

M.P. STARKWEATHER



Princess
OR KNOT

THE PACK NEXT DOOR, BOOK ONE

Princess of Knot

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PHOENIX ECLIPSE LLC

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I want to dedicate this book to my two biggest fans, my husband Josh and my son Thom, who will probably never read any of my books. Thanks for pushing me to chase my dream. I love you both to the moon and back.

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PROLOGUE

OROLIS

The island of Orolis is vast and lush. Most of the island is green, with trees and vegetation that grow wild. Crops grow easily, animals are raised well, and children get the best educations. The public education system is so advanced that the royal children attend school with the commoners. The island is a short ferry ride away from the mainland, Ayix, where the people live under democratic rule.

Most people would never dream of leaving Orolis. There are a few, however, who don't care for the class structure and like to protest. Orolis is made up of people who fall into three categories: alpha, the strongest; beta, the smartest; and omega, the most sensitive. That's not to say that people can't have all three traits, but generally one is the most dominant. Alpha and beta women are only able to produce beta children. Beta males can produce children with alpha or beta females, and rarely, with omegas. But for a family to have an alpha child, the mother must be an omega. Because of this, they have put a

system in place. Omegas are assigned to families, as a mate, in order to further their lines.

Omegas have very few rights. Because of their ability to produce alpha offspring, they are highly desired. Until they are assigned to a family, they are considered the property of their parents. These parents are legally able to sell or trade their children for financial gain. They are the only ones who have the ability to enter an omega into the matching pool, beginning at the age of twenty. The Omega Assignment Ceremony is a rite of passage for all omegas.

Once an omega is entered, a family may request them, and the omega's family can decide if the offer is acceptable. If an offer is accepted, typically the council will not interfere unless there are extenuating circumstances. However, if no such agreement is made, the council will review the questionnaires completed by the families and the omegas, and determine where an omega will fit the best. Once the assignments are announced, they cannot be changed.

The only loophole that could get an omega out of an assignment is rejection. If the family they were assigned to decides that they no longer want the omega, they can complete termination paperwork, and the omega is sent back to their family or to one of the royal families to live as a servant.

The island of Orolis encompasses three kingdoms. Crescent Canyon is to the east, Black Meadow is to the west, and Elysian Hill is in the North. Each kingdom is slightly different, making it nearly impossible to compare them. The three

kingdoms do have a few things in common. First of all, class structure. Each is made up of alphas, betas, and omegas. The laws that govern these three classes are mostly the same, although there are slight differences. Omegas have few rights in each kingdom, and each kingdom has its own Family Council who determines omega matching.

Crescent Canyon was made up of mostly farms surrounding a small town near the castle. Elysian Hill had the textile factories in a small city that butted up against the castle grounds. Black Meadow boasted the largest city, and their main source of income was the mines that ran under the mountains.



CRESCENT CANYON

The kingdom of Crescent Canyon is ruled by the Brighton family. They have been in power since the beginning of Orolis. The king and queen are known for being fair and taking care of their people. King Lester is an alpha with two beta brothers, Horatio and Adam. The three men are mated to Queen Amelia, an omega whose beauty is known across the kingdom.

She bore the king three sons, Drake, Landyn, and Kingsley before giving him a daughter, Annabeth. The boys were born a year apart, like stair steps; but Annabeth didn't arrive until the youngest son was ten. Crescent Canyon was a happy place. The children grew and thrived on the grounds, being watched after by nannies until the boys were old enough to take care of themselves.

King Lester and Queen Amelia were not kind parents, instead preferring to rule their children through fear. They were dismissive and unimpressed with any of the boys' school achievements. However, they doted on Annabeth, preferring to

spend time with her and give her the attention the boys would have loved.

In addition, they were hugely attached to the current political system that oppressed omegas, even though the queen was one. They fought against the rebellion, trying to rid their kingdom of anyone who was against their ideals.

She saw the omegas' difficulties as a necessary experience to teach omegas how to be obedient and silent. An omega's purpose was to bear children. No more, no less. She was never fond of the neighbor girl who spent so much time with her sons. Isabella Vanderbilt was a problem, and she would have to find a solution.



Ten Years Ago

ISABELLA

“Come on Sissa, I wanna get in the pool!” Annabeth yelled again, running down the hall toward the door that led to the courtyard.

“Wait for me, Bethy, you can’t get in the pool by yourself. It’s not safe,” I called after her, walking quickly in the direction she headed. I knew better than to run, because Queen Amelia always knew when I broke the rules. If I got in trouble again, she wouldn’t let me take care of Annabeth while she was away anymore. Then I would have to find other ways to see the three boys I was in love with. Being sixteen was hard. Hormones were no joke.

Drake stepped out of his room and into my path, catching me as I nearly knocked him over. “Did she say you’re going swimming?” He cocked an eyebrow and tightened his grip on my waist.

I nodded, “She did. Now let me go before she jumps in without me.” My heart raced at his closeness. I wanted to send Bethy back to her room, but it wasn’t fair for her to get punished just because my hormones wanted me to jump her brother.

“Sissa! Come on!” the six-year-old yelled again. “Bubby, leave her alone. I wanna go swim!” Her insistence had him releasing me, even though his eyes said it was the last thing he wanted.

“You’re welcome to join us if you’d like,” I offered, walking away slower than Bethy wanted. She ran to me and grabbed my hand, trying to pull me faster. I smiled down at her. “I’m coming. Settle down.”

We walked outside to find the pool pristine and waiting for us. The heat of summer was miserable, and I felt bad for anyone who didn’t have access to a pool. The water looked cool and inviting. I held her hand tightly to keep her from running off without me. She was the most spoiled of the Brighton children. Being the only girl in a family of boys definitely had its advantages for her. The king and queen gave her whatever she wanted, and her brothers did the same. The nanny and I were the only ones to ever tell her no, and that was only on things that would hurt her.

When I stopped to think about it, Bethy was pretty well behaved for how spoiled she was. Most of the time she listened and did what I asked. I had a bad feeling about today though and wasn’t sure why. We pulled our cover up dresses

off. “Okay, let’s get in the water,” I said before adding, “remember to *walk* when we’re near the pool. You don’t want to slip and fall in.” I pushed the thought away, terrified that giving it space in my mind would be a bad omen.

Bethy and I walked carefully down the steps into the pool. “Don’t forget, we have to stay at the shallow end. You need to practice swimming before we can go in the deep end.” I hated having to remind her that she’d been struggling with swim lessons. It had been hard enough to get the king and queen to let me take her swimming without bringing that up.

“I know,” she pouted as she stretched the words out into a whine. Then she smiled at me and started to practice her kicks while holding the edge of the pool. After a bit, she walked over to me, bouncing the whole way. “Can we do strokes now?” She loved when I held her waist and let her drag her arms through the water.

“Of course,” I replied, scooping her into my arms and laying her on her stomach. “Go for it.” Bethy splashed and giggled, only half practicing her strokes. I couldn’t get mad at her because she was just too cute. I noticed movement from the corner of my eye. Drake had decided to join us. He motioned for me to go to him as he stood by the pool house in the shade.

“Okay, we need a short break. Time to get out and dry off a little. We’ll get a drink and use the restroom, then come back in the water.” I used my most authoritative tone so that she wouldn’t argue. The frown that crossed her face nearly broke

my heart. We climbed out of the pool and I settled her into one of the lounge chairs before grabbing her a drink and towel from the bar. It was stocked with juices and towels instead of alcohol, as the king and queen did not partake of swimming.

“Wait here; I’ll be right back,” I said, walking over to where Drake was waiting. I’d wrapped a towel around my waist. My heart danced in my chest at the idea that he wanted a moment alone with me. I glanced over my shoulder at Bethy, just to make sure she was sitting still. So far, so good.

Before I could speak, Drake pulled me into his arms, stopping when our lips were a breath apart. “I’ve wanted to do this all week,” he declared. His lips brushed mine, just a teasing, barely there, touch. I sighed and he deepened the kiss, his tongue finding its way into my mouth to tangle with mine. It was a perfect moment.

But something was wrong. I shouldn’t be here right now. The moment I had the thought, the noise behind me broke our kiss. “What was that?” he asked.

My eyes went wide. “Bethy!” I turned and ran for the pool, breaking Drake’s embrace. It had taken a moment for the noise to register. It had been a thump, then a splash. I dropped my towel and dove into the pool, landing almost on top of the limp girl. She’d fallen into the deep end and was currently lying face down. Her golden hair was slipping from its braids, fanning out around her like a halo. “No, no, no, no, no. Please don’t let her be hurt. I’ve got you.”

I started pulling her toward the edge of the pool when Drake slipped into the water next to me. He grabbed her feet and helped me pull her out of the water. We checked for a pulse and tried to resuscitate her, but it was no use. She was gone. I sat there with my legs folded under me, holding her, as Drake went to get help. Ambulances and EMTs came and took her from me. There had been no way to save her. Annabeth had hit her head on the edge of the pool and fallen in. Since she was unconscious, she couldn't stop herself from breathing in water. They told us there was nothing we could have done to save her.

But they were wrong. I could have ignored my selfish desires and been with her. I blamed myself, even though it was Drake who had asked me to leave her alone. I knew that he would blame himself too. I was in shock, according to the EMTs. I felt numb and broken. They assured us it was an accident and no one was at fault. Then one of them took me to the pool house to get dried off and dressed. The moment I stepped outside again, a guard was waiting to take me to the throne room.

I knew that I would have to explain myself to the king and queen. I just hadn't expected that moment to be now. I walked with the man who didn't speak other than to tell me to come with him. He opened the door and gestured for me to go inside. I was shocked to see Drake already there. And the queen was nowhere to be seen. I knew this would hurt her, but I'd expected to have to tell her the part I'd played in her loss.

“Your Majesty,” I began, curtsying low. He held up a hand to stop me.

“We don’t need to bother with formalities, Isabella. I’ve brought you here to give you a choice. You can either leave the kingdom, or be thrown into the dungeon. You are responsible for the death of our beloved princess, and that is not taken lightly.” His words tore through me. Leave or get locked up. How could this be my life?

I looked at Drake, hoping for some help. He had to stand up for me. Didn’t he? He’d always been there for me and defended me in the past. Drake had been the one who’d always protected me. Until now. He took a step forward, as if he were going to pull me into a hug.

“I think you need to leave. Today. And never come back. This is your fault, and you should be ashamed of yourself. There is no greater crime than being responsible for the death of a member of the royal family.” I could see the pain and tears in his eyes. Did he really believe that I was responsible for his sister’s death? Or was he just trying to protect me from the dungeon?

“I can never come back?” I asked quietly.

“Your parents may petition for your return in the future, after you turn twenty. We will review the circumstances and decide then.” The king’s tone was final and dismissive. I turned and walked through the door, where the guard was waiting for me. He drove me home, making sure that my parents answered the door before he left. From their red-

rimmed eyes, they'd already heard what had happened and knew about my punishment.

I'd tried to apologize, but neither of them would speak to me about it. No one wanted to hear my side of the story. Instead, I was set up with an apartment on the mainland and when my heats started, supplements to dampen the effects. I spent ten years passing as a beta and trying to learn how to forgive myself and forget what had happened.

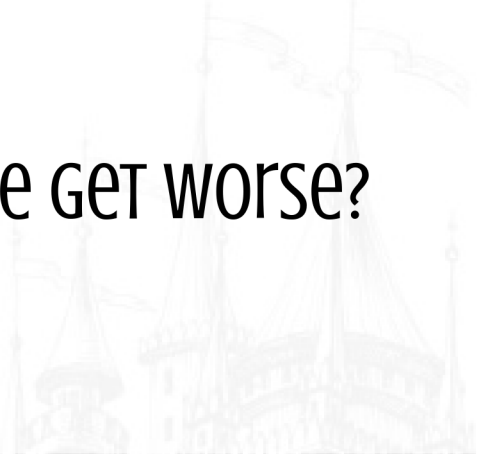
Mother's calls were the only contact I had with the island. She loved to tell me what I was missing out on. When I was finally of age for matching, I thought she would petition for me to be able to return. Instead, she reveled in telling me that the Brighton boys had rejected every omega who was assigned to them. The king and queen were apparently getting desperate and angry.

I spent so many lonely nights wishing I could talk to my best friend, but Kings was out of reach. The first time I'd tried to send him a message, it had bounced back as number out of service. So, they'd all changed their numbers or blocked me. Guilt ate at me every day I spent away from Crescent Canyon.

one



Can My Life Get Worse?



ISABELLA

Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.

It was my day off; I would not answer that. Ignoring my phone, I closed my eyes and drifted back to sleep. Moments later, I was sixteen again.

Drake Brighton was pulling me into his arms. Butterflies flitted around in my stomach as he pressed his lips to mine. There was a nagging feeling that I was forgetting something, but I relaxed and let myself kiss him deeper. My hands fisted in his sandy hair and his smoky walnut scent filled my lungs. A loud thud followed by a splash tore us apart. I ran for the pool, already knowing I was too late.

My skin was clammy and sweaty as I bolted upright. I hadn't had that nightmare in years. What had brought all those feelings back to the surface? ***Buzz. Buzz. Buzz.*** Damn whoever kept calling me. It was barely six in the morning, on my only day off this week. With a sigh, I picked up my phone and looked at it. Sliding a finger over the screen, I lifted it to my ear.

“Mother? Why are you calling so early? Is everything okay?” Fear gripped my chest. Had that dream been a premonition of what was to come? I prayed not.

“Isabella. I’ve been calling you for over an hour! Why are you avoiding me? I’m your mother. You should drop everything to speak to me. I can’t believe how disrespectful you are!” she ranted for another five minutes before allowing me a chance to respond.

“I was asleep. The phone ringing woke me up.” Before I could say anything else, she started again.

“You need to come home as soon as possible. Today. It’s urgent,” she insisted. Veronica Vanderbilt was nothing if not dramatic. She could make a hangnail sound like the plague. And I still hadn’t gotten a straight answer about what was wrong.

“I have to work tomorrow,” I explained quietly. I knew it would do no good, but there was no way I was going to drop everything and go back there. I had spent the last ten years passing as a beta, and I wasn’t about to give up my job and apartment for one of her whims.

“I’ve already called your boss. You no longer work there. That place wasn’t right for you anyway. Now you can come straight home. It’s important. No arguments. I’ve sent the ferry ticket and the taxi will be at your apartment in ten minutes. I’ll see you soon!” My mother disconnected the call. *Shit*. I dressed quickly and rushed around the room, making sure to

pack what I would need for a few days, since I had no idea when I would be back.

It pissed me off that she'd cost me the job I'd fought so hard to get, but it didn't surprise me. There was no way my mother would allow her daughter to be a news reporter. The intern position had been difficult to secure, and she'd already tried to mess it up before. It was especially difficult to argue with her when she'd been putting money in my bank account for the past few years. Granted, she never said anything about it, but it had to be her, right? No one else knew where I was. Besides, who else would give me money to live on besides my parents?

I stopped and debated not going, but that would be worse. If I didn't go there, she would come here. I would end up not only jobless, but homeless too. Then I would have no choice but to go home with her. I refused to give up my freedom that easily. Besides, omegas had no real rights, so even if I had wanted to, I couldn't refuse my mother's request. She'd been generous to allow me to live on the mainland for the past ten years and hide who I really was. I was stupid to think it would last. I would just have to make the best of this trip.

I made it to the early ferry just in time. It seemed strange that she hadn't mentioned how I would get to the estate from the ferry, since she'd arranged for me to ride it without the taxi. Hopefully she didn't expect me to walk. I knew from previous calls that my parents were having some financial problems, but it seemed unlikely that she'd called me to come home because of that.

The ferry docked and I exited, walking down the path to the parking lot. I really hoped I didn't have to call someone to pick me up. I winced when I saw Chad Wilde standing next to his bright yellow Ferrari. It was nearly as over the top as he was. Talk about pretentious; it was as if he was saying 'look at me, I have money!' Realization hit me, and I knew exactly what my mother's emergency had been. She was going to try to pawn me off on the Wilde family and profit from it. I rolled my eyes at the way Chad lit up when he saw me.

"Your mother asked me to pick you up. I was thrilled to help out. We're meeting your parents for breakfast," Chad said just before he kissed my cheek and took one of my bags from me. I followed him to the back of his car and dropped the bag I carried next to the one he'd taken from me. His licorice scent burned my nose and turned my stomach.

"I see. So, you're the reason she called me at five this morning and said I needed to come home immediately?" I hadn't meant to sound so bitchy, but I couldn't help it. Mother knew that I hated Chad.

"I'll let her give you the good news. We're meeting at the club." He actually opened my door and waited to close it until I was settled in the seat. He was acting strangely, and I didn't like it. Part of me wanted to call Kings to come get me, but I wasn't sure how that would go over after so long.

Breakfast went exactly as I'd expected it to. My suspicions were confirmed; she'd basically sold me to the Wilde family. I would be announced as his mate at the Omega Assignment

Ceremony, and that would be the end of it. He and his brothers would share me, and I would be miserable for the rest of my life.

“Mother, please. There has to be another way. You can’t do this,” I started begging the moment we got home after breakfast. It was a relief that Chad hadn’t followed us and insisted that he spend more time with me before finalizing his offer.

“It’s done, Isabella. Now be a good girl and stop complaining. The Wilde family offers three alphas, that should please you.” She’d used her dismissive tone, thinking that would be the end of it. But I refused to give up.

“The assignments are supposed to be done based on compatibility. I’m not compatible with Chad or his brothers. Besides, I’m pretty sure Dex is gay. And Jax is interested in Maria. They can’t possibly be on board for this.” I hoped that what I was saying was true, but it didn’t matter.

“It doesn’t matter. They’ve applied and been accepted. The fees are paid, and a generous offer has been made. Your father and I have accepted it. In just a couple of days, you will belong to them. Stop whining and get used to the idea. Besides, if Dexter is gay, that will be one less man you’ll have to please. That sounds like a win to me.” Mother walked away, leaving me alone with my father. I decided to try another tactic. Surely my father would feel more protective of his only daughter.

“Daddy, you can’t possibly want to send me off with Chad. This is ridiculous. He’s so mean. I’m scared of him. What if he hits me or hurts me?” I forced my eyes to well up with tears and turned to my father. I’d hoped that Andrew Vanderbilt would be easier to convince than his wife was. I was already beginning to see them as something other than my parents. They were money hungry leeches who would do whatever it took to get what they wanted. I hated that I still loved them and wanted their approval.

“Now, Isabella, you know your mother has vetted this family. She says they are the best match. I can’t go against her. Chad has never shown us any indication that he will be mean to you. Do you have any proof that he’s abusive? Those are some serious allegations to make against one of your intended.” My father straightened his tie and raised an eyebrow at me. I knew that it wouldn’t matter if Chad punched me in front of him, Father would argue that somehow, I’d done it to myself.

I shook my head and walked away. I took my time getting back to my room, making sure to lock my door so I wouldn’t be bothered. Mother could have a fit at dinner when I refused to go. I didn’t care at this point. My life as I knew it was over, and legally, there was nothing I could do about it. I stayed there, in my room, ignoring my parents and Chad’s calls for the next three days.

Sadly, on the day of the Omega Assignment Ceremony, I could no longer avoid them. Mother pounded on my door at eight in the morning. I hadn’t slept well, and was already

awake. I groaned and rolled over, hoping to go back to sleep for a while. The pounding didn't stop. "Isabella, open this door. We need to get you fitted for your gown. This should have been done days ago. You can't stay in there and pout anymore. We've given you space, now stop this childish behavior and open the door."

I pulled myself out of bed and dragged my feet all the way to the door. I flipped the lock on the door and before I could even move, it smacked me in the face. "Ow!"

"Why the hell are you standing against the door?" she yelled the question at me.

"I was unlocking it so you could come in," I responded, rubbing my forehead. Mother pushed her way into the room with two people following her. One carried a dress and bag of seamstress tools, while the other pulled a suitcase behind her. "What's all this?"

"Miranda has your dress and will make sure it fits properly. Stella will be doing your hair and make-up. Please don't give them any trouble."

"You do realize it's barely eight in the morning? The ceremony is in twelve hours. There's no reason to do hair and make-up this early," I protested. I wanted nothing more than to go back to bed and sleep this day away.

"We need pictures, of course." She'd said it so matter-of-factly that I couldn't argue. "The Wildes are paying for a full photoshoot with you and the boys."

My face paled and I felt faint. Of course, my mother would want engagement style pictures of me with Chad and his brothers. It wasn't traditional, but Veronica Vanderbilt never did anything half way, especially if it was on someone else's dime. I sighed and gave in. There was no way to argue with her. It was best to just cooperate and resign myself to this being my life now. Once the dress was fitted, my hair and make-up were done. When the look was completed, the photographer showed up and took a few shots of me in the garden.

I would never admit it to my mother, but I felt beautiful. The pale lavender satin flowed over my curves just right, and the tulle underskirt gave it just enough body. With the delicate lace trim, I looked like a fairy princess. My long red waves were twisted into an intricate braid with tiny white flowers woven through. That tiny bit of happiness was short-lived, fading as soon as Chad arrived. Dexter and Jaxon followed him, both looking as if they wanted to be anywhere but here. I didn't blame them.

The four of us posed for the standard engagement photos, all with forced smiles and awkward silence. Except Chad. He was clearly the only one who was happy about this arrangement. I couldn't get him to stop touching and grabbing at me. It was annoying and gave me a very bad vibe. He growled at Dex and Jax when they tried to tell him to stop.

Once pictures were done, the others left, and I was alone with Chad. I didn't want to be, so I made excuses to leave. None of them worked. He followed me everywhere. Luckily, I

had to be chaperoned while suitors were at the house. At least my parents followed that particular social custom. If they hadn't, there was no telling what would have happened. Who am I kidding? I would have been fighting Chad off even more than I already was.

Just when it seemed that the ceremony would never get here, Mother announced that it was time to leave. Chad would drive separately, and we would meet him there. I sighed in relief that I would get at least a small break from him. In the car, I wondered how long I could fake my period to keep him away. My luck, he would be one of those weirdos who liked messing with a girl while she was bleeding.

I walked into the hall with my parents, who quickly left me to find their friends. No doubt my mother wanted to brag about how much they'd gotten in exchange for my hand. I rolled my eyes as Chad approached me. "Let's go in the ballroom," he said with a wink. It was dark in there, and I would have very little protection from his creepy advances.

"Can't we just stay out here and talk?" I asked, hoping that somehow, I would convince him to leave me alone. Within moments, I was slapping at his hands as they tried to pull my skirt up. "Chad, I said no. Please stop this."

Nothing I said made a difference. Being an alpha, even a weak one, he felt like he was entitled to take what he wanted when he wanted it. Chad kept trying to get his hands up my skirt while he was trying to kiss me. I'd been so distracted

fighting him off that I hadn't seen the alpha enter the hall. There was something familiar about his scent, though.

"Come on, baby. You've been avoiding me for days," Chad said, gripping my thigh. I whimpered despite trying to keep quiet. I wiggled and twisted, trying to get away, but nothing worked. I could sense the alpha getting closer.

"Excuse me," the alpha interjected, placing his hand on Chad's shoulder. He looked at me and continued, "Get your hands off my woman." My jaw dropped. No wonder his scent had been so familiar. I was staring at Drake Brighton. He was the crowned prince, and the reason I had left the island ten years ago. Now he was claiming I was his woman?

Chad looked at him over his shoulder. "What the fuck?" He looked from me to Drake and back again.

"I said, get your fucking hands off of my woman." Drake was insistent, clenching his hands into fists at his sides. I knew that he wanted to knock Chad out, but I couldn't figure out why he cared. "Or do you want me to help you with that?" he asked, looming over Chad until he shook his head and let me go.

Drake held out a hand and spoke to me for the first time in a decade. "Come on, *Izzy*, let's go." Was it annoyance or desire that I heard when he said my name? My hand shook as I placed it into his. He pulled me behind him, stepping between me and Chad. He said something, but I was freaking out too much to pay attention. I had to be going into shock. This was so unreal.

Drake Brighton had just stopped Chad from assaulting me at the Omega Assignment Ceremony. What was happening? And why did my heart flutter as Drake pulled me into his arms? My emotions betrayed me; I had wanted to be angry when I saw him again, not broken and in need of rescue.

TWO



WHAT DID I JUST DO? WHERE'S IZZY?



DRAKE

I jogged into the building, irritated that I was running late. When I got to the hallway outside the ballroom, it didn't surprise me that Chad had some poor girl pinned to the wall. I hoped that she knew how to fight him off.

I almost walked away, then I caught it. The faint scent of lavender and roses wafted toward me. I knew that scent. I had dreamed of it nearly every night of the past ten years. She had remained on my mind since the day she left, or rather, since my father made her leave.

"Come on, baby. You've been avoiding me for days," Chad pressed. The girl whimpered and tried to escape his grip. He was pawing at her dress, and she was trying to fight him off without causing a scene. Typical omega behavior.

"Excuse me," I interjected, placing my hand on his shoulder. I saw the fear in her eyes and continued, "Get your hands off my woman." Why did I say that? This is going to blow up in my face. Oh, shit. There was no way I could be sure it was even her. How stupid would I look if it turned out

to be just another omega? Even as I had the thought, I knew better. It was her.

Chad turned and glowered at me. “What the fuck?” He looked from the girl, to me, and back again.

“I said, get your fucking hands off *my woman*.” My hands balled into fists at my sides. I wanted more than anything for him to fight me. It took every ounce of self-control for me to not grab him by the throat and slam him into the wall. “Or do you want me to help you with that?” The scent of walnut and smoke permeated from me in waves.

He shook his head and released her. It was good to be feared. It didn’t matter to me if it was because of my size or my title. I just needed him to let her go.

I stared past him at her, seeing her long red hair done up in a braid. There was no doubt in my mind that it was her. “Come on, *Izzy*. Let’s go.” I held out my hand, and she trembled as she placed hers into it. Recognition crossed her face as my scent hit her and I pulled her behind me and stepped up to get in Chad’s face. I wondered if I had changed that much for her to not recognize me immediately. I’d worry about that later. For now, I had to deal with Chad.

He started to shake, and I could smell the fear oozing from him. He was a weak alpha, barely worthy of the designation. It was one of the reasons that his family was underneath mine in the hierarchy. “Now get out of here before I show you what happens to people who touch what’s mine.” The threat wasn’t necessary, but it made me feel better. There went my plan to

pop in for the ceremony, reject the omega who was assigned to us, and head home. Sometimes I thought Kingsley was lucky he'd been born a beta instead of an alpha like Landyn and myself. I always ended up dealing with the messes. An alpha's work was never done.

Once he ran off, I turned to Izzy. My tone was harsh because I knew how badly I had just messed up. "Are you okay?"

She nodded, fear still gripping her, just as tightly as she gripped my arm. I pulled her to me and wrapped my arms around her, pressing a kiss to the top of her head. I wanted to chase Chad down and rip him in half for what he was trying to do. I hated the smell of her fear. "Well, this is going to really fuck up the ceremony," I muttered to myself, then turned to her. "Let's go."

I wrapped my arm around her shoulders and started toward the ballroom. "Wait, where are we going?" she asked meekly.

"To talk to Mrs. Robinson. She's probably going to shit herself, but she's going to change your assignment to my pack. Otherwise, Chad will never leave you alone," I growled at her, suddenly pissed at the turn of events. I knew this was my fault. I should have just walked away. But I couldn't just leave her like that. How was I going to explain this to my brothers? Or my parents?

"My parents promised me to him already," she whispered. "And they approved the request. Mother said—"

I gritted my teeth and tried not to snarl at her. “I don’t care what she said. You’re not his, and never will be. I promise, Izzy, I’ll fix this.” I watched her face as the fear melted away. Even if she hated me, she still trusted me to take care of her. There were a million things I wanted to say, but I had to make sure that she didn’t get officially placed with the Wildes. If she was right about her parents having a contract, this would be tricky. There was no way my Izzy would survive what Chad would do to her. He had a reputation for abusing women, and there was nothing I could do about it until I found proof. I looked down at Izzy again. I was certain she was in shock, and I wanted nothing more than to take her home and care for her. I couldn’t do that, though. Not yet, anyway. I had to proceed with what was expected of me. Being the crowned prince sucked sometimes.

If her mother told her that a request had been made and approved, then that meant she would most likely be assigned to the Wilde family. The Family Council was excellent at taking the omegas’ desires into account, or at least the desires of their families, during matching. They tried to make sure that an omega was compatible with the family she would be assigned to, and that everyone involved would be happy. The matching portion of this whole affair was the one point where omegas actually had some say. Unless, of course, their parents arranged everything without letting them know, or worse, forced them into a match just for money. Once assignments were officially announced, they couldn’t be changed unless both parties agreed. So, if Chad got Izzy, there would be no

way for her to get away from him. I had to make sure that never happened.

I kept my arm around her as we entered the ballroom. I felt every eye in the place turn to stare. Izzy recoiling into my side would have been a welcome feeling if not for what I had to face.

Kingsley strolled over. “What’s going on?” His eyes flitted to hers, and the question could have been meant for either of us.

“I’ll explain later. Keep everyone away from her. I mean it,” I growled, practically shoving her at my brother. Izzy latched onto Kingsley and I stomped off. I fought the urge to look over my shoulder. Even if I had saved her virtue, I couldn’t make my feelings so obvious. I had already messed up my chance with her when I let my father destroy her. The best I could hope for was that she would be happy with my brothers.

I found Mrs. Robinson going over her list next to the stage. “May I have a word?”

I had startled her, but she recovered instantly, a picture of professionalism. “Of course, Prince Drake, how may I be of service?”

“I need you to change an omega’s assignment.” I kept my words curt, giving her little room to argue. I hoped that she would agree without involving my parents.

“Oh. But the list has been finalized, Your Highness.” Her excuse made my blood boil.

“Would you be able to tell me which omega has been assigned to which family? Perhaps I can arrange a trade if necessary.” At this point, I had no idea if Izzy had actually been assigned to another family, I realized.

“I’m really not supposed to share the assignments before the ceremony.” She hesitated. “But I suppose if there was someone specific you were interested in, I could take a look.”

“Isabella Vanderbilt,” I said simply, meeting the older woman’s gaze.

“Ah, yes. She was requested by the Wilde family,” Mrs. Robinson said flatly. “They filed the paperwork last year.”

I gritted my teeth. No wonder Chad had been acting like he owned her. He had known for a year that this would happen. I would have to turn up the charm. I forced a practiced grin and placed a hand on Mrs. Robinson’s arm. “I would consider it a personal favor if you would trade the omega assigned to us with Ms. Vanderbilt.” I knew that I couldn’t bribe her outright, and there was no way I could fill out a formal request without Father’s signature. *Please let this work.*

She eyed me suspiciously for a moment. I tried to look as innocent and trustworthy as I could. “I suppose, I could swap them around without anyone noticing right away. If that would please the royal family?” She worded it more as a question than a statement. “You’ve rejected every omega I’ve tried to place with you since you boys came of age. Is it because you always wanted this one?”

I nodded. “Very much so. But would you mind keeping this just between us? I’m happy to make a sizable donation or set up a crew of volunteers for your next event.”

She smiled. “Of course, Your Majesty. I’m happy to help.”

After thanking her, I walked across the room to find my brother. I knew I would have some explaining to do after the ceremony. The moment I saw Kingsley, my anger returned. He was standing next to the wall, alone. I glanced around the room, eyes searching frantically, but could not find her. I stomped up and grabbed him by the tie.

“Where is she? I told you to keep her away from everyone,” I growled into his face.

My youngest brother raised an eyebrow and laughed in my face. “What gives you the right to make demands? She went to the bathroom with Bianca. It’s fine.”

“It’s not fine. You didn’t see what happened before we came in here. If that weasel gets his hands on her again, I swear, you will take half the punishment I’m going to give him.”

“Drake, chill. It’s not like you own her,” my little brother quipped.

“Except I do,” I muttered, walking off to find her. I spotted Chad huddled in the opposite corner, hiding behind his friends. He stared daggers at me as I walked past. At least I didn’t have to worry about him attacking her again.

I stomped into the ladies’ restroom without a second thought. And I regretted it immediately. Half a dozen women

turned to stare at me as my eyes met Izzy's. She'd been in here crying, I realized, and these women were comforting her. "I'm sorry. I came to check on Izzy." I gestured at her. Their glares softened a little, but they didn't move away from her.

Izzy sniffed and wiped her eyes. "It's okay. He saved me." Her tone nearly broke me. I wasn't an emotional person, but when it came to Izzy, I could not handle anything. I wanted to rip Chad's face off, but at the same time, I wanted to pull her into my arms and never let her go.

I stood there, waiting to see if she would reject me the same way I had her all those years ago. I was dying to tell her everything, but I couldn't. I had to keep the family secrets, no matter how badly they ruined my life.



ISABELLA

I shivered at the thought of what would have happened if Drake hadn't swooped in and rescued me. Chad was telling me about how his parents paid mine to set up the assignment. I was about to belong to him. I'd wanted to fight him but knew that if I did, I would pay for it when I got home. Then Drake was there, just like when we were kids. He'd always protected me, until the day he didn't. I had recognized Drake's scent the moment he dashed through the door. I'd been praying for someone to intervene, but people just kept walking past as if it wasn't their business. Technically they were right. That is if Chad's claims that his parents had purchased me for him were true. Drake was going to be in big trouble for taking me from him. Drake and big trouble; the two seemed to go together like peanut butter and jelly.

The thought took me back to my return to Orolis. Most of the time, I don't even remember that I'm an omega. I've been living in Ayix and passing as a beta for the past decade. Suppressants had helped to hide my heat, and no one looked

twice at a beta. I'd grown up with the perfect model of beta behavior, so it was easy to fool them all.

Therefore, when my parents called and summoned me to come back home, I was shocked. Until I realized why they were so desperate for me to return. They needed me to form an alliance with another pack. I hated the thought that I would be used like this. Part of me didn't understand why I had agreed so easily, but then I remembered. I'm an omega, and that's my role in life. I wondered to which pack I had been promised as I packed my bags and prepared for the trip home. Home. That was such a strange word to describe where I came from.

Ten years ago, it was home. Growing up next-door to King Lester Brighton and his family had been amazing. All three of the boys were only a year apart, with the youngest being my age. We did everything together. And then there was Annabeth. She was a sweet little surprise the Queen had let me babysit.

No. I wasn't going to think about that anymore. I promised myself when I left that I would never go back. I remembered that day as if it were yesterday. The day I lost everything. My heart raced at the thought of seeing the Brighton boys again. But it was more fear than excitement. Would any of them even speak to me? It had been ten years. Surely everyone had moved on, right? I tried to convince myself, but I knew better. If I wasn't over it, there was no way they would be.

I shook away the memory and focused on the man standing in front of me. In the women's restroom. At the Omega

Assignment Ceremony. How did my life get so screwed up?

Prince or not, the other girls would have attacked him if I hadn't stopped them. I wasn't sure how I felt about the situation, but Drake had assured me that he would take care of it. "Is it settled, then?" I asked quietly, forcing my eyes to meet his. For a moment, I thought I saw a spark of what used to be.

He nodded and held out a hand. I hesitated for a moment. Did I really want to do this? Could I face his family after what had happened all those years ago? I stepped forward and took his hand. He brushed a tear from my cheek, and the girls all swooned. I chuckled and looked at my reflection. My makeup was a little smudged but didn't look too bad. I knew that the ceremony would be starting soon, so there wasn't time to fix my face anyway.

Drake led me out of the bathroom and over to where his brothers were waiting. Kingsley hadn't pressed me about what happened. I was glad that things weren't awkward between us. He kissed my cheek and hugged me. Drake didn't let go of my hand, remaining so close to my side that I wondered if he was trying to intimidate his brothers. It amused me that alphas were so territorial when they knew that they would have to share a bride. Our culture has always been that way.

Then my eyes met Landyn's and I suddenly forgot how to speak. He leaned in to kiss my cheek, catching me off guard. I jerked my head and slammed into his nose. "I'm, I'm so, oh no. I'm so sorry," I stammered. Well, that answers that question. I still have a ridiculous crush on him from ten years

ago. My face turned red and I was thankful that the lights were low.

“Are you okay, Bella?” he asked, holding his hand under his nose. Why was he worried about me when I had clearly busted his face?

“I’m fine. You’re bleeding,” I whispered, wishing I could crawl into a hole and hide. Drake came to my rescue by handing Landyn a handkerchief. “I’m so sorry.” I knew I had already said that, but I had no idea what else to say.

“It’s nothing. I’m good.” Did he just wink at me? My face was on fire; I didn’t think I had ever been this embarrassed before in my life. Landyn had always had this kind of effect on me ever since we were kids.

Things were always awkward with Landyn, easy with Kingsley, and irritating with Drake. That was just the way we got along. Kings had been my best friend before I left and I missed that. Being around them now, I realized how much I had missed all of this. It didn’t matter that our lives would never be the same again. These three would always be my guys. Even if I couldn’t really have them. I would always have my memories.

“Elle? Mrs. Robinson is waving you over. I think it’s time for the ceremony to start. Do you want me to walk you over?” I had forgotten that each of them had their own version of my name that they used as an endearment. That memory shook me for a moment, then Kingsley offered me his arm and I took it. I had no idea what Drake told her, or what was going to happen

next. I took a deep breath and let him lead me over to the event coordinator.

“There you are! I’ve had people hunting for you since Prince Drake and I spoke,” the older lady said as she took my arm and led me away from Kingsley. “Did you know that he specifically requested that I change your assignment?” she whispered in my ear.

I nodded, studying her face. I wondered if Drake had gotten his way, or if he would be furious when this was over. She gave no indication either way, simply led me to the area backstage where I would wait until she called my name and announced my placement.

I knew that I should have argued with Drake. There was no way I could be placed with his family. The Wildes had already signed a contract with my parents. If what Chad told me was true, they had paid well for it, too. It felt a lot like being sold to the highest bidder, but that was part of being an omega. You were expected to keep your mouth shut and do what you were told. I’d never been treated that way by the Brighton’s. At least not until after Annabeth died.

Mrs. Robinson stepped onto the stage and started the ceremony. There were seven omegas this year. If she followed the usual pattern of announcing the girls in alphabetical order, as we’d practiced, I would be announced last. I lined up with the other girls, prepared to wait through the entire program before I moved from the spot that I was standing in. After her opening comments, Mrs. Robinson cleared her throat. “As you

all know, the Orolis Family Council makes these assignments based on where our omegas will fit the best. With that said, I would like to remind everyone that, once announced, the assignments are permanent. They cannot and will not be changed.”

I wondered if that statement was because of me. I didn't have to wait long to find out. My heart raced. What if she didn't change it? What if she did? I wasn't sure which would be worse. I let myself get distracted. I tuned back in when Mrs. Robinson spoke again, “Normally we would announce the assignments in alphabetical order, but tonight will be different. Due to a special request, I'll start with the royal family tonight. First up, the omega who will join the Brightons. Please congratulate Ms. Isabella Vanderbilt, who has been selected as their omega. You may join your pack, dear.” She'd gestured to where the Brightons waited by the stage. “Gentlemen, welcome your omega.” When she spoke, I watched Drake, Landyn, and Kingsley step forward.

I heard the words, but it didn't register that she had just given my assignment. Whispers raced through the crowd. One of the other girls pushed me and I stumbled forward before righting myself and strolling out to the center of the stage. We had practiced this so many times. I was certain I would be chastised for screwing it up, especially since I was the first. When I hit my mark, I curtsied and dipped my head low, trying to hide my embarrassment.

After an appropriate moment in the spotlight, I cautiously walked to the steps that would lead to my new family. The

three men waited for me with a mixture of excitement and annoyance across their faces. Anxiety threatened to swallow me whole. I tripped going down the stairs, and Landyn stepped forward to catch me. I'd never been so mortified in my life. This was even worse than headbutting him in the nose.

Kingsley took my right arm while Landyn held onto my waist from the left side. Drake walked in front of us as if he was pissed. But he was the one that asked for the assignment to be changed. I didn't understand why he was mad; my head was spinning from the events of the last hour and what it all meant for the rest of my life.

THREE



RELIEF, CURIOSITY, and a TWO-SIDED CRUSH



KINGSLEY

I knew something was up when Drake stormed into the ballroom practically dragging Elle with him. After Mrs. Robinson took her backstage, I tried to ask him about it. “Drake, what’s she doing here? Where did you find her?” At that moment, I wished I was an alpha too, so I could challenge him and force the explanation. But somehow, I ended up as the only beta in the royal family. I hadn’t minded it growing up, although there were times when it seemed to get in my way.

He stared at the stage, not paying attention to anything except Elle. He had positioned himself to the exact spot that allowed him to see backstage where the girls were lined up. “Drake, seriously. What is going on? You’re acting like Elle is in danger or something.” Lan walked up and took his place between us.

“What did I miss?” Landyn asked. I shrugged and Drake ignored us both.

Drake’s eyes never left her. “She is, or was, in danger, that is. It’s handled. Just don’t flip out when they start handing out

assignments.” My oldest brother looked pissed. I wondered if I would ever find out what had happened. There were days when I hated being a beta. If I were an alpha, I could make him talk.

Mrs. Robinson stood in the center of the stage, calling omegas forward to show off their dresses before the ceremony started. Then she began. “Normally we would announce the assignments in alphabetical order, but tonight will be different. Due to a special request, I’ll start with the royal family tonight. First up, the omega who will join the Brightons. Please congratulate Ms. Isabella Vanderbilt, who has been selected as their omega. You may join your pack, dear.” She’d gestured to where we waited by the stage. “Gentlemen, welcome your omega.” Elle looked like a deer in headlights. Clearly, she hadn’t expected us to be the pack she was assigned to. The only one who didn’t look surprised was Drake.

After the announcement, I belatedly realized why he’d warned Lan and me to not freak out. My heart leaped when Elle tripped coming down the steps, but I wasn’t quick enough to catch her. I breathed a sigh of relief that it had been Lan and not Drake who had managed to stop her from hitting the floor, though. Drake wasn’t gentle with anyone, least of all Elle. I knew it was because he didn’t know how to deal with his feelings for her. They’d always fought like cats and dogs. But given that she was officially our omega now, he would be forced to face it.

“Come on, we’re going home,” he demanded the moment Lan had Elle in his arms. He led the way out of the ballroom

and headed for the exit.

I tried to step in and stop him. “Drake, we can’t leave yet. What will everyone say?”

“That we were excited to get our omega settled in at home. Or whatever they want. I don’t care,” he growled without turning around. Lan and I exchanged a glance over Elle before she turned to me. I smiled at her, but would have guaranteed that the confusion on her face was mirrored on my own. Elle followed Drake with Lan and I on either side of her. At least she wasn’t going to fight about the assignment. I wanted to ask her what had happened, but it wasn’t the right time. It would have to wait.

Once we were outside, away from anyone who could hear, she whispered, “Why is he so angry?”

Because he’s in love with you. I shook my head. I refused to be the one to explain my brother’s feelings to the girl I was in love with. It would be awkward. The more I thought about it, the more I realized just how difficult this would be. I knew that all three of us were in love with her, but I had no idea how she felt about us. If she was only interested in one of us, the omega bond would be unbalanced and wouldn’t work out. I remembered that she’d had the biggest crush on Lan when we were younger, but she could have outgrown it by now. A lot could change in ten years. Of course, I was still in love with the same girl at twenty-six that I had been at sixteen, so I wasn’t really an expert.

I should have seen it coming, but I'd been too focused on Elle. If I had been paying more attention, I could have warned Drake about the bat Chad was swinging before it connected with his shoulder. "Isabella is mine. You can't just take her," he yelled as he swung the bat again. His friends had followed him out, but none of them got involved. Even his brothers stood back and watched to see what would happen.

Drake held his shoulder for a moment before grabbing the bat as Chad's second swing nearly landed. Lan took a defensive stance at Drake's back to make sure that no one interfered, even though they'd already started laughing at the situation. Drake jerked the bat away from Chad and growled in his face. "And I told you; she's my woman. You're lucky that I'm not my father, or you'd be in the dungeon right now."

Chad scoffed and Drake punched him in the eye. He doubled over, holding his eye and crying. It was hard not to feel embarrassed about the whole thing. How had Chad expected to win against Drake? Weak alphas don't defeat strong alphas.

Lan gestured for us to keep moving toward the car while he watched our backs and kept an eye on Drake. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that both of them were right behind us. I figured it was a good time to try and distract Elle.

"I'm glad you get to be with us," I offered. I tried to keep my excitement hidden, but could not wipe the smile from my face. I'd dreamed of this moment when we were younger. After the king's reaction to Annabeth's death, I didn't think

this would ever happen. *Oh, shit. He had no idea.* There was a very real possibility that Mrs. Robinson would be in big trouble when King Lester found out about the omega assignments.

I couldn't broach that subject until Elle was settled into her new room. Even though I was certain our omega wouldn't be her, I'd made sure that the room was decorated to suit her, specifically. Anyone else would have been uncomfortable in it, and I didn't care. Elle had been my best friend until ten years ago, when she'd disappeared.

After Elle left, no one would talk about her. It was like she'd never existed. It had taken me five years to find someone who was willing to locate her and report back to me without telling my father or brothers. Once I knew she was safe, I felt like I could breathe again. Then I had tracked down her banking information and set up the anonymous deposits. That was fun. I just wanted to make sure she was taken care of while she was away. It was easy to take half of my monthly allowance and give it to her. As far as I knew, she hadn't figured out where the money came from.

I hadn't stopped smiling since she walked into the ball tonight. I had hoped that we would get to catch up, but this was even better. I was nervous about facing the king, but it wasn't like we had set this up. There was no way he could be angry with us about it.

Drake opted for the limo to take us home, since that would allow the four of us space to talk without interruptions. Once

we were settled in and headed to the castle, he finally spoke. “I will take full responsibility for this. None of you knew what I was doing, and you couldn’t have stopped me if you had tried. Izzy was in danger and I did what was necessary.”

“Wait, you got her assignment changed? How? They don’t change that. Ever.” Lan’s jaw dropped as he spoke.

“Is that what you talked to Mrs. Robinson about earlier?” I asked. “What did you promise her?”

“Don’t worry about it. I told you; I took care of the situation. Izzy will be safe with us,” Drake insisted. Then he turned to face the window, cutting off any further conversation.

“Of course, she’ll be safe with us. But why wasn’t she safe?” Landyn asked Drake’s back. Our oldest brother ignored the question. Lan and I exchanged another look. Elle sniffed, and we turned our attention to her.

“Are you okay? Do you want to talk about it? Lan and I have no idea what happened back there.” Landyn nodded his agreement and took her hand. I could tell she was fighting against her emotions.

She shook her head and we watched her eyes fill with tears. “I can’t. Please. Not tonight.” It stung that she felt like she couldn’t talk to me about it. But maybe it was just because Drake and Lan were there. I hoped that was the case.

Before I could respond, Lan pulled her into his lap. “It’s okay, Bella, you don’t have to talk about anything that makes

you uncomfortable. Just relax, we'll be home soon." He started to rub his hand up and down her back until she finally let herself collapse against him. From the way her cheeks turned red when he scooped her up, I knew that she hadn't gotten over the crush after all.

That thought shouldn't have made me jealous, but it did. I had been in love with Elle since the day we met. Since I couldn't have her heart, I settled for being her best friend. I'd always secretly hoped we'd have one of those moments from the rom-com movies where she would profess her love for me. So far, it hasn't happened.

With Elle being assigned as our omega, she would be expected to be with all three of us. I wouldn't push her into anything she didn't want, and I was certain my brothers felt the same way. She'd had a love-hate relationship with Drake since the day they'd met. I wondered how that would play out now that she was moving in with us.

I glanced back over at her on Lan's lap. Her eyes had closed and her breathing was slow. "Is she asleep?" I whispered to him. He nodded, barely moving.

I watched out the window as we drove up the winding road that led to the castle, we called home. The castle itself was enormous. There were three wings; one for our parents, one for us, and one for the lavish parties our mother liked to throw. The grounds were expansive too, containing several gardens with various flowers, fields and barns for the horses, housing for our employees, and even a playground that we used as

children. Elle's family home was on the other side of the stone wall, a five-minute walk from the playground. I remembered climbing that wall to go between the two houses a lot as a kid.

When we arrived at the castle, Drake stormed off. Lan let me carry Elle up to her room. He followed close behind, as if he didn't quite trust me to settle her in. Once he was satisfied that she was comfortable, he kissed her forehead and headed off without a word. I hesitated at her door. I didn't want to intrude on her privacy, but I couldn't bear the thought of leaving her alone. We had lost so much time already, and I wanted to know why.

When Elle left, I'd asked so many questions; begged for answers. Every single one was met with rejection. "*You don't need to worry about that, Kings.*" Well, I was worried about it. I stayed worried until I found her. She was here one day, then when I needed her the most, she was just gone. It didn't seem right. There was no way Elle would just take off the day after my baby sister died. She loved Annabeth too much for that. I knew there was more going on, and the fact that even Drake refused to talk about it made me more suspicious. No matter how much I begged for answers, I ended up with none. That was what led me to learn the ins and outs of security. I had told myself that with that knowledge, I would be able to find her and bring her home.

I closed the door and walked silently back to the bed. She looked so peaceful right now. She had been so upset about whatever had happened before she came into the ballroom with Drake. I wasn't sure if she was mad at him or if there was

something else that they weren't telling us. I leaned down and kissed her forehead, planning to leave and let her rest. As I pulled away, her arms wrapped around my neck and dragged me on top of her. "Stay," she whispered. It was awkward, but I managed to climb over to lie beside her.

Then I pulled her on top of me, so her head rested on my chest. There were so many things I wanted to say to her. I hoped that I would get the chance. "I'm here, Elle. I'm not going anywhere. You're with us now. We'll keep you safe."

I watched her sleep until I couldn't keep my eyes open anymore. Knowing that Lan and Drake would be pissed that I stayed with Elle, I did it anyway. She wanted me here. Even if she wasn't in love with me, she needed me. I wasn't about to leave her alone when that wasn't what she wanted.



LANDYN

After escorting Bella to her room with Kings, I went to find Drake. He owed us an explanation. The eldest Brighton brother never did anything without good reason. So, for him to risk pissing off the king, there had to be more to the story than we were given. If Bella couldn't talk about it, Drake damn sure would, one way or another. I found him in the den, staring out the window. I knew this was where he'd be. Drake always practiced conversations in his head beforehand if he could. He would stare out this window for hours going over every possible outcome. Somehow it calmed him down.

“Drake, we need to talk,” I demanded. I looked over my shoulder, expecting Kings to be there, but he wasn't. Of course, he would have stayed with Bella. Lucky bastard. I turned back to my brother, noticing again how his sandy brown hair and green eyes contrasted with my darker chestnut hair and hazel eyes. I wondered if he'd ever noticed. I was convinced that each of us had a different father. It was the only explanation for how little we looked alike. It didn't matter,

since our mother was the king's omega and he shared her with his brothers. We were all family. There were many different family arrangements in Crescent Canyon, ranging from polyamory to monogamy, depending on the family. Luckily, our society was pretty accepting about that. You loved whoever you loved, and it didn't matter.

My oldest brother turned to face me. His eyes were sad, but the rest of his face looked angry. "What do you want? I said I would take care of it."

"That's just it. What are you taking care of? What happened to Bella tonight?" I crossed my arms over my chest and stepped closer. Drake was only a little bigger than me; I wasn't sure that I could take him, though, if it came to a fight. "How did she end up with us? I thought they'd offer us another one that we'd reject this year."

"They sold her to the Wildes. I couldn't let that happen. Hell, Chad was about to force himself on her in the hallway outside of the ballroom." Drake fisted his hands in his hair.

I stared at him in disbelief. "What are you talking about? Who sold her? He tried to rape her? Just wait until I get a hold of Chad. That slimeball will be dickless when I'm done," I ranted, not giving Drake a chance to answer my original questions. It didn't matter. I knew who'd sold her. The only people who could have done it were her parents. I never would have expected that from the Vanderbilts, but I guess I should have. They had always tried to get closer to our parents when we were kids. Then after Bella left, they all but disappeared.

“It doesn’t matter. I’m taking care of it. Mrs. Robinson likes us better than the king. As long as I can keep him off her back, she won’t regret helping me. I’ll make a large donation and round up some guys to help with her next event. It’ll be okay. And I’ll be the one to face him about it. I won’t put that on either of you.” Ever the dutiful eldest son, Drake was hell-bent on taking the blame for something we all would benefit from.

“No,” I replied. I couldn’t remember the last time I had gone against something he’d told me in regard to our parents. But I wasn’t about to let him take the fall for this.

“No?” he parroted.

“You’re not going to face him alone. I’m going with you. This is something that impacts the three of us. We’ll leave Kings with Bella to keep an eye on her while you and I talk to the king. This should’ve been a decision that was made by us as brothers, and that’s how it will be presented.” I hoped that this disagreement didn’t come to blows. I’d been working out for a while, but Drake was still more built than I was.

His bitter expression softened. “You’re serious. You would do this for me?” I knew that the question was hard for him to ask.

I nodded my head. “Of course, but I’m not doing it for you. I’m doing it for her. You know as well as I do that the three of us have been in love with that girl since we were kids. Nothing is going to change that.”

He dropped his shoulders, relaxing. I couldn’t believe that he didn’t want to argue with me over the whole thing.

Forgoing his desires to honor his sense of duty had been a point of contention for a long time. Normally, I would just let him take the blame for whatever stupid thing we'd all done. Our father would lecture him about responsibility and that would be the end of it. I'm pretty sure he knew when we talked Drake into things.

"I guess we should get some rest. Tomorrow will be a difficult day," Drake admitted. We knew the king would summon us first thing once he heard about what had happened at the ceremony. I had to laugh since this was the first year that he'd missed one of the omega assignments. Since we had rejected every omega they'd ever tried to assign, they assumed this year would be the same. Mother had insisted that he escort her to an event in a neighboring country. They would get home late and receive news of tonight's events first thing in the morning. I had a feeling they'd be pissed that we'd finally accepted one when they weren't available.

I waited until Drake closed the door to his room before I left the den. I had to pass Bella's room to get to my own, so I figured I would stop and check on her. I took my shoes off and strolled quietly to her door. I couldn't believe she'd been assigned to our family, I felt as though I was still in shock. I had no idea how Drake had pulled it off, but I owed him.

It would take time for her to adjust, but hopefully soon we'd be back to the way things were before. I'd missed her more than I wanted to admit while she'd been gone. Honestly, I never knew how to deal with my feelings for her, so I pushed her away and teased her by dating any pretty girl who threw

herself at me. When that didn't work, I started doing stupid stunts and getting injured just to get her attention.

My favorite memory was when I broke my leg water skiing. I had been doing crazy stunts and landed a jump wrong. I hit the side of the boat and ended up in the hospital. Surgery fixed my leg, but the pain isn't what I remember. The thing that stuck with me was waking up to Bella standing over me, arms crossed, trying to look angry. The concern in her eyes melted me. Kings told me later that she had refused to leave from the time I was brought in the hospital until I woke up after the surgery.

I had at least a dozen more memories like that, where I had done something stupid and ended up hurt. Each one of them ended the same way, with Bella by my side. It amazed me how long it took for me to realize that I had been doing it on purpose just to get her attention. I hadn't been injured once since she left. I stopped hanging out with my daredevil friends and no longer had any interest in doing those stunts.

I stopped outside her door. Should I knock? Surely Kings had left her by now. I didn't want to disturb her rest. She looked as if she'd been through a lot earlier and I had been relieved that she'd fallen asleep so easily when I pulled her into my lap. I decided to peek in and make sure she was sleeping okay. I carefully pushed the door open, letting the hall light spill inside, and I froze.

Of course, Kings was in bed with her. Why wouldn't he be? He had always been the one she turned to when she was upset.

