd kept my wits about me in that corridor and stopped myself from begging him to fuck me on the spot. If I hadn't been certain he'd know what I was as soon as he got his dick inside me, I would have.

I rested against his chest, exploring the strength in his heavily muscled arm and shoulders with my free hand as I kissed him back.

I went from submitting to his passion-filled kisses to challenging him for dominance of them.

He jerked in surprise and growled, the sound soft and low like a purr. It hit me like a bullet, heat racing through my veins to pool between my thighs.

I shivered, blindsided, and pressed closer against him. Needing more, I pulled at the neck of his shirt, breaking from the kiss to trail my lips down the side of his throat. His groan rolled through me, deep and sexy.

I grazed the side of his throat with my teeth, and he jerked, yanking me away, his hot gaze blazing down into mine.

“Don't tease, Pen,” he growled. “If... *when* you bite me, you'd better make damn sure you mean it.”

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CHAPTER SEVEN

LOGAN

I felt like a teenager on his first date as I waited for Penny at the restaurant the next evening. Trying to quell the butterflies in my stomach, I checked out my reflection in the night-darkened windows opposite the bar.

Even though I wore them every day, I'd opted for a suit again. This one was in a deep navy and a little flashier than the ones I usually wore. It was a better fabric than my work suits, with a black silk shirt. I looked and felt good, which boosted my confidence.

The elation at Penny agreeing to a date with me was tempered by the knowledge that she was seeing someone else. But I didn't know who my competition was. It could have been any of the alphas where she worked, which made my spirits sink.

I'm not into guys, but even I could acknowledge that most of the alpha operatives of the ASC could moonlight as cover models. Something about the alpha dynamic lent itself to seriously dangerous but stunningly handsome men. How could

I, a beta, compete with all that? They had everything going for them.

But... somehow she'd still agreed to a date with me. She was an alpha, so she would be immune to a lot of the tricks other alphas pulled to get women into their beds.

That gave me hope and I nodded to the waitress.

"Just a tonic and lime please," I ordered. "I'm meeting someone and don't want to be squiffy when she gets here."

"You got it."

She smiled as she mixed my drink. I didn't miss the appreciative glances she kept shooting my way, and she was pretty. If I hadn't met Penny, I might have been tempted to ask her what time she got off work and whether she'd like to have a drink with me.

She slid my drink over and I paid with a tap of my phone. Taking a sip, I opened my messages again. Nothing, and it was twenty to eight. We'd agreed to meet at half seven.

Concern gripped my stomach. Perhaps she wasn't coming? Perhaps she'd changed her mind?

No, I reassured myself. Penny was a woman of integrity. If she'd changed her mind, she'd have let me know. I was sure of it.

A second later the restaurant door opened, announcing the arrival of a new customer with a blast of cold air and the sound of traffic from outside.

I looked up and caught my breath. Penny walked toward me, but this was a Penny as I'd never seen her before.

I'd seen her dressed for work, in combat gear, and then undercover in a skimpy dress and heels that still made things

south of my belt a little tight. I'd even seen her in her bridesmaid's gown for my brother's wedding, flowers woven through her short hair.

But I'd never seen her dressed as herself. In clothes that she found comfortable. Now I was. She walked toward me, the skin-tight leather pants highlighting every curve she had. Heeled boots gave her a few extra inches, but these weren't stilettos she was tottering about in. The thick, chunky heels looked like she could run marathons, or kick ass and take names in. They suited her, as did the oversized man's jacket she wore, the sleeves folded up, and... was that a corset she was wearing underneath?

I swept my gaze up. Her hair was styled off her face into some kind of spiky faux-hawk, and her eyes had been outlined in black makeup, giving her a feline look. It was edgy and in your face, a combination of function and sexiness that was utterly unique, utterly Penny.

My brain threatened to fritz out.

"You look fantastic." I leaned forward to kiss her cheek. "Just... yeah, fucking wow."

"Yeah? I'm glad you like it."

She smiled up at me and I was reminded how tiny she actually was. It was hard to tell most of the time since her personality was just so big and dynamic, filling all the available space in a room. It was easy to forget how petite she was. I liked it, though, savoring her closeness as she leaned into me for a moment.

"I'm sorry I'm late. There was an incident on the subway. Some alphas were being assholes to a bunch of beta women, so I ended up going an extra stop and had to double back."

That was my Penny, a protector to the end. I shook my head, forgetting my previous worries.

“Don’t worry about it. Can I get you a drink?”

She nodded, running a hand down my arm as she leaned forward to check out the offerings behind the bar. It was an absent gesture but one that warmed my heart. She liked me enough to touch me, which boded well for how things between us were developing.

“I’ll have a gin and tonic please.”

I nodded and motioned to the waitress hovering nearby. As she poured drinks, I turned to Penny again. She leaned back, her elbows against the bar, and one booted foot rested against the foot rail—a study in sexy nonchalance.

“I’m glad you said yes,” I said in a low voice, taking a sip from my drink as I watched her. I almost felt like an alpha, watching my prey.

I wasn’t ashamed to admit my feelings toward her were utterly predatory. If she gave me half a chance, tonight would end up with her in my bed, and I’d make her scream in pleasure until she was hoarse.

“You thought I wouldn’t, after what you said at the wedding?”

She glanced up at me, a sultry little look in her dark eyes that sent a surge of heat through me so strong that I honestly contemplated bending her over the bar, stripping those leather pants down to her knees and taking her there and then.

Before I could answer, the maître d’ appeared at my elbow.

“Sir, madam... your table is ready.”

PENNY

Dinner was perfect. The food was excellent although, to be honest, I didn't remember a bite of it seconds afterward. I was too focused on the man on the other side of the table and the easy conversation between us.

“So...” Logan leaned forward, a smile in his blue eyes. “What made you go into the military? Most—”

He cut himself off, like he'd said too much, and sat back.

“Most what?” I asked, taking a sip of the wine he'd ordered with dinner.

It was excellent, a quality I didn't usually drink. I was definitely a cheap plonk sort of girl.

“I'm sorry. It would have been a rude question,” he said, tilting his head. “But I'm curious as to what would make a female alpha go into the military.”

I snorted, somewhat inelegantly. “Have you met many female alphas?”

He shook his head, slicing into the steak he'd ordered. For a second I was distracted by the movement of his hands. Strong, but elegant, he had an economy of movement that struck me on a very primal level. What else could he do with those hands?

“I've not met many either. We're that rare.” I ignored the fact that, if Danny was right, I was rarer than most. “But most of us gravitate to the military. It's the only place we can control the... aggression?”

It was more than that but I didn't want to go into too much detail and scare him off.

“The routine of the day and the high levels of physical exercise helps,” I added, a little lamely. “It’s hard to explain.”

“Hey.” Reaching over, he put his hand over mine on the table. “You don’t need to explain anything or feel you need to explain how you are. Believe me. I get it. I feel that way, and I’m only a beta.”

“Beta but definitely all man,” I said, paying attention to my meal suddenly. Flirting was *so* not my forte.

When I looked up, he watched me over the rim of his wine glass and his scent thickened in the air, cedarwood and cotton. I bit back my groan, feeling like prey—a mouse to his cat but in a good way that made me shiver and fight the urge to squirm in my chair.

“Oh, I’ll prove that.”

“Really now?” I bit my lip and sat back, watching him as much as he watched me. “When?”

“Later,” he promised with a small, sexy little grin.

I grinned in return, feeling myself relax. It wasn’t the wine. My system ran too fast, and it wasn’t anywhere near strong enough to get me drunk. But good food and the company of a handsome man, moreover, the company of a handsome man who was *into* me, was exhilarating.

“So,” I all but purred, a sound I’d never made before. “Tell me about you? Did you always want to go into the police force?”

His gaze focused on me, his pupils more dilated than normal. It seemed to take him some effort to nod. “Yes. Family business so to speak. I’m fourth generation. Mom and Dad were both cops before they retired, and then my grandfather and his father before him.”

I tilted my head to the side. “I can see that about you. The cop thing.”

His lips curved in a small smile. “Really? Why?”

“Well, when I first met you at Bane’s, you were all stern and professional. Kinda confused me back then. I thought you were an alpha, but alphas can’t be cops.” I winced. “That’s why I accused you of lying.”

As I spoke, I was right back there, shouldering my way through the door to Bane’s place, dress bags and other shite hanging off my shoulders like moons around a small planet, only to nearly be leveled by a pair of blue eyes.

He groaned, chuckling. “Yeah. Threatening to arrest you probably wasn’t one of my shining moments, but that wouldn’t have been a wise idea...”

He trailed off suggestively, eyebrow raised as he refilled our wine glasses. I knew all the reasons why putting handcuffs on an alpha was a bad idea, but I really wanted to know what that little expression meant.

“Oh? Why’s that?”

He handed me my glass. When our fingers brushed, I felt the charge of electricity right down to my soul.

“If I ever got you in handcuffs, sweetheart, you do not want to know what I’d do with you.”

Oh fuck. Yes, I did. I *really* wanted to know what he’d do. I moved forward onto the edge of my seat, my gaze locked on to him.

“Oh come on, you can’t stop there.” I pouted when the waiter returned to clear our plates, and Logan asked for the dessert menu.

He winked at me, offering me the menu, but I waved it away.

“Just order something decadent and chocolate? I need to powder my nose.”

“Of course.” He inclined his head, already looking at the menu and giving me a chance to escape to the ladies.

The restroom was just as opulent as the rest of the place, and after I left the stall, I took a moment in front of the large mirrors to touch up my makeup.

“Is that *fine* looking guy in the suit yours?” a lady with steel-grey hair in a severe bob and a twinkle in her eyes asked as she stood next to me at the mirrors.

“Black shirt?” I asked, smiling back at her as she painted her lips scarlet red. I wish I had the confidence to pull off a strong makeup look like that. “Looks like he’d make you scream for days?”

“That’s the one.”

She slid me a sideways glance. “Does he?”

I reapplied my clear gloss, wondering if Logan liked red lipstick.

“No idea. Yet. Planning on finding out tonight.”

She put her lipstick back in her clutch and snapped it shut. “You go girl! Make sure to get some for the rest of us who don’t have someone to warm our beds tonight.”

“I will! Thank you!” I called out as she left.

Taking a moment to myself, I blew out a sigh and looked at my reflection. Did I mean what I’d said? Was I going home with Logan tonight.

I met my own eyes in the mirror.

Hell, yes, I was.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

LOGAN

I ordered the most chocolatey dessert on the menu with the help of the waitress, who assured me that *any* woman would die for it—alpha, beta or omega. Sitting back, I emptied my wineglass and contemplated how the evening was going.

So far, so good.

I hadn't been sure what to expect from this evening, but then Penny had arrived dressed like... well, wow. It hadn't been what I'd expected and neither was her conversation tonight.

Not that I was complaining, especially as she'd let her guard down a little. Instead of the hard-edged alpha I'd first met who'd threatened to shove my cuffs where the sun didn't shine, she was softer tonight. Smiling more and actually giggling at my jokes. And then she'd almost purred.

I'd almost come right there on the spot. I'd heard about an alpha's purr—something that, even as close as I was to the alpha-beta dynamic line, I couldn't replicate—and holy *hell*. Everything male in me had sat up and taken notice, locking on to the delicate little female across from me that I *still* had

trouble seeing as an alpha, even with the evidence, her purr, right there in front of me.

Omegas purred as well, a little voice in the back of my head whispered. But that wasn't possible. Penny was too alpha for that, despite her delicate appearance.

I looked up as someone dropped into the seat opposite, but it wasn't Penny as I expected. Instead Thale Barnes gave me the hardest of looks.

Penny had said she was dating someone else.

"It's *you*."

What the fuck was he doing here? He wasn't dressed for dinner but looked like he was out for the night in a leather jacket, shirt, and jeans.

"Me."

He nodded, sizing me up from the other side of the table. I got the feeling battle lines were being drawn, and that how I reacted right here and now would have lasting repercussions on my relationship with Penny.

"It could have been worse," he added, almost like an olive branch. A begrudging one but still an olive branch. "She's had a male omega sniffing around as well."

"Shit." I leaned back, hand on the table, turning my wine glass by the stem. "That would... not be good."

"Exactly," Thale grunted. "Neither of us can compete with that. Thankfully, she's not into him."

Relief hit me hard and fast. Thale was competition enough. No way would either of us get a look in if she bit an omega. Neither of us would even exist for her once he went into heat.

“So what are we going to do?”

Thale shrugged. “Whatever the lady wants.”

“So we both date her?”

I arched an eyebrow, surprised he was being so calm about this. Weren't alphas supposed to be highly protective? Prepared to rip body parts off any man who dared look at their woman?

Thale looked uncomfortable for a moment, but then his expression leveled out. “If that's what she wants.”

Okay, I'd obviously slipped into a parallel universe. Funny, it looked exactly like the one I was used to, right down to the light reflecting off the crystals of the chandelier above the table. I'd picked The Kelsmoor because it was classy but edgy. Romantic if you wanted it to be but also a good venue for a business dinner if needed.

I looked him straight in the eye, asking the question that had been playing on my mind since Penny had said she had conditions.

“What if she wants to pack up?”

He didn't flinch.

“I'm game if you are. I'm not into dudes, but I'm okay with sharing as long as I get a place in her bed.”

Silence fell between us for a second as I contemplated that. Could I be in a pack with this guy? I didn't even know him and he was an alpha. Would he try and dominate me because I was *just* a beta, dominate and control our entire pack?

But I didn't have a choice. I knew as well as he did that female alphas rarely took just one partner. And if it came

down to a choice between me and Thale, would she choose me? A beta?

No, I had to be realistic... I had far more chance... we *both* had far more chance of keeping hold of her if we worked together. Especially if a male omega came into the picture.

“Same,” I replied with a nod. “I’ll do whatever I have to in order to keep her.”

“We are agreed then.”

He looked over my shoulder and his face spilt into a wide smile that I knew wasn’t meant for me. Instantly he was on his feet, holding out the chair as Penny rejoined us.

“Hey, beautiful, fancy seeing you here.”

Oh fuck, the guy was smooth. Very smooth. I wouldn’t have thought it, not given his appearance, which was, to put it bluntly, thug-like. But someone, somewhere had taught him slick manners as he seated Penny, sliding her chair back in as she sat down.

“Thale!” Her voice rang with delight. “What are you doing here? Did you...” She looked at me warily. “Did you want to join us?”

I inclined my head. No way did I actually want Thale to join us, but I couldn’t do anything about it if Penny wanted him to. Arguing would just make me look like a possessive prick.

“I was just passing and spotted lover-boy here through the window,” Thale said, his voice lower than it usually was as his hands smoothed over her shoulders. “Thought I’d come in and say hi.”

He leaned down and pressed a kiss to her forehead. “You two have fun. I’ll pick you up for work tomorrow. Normal time.”

“Yes, of course.” Penny looked as stunned as I felt, but at least the male alpha wasn’t being an ass. “Thank you.”

“No worries. Catch you soon, Shaw. Nice shirt by the way. You’ll have to give me the name of your tailor.”

And then he was gone.

PENNY

“That was... unexpected,” I said, watching as Thale left the restaurant, his broad-shouldered figure disappearing into the dark outside the restaurant.

“You’re telling me,” Logan rumbled.

I turned back to him, trying to analyze his expression. When I’d walked out of the ladies to them both sitting here, all my instincts had gone into overdrive. They’d been sizing each other up like two dogs about to fight.

Thale was the bulldog, powerful and vicious, whereas Logan was more like a wolfhound, sleek and dangerous. I wasn’t sure which of them would come out on top in a fight.

But as I’d walked toward them, they’d seemed to come to some kind of agreement, and the tension had drained away from the table.

“What did you guys talk about?” I asked, murmuring my thanks as the waitress put the biggest chocolate dessert I’d ever seen in the middle of the table.

Two spoons.

Right. A romantic sharing dish.

Logan looked up, his expression spearing me in place. Then he smiled a wicked little smile as he held out one of the spoons.

“*You.*”

“You were talking about me?”

Again our fingers brushed and I got a bolt of electricity, enough to make me suck in a breath.

His smile broadened a little. He’d noticed. I just knew he had.

“Of course.”

“What were you talking about?”

I shouldn’t ask. I knew I shouldn’t ask, but I couldn’t *not* ask.

He dug into the chocolate and held his spoon out to me. I couldn’t resist opening my mouth to the heaped chocolate and caramel.

I groaned as the chocolate hit my tastebuds and then again for an entirely different reason when he leaned forward to wipe away a smear of chocolate at the corner of my lips with his thumb.

“Open up,” he ordered, and I parted my lips. He slid his thumb past them, his blue eyes dark with heat. “Now suck.”

I did and was rewarded with his expression tightening.

“This dessert looks wonderful,” he said, his voice a low rasp. “But I had an entirely different one in mind for tonight. Do you want to get out of here?”

A few minutes later we'd paid the bill and Logan held the door open for me as we left the restaurant. I shivered as the cold air hit me, only for Logan to slide his arm around my shoulders a moment later, pulling me against the warmth of his larger body.

"My place or yours?" he asked, looking down at me. I savored the moment. Me, the alpha no one had wanted, here with a drop-dead gorgeous guy like Logan. The only thing that would make tonight better would be if Thale had stayed with us.

I buried that thought down as deep as I could.

Sure, they'd both agreed to date me, and to my condition that I could date the other one, but I wasn't sure how Logan would feel about a pack deal. We hadn't had that conversation yet. And tonight was *his* night...

"Mine," I said firmly, ignoring the shiver of nerves in the pit of my stomach. "I don't live far. We can walk."

So walk we did, Logan's arm looped around my waist. It took us longer than it would have taken me on my own since Logan pulled me into every alleyway and shadowy area for long, drugging kisses that both brought me further under his spell and put me on a sensual knife-edge all at the same time.

I gave a soft chuckle the last time he let me go, looking up at him. His hair was disheveled by me running my fingers through it, and his eyes were so dark, the color all swallowed up, that it would have been easy to mistake him for an alpha.

"We're never going to get home at this rate."

"Anticipation," he murmured. "Makes the dish all the sweeter. Besides..." He looked up and nodded at the nearest apartment block. "Isn't this one yours?"

I glanced up in surprise to find it was. I'd been so wrapped up in his company that I'd actually lost track of where we were—an unforgivable sin for a combat-capable alpha. But with him, I found I didn't mind.

Sliding my hand into his, I tugged him toward the building. “Checking up on me, detective?”

“Of course.” He followed me, holding the door open for me so I had to duck under his arm. “I keep tabs on all the sexy women in my life. Of which there is exactly one. You.”

“Yeah?” I couldn't help the pleased little smile that he'd felt the need to qualify that.

“So you're keeping tabs on me then? Should I be worried about a cop keeping tabs on me?” I teased as I backed up toward the elevator. I lived on the ninth floor and usually I took the stairs for extra cardio. Right now, though, I had far better ways to get that extra cardio in.

His expression was wickedly predatory as he backed me up against the wall, the door sliding shut behind him. “Only if we're talking about those cuffs again,” he murmured, using his bigger body to crowd me.

His hand closed over my throat, a domineering hold I would normally have railed against, but with him it just made me melt. He pressed his thumb lightly under my jaw, making me tilt my head up as he leaned down to kiss me.

The world stood still as every cell in my body focused on him. On his lips as they whispered over mine. The kiss was soft, but it wasn't gentle. Nowhere near. It was more an erotic warning.

A growl in the back of his throat, he pressed against me fully, every inch of his hard, muscled body against mine. Betas

weren't supposed to be able to build as much muscle as alphas, but it seemed no one had bothered to tell Logan that.

I moaned in appreciation, my lips parting under the hard thrust of his. Sliding my hands up his chest, I found them ruthlessly captured a second later and yanked up. Pinned above my head.

“Oh *fuck*,” I broke away to gasp, heat and need slamming into my body broadside.

“That’s the idea,” he growled, but his next kiss was halted by the ping of the door behind us.

“Fuck,” he growled under his breath, yanking me away from the wall. “We can’t stay in here.”

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CHAPTER NINE

PENNY

*M*y hands shook as we reached my door and I managed to get it unlocked. That was the last sensible thought I had for a while.

