



*Run
of Luck*

VIOLA GRACE

♡ Betas In Waiting

Used to pay a debt, Arty has to escape her fate, but what she really needs is luck. Fortunately, she finds him.

Arty went with her mother for an evening appointment and ended up as a cam girl to pay the debt left by her deceased father. As her efforts begin to pay down the debt in record time, her boss becomes interested in more than her income.

She gets a PM from a loyal pervert, and he mentions a person from her past, then asks if she wants help. She jumps at the chance to get out from under the debt, knowing the price she will probably be asked to pay.

Her boss refuses the money but agrees to rent her out for the month. Creepy but manageable.

Arty is brought to safety and meets her benefactor, the same man she rejected five years earlier... and his omega. It turns out that the alpha's omega mate was her super fan. Just her luck.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

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Published by Viola Grace

Look for me online at violagrace.com.

Run of Luck
Betas in Waiting Book 11

By

Viola Grace

Chapter One

Arty was confused. “Mom, where are we going?”

Maribel Winter muttered, “We are just going to drop something off.”

They were driving through the hard, glittering section of town. There were nightclubs that Arty’s classmates had gone to, and they had returned with stunned expressions.

Her mother stopped in front of one of the clubs and said, “Get out. I need you with me.”

“Can we park here?” She got out and stood with an unsure feeling crawling on her skin.

“The valet will take care of it.”

Arty blinked as her mother handed the car over to a young man with an easy way of moving. She walked with her mother and tried to ignore the stares she was drawing. She had dyed her hair brown, but her huge pansy-blue eyes got a lot of notice.

Her mother spoke to the bouncer, and a side door was opened. They went in.

An alpha with a history of violence written on his skin escorted them down a few levels to an office where a man sat with a very young woman on his lap. He was perfectly pleasant for an alpha. He lifted the young lady off his lap and patted her on the backside. “Come back in twenty minutes, Lolli.”

“Yes, boss.”

When the young woman in the short skirt was gone, he was all business. “Mrs. Winter, is this your daughter?”

“This is Artemis, yes.”

He got up and walked around the desk and then around Arty. “Mom, what’s going on?”

He paused and looked at her mother. “You didn’t tell her?”

Maribel shook her head. “No. I didn’t know how.”

“Tell her now.” His voice was an oily purr.

“Arty... you know how your dad had gambling problems?”

“Yeah.”

“He left us half a million dollars in debt to Mr. Wilhurst here. I can’t work off that much debt, but you can. If you take over the debt, he will see that you have the opportunity to make the money in under five years. You will have room and board. Nothing... no sex is necessary.”

Arty looked at the man who was too close. “What happens if I say no?”

“Your mother becomes a cocktail waitress, and at her age, I don’t think she will be able to pay the debt before osteoporosis kicks in, so then she will become a cleaner.”

Arty closed her eyes and then slowly opened them. “Is there a contract?”

He chuckled. “Yes, pet. There is.”

He reached over and picked up the contract, handing it to her. She leaned against his desk and winced at the job options outlined as starting positions. The likeliest place would be as a cam girl. She could change jobs for a penalty, but it was fairly straight forward.

“Where is the discharge paperwork for my mother’s debt?”

He raised his brows. “Clever pet.”

“Sign it and let her go... with the document.”

“No. Not until you sign.”

“Sign the paperwork assigning all the debt to me. I will sign that, and you can discharge my mother.”

He chuckled and printed the paperwork. She read it over and signed it. He signed it. Her mother was given the document,

and she blinked. “Just like that?”

“Just like that, Mom. Now go.”

She nodded, and the scary bouncer escorted her out of the room.

Arty sighed and continued reading the contract. She nodded. “Fine.” She went to sign it.

“Wait. I will offer you another position.”

She paused. “What?”

“My pet. For one year.”

“I will rather take my chances with the cam patrons. At least, I don’t have to look them in the eye.”

Mr. Wilhurst smiled. “You think you can do it without crying? Some of the clients can be brutal.”

“I don’t know until I try. I do know that your little lap warmer would be pissed at me if I agreed to that position. Now, how can I see my total, and what are the interest terms? They aren’t stipulated in this form.”

“Ten percent monthly on the principle. So by the end of this month, that will be fifty thousand dollars.”

She exhaled. “Well then, I had better start shaking my ass on camera. I am assuming you have bedroom-style studios.”