I had no idea why I thought this time would be different. I knew that I shouldn't be jealous, because if she stayed, the three of us would share her. But that green-eyed monster had me by the dick and I couldn't escape its hold. Had she asked him to stay until she fell asleep, or had she actually slept with him? Why did I care so much about the answer?

I closed the door as quietly as I could and crept down the hall to my room. I knew that I should be thankful that she wasn't alone, but at that moment, I hated my little brother. I grabbed a towel and stomped into my bathroom. Maybe a hot shower would calm me down enough to sleep. It wasn't going to be fun standing in front of the king and telling him that we had disobeyed him on something this big. He and Mother had made it clear that Bella was not a possibility for our omega. We could get disowned if he got angry. I hoped that he remembered how close the four of us used to be and accepted that we wanted Bella as our mate.

If he didn't, I wasn't sure what would happen. Sure, he *could* disown us. But Mother would not be thrilled about that. More likely, he would be concerned that we would try to overthrow him if he disagreed. Now that was an interesting thought. My brothers and I had often discussed how we would change things once we were the rulers. Would we take the chance of fighting our father to take his seat? I wasn't sure about the other two, but I knew that I would. If it was the only way that Bella got to stay with me, I would fight them all. And I would win. I couldn't lose her again.

I showered and climbed into bed, thinking about ways to get Bella's attention. I was too old to be breaking legs and arms over a girl. I needed to come up with something better. I started planning dates that would win her over before I drifted off. There was so much I wanted to show her, so much she deserved from life. I hoped that I would get the chance to share it all with her.

FOUR





AN ARGUMENT AND AN ULTIMATUM

ISABELLA

I woke in the middle of the night in a strange room that somehow felt more like home than anywhere I had ever been. Kings was still sleeping beside me; I hadn't wanted to be alone, and he'd always been my best friend, so it didn't seem strange to have him stay. I briefly wondered if he would get into trouble with his parents over it. The king and queen wouldn't care that their sons were adults, they would still expect propriety.

I glanced around the room, noticing the dim light coming from the bathroom. Kings had his arms wrapped protectively around me, and I wanted nothing more than to snuggle in and stay here forever. But this ball gown was uncomfortable, and I really had to pee. I gently lifted his arm from my waist and slid off the bed. I wondered if there were any other clothes here that I could change into.

I tripped over my shoes on the floor and almost face-planted before I caught myself. I stumbled as quietly as possible to the bathroom door. It was a good thing Kings was such a heavy

sleeper, he hadn't seemed to notice I moved. I slipped into the bathroom, and silently closed the door. Then I turned on the light and my jaw dropped. It was exactly the way I had imagined my dream ensuite when I was thirteen.

Kings and I had talked a lot about everything, especially how things would be when I was chosen as their omega. I couldn't believe he'd remembered every detail that we'd discussed as kids. The towels were the precise shades of lilac and sage that made my heart smile. The tile in the shower was beautifully marbled, and every surface was polished to perfection. I opened the cabinets, looking to see what else he'd surprised me with. I found a new toothbrush, my favorite toothpaste and mouthwash, and a bottle of hand soap that smells like honeysuckle. Had they really decorated this room for me? Or was this just a crazy coincidence? Surely, they'd been preparing for a different omega. But why hadn't they accepted one before now? It didn't make sense.

The shower held bottles of my shampoo, conditioner, and body wash. He'd gotten every detail right, down to the brand of razor I had used back then. How had Kings done all of this? I was so shocked that I nearly forgot why I had come in here. Then it hit me; I had to pee. The dress was beautiful, but so very much in my way. I peeled it off then took care of business. I left the offending garment crumpled on the floor, possibly just to spite my mother who had picked it out without any input from me.

Oh, shit. My mother. She was going to be so pissed. They would probably have to give the Wildes back the money that

had been paid for me. I chuckled to myself at that thought. Good. Serves her right for trying to sell her own daughter to the highest bidder. I hated being an omega. It sucked to be expected to take care of everyone and never have your own opinion.

A cold chill ran up my back and I realized that I couldn't leave the bathroom like this. I needed to find something else to wear. I opened the built-in cabinets one by one until I found a door with a robe hanging inside. I slipped into the soft material. This was so much better than that dress. I stifled a yawn and walked over to the sink. I needed to wash off my make-up, even though it was far too late to keep my guys from seeing me this way.

I grabbed a washcloth and the special face soap Kings had to have stocked here. He was the only one who knew what I had liked when we were growing up. I'd spent more time talking to him than fighting with Drake or drooling over Landyn. It was weird how things worked out. All my life, I wanted to be exactly where I was now. But at the moment, I was terrified that I wouldn't be enough for them. I wasn't exactly the typical, submissive omega. Even if I tried, my facial expressions would give me away. There was no way the king and queen would accept this assignment. They would compel Mrs. Robinson to change it back to the original plan, and I would be forced to live with Chad.

Another shiver ran down my back and I gagged. I wiped the cloth over my face again, trying to calm myself down. Just the thought of Chad being one of my mates made me feel sick. I

pushed the feeling away, then decided that I needed a drink. If Kings really had outfitted this suite with me in mind, there would be a mini fridge with my favorite peach tea somewhere in the bedroom. That would be the ultimate test. If the tea was here, they'd definitely done all of this for me. But that couldn't be, right? This was all meant for someone else.

I turned off the bathroom light and waited for my eyes to adjust to the dark again. The nightlight came on, and I realized that was what I had seen from the bed. He really had thought of everything.

I slowly worked my way around the room, hunting for the fridge. It had to be here. Didn't it? How did Kings know that I would be assigned here? Had they planned this? I went from annoyed to pissed. That was the only way that he would have known to decorate the room exactly the way I had described when we were younger. It was the only logical explanation. How could I be so stupid? I was just a pawn in whatever game they were playing with their father.

As I silently moved around the room, I let out a relieved sigh that Kings was still asleep. It didn't look like he had even moved. Good. I still wasn't ready to talk about what had happened. I knew he wouldn't push, but he had this way of looking at me that made me want to spill my guts to him.

Suddenly I didn't want to be in this room any longer. I couldn't. I made my way to the door and slipped into the hall, careful not to make a sound. Then I realized that I was wearing nothing but my underwear and a bathrobe. Shit. I took a look

around the dimly lit hall and realized that I knew where I was. Even after all these years, they hadn't moved to another part of the castle. I wondered if they had redecorated their rooms at all, or if they would look the same.

No! Stop letting yourself fall back into the past. The past. That was definitely a sore subject. I was still so pissed about how everything had happened. I needed to punch something, Or someone. *Drake*. I stomped down the hall to the first door on the left. I didn't bother to knock, but I did open the door carefully just to make sure this was still his room. I wasn't trying to scare anyone else. But I wanted to strangle Drake.

Sure enough, he was sitting on his bed, wide awake, with his face in his hands. He looked drained and sad. Well, that's tough for him, because I was pissed. "I can't believe you want to just pretend like nothing happened between us. What kind of sick game are you playing?" I tossed the accusation at him as I let myself in his room and closed the door behind me.

He turned to face me and a bit of the sadness left his eyes. Drake looked shocked and gestured toward my chest. I looked down, suddenly feeling self-conscious. My robe had fallen open. I quickly covered myself up and crossed my arms over my chest. "First things first. Do you want something else to wear?" he offered. As much as I wanted to slap him over the whole situation, I nodded.

Drake stood up and walked to his closet. I couldn't tear my eyes away from his body, covered only by a pair of boxer briefs. I hadn't considered finding him undressed when I

stormed into his room. My cheeks reddened and I tried to avert my eyes, but they just wouldn't listen. He came back to me wearing a pair of pajama bottoms and carrying clothes. His chest was still uncovered. I stared at his chiseled abs and the V that disappeared beneath his pants.

"They'll be a little big, but it'll be better than the robe." He handed me one of his t-shirts and a pair of shorts. Then he turned around so I could get dressed without his eyes on me. Maybe I misunderstood the situation. If he had orchestrated everything, wouldn't he be trying to get me into his bed? It didn't make sense. I had come here to fight with him, and instead, he was trying to take care of me. That was annoying.

"Thank you," I offered as I pulled on the clothes. He was right, it was so much more comfortable than the robe, even if it had been fluffy and soft. I felt better knowing that the important things were fully covered.

"You're welcome. Now what is it that you're so pissed at me for?" He looked me up and down, obviously enjoying that I was wearing his clothes. For a moment I felt even more exposed than I had been with an open robe. Drake still looked exhausted, but there was a hunger in his eyes.

"As if you don't know." The anger washed over me again. I wanted him to admit that he'd said all those things to hurt me. I wanted him to argue that he'd never meant any of it, or that he'd meant it all. I wanted an apology. I wanted him.

Drake stepped closer and I took a step back. He held up his hands in surrender, then stepped forward again. I wanted to

run back to my room and hide from him. Suddenly the truth didn't matter as much as I thought. He reached out and grabbed his shirt that I was wearing, pulling me closer, until his arms were around me.

“Izzy, come on. This can't be because of what happened so long ago, can it?” He looked hurt at the thought.

I shook my head. Drake would never put me in danger. I knew better, even when I had made the accusations. “It just all fits a little too easily, doesn't it? How are you going to make sure I don't get sent to the Wildes?”

He laughed and hugged me tighter. “Perhaps it does. But maybe it's supposed to. I know you're worried about your parents, Chad, and my parents. I promised you that I would take care of it. I meant that promise. I just need you to trust me, okay?”

“Why haven't you guys taken an omega before this? The girls at the ceremony said that you reject anyone they try to assign. I don't understand what's so different now.”

“I know you don't really trust me, so I'll just say that tonight was a very different situation. You needed us. None of the others ever has.”

I wrapped my arms around him and let myself relax a little. As the adrenaline rush faded, I yawned. I would have to go back to my room and get some more sleep. I was certain that this would be a long day, especially if I had to deal with my parents. At least I knew I wasn't going to do it alone. “I'm still tired. I think I should go back to bed.”

Drake chuckled and scooped me up, then carried me to his bed. “You can stay here for now. I might actually be able to sleep if you’re here. Unless you’re still mad at me and don’t want to be here?” The last bit was more like a question, and his eyes changed with it. He wanted me to stay, but didn’t want to directly ask.

“It’s not exactly appropriate,” I tried to argue.

“Neither is Kings being in your bed right now, but I wasn’t going to give you crap about it. I promise I’m not going to try anything.” The sincerity in his voice touched me. Without thinking, I leaned forward and pressed my lips to his.

Drake shifted his hold on me so I could wrap my legs around his waist. Then he deepened the kiss, teasing my lips apart so his tongue could dance with mine. Fireworks shot across my body. I knew this was a bad idea, but I didn’t care. I wanted to kiss him; I wanted so much more than that. His hands fisted in my hair as his mouth assaulted me. He groaned and I swear it made me purr. When he finally broke contact, we were both out of breath.

“That’s exactly what I’m not going to do. Thanks for the demonstration. Now get some sleep,” he ordered, lowering me onto the bed. I couldn’t figure out what had changed. Two seconds ago, we’d been about to rip each other’s clothes off, and now he seemed hesitant. Typical Drake. Hot then cold. It was the same way when we were teenagers. Was it any wonder that he irritated me so much?

I was too tired to fight with him right now. My eyes refused to stay open. "Fine." I couldn't even put any force behind the word. I passed out as my head hit the pillow. I felt him snuggle in beside me and pull me close, but I couldn't wake up enough to respond.



DRAKE

I'd been shocked when Izzy kissed me. I dreamed of that moment for years and it was so much better in reality. I knew that if I didn't pull away, we would do something that she might regret. I couldn't put her in that position.

Exhaustion was written all over her face, so I pulled away and encouraged her to sleep. I probably would have begged her to stay if she had tried to leave. I hated the thought that she might go back to her room to be with my brother.

Jealousy was not a new emotion for me. I had been fighting the green-eyed monster since Izzy decided that Kings would be her best friend. They did everything together when we were kids. Lan and I barely got any of her attention, and neither of us was happy about it.

Lan tried to make her jealous of his other conquests. When that didn't work as well as he'd wanted, he turned to getting injured. That had been an effective method.

I, on the other hand, opted to fight with her. I constantly started arguments over the dumbest things, just so she would talk to me. I hated to admit it, but seeing her irritated turned me on. She was hard to resist, but I had to, just for a little while longer. Soon, we would be able to finish what we'd started. I needed to deal with my father first.

Once Izzy fell asleep, I debated finding somewhere else to rest. In the end, I couldn't stop myself from climbing into my bed with her and snuggling up against her soft body. Even in her sleep, she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever known.

For a while, I laid there, trying to figure out how to explain everything to her. When I finally fell asleep, it was the best sleep I'd had in years. I woke to find Izzy sprawled across me, with her head on my chest and her hand dangerously close to my erection. I looked at the clock and realized that I needed to get moving. It wouldn't do to keep the king waiting, even if he was your father.

I placed a kiss on the top of her head and slipped out of her grip. She groaned and rolled over, obviously upset that her pillow had disappeared. My heart swelled at the sight of Izzy curled up in my bed; I wanted this for as long as I could remember.

It took everything in me to walk away from her there. If I hadn't been so scared of my father's reaction to Izzy being selected as our omega, I probably would climb back into bed with her. I would never admit that fear. Alphas were expected to be fearless, after all.

I showered quickly and got dressed in my walk-in closet. Then, like a coward, I snuck past Izzy and out of my room. No doubt, she would be upset when she woke without so much as a note. But what was I supposed to do, write her poetry? Confess my undying love for her? That wasn't my style. Feeling those things was hard; it felt like expressing them was nearly impossible.

I met Lan outside his door. "We should wake Kings before we go, but I don't want to wake Bella." So, he knew where our little brother stayed last night as well. Interesting.

"That won't be a problem. She's in my room, sound asleep." The look I gave him was a dare. I wanted him to call me out, so I could rub it in his face that she had come to me in the middle of the night. He didn't need to know that it was only because she wanted to fight. I turned and walked back to Izzy's room. I didn't bother to knock. I walked in like I owned the place.

Lan strolled in behind me, closing the door loudly. Kings jumped and his face turned red. "Hey guys, I just came to check on Elle. But she's not here."

"You came to check on Bella in the outfit you wore to the ceremony last night? Why didn't you put on pajamas?" Lan smirked.

"Better yet, why didn't you sleep in your own bed?" I asked. We loved making him sweat. Lan and I exchanged a glance while we watched panic cross Kingsley's face.

“I came back to check on her, and she asked me to stay. Nothing happened, I swear,” he stammered. He fisted his hands in his hair. “I woke up this morning and she was gone. But her dress is in the bathroom.”

“Shit. We need to get her stuff from her parents’ house. Lan, would you arrange for someone to go collect her possessions? I don’t think she wants to see the Vanderbilts right now.” I ignored Kings for a moment and focused on what Izzy would need.

“Yeah, I can get someone on that as soon as we’re done with our meeting.” Landyn nodded and glanced at Kings.

Kingsley stared at us. “Who are you meeting with? Why wasn’t I included? And where the hell is Elle? You look like you know.” His accusations were met with laughter.

“Of course, I know. She came to my room in the middle of the night. She’s asleep now. You will not bother her. She’s exhausted. As for the meeting, it’s with the king. We’re going to explain about Izzy and figure out a way to make him accept it.” I skipped over why he wasn’t included. He’d been left out because he never took anything seriously, and I wasn’t willing to risk our father taking Izzy away from us because Kings said something wrong.

“So, I’m just supposed to sit around and wait for her to wake up? Then what? I just babysit her until you two get done and you’ll give me instructions after that?” His sarcasm had gotten better, but I pretended not to understand.

“That sounds great, thanks, little bro,” I said, turning to leave the room. Lan followed me into the hall.

“You know that pisses him off,” he laughed. Neither of us cared if Kings got a little upset. He deserved it for the stunt he’d pulled by climbing into bed with Izzy before we’d all had a chance to talk about things. There had to be rules about us sharing her time. We couldn’t force her into situations where she wasn’t comfortable.

“I don’t really care. If he had really been concerned about Father’s reaction, he would have talked to us last night instead of crawling into Izzy’s bed.” I shouldn’t have been as angry about it as I was. After all, she ended up in my bed with me.

Lan pulled out his phone and stared at the screen. “Speaking of the king, check your phone. We’ve been summoned.”

“Just us, or Kings too?” I asked as I pulled my phone out and looked at the message myself. “Good, he just wants us.” As much as I teased Kings about being a screw up, Lan and I tried to protect him from our father’s temper.

We hurried to the throne room, anxious to see how the king would react to the news about last night. Unsurprisingly, we didn’t have to wait long. The moment we walked through the doors, he bellowed, “Everyone out! I will speak with the princes alone.” King Lester Brighton looked at his wife, our mother, Queen Amelia. She nodded and excused herself. This was not good. The only time our father had ever talked to us without Mother being around was when we were punished.

Landyn and I stood at attention near the entrance. It would be suicide to approach the throne before the king called us forward. We'd learned that one the hard way. He waited for the room to clear, gritting his teeth and scowling at us. I exchanged a sideways glance with my brother, neither of us daring to move until commanded. My heart was racing, as I imagined Lan's was. I calmed slightly when I realized that the situation could have been worse, the king could have ordered Izzy to come with us. I was thanking the stars for that one small blessing.

The door clicked as the last person finally left. King Lester stood and pointed at us. "Get over here, now." Lan and I walked quickly, keeping our posture straight, and stopped directly in front of our father. We gave low bows and waited for him to give us permission to stand.

"You may rise," he ordered, clearing his throat. "What's this nonsense about the Vanderbilt girl being assigned as your omega? You boys know that she's not worthy of the royal family."

I felt the anger wash over my brother and myself. It didn't matter what he said, we had already claimed her. Neither of us cared that it wasn't official. Izzy was ours. "Your Majesty, if I may," I began before he held up a hand.

"You may not. I am not concerned with your excuses or failed attempts at flattery. I am aware that the assignment cannot be changed now. We will simply make the best of the situation. However, if there is any type of scandal within the

adjustment period, I will banish her and disown you both.” He paused, stroked his beard, then continued, “Better yet, you boys have thirty days to claim her and get her in line or she will become my servant, where you will have to watch me teach her where she belongs.” With a wave of his hand, our father dismissed us.

FIVE





WAIT, WHAT'S GOING ON?

KINGSLEY

I was terrified when I woke up alone in Elle's bed. I searched the room, scared that she had run off. Last night she had been so upset and didn't want to talk about it. I wasn't sure if she was upset about Drake messing with her assignment, or if it was something else. When I found her dress crumpled on the bathroom floor, I thought that maybe someone had taken her.

When Drake told me that she went to his room, relief washed over me. Then after he and Lan left me to babysit, anger set in. I hated being expected to obey just because he was an alpha. I knew I couldn't beat him in a fight, so in the end, I relented as I always did. After stopping to look in on Elle, who was still asleep in Drake's bed, I went back to my room to shower and get dressed for the day. I grabbed a pair of jeans and a sweater for Elle and hoped that she didn't mind wearing my clothes until we could get hers moved.

Irritation took over at that thought. I should have been the one to make arrangements for someone to collect her

belongings but Drake had given that job to Landyn. I was getting sick of those two always blocking me out and bossing me around. Growling to myself, I stomped back to Drake's room. If Elle wasn't awake, I would have to wake her. There was still a chance that the king would summon her today.

I couldn't envy my brothers for their meeting with our father, it was the one time I was glad they left me out. If we were lucky, he wouldn't call for us to bring Elle to speak with him. He'd been in such a hateful mood since she left and I didn't want to put her through that. She deserved some time to relax and get used to being here. I wanted to give her everything she desired and prove that we cherish her completely.

Without thinking, I threw open my brother's door and stormed into the room. My thoughts had distracted me and I let my irritation with Drake spur me on. Elle jumped and screamed at the sudden intrusion. She was sitting in his bed with the covers pulled up over her chest, and she appeared to be wearing his clothes. I guess that tells me everything I didn't want to know about what had happened.

"Kings! You can't just burst into someone else's room. What are you thinking? You scared me!" The look on her face was a mix of terror and amusement. I figured that she was relieved that I was the one who'd come in. Part of me wondered if she would have looked so relaxed if it had been Drake at the door. I paused and shook the thought from my head; I couldn't let myself get caught up in jealousy.

“Sorry, Elle. I just got so bored waiting for you to wake up. After I hunted for you for an hour, that is. If you had said you wanted to sleep with Drake, I would have let him have my spot.” I made a pouty face at her and she laughed. That sound was my absolute favorite in the world. I wanted nothing more than to find a way to hear it constantly. “You wanna get some breakfast and see what kind of trouble we can get into?”

Elle looked at me, then gestured to herself. “I’m not exactly dressed to go exploring the castle. You can’t possibly expect me to put that dress back on.”

It was my turn to laugh. “I thought you’d just wear what you have on. I mean, this is your home now. Why not?” Then I took a couple of steps closer and handed her the clothes I had brought. “I know they’re not yours, but I think my stuff will fit you better than his.” She held up the sweater and then the jeans. I could have brought her something we had in her room for her, but it would be way more fun to mess with my brothers by having my scent all over her.

“I think you’re right. How is it that you and I are nearly the same size? That’s so weird. Shouldn’t you be all bulked up like Drake? Or tall like Landyn?” At the mention of Lan, she blushed. My smile made her look away, as if trying to hide.

I stepped even closer and sat down on the edge of the bed. “It’s okay. You’re our omega. That means you’re allowed to like us. You don’t have to hide the fact that you’re crazy about him. I just hope someday you’ll look at me the way you do him. I’m sure Drake feels the same.” It was my turn to look

away. I felt her eyes on me and wanted to run. She reached over and grabbed my hand. Suddenly it was hard to breathe and I felt like the room was closing in on me. I had dreamed of holding hands with Elle and planning our future so many times. But this was different. The assignment couldn't be changed, but she could still refuse to be ours. Then she would be considered a servant for the family, meaning none of us would be able to touch her.

I closed my eyes, saying a silent prayer that her attraction to my brother would keep her from rejecting us. With as bad as she fought with Drake, I couldn't be sure. I felt the bed shift, then her other hand was on my cheek. I took a deep breath of her scent mixed with Drake's. I could tell they hadn't had sex, but since she'd slept in his bed, she still smelled of him. I started to open my eyes, but her lips pressed against mine.

Before I realized what was happening, Elle had pushed me onto my back and climbed on top of me without breaking the kiss. I groaned at her weight on my cock, which was already hard. She giggled and deepened the kiss, teasing my lips apart so her tongue could explore. I wrapped my hands around her waist and pulled her closer. She held my face gently between her hands, as if she had to slow herself down.

At that point, I remembered where we were. My eyes flew open and I sat up, holding onto her so she didn't fall off the bed. "We can't do this here," I breathed.

"Why not?" she asked sheepishly. "You don't think he'd do it to you?" I laughed. She was probably right. Drake was the

type who would make sure he made out with her in my bed just so I had to smell him mixed with her until I changed the sheets.

I smiled at her and stood up, wrapping her legs around my waist. “I’m sure he would. But I’m the nice brother, remember? And I am definitely interested in continuing this, just not here.” Her pout nearly changed my mind. “Do you want a shower before you get dressed? We can go back to your room so you can use your own soap if you want.” She glared at me playfully, as if accusing me of something. “What? I’ll be good, I promise.”

“Fine. Grab your clothes and I’ll let you carry me to my room. Then you can wait outside in the hall while I take a shower,” she insisted and I didn’t argue. I was too excited to see if I could convince her that I was worthy of her affection. I would take what I could get for now, then start pushing boundaries later. Besides, there was still a chance the king would find a way to stop her from becoming our omega.

I picked up the sweater and jeans from the bed while Elle hung onto me like a spider monkey. Then I carried her to her door, set her down, and handed her the clothes. “I will be right here if you need anything.” Not stopping to think, I pulled her close and kissed her. She pressed against me and I pushed her back to the door. There were so many things I wanted to do to her, but I knew I would have to wait. Patience was a virtue, after all. And I had waited my whole life for Elle. What’s a few more days?

I pulled back and opened the door, gently pushing her inside. I pulled it closed, and her sigh through the door melted my heart. It was nice to know I'd piqued her interest, at least a little. I slid down the door and settled onto the floor to wait for her. If anyone had come by, I probably would have received a lecture about propriety, but I didn't care. My girl had told me to wait here, and so I would. I sat there thinking about everything that had happened at the ceremony last night, and what had occurred since. It was surprisingly a lot in such a short amount of time.

I heard my brothers before I saw them. "What do you think he has planned?" Lan asked. "I'm sure he's not just going to let us bond and that will be the end of it." Apparently, Father hadn't taken the news well. I still couldn't figure out what he had against Elle. She was the most amazing woman I'd ever known.

"I don't know what he's going to do, but you can bet it will be designed to make us fight amongst ourselves and with her. We can't let him win this time," Drake replied. A moment later, they rounded the corner and nearly ran over me.

"I thought you two had a meeting with the king," I said, ignoring the fact that I heard part of their conversation. I wondered if they would tell me anything, or if I would have to be sneaky and figure it out myself.

"We did. It was very, uh, short," Lan spit, looking at Drake to see if he could say more. Our oldest brother nodded and Lan continued. "The king has certain reservations about the

assignment, but has graciously allowed us the typical ‘adjustment period’ to prove that we can make this work. No scandals, no drama.”

“That seems like a strange reaction from him, doesn’t it?” I asked, looking from Lan to Drake.

“We thought so too, but he wouldn’t budge on it. It seemed like he was determined for us to mess this up. I think he wants to make sure we don’t bond.” Drake’s assessment of the situation scared me a little. What could possibly have made the king upset about us finally agreeing on an omega?



LANDYN

“Why exactly are you sitting in the hallway outside Bella’s door?” I stared down at my little brother as if seeing him for the first time. With his light coppery brown hair and pale green eyes, he couldn’t have looked less like Drake and me. My hair was a darker, chestnut shade and my eyes were hazel. Then there was Drake, with his sandy brown, almost blond, hair and dark green eyes. It was strange for us to look so different, but not if we’d all had different fathers. Of course, Mother would never admit to that because it could hurt our claim to the throne. I shook the thoughts away and focused on what was happening right now.

If Kings had pissed off our girl before she had even accepted us, I would kick his ass. Especially since the king handed out his ultimatum. It was going to be hard enough winning her over without Kings fucking it up.

“She’s in the shower. I’m a gentleman, so I’m waiting out here,” Kings said with a smirk. I wondered if he really expected her to fall into line so easily. The Bella I knew would

talk Kings into standing out here while she snuck out the window.

I gave him a pointed look. “You know she’s climbing out the back window and down the trellis right now, don’t you?” He paled, his eyes opening wide. Then he shook his head, trying to convince himself that she wouldn’t do that. We all knew better.

Before I could grab the doorknob, Drake had the door open and walked inside, pushing us out of the way. “See? She’s gone. Good job, asshole. Now we have to find her.”

I walked into the room and over to the window next to Drake. It didn’t look like any of them were unlocked, but I knew that if anyone could figure out how to lock the window after climbing out of it, it was Bella.

Kings stayed in the doorway. “There’s no way. She went to take a shower. Elle has to be in the bathroom. Trust me. You two will be in the doghouse when she comes out and sees that you’re in her personal space without permission.”

I shook my head and walked to the bathroom door. There were no sounds coming from the other side. “Do you think she climbed out the window in here?” Before Drake could answer, the door was thrown open and Bella was standing in front of me, wearing nothing but a towel.

“What the hell? You two have no respect! Get out!” she yelled, then turned toward Kings. “And you! You were supposed to keep them out. All I wanted was to take a shower and get dressed. Is that too much to ask?” As angry as she was,

her voice broke at the end of her rant. Tears welled up in her eyes.

Drake and I hung our heads, feeling guilty for expecting her to run. It would serve us right if she insisted on going back to her parents. I wondered briefly if this would count as drama. Of course, it would. Everything was stacked against us here. We needed to calm her down and fast. I nodded to Drake and he walked out into the hallway. “Just give us a minute,” I said as I gently closed the door.

Once we were alone, I held my hands up in surrender. “I just want to talk. I’ll turn around so you can get dressed. I’ll even close my eyes, if that makes you more comfortable.”

“Fine. Turn around and eyes closed. What do you want?” Bella had never taken this tone with me before and I wasn’t sure how I felt about it. My dick jumped as if trying to tell me that I liked it. I had gotten so used to everything being awkward between us. I guess she had grown out of some of it. Maybe I had too.

“Do you want to be our omega? I know that no one asked you that but really, the decision should be yours.” I wished that I could see her face, but I had promised, so my eyes were closed and I faced the door. I even put my hands over my eyes to keep myself from sneaking a peek.

“Maybe I should be asking you if you want me to be your omega. Because I’m pretty sure Drake didn’t ask you or Kings before he set up the whole thing,” she replied from right behind me. Her closeness startled me, in a good way. I wanted

to spin around and pull her into my arms. “I don’t understand why he did it anyway. He hates me.”

“Why would you think that we don’t want you? The three of us are thrilled to have you. But we’re not going to push you into anything you don’t want. Also, Drake doesn’t hate you.” I kept my eyes closed and turned around. “This is really awkward when I can’t see you.”

I felt Bella put her hands on my face and let my hands fall as she pulled me down to her. I fought the urge to open my eyes. If this was a test, I was determined to pass it. She gently pressed her lips to mine, then let me go. I stood there for a moment, shocked. I had wanted to kiss her since the last summer she was here. I’d waited ten years for that kiss and I was not disappointed. I wanted more.

I took a chance and opened my eyes. Her face was mere inches from mine. A quick glance down and I could see that she had gotten dressed in some of Kingsley’s clothes. I groaned. “I’m sorry. I haven’t had a chance to see to getting your belongings from your parents’ house yet. I figured you’d sleep longer and I could take care of it before you needed them.”

Bella took a step back, surprised. “You’re going to get my stuff? I thought I would have to.” There was an unspoken emotion attached to her statement. I couldn’t tell if it was anxiety or fear. I knew that her parents could be ruthless, especially if what Drake told me was true. If her parents had sold her to the Wilde family, they wouldn’t be happy about us

ending up with her. But maybe we could spin it differently to make them accept it. Perhaps I would go personally and retrieve my love's clothing and important items.

“Of course. I'll do it myself if you'd like. You don't need to see them unless or until you're ready. It would probably be better if you settled in here first, anyway. There are some things my brothers and I need to discuss, then we'll need to talk to you about them as well.” Oh, no. I had said something wrong. Her face changed from anxious to relieved to angry in the amount of time it took me to finish speaking. I should have left this part to Drake. What was it about this girl that made me want to pour my heart out and tell her everything?

“I'm supposed to just let you guys handle everything? Sure, I'll sit over here like a good girl and let you big, strong alphas and my sweet beta take care of it all. Does that sound good?” Her fists were balled at her sides. I had stepped in it for sure.

“That's not what I meant and you know it. Drake and I need to tell Kings what our father said.” Before I could finish my thought, she interrupted.

“Then get them both in here and let's talk about it. I'm part of this situation too. I deserve to know what's going on,” Bella insisted, tears threatening to fall. If she cried, I knew I would lose it. I would break down the castle brick by brick if her tears fell. I pulled her into my arms, tucking her head against my chest. I wanted to hold her forever, but I knew that her anger would take over again soon. After a long hug, I let go and walked to the door.

“Get in here; we need to talk,” I said to my brothers who were both waiting expectantly on the other side. Kingsley strolled in, but Drake just looked at me. “Come on, we might as well talk about it all together. It’ll make her feel better about everything.”

He nodded and walked in, closing the door behind him. “Lan’s right, we should all be together to talk this through.”

Bella smirked. “Yeah, because it was his idea.” She rolled her eyes at Drake and sat on the bed. Kings flopped down next to her, then she patted a spot on her other side and motioned for me to sit by her. It was cute that she still blushed around me. Drake was left to drag the vanity chair over. Once we were all settled, I took a deep breath and waited for my oldest brother to explain our situation.

Before he had a chance, Bella spoke. “I’m guessing the king is going to make this difficult for us, since he had no idea that I would be assigned here. I can imagine that he still hates me, and that you were given some sort of ridiculous ultimatum.” She looked from my face to Drake’s, then continued, “Spill it. What are his conditions? I know I have absolutely no say in any of it.” She threaded her fingers with Kings, and I felt that pang of jealousy hit me again. I wanted her to be that comfortable with me. I wondered if she would pull away if I tried to link our hands.

Drake didn’t give me a chance to find out. He leaned forward and took her other hand. “Izzy, it’ll be okay. I’m taking care of it. He’ll come around. We just have to prove that

we can make this work.” I noticed, with another pang of jealousy, that she didn’t pull her hand from his.

SIX





THIRTY DAYS TO SEAL THE DEAL

ISABELLA

It didn't take a genius to figure out that the king would be against me marrying his sons. Ten years ago, he had told me as much, then watched as Drake echoed his words. They had been cruel and hurtful. I was more surprised that the king hadn't banished me.

I hadn't expected Drake to change his mind, and I wasn't sure what had caused it. But maybe there was hope for the king as well. I wasn't about to hold my breath over it. I knew that Drake was trying not to tell me the worst of it. I released Drake's hand to pull Lan closer. "Tell me." I stared directly into his eyes, not giving him a chance to look to his brothers for help.

"He gave us a month to be fully mated. And if we're not, or if there's any kind of public drama, he's going to handle it," Landyn dropped his eyes, refusing to look at me after he spoke. I turned to Drake.

"What does that mean?" I asked, not sure I wanted to know the answer.

“It means that if he feels like we’ve failed or if we embarrass the family, you’ll be his servant, and we’ll be exiled,” Drake responded flatly. I winced. It didn’t surprise me, but I had hoped for something less severe.

I had to commit to the Brighton brothers within thirty days, and couldn’t have any public drama during that time. Oh, sure, that sounds like a walk in the park. I’m sure my parents and Chad will just go along with it all. We were screwed. There was no way that we would be able to avoid drama. I stared at Drake with wide eyes. “I see.”

I couldn’t help retreating into myself a little. I still wasn’t sure how to feel about being here with them, and suddenly everything is going to be so much more difficult than I could have expected. I pulled my hands away from Kings and Lan, laying them in my lap, and I stared at them. There was nothing else to say. I would have to accept that I was going to be the king’s servant. Even if I wanted to, there was no way I could bond with each of them and avoid any drama. This situation would breed drama. Why couldn’t Drake have just walked away? Why did he have to save me?

I knew the answer, even if none of us wanted to say it. He wanted me. They all did, apparently. In less than twenty-four hours, I had managed to kiss each of them. I could tell from those interactions exactly how they felt about me. Or at least how their bodies felt about me. Their emotions were a little more guarded, and I doubted they would profess their love for me anytime soon. Could I settle for three men who simply

wanted me for my body? Or would I constantly wonder if I deserved their love?

At that moment, I decided that I would direct my anger toward my parents. This entire situation was their fault. I was perfectly fine, living on my own, passing for a beta. Why couldn't they leave well enough alone? I could have lived in Ayix and managed to force down my feelings for the Brighton boys. I wouldn't have ever married, but I could have been happy focusing on myself and my art. But no, the Vanderbilts had to make a deal with the Wildes and essentially sell their omega daughter. The only course of action I had now was to find a way to make this work. I wouldn't settle for being the king's servant. Not without a fight.

"I need answers," I said quietly, finally looking up at the three men who were staring at me intently.

"Ask me anything," Kings responded. Before I even asked, I knew that he would tell me anything I wanted to know. I wondered if the other two would be so forthcoming. I looked at Lan and he nodded, then at Drake who rolled his eyes. I guess two out of three wasn't bad.

"Do you actually want me as your omega?" I stared at Drake, hoping he would answer. It stung when he stood up and walked to the window. I turned my attention to Kings.

He looked at me with those sad hazel eyes. "Of course. I mean, look at this room. If I didn't want you, I wouldn't have been willing to force whoever was assigned to us to live in your dream." He made a good point. The room screamed

Isabella, and with the last-minute change at the ceremony, he couldn't have known.

“Fair enough,” I said before turning to Lan. I raised an eyebrow and he blushed. I'd never seen his cheeks turn red before, especially when talking to a girl. Interesting.

He nodded. “Yes.” His voice was breathy and, if I didn't know better, may have been laced with need.

I felt my own cheeks get warm and turned to Drake at the window. “That just leaves you. Answer the question.” I could have said please; I could have asked nicely. But I didn't, because it was Drake and that wasn't how our relationship had ever worked.

He turned back toward me, his eyes burning with something. Anger? Passion? I couldn't tell from this distance. His jaw was set and he was scowling. I held up my hands, gesturing for him to respond. Drake crossed the room and picked me up, crashing his lips to mine. He poured his emotions into the kiss. I felt every bit of his anger and frustration, but there was something else. Desire? Or was it something more?

My breath came in ragged bursts when he finally released me. His expression dared me to ask my question again. I nearly did, before thinking better of it. When I didn't, he finally spoke. “Now that we've settled that nonsense, what else do you want to know?”

Okay, so that kiss was his answer. I hoped that meant he wanted me. He was hard to read, though, and I was never sure

what he was thinking. I took a minute to think about the best way to word my next question. We'd never get anywhere if my guys took turns responding with kisses. I wasn't sure I would mind that but I knew we had other things to deal with first.

“Right. My other questions,” I stalled, trying to cover up the fact that he'd thrown me off with the passion in that kiss. I wanted him to do it again. *Focus. This is important.* “I want to make sure I understand the details. I have to be fully bonded and mated with each of you within the next thirty days. There can't be any public drama that would embarrass the king or your family. If I fail at either of those, I'm going to be the king's personal slave. Did I get all of that right?” I honestly hoped that I had misunderstood at least part of it. I didn't want to be pressured into this. I thought we would all have time to get to know each other again and bond naturally. One month was not enough time.

Drake nodded. My heart started racing faster as panic began to take over. There was no way. By this time next month, I would be a slave. My chest tightened and I gasped for breath. Darkness closed in, and I felt myself collapse. I had expected to hit the floor, but two strong arms caught me and held me tightly against a firm chest. I could still hear, but it felt like I was listening to the conversation from outside of my body. “I've got you, Bella. It's okay. Just breathe.”

As embarrassing as nearly fainting was, the guys didn't seem to be upset by it. Lan caught me and Kings helped him put me back in bed. Drake even covered me with a soft blanket. It was so sweet of them to take care of me. It took a

few minutes for my vision to come back. All I could do was listen to the three of them while I waited.

“It was clearly a panic attack caused by stress,” Lan explained, a concerned edge to his voice. I had thought that he was mildly interested in me, but maybe it went deeper than I realized.

Drake grunted and I heard the chair move again. Was he putting it back or moving closer to the bed? I lifted my head, even though my vision was still hazy. “Just relax, Izzy. We’re still here.” His tone wasn’t as angry as it had been. And he was definitely closer now.

“How do we fix her? There has to be something we can do.” I heard Kings, but he sounded like he was across the room. He’d just been beside me. What was he doing? My vision was still blurred and my head spun.

“What did she eat for breakfast?” Lan’s voice was soft but demanding.

Kings stuttered his response. “Oh, I, uh, I mean. She hasn’t been up that long. I was going to get food after she showered.” I heard a thump and Kings grunted.

“Hello, Carlotta. Would you please have a tray of brunch prepared quickly and brought up to Isabella’s room as soon as possible?” Lan paused, then replied, “Yes, that’s correct. Thank you.” He must have been on the phone. Now that I took a moment to think about it, I hadn’t eaten anything since lunch yesterday. It had been nearly a full day. No wonder I was light-

headed and dizzy. As if on cue, my stomach started to grumble.



LANDYN

My brother was an idiot. Of course, it wasn't just one thing that had caused Bella to collapse. It was a combination of the anxiety attack and lack of nourishment. Why had I left her in his care? I should have known that he wouldn't be able to handle it. I punched him again. "You know she didn't eat last night. The fact that you didn't bring her breakfast in Drake's bed makes me want to punch you again."

Bella stirred, but her eyes were glazed and unfocused. Drake managed to stay just out of my reach, obviously concerned that I would start swinging at him too. And I might. I had already berated myself for not considering her needs. I wasn't going to allow the other two to neglect her as well. Nurturing was odd for me. Landyn Brighton didn't do relationships; he wasn't a caring or considerate man. Or at least, that's what most of my exes would say if anyone asked.

The problem was that none of them were my Bella. I had only ever wanted to take care of her. I had imagined brushing her hair when we were kids. Then as I got older, my fantasies

matured with me. Now I wanted to pamper her completely, bathing and worshiping every inch of her. I had a feeling that I would do nearly anything for this girl.

A sharp knock on the door made Bella jump. “It’s okay; it’s just food.” Kings opened the door as he spoke. I hadn’t expected Carlotta to bring the tray up herself, but there she was, pushing the serving cart. There was enough food on it for an army. It all smelled amazing.

“I brought you boys some food too. Everyone needs to eat. I had expected you to call last night for dinner, especially after what I heard happened. Is she okay?” Carlotta didn’t wait for an answer, she just walked over to the bed herself to see. “Isabella, how are you feeling? I brought you some soup to start with. Then you can have whatever you want. The boys will wait to eat until you’ve had your fill.” She turned, giving us a pointed stare. We nodded in agreement.

There was no way we would go against Carlotta’s orders; she had always been more like a mother to us than the queen. It wasn’t our mother’s fault. She had duties and responsibilities to tend to, which left us in the care of nannies and Carlotta, our kitchen manager. She had made sure we were fed and cared for, only taking this stern tone when we had really screwed up.

Bella tried to sit up, but struggled. I climbed into the bed with her and helped her sit against my chest. “I’m okay, Ms. Carlotta. Thank you for bringing me something to eat.” Her voice was quiet. She leaned back against me until I wrapped

my arms around her. Bella turned her head and sniffed me. “Thank you, Lan.” The words were whispered just before she kissed my cheek. I wasn’t sure if that was for my benefit, or to keep me out of trouble with Carlotta.

“I promise we’ll take better care of her. No more missed meals,” I said, meeting the older woman’s gaze. She nodded before turning to go. I was surprised that she didn’t have more to say about the matter. After she left, Drake pushed the cart over to the bed and Kings started making a plate. “What are you doing? Bella needs to eat first,” I snapped.

“I was making it for her,” Kings tried to defend himself. I wasn’t sure that I believed him, but I let it go. Drake handed me the mug of soup and I held it up to Bella’s lips.

“Be careful, it’s hot,” I whispered as she took the mug from me and sipped slowly. After a few sips, she handed the mug back to me and I placed it on the nightstand.

“I’m feeling a little better now,” she said. I started to pull my arms away and let her sit on her own, but the moment I moved, she grabbed my hands and brought my arms back around her. “Where do you think you’re going?” The look on her face proved that she was as shocked as I was that she’d said it.

I kissed her ear. “I’m not going anywhere. I thought you might be more comfortable in a different position.” Two seconds before my brothers snickered, I realized what I had said and instantly regretted it. “So much for trying to be sweet.”

Bella laughed and snuggled against me. “It’s okay. I understood what you meant, even if it came out wrong. I have that problem around you a lot.”

“Can we finish talking about our situation, or would you two prefer to be alone?” Drake’s tone was condescending and I wondered why he was trying to fight with Bella. One look at his face told me that he was worried and didn’t know how to handle it. It would probably be a good idea to have a talk with him later about this.

Before I could scold him for it, Kings climbed onto the bed with us and held a plate of food out for Bella to eat. It was piled high with fruit and sweets. That definitely looked better than the soup had. She smiled at him and took a strawberry. “Give her a minute to relax before you start stressing her out again.”

“It’s okay, Lan. We need to talk about it. I’m sorry I collapsed. Everything was just too much for a minute. Thirty days is not a lot of time,” she said between bites. It appeared that her appetite was returning. Maybe all she needed was to eat and argue with Drake. Even if that was the case, I still refused to let him be rude to her.

“Then we talk; no yelling or fighting. Understood?” I faced Drake when I spoke, to make sure he knew I was specifically talking to him. He nodded, gritting his teeth.

Kings spoke up from beside me. “I have an idea that might make the bonding easier.” He popped a slice of banana in his mouth and continued. “We should have a schedule. Each of us

gets a day with Elle. We can hang out, talk, go on dates, whatever. If things progress from there, it stays between her and whichever of us she's with. We don't compare notes, other than to make sure we're not repeating date ideas."

Bella was facing Kings, so I couldn't see her expression. She tensed as he spoke, then relaxed against me again. "I think I can handle that. I wasn't sure how we would get enough time to truly bond in a month. Your idea sounds pretty good, Kings. But who will plan the dates?" I shifted slightly so I could see her expression.

"I think we should handle that part; if that's okay with you. We can show you things we like to do and you can decide if you enjoy them too. If you don't enjoy an excursion, you can suggest something different for the next date. Does that sound good?" I placed a kiss on her temple. As long as we could get Drake on board, this plan just might work.

Bella nodded. "That sounds good. I wasn't sure how I would plan anything when you three aren't going to let me out of your sight for five minutes."

Drake snorted a laugh. "Should we have left you on the floor when you passed out?" He crossed his arms and leaned against the wall halfway across the room. He appeared to be purposefully putting space between himself and Bella. I wondered why.

She looked at him indignantly. "No, but you don't have to be an ass, either." Kings and I laughed.

“She told you,” Kingsley said as he doubled over with amusement. Drake growled and our youngest brother went silent. Kings was a bit smaller than Drake, and wasn’t as experienced at fighting. Typically, if he couldn’t avoid a fight, I had to step in to make sure Drake didn’t kill him.

“What is your problem, Drake? We have to find a way to make this work, and we have. But we need you to cooperate, too.” I was already fed up with his attitude.

“I don’t see how coddling her helps the situation. I’m not going to be someone else just because we have an omega now. Unlike some people,” he said, staring at me. There was no way to make him understand that I wasn’t being someone else now; I was someone else before Bella came back to us.

seven



OF COURSE, HER PARENTS OBJECT



DRAKE

Once everyone was finished with brunch, Izzy seemed more herself. “So, Lan will arrange to have your belongings brought over this afternoon, and then we’ll sit down and decide on a rotation for dates. I know there isn’t much time overall, but organization is key.” Taking charge was easy for me, since I’d been expected to do exactly that for most of my life. I didn’t wait to see what the others would say, I simply made a decision and went on.

“No,” she replied quietly. Lan and Kings looked at me. They were most likely worried that I would blow up at her clear defiance. Omegas were supposed to be quiet and obedient. But our Izzy was anything but a typical omega. That’s probably what drew me to her.

“What do you mean ‘no?’” I asked, trying to channel patience and calm. I couldn’t let her openly deny my authority, especially in front of my brothers.

“I’m going over to get my stuff. You can’t stop me, so don’t even try. If Lan or Kings wants to come, I’m good with that.

You are cranky and cannot be trusted not to start a fight with my parents.” Izzy stepped up to me, standing on her tiptoes to get in my face. I didn’t like her challenging me like this, but there was no way I could deny her anything she wanted.

I growled, hoping to intimidate her a little. I didn’t care that she wanted to go, I just didn’t want her asshole parents to hurt her again. They didn’t deserve to see her ever again after what they did. I wanted to banish them from the kingdom, but I knew that Father wouldn’t agree. He would claim that they were well within their rights as her parents to negotiate a deal that would lead to an alliance. He would conveniently leave out the fact that the Wilde family had paid the Vanderbilts a lot of money in exchange for this deal.

Omegas were nothing more than property to be traded and exchanged, according to the king. “It has always been this way, son,” he would tell me when I was growing up.

I hated how omegas were treated. They were people too, not just things to be owned. When I was a teenager, I had tried to petition the king to change the laws, but he refused. I had even attended protests and chanted with the others who believed that change was needed. My father’s response? He threatened to remove me as one of his heirs if I continued to involve myself with those who protested his policies publicly. So, now I just send donations to the omega rights organizations to help them fund their rallies and protests. Once he steps down and puts us in power, we will change the laws.

Until then, I had to play the part publicly, no matter how much I wanted to give in to her demand. “If you insist on going, I’m going with you. The four of us should be able to handle it,” I challenged. Izzy glared at me, still trying to balance on her toes to keep her nose mere inches from mine. I wrapped my arms around her and pressed my lips to hers, taking what I wanted most. She tensed at first, then melted into me, opening her mouth to let my tongue fight with hers. Without thinking, I scooped her up, wrapping her legs around my waist and carried her across the room. I wanted to be as far away from my brothers as possible. I knew they were watching, and would likely step in, but I didn’t care.

I pressed Izzy up against the wall and lowered her slightly. I wanted her to feel what she did to me. When she moaned, one of my brothers coughed. I trailed kisses down her neck, grinding against her. Izzy had her hands fisted in my hair, encouraging me to continue. I brought my lips back to hers, kissing my girl until I was sure we’d both die from lack of oxygen. Then I set her on her feet and stepped away.

“I’ll be back to get you in thirty minutes. Be ready to leave. I don’t want to spend all day over there,” I ordered before stomping out of the room. I heard my brothers finally move from where they’d been frozen. Of course, they would scramble to make sure I hadn’t offended her. Those assholes should be on my side, but they’d both already made it obvious where they stood. I had expected it from Kings, but Lan surprised me.

By the time I made it to my room, I was even more pissed. Izzy and I had always been like oil and water. All we ever did was fight; I hated it and loved it at the same time. Everything between us was red-hot passion. She always pushed me until she'd driven me crazy, then puckered up like she was going to cry because I had hurt her feelings. Then I would end up beating myself up over the whole thing and taking it out on her the next time we were together.

I didn't want us to be like that, but I couldn't find a way to stop myself. Every time she made some smart-ass comment, I lost my cool. At least this time, I kissed her instead of yelling at her. I wasn't sure that had been a better decision. Screaming at her would have left me irritated with myself. Kissing her had left me irritated with myself and horny. I couldn't exactly walk back into her room and ask her to take care of things with my brothers standing right there.

I needed to calm down so that we could go to her parents' house. The sooner the Vanderbilts were dealt with, the better. I just couldn't get Izzy out of my head. Even in Kingsley's clothes, she was hot. A cold shower, that would fix this. I grabbed a towel and headed to my bathroom, locking the door behind me. I didn't need anyone walking in on me today, there was no telling how I would react.

I stripped down and turned on the shower, knowing I should go with ice cold water, I turned it to hot and stepped in. Izzy refused to leave my thoughts. Her standing up to me had always turned me on. As I thought about her pouty mouth, I slid my hand down my abs and gripped my cock. I swear the

damned thing had been hard since I saw her with Chad. I stroked slowly, images of Izzy on her knees with my dick in her mouth assaulted me. I had dreamed of that for so long, and now it was actually a possibility.

I imagined all the ways I wanted to take her while I stroked myself. By the time I came, I had mentally fucked her in seven different positions, each one more complex than the one before. I needed to find a way to make that fantasy come true. While I considered that, I cleaned up and got out of the shower. I walked into my room with the towel wrapped low on my hips.

“It’s about time; we’ve been waiting on you for over ten minutes now,” Izzy said. I jumped at her voice and almost lost my towel.

“Were you in there spanking it?” Kings asked with a smirk. Great, just what I needed. Now everyone knows, because I felt my face turn multiple shades of red.

I walked slowly to my closet and started grabbing clothes. “What are you doing in my room? I said I would come get you.” I decided to forego modesty and start getting dressed in the doorway of the closet. If they didn’t want to watch, they shouldn’t be in my room. Heat spread across my face again when I realized that Izzy didn’t look away.

“You said you’d be back in thirty minutes. It’s been forty-five. You’re normally so punctual. We came to make sure you were okay. The door wasn’t locked, so we came inside. You

set that precedent earlier,” she explained casually while maintaining eye contact as I pulled on clothes.

I glanced at my watch and realized that she was right. “I’m sorry, I lost track of time. I’ll be ready in a minute.” Once I was dressed, I walked into the bathroom to finish getting ready. “Where’s Lan?” I asked when I came back.

“He’s getting a couple of the stable hands to help move stuff. It’ll be easier if Elle can pack what she wants and we can stay with her while still having someone to carry the stuff down to the trucks,” Kings said, wrapping an arm around Izzy as if there was no chance of this outing going south. Her parents were not the friendliest people, and they were usually only interested in how things would benefit them. I wondered if they had explained to Izzy that they needed the deal with the Wilde family because they had lost their money in another get-rich-quick scheme. The saddest part of everything they did was that they started out wealthy, but it wasn’t enough for them. They wanted more.



KINGSLEY

Was it mean to take Elle to Drake's room to wait for him? Absolutely, especially when I figured out exactly what was taking him so long. Did I care? Not at all. If he wanted to be a dick and then go spank it while we waited, I'd do it again. Lan had decided to ask Stephen and Justin to help with the move. I thought it was more so he didn't have to deal with Drake. I could tell the tension between them was getting worse and it was only a matter of time before things blew up.

The level of control her parents were exercising was outrageous. Before the ceremony they took her purse and phone, so Elle couldn't even call them to make sure they were home. I hoped that we didn't have to break in to get her stuff. If it was up to me, we would just buy her everything brand new and forget everything else. But I knew her well enough to know that wouldn't work. She would insist on getting her books and art supplies, and probably her wardrobe. I couldn't say I blamed her. Elle had always been a great artist, even if she didn't believe me when I told her. She should be selling

paintings instead of dealing with all of this drama. That's probably what she was doing in Ayix.

I had so many questions about her time there. It was virtually impossible for an omega to live on their own, but our girl had done it. Somehow, she had passed for a beta, getting a job, and an apartment while going to school. It had been hard at first hiding her location from my brothers. But they couldn't let her go either. So, once they also figured out where she was, we'd discussed going and begging her to come back. Drake had decided that it wasn't worth the hassle. So, I continued to secretly send her half of my monthly allowance. I wondered if she'd ever figured out where the money came from, or if she even knew it was there.

"Can we talk later about your time on the mainland?" I asked as we climbed into the limo for the short trip next-door. It was as ridiculous as it sounded.

Elle turned and looked at me, tilting her head and squinting her eyes. "If you want. Is there something specific you want to discuss?"

I knew I shouldn't have said anything, because I'd probably just started her wheels turning. She would figure out soon enough that I'd sent her money if she didn't know already. "Not really, I just wanted to know what it was like there for you."

"If you say so," Elle said, her tone seemed suspicious, as if she was working out what I really wanted. Her face scrunched

in concentration and I could tell she was considering something.

“What did Kings do to make you mad?” Drake asked, suddenly interested in our conversation. Why did I bring up the mainland? Elle always could read me like a book, it was no surprise that she would start figuring it out so quickly. Although, even if she just realized, it had taken her five years. So, I guess that was something.

“He didn’t do anything. I was talking to you, but as usual, you ignored me.” Elle turned to face him, ready to fight. Relief washed over me and I mouthed ‘thank you’ at her. She nodded once, winked at me, and waited for Drake to respond.

“What the hell did I do?” He had turned defensive, which wasn’t unusual when he spent time with her.

She shrugged. “You tell me. You’re the brains behind all of this. What exactly is your plan for facing my parents? They’re going to be pissed that they’ll have to give the Wildes back the money that was paid for me.” I stifled a laugh at the way she had effectively changed the subject.

He rolled his eyes at her, threw up his hands in defeat, and turned away. No doubt he was trying to figure out how he’d pissed her off this time. I almost felt bad for him. Almost.

Elle looked at me and mouthed, ‘later,’ to which I responded with a thumbs up. I owed her big time for not ratting me out to Drake. Sure, he would find out eventually, but I wanted to discuss it with her first before telling my brothers what I had done.

I watched out the window as they continued to grumble at each other. I could see the Vanderbilt's mansion sitting next to the Wildes' estate. I wished that Chad hadn't turned out to be such an ass. There had been a time when we'd been friends, though it only lasted a few weeks before he started being mean to Elle and we'd taken care of it.