We stumbled through the door, Logan already stripping my jacket off. It dropped unheeded to the floor as he whirled me around, pinning me up against the back of my front door and closing it in the same movement.

“You have no idea how much I want you,” he murmured, shoving a hard thigh between mine before he claimed my lips again.

I gasped, the sound lost under his mouth. He kissed with devastating ruthlessness that shredded any defense I might have had against him.

My hands were all over him, and I pushed at his jacket even as our tongues dueled. My earlier submission had disappeared and I challenged him for control of the kiss. He growled in warning, the sound from the back of his throat and the middle of his broad chest just spurring me on all the more.

The heat between us caught, ignited, and grew into a blaze.

His jacket joined mine on the floor, followed by his tie. I sighed into his mouth as the little buttons on his shirt gave way under my determined onslaught, and I finally touched the satin-hot skin of his broad chest.

He wasn't idle either. My corset top had disappeared, proving that he more than knew his way around female clothing. I would have been impressed that he'd managed to get me out of it so easily, but I was a little distracted.

I whimpered, actually whimpered, as his large, slightly callused hands stroked over my bare skin, sliding up my ribcage before he cupped my breasts.

"Perfect," he whispered against my lips, using his thumbs to roll my nipples into hard buds. I shivered, pleasure coursing through me at the gentle caress.

Then he pinched, and I yelped in surprise, right before deep, dark need washed through me, nearly buckling my knees.

My moans filled the air in the small corridor, and I arched my back, offering more of myself to him. I needed this, needed him. My body hummed with unsatisfied pleasure and my pussy ached to be filled.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered, his hands shaping the sides of my waist and then sliding around to cup my ass and pull me up against him. Hard.

His lips claimed mine again and he lifted me, wrapping both my legs around his lean hips so he could grind against me. My gasp was lost in his mouth. He was big, a lot bigger than I'd thought, and I whimpered as heat washed through me. I ached for him to use that cock and fill me, to have him pin me and take me in a way no alpha should want.

But right now I didn't care. I just needed more of what he was offering. More of his kisses. More of his touch.

He dropped me to my feet, the movement taking me by surprise. Before I could say anything, he'd spun me around, hands putting mine on the door in front of us.

"Stay still," he ordered, his voice a rough growl in my ear that spiked my arousal even further.

My breath came in hard pants as he dealt with my belt buckle with ruthless efficiency, my pants shoved halfway down my hips as he slid a big hand into them. Into my underwear.

"Satin," he growled, nipping my ear. "Pretty. I'll see these soon, not just touch them. Then tear them off you."

My knees went weak, but his strong arm around my waist held me, my back against his broad chest. His heart beat heavily and reassuringly as his clever fingers stroked through my pussy lips. I caught my breath, trying to stay still as he groaned.

"God, you're so hot and wet," he whispered, kissing along the side of my neck. I moved, needing to touch him, and he growled, freezing me in place.

"You don't get to move until I tell you. Understand?"

I couldn't do anything but nod, my breathing coming hard and fast as he stroked and teased. My clit throbbed and my pussy ached. He moved, sliding down to thrust two fingers into my pussy, and I cried out, my back arching as pleasure exploded through me.

"That's it," he murmured, his deep voice rough. "Sing for me, little bird."

I couldn't do anything else, my soft cries loud in my ears as he pushed me through one climax and right into the next, his fingers making an obscene sound given how wet I was.

"I can't wait to get inside you. To make you mine," he growled against the side of my neck, his teeth grazing the skin where an alpha would give me his bite.

My eyes flew open at the idea of Logan biting me, even though he was a beta, and then hot on the heels of that one, came another.

Logan *and* Thale biting me. At the same time. While I was sandwiched between them.

Logan froze as he noticed the change in my body language, and looked down at me.

"What's wrong?"

"I..." I turned to look up at him, stricken. "I can't do this."

His expression shuttered, and he pulled his hand from me, putting distance between us. I held on to him, my hands clutching his arm around my waist.

"Not I don't *want* to do this. But I need... shit, this is awful."

"Shhh, shhh, Penny, it's okay," he murmured, turning me in his arms and then leaning forward to kiss my forehead.

The gentle, caring gesture made warm, fuzzy feelings expand in the center of my chest. "What is it? Do you need more time?"

I shook my head, resting my forehead against his broad shoulder. "No, it's not that. I want to, but..."

"It's him. Isn't it?"

Panic washed through me as I looked up. His expression was shuttered still but he watched me intently. I swallowed my nerves.

“Yes, but not because I want him instead of you. Shit,” I breathed, heat of embarrassment washing over my cheeks. I was going to sound like—

“Hey, look at me,” he ordered, a hard hand under my jaw when I tried to look away. “You’re a female alpha, Penny. I knew that going in. I knew I wouldn’t get you all to myself.”

“Yeah...” I whispered, almost on the edge of tears.

This wasn’t fair. He didn’t deserve to be treated like this because of my fucked-up genetics.

“But you should get the first time for just you. Right?”

He leaned down, his hold altering so he cradled the back of my neck. “There is no *should* in how this is going to work, darling. There is just how it works for us. How it works for you. If you need both of us... that’s what we’ll do.”

I almost collapsed with relief.

“How did I get so lucky?” I breathed, lifting a hand to trail my fingertips down his jaw.

I *ached* for his touch, for him to take me, but something deep inside cried out at Thale’s absence. I’d never felt this way before.

“How are you being so good about this?”

He chuckled, the sound low and dirty. “I didn’t say there wouldn’t be repercussions, though. Did I?”

Heat zinged through me again and I froze in place, looking up at him.

“The handcuffs?” I guessed.

He nodded, a wicked look in his eyes. “You’ll enjoy it. I promise. And so will I.”

He leaned down to kiss me again, but this one wasn’t as heated or torrid as before, even though I was half-naked in his arms. It was a promise of future pleasure instead.

“Now,” he said, breaking away from my lips and bending down to pick up my jacket. He wrapped it around me, his touch caring and gentle.

“I’d stay and make sure your neighbors knew my name, but if I stay, I *am* going to fuck you,” he promised darkly. “So rain check until we can get Thale here. But, Penny...”

“Yes?” I breathed as he thumbed my chin up again so he could claim a quick, hard kiss and then breathed against my lips.

“Don’t make me wait too long.”

PENNY

I heard a knock on my door at half seven the next morning.

Rushing between the shower and throwing work clothes on, I headed to the door, grumbling under my breath. If this was a delivery for number nine thirteen again, we were going to have words.

The woman who lived the other side of the landing was always ordering stuff online and giving my address as an alternative if she wasn’t in because she knew I was often home during the day. It hadn’t occurred to her that the reason I was around during the day was because I worked nights and

needed to *sleep* in the day. Like most people, she only saw an opportunity she could use.

The wind was taken out of my sails when I looked through the peephole. Instead of the delivery driver I was expecting, I found Thale standing there. Still holding the towel in place, I opened the door to look up at him.

“You’re early,” I said, maybe a little grumpily. I wasn’t ready, and even though he was sexy as sin with a tight-fitting black tee and black combat pants that I already knew hugged his ass and powerful thighs, he was throwing my morning routine out of whack. “Is something wrong with your truck?”

But if so, he should have his cell on him... he wouldn’t have come up here just to use the phone. Which meant—

“No, I came early because I wanted to see you.”

He stepped inside without asking, sweeping a look down me and making me back up. Heat shivered through my veins as he took a deep breath, scenting the air, and his eyes darkened.

“You didn’t fuck Logan.”

“Keep your voice down!”

I darted past him to shut the door. This was not a conversation I wanted to have with my front door wide open. The old biddy in nine sixteen was a fucking terrible gossip. If she had heard, the fact I was fucking two guys would be around the building by lunch.

He turned, grabbing hold of me before I even realized he’d moved, and hauled me into his arms. The inelegant little squeak that escaped me was purely because he’d surprised me, honest.

A second later I found myself firmly wrapped in his arms, my towel in danger of slipping and my bare legs against the heavy fabric of his combat pants.

“What he gets, I get, remember?” he rumbled, the sound a deep gravel of arousal.

Shifting experimentally in his arms, my eyes widened at the thick bar pressing into my stomach. I knew he was big, that much I remembered from the undercover op, but *fuck*... he was huge.

Something of my thoughts must have shown on my face because he made a soothing sound in the back of his throat, his hand on my back meant to soothe rather than arouse.

“It’s okay, beautiful,” he murmured, watching my expression. “I can control my knot. I promise. I won’t hurt you.”

I bit my lip and nodded. I wasn’t worried about that. I was worried about giving myself away and begging for it, in a way a female alpha wouldn’t. Not ever.

“I’m not worried,” I whispered as his hand spread out over the back of my hips, holding me against him. He didn’t grind against me or anything so crass. He didn’t need to. He just held me against him and drank me in with his eyes.

Of all the things he could have done—pressed me up against the wall, dropped me to the ground and pinned me—just looking at me with those heat-darkened eyes was the one thing that made me have to bite back a moan and arc gently against him.

“Tell me what you did,” he ordered.

My mind was a blank, and he hadn’t even kissed me yet. “What?”

“With Logan,” he said, his free hand sliding up my arm to cup the side of my neck. His thumb stroked the side of my jaw. “What did you do with Logan?”

Heat flushed over my cheeks.

“You can’t be serious!” Okay, so much for calm and collected. My response emerged as a breathy squeak. “Why do you want to know that?”

“Because I get whatever he gets. Remember?” he reminded me and then gave me a wicked little grin. “And because I want you to *tell* me. And you want to. You know you do.”

“I do not!” I retorted, but the thickening of my scent in the air around us said otherwise. I bit my lip, hard, but he’d already noticed, his grin widening.

“You do. It turns you on telling me what you did with him. Doesn’t it?”

“It does not!”

I shoved at his shoulders, but the movement was half-hearted. It wouldn’t have mattered if I’d pushed with all my might anyway. Thale was built like a mountain, and the thought that he *could* actually just take what he wanted, *if* he wanted, made me shiver inside. Made me weak at the knees.

Shame and arousal whirled through me. Everyone knew I was an alpha. And no alpha submitted to... wanted to be dominated. It was more evidence of my hidden nature. My secret shame.

He held me easily, dark eyes boring into mine.

“Don’t lie to me, Penny! Admit it. You like telling me everything you did. Everything you want,” he growled,

compulsion in his voice.

It should have made me angry. Should have made me rail against him that he was trying to alpha me. But instead I shivered and melted against him.

His eyes searched mine, noting the change, and he growled. Shit. I could argue back against anything, as long as it was words. But his growl... it was everything I'd expected and secretly dreamed of, on the rare occasions I allowed myself to think of my hidden nature.

"*Fuck,*" I groaned, dropping my head back. "Don't do that. It's..."

"It's what?" he demanded, his lips against my neck. Fair play since I had bared my throat to him without thinking. The scrape of his fangs made me flinch and moan, liquid heat escaping me.

He dragged a harsh breath in, kissing along my bare shoulder.

"You're lucky I have self-control," he growled against my throat. "Or I'd be balls deep, my fangs in your throat right now."

"Don't," I begged, my whisper tortured. My hands curled into claws on his shoulders, digging through the thin fabric to the heated flesh beneath. I'd seen him half-naked plenty of times, but that was then, and this was now.

"Off," I demanded, plucking at his shirt. "I got to touch Logan."

I wanted to touch Thale. *Definitely* wanted to touch him and more.

He eased back enough to pull his tee free of his pants and haul it over his head. It dropped to the floor behind us. My brain fritzed out at the sight in front of me. The heavy build and carved muscles of his upper body, all that hot, satin skin just waiting for me to run my hands over.

He stepped forward as I did, pulling me firmly against him as his rainy woods and orange scent filled the air, deeper with his own arousal.

“Did you *just* touch?” he demanded.

A small groan of pleasure escaped his lips as I took my time running my hands over him. I traced the lines of his abs, palming over the swell of his pecs and then running my fingertips over the line of his lower lip. He had surprisingly sensual lips for such a brutal-looking man. They both seemed almost out of place in such a cruelly handsome face yet fit perfectly.

He nipped at my fingertips.

“Penny! Answer me!” he barked, again pushing compulsion into his voice.

I started, yanking my attention from his mouth to his eyes.

“Touch. He touched me.” I had trouble forming a sentence when he used that tone of voice with me.

He smiled wickedly as he leaned down and rewarded me with a kiss.

“Good. Where? Show me.”

Heat burned in my cheeks, but I refused to look away as I pulled back. Just enough to let the towel drop to my waist, still caught between our bodies, and revealed my breasts. I wasn't curvy like some women. I'd always been petite, and years of

training, both in the military and since then with the ASC meant I was more slender than anything, and...

I bit my lip, hoping he liked what he saw. What if I wasn't female enough?

The look on his face, though, made my breath catch in the back of my throat. He looked at me like I was a goddess made flesh, his expression somewhere between stunned and awed reverence.

"God, Pen, you're killing me," he groaned, his hands sliding up the sides of my ribcage to cup my breasts. The girls were little more than a handful, definitely not overflowing his huge hands.

"Perfect," he murmured, gently stroking and caressing like he was trying to memorize every inch and imprint them on his memory forever. "Just fucking perfect."

One of his hands slid around my waist, spreading out under my shoulder blades. I was forced to bend backward, and a second later his mouth was on my breasts. I whimpered, hands in his hair as his tongue brushed over my nipple, bringing it to hard, aching attention.

"Oh god, *Thale!*"

Hard need and anticipation drew a line between my nipple and my clit. I was wet and aching in a heartbeat.

His other hand found my knee, dragging it up and over my hip as he stepped in, opening me up and around him. I cried out as he drew my nipple into the warm cavern of his mouth, rocking his hips against mine at the same time.

"Why didn't you fuck Logan, Pen?" he demanded between hard suckles and soft licks. "Tell me, *now.*"

“Didn’t seem right,” I managed, grinding against the hard bar of his cock. I needed more, just a little more. “Not without you.”

“Good girl,” he growled in approval, lavishing attention on my other breast. I was almost out of my mind with pleasure and building tension, but then he stepped away suddenly, the towel dropping to the floor at my feet.

“I-what the fuck?” I spluttered. I’d been *so* close. Almost there.

His dark eyes glowed with desire as a small, wicked smile curved his lips.

“You didn’t just let him touch you. Did you, Penny?” His eyes were dark, his voice a rough growl of sound that turned me inside out with need. “I can smell your climax. You let him make you come. Didn’t you?”

Oh fuck. I’d been stupid to think he wouldn’t notice. The air in here reeked of sex. Any alpha with a nose on their face would know what had gone on.

I nodded silently, my eyes wide. His gaze held mine as he backed me up. My back hit the wall. I couldn’t look away as he knelt in front of me, hands on my hips. All my alpha bravado had deserted me as soon as he’d touched me, and when he’d growled at me, I was done. Utterly done.

“What are you going to do?” My voice was less than a whisper on the air, breathy and halting in a way I’d never heard before.

“I’m going to make you come, princess. Right here and now.”

He held my eyes as he lifted my leg, looping it over his broad shoulder.

“What? Like this?” I gasped, clinging to his shoulders to keep my balance.

“Like this.” He winked, a wicked grin curving his lips. “I like you off balance and clinging to me. Needing me.”

Oh fuck. I needed him. He had no clue how much I needed him.

“Lean back,” he ordered, keeping me pinned against the wall as he lifted my other leg. He held me easily, his strength taking my breath away, and leaned forward.

I bit my lip as his tongue parted my pussy lips. He growled, which just made me wetter.

“God, I could eat you out all day.” His hands closed around my hips as he found my clit and slicked his hot tongue over it. I was completely open to him, totally dependent on his strength to stay in place. Helpless to whatever he wanted to do to me.

And it was so hot. So fucking hot.

He was ruthless, not giving me any quarter as he built my arousal higher and higher. Each hot slick of his tongue over me, each time he thrust it deep inside my needy pussy, fucking me with it... I came apart a little more. Until my breath came in short, hard pants, and was that me whimpering in need?

“Come,” he ordered, growling against my clit, and I couldn’t help it. Even if I’d wanted to disobey him, my body had other ideas.

With a soft cry, I shattered apart. He growled and dove in again, feasting on me again as I came. Hard and fast. All over his tongue.

He didn't stop until I started to come down, giving me a last, long lick as he stood.

“You wouldn't fuck him without me there,” he said, wiping his mouth with a big hand. “So I won't fuck you without him here. Fair's fair if this is going to work, princess.”

I groaned as I stepped forward into his arms. He let me, stroking my back as I leaned my forehead against his shoulder. These two were going to be the death of me.

“Okay... thank you,” I whispered and then pushed away. “I'll get dressed and we can get to Danny's.”

I was halfway down the corridor when I turned back to find him watching me, a hard, possessive look on his face.

“But we'd better make sure we're all in a room with a bed,” I said as a parting shot. “Soon.”

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CHAPTER TEN

THALE

Penny's heart rate had just about returned to normal by the time we reached Danny Stone's place. A fact I was inordinately proud of.

The drive had been in silence but not an uncomfortable one. A charged one. I was aware of every movement she made, every little, quivering breath she took. And, if the little looks she kept shooting me were any indication, she knew it.

That teasing tension disappeared as we pulled into Danny's, only to find the courtyard filled with vehicles. Not just normal ones either but the big, heavy-duty bulletproof kind. An alpha got out of one of them as we parked, shooting me a lazy grin.

Fury exploded through me with the force of a grenade.

"Fucking *fuck!*" My hiss had a lot of fang behind it. "That's Jack fucking Marshall. Danny better not be replacing us with KPS."

I threw myself out of the car, rage surging through every cell in my body and leaving Penny to trail in my wake as I searched out Danny.

KPS, or Kincaid Protection Services, were ASC's rivals in the world of personal protection and always nipping at our heels. They were a professional outfit, but some of them, like Jack Marshall, were assholes.

And I'd fucked up enough with Bane's wedding. I didn't need to lose a big contract like Danny's on top of it.

I barely spared the other vehicles a glance as I passed them. In the world of bulletproof vehicles, there were sleek varieties, used to get a primary from point A to B without announcing to the world they were a VIP. And there were the in-your-face, scream it to the heavens, "Look at me. I'm important," types. These were definitely the latter.

ASC used the former. Unless we were actually going into combat, of course, and pulled both the big guns and the big trucks out, we preferred to get our jobs done with the minimum fuss and disruption to our clients.

"Danny had better not be fucking us over," I snarled again with Penny on my heels as we stormed up the steps to the door.

I hit it like a freight train, bellowing Danny's name as I plowed ahead, almost knocking over Killian on my way through the door.

I stormed through the corridors of Danny Stone's mansion, looking for him so I could tear strips off him. I'd been protecting the ungrateful little shite for months now, putting up with his fake-alpha bullshit, and this was how he repaid me? By getting in KPS behind my back?

Not. Happening. When I found the little cunt, he was going to find out how a *real* alpha reacted. I didn't care that he was one of the biggest film-stars in the world. He would—

“Dude!”

Killian got between me and the door to the expansive lounge, managing to stop me before I piled into the room. Danny was in there. I could scent the guy from here. Killian slammed a hand into the center of my chest, forcing my attention from the room, where everyone had turned to look at me in surprise, to him.

“They’re here as guests,” Killian hissed urgently. “Stand the fuck down.”

I blinked and looked past him.

Sure enough, Serena Lawrence sat on the couch opposite Danny, a vision of grace and beauty. I took a breath, sorting her delicate rose and cotton candy scent from the cacophony of others in the room.

“That’s Serena Lawrence,” Killian murmured with something near to awe in his voice.

I nodded. I knew who she was. Few didn’t. Her story was tragic and well-known. Publicly humiliated and rejected by her alpha, it had been expected she would disappear, hiding her shame. She hadn’t.

Even though as a rejected omega she was relegated to the fringes of polite society, she had become an activist for omega rights. Ironically, it had brought her into direct confrontation with the male who had rejected her, Senator Davies. Despite that and her own fame, she was still used as a warning for young omega girls. *Behave and please your alpha or you’ll end up rejected like Serena Lawrence.*

Danny half turned to look over his shoulder at me with a frown. “Thale? Is there a problem?”