“We do. Accessories are billed to your account. We provide a twenty-four-seven live feed. Free of charge. Any monies you get from subscribers or bonus donations will be applied to your account. You can check it at any time.”

She wrote in the interest terms on every page, partially over the typeface. If he tried to change them, there would be a visible track.

With a sigh, she signed it. “Realistically, how long do you think it will take me to finish the debt?”

He smiled as he crowded in and signed her contract. “Twelve years is normal. Less if you find someone to buy out

your debt. I can help broker that. Do you have any disfiguring marks?”

“Shamrock tattoo on my back. I don’t remember getting it, but it isn’t coming off.”

He frowned. “Show me.”

She frowned but pulled off her jacket and then yanked her shirt up to her shoulder. He tutted as he traced the mark. “That can drop your value.”

She pulled her shirt down and tucked it in. “Yeah, whatever. That is my problem, not yours unless I don’t earn. So, put me to work.”

He growled and muttered, “Take my offer. Be mine for one year.”

She snorted. “And if you change your mind during that year? I am stuck with memories and debt.”

She stepped to the side and picked up her jacket.

He returned to his desk and tapped his fingers. “I would be gentle.”

“Until some new pet walked through the doors. Then I would be off your lap and onto the floor. Unless you agreed to let me go with a cleared debt the moment you tired of me.”

“Only if you remained with me past the year if I don’t discard you.”

She blinked. “That is an unexpected counteroffer.”

“Something about you calls me. That doesn’t happen often.”

The door opened, and the scary bouncer returned. Mr. Wilhurst nodded. “Set her up. She is confident, so I look forward to seeing what she offers our subscribers.”

The scary man nodded, and Arty walked along with him. He murmured, “Choose a cam name.”

“Felicity.”

He smiled. “Good. Cute, innocent, and sounds legit. You know how this works?”

“Yeah, I pretend to be a combination of horny and sleepy, and guys pay me to talk to me in a text chat. The more money I make, the faster I pay the debt. I can also take suggestions from the viewers during a live chat.”

“You seem to have the basics. Should I ask why?”

“Definitely not. The less he thinks I know, the faster I can get the hell out of here.”

He chuckled. “You seemed very calm for someone who had just been sold.”

“I am mad as hell, but my mom made her choice. She could have sold the damned house. She would have had a few hundred thousand after the sale and the debt paid. Enough to start again.”

“I like you, Felicity. This will be your room. I will give you an hour before you go live and then consider the cameras on around the clock. You will live, eat, and sleep in front of the camera. Food can be ordered and will be delivered on a schedule. As you are new, you eat last.”

“Got it. What is your name?”

“Venner.”

“Thanks, Venner.” She entered the room and set about making it ready for her to make her debut. It was all about appearances, and she was going to make sure they saw what she wanted them to see.

* * * *

“Tobias, what are you watching?” Sven watched his omega staring at a cam girl who was cute and flirty.

“You would not believe this, Sven. She’s amazing.” He was smitten. It showed in his voice.

“How much have you spent on her?”

“Dunno. Ten thousand? She is just so frigging fun to watch.” He smiled. “She did a mukbang and ate everything,

but her voice is just great, and she has a sense of humour.”

“Wait. I thought this was a sex cam.”

Tobias laughed. “It was supposed to be. I don’t know if her organizers know what she is doing yet, but she is making a ton.”

Sven winced. “Have you hacked their system?”

“Just a little. I wanted to learn more about her. She’s stunning. Her hair looks fake though.”

Sven looked at his omega and ruffled his hair. “Try not to go blind jerking off to her.”

“Too late. I got blisters. I had to switch hands.”

“What is her name?”

“Her screen name is Felicity. Her actual name is Artemis Winter.”

Sven’s blood went cold. “Put her on the big screen.”

Artemis was looking at her screen and saying, *“Oh, I can’t do that. Eggplants aren’t even in season, and I try and buy local when I can.”*

He smiled. That was definitely the woman he remembered. “Can you get a message to her?”

“Public or private?”

“Private. Tell her it is the unlucky bastard and ask how much she owes. I will pay it off.”

Tobias smiled and opened the backdoor that he had burrowed into their system.

“Sending that very cryptic message. So, I am guessing you know her.”