We pulled up to the Vanderbilt's mansion before Drake could find something else to argue about. I could tell that Elle was worried about facing her parents, but I was proud of her for deciding that she needed to do this. I knew that my brothers and I would stand by her no matter how this went. When Andrew and Veronica Vanderbilt were standing on the front steps with their arms crossed, I knew this was a bad idea.

"You don't have to do this, you know. We can turn around and send someone to collect your things. Or we can just buy you all new stuff," I suggested, wincing at the hateful expressions on her parents' faces. I was not looking forward to going in their house.

"I'm going in. You can stay in the car if you're scared. I appreciate the offer of new stuff, but that's not fair to you guys. You've done so much for me already. I have to do this," she insisted, patting my hand.

"If you're going, I'm going." I tried to sound brave, but I was sure she knew better. Drake climbed from the limo, turning and holding a hand out to help Elle exit the vehicle. I took a deep breath and got out on the opposite side, further

from the house. Lan and his help parked behind us and I heard him ask them to wait at the truck until he called them.

“We’re going to carry things down and the guys will load them up. That way Bella’s parents can’t complain about extra people in their house. And we can make sure she’s never alone with them.” It seemed as if my older brother had thought of everything. Drake didn’t argue with Lan’s plan. Instead, he marched up to the front door where the owners were staring at us. Elle took my arm and Lan’s and we walked behind him.

“Let me do the talking,” Drake ordered, expecting us all to agree. I didn’t plan to fight him on this one, but something in Elle’s expression told me that she wouldn’t be so easily swayed.

“They’re *my* parents, you know,” she grumbled.

“Yes, and they completely subscribe to the ridiculous idea that an omega is property. So, please, Izzy, let me handle this diplomatically. We’ll get in, get what you need, and get out without a fight.” He stopped and turned to face her so suddenly, we barely kept from running into him. Drake made a big show of pulling her into his arms and kissing her. Then he turned her toward Lan, whose face turned red and he kissed her on the cheek. I followed his lead, preferring to keep our private moments just that. I knew that Drake was just trying to assert dominance in front of her parents, but it seemed wrong to me.

She turned back to him after the show. “Fine, I’ll do it your way for now. But if they start in on me, I’m not keeping my

mouth shut.”

“I’ll take care of it. Just worry about clearing out your room. Whatever you want, take it. If they complain, we’ll appease them financially,” Drake said, sounding like this was a business deal instead of moving our girl out of her family home.

Our entourage started moving again, until Drake was standing right in front of Elle’s parents. “Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt, it’s lovely to see you. We’ve brought Isabella to collect her personal belongings. Since she has been assigned as our omega, she will be moving into the castle now.” He sounded polite and professional, completely unlike himself. The usually gruff and cranky man was replaced with this prince, who obviously knew how to talk to people.

“She was absolutely not assigned as your omega. I believe you know that already. We’ve filed a formal complaint this morning and will be working with the Orolis Family Council. The error will be corrected swiftly,” her father scowled as he spoke. I wondered if he would have taken that tone with our father, the king. Mr. Vanderbilt handed Drake an official looking document. He scanned it and handed it to me before turning back to them. “You’ll find the paperwork in order. If you know what’s good for you, you’ll return her to the Wildes before this matter goes to hearing.”

“My apologies for the lack of notice of the change. I can assure you, however, that it will not be reversed. There was no error. The king is aware of the assignment; Isabella has been

accepted and will be moving to the castle. You can either move out of our way and allow her to collect her personal effects, or we can send guards to collect them for her.” Drake kept his cool, condescending tone going. “I feel quite certain you would prefer to let us collect Isabella’s belongings, given that our guards are fairly clumsy and may be prone to property damage.”

His veiled threat was understood immediately. Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt grudgingly stepped away from the door, allowing Elle, Lan, and me to go inside. Drake didn’t seem to be finished berating them, so he remained in the doorway. I think it also served to keep them from following us or cornering Elle.

I looked at the document Drake had handed me. *Blatant disrespect for the decisions of the council. Egregious error that must be corrected immediately. Return of our property to its new owner. Damages.* Every word I read pissed me off more. They wanted us to pay damages to the Wildes because we “stole” their omega? Ridiculous.

We followed our girl up to her childhood bedroom. She stopped outside the door for a moment as if steeling herself against her emotions. Was she unhappy about being with us? That couldn’t be it. She must be upset about her parents’ reaction to the situation. When she finally opened the door, I followed her inside without an invitation, but Lan waited just outside.

“Are you coming in?” I asked him, confused about why he would hesitate.

“I’ve never seen her bedroom before,” he whispered in awe. Wow, this crush thing was getting worse all the time. I hoped it would smooth itself out after they’d had a chance to be intimate. Who was I kidding? That would probably make the awkwardness ten times worse instead of making it go away.

EIGHT





AND THEN, BIG SURPRISE, DRAKE IS A DICK

KINGSLEY

I stepped out into the hall with my brother. It seemed funny to me that he'd be hung up on seeing her bedroom from our childhood. Most alphas would have jumped at the chance to leave their scent all over the place. This was one instance where being a beta helped me out.

“Seriously, Lan? It's not her room now. It was when we were kids. Just get in there and help us pack what she wants to take.” I shook my head and shoved him into the room. After a few minutes of standing there staring, he decided it wasn't as awkward as he'd made it.

Elle started with the luggage that she'd brought when she came home. I knew that she'd only been here a few days. The room didn't even smell like her. She tossed the suitcases onto the bed and opened them. Her clothes were neatly packed as I imagined they had been when she'd arrived. We spent the next couple of hours helping her sort through childhood memories and decide what she wanted to take.

Lan carried another box down for the guys to load, and I took that moment to check on Elle. “Are you okay?” I asked, pulling her into my arms and pressing a kiss to her temple.

She wrapped her arms around me and hugged me tightly. “I will be. This is just really hard. I know that they want to yell at me. And I can’t get over them filing a complaint and asking for the assignment to be changed.” Tears started to fall. I never could handle her crying. “I’m scared.” Elle buried her head under my chin.

“I get that. But there’s no reason to be scared. We’re not going to let them take you from us. You belong with us. No one will take you away. I promise.” I hoped that I could keep that promise. I knew that each of us would fight for her, but would it be enough?

I leaned back and tilted her chin so she had to look at me. I gently pressed my lips to hers in a sweet kiss. I wasn’t going to seduce her in this room, even though I had thought about it most of my life. I wiped the tears from her cheeks and she gave me a small smile. “Thank you.” I kissed her forehead and let her go just as Lan came back.

“Everything okay here?” he asked. I looked at Elle and she nodded. “Why do I feel like I missed something big?” Lan crossed his arms over his chest and stared at us. I was sure he got jealous of how easily Elle and I exchanged affection. It wasn’t my fault that we’d been best friends since the day we met. He should have tried harder to get her attention, the right way, instead of focusing on making her jealous.

“You didn’t miss anything. Elle is just a little worried about her parents’ complaint. I told her there’s nothing to worry about,” I explained. He seemed satisfied with that answer, but walked over to her and started helping her pack the next box.

“Do you just want to take everything and sort it at home?” he offered. It would definitely be easier and faster that way.

“Not really. I’d rather leave what I don’t want here for them to deal with. I know it’s not convenient for you guys. If you need to go, you can. I promise I’ll get it done as quickly as I can. I don’t want to be here any longer than I have to. I probably don’t need any of it to be honest. I’m just afraid I’ll leave something important.” There was an edge to her voice that I had never heard before. But I understood why she would be angry, given the situation. Her parents objecting definitely made things more difficult, but so did Father’s reaction. Luckily, neither of them had the authority to force the council to change its ruling.

Before I had a chance, Lan pulled her into his arms. I decided to give them a moment, turning my back to start packing another box. Elle had already sorted a lot of her things into piles of what she wanted to keep and what she didn’t. I couldn’t stop myself from looking over my shoulder just in time to see him kiss her, causing me to clench my hands into fists. I really had to get a handle on this jealousy thing. There was no way the four of us could make this work if I couldn’t stand to see her with my brothers.

After she left, I was convinced that I would be happy no matter what, if only she would come back. The thought of sharing her hadn't bothered me until I saw her with them. I hadn't even felt this jealous when Chad was trying to get her attention. I knew that I shouldn't be watching them, but I couldn't stop myself. I suppressed a growl as his arms tightened around her. I guess even betas had a jealous streak when it came to the women we loved.

I tossed the rest of the stuff from the pile into the box and picked it up to take it downstairs. If I stayed here, I would end up between them and that wasn't fair to anyone. I tried not to stare at them as I walked past. As I took the stairs down, I heard arguing. I had planned to ignore it until I realized that one of the voices belonged to Drake. Who was he yelling at? Was that Elle's dad?

I stopped to listen, careful not to make any noise with the box or its contents. I placed the box gently on the floor and knelt as if I were tying my shoe. It was the best excuse I could come up with on the spot. Once I could hear the whole conversation, I froze.

"You can't have her. After what you did to her, you don't deserve her!" Andrew yelled. Her mother was sobbing. What had Drake done to Elle that made her father so angry?

"I told you. That was all a huge misunderstanding. Besides, you and Veronica tried to sell her to the Wildes. Can you say that was in her best interest?" Drake growled back.

Veronica's sobs got louder. "He's going to chase our baby away again." What was she talking about? Drake had chased Elle away? Was he the reason she'd left ten years ago, just when I needed her the most? I had always thought that Elle couldn't handle our baby sister's death and that was why she had moved away. Maybe there was more to the story than I knew.

"He's not going to chase her away. Not this time." Andrew seemed to be comforting his wife. "Because if he does, he will have me to deal with."

"Look, you're obviously only worried about the money you got from the Wildes. I will arrange for them to be repaid and you won't have to worry about it. Honestly, I would be more worried about where you're going to get another daughter to sell when you get in a bind again." Drake's words were cruel and unnecessary. Mrs. Vanderbilt started to cry again and I heard Mr. Vanderbilt comforting her more.

I picked up the box and stood, ready to sprint down the rest of the stairs so I wouldn't get caught eavesdropping. I heard Drake's voice again and stopped. "Don't even think of trying to extort more money from us. We've paid you enough, and I'm handling your debt to the Wildes. If you continue trying to blackmail me, you'll never see your daughter again."

With that, I jogged down the front steps, careful to do it as quietly as possible. My mind raced as I tried to figure out what they had been talking about. Drake couldn't have been the reason Elle left, could he? I tried to imagine what he might

have done to chase her away. We were all wrecked after Annabeth's accident. Then Elle took off right before the funeral. It had ripped my heart out that she wasn't there for me when I needed her the most. It took a few years for that pain to ease. Hearing Drake's conversation with her parents brought it all back to the surface.

I knew that I should be angry with her for abandoning me, but I wasn't. Right now, I was angry with him for bringing it up. I had finally found a way to get past it, and there he was, shoving it in my face again. No, that's not true. It was my fault. If I hadn't stopped to listen to someone else's conversation, I might not be thinking about that pain right now. It wasn't fair to be angry with either of them. But now I wanted answers.

I dropped the box off with Lan's guys and headed back up the stairs, running into Drake as he exited the room he'd been in when he argued with the Vanderbilts. "Are you three almost done?" he growled.

"A few more boxes. Why?" I asked, trying to sound nonchalant. I was certain it wasn't working.

"We need to get her out of here," he spat. "As usual, I guess I'll have to take care of it." He stomped up the stairs in front of me. I reluctantly followed, wondering if I should have warned him about Elle and Lan's intimate moment. I decided that I would let him witness it for himself if they weren't finished. He deserved it for keeping secrets.



ISABELLA

Landyn had pulled me into his arms and kissed me, much the same way Kingsley had done when we'd had a moment alone. Except Lan didn't wait until we were alone, he kissed me in front of his brother, as if that were the most normal thing ever. I felt, more than saw, Kings grab a box and leave. My sweet beta was upset, even though he didn't want to be. I would have to reassure Kings later. I understood how difficult this situation was and wanted to make it easier for everyone. I would have to set boundaries until the four of us were more comfortable around each other.

After he'd kissed me, Lan held me for a moment. I slowly pulled away, in wonder at how this gorgeous man could possibly be interested in me. My childhood dreams are suddenly within reach. "We should get the sorting and packing done. Drake will be angry if we take too long." He nodded and let his arms fall away from me. A cold chill ran up my back and I wanted to sink into his arms again. Later. I could spend time alone with him later.

I refocused my energy on sorting through the last of my personal belongings that were here at my parents' house. Then I realized, anything else I really wanted was in my apartment in Ayix. I hadn't planned to be here for more than a week or two. Even after finding out that my mother and father had basically sold me to cover their debts and turn a profit, I had planned to return to Ayix to collect my stuff.

Lan and I worked in near silence, the only conversation when he wasn't sure if something was meant to be kept or tossed. The silence was comfortable for a while, then my mind started to wander. What would I have done if Drake hadn't saved me from Chad? I know that Chad hadn't planned to rape me, but he would have just the same. He would have convinced himself that omegas don't have any rights and that meant I couldn't say no. He owned me, after all.

That line of thinking pissed me off. I started throwing things into the boxes, not worrying about if I was doing all of the work anymore. Lan and Kings had convinced me that making piles would allow them to help me and keep things fair. It was sweet that they respected me that much, especially when no one else did. I didn't ask for any of this. I wasn't sure I wanted any of it. I damn sure didn't want to be sold to the highest bidder. But no doubt, Drake would make my parents an offer that they couldn't refuse. Then I would belong to the Brightons, just as my parents had intended for me to belong to the Wildes. I would be property, bought and sold as my owners desired.

Lan must have sensed the change in my demeanor. “Are you okay, Bella? We can take a break, if you want.” His sweet sensitivity touched my heart. But I was too pissed at that moment to let it get to me.

“I’m okay. It’s just exhausting trying to keep up with who owns me now. I’m sure your brother is brokering a deal to pay my parents off so I can stay with you guys.” The statement wasn’t fair, and I knew it. But I didn’t care. I was hurt and pissed, and I wasn’t exactly thinking about other people’s feelings.

“We can talk about it if you want. I understand how upset you are over this, and I agree with you. It’s not right that omegas get treated this way.” He paused as if considering something. “I probably shouldn’t tell you this, but Drake and I are planning to change the laws once we take over.” He smiled at me, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. He was hiding something.

“Seriously? You guys are going to head the Omega Rights Movement from inside the monarchy?” I laughed. Drake fighting for my rights seemed hilarious to me. He was one of the worst about making decisions for me and acting like I was simply property to be traded.

“He already does. At least as much as he can without Father finding out. We’re both involved. Drake donates more than I do, but I arranged deals for printing posters and pamphlets. He supplies the money, and I organize the manpower most of the time,” Lan explained it as if he thought I wouldn’t believe

him. And he was right. I didn't. There was no way that Drake, the giant asshole extraordinaire, financially or otherwise supported an organization that wanted to give me the freedom to make my own decisions.

"I'll believe it when I see it," I said simply. I turned back to the boxes I was filling, cutting off any further pursuit of this conversation. I tried to focus, but my mind was racing with the information Lan had given me. My two alphas had been fighting for my rights. It seemed strange, and I wondered if my beta had a clue what they were doing. I hated the way they kept Kings in the dark about most things just because he wasn't an alpha.

We worked for a while longer, placing childhood mementos and books into the boxes and stacking them by the door. I hadn't realized that there was so much in this room that I wanted to make sure I kept. Seeing the four boxes next to the door and knowing that Kings and Lan had already taken three others down, plus my suitcases, it hit home that I was leaving this place and never coming back.

"This is really happening, isn't it? I'm moving into the castle," I said softly. I didn't realize that I had started to cry until Lan wiped a tear from my cheek. "I'm never coming back here."

"I'm sorry, Bella. I wish I could make it all better. I know it hurts." He wrapped his arms around me again, this time for comfort and nothing else. He gently pressed a kiss on top of my head and I let my arms hold him. I had dreamed of this for

so long. I couldn't let myself believe it was really happening. I was in an embrace with Landyn Brighton. My heart started to race.

I should have expected something to ruin the moment. Drake burst through the door, scowling. I hated that my body's reaction to that was more tears. Lan held me tighter and rubbed my back, glaring at his brother. "Don't start, Drake. She's already upset about the whole situation."

The warning seemed to instantly goad Drake into an attack. "Then maybe you should have packed faster. Is this everything that's going?" He pointed to the four boxes, stacked neatly by the door. I nodded, not looking up from Lan's chest where my face was buried.

I heard the boxes shifting and assumed he had picked one up. I stepped back from Lan, knowing that I would need to help carry the last of them down to the truck. When I turned, Drake was gone and there were only two boxes left. Kings was picking one up, and Lan stepped over to grab the other. I guessed that meant Drake had taken two. So much for having to help load them up. I quietly followed Kings, with Lan walking behind me. Neither of them said it, but I was sure they were trying to protect me from being cornered by my parents.

I had expected them to at least try to talk to me, but it looked as if they had decided I wasn't worth it. Typical. They didn't get their way, so now they would go off and pout, ignoring me until I sought them out. I never understood until this moment that they had done it on purpose. They forced me

to go to them so they could punish me for whatever they had decided I'd done wrong. It was like being punished twice. Well, I would show them. I wasn't falling for it this time. As much as I wanted to say goodbye, I would not go to them. I would make them come to me.

Once we were safely tucked back into the limo, Lan and Kings seemed to relax. Drake, on the other hand, was fuming. I wondered what had happened with my parents to push him this far. I couldn't make myself ask, because I was afraid of the answer. "Will you arrange for someone to clean out my apartment, or will I be able to go myself and pack it up?" Honestly, that question was just as likely to set him off, but it was safer than discussing my parents.

"You are not leaving the castle without one of us. If you insist on going to the mainland to pack your apartment, all of us will go. I'll let you know when arrangements have been made. Until then, drop it," Drake snapped. As much as I wanted to call him out for being hateful, I refused to give him the satisfaction.

nine





LANDYN TO THE RESCUE

LANDYN

I wasn't about to let my brother get away with snapping at Bella like that. She had simply asked a question. It wasn't like she'd threatened to run away. I moved so I was between them, and turned to him. "What the fuck is your problem?" I braced for his reaction.

"Don't worry about it," he replied, lifting one shoulder slightly.

"I am worried about it when it makes you disrespectful to our omega. Tell me," I demanded. He shook his head and turned toward the window. "Bella, please accept my apologies on behalf of my idiot brother." She gave me a weak smile.

"I know why he's pissed," Kings said with a smirk, staring at Drake until he turned to meet our little brother's gaze.

"Were you spying on me?" Drake accused.

Kings laughed. "I was walking down the stairs and heard you and Elle's parents fighting. What was I supposed to do,

keep walking? Of course, I stopped to listen.” Bella and I looked back and forth between them.

“What did you hear, Kings? Since Drake won’t tell us, maybe you should.” I glared at Drake and waited while he explained the conversation he had overheard.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” I ranted. “You paid them off so they would drop the complaint? That is the most asinine thing you’ve ever done.”

“Not to mention stupid. They’ll think you’re fair game for blackmail now. And when the king finds out, that will probably qualify as drama, and he’ll force me to be his maid.” Bella’s words were said softly, but still held the bite of her anger. She flopped back against the seat and covered her face with her hands.

I reached over and grabbed Drake by his shirt, pulling him almost in my lap. With us eye to eye, he could see just how pissed I was. For a moment, I thought I saw a flicker of fear.

“You’re going to fix this. Now. If she’s right, and Father decides to take her away from us, you’ll have to deal with me. And I guarantee, dear brother, that you won’t come out unscathed.” I tossed him back against the seat and pulled Bella back into my arms. I knew it was childish to threaten him, but I couldn’t help myself. I wanted to rip his head off and shove it up his ass. His stupid temper had put our relationship with Bella at risk.

“He’s not going to find out. That was part of the arrangement. I’m paying off the Wildes so they leave Izzy’s

parents alone. They're not getting any extra from me. I made sure they knew that blackmail would only result in their exile," Drake's voice was flat and matter-of-fact, as if nothing he said was important. I hated when he blocked showing emotion like that.

Kings and I knew that Drake felt everything as much as we did, if not more so. But he was a master at hiding his emotions. It was a good skill to have for negotiations, not so helpful for talking to family. "With that settled, we need to discuss our situation more tonight. I think we should all spend the evening together. We need to figure out a schedule that works for everyone." I knew that changing the subject could be a great idea or could ruin the mood even more.

We had to figure out who would spend time with Bella first, though, and there was only one way to do that. Okay, there were actually a couple of ways. We could have physically fought, but most likely Drake would win. We could have had a trivia battle to see who knew Bella better, but that one would have gone to Kings. The only way I would have a chance was with rock, paper, scissors. Which worked for me because I could read them both better than they realized. Since I didn't see anyone agreeing to any of those ways to make the decision, I figured that conversation would be the next best thing.

"Fine, I'll have dinner delivered to the sitting room at seven," Drake said, still staring out the window and refusing to look at any of us.

“Sounds good,” Kings mumbled. He had reached over and taken one of Bella’s hands in his own. The gesture seeming to have calmed her down a little.

I settled back onto the seat next to her and took her other hand. “Is that okay with you? We can try something else if you want.”

She shook her head and I wiped a tear from her eye. “It’s the best way to figure things out. We need a schedule. And boundaries.” She said the last word a little louder than necessary, and I wondered if she was trying to tell Drake something, or if that part had been directed at all three of us. I supposed we would find out at dinner.

Arriving back at the castle had only taken a few minutes. The truck was already unloaded by the time our limo parked. Everything had been taken to Bella’s room. “Do you want help putting things away?” I asked as we climbed the stairs and turned toward our wing.

“I think I’d rather put my suitcases away and store the rest in the closet for now if that’s okay. I don’t think I can handle seeing all of it again right now. I just need some time to process what’s going on,” Bella replied, her voice barely a whisper.

“How about we help with that, then give you some time to rest before dinner?” I suggested. When she nodded, I gestured to Kings. We had already decided that we would help her put everything away. Once the boxes were secured in a back

corner of her closet where they wouldn't be in her way, we helped her unpack the suitcases and put her clothes away.

By the time we'd finished, Bella was stifling a yawn. "I think it's time for us to leave you to your nap." I pulled her into my arms and kissed her forehead. I wanted to do so much more, but I could see how exhausted she was. I knew that a month wasn't much time, but it didn't matter. I refused to push her into something she wasn't ready for. I stood there while Kings kissed her, then I shoved him out the door. "Go find Drake," I ordered as I closed the door.

Bella tilted her head and looked at me. "I thought you were making everyone leave me alone so I would rest."

I nodded. "I am. I had to make sure that Kings actually left this time. Now into bed with you. I'll be back to get you for dinner."

"Thank you for saving me today," she said quietly as she climbed into bed. I mimed tipping my hat to her, then let myself out.

I looked up and down the hallway, making sure that Kings hadn't decided to hide until I left. Bella would need some alone time to process everything. She was emotionally and physically exhausted from the stress of moving. I was determined that everyone would leave her alone to rest before dinner. Then we would figure out a plan for how to split her time evenly between us while giving her some privacy too. I was sure my brothers wouldn't like it, but I would insist.

I found my brothers in the den, just as I had expected. Drake was brooding by the window, and Kings was lounging on the sofa. “Bella is in bed. I told her I would get her for dinner.” Neither of them looked at me when I walked in. “We should talk about what happened today while we have some time alone.”

Kings looked at me and cocked an eyebrow. “What, you wanna yell at me for eavesdropping too?” He rolled his eyes and laid back.

“No, I wanted to discuss why our older brother thought it was appropriate to purchase our omega from her parents. Especially without discussing it with us first.” Irritation permeating my words.

Drake finally turned to look at me. “You weren’t there. I won’t try to justify myself. I made a call and I would do it again. Don’t test me right now.”

His tone didn’t sit well with me. I stepped up to him, and got in his face. “I will test you at every turn, so long as you continue to make wrong decisions, brother.”



DRAKE

I balled my fists, wanting nothing more than to take my anger out on Landyn. But I understood why he was upset. In truth, I was just as upset with myself, and with the Vanderbilts. I hadn't meant to buy her. I was only trying to convince them to drop the complaint. There was only so much I could do to prevent the assignment from being reversed. I resorted to the one thing her parents seemed to care about. Money.

“Do you think I went there with the intent to ‘purchase’ Izzy? You know that’s ridiculous,” I insisted. At least I hoped that my brothers knew I would never try to do that. “I saved her from that kind of life. Why would I try to trap her like that?”

Lan seemed to relax a little. “How do you ‘accidentally’ purchase an omega? Please explain it, because I’m lost.”

I went over the whole conversation with Izzy’s parents, making sure to tell them everything, including the parts that Kings had missed. When I was finished, they both looked as

angry as I felt. “Wow. I knew they were dicks, but I never would have expected that,” Lan remarked.

“I knew it would be bad, but I didn’t realize just how horrible they were,” Kings chimed in. He shivered, sitting up and making room for Lan to join him on the sofa.

“We can’t tell her about any of that. You two have to promise me. It would destroy her to know that her parents were more concerned with their finances than with their daughter.” I knew I didn’t have to make them promise. Neither of them wanted to hurt Izzy any more than I did. I’d done everything I could today to protect her. The only reason I had growled at her about not being done packing was that I was so close to breaking down.

“Now that the Vanderbilts are taken care of, what are we going to do about Father? He’s obviously against the whole situation. We need to be prepared for when he decides that she should be his slave instead of our omega.” Lan had a good point. I wouldn’t put it past our father to try something like that.

I pulled out my phone and sent a quick email. “I’ve got something in the works that will derail his plans. I’ll explain when I get some answers.”

“That’s somewhat ominous,” Lan remarked, obviously annoyed that I didn’t share exactly what I was doing. I wanted to tell them everything, but I needed to wait for the lawyers to respond. If I was wrong, there was a chance our efforts would be for nothing. If I was right, we would back the king into a

corner and he would have no way to take Izzy away from us ever again. I couldn't risk disappointing them if things didn't go the way I wanted.

"It'll only be a few more days, then I'll be able to explain. I'm not hiding things on purpose. I just want to be sure that I'm right before I tell you about it. Trust me," I insisted.

"Okay. We'll trust you. It's not easy, though. You've been so flippant toward Bella. I'm sure she's getting whiplash from your mood swings," Lan accused. Kings nodded in agreement.

"None of this is easy for her, and I feel like you guys are keeping secrets. That isn't going to help the situation either," he added. Lan and I exchanged a glance. Maybe it was time to tell our little brother what had happened when Izzy left. I cocked an eyebrow, and Lan nodded.

"Kings, you have to understand, we didn't keep any of this from you on purpose. You weren't there when it happened, and Father made us swear to never talk of it again. We didn't expect Izzy's parents to call her to come home. We thought she was gone," I began.

He looked at me, waiting to see where the conversation was going. Lan interrupted, "You were out of town when Annabeth had her accident, and the king handled the situation swiftly. There wasn't time to call you and explain. Then when you got back, Bella had already left. We were all caught up in mourning, and by the time we had a chance to tell you, it was too late."

He was looking more confused now, with good reason. Lan and I sounded crazy. “Izzy was watching Annabeth when she had her accident. Father blamed her. But it wasn’t her fault. It was mine. I told him that, but he refused to accept that I had distracted Izzy. He blamed her for everything,” I explained.

“Then he made Drake tell her that she was responsible and that she should leave before she got banished. He wanted me to agree, but I refused, so he locked me in my room until after she’d left,” Lan continued.

“What? How could it have been her fault? Annabeth drowned in the pool. Elle never would have let her go near the water if she’d been watching her. She loved our baby sister as her own,” Kings said, shaking his head in confusion.

I felt my face turn red as I prepared to admit something I hadn’t been able to say since the day it had happened. “They were getting ready to go swimming. Izzy was wearing that little purple bikini and I couldn’t help flirting with her. We shared our first real kiss by the pool house. While I had her attention, Annabeth got too close to the edge of the water and fell in. By the time we got to her, it was too late.” I felt the tears running down my face. It felt good to finally get that off my chest, but I was still so ashamed of myself for hiding it from him for so long.

“You were there when it happened. It, it was your fault? No one ever told me what happened. Just that she drowned. I thought maybe she went out back alone. Every time I asked, someone changed the subject. Now I see why. And he made

you tell her that you blamed her for it? That monster,” Kings sobbed. I hadn’t wanted to taint his view of our father, but he deserved to know the truth.

“I’m sorry we kept this from you for so long.” I knew that the apology wouldn’t help the pain, but it was all I had to give him. “I blame myself, and I’m sure she blames me too. For everything.” I knew that at some point I would have to talk to Izzy about it, but I couldn’t face that yet. I needed time.

Kings sat there for a moment, staring off into space. He started muttering to himself about being treated differently because he wasn’t an alpha, then stood up and walked off. “Kings, wait,” I tried to call after him, but he kept going.

“I’m sure he’ll need some time to process everything. Let him at least have until dinner. He will want to spend time with Bella tonight. We’ll talk to him again after,” Lan said to stop me from chasing after our little brother. Everything in me wanted to go after him, to let him yell, scream, punch—whatever he needed to feel better. He should be able to take it out on me.

I nodded and walked back to the window. Lan put his hand on my shoulder for a minute, then left me alone with my thoughts. I stared out the window at the pool, just as I had done every day since Izzy left. I knew it was my fault, and I kept torturing myself over it. I wanted Father to punish me for distracting her, but he refused. *It was her fault.* His words echoed in my head. I should have stood up to him and argued

more. Instead, I had let him bully me into telling the only girl I had ever loved that she had killed my sister.

Every time I looked at the courtyard below, I remembered that day. Annabeth had been so excited to play in the pool. They'd invited me to join, but I refused. I couldn't stop myself from following them and watching from next to the pool house. I managed to get Izzy's attention and motion for her to come to me.

I watched as she got Annabeth out of the pool and told her to stay put. Then she'd wrapped a towel around her waist and strolled over to me with a quick glance over her shoulder.

"I've wanted to do this all week," I'd declared. How was it that I remembered every moment, every word, as if it had just happened? She blushed and nodded. I pulled her into my arms and pressed my lips to hers, my body instantly aware of every sensation. The splash hadn't even distracted me from the sweetness of her lips. I murmured against them, "What was that?"

Suddenly Izzy had pulled away and ran toward the pool screaming for Annabeth. In my shock, I couldn't focus on what she'd been saying. It had taken less time for my little sister to drown than I ever thought possible. Izzy and I pulled her from the water and tried to resuscitate her, but it was too late. Tears streamed down my face as the memory assaulted me again.

One moment, I was about to declare my undying love for Izzy, the next we were desperately trying to get Annabeth to

come back to us. Mother was broken-hearted and refused to leave her room for weeks. Father was cold and cruel. I tried to explain to him that it was my fault. I had been the one to distract Izzy. But it didn't matter to him. She should have been able to resist me and paid more attention to my sister. And the things he'd made me say to her—I had been so heartless and vicious. How would she ever be able to forgive me?

ten





OH, Great, CHAD'S Here

ISABELLA

Landyn showed up at my door at exactly ten minutes before seven. I knew that he would be precisely on time, but it still surprised me. To be honest, the whole situation surprised me. I couldn't figure out what had made Drake change his mind. With the things he'd said to me after Bethy, well, I didn't think he'd ever want to see me again.

It didn't seem like Lan or Kings knew that anything had happened between us, and I didn't want to be the one to tell them. So, I kept it to myself for now. At some point, I would have to discuss it with Drake. Maybe I would do that on our first date. The idea of the three of them planning activities for us scared me. I could guess what each one would decide on. Drake would plan a walk through the gardens because that would allow us plenty of time to talk. Lan would want to go skydiving or something equally as dangerous because that was what he was into. Kings might ask me what I wanted to do, or he might just decide on a movie because that was the easy way to go.

“I’m almost ready. Sorry,” I offered, gesturing for him to come in. I needed to check my hair and grab my shoes.

“No rush. It’s just going to be the four of us, and Kings might be a little late. I promise this isn’t going to be a formal affair,” Lan explained.

“What’s going on with Kings? Is he okay?” I grabbed my shoes; my hair was instantly forgotten as concern for my best friend took over.

“He and Drake had a disagreement and he’s taking it harder than expected. I promise, he’ll be fine. Especially when he sees you in this dress! You look amazing!” Lan tried to steer the conversation away from his brothers’ argument and refocus my attention on something more positive.

I decided that it would be easier to get answers out of Kings anyway and dropped the subject. There would be plenty of time to interrogate each of them when I got them alone. Tonight was for planning and determining exactly how much time each of them would get to bond with me. I hated that our relationships had a timer on them. I wanted things to progress naturally, not be forced into physical relations before we were ready.

I followed Lan to a sitting room I hadn’t been in for a very long time. When we were kids, the queen would have dinner parties, and the children of guests would be entertained in this room. It hadn’t changed much. Our dinner was laid out on a small table that would seat only the four of us. It would be a cozy meal, so long as everyone behaved themselves. I didn’t

hold out much hope for that since apparently Kings and Drake had already been fighting. I would have to sit between the two of them and hope they didn't start throwing punches across the table.

Lan seemed to read my mind, holding a chair out for me to sit, then taking the one across from me. He pulled out his phone and sent a couple of texts. "They should be here in just a minute or two. How was your rest?"

I knew he was trying to distract me from the tension I could already sense. He was hiding something, and I wasn't sure if I wanted to know about it or not. What kind of secrets did Landyn Brighton have? "It was fine. I slept for a couple of hours and still had time to get ready for tonight. I would ask what you did, but it sounds as if you played referee to your brothers."

He gave me a sheepish grin and turned toward the door when it opened. My jaw dropped. I had expected either Drake or Kings, or both, to walk in. Instead, standing there in the doorway, was Chad. What the fuck was Chad doing here? His dirty blond hair was greased and slicked back, and he was wearing his usual sport coat over dress slacks. The maid that let him in quickly retreated as if she knew that she shouldn't have done it. I was about to object to him being here when Lan looked at me and winked. I decided to give him a chance to handle it.

"Mr. Wilde, we were not expecting company tonight. Forgive me for being blunt, but what do you want?" Lan spoke

with quiet authority and I felt myself fall for him a little more.

“I want my property back,” he said, stomping into the room and heading straight for me. Landyn was out of his chair and in front of me before Chad could get close.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about. We do not have your property. I’ll have to ask you to leave now, as we have a previous engagement to attend to.” Lan’s dismissal was more than Chad could take. His face turned red and he began to sputter.

“You can’t have her. I bought her fair and square from her parents. She is mine. My parents filed a complaint with the council and will be speaking with your parents in the morning. If you return what’s mine, I will forget the whole thing and may even invite you to the wedding.” Chad sounded like a spoiled child whose parents finally told him no. He wasn’t going to give up.

“As I said,” Landyn stepped closer, standing eye to eye with Chad, “she isn’t yours. Your money will be returned, and you will leave us alone. If you choose not to cooperate, you may find yourself in the dungeon.”

I stifled a laugh at Lan’s threat. I had no doubt he would make good on it, but Chad’s face was comical. He really believed that he owned me. At least Lan hadn’t turned it into a pissing contest by saying that the Brightons owned me. That would have made me feel even less human than I had been feeling. Being back here brought back all the emotions that

surrounded my leaving, and I wasn't ready to face them yet. I might never be.

Chad wasn't going to back down so easily. "Isabella, you're coming with me. Your parents called as soon as you left their house. They don't want these monsters to have you. Let's go."

I gaped at him. Did he actually think that commanding me would work? That I would just fall in line like a good little omega? I started to laugh. I knew that I shouldn't, but I couldn't help myself. Laughter rolled out of me until I doubled over, wiping my eyes of amused tears.

Chad took a step toward me and Lan shoved him back, knocking Chad into the table that held our dinner. I winced as the plates shattered.

"I'm not going anywhere with you, Chad. I'm sorry that your deal with my parents fell through, but I'm not yours. I don't belong to anyone. You can't own a person." He didn't look too concerned about my statement.

He righted himself and came for me again. This time, Lan met him with a fist in the face. Chad screamed his shock and displeasure. A long-forgotten memory came floating back to me. This had happened before. When we were kids, Chad had decided that I would be his girlfriend. I had been terrified that he would hurt me. I had seen what he did to Victoria after all. Her parents had sent her away to school on the mainland to keep her safe from him.

All three of the Brighton boys had stood up for me then. After school, they had insisted we have a play wedding and I

marry all three of them, just like I would if I was selected as their omega. It was the sweetest thing.

I watched this near recreation of that day, realizing that if Lan, Drake, and Kings wanted a wedding this time, it would be real. I winced as Chad's fist made contact with Lan's jaw. I knew that Landyn wasn't much of a fighter, but I didn't want to think of what would happen if he lost this time.

Lan stumbled from the force of the blow. I rushed to his side, but Chad grabbed my arm and spun me to face him. I swung wildly, punching him in the eye. It didn't faze him. He continued to drag me toward the door. Before Lan could make it across the room to stop him, the door opened.

"Sorry I'm late. I went for a run to blow off some—" Kings stopped mid-sentence when he saw what he'd walked in on. He turned and yelled out the door, "Drake! Get in here!" Then he ran at Chad, trying to force him to let me go.

Chad's grip tightened against my wrist, until Drake stepped into the room. The intruder's face paled. It was clear that Drake was the only one of the brothers that he feared. I wondered how many times they'd faced off and what Drake had done to him for Chad to have this reaction.

He released my arm and I ran to Lan, making sure he was okay. Drake and Kings surrounded Chad, refusing to let him leave. They each grabbed one of his arms. "You're going to leave her alone, or we're going to lock you in the dungeon. Do you understand me?" Drake growled in Chad's face. The only response was a whimper and a slight nod.



LANDYN

I told myself that it didn't bother me that Drake and Kings had come to the rescue, although it did remind me that I needed to get better at fighting. I wondered if Bella would see me differently now that she knew I couldn't protect her. I felt like a phony alpha, since I couldn't defend her properly. I made a mental note to discuss the issue with Drake later. He'd been on me for years about a training regimen, maybe it was time to listen to my big brother. I hated to admit that though.

Once they had Chad under control, I called for security to come get him. He would be taken to the dungeon to cool off, then released in a few hours. When he'd been dealt with, I had someone track down the maid who had let him in. She would be fired for nearly getting the soon-to-be princess kidnapped.

"Are you sure that you're okay?" I asked Bella again. She was more concerned with the bruises that were forming on my cheek, but I wanted to make sure that Chad hadn't hurt her. I tried to push away my feelings of disgust with myself because

I hadn't been able to take care of Chad on my own. I heard the disappointment and irritation in my voice.

"I told you six times already, Lan, I'm fine. Your cheek looks awful, though. Please hold some ice on it," Bella insisted. I didn't argue when she retrieved a bag of ice and wrapped it in a small towel. Her hands were gentle when she touched it to my face. I held her hand between the ice and mine for a moment before I let her go. I sat on the couch and waited to see if our evening could get back on track. We still needed to discuss our situation and figure out how we wanted to split our time.

"I can call the kitchen and have dinner replaced, if you want," Kings touched Bella's cheek as he spoke softly to her. None of us were concerned that we hadn't gotten to eat, but we all wanted her to have what she needed.

"Can we just get pizza instead? I think that would be easier at this point. Then we can have our talk," she offered. I wondered if that was because she really wanted pizza, or if she didn't want to trouble the kitchen staff. Either way, my brothers didn't seem to mind, and I was always up for pizza.

"I'll take care of it," Kings said, walking out into the hall to make the call. Knowing him, we'd probably end up with six pizzas, all with different toppings, plus at least one dessert.

Bella sat next to me on the couch, letting me wrap an arm around her. She flinched when Drake flopped down on the other side of her and took her hand. It was a small gesture, and I was certain he was trying to reassure her in his own way, but

it was completely foreign to him. Drake wasn't the caring, compassionate brother. He was the take charge, get things done brother.

“What will happen to Chad?” she asked him.

Drake ran his free hand over his face, needing to collect his thoughts before he answered her. I'd seen him do that when he was trying to be careful with what he said. “That's up to him. If he agrees to leave you alone, he'll get to go home. If he insists that you belong to him, he'll be locked up in the dungeon.” He hadn't sugar-coated it for her. But he never did.

She nodded at his answer. “Good. You should have kicked his ass.” I laughed at her admonishment of my brother. Drake looked shocked. I think we both expected her to be upset that the situation had escalated to violence at all, not irritated that it wasn't violent enough.

“You wouldn't have been upset?” I asked, nudging her to face me. Bella looked at me and smiled.

“Not at all. Chad deserves what he gets. I don't usually condone violence, but in this case, he brought it on himself. If you guys hadn't taken him down, I would have kept punching him until it did some good.” Bella bristled at Drake's laughter, then started to chuckle herself.

“I think I would have paid to watch you beat the hell out of him,” Drake offered. I nodded in agreement. I would have done the same.

“We could have recorded it and posted it online,” I offered. That made her laugh harder. It was the sweetest sound, and I wanted to find a way to keep it going forever.

Kings walked back in from the hall and looked at us. “What’s so funny?” He walked across the room and plopped down on a chair across from the sofa.

“We were just discussing what Izzy wanted to do to Chad,” Drake explained. “She wanted to beat his ass while we recorded it and streamed it online.” His matter-of-fact delivery made her crack up again.

“I would have paid to watch that,” Kings said, which made the three of us laugh even harder. “What did I say?”

“Drake said the same thing. Now I wish I had pounded on him more,” Bella said, gasping for air. She took a deep breath, then her focus seemed to shift. “I guess we should talk about setting up a schedule. We don’t have a lot of time.” That statement changed the mood of the entire room. It was like we were fine until the reminder of how little time we had to bond. Father would be keeping an eye on us and he would know if we didn’t hold up our end of the bargain. Not that there was a bargain. It was a proclamation that we had no say in.

“I think it’s only fair if we each get equal time. And we should try to plan activities that Bella will enjoy too,” I suggested. I wanted to push the issue and get the first day with her, but I figured that Drake’s ego would make that impossible.

“I agree with that. I don’t mind trying new things, but please don’t try to make me do stuff you know I don’t like. Will I get to help plan any of it?” Bella seemed to be concerned about the possibility of what we might come up with. I couldn’t blame her.

“I think we should plan the first three anyway. That way each of us is responsible for one date all on our own. That should help you decide if we need help. You can’t be afraid to tell us if you don’t like something.” As usual, Drake was trying to take over and control everything.

“So, who gets the first day?” Kings asked what we were all thinking. The three of us turned and stared at Bella as if she held the answer.

“I don’t know. There are so many ways to decide. I’m not sure which to use.” I could see that she was upset that we were so focused on her. I took her hand, trying to reassure her.

“What’s the silliest way to choose that you can think of?” I asked. No matter what she said, I was determined to win against my brothers. I wanted time alone with her more than I wanted to breathe. I had to make this happen. I had planned our day together in detail the moment she was announced as our omega. I wanted to show her how cherished she will be with us.

She looked at me, raised an eyebrow, and smirked. “How about a striptease contest? You can each dance for me while taking off your clothes. That would show me who was more interested in pleasing me.” Before any of us could comment, a

butler arrived with the pizzas. He pushed the tray into the room, swapping the pizza for the ruined dinner from earlier. After he cleared the mess from the broken table that was spread across the floor, he disappeared out the door. Kings loaded a plate with several slices of pizza but handed it to Bella before Drake or I could get after him for taking so much. Then he waited for everyone to get settled with their dinner before he made his own plate. I wondered who was more shocked by his behavior, Bella or us.

Just when I thought he was learning manners, Kings proved me wrong by talking with a mouth full of pizza. “Are you really gonna make us strip?”

Drake looked at her expectantly. Of my brothers, he was the most reserved when it came to nudity. I could see him bowing out of the competition if she was serious. He didn’t say anything, just focused on her while he ate.

Bella looked around the room, taking her time examining each of us until her eyes met his. “No, I’m not going to make you strip. Unless you want to. I mean, I won’t say no to a show, but I’m not going to use that to make this decision.”

Relief washed over my brother. I wondered if she’d noticed how he tensed when she tossed out the suggestion. She was about to continue when a knock sounded against the door. I answered it, surprised to find the king’s personal butler standing there with four envelopes. He handed them to me without a word, then turned and left.

“What was that all about?” Drake asked when I turned back to the room.

“He delivered these,” I said, holding up the dark envelopes. “There’s one for each of us. They look to be handwritten.” I handed them out, then settled back on the couch next to Bella.

“I guess we should open them,” she said quietly. Bella had placed her plate on the side table next to the sofa and began to open the note. “It’s an invitation.”

ELeven





THE KING THROWS a PARTY

DRAKE

“An invitation? To what? There’s nothing on the schedule for weeks.” I had been in the planning meetings with the king and should have known if there had been anything going on. Father had insisted that I be a part of planning events for years now, he’s been grooming me to take over for him when he finally decided it was time. My brothers had it so much easier. Kings was allowed to do whatever he wanted, while Lan was only required to work with the kitchen staff planning menus and seating charts. I had to deal with the diplomatic aspects and spend more time with our father.

“It says: *Your presence is requested by King Lester Brighton and Queen Amelia Brighton at The Royal Ballroom tomorrow at seven o’clock in the evening for an engagement party. Do you think it’s for us to announce our engagement?*” Lan read the note aloud. Izzy just stared at her invitation. Kings rolled his eyes and tossed his on the table.

“It could be, but he wasn’t very accepting of our situation. Remember the deadline? I think it’s probably some sort of

trick to cause drama. You guys said he could terminate Elle's assignment if there was drama, right?" My youngest brother had a point. It could be a trap.

"It doesn't say who the party is for. Isn't that strange?" Izzy finally spoke. She wouldn't take her eyes off the dark paper. "Shouldn't it say?"

"Typically, the invitations would at least mention what type of gift is required, if they didn't name the honored guest. Perhaps it's a surprise. I'll speak with the king in the morning and try to find out what this is all about." I turned the card over in my hand. There were no artisan marks on it, which was also strange. Had he written these out himself? There was no way. My father would never do something himself that he could get someone else to do for him. If I knew anything about him, it was that.

"Well, given this turn of events, I think Drake should have tomorrow. The ball can be his date," Kings offered, turning to me. "You're better at the fancy stuff." He shrugged and settled back into the chair with his legs hanging over the arm.

"I think that has to be a mutual decision, or at the very least, Izzy would have to agree," I told him, glancing at her from the corner of my eye. I wanted very much for her to choose me first, but I had a feeling there would be resistance.

She looked from Kings to Lan before settling her gaze on me. "Okay. I think the ball would be a good place to start."

"Fantastic. I'll contact Pauline and have her come see you in the morning. If she doesn't have a dress for you, she'll make

you one.” I pulled out my phone and sent a quick email to our dressmaker. She only concerned herself with making our mother’s clothes since our sister’s unfortunate accident, so I knew that she would have plenty of time to put together a dress for Izzy before the ball tomorrow night.

“Doesn’t it seem strange that we got the invitations less than a day before the party?” Lan wondered out loud. His brow was furrowed in concentration, as if he was trying to solve a puzzle. “It’s almost as if he wants to see how we react to the last-minute change in routine.”

He wasn’t wrong. I had seen Father test others in similar ways in the past. It actually shocked me that we hadn’t been subjected to that type of test before. “It’s a test for Izzy. He’s never done this to us before, so it wouldn’t make sense for him to start now. He wants to see how she reacts to the unexpected. We need to be prepared for anything tomorrow.” I explained my theory. If I was right, this wouldn’t be the only change that hit us last-minute.

“So, we need to be prepared for anything. How do we pull that off?” Izzy asked, concern showing in her expression. I knew she was terrified of the king’s punishment if we failed.

“We beat him at his own game,” Kings threw the idea out so flippantly that I had to do a double take to make sure it was him who had spoken. “What? It’s not hard. You just have to take things to the opposite extreme. We have to make it look like we’ve all bonded with Elle already. We can’t react to his randomness.”

Lan sat up straighter. “That’s actually a really good idea.” He said it as if Kings had never had a good idea before. He might have been right. Kings usually waited to see what we thought before throwing out his ideas. That was probably because he was a beta, and naturally followed the alpha’s guidance. There were very few times when he’d gone against us. Most had been because of Izzy’s influence.

“Where do we start?” I asked, turning my attention to our beta so he could explain his idea further. Kingsley looked around the room for a second, blushing at being the center of attention.

“Well, he probably thinks it’ll be hard to have Elle dressed to perfection in such a short amount of time. We should start with finding the perfect dress for her. Then we have to make sure that we look just as good as she does,” he instructed.

I stood and paced the room. “There has to be more to it than just our looks. What else should we consider?”

“What if the party is designed to trip us up?” Izzy offered. “What if he tries to give me to Chad’s family in some kind of trade?” Terror spread across her face.

“We’re not going to let him trade you, or make you a slave. You have my word,” I promised her. I should have expected her reaction.

Izzy scoffed. “Like your word is worth anything to me.” She walked over to the window and stared out at the pool to make her point. It wasn’t necessary. I knew exactly what she meant. I had promised that everything would be okay and I

would take care of her when Annabeth had her accident. Then after a five-minute conversation with my father, I flipped on her and told Izzy to leave. I told her that we didn't want her.

"Izzy, please. Can we talk about this?" I hated resorting to begging, but I couldn't let this fall apart now. "I can explain."

"I don't want your explanations. Do you think I didn't know it was your dad's influence? Of course, I did. I knew that you didn't mean a word of it. That didn't make it hurt any less. You broke a promise to me that day. I can't trust you." Her words cut my heart and I felt the pain radiate through me.

"If you knew, then why did you leave?" I couldn't stop myself from asking the question. I knew we didn't have time to get into this, but I had to know.

"Because if you couldn't stand up to him to defend me, then you couldn't possibly love me enough to convince him to make me your omega." She looked down and continued, "Besides, your dad is right. I don't deserve you. I never did. I'm not meant to be a princess. And after what I let happen to your sister, I'm surprised any of you want me around."

She sniffed and I knew that she was crying. I couldn't stand that I had hurt her that badly. I wanted to fix it all, but had no idea how. "What can I do? Please don't punish Lan and Kings for my behavior. If you bond with them, I'll tell him that you bonded with me too, and you can stay. I won't push for more than you want to give me." My offer broke me even more than her words could, but I refused to be the reason for her tears. I

knew that being around me wouldn't be easy for her, yet I had still pushed to have her reassigned. It was selfish and cruel.

“Why would I refuse them because you lied?” she asked, finally turning to look at me. “Would you really do that for them? Sacrifice your happiness, tamp down your desires, just so they could be happy? Just so I could be happy?” Izzy reached out and put her hand on my cheek as if she was remembering something sweet.

I nodded. “I would, and I will. If that's what it takes to make you comfortable here, that's what I'll do. We'll have to be seen together in public for events, but other than that, I'll stay away from you unless you seek me out. Everything will be on your terms.” Tears filled my eyes and I turned away from her. I wanted to bask in her light every moment of every day, but I knew that telling her would only serve to push her further away. Maybe someday she would be able to forgive me and we could be together.

I sensed Lan behind me and turned in time to see him take Izzy into his arms and whisper in her ear. She shook her head and he kissed her temple. “It wasn't your fault. It was mine.” The words came out in a whisper. For a moment, I wasn't sure I had said them out loud. “I'm the one who distracted you. I didn't expect her to go near the water after you told her not to. I should have waited.”



KINGSLEY

Listening to Drake spill his heart out about what had happened to our baby sister nearly broke me. I was supposed to be the fun-loving, can't-be-serious brother. No one realized how much losing Elle and Annabeth on the same day had hit me. I did everything I could to hide the pain. I threw myself into my studies, then obsessed over the minuscule responsibilities that our father let me have. I knew that he didn't expect me to be as dependable as Drake, or as polished as Lan. The king had seriously underestimated me.

I learned everything I could about surveillance and security without telling my family. I spent my free time planning the changes I would make when Drake took over for the king. Since there could only be one king, the other brothers would take high level jobs, or be given the opportunity to find another way to make themselves useful. As a beta, I wasn't expected to do much. I was told to show up and behave myself. Little did they know, I was constantly taking care of security and surveillance issues.

Adam was the head of the king's security detail. He was also the king's brother, and one of our mother's husbands. I always suspected that he was my actual father, but they wouldn't tell us that. Mother said it didn't matter who had fathered us, we were princes because Lester was the king. I spent a lot of time with Adam, going over things I had learned in my classes. He'd given me his word that no one would know about my coursework or the time we spent hanging out. So far, I was certain he'd kept that promise.

"I understand that you're upset with Drake, and I support you completely in that anger. But we have to make it look like everyone is getting along if we want to get away with this," I said from the chair. I wasn't walking over to the window to talk about the past when I had a perfectly comfortable chair right here. "Come sit down and we can figure out how to make it look like we're all happy."

Elle grabbed Landyn's hand and dragged him back to the sofa, making sure to sit on the end so he would be in the middle if Drake sat down. "Fine. I don't really want to talk about it anymore." She crossed her arms over her chest and leaned back.

"I understand that. And we don't have to talk about that part anymore right now. What we do need to talk about is the fact that the king has spies keeping an eye on us. So, if we want to make this look good, we have to use that to our advantage."

"What do you mean, he has spies?" Lan asked. He scooted forward and leaned toward me. "The servants are reporting

back to him about us?”

I nodded. “I’m surprised you didn’t know that. So far, they have probably told him that I stayed in Elle’s room last night, and that she went to Drake’s room in the middle of the night. That covers two of us. Now all we need is to convince him that she’s been with Lan too.”

Her cheeks turned the cutest shade of pink at my implication. Of course, nothing had really happened with any of us, but the king would think we’d already bedded her. And that worked to our advantage. “How do we do that?” Elle looked nervous about that possibility.

“You stay in his room tonight. I’m not saying you have to have sex with him, unless you want to. Just sleep in the same bed. I guarantee that someone will blab that you’ve been with all three of us in less than a day,” I explained, hating that it wasn’t exactly true. I wanted her more than I could express, but I was basically giving her to my brother on a silver platter. I hoped that he appreciated my sacrifice.

Elle looked at Lan. His cheeks were as pink as hers. It was adorable how these two were so innocent. It kind of ruined his image, though. He was rumored to be this big playboy, but in reality, I knew he’d only slept with one girl. It had been a huge disaster, so he’d decided to wait for Elle, even though none of us expected her to come back. I wondered if she knew that the stories were all made up. I wasn’t sure it mattered at this point.

“I guess we could, I mean, if you want to. It’s not a bad idea,” she fought to get the words out, unable to maintain eye

contact with him.

Lan nodded. “You can stay in my room whenever you want.” He couldn’t look at her either. I stifled a chuckle. There wouldn’t be any funny business going on there tonight, I would stake my reputation on it. They were both way too awkward about the whole thing.

“Well, now that we have that settled, tomorrow is Drake’s day—after you stay with Lan tonight, then I’ll take the day after, and Lan can have the next one. Is that okay?” I hoped that I didn’t have to wait even longer to spend a day with Elle. I was dying to talk to her about so many things that I didn’t want to discuss around my brothers.

“That sounds good. Can we get some sleep now? I’m wiped, and tomorrow is going to be hard,” Elle turned to Lan, who held out a hand for her and escorted her out of the room.

Drake hadn’t moved from his spot at the window. I knew that he was still beating himself up over everything. “She’ll come around,” I said simply, walking over and putting my hand on his shoulder.

He looked over his shoulder at me. “I hope so. I don’t want to give up time with her, but I won’t force her into something she doesn’t want.”

“She does want it. Elle wants all three of us. She’s just mad at you, with good reason. You have to find a way to make it up to her.” I knew that I wasn’t telling him anything he didn’t already know. He was constantly trying to find a way to make

this situation better, even though it had only been a couple of days.

“I hope you’re right. I don’t want to lose her because I was stupid. I can’t believe I let him intimidate me like that. Maybe I don’t deserve the crown. If I can’t even protect my girl from the current king, how can I rule the kingdom?” Drake’s doubts shocked me. He’d always come across as quiet and confident.