I had to give it to him, when it came to threats and matters of protection, Danny did the fuck as he was told, when he was told. He was probably the easiest primary I'd ever had to deal with, never arguing unless it was over his suit or something.

Marshall, the cock, chuckled as he walked into the room from the French doors, the blue of the swimming pool behind him. He grinned at me like butter wouldn't melt in his fucking mouth, all prim and proper in a bespoke suit over the bulk of a bulletproof vest.

I curled my lip back. That wanker had run unsupervised on the streets as a teen causing havoc, and now he wore a suit that cost more than most people's annual wages.

Don't get me wrong, I didn't have an issue with anyone bettering themselves or having nice things. What I did have an issue with was the fact Marshall's omega was often dressed in old clothes or finds from thrift stores, and there was nothing in the house for her or his kids to eat. An alpha like that didn't fucking deserve an omega.

Killian increased the pressure of his hand on the center of my chest, and I gave Marshall a glare rather than storming across the room and ripping his throat out like I wanted to.

"Thale?" Danny repeated, starting to sound worried.

I shook my head. "No, Mr. Stone. No problem here at all."

"Well, run along then, little alpha," Marshall growled from the other side of the room. "The adults are talking."

Red filtered over my vision. I was going to fucking kill him. Dead as a fucking doornail kill him. A surge of fury washed through me that had my claws and fangs aching to pop and drop. I was still frustrated from this morning and not getting to fuck Penny as I wanted. Alphas dealt with

frustration in one of two ways—sex or violence. And I sure as hell didn't want to fuck this asshole.

But my answering snarl had barely welled up in my throat before a feminine voice barked, “Marshall! We are guests here and you will not disrespect our hosts. Do I make myself clear?”

Marshall's expression was murderous, but his gaze flicked from me to his boss before he nodded. Begrudgingly, but he nodded.

“Yes, ma'am.”

I blinked in surprise. I'd rarely, if ever, heard an omega use that tone, and it stopped me in my tracks. It was so close to an alpha compulsion yet totally different. I knew omegas held power over their own alphas, but I'd never seen or heard of it weaponized in such a way. I'd certainly never heard of an omega putting an alpha who was bonded to another omega in thrall like that and I looked at her again.

She was just as beautiful as I remembered. Back then she had been held up as the ideal of omega beauty—delicate and fragile. That fragile air was gone, replaced by a steely determination she wore like armor.

She wouldn't recognize me, of course. The last time we were in the same room I'd been a gangly teenager just past dynamic presentation and on my best behavior because we all knew she was promised to Senator Davies.

I waited to see if Marshall would say anything else. Honestly, I was kind of hoping he would so I could see him get put in his place by an omega again. That had to hurt, especially as he was one of those alphas who thought omegas were second-class citizens, only there to provide a home for

their alphas' dicks. He was also one of the sickos who claimed omegas were built for the kind of abuse some alphas liked to hand out.

She nodded at his answer and looked around. "I'd like to talk to Danny alone, please, so you all need to leave."

The tone was an order, no mistake about it, and my alpha side bristled at being ordered around by this tiny slip of a woman. But we were here as staff, and the two "omegas" paid our wages, so I inclined my head. Her gaze fell on Penny.

"She can stay. For... protection."

Huh. Lawrence must be wanting to talk about omega things but didn't want a male alpha in the room. Made sense.

"Everyone out," I ordered, winking at Penny as all the men apart from Danny filed out, and I shut the door behind us.

PENNY

I wasn't surprised to be ordered into the room with Danny and Serena Lawrence. What I was surprised about was how tiny and beautiful the woman was.

"Penny, please come in," Serena said, that soft voice of hers holding just as much compulsion as any alpha I'd met.

Nodding, I stepped into the room, making sure to secure it as an alpha operative would. Just because I knew she was here to talk to me didn't mean I wasn't going to do my job.

Then I turned my attention to her. Serena Lawrence was a vision. Small and delicate, she had long dark hair that curled around her face. Her skin was pale and clear, her eyes a deep, dark brown color. With full lips, arched eyebrows, and a gentle

expression, she looked both wise and kind, like someone I could *trust*.

Her posture was straight and proud, showing a confidence I'd never seen in an omega before. Not an unmated omega. Not a *rejected* omega.

"Hi," I managed, for some reason struck dumb in front of such a beautiful woman. The epitome of everything I'd never expected an omega to be, she was everything I *wanted* to be but made do with physical conditioning and attitude. She was proof that strength wasn't just in combat readiness and the ability to lift as much weight as possible.

Her eyes flickered with intelligence and strength as she looked me over. A hint of a smile curved her lips as she looked at Danny, lounging on the couch next to her with his head propped up on one hand as he looked at me with banked heat in his eyes.

"I can see why you like her. She has strength and confidence. Sit down please, Penny," she ordered softly and I didn't think for a moment about not obeying. She had an air of power and grace that was undeniable, equal to any alpha.

I could see how she was as good as she was at what she did, even though she'd been shunned by her family and the entire high-society set she'd been born into after her rejection.

"You wanted to talk to me about dynamics?" I said, wiping my suddenly sweaty palms on my black combats.

"Yes. If you're comfortable with that?" She checked, her expression concerned, and I shrugged.

"I'm here. Aren't I?"

I wasn't entirely comfortable, especially with the alphas outside of the room. All alphas had excellent hearing, and I

didn't want anyone to know about this, much less Thale. Not until I was ready.

She seemed to read my expression and divine my worries, leaning forward to tap what I'd assumed was an ornament on the table.

"No one can hear us in here. Don't worry." She smiled.

I blinked in surprise.

"A privacy shield?"

I hadn't paid it much attention before. It was one of those artsy things people with more money than sense filled their houses with, but now I looked at it more closely, it was far finer and more delicate than anything else I'd seen in Danny's house. Small, and in the shape of a scarab, it looked like something I would expect to see on a woman's dressing table.

She nodded.

"It's a personal shield. It blocks all sound and light. It's very useful for when you want to talk without anyone else listening."

I looked at her with newfound respect. This was one powerful woman.

"I didn't know they came that small."

She smiled and nodded.

"They do. They're expensive, but a small price to pay to keep our brothers and sisters safe. Now, let's talk about dynamics. What would you like to know?"

I put my surprise aside, took a deep breath, and began. "I've always been told I'm an alpha. But..."

She nodded, her expression calm and collected. “Let me guess, you had to be tested more than once because of inconclusive results?”

I nodded, unable to keep the surprise off my face.

“Yes. How did you know?”

She smiled gently. “It’s not uncommon. You’re not the only one who has had that problem. Often those close to the dynamic lines confuse the tests.”

“I had to have four tests,” Danny piped up, his voice a low rumble. “Finally, they concluded I was an omega, but at least two tests put me as an alpha.”

My eyes widened. “Really? Mine came back inconclusive until the last one when they decided I was an alpha. Then they let me sign up with the army.”

Understanding washed over Serena’s face. “You didn’t have a civilian test? You were tested at a recruiting office?”

I nodded. I remembered the army recruitment office clearly. It had been a large, imposing structure with gray stone walls and stark white doors. Inside, recruits had been forced to wait on uncomfortable chairs, waiting our turn to speak to one of the recruitment sergeants at the desks on the other side of the room, all with the same military logo emblazoned on them.

A sense of authority and formality had hung in the air, even though the place was slightly dingy and worn down from use. The air had been heavy with the smell of dust and ink from the paperwork mixed with the faint aroma of gun oil from somewhere further back in the building. An underlying hint of stale coffee emanated from the many mugs on the desks.

“I never presented,” I explained. “So everyone assumed I was a bossy beta. But the military needed the paperwork, so they tested me and then finally declared me an alpha.”

I’d never felt right about it. No sense of elation at being declared the most powerful dynamic, other than a sense of satisfaction that I could apply for more and better battalions.

“I joined up because my family couldn’t afford to feed another mouth,” I explained. “Got an omega sister and my parents are betas. Food and medical care for an omega is expensive.”

I shrugged, not sure why I was explaining this to them. “I expected them to rule me a beta. But...”

Serena nodded. “You weren’t. But you’re not an alpha either. You’re an omega.”

“But *how!*” I asked, my voice sharp with demand. “I’m an alpha. How can I be like this—”

I flashed my fangs and claws. “And be an omega? And why haven’t I gone into heat? I thought all omegas went into heat at least once a year.”

Serena’s expression was full of sympathy.

“Most do, but with you being so close to the dynamic line, you have a lot of alpha traits. You definitely have a dominant alpha personality, which I suspect you developed as a defense mechanism. It’s the reason you’ve survived.”

Her gaze softened. “You haven’t gone into heat because you haven’t found *your* alpha yet. We’ve always been told that any alpha can trigger an omega’s heat... that just being around them and their pheromones is enough. But it isn’t. For some omegas, it needs to be *their* alpha to trigger the heat.”

I nodded.

“Like Neve. My bosses’ wife,” I added at her curious look. “She thought she was a beta until she met them. Then *boom* she went into heat.”

It wasn’t exactly like that, but I didn’t need to go into the sordid details about Neve’s ex-husband and how he’d kidnapped her.

Serena nodded. “Dormant presentation. It happens. More often than you’d think actually.”

I looked at Danny with interest. “Are you the same?”

I’d always wondered how he could pull off the perfect alpha act and do everything that he did... be in the public eye, etc... when he was an omega. But if he’d never had a heat, that made sense.

He snorted. “No, love, I’m a tart and I absolutely love heats.”

“Ignore him. He *is* a tart, but we love him all the more for it.” Serena slid him a fond smile, patting his hand where it lay on his leather-clad leg. He was dressed as the rock star this morning, all black leather pants and ripped wifebeater. He wore eyeliner better than I did.

“But back to you. Have you... had any symptoms?” she asked delicately.

I shook my head, ignoring the heat that crawled up my neck and took residence in my cheeks.

“No, nothing.”

I shoved Thale and Logan and the way I reacted to them out of my thoughts. That wasn’t heat. That was just... I didn’t know what it was, but definitely not heat. I’d seen my sister

suffer through heat time after time. The pain and misery she'd gone through.

Which was definitely *not* what I felt around Thale and Logan. Or when they kissed me...

“Well. If you should start to develop symptoms, Danny can help. We can get you suppressants if you want them.”

I blinked, the offer bringing me back to the conversation. I looked between the two of them.

“Why... why would you do this for me? You barely know me?”

Serena smiled. “I’ve been doing this long enough to get a sense about people. To know who I can trust just by looking at them.”

“That,” Danny drawled. “And she’s already had you investigated.”

I chuckled and looked at Serena again. “I’m impressed. And thank you. If I get to that point, I’ll let you know. But I’ve been hiding out as an alpha for so long, I doubt anything will change now.”

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

PENNY

I left Serena and Danny to discuss other business and headed to check the house as Thale and Killian completed the handover.

I paced through the rooms in the east wing of the house, trying not to think too much about the conversation with Danny and Serena. I made sure to look out the windows, making sure nothing was out of the ordinary.

Danny was famous as fuck but intruders generally weren't the type wanting to put a bullet through his brain. Instead they were fans trying to get a glimpse of him or steal his underpants.

Occasionally with this kind of job we got an unhinged nutcase convinced they were in a relationship with the celebrity. They were a little more difficult to deal with since you never knew what the hell they were going to do next. Usually a chokehold and introducing their faces to the nearest hard surface tended to calm them down rather quickly.

My phone pinged in my pocket and I fished it out, smiling as I saw Logan's name pop up on a message.

Hey sexy. How are you feeling this morning? Exhausted after last night?

I frowned in confusion. What was he on about?

Last night? We... I stopped typing. We hadn't actually done anything last night. But how did I phrase it without being rude? I deleted the whole thing and retyped.

What do you mean?

A second later he replied.

Wasn't it you running through my dreams last night?

I groaned softly.

That is the cheesiest pickup line I've ever heard.

Did it work?

I chuckled.

Yeah, maybe.

I'm serious. I couldn't sleep for thinking of you. I ache to get you into my arms again.

Tonight. I sent back. The three of us. That work for you?

The skin on the back of my neck prickled, and I turned just as Logan started to type a reply.

An alpha was standing in the doorway.

The hairs on the back of my neck lifted in warning. He was a big bastard with a thick neck and a barrel chest. His eyes were maxed out and fixed on me as his nostrils flared.

Instantly I was on high alert. Maxed-out alphas were never easy to deal with, even when they weren't an absolute unit like this one was. What the hell had set him off? As far as I knew Danny wasn't anywhere near his heat, and he used the kind of

ironclad, high-end suppressants the rest of us could only dream of. And, if it *was* Danny, what the hell was the alpha doing in here?

“*Omega*,” he growled, taking a step forward.

Ice washed through my veins. He didn’t know. He *couldn’t* know. My cover was too good and I’d never had a heat, even if what Danny had said was true. And I knew it was.

But he *knew*.

“You’re maxed out, buddy,” I told him, my voice loud enough to carry. Killian was with Thale, but the rest of his team were around somewhere. “You wouldn’t know an omega from a hole in the ground at this point.”

He lifted his head to sniff the air. “*Unclaimed* omega.”

Fuck.

“Barking up the wrong fucking tree, sunshine,” I snarled, dropping my own claws. They weren’t as big or flashy as a male alpha’s, but they were just as sharp. Certainly sharp enough to take this mother-fucker apart if I needed to. “How about you back your happy fucking ass up there before you get hurt.”

It wasn’t a question. It was a statement of fact and a warning all rolled into one. I gave him a grin full of fangs. I was as frustrated as fuck after last night and this morning and, if I couldn’t get sex, violence would do just as well to satisfy the mixed-up cravings within me.

The sight of my claws didn’t warn him off, though. Instead, they just seemed to enrage him. Dropping his head, he roared and charged at me.

I had a split second to react. He was that fast. I waited until I could feel his breath on me and then ducked under his wild grab. Maxed-out alphas were never fun in a fight. Half in rut, they were massively stronger and faster, probably due to the fact their dicks were in the driving seat, but I did have an advantage.

He'd registered me as an omega, which meant he was trying to take me to the ground, not outright kill me. He hadn't lashed out with his claws, not yet. I balled my hands into tight fists and slammed a heavy blow into his ribs as I ducked beneath his swinging arm.

Then I was behind him, but that didn't give me as much time as it would have with a normal opponent. He roared in pain and frustration, turning on a dime and back on me in a heartbeat. I blocked his fury-driven punch and slashed across the front of his chest with my claws.

The scent of blood blossomed in the air, and he staggered back, looking down at his chest in confusion. I'd slashed right through the bulletproof vest the fucker was wearing—evidence that before he'd slid into rage, he'd been on duty—and torn through the skin beneath.

He jerked his head up, black eyes latching on to me, and I saw the moment I went from omega to prey. He wasn't planning on fucking and biting me anymore. We'd gone right through that to pure killing rage.

Good. Him trying to kill me was infinitely preferable to him trying to fuck me. I roared a challenge back, both hands extended and my claws on full show. Blood dripped from the ones on my right.

The next time he charged I met him fury for fury. I couldn't afford for this to be a long fight. He was both bigger

than me and maxed out. I needed to end this as fast and brutally as possible.

We met in a crunch of bodies, my elbow connecting with the bottom of his jaw as I used momentum and my entire bodyweight against him. His mouth closed with a loud click, his head snapping backward. He rocked back on his heels but I didn't stop, pulling back to stab my extended claws into the sides of his ribcage.

Stab-stab-stab!

With each thrust I felt the pop as his skin gave away beneath the lethal edges of my claws. Hot blood washed over my hands. He roared and reared away from me, lashing out quicker than possible even for an alpha.

I tried to jerk back but I was too close. His reach was longer than I'd anticipated. His closed fist caught the side of my head, and for a moment, everything in my body shut off. I was conscious, awake, but it was like the signals between my body and my brain had been cut.

I dropped, sprawling over the floor. The impact shocked me back to life, and I shook my head. But before I could scramble away, he was on me, pinning me with his huge body. I tried to curl up as he slammed fists like battering rams into me, using my arms to try and protect my head.

Screams filled the room, and just as I slid into the darkness, I realized they were mine.

THALE

I didn't get the chance to ask Penny what Danny and Serena had spoken about while she was in there, but Killian grabbed

my attention so we could go through the handover paperwork. We were almost through it when roars from another part of the house filled the air. One deep and masculine, the other higher. Feminine.

Killian and I exchanged glances.

“*Penny.*”

We turned as one to race down the corridor, Killian roaring for the protection team to secure the house in case it was an attack. Two alphas roaring challenges... it had to be an attack. Then the screaming started and my blood ran cold. That was Penny and she was in pain.

My own roar ripped from my chest as I thundered through the house, skidding around the last doorway into the room the screams were coming from.

It was a scene from my nightmares.

A huge alpha had Penny, *my* Penny, pinned down. He was hitting her with huge fists while she was curled up into a little ball. As I watched, he caught her around the temple. I saw the moment she lost consciousness, uncurling from the protective ball as her body relaxed, flopping onto the floor like a rag doll.

I roared with rage and threw myself across the space to tackle the other alpha. I'd killed before, most alphas in the military had. Hell, sooner or later any alpha would have to kill another—either in a challenge fight or to protect someone else. The difference between them and me was I *knew* how to kill. And, at times like this, I enjoyed it.

This fucker had hurt my princess, and I was going to hurt him back so bad his ancestors would feel it.

I hit him hard around the waist, and we flew halfway across the room to crash into a table. It splintered, falling

around us as we took the legs out from under it. I didn't care, batting the matchstick remnants away.

A second later I was back on my opponent, slinging an arm around his neck as he tried to throw me off. Just the quick glimpse of his face had told me all I needed to know. He was raged out, eyes black as pitch and his claws fully descended. I didn't give him the chance to use them, holding him in a choke hold as I stabbed my own, lethal claws into his side. Again and again.

Like the rest of Marshall's crew, he wore a bullet-proof vest, but I didn't care about that. I just kept digging for his lungs, his heart, any internal organ I could reach and shred from this angle.

He bellowed, rage in his voice even though blood poured down his sides, dripping scarlet on the polished wooden floor. This maxed out, he wouldn't feel any pain.

He turned and slammed me back against a wall. I grunted at the impact but held on. Fucker wouldn't get rid of me that easily. In the corner of my eye, I saw Killian kneeling next to Penny's fallen form.

I lost it, roaring as I dropped my hand and drove my fangs into the side of the asshole's throat. Hot blood filled my mouth, sharp and disgusting. There were two ways an alpha bit. The first was in combat to kill and maim. The second was to bind an omega, body and soul, to him.

This asshole was definitely no omega and I wasn't in a binding mood. I was in a killing rage.

I shook my head like a pit bull, tearing great gobbets of flesh away with each bite. His roars turned to screams and then grunts as I rode him down to the floor.

Finally he was still, lying in a pool of his own blood. I rolled off him, at Penny's side in a heartbeat. My hands shook, my heart stalling in my chest as I reached out to press my fingers into her throat, feeling for a pulse.

"She's alive," Killian grunted next to me, a phone already against his ear. "Yes, ambulance, please. Hurry."

I tuned him out as he gave emergency services the address, turning Penny's head gently to check her neck. My breath punched out of my lungs in a rush. He hadn't bitten her.

Even if he had and tried to force a bond on her even though she was an alpha, it wouldn't matter now. Any bond would be broken with his death. But the impact of such a thing, the violation... I gritted my teeth at the idea of her going through that. It would be devastating.

Gently I scooped her up, holding her against my chest as the sound of sirens reached me from outside. My sole focus was getting her to the ambulance. She was an alpha. She would be alright. Our physiology meant we could shrug off an argument with a semi or worse. She would be alright. She *had* to be okay. I wouldn't accept anything else.

Killian dogged my steps, his expression tight. I snarled, warning him off. He'd offered to pack up with her, so he was a rival. At least that's what the alpha raging inside me roared, wanting to rip his face off for even looking at her.

He backed off, his hands raised. "All good, man, just wanted to help."

The ambulance arrived, screeching to a stop in front of the house, and paramedics leaped out. I snarled at them when they tried to take Penny from me and stepped up into the ambulance to place her directly on the gurney. She was so pale

and lifeless, the scent of her blood hanging in the air. I could barely detect the rise and fall of her chest as the paramedics shoved me out of the way to start treating her.