“Yeah. Her father lost a bet to me, and I was paid back in three months. When I asked her how she did it, she told me. I asked her out, and she said that it was one offer she didn’t have to take, and I said I was an unlucky bastard.”

Tobias paused. “Holy shit. She just said she had half a million reasons to cuddle up to the camera, just waiting for an

unlucky bastard to rescue her.”

Sven blinked. “Rescue? I hadn’t thought of it that way. Mention that she will owe me.”

She chuckled. “*Sometimes you have to take a deep breath and go with the devil you know instead of the devil at the door.*”

“Shit. She’s being pressured by the company owner.” Sven sighed. “Who has her?”

“Wilhurst.” Tobias made a face.

Sven flinched.

* * * *

Arty folded her laundry with her ass to the camera. The pleated skirt and thong didn’t cover anything.

The flicker of hope when someone had hacked her chat feed had been a nice break. She had answered while keeping in character. Being *on* twenty-four-seven was wearing on her, but it had been three weeks and a hundred thousand dollars. She was making a difference, and if she did another mukbang, that would jack up her revenue by considerably more.

People liked to watch her. The first time she did it, she was scared for the first few days until she realized they couldn’t touch her. She was touching herself. It was fun if you took away the reason she was doing it.

There was a knock on the door, so she told her watchers that she had a visitor at the door, and no, it wasn’t that kind of visitor.

She smiled and waved at Venner. He nodded his head. “Mr. Wilhurst needs to speak with you.”

She said, “Just a moment.” She went to her underwear drawer and tossed two handfuls of panties on the bed. She spoke to the camera. “I have to leave for a moment, but if you

can count the number of panties, I will be back to crown a winner. Bonus if you can tell me how many are crotchless.”

She skipped out and walked with Venner to Wilhurst’s office.

His jaw hung open. She wore a cross-strap push-up bra and a micro-pleated skirt with a thong. The thigh highs and heeled Maryjanes completed her outfit.

“You rang?” She prompted.

“Right. What the hell are you doing on your channel?”

“Usual stuff. Flirting, patter. Mukbang.” She wrinkled her nose. “What is the trouble?”

“You are working your debt off quickly.”

She nodded. “That is the idea.”

“Too quickly.” He scowled.

Arty blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

“Your channel is becoming too popular, and I don’t want you leaving that quickly.”

“But there is no restriction on how fast I earn the money. The contract had no such stipulation. There wasn’t even a due date when the mass would be due. You will get your money; I will be able to stop shaking my ass on the internet.”

“I want to keep you.”

“What?”

“Your mother has begun to borrow money for a shopping habit. If you crawl onto my lap right now, she can live her life in luxury.”

Arty blinked. “I don’t give a frosty fuck about new debts. She did it to herself. I am not staying in that cage one moment more than I have to, and I am not shackling myself to your *post* in exchange.”

He chuckled. “I am beginning to understand the demographic you appeal to. Oh, I have had an offer for your full debt. A few, surprisingly.”

She blinked in surprise. “Really? What do they want?”

“Pretty standard. The most promising is an alpha and omega who need a maid. They are willing to cover the interest accrued to date as well.”

She jerked back. “A maid?”

He smiled. “Perhaps some time serving a sloppy omega and his alpha will make my offer more appealing.”

She shivered.

“Yes, I think that is just the thing. We will have them pay to have you for a month. Then, you come back to us, and we renegotiate.”

“Wait. A month?”

“One hundred and fifty thousand dollars will buy one month with you.” He smirked. “Yes, that will be it. I will arrange it while Venner returns you to your cage.”

Venner gestured for her to leave the office.

She was shaking with irritation. “He can’t just change the rules like that.”

“He can, and he did. What will you do?”

“Practice curtsyng in a tutu, I guess.”

Venner shook his head. “You really have no embarrassment, do you?”

“Not really. I burned that out a long time ago.”

She was returned to her cell and pasted a smile on her face. Time to reward her alert little perverts.

* * * *

“We can only get her for a month. He’s refusing full payment.” Tobias frowned. “Well, that sucks.”

“Why is he letting us have her for a month?”

“I told him we needed a maid. It seems that it would appeal to him.”

“Right. When can we have her?”

“The end of the week. I think we need a decoy to pick her up. What about Devlin?”

“He might do it. It will cost me though.” Sven sighed.

“He can pass for an irritable and slightly pervy alpha, you know, ‘cause he is one. Call him and give him a briefing.”