“You should talk to her about this. I think the fact that you’re worried about it means you’ll do a good job. Just stop overthinking it and let people in. You can’t do it all on your own. It won’t hurt you to let us know what you think and how you feel. If anything, it’ll pull Elle closer.” I hoped that he would take my advice to heart, but my older brother had a tendency to be cocky and not listen. He thought that he knew better because he was older. I wanted to convince him that he didn’t have to do everything on his own.

If we wanted to survive the king’s plans, we would have to stay together. I had no doubt that he planned to turn us against each other. I couldn’t let that happen. There had to be a way to convince the others to go along with my plans. “I know that you’re usually the one in charge, but I really think that if you listen to me, we can get this to go our way.”

Drake looked at me with his brow furrowed. “What do you have in mind?”

I grinned at him and explained my plan. We would have to clue Lan and Elle in on it in the morning. “A united front is important, but we can flip the script on him if we appear to be

having difficulty getting along. Then when he thinks he's won, we let him see that he hasn't. I know it's a little complicated, but it really just goes along with everyone's feelings. We just have to trust that, at the end of the day, the four of us will be together as a cohesive unit in the end."

"I like the sound of your idea, but I'm not sure we can pull it off. I mean, it won't be hard for Izzy to pretend to be mad at me, but it'll be harder for her to prove that she's not. Because we both know that she's pretty upset right now. And I deserve it. But that doesn't help our cause. I'll meet with him first thing in the morning and see if I can find out anything about the party or his plans. I'm sure he won't willingly tell me anything, but I can try."

Drake was still beating himself up over everything. This was going to be harder than I had expected. I had to somehow go from the baby, who had no perceived responsibilities, to the leader. It wasn't something I'd been taught. Betas didn't take charge. I could hear the king telling me that when I was younger. "Follow your brothers; betas don't lead." Bullshit. I would show him. I would show them all.

I left Drake standing at the window, lost in the past again, to go make a plan in my room. I would only have a small window of time to explain it to them tomorrow morning, so I had to make sure I got every detail right. This was my one chance to earn their respect and I wasn't going to let them down. Everyone was depending on me for once.

I stayed up too late working out the details, then even later thinking about Elle. I couldn't wait to have her in my bed, and not just to create rumors. I wanted to show her everything I could give her. Even though it was my idea for her to go to Lan's room, I couldn't stop the jealousy from grabbing hold of me.

TWELVE





WELL, THAT WAS AWKWARD

LANDYN

The ball invitation had definitely thrown a wrench in my plans. I'd wanted the first full day with Bella to myself. Of course, for a fancy party, Drake was the obvious choice. I wondered if the king was actually trying to cause discord between my brothers and me. It wouldn't seem to be in his best interest. But Drake spent more time with him than I did, so he might have more insight.

I hadn't expected Kings to drop the bomb on us that we were being spied on. And to suggest that Bella and I spend the night together was completely outrageous. All for the chance someone would tell our father. I shook my head at the thought. Maybe there was a chance that I could make a move tonight. It wasn't a competition to see who she'd have sex with first, but part of me wanted to try. My luck, she would think I viewed her as another conquest, even though I didn't have sex with any of them. Most women wanted me until they found out that I wasn't the one who'd take over the crown. Or until they discovered that I was in love with someone else.

There had been several girls who wanted to claim Landyn Brighton as their own, who later realized that I wasn't available. I had fallen for Bella and couldn't stop myself from comparing every girl I dated to her. Spoiler alert—they never had a chance. Bella was perfect. She was sweet and kind, not to mention gorgeous. In my mind, there was no comparison.

We walked back to my room in silence, still holding hands. I took that as a good sign. I had to figure out how to be less awkward around her. I was usually so calm and confident. The moment Bella walked into a room, I shut down, because if I didn't, things got weird. I would say or do something that was meant to be smooth, but it would come out wrong and make me look either rude or stupid.

"I'm sorry about my brothers," I whispered as I opened my door and gestured for her to enter. She paused for a second, just in the doorway.

"Are you sure you want me to stay with you? Things are really awkward between us, and it feels like you were pushed into this." Wow, she was already in tune with how I felt.

"I, I do want you to stay with me. I'm sorry about being awkward. I try so hard not to be. Can we talk inside?" I motioned again for her to enter my room. As she walked inside, it occurred to me that I had never brought a girl here before. The only one I'd ever wanted to share this space with was finally with me. My heart started to race and my hands shook as I closed the door.

“Feel free to get comfortable. Do you need something to sleep in? I can find a shirt and shorts or I can get your pjs from your room.” There I went, getting awkward again. I stopped myself from saying anything else, instead took a deep breath and closed my eyes for a second. Then I walked over to my dresser and grabbed one of my favorite concert t-shirts and a soft pair of sleep shorts. I set them on the bed.

“I’m sorry. I’m just so nervous. I don’t know how to be myself when I’m this close to you.” That may have been the wrong thing to say, but I couldn’t dance around it anymore. I sat down on the edge of the bed opposite where Bella was standing. There was no way I would come back from this. I’d screwed it up too much.

When I finally looked up, the clothes were gone, along with Bella. I heard the soft click of the bathroom door. At least she hadn’t run away. Yet. I was convinced it wouldn’t take long. Drake’s offer to let her be with Kings and me while he stood back might just have to be expanded to include me. There was no way Bella would want me after tonight. I sat there with my head in my hands. The least I could do was to sleep on the floor so she could have the bed and be comfortable.

Before I had a chance to move, soft hands were running through my hair. I couldn’t bring myself to look anywhere but her feet. She caressed my scalp, gently brushing her fingers through my sandy brown hair. Then Bella shocked me by fisting her hands in it and jerking my head up, forcing me to meet her eyes. She stepped closer and pressed her lips to mine.

The kiss started gentle and sweet, then in an instant, burned with emotions I struggled to name.

She pulled back slightly as my arms wrapped around her. “It’s okay. I’m awkward around you too. Maybe this will help.” Bella leaned down and kissed me again. I tensed as she pushed me back onto the bed and climbed on top of me. Would she get upset that I was already hard? What did she expect? I wouldn’t push her or try to talk her into anything she didn’t want or wasn’t ready for. I decided to relax and follow her lead. I had to trust her enough to tell me if I crossed a line. I would still have to pace myself, or I would be done before we’d even started. Bella had that effect on me.

I groaned when she rubbed against me. “Did I hurt you?” she whispered, lifting herself to take her weight off me.

“Not at all. You feel so good. I just don’t want to push you into anything,” I replied, trying not to groan again when she let her body drop back onto mine.

“I’m the one on top of you, remember? You’re overthinking it. Just do what feels right. Unless you don’t actually want me to be your omega.” She sat up, pressing against my erection. Fear filled her eyes. She really thought that I didn’t want her.

“Bella, of course, I want you. I only want you. No one else, ever.” I pulled her back down and pressed my lips to hers. If I couldn’t use words to show her how I felt, I would find a different way to prove it. My hands wrapped around her waist, drawing her closer until there was nothing between us but our clothes.

Her sighs urged me on. I flipped her, so that I was on top. I pressed her to the bed with the length of my body, never breaking contact with her mouth. I stretched her hands over her head and held her there, exposing her stomach to my hungry eyes. She shivered when my throbbing cock jumped. “I’ll stop whenever you want. You are in control here. I won’t do anything you don’t want. If you tell me to stop, I will. I promise.”

I pressed a kiss to her neck and waited to see what she would say. Bella’s eyes met mine, and I could see the sheen of tears. “I’m sorry,” I jumped off her and backed up. Had I done something wrong already?

Bella laughed. She actually laughed. I turned back to look at her again. “What’s so funny?” I was mortified. Was she laughing at me?

“You. You’re so sweet and thoughtful, and I can’t believe you really want me. But you’re so afraid of hurting me that you can’t just take what you want. Or give me what I want. I’m not laughing at you, Lan. I’m laughing because of your reaction. Please come back here. I’m not done with you yet.”

Wait, what? She’s not done with me yet? I pounced on her, our lips meeting in a hungry kiss. It was hard to tell who was leading this dance. Her hands fisted in my hair, holding me in place as her tongue assaulted mine. I ran my hands down her sides, then inched one hand under the hem of her shirt. I had to admit, she looked hot wearing my favorite shirt. I would have bet that she would look even better with it on the floor.

Bella released my hair and started pulling on my shirt. I paused in my exploration to help her. Once she tossed it to the floor, she reached for my jeans. I froze, not wanting to stop her but scared that if she touched me, I would explode. Her fingers unfastened my pants and teased the waistband of my boxer briefs. I groaned and tugged her shirt over her head, letting it fall to the floor and join the growing pile of clothes.

She wasn't wearing anything under it. My eyes glazed over as I took in her perfect tits. I couldn't do anything but stare for a moment. She must have realized that I was mesmerized, because she continued her teasing until I snapped out of it. Bella shifted until I had to move to let her up. She pulled off my pants and dropped them. I wondered if she was wearing anything under her shorts, and slid a hand up one leg to find out. My fingers grazed her bare ass and I groaned again.

Bella laughed and a moment later, the shorts joined the rest of the clothes. Her naked body lay before me, and I took it in. "You are perfect," I breathed.

"Why am I the only one who's naked?" she replied, tugging on my underwear before running her hand up her waist and cupping her breast. I jerked the offending article off and threw it. Her gaze landed on my dick, standing tall, begging for her attention. I was nervous about her reaction, but her eyes went wide and she smiled before she reached for me. Her fingers wrapped around my girth and stroked.

I sighed and pulled her to me for a kiss. While I kissed her, she kept touching and stroking me. I rubbed my hands down

her body, skimming the sides of her boobs. Then I cupped her ass and pulled her to me. She kept working me, bringing me closer to the edge. I squeezed her ass, then stroked her thigh, moving my hand back up to her wet center. I stroked her clit, then dipped a finger inside of her. She threw her head back, making a noise that could only mean she liked it. I continued to alternate rubbing her clit and fingering her, until she cried out. “Lan, I can’t take anymore. I need you.”

That was all the encouragement I needed. I spread her legs, positioning my cock at her entrance. I rubbed it along her slit, then used it to stroke her clit again. “Are you sure? If we do this, we can’t take it back,” I warned her while I was using my dick like a sex toy, inching her closer to her orgasm.

Instead of answering me, she wrapped her legs around my waist and used them to pull me forward. Before I could stop myself, I thrust inside her tight pussy. “Oh, Landyn,” she whispered, “fuck me.” If I had died at that moment, it would have been with a smile on my face. I captured her lips with mine as I started to slowly move in and out of her. I wanted to make this last forever. I was determined to go as slowly as possible and make her cum at least a dozen times. “Faster. Harder. Come on, Landyn.” Hearing her cry my name that way almost made me lose control.

I began to pump into her harder and move faster. Her moans and cries pushed me to pound her soft pussy. So much for going slow and savoring the moment. I thrust in and pulled out, over and over, while she cried out my name as she climaxed. “I’m gonna cum,” I breathed.

Bella grabbed my face and kissed me while I pounded into her again and again. When my body tensed with impending release, she bit my shoulder. That unexpected pain sent me over the edge. “Bella,” I whispered.

I felt my knot swell, locking her in place as my orgasm started. She gasped at the sensation. Finally, the thing I’d wanted most in my life had happened. I could die a happy man. I felt her spasm against my knot as she came. I rolled my hips, changing the angle slightly and making her moan.

We laid there, wrapped up in each other for a minute or so, breathing hard and basking in the emotional high. “Landyn,” Bella said, breaking the mood. Hearing her use my full name scared me. Then I realized that she’d done it while we made love. I wondered if it was something to worry about.

“Is everything okay? Did I hurt you?” I was suddenly terrified that she regretted this decision. It was the best thing that had ever happened to me, but if she had hated it, I would be devastated.

“I’m great, but could we take a shower? Things are a little messy,” she gestured to the wet spot we were lying in and laughed.

“Oh, that. Yes. A shower. Good idea.” There I went fumbling words and being awkward again. I rubbed a hand over my face and shook my head. Bella pulled my hands from my face and kissed me again. The awkward feeling subsided, and I scooped her up off the bed. I carried her to the shower, only setting her down to turn on the water and grab towels.



DRAKE

I paused outside Lan's door. I was going to knock and try to apologize to Izzy again, but then I heard what could only have been them having sex. Wow, he moved pretty quickly there. I guess I should have expected it since they'd had huge crushes on each other for years. Somehow, I thought that I would have been her first Brighton. There had been a time when I would have bet money on it. But now, she'd chosen Lan as her first. Or was he? It was bold of me to assume she'd still be a virgin.

I'd been told she was living in Ayix as a beta and had taken that as confirmation that she wasn't involved with anyone. If she had been, they would have known she wasn't a beta. In addition to the noises, I could smell her from the hallway. I was pretty sure that Kings would be peeking out of his room any time now. Our girl was potent. And there was no mistaking the scent of an omega. As if on cue, Kings opened his door and stepped into the hall.

Our eyes met and I nodded. His eyes went wide and I could see the disappointment on his face. He'd wanted to be the first

too. There was no way around this feeling. Two of us were bound to be left out, unless we'd convinced her to be with all of us at once. I wasn't sure how my brothers would feel about that, or if Izzy would agree. He turned and stomped back into his room without a word. I was shocked that he didn't slam the door.

I eased my door closed and leaned against it. After what I did, I couldn't have really expected her to want me. But somehow, she did. She kissed me when she'd come to my room to yell at me for making all of this happen. I think Izzy would have had sex with me then if I hadn't stopped her. Why had I? Because I can't get past my guilt. I don't deserve her. I felt like I would die if I couldn't have her, but I knew that it would only happen on her timeline. I couldn't push the issue, especially since my guilt had me constantly pushing her away. I wanted her, but felt like I didn't deserve her love. If she decided that she could never forgive me, I would have to accept it and find a way to live without her affection.

That first kiss had been everything. I'd wanted to take her into my arms and profess my love for her after that kiss. I wanted to give her every ounce of pleasure that I had denied myself for the past ten years. I'd dreamed of having the chance to make this up to her. I needed to get this right because she deserved so much more than I could give. But I was going to try my best.

I wondered if she would let me pleasure her. Maybe if I proposed it in a way that let her know I didn't expect anything from her in return, that I just wanted to make her feel good.

How did a guy ask a girl if he could lick her pussy without it being weird? I would have to think about that for a while. After all, I didn't want to let my brothers have all the fun. No doubt, Kings would start trying to nudge her toward fucking him next, since she'd already banged Lan.

I went to sleep in a foul mood and woke up in a worse one. I'd dreamed of Izzy rejecting me; choosing to only be with my brothers, but refusing to even let me have a moment of her time. I wanted to punch someone, which didn't bode well for me. I had an appointment with the king in less than an hour. It would be my one chance to find out what the ball was for before we arrived and were caught off guard.

I showered quickly and got dressed. I selected a dark blue suit that I knew Father would approve of, then rushed to get to the throne room on time. Even in my mood, I noticed Lan's absence. He'd become my best friend since Izzy left, and now that she was back, he'd been taken away from me. I knew even as I had the thought that it was ridiculous; she wasn't taking anyone away; she was our omega. I just had to find a way to convince her to give me a chance.

Either way, I had to push her from my mind and go into this meeting with a clear head. It wouldn't do me any good to walk in and show him that I'd had a bad night. That would only cement his idea that this will fail. I needed to make him believe that everything was going well. I stopped outside the chamber door, took a deep breath, imagined my kiss with Izzy, and let the smile form on its own.

I would have to keep imagining that kiss, that tender moment, for the rest of the day to push away the mood I'd woken up in. But I knew I could do it; for her. I pushed open the door and entered the room. I was surprised to find the room empty except for the king on his throne.

“Drake, my boy, I’m pleased that you are on time this morning. I’ve heard there may have been cause for you to be late. It’s nice to see you aren’t going to let your dalliances interfere with your responsibilities. Come, let’s speak of the matters at hand.” His tone was regal and authoritative.

I nodded my head and bowed slightly before stepping forward. He shocked me by motioning to a chair on his right. I had never been seated in his presence before, unless we were meeting with other dignitaries or at a meal. “Am I to sit, Sir?” I hated that I had to ask, but I refused to assume anything with him.

“Yes, son, take a seat. We have much to discuss. I trust you received your invitations to the ball tonight.” It wasn’t a question. He knew the precise moment that the cards were delivered. He probably even knew our reactions to them.

“Indeed. I had some questions about that, if I may.” I knew that he could deny me the opportunity to ask, but I had to try. It was a thin line I had to walk, but there were times in the past when I was able to get the answers I wanted. I would wait until he allowed me to ask instead of pushing ahead.

He began by discussing the trade agreement that was in the works between our territory, Crescent Canyon, and the

Davenport Kingdom, Elysian Hill. With the island of Orolis split into three separate countries, trade agreements were key. Our kingdom held the land that was perfect for farming, Elysian Hill handled textiles, and Black Meadow, which was controlled by the Windsors, held the mines. A week ago, we finalized the agreement with King Windsor. This week, we began working out the details to present to King Davenport. It was a delicate balance, but Father had actually said I was good at diplomacy. I listened intently as he went over exactly what he wanted to achieve, and asked for my opinion about how to make it happen.

Once I explained my thoughts to him, we debated back and forth about the minuscule details that could tie up the agreement. When I finally got him to agree that we needed to do some research and meet again, he decided to let me ask my questions.

“You mentioned questions about the ball. I’ll entertain those now, as we have a moment before my next appointment.” He sounded so pompous and arrogant. I hoped that I never turned out like him. He was a good king, but not a great father. I was determined to do both to the best of my abilities, if Izzy allowed me to father her children.

“There was no mention at our last meeting of a party, Sir. I simply wished to know, if I may be so bold as to ask, what is the purpose of the event?” I’d tried to choose my words carefully, because pissing off the king who also happened to be your father was never a good idea.

His face scrunched in displeasure. I guess I had not worded that question in an acceptable manner. He was about to blow up at me. I would be lucky if I didn't end up in a cell next to Chad. Shit. I thought I was good at this. Just another thing to add to the list of things that pissed me off today.

“I had intended for it to be a surprise, Drake. If you must know, it is a party for you, your brothers, and your—Isabella.” The way he'd said her name made my hands curl into fists. Kings was right. This was a trap. Father was setting us up. We had to be ready for anything. “It will be an engagement party. There will be representatives from the other two kingdoms and the mainland. Dinner, dancing, and gifts, if I'm not mistaken. I trust you boys will keep her in line.”

I kept my stoic expression in place as I did every time that I met with him. My only response was to nod. His statement had been a dismissal, and I knew it. I didn't let my feelings show until I was back in our wing of the palace, closing my bedroom door. “Fuck,” I said simply, leaning back against the cool wood. I'd wanted to scream it, but then he would be sure to find out. As it stood, I had a slight chance that he didn't realize he'd upset me. If I couldn't control my response now, someone would report back to him.

THIRTEEN





SPEED DATING, ANYONE?

KINGSLEY

I had stepped out into the hall last night, planning to check on Elle. I knew that she felt weird about my suggestion that she spend the night with Lan, even if it was just to start rumors. When I met eyes with Drake, I knew exactly what was going on in Lan's room. Jealousy didn't begin to cover what I was feeling. We had decided not to push her, but somehow, Lan ended up having sex with her. I wasn't sure if I was proud of him, or disappointed in her. Either way, I woke up feeling dejected. I called down to have breakfast brought to my room, then I took a long, hot shower.

By the time I was dressed and left the bathroom, Drake was sitting on my bed eating my bacon and eggs. "What the hell? Get your own breakfast, dick." I rushed across the room and jerked the plate out of his hands.

"I thought you'd want to know what Father had to say," he smirked. "So what if it cost you a couple of slices of bacon?"

"You already met with him? This early?" I was shocked that the king was entertaining before noon on a party day. But he

usually left his own events early, forcing Drake to take over as host.

Drake nodded. “I did. And you’re right, it’s a trap. He called it an engagement party for us. I don’t trust him.”

I set the plate on the delivery cart and turned to face him. “How are we gonna get around this one? What can he do with this masked as an engagement party?”

“Well, for one, he can find a way to quiz us to prove we’re not compatible. I think that’s the most likely scenario. I’m not sure how to fool him on that one though. It’s only been two days since Izzy moved in.” Drake had a good point. We would be leaning on our knowledge of her from before she left. As far as I knew, I was the only one who knew what she’d been up to while she was gone.

“We should talk to Lan and Elle about it. Maybe we can get a game plan together. Unless you want to let them have the day together,” I suggested. Drake glared at me and I knew he sympathized with my feelings on the matter. He walked back to the cart and helped me finish my breakfast before we headed for our brother’s room.

We stopped outside his door, wondering if we would be interrupting anything. Part of me hoped that we would, because I was jealous and wanted to cockblock him. Drake and I exchanged a look, then I knocked loudly on the door. There was no answer from the other side. I knocked harder, wondering how they could have slept through all the noise I

was making. I turned and looked at Drake, shrugging my shoulders.

He shoved me out of the way and tried the knob. The door swung open easily and we could see that the room was empty. Where could they be? We walked in and looked around to make sure they weren't in the bathroom together. Once Drake was satisfied that the room was vacant, we walked back into the hall and I closed Lan's door.

"Where do you think they are?" he asked me, as if I had some insight into where Lan would take Elle. I wish I knew.

"Her room?" I suggested, realizing that he may have taken her there for her dress fitting. "She does need a dress for the ball tonight."

Drake started walking away before I had even stopped speaking. I had to jog down the hall to catch up to him before he walked into her room without even knocking. I winced when he threw the door open. Lan was sitting on her bed, watching the seamstress help Elle try on dresses. We had caught her in the middle of either taking one off or putting it on. Elle screamed and I covered my eyes. Drake did not. He stomped into the room and flopped on the bed with Lan.

"Get in here and close the door, Kings," he ordered, ignoring Elle's protests. So much for respecting her privacy and allowing her time to adjust. I did as he ordered, making sure to keep my eyes averted from her as much as I could. She was gorgeous and I couldn't help sneaking a peek, but I wasn't about to stare at her the way Drake was.

“You could have knocked,” Lan said as he punched Drake in the arm. “I’m sure Bella doesn’t like feeling exposed.”

“Well, you’re in here, so she must not mind too much,” he responded. I didn’t want to be in the middle of a fight, but I could tell it was coming.

I cleared my throat and glanced at Elle. She’d put on a dressing gown, and the seamstress had left the room. “We know about last night.” My statement was simple and effective. Both Lan and Elle’s cheeks turned red.

“Oh, so that’s what your problem is,” Elle turned on Drake. “You’re pissed because you didn’t get your way. Get over yourself. Who I choose to sleep with or not is my business, not yours.” The venom in her tone stung me, even though I knew it was meant for him.

“You’re right, of course. Drake and I have no right to be jealous, even though we are. I’m sorry. Please can we talk about the ball and what he learned in his meeting this morning? It’s kind of important.” I figured that being the peacekeeper would get me some points with Elle, but the look she shot me said otherwise. Drake and I were both in the doghouse. Great. That’s just what we needed with less than a month to prove we can make this work.

“It doesn’t matter what the king said. We already know that the party is designed to pit us against each other. And look, it’s working. Oh, wait, that’s just you and Drake being jerks. Now, if you don’t mind, Lan and I are trying to choose the right

dress for me to wear tonight.” Her tone was dismissive in a way I had never heard before. When had she gotten so bitter?

When our father forced Drake to chase her off. When our family let a stupid, tragic mistake ruin the best thing that had ever happened to any of us. My heart ached. I walked over to the door and put my hand on the knob. Elle’s gasp had me turn around.

Drake had her pinned to the wall opposite the door. He must have scooped her up when I turned away. His hand was on her throat, but I could tell from her face that he wasn’t choking her. He was simply holding her in place so he could have his say. Or do whatever it was he wanted to do. I waited, because I wasn’t sure what my brother had in mind, and I wouldn’t let him hurt her.

“You want to be pissed at me for barging in here without knocking? Fine. You want to be pissed at me because of what happened ten years ago? Fine. But you will not mistreat the one person who has always had your back. Kingsley has never said or done anything against you. He tried to stop me from coming in without knocking. So, if you want to be a bitch to me, go ahead. But you owe him an apology.” Drake’s face was inches from Elle’s. The look in her eyes wasn’t fear, though. It was a mix of pride and desire.

She didn’t make a move to get him to release her. She didn’t flinch at the bite of his words. Elle even waved Lan away when he would have intervened. If I didn’t know better, I would think that Drake manhandling her had turned her on.

Her face didn't show any emotion. In that moment, she looked like a queen. Calm, controlled, and patient.

"You may release me now," she said with authority. Drake balked at her command.

"No," he replied, snarling at her. "I like you here." That was a mistake. Elle brought her knee up and smashed it into his dick. Drake released her and cupped his balls. "What the fuck?" He doubled over and she stepped around him.

"Kingsley, please come here," she demanded. I was terrified to refuse. Would she knee me in the nuts too? I hoped not, but there was no trace of my Elle here. I had no idea what this version was capable of. I sulked over to her, deciding to take whatever punishment she handed out like a man. She reached for my hand and I flinched. "I'm sorry. I should have realized that you were not to blame for barging in. Your admission caught me off guard. I had planned to talk to you both about it later. I didn't realize that everyone already knew. Can you forgive me?"

The sincerity of her apology touched me. I tugged on her hand, and she let me pull her into my arms. I gently pressed my lips to hers, relaxing only when her arms wrapped around my neck and she deepened the kiss. When she eased back, I looked into her blue eyes and said, "I can never stay mad at you."



ISABELLA

I was so angry with Drake that I had taken it out on Kings. I felt awful, but how was I supposed to know they hadn't been in on it together? The fact that they knew I had slept with Lan caught me off guard.

“Did you have to knee me in the nuts?” Drake whined from the floor, where he was still curled up holding himself.

I chuckled as I stood over him. “You won't make that mistake again, will you?” He winced and shook his head. “Will one of you help him up? I'll grab some ice.” I walked over to the mini fridge Kings had been so kind to have installed for me. I scooped some ice into a clean sock and headed back to my bed. Lan and Kings were getting Drake settled in. They scattered when I got close. I climbed onto the bed and straddled Drake.

He immediately covered his delicate parts with his hands. Good, I wanted him to be scared. It was the first step to making him respect me. “Are you worried about your manhood?” I asked innocently.

“I get it; I pissed you off. I’m sorry. I don’t know how else to say it. I was an asshole and I know it. Yes, it was intentional. And yes, I do regret it. All of it. Just please don’t take it out on my balls,” he was practically begging. And now I was starting to feel bad. Damn, I hated how easily I caved to him.

“I’m not going to hurt you again. At least, not yet. You have to stop being such a caveman about everything. You were there when the king said we only have a month to fully bond. Then you practically throw a fit at me for moving ahead with it because it wasn’t with you first? Newsflash—that’s not how you get your way.” I hoped that he was actually listening to me. With Drake, there was no real way to know for sure.

“Bella, maybe you should cut him a little slack. I don’t think he’s trying to be a jerk. It’s really easy to get jealous of who you choose to spend your time with and show affection to,” Lan said cautiously from behind Kings. Great, now they were all scared of me. Just what I needed.

I leaned forward and pressed a chaste kiss to Drake’s lips. “Let’s call that a warning, then.” I climbed off his lap and walked back over to the rack of dresses the seamstress had been showing me. “Now let’s pick the most fabulous dress for the ball tonight.”

It was a little flippant of me to change my mind about Kings and Drake staying for the fashion show, but Lan had a point. If I only spent time with him, the other two would be jealous. I didn’t want any of them to feel jealous of the others. Even if I

was pissed at Drake, I still wanted to be with him. I just wanted him to stop acting like he owned me.

It wasn't fair, since I technically belonged to all three of them. I hated that thought. I didn't want to belong to anyone. I wasn't property or a pet. It irked me that our laws were so ancient that omegas had virtually no rights. If it hadn't been for the king's father creating the council, there would be no selection process. Before the council was created, omegas had to worry about being stolen from their homes in the middle of the night, or being sold at auction. I had to remind myself that it could be worse.

I had been rude earlier when I'd ordered Kings and Drake to leave. It wasn't like I was shy about changing in front of either of them. I'd done it enough times before I left, even though Drake didn't think I knew about his hiding spot in the pool house where he would spy on me while I changed. I wasn't giving that tidbit up just yet though.

I picked up a beautiful blue silk dress and held it up. "Thoughts?" I wasn't a fan of the dark shade of blue, but I wanted to hear their opinions without taking mine into consideration.

"No," Kings said, not offering any explanation. Lan shook his head, and Drake made a face.

"Why not? It's a gorgeous dress," I prompted. I wondered if they would tell me why they didn't like it.

"You hate that shade of blue," Drake said simply. How did he know that? My eyes went wide. Maybe I was more

transparent than I thought. I decided to keep going through the dresses. There was one that I was dying to try on, but I wanted to save it for last.

“I really do,” I replied, dropping it into the ‘no’ pile and selecting another one. We went through the rack of dresses and they refused each one. With each ‘no,’ one of my guys told me exactly what *I* didn’t like about it. And I was shocked at how well they did. There was no way they could get every one right, but they did better than I expected. While we bantered about the dresses, we chatted about things that were likely to come up if anyone asked about our bonding process. It would be helpful if we could answer basic questions about each other. We finished the list of questions that Drake had come up with just as we finished looking at the rack of dresses.

“I’m glad you guys said no to all of those because I’m pretty sure this is the one.” I ran to the bathroom and pushed the door closed. I pulled the dress out of the linen closet where I had hidden it and carefully put it on.

“Hey, no fair. You said we got to watch,” Kings protested. I laughed through the closed door. I heard him grunt, then say, “What? She did say that.” I giggled picturing how Lan or Drake must have slugged him for getting after me. I made a mental note to kiss them both when I was finished making their jaws drop. I slipped on the heels that matched the dress and stepped up to the door.

“Close your eyes,” I yelled. I waited two seconds and opened the door. When I stepped into the bedroom, I was

surprised to see that all three of them had done exactly what I'd asked. They were sitting on the edge of my bed, facing the bathroom, with their eyes closed. I walked quietly into the center of the room and stopped, arranging the full skirt around me for the best effect. "Okay, you can open them."

Three pairs of eyes opened, and three jaws dropped, just as I had expected. "Well, what do you think?" I asked, turning so they could see the back, then around again so I could see them.

The bodice of the dress was deep royal purple, with lavender beads decorating it. The skirt was a lighter shade of purple with darker beading accents, and a small overskirt that hung at an angle over the right half of the skirt. It fit me like a glove at the top, then flared out. I knew the moment I saw it that this would be my dress. I just couldn't resist testing the guys with all of the others. I held my breath as they stared me down, their eyes all over me.

"Bella, you're gorgeous. That color is perfect on you," Lan breathed.

"Izzy, it's perfect," Drake agreed.

Kings struggled to find words. He stammered before he managed, "Oh, Elle."

I let my breath out in a sigh of relief. "I take it you like this one?" I asked them for confirmation. All three nodded. I started walking backward slowly, trying to keep them from realizing what was about to happen. I needed to take this dress off before one of them tried to kiss me and ruined it. We still had hours before we needed to get ready for the ball.

“Hey, where are you going?” Kings finally found his voice when he realized I was running away.

“I can’t let you ruin my dress. Give me five minutes to get this off and hung up. I’ll be right back, I promise. Then you’ll each get a reward for being good boys,” I teased, slamming the door on him before he could catch me. It took a little extra effort to lock the door, because Kings was trying desperately to get in. “If one of you restrains him, you’ll get extra attention!” I wasn’t above bribing my guys to get what I wanted.

Oh, shit. I had actually started to think of them as mine. They were my mates, my men, my guys. These were the men I would spend the rest of my life with. It was just like I’d always dreamed. It was the one thing I never thought would be possible. Not after Annabeth.

I caught my reflection in the mirror and smeared at the tears that had started to fall. I had to get the dress off and taken care of before I let myself break down. I took a deep breath and wiped my face with a hand towel.

I needed to get myself together so we could work out our plan for the ball. We had to convince the king that we were getting along and moving forward with bonding.

Fourteen





TOO MUCH Drama

ISABELLA

Once I regained my composure, I walked out of the bathroom. Shock gripped me at what I found. Drake and Lan were sitting on Kings in the middle of the floor. I laughed and rushed over to them, grabbing Lan's face for a kiss. Then I surprised Drake by doing the same to him.

"Okay, you can let him up now," I ordered, dragging Drake off his brother by his arm. I realized my mistake a moment too late. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me. It caught me off guard and I melted into him, momentarily forgetting that I was still mad at him.

"Sorry," he muttered against my lips. Then he hugged me tightly for a second before pushing me at Lan. Was he trying to apologize for calling us out about last night? Damn him for making me want him even when I'm mad.

Lan quickly pulled me into his arms, and I leaned my head back for a kiss. The lips that met mine weren't his. Kings shoved his way between us and his kiss wasn't gentle. It was hard with need. I let myself respond, knowing that we

wouldn't have time alone to finish whatever he was trying to start.

I backed away from him and went back to Lan, kissing him tenderly. Then I walked over and flopped onto the bed. "You three exhaust me," I breathed. I knew that being on the bed was dangerous because they could take it as a sign. I hadn't planned to fuck Landyn, it had just happened. I didn't expect that the four of us would be intimate together until my heat hit.

"Are we ready for tonight?" Kings asked, dropping onto the bed next to me and taking my hand. I made a face. I wasn't ready for tonight. I hadn't been to a ball in more than ten years. I wasn't sure I could handle it.

"I think we've done as much preparation as we can," Drake said, sitting next to Kings. I was surprised he left my other side open for Lan.

Landyn plopped down beside me and put his arm over my stomach. "I don't. There's one more thing we can do."

The three of us looked at him quizzically. I thought about it for a while, but couldn't come up with anything. "I give up; please tell me."

"We have to watch princess movies to get you in the mood, of course." Lan looked at us as if his answer was the most logical thing in the world and we were crazy for not seeing it. I started to laugh, and it caused a chain reaction. Before long, all four of us were laughing. I listed off a few movies with princesses as main characters, and Kings started typing

something on his phone. A moment later, a TV sprung from the base of my bed and turned on.

Within minutes, Kings had a movie playing, Drake had ordered lunch to be delivered to my room, and Lan had arranged for the seamstress to collect the rack of dresses. A girl could get used to this kind of treatment. The afternoon was spent lying in my bed, the four of us snuggled up and watching movies. The guys even took turns with who would be beside me. When Lan was the odd man out, he decided that he could just lay in my lap. I couldn't help but laugh at him. Then the other two decided they would do the same when it was their turn.

The afternoon passed quickly with no arguments. When it was time to get ready for the ball, I kissed each of them and kicked them out. I did my hair and make-up, then put on my gown. My hair was pulled up into a loose Dutch braid, with curled tendrils that framed my face. I was slipping my heels on when the knock came at the door. I took one last look in the mirror before I strolled over and opened the door.

It was my turn for a jaw-drop moment. My three men stood there, each one gorgeous in a suit with accents that matched my dress. Drake's had pale lavender, Kings had deep purple, and Lan had both mixed together. They were gorgeous.

Their reaction to my finished look was pretty similar to my reaction to them. The four of us stood there for a moment, just taking each other in. "You guys look amazing," I breathed.

“You’re gorgeous,” they said in unison. I couldn’t help laughing. The three of them hadn’t ever agreed on anything before, but here we were. Lan kissed my cheek before stepping back to let the others greet me. Kings did the same, allowing Drake to be the one to escort me to the party. We had agreed that tonight would be his date, even though I was still a bit irritated at him.

At least they knew I wouldn’t hold a grudge forever. I would forgive him eventually. Tonight, I would set it aside and pretend like I wasn’t upset. I would be his Izzy, the carefree and fun girl that used to hide from the other two with him in the pool house. I wished I could turn back the clock and be her again. But I’d been through too much to believe that it would be so easy.

We entered the ballroom just as the king and queen were preparing to make an announcement. Talk about perfect timing. I walked in on Drake’s arm, with Lan and Kings behind us. I would be free to dance with all three of them, but would spend most of the night with Drake, per our agreement. I knew that the other two thought it would be an easy way for their oldest brother to get back on my good side. They might be right.

The room was decorated beautifully, in pale blues and yellows. It reminded me of the queen’s gardens in the spring. Her flowers bloomed in the same colors that were present here. “Are you ready?” Drake asked as we strolled closer to the small stage where we would be officially announced.

I nodded. “As ready as I can be.” My heart was racing and I had started to sweat. I was glad the bodice of my dress was the darker purple, because it wouldn’t show. We stopped in front of the king and queen, waiting to be called up.

When King Lester started speaking, I tried to calm my speeding heart. It wouldn’t do to pass out before he had made our engagement official. I was so focused on avoiding an anxiety attack that I missed half of what he’d said. I heard Drake mutter, “What the fuck?” I turned to look at him, curious as to what I’d missed.

“What? I missed it.” I kept my voice low and leaned close to his ear.

“Apparently, he lied about what he’d planned for tonight. This isn’t our engagement party. It’s a competition to see who he thinks you’ll be best suited for. Damn, how did I not see this coming?” His voice was strained, even at a whisper.

I knew that we couldn’t react, because his parents were watching us. I wanted to cry; I wanted to run. How could he do this to his sons? Didn’t he want them to be happy? Panic gripped me, and I had to refocus on calming myself. Kings noticed and stepped up beside me. “Just breathe. It’s okay. We’ll work it out. Nobody is going to take you from us,” he promised.

Lan stepped up behind him casually and nodded. I turned my eyes back to Drake. I could see the promise in his eyes. These three would never let me go willingly. But would they risk their inheritance and chance to take the crown just to keep

me? I wondered how twisted it was that I wanted them to. I wanted to be more important to them than anything else. Their eyes told me that I might already be.

The king stopped speaking and the crowd clapped politely. Drake quickly explained what I had missed. The evening would be casual, and anyone who wished to spend time with me would be allowed to, whether I agreed or not. “But I want to stay with you guys,” I whispered.

“We’re going to split our time up. You’ll be with me, then you’ll have to dance with a few others before Lan will cut in. Then a few more and Kings will save you. A handful more and I’ll come back again. Don’t worry, we will be the only ones who can have two dances. I promise. We’ll make sure of it.” Drake’s words made me relax a little. I still had so many questions I just couldn’t voice. This was all too much. I couldn’t handle it.

“I don’t want to dance with anyone else. I don’t want to be here now. Can’t we just go back to our wing?” I begged.

Lan stepped closer. “We’ve got you. It’s just another hoop the king is making us jump through. It will be fine. We’re not going anywhere.”

“And if you start to feel overwhelmed, you can signal one of us to come get you,” Kings offered. I nodded, taking a deep breath. This really didn’t sound that bad. I just had to dance with everyone. But I didn’t want to dance with the other men here. I only wanted to be with my men. The king had succeeded in one thing with his games, I was now even more

determined to fully bond with each of them before the deadline, no matter what.

Drake swept me onto the dance floor just as the music started. I could see Lan and Kings were staying close in case I needed them. It was reassuring, even though I didn't want to dance with anyone else. I wanted to be theirs. My heart raced as we danced.



DRAKE

I could sense Izzy's hesitation over the whole situation. I didn't blame her at all. I was pissed. Father and I had discussed the ball and he clearly stated it would be our engagement party. I couldn't believe that he had flat-out lied to me. I should have expected it, but somehow, I had chosen to believe him. I didn't have time to berate myself. I needed to focus on Izzy and keeping her safe tonight. She wasn't happy and neither was I.

I pulled her into my arms as the music started and did my best to distract her. "Are you still mad at me?" I whispered in her ear.

She leaned closer so I would bend down. "Of course, I am. I have every right to be. It makes me wonder if you knew about this and just didn't tell me." Her words cut through me like knives in my heart. I wanted her to trust me, but I'd done so much already to fuck that up.

"Are you ever going to forgive me?" I knew it was a loaded question and there was no way to know for sure, no matter

what answer she gave. When she didn't respond, I looked down at her, terrified that she'd just stop talking to me at all. Her expression was neutral, almost regal. The king must be watching. "Izzy, please. Forget about all of this for a moment and tell me that you'll be able to forgive me someday. I can't live with you hating me. I mean, yes, we fight, but there's never been any actual malice behind it. I thought we were flirting."

"You don't care that your father is staring us down? You really want an answer, don't you?" she breathed, keeping her expression so flat that I couldn't tell what she was thinking.

"I don't care that he's watching. I want you to forgive me. You are more important than anything. I need you to be able to trust me again. It kills me that I've wrecked that." My words were desperate and I was on the verge of begging. I hated it, but not as much as I hated her being upset with me.

"What about his 'no drama in public' rule? Because this will definitely cause some drama," Izzy kept her voice low, her words only meant for me, and her eyes trained on my father.

"I don't care about his damned rules or demands. I have people working on it. No one is going to take you from us. I won't allow it," I promised. It was a long shot, but I hoped I wasn't lying to her.

"Okay, but remember that you asked for it," she giggled. I drew my brows together and started to ask what she was talking about when she pulled me down for a kiss. Her lips

met mine and there was no doubt that everyone was staring at us. Their shocked gasps barely registered through the heat of our connection. I dragged her closer to me and pressed my body against her, dancing all but forgotten. We stood there, in the center of the ballroom, and everything else melted away.

Her hands fisted in my hair and her tongue brushed mine. I groaned, wishing we were alone so I could see just how far she would let me go. I wanted to give her everything, but I wasn't sure that she was ready for that yet. The more I thought about her being with Lan, the more I understood. They both needed that connection so they would be able to bond. When we were kids, Izzy and I had bonded—although not sexually. Once the connection had gotten overwhelming, I pushed her away and started fighting with her constantly.

A tap on my shoulder pulled me out of my memories. I had gotten extremely distracted while Izzy's mouth was on mine. I gently pulled away from her to find Chad standing there. "It's my turn with your little whore," he said.

I turned back to Izzy. "Give me just a minute, love. If you don't mind taking a couple of steps back, I'll take care of this and be right back with you." She did as I requested and I motioned for Lan. "Make sure no other assholes dance with our girl. Fuck what the king wants. This night is ours." He nodded his understanding and pulled her into his arms. They didn't move far away, just giving me enough room for what I'd wanted.

I turned back to Chad and grinned. His cocky smile faltered. “You see, *Chad*, you made a couple of mistakes there. First, you admitted that Izzy is ours. You have no claim to her. Second, you called her a whore, which is so far from the truth that I can’t let it stand.” Before he realized what was happening, I threw the first punch. The gasps and cries from the crowd were even more intense than when I’d been kissing Izzy.

The force of my fist, backed by the anger I still held at what Chad had planned to do to my girl, knocked him onto the floor. I turned my back to him and bowed to the crowd before walking back to where Lan and Izzy stood. “Drake, look out!” she shouted. I had expected Chad to attack me from behind because he was a coward. What I hadn’t realized was that he would have the balls to bring a gun to a party. How had he even gotten it inside?

Then it dawned on me. Father was in on it. He wanted Chad to take Izzy from us, and if she wouldn’t go willingly, he would force the issue. I held my hands up, making sure to stand in front of Izzy, who had been shoved behind Lan. There were two of us that he’d have to get through before he could hurt her. Where the fuck was Kings? I made a big show of holding my hands up as if I were surrendering. “Take it easy, Chad. You don’t need a gun to have a conversation.”

“No, but I need it to take you guys out. Then Isabella will be mine, just like her parents promised. It was never about the money. I just want her.” His words sent a shiver down my

spine. This guy was unhinged. There was no way I would let him leave with her.

“Let’s talk about it. Why do you want someone who clearly doesn’t want you? I mean, come on, man. There are other omegas. I know there has to be one that’s dying to get with you. Why Izzy?” I had no idea why, but I felt like I needed to keep him talking. I was stalling for something, anything to intervene. A glance at my father made it clear there would be no royal interference. This was up to me to settle.

“I don’t want to talk. And I don’t want another omega. Did you know that I watched you four when we were kids? I saw how she was with you, and that’s what I want. Give her to me.” He brandished the gun as he spoke.

“Chad, you know I’m not going to let that happen. Izzy is ours. You’re not going to hurt her. She doesn’t want you, and you’re going to accept that,” I insisted. I had to talk him down before our girl decided to do something stupid like offer herself to keep Chad from shooting us.

The crowd around us had thinned. Most people were carefully moving toward the exit, terrified of the idea that they could be shot because they were nosy. Honestly, that would be a shitty way to go. I hoped that enough of them got away that I could manage to get Izzy out safely. I wondered if Lan could get her into the crowd where there was more cover.

It seemed like my brother had read my mind. Chad tensed, his eye twitching. “Stop. Do not move. I will shoot you both,”

he barked at Lan to stay where they were. Damn. So much for that. I needed to get his attention off of them and back to me.

“Chad, let’s talk about this. There has to be something I can give you to resolve this situation,” I stepped to the side, purposefully putting myself in front of Lan again. When I moved, he pulled Izzy to his back. We would shield her with our bodies.

“You won’t give me what I want,” he replied, keeping the gun trained on us. I glanced over and saw that the king was watching with amusement, but the queen had disappeared. At this point, I was less concerned with my father, and more concerned with how I was going to save Izzy. It was obvious that Chad’s behavior was going to be tolerated by our monarch.

“I can’t give you our omega, Chad. No matter how badly you want her, you can’t have her. She’s already mated to us. You know as well as I do that nothing can be done about that now.” I hoped that my bluff would go unquestioned.

Understanding crossed his face, then turned to anger. “I knew she was a whore! You’ve only had her for two days, and she’s already slept with all three of you! She deserves to die!” He cocked the gun and I braced for the bullet that would no doubt hit me. If I could protect Izzy, my death would be worth the price.

Just as he pulled the trigger, Kings snuck up behind and tackled him to the ground. The gun went off and my head whipped around to Izzy. “Are you okay?” I asked her

frantically. She nodded. I looked at Kings, who was lying on top of Chad. “Kings?” He shook his head to tell me he hadn’t been hit. I turned again to see Lan clutching his shoulder. “Lan?”

He pulled his hand away and it was coated. I caught him as he fell, pressing my hand to his wound. His blood was red and sticky. “Landyn!” Izzy screamed in anguish. Kings clobbered Chad, knocking him out. By this time, the guards had decided to help their princes after all. One of them handed Kings a set of zip tie cuffs and watched as he tied Chad up. Another picked up the gun. Two of them grabbed Chad by his bound arms and dragged him from the room.

“Are you happy now, Father?” I shouted for all of the remaining guests to hear. “Because of your games, Lan is seriously injured. I expect Chad to answer for his part in this, but I also expect you to answer for yours. You could have intervened at any point. His blood is on your hands.” I watched as a foreign emotion crossed my father’s face before he turned and left. Two more guards helped me carry Lan to the medical wing of the castle, where the surgeon had already been called in.

Izzy held Landyn’s hand and spoke softly to him the whole way there, having no trouble keeping up with our pace. “I can’t lose you now. Hold on. You’re going to be okay. You’ll see, it’s just like all those times when you had accidents on your adventures. I’ll be right by your side to nurse you back to health.”

“You know he did all of that on purpose just so you’d spend time with him,” I whispered. It wasn’t my place to give his secrets away, but I felt like it might lighten the mood.

“What? You’re kidding, right? He hurt himself intentionally just to spend time with me? Why?” She was clearly caught off guard, but my statement did exactly what I’d wanted. It distracted her from the seriousness of Lan’s injuries.

FIFTEEN





THINGS GET EMOTIONAL

KINGSLEY

I stayed behind for a moment after the guards took Chad away and helped Drake carry Lan to the medical wing. But I wasn't about to let the king off so easily. Even though Drake had called him out, that didn't force him to admit his part in this. I crept down the hall and stopped outside a door when I heard voices.

“You can't keep interfering with their lives. At some point, you have to let them grow up.” King Lester's voice was harsh and cold.

“They're my sons, and I will not allow them to be mated to the girl who killed our daughter.” I took a step backward from the venom in my mother's voice. I knew that she was still holding on to her pain, but I had no idea that she blamed Elle for Annabeth's accident. I thought the king had been the problem. Perhaps I was wrong.

“We have discussed this. She's already been punished for her part. Shouldn't the boys have a chance at happiness?” The king's words surprised me, especially after the conversation

Lan and Drake had with him a few days ago. Was our mother behind that as well?

I needed to get back to Lan. I'd trusted the others to take care of him, but I wanted to stay close. The surgeon had to save him. Otherwise, Drake and I would be having a talk with Chad in private. I was half tempted to take care of that without checking on Lan first, but I knew that Drake would pull some bullshit alpha claim about it, and we'd end up fighting. I had to trust that Chad would get what was coming to him soon enough. I raced through the halls to the medical wing, searching for my brothers and Elle.

Drake and Elle were pacing back and forth in the hall outside the main office. There wasn't an operating room here, so I was certain they'd had to improvise. "Is he going to be okay?" I asked as I approached. Elle raced over and threw herself into my arms.

"Doc won't tell us anything until he's done with the surgery. He said it's probably gonna take a while. He told us to go back to our wing and he'd call. Izzy told him in no uncertain terms that she wouldn't leave without Lan." Drake beamed with pride at her.

"Were you misbehaving?" I whispered in her ear. I felt the shiver run down her body at my breath on her ear.

"Always," she said before pressing her lips to mine. I wondered if she'd wanted to kiss me, or if she was punishing Drake more. I knew she was still angry with him and I

couldn't blame her; he'd kept a really big secret from all of us. Either way, I enjoyed the attention.

"Where'd you go?" Drake asked when Elle and I finally broke contact.

"I followed the king. My plan was to make sure Mom was okay. I heard them talking, and I don't think everything is as cut and dried as you guys thought," I said, rubbing my hand down Elle's back.

"What did you hear?" she asked before my brother had a chance to.

"It's not necessarily the king who's trying to keep us apart. He was arguing with her about it. I think she was behind Chad being here tonight. It sounded as if she'd planned to have Elle killed."

Drake pulled her close to him when she gasped. He didn't look surprised so he must have suspected our mother's involvement. "It's okay, Izzy, we've got you. We'll keep you safe."

"You think she orchestrated this? Would she really put you three in danger like that?" Elle's voice was a whisper. Her eyes were wide with shock. Even she hadn't expected our mom to be the big issue in our relationship.

"I honestly don't know. Before today, I would have said no. After what I just heard, I wouldn't put it past her. She sounded unhinged," I explained. I took a step back and ran my hands over my face before fisting them in my hair.

“She blames me for Annabeth.” Elle’s quiet admission wasn’t a question. I nodded. “If she’ll go to this extent to keep us apart, then we don’t have a chance.”

I paced the floor in front of her. “We can’t think that way. Elle, we want to be with you. We care about you. Please don’t give up on us just because our parents are jerks.”

“Don’t worry about them. I have something that will shut them up. I’m just waiting for the right moment.” Leave it to my brother to be both hopeful and ominous in the same sentence.

Elle and I both turned to look at him. Before either of us could speak, the doors opened and the doctor came out. His scrubs were spotted with Lan’s blood and he looked concerned. Elle’s attention immediately shifted. “How is he?”

“Stable and resting. We’re going to move him to his room to be more comfortable, but someone will need to stay with him overnight to make sure he stays asleep. If he starts to stir, he’ll need more medication. The surgery went well. The bullet tore his shoulder up pretty badly, but I was able to fix most of it. He’ll need physical therapy after a couple of days. Other than that, he should recover.” The doctor spoke matter-of-factly, as if Lan had never been in any real danger. Could we have really overreacted that badly?

“I’ll stay with him. Will you show me the medicine and how to give it to him?” Elle volunteered.

“We’ll all stay with him tonight. I think Izzy should be in charge of the medicine, though. But Kings and I will be there

in case she needs us,” Drake responded. Elle looked at him and I watched her concern melt into relief. I knew that Drake would do whatever he could to get her to rest as well. We could take turns watching Lan and making sure that he was okay.

“Certainly, right this way,” the doctor said as he led Elle back into his office. Drake and I stayed where we were.

“Did you hear anything else?” my older brother asked me quietly. I figured I’d be grilled about this when no one else was around.

I shook my head. “I walked away after she admitted to her part in it all.” I had been scared to stay any longer. It was hard to hear your mother say those things, I didn’t want to hear more. There was no way to tell him that though.

“Okay. We’ll get him settled, then try to get her to sleep as well.” He confirmed what I’d suspected was his plan. It wouldn’t matter how I responded, so I kept my mouth shut. It would be up to Elle to decide if she wanted to sleep. If she refused, I would stay awake with her.

The doctor was able to get Lan moved and settled in within an hour. It was the fastest I’d ever seen medical professionals move. Drake made his move the moment the door closed. “Lan is settled in. You should get some sleep too. If he wakes up, we’ll let you know.”

I could tell from her face that she wouldn’t be his obedient little omega and do what her alpha said. I wanted to laugh at

the way he'd basically told her what was going to happen. But her response was worth keeping quiet.

"Excuse me?" she said, looking at him quizzically.

"You need sleep," he repeated.

Elle glared at him. "You can take your bossy ass right to bed. I'm taking care of Lan right now. Which means that I will stay awake as long as it takes to be certain that he doesn't need anything. If you want to fight about it, you'll just have to go fight yourself, I'm busy." She turned and walked to the bed. Her shoulders were shaking. She was pissed.

"I didn't mean to upset you. I'm only trying to take care of you, too." Watching Drake try to defend himself was hilarious. A chuckle slipped out and he turned to glare at me.

Elle spun around. "Upset? You think I'm upset? No, Drake, I'm pissed. You cannot keep treating me like you own me. Just stop. I'm not going to sleep right now. I'm not your property. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to take care of Landyn." She had actually dismissed him. I'd never seen anyone dismiss Drake except for the king.

I watched his face. Anger turned to outrage, then melted into disappointment. He wanted so badly for her to accept him. Sadly, that wouldn't happen as long as he kept pushing the alpha bullshit. I'd been her best friend for longer than she'd been away. There was no way she would ever submit like that. He would have to approach it so much differently if he wanted her to take him seriously and give him a chance. He stomped

over to the window and flopped in a chair. Well, this should be fun.

“What do you need me to do?” I asked gently, walking over to where Elle was checking on Lan. “He’s sleeping; you don’t have to hover.”

“I know. I was going to take a nap, but then Drake ordered me to. Now I can’t, or it looks like I’m being his good little omega.” She glared at him across the room, keeping her voice quiet.

“Why don’t you change into pajamas, and I’ll get him to go after food. Then you can ‘fall asleep’ while he’s gone. I’ll even let you crawl in bed with Lan. And I’ll make sure Drake doesn’t give you any crap about it later,” I offered. Her smile was all the thanks I needed. I turned and strolled across the room as she walked into the bathroom and closed the door. “Elle needs her pink blanket from her room, and she said she’s hungry. But she doesn’t want anyone coming in here because of Lan. Will you go get some food?” I hoped that he didn’t try to send me. I wasn’t in the mood to fight with him.

“Fine,” he growled and rolled his eyes, apparently realizing that she just needed a break from him. Once he left the room, I turned to find Elle had already returned from the bathroom and was curled up in bed with Landyn, already asleep.



LANDYN

I woke up, groggy and in pain. I looked around the room, relieved that I was in my own bed. I knew that the warm lump next to me was Bella. I noticed my brothers asleep in chairs. Then I remembered what had happened. I'd been shot. Chad shot me. He tried to shoot Bella. Fear gripped me and I turned to her, careful of my shoulder. "Bella, please tell me that you weren't hurt," I whispered into her ear, then backed up as she jerked awake.

"Lan! You're supposed to be sleeping. I'll get the medicine," she exclaimed, trying to climb from the bed. My hand on her arm stopped her.

"Please. I don't need more pain medicine. I just need to know that you weren't hurt." The dim light from the corner lit up her face. It took a moment for her to understand what I was asking. She relaxed against me for a moment.

"Kings tackled Chad before he could shoot me. I didn't get hurt. Just you. Please sit back and rest. I won't give you the medicine as long as you cooperate," she offered.