“Call Logan Shaw,” I growled at Killian as they started to close the doors. “Get him to the hospital. *Now.*”

LOGAN

It's Penny... she's been hurt.

Those words echoed around my mind, a never-ending loop that tortured me as I drove at breakneck speed to the hospital. The journey was a blur, punctuated by traffic lights and explosive swearing as people didn't get out of my way fast enough. But as I screamed into the parking lot, I couldn't have told you anything about my journey. Abandoning my car as near to the door as I could, I leaped out and raced into reception.

“Penny Masterton,” I demanded, slapping my hands down on the counter in front of the receptionist on duty. “Which ward?”

“Logan Shaw? *Detective* Logan Shaw?”

I turned to find myself looking at the last person I'd have expected to find here. Killian Burton, the Devil of Denning Heights and once DHPD's most wanted stood by the door leading out of reception.

“I am,” I replied, matching his look with one of my own. I'd heard he'd turned over a new leaf and given up his old life after the ASC had recruited him, but I hadn't really believed it when my brother had told me. “Nice to see you outside of a jail cell, Mr. Burton.”

How the hell the ASC had gotten his record cleared and all the warrants for his arrest to disappear I didn't know, and I didn't want to know. Probably Bane. He was a slippery fucker at the best of times, and what he didn't know about the law wasn't worth knowing. No doubt he'd gotten the devil's record cleared on a technicality or loophole somewhere.

He shrugged. "Nice not to have a cop try and arrest me as soon as they meet me."

Suddenly I placed his harsh, raspy voice, the hard tones courtesy of the big scar across his throat. "You called me. Didn't you?"

He nodded, jerking his head toward the door he held open. "Penny's this way."

I was by his side in an instant. "How bad is she hurt? What happened?"

"She was attacked by a raged-out alpha," the devil replied.

"Fuck! Where? How?"

Killian shook his head. "On a job. An alpha from another team raged out. Penny took him on, but he almost killed her."

We pushed through the double doors onto the ward. Thale was pacing the corridors outside one of the rooms, the blinds drawn. One look at him covered in blood, and fury exploded through me like a supernova.

"*You!*" I launched myself at him. "You were supposed to keep her safe! You were supposed to *look after* her!"

The alpha locked his arms around me as I hit him, giving vent to the anger and fear in my heart. Panic and the very real fear of losing her... losing Penny filled me. I couldn't lose her. I'd only just found her. And... I loved her.

Truly, deeply, bottom of my heart loved her.

I sagged against Thale as the realization hit, stealing my strength. Only then did I realize the alpha hadn't been fighting back. He'd just been absorbing my blows, taking them as he whispered brokenly.

"She's okay. She's okay... I'm sorry. I wasn't there in time. I'm so sorry. But she's okay," he murmured, holding me up.

"I killed him." Thale's voice was low and raspy, urgent as he pulled back, hands either side of my face to make me look at him. "I tore that asshole's throat out for what he did to our girl."

Our girl.

The possessive declaration hit me hard. She *was* our girl. She didn't just belong to me. She belonged to Thale as well. Or... we belonged to her.

I'd never been this close to the guy before, but now his rainy woods and orange scent was a comfort. Perhaps because I knew he loved Penny too. Pulling back, I looked him over. He was covered in blood.

"You're hurt."

"Not really." He shook his head, but I could see the lines of pain bracketing his mouth and the stiff way he moved. "The blood's all his."

"*Thale!*" I growled, the deep sound demanding an answer.

His eyes widened and then he shrugged.

"He got a few good shots in," he admitted finally, begrudgingly.

“Have you seen a doctor?” I asked, my hand tight on his shoulder as I looked around. The place was bustling.

“Hey! Can we get a doctor over here to check on my partner?” I called out, my voice carrying. “He was hurt as well.”

“Doctor Bouchard is in with your...”

“Fiancée,” I replied promptly when she paused. “She’s our fiancée. But Thale was hurt in the same attack. He needs seeing to.”

She nodded and disappeared into the room. Thale looked at me.

“You proposing now, beta?”

I pinned him with a look. “I am. You got a problem with that?”

His lips quirked and he leaned against the wall, hand over his ribcage as he chuckled. “No. Not at all. Might wanna run that by our girl as well, though.”

“Penny will be fine,” I said, with newfound confidence. I might not have picked Thale as the third in our little pack, but we fit together. Both of us protecting her. Loving her.

“Logan? What are you doing here?”

I turned to find Kelsey at the end of the corridor, a stack of files in her arms and a frown on her face.

“You’re not hurt. Are you?” she asked, concern on her face as she approached. The frown deepened as she spotted Thale, doing his best impression of an extra from a slasher film. “Oh my god, what happened. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” I waved her concern away. “There was an alpha attack. How did you know I was here?”

I knew she worked in the hospital, but she’d always said she avoided the emergency wards.

“Yip messenger,” she said, wagging her cell in her hand. “Showed you as nearby and I was worried you might have been...”

My brows snapped together as I fished my cell out. “I don’t have Yip messenger?”

I didn’t use any messengers, just text. I preferred people not to know where I was, just in case I was on an active crime scene. Since I dealt with homicides as well, some of them could get pretty gnarly.

But sure enough, there on a third screen I never flicked to, was a new messenger program.

“I didn’t install this.”

“Oh, it must have been an auto-install from your network provider.”

“He’s on Tavtel, like me,” Killian commented from behind me. His expression was hard as he looked at Kelsey. “It doesn’t auto-install that messenger. Someone had to have installed it. *For him.*”

Sudden guilt washed across her face but she rallied quickly, looking toward the closed door of Penny’s room. “I’m sorry, is it one of your colleagues?”

“You installed this on my phone?” I demanded, my voice a harsh whip in the air. How long had it been on there? How long had she been tracking me?

The blinds on Penny's room rattled up and I whirled around. My breath caught at the sight of her in the middle of a large hospital bed. She looked so tiny and fragile that my heart lurched.

"It's *her*," Kelsey breathed, bringing my attention back to her. She stood at my side, shock and realization in her eyes as she stared at Penny. Then she turned and fixed me with an accusing glare.

"This is the omega you dumped me for. Isn't it?"

"I didn't dump you," I snapped, my patience well and truly worn through with her. How *dare* she stalk me? "We split up weeks ago."

"But you knew I thought we'd get back together eventually." Her lower lip trembled, her voice pleading. "Logan, *please*, we had a good thing going... do you really want to throw it away for an omega who will bond an alpha eventually?"

She looked past me at Thale, bruised and bloodied. He was wiping blood from his lips with his thumb, but his gaze was fixed on Penny through the glass.

"Look, she already has an alpha..."

"That's not your concern," I said, my voice hard. "We're over, Kelsey. We've been over for a long time. You need to move on."

Penny was awake, speaking to the doctor, but it was easy to see she wasn't well. That she was hurt. I needed to get in there to her. I'd have to fight Thale at the door as we both tried to get in there at the same time, but I *needed* to see her, needed to know she was okay.

“Wait!” Kelsey grabbed my arm and I looked down at her. I’d seriously already forgotten she was there, my primary concern getting to Penny.

Her brows beetled together. “This is the alpha wing. What’s your omega doing her—”

Her words cut off and she backed away, a bitter laugh falling from her lips.

“Oh, you’ve got to be *kidding* me!” she whispered. “She’s not an omega. Is she? She’s some kind of freak bitch alpha! You threw *me* over for an alpha! I hope she fucking dies!”

Fury surged through me in a hot, bitter wave I could almost taste. I shook her off, my jaw and hands aching. Whatever we’d had was long gone now and she’d just killed off any remaining good feeling I’d had for her.

Movement in the corner of my eye made me look sideways at Killian. His expression was as hard as mine.

“Kelsey, meet Killian Burton. Also known as the Devil of Denning Heights. Killian, would you get her out of here before I do something I’ll regret, please?”

“What? No!” Kelsey’s face drained of color as Killian grabbed her by the upper arm.

Everyone had heard stories of the devil. In them, he was a cross between a cold-blooded murderer and Satan himself with some nightmare thrown in for good measure. They said he couldn’t be killed. The scar across his throat from where someone had tried to kill him and he’d dug himself out of his own grave was testament to that.

“Wouldn’t be something I’d regret,” Killian snarled, hauling her away despite her struggles and screams.

I didn't spare her a further thought as the door to Penny's room opened and the nurse looked out. "She's ready for you both now. The doctor would like to have a word."

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PENNY

“*P*enny? Are you okay in there?”

I leaned back against the tiles as I stood under the hot spray of the shower, my eyes closed. I hurt more than I thought physically possible. That alpha had really worked me over, my body black and blue, yet I couldn't stop the small smile that spread over my lips at the sound of Logan's deep voice from the other side of the door.

“Yeah. I'm okay,” I called back.

“Okay, just shout if you need us. We'll hear you.”

I dropped my head back against the tile.

“Thank you. I'll be out in a minute.”

I waited for a few seconds after answering, listening out. Sure enough, he stood on the other side of the door for a few moments before I sensed him moving away.

He and Thale had both been there at the hospital, in the room with me as soon as the doctor had let them. And they hadn't left me alone for a moment since, even arguing that I needed someone in here with me while I showered.

When it looked like it might come to blows over which one of them would be holding me up, I'd told them I was fine. I could manage. It was still cute though. Seriously cute.

As was the way they'd both insisted on looking after me when the hospital had released me. My screwed-up physiology, whatever it was, still granted me the speedy healing ability of an alpha, so the worst I had from the attack were cuts and bruises as well as a possible concussion. A concussion meant I couldn't be left on my own without supervision, which meant I had both my men in my apartment, tiny as it was.

I opened my eyes and snapped the shower off, stepping out of the small stall that definitely wouldn't have fit all three of us, and grabbed a towel. The bathroom opened into my bedroom as well as the corridor, so I dried and dressed quickly in comfortable yoga pants and a crop top. I didn't bother with underwear, not wanting anything even remotely tight over my bruises.

My reflection in the mirror made even me wince. I had rapidly fading bruises down one side of my face and my lip was split. I wouldn't be winning any beauty pageants. That was for sure.

Raking my hands through my hair, I walked through into the main living area. My apartment was open plan, so the living room flowed into the kitchen, the two areas separated by the breakfast bar Thale currently sat at. Logan was busying himself in my kitchen, making drinks.

"Sit," he ordered, placing what looked like a milkshake down in front of me and nodding toward my bruised throat. "Eating might be sore for the next twelve hours or so."

“Yeah. I’m a right oil painting. Aren’t I?” I grimaced, picking the glass up to take a sip.

“Banana and chocolate?” I blinked, looking at him in surprise. “This is my favorite. How did you know?”

He grinned and tapped the side of his nose before rinsing out the blender under the tap. “I’m not the city’s best detective for nothing, you know.”

Thale turned on his stool, reaching out and pulling me, stool and all, so I sat between his spread thighs.

“Drink up, princess,” he said, a soft smile on his lips. “I would say you’ll need your energy for later, but *all* you’ll be doing later is sleeping. With us either side of you, keeping you safe.”

I had downed half the milkshake without realizing it, looking from Thale to Logan as hope unfurled in my chest. I’d been trying to think how this thing would work between us. They’d said they were both okay with sharing, but I’d assumed that would be just sex. That for anything like sharing I would have to share one of their beds and then the other.

“My bed... it’ll be a tight fit,” I warned them. “Are you sure you both want t—”

“Absolutely,” they both growled in the same breath, and I bit my lip as shivers washed over my skin. Logan’s growl was just as powerful as Thale’s in an entirely different way.

I finished my drink, watching them both as I put the empty glass down.

“No.”

Thale gave a start of surprise as Logan leaned forward. “No?”

“I refuse to sleep, to rest,” I told them, beckoning to Logan as I turned in Thale’s arms.

The need for touch and comfort rolled through me, the need to feel alive after nearly dying under another alpha’s claws.

“I want you both and I’ve finally got you both in the same room with a horizontal surface,” I said, waving at my couch. It was large and leather and dropped down into a bed, far more comfortable than my actual bed for the three of us. “Which means I’m not letting either of you go.”

Thale chuckled, and a second later I was in his arms, tucked up against his broad, heavily muscled chest.

“What the lady wants, the lady gets.”

“What lady?” I teased, shoving at his shoulder as he carried me over to the couch. “You got another woman in here or something?”

“The only woman for me is you,” he vowed, sitting down with me in his lap.

“For both of us,” Logan added, dropping into the seat next to us.

I bit my lip, wriggling until somehow I was between the two of them. I’d kissed them both and more, but at different times. However, now I had them together, unaccustomed shyness rolled through me. What had I done to deserve these men? The need and emotion that shone in their eyes. What would they thin—

Stop thinking, Penny, the little voice in the back of my head said firmly. What Danny had said was utter rubbish. I couldn’t be an omega. I’d never had a heat. I was just a fucked-up alpha with a submission kink. That was all.

Leaning forward, I pressed my lips against Thale's. Soft. Gentle. At least that's what it was intended to be.

His mouth parted beneath mine, and the slow buildup, learning both my men, that I'd planned disappeared like a puff of smoke on the wind.

Carnal heat ripped through me, and I groaned as I kissed him back, hot and open-mouthed. He growled, his hand hard in my hair as he held me still to devour my mouth.

I let him. My hands roving over his chest and shoulders urged him on. Then too much fabric was in the way, and I tore at his shirt, desperate to get it off him. I needed to touch him, touch skin.

He broke the kiss with a gasp. His eyes leached to black on black as I watched, the sign of an alpha's arousal even as his scent thickened in the air.

I ran the edges of my claws over his skin, not breaking the surface. Just enough to tease.

"Oh god," he groaned, his head dropping back. "That's so fucking sexy."

I leaned forward to kiss his neck before turning to Logan. He watched me with eyes only a shade lighter than Thale's. I'd never seen a beta's eyes go that black, and the sight sent a shiver through me.

He reached up, a big hand on the side of my face as I leaned over to kiss him, wriggling so I was kneeling between him and Thale.

He claimed my lips with equal passion to the kiss between Thale and me, parting my lips with a hard sweep of his tongue to claim my mouth. I leaned against his chest, unable to stop the soft whimper in the back of my throat. If anything, Logan's

touch was more dominant than Thale's, which sent my arousal up into orbit.

He slid his tongue against mine in an erotic duel. I moaned as Thale's big hands smoothed over my body in soft caresses and then some not so soft.

"Off!" I broke from the kiss to demand, trying to get out of my clothes at the same time I tried to get Logan's shirt off. Unlike Thale, who had been wearing a simple T-shirt, easy to tear, Logan wore a fine dress shirt. I didn't want to damage it, but I shook with the need to touch and be touched.

He growled and took the decision out of my hands, tearing it down the front. Buttons pinged and flew everywhere, and I moaned as he kissed me again.

The sound deepened as, between them, they got me out of my clothes. Logan kissed along the side of my neck as Thale claimed my lips again.

I didn't know whose hands were whose as they worshipped my body. Someone cupped my breasts, rolling my nipples into hard peaks, while another pair of hands smoothed over my ass.

I gasped against Thale's lips at a pinch to my nipple. That was Logan then. The thought scattered as strong fingers slipped between my thighs and parted my pussy lips.

My groan mingled with Thale's as he found me hot and wet, his fingers slipping easily over the evidence of my arousal. Sudden panic rolled through me. Previous boyfriends had always said I was too wet, that I produced too much lubrication. Would they be put off by it?

"Fuck, Penny," Thale groaned against my lips. "I can't wait to get inside you."

He moved and I gasped as he slid two thick fingers into the greedy clasp of my pussy.

“I think you just did,” I managed, my eyes fluttering closed as he pumped slowly, fucking me with his fingers and making sure to brush my g-spot each time.

He grinned, the movement more felt than seen. “Oh, this is nothing. There’s more to come. *Plenty* more to come.”

His thumb found my clit and I bucked my hips against him, turning to claim Logan’s mouth in a torrid kiss again. He worked my nipples as Thale worked my clit, the two of them turning me into a panting, needy mess within minutes.

Thale moved, taking me with him, and a heartbeat later I found myself stretched out across Logan’s lap with Thale settling himself between my parted thighs. I ached in anticipation. I knew what he could do with his tongue.

I sucked a hard breath in as he probed between my pussy lips, seeking my clit. Then he found it and went to town, teasing and tormenting me. I groaned into Logan’s mouth, lifting my hands to drive them into his hair. He chuckled against my lips, his hands doing wicked things to my breasts.

“You’re so beautiful,” he murmured. “And so sexy.”

I couldn’t do anything but gasp in reply, holding on as they drove me out of my mind. Then Thale closed his lips around my clit and sucked.

My world exploded, and my breath stalled in my throat in a silent scream as pleasure cascaded through me. My clit and pussy ached, throbbing savagely as waves of ecstasy tore me apart.

I came with a shudder, pushing at Thale’s shoulders.

“Up,” I demanded, already crawling over Logan. “I need one of you now... if not faster!”

Logan chuckled. “Bossy little alpha, aren’t you?”

“You’d better believe it,” I growled against his lips, my hands busy at his belt as I heard fabric rustling behind me.

Thale’s naked body pressed against me from behind just as I got Logan’s cock free from his pants. They were both all hot skin and hard muscle, Logan’s dripping erection filling my hand.

I wrapped my fingers as far around him as I could, watching his expression tighten as I stroked him. Then I looked over my shoulder and met Thale’s eyes, lifting my chin for a kiss.

It was explosive, hot and open-mouthed as he pushed me to kneel half over Logan’s lap. Then with a hard hand on the back of my neck, he pushed me forward.

My hand on the couch by Logan’s shoulder, I leaned in, sharing a breath with him as I stroked him from root to tip. Thale moved, pushing my knees further apart with one of his, and then he was there. Pressed up against me.

Logan swallowed my moan as Thale pushed himself inside, stretching me around the thickness of his huge shaft. I knew he was big. I’d felt him pressed up against me, but up until this moment I hadn’t realized just *how* big he was.

“That’s it, princess,” he groaned. “Take it. You can take it all.”

I whimpered and thrust my hips back, eager for everything he could give me. My body burned as he pushed in, inch by thick inch, but it burned *so* good. Then he was all the way in me, my pussy throbbing around him even as I stroked Logan’s

cock. My hand and his shaft were slick with precum but it wasn't enough. I needed more.

“Back,” I ordered, making Thale groan as I pushed back against him and then leaned forward.

I watched Logan's face as I wrapped my lips around his cock, taking him as deeply as I could. His taste exploded on my tongue, and I groaned, using the vibrations of my tongue against the underside of his shaft.

He swore, his hands in my short hair, holding me as I fucked him with my mouth. Thale moved, hands on my hips as he took me from behind, each thrust filling me more than I'd ever been filled before and each retreat a loss that took my breath away.

The room filled with sound. The slap of skin on skin, soft gasps, deeper moans. Heat filled every inch of me, searing my skin until I felt like I would burst.

Logan's hand tightened in my hair, his cock jerking in my hand as a warning leak of precum hit my tongue.

“Penny, I'm g—”

He tried to push me away, but I took him deeper, swallowing his length as he jerked and came. His hot seed filled my mouth and poured down my throat. I swallowed as quickly as I could, and Thale swore behind me as I clenched down around him.

His hand slid around my hip, seeking my clit as I sucked Logan clean. I whimpered around his cock as Thale stroked me. He took no prisoners, his clever fingers on my clit driving me insane as he sped up. Fucking me harder. Faster.

I let go of Logan's cock, the broad head smearing slickness over my cheek as I leaned against his hip, panting.

Then Thale slapped my clit and I screamed, coming harder than I'd ever come in my life and hearing him roar behind me as he, too, came.

I didn't even think or worry about his knot. If it happened, it happened. I could take it. I knew I could.

I wasn't an omega.

But for them I wanted to be.

LOGAN

I was up before the other two and cooking breakfast by the time they woke, which made me smile.

"I thought soldiers were always up with the sunrise?" I asked, putting plates piled with pancakes and fruit in front of both of them.