Tobias put on his earpiece. “Can we find a way to keep her?”

“Rescuing her and then keeping her is called kidnapping, you little pervert.” He ruffled Tobias’s hair. “I have you, and that’s good enough for me.”

Tobias smiled as he punched in Devlin’s number. “Maybe she will want us. It’s possible, right?”

Sven frowned, but he knew the answer. “Possible but not likely.” He had offered to keep and protect her once. She had punched him in the jaw. It had been a solid hit. Definitely not foreplay.

Chapter Two

Arty warned her audience that she would be off for a month. She didn't hint that anyone could simply rent her for a month. She tried to suggest that it was a medical issue without saying anything, but she didn't ask for funds for it.

When the handover day arrived, Venner showed up with a French maid outfit.

She looked at it and scowled, "I don't think it is your colour."

He snorted. "They wanted a maid, and Mr. Wilhurst says this will get you off on the right foot."

"Fine." She slipped the outfit on over her strappy lingerie and fastened all the closures. Her butt would be visible with the slightest tilt of her hips. A bunny dip was the only way she would get anything done.

He sighed. "You adapt so quickly. Did you sign off?"

"I did. Ready to go."

They headed back to Wilhurst's office.

"Well, well. I am sure your subscribers would love to see you in that."

"Only if I added kitten ears and a tail. I know my audience."

"Your renter is here." Wilhurst got up from his desk. "What I want to know is, who is your knight in shining armour?"

The door opened. She turned and paused. The man with sandy hair and black eyes was not the person she was expecting. She curtsied politely. "Hello."

"Hello, Felicity. I am here to sweep you away for a month."

She nodded shyly toward him and said, "Thank you, sir."

He held out his hand. “The money has changed hands. Come here, pet.”

She took a step. “If the funds have changed hands, what is my current balance?”

Wilhurst grimaced. “Two hundred fifty thousand.”

Her patron continued to hold out his hand, so she slipped her fingers into his palm, and he jerked her against his body. She grunted as she felt his hard, lean torso against hers. It was like being held against a leather stick.

She couldn't relax against him. She tried, but everything was wrong.

He chuckled and simply lifted her off her feet. He was an alpha, so it wasn't tough. He walked out while Wilhurst was screaming that she had to be back on the first of the following month.

Arty waited until they were out of the building to ask, “Who the hell are you?”

He chuckled, and next to the silver vehicle, he stripped the maid outfit off her and left it on the ground. He tucked her into the car and got in after her. “There is a new shirt over there.”

She blinked and opened the packet, sniffing the shirt. It was clean. She pulled it on.

The car started moving. “Right, so who are you?”

He leaned back and opened a bottle of soda for her, handing it to her. “My name is Devlin, and a charming little omega named Tobias asked me to do him a favour. He's a fan of yours.”

“Oh. An omega. Well, that's okay.” She sighed. “Thanks for the shirt.”

He smirked. “Sven thought you would enjoy it.”

She choked on the soda. “What? I thought you said Tobias?”

“Tobias is Sven's omega.”

She blinked and coughed again. “Oh, right. I should have known.”

“Known what?”

“That he would have an omega by now. It’s been a few years.”

He smiled. “Lean back. It’s a two-hour drive.”

She put the cap back on the soda. “Great.”

She smoothed the shirt over her thighs, yawned, and let herself relax into the car ride. There were no cameras, and the lean alpha next to her wasn’t going to make a move, so she got some sleep. She might need it.

* * * *

Tobias watched the beta sleep. He loved the smooth line of her inner thigh. “She’s so pretty. She’s like a doll.”

“Yes, she is. Now perhaps you should stop perving on her.” Sven checked his phone. “Devlin says she’s using scent scrubber.”

“Why is he concerned with her scent?” Tobias looked at his alpha with a smirk on his lips.

“I... shut up, Tobias. Is her room ready?”

Tobias nodded. “It’s ready. Closet is stocked. I have taken out all the cameras that I put in.”

“Good. She needs to feel safe. You can traumatize her later.”

He went to check on the kitchen and made sure that her favourite snacks were ready for her. It had been five years since she flattened him. Now, he was trying to make a better impression.

* * * *

A hand shook her shoulder, and she jolted, cowering in the corner.

A deep voice said, “Oh, dear. That isn’t a good sign.”