I sighed and leaned back against the pillows. I wouldn't tell her that the pain was excruciating and that I wanted the pain meds more than I wanted to breathe. But she was safe, and that was all that mattered. I could deal with the pain. "Did the doc fix me up?" I remembered going in and out of consciousness on the way to the medical wing. Drake speaking with the doctor and that was all I could remember.

Bella kissed me gently. "He did. But he said you need to rest. Please don't try to get up." Her voice cracked and I saw the tears form in her eyes. "I thought we were going to lose you."

"I'm fine. Do you really think Chad could take me out? After all the times I got injured because of the stupid stuff I did, you think he's gonna be the thing that killed me? That's harsh," I tried to play it off like I hadn't been terrified that he'd hit something important with that bullet. I wasn't sure if it worked or not.

"Drake told me something while you were in surgery. I need to know if it's true," she continued. Oh, shit. What could he have possibly told her that would make her so serious?

"Ask away. I've got nothing to hide," I fibbed. I had a lot to hide, but I wasn't about to tell her that. I hoped that he hadn't told her anything that would damage our relationship. It would be hard to gain her trust again if he'd spilled all of my secrets.

"He said that you used to get hurt intentionally so I would come take care of you." Even in the dim light, I could tell that her cheeks had turned pink.

“Oh, that. Um, I hadn’t wanted to tell you about that,” I danced around it, hoping she would change the subject. She didn’t.

“I see. Does that mean it’s true?” Bella looked concerned and offended. I knew that I couldn’t lie to her, but I hated to tell her what I’d done.

“Unfortunately, it is. I’m sorry. I know that I shouldn’t have done it, but I had the biggest crush on you and had no idea how to get your attention. I did everything I could to make you jealous, but nothing worked. Then I started doing the crazy stunts, and the first time I got hurt enough to be in the hospital, you came and sat with me for days. It was the only way I got to spend time with you by myself.”

I watched her face, waiting for her to respond. I couldn’t tell what she was thinking. She mulled over my answer before turning back to me again. “You had a crush on me?”

I couldn’t stop the laugh that bubbled to the surface. “I confessed all of that and your take away was that I had a crush on you?”

“Well, yeah. I had a huge crush on you. But I didn’t know how to talk to you. When you got hurt, the awkwardness didn’t matter. All that mattered was taking care of you.”

“That was exactly how I felt. I guess we should have found a way to talk about this before. It might have changed things.” I wasn’t sure if my feelings would have been enough to keep her from leaving, but at least she would have known.

“It wouldn’t have changed anything. Your father still would have sent me away because of what I did. I know that you don’t think it was my fault, but I was responsible. Nothing you say will change my mind on that,” she insisted. I wasn’t about to risk losing what we were building by arguing with her.

I needed to move. I’d been lying still for too long. My shoulder ached and the sharp pain that had torn through me when I’d been shot came back with a vengeance. I wasn’t about to tell Bella and risk being put under again. I pushed myself up and climbed out of the bed, against her protests.

“Lan, wait. You shouldn’t be up,” Bella cried as she raced around the bed. I tried to wave her off, then my legs gave out and she caught me, pushing me back against the bed. I was surprised she was able to support me. “See? I told you; you need to rest.”

“I can’t just lay here. I need to move,” I complained. It didn’t matter to me that I sounded like a spoiled child. I wanted to be out of this room. I wasn’t even sure why, exactly, I just needed to move, to walk. I felt like I was suffocating. The feeling hit me suddenly and refused to let go. “Please.” I hated being reduced to begging, but if it was the only way I could get out of here, I would do it.

“Okay, but you have to lean on me. Or I’ll have to wake your brothers,” she threatened with a wicked grin. I nodded my approval and wrapped my good arm around her shoulder, letting her settle in under my arm. She held me around the waist and we slowly headed toward the door. I held my breath

as she eased the heavy wooden door open, then closed it quietly behind us. Once I was certain my brothers weren't following us, I let out my breath.

“Thank you for this. I feel like I was asleep forever. A walk will help.” My confidence was returning, and I took a tentative step away from her embrace. A couple of steps later, she grabbed me again as I started to lean to the side. “Apparently my balance is a little off. Sorry,” I apologized and let her take more of my weight. I hated showing weakness in front of her.

“I've got you. I'm stronger than I look. How do you think I managed to pass for a beta for ten years on the mainland?” Bella laughed nervously, and I could tell she didn't want to talk about her time away. As much as I wanted to ask, I didn't.

“What did I miss while I was out?” I stopped walking when we entered the gardens. We stood next to the rainbow of roses and I turned to look at Bella. She looked away, suddenly fascinated with the flowers. I tilted her face back toward mine and gently pressed my lips to hers. “Please tell me.”

Tears filled her eyes as they met mine. “Whatever it is, we'll face it together. I promise,” I assured her. I wanted her to trust me, but I understood why she found it difficult. If only I had been honest about my feelings so long ago.

“It's not just your dad who wants me gone. Kings heard them talking, and your mom was behind Chad coming to the ball. She might have been behind all of it,” Bella sobbed, covering her face with her hands. I pulled her close and held

her with my good arm. I let her have a moment to get all the tears out, then kissed the top of her head gently.

“Drake and Kings both know?” She nodded and I continued, “Then we’ll deal with it. Don’t worry, we’re not going to let anyone take you from us. I think I proved that when I took a bullet to protect you.” Bella chuckled, then looked horrified. “I’m okay. Yes, it’s gonna hurt for a while, but I’m okay. Let’s go wake up the guys and see what we can do about our meddling parents.” I dropped my arm from her and grabbed her hand.

Just as we walked up to my room, the door swung open and Drake rushed out. “What the hell? We were looking for you.”

Kings popped his head around the corner. “You’re supposed to be resting. And you were supposed to make sure he did.” They ushered us inside.

“Don’t blame Bella. I needed some air. She helped me. I’m fine,” I insisted. “But we do need to talk about what we’re going to do about our parents.”

“Especially since we’ve been called in front of them this morning,” Drake countered. “That’s why we were looking for you two. We need to get ready.”

Bella ran to her closet and pulled out a simple but beautiful lavender dress, then disappeared into the bathroom. My brothers headed to their rooms to dress for the day, but I waited for Bella. I knew that I would need help changing, and wanted her to be the one to take care of me. Once she was dressed, we went to my room where she helped me change

into a casual suit that would probably irritate my parents. I didn't care, since I'd discovered it was their fault that I'd been shot in the first place.

We met up with Drake and Kings, then headed to the throne room to see what the king and queen had to say.

sixteen





THE QUEEN'S OBJECTION

DRAKE

I had tried to give Izzy her space. I tried to respect that she was angry with me and needed time to get over it. I knew that I would have to find a way to convince her to forgive me. What I didn't know was that she was still so stubborn. She wasn't going to make this easy on me, and she would exploit every chance she had to make me jealous because of the affection she freely gave to my brothers.

I'd watched her flirt with Kings and hug all over Lan while we walked through the corridors that would lead away from our wing. Izzy teased and taunted Kings, making him grab her and start tickling until Lan stepped in. Then she snuggled up with him, practically announcing to the world that they'd been intimate. I hated the jealousy I felt, but I couldn't give myself time to focus on that right now. I needed to remain calm to deal with this summons. I had to push my issues with Izzy out of my mind. It couldn't matter right now that she and Kings were so close, or that she'd slept with Lan before me. I would have to deal with all of that later. If there was a later.

I was convinced that this would not be a pleasant meeting with our parents. This would be the moment of truth, and I would have to pull out my backup plan. I pulled out my phone and checked my email, breathing a sigh of relief that the message I had been waiting on had finally arrived. I skimmed it quickly, making sure that it said what I wanted it to. A wave of calm passed over me, and I turned to Izzy.

“Can you at least pretend like you’re not pissed at me while we’re in front of them?” I asked her quietly as we walked through the throne room doors.

“I’ll try,” she said, then took my arm and plastered a sweet smile on her face. “But only if you stop being an ass.” I grimaced at her words that were smothered with that sickly sweet tone that meant I wouldn’t be forgiven easily.

The guards escorting us stopped in front of the king and queen, who were both seated as if they’d been waiting for us. I knew we weren’t late, but the looks on their faces had me second guessing myself and wanting to apologize. He nodded at the guards, who stepped away, taking their assigned places. Instinctually, the four of us took a small step forward, standing in the spot where the guards had been.

Everything in me wanted to panic. I took a deep breath and calmed myself, I couldn’t show fear or let anyone know that I was intimidated. I had to be the strong one. I was the future king, after all. I squared my shoulders and prepared for whatever was about to come.

With a quick bow, I got the nod from my father that I could begin. “Your majesties, we are pleased to be summoned before you today. How may we be of service?” Izzy’s scoff was audible, but I didn’t dare give her a sideways glance. She tried to cover it with a cough, but if I caught it, I was certain they did as well. This was going to be more difficult than I thought.

“We wanted to make sure you were all well, after the incident last night,” the king began. He put odd emphasis on the word incident, as if he had more that he wanted to say about it.

“Yes, sir. We are well. Landyn’s injury has been tended to, and he seems to be feeling better this morning.” It wouldn’t be appropriate to tell them that Lan was still in pain and should probably be resting. Even though they were our parents, they would be more concerned with the outward appearance of weakness than with his health.

The king’s nod confirmed my suspicions. Since he was awake and able to stand in front of them, it didn’t matter if he was in pain and looked as if he were about to pass out. Luckily, Kings was standing on the other side of him and could hold him up if needed. I hoped it didn’t come to that.

“There have also been complaints about the omega assignments. It’s been brought to my attention that you boys may have had something to do with the changes made by forcing Ms. Vanderbilt into this arrangement,” the queen interjected. How had she found out about my deal with Mrs. Robinson? Surely the old woman hadn’t ratted me out.

“I’m afraid I have no idea what you’re talking about. I was assured that the assignments were made with each omega’s needs in mind. Isabella is adjusting nicely to being a part of the family again.” I spoke with confidence, making sure to curb the sarcasm I wanted to throw at my mother.

“Regardless, there are accusations, and there will be an investigation. I hardly think it’s fair to anyone for you to get attached when it’s likely that the assignments will be changed.” The queen spoke as if she were talking about a pet or a job, not about the love of my life.

“I disagree. Isabella is a perfect fit here. There is no reason to change the assignment. It was ridiculous for Chad to think he could buy her from her parents. They are not a good match, and you know it.” I knew that my tone wasn’t as respectful as it should be, but I was losing patience with this line of conversation. A glance to the side showed me that Izzy was ready to lose it too. If Lan hadn’t grabbed her arm, she might have actually attacked the queen.

“Your concerns will be noted. However, there are witnesses who claim that you spoke with Mrs. Robinson and convinced her to change the assignment at the last minute. That doesn’t sound like the omega in question was considered for you at all. As for her parents selling her to the Wilde family, that is well within their rights. You know that is perfectly legal according to our laws,” the king interjected. He’d already allowed our mother to say too much, and now he had to cover for her.

“I would like to speak with these so-called witnesses. I have a right to confront my accusers. As for your laws, you are aware of my objections. My brothers and I feel that Isabella’s preference should be taken into account. I have offered to refund the amount that the Wilde family provided to the Vanderbilts. I am waiting for confirmation that the offer has been accepted, but I have no reason to believe that Mr. Wilde will refuse.”

“It seems as if you’ve taken all aspects of this into consideration, son. I’m impressed. If Mr. Wilde accepts your offer, I see no reason to proceed with an investigation or a reassignment.” For a moment, I saw my father instead of the king. Then the queen interrupted.

“I am not impressed. This behavior is crass and out of line. Our laws exist for a reason. They are to be respected and obeyed without question. At this point, I feel that an investigation is pointless. We do not reward illegal behavior. The assignment should simply be reversed. Ms. Vanderbilt will be returned to the Wildes, and there will be compensation for their time that was lost with her.” She was cold and calculating. The look she gave Izzy was painful. I was impressed at how my girl was holding her own. She hadn’t spoken, but she also refused to look away from the queen.

“Mother,” Lan started to speak, but a look from Izzy stopped him. She simply shook her head. I’d never seen anyone with this much control over my brother. It was almost scary. He was obviously in love with her, just like Kings and I were. If we lost her, it would destroy us.

“I understand that you boys are already attached to this omega, but you will be able to transition those feelings to a new one with a little time and effort. Mrs. Robinson has admitted that Bianca Pierce would have been the omega assigned here if you hadn’t interfered, although she claims that you had nothing to do with the last-minute change. We will make the arrangements to have Bianca brought here and return Ms. Vanderbilt to the Wildes.” The queen seemed adamant that Izzy would not be ours. There had to be something I could do. I wasn’t ready to drop my bomb on them yet. I was saving that for a last-ditch effort. But the way things were going, I may not have a choice.



LANDYN

I wanted to yell. I wanted to throw things. For the first time in my life, I wanted to hit a woman. There was no reason for our mother to be acting this way. “I would like the chance to speak, please.” My quiet insistence was different from Drake’s polished professionalism, and I thought that maybe it would help. I waited a beat for the king to nod his approval, then began.

“Perhaps there were reasons that Mrs. Robinson changed the assignment before the ceremony. It was my understanding that the omegas’ preferences were taken into account. It’s entirely possible that she hadn’t spoken with Isabella until that night. She had been on the mainland until a day or two before the ceremony.” I clenched my jaw when I finished speaking, watching my mother’s face. I could almost see the venom flowing through her as she tried to come up with a retort.

“That is a good point, son. Perhaps we should ask Ms. Vanderbilt what she would prefer. So long as the financial portion is taken care of as Drake states, there is no reason why

her desires should not be considered.” The king glanced at the queen, then turned his attention to Bella. “Isabella, where would you like to be assigned?”

She jumped when she realized that he was speaking to her. Bella’s cheeks turned the brightest shade of pink I’d ever seen them, and she took a breath to steady herself before responding. “Your majesty, I would like to remain here with your sons. Please. I did not choose the Wilde family, and was not even asked for my thoughts on the matter before the ceremony.” Bella spoke frankly, but with so much conviction. My mother scowled at her, but my father beamed. I could see now that his reaction earlier had been because of his wife’s influence. Perhaps we had a chance to change his mind after all.

“Hmm, interesting. And the three of you desire for her to stay as well?” he asked us quietly, as if he was scared to say the words too loudly.

“Yes, sir, that is what we want. All of us,” Kings spoke up for the first time. I couldn’t remember him ever speaking in front of them like this without specifically being called on. I was glad he would stand up for what we wanted. If we ended up having to fight, we’d be a united front.

“I believe that is all we needed. The assignment shall stand, provided Mr. Wilde accepts your compensation offer.” The king’s declaration was final. I nearly breathed a sigh of relief. But tension remained in the air.

“No.” The queen spoke simply, that one syllable halting any celebration we’d been about to have.

“What do you mean, no?” King Lester turned to his wife. “There is no reason to disrupt everyone just because you are not pleased with our sons’ choice of mate.”

“That is precisely the reason. She killed our daughter and you wish to push that aside and accept her into the family? That is ridiculous. I will not be a part of it. Per our laws, I have the right to object, and I am exercising that right. The matter is settled,” she said forcefully.

“You do have the right to object, wife, but that does not settle the matter. It does, however, force a trial to determine the outcome. Each side will present their case, and at the end there will be a vote. The council will oversee and make the final decision.” I knew the law, but hated that it had come to this. Would we be able to convince the stern and unfeeling council to go against our mother to let us keep Bella? I wasn’t certain it was possible.

“Fine,” she said before standing and storming out of the throne room.

After her exit, the king turned to us. His expression was one of apology and disappointment. “You must forgive the queen for her outburst. She isn’t over the loss of Annabeth, and holds grudges tightly. I will do what I can to convince her that a trial is not needed. Please prepare your arguments anyway, and we will convene tomorrow morning.” He paused, then addressed

Bella directly. “Isabella, may I have a moment alone with my sons? You may wait for them outside the chamber.”

She nodded and barely looked at us before she walked away. I knew that she was trying to hide the tears in her eyes. She was afraid that our mother would get her way and send her back to Chad. I would die before that happened.

Once the door closed behind her, the king relaxed. “My boys, I have something to ask you. It’s personal and you’re not going to like it. Have any of you been physically intimate with her?” He looked at each of us in turn. I didn’t know if either of my brothers had, but I suspected that I was the only one.

“I have,” I said simply. The other two shook their heads. That would explain a lot of the snarky comments that had been coming my way. I should have known that neither of my brothers had made a move yet.

“I hate to be crass, but if all of you had, it would make your mother’s case less impactful. The council would never separate a fully bonded pack. I’m not saying that you should pursue bonding tonight, but if it happens, that will help your case.”

“Understood, sir,” Drake responded. I wondered if he would try to make a move on Bella or if he would give Kings the chance. It didn’t matter, as long as we found a way to keep her with us.

“Is there any other way? I hate the idea of forcing her to sleep with any of us if she’s not ready, just so she can stay.” Leave it to Kings to object to getting exactly what he’d always

wanted. I understood the feeling, though. I wouldn't push her either. Everything would be done on her terms.

“Landyn’s claim will help. If there’s anything else you can think of, please try. I hate to see you lose someone who is obviously so important to you. And yes, Drake, I know that you arranged it. Your mother suspects, but I have spoken with Mrs. Robinson myself. She refused to admit it publicly, but she did tell me in confidence exactly what happened. I do not approve of using your station for influence, but promising to volunteer or provide a donation was a smart move.” Wait, what? He was proud of Drake for going behind his back and convincing the head of the Family Council to change the omega assignment. How was that possible?

“Thank you, sir. I have some ideas that might help our case. I’ll prepare them tonight for presentation,” Drake added, bowing his head in respect. What exactly did he have up his sleeve?

With that, we were dismissed until the trial in the morning. It seemed like a ridiculous way to handle a dispute, but this was the monarchy we were dealing with. “Is it just me, or does it feel like we’re the ones going on trial here?” I asked when we got back to our wing of the castle. The four of us settled in the den to plan.

Kings laughed. “Of course, we are. How else can she undermine us? I know for a fact that the trial option hasn’t been used in decades. Leave it to our mother to decide that’s the way to wreck our relationship.”

“So, what’s this super-secret plan you have, Drake?” Bella asked, turning her attention to him for the first time since we left the throne room.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said, focusing on his phone. He seemed to be scrolling through emails and stopping to respond once in a while. Kings and I both grimaced at his comment. The look on Bella’s face was terrifying.

“Don’t worry about it?” she screamed at him, then stepped over and snatched his phone. “You’re doing it again. Stop being a controlling dick and talk to me. Otherwise, this will be over for good. Your parents will see to that. Just because your dad seems to be on our side right now, that doesn’t mean he will stand up to your mom tomorrow. We need to work together. Unless you don’t want me?” Her anger fizzled into uncertainty. Kings took her hands and pulled her away from Drake, handing his phone back as they walked.

“He’s not saying that. Of course, we want you. Just let him pout about not getting your attention. Why don’t you let me distract you while they discuss a plan?” Kings could not have been more transparent. It was obvious he was going to try to sleep with her. I wondered if she would do it, knowing that this might be her only chance. Hell, she might even give Drake a shot if she thought it would save her from being sent to the Wildes.

“Fine, let’s go to your room then,” she agreed way too quickly. It made me think that she’d had the same thought I had. I would wait to discuss it with Drake after she and Kings

left. Bella shocked me by walking back to Drake and kissing him on the cheek. It was a sweet gesture; one that didn't fit their relationship at all. I smiled as she strolled over and pressed her lips to mine. "I'll see you in just a bit."

Once the door closed behind them, I turned to my oldest brother. "Do you think she's going to sleep with him just so she can stay with us?"

He looked at me, sadness clear in his eyes. "Is it wrong if I hope she does?"

seventeen





wait, we're ACTUALLY,WHAT?!

ISABELLA

I knew what Kings had in mind when he asked if he could distract me. I hoped that it wasn't as awkward as it seemed that I had agreed. Of course, I was attracted to Drake and Kings, I just wanted to let things progress naturally. I wasn't sure if I was ready to be with either of them physically yet. Unfortunately, I felt like I couldn't admit that. The king told them that physically bonding would help our case. Part of me wanted to grab Drake and Kings and just get it over with. Being with both of them at the same time would be weird, but would complete the bond. Then the council wouldn't dare take us away from each other. Why hadn't I pushed the issue with Drake the other night? I could have seduced him then. If I had, then I would only have to convince Kings to make his move.

I shook the thought from my head. I wasn't going to force myself on either of them. If something happened with Kings tonight, it would be because we wanted it to, not because the king said it was our only chance. "Let's get something straight before we go in here," I said when we approached his door.

“Okay, what is it?” he answered cautiously.

“I’m not going to your room to sleep with you. If something happens because you and I want it to, that’s fine. But that is not the reason I’m here. I want to spend time with you. I want you to distract me from all of this, especially how angry I am at your dumbass oldest brother,” I insisted.

“I’m not going to push you into anything you don’t want or aren’t ready for. I promise.” His smile nearly melted my panties. So much for taking things slowly. I refused to act on my attraction, though. I wanted this to work, which meant not jumping into bed with him.

“So, how are you going to distract me, then?” I asked as we walked into his room.

“Let’s get changed first, so we can be comfortable,” he offered, handing me a shirt and shorts, then gesturing toward the bathroom.

When I returned, he switched on a light and I could see that he might have actually planned for me to end up here tonight. His bed was made and there was a picnic basket in the middle of the floor on a blanket. “What’s this?”

“This, Elle, is your distraction. Dinner and a movie. And anything else you want. I won’t push, but I won’t say no either.” He gave me that adorable little smirk that I’d been in love with for years. I rolled my eyes at him, not buying it for a minute. This was a seduction attempt for sure. I wasn’t sure how I felt about it. I knew he wasn’t trying to force me into anything, but I didn’t know if I was ready for our friendship to

change so drastically. Instead of focusing on that, I decided to relax and see where the night took us. I pressed a chaste kiss to his cheek and settled myself on the floor next to the basket.

“What movie did you pick for us?” I asked, trying to steer the conversation away from my nerves and building expectations.

“Your favorite one, with the pirates,” he replied with a smile. I laughed at that. I should have expected him to use my love of cheesy movies against me. It warmed my heart that he remembered my comfort movie.

“And dinner?” I knew the answer before I asked. If he remembered my favorite movie, he would have no problem using my favorite foods against me too.

“Pizza with pepperoni and banana peppers, of course. And I have your chocolate covered peanut butter cups for dessert.”

“You know me so well,” I sighed as he dropped down beside me and captured my lips with his. Maybe the change wouldn’t be so bad. Especially if every day could be like this.

“You’re nervous. It’s okay. We’re just eating pizza and watching a movie. There’s nothing to worry about with me.” His words touched me in a way I hadn’t thought possible. Suddenly I couldn’t think about anything but getting his clothes off. My awkward feelings fell away and it was just us.

I pulled him closer and kissed him again, needing to feel his closeness. I wanted to ask if he felt the way I did, but I couldn’t make myself say the words. I poured my emotions

into the kiss, hoping that he cared for me the same way I did him. I knew that all the brothers wanted me as their omega, but I found it hard to believe that they'd wanted it as badly as I had for all these years. He dragged me against him, into his lap, and deepened the kiss. As our tongues played against each other, I felt a surge of emotion. Then I felt something else.

Kings was hard and groaned as I pressed against him. He was bigger than I had expected. His reaction to my closeness made me question what I'd believed. Maybe he really had been hiding his feelings all those years. Lan had said something the night we were together that made me think the three of them had talked about it before. I didn't think I was special enough for them to have chosen me, maybe I was wrong. I had this moment to decide if I was ready to pursue these feelings or if I needed more time. If I let things progress past kissing, I wouldn't be able to stop myself. Did I want to?

His arms wound around me, and I leaned closer. I was teetering on the edge. The time for a decision was now. Could I give in and let myself love him? A moment of indecision had me pulling away from him, leaving just a whisper of space between us. "I love you, Elle. I've always loved you," he said breathlessly. That was all the convincing I needed.

My lips brushed against his, then down his jaw, until I bit his neck. He moaned in approval. I couldn't give him the words yet, so I would show him. Once I made the decision, everything else faded into the background. The timeline didn't matter, his parents' objections were moot, my parents' betrayal

—none of it was important. Kings loved me, and even if I couldn't tell him, I loved him too.

I knew that if I wanted him, I would have to make a move. He wouldn't ever make me do anything he wasn't sure I wanted, and this was no exception. I ran my hand through his hair, then down his chest, stopping at his waist. I had to lean back and put a little space between us so I could touch him. And I desperately wanted to touch him. I brought my mouth back to his and swallowed his protests as I eased myself off his lap. He reached for me when I broke the kiss off, his panting breaths matching mine.

When I popped the button to his pants open, he seemed to finally understand what I was thinking. His hand covered mine before I could even get my fingers around the zipper. “You don't have to do this. I'm not going to push you for anything you're not ready to do. I would wait forever for you.”

“What if I don't want to wait?” I watched his face shift from concern to surprise. When I moved my hand toward his pants again, he didn't stop me. I inched the zipper down, glancing up and watching his expression when my fingers grazed his cock through the rough material. His eyes darkened with desire.

“Oh, Elle,” he moaned when I reached in and pulled his erect member out of his boxers. I paused for a second before dipping my head to take him into my mouth. His breath caught when I managed to take him all the way to his base. I gave

myself a minute to adjust to his length, then started moving up and down, stroking him with my mouth.

I hummed as I worked, alternating between deep throating him and running my tongue around his dick. He tasted salty and smelled of a summer rain shower. While my mouth was wrapped around him, he tried to stay focused enough to touch me. I was amused at how distracted he was.

“Elle, your mouth feels amazing,” he whispered. “But I need to touch you. I don’t want to finish before we get started.” Kings tensed with his words, and I could hear the strain in his voice. I pulled back and grinned at him mischievously before he flipped me over, towering over me. I wondered at how quickly he was able to remove his clothes while still holding me down. “May I?” he asked, gesturing toward my clothes. I nodded, unable to speak. I’d never seen him act this forceful before. I was used to him making jokes, not being serious. I could count the number of times I’d seen him like this on one hand—once.

His sudden action wiped the grin from my face. He quickly stripped my shirt off, then my shorts. I lay there in front of him in just my bra and panties, feeling somewhat exposed under his scrutiny. The look Kings had trained on me could have melted me, but I found myself wanting more. I wanted him to look at me that way forever. Kings gently stroked a hand down my body, tracing the lines of my bra, then my panties, before taking my lips with his again.

His hands explored my exposed skin while our mouths never lost contact. Before I realized what he was doing, Kings had me completely naked. I closed my eyes as he kissed down my neck, his lips gentle and nurturing. It didn't matter to me that he was a beta. No, Kings was not just a beta, he was *my* beta.

Kingsley's hands and mouth were everywhere at once. The sensations were almost too much for me to take. I whimpered, my need growing. As if he could read my mind, his hand slid down my stomach and traced slow circles around my clit. He kissed me again, silencing my moans.

I wrapped my hand around his cock and stroked him slowly, teasingly, until he slid a finger inside me. Then I increased my pace, stroking him quicker, tightening my hold, until he groaned. "Elle, are you sure? If we don't stop now, I won't be able to," he whispered against my lips.

Instead of responding, I rolled him over and climbed on top of him. Before he could object, I lined up our bodies and sank onto him, taking him into me easily because I was dripping wet. I threw my head back and rode him, slowly at first, then building up speed. Pants and moans were the only noises in the room as I took charge of our pleasure. I wanted to show Kings just how much I wanted and needed him. After a few moments of shock, his expression turned to lust and his hands moved from my hips to my breasts. As I rode him, Kings squeezed my breasts and pinched my nipples. Then shifted a hand down to give my clit some attention as I moved.

He felt so good, stretching me in all the best ways. I wanted to stay like this forever, but almost as soon as I had the thought, we climaxed together. “Oh, Kingsley,” I cried out with my orgasm. It was everything I had always wanted. He was everything I needed.



KINGSLEY

I couldn't believe that I'd just made love to Elle. It was everything I'd always dreamed of and more. I scooped her up and carried her to the bathroom where I turned on the shower and cleaned us both up. "Will you stay with me tonight?" My voice sounded needy, but part of me didn't care. We would have to face my parents tomorrow and I didn't want to waste a moment with my beautiful omega.

"Your brothers won't care?" she asked. I kissed her forehead, pulling her into my arms as I wrapped a bath sheet around us both. It was sweet that she cared about the three of us equally, even when I knew she was still pissed at Drake.

"They'll be fine with it. If you want, I can ask them to come sleep with us too," I offered, hoping that she would refuse.

"The four of us snuggled up in your bed does sound nice," she responded sweetly. How could I refuse that face? I would give her anything she ever wanted. I hoped that I wouldn't have to fight Drake to get him in here.

“You get dressed in some of my pjs and I’ll get them.” I strolled away, not bothering to cover myself. I picked up my phone and sent a text to both of my brothers, letting them know that our girl wanted them both in here with us. Then I decided that neither of them would be excited to see me naked, so I got dressed.

Elle and I settled on the floor and started eating our pizza. Neither of us seemed to care that it was cold; it was still delicious. A few minutes later, there was a quiet knock on my door before Lan poked his head inside. “I heard my presence was requested,” he said with a laugh. Elle raced across the room and stopped short of throwing herself into his arms, opting instead to place her hands on his cheeks. I couldn’t help but smile at how they’d gotten past the awkward crush that had nearly always been between them. It was hilarious how neither of them knew about the other’s feelings back then.

She kissed him passionately, and I hoped that things didn’t progress from there. We hadn’t set ground rules for when we were all together. While none of us wanted to deny her affection, but I didn’t think we wanted to watch each other have sex with her either. I made a mental note to discuss the issue with my brothers as soon as possible. As I tucked the thought away, Drake walked in without knocking. “You really want me here?” he asked Elle, not bothering to speak to Lan or myself. I was certain if she said no, he would turn around and leave without a word.

“Of course, I do,” she replied, walking slowly over to him and wrapping her arms around him in a hug. He hesitated

before snaking his arms around her and closing his eyes as he held her. Maybe they would be able to get past her anger and his guilt after all. Lan and I watched as she pressed a gentle kiss to his lips before returning to the floor by my side. I threw an arm around her and kissed the top of her head. Drake closed the door and took a seat across from us. I passed the pizza around and we had dinner together, talking and joking, as if our lives weren't hanging in the balance. "Just because I'm still pissed at you, that doesn't mean I don't want to be with you. It means that you haven't given me a reason to forgive you yet."

Drake sighed and nodded at her declaration. We all knew that Elle was good at holding a grudge, so it could be a very long time before she forgave him. My oldest brother would have to decide if he would keep trying, or if he was going to accept defeat. He was almost as stubborn as she was, so I didn't see him giving up any time soon. I stood to clean up our picnic and start the movie, motioning for Drake to take my spot. He shot me a look, then decided to take the chance. Elle didn't get upset, instead snuggling into him as I turned off the lights.

Whether she wanted to admit it or not, she cared about him, and wasn't as pissed as she claimed to be. She wouldn't make it easy on him, though, rightfully so. I wondered if part of her reasoning was for Lan's and my amusement. I settled in on the couch behind where Lan, Elle, and Drake were sitting on the floor. I stroked my fingers through her auburn waves while the

movie played. Within twenty minutes, she was sound asleep on Drake's shoulder, holding Lan's hand.

"You want to carry her to the bed? It's big enough for all four of us," I suggested to Drake quietly, not wanting to wake Elle. She needed to rest.

He nodded, scooping her up and getting to his feet quicker than I'd ever seen him move. He placed her gently on the turned down bed, then covered her and kissed her temple. "You two sleep next to her. I don't want her to be more upset with me because she wakes up thinking I tried to snuggle without asking." He climbed onto the mattress by Elle's feet. Lan and I settled in on either side of her and before I could say anything, I was out.

I woke early in the morning to a mostly empty bed. Elle was still lying next to me, snoring softly and snuggled so close, I wondered how I hadn't awakened sooner. Drake and Lan were nowhere to be found. I rolled over carefully to check the time on my phone. A quick glance told me that we had plenty of time for Elle to sleep without being late. She threw an arm over me and held me in place.

A few minutes later, my brothers returned, both quietly entering the room so they wouldn't bother our sleeping princess. Lan brought a cart of breakfast with him, and Drake seemed to be distracted by something on his phone. He'd brought Elle's dress and shoes with him, so I couldn't be too upset about it. Lan handed me a cup of coffee and Elle started

to stir. “Mmm, something smells good,” she said in a raspy, not-quite-awake voice.

She sat up and I gave her the cup. “We have plenty of time to get ready, so don’t feel like you have to rush,” I explained. She nodded as she sipped the steaming liquid. Lan carefully carried a plate of fruit and pastries with his uninjured arm. Her smile lit up the room almost as much as Drake opening the curtains. We finished breakfast and got ready for the day; anxiety nearly palpable in the air.

Elle walked slowly toward the throne room, hesitating outside the door. “Can they really take me away from you?” She directed the question to Drake, but I knew she meant all of us.

“We’re not going to let that happen. I know I don’t deserve it, but please trust me on this. I have a plan. You’ll see,” Drake assured her before opening the door and gesturing for us to enter. I took a deep breath and walked inside, leading the others to face our destiny.

Elle walked in behind me, then Lan, and Drake was the last to enter. He had a smug look on his face, like he had a secret that could flip the tide in our favor. I wondered what it was that he wouldn’t tell us. I supposed that we would find out soon enough. The throne room had been adjusted to suit today’s purpose, with tables and chairs brought in for use by the council and the four of us. From appearances, we’d be able to argue our case. There was a third table that I hadn’t expected, but when I realized who was sitting at it, I kicked

myself. Chad was sitting there with Elle's parents. No doubt our parents would use hers to sway the council. I said a silent prayer that Drake's bomb would be enough.

We went through the pomp and circumstance of a trial, listening to accusations from Elle's parents, then Chad. Our mother even chimed in to say that Elle had somehow bewitched us into doing whatever misdeeds we were being accused of on her behalf. I rolled my eyes, and watched my oldest brother struggle not to make objections. But we didn't have that authority. The things they were saying were offensive, thankfully Lan and I had practiced not reacting. It seemed as if Elle had too.

When the king turned his attention to us, Drake stood expectantly. He was certain that he would get to speak, finally. With a wave of his hand, the king looked at Elle. "Isabella, would you please tell us your version of what has happened here?" Four jaws dropped. None of us expected that he would ask her to speak. She took a deep breath, and told him about everything. She began with Annabeth's death and her guilt, noting that the king and Drake had told her to leave the kingdom. Then she told him about living on the mainland and passing as a beta with the help of mild suppressants. She detailed the call that brought her home, and her mother's claim that her help was needed. When she got to the part about being sold to the Wildes, Chad had the decency to look mildly embarrassed. By the time she explained what had happened the night of the omega assignment ceremony, half of the council was wiping tears from their eyes.

They straightened under the queen's scrutiny, and I realized that no matter how they viewed our case, they would follow her orders. There was no way to change her mind, and she knew that all of this was pointless. Elle would be ripped away from us and we would be powerless to stop it. Outrage boiled inside my chest, and I fought the urge to stand and scream. When Elle took her seat again, Drake stood, expecting his turn. Once again, the king waved him off. This time, he didn't back down.

"I have evidence that is directly relevant to our case, sir. Please, would you allow me to present it? I will be brief, and it will decide the matter for you all." My oldest brother spoke confidently, his posture bordering on arrogant.

"Drake, that isn't necessary," our mother, the queen, began before our father, the king, cut her off.

"I'll allow it," he said loudly, putting an end to any further objections my mother would have made.

Drake bowed his thanks, then stood and faced the queen. There was a wicked glint in his eye. "Isabella Vanderbilt cannot be reassigned. She cannot be removed from the castle, or from the Brighton family."

"Son, this isn't evidence, it's conjecture," the king began. Drake held up a hand, and the monarch fell silent.

"As I was saying, she cannot be removed or reassigned because she is a member of this family. As the wife of the princes, she is a princess, and has certain irrevocable rights." He maintained eye contact with the queen as he spoke.

“What are you saying, Drake?” Mother’s eyes widened at the realization that she may not win this time.

“As you can see in this documentation, and the accompanying letter from royal counsel, the wedding, which was performed by the king twenty years ago, was an official ceremony. Each of us signed the documents, which were signed by yourself, Sir, and notarized. Therefore, she is our wife and cannot be reassigned. She could not be assigned to another family anyway. Since she is a Brighton, she could not be sold to the Wilde family without our consent. And we did not give it. I have made a settlement offer to the Vanderbilts and Wildes to compensate for the error, but neither family wishes to respond.” When he finished speaking, Drake handed the paperwork to the king and returned to his seat as if nothing had happened.

“We’re actually married?!” Elle whispered at him. He turned and grinned at her.

“I told you I had it covered,” he responded.

The king stood, causing everyone in the room to stand as well. “In light of this evidence, I see no reason to continue these proceedings.” He turned to the council, most of whom were on the edges of their seats with this juicy gossip. “Thank you for your service; you are excused.” He waited until they had been escorted out to address the opposing side. “The documentation is official and legal, just as he said. You would both do well to accept his offers before they expire.” With that, Elle’s parents rushed from the room, muttering under their

breaths. Chad was escorted off by the guards, who were most likely taking him back to the dungeon.

When the king spoke again, I realized that my jaw had been agape for a while. Elle was ours. Really, truly, officially ours. No one would ever take her from us. I glanced at her and immediately regretted it. She had tears streaming down her face. I wasn't sure if they were happy or upset. "Isabella, please accept my apologies for this misunderstanding. We will have a family dinner next week to celebrate, and will begin planning a ball to announce your marriage to the kingdom." She bowed her head to him, not bothering to wipe the tears away.

Our mother glared daggers at Elle before stomping away.

EIGHTEEN



DISTRACTIONS, DATES, AND OTHER D WORDS



LANDYN

Drake's announcement had everyone on edge. The king said the paperwork was in order, so it had to be legit. Bella was ours. She was our wife. As crazy as it sounded, that took a weight off my shoulders that I hadn't realized was there. After our mother stormed out, our father excused us, suggesting that the four of us would need to discuss what had just come to light. He was right. The moment we were in the hallway walking back to our wing of the castle, Bella laid into Drake.

"You knew and didn't tell me! And this isn't the first time. That's why I'm pissed. You can't keep things from me. Especially if we're married." She pouted and grabbed my hand, turning her back on Drake and the conversation.

I held up my hands between them. "Wait. So all that with the king...you mean the wedding we had when we were kids, seven, eight, nine years old...was real?"

"Of course, it was. Look," Drake handed me his phone with the documents pulled up. I hadn't realized it at the time, but

the paperwork we'd all signed was official. The king had even marked it with his seal. Bella was our wife.

“How could it possibly be legal? We weren't of age yet. It doesn't make sense,” Kings chimed in.

“And you didn't think it was important to tell us about it before you sprung it in front of a room full of people?” Bella growled at him again.

“Izzy, come on. It's not that big of a deal. I had it handled. Everything is going to be okay now,” Drake insisted. “And yeah, it's legal. Our kingdom used to sanction weddings that early. I'm sure there was no consummation at that point, but still. Everything is official and legal. There's no reason to be mad about it. Help me out, guys.”

“I'm with her,” I said simply, wrapping my good arm around our beautiful wife. I didn't feel guilty at all leaving Kings to deal with Drake. With any luck, he would ream our brother too, and Drake would be doing a lot of groveling. Bella and I picked up our pace when my brothers started to argue. “What would you like to do for the rest of the day, Mrs. Brighton?”

“I'm not sure. And that sounds weird, like I'm pretending to be someone I'm not,” she claimed. The flush that lit up her cheeks told me that she didn't mind it too much.

“What if we go shopping? I'll get the guys to stop bickering, and the four of us will go. What do you say?” The moment Drake announced that she was our wife, I started planning a trip to the jewelry store to pick out her rings. I

wanted to do it now instead of waiting until our mother found a way to mess things up again.

“I think I would like that. Are you sure you can make them stop? Kings is really laying into Drake. He deserves it, but still.” Bella winked at me and grinned. I nodded and walked back to where my brothers were arguing.

“Break it up. Yes, we’re all pissed at Drake. We’ll get over it. This time his shit worked in our favor. Should he have told us? Definitely. Is he going to have to grovel at Bella’s feet to make it up to her? For sure. But our princess would like to go shopping. So, we’re going to stop fighting and give her what she wants.” I put a little extra alpha oomph into my words and was surprised when my alpha and beta brothers actually submitted. I glanced at her face after I laid down the law to my brothers. Her face made it all worthwhile.

Kings and Drake stared at me, obviously shocked that I took charge of the situation. To be honest, it was probably the first time I had ever stepped between them in a fight. I usually watched and waited to choose sides based on who won. But being with Bella did something to me. It changed me. It made me want to be the man she deserved. And right now, our wife deserved the most beautiful ring in the kingdom.

Once they realized that Bella was excited about shopping, they settled down and agreed to argue about it later. Within an hour we pulled up to a small boutique that carried clothing and jewelry. I knew that she was worried about our mother’s reaction to finding out that our childhood marriage was

actually official. We would have to work hard to distract her from those worries. There was nothing the queen could do at this moment to wreck our happiness. I felt bad for our father, who had to deal with her irritation at being bested.

“You can pick anything you like,” Drake told Bella when we entered the store. I walked up to the counter and spoke to the clerk.

“Keep an eye on her when she passes the ring cases; we need to know what she likes.” I slipped a large tip across the counter with my request and the woman nodded with a huge smile.

“Yes, sir. May I say something?” She turned her face downward as if she felt unworthy to speak with me.

“Of course,” I responded, unsure what she could say that would make her nervous to speak.

“The whole kingdom has heard rumors about your omega. We are truly excited that things seem to be working out for you all. Ms. Vanderbilt is beautiful and kind,” she gushed.

“Thank you for your sweet words. I will be sure to pass them along. If you’ll excuse me, I need to make sure my brothers are behaving.” I gave her a wink and walked away. I wondered how excited they would all be when they found out that the wedding had already taken place. I browsed the store, keeping an eye out for Bella. I was certain by now that Drake and Kings had her in a dressing room with explicit instructions to model everything. I didn’t want to miss that. Sure enough, I

found my brothers outside the dressing room with Bella popping out in different outfits.

“But where would I wear it?” she argued with Drake, most likely over the ball gown he’d insisted she try on.

“To the reception, of course,” he insisted. She shook her head. For once, I was on his side. That dress was perfection. The pale green silk clung to every curve, leaving little to the imagination. I could easily imagine what it would look like crumpled on the floor after a night of dancing.

“It’s perfect. Especially if we’re not having another wedding ceremony. You can wear it to the ball that we will have to celebrate that you’re officially ours.” I stepped close to her, pulling her into my arms for a kiss.

The blush that crept across her cheeks made my cock jump. Suddenly I wanted to be home instead of out here in public. But Bella needed to be pampered, so we would deal with shopping and maybe a spa visit. “Maybe after you try everything on, we can pick some jewelry to go with it. They have a case up front. Sheila will show us anything you want to see,” I explained, having noticed the woman’s name tag while we spoke.

“I guess if you two are going to gang up on me about it, I’ll get the dress. And something sparkly to go with it. I know presentation is a big deal, especially if I want to win over your mother.” She’d agreed without a lot of fuss. That was a relief, because the last thing I wanted was to argue about spending

money. We had plenty, and our wife deserved to use it for anything she needed or wanted.

“And we’re getting the rest of it too,” Kings said, draping outfits over his arm to carry up to the counter. “Plus whatever else you want.”

“You don’t have to spoil me. I don’t need all of this. It’s too much,” she insisted. The three of us shook our heads, refusing to give in.

“You are the crowned princess. You need the appropriate clothing for the parties and meetings we will be required to have to entertain people who want to celebrate with us. Besides, we want to spoil you. So, either you pick out what you want, or I’ll pick for you,” Drake threatened with a smirk. Images of lingerie and other barely there outfits crossed my mind. I could tell the moment Bella realized that was his plan, because a look of horror passed over her face.

“You wouldn’t,” she said, slapping his arm.

“You know I would,” he retorted. “Unless you choose your clothes for yourself, I will select what I want to see you in. It’s your choice.”

“Fine. But this is already a lot. Let’s look at the jewelry now. I’m getting a little overwhelmed.” Her admission touched me. I knew that her parents had never been the type to spoil their only daughter, preferring to spend their money on their sons and themselves. It hadn’t occurred to me that she would be anxious about our desire to make her feel special.

“That sounds like a lovely idea. Let’s go.” I hold my good arm out for her to take, then head back to the front of the store. “Ms. Sheila, I think we’re ready to see some jewelry. Could we start with something that will enhance the beauty of this dress?” Bella looked down, realizing that we hadn’t let her change from the ball gown.

“Of course, Your Highness. Right over here.” For the next thirty minutes, Sheila showed us necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings, and tiaras that would compliment the pale green silk perfectly. Bella couldn’t decide which she liked best, so I arranged to purchase several options. I wanted to buy them all, but our wife insisted that would be selfish.

True to her word, Sheila watched Bella like a hawk when she showed us the ring case. If there was something our woman reacted to that I didn’t notice, Sheila was sure to catch it. She started with the diamonds, but Bella didn’t seem interested in those. After that, she moved on to gemstones. Even I saw Bella’s face light up when Sheila showed her the gorgeous two carat Ceylon sapphire set in rose gold. “Isn’t it beautiful?” Bella asked me, trying it on. The blue of the stone was light and nearly matched her eyes.

“It’s perfect,” I agreed, nodding to Sheila. I knew from the price that Bella wouldn’t agree to it, but it would be hers regardless. I watched her face fall as she let Sheila put the ring back into the case, thinking that she would never see it again.

“Now shoes?” I offered, turning Bella toward a different side of the store. I looked over my shoulder to find Sheila

pulling the ring from the case and taking it to the back to be cleaned and boxed up. It would make the perfect engagement ring. I escorted Bella to the shoes, watching carefully as she tried on some that would look amazing with the gown. Kings popped up next to us, noting her size, then disappeared again. I wondered what he and Drake were up to, but assumed it had to be choosing additional shoes and clothes for Bella. I was glad that my surprise would be for the three of them, not just her. I wondered if they would get upset that I'd taken the initiative to select her engagement ring without their input, then decided that her face when she'd seen it was worth the risk.

A few minutes later, I managed to flag Kings down and get him to trade me places. He guided Bella to handbags while I made my way back to the jewelry counter. Sheila had been watching for me and had everything ready. "I slipped the bonus package into this bag with the other jewelry purchases, sir. I hope that is acceptable." She kept her voice low even though Bella and Kings were on the other end of the store.

"I appreciate your discretion. I need to request another favor, if you don't mind." At this point, I was certain she would help me in any way she could. She had to know that her tip would be more than the standard, and she seemed genuinely happy to help with a surprise for Bella.

"Of course, anything," she insisted, her eyes wide with anticipation.

"I need to locate a wedding band, along with three men's bands, that will match the sapphire ring. If you could make

sure they are in the correct sizes and have them delivered to the castle as soon as possible, I would be eternally grateful.” I flashed her a smile and she nodded.

“Absolutely, sir. Let me see what I can find. I may have the perfect thing in the store today.” She walked away without waiting for my response. Most people would have thought it rude, but to me she just looked like a woman on a mission.

A few minutes later, we were loaded into the limo and returned to the castle. There were a million other places I wanted to take Bella, but it seemed that we would need to take things slowly. The big reveal earlier and following excitement had worn her out. Perhaps she would take a nap and I would have time to show my brothers what I’d snuck into our purchases.



ISABELLA

I knew that Landyn was up to something when he'd practically shoved me at Kings and ran back to speak with the lady at the jewelry counter. I refused to let myself worry about it. If my husbands wanted to spend money, I couldn't stop them. None of them seemed to care that I didn't want or need any of the beautiful things they insisted I get. But I understood their need to shower me with gifts. Defeating their mother had been a big deal, they deserved to celebrate. Besides, everything I'd allowed them to purchase for me had a practical use. It wasn't like they had gone overboard and bought the gorgeous sapphire ring we'd looked at.

I tried to stifle my yawn when they finally had the limo brought around and took us home. The castle was finally my home. I'd wanted this for years, and it was all coming true. I couldn't believe it. I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. I had a nagging feeling that the queen wouldn't give up just because the king agreed with Drake. I had to be alert and watch for her next move. Unfortunately, that would have to

wait until after I took a nap. These guys really knew how to shop, and I was exhausted. I hated to admit it, but I couldn't keep up with them until after I'd rested.

I was surprised that none of them objected to a midday nap, and not a single one offered to snuggle. That meant they were up to something. Sadly, I didn't have time to wonder what they were planning because I was asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

The next couple of weeks were filled with dates during the day and group dinners at night. Drake brought me flowers every day, trying to wear me down so I wasn't mad at him anymore. I alternated my nights between the three of them, although when it was Drake's night, he always found a reason for me to go back to my room alone. I was getting whiplash from the back and forth with him. If I didn't know better, I would think he had changed his mind about me at night, then regretted the decision in the morning.

I was shocked to find him at my door the morning after he'd abandoned me for the second date night in a row. "What do you want?" I couldn't help the annoyance in my voice. I knew that part of it was due to my hormones being out of whack from my upcoming heat. I had noticed that my desires were increasing as well.

"I just want to talk. Your heat is coming up, and I think we should discuss some things before our hormones take over. I won't be able to deny you then. And I know it's not what you

want.” His words were quiet. He’d been pushing me away because it’s what he thought I wanted?

“Okay. You should come in,” I said, turning back to my bed, where I’d been collecting things for my nest. I hadn’t told any of them that I was snatching their stuff and wasn’t sure how he would react to seeing all of it. I quickly threw my comforter over the stash.

“What’s all that?” Shit, he’d seen it.

“Nothing,” I insisted. “Come over here and sit with me.” I tried to pull him to the chairs by the window, but he refused to budge.

“It’s not nothing. I’ve been looking for that shirt for days. I didn’t know you took it.” He stared at me, realization finally setting in. “Oh.”

“Um, can we not talk about that right now? I’ll give it all back after. Okay?” I was still terrified that they would find a reason to send me away. I hoped it wouldn’t always be like that.

“It’s fine. You can keep it. Take whatever you want from my room. I’m sorry, I wasn’t trying to be a dick about it.” His attitude changed completely. “I can even help you take stuff from Lan and Kings if you want. I’ll distract them.”

I laughed at his offer. It was tempting. But Lan had already given me the run of his room, even bringing his favorite pillow to my room without me asking. I’d been more worried about

Drake's reaction, since I'd had to be sneakier about taking his stuff. "I'll keep that in mind."

He walked over to me and I let him pull me into his arms. "You drive me crazy, you know that, right?" he asked, kissing my temple.

"Same," I replied, wrapping my arms around him. "But you know you love me."

"I do," he said with a smirk. "More than anything." He pressed his lips to mine in a gentle kiss. A small whimper escaped me when he pulled away. Drake stared into my eyes, his hand moving to my cheek. "I love you, Izzy. I've always loved you. I'll spend the rest of my life making everything up to you. I promise. I will be the man you deserve."

I stood on my toes to press my lips to his. Moments like this made me almost forget why I was so mad at him. Almost. I broke the kiss before either of us could get carried away. I knew that we would both regret it if we took things further right now. Once my heat came on, I wasn't sure we'd have a choice. "What did you want to talk about?" I forced myself to walk away, putting space between us.

"With your heat coming soon, I wanted to offer to go away until it ended. I have some business that I can deal with on the mainland if you'd rather I wasn't around this time." His tone was so matter-of-fact that I wondered if he'd practiced the statement or if he really didn't care.

"You want to leave when your omega needs you the most. That sounds like a very Drake thing to do." I couldn't help the

anger rolling through me when it melted into my voice.

“I don’t want you to be forced into anything you don’t want. That’s all. It will kill me if you send me away, but I refuse to do something you’ll regret later.” He was adamant that I didn’t want him. I knew that part was my fault. I’d denied him affection because I was angry. Maybe that was not the best way to handle our situation because I wanted him more than I wanted to breathe most days. Sure, I had moments when I wanted to choke the hell out of him for being a selfish dick, or when he acted like he thought he knew better than anyone else. But I knew that part of that was his alpha nature. I wasn’t sure how Lan managed to keep his in check, but he would have to help Drake figure it out.

I grabbed his shirt and pulled him to me, kissing him hard. I poured every bit of desire and need into the kiss. If he was worried about my heat, I would take care of it before then. He would never again wonder if I wanted him. I would tear that wall down right now. While my mouth assaulted him, I pushed him backward toward the bed. He tried half-heartedly to fight me off, but I wouldn’t give him the chance. I shoved him back onto the bed and climbed on top of him.

“Do you honestly believe that I don’t want you?” I asked him. Surprise worked in my favor; he was too stunned to try and move. “Just because I’m pissed at you, that doesn’t mean that I don’t love you or want to be with you. And if you believe that I would ever regret being with you, then you don’t really know me.” I glared at him. He was infuriating. Part of me wanted to slap him and walk away. The other part wanted

to rip his clothes off and show him exactly how I felt. I sat there, staring at him, while I tried to decide which way I wanted this to go.

If I waited until my heat, he would never really believe that I wanted him. He would always think it was biology, an urge that I couldn't resist. I hated the idea of that, no matter how furious I was. I had wanted to wait until I was less angry with him. Let's face it, I would always be angry. He'd lied more than once and tried to hide it each time. I had every right to be pissed with him for as long as I chose to be. But anger could wait. Right now, I needed to show him that I wanted him. That I love him.

Decision made, I reached between us and unfastened his pants. Drake grabbed my hands to stop me. "Izzy, you don't have to do this."

"But I want to," I said simply. "Unless you don't want me?" I asked with a pout. I knew there was no way he would deny me now. It didn't matter what he was scared of, he would take my question as an indication of what I would think if he didn't have sex with me.

"Of course, I want you," he began.

I cut him off. "Then shut up and take me. Stop being a whiny little bitch and take what's yours," I goaded. I knew it was dangerous to talk to my alpha that way, but I had known Drake almost my entire life. He would never hurt me physically. Emotionally was a different story.

“If you’re sure,” he whispered. I nodded and leaned down to kiss him again. While I was distracted by his lips, he flipped me over and settled on top of me. I tried to protest, but he held me down. “You asked for it. So, I’ll give it to you. We’re close enough to your heat that we might knot. Are you okay with that?” Knotting was a physical thing caused by hormones that happened to ensure that omegas had the best chance to get pregnant and further the alpha’s line. It was rare for it to happen outside of an omega’s heat, but he was right, it was possible. I was only a few days away and could feel the hormones start to kick-up my sex drive weeks ago, and it had only gotten worse.

“I understand the risk, alpha. Do you?” I asked coyly, as if I didn’t already know his answer. He growled and ripped my shirt off, tearing it in half. “Hey, I liked that shirt!”

“I’ll buy you a dozen more.” Drake huffed as he pulled off my leggings and tore through my bra and panties. I lay there naked and watched him start to strip for me. When I reached for him to help, he shoved me back on the bed. “Be a good girl, and I’ll make you feel good.”

I smirked at him. “And if I’m bad?”

His eyes met mine. “Then I’ll walk away before you can finish.”

“You wouldn’t,” I said quietly, my eyes widening.

“I would,” he countered.

“If you leave me before I finish, I’ll spank you.” Drake laughed at my words, flipping me onto my stomach and swatting my ass.

Then he flipped me back over and growled, “Don’t make threats. Just obey your alpha, and let me pleasure you.”

Suddenly I wanted to be a good omega, something I’d never wanted before. I mean, I always wanted to please my guys and create a family with them, I just wanted to be a little bratty about it. I nodded solemnly, giving an unspoken promise to be a good girl. Watching him strip so slowly made me ache. I slid my hand down to touch myself. I figured he’d like to watch.