Penny shoved at her hair, all ruffled from sleep and having mine and Thale's hands in it last night. The memory of holding her hair, just long enough to grip, as she lazily rode me to completion sent a shiver all the way through me. She squinted at the light while Thale looked more like a sleepy bear, his dark hair standing up in all directions.

I slid mugs of coffee in front of them, hiding my smile as they practically came back to life in front of my eyes.

"We're only up if we have to be," she grouched. "First rule of soldiering. Sleep when you can."

"Amen to that."

Thale lifted his mug to clink it against hers in a sleepy toast. I tried not to feel jealous about their shared past. It was something they had together that I hadn't experienced. It was

hard not to feel a little left out when this thing we had was so new.

Shoving the thoughts away, I leaned back against the counter, my own coffee in hand as the pair of them applied themselves to the pancakes. Luckily I was used to alpha appetites and the sheer amount of food they could put away.

“These are really good.” Penny looked up at me. “Thank you. I didn’t realize how hungry I was.”

I smirked. “Well, you were rather busy last night.”

Thale chuckled along with me, and Penny’s cheeks flared with color.

It was such an intimate, comfortable scene, and one I’d never thought I’d be a part of. No, that was wrong. I’d sometimes thought about settling down, envisioning scenes of domestic bliss, but they had always consisted of me and my wife, never another guy as well. Certainly not an alpha like Thale. He was like... larger than life and took up more space than any living being had a right to.

Admittedly, even I was guilty of the usual male fantasy of claiming an omega—a perfectly submissive and willing woman eager to meet my every need. That fantasy had disappeared like smoke as though it had never been as soon as I’d met Penny.

Now all I wanted was a beautiful bossy little alpha with a surprisingly soft center. One who liked my hand around her throat as I powered into her...

“Right,” I said, draining my coffee and taking off the apron I wore. I only had my boxers on beneath, my male ego massaged by the appreciative little glint in Penny’s eyes as she tracked my movements.

“I need to hit the shower and then get to work.” I’d need to stop by my own place and change my suit. I couldn’t turn up back at work in what I’d worn last night.

Penny hopped off her stool, still tracking me like a raptor. “I’ll come with you. I need someone to wash my back anyway.”

A cell rang and we both turned to see Thale glaring at his phone like it was the source of every shitty thing that had ever happened to him. He looked like he planned on murdering someone. “You two go ahead. I need to deal with this.”

“Everything okay?” Penny paused and was about to turn back, but something about Thale’s hard expression had me reaching out to snag her arm and pull her along with me.

“Give him a moment, love. Might be work or something.”

“I work with him. Remember?” she hissed but let me pull her from the room.

“Yeah...” Shit, I’d forgotten that for a moment. “Well, maybe it’s his family or something. You never know. Maybe big, mean, Thale Barnes is secretly a mommy’s boy.”

“No, no... he can’t be. Do you think he is?” She giggled, letting me herd her into the bathroom. “No... he can’t be. He’s too tough for that.”

I stopped us right in front of the shower stall, leaning around her to snap on the water.

“I dunno. The bigger they are, the harder they fall,” I murmured against her lips as the water heated up behind her.

I’d had her less than three hours ago, but my cock was trying to punch holes through my underwear. I was rock solid and aching for her touch again.

With a growl, I crushed her mouth beneath mine, ruthless and demanding. I'd spent all night working out what she liked. How she liked to be kissed, touched... fucked.

And it turned out our little alpha had a hell of a submissive streak.

I put all of that knowledge into play now, stripping off her sleep set with quick, ruthless movements. She clung to me, her soft moans making me harder than a rock. Within seconds we were both naked, and I walked her backward into the shower stall.

The warm water hit us, and I turned, making sure to take the brunt of the water over my back and shoulders so it didn't spray in her face. As much as I wanted to fuck her, possess her, own her... I also wanted, *needed*, to protect her. That need settled itself into my very bones. Nothing would ever happen to her while I drew breath.

It took less than a second to pin her up against the tiled wall of the small enclosure, the steam building up around us. Wrapping my hand around her throat, I thumbed her chin up.

"You're mine, Penny," I vowed. They weren't the words in my heart, not yet. I didn't want her to freak out and run. "You'll always be mine."

Her eyes were wide and dark as hell. The sight hit me on a visceral level, my cock throbbing against her toned stomach.

"This isn't going to be slow and gentle," I warned her in a rough voice. It couldn't be. I needed her too much for softness.

"Fuck me, Logan," she whispered, her hand sliding down the front of my body to wrap around my cock. "Take me. I'm yours."

The growl burst from my throat as I lifted her. Wrapping her legs around my waist and pressing her back against the tiled wall, I dipped my knees and fit myself against her.

She was hot and wet already, and we both groaned as I shoved inside her in one hard thrust. Balls deep, my cock throbbed in her hot, tight depths.

“*Fuck!*” she hissed, her head back against the tiles, exposing the delicate length of her throat to me.

I groaned as I took the offering, leaning down and biting the side of her neck. She gasped and clenched around me, making my eyes cross and my thrusts speed up.

I ached to be able to bite her, but I was just a beta. I didn’t have the equipment to bite her as an alpha would. We would never be a true pack that way... the only way for that to happen was if she somehow became an omega overnight and bonded us all with her bite.

Shoving the thought away, I concentrated on fucking her against the tiles. We moved together, instinct and deep, dark need driving us. Her nails scored my back, dragging a gasp from my lips as I drove into her harder and faster. Each time I filled her balls deep, I rolled my hips and ground against her. I trapped her clit between us as I did my best to make her scream in pleasure.

“Oh god, Logan. I’m gonna—”

Her words cut off and her beautiful face filled with ecstasy as her climax hit. I growled, wanting to watch her, wanting to savor the moment, but she clenched down around me. The grip of her body was so tight, I could barely move. But wild horses wouldn’t have stopped the momentum of my hips, fire racing down my spine to circle my balls.

I groaned my pleasure as I thrust one last time, my face buried against the side of her neck as I came in long, hot, juddering waves. I emptied every ounce of my passion for her, my balls emptying as I filled her again with rope after rope of my hot, thick seed.

She whimpered against me, her arms around my neck and my shoulders as my climax sparked another for her. I closed my eyes as we rode out our pleasure together. I never wanted to move. I wanted this perfect moment to last.

Forever.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THALE

I scowled at the name on my phone screen.

WTB.

It stood for Warren Travis Barrington. My brother. And someone I definitely did not want to talk to, especially not after last night. Way to go ruining this morning.

The cell continued to ring and I sighed, thumbing it on. Warren was just like my mother. Relentless. If I didn't pick up the phone, he would just keep calling.

"Hello, Warren."

"Thale." Warren's bark didn't surprise me. He treated everyone, including his family, like they were soldiers under his command. "What's this I hear that you're not going to the Harlow-Jennings wedding?"

"You've been speaking to Mom."

That got my back up instantly but not as much as his next words.

"Of course. You are a Barrington, so attendance is mandatory. Mother has arranged for your date. A lovely girl,

Father is—”

“She’s done *what?*” My voice was low and dangerous as my hand tightened around my coffee mug.

“Arranged for your date. You need to bond, and the Elliotts are an exemplary family.”

I closed my eyes and deliberately relaxed my hand on my mug before I shattered it. Anger surged, filling my veins as my fangs threatened to drop.

“Then she can just un-arrange it. As I told Mother, I am working this weekend.”

I didn’t tell him that I could arrange my own date. I knew Warren of old. When we were teens, he’d always tried to steal any girl I was interested in. Blond-haired and blue-eyed, his smile was enough to charm the birds out of the trees and panties off any high-society girl panting around a Barrington.

Trouble was, he was all smile and no substance. He used girls up like they were disposable napkins, tossing them aside when he’d gotten what he wanted. Not one of them got the ring on her finger or the bite on her throat she wanted.

I didn’t think he would turn Penny’s head. She’d probably tell him to fuck off, and when he wouldn’t, she’d make him. But this thing we had was too new. I didn’t want Warren anywhere near it, fucking it up.

“Yes. The ASC.” Warren snorted. “Take the weekend off. Make sure you’re there.”

Then he put the phone down on me.

“Asshole,” I grunted. That was it. He was getting ignored from now on.

Sliding off my stool, I grabbed the breakfast pans and began the washing up. I had plenty more to think about than my asshole of a brother. Like last night and the best sex I'd ever had.



I had the biggest, cockiest grin on my face when we walked into the briefing room at ASC headquarters, feeling on top of the fucking world even though I'd had less than a couple of hours sleep and a call from my wanker of a brother.

I snuck glances at the reason for my good mood across the table, unable to help myself. Penny was beautiful, utterly beautiful. Her alpha physiology had cleared up most of her injuries from yesterday, but even so, she did look a bit tired this morning.

A lot of that was to do with the fact Logan and I had only let her sleep a couple of hours before we had to get up. We'd been gentle, aware of her injuries as we spent all night fucking.

That first time had opened the floodgates. She'd been as insatiable as us, perhaps even more so, and I was pleasantly exhausted this morning. Not that that would stop me if she gave me *that* look again. I'd be up and raring to go in a damn heartbeat.

I hadn't even minded Logan there with us. In fact, in an odd way, I couldn't imagine him not being there. He wasn't the third I'd have chosen for our little pack, but he fit. With Penny. With me. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't going to fuck

the guy, but I didn't mind being naked with him in close quarters when it came to satisfying our girl.

His proposal last night had come out of the blue and I was still mulling that over, waiting for him to broach it with Penny. I'd marry her in a heartbeat—I knew that—but did I want to tie myself into a pack legally?

I let the thought slide, wondering if he'd mentioned it to her this morning. They'd showered together, and I knew they'd fucked again in there, but I didn't mind. I worked with her, and Logan had to wait at least eight hours to see her again, so it had only seemed fair.

Killian arrived and dropped into the seat next to me. He leaned over to murmur, “You lucky fucker. Look after her, okay? Women like that are hard as fuck to find.”

I breathed a sigh of relief, glad he hadn't taken Penny's rejection badly. ASC was full of dangerous alphas. Most I would be wary of taking on, but Killian was on the “fuck no, not a chance” list. Of all the alphas I worked with, he was the one who truly scared me. Probably all of us. Whatever Dante and Mason had done to tame him had only just gotten him under control, and we all knew it.

But then he scrubbed at the stubble on his chin, running tattooed fingers over the big scar on his throat. “If you hurt her, I'll make sure they find your body in seventeen different zip codes. And you'll be alive for at least ten of them. Understand?”

Shit.

Scratch the tamed part.

I leaned in, keeping my voice just between the two of us, like he had.

“I’d rather tear my own heart out than hurt her. Nothing you could ever do to me would be worse than losing her.”

He grunted, nodding at me, something like approval washing through his eyes. I got the feeling I’d passed some kind of test.

The door opened and Dante walked in. The co-owner and founder of ASC, he was a powerhouse of an alpha and a man I had immense respect for. He was also one of our best tactical minds, so if he was here in this meeting, things had gone severely sideways.

He nodded to Penny as he took his position at the head of the table. “Thank you, Penny, for joining us. I hope you’re beginning to feel better now?”

She nodded. “A little sore, boss, but I’ll live, thanks.”

“Good to hear.”

Dante didn’t sit. Instead, he put his files down on the table in front of us and leaned forward, steepled hands on the table top.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I don’t need to tell you that this contract just went to shit and no mistake.”

I shot him a look. “More to shit than a raged-out alpha getting on site and nearly killing one of our operatives?”

Dante nodded, his expression grim. The bottom dropped out of my stomach. Whatever he was about to say, I knew I wasn’t going to like it.

“We had an info blackout on you and Penny while she got treatment.”

I nodded. That told me the ASC had registered my relationship with Penny. It was standard procedure to take

alphas whose partners or pairs were injured or worse out of the field.

“Okay, so what happened?”

Dante stood up, his arms crossed over his chest. “The raged alpha was a distraction. While you were busy dealing with him, the two omegas on site were taken.”

“*What!*” I bellowed, on my feet in a heartbeat. “No, that’s not possible—”

I turned to look at Killian. “How is that possible? We had two teams on site. Ours and Serena Lawrence’s. No one should have been able to get to them.”

Killian shook his head, and I knew what he was going to say before he said it. “I was with you at the hospital. The kidnappers managed to take out the Lawrence’s team and grab both her and Stone.”

“*Fuck!*”

“Fuck indeed,” Dante growled. “Since we’ve lost a primary, this now becomes top priority.”

I sat back in my chair, closing my eyes as I rubbed the bridge of my nose. Fucking *hell*, I knew Marshall was a waste of fucking space. I should have expected him to fuck up a simple protection detail.

Then guilt hit me broadside. Danny had been taken. I was supposed to protect the guy, yet as soon as there had been danger to Penny, I’d left him in the dust. I hadn’t spared him so much as a thought until right now. *Shit.*

“Wait.”

I opened my eyes to look over at Zeke, sitting on the other side of the table next to Penny.

“If there were two omegas, why did the alpha lock on to Penny?”

Only because I was looking at her at that precise moment did I see the panic flare in Penny’s eyes. Just as soon as I’d seen it, her expression blanked. It was fast, just the blink of an eye and slick as fuck. Practiced. But I knew I’d seen it. She was hiding something—something she didn’t want anyone to know. Something that had caused her to panic and shutter up.

“Maybe because I was trying to tickle his heart through his ribcage with my claws,” she drawled in a bored tone. “Figure that would get pretty much anyone’s attention. Even a maxed-out alpha.”

“That would do it,” Dante rumbled, bringing the meeting back to order. “Moving on. Thanks to one of our sources, we think these kidnappings are being organized by a member of one of the high-society families, using their money and connections to evade detection.”

My ears pricked up. That couldn’t be possible, surely? Yeah, high-society families were wealthy, self-absorbed and narcissistic as fuck, but to run something like this? That was something else entirely.

“Is this from a credible source?” I asked, sitting up and my focus absolute.

Dante nodded. “Unfortunately so. We had a tip-off from a source embedded in the Jennings country estate. A young girl matching the description of a missing omega was spotted there. But by the time the authorities could organize an operation, she was gone.”

I sighed. “Because raid operations like that require a warrant from a judge... who would happen to be *from* a high-

society family. And they're all in bed with one another. In some cases, literally."

Dante nodded. "You got it. Every step we take, they already know about it through legal channels. It makes tracking these fuckers down nigh on impossible. The best lead we have is that they're going to use an upcoming wedding as cover to move an omega to a new location. So, we're going to put a team in undercover as staff to try and rescue the omega and gather more intel on their operation."

He looked over at Killian.

"I'm afraid you'll have to sit this one out until you can get camouflage makeup for..." He motioned to his neck area. "You're way too identifiable with that."

"It won't work," I said suddenly, breaking into the conversation. All eyes turned toward me.

"Why is that?" Dante asked.

"I mean, it's a good plan and everything, but high-society families are paranoid as fuck."

I sat back, every eye in the room on me.

"All their staff are vetted and re-vetted. If you're talking about the Harlow-Jennings wedding, they'll only use staff that have a proven record of employment for at least six months. Especially as Jenna Harlow is an emerging omega. They won't risk anything."

Zeke grunted. "And what the fuck do you know about high-society families?"

"A damned sight more than you do," I snarled back, locking gazes with Dante. "I can get a team into the wedding."

"Yeah, right," Zeke snorted until Penny glared at him.

He shut up fast. I didn't blame him. I wouldn't want Penny glaring at me like that either. I might have seen a softer side of her last night, but the memories of many bruises from her during sparring sessions still lingered. She might be small, but she packed a hell of a punch.

Dante's expression sharpened with interest. "And how do you plan to do that?"

"I have an invitation."

Silence filled the room.

Then Zeke laughed. "How the hell has *Thale Barnes* gotten an invitation to the wedding of the year?"

I snorted. "Because before presentation, I wasn't Thale Barnes, I was Thale *Barrington* and if I hadn't come to my senses when I did and joined the army, *I'd* have been the poor fucker marrying Jenna Harlow."



The meeting broke up in short order, everyone given orders for the upcoming weekend. Along with my team as wedding guests, which comprised of me, Penny, Zeke and Logan, other teams would be undercover in whatever way we could get them there.

"Just understand, I am *not* kissing Zeke," Penny grumbled. "I don't care how realistic you want our cover to be."

"It's okay, love," I chuckled, wrapping an arm around her and pressing a gentle kiss to her temple. I didn't know how she felt about PDAs at work but she didn't push me away. "If we need it for our cover, I'll kiss the ugly fucker."

She smiled up at me as Zeke made gagging sounds behind us.

“Like I’d want to kiss you, Barnes. Or Barrington... Should we call you Barry now?”

I gave him a one-fingered salute behind Penny’s back and then spotted Dante gathering up his folders. The guy was an absolute unit and deadly in combat, yet he navigated boardrooms and financial meetings with an ease that astounded.

“You go on ahead, love,” I murmured to Penny. “I’ll catch up with you.”

She nodded, ushering Zeke out the door ahead of her as I cleared my throat to get Dante’s attention.

“Boss, you got a minute?”

He looked up, spearing me with a look, and then nodded. “Of course. Want to shut the door?”

“Yeah, thanks.” I moved to close the door.

“So, what’s up, Thale?” he asked, perching on the edge of the boardroom table and looking at me in expectation.

For a moment I just stood there, a frown on my face as I tried to put my thoughts in order.

“This is going to sound a little odd. But how did you know Mason was your pair?”

His eyebrow winged up on one side. “Errr, I guess we always just knew. From the moment of presentation.”

Shit. Yeah, I hadn’t considered that angle. They were brothers so it would always have just been there.

“Why?” he asked. “Do you think you’ve found your pair?”

“Yeah, maybe?” I rubbed at the back of my neck, not liking this unsure feeling. Or the fact I couldn’t explain how I was feeling or how to phrase my question.

“Okay... so you’re paired with Mason. How does that work with Neve?” I finally settled on.

Surprise washed over his features and I quickly added. “I’m sorry, I know it’s a rude question. It’s just that... Penny and I are in a triad and I’m not... the other guy.”

“Ahh...” Finally understanding washed over Dante’s hard features. “You think you might be a pair with the other guy?”

“Yes! Exactly!” I exclaimed. “There’s nothing physical between us, but I’m a lot more comfortable being naked around him than I expected. Even... I like him around, but that doesn’t make sense since I’ve not known him that long.”

“And then there’s the fact you tried to punch his lights out at Bane’s wedding?”

I groaned. “You know—”

He chuckled. “Yes, I know it’s Logan Shaw. Mason and I were taking bets on how long it was before Penny got the two of you into bed. And whether you’d kill each other before you got there. Or *when* you got there.”

I thumped down into a chair and ran my hand through my hair.

“It doesn’t make sense. He’s not even an alpha. How can he be my pair?”

Dante folded his arms.

“There’s a lot we don’t understand about the dynamics, but from what I’ve seen, Logan Shaw is an alpha in all but name. And if you both have a link with Penny... yeah, I can see a

pair bond forming. Whether the potential was always there or whether it formed because you both have a connection with Penny..." He shrugged. "That's something you'd need someone with far more understanding of the interactions between the dynamics to answer I'm afraid."

I nodded. It all made sense. "I didn't know if there was like, one resounding moment when you recognized your pair or something."

Dante shook his head. "It was always there for Mason and me, even before presentation. But that could be our blood link. Others I've spoken to... some say they knew as soon as they met their pair, and others it took longer for them to recognize it."

"Okay, that makes sense."

It certainly hadn't been immediate for Logan and me. In fact, the only immediate feeling I'd had about the guy was the need to punch his lights out.

No... that was wrong. When I'd first met him, fleetingly during the Jaeg mission, I hadn't had any feelings one way or the other for him. I'd only wanted to punch him when I thought he'd stolen Penny from me.

"Does he feel the same?"

I shook my head. "I don't know, it's not something we've discussed. Let's just say, talking hasn't been high on the agenda so far."

Dante smirked. "I guess not. The first days and weeks of a new relationship are always heady, especially for alphas. That's something I think the other dynamics miss about us. We feel everything more intensely. You might want to have that conversation with him, though? See how he feels about it all."

Remember, he's in a relationship with not one, but *two* alphas. His head has to be whirling."