She slowed her breathing by an act of will. “Sorry. Bad memories of grad night.”

He nodded. “I see. Well, we are approaching the lake house. Don’t worry. They are eager to see you.”

“They?”

“Oh, yeah. Wilhurst would have freaked out at Sven’s name, so I was the go-between, and I will be again when I bring you back.”

“Ah, yes, I forgot I had to do that. Sorry, still waking up.”

She turned to look, and the lake house was big. The lake was a still mirrored pool and reflected the nearly full moon above.

There was a rotunda that the car drove around, and when it parked, she blinked. “Oh. Right. I have to get out here.”

Devlin slid out and reached back to take her hand. “Come on, pet.”

She grimaced but put her hand in his. He eased her out of the car and into the night air. She fidgeted and walked next to Devlin as he approached the door. She focused on breathing and concentrated on staying upright. The door slowly opened, and she didn’t see anyone, but then a beautiful man in a wheelchair grinned at her. “Artemis, I presume?”

She looked at him in surprise, and he was missing his right leg from mid-thigh downward. “Hello. Tobias?”

He grinned. “Pleased to meet you. Come on in. You will be our guest for the next month while we try and get you out of your situation.”

“Guest, not maid?”

He extended his hand, and she smiled and shook it. He pulled her close and rubbed his cheek against her hand. She

could feel the smooth surface of his skin. He kissed her knuckles. “You feel nice.”

Devlin snorted. “Hitting on her, Tobias?”

Tobias looked at him. “Thank you, Devlin. You can go be creepy somewhere else.”

Devlin laughed. “Not even a cup of coffee?”

Tobias pulled her into the house and made a face at the alpha. “Nope.” The door swung shut, and there was a burst of laughter from outside.

Tobias led her into the house, keeping hold of her hand and moving his chair with a control pad. “Sven is nervous about this. I am guessing you two have some kind of history.”

“We bumped into each other a few times. I think I made an impression.”

Tobias asked slyly, “Are you wearing the outfit you were wearing when you signed off?”

“Yeah. I put on a maid outfit over it, but Devlin dumped it.”

“It was probably rife with trackers.” Tobias smiled. “Let me get the scanner, so we can make sure you aren’t sending a signal.”

He let go of her hand in the living room and used both hands to wheel the chair.

Sven was standing in front of her. “So, this is not how I imagined we would meet again, Artemis.”

She shrugged. “Me neither. Frankly, I never counted on seeing you again.”

She looked at his blood-red hair, deep green eyes, and lightly tanned skin. With the black shirt and trousers, he looked the same as he did five years earlier.

“Your fashion sense is better.” He smiled.

She looked down at her shirt. “One of yours?”

He was hasty when he said, “It hasn’t been worn. It is brand new.”

She nodded. "I could tell."

"You... uh... are using nullifying products?"

She blinked as it hit her. "Oh. Shit. Is there a way for me to get any here?"

"Tobias might have some left over from his last restricted heat." Sven shrugged. "I promise not to pounce on you. It's only a month. We should be able to figure out a way to just get around any scent issues that arise."

"Yeah, well, if you have an *arising*, I am going to hit it with a hammer." She frowned.

Tobias came in and laughed. "That was an interesting sentence to return on. Artemis, please, come close and take the shirt off."

She grimaced. "I don't really need the shirt off for this, do I?"

He blushed. "No, but you are lovely, and Sven already paid for us to look for an entire month, so where's the harm?"

She heard his words, sighed silently, then giggled. "Whatever you say, cutie."

She slowly worked the shirt over her head and wiggled closer. "So, are you going to run that wand all over me?"

He blinked in surprise, and a deep blush filled his face. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean that."

She sighed and crouched in front of him. "A sex toy just walked off your screen and into your living room. I get it. Until I am back on the screen, remember that I am a person and can kick your ass."

He chuckled. "I doubt it. Not with Sven here."

"Oh, he didn't tell you? Five years ago, I kicked his ass, too. Well, I made him stagger to the side."

Tobias's brows rose. "Seriously? You hit him?"

"Oh, sure. He offered to make me his mistress, but I couldn't tell anyone."

Tobias muttered, “That was five years ago?”

“Yeah.” She sighed. “Now, can you scan me for trackers? This outfit doesn’t have any insulation value.”

“Uh, stand up and turn your back to me.”