Before I knew what had happened, my arms were over my head and Drake was on top of me. “You don’t move. You don’t touch yourself or me without permission. Got it?”

I whimpered but nodded. He caressed his lips to mine, then kissed down my neck. His hands left mine and roamed my body. Everywhere he touched felt like electricity running over my skin. I was soaking wet, my clit throbbing with need. I cried out when he took a nipple in his mouth and pinched the other one. I almost moved to fist my fingers in his hair, but I remembered his threat. I wasn’t about to do anything that would stop this.

“May I touch you, my alpha?” My voice came out breathless and quieter than I’d planned. He groaned, licking a trail from my breasts to my stomach.

“Only if you tell me what you want to do.” Oh shit. How did it not occur to me that Drake would get off on being

bossy? Why didn't I realize that I was totally into it? For some reason, him telling me what to do here was so much different than when we were wearing clothes.

“I want to put my hands in your hair. I want to touch your cock. I want it in my mouth. Drake, I need to touch you everywhere,” I whined. He shot me a warning glare. I knew that another outburst like that would make him follow through with his threat to leave. Then there would be nothing I could do to get myself off, and I would be miserable.

When he moved, I thought I'd ruined everything. I thought he was walking away, leaving me to suffer. Then he climbed onto the bed, laid down on his back and flipped me onto him. A moment of disorientation passed before I realized that his dick was staring me in the face. He'd growled about it, but given me exactly what I'd wanted. Part of me wanted to take him into my mouth, but another part of me played the game even more. “May I?”

Instead of answering, Drake thrust his tongue into my slick-coated entrance. I gasped at the surprise of it and he slid his cock into my open mouth. While he teased me with his tongue and fingers, I went to work sucking him deeper and harder until I felt him moan against my pussy. He stroked his tongue around my clit while his fingers slid in and coaxed an orgasm by stroking my g-spot. I groaned in pleasure, and he lifted his hips and his dick slid further down my throat. I felt him tense, then I was flipped around again, facing him.

“We’re going to start with you on top, then I’m going to flip you over. Are you ready?” At least he had the decency to tell me there would be acrobatics involved. I nodded my agreement, still too breathless from my orgasm to speak. Drake grabbed my hips and slammed me down on his erection, my slick making the entry smooth. We both cried out, and I thought for a moment that this would be the shortest first time ever. Then he started to move, thrusting in and out by lifting me up and lowering me slowly onto him.

The noises I made must have encouraged him, because he picked up the pace, moving me up and down on his dick, faster and harder with each thrust. He sat up and kissed me before taking a nipple into his mouth. Drake sucked me, pumping harder and harder, then slid a hand between us to stroke my clit. I fisted my hands in his hair and held him in place, riding him through the orgasms as they washed over me.

A moment later, I was face down on the bed, with Drake behind me. He pulled me up on my knees and thrust into me from behind. “Oh, Drake,” I cried over and over. His thrusts became more desperate and heated. I came again, screaming his name, when I felt a pressure I’d never experienced before. The base of Drake’s cock swelled up and held me in place. His knot was larger than Lan’s and stretched me in a good way. Omegas were taught about how the knot works and why it happens, but in the moment, all I could do was ride the wave of ecstasy and let myself go.

I could feel that he was coming, which must have triggered the knot. His thrusts were shorter, and gentler too. “Oh, Izzy. That’s my good girl. Look at you, taking my knot. You’re so hot. This has been the best moment of my life.”

Drake kept talking, telling me how good I was and that I would be rewarded. He talked about how many babies we would have and how much he loved me. I wasn’t sure if the words were for my benefit or his. After a few minutes, his knot released and he slipped himself out of me. He pulled me close and held me for a bit, kissing my lips, my cheeks, my forehead. If I didn’t know better, I would think it was his first time. But it couldn’t be, right? There’s no way the crowned prince hadn’t been with anyone before, was there?

nineteen





Learning to Share

KINGSLEY

It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Elle had finally given in and fucked my oldest brother. I was amused that she'd made him wait so long, since she'd first slept with Lan and myself weeks ago. I hated that I still felt so jealous when she was around one of my brothers. I knew that it was just because I was insecure about our bond. I didn't have a knot to give her, and it bothered me. I didn't usually care about our orders. Alpha, beta, omega. It didn't matter. The king had always made a big deal out of excluding me from things because I wasn't an alpha. In reality, I think it was because he knew that he wasn't my father.

That didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was taking care of Elle. We had to prepare for the ball that the king had promised. Drake had expected it to happen a week ago, but the king and queen pushed it back because of some diplomatic trip they suddenly had to go on. I wondered if it was really because our mother was still trying to find a way to undo our wedding. The four of us had spoken with the lawyers and knew that

there was nothing anyone outside of our marriage could do to tear it apart. The only way Elle would be taken from us was if she chose it.

I busied myself with cleaning my room while I waited for Elle to come to me. It was my day with her, but I refused to interrupt her and Drake.

While I was finding things to occupy myself, I thought back to the day Drake had announced to our parents that the wedding we'd had as kids was actually legal. We'd taken Elle shopping after and Lan had picked out the most amazing engagement ring for her. It was currently locked in the safe with the four matching bands. We were planning to give it to her just before the ball, where our marriage would be announced.

I finished tidying my space and decided that I would relax until Elle arrived. There was no reason to rush her. If she needed more time with Drake right now, that was fine by me. I hoped that their physical connection would result in fewer fights. Somehow, I suspected that it wouldn't make a difference. That may have been because I could hear them shouting at each other from somewhere nearby. I wondered what boneheaded thing Drake had said this time to start a fight. Sighing, I walked out of my room and followed the noise. I ran into Lan just before I got to Elle's door. We listened for a minute.

“You never change!” she yelled.

“You’re being unreasonable. I didn’t do anything wrong this time,” he countered.

“How many times have I told you that I can make my own decisions?” Elle’s voice got even louder.

“I’m just trying to protect you,” he countered.

“What are they fighting about?” he asked. I shrugged, then raised my hand to knock. At that exact moment, the door swung open and Drake stormed out.

“She’s impossible,” he muttered as he pushed his way past us.

Lan and I exchanged a look and glanced inside. Elle was sitting on the bed, crying. “May we come in?” I asked, dying to hold her and wipe her tears. She motioned that it was fine without moving from her spot. We entered the room, closing the door gently.

“Bella, do you think you can tell us what the bastard bully did to you?” Lan asked with a smirk, clearly trying to distract her from whatever Drake had done while still getting to the root of the problem.

“He’s a dick.”

“I feel like that’s not news,” I said, pulling her into my arms as I sat on the bed beside her. Lan sat on the opposite side, sandwiching her between us.

Elle actually chuckled. “I know. But I won’t have you three fighting just because I’m mad at Drake. I’ll handle it.” She wiped her eyes and took a deep breath.

“Are you sure? We could overpower him and tie him up for you. Then you could tickle him until he submits to you,” I offered. She looked amused.

“I’d rather just forget about it for a while, if that’s okay. We just need some time apart,” she admitted. “I know I annoy him just as much as he does me.”

“I think Lan and I can come up with some ways to distract you.” I looked at my brother and he nodded in agreement.

“I can think of a few things I’d like to do,” he responded with a wink. Fuck, my brother’s sexual innuendo should not have my dick jumping at the thought of sharing Elle. But it does. I glanced down to make sure she hadn’t noticed. After her fight with Drake, I wasn’t sure it was the right time to be seducing her. We needed to take her mind off of everything.

“What about a spa treatment?” I offered.

Elle scrunched her face in concentration, then shook her head. “Could we just go lounge in the pool instead?” With the way my cock stood at attention, I wasn’t sure if that was a good idea or not.

“Of course, we can, my love. Let’s grab our suits and head to the pool house to change.” The minute I said pool house, I could have kicked myself. None of us had gone near it since Annabeth. I hoped that Elle didn’t start thinking about that again. After her accident, our parents had the pool demolished and a new one put in. I always thought it was a ridiculous idea, since they put the new one in almost the same spot as the original, but somehow it was supposed to make us all feel

better. I never understood why they didn't tear down the pool house too.

Elle didn't seem bothered by it, so we got our suits and headed down. I breathed a sigh of relief that she hadn't changed her mind. I couldn't wait to see her in the bikini we'd picked out for her during our shopping trip. Each of us had selected one, then she insisted that we let her get a one-piece as well. So she had four to choose from. And we'd never seen any of them on her, because she refused to try them on for us at the store.

Lan and I each took one of her hands as we strolled down the halls of our wing of the castle. As much as we wanted to rush so we could finally see her in the new swimwear, we walked slowly, discussing how the castle was decorated and what changes Elle would like to see made once we took over.

“I think it's lovely, really. There's not much I would change about how the castle is decorated. I mean, obviously there will need to be a few changes when little ones arrive.” Her words stopped me in my tracks. We all knew that her heat was coming up, but none of us had ever discussed children. It was an omega's responsibility to bear her alphas—and betas—children, but we weren't typical versions of our orders. I knew that most betas couldn't have children with omegas, but since Lan and I were convinced that the king's beta brothers were actually our fathers, it had to be possible. It had to be her decision, though. If Elle didn't want children, we wouldn't force the issue.

“Is that something you want?” I asked, curious to see if her answer had changed in the past twenty years. We were so young when we’d first discussed her being our omega, and didn’t even really understand where babies come from. She’d decided at the time that she wanted a dozen little ones running around.

“Of course, I want children. I thought you knew that. If you guys aren’t ready, there are precautions we can take when my heat hits. I’m sorry that it never occurred to me that we needed to talk about this before.” My heart skipped a beat at her words. She was ready to start a family with us now. I’d wondered if Annabeth’s death would make her change her mind, but it didn’t seem like she was thinking about that at all.

Landyn spoke before I could, “Bella, we want nothing more than to have a castle full of children with you. And we’re happy to start on that whenever you’d like. If my brothers don’t want to be involved, I’d be proud to be first.”

I slugged him in the arm as we approached the pool. “Hey! I never said I didn’t want to be involved. She’s my wife too.”

Lan punched me back and before I knew what was happening, fists were flying. It seemed as if I’d hit a sore spot with my brother, and now we were out for blood.

Elle stepped out of the way as Lan tackled me and we wrestled for a minute before I managed to pin him. “Chill out.”

“I wish you’d stop fighting. The three of you need to figure out how to share my time, or this isn’t going to work. We’re

all going to be miserable,” Elle said quietly, then walked away.

“She’s right, you know. We have to do better.” Helping him to his feet, I took a hard look at my brother.

“And just when did you get so smart?” I asked.

“When I was spending time with our girl instead of fighting with Drake,” he replied with a wink. “Now we need to find her and apologize.”

“Or should we find Drake and make a bigger gesture?” I offered, thinking that maybe we could help our big brother out too.

“What did you have in mind?” Good, it wouldn’t take much to get Lan on board. We discussed my idea, and he agreed that it could work. I sent him off to check on Elle, then take care of getting flowers.

I headed in the opposite direction, hunting for Drake. I found him brooding in his office, staring at paperwork and scowling. “Your face will get stuck that way.” He looked up and growled at me. I held up my hands in surrender. “Don’t punch the messenger, especially when he has a plan to get you on our girl’s good side.”

Drake stopped and stared at me. “If you make it worse, I’ll hurt you.”

“Noted. Don’t worry, Lan and I messed up too. She didn’t tell us what happened between you two, but now we all need to apologize, and I have a plan that just might work.” With a

skeptical look, he offered me a seat, then sat down across from me.

“What do I need to do?” he sighed. I could tell he didn’t think I could actually have a plan that would work.

“I sent Lan to get flowers. I need you to figure out dinner. Something romantic but comfortable. Then figure out exactly how to tell Elle how you feel about her. Lan and I will too. Because she needs those words. And she deserves to know.”

“I don’t understand. Why are you two trying to help me?”

“Because it helps us, too. That, and we might have pissed her off too. Or did you miss I said that a minute ago?” I cocked an eyebrow at him and he gave me a slight nod. “Yeah, we all need to make it up to her. So we might as well do it together. Are you in or not?” Drake nodded. “I guess. It’s not like I had a plan for how to apologize. And I just have to figure out dinner for the four of us and what to say so she knows how I feel?”

“That’s it. I’ve got the rest handled. But I need to get moving.” I started to walk away, then turned back. “I’ll send you details of where to meet us.”

I wanted tonight to be the best night of Elle’s life. I needed her to see that the three of us could actually get along, and that we could keep Drake in line. But could I pull it off? I’d always been treated like a screw up, and I’d found that to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. I had to shake off that thought and get everything done.



DRAKE

After Kings took off, I sat at my desk, completely lost. I had to plan a romantic dinner and figure out how to tell Izzy exactly how I feel about her. The first part wouldn't be hard. I knew how she liked her filet mignon, the toppings for her baked potato, and that crème brûlée would be the only acceptable dessert. As far as my feelings, I had no idea what to say. What I felt for her was so much more than love. But how do I explain that?

I pulled out a pen and paper from my desk drawer. This needed to be something big. She had to understand that I wasn't trying to be a dick. I'd simply suggested that we keep her from public scrutiny for a while until the drama with Chad blew over. That had pissed her off.

“Are you ashamed of me?” she'd asked.

“Of course not,” I'd replied.

“Then why do you want to hide me away like some dirty little secret that you don't want anyone to find out about?”

Her words had bitten into my heart. I didn't want to hide her away to keep others from finding out about her. I wanted to protect her from the rumors I'd already begun to hear. People were saying that we'd stolen her from the Wilde family. I'd heard that someone was saying that we'd gotten her pregnant to force her into being our omega. The whole situation painted us and her in a very negative light. I knew that it was only a small part of our kingdom who actually believed that, but I couldn't bear to think about the look in her eyes when she heard those things about herself. I would not let her find out that scumbag Chad was spreading rumors about her. I wasn't even sure how he was doing it since he was locked up. I was only trying to keep her safe. Things had heated up after that and we'd ended up shouting at each other until my brothers came by.

And of course, I'd made the mistake of telling her that I wanted to keep her to myself forever after we'd made love. She took me seriously and yelled about learning to share and being fair to my brothers. I never wanted to keep her from them. I just wanted her to understand how much she meant to me. It seemed as if every time I tried to express myself, I made things worse. Before Father and I chased her away, I'd been able to talk to her about anything, even if we did bicker much of the time. She'd never mistaken my words' meaning. It was as if suddenly we were on opposite sides of everything. That knowledge caused the guilt I always carried to burn more in my gut. Every day was worse than the last and somehow, I just couldn't get it right.

As shocked as I was that my brothers had also screwed up, it made me feel better. We'd always been able to work together for a common goal. Kings had never taken charge like this though. I hoped that he was able to hold up his end. I made a call and arranged dinner as he'd asked, letting them know that I would provide the location this afternoon. I hoped that Kings kept this event on property, but there was no way to know with my youngest brother.

He'd always been accused of messing things up, so that was what he did. I've wondered if it was on purpose. Like, *they think I'm a screw up, so I'll be one*. Our parents treated him differently because he was a beta. Lan and I tried hard to include him, but for some things, it just wasn't possible. He couldn't come to the alpha meetings with Father. He couldn't attend foreign conferences. He didn't even have a say in the laws of the kingdom the way alphas did. It was one of the many things I wanted to change when we took over.

Because unlike how our father and his brothers had handled things, I was going to make things equal with my brothers the moment the coronation was done. I'd been planning it for most of my life. I wanted to prove to everyone that I wasn't the only Brighton who was worthy of ruling. The three of us, with Izzy by our side, would be the best thing that had ever happened to Crescent Canyon.

When all was said and done, I trusted Kingsley to plan whatever this was going to be. Dinner was covered. All I had to do was figure out a way to tell Izzy exactly how much she meant to me. Why was this so hard? Because we didn't grow

up in that kind of family. Neither did she, but Kings was right, she deserved to know. There was no reason for her to ever wonder.

I started jotting down ideas, crossing them out, rewording and rewriting until I felt like I might be able to handle this. It would be easier to write her a letter and let her read it in private, but I had a feeling that part of what Kings had in mind meant embarrassing ourselves to make a point. I poured my heart out on that paper, hoping that she didn't think I was an idiot.

I was so caught up in what I was doing that I jumped when my phone chimed. A text from Kings detailed the location for our dinner. I made a quick call to let the staff know where they would be serving, and to ensure that discretion would be maintained. If our parents caught wind of this, they might be tempted to drop in. None of us wanted that, especially if we were trying to fix things with Izzy. Once everything was settled, I texted Kings back and asked how we were supposed to get her there.

His response was a string of laughing emojis, and I gave up on trying to get him to tell me anything useful. I got ready and arrived early, thinking I would need to help with setting up decorations, or something. Impressed to see that everything was already taken care of, I searched for my brothers. Kings was talking to a man standing next to a table with stereo equipment on it. Had he hired a DJ for our date? That seemed a little over the top, even for him. But my little brother never did anything halfway.

I strolled over, waiting just out of his line of sight until he'd finished talking with the man. When he turned around, I spread my arms in a ta-da kind of way, making him laugh. "I'm here, and I'm ready. What can I do to help finish setting up?"

"I think it's all done. I saw the kitchen staff setting up for dinner. Everything smells amazing. Steak and salad?" Kings looked impressed with my choices.

"With loaded baked potatoes, and crème brûlée for dessert," I added. I had nearly forgotten that Izzy's favorite meal was also my little brother's. "Where's Lan?"

"He's getting Elle ready," he said and rolled his eyes. "I guess she got excited and nervous about dinner with all of us, so she's taking her time getting ready."

"The best things in life are worth waiting for. But seriously, how much longer until they get here?"

He shrugged. "I'm not sure." Kings looked at his watch. "Oh, they're on the way now." He shoved me over toward the fountain and stood next to me while we waited. A moment later he waved at the DJ and soft music started to play while the lights went down. I had no idea that the courtyard had lights installed, much less that they were dimmable.

Izzy walked in on Lan's arm, with a scarf around her eyes. It seemed as if my brothers had gone all out for this surprise. I got the impression that this was more of a proposal type dinner, but Kings didn't explain it like that. Besides, we were already married. Then it hit me—the ring! They were planning

to give her the ring tonight. That was why we all had to work out what to say and everything had to be perfect. I was such a dumbass. It all makes sense now. My hands started to sweat.

Looking around, my brain finally allowed me to process the indications that this was more than just an apology dinner. Izzy's favorite shade of purple was everywhere. Kings had hung twinkle lights all around the gazebo where dinner was set up. He'd chosen the one spot where the flowers were the thickest, which also happened to have the dahlias that our girl loved. How had I missed all the signs? Shit, I wasn't prepared for a marriage proposal, even if we were technically already married. What would I do if she refused me? We'd already bonded, so that wasn't likely. But as angry as she was at me, there was always a chance.

I watched her walk with Lan to the edge of the gazebo, Izzy was laughing at something he'd said. She seemed perfectly comfortable with being blindfolded and led to whatever he'd told her this was. I wondered if her reaction would be different when she realized that Kings was planning to ambush her so that she would forgive us. Lan motioned for Kings and me to come closer. We stood there, the three of us surrounding our wife, as he pulled the scarf from her eyes.

"Oh! What's all of this? I thought we were having a quiet dinner under the stars," Izzy gasped as she took in the three of us and the decorations. It was obviously a lot to process.

"We are having a quiet dinner under the stars," Kings agreed. "We just wanted it to be special."

Landyn nodded and I stood there, too dumbstruck to speak. “We each have something to say to you, Bella.” He placed her hand in Kingsley’s and took a step back. After a moment, I stepped back too. They had decided that we would go in reverse age order, leaving me for last. I would be the one to present the ring Lan had selected. My eyes widened at the realization. I looked at Lan as Kings professed his undying love to our woman. He winked at me and slipped the ring box into my pocket.

My attention was drawn back to Izzy and Kings when she threw her arms around him and kissed him hard. Nothing I had written would be good enough for this moment. I had to come up with something quickly. A moment later, Lan was pulling Izzy from Kings’ arms and into his. I didn’t have much time left to figure this out. My heart pounded in my ears, and every breath felt like it was coming through sand. I tried to focus on what my brother was saying, but the world had gone gray. I watched as once again; Izzy threw her arms around one of my brothers and kissed him with reckless abandon.

Suddenly all eyes were on me. Sweat beaded on my brow. A dizzying sensation took over and I stumbled. Izzy stepped closer, putting her hand on my arm. “Are you okay, Drake? Do you need to sit down?”

Silently, I nodded. Sitting down sounded much better than collapsing. My brothers grabbed me and helped me to a chair. I reached for Izzy and pulled her onto my lap. “Is this okay?” I whispered, not wanting to push her into anything she wasn’t comfortable with.

“It’s fine. Are you okay?” I smiled and she continued, “Are you going to explain what all of this is about? Or are you going to be like your brothers and tell me how you’ve always loved me and you can’t live without me?” There was a hint of humor in her tone, but I knew her well enough to realize that she wanted the words. She deserved them.

“Izzy, you are my world. I know that I piss you off and you love to return the favor. But please don’t ever doubt how much you mean to me. I would move the planet and stars to make you happy. All I ever wanted was for you to be mine...ours.” I paused to pull the ring box from my pocket. I opened it and held it up to her. “You’re all I’ve ever wanted, and I promise that I’ll make up for the past. My brothers and I will worship you for as long as you’ll let us. All we want is to spoil you and take care of you. What do you say? Will you be ours?”

Izzy’s eyes widened and filled with tears. “You know we’re already married, right?” she joked. I wiped the tears from her cheeks and kissed her temple. She held out her left hand for me to put the ring on her. “It’s beautiful,” she sighed, staring at the ring while she moved her fingers to make it sparkle in the dim light.

“You didn’t answer our question,” I prompted, ignoring her comment about already being married. That part didn’t matter right now. All that mattered was her accepting us.

“Oh, you guys really need me to say it?” Izzy glanced from one face to another until her eyes settled on mine again. The three of us nodded at her, encouraging her to answer. “Of

course, I want to be yours. I've always been yours. I love you. All of you." She kissed me gently, with none of the passion she'd given my brothers. I wondered if that was because it was what she needed right now, or if it was because she was still angry. I tried not to let jealousy take over. We would have to figure out how to share her if we wanted this to work. It wasn't even sharing that bothered me, it was the idea that she loved the two of them more than she loved me. That was what hurt me most.

Izzy reached for Kings and Lan, pulling both of them closer and kissing them in turn, while still sitting on my lap. They both stepped away to take their seats at the table. I expected her to do the same. When she didn't move, I turned to face her, raising an eyebrow. "You're not getting away from me that easily," she whispered before crashing her lips to mine in the most passionate kiss I'd ever experienced. It was as if she poured her soul into me through that little bit of contact. A moment later, she pulled back. Flushed, she stared into my eyes and said, "We'll continue this after dinner." A chill ran down my back and my cock jumped against her thigh. She smirked, then got up to take her seat for dinner.

Once dinner was served, Izzy looked at us again with a wry smile. "I bet I can guess exactly what each of you contributed to our date tonight."

"What do we get if you're wrong?" Kings asked, clearly trying to get her to make a real wager.

“Whatever you want,” she offered. “And if I win, I get whatever I want.”

My brothers and I exchanged a glance. I knew better than to bet against her. Izzy knew the three of us better than anyone. I knew that she would be able to tell what each of us had done. “Can I bet with you instead of against you?” I asked, taking her hand in mine. I rubbed my fingers against her skin, thrilling at the fact that she’d be marked with my scent.

“Hmm, I think that would be okay.” She had agreed way too easily, and I was scared of what that might mean.

“Traitor,” Lan accused. I grinned at him, then stuck my tongue out at Kings. They both laughed. Everything has been way too serious lately. We needed this time to relax.

“Okay, smarty pants, tell us. Who did what to make your special night?” Kings prompted. Lan took Izzy’s other hand and kissed it. No doubt, he was trying to distract her from winning the bet by marking her as well. I wondered what she would make them do when she won. Maybe she would let me give her some ideas.

“Well, Lan picked out the ring. He was the only one who saw me look at it.” She looked to him for confirmation, even though she didn’t need it. At his nod, she continued. “Drake took care of dinner, because this is the exact meal we had the only time we had a date as teens.” A glance my way told her she was right. I was smiling ear to ear when she continued. “And that means that Kings handled decorations and put the

whole thing together. Because he's the one who knows that this is my absolute favorite spot in the gardens."

"Fuck," Kings said. Somehow, he had doubted her ability to figure us out. "You win. What do we have to do? Clean our rooms naked? Give you a full body massage? Take you shopping?" He'd listed off things that wouldn't have been bad punishments at all.

She laughed. "I'll let you know when we decide."

Kings' face fell, and his eyes widened. "Wait, we? You're going to let him help you choose what you get for winning? That's evil."

Her smirk matched mine. "I know."

"Don't worry, brother; it won't be that bad," I reassured him. From the look on his face, I didn't think he believed me.



ISABELLA

I had suspected that my amazing men would get me a ring and have some sort of celebration, but what they did for me in

the gardens was more than I'd ever imagined. I was floored that Landyn got the ring I fell in love with when we'd gone shopping. It amused me that Drake remembered our date from more than ten years ago. And it was sweet how Kingsley had made sure the whole thing happened in my favorite spot.

Lan told the other two that I was running late to dinner because I wanted to look perfect. In reality, it was because he'd caught me swiping dirty laundry from their rooms when I was supposed to be getting dressed. I couldn't help myself. They smelled delicious and I was desperate for their scents.

I could feel my heat coming on, and I wasn't ready. I found myself sneaking into the guys' rooms and taking things that smelled like them. I stole Drake's pillow, Landyn's favorite sweatshirt, and Kingsley's blanket. I was horribly embarrassed by it, but I needed their scents near me. I craved their attention and affection in a way I never had before.

I wanted to be close to them constantly. The moment Drake asked if he could side with me for the bet, I knew he was feeling it too. Normally, I would have denied him or made him work for it. This time I agreed easily, needing his touch. He twined his fingers with mine, spreading his walnut and smoke scent across my skin. I wanted to purr with contentment, but was a little busy teasing the other two. Then Lan reached over and took my other hand, and his cinnamon honey mixed with Drake's scent. It was enough to drive me wild.

I clenched my thighs together, hoping to quell the ache that was forming there. It wouldn't be long until my heat hit full

force. I would be even more desperate to take Drake and Lan's knots, and for Kings to take care of me while they recovered. Just the thought of group fun made me desperate to be closer to them. After we finished eating, I grabbed Drake and pulled him onto the makeshift dancefloor in front of the DJ. I hoped that the guy playing the music didn't mind if I got a little inappropriate with my men tonight.

I slid into Drake's arms and swayed with the music, even though it was not a slow song. To his credit, the DJ switched seamlessly to something slow and sensual. No doubt he could sense the change in my scent. Even with the flowers here, I could smell my lavender and rose pheromones filling the air. Drake groaned and pulled me closer, his cock hard and pressing into my stomach, showing me exactly what my scent did to him.

I pressed myself as close to him as I could, letting his scent surround me. With any luck, I would smell him for days. Not that I planned to be away from him for any amount of time. But it was Drake, so no doubt we'd be fighting again tomorrow. I was focused on Drake and my desire until I saw Lan and Kings waltzing. It was ridiculous considering this was not the music for it, and they were being extremely over the top about it. When Lan dipped Kings, I lost it. I nearly collapsed with my laughter. Drake had to tighten his hold on me just to keep me from hitting the ground. It was enough to distract me from my desires for a moment, which was what I needed.

Twenty





ACCEPTING THEIR FATE

LANDYN

It didn't surprise me that Bella won the bet. It shocked me that Drake had sided with her, and that she'd allowed it. Usually, they were on opposite sides of everything. It was nice to see them getting along, especially since we'd planned this to be the best night of Bella's life. I wanted her to remember it fondly forever. If that meant that Kings and I had to suffer through some strange punishment that she and Drake came up with, I was fine with that.

Dinner was delicious, as expected. We took turns dancing with Bella, making her giggle at how silly we were acting. When she danced with Drake, I grabbed Kings and pulled him in for a waltz, even though the music didn't fit. I knew she would crack up at our behavior, and I was right. She collapsed in a fit of laughter. If Drake hadn't been holding her up, she would have been on the ground.

I cut in when the next song started, holding her close and swaying slowly even though the song was upbeat. "I just want to be close to you right now," I'd insisted when she had tried

to get me to let her go to dance properly. Her objections had been half-hearted; I could tell from her scent. Bella relented, letting me hold her as close to my body as I could. I wanted to get even closer, but we were outside and both of us were wearing way too many clothes. I'd heard her promise later to Drake, and didn't mind waiting my turn. Those two needed to spend some time together when they weren't fighting. I knew there would be plenty of time for us when they started arguing again. I stroked my hands up and down her back and arms, marking her with my scent. I loved the way all of our scents mingled together.

I kissed her lazily before letting Kings take her from my arms. I would love for every night to be just like this one. I knew it was too much to ask, but we needed to enjoy this while we could. I had no doubts that our mother wouldn't give up so easily. Just because we were legally married, and the queen had left us alone for a few weeks, that didn't mean she wasn't up to something. After all, she'd pushed the ball that was to be our marriage announcement back three times in as many weeks.

I watched Bella dance with my younger brother while I considered everything that could go wrong. Our mother could try to pull another stunt like at the last ball. We would need to make sure that security was beefed up. There would be no more assassination attempts on my watch. There were dozens of other things she could do to get between us and cause problems. We would have to discuss the options and see how we could counteract each possibility. But not tonight. Tonight

was for Bella to enjoy. There would be time for planning tomorrow.

I knew that her heat was coming up soon, and wondered if that could be part of what our mother was planning. If the ball happened to coincide with Bella's heat, it could be a disaster. I'd never heard of an omega making public appearances during her heat. We might have to consider canceling the whole thing. I knew that would piss off our parents, but I would not put Bella under any stress just to satisfy their petty need for control.

Movement caught my attention, and I watched as Kings passed Bella to Drake. The transition was smooth and flowed just like the music. I pulled out my phone and texted the head of security to arrange a meeting in the morning. I needed to have everyone on the same page before this ball. I felt as if my brain was jumping all over the place, refusing to focus on one thing for more than a few minutes at a time. I needed to let go now.

If I couldn't focus on her tonight, what guarantee would I be able to give Bella that she would be the most important thing in our lives? I pushed away thoughts of what needed to be done and watched as my brothers passed her back and forth, taking turns dancing with her. Bella turned and motioned for me to join them. I tried to deny her. Dancing was one of my favorite pastimes, but I'd had so many injuries in my quest to get her attention that I wasn't able to do it well or without pain. She refused to drop the issue, so I relented. The moment I was close enough, she tossed herself into my arms.

I wanted to tango or mamba with her, but the best I could manage was to sway gently to the music. Bella didn't seem to notice my limitations but didn't push me for more than I was able to give. I leaned down and pressed my lips to hers. "You have to relax," she said against my mouth.

"I am relaxed," I insisted. She shook her head and laughed.

"No, you're worried about something. I wish I knew what it was. I want you here with me, with us. This is a celebration." She was right. I needed to be more present tonight. Bella was the only thing that mattered.

"I'm sorry, my love. I'll put it away for tonight." I hoped that I was able to get my mind to let go of everything I'd been worrying over. "I was thinking about things I needed to handle tomorrow. It can wait." I twirled her, then dipped her low, pulling her up slowly to lift her into a kiss again.

"For the ball? That's another week away. I just want the three of you to take care of me tonight. This is our time." Her insistence was touching. She didn't just want me, or Kings, or Drake. She wanted this time with all of us. It would help solidify our bond as a pack. That would make us stronger. I wondered if she realized that we would have to fight against the king and queen if they kept pushing against our relationship. We didn't know how our wife would react to being part of a plot to overthrow the monarchy. I hoped it wouldn't come to that. But that was for later.

"Yes, tonight is our time. Everything else can wait," I agreed, pulling her in for a kiss. Her pheromones were already

changing, signaling that her heat was nearing. There had been a brief conversation about breeding and children, but part of me wanted to wait until we'd had more time to settle in. I didn't want to rush anything with Bella. I knew that my brothers felt the same way. I lingered over the kiss, even when I felt my brothers' eyes on us. I wanted to carry Bella back to my bedroom and spend the night making love to her. There were risks with that, though. If we weren't completely ready for kids, we would have to avoid knotting with her. And since that meant not having sex with her, that was off the table.

"Come on, Lan. You have to share," Kings demanded, making sure it was over the top, exaggerating the sound to make Bella laugh. She pulled away from me and went into his arms easily. Drake slid an arm around my shoulders as we watched them together.

"It's like a dream come true, right?" he asked, oblivious to the concerns that had plagued me all night.

"It is. That makes me wonder when we're going to wake from it, and how bad things will be when we do," I replied, glancing at him. His puzzled look lasted for only a moment before he turned back to where Bella and Kings were dancing, if you could call it that. It looked more like Kings was grinding on her, and Bella was trying not to fall over laughing at him.

"You think they'll try something else to get between us." It wasn't a question. Drake had reached into my brain and pulled out my biggest fear.

“Her heat scares me. I think they’ll use it against us. I’m almost certain that’s why they’ve rescheduled the ball so many times. Mother is waiting to catch us off guard. You know once Bella goes into heat, she won’t be able to stop herself from mating with the nearest alpha, even if she doesn’t want to. It’s biology.” I thought saying it out loud would help, but fear gripped my heart and I felt as if I couldn’t breathe.

Drake nodded, not taking his eyes from our wife. “I agree. That’s why if she goes into heat before the ball, we’ll have to keep her away from everyone.”

“How?” I asked, wracking my brain for a way to fulfill our social obligations without putting Bella at risk.

“What if it’s a masquerade ball? We could have someone who looks enough like her, in an identical gown and mask, standing by to take her place. We make our appearance, then take Izzy back to one of our rooms. Her doppelganger would take her place, and we could rotate out to take care of our woman, while still making our parents happy,” he suggested.

It wasn’t a bad idea. “That might work. But who do we know that looks enough like Bella to be her double?”

“That, dear brother, will be Kingsley’s department. He has a guy for everything. I’m pretty sure he could find doubles for us as well, if we needed them. We’ll talk about it in the morning. Let’s try to enjoy our impromptu engagement party with our wife.” Drake laughed. “That was something I never thought I’d say.”

I joined his laughter. “I’m sure this situation is one we never expected. What prompted you to take a look at that paperwork from when we were kids, anyway?”

Drake looked at me and grinned. “I’d been waiting for her to be assigned somewhere else. I was planning to use that as a way to steal her from any other pack that tried to take her from us. Luckily for me, Chad is handsy and I got to swoop in and save her.”

I shook my head. Leave it to Drake to have a ten-year plan for claiming our omega. “You knew the whole time that she’d be back? Even when Kings and I complained and whined about her being gone?”

“I suspected that her parents would pull something like what they did. I had no idea that the Wildes would pay so much for her, but I’d been saving for years to make an offer. I wasn’t planning to purchase her, just to pay a dowry to her parents and convince them to nudge the committee to assign her to us. The whole thing didn’t exactly go to plan, but it all seems to have worked out.” He looked like a cat that caught a canary; self-satisfied and smug. Normally I hated that look on him, but tonight, I was glad that he’d gone to so much trouble to make sure we got our girl. We’d known even as kids that we wanted her. That was why we’d pushed for our father to perform the wedding. Drake had somehow known that he could claim the ceremony was official.

“We’d better cut in before Kings starts taking off his clothes,” I suggested, watching as the youngest Brighton’s

dance moves got more and more obscene.

Drake nodded and slipped between them before I could move. I snuck up behind Bella and wrapped my arms around her waist as Drake put his around her shoulders. When we effectively nudged Kings out of the way, we laughed. It took him a moment to realize what we'd done. Once he did, Kings tried to squeeze in between us, but failed. Drake and I had our girl pinned between our bodies.

"We've had dinner, dessert, and dancing. What would you like to do next?" I asked Bella, placing a kiss on her temple.

"You left out the amazing three-way proposal," she said, holding the ring up to glint in the low light.

"Oh, I nearly forgot! Kings, get the other rings," I ordered. Bella looked at me and cocked an eyebrow.

"The other rings?" she asked.

Drake kissed her ear. "Did you think there wouldn't be wedding bands?" He chuckled against her skin and I watched the goosebumps form.

"I guess I didn't think about it," she admitted. Kings walked up with four small boxes in his hands. He opened one and offered it to Bella. She gasped. "It matches perfectly!" He pulled the ring out of the box and slipped it onto her finger. Then he showed her our rings that perfectly complemented hers and we each put one on.



ISABELLA

These three were determined to make me cry. My engagement ring was gorgeous, but the matching bands for all four of us was too much. Tears of joy streamed down my face when they showed me. It had been enough to stop the questions I'd been peppering Kings with while we danced. Drake and Lan had been plotting something, and I wanted to know what it was. Of course, my sweet beta boy refused to tell me anything about his alpha brothers. He claimed not to know, but I was certain he was not telling me the truth. He had an idea at least.

But the rings were an effective distraction. I couldn't stop looking at my hand. The band matched the style and stone of the engagement ring perfectly. The light caught the sapphire and glinted. It was a ring fit for a princess. Oh, shit. I was a princess. I'd dreamed of this for most of my life, but something deep down told me it would never happen. Most of that had stemmed from Bethy's accident and my guilt. But here I was, with three men who adored me.

Another wave of desire crashed into me. As much as I wanted to take my sexy men to bed, I knew that we had things to take care of tomorrow. If I started things now, we'd never get any sleep. They walked me back to my room with the intent of heading back to their rooms.

“Will you all stay with me tonight?” I snuggled deeper into Kingsley's arms, reaching around him to grab his brothers' arms. He kissed the top of my head and squeezed me.

“Anything you want, Elle,” he promised. I watched him glance at his brothers, silently asking if they would deny me this.

“Are you sure? I have it on good authority that my brothers snore,” Drake joked. He wove his fingers through mine and gently pulled me away from Kings and into his embrace.

Lan looked offended. “I don't snore; that's you! Of course, she's sure. Bella wouldn't ask if she didn't mean it. Do you want to give us a minute to grab pjs?”

I smirked and shook my head. If I were being honest, I wanted them all naked. I knew I was tempting fate by asking them all to stay, but I craved their scents and didn't want to sleep alone.



KINGSLEY

Elle knew that Lan was distracted. Drake and I saw it too. Instead of focusing on his issues, I tried my best to take her mind off of it. I wanted her to focus on what tonight meant for us as a family. It caught me off guard when my brothers shoved me out of the way to cage her in. But once I presented the wedding bands that matched her engagement ring, Elle wormed her way free, and I got some affection. She decided that she wanted all of us to stay together for the night, so we ended up in her room. The bed was barely big enough for the four of us to cuddle up on it. I didn't think my brothers were ready for me to suggest group fun time, so I kept that thought to myself for later. Seeing their junk wouldn't bother me, but I wasn't sure either of them was in a place for that to be okay. They'd get there really quick once Elle's heat hit, so I wasn't going to push it.

The next few days were filled with preparations for the ball. Knowing that Elle would most likely go into heat just before or during, I had to find a body double. We had to have a way to get her out quickly without anyone noticing. Luckily, I

knew a lot of people. Hell, my people had people. And I was connected to them all. That led us to Tracy, who looked a lot like Elle; enough so that I decided to see if I could fool my brothers.

Tracy and Elle were happy to go along with it. My wife and I hid in the closet while Tracy stood at the window. Drake came into the room and pulled her into his arms without hesitation. I barked a laugh, and Elle dashed out to slug him for showing affection to someone else.

“Oh, please. I knew it wasn’t you. I just wanted to know where you were hiding,” he insisted. “Don’t get me wrong, you look a lot like my Izzy, but your scent is different.” He was right, of course, no one else had that enticing combination of lavender and roses that our girl had.

Elle gasped. “I hadn’t thought about that. Will scent be enough for people to tell it’s not me?” Horror crossed her face at the thought that our plan might have just gone up in flames.

I shook my head. “No one there will know your scent, except us. But Tracy can use a combination of fragrances that will mimic it. And don’t forget, two of us will be there with her to help pull off the con.” Elle relaxed into Drake’s arms, letting him kiss her. I hadn’t thought that he’d be fooled, but it was amusing to watch Elle get jealous.

We continued to hammer out the details of our plan, which involved Tracy staying in Elle’s room until the ball. “I know that will mess with the scent of the room, but it’s the only way we can keep her hidden from everyone until then. You can stay

with one of us, or we can all pile into one room together.” I knew that our girl preferred to have us all in one bed. I expected her to agree based on that suggestion alone.

“That sounds like the best option. If you try to sneak her out and back in, someone could see her. How did you get her in here, anyway?” Elle asked, eyeing me curiously.

“A wig and the servants’ entrance,” I laughed. “No one even batted an eye.” It seemed odd that no one had noticed me sneaking a strange girl in, but I’d waited until early in the morning when the staff wasn’t in yet. We’d passed a handful of people, but I was sure most of them thought it was Elle who was with me.

Maybe I’d been wrong, and they knew something was up. But that was why Tracy had been in a wig. With her oversized sunglasses, no one could know exactly who she was. The whole thing was a bit more cloak and dagger than I wanted, but at this point, I would do whatever it took to keep Elle safe and happy. Once Tracy was settled in, Elle and I followed Drake to his office. It was one of the only places in the castle that the servants avoided. Drake preferred to take care of it himself, and had made that wish clear to them all.

“Why don’t you let people in here?” Elle asked as she flopped down on the couch. I sat next to her and raised an eyebrow at my brother. Would he tell her the truth? Had he told Lan and me the truth? I wasn’t sure that I cared.

“I don’t like people messing with my stuff,” he said simply. “So what do we have left to take care of before the ball?” He’d

effectively changed the subject, taking the attention off of himself and putting it back onto the task at hand.

“Why do I feel like that’s only part of the reason?” Elle wondered aloud.

Drake and I ignored the question. “We have to make sure Elle’s and Tracy’s dresses, hair, and masks are exactly the same. Other than that, we’ve got it all settled.”

The next few days passed quickly. Elle’s discomfort became more apparent as her heat neared. It was hard for Drake and Lan to keep themselves from going into a rut around her. Elle had been collecting our blankets, pillows, and shirts for her nest. I caught her dragging all of it out of her room and settling it into Lan’s closet. It could have been worse, I suppose. She could have selected the closet in Drake’s office or the den. Those were so small it would be hard for all four of us to be in there at once. At least Lan’s closet was huge. It was nearly as large as Drake’s office.

On my night, I helped her get settled in. We stole pillows and blankets from my brothers, and I gave her mine willingly. It melted my heart that she wanted my scent near her as much as she did my brothers’. With them being alphas, their pheromones would affect her more than mine would. I was the least likely to lose control, so I was the one who would have to stay with Elle during the ball, while the other two helped convince everyone that Tracy was our wife. We all knew that Drake and Lan would have to take turns coming to Elle’s nest,

or she would be miserable. An omega in heat craves one thing only; her alpha's knot.

It would be my job to make sure that she got it, but also that they didn't get carried away. No one could know that Elle was already in heat and had to leave the ball. "I think it's going to start before the ball. Maybe it'll be less intense by then?"

Elle laughed at me. "I love you, Kings, but you have no idea what my heat will be like. I've only been through it once, and it was horrible. All I wanted was an alpha to knot with. I suffered so badly on the mainland without you three."

She had included me, even though I'm not an alpha and can't give her a knot. I had other tricks up my sleeve to make up for it, though. I knew that she didn't feel any differently about me for not being an alpha, so I wasn't worried about it. I had advantages that my brothers didn't, and it made us a better team.

"What are you thinking about over there? You've been zoned out half the day today. If I didn't know better, I would assume you were daydreaming about another woman," Elle teased.

"But you do know better, so you know that's a crazy thing to say. I only daydream about you." I pulled her into my arms and pressed my lips to hers. "I'm sorry I've been distracted. I'm thinking about you going into heat and all the naughty things I'm going to do to you to tide you over between knots." She moaned and I pressed my lips against hers, teasing her lips apart with my tongue. We both felt my growing erection

between us. I could smell her arousal, and it teased me even more than her tongue was.

I wanted to tear her clothes off and bend her over the couch, but I knew that we had to have lunch with my parents today to go over last-minute ball details. I slid a hand between us and stroked her clit through her leggings. “We’re going to have to get changed for lunch soon,” I whispered against her lips.

“Wouldn’t you rather stay here and finish this?” she asked, cupping my cock through my pants. I groaned and pulled away.

“Of course, I would, but I don’t want to be the reason my parents hate you.” That effectively killed the mood, and Elle made a face. “Don’t pout; I love you.”

“I love you, but we both know your parents already hate me.” She sighed and stepped away from me. I walked over to my closet and pulled out some clothes. I laid her dress on the bed, then started to strip. Elle watched me with curiosity. I knew she was wondering if I was going to put the dress on, and if I thought for a second that it would put her in a better mood, I would have. I couldn’t remember the number of times I’d done something silly like that just to see her laugh. But there wasn’t time for that today. So, when I opted for a dress shirt and a pair of slacks, she sighed again and put on the dress.

Just as she finished braiding her hair, Drake and Lan showed up. The four of us walked silently to the formal dining room where we would wait for the king and queen. I knew

we'd be waiting, since neither of them ever showed up on time for anything. *"It's one of the perks of being royalty, son. No one would dare start anything without us."* His words rang in my ears. I'd been seven when he'd given me that little secret. I chuckled as I thought about the arrogance of his secret. Of course, no one would dare start a meal or anything else for that matter without the king and queen. That was why they didn't get invited to as many events as they used to.

As we took our seats, I admired Elle's dress. Drake had selected it for this luncheon. It was pale lavender, formfitting without being trashy, and stopped just above her knees. She looked gorgeous no matter what she wore. I knew that he'd chosen this one so that she wouldn't outshine the queen. Our mother considered lunch to be a formal occasion. No doubt she would show up in some sequined number that was too low-cut and tight. But that was our mother, the queen. A superstitious man would have believed that my thoughts had conjured her or summoned her to our location.

The doors swung open dramatically, and the king strolled in, wearing one of his formal suits that would have been more appropriate for a ball rather than lunch with family. On his arm, glittering in a red sequined dress that showed way too much cleavage, with a slit that showed too much leg, was the queen. Mother's other two mates, the king's brothers, Horatio and Adam, walked in behind them as if they were hand servants. Elle stiffened beside me, and I saw Lan cover his mouth and fake a cough. I'd gotten good at stifling my laughter at her ridiculous outfits, but Drake was the champ. He

didn't even flinch, instead standing to kiss her hand and tell her that she looked lovely today.

Lan and I stood and bowed; Elle curtsied, then we waited for the monarchs and elders to take their seats so that we could sit. Lunch would be a test of manners, as always. It had been a long time since we'd been forced to suffer through one of these. I suspected this would be a way for our parents to find something new to use against us, but my brothers didn't seem as worried.

"Please, sit." Father's tone was clipped. Perhaps he had been arguing with Mother this morning. We did as he asked, taking our seats while he remained standing. "This luncheon is to officially welcome Isabella into the family, and to finish planning the ball where your marriage will be announced."

Mother mumbled something under her breath, and I hoped that Elle hadn't heard her. I didn't know what she said, but no doubt it was something hateful. Drake stared at the queen, and I swear she flinched. He must have heard what she'd said.

Horatio reached over and took Mother's hand, quietly chiding her for her words that we missed. Adam looked appalled, but didn't say anything. Neither of them would speak unless the king gave them permission. We all knew that we were not permitted to converse with them either. It was the worst part about the official dinners.

"Thank you, Your Majesty," Elle said, bowing her head.

"What matters are left to be decided for the ball, sir?" I asked. Each of us had met with our mother on several

occasions to help plan the party. I didn't think there could be anything left to do.

"The only thing left to do is select your wardrobe. The queen has been kind enough to have the royal seamstress schedule a time with each of you today for fittings." Father beamed at Mother, obviously impressed with her claims that she was helping. None of us were convinced.

"That is extremely generous of you, Your Majesty," Lan addressed our mother. She smiled and her cheeks flushed. I wanted to cringe because we knew there was nothing sincere or humble about her.

"Only the best for my boys," she said, then quickly added, "and their wife." There was no missing the animosity behind the word *wife* when she said it. We knew that she wasn't happy about the union, but I hadn't expected her to be so blatant about her displeasure.

"We appreciate it," Drake added. He turned to the king and started a conversation about some treaty or other, and I stopped paying attention. The rest of lunch was fairly uneventful. Mother made snarky comments and backhanded compliments to Elle, who refused to react. I was so proud of the gracious and regal way that Elle handled everything the queen threw at her. By the time lunch was over, it seemed as if even our father was getting annoyed at our mother's behavior. When he'd had enough, we were dismissed with the promise that the seamstress would come to our rooms for the fittings.

That meant we had to hide Tracy until the dress fitting was completed. It wasn't a hard task, but since we had no idea when to expect the woman, it would be challenging. The four of us headed back to Elle's room to figure out what we needed to do. In addition to hiding Tracy, we would have to make sure we had two identical dresses without anyone knowing. Once again, our mother had thrown a wrench into our plan and had me questioning our ability to pull it off.

Twenty-one





ANOTHER AWKWARD PARTY

DRAKE

I should have expected that our mother would do everything she could to upset Izzy. Hiding Tracy had been easy. When the seamstress, a lovely woman named Sharon, came, Tracy slipped into the closet. The moment she pulled out the dress our mother expected Izzy to wear, we all grimaced. It was the ugliest thing I had ever seen. There was no way Izzy would ever wear it, even for a fitting, not even to please the queen.

“I’m sorry, Sharon. There must be some mistake. This can’t be the dress the queen selected for the princess. Surely you have another option?” I asked politely. I wanted to rip the monstrosity in half and throw the woman out.

“My apologies, Prince Drake. I have strict orders from the queen. I am to make sure this dress fits the princess perfectly.” She paused as if choosing her next words carefully. “I tried to talk her out of it. That fabric is much too thick for a summer party, and the print is too mature for the lady.”

“You mean it’s hideous,” Izzy cried, covering her face with her hands. Her tears were silent, but I could sense the change

in her mood. Mother had another thing coming if she thought Izzy would be caught dead in that dress.

“It’s not so bad. With the right accessories and hairdo, you’ll look amazing.” Kings tried to placate her, but he couldn’t get his face to match his words.

“Don’t upset her more than she already is,” Lan insisted. “Look, Sharon, I understand that the queen has declared this is the dress. However, I am sure you have something more flattering that would be more suited to our princess.”

“Please,” I added. “We won’t tell the queen that you helped us. We’ll take full blame for not using the dress she chose. There will be no repercussions. You have my word.” Sharon seemed to consider my statement for a moment. I thought for sure we were getting through to her.

“I’m sorry, I can’t. If the princess refuses the dress, I am to report straight back to the queen. If I don’t obey her commands, I could be banished from the kingdom. I’m afraid it’s this dress or nothing.” Sharon shook her head slowly as she spoke, regret clear in her tone. She was backed into a corner, just as we were.

“Well, we can’t have that, now, can we? The princess will be happy to try the dress on for final fitting,” I said, giving Izzy a look that I hoped conveyed my thoughts. I would let Sharon have her victory, then we’d find another dress. Izzy seemed to understand, wiping her face and accepting the offered dress. She stepped into the bathroom to put it on, then came back so Sharon could check the fit.

It was floor length, with a puffy skirt and sleeves. The floral pattern was a deep red color that completely clashed with Izzy's hair. The background for the flowers was a pale pink that was almost white. There was no doubt in my mind that our mother had done this on purpose. She would have no way to deny that this dress was a slight against our wife. To be fair, the dress was slightly less hideous on Izzy than it was on the hanger but it was still the ugliest dress I had ever seen. Honestly, Izzy would be beautiful no matter what she was wearing.

Sharon had Izzy do a turn while she checked the seams. It looked as if it was a size too small, but the older woman nodded and mumbled to herself. "Okay, that's perfect. Would you like me to press it for you?"

"You don't think it's a little snug?" Izzy asked quietly. "It's hard to breathe in it."

"No, Miss, it fits just the way Her Majesty wanted." Sharon was a piece of shit just like my mother. There was no way Izzy would ever leave this room with that dress on her.

"There's no need to press it. We will take care of that," I offered, showing Sharon to the door. "That will be all. Thank you." Once she was on the other side of the door, I closed it in her face. I turned back to see Tracy coming out of the closet and walking around Izzy in a large circle.

"What if I let it out a bit and dye it a different color?" she offered. A hopeful look crossed Izzy's face.

“Is it possible? Can you fix it?” Izzy lit up at the suggestion. Tracy kept circling the dress, then grabbed a section of the skirt and felt the material.

“I think so. Worst case scenario is that I have to make another from scratch. Either way, I can do something to make it better. If I ruin it, you can just say it got caught on a nail or something got spilled on it.”

I silently thanked Tracy for coming to the rescue, and my brother for finding a girl who'd been so willing to help us. From her scent, I could tell she was a beta like Kings. Her generosity would be rewarded once we'd pulled this off. My brothers and I spent the next four hours watching as Izzy and Tracy went to work to transform the monstrosity into something they'd both be proud to wear.

While they worked, Lan and I watched a soccer match. Kings kept running out of the room to fetch things for the ladies, offering his services in any way they needed. He'd even arranged and delivered our dinner to the room so they wouldn't be disturbed. That was probably more so the staff wouldn't know what was going on in Izzy's room. We didn't need them reporting back to the queen that we'd found a way around her nastiness.

I only half watched the game, preferring to keep an eye on Izzy when she didn't realize I was looking. I loved the way her nose crinkled when she concentrated, and the laughs that Tracy brought out of her pulled forth a tinge of jealousy. I wanted to be the cause for Izzy's laughter. I knew it didn't

matter. Once the ball was over, we would be able to spend more time together than we already were.

Izzy's heat was about to start, and it was getting harder to keep my hands off of her. I wanted to bury myself inside of her and stay there forever. But we had other things to deal with first. The ball was top priority, then we would worry about Izzy's heat.

I noticed that the chatter had stopped. Izzy and Tracy were silent. I turned to see why, and my jaw dropped. Tracy had completely transformed the dress. The pale pink was lavender now, and the bright red roses were a deep, royal purple. Gone were the puffy sleeves, and the skirt had been flattened out a bit too. I wouldn't have known it was the same dress if I hadn't watched them make the changes. Not that I knew what they were doing as it happened.

"Oh, Tracy, it's gorgeous. Thank you so much," Izzy gushed. "But will we have time to make an identical one for you?"

I'd nearly forgotten why Tracy was here in the first place. Her smile fell. It was already getting late. I knew that we didn't have the supplies to make another dress without alerting someone to what we were doing.

"Probably not. But I think I have an idea about that." Tracy took Izzy's hand and winked. "I can go in a different dress, then we can slip into the bathroom and switch. After that, you will be able to leave, and no one will be the wiser."

It wasn't a bad idea, but there were a dozen ways it could go south. We would have to plan it very carefully and make sure the bathroom was cleared before they went in. Then we would have to guard the door to make sure no one went in while they were trading dresses. The new plan might have been risky, but seeing the way Izzy's face lit up, I couldn't refuse.

"Okay, that sounds like it could work. We will figure out the details tonight," I announced. I had learned the dismissive tone from my father. I hadn't really meant to use it on Tracy, but she nodded and excused herself to the bathroom.

Izzy grabbed her pajamas and followed. I was certain she meant to leave the dress here and come to one of our rooms. I'd hoped it would be mine, but the look she'd given me before she followed Tracy said otherwise. It only took me a moment to figure out that I'd done it again, managing to inadvertently annoy Izzy when I was trying to be helpful. "Shit," I muttered when the bathroom door closed a little harder than I'd expected.

"You're getting good at that," Lan observed, nodding his head toward the closed door.