I stilled, considering that. I hadn't even thought of things from his point of view.

"Is he really in a relationship with me, though, like really?" I asked, even though I knew that society would consider us a triad. "We're both there because of Penny."

"A relationship doesn't have to be either sexual or romantic," Dante reminded me. "Mason and I are blood. Our relationship is a sibling one, yet we both love the same woman. Some triads have all partners in love with each other, and some just love each other like family. There are no rules, Thale. You make of it what you want. Shit." He smiled. "I never thought I'd be here, giving out relationship advice."

"Agony Aunt Dante," I threw back with a grin. "Seriously, you're good at this. You should consider a career change."

His arched eyebrow warned me I was treading on thin ice.

"*Annnnnnd* on that note," I said, levering myself to my feet. "I'm outta here. Thanks for the chat, boss. It really helped."

"Anytime," he nodded, following me out of the door. "Now go check on Penny and make sure she doesn't overdo it on her first day back at work."

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PENNY

The last few days had been a whirlwind of activity as the ASC mobilized for one of our biggest operations yet. Even so, I didn't feel ready as the four of us headed up the long driveway through the Jennings family estate in Thale's big truck.

"Fuck's sake," Zeke grumbled from the back seat. "How much grass does one house need? You could graze cows or something on this lot."

I held back my chuckle. I'd thought just the same thing about the vast expanse of green lawn we'd been treated to the moment we turned through the ornate gates. It was perfectly landscaped and mowed so precisely I wouldn't have been surprised to see a gardener out there on his hands and knees with a ruler and a pair of scissors making sure each blade of grass was just the right height.

"Unlikely," Thale said, his voice unreadable. "The Jennings have several farms. It just wouldn't do to allow their cattle to graze on a Tsuyoshi-styled garden like this."

“Tsuyoshi-styled garden?” Zeke spluttered. “What the fuck is that when it’s at home?”

“Tsuyoshi is a famous landscaper and architect,” Thale replied as we turned into a tree-lined avenue. “He has a long waiting list to work on gardens. The Jennings are *very* proud of theirs. It’s considered to be one of his finest works.”

There was silence from the back. I half turned to meet Logan’s eyes, sitting in the back seat opposite Zeke. He smiled, obviously amused by the alpha’s bemusement. I drank in the sight of him.

We hadn’t seen too much of each other over the last two days with mission planning, so I was pleased that Thale had put his foot down about Logan being part of his invite to the wedding. He’d told Dante that we were a pack and Logan’s presence was nonnegotiable.

And Logan looked amazing, wearing one of his normal suits, but with his hair ruffled rakishly. Come to think of it, I’d rarely seen him out of a suit. Well... I *had* seen him naked, so that counted as out of a suit. But clothing-wise, I’d only seen him in a suit, or, once, in combat gear. Since we’d been in the middle of a mission, though, and I’d just shot Thale, I hadn’t really paid attention to his attire.

“So we have to wear penguin suits to this thing?” Zeke was back to complaining, a mulish look on his face when I cast a look over my shoulder.

“Indeed,” Logan answered before Thale could, picking up seamlessly before the big alpha could stop the car and throw Zeke out. Or stuff him in the trunk or something. “Well, morning dress to be precise. It’s traditional for a high-society function like this.”

“Morning dress? So not a penguin suit?”

“No, we’re not wearing tailcoats.”

I caught a hint of Thale rolling his eyes and smiled. Zeke was so out of his depth it was cute, even though I suspected the rough-about-the-edges alpha was playing up his ignorance to irritate the other men. Why, I had no idea. It was the sort of alpha pissing contest shit that I normally stayed the hell away from.

I studied Thale out of the corner of my eye. I was still trying to come to terms with the fact that he was a *Barrington*. The Barrington name was famous, from way back when. There had even been a Barrington president. Admittedly, that was a couple of hundred years ago, just after WWII but still. The name was well-known and the family was fabulously wealthy. Even more so than the Jennings, whose country manor house now appeared in front of us.

“Fuck me,” Zeke breathed. “How many rooms does this place have? I wouldn’t like their heating bill.”

I had to agree with him. If the gardens hadn’t been intimidating, the main house certainly was. A display of sheer wealth, it looked like some kind of old country palace. The large main building was four... no *five* floors high, built in some kind of warm cream stone.

I could see at least two wings and little towers complete with turrets. Ivy grew photogenically up the walls, framing the front doorway, which had its own roof and a set of wide, sweeping steps leading down to the courtyard in front.

It was... yeah. I exchanged a somewhat panicked look with Logan in the back seat. If this was the world Thale came from, what the fuck was he doing with a rough and ready, ex-

soldier like me? I hadn't been a lady before joining the army, and I sure as fuck wasn't one now.

Before I could fling the door open to escape, we pulled up in front of the house. Staff were already everywhere, some acting as valet parking while others collected luggage from the back of expensive cars and limos.

"Game faces on," Thale warned as liveried staff converged on the truck. The doors were opened for us, our luggage removed, and the truck whisked away as we were ushered up the steps toward the front doors.

Zeke looped his arm around my waist, grinning down at me as my steps faltered a little. I wasn't used to being close to people at the best of times, and the fact it wasn't either Thale or Logan touching me made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

"Don't gut me," he murmured, leaning in to drop a kiss on the top of my expensively curled and styled hair. "We gotta sell this. Remember?"

I grumbled but nodded slightly. If this was going to work, everyone here had to believe we were a pack. That way no one would question much to see Logan and Zeke wandering around. Thale's presence here was assured, given who he was, but the rest of us needed to telegraph who we were and why we were here.

The plan was for us to make a show of being a pack and then for me to stick to Thale like glue while the other two split off and checked for any clues we could use. Even though Logan wasn't part of the ASC, he'd offered to help as soon as we'd explained the situation.

“So we have a little while before the ceremony,” Thale said in an undertone as we were led through the entrance hall. And it was an entrance *hall*. The walls and columns were pale marble, smooth and unblemished. Works of art hung on the walls, and even my untrained eye knew each was priceless. The Jennings were not the type to have anything but the best hanging on their walls.

No... it was more than that. They were the type of people for whom mastery didn't matter; only the perceived value and status owning them conveyed. It could have been a banana duct-taped to a wall for all they cared as long as they could boast that it was the latest Denham or Norman Eland.

“You have been assigned the blue suite, Mr. Barrington,” the butler said as we were led up a statement staircase and along more corridors than a hotel. I seriously hoped they weren't going to expect me to find my own way out of this place. They'd find me still wandering around in a hundred years or something.

“Thank you.”

Thale's manner had changed along with the smart suit he wore. I was so used to seeing him in combat or casual clothing that the sharp back suit with black-on-black shirt and tie had totally taken me back a step. It wasn't quite what he'd worn for the undercover op where he'd posed as Russian mobster Mikhail Goranovich, but it was close enough to send heat simmering through my veins.

But it was more than that. His bearing and manner had changed as well. Now, power clung to him like a second skin, and I had no problem seeing him not as rough-and-ready Thale Barnes, ASC operative, but the honorable Mr. Thale Eugene Barrington, high-society bachelor.

Only—I snuck a glance sideways at him as we stopped in front of a set of double doors—he wasn't a bachelor anymore. He was off the market now.

He was *mine*.

“The blue suite,” the butler announced as the doors were opened by two more members of staff. I bit back my gasp at the sheer opulence of the rooms beyond.

Decorated in a delicate pale blue, the doors opened onto a sitting room with large windows that looked out onto the landscaped gardens. Heavy drapes were swept elegantly to the side, matching the upholstery that had to be antique couches in the middle of the room. Three doorways led off the room, and I could see bedrooms through at least two of them. The final one must be the bathroom.

“Our apologies, Mr. Barrington, but Jennings Hall is a historic building. There are no en suites in this section of the house.”

Thale smiled. “It’s perfectly fine. Thank you...”

“Swanson, sir.”

“Thank you, Swanson. This is most agreeable.”

I hid my smirk at Thale’s more cultured accent and manner. He’d been hiding his light under a bushel for sure. Swanson quickly organized the minions with him carrying our belongings and had them arranged in the rooms before the staff left quietly and efficiently.

“Right,” I turned as soon as the doors were closed. “You lot can get dressed in that room, and I’ll take the main one. I’ll see you down there.”



I chased them out of the main bedroom to start getting ready. The staff had already laid out my belongings, but I noticed a dress box I hadn't seen before. A frown creasing my brow, I turned it toward me. It had the name of a very expensive designer on the front, certainly not one I could afford to shop at.

Had the staff put this in the wrong room? I was about to call them back to rectify the mistake when I spotted the small envelope tucked into the pocket at the side. I recognized Thale's scrawl immediately. I'd seen it on enough reports.

I saw this and thought of you. There's an extra box inside, don't miss it. Tx

I opened the box and caught my breath.

Inside was the most gorgeous midnight blue gown, made from silk that shimmered. The gown rustled as I took it out of the box almost reverently. This couldn't be for me, surely?

My breath caught as it unfurled in front of me. The dress was the perfect shade to make the most of my coloring, and the style would make me look like I had curves, where normally I hid them in unflattering clothes.

It was a princess gown, the kind I'd always dreamed about, and suddenly I felt like that little girl who still believed in fairytales. The little girl I had been back when I still believed the fiction that omegas were rare and prized princesses waiting for their alpha princes to come along and save them from their life of drudgery. Not the reality where they were a commodity to be allocated at the whim of the council or bought and sold on the black market. Hell, they were even *making* new omegas

with adapted versions of *Representine*, like the nightmare Neve had almost lived through.

I shook the thoughts away, happily plunging back into the fantasy. If Thale or Logan had been the prince in the fairytale, maybe I wouldn't have rejected the idea of being an omega so soundly.

In my amazement and reverence over the gown, I'd forgotten that Thale's note had mentioned another box. It clunked against the side of the dress box as I moved the dress reminded me.

Putting the dress down carefully on the bed, I looked inside the box again. A smaller box was in there in a velvet slip. I frowned as I reached in for it.

It was a jewelry box. My eyes widened as I slid it free from the protective bag. It was old and battered but had obviously been expensive when it had been made. I opened it carefully and gasped, almost dropping it.

It was a set. Inside was the most gorgeous diamond and light blue sapphire choker, with matching earrings and a bracelet. I couldn't breathe, reaching out a gentle fingertip to touch the sapphire like a teardrop at the bottom of the choker.

"No way," I breathed. This was... old, and beautiful and exactly what I'd have chosen for myself if money was no object.

Another little card was tucked in the top of the box, covering the name of the maker. My eyes widened. Kier-Alma was *the* classic name in omega jewelry for the last century. This should be in a museum, not in my dress box.

Thale's note was scrawled in the same distinctive hand. I now realized it had been formed writing with a fountain pen,

not a ballpoint like the rest of us.

*These were my grandmother's. She would have loved you.
Please wear them tonight. T x*

Tears filled my eyes at the thoughtful gift of the dress and that he'd lent me something of his grandmother's. It wasn't that it was valuable, a Kier-Alma set for heaven's sake, but more that it was something prized to him. This set must have been left to him by his grandmother, the only member of his family I'd ever heard him talk about, and he'd let me borrow them for tonight.

The choice of the two things told me something else. He *saw* me for who I truly was. Saw the woman inside I tried to hide, the one who wanted the fairytale and all the pretty things, even though life and experience, our society, told me I shouldn't. I didn't *need* pretty things. I had everything I needed. Practical, utilitarian things were the only things I allowed myself. They were like my armor, building the hard-edged look that screamed "alpha" so no one could mistake what I was.

So no one would look at me and realize the truth.

Omega.

It didn't take me long to get ready. I'd had my hair done at a salon around the corner from the ASC building this morning, letting them ooh and ahh over styling my hair into something suitable for a wedding. It was a more dramatic version of the style I'd had for Willow and Bane's wedding, my hair in retro curls up and away from my face, tiny jewels woven through them. My makeup was the one thing I could do myself, a heavy smokey eye and pale lipstick that made my lips look fuller than they were.

By the time I stepped from the room, I felt like a million dollars, a feeling helped by the whispers from a gaggle of younger women who left one of the rooms a little further down the hall.

“That’s her. That’s the alpha with Thale Barrington.”

“He’s soooo sexy.”

“She’s scary—beautiful but scary.”

“Have you seen the rest of her pack? They’re all drop-dead gorgeous.”

I kept my smile to myself as I swept down the corridor, my skirts rustling around my legs. The dress fit me like a glove with a clever adaption to the skirt that meant the split could go from demure, just above the knee, to thigh high. A feature I fully intended to take advantage of later.

Reaching the top of the staircase, I looked down to find my men and Zeke waiting for me at the bottom. Zeke’s stunned expression became movement as he elbowed Thale, who turned at the same time as Logan.

I sucked in a hard breath at the sudden, feral looks on their faces as they saw me. Logan even took a step forward, like he was about to bound up the steps to come and claim me. Thale’s hand on his arm stopped him, and for a moment I thought that was it. They would come to blows right there on the stairs. But then Logan stepped back next to Thale, and they both watched me with the intensity of predators as I walked down toward them. I knew if we didn’t have a mission, we wouldn’t be attending the wedding. One of them would already have thrown me across a broad shoulder and we’d be making the most of the huge bed in the sumptuous guest room.

With all this in mind, I practically floated down the stairs toward them. Perhaps this thing between us all really could work...

As I stepped off the bottom step, Zeke shouldered his way past the other two to wrap me up in his arms. I tilted my face up just in time to stop him planting a noisy and showy kiss in my hair, potentially ruining the style, and managed to make it look like a tender temple kiss instead.

“You look beautiful, my love,” he murmured loudly enough for the giggly women from the corridor to hear him as they passed us. I glared at them all as they eyed up my men, warning them *I* was the alpha here and they didn’t stand a chance of poaching any of them. Not that I needed to, Thale and Logan completely ignored them, their near-identical gazes locked on to me.

Zeke dropped his voice so that only I could hear. “And that should do it. I’m moving before the brothers pissed here see fit to rip my arms and legs off and beat me to death with them.”

I held in my amusement as I peeked over his shoulder. He was right, both Thale and Logan looked ready to haul him off and bury him in a shallow grave somewhere on the grounds.

Playing up our cover, I smiled at him as he moved away, stroking my hand down his arm in a lingering caress. He shot me a warning look and I winked back at him.

Despite my words earlier, I was actually glad it was Zeke and not Killian undercover with us. Despite the fact that he came from the same criminal underworld background as Killian, and he was as undoubtedly as dangerous as fuck, Zeke hadn’t offered to pack up with me. If anything, our working relationship was more like siblings needling each other than anything seriously romantic.

He didn't get a chance to reply, as Thale and Logan both shouldered him out of the way with moves that came perilously close to body slams.

“One more move like that,” Thale growled as he yanked me into his arms and buried his nose into my hair. “And I’m going to cause that guy serious harm.”

I smiled as I patted his arm, loving the feeling of his arms around my waist. “Play nice. We’re supposed to be a pack. Remember?”

Logan leaned in to kiss my temple. “Darling, you look utterly beautiful. Ready to go in?”

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THALE

I'd timed our arrival in the ceremony room to be just before the bride so we didn't have to talk to anyone or answer questions about our pack arrangements. Particularly when we had Zeke with us, and given both Logan and I wanted to rip the guy's arms off whenever he touched Penny, it would be a little difficult to pull off such a deception.

Hushed whispers and the shuffle of feet filled the room as the congregation waited for the bride. The ceremony room was the south-facing expansive ballroom at the back of the main house. The ballroom had been updated since I'd been here last. Tastefully decorated in white and gold, chairs were arranged in pews on either side of the aisle on the polished wooden floor. Displays of fresh flowers stood between the windows, the puffy white curtains doing little to stop the white light of the summer afternoon from creeping in.

I realized my mistake as soon as we stepped through the door, and all the eyes in the room swiveled toward us like they were on stalks. Instantly, their gazes focused on Penny at my side. Shit. I should have thought of that.

I mean, I didn't blame them. She was absolutely stunning. She'd have been stunning in sackcloth, but in the blue gown and with my grandmother's jewelry, she was an utter vision. I could scarcely believe my luck that this goddess at my side was actually mine.

The problem was that while I was used to the intense scrutiny of my social set, Penny was not. I was the black sheep of the Barrington family. The son who had gone into the army but, horror of horrors, had joined up to actually fight rather than collect bling and braid. I'd thought it would have caused me to drop out of notice, but instead it had just made interest in me worse. Not that I cared, but if it negatively impacted Penny, I did. I cared a *lot*.

But the expressions turned our way were not disapproving nor salacious. Instead, I heard whispers and expressions of interest. An approving rumble escaped the back of my throat as I herded her into the pew ahead of me. I didn't care that the rest of the pack was forced to trail behind me. This was my world, and I understood the rules. Protecting Penny here was *my* responsibility in the way I saw fit.

Logan didn't seem to mind, a soft chuckle of amusement rolling from his chest as he took the seat next to me.

"Are you sure you don't want to beat your chest?" he leaned in to murmur. "Maybe piss up her leg to stake your claim."

"Fuck off," I snapped back, keeping my voice low. I needn't have worried. The sound was masked by the music that swelled in the air to mark the arrival of the bride. "Like you're any better!"

"If I could bite her," he threw back, his eyes glittering, "she'd already be wearing my mark."

Logan's words whirled in the back of my mind. I didn't think he'd meant it as a jibe, but it hit home. I watched as Jenna Harlow made her way down the aisle, resplendent in her designer gown and a voluminous veil topped with the Harlow family tiara. I might've been looking at her, but I didn't really see her at all.

Logan was right. I could have bitten Penny any time since we'd become a pack and bonded us. But I hadn't.

Movement in the congregation nearer the front caught my eye. My brother, Warren, was half-turned to watch the bride walking down the aisle. He had the Elliott girl at his side, proof that my mother hadn't given up on the link with the Elliott family, regardless of which son was the sacrificial lamb. I smirked at Warren's dark look. I didn't care that I'd thrown him under the bus. Fucker deserved it and then some.

His gaze slid sideways to Penny, and my hackles went up. I didn't want him even looking at her. On operations and in combat I knew Penny could handle herself, but in a high-society ballroom against the weaponized charm my brother could bring to bear, I wasn't so sure.

I gave him a blank expression to look at, knowing that any reaction would just spur him on. Warren was the worst kind of bully, looking for a reaction from his victims.

He shot a wink at Penny. She stiffened at my side so I knew she'd seen it. He smirked and turned back around. Janie clung to his arm, smiling like the cat that got the cream. I almost felt sorry for her. Even though she was one of the worst gold diggers in our social set, even she didn't deserve the wanker that was my brother. She hadn't presented as an omega, but given her family history, the likelihood of her having alpha or omega children was high. Warren would

marry her, treat her like shit, and if he found an omega to bite, drop her like a hot cake and keep the kids.

“Friend of yours?” Penny murmured as she slid her hand onto my arm.

We sat at the instruction of the minister, and he began his speech on the sanctity of marriage and the beauty of the alpha-omega bond. I tuned it out. That used to be what I wanted until a certain fiery alpha had come into my life.

“My brother,” I replied, my voice low so only she could hear. “He’s a bastard and a half. Generally, I stay as far away from him as possible.”

“I’ve seen him before,” she whispered into my ear. “He was at the base I was assigned to a lot.”

My eyebrow winged up.

I wasn’t aware that my brother ever left his office. For anything. A top communications officer for the military, to say that he wasn’t front-line troops was an understatement. I didn’t think he’d touched a rifle since he’d finished basic training. So for him to have been on an active base like Penny’s...

After the vows were over, the groom kissed his new wife. The guests rose to their feet, clapping politely as the bride and groom walked back down the aisle together. The bridal party followed in a flurry of color before the guests moved to follow them as they led the way out to the marquees in the garden where the reception was to take place.

I ignored my brother’s look as he passed us but didn’t miss my mother’s disapproving look as she saw Penny. Of course, she hadn’t expected me to bring an alpha to the ceremony. Though I had a feeling that even if I had brought an omega,

the disapproval wouldn't have been any less because it would have been an omega that she hadn't picked.