She did and turned when he asked her to. When she was cleared, she rolled her shoulders.

Sven was behind her. “What is going on under those straps?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“There is red and the faint smell of blood.”

“Oh, I get bruises from this one. On camera, I put makeup on in the morning to make the sadists happy, and the later risers don’t know it happened.”

Tobias frowned. “Come with me.”

Arty blinked at the assertive tone, but she followed Tobias through the house, and he absently pointed, “That’s my elevator.”

He continued to a bedroom and went to a dresser. He pulled out a handful of something slippery. “Put this on and take that off. I will find the matching robe.”

She took the long nighty and went into the bathroom. She closed the door and got out of the bra, skirt, and thong with a groan of relief. Arty slipped the gown over her head, and her screaming shoulders were throbbing. She came out of the bathroom with her underwear in her hand.

Tobias was standing and leaning against the door of the closet. “Here’s the robe.”

She blinked. “You are tall.”

He laughed. He tossed her the robe and grabbed the arm of his chair before dropping in. “I am only the same height as you, but I imagine the difference is extreme versus the chair.”

“A little bit.”

“There is a hamper behind you. Our housekeeper comes in during the morning.”

She nodded and discarded the cheap fabric. She slipped the robe over her shoulders and walked out wearing the dark green outfit.

Tobias nodded to the bathroom. “There is some body butter in there. Bring it along.”

She walked behind Tobias, and when they got back to the bathroom, he grabbed a cushion and dropped it on the floor next to the couch, and then he got himself out of the chair and onto the sofa.

He nodded to the cushion that he positioned with his foot. “Sit and show me your shoulders.”

Sven looked at her and shrugged. “He normally isn’t this bossy.”

Tobias snorted. “Sure. When an alpha tells people what to do, it’s assertive. When an omega does it, they are bossy. Don’t care. Artemis, sit down.”

She chuckled and sat, sliding the robe down to her elbows and then the straps of the gown. Tobias opened the container, rubbed his hands together, and began a slow massage of her shoulders. After a minute or two, she started to softly groan as Tobias made sure the visible welts were massaged and soothed. He stroked her hair and said, “Now, get up, lie across my lap, and move the gown down to your hips. Sven won’t look.”

Sven cleared his throat, and his voice was husky. “I will go put a meal together.”

Artemis waited until he was gone before she scrambled into position on Tobias’s lap.

Tobias chuckled, then rubbed her back and around her ribs while she made soft whimpering sounds. She shuddered as the burn changed into a gentle throb.

He had her pull her clothing back into place and then ran a hand up her thigh. When her hips moved away from his hand,

he tutted and hauled her over him.

She braced her hands on his shoulder, and that is what Sven saw when he walked in. “Oh, god.” The tray rattled.

Arty blushed with mortification, and she bent her head. Tobias lifted his head to meet hers, and when all of the grooves left by the clothing had been treated, he patted her butt. “Now we can stop giving my alpha a coronary.”

She nodded, moved to one side, and sat in a corner with her legs curled up. “Sorry.”

Sven snorted. “Tobias, what do you want?”

He smiled and gave orders to Sven, and he was handed his plate a moment later.

Arty waited until Sven had served himself, and then she went in to get herself something. Her favourites were gone, so she just grabbed a handful of vegetables and dip.

She nibbled away and finished quickly.

Tobias looked at her. “That’s it?”

“Yeah. I am not a fan of broccoli and cauliflower.”

He looked over at the table, then down at his plate. “Do you want some of these?”

She was going to say no, but her stomach protested the lack of a meal. “Only what you don’t want.”

“Well, I want it all, but I think you need it more. And I know where the cookies are hidden, and you can help me reach them.”

Sven huffed, and she got up to sit next to Tobias.

He tapped her jaw, and she caught on that he wanted to feed her. She opened her mouth, and he ran an appetizer through the hot sauce. She grinned and took it in. Crunchy pastry and meat with a strong hot sauce made her day. She loved spice.

He did it again, and her body flushed with heat. She was relaxed, she was getting fed, and she had plenty of hot sauce. By the fourth piece, she smelled lemon and clover.

Tobias grinned. "There it is."

She sat back and munched. "You were trying to draw my scent out?"

He nodded.

"You could have just asked, and I would have done a bunch of push-ups in the foyer. I would have gone for jumping jacks, but I took my bra off." She swallowed. "Can I get something to drink?"