"A little too good, honestly," Kings added. I couldn't argue with their assessment of the situation. At least this time it was just my tone that had done it instead of my words. It was always harder to apologize when I'd used the wrong words to convey my meaning. There was a chance Izzy would let this go quickly.

“I didn’t mean it the way it sounded,” I said, turning toward the bathroom. “Izzy, please come back so we can talk.” No response. “I’ll even admit that I’m an idiot.” The door creaked open just a sliver.

“Do that first,” she demanded.

“Why?” I asked reflexively. As soon as the word left my lips, I started kicking myself. “I’m an idiot. Okay?”

She opened the door a crack and I could see that she wasn’t angry like I’d thought. She’d been scared. I did that with the tone I’d used. I felt even more like an idiot.

Instantly, I did as she asked. Even though Tracy said it was no problem, I felt like both women were still upset with me. I might have deserved it, but that didn’t mean I had to like it. I watched as Izzy showered my brothers with attention and affection, barely acknowledging that I was still in the room. Aggravated, I stormed off into my own room. I didn’t need this today. I needed to finalize our plans for the ball so we could keep Izzy safe and protected. If she went into heat before or during the party, it would be possible for another alpha to take advantage of her. That wasn’t something I wanted to happen. I would fight tooth and nail to protect her from anything my mother threw at us.

I paced my room, wondering how I would make this up to her. I was constantly saying stupid things in front of her and had no idea why. It was like my brain wanted us to fight. I hated it when she was mad, but lately, the make-up sex had been amazing. Maybe that was why I kept baiting her.

Subconsciously I knew that she would forgive me, and if not, I'd seduce her, and then she would forgive me.

I hadn't expected the knock on the door, but it jarred me from my thoughts. I stalked over and threw it open, ready to tear into whoever was there. Shock ran through me to find Izzy standing in front of me with tears in her eyes. I pulled her into my arms and held her close. "What happened?"

She sniffed and held tightly to me; arms wrapped around my waist. "You left me." Her whispered words ripped my heart in half. I eased her back, loosening her grip on me, and looked her in the eyes.

"Never," I insisted. "I would never leave you. I was just giving you time and space to cool off. I needed some too." I kissed her forehead and pulled her back into my arms. Then I lifted her up, kicked the door closed, and carried her to my bed. I sat her down on the edge and lowered myself to my knees, sitting between her legs. "I promise you, Izzy, I will never leave you. I will do whatever you need me to."



ISABELLA

I wasn't sure what set me off about Drake walking away. He always did that when he needed to cool off. I knew that if he didn't, we'd just fight more. It shouldn't have felt like being abandoned, but it did. It felt like my heart was being ripped out of my chest. As if he would never come back. Logically, I knew better. But my upcoming heat was really messing with my emotions. I needed to be near him, no matter how irritated I was with the way he'd all but dismissed Tracy as if she were a servant.

It was ridiculous, but no more so than anything else we'd fought over. I wanted him to see that his tone mattered, his actions mattered. He needed to be concerned with someone other than himself. In an effort to calm me down, Lan told me more about how active they all were with the omega equality movement, Drake especially, but it didn't seem real. I decided that I could focus on that after the ball; after we'd managed to hide my heat from the king and queen; after I'd managed to make sure Drake wasn't leaving me.

I showed up at his door on the verge of tears, and he'd carried me to his bed, kneeling in front of me and promising that he would never leave me. He gave me the words I'd already known but needed to hear. I stayed with him but he didn't push for sex, even though we both wanted it. He'd held me and kissed me tenderly, trying to prove that he wasn't going anywhere. My heart knew it, but my hormones were going crazy.

I woke to an empty bed; his side was cold, as if he'd been gone for hours. I didn't have time to wonder where he'd gone, though. The door swung open and a cart with the most amazing smells was brought in. Coffee, French toast, fresh fruit—my mouth watered at the scents. Drake strolled over and kissed the top of my head, then the door opened again. Kings and Lan walked in and joined us for breakfast. The rest of the day was spent getting ready for the party tonight. It was a whirlwind; everything happened so fast. I was anxious about being in front of all of those people again after what had happened with Chad. I could feel my heat starting, and that made me more worried. What if I couldn't get out of there in time? What if another alpha scented me and I got trapped? Would I be able to fight against the desire to submit?

My husbands assured me that they wouldn't leave me alone, so I tried to relax and enjoy the preparations. By the time the ball was set to begin, I'd had a spa treatment, my hair was braided intricately, my mask was in place, and I was wearing my version of the dress my mother-in-law had selected for me. We had decided that none of us would take credit for the changes to the dress, since Sharon was so hateful about it. I didn't want to see her punished, but at the same time, she could have been nice and helped us. If she had, we would have protected her. It wasn't like the queen would have her executed for giving us the wrong dress. I hoped.

I entered the ballroom sandwiched between Kings and Lan. Drake followed right behind, insisting that I go first so he

could show me off. I took a deep breath when the guard announced our arrival.

“Now arriving: Lady Isabella, escorted by Prince Drake, Prince Landyn, and Prince Kingsley of the Brighton Kingdom.” Several people bowed; others whispered behind their hands. For that instant, I was the center of attention. I wasn’t sure how I felt about it.

We’d been instructed to be exactly five minutes later than the start time of the ball, so we could make a proper entrance. My eyes scanned the room and settled on the queen, my mother-in-law, the woman who’d been trying to ruin me since I came back. I held my head high, not looking away when she glared. She would know that I was the one who had changed the dress, if nothing else, because of the look I gave her now. It was pure defiance, and I wasn’t about to hide it. She’d done too much to earn my loathing. All I wanted was to make sure her sons were happy and taken care of. That shouldn’t have been too much to ask for her to support me in that endeavor.

Of course, her dress was gorgeous. She was clad in a flowy, golden gown with a snug bodice and skirt that hung perfectly on her. The color highlighted her dark hair and otherwise plain features. My guys had told me that she was jealous of me, but I hadn’t seen it until just now. I had always believed the queen was beautiful, but now I saw the ugliness in her and couldn’t unsee it. I refused to look away, even though every nerve in my body was begging me to submit to the more powerful omega. A moment later, someone approached her and she relented. I had won, for now. But I wasn’t sure how long I

would be able to keep fighting her. All I wanted was to go back to my room and take my men with me. I wanted to nest and cuddle up with them until the desires were too much and we all ended up tangled together.

“Izzy? You have to push those thoughts away,” Drake warned in my ear. How had he known what I was thinking?

“We can smell your desire, love. Drake is right. You need to focus on something else,” Lan agreed. I had momentarily forgotten where we were and why it was important that I not think about sex tonight for as long as possible. We had to make it through the monarchs’ announcement of our marriage.

“I’m sorry. I’m trying, it’s just so hard to push it away. The ache is building and it won’t be long until I feel like I’m dying.” I silently berated myself for whining. This wasn’t their fault, and nothing could be done except for what we were doing. I wished that I knew more of what to expect. I’d gone through my first heat alone on the mainland. I’d locked myself in my apartment and survived with chocolate and toys.

“We only have about five minutes until the announcement. After that, we’ll have to mingle for a little while. Then we’ll be able to sneak you out of here. Just hold on,” Kings whispered reassuringly into my ear. I squeezed his hand and took another deep breath. They had promised me that I would only have to spend an hour here at the most. I just had to make it one hour. I could do this. The dull ache between my legs was growing stronger but I was determined to do what I had to for our family. Another deep breath in and out, then I straightened,

standing tall against the world. I was a princess after all. I would do my duty, then let my guys take care of me until my heat subsided.

The four of us made our way toward the stage where the king and queen were waiting. The queen's other mates, Horatio and Adam, were there as well. It seemed odd to me that they were present, since they normally avoided anything formal. Horatio had served as my guys' teacher, and Adam was the head of security. I'd always suspected that each of them had a different father, with how different they were. It amazed me that no one else had figured it out. Seeing them all together now, it was pretty obvious that Horatio had fathered Lan, and Kings looked way too much like Adam for that to be coincidence. But they were all princes, because their mother was the queen.

I'd heard that she got angry if anyone asked about their parentage. Of course, it didn't matter, but it was interesting to speculate. I realized that I'd gotten distracted and missed something that had been said to me. Damn. "Izzy, are you okay? Horatio asked how you liked being back on the island," Drake whispered in my ear.

"I'm enjoying being home. The island is lovely this time of year, and there has been so much to do." Horatio gave me a sympathetic smile and continued talking. I made sure I was paying attention now, not missing another question. Queen Amelia was glaring at me, and I thought for a moment that she was going to ask about the dress.

Fortunately, King Lester beat her to it. “That’s a lovely dress, Isabella.” I beamed at him as his wife stared daggers at the back of his head.

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” I said, my smile turning wicked, “the queen selected it for me.” I wouldn’t dare say any more than that.

“Well, as always, she has excellent taste,” he replied before turning and walking onto the stage with the angry queen behind him. She couldn’t deny that she’d chosen the dress exactly as it was without explaining to him what she’d tried to do. And for some reason, I found it hilarious. I tried to stifle my laughter, but snorted anyway. Both Horatio and Adam looked at me quizzically, and Drake cleared his throat.

“She’s still a little nervous around them. I’m sure it’ll pass after a while,” he covered. My expression morphed from amused to mortified in an attempt to sell the lie. I’d never been nervous around his parents. I’d always just acted like they were his parents and nothing more.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, if I could have your attention. We have an official announcement to make.” The king spoke quietly into the microphone and his voice carried with authority. The room went silent and all eyes turned toward the stage where the king and queen stood smiling. I wondered if anyone else could tell that the queen’s smile was forced. “Thank you. As you all know, Isabella Vanderbilt was selected as the omega for our princes.”

He paused, perhaps for dramatic effect. “Yes, there has been some mild drama surrounding the selection, but all of that has been put to rest. Today I have the great pleasure to announce that the princes and Ms. Vanderbilt have been married! Please join us in congratulating the happy family.” King Lester turned and motioned for us to take the stage. Drake scooped me up like a bride crossing the threshold and walked up the steps, only setting me down when his brothers were at his side. I stood there, in front of the crowd, with the three of them at my back.

I’d expected rumors to spark instantly, but while the crowd murmured quietly, they were applauding loudly. Their cheers shocked me, and a quick glance to my side showed that they shocked the queen as well. Neither of us had expected this reaction. The lack of animosity from the public made me nervous. I’d expected them to agree with the queen and try to have me shipped back to Chad. A shudder ran through me. That wouldn’t happen. It couldn’t happen. I was legally married to the Brighton heirs and there was nothing any of them could do about it.

Drake stepped around me to the microphone and held up a hand. The crowd fell silent again, focused on the crowned prince and what he might have to say. “Thank you for the warm reception. Please, let’s enjoy some dancing now.” This was it. We would dance for a little while, then I would be swept into the bathroom with Tracy and swap dresses.

I smiled as Landyn picked me up exactly as Drake had and carried me down the steps where Kingsley was waiting for us.

The moment my feet hit the floor I was swept up and in the middle of the dance floor. While Drake had suggested everyone dance, they were waiting for us to start. The next thing I knew, Kings was twirling me around the floor. At the end of the song, Lan slipped into my arms.

My smile instantly dropped. The moment he touched me, the heat in my core flared up. I wanted him more than I ever had. No, that wasn't right. I needed him. I desperately needed him to put an end to the ache that was once again growing stronger. Shit. I'd hoped that my heat would wait until we were able to leave. "What's wrong?" he whispered in my ear. I shook my head, trying to push the feeling away. I knew it was pointless, but I tried anyway. "I'm okay," I croaked. I knew he didn't believe me, but the fact that I hadn't triggered him yet was a good thing.

I got a moment of relief when he passed me to Drake—the singular moment when neither of them was touching me. That was just enough time to sigh in relief. It was gone the second Drake's fingers connected with my skin. The burning was so intense that I nearly begged him to take me right there on the dance floor. He tensed as the music slowed and he pulled me into his arms for a slow dance. I fought against the urge to grind against him. I was certain my scent had changed simply because of the look on his face. He was fighting his desires just like I was. "We need to get you out of here," he said through gritted teeth.

I nodded and let him guide me toward the bathrooms. I knew he was trying to find Tracy. I hadn't seen her since we'd

left her in my room. Had something happened? Drake stopped us long enough to say something to Lan, then continued toward the bathroom. Kings jogged up and suddenly we changed direction, heading somewhere else. “Where are we going?”

“Change in plans. We’re going out in the gardens for a little while. Lan can’t find Tracy. Kings and I will try to give you some relief while Lan figures out what happened. If we have to, we’ll excuse ourselves and just leave.” I knew that would be horrible etiquette, and we’d never hear the end of it from the queen.

Pain shot through me, centered between my legs. My clit throbbed and I doubled over. Kings grabbed me, taking me away from Drake’s touch. The sensation got worse. It felt like I was going to die if I didn’t get my alpha’s knot. This was worse than my last heat.

TWENTY-TWO



THE VANDERBILTS CRASH



DRAKE

It hadn't occurred to me that by moving away from Izzy, I was putting her in excruciating pain. The moment Kings took her and stepped a few feet away, I watched her pain increase. I moved closer to her, but didn't take her from him. Damn. I'd never meant to hurt her. We headed into the garden, hoping to find a quiet spot away from the ball where Kings and I could take care of Izzy for a bit. She needed a release. The only problem was that we couldn't be sure if it would make things better or worse. But with her in this much pain, there was no other option.

The garden was more crowded than we'd anticipated. I'd hoped there would be a place close enough that we could slip back in without anyone noticing we'd left the ball. Thankfully, no one seemed to notice us racing through the flowers, searching for privacy. We had yet to get a second look from anyone we'd passed.

I finally found a secluded corner behind some rose bushes, near the fence. No one used this path, as it was fairly

overgrown. I took off my jacket and spread it on the ground. I would have to keep watch while Kings did everything he could to help Izzy. The only way I could help her was with my knot, and there was no way to know if we'd have time for that.

I stepped away, keeping low to stay behind the bushes. Kings laid Izzy down on my jacket, removed his own jacket, and balled it up for Izzy to use as a pillow. He kissed her tenderly and she grabbed him, passion emanating from them.

She was in so much pain that she couldn't speak. My heart hurt because I was making it worse. I scooted as far away as I could while remaining close enough to see them and be sure no one was coming toward us.

I'd thought it would be awkward or embarrassing to watch my brother pleasure our wife. I was wrong. It was hot. So much so that I wanted to join them. I knew that I couldn't; we would have to return to the ball soon. Or I would at least. I could make excuses for Izzy and say that Kings took her back to our rooms. I worked on a believable reason while I watched him hike up her dress and remove her thong, exposing her to the cool night air.

Her whimpers had me moving closer until Kings held up a hand to stop me. He shook his head and motioned for me to give them more space. She must have been picking up on my scent, triggering her need for the knot. I desperately wanted to give it to her. My cock was hard and throbbing. I pulled it out and stroked it while I kept watch.

Kings ducked his head to her delectable pussy. I stroked myself in time with his tongue as it lapped along her slit. A wave of jealousy hit me as he slipped his fingers into her, coating them with her slick. I was dying for a taste of her, but knew that I couldn't get close without putting her in more pain.

I purposefully moved a few feet further away, stroking myself the whole time. I hated that I was reduced to masturbating while my brother got to pleasure our woman, but it was what she needed right now. He fingered her and teased her with his tongue until she came. Somehow watching the whole thing pushed me to the edge and I came with her. I wanted to slide my dick into her hot pussy, but that would have to wait.

Instead, I watched as my brother positioned himself above her and slowly pushed himself inside. Izzy tensed for a moment, then relaxed. He thrust into her gently, slowly, teasing, until she murmured something and he groaned. I knew exactly what she'd said, even without hearing it. *Fuck me, Kings. Hard and fast.* That was precisely what my little brother proceeded to do. He thrust into her harder and faster, making her come again and again. I wasn't sure how much time had passed. I should have felt like a pervert for watching them this whole time, but instead, I felt closer to them somehow.

I felt her annoyance when he suddenly stopped and pulled out of her. A moment later I understood what he had in mind. Kings flipped her onto her stomach and pulled her up onto her

knees. Then he slammed his cock into her from behind, his hips slapping against her ass. Oh, how I wanted to be inside that ass. Maybe she'd be up for it later. For now, I needed Kings to keep fucking our girl. The more she came, the more I wanted to be the one who was balls deep inside her. My dick was rock hard again, but I didn't have the desire to stroke it again. I tucked it back into my pants the best I could, determined to save it for her.

I should have been watching our surroundings instead of focusing on Izzy and Kings, but I couldn't stop myself. The moment Kings came, I realized my mistake. "Well, if it isn't my whore daughter and the asshole princes who stole her from me."

I stood and turned to face Veronica and Andrew Vanderbilt as Kings struggled to quickly cover himself and Izzy. "What are you doing out here? If I recall, you weren't even invited to the ball." I stepped in front of my brother and our wife, blocking my in-laws' view of the scene.

"Oh, we were invited. By the queen herself. I had no idea there would be a show along with the party, though." Veronica's words were laced with venom. I knew that if she thought she could get away with it, she would strike us all down right here.

"This area of the garden is off limits to visitors. I'll have to ask you to head back to the ballroom." I kept my tone serious and commanding. It was the dismissive one that Izzy had gotten upset with me about yesterday. Somehow it seemed to

fit today's needs. I glanced over my shoulder to see Kings helping Izzy to her feet. He grabbed our jackets and wrapped mine around her shoulders.

“I don't think you understand what's happening here. Once we tell your mother what we just witnessed, you'll be humiliated. Do you really want to do that to the king and queen? The whole kingdom will know that you're nothing but a bunch of perverts.” Andrew didn't usually say much, but it seemed as if tonight he planned to handle the blackmail.

“What do you want?” Kings asked, stepping forward and keeping Izzy behind him. I was relieved that he kept himself between Izzy and me. I didn't need her to start whimpering again. Although she looked mortified and as if she was about to cry. I was tempted to scoop her up and take her back to my room until this was all over.

“You already know what we want—our daughter to go to the Wildes. But you've stopped that from happening. So we'll have to settle for what we can get,” Veronica snarled. My mother-in-law was a hateful bitch who was out to get whatever she could.

“You know, you'd be better off showing kindness to your daughter. If you were actually parents who cared, you'd be included in the family and could benefit from that alliance. Instead, you're conniving gold diggers who want to blackmail their way to riches. It's not happening this time,” I warned. I took a step forward and Andrew stepped back. At least he had the common sense to be intimidated, even if his wife didn't.

“We had every right to sell Isabella to Chad. She’s our omega. The law is behind us. Yet somehow you found a way around that. Now we’re in debt up to our eyes and have no way out,” Veronica sobbed. I had to admit, she was a good actress. I’d seen her perform in movies, but there was nothing like watching her in person.

“She was your omega. Now she’s mine. We were married in a legal union that was handled by the king himself. In reality, she wasn’t yours when you tried to sell her to the Wildes. She was already mine. I could have you thrown into the dungeon for attempted theft if I wanted. But I think omegas are worth more than being property. If Izzy wants you locked up, that’s what I’ll do. If she wants me to let you go, then it’s her choice. If you ever hope to see a dime from the Brightons, you’d better stop trying to blackmail us.” The threat may have seemed a little empty, but I had every intention of locking them up if Izzy said that was what she wanted.

Personally, I wanted to throw them out of the kingdom and have them blackballed from society in general. That would cause them to have to move to the mainland and give up any claim to land or titles they had in any of the island kingdoms.

I turned to look at my wife, who seemed to be collecting herself. “I’d rather not lock them up, but if they keep trying to blackmail us, maybe banishment would be the way to handle it.” The words took something out of her. I could see the pain in her eyes, and it wasn’t from her heat. It was from yet another rejection by her parents. I wanted to rip them apart and bury the pieces where they’d never be found.

“You heard her. You can either leave us alone, or we’ll have you banished,” I growled. I took another step forward and Veronica actually stepped backward with her husband. Good, they were finally realizing that I wasn’t to be messed with.

“We just want what’s rightfully ours,” Andrew croaked.

“That’s not Isabella. She hasn’t been yours for a long time. I’ve offered you a settlement that would take care of your debt to the Wildes and give you plenty to live on. I suggest you take it,” I said, muscles tensing for a fight. I was itching to punch my father-in-law in the face for letting his wife treat mine this way.

“You know that’s not enough money for us to maintain our current lifestyle. Besides, the queen wouldn’t let you banish us. She wanted us here tonight. She’s the only one who’s got our best interests in mind.” Veronica tried to step up to me, but backed down when I leaned toward her. I’d never hit a woman, but at this moment, I was rethinking that stance.

“Mother, you need to leave. This party isn’t for you. My husbands have made you a generous offer. You can either take it or leave it. That’s your choice. But you will not come to my home and threaten us. Get out. Now.” Izzy stepped forward; fists clenched. I thought she was going to punch her mother. Fortunately, so did Veronica. She stepped backward again, tripping and falling on her ass. I was impressed with the way Izzy stood up to her parents.

“Are you going to let her talk to me that way?” Veronica looked at Andrew. He shrugged. There was nothing he could

do, and he knew it.

“Perhaps she’s right, dear. Maybe we should take the offer and leave them alone. They seem happy. Wasn’t that what we wanted for Isabella anyway?” he said as he offered her a hand to help her from the ground. She huffed and swatted his hand away.

“No, that’s not what we wanted. Her happiness has always been secondary. We need that money. She’s worth at least double what he offered. Maybe even triple,” she whined.

“Veronica, you need to let this go. The offer stands as is. If you refuse it, you’ll be responsible for paying the Wildes back on your own. Is that what you want?” I asked. I’d just about had it with this woman. If she didn’t leave soon, I was going to call the guards.

“You have no right to be so disrespectful to me. I’m family after all.” Her incessant whining was giving me a headache.

“Wait a minute. You think he’s being disrespectful, but you’re the one over here trying to blackmail your son-in-law. You don’t see a problem with that?” Izzy chimed in. I could tell another wave of hormones was coming over her. The pain on her face was a combination of desire and anger. I vowed to myself that as soon as we got rid of her parents, I would whisk her back to my room and take care of her.

“You stay out of this. You’re nothing but a whore anyway.” Izzy’s hand shot out and connected with Veronica’s cheek. “How dare you!”

“Shut up. Do not speak. This is what’s going to happen right now.” Izzy turned to her dad, ignoring her mother. “You’re going to take her and leave. You’re not going to ever come back here. You will accept the Brighton family’s offer for settlement. Then you will forget you ever had a daughter. Do you understand?” Her voice was ice.

“That’s ridiculous,” Andrew began.

“You can’t be serious,” Veronica cried.

“I’m not kidding. If you come back here, I will kill you both myself. I’ve had enough of being your little toy to trade around and use for your own benefit. These men love me, they’ve always loved me, more than you ever did. Now go, or you’ll find out just how serious I am.” Izzy grabbed my hand and Kingsley’s then turned and stomped back toward the ballroom without a backward glance.



LANDYN

“Do you think that will work?” Kings asked Bella as they reentered the ballroom. I’d been searching for Tracy

everywhere, but she wasn't here. I was headed out to tell Bella and my brothers when they walked in.

She shook her head, "You know it won't. That woman loves to test me. I'm so pissed right now."

"I can't believe you threatened to kill them," Drake laughed.

"Wait, now I feel like I've missed something important," I said, stepping closer. Bella jumped and I pulled her into my arms. She tensed and I realized that I shouldn't have done it. "I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking."

"It's okay. I just have to get it under control," she replied. "Did you find Tracy?"

"No, she's not here. Don't avoid my question. Who are you going to kill?" I pressed, feeling like there was a huge story I'd missed.

"Her parents are here," Kings explained. "They caught us in the garden while I was taking care of Elle." His face told me exactly what he'd meant by that.

"Oh, no. Did they realize that she's in heat?"

"I don't think so. They spouted a bunch of nonsense about how we've ruined their lives and they want more money. Izzy told them to fuck off. It was great," Drake offered.

"Yeah, great, except that they're still here." Bella pointed to another entrance where her parents had just joined the crowd.

"I'll get security to escort them out," Kings said, walking away to find Adam and brief him on what had happened.

“Shit,” Drake muttered. “We shouldn’t have let him leave.” I didn’t understand his meaning until Bella nearly doubled over in pain. “If we touch her, the pain gets worse. We’re already standing too close. We need to get her out of here.”

“You take her back to our rooms, and I’ll make our excuses here,” I offered. As much as I wanted to be alone with Bella, I knew that Drake had been suffering more than me by keeping his distance.

“No, you take her. I need to make sure her parents know that they are no longer welcome here. I also want to make sure the king and queen know that as well. I won’t tolerate them going behind our backs anymore.” My older brother was pissed and had apparently decided that decorum could be tossed away. I was impressed.

“I’ll take good care of her,” I vowed. Then I turned to Bella. “Bella, darling, do you want me to carry you? Or will that make it worse?”

She didn’t speak, just held up her arms. I scooped her up like the bride she was and headed toward the door. I planned to just keep walking, no matter who tried to stop us. I could sense her pain mingled with her desire. She needed my knot. It was the only thing that would ease the agony she was in. As I carried her across the room, most people moved out of the way without a word. A few had to be asked to clear a path. I didn’t worry about the whispers and murmurs behind us. That could be dealt with later.

Horatio was standing by the door when we approached. “Is everything okay, Landyn?” I looked at Bella in my arms and back to him.

“I need your discretion, Father.” I had never let on that I knew he was my actual father, and I could tell from his expression that I’d caught him off guard. He didn’t deny me, which told me that I was right. Lester wasn’t my father. I’d never been more relieved.

“Anything, my son,” he replied, moving closer so we could speak without anyone hearing.

“Bella is going into heat. I need to take care of her. I know that Mother will have a fit that we’ve left, so if you could make some excuses without telling her why we’re missing, that would be great.” I watched his face as confusion took over. “She’s still trying to split us up. I won’t let that happen. Please, Father, help us.”

“If anyone asks, I saw you in the garden. If anyone else asks, you might be in the bathroom. I’ll take care of it, my son. I’m proud of you.” I bowed my head to him in thanks and ran from the ballroom. I wanted to get Bella back to my room as quickly as possible. I heard a noise behind me and turned to see Horatio holding back a man who’d tried to follow us. He nodded to me and I kept going.

I didn’t stop running until we made it to my room. I locked the door behind us, knowing that Kings and Drake each had a key. I set Bella down on the bed and walked over to my closet. I propped open the door and took a look at her nest. I wasn’t

sure what else she would need, so I fluffed some of the pillows and grabbed some snacks. Then I went back to the bed and carefully picked her up. Bella's whimpers tore through me. I was hurting her, and that wasn't okay. "I'm sorry, love. Let me help you out of that dress and then I'll take care of you."

She lifted her arms again to give me access to the zipper of her dress. Once it was unzipped, I slipped it over her head and threw it across the room. My breath caught when I realized that she didn't have anything on under it. She sank down on the pillows and blankets that she'd been stealing from us in preparation for this exact moment.

I tore off my suit and tossed it away like I'd done with her dress. I dropped onto the nest with her and pulled her into my arms. "It's okay, Bella, I'm here. I'll take care of you." I pressed my lips to hers and kissed her, igniting our passion into flames. While I kissed her, I ran my hands down her body, memorizing every inch of her. I slipped one hand between her legs, stroking her clit.

"More, Landyn. I need more," she moaned. I could see that the pain was easing the more I touched her. I wouldn't stop until she was okay again. I slid one finger inside of her, my cock jumping at how drenched she was. Bella made a noise again and lifted her hips toward me, so I slipped another finger in, relieved when she sighed. I fucked her with my fingers, spreading her slick around. "I need you," she breathed.

That was all the encouragement I needed. I lifted myself over her and slid inside. My dick throbbed with how tight and

wet she was. “Faster, Lan. Harder. I need more.” She was insistent, so I didn’t tease her or make her wait. I thrust into her over and over, pounding harder and going as fast as I could. I felt her first orgasm, then my knot swelled up, holding us in place. Her moans changed to screams of pleasure, and I kissed her to quiet them. I felt her come again, and made it my mission to keep her pleasure going. I pumped my hips, even though we were locked together, trying to give her everything she needed, until I felt my own orgasm tear through me.

I held her close, kissing and nuzzling every spot of her I could reach. Eventually, my knot went down, and I kissed Bella once more. Damn. I forgot the wipes and towels. I rushed off to the bathroom to grab them. I plugged in the warmer and placed the wipes inside. That wouldn’t help this time, but I was certain she’d appreciate it later. Then I set about cleaning her up. I gently wiped at our combined fluids as she watched me with sleep heavy eyes. “Just rest for a bit. Drake and Kings will be here soon.”

I needed her to nap as much as she could, then eat. I knew that if I tried to feed her right now, she’d probably be sick because of the stress with her parents. After I cleaned her up, I took care of myself. I slipped on a pair of boxer briefs so that my brothers wouldn’t be uncomfortable when they got here. It was a little ridiculous because I knew we’d have to get really comfortable with each other really fast. Our woman needed all three of us, and we weren’t going to let her down.

I checked on Bella, who was sleeping peacefully. I pulled a thin blanket over her and then grabbed my phone. I shot a text

to Kings and Drake, asking how long they'd be and requesting that they bring dinner back when they came this way. I didn't bother to wait for a response, because Bella started to stir.

"Lan, where'd you go?" Her voice was strained and laced with need. While my cock was getting hard again, I was fairly certain I wouldn't be able to knot with her so soon after the last time. But I had ideas that might ease her pain until my brothers could get here.

"I'm right here. Do you want a snack?" I'd start with food, then move on to a massage and let that lead wherever she wanted. She nodded and I grabbed the basket of snacks, then settled in next to her. She selected a bag of caramel corn and a chocolate bar. "Will you let me feed you?" She hummed her agreement and settled back onto the pillows after I fluffed them so she could sit up.

I broke off a piece of the chocolate bar and lifted it to her lips. She opened her mouth and I popped the piece into my own mouth, laughing. She swatted my arm and I broke off another piece to feed her. Instead of grabbing for the chocolate, or trying to lead my arm to her mouth, she put her hand under my mouth and waited for me to release the sweet to her. When I did, she moved her hand. "I don't mind sharing, but if you tease me with chocolate like that again, I will hurt you." Her threat was serious, and I nodded solemnly.

I continued to feed her bits of the caramel coated popcorn and chocolate alternately, only stopping when she held up a

hand. “I can’t eat any more right now. I think I’m sleepy again.” Bella stretched her arms above her head and yawned.

“Sleep while you can. We know the urges come in waves. Maybe the others will be here when you wake up.” I put the candy and popcorn away and tucked her back into the nest. I started to get up, but she grabbed my hand and pulled me back to snuggle. I must have been more tired than I realized because I woke to find Drake and Kings speaking softly in the doorway.

“It’s about time you woke up,” Kings joked. “How’d you convince her to sleep?”

“I wore her out,” I whispered as I slowly untangled myself from Bella’s embrace. She didn’t flinch, and I found myself checking her pulse and breathing to make sure she was okay. “More so than I thought. She’s out cold.”

“Probably from the stress her parents put on her combined with her heat. I’m sure she’s miserable. Do you need to stretch? I can take your place so she doesn’t feel abandoned.” Kings was already stripping down to his underwear.

“That sounds great. I’m getting a little sore from laying here.” The swap was seamless, I rolled backward and Kings slipped right in beside Bella, wrapping an arm around her just as I had a moment ago. She shifted slightly to press her face against his chest and murmured something that none of us understood. I watched her nuzzle my little brother for a minute, then excused myself to the bathroom. A glance at the

clock told me it had been hours since we'd been sleeping. Bella must be exhausted.

When I came back from the bathroom, I walked over to the window to talk to Drake. He was staring out at the gardens. "Did you get them taken care of?"

He shook his head. "I didn't. Nothing I did made a difference. Mother would not have them thrown out. Then Adam came up and somehow found a concealed weapon on them." Drake smirked. "That got them tossed into the dungeon."

"How did you plant a weapon?" I knew that Bella's parents wouldn't be dumb enough to come into our castle with anything like that. They were too weaselly to threaten us directly.

"Kings talked to Adam. He explained the situation and Adam volunteered to help. But don't worry, he promised not to tell Mom." I made a face and my older brother raised an eyebrow.

"Horatio knows too. But he also vowed to keep it from our mother," I admitted. Drake nodded. I had expected him to be pissed, but instead, he seemed relieved.

Twenty-Three





TAKING OUT THE TRASH

ISABELLA

I woke to find Kings curled up beside me. I was certain Lan had been there before I fell asleep. It didn't matter. I could still smell him, so I knew he was close. I was starving, so I gently shook Kings and sat up. "Where's dinner?"

My question was answered by three separate laughs, and I felt a wave of relief knowing my husbands were nearby. How had I adjusted to them being my husbands so quickly? Was that a trick of my heat, or was it because my heart knew they were mine before they realized it?

Drake brought a plate over, sat next to me and asked, "Will you let me feed you?" I nodded, smiling when I saw that he'd brought me a steaming plate of spaghetti with meat sauce and cheese. It smelled like Heaven, and I wondered if I'd died. The first bite brought me back to reality. "Is it too hot?" he asked.

"No, it's perfect. Thank you," I said between bites. "But if you don't start getting me bites faster, I'm taking the fork away from you."

“Don’t be a brat,” he teased. There were a million questions I wanted to ask about what had happened after Lan and I left the party, but food was all I could focus on. I could feel another wave of desire coming over me, and knew that if I didn’t eat now, I wouldn’t have another chance for hours. Especially when all three of them were here. I wondered if they would be shy and awkward around each other if I asked them all to fuck me at the same time.

Drake groaned and squeezed the fork so hard it bent in half. I laughed, even though I knew it was my fault. My pheromones affected Drake and Lan more than they did Kings, because of their alpha nature. “I’m sorry,” I said through my laughter.

“It’s fine. You need to eat. You’re gonna need your strength.” His words sounded like a threat, but it was one I was excited to see play out.

“I have some thoughts about that,” I smirked. He raised an eyebrow and looked at his brothers. When his eyes returned to mine, I nodded slowly, making sure he understood my meaning.

“You mean...” he let the question die on his lips.

“I do. Can you handle it?” I looked at him for a moment before meeting Lan’s gaze and then Kings’ eyes. Each of them looked like a deer in headlights. You’d think I’d asked them to sleep with each other instead of just wanting the three of them to have sex with their shared wife at the same time. “Or are you too prudish?”

I knew that the implied dare would have at least two of them jumping on the bandwagon. Lan stared at me intently. "I'm in." At least he trusted me enough to commit. I turned to Kings.

He nodded. "Me too." Then I looked at Drake, expecting him to say no.

"Let's do it," he responded eagerly. Shock took over and my eyes went wide. My jaw dropped and I couldn't form words. A moment later, Drake joined his brothers by stripping down to his boxers. Lan disappeared into the bathroom only to return with a small bottle and a few towels. Apparently, they were more prepared for my suggestion than I was.

"Are you sure? I mean, I can't believe you all agreed so easily," I stammered.

"Bella, we're big boys now. We can share just fine. Why don't you let us take care of you?" Lan's words sent a shiver through me. I could sense their need as if it were my own. Hell, maybe it was my need that was being pushed through them. There was no real way to tell for sure. From the looks on their faces, it didn't matter whose desire it was, they were ready to act on it.

There were so many things I wanted to talk about; I had questions about last night and my parents. But a wave of desire passed over me and everything fell away as I collapsed back against the pillows. My skin was on fire. I kicked the soft sheet away and fanned myself. I tried to speak, but couldn't form words.

My men shared a look, then climbed into my nest with me. Drake pulled me onto my side facing him while Kings slid in behind me. Lan made his way around both of them to kneel by my head. I barely registered him handing the small bottle to Kings before he was brushing his fingers across my face and through my hair.

Drake pressed his lips to mine while Kings kissed my neck and shoulders. Their hands caressed my skin, sending electric shivers down my spine. Instead of cooling me off, their touch was setting me more on fire. I needed more. I wanted more. While I was distracted, they'd removed the last remaining barriers between us. I felt Drake's erection pressed into my stomach, and Kingsley's pressed into my ass.

When Drake started to trail kisses down my neck to my chest, I reached above me and guided Lan's cock into my mouth. I hummed against it as he sucked in a ragged breath. I felt Kings slide his fingers along my slit, coating them with slick before slowly inching one into my ass. The sensation was nearly overwhelming, causing my breath to catch. Then Drake coated his fingers with slick and started rubbing my clit while he slid two fingers inside of me. I tried to moan my pleasure at what they were doing to me, but Lan's girth made it impossible.

Instead, I reached for him again, wrapping an arm around his ass and pulling him closer, silently begging him to fuck my mouth. It only took a moment for him to understand my request, and he shifted a little to find a more comfortable

angle. He slowly thrust into my mouth, stretching my throat the way I'd wanted.

Kings added another finger, increasing the pressure in my ass. Each of them encouraged me to stop them if they crossed a line or if anything hurt. But I wanted more. I needed more. I hummed against Lan's cock, grinding myself against the other two the best I could. Kings slid his dick into my ass, at some point he had to have added some lube, but I didn't catch it. The sensation was almost painful at first and he froze. I was afraid he would pull out and give up, but instead, he waited for Drake to slide his cock into my pussy.

“Oh, Elle, you feel so good.”

“Mmm, Izzy, you're so tight.”

“Bella, your mouth is amazing.”

Their praise had me wriggling against them, wanting more. I'd never expected that to be something I was into, but at this moment, it almost sent me over the edge. Drake and Kings worked out a rhythm that stretched me and filled me so much that I thought I'd break. Yet I wanted more. I encouraged all three of them to go faster, needing to find my release while giving them theirs.

Lan thrust into my mouth in time with his brothers, the three of them pounding into me harder and faster. Their thrusts hammered into me, over and over, until I felt Lan and Kings come, and Drake's dick swelled with the knot that would hold us in place until we'd had enough. My body relaxed as Lan and Kings both slid out of me. They each grabbed a damp rag

and cleaned me up, before cleaning themselves and trading spots. Another wave of desire passed over me, and I was excited for what would come next.

Kings slid his cock past my lips, not hesitating in his quest to fuck my mouth. Lan's cock slipped into my ass with no resistance, but he groaned when I squeezed it because of my orgasm. Drake rocked his hips, prolonging my pleasure while Lan thrust into me from behind. These men were everything I needed, everything I'd ever wanted. I felt Drake's knot release after he came again. A moment later, Lan and Kings both finished in me as well. I felt sated and sleepy again, but I refused to give in.

I let them clean me up and feed me again. I wanted another round, but needed the answers to my questions first. I kissed each of them, then we settled back into my nest to snuggle.

“What happened last night after Lan and I left?” I pointed my gaze at Drake. “Did anyone ever find Tracy?”

“No sign of her, unfortunately. I've got some of the guards searching. They'll let us know if they find her,” Kings cut in.

“And you won't have to worry about your parents bothering us again. They're locked up,” Drake replied simply.

A wicked smile crossed my lips. “Really?” As worried as I was about Tracy, I was relieved that my parents wouldn't be an issue.

“Yeah, Adam found a weapon on each of them,” Kings added. If I hadn't already been in love with these men, they

would have just stolen my heart.

“How did you convince him to plant the weapon?” I asked with a laugh.

“My lady! We would never do that!” Kings replied in mock horror. “We are not the bad guys. We don’t plant weapons. Besides, what if they’d tried to hurt you?”

I couldn’t miss the twinkle in his eye. Even if he wouldn’t admit it, I knew he was responsible, and I was forever grateful. “Thank you,” I said, leaning over to kiss him. He pulled me into his arms and slid me onto his lap.

“No thanks necessary. Just doing what I can to protect my wife.” *My wife*. I would never get tired of them referring to me that way. I relaxed against his chest and let sleep take me again. I knew that we would be hidden away for the next few days while the world went on around us. The only thing that mattered right now was my heat. Other omegas hated going through it, because if you’re unmated, it’s miserable; and if you are mated, you risk pregnancy. Most of the omegas I knew hated that idea. But not me. I said a tiny prayer that my heat would do exactly what it was designed for. I wanted more than anything to start a family with my men.

I lost track of days as we slept, fucked, ate, and slept again. Each day, the desire would wake me. And every time, Drake, Lan, and Kings would tenderly, generously take care of my needs. In my nest, in the shower, on the bedroom floor halfway between the shower and the nest. It didn’t matter where we were, if desire hit, they would take care of it.

We didn't speak of my parents again. When the urges became less painful and came less often, the guys decided that they could trade off occupying me. Drake went back to his duties first. Then Kings claimed to have things he needed to take care of. Lan stayed with me for as long as he could, then called Kings to swap.

"I'll be back in a few hours. Don't let Kings talk you into anything crazy," Lan laughed and kissed me as he walked out the door. I pulled my robe tighter against me. I was feeling more myself today. I still had the urge to snuggle, though. I closed the door and walked back to the couch where Kings was waiting for me.

"Movie?" he prompted quietly, ignoring his brother's accusations. I nodded enthusiastically.

"I want a musical," I said with a giggle. I settled onto the couch and pulled the soft blanket over me while he switched the movies out. We snuggled up together and got lost in the black and white film.

"I don't understand why you like these so much," he whispered at the end of the movie.

I sniffed back the tears that always fell at the sweet ending. "It's beautiful."

A glance at the time had me wondering where Lan and Drake were. "Shouldn't they be back here by now?"

"They both texted that they would be late," Kings explained, holding up his phone for me to see.

“Oh,” I said softly. I’d gotten used to them being available to me at any time. Since my heat was ending, I would have to adjust to them having other responsibilities. “What will I do once everything goes back to normal?”

Kings made a face, not understanding my question. “Back to normal?”

“With my heat ending and your parents finally accepting me, you three will have to get back to your work. What will I do all day while you’re busy?” I posed the question a different way, thinking maybe he was trying to avoid answering.

“I hadn’t thought about that. You can do whatever you want,” he smirked.

“Whatever I want?” I asked. I don’t think he’s thought this through. I raised an eyebrow at him. “What if I want to do you?”

“Absolutely. I can handle that all day long. You forget that my meetings are more flexible than Drake or Lan’s.” He laughed at the face I made.

“What if I want to go back to my job on the mainland?” I didn’t, but he didn’t need to know that yet. I’d been working there with children whose families were less fortunate in addition to my internship at the newspaper. It was rewarding, but I was certain that would be nearly impossible for me to continue as a princess.

His eyes went wide. “You want to leave us?” His voice wavered. That had hit him harder than I’d expected.

I quickly shook my head and scooted over into his lap. “Never. I don’t really want to go back to the mainland. It was just a question. You shouldn’t tell me that I can do whatever I want. Or at least qualify it with ‘within reason’ or something.” I pressed my lips to his, kissing away the fear I had put in his eyes.



KINGSLEY

Elle's question about going back to the mainland caught me off guard. Of course, she would never want to leave us. It was a ridiculous thought that crept in when I wasn't thinking. I knew that she felt the same way about the three of us as we felt about her.

It only took her a second to realize what she'd said. Then her lips were on mine and I was holding her close. I never wanted to let her go. I vowed to myself that I wouldn't let her go.

The next couple of weeks passed without issues. We spent more time together as a family than we did with Elle individually but we also made sure we each got one night a week when we had her to ourselves. Drake took Elle dancing, Lan talked her into skydiving, and I did my best to keep her snuggled up in my room when it was my night.

One morning we woke early and Elle looked pale. "Are you feeling okay, doll?" I touched my hand to her forehead, noting that she was clammy. "Should I get the doctor?"

She shook her head. “I’m okay. I just need water. Don’t get up; I can get it.” Elle pressed a kiss to my lips and headed to the bathroom. I thought it was a little strange since she’d said she was getting water, but when you gotta go, you gotta go. I flopped back on the bed and dozed for a bit while I waited for her to return.

“Kings! Text Drake and Lan. I need you all right now.” Her words woke me and I ran to the bathroom. I turned the knob, but it was locked.

“Are you okay?” I asked through the closed door. I was tempted to break it down and burst in on her.

“I need you to get your brothers. Please,” she begged. I couldn’t tell if she was upset or laughing. I pressed my palm to the door before turning to grab my phone from the nightstand.

“They’ll be here in a moment,” I said, flopping down on the floor next to the locked bathroom door.

What felt like an eternity later, my brothers entered my room and I stood up. “We’re all here.” Speaking to the door made me feel like we’d all done something to upset her.

The bathroom door flung open and Elle bounced out, jumping into Lan’s arms. She reached for Drake and me, and kissed each of us hard. “What’s going on? Kings made it sound like something was wrong,” Drake growled.

Elle leaned back in Lan’s arms until he let her go. “You three might want to sit down.” She started to pace the floor,

and the three of us dropped where we stood, choosing to sit on the floor so she would speak faster. “I’m pregnant!”

At that moment, I think the three of us wore identical expressions of shock and joy. There would be no way to know who the actual father was until the baby was born, but it didn’t matter. We were going to be dads.

“Are you sure?” Drake asked. He was pale and I worried that he might faint.

Elle nodded. “I took three different tests this week. All three were positive. We’re having a baby.” Her voice was filled with wonder at her own words.

Lan jumped up, wrapped his arms around her again and spun her in a circle before setting her back on her feet and kissing her. “This is the best news ever!” It had been a long time since I’d seen him this excited.

Drake stood next and pulled Elle into his arms. He laid his head on top of hers while he hugged her close. “Amazing,” he whispered. When he finally let her go, she looked at me. I hadn’t moved.

“Are you okay?” she asked, taking a cautious step in my direction.

I waited a beat before I stood and crossed the few steps between us. “No,” I said simply, watching her expression change from excitement to worry. “I’m so much better than okay. This is fantastic!” I kissed her passionately.

The three of us crowded around her and gathered her into a group hug. “We need to announce this as soon as possible,” Drake said.

Elle shook her head. “We can’t.”

He looked confused. “Why not?”

“Because we have to wait and make sure the little one is okay first. We can’t have everyone excited about this and then something happens. That would be tragic,” she explained. “I would be devastated if we announced it and the baby wasn’t healthy.”

I hated how that made sense. “Then we’ll wait until you’re ready.”

“Until then, the three of us will take care of you in any way you desire,” Lan offered. Our girl clearly liked that idea, a wicked grin spreading across her face. I had a feeling we were going to regret Lan making that pledge. Not that he needed to give her the words. We would do whatever she wanted anyway. She knew that. We’d proven it several times already.

“We need to get started on renovations. No one needs to know that it’s because of the baby. We should have a proper family suite anyway,” Drake said as he turned to Lan. They started to plan the layout of the new room our family would use. I knew that they would take care of it, and I could take care of Elle.

“Come, sit down. Let me rub your feet, little mama,” I said, taking her hand and gently pulling her to the couch.

“You can’t call me that. People will figure it out before we’re ready,” she chastised.

“Only in private, I promise. Now give me those gorgeous toes,” I demanded, pulling her feet into my lap and gently rubbing them. The thought of my child growing inside of her made me weak in the knees. We’d only barely started talking about the possibilities, and now we were starting an actual family. I wondered what our parents would say about it.

“Do you think they’ll get angry?” She seemed to read my thoughts. That’s been happening a lot more lately. It was probably an after effect of bonding. We’d all gotten closer through and since her heat.

“I don’t care if they do. But no, I don’t think so. They want us to carry on the line, and that means babies. I think they’ll be excited. Just like we are.” I hoped that my words were true, but couldn’t get past a nagging feeling that our mother’s reaction would not be what I hoped.

Lan ordered a huge breakfast and we spent the day cuddled up, talking about the future. The four of us were riding the high of amazing news, enjoying each other while we had a chance. There would be time to celebrate officially when we made the announcement, but for now, we kept things low key and private.

The icing on the cake of our day came in the form of a written announcement from the king. He had reviewed our accusations against Elle’s parents and made his official decision. He was banishing them from the kingdom, effective

immediately. They would be forced to sell their home and move at a minimum to the mainland. When someone was banished from one island kingdom, the other two accepted that as law and refused to allow them entry. It was essentially like being banished from the island itself.

“Then we don’t even have to tell them,” Elle gushed. “This is fantastic news.” I didn’t want to upset her, but the fact that she was pregnant would give them a reason to argue against the king’s ruling. We needed to make sure that they didn’t find out, even after they left the island. Or we would have to make sure King Lester wasn’t somehow conned into changing his mind when the news came out. This had the potential to complicate things.

“We’ll keep it a secret until after they’re gone. Then we’ll fight like hell if we have to in order to keep them away,” Drake insisted. He knew the laws better than any of us, so it would be up to him to find any loophole they could use and close it before they had a chance to manipulate the situation.

The next few weeks moved quickly. We stayed busy with secret preparations for the baby, or babies – we couldn’t be sure yet, and kept to ourselves. Our social circle seemed to understand the rejected invitations; no one got upset that we needed time to bond as a family.

The four of us were shocked when we received an invitation that we couldn’t refuse. It was dinner with the king and queen. “Do we have to?” Elle whined, handing the fancy note to Lan.

He looked it over and handed it to Drake. “It looks legit to me. Is it just coincidence that it’s the day before Bella’s first doctor’s appointment for the baby?”

Worry furrowed in Drake’s brow. “It has to be. They can’t know. We haven’t told anyone. The four of us are the only ones who know.”

“Unless they’ve hacked into our computers and saw all the baby stuff Lan’s added to the list he’s keeping,” I teased. I’d meant it as a joke, but both Drake and Lan froze.

“You don’t think?”

“No, they couldn’t.”

Yet both of my brothers were suddenly running for the computer and furiously tapping keys to pull up scans and menus. While I was into the security aspect of things, Lan was pretty good with computers. He’d been the one to make sure our rooms weren’t bugged when Elle came to live with us.

“Shit,” he growled. “How did I miss that?” Lan pointed out something to Drake, who cursed under his breath.

“So they know?” I asked, wishing I’d never opened my big mouth.

“Most likely. But I can cut off the surveillance feed now. The only problem is that they’ll know that we know about them spying.” Lan’s words echoed in my head. We’d be directly challenging the monarchy. Or would we? “Would they have proof that we knew it was them?” I whispered. Drake’s face lit up.

“Can you delete the last two minutes of recording, then shut it down? Then there would be no way for them to know that we’re on to them. They would just know that we discovered the bug. We can even mention it at dinner,” he rambled. Lan nodded and got to work. It would take him a while, if it was anything like destroying the links to the hidden cameras we’d found in each of our rooms. But if anyone could do it, my brother could.

I turned my attention to Elle, who was staring out the window. “I don’t want them to know yet. Is it horrible that she scares me?”

I pulled her into my arms and kissed her forehead. “We’ll keep you safe. It’ll be okay. Please don’t worry.” She nodded and buried her head in my chest. I hated how our mother still got to her. Elle shouldn’t have anything else to worry about except for the life growing inside of her. I hated my parents for adding stress to her mind. I rubbed my hands down her back and held her for a while.

“Okay, the recordings and bugs have been taken care of. They won’t be able to spy on us anymore,” Lan announced. He strolled over and wrapped his arms around Elle while I was still holding her. She turned her face up so he could press a kiss to her lips. Then she slipped out from between us and strolled across the room to where Drake was checking his email.

“Don’t think that you’re getting away from me that easily, mister.” Her tone implied that she was angry with him again,

and his face jerked up to meet her gaze. Laughter rolled from her lips just before she grabbed him and jumped into his arms. Since her heat, they'd been getting along better. I wasn't sure if that was because he was trying harder or if he'd just learned to keep his mouth shut.

Lan and I watched as she attacked him with her mouth, kissing his lips, then his neck. She was purposefully making it hard for him to hold on to her just to see what he would do. Drake struggled to keep hold of her before he finally gave up and dropped to the floor, making sure that he hit first. I thought he was going to yell at her about knocking him over. Lan and I both froze for a moment.

Elle's laughter filled the room, and Drake looked from her to us and back. Then he started to chuckle. "Good one, Izzy. I think my ass is bruised now. Are you okay?"

Her smile fell away. "I'm fine. I didn't mean to hurt you; I'm sorry. I'll kiss it and make it all better." Her innocent declaration had the three of us smirking. After a moment, she realized how we'd taken her offer and her cheeks turned red. "You three are in so much trouble." She play growled and lunged for me. I ran from her, making sure to take a path that would take her past Lan, who grabbed her.

"If we're already in trouble, then I guess this won't hurt," he said and pressed his lips to hers. I crept up behind her and wrapped my arms around her waist, hugging her to me. Drake slowly stood and when I thought he'd leave the room, he walked over and engulfed the three of us in a bear hug. The

rest of the day quickly devolved into snuggles on the couch to ease Elle's nerves about the upcoming dinner with the monarchs. Giving her a night to relax was just what the doctor would have ordered.

Twenty-Four



PUTTING THE KING IN HIS PLACE



ISABELLA

Three days. That was all the time I had to prepare for dinner with the king and queen. I needed more time to come up with a believable lie for why I wouldn't have wine, or eat sushi. Lan assured me that he would take care of the menu himself without letting their parents know. If this was a ploy to make us admit that I was pregnant, I fully expected the queen to use whatever methods she could. I started to completely freak out about it the day before. "I'm not ready. I can't sit there and lie directly to them. It won't work."

Drake had been trying to calm my nerves all day. He even stayed with me instead of going to a meeting with his father and some foreign dignitary. I was shocked when he said the king wasn't upset with him for flaking. They knew. That was the only explanation.

"It'll be fine. Just avoid the subject. If they outright ask, one of us can change the topic," he assured me.

"What if I spaz and just blurt the news during an awkward silence?" I would be mortified if that happened, especially

since we'd decided to wait another month or two before announcing it.

“If that happens, we will deal with it then. Please stop stressing. It's not good for either of you.” He patted the couch next to him, and I sighed before dropping down on it. Drake pulled a blanket over me and I snuggled up to him.

“Are you trying to distract me?” I asked, even though I already knew the answer. Of course, he was trying to distract me. He'd already sent Lan to double-check the menu, and Kings to pick out a new dress for me. Drake had even given Kings specific instructions to make sure it was flowy and wouldn't cling. He didn't want me to be paranoid about my tiny bump that had already started to form.

“Maybe. Is it working? Or should I start a fight?” He cocked an eyebrow at me and grinned, I had to laugh at his joke. I might even want him to distract me from my worries.

“What do you want to fight about?” I teased back, wondering if we could hold on to this easy companionship that seemed to have formed between us. We hadn't fought since I'd told them all that we were expecting. Realistically this bliss wouldn't last the entire time I was pregnant, but I was determined to enjoy it while I could.

His eyes went wide and he stared at me for a moment, trying to decide if I was serious or not. “Maybe we could argue about how you're wearing too many clothes right now. Or about how you're not letting me take care of you the way

you let Kings and Lan.” There was a touch of sadness in his words.

Had I been pushing him away? Was I letting the other two take care of me more than I’d allowed Drake? I turned to face him, putting a little space between us. “Do I really do that?” It was getting harder to hold back my emotions since my hormones were changing. I went from teasing to on the verge of tears in less than a minute.

“I don’t think you mean to, but you haven’t let me feed or cuddle up with you the way you have them. I’m sorry, I really wasn’t trying to start a fight. I just thought maybe we could talk about it.” The tender emotion in his voice was all it took for the floodgates to open. I started crying, sobs wracking my body. Drake pulled me onto his lap and held me close. “I’m sorry,” he repeated, rubbing my back until the tears subsided. He handed me a tissue and managed not to laugh when I loudly blew my nose.

When I faced him again, I wiped tears from his cheeks. “You have nothing to apologize for, Drake. I’m the one who messed up. I want you to take care of me. Most of the time, you step back and let Kings or Lan do it. I thought that meant you weren’t interested,” I admitted.

“It’s okay. I like to see you happy and letting them care for you puts that smile on your face. I don’t want to mess this up. We haven’t had peace for this long since we were teens and I kissed you the first time.” His words brought forth an image into my mind. Our first kiss. I knew why I had pushed the

memory back so far into my mind. It would always remind me of our last kiss before I left. Before Annabeth. I couldn't let myself dwell on that.