I suppressed a sigh as we followed the crowd out into the gardens. The guests split off into groups as the happy couple posed for the photographer. Penny and I wandered to a high table, closely followed by Logan and Zeke.

"Well, this is... interesting," Zeke said, lifting a glass of champagne he'd snagged from a passing server to his lips. "I've never felt so much like a goldfish in all my life."

I snorted, handing Penny a glass of champagne. "Welcome to high society. Where the gossip is rife and if you turn your back, it'll end up filled with knives."

Logan raised an eyebrow as he sipped his champagne. "I don't doubt it. So where do we start?"

"You two split up and look like you're going to circulate. Then poke around. See what you can find. Penny and I will command attention here," I said, taking another sip of my champagne.

It was top quality, as I would have expected, a reminder of the life I'd left behind. I had drunk nothing so fine since a visit to my mother's last Christmas.

"Got it, boss," Zeke nodded, knocking back his champagne and sauntering off in the opposite direction to Logan.

"Now we've gotten rid of those two reprobates..." I reached over and took her glass, putting it with mine on the table. Offering my hand, I smiled. "Would you care to dance?"

"I would be delighted." She smiled, giving me an upper-class accent the very echo of the rest in the room. I grinned back. I'd known she was an excellent mimic, but that was amazing.

But we didn't make it to the floor. Instead, our path was blocked by none other than my mother.

Miriam Barrington would never be so crass as to make a scene at an event like this, but her withering stare as she looked Penny over dismissively was just as bad. Penny's hand tightened on mine as my mother drawled.

"If you'd informed me you were doing charity work, Thale, I wouldn't have had to make your excuses to Janie."

"Charity work?"

"Indeed." She sniffed delicately and looked at Penny pointedly. "Allowing the less fortunate a glimpse into the lives of her betters. What are you, my dear, a sex worker he's brought along to embarrass me?"

I gasped, hardly able to believe my ears. Then my blood boiled. "What the fuck, Mother?"

Penny was as stiff as a board by my side, her voice clipped as she replied.

"Oh, he didn't need to do that. You're perfectly capable all by yourself. Thale, I will leave you to speak to your mother. Find me when you're done."

And with that, she turned and walked away.

LOGAN

This wedding was like nothing I'd ever been to before. I meandered through the crowd, a pleasant smile on my face as I nodded at people. Mingling wasn't really my thing, but the point was to see and be seen rather than actually talk to anyone. Oh, and sample this very, *very* nice champagne they were serving.

The newlyweds were now outside in the gardens, where some guests had gathered. The sun had begun to set, casting a golden glow over everything.

I emerged from the marquee and paused by a column topped with a winged lion. My hand stayed in my pocket as I sipped from my glass and looked around, playing the part of the polite and amiable wedding guest. The gardens were beautiful. The well-trimmed grass and colorful flowers were a sight to behold but still struck me as too perfect. Too styled. Like the women here. I preferred my women real... like Penny. No, it was just Penny. She'd ruined me for all other women.

I let my gaze slide over the crowd, thinking of the ring box in my jacket pocket as I ignored the interested looks some women cast my way. I wasn't arrogant, but I was used to it. They weren't interested in *me*, just in what they thought I was.

Music played, and guests flocked to the dance floor to see the happy couple's first dance. I stayed where I was, watching the crowd. Waiting. We were here for a reason, but at the moment nothing was tingling any of my investigative senses. I knew one of these entitled, privileged assholes was trafficking omegas. No, not just omegas, but young girls who could become—not definitely were—omegas. And now, with drugs like *Representine* and its brutal street counterparts, if those poor girls weren't omegas, they soon would be. Kidnapped and shot up before being sold into a lifetime of slavery. It was sickening.

Something in the corner of my eye caught my attention—a flash of bright red and a spill of dyed-auburn hair. I turned my head, spotting the woman immediately as she headed for Thale and Penny.

She was definitely looking for attention in a full-length red dress. She cut Thale and Penny off before they could step onto the dance floor, her face set into polite lines so rigidly it was a declaration of war.

I tensed, my instincts warning me of danger. Handing off my empty glass to a circling server with a murmur of thanks, I sauntered back that way, my hackles raising the closer I got. It took everything I had not to break into a run, but that would draw attention to what I was sure was about to turn into an incident.

Although she was still smiling, Penny's face had taken on a fierce quality, her eyes turning almost golden as they narrowed. It wasn't a good sign.

Still too far away, I didn't catch what was said before Penny turned on her heel and stalked off, the epitome of style and grace. I looked past her to see if Zeke could head her off, but the ASC operative was nowhere to be seen.

I reached Thale just as the woman turned to leave. Her thin lips thinned further as her nostrils flared and her eyes narrowed. The air felt heavy, charged with the electricity of her anger.

"Not so quick, Mother," Thale snarled, a big hand on her arm to stop her.

Her eyes flickered with surprise, apprehension, and a hint of fear. She turned to glare at Thale, her voice tight and angry. "You impudent little shit. You've embarrassed me in front of all of our friends. How *dare* you touch me like that!"

Thale's grip tightened, holding her still as he said in a murderous, low tone. "I dare, and I'll dare a lot fucking more if you *ever* talk to my fiancée like that again."

She gasped like she was being murdered. “Engaged? Are you out of your mind? You cannot marry that... jumped up, gold-digging alpha!” she hissed, yanking her arm free of his grasp at the cost of some sequins from her gown. They fluttered to the grass at our feet unheeded. “I will not stand for it! I’ll see that your father dis—”

“Disinherits me,” Thale drawled, his face as dark as thunder. “Yes, I know. Spare me the speech. I don’t give a fuck about the will. It’s been nothing but a stick you’ve beaten me with since I was a child.”

“Thale, my darling,” she cried, her tone changing abruptly as she reached for him. “Don’t be a fool. You know...you know I only want what’s best for you!”

He jerked her forward so fast I barely saw it.

“Now you listen to me. You will never ever talk to Penny in that tone, or you will *never* see me again. Nor any children I might have. Do I make myself clear?”

“Thale, you can’t mean that! We’ve been b—”

“Do I make myself clear?” he asked in a very soft, dangerous tone. His eyes were cold and black, his face hard as granite.

She paled, her eyes darting to his face and away. Her hands fluttered in helplessness. “Yes, yes, of course. I...I didn’t mean to be so vicious. You know I only want what is best for you.” Her tone was whining and wheedling. “I’m sorry. I was only ___”

“Threatening to disinherit me. Yes, we’ve been over that.” He let go so abruptly that she stumbled back on her high, no doubt-designer heels.

She stepped away from him a pace, her eyes darting between his face and mine.

“Thale, my darling,” she cried suddenly, her voice breaking. “Please, listen to me. You’re in shock. You know what I’m saying is true. You must see that. She’s a gold digger, only after your money—”

“Enough,” Thale snarled, pushing so much compulsion in his voice that even I wanted to fold in on myself. He looked down at her like she was something he’d scraped off the bottom of his shoe. “You have had your say; now stay away from me and my pack. Do you understand me?”

She nodded mutely, her eyes wide under the force of his alpha compulsion.

“Go,” he ordered, his eyes narrowed.

Her body language tight, she turned on her high heels and strode haughtily away. I watched her as she disappeared into the crowd of guests, feeling a little sorry for her. Not much, but a little.

Thale turned back to me.

“I’m sorry,” he said in a tone that was anything but apologetic. “I should have warned you all, but I thought she would behave herself in public. I should have known better. My mother always wants to get her own way.”

I shrugged, offering a small smile of support. “No worries. Families. Can’t pick them. Can’t bury them in a ditch.”

Thale snorted in amusement. “Unfortunately not. I’ve considered it in the past, believe me.”

“Too much paperwork,” I told him. “And orange really isn’t your color.”

“True.”

He twisted on his heel, looking around. “Did you see which way Penny went?”

I motioned toward the house. “In my experience, women tend to withdraw to the ladies’ room to regain their composure. Perhaps she went inside?”

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PENNY

I was so angry that I literally shook, my entire body reacting like I was about to go into combat... like I'd been threatened physically.

I stalked toward the house, my fists aching as I clenched them so hard I practically heard my bones creaking. I had to get out of here before I did something I'd regret, like tearing Thale's mother's head off. That wouldn't go down well, either with the wedding party or the man who was rapidly becoming more important than life itself to me.

The ladies' room—the standard sanctuary and point of retreat for women since the things had been invented. Stepping inside the shaded cool of the main house, my heels clicked against the marble floor as I headed that way. Only for the twitter of excited voices within to pull me up sharp as I put my hand on the smooth wood of the door.

“I'm telling you, Marianne is so going to get herself bitten if she carries on that way. And Magnus will not be happy at all about it.”

“No, not after his cousin went missing. They’ve only got one omega in the family now. They’ll be holding out to see if they can snag Colonel Barrington.”

There was a high twinkle of laughter. *“Yeah, right, like Janie Elliott is going to let go of that golden goose anytime soon. Did you see the way she was all over him before the ceremony? Practically laying it out on a plate.”*

“Yeah, well, I heard she’s heartbroken over the older brother taking up with that alpha and her pack.”

Closing my eyes, I shook my head. I couldn’t do this. Not right after that run-in with Mrs. Barrington. Turning on my heel, I walked down the corridor. And it was walking, not fleeing, I told myself firmly.

I simply didn’t want to be in an overcrowded room with dozens of beta women stinking the place up with their perfume. I’d had enough of that already. The artificial ones were bad enough, but some of them were wearing pheromone-enhanced scents that made me feel nauseated.

Thankfully, the stairs weren’t far away. I resisted the urge to take them two at a time. If I hadn’t been wearing heels, I would have. As it was, I made my way up them as quickly as I could, my hand smoothing over the silken wood of the handrail. It was old and worn, and even a Denning Heights brat like me could feel the weight of history in the place. How many kids had slid down these? Kids like Thale.

All of a sudden, an image of him as a young boy filled my mind; of him standing on stairs like these, hair tousled and eyes dancing as he showed off for his parents. I could almost hear his laughter. It was such a vivid image that for a second I could almost see his face.

Then the image was gone, and I was standing at the top of the stairs. Reality intruded as I set off toward our suite. No way had that sour-faced old bitch that was his mother stood by and laughed in encouragement if Thale had done that as a child.

No one was up here since all the guests were out in the garden, but the hair on the back of my neck prickled. I stopped, looking over my shoulder and expecting to see someone behind me.

But the corridor was empty, the only living things apart from me were the flowers on the console tables. I shook my head at myself. This whole place was giving me the creeps. I could have sworn for a moment that I'd been followed. Which was ridiculous...

My heels were soundless on the plush carpet as I reached the door to our suite and pushed it open. Again the sense of being watched struck me and I turned suddenly.

Still nothing.

"Seeing things, Penny," I chuckled to myself and closed the door behind me. I'd hang out here for five minutes to calm down, check my makeup, and then, armor firmly in place, head back down to the reception. I wouldn't give Mrs. Barrington the satisfaction of chasing me off.

A sex worker, indeed. I couldn't believe the cheek of the woman. Even if I was... to say it outright to my fucking face. I'd torn into people for less. But that had been on base, or working for the ASC, not here in a world I didn't understand.

Taking a calming breath, I walked through into the main bedroom. I wouldn't stoop to her level. I would be calm and

collected and not embarrass Thale in front of the people he'd grown up with.

“Well, aren't you a pretty little thing?”

I whirled around, my heart in my throat. Sitting in the armchair placed in the room's corner was Thale's brother, Colonel Barrington, with an amused look on his face as he watched me, one eyebrow raised in expectation.

“What are you doing in here?” I demanded, my heart in my throat. Something about the way he watched me set the hackles on the back of my neck up even further.

He shrugged and stood, slowly walking toward me.

“I wanted to meet the woman who had managed to capture my brother's attention,” he said in a low voice, his eyes never leaving mine. “*Privately.*”

I took a step back, feeling very exposed.

“I don't think that's necessary,” I said, my voice hard.

He smiled.

“Oh, but it is,” he said smoothly. “Thale may not know your little secret, but *I* do.”

The blood drained from my face. He didn't know. He couldn't. There was no way he could.

I managed a laugh from somewhere.

“I don't have a clue what you're on about. You need to leave.”

He stopped mere inches away from me and ran a finger down my cheek; the touch sent a chill down my spine. My claws throbbed, ready to drop and rend his face from his skull.

“Don’t worry, Penny,” he said softly. “I intend to get to know you a little. Sample what my brother so obviously enjoys without realizing it. Tell me.” He leaned in. “Have you gone into heat for him yet?”

I stepped back and my claws dropped, ready for action. I felt my eyes turn black as I let out a low growl.

“You need to leave.” I snarled, my voice low and dangerous. “Now.”

“I don’t think so.” His expression hardened. “You might hide behind that alpha mask, but I know what you are, *omega*. Now, *present*.”

The compulsion in his voice hit me like a tidal wave, battering me and taking me under, washing away all the defenses I’d built around myself. Tears filled my eyes as my body moved of its own accord, trying to force me to kneel in front of him in submission.

My mind screamed at me to fight, to stand and fight. To make him leave me alone. Digging down to the part of myself I *knew* was pure alpha, I connected. I snarled as a surge of power coursed through me, and I pulled my fist back to punch him across the jaw. His head snapped back, the scent of blood blooming suddenly in the air as a trickle of scarlet rolled down his lip from his nose. Fury flared in his eye, and he growled, low and dangerous.

I didn’t back down, keeping my fists up and my tiny claws raised as a shield between us.

“Leave. Me. Alone.”

But he didn’t. Instead he walked around me, examining me from all angles with a smug expression on his handsome face.

I snarled at him, turning to keep him in sight. No way on earth did I want him behind me, ever.

I feinted a punch toward him, wanting nothing more than to slam my fist into his face again and spread his nose all over his face. But he was too quick for me, staying out of reach, and I couldn't stride forward because of the tight skirt of my dress.

"You are a feisty one. I like omegas like that," he said and then gave me a bone-chilling smile. "I especially like it when I can break them. Now *behave*."

The force of his compulsion hit me again. I gritted my teeth but knew I was fighting a losing battle. Slowly, my body moved against my will and I sank to my knees before him.

He laughed as I glared at him, not willing to give him the satisfaction of bowing my head to him as well. The cruel sound echoed through the room.

"That's much better," he said softly, stroking a finger down my cheek. I was locked in place, unable to move so much as a muscle, held captive by a more powerful alpha's will. His fingers brushed my hair back, and he smiled, the expression chilling the blood in my veins.

"That's better," he said, his voice gentle though anything but soothing. It was cold and calculating. "Now, why don't you let me have a taste of what you've given my brother?"

"Fuck you!" I snapped through my tears. That they streamed down my face pissed me off all the more. I didn't want to show weakness in front of this asshole, not when he held me prisoner in this way. Not when I was helpless. "You're not half the man he is!"

He laughed and lashed out, backhanding me. Pain exploded in my face as I tumbled to the floor.

“You’ll find I’m far more,” he said, his voice dripping with cruel amusement. “I’ll rip you apart with my knot. Let’s see if he wants you then, after I’ve made you my plaything. Now, present, you little omega whore.”

I snarled at him as, helpless, I shuffled to my knees and parted them, my hands in my lap. It was the traditional omega pose and one I had never used in my *life*. To be forced into it under compulsion...

The moment I tilted my head, baring my neck in submission, he snarled and lunged at me, tumbling us both to the ground. His hand was around my throat, pinning me to the floor before I had a chance to move. He tore at my clothes savagely, the sound of tearing material filling the air. Tears rolled down my cheeks. He was too big and strong, I couldn’t escape.

Desperation flooded my veins, my mind reaching in panic for a way out of this situation, a way to fight back. But he was too heavy, his massive form pinning mine with ease. I snarled, fighting back as he thrust a hard leg between mine. I tried to stop him wedging himself between my thighs.

His cruel laugh filled my ears, and he dropped all his weight on me, crushing me beneath him. I gasped, unable to get any air into my lungs as I shoved at his shoulders. He was an alpha, and a huge one, outweighing me by well over a hundred pounds.

“Don’t think I need you conscious for this, omega,” he grunted. “All I need is to ruin your tight little cunt for my brother. Then I’ll bite you and make sure he can *never* have you.”

Tears streamed down my face. How had it come to this? How could I get myself out of it? No one knew I was even up here, so no help would be coming.

The reality of my situation hit like a bullet. No one knew I was here, and he was going to rape and bite me. I would lose Logan and Thale forever because I would be bonded. To him. To an alpha I hated.

That's even if he left me alive.

The tears flowed freely now, streaming down my face as panic overwhelmed me. It would be better if he killed me. I couldn't live without my pack. Without Logan and Thale.

I... loved them.

And I'd already lost them.

My heart broke, and a whimper broke from my throat as my vision began to gray at the edges. On the very edge of consciousness, my body went lax beneath his. He thrust my legs apart with hard hands, tearing my underwear off me.

I closed my eyes, not wanting to see his face as he stole my future from me.

THALE

The ladies' room seemed like the logical place to start. Logan at my side, I hurried up the steps to the terrace of the house, each step taking us further away from the noise of the wedding reception.

It didn't take long to locate the ladies' room, and a moment later Logan and I burst through the door, startling a group of women who were standing around the vanity, checking their makeup and gossiping.

As soon as we stepped inside, the screams of surprise and shock echoed off the walls. One woman had her hand on her chest as she gasped for breath, “You shouldn’t be in here, gentlemen!”

“My apologies, ladies. Wrong room,” I apologized as I shoved Logan out of the room in front of me. One breath had been enough to tell me Penny wasn’t in there.

“She must have gone off somewhere,” Logan said, his expression tight.

“Fuck!” I looked up the corridor toward the ballroom. “Where would she go?”

I reached up and shoved a hand through my hair. I needed to find Penny. I needed to apologize and make it up to her for my mother’s awful behavior. If I’d known my mother was going to do something like that, I would have tracked her down first and told her to stay the hell away from Penny.

I closed my eyes for a second. Not in a million years had I thought my mother would do something like that. Would embarrass her in front of everyone at the wedding reception. It had been wrong. Worse than wrong, it had been unforgivable. I didn’t want Penny to think I condoned what my mother had done in any way, shape, or form.

But I saw no sign of the beautiful alpha, not even when I looked through the terrace windows to see if she’d returned to the reception by another door.

“We should split up,” Logan said, but something caught my eye and I put a hand out on his arm to stop him. He started in surprise, looking at me, but my attention was on the slender blonde standing on her own near one of the ornamental features.

I quickly scanned the crowd for the tall form of my brother. “Warren’s date is on her own.”

Ice slithered along my spine. I couldn’t see him. Where was he?

“And that’s a problem because?”

Before I’d have taken Logan’s comment to be confrontational and sarcastic, but I heard the concern there as clearly as I felt it run through my veins.

“My brother is a bully who abuses women,” I said shortly as dread spread through me like wildfire. “We need to find Penny before he does.”

“The room, come on!” he said, taking off at a run.

Logan and I raced through the corridors and pounded up the stairs, heading for the suite we’d been assigned. My sense of dread grew with each step as we hurried down the hallway, fear of what we would find quickening my pace.

We reached the top of the stairs and the sound of snarls and growls coming from further down the corridor stopped my heart right there in my chest. I wasn’t aware of moving, or the snarls that ripped from my chest as we raced for the suite.

Logan and I didn’t stop, barreling through the door together. The main sitting room was empty.

I paused, my heart pounding in my chest as I looked around, desperately searching for signs of Penny. The bedroom door was open, and I glimpsed movement inside.

I caught Logan’s eye, and together we launched ourselves across the room to the bedroom door. It slammed into the wall as I burst through it.

For a second time froze as I took in the scene in front of me, my brain struggling to take in the reality of it.

My brother had Penny pinned beneath him. She was naked, her skin marked with cuts from his claws and her clothes shredded on the floor around her. The smell of slick, an *omega's* slick, filled the air and I realized it was coming from Penny.

My world stopped spinning as that fact slammed into me. She didn't just resemble an omega.

She *was* an omega.

My omega.

Logan's snarl sounded beside me.

Our omega.