Tobias said, "Sure. Help yourself to the fridge. Or the wine. I think you need the wine."

She nodded. "I think I do, too."

She got up and walked past Sven, pretending he wasn't tracking her with his head, nose first. Alcohol would turn that reflex down. It would add an unpleasant contamination to her scent.

She found the wine rack and looked for a familiar label. She finally pandered to her sweet tooth and grabbed a Moscato from the wine fridge. It had a screw cap, and she opened it before looking for a glass. She found the glasses and then grabbed a chair from the kitchen table, using it to boost her to the wine glasses. She grabbed one and climbed down carefully before setting it on the counter. She closed the cupboard and put the chair back at the kitchen table. She poured a glass of wine, put the cap back on the bottle, and started drinking as she returned to the living room. The glass was empty before she sat on the couch, so she turned and walked back to the kitchen. Tobias called out, "Just bring the bottle."

She returned with the bottle and curled up on the couch with her refilled glass against her chest.

Sven sighed. "To dissuade an alpha, it needs to be liquor."

She shrugged. "I will just drink more, and if I have to, I will barf on you."

Tobias grinned. "She's a woman with a plan."

It was four glasses in when she felt her circumspection leaving her. "Uh-oh."

Tobias was concerned. “What is it, Artemis?”

“Call me Arty. My brain changed gears, and I have questions.”

Sven leaned forward. “Shoot.”

Tobias grinned. “Ask away.”

She leaned forward, lurched, and then she sat up again. “Tobias, what do you do when you are not being all hot and pretty?”

He grinned slowly. “I write code for computer games.”

“Oh. Cool. Where did your leg go?” She squinted and felt if she looked hard enough, she could see it.

He laughed. “I lost it in a car accident. Icy road, spun out, and crunch. I woke up, and the leg was gone. I was lucky to be alive, but it was difficult to come to grips with that at first. I had a few packs interested in me, but that interest faded when they saw the stump.”

Sven smiled. “And then, I met him in rehab while my sister was getting back into things after having a broken arm.”

Arty struggled to ask the next question. “Do you have a prosthetic?”

“Sure. Three of them. Sven got me whatever he thought would entice me into using it, but I don’t see the point. I work at a desk, and others do the cooking. I’m good.”

She looked and nodded. “I can see that.”

Sven smiled. “Arty, are you hitting on Tobias?”

She blinked. “Am I?”

Tobias grinned. “A little bit.”

She blushed and went to refill her glass of wine. The bottle dripped after she got half a glass. “All gone.”

She looked remorsefully at Tobias. “I am sorry. Being looked at by people you don’t like is bad.” She shuddered and finished her glass of wine.

She looked at the bottle and swayed. “I should get some water.”

She got to her feet and thudded down onto the couch. “Sorry!”

Sven got up. “Come on. I will carry you to bed and then bring you water.”

Tobias watched her cringe as Sven approached. He blurted out, “Arty, did an alpha hurt you?”

Sven froze.

She looked to Tobias. “No, it was two betas who hurt me. They got caught. Charged. I recovered, but I don’t get close to men very often.”

He blinked. “You were nearly naked in my lap.”

She waved at him. “You are an omega with an alpha. You don’t do girls.”

Tobias blinked and frowned. “I don’t know who told you that, but you have been most grievously misinformed.”

Her head was fuzzy. “What? Make the words smaller.”

“Omegas are a lot more flexible with who we sleep with than most folks like to admit. It is fairy tale crap that one alpha or one pack is all we will ever want. They are just better at taking us through a heat than betas.”

Sven smiled. “And omegas are just better at taking alphas.”

Tobias smiled. “Everybody needs a hobby.”

“Okay. Good to know. I am just gonna crawl to that room.” She slithered to the ground and started creeping past the coffee table and then past Sven’s legs.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake.” Hands slowly lifted her, and he cradled her against his chest.

She looked at him blearily. “You are pretty, too.”

“Yes, I know. It is on my business card. Why did you get drunk, Arty?”

“Cramps are starting. Tummy hurts.”

“Oh, your period?”

“My un-period. I have an implant. Can’t trust guys.”

Sven nodded. “So, those men got arrested?”

“Yes. Got a fine, and then they were let go. I got lucky, and they were in a fatal accident six months later.” She heard her