I let the memory take me for a moment, and I was standing next to the pool house with Drake's hand on my cheek. His lips were gently pressed against mine, barely holding back the passion he wanted to pour into the kiss. It had been our first kiss; neither of us wanted to give that to someone else. I had been so in love with him back then, or so I had thought. I realize how much that small emotion paled in comparison to what we have now.

I leaned forward and took his face in my hands. Then I pressed my lips to his, recreating that first sweet moment. Then I slid my hands into his hair and teased his mouth open with my tongue. I wanted him more now than I had while I was away. The difference was that I could take him now. So I did.

I kissed him deeply while my fingers quickly popped open the buttons of his shirt and peeled it from him. We broke contact for a moment as I pulled his undershirt over his head, exposing his bare chest. "Izzy," Drake started, but I swallowed his words with another kiss, letting my tongue distract his and draw him deeper into our need.

The next time we broke contact was for me to strip off the rest of his clothes. After that, I slid off his lap and pulled my dress over my head, exposing the fact that I hadn't worn anything underneath. Drake growled and pounced on me,

dragging me onto the rug with him. We rolled over and over, kissing, touching, desperate like teenagers. I gasped as his hand slid between my legs to slide along my opening and rub my clit.

I wrapped my fingers around his cock and stroked it slowly, making his breath hitch. I wanted him to be as worked up as I was. I lazily continued to stroke him, my fingers dancing around his stomach and thighs.

Then he flipped me onto my back and buried his face between my legs. His tongue lapped at my pussy, humming as my slick coated his tongue. Drake slid two fingers inside of me as he sucked on my clit. My back arched and I whimpered, begging for more. I stretched my fingers as much as I could, but I couldn't reach his dick. I tried to shift to a different angle, but he held me in place. He continued licking and sucking while his fingers stroked into me over and over until I came.

I cried out his name as he abandoned me for a moment, then thrust his cock into me forcefully. The sensation sent me back over the edge again. His groan of pleasure met my panted breaths and he started to thrust. "More; I need more." Desire washed over us until he started to thrust harder and faster. I loved that Drake didn't treat me like I was fragile just because of the baby. I lifted my hips to meet his thrusts, then caught him off guard and flipped him onto his back. I laughed and climbed on top of him, easing myself down on his dick slowly so I could watch him squirm.

He started to buck his hips, bouncing me so I would drop onto him harder. I fought to control the orgasm, but couldn't hold it back. As soon as I came, his knot swelled and he flipped me onto my back again, so he could thrust in small bursts. He couldn't pull out, so instead, he focused on stroking my clit and moving his hips back and forth as much as he could. He was at the perfect angle to hit my g-spot, setting me off again. I felt myself gush all over him with my release, which set him off. "Izzy!" he cried as he came. Then he carefully lowered himself onto me and rolled so I would be on his chest. I guess he was worried about the baby after all.

A knock on the door pulled us from our post-orgasmic bliss. When the door opened before we could even try to cover up, Drake grabbed the blanket from the couch and draped it over me and his lower half.

"No need to hide the goods, love, we were just giving you two a warning that we were here." Lan's laugh filled the room, and Drake relaxed.

"Asshole," he retorted.

"Aw, man, did I miss it?" Kings sounded disappointed at not catching us in the act.

"Yeah, and you owe me a hundred bucks," Lan replied, holding out a hand. Kings pulled out his wallet and grumbled as he handed over the money.

"Wait a minute here. What were you two betting on exactly?" I asked, wrapping the blanket around me and stalking over to them. Drake busied himself putting on his

pants and watching his brothers get in trouble, while trying not to look amused.

“Oh, um, well, we had a bet going about whether you two would be naked or not when we got back. I figured you’d have sex as soon as we left, but Lan thought you’d wait a while. Looks like he was right,” Kings said with a laugh.

I punched them both in their shoulders and took the bill from Lan. “I’ll take this. Thank you,” I said in a clipped tone. I turned and walked back across the room, only stopping for a moment when Kings grabbed the edge of the blanket and tugged. I glared at him over my shoulder, not bothering to cover myself. Then I walked over to Drake, pulled him in for a steamy kiss, and slid the cash into his waistband.

“Now that we’ve taken care of that, we have to get ready for dinner with your parents. We can’t be late.” I grabbed Drake’s hand and walked toward the bathroom. We needed to clean up anyway. I waited at the bathroom door for Kings to get there, kissed him chastely and shut the door in his face. Drake and Lan laughed at him from opposite sides of the door.

Drake and I showered together, taking great care to make sure each other’s bodies were clean. It took way too much restraint not to make love again. The only thing stopping us was the fact that Landyn and Kingsley had picked the lock to the door and were standing outside the shower watching us. It wouldn’t have mattered, but we really did have to get ready for dinner.

I dressed slowly, wanting to put off this interaction for as long as possible. It hurt my heart that my child wouldn't have loving grandparents. Adam and Horatio would love them, of course, but I'd wanted my parents to be less shitty than they were. Plus, the king and queen would not be doting on my children. There was nothing we could do about it, but my parents were horrible, and the monarchs were nearly as bad. I didn't want my children to have anything to do with them. I wasn't looking forward to the backhanded compliments the queen liked to give me, either. I worried that she already knew I was pregnant and would announce it to the kingdom before I was ready. Or worse, that she would insist it couldn't be her sons' child and force me to publicly take a paternity test.

There would be no coming back from that kind of humiliation.

I wore a fancy black gown that was flowy and hid my growing stomach. Each of my guys was wearing a black suit with an aquamarine tie that nearly matched my ring. If it wasn't for the company we were meeting, I might be excited about this dinner.

I dragged my feet on the way to dinner so much that Drake threatened to carry me. I admitted that might be easier, but it would ruin my dress. So, I was resigned to walk, feeling like a prisoner being marched to her death.



LANDYN

I laughed as Bella teased us about the bet. Kings and I knew that she wasn't really angry. It was just another way that she got us riled up. And if it helped her nerves about dinner, it was worth the mild aggravation. After their shower, she let me help her get dressed. When we were all ready, we headed to the grand dining hall where we would meet the king and queen.

I had spoken with them about Bella's coronation. Since she was officially announced as our wife, she should be crowned as princess. King Lester was willing, but Mother had a fit. I'd managed to keep calm and leave without saying anything I would regret. I wondered what it would take for her to accept our wife.

We sat down to dinner in our assigned places, decorative name cards sitting in front of each plate. As usual, the king and queen would sit opposite each other. Bella was sitting on the king's right, Drake on his left. Kings was seated next to Drake, and I was between Mother and Bella. I was glad to be the buffer. That would prevent her from saying anything out of

line to our wife. I wasn't worried about what she would say so much as how Bella would react, especially since she was pregnant.

We waited patiently for the king and queen to arrive, keeping our conversation to small talk or discussions about the kingdom. There had been an increase in protests by the ORM. It appeared they were putting our donations to good use. Our parents would be mortified to know that their money had paid for most of the protests for the past ten years or so. We wanted equality just as much as the omegas did. They deserved to make their own decisions, not be forced into marriages that they weren't happy with.

One of the guards announced the monarchs and we stood to welcome them. It was unfortunate that Adam and Horatio had to miss this dinner, but I understood that as betas, their responsibilities to the kingdom had to come first. After curtsies and bows, they were seated and dinner began. Their small talk was baited as if they were using it to pry information out of us. "Have you heard about the protests?" Drake asked, trying to hide his smirk.

"I wish those people would just drop the whole issue. There's nothing wrong with the way things have always been done," King Lester growled. It had been a sensitive subject since we were teens. He hated that the three of us wanted to side with the protesters.

"Then maybe you should change the laws so they don't feel like they have to protest," Kings offered. He usually stayed

silent and let Drake handle the omega issue. It seemed as if having our own omega to protect made us all bolder.

Dinner started with salad and soup. I noticed that Bella only picked at both. I squeezed her hand under the table and she shot me a small smile. I wondered if it was the company that had her appetite held hostage. Mother called for a server. “Where is the wine? Everyone needs wine with dinner.”

The server brought out a bottle and showed it to her for approval. “Yes, yes, that’s fine. Just pour it.” Her annoyed tone had the server moving quickly. The poor girl spilled the king’s glass, and I thought she was going to cry.

Mother screamed at her. “How can you be so impudent and clumsy? You’ve made a mess all over the rug. It’s ruined! I should have you locked up for this!” She ran off to get some rags to clean it up with, and Bella handed her glass to King Lester.

“I don’t feel like wine right now. You can have mine.” My brothers and I knew the reason she didn’t feel like wine, but we weren’t going to say anything.

Mother stood up and objected, “No! That’s Isabella’s wine. You can wait until the server brings you a new glass.” The king glared at her. She raced around the table and tried to take the glass from him. He fought her off without spilling a drop. Mother clawed at his arm and whined at him to stop.

“There’s no reason for dramatics, dear. If she doesn’t want the wine, I’ll drink it.” With that, he took a long drink of it and

Mother paled. I looked at Drake and Kings. They shrugged. It wasn't just me. That was strange behavior.

“Mother, is everything okay?” I asked, turning to watch her as she stared at her husband. She looked as if she was waiting for something.

“Of course,” she answered. “Why wouldn't it be?” Her tone was snappy, which had become her normal since Bella came to live at the castle.

Before I could question her further, King Lester started to cough. “Father? Are you all right?” Drake was on his feet and by the king's side in seconds. He turned and looked at me. “Call the medic. Something's wrong.”

I nodded and pulled out my phone. Once I was assured the medic was on his way, I hung up and turned back to my mother. She had something to do with this. I knew it. She had run back to her seat and was gripping the edge of the table so hard her knuckles had gone white. “Is there something you need to tell us, Mother?”

“I'm certain I have no idea what you mean, Landyn.” Her response was clipped. This was what we'd always referred to as the queen's voice. She used it for official duties and when she wanted to make someone feel small.

“It's just a little strange, don't you think? You insisted that the king could wait for another glass of wine, and that the glass he held was for Bella. Then as soon as he drank it, he started to choke, as if he'd been poisoned.” I didn't hold one

iota of shame for accusing her. I was convinced that she was guilty and wanted a full confession.

The king continued to choke, struggling to breathe, while Drake and Kings did what they could to keep him calm and comfortable until the medic could get here. Bella was staring at the queen with her mouth open. “That’s ridiculous, Landyn. Why would I want to poison your father?”

“I never said you were trying to poison him. I said he was acting as if he’d been poisoned. He drank from Bella’s glass, Mother. You were trying to poison her. Weren’t you?” I accused, not caring that it could be considered treason and have me thrown into the dungeon.

“Why, I’d never!” she exclaimed. I stood and grabbed the glass of wine, holding it out to her. She refused to take it.

“Then you won’t have a problem drinking the wine in this glass.” She stared at me, as if I were trying to kill her. Maybe I was. Or maybe I was trying to prove a point. “Or should I drink it?” I brought the glass to my lips and paused.

“Landyn, no!” my mother screamed, slapping the glass out of my hand and sending it crashing to the floor. The glass shattered, spilling the rest of the wine on the marble floor.

I looked at the guard who was standing by the door. “You should escort the queen back to her room and keep her there. She will be tried for attempted murder, and maybe even murder if the king doesn’t make it.”

Mother's protests echoed through the room. I couldn't believe that she would do that to her own children. Trying to take away our wife, our soulmate, was callous and cruel. What kind of mother does that?

Drake and Kings were helping the medic get the king strapped onto a stretcher, and Bella was holding his hand. "I'm so sorry. I never meant for anyone to hurt you. I thought I was being helpful." Her whispered words touched my heart and made tears spring to my eyes. The king tried to nod, but movement was difficult with him strapped down, especially after the medic put the oxygen mask on him. They would try to pump his stomach and administer anything they had to counteract the poison. Without knowing what she'd used, it would be nearly impossible to treat him properly.

I pulled Bella into my arms and held her while she cried. "It's okay, love, this wasn't your fault." I turned her face into my chest when I saw the king start to seize. She didn't need to watch this. I was fairly certain he was dying. That would put Drake in charge, especially after our mother was convicted of murder. She would be put to death for killing the king. There was no other punishment for that particular crime.

"But that wine was meant for me. She tried to kill me. Again." Bella paled and whispered, "And our child. That monster."

The realization that if Bella had taken a sip of that wine, it would be her strapped to the gurney and being wheeled out began to sink in. Rage settled in my heart and I wanted

nothing more than to beat my mother for what she'd tried to do. For what she'd done. To all of us. But most of all to Drake.

In an instant, Drake would become both the new king and an orphan. He would need us more now than ever. It was strange that I didn't feel anything other than sorry this happened. I guessed that knowing he wasn't my father made it easier to say goodbye. Kings didn't look as upset as Drake either.

I wondered how things would change with my brother in power. When Lester had taken over, he'd apparently pushed his brothers aside in favor of ruling on his own. Drake had always promised that we'd do it together. I hoped that was true. I held Bella against me as they wheeled the king out, taking him to the medical wing. Drake stood there, in the middle of the dining room, looking lost.

Bella pushed away from me to go to him. She pulled him into her arms and kissed him gently. "Go to him," she said simply and stepped back. Drake rushed out of the room, following the medic who had his father. Then she grabbed my hand and Kingsley's, waiting until Drake was out of sight to speak. "He's dying. This is going to destroy Drake. We need to be there for him; he won't handle it well."

Kings and I nodded, knowing that her words were true. There was no way to prepare for losing a parent. Even with Kings and me losing our mother, it still wouldn't be the same as losing both parents at once. He'd always been the one who was closest to the king. Drake had played the part of the

golden son, trusted advisor, and confidant. Now he would have to take over the king's role with no one to guide him. We headed toward the medical wing slowly, not wanting to overshadow Drake's last moments with his father.

By the time we arrived in the waiting area, Drake was sitting outside the door with his head in his hands. "I can't believe he's gone."

Bella was at his side instantly, pulling him in to hold him against her. She cradled his head against her breasts and talked softly to him. I couldn't hear what she said, but it seemed to calm him down a little. He placed a hand on her stomach and kissed her. Then she wiped his tears and they stood. Kings and I went to them, wrapping our brother in a group hug.

Twenty-Five





HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

DRAKE

Losing my father was the hardest thing I'd ever dealt with. The next few days were a blur. I had to prepare the funeral arrangements, then figure out my coronation. Once I was coronated, I would announce that my brothers would rule beside me, and we would have another coronation for them and Izzy. The four of us would rule together, as it should be. I would wait until everything settled down to start changing the omega laws.

Equality would come to our kingdom, but at what cost? We'd lost our king and next, we would lose our queen as soon as my coronation was completed. It would be up to me to tell the kingdom what had happened or to spin a story and cover it up.

“Sir? I hate to bother you, but the king had asked me to keep him updated about the protests.” One of my father's advisers had entered the office while I was preoccupied. I couldn't think of it as my office; it would always be my father's.

“Yes, Michaels, what is it?” I wanted to scream, throw things, break down, and cry. But I knew that I couldn’t do that with an entire kingdom counting on me.

“The protestors are outside the gates, sir. They’re blocking entry and exit for anyone. They have signs and are chanting. Perhaps now would be a good time to announce the king’s passing so they will call off the protest?” Michaels looked at me hopefully, as if I should jump on the chance to announce that I was now in charge. He was right, I should, but I wasn’t sure that I wanted to.

“I’ll consider it. Perhaps I should go talk to them,” I offered, standing and walking toward the door.

“No, sir, I don’t think that’s a good idea. It’s not safe for you to be involved in the protests.”

“Your objection is noted, Michaels. Thank you. I’ll have my brothers go with me. There will be nothing for you to worry about.” I sent a quick text to Kings and Lan, knowing that Izzy would insist on coming too. Then I headed for the front gates.

I had to do everything I could to protect Izzy and our child. The doctor had confirmed the pregnancy, and that the baby was healthy. It had been a bittersweet moment after the king’s passing. I couldn’t even think of him as my father anymore. I had to focus on him being the king. The king. That was me now. How had this happened? How had everything escalated so quickly? I was lost in my thoughts when I reached the gate, not bothering to wait for my brothers as I had assured Michaels that I would.

“People, please. If I could have your attention,” I called to them. They couldn’t hear me over the sounds of protest. I knew what they wanted; it was the same thing I wanted. But how could I tell them that the king was gone and I was the new one? “Excuse me! Please, I have something to say!” I shouted above their chants and yells.

Everyone stopped and stared at me. Somehow, I managed to get their attention. “I’m on your side. We are currently working on a plan that will give omegas and betas equal power and say in all aspects of their lives. Please disburse and head to your homes. There will be an official announcement this evening.” I didn’t want to shout to them that the king was dead. I would have to do a broadcast and announce it the same way my father had announced his own father’s death. Sadly, my child would never know their grandfather the way I knew mine.

The crowd began to talk and chant again. I turned and saw Izzy and my brothers heading down the path toward me. Someone threw a glass bottle and it clocked me in the jaw. I ran a hand over the spot, pulling back bloody fingers. I held up a hand to stop Izzy from coming any closer. Then I turned back to the crowd. I let out a loud whistle to get their attention again.

And I made a decision. If this was how word got spread, then so be it. “Look, I need you all to listen,” I began, shouting to be heard over the chaos. I waited for the crowd to quiet before I continued. “The king is dead. He was murdered by the queen, who will receive judgement after my coronation. I am

your new king, please listen to me. I will change the laws. Omegas and betas will have equality. You have my word. Please return to your homes now. This protest is getting you nowhere.”

I stood there, wiping blood from my chin as the crowd mulled over what I had said. Then slowly, they started to walk away. It pained me to announce my father’s death that way, especially since I outed my mother as a killer in the process. But it got their attention, and enough of them knew me that they understood. It’ll be a process to change the laws. It will take time. No matter how badly I want to push forward and make the changes instant, I can’t. The Council has to be involved.

I wondered if dissolving the Council would be a good idea. I’d toyed with it for a while. If my brothers and I ruled together with Izzy, we could make decisions without it. We could create a more fair system that allowed people to give their input as well. Perhaps reforming the Council was a better idea than getting rid of it all together. I would discuss it with my family and we’d decide together.

I turned and walked back to where Izzy, Lan, and Kings waited for me. “That didn’t go as I’d planned,” I said simply as I walked past them, dismissing Izzy’s attempt to grab my arm, and heading back into the castle. With the crowd disbursing, I was free to go back to work. I would have to have my wound treated first of course. It wouldn’t be proper to address the Council with a bleeding gash on my face.

I needed to meet with the Council to discuss the queen's sentence. I didn't want to put my mother to death; it would be easier if it were someone else making that decision. Once I had them gathered, we spoke at length about the accusations against her. They wanted to hear her side of it, so I had her brought in.

"Queen Amelia, do you understand why you're here?" one of them asked her. She blinked a few times and nodded. "Please tell us, in your own words, what happened."

It didn't take much encouragement for her to begin. "I killed the king. That is why I'm here. It should have been that dirty whore, but no, she had to offer him her drink." Then she turned to me. "Why didn't the little bitch just drink the wine? How did she know I'd poisoned her glass?"

The Council gasped. It was unnerving to hear my mother talk about wanting to kill my wife so easily. I looked from them to her. "Izzy didn't drink the wine because she's pregnant, Mother. And she's already a better mother than you've been since Annabeth died." I knew that Izzy would be upset with me for announcing her pregnancy that way, but I couldn't help it. I wanted the Council to know the extent of the queen's treachery. If she had succeeded, she would have not only killed my wife but my child as well.

"That certainly changes things, Prince Drake. The queen shall be sentenced to death. Her execution shall be immediate, with no chance for appeal." Apparently, they took threats to the royal line very seriously.

My mother sputtered, shock covering her face. She suddenly looked decades older. It was as if finding out she'd almost murdered her own grandchild nearly killed her. I stifled a laugh at her reaction. "Yes, Mother, she's pregnant. With your grandchild. That you would have killed if your plan had worked. Did you think you'd get away with it? How were you planning to hide the fact that you were the one responsible?" I knew she wouldn't answer, but I couldn't stop the questions from falling out of my mouth.

"I had no idea she was pregnant. Are you sure it's yours or your brothers'?" Her accusation cut through me.

"I'm finished with her. Please take her to the dungeon to await her public execution. Thank you," I said to the guards. It was harsh to send my own mother to the dungeon, but after she admitted what she'd planned to do and accused my wife of cheating, there was no sympathy left for her. At least not from me.

I turned back to the Council after she left. "I'd like to wait and hold one funeral for both monarchs. I know it's unorthodox, but she is my mother. Then I want to hold the coronations three days later, with the pyre between. The kingdom does not need to remain in mourning for the usual time period. We have much to celebrate. I know it will be a solemn occasion, but I'd like to show the people that we are set on moving forward."

I had expected some of them to argue, but no one did. Each member of the Council nodded and murmured their agreement

with my plan. I wondered if they actually agreed, or if they were afraid that I would be like my parents. I knew it would take years to prove myself but I was determined to do so; to set myself apart from monarchs of the past.

“There is one more item I’d like to discuss, if you don’t mind.” I spoke quietly while they prepared to leave. Each of them settled back into their seats and stared at me.

When no one spoke, I decided that was my cue to lay out my plan. “As you are all aware, my coronation is to be followed by Isabella’s.” There were nods and smiles from my audience at this statement. “But that’s not all.” Confused looks all around stared at me. I took a deep breath and continued. “As king, I have the power to change certain aspects of the monarchy and how the government is run. I will be exercising that privilege right after my coronation. Because Isabella’s won’t just be for her. It will be to officially name her as queen, and to name my brothers as kings as well. The four of us will rule together. I need to know that you are all behind me on this change, and that there won’t be any objections.”

I held my breath for a moment while I waited for a response. They exchanged glances, but no words were spoken. I nearly jumped when one of them stood. “If I may, Your Highness,” he began. I nodded and he continued. “We have discussed this matter previously, as your father was concerned you might try to change the laws. He wanted us to block this request.”

I nodded, expecting this to turn into a fight. But the man held up a hand. “However, as I said, we discussed it at his request. And we agree with you. The kingdom will benefit more from four rulers than one or two. You have our full support in making this change. I’m sure you have other issues you’d like to discuss as well, but we feel those are better left until after the other matters are taken care of.” I felt the smile spread across my face. I hadn’t expected them to agree so easily. Perhaps our kingdom was ready for change after all.

“And you all agree?” I had to ask. Every hand in the room raised. It was unanimous. Crescent Canyon would have four monarchs from this day forward, depending on how many children we had and how many mates they chose. I watched as the members filed out of the conference room. Once the last member walked out, I turned and headed back to my office. My brothers and Izzy were waiting for me. She threw her arms around me the moment I came through the door.

I kissed her hard, pressing my body to hers. Then I pulled away. “I have news.” I couldn’t stop the tears that streamed down my face. We’d just lost the king, now we would have to say goodbye to our mother. Although I felt as if we’d done that years ago; she hadn’t been the same since Annabeth’s accident. I gestured to the couch and everyone sat. “The Council questioned her and she admitted that her plan was to kill Izzy. She was pissed that it didn’t work. Then I told her about the baby. She didn’t know before. There was no way she could fake that kind of shock. They sentenced her to public execution.”

Izzy took my hand in hers. “Oh, Drake. I’m sorry.”

“There’s more. They agreed to a joint funeral, even though it’s not the way things should be done.” I paused to let that idea sink in. I hadn’t discussed any of this with them before the meeting. Lan and Kings nodded and I watched as tears escaped Izzy’s eyes. “And,” I continued, bringing their eyes back to mine, “they agreed to the monarchy change. My coronation will happen first, then I’ll announce the change, and we’ll have yours. All three of you will be crowned together.”

Kings jumped up and cheered. Lan smiled sadly. Izzy’s eyes went wide and she pulled me into another hug. “How did you convince them to see it our way?” Lan asked.

“I didn’t have to. Father’s actions did. He asked them to deny the request. So, of course, they discussed it and decided to do what was best for the kingdom.” Relief washed over me. Everything was working out the way it was supposed to. *It’s going to get better.* All of this would be in the past soon enough.



KINGSLEY

It seemed surreal to me that the Council had agreed to let Drake expand the monarchy to include us. Not so much Lan, because he's an alpha, but me—a beta. A beta has never had this kind of power before. Growing up, we never spoke about Adam or Horatio's order. I assumed it was because they were betas. After the king's death, we discovered that they were actually alphas, but had been forced by our mother to take suppressants. They'd been so in love with her that they let her convince them that it would be safer for everyone if there was one king. More likely, it allowed her to keep them under control and only let them access their alpha benefits when she was in heat. That thought grossed me out, but we had to be created somehow.

Besides, it was different thinking about creating life now that I knew we'd done it. With the suppressant revelation, I knew it was a long shot for me to father children with Elle, but I still held out hope. No matter which of us was actually the baby's father, we would all be its dads. And that child would

know love like no other. I would never let a day go by without making sure the kid had exactly what he or she needed, physically and emotionally. We were going to make things better. Together.

I spoke with Adam and Horatio about staying on as security and tutor, respectively, and both agreed. There was nowhere else for them to go, but I didn't want them to think they weren't wanted. I valued their opinions and help. There was no doubt in my mind that they would make amazing additions to our kingdom while we made the needed changes.

The days seemed to get shorter as we prepared for what would lead up to our coronation. Drake made the official announcement and we waited a few days to see how the people would react. There was one group of alphas who showed up with signs and attempted a protest against the upcoming changes, but they were quickly run off by a larger group of omegas, betas, and alphas who came to show their support. The ORM was there, and they'd brought friends. Knowing that the majority of the kingdom was behind us made things so much easier.

I wished that we could skip the execution and just move on with our lives, but it wouldn't look good for us to avoid it just because it was our mother being put to death. So, we stood there, tears streaming down all four of our faces, as she was paraded out into the courtyard to face her sentence.

"You can't do this to me! I'm the queen! Take your hands off me, you brutes!" Our mother screamed, fought, and cried

to get out of what she knew was coming.

The guards struggled to hold her, so my brothers and I stepped forward. “We’ve got her; you guys handle the crowd.” At Drake’s instruction, the guards backed away, leaving us facing our mother in the center of the courtyard. We were surrounded by most of the kingdom. There were people with signs demanding the queen’s death, some with signs begging for her to be pardoned, and others with signs regarding omega rights.

“Surely you boys don’t intend to kill me. You know this was all a huge misunderstanding.” She looked over at Elle. “This is your fault. You turned them against me.” She dove at our wife, trying to claw and bite while swinging her arms wildly. Lan and I grabbed Mother, restraining her before she could reach Elle. Drake took the syringe from the doctor and walked over to where we were standing.

“You’ve been sentenced to death, Mother. This was your own doing, and there’s nothing you can say to stop it. At this point, the only choice you have left is if you’re going to show some respect to your family name and go out with dignity or not.” His words triggered her again and she started fighting against us. Just as she would have broken free, Drake plunged the needle into her neck and released the poison into her bloodstream.

“What have you done?” she asked, her eyes wide and confused. Mother’s expression seemed to say *there’s no way my baby boy could have done this*. Regret passed over Drake’s

face for a moment before being replaced with cold acceptance. He did what he had to do. As the crowned prince, it was his responsibility.

Mother stopped struggling, allowing Landyn and me to cradle her as the poison took over. Elle walked over to Drake and wrapped her arms around him. I wasn't sure if it was to comfort him or herself. We all watched as our mother, the woman who'd given us life and tried to take our wife and child away, choked and sputtered while the poison coursed through her veins. Once her body stopped convulsing, the doctor had two orderlies take her from us. They placed her on a gurney and wheeled her away from us.

When it was over, we left the medics and guards to take care of everything else. The subjects who had attended would be escorted out. The body would be taken and cleaned up for the funeral pyre, to be laid to rest alongside the king. It would be a truly cathartic moment, saying goodbye to both of them. I had no comforting words to share with my brothers, nothing I could say to Drake about him being orphaned. Nothing would ease that pain anyway.

"I'm sorry, brother," was all I could give him as I hugged him tightly. For once, he didn't try to push me away or slug me for being affectionate. He hugged me just as tightly.

"I am too. But I'm glad you still have your father. I'm glad our little one will be able to know two of their grandfathers," he replied. My breath caught in my throat. Lan and I thought

Drake had no idea we'd all had different fathers. Apparently, our big brother still had ways to surprise us.

“So, you knew this whole time?” I asked quietly. Drake nodded and smiled. It was the saddest smile I'd ever seen, but it was something.

“I've asked them to be our advisers. We'll need their input. And now that they're off the suppressants, they can claim their alpha status. Their years of watching from behind the scenes will come in handy too.” Who knew my brother was a softie, always finding a way to keep the family together.

I laughed. “That's hilarious. I asked them to stay on in their current positions. Adam is going to head up our security, and Horatio is staying to teach our children. I'm glad you don't object.”

“I've felt more love from those two men than I ever did from my parents. I wouldn't have let them leave if they had tried.” Drake's words touched me. I was proud to have him as my brother.

Things were mostly calm after the execution. Everyone was busy preparing for a multi-coronation. It would be the biggest event the kingdom had ever seen. And we only had two days to get everything done, and that included the funeral pyre. For a moment, I wondered why we'd left it all until the last minute, then I realized. We needed this to distract us from what had just happened. We had to have something to keep Elle's mind off the fact that we'd just killed our own mother. She blamed herself for both of their deaths now.

“Baby, please. Just come back to bed. Lan and Drake will be here in just a bit. This bed is way too big for me to be in by myself,” I pleaded with her. But she kept fussing with her dress and our formal suits for the coronation.

“Everything has to be perfect. We have to be perfect. The ceremony, the reception, everything. I just need to adjust these buttons and those tassels.” Her objections were quiet, and I knew that she was crying again. It was hard to tell what was hormones from the pregnancy and what was sadness over the situation. That was why my brothers had left me here with her while they attended to the final details. Her tears might get to me, but I would be less affected by her nearly constant changes in scent.

“We have all day tomorrow to finish getting ready. You need to rest now. Please, Elle. For me?” I knew that wouldn’t get her to cooperate, but I had a trick up my sleeve yet. “For the baby?” She turned and scowled at me. Bingo. That would be the one thing to get her to rest. And I was right, she had been crying.

“Okay. I’m just so restless,” she whispered, walking over to the bed. I took her hands, pulling her onto the blankets with me. I pressed my lips to hers in a sweet kiss.

“Let me take care of you. I’ll rub your back to relax you. You’ll be asleep in no time,” I promised. With the way she’d been crying, she was likely to fall asleep before I even got her tucked into the bed. “Who do you want to sleep next to tonight?” She’d been giving Drake extra attention, so Lan and

I were switching off sleeping on her other side. We understood that he needed her right now.

“I need you tonight. Do you think Lan will be upset? I wish I could find a way to snuggle up with all three of you at once, but it seems like someone always gets left out.” She rubbed a hand over her growing belly. It was still barely noticeable, but we stayed focused on it.

“He’ll be fine. I’m sure he’ll give you kisses when he gets here. We know you’re not playing favorites. Drake needs us all right now. He can be sandwiched between you and Lan tonight.” I laughed at the thought of them snuggling Drake. He’d be fine with Elle, but the thought of Lan’s lanky frame cuddled up behind him was amusing.

Elle settled down and let me rub her back, then I pulled her into my arms, pressing her back against my bare chest, and she was asleep before either of my brothers showed up. They opened the door quietly when they returned. I raised up on my elbow and held a finger to my lips, letting them know she was finally asleep.

They both got ready for bed quickly before stopping to look at our girl. “Did she cry herself to sleep again tonight?” Lan asked, gently pressing a kiss to her forehead and running a finger down her cheek.

I nodded. “I did everything I could to distract her, but she mostly ignored me.” I hated that I hadn’t found a way to dry her tears, but mourning hit everyone differently. And Drake wasn’t the only one who’d lost parents recently. Elle had

finally accepted that hers would never change and said goodbye when they were banished.

When I didn't make a move to get up, Lan understood that she'd chosen me for the night. He waited for Drake to climb in bed and snuggle up to Elle, then he got in bed. The custom bed we'd commissioned was large enough for us plus three other people, which would accommodate kids in the future. Hopefully there will be lots of kids. We needed some happiness to chase away the shadows.

The next day was filled with last minute preparations for the coronation. After discussing and debating, we decided that we would be announcing the pregnancy at the celebration. The kingdom needed some good news to counteract the sad. I didn't expect Elle to agree, but she lit up at the idea. It was the one moment when she didn't look as if she'd lost everything. I knew that she would recover, but it was hard to watch her go through this. We couldn't find a way to ease her guilt over the situation.

I was convinced that each of us bore a portion of that guilty feeling, even though it had been our mother's choices and actions that led to her death. The funeral pyre would be the last moment I would allow myself to dwell on these feelings. Once the monarchs were laid to rest, I would shake this off and be my usual silly self. It's what the family needed. And I would always be what this family needed.

I helped Elle get dressed for the ceremony. Everyone would be clad in dark jewel tones, as was our kingdom's custom.

She'd let me select her dress, a dark amethyst that was loose and flowy after hugging her breasts. The neckline was higher than I would have liked, but this was a funeral, after all. I zipped her up and helped her step into the flats I'd chosen for comfort.

Then I dressed in my onyx-colored suit. Drake was wearing a deep garnet, and Lan was clad in dark sapphire. We entered the courtyard slowly, followed by the Council and staff. Everyone would come to pay their respects and honor the fallen monarchs. Drake had anticipated protestors, so we were shocked when none appeared. The kingdom was dressed in a rainbow of jewel tones, everyone showed up to do exactly what was expected of them.

That meant that either there would be no protests, or they would at least wait until after the pyre. Our traditions insisted that we burn the bodies of our deceased so that their souls could be released to the afterlife. Typically, if someone murdered another person, they would be buried instead of burned, trapping their soul in the vessel that had committed the heinous crime. Drake's decision to include our mother with the king was a controversial one, but it seemed that the kingdom understood his need to give her a second chance. I wasn't so sure that I agreed, but I wouldn't take this comfort away from him.

As the oldest son, Drake would be the one to light the pyre after the head of the Council said a few words. The man, Marcus, maybe? spoke of the king's accomplishments, making him sound way better than the man he actually was. He barely

mentioned the queen, but that was expected. Even though they'd agreed to let her be on the pyre, no one would give her the respect that they would give her victim. Once Marcus had finished relaying the story of the king's life, Drake stepped up with the torch and held it to the base of the pyre.

I watched Elle's face as the flames took hold. Several emotions crossed her face as she tried to remain stoic. I wasn't surprised to see that relief was one of them. Our mother had been horrible to her ever since Annabeth's accident. She had been the one to force the king, and Drake, to send Elle away. She twisted the truth to make it seem as if Elle was the one responsible. It would take years to undo what the queen had done. To unravel the lies she'd woven together for her own benefit.

I couldn't watch the fire. My heart couldn't take mourning for what could have been; for what should have been. Our children would grow up without a grandmother because both of them had been horrible people. But those horrible people would become a legend in our kingdom. Their stories would be a warning to children to be nice, to respect those around them, to always listen, and try to forgive. That was a small comfort.

TWENTY-SIX





A SURPRISING CORONATION

ISABELLA

“Come on,” Drake said, grabbing my hand and pulling me toward the door.

“But the coronation is this way,” I insisted, pulling back. His grip was too tight for me to break out of. “It’s almost time to begin.”

We walked back out into the courtyard where we’d participated in his mother’s execution. I had no idea what he was doing. It only took me a moment to realize that he’d arranged to have the coronation out here since so many of his subjects had shown up.

People rushed around, setting up floral arrangements and chairs. I knew there wouldn’t be enough seats for everyone, but they seemed to be set on giving as many as possible a seat. I watched in wonder until Lan and Kings walked up. Once they were with us, Drake let go of my hand.

“I have to talk to Marcus before the ceremony starts. Stay here,” Drake ordered. I wanted to growl at him, but I knew

that he was already feeling the weight of the crown before it was even placed on his head. So I nodded and let his brothers hug me while I waited to see exactly what he had planned.

“Did you know about this?” I asked Lan, since he was usually the one who’d been clued into things.

He shook his head. “I have no idea what he’s doing. Maybe he just needed fresh air.” I didn’t buy his excuse, but I also couldn’t prove that he knew anything. He pulled me into his arms and kissed me. I suspected that he was just trying to distract me.

“Everyone take your places, please. The ceremony will start in five minutes,” someone announced. I couldn’t see who’d spoken, but it must have been one of the officials. The three of us started to walk toward the first row of chairs.

Drake jogged up and stopped, blocking our way. “You don’t get to sit there. You three are coming with me.” He gestured to the chairs by the podium. It looked as if we were going to get a front row view of his coronation. He walked us to our seats just in time for the ceremony to start.

Marcus, the head of the Council, walked up to the podium and took the microphone. I tuned out most of what he was saying because so many people were looking at me. It was crazy how many had shown up for the execution and stayed out here for three days to see the coronation. Something about his tone caught my attention and brought me back to focus on him.

“If you’ll all stand, we’ll begin.”

I looked at Drake, completely confused. “What’s going on?” I whispered. He took my hand and squeezed. I followed his lead, as did his brothers. They looked as confused as I felt. We lined up where Marcus pointed. Then he placed a crown on each of our heads.

“Now if you will all repeat after me,” Marcus continued, “I, please state your name, give this day my promise to lead and protect this kingdom with everything I have, including my life if needed.” We all repeated the phrase, vowing that the kingdom would be our focus as a family.

There had never been a coronation like this one in the history of Crescent Canyon. There had never been a royal family who decided to rule together either. We were making history. I hoped it would be a good one.

I can’t describe the feelings that tore through me when that crown was placed on my head. My wonderful husbands had taken the time and care to have a new crown created just for me. The gems in it matched my engagement ring and wedding band. I tried to stifle the tears as we were announced as the new reigning family. The crowd cheered; everyone seemed happy that we were taking over and changing things already.

Once the ceremony was finished, I had expected that we’d be finished with our public responsibilities for the day. Again, I was surprised.

Kingsley led me into the castle, guiding me away from our wing. “Where are we going?” I asked, realizing we were heading the wrong way.

“You’ll see, my queen,” he said with a smirk as he stopped in front of the ballroom door. He tapped on it, then it opened. “After you.”

I walked through the opened door and into a gorgeous wonderland of color. “How did you guys do this without me knowing?” My head spun because there was so much to look at. I couldn’t take it all in.

“Teamwork, baby,” Lan responded. I jumped because I hadn’t realized he was standing behind me. Then I felt stupid because I had noticed his scent, just hadn’t realized that meant he was standing there. He drew me into his arms and rubbed my back to relax me. I had no idea why I was so jumpy right now. My biggest foe had been executed, and I’d just been crowned queen of Crescent Canyon. Add to that my three perfect husbands and our baby growing inside of me, and my life was pretty perfect.

Before Lan could drag me out to the dance floor, Drake was by my side. “May I have the first dance with our new queen?” He bowed low, nearly losing his own crown. I chuckled and held out my hand.

“I’m looking forward to being worshipped later,” I said with a smirk. I was suddenly surrounded by walnut smoke, cinnamon honey, and citrus. It ignited my own desire and before I could try to suppress it, lavender and roses were mixing with their scents.

“One dance with each of us, then we’re leaving,” he announced through clenched teeth. His reaction to me sent a

shiver down my back. My thighs were already damp, and he'd barely touched me yet. I nodded, and he pulled me into his arms for our dance.

As soon as the song was over, Landyn was there, sweeping me off for our dance. "Impatient, much?" I asked him with a laugh.

"Absolutely. We're going to have fun worshipping you, my queen, and don't wish to delay it any longer than necessary," Lan said in his most formal voice, causing me to laugh again.

Before the song ended, Kings dragged me away from him. "You three don't have to be in such a hurry. I'm your wife, and I'm already pregnant." His eyes met mine, and I could see his passion.

"I've never slept with a queen before. I'm excited to see what it's like," he offered.

"But it's just me," I argued. He pressed his lips to mine to shut me up. I melted into the kiss and didn't object when he swept me up into his arms and carried me out of the ballroom. When we were in the hall, he pulled his mouth from mine. "What about the party?"

"Everyone knows about the baby, so Drake is using that to our advantage. He's making the excuse that you need to rest for the good of our offspring. It'll be fine. He and Lan will be along in a minute." Kings carried me toward our wing, but didn't stop at any of our rooms.

“Where are we going?” I asked impatiently. “My room is right there.”

“No, that was your room. We’re heading to your new room. We’ve been working on it in secret for a while now. I hope you like it.” His response brought tears to my eyes. I’d been crying at the most inopportune times lately. The guys assured me it was just hormones, but I suspected that it was because I wasn’t used to being so happy and everything overwhelmed me. Kings stopped in front of a set of double doors and knocked.

When the door opened, my jaw dropped. I didn’t see who had answered the door, but it looked like we were alone. Kings set me on my feet and I walked into the room, stopping in the middle to turn a circle and look at all of it. The room was bigger than my apartment in Ayix had been. To the left was a bed bigger than any I had ever seen. To the right was an enormous bathroom. I could see a garden tub from where I stood, and imagined that everything in there would be oversized to fit the four of us as well.

In front of me was a sitting area with three couches and a large screen television above a gorgeous fireplace. “Come on, you have to see this,” Kings said as he dragged me toward the door that was near the bed. I ran a hand over the blankets on the bed as we passed. They were so soft and comfy. I couldn’t wait to climb in and snuggle up.

He tapped on the door and it opened. My jaw dropped again. What I had assumed was a closet was actually a nest. There were pillows and blankets everywhere. In one corner

there was a mini fridge and in another there was a bookshelf filled with snacks. The third corner had a door that was standing open, showing the full bath that had been tucked inside.

“How did you guys do all of this?” I wondered aloud, just realizing that Drake and Lan were already in the nest waiting for us. My ability to think left me when I saw that they were snuggled up in the fluffy pillows and blankets, totally naked.

I dropped to my knees in front of them, pulling the blankets away and exposing them. My eyes feasted, then my hands reached for them. “Not so fast, my queen. You have us at a disadvantage. You’re still fully clothed,” Drake said. Kings slipped up behind me and unzipped my dress. Lan and Drake helped me stand up and watched the dress fall into a dark purple pile on the floor. I hadn’t worn anything under it.

Six hands roamed up and down my body. I nearly purred with satisfaction at their touch. I felt my center dripping with anticipation. I wanted it rough, but knew they’d never agree. The three of them had already assumed daddy duties and were concerned about the welfare of our growing bundle constantly. They lowered me onto the pillows and I lay there, letting them worship me as they’d requested.

I shivered as Lan’s tongue worked its way up my leg from my ankle to my thigh. Drake lazily stroked my clit, while Kings pinched and sucked my nipples. The sensations were overwhelming, but I let myself go and simply enjoyed it. The three of them worked together to excite me enough that my

slick coated my pussy and ass. Landyn's tongue and fingers replaced Drake's. He lapped at me like he was starving and I was the only thing to eat for miles.

I grabbed Drake by the cock and pulled him up to me. I took him into my mouth slowly, watching his face as he slid deeper into my throat, humming softly. He groaned and fisted a hand in my hair.

Kings turned me slightly toward Drake, I thought to make the blow job easier, then I realized that he wasn't helping his brother, he was positioning me so he could play with my ass. He rubbed his fingers around the already lubed hole, dipping inside a few times to ease me into it. "More," I begged, backing away from Drake for a moment. Kings growled as I turned back to Drake and licked him from base to tip. As Kings slipped into my ass, I took Drake into my mouth again. I writhed against him, begging for even more. Lan sucked my clit while he slid his fingers in and out of me until I thought I'd die from the pleasure of it. I grabbed his chin and pulled him away from my pussy. Then I bucked my hips at him while Kings continued his slow assault of my ass, leading me toward what I knew would be a massive orgasm. While he fucked my ass, Kings teased and caressed my nipples and took over rubbing my clit when I pulled his brother away.

Lan understood what I wanted and nodded. He grabbed his dick and rubbed it over my center, coating it with my slick. I groaned against Drake's cock. Lan slid into me with ease, going torturously slow. He and Kings matched their pace, one thrusting in while the other backed out. I let Drake take over,

fucking my mouth the way he wanted. I surrendered to the sensations and pleasure they brought me. Three men who truly worshipped me, thrusting their dicks into me, their only goal to give me what I wanted. The first orgasm hit me and made Lan's knot swell, holding me in place.

Since he could no longer move, Kings took over thrusting faster to give us the friction we loved. Drake backed away, pulling his cock from my mouth. "I want your cock too," I breathed, opening my mouth again and silently begging him to use me for his pleasure.

"Are you sure? I don't want to hurt you," he replied. I nodded and he moved closer. I put his dick in my mouth and grabbed his ass to thrust it down my throat. He was so big that I struggled to keep my lips wrapped around it. I couldn't move much, but knew that we were all really close to coming undone.

I hummed against Drake's dick as Kings continued to give me the friction I craved while I grinded against Lan's knot. I was full in the best way. I felt a huge wave of sensation tear through me as all three of my men came at the same time, triggering my orgasm. Kings slipped out of me when he finished, and I missed his body heat against my back.

By the time Lan's knot let me go, Kings was back with damp cloths for everyone to clean up with. The three of them took turns caring for me before they worried about themselves. Drake grabbed a bottle of water and passed it around, making sure I got the first drink. Then Lan brought a small fruit plate

over and started feeding me from it. Kings tucked me in, fluffing the pillows and covering me with cozy blankets so I didn't get cold. It was the perfect ending to a roller coaster of a day.

Twenty-seven





EPILOGUE

ISABELLA

After that day, our lives were a whirlwind. There were matters of state to tend to, treaties, negotiations, balls, celebrations, holidays—so much to do. Added to that were doctor’s appointments and watching my belly grow until I felt like a beached whale.

Just before I was due to deliver, I received a letter. It was from Tracy. We’d never stopped searching for her, but somehow, she managed to hide from us for all this time. The letter claimed that she was sorry and explained that the queen had forced her to leave by threatening her family. Once she heard about the execution, she knew that she was safe. Her family decided that the mainland might be a better place to be, and they decided to stay there. I had no way to know for sure if the letter was really from her, but I liked to think she was happy wherever she ended up.

Thinking back on it, the day our daughter was born was the single greatest day of my life. Every bit of guilt and sadness I’d held onto since my parents’ betrayal and that of my

mother-in-law melted away at those sweet blue eyes. I held her against my chest and stared at her in awe. Drake, Landyn, and Kingsley surrounded us, completely taken with our little treasure. We'd discussed names but hadn't settled on anything. Each of them had a different idea of who they wanted our little one to be.

"Did you decide yet?" Drake asked after he'd told his brothers that I was perfectly capable of naming the baby on my own. He'd clearly expected me to go with his choice.

I smirked. "Maybe." I purposefully closed my mouth and turned my attention to the baby.

"Are you going to tell us?" Kings asked anxiously.

"Maybe." I refused to look up, not wanting to meet their eyes because I knew they'd get it out of me before I was ready to tell them. I was still testing the sound of it in my head.

"Or do we have to persuade you?" Lan winked. I knew exactly how he would persuade me, and I was all for it. I could see it in my mind. He would use his fingers and tongue to push me toward orgasm, where I would have no choice but to give them the answer they wanted.

"That sounds nice, but I don't think that's allowed right after I gave birth," I said with a giggle. "Anyway, I have to rest for a while. Who would have ever expected that giving birth was difficult?" I joked, making all three of them laugh. I had nearly broken Lan's hand when the contractions were at their worst. Then I'd yelled at all three of them because I didn't know which one had done this to me. In the end, our

tiny bundle was completely worth the pain. The moment I saw her perfect little face, it all faded away.

I probably should tell them what I'd settled on for her name. But making them wait was fun. A wave of exhaustion poured over me, and I gave in to the temptation of spilling the beans. I turned my attention to the little one who was falling asleep on me. "It looks like you have the right idea, Madeline Annabeth Brighton. It's naptime." I raised my tear-filled eyes to meet the three men surrounding me.

"It's perfect," Kings said, putting his hand on her back.

"Absolutely," Drake agreed, brushing my hair from my face.

"I love it," Lan added. He'd been holding my hand since before the nurse handed me the baby.

"One question," Kings said with a chuckle, "Are you ever going to let one of us hold her?" He peeled his shirt off while I laughed, easing my arm down so he could take Maddie from me. I had to admit, he made a sexy picture, bare chested, holding our baby against his skin.

"Don't forget you have to share. She's not just yours. Maddie is ours," I insisted. With a yawn, I watched the three of them for a bit. Drake and Lan pulled their shirts off and Kings passed her over after a bit of snuggling. She didn't fuss, seeming to love the attention from her fathers. I couldn't wait to have a dozen more. I let myself drift off to sleep in the bliss of the moment.

These amazing men I married made sure that everything was taken care of with our girl until I was feeling up to taking over. I'd never experienced anything so wonderful as motherhood, especially since the daddies were so willing to help. Drake refused to work more than half a day for the first year. Lan took three weeks off to help me recover from giving birth. Kings made sure that he was available any time I needed him. I couldn't wish for better partners. I did wonder if they would keep it up when we had more babies.

"We've talked about it, and decided that we want at least a dozen," Drake said in his most authoritative tone.

"Donuts?" I asked, pretending not to understand as I fed Maddie. "That sounds more than reasonable, unless you want a dozen each. That's just excessive."

He shook his head. "Not donuts. Babies."

My eyes opened wide and I didn't know what to say. I could tell he was serious but I wasn't sure how I felt about it, even though I'd had the same thought. "We'll see." I refused to commit until I knew I wouldn't get overwhelmed by caring for the brood by myself.



The next five years seemed to pass in an instant. They were filled with love and challenges. Drake and I argued like always. Kings tried to make us get along, while Lan busied himself with nursery preparations. My men were pretty serious about keeping me pregnant every chance they had. After Maddie, we had Warren and Ben, the twins. They proved to be a handful, just like their fathers. But to their credit, my husbands kept up their helpful ways. They even went so far as to separate the children when they fought, each taking one to work with them for a while. It was nice to see them as fathers; they were so caring and kind.

The boys liked to pull their sister's braids and run through the castle as if it was their own personal playground. Drake acted annoyed, but I could see the pride in his eyes. The castle was finally becoming the happy place we'd always wanted it to be.

Last year, we had Hope, and this year, only a few days ago, I presented our growing family with another sweet boy. We'd been debating his name for days. "There's nothing wrong with

Thaddeus. It's a strong, royal name." Drake's argument was getting old, and he knew it.

I shook my head, cradling the newborn to me while the other kids played across the room. "No." I refused to argue why it was not the right name for our child, closing the conversation with that one word. We had been over it at least a dozen times in the past two weeks. I was tired of explaining that it sounded like a stuffy old man, not a handsome prince.

"I think Ryan is a great name," Kings offered. "Even the kids like it. Don't you, kiddos?" He turned and pulled the toddlers into our debate. There were shouts and cheers. He'd obviously bribed them. To be honest, I did like Ryan better than Thaddeus.

"But Lan likes Henry. There are too many choices. I don't know what to pick." I was on the verge of whining, when something caught my attention. One of the kids had turned on the television and was looking for something to watch. Maddie, no doubt. That girl was obsessed with old shows and movies, just like Lan. "What about Neil?" I hadn't thought to name him after one of my favorite actors until I'd seen the man's face cross the screen.

"It's a good name," Drake conceded. Then he slugged Kings in the shoulder and looked at Lan. They nodded their agreement. Naming the babies had been the hardest part, besides the actual labor. We'd spent six months arguing about the twins' names before they were born.

“Then it’s settled. Welcome to the family, Neil.” We would work out the middle name later after the kids had all been tucked in for the night. I couldn’t let one of the guys bribe them again. “Why don’t you all go watch a cartoon with Maddie?” I asked the bouncing group of toddlers. I needed a moment alone with their fathers to ask about grown-up matters. They all cheered and ran to the couch, each yelling at their older sister to turn on their favorite cartoon.

Drake cleared his throat and they settled down, not wanting him to get upset. He was definitely the disciplinarian of our bunch. Lan and Kings were too giving, wanting to play and provide everything their little hearts desired. I tried my best but found it hard to say no to the sweet little faces. Because of this, the playroom was covered with toys, just like every other living space we had. I didn’t care, as long as they were healthy and happy. I turned my attention back to my guys.

“You’re going to ask about the protests, aren’t you?” Kings asked once the kids were occupied.

I nodded. “Are they getting any better? I thought once we took power and changed the laws that things would get better.”

Drake shook his head. “I wish it were that easy. The terrorist group Alphas United is still abducting omegas and forcing them to bond during their heat. We’ve had some success tracking them down, but it hasn’t stopped the protests on either side.”

“We won’t stop working until there’s peace, though.” Lan was insistent that peace was possible. I hoped that he was

right.

“Do you need to be in the middle of it?” I worried when they all decided to visit different areas of the kingdom. I wanted them to stay together. I wanted them to stay home. Five years of brewing war made me nervous, especially since our family was growing.

“We’re as careful as possible, love, but we have to talk to the people. Many of them don’t have the ability to travel to us. It makes more sense for us to go to them. But we will always come home to you.” Drake’s promise should have eased my heart, but it did little to affect the worry.

“At least the other two kingdoms are fighting with us now. Elysian Hill was fortunate that their king listened to his sons and became our ally. We’re close to an agreement with Black Meadow, but it’s been challenging. They want to back us up without committing to our ideals,” Kings explained.

“The fighting isn’t as bad in those kingdoms, is it?” I wondered as I stroked Neil’s soft chestnut hair gently. I had to believe that we could fix this for our children.

“Not yet,” Drake admitted. “But it’s coming to that. If they don’t stand firm with us, it will get just as bad in their kingdoms, if not worse.”

“I have faith in you three. Don’t let me down. But we need to rest now.”

Each of my husbands kissed me, tucking me into bed, then Drake took Neil to snuggle while I slept. Lan and Kings went

to watch cartoons with the other little ones. Even with as worried as I was about the future, I knew that we would overcome any obstacle, together. The Brightons would always protect those who needed it. We would prove it to the world.

THE PACK NEXT DOOR, BOOK TWO

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Barren omegas live a cursed life.

At almost thirty, I haven't had my first heat. Mother insists I keep my secret if I want any semblance of a good life. As for me? I'm madly in love with the Davenport boys from next door.

I've grown from a tomboy, playing in the mud with them to a pretty omega taught how to please. But one thing hasn't changed: the desire to be more than friends.

Except I'm damaged goods.

No pack will want me, because there's no way I'll be able to give them children. So when my omega assignment comes in, Mother wants me to lie. I'm torn between my love for my best friends and dooming their bloodline.

With every passing day, my heart breaks, and I'm running out of options. A couple of bad decisions later, I realize I

might have been wrong about everything. But what if I'm too late? I could destroy our lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M.P. Starkweather is a wife, mother, author, poet, casual online gamer, self-proclaimed fan-girl, and full-time nerd. She writes free-form poetry, paranormal romance, sci-fi romance, reverse harem romance, and is branching out into contemporary romance. In her free time, she enjoys writing, reading, Dungeons & Dragons, table top games with her husband and friends, and playing with her son. M.P. also enjoys tv, movies, and music across various genres.

To get the most up-to-date information about her latest releases and book signings, check out www.mpstarkweather.com and join her newsletter, or follow her on your favorite social media site.

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The Pack Next Door – RH OV series

[Princess or Knot](#)

[Fiancée or Knot](#)

[Queen or Knot](#) (pre-order coming soon!)

The Legend of Khaine Academy – RH Academy series

[The Awakening](#) (pre-order coming soon!)

Vampires at Midnight - RH series

[Blood Moon](#)

[Blood Lost](#)

[Blood War](#)

Forged by Magic - M/F series

[Hidden](#)

[Betrayed](#)

[Saved](#)

Daydreams and Sunsets - a collection of poetry

[Daydreams and Sunsets](#)