Her wide, dark eyes latched on to mine pleadingly as Warren forced her thighs apart. He tore at his fly as his mouth opened. His fangs were on full display as he prepared to bite her.

A roar of rage broke from my throat, and red mist descended over my eyes. I threw myself at him, every second feeling too slow. Too late to stop him biting her and claiming her forever. His bite was worse than the rape he had planned because it would claim her forever.

I crashed into Warren, sending us both sprawling across the floor. I grabbed at his arm, pulling him off of Penny. He snarled and snapped at me, claws raking against my skin as he tried to break free.

I looked into his black-on-black eyes, right down to his soul, and saw the desire to hurt Penny there. It was all over his

twisted features, and desperation surged through me like wildfire.

I punched him hard in the face, and his nose crunched beneath my knuckles. Yelping, he slumped to the floor, snarling and spitting. I kicked him away from Penny, sending him crashing into the wall.

“I won’t let you do this,” I hissed, adrenaline surging through me as Warren recovered himself and attacked.

Logan appeared at my side, snarling and growling as he threw himself into the fray. He grabbed Warren by the neck and yanked him around, leaving Warren’s ribs open for the tender, loving care of my fists. He snarled and threw off Logan’s hold, watching the two of us circling him.

“You can’t save her,” he spat, baring his fangs. “I *will* have her, one way or another.”

I lunged at him again, but this time Logan intercepted him. The two of them skidded across the floor in a flurry of snarls and claws. I caught my breath, sure the beta was about to meet his end, but Logan slid under Warren’s guard and lifted him, slamming him into the floor with a force that had to have cracked the floorboards beneath the plush carpet.

But Warren wasn’t down and out. Bellowing with rage, he caught Logan with an uppercut, making the big beta stagger back a few steps and crash into the vanity behind him.

Warren growled, his eyes blazing with rage as he spun around and focused on me. He advanced, claws outstretched as he pounced. I stepped back, swinging at him and catching him with my fists. This time I felt something give beneath my knuckles and he gasped, curling in to favor his injured side.

But his momentum had taken us both to the floor, and he slammed blow after blow into my head and torso.

Logan stepped in, grabbing Warren by the throat and hauling him off of me.

“You will never touch her again,” he snarled into Warren’s ear, his voice low and threatening.

My brother howled in rage, struggling against Logan’s grip, but it was no use. The beta was a powerhouse of strength, his muscled arms locked around Warren’s neck in a chokehold.

The muscles in Logan’s arms bunched, tension on his face as his grasp tightened around Warren’s neck. His eyes popped in their pockets as he looked at me wildly. I folded my arms, watching as his eyes rolled into the back of his head. He slumped but Logan didn’t let up the pressure, a snarl on his features.

Penny gasped behind me, and I whirled around, at her side in a heartbeat. She’d curled up away from where Warren had had her pinned, her wide, dark eyes haunted.

I hauled her into my arms, holding her close as tears rolled down her face and her body shuddered with her sobs.

“Shhh, love,” I murmured into her hair. “It’s okay. I’ve got you... *we’ve* got you,” I said as Logan joined us, draping his jacket over her nakedness.

Looking over my shoulder, I saw why. Zeke had arrived with an older, portly gentleman I didn’t know.

“The police commissioner,” Logan said in an undertone. “Zeke realized something was wrong and followed us with backup.”

I nodded, too busy cradling the hurt woman in my arms to care what happened to my brother now.

“They can lock him up and throw away the key for all I care,” I murmured, nodding to Zeke as he crouched beside us, his expression concerned as he looked at Penny. The alpha inside me wanted to snap and snarl at him for getting too close to my... *our* woman, but he sensibly kept his hands to himself.

“Attempted rape and a forced bite is a serious matter,” he said. “Even for an alpha. He could face the death penalty for it. *Would* if she was an omega.”

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LOGAN

“*She is* an omega,” I growled, the truth out there before I could stop it. I’d clocked her scent change at the same moment Thale had. “Shit... sorry, but he *has* to pay for this. Who knows how many other women he’s hurt? We can’t get him for them, but we can get him for this.”

Thale’s icy stare seemed to pierce my soul, and the lost look in Penny’s eyes tore my heart to shreds. In a heartbeat I realized my mistake. I was a detective, a police officer, so my first instinct would always be to bring criminals to justice. But not at the expense of someone I loved.

She’d kept her secret for so long, and it wasn’t my truth to tell. I looked at Zeke, for once speechless.

The big alpha just nodded, his expression taut. “Won’t tell a soul unless you want me to.”

I grabbed hold of Penny’s arm and squeezed her tightly before turning back to Zeke.

“Thanks,” I said, my voice tighter than I was used to.

“No worries. It’s totally up to you, Pen. Whatever you want,” he said gently, his tone full of support and understanding. I wanted to kick myself again. That was what I should have said.

She struggled to sit up in Thale’s arms, still wrapped in my jacket. He gently helped her, his eyes full of questions that I didn’t have the answers to.

“I’m sorry,” I finally said, my voice barely a whisper. “I shouldn’t have just blurted it out like that.”

I shouldn’t. She hadn’t even told us, so it was obvious she didn’t want anyone to know. Why... I had a good idea, but it broke my heart to think about. The official line was that omegas were rare and protected, but Penny and I lived in the real world—the one that contained assholes who didn’t care if they hurt people. Unfortunately, most of those assholes were alphas.

She didn’t say anything, simply looked away with a frown on her face. As I watched, she reassembled her armor and went from being the lost omega back to the strong, confident woman I knew she was. Her shoulders straightened and her chin came up, determination stark in her eyes.

“No,” she said firmly. “He can’t get away with this. If I hide what I am, he’s just attacked another alpha. He’ll get away with a reprimand, if that. Doesn’t matter that I’m female. All the law will see is aggression between alphas.”

Her voice was determined, and she looked at me with a steely gaze.

“You’re right, Logan. He attacked me. Attacked an *omega*. They’ll make an example of him, and he won’t get away with

it. I want to press charges. He needs to pay for this. For what he's done. Not just to me but to other women he's hurt."

Her lip trembled the tiniest bit, betraying the turmoil inside as she looked at Thale. "He's your brother, though. Will you... hate me for doing this?"

Thale looked at Penny and then back at me. His look was unforgiving and cold as he looked over to where his brother was being restrained. He nodded and then leaned in and pressed a soft kiss to Penny's temple.

"I love you, Pen." His voice was so soft, I could barely hear him. He took a deep breath, his rumbling growl audible through the room. "He's my brother, but he's an asshole. And I'll hate him for the rest of my life for what he tried to do to you. You're my omega, darling, and I'll always love you, no matter what."

She sighed, relief visible in her beautiful face as she nestled against him like all the strength had gone from her body.

"I love you too," she whispered, tucking her face against his neck. Then she peeked out, looking at me. "And you, Logan."

"*Annnnnnd* that is my cue to leave." Zeke pushed himself to his feet, obviously uncomfortable. Then he grinned. "Carry on with your mushy stuff. I'm gonna go arrest me a Barrington."

I didn't point out that Thale's brother had already been arrested, instead turning to Penny. "I know this... well, this isn't the best time to do this. But can I..."

I slid my hand into the pocket of my jacket and withdrew the ring box hidden there. Her eyes widened as I opened it,

revealing a beautiful diamond solitaire set in white gold. My voice shook slightly as I asked, “Penny Masterton, you are the most amazing woman I know and the only one for me. Will you marry me?”

“Us,” Thale growled, the sound soft enough to be almost a purr. “Will you marry us?”

“Yes... yes, I will.” Tears filled her eyes as I slipped the ring onto her finger. She smiled as she reached for us both, the jacket nearly slipping before we caught her between the pair of us, held tight and safe.

I closed my eyes as I buried my face in her hair. She was mine... *ours*. And I would do whatever I had to, whatever I needed to do to keep her happy and safe as long as I lived.

PENNY

By the time we’d gotten back to Thale’s that evening, I’d stopped shaking. It had been the longest of long days, what with the wedding and then everything that had occurred after.

After the attack, they had whisked us off to the Alpha Station, where Colonel Warren Barrington had been charged with attacking an omega.

Me. Charged with attacking *me*.

It was the first time I’d admitted what I was, publicly anyway. But I didn’t feel bad about it. If anything, I was relieved, even when Mason and Dante had arrived with Bane in tow. I’d thought they would treat me differently, knowing I was an omega, but they hadn’t.

I closed my eyes as I nestled on the couch between Logan and Thale. I’d been pampered and cossetted to within an inch

of my life. A hot bath with rose petals and candles. Soft nightwear while Thale brushed my hair. I hadn't stopped him. He seemed to enjoy looking after me. They both did, and after today... I finally let loose my omega side and allowed myself to enjoy being looked after. Now I was wrapped in a blanket, cuddled between the two of them as some action film played on the massive TV in Thale's lounge.

Our lounge now, I guess. Since we were going to be married, we'd either need to move in here or find a place for all three of us.

Thale reached for my hand. Sleepily, I opened my eyes as he tilted it so he could admire the rock on my finger.

"Our boy has good taste," he said, shooting a smile at Logan.

"Well, I do my best." Logan inclined his head. "I don't have the Barrington fortune or anything..."

"It's perfect," I said, snatching my hand back protectively. The single solitaire was in a delicate setting, exactly the sort of thing I would have chosen for myself. "Thale gets to choose the wedding band."

Thale's eyes sparkled.

"I've got just the thing in mind," he murmured, his voice low and husky.

Putting his arm around me, he pulled me closer. His breath was hot against my neck as he nuzzled me. I gasped as his lips grazed the skin, sending a shiver of desire coursing through me.

"And I can think of a few ways to make our wedding night extra special," he said, his voice low and sultry. I felt a sudden spark of heat between us, and my heart fluttered in response.

“We’re not married yet,” I managed, my train of thought derailing at the dark heat in his eyes. “Still seven days to go.”

“Oh...” He smiled wickedly, increasing my heart rate. “I’m sure we can get a lot of practice in before then.”

“Exactly. Lots of practice.” Logan chuckled as he leaned down to kiss my shoulder on the other side.

I blushed, warmth spreading outward from the center of my chest to fill my body. I’d never felt so accepted and loved in all my life. I was exactly where I belonged.

“Really now? You guys need *that* much practice?” I turned the tables on them with an innocent smile. “Are you sure? You two seem pretty confident to me.”

They exchanged a quick look over my head and then Thale grinned, capturing my attention as he ran his fingers along my jawline.

“You’re right,” he said, his voice husky. “Confidence is key.”

Logan’s breath whispered against my neck. “And we’re going to keep practicing until the wedding night so we get it perfect.”

I shivered in anticipation, feeling heat rush through me from head to toe. Thale brushed his lips against my neck again, his warm breath sending goose bumps down my spine.

“We wouldn’t be doing our jobs properly if we *didn’t* practice,” he said with a mischievous grin. “I hope you’re ready for this.”

A thrill of excitement ran through me as I nestled between them, knowing that no matter what happened in the future I would always feel safe and loved here with them by my side.

“Oh, I don’t know. I heard that omega stamina is much greater than alpha or beta stamina.” I pursed my lips, acting coy for all I was worth. “I might need to expand the pack a little to make sure my... *needs* are met.”

They growled in response, their eyes blazing with desire as they moved. I squeaked as I found myself suddenly pinned between the two of them, half in Logan’s lap and with Thale’s lips against the soft skin of my throat.

“You don’t need anyone else to meet your needs,” Thale growled, the rumble against my skin making me want to arch back against him. “We’re *all* you’ll ever need.”

Logan’s hand stroked the nape of my neck as he kissed my shoulder, his lips gentle against my skin. His tenderness only increased the desire that coursed through me as Thale scraped a gentle fang along the side of my throat.

I whimpered, heat hitting me like a tidal wave. I needed this. Needed *them*.

Large hands roved over me, teasing and caressing. Within seconds my flimsy nightwear was gone, and I was naked in their laps.

Thale looked up at me, his gaze searching. “Are you okay with this, love? You’ve been through a lot today.”

I nodded, wanting nothing more than to feel both of them, together, claiming me as their own. “Yes. I could have lost you both today all because I was afraid. Because I didn’t want to admit I’m an omega. If I’d just let you bite me when you wanted, Barrington couldn’t have bonded me.”

“Shhh, it’s okay, darling,” Logan murmured, turning my head so he could whisper against my lips. “It’s all in the past.

You're safe here with us and we're never letting you go. It'll happen when you're ready."

I took a deep breath, letting go of the last of my fears. "I am ready. Let's do it. Let's do it now... tonight."

Thale growled and I was lost as Logan claimed my lips. They moved around me, touching and teasing, one hand between my thighs stroking my clit while others cupped my breasts, teasing my nipples. I shivered and thrust my tongue into Logan's mouth, unable to help trying to dominate the kiss.

Anticipation coursed through me, my body quivering in anticipation as Logan broke the kiss. Thale and Logan shared a look, which was when I realized that somehow they'd both gotten naked. Biting my lip, I ran a possessive gaze over both of them. They were mine, and after tonight, after we'd bitten each other, it would be forever.

Thale moved, pulling me over his lap, his eyes shining with need and love. That look almost undid me there and then. His hands smoothed over my hips as I straddled him, reaching between us to position his cock against the entrance to my body.

I sank down, hissing with pleasure as he parted and filled me. He was huge, way bigger than a normal alpha, but my slick helped me take him. His jaw tightened, his hands flexing on my hips, and I knew he was keeping himself in check.

"Don't worry," I murmured as I leaned down. "You won't hurt me. I want it all. All your power. All your passion."

It was, literally, what I was built for. I was an omega. I was built to take all the power and lust an alpha could dish out. But it was more than that. I knew neither of them would ever lose control and hurt me.

“*Fuck*, Penny. You feel fucking amazing,” he groaned as he filled me hilt-deep, our hips meeting. I bit my lip and rolled my hips, grinding my pelvis against his and trapping my clit between us. I was rewarded with a deep growl and a burst of hard pleasure as my clit throbbed.

More. I needed more.

Looking over my shoulder, I caught Logan’s eyes.

“You too. Please. Now,” I begged brokenly. I needed them both, needed them to take me. Fill me. Love me.

“We’ve got you, love,” he murmured. I leaned forward to claim Thale’s lips as Logan pressed into place behind me. For the first time I was grateful for my omega nature, and the slick of my arousal making his penetration effortless.

“Oh god,” I broke the kiss to whimper as he filled me, their two cocks throbbing in unison with me. “That feels so good.”

Thale purred, kissing along the side of my throat, and my eyes fluttered closed. They moved in sync—slow at first, back and forth in counterpoint to each other. Getting me used to the feel of them within me.

But that didn’t last long. It couldn’t. Need and heat drove us until the pace changed... Became hard and fast, their hips thrusting in a primal rhythm that made me moan in pleasure.

I gasped, my mind spinning as I felt them both, inside and out. They filled me until I was overflowing, and then I felt Thale’s teeth scraping against the skin at the side of my neck.

Logan’s deep, penetrating thrusts and Thale’s teeth on my skin drove me wild. I felt their love for me as I was taken, and both men moved in perfect synchronicity to bring me rushing to the edge.

I stilled, caught in a perfect moment between one heartbeat and the next.

And then I screamed as they both bit me on opposite sides of my neck, claiming me as their own. Pleasure exploded through me, driving me further and further as they kept thrusting, holding me still with their bites.

My orgasm went on and on, endless rolls of pleasure. I bucked against them, clenching around their cocks. Logan was the first to come, breaking from my throat to press his forehead to my shoulder as he pulsed and jerked within me, coming in long, hot spurts that made my toes curl.

Thale's purr deepened to a growl and he held on, his fangs still in my throat as he drove up into me one last time. I gasped, liquid heat escaping me as his knot swelled, locking the three of us together.

"Fuck! That was amazing..." Logan half shivered, half chuckled as he wrapped his arms around me, almost collapsing against my back.

I purred in happiness, feeling the two of them expand in my consciousness as the bond took hold. I would never be alone again.

They were mine, and I was the luckiest omega in the world.



Seven days passed quicker than I'd thought possible, and it seemed no time at all before I stood in front of the minister, my two grooms at my side as I said the words that would marry us.

The ceremony was small and intimate, just us and a few close friends and family. I had been worried that my omega status would be a barrier to them wanting to marry me. They didn't need to, as a bonded omega I already belonged to them. That they wanted to marry me as well warmed my heart, and I was filled with a sense of peace and happiness as I listened to the minister's words.

We were pronounced man, man, and wife and my eyes filled with tears of happiness as I looked at my husbands. They looked back at me, both of them with love and pride in their eyes.

They each extended an arm to me, and I rearranged my bouquet so they could both lead me back down the aisle. As we did, I noticed a woman dressed in a neat baby-blue suit and hat sitting in the back row.

She lifted her head slightly and I could see her face.

Thale's mother.

I smiled tentatively to her. She'd told him she wasn't coming when he'd sent her an invite, had said he was marrying beneath him, but today I could forgive her. If she was here, she obviously cared about her son, and since I loved him as well... perhaps we could find a middle ground.

We stepped out of the church to the peal of bells and a cloud of colorful confetti. Congratulations from our guests filled the air as we walked back to the car. My husbands were beaming with pride, and I could feel the love radiating from both of them as they stood on either side of me.

Thale's mother stepped forward from the crowd, eyeing me warily.

She offered a small smile. “I’d like to apologize for my... for what I said to you before,” she said, and I could see where Thale had gotten his strength of spirit.

“Thank you. That means a lot. And thank you for coming today,” I said, watching her. She looked dignified but with a lost expression in her eyes.

On a whim, I stepped forward and enveloped her in a hug.

“Welcome to the family,” she whispered into my ear.

I smiled. I had found true love and acceptance, and it felt wonderful. My name is Penny Barrington-Shaw, and I am finally proud to call myself an omega.

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EPILOGUE

KILLIAN

The house was shrouded in darkness—for all intents, empty and unoccupied.

I studied the darkened windows, searching for any sign of life. My eyes darted around the property, through the open shutters at some of the windows to the rooms beyond, but I could only make out a few pieces of furniture in the dim moonlight.

Was I even in the right place? It had taken several favors and a few threats—all of which I would happily back up—to even get this far and find a house where she could have been taken.

Taking a deep breath, I held it as tension crawled along my spine and tightened every muscle in my body. Slowly I released it, letting the warmer air trickle over my lips as I watched the house. I was a wraith in the darkness, waiting for any hint my prey was within.

If she was in there, she could be in any of the rooms with closed curtains or even in the basement. I grunted softly. A bit cliché for a kidnapping, but this outfit wasn't one I was

familiar with, so I didn't know their MO. How they operated. If they even knew the devil was on their tail.

And if they had her...

My jaw tightened, gums aching with the need to drop my fangs as I fought the urge to move. It wouldn't be hard to slip into the shadows, cross the street, and break in.

I didn't move, continuing to watch. My eyes didn't leave the windows, locked on to those portals to the view within.

The cold chill of the incoming winter whipped around me, lifting the edges of my jacket to reach cold fingers beneath. It felt like I'd been standing here for an eternity, rather than the few scant hours since I'd arrived, but I wouldn't move until I knew for sure she wasn't in there. Then I would move onto the next location and the next until I'd found her.

I leaned against the concrete wall whose shadows concealed me, perfectly at home in the darkness. Was she safe? She needed to be safe. I'd let my guard down that day she'd been taken. If she'd been hurt, or worse, I would never forgive myself.

Shaking my head to clear it, I put the thoughts of "what if" from my mind. I needed to stay focused. *She* needed me to stay focused and rescue her.

Noises came from the house, carried on the slight breeze. A muffled cry, a scuffle of feet, and the sound of a door slamming shut. I held my breath, straining my ears for more, but I couldn't make them out enough to say for sure what was going on.

Then finally, a woman's voice from one of the upper rooms, muffled by the closed curtains. My heart stalled and

skipped a beat. I couldn't hear the voice properly, but I knew it was her.

She was alive.

I pushed off from the wall, intent laced through every cell in my body.

She was alive, which meant the devil was about to go to work...

Thank you so much for reading

Omega's Choice!

I hope you loved reading Thale, Penny and Logan's story.

The next book in the Alpha Security Company series will be

Devil's Omega!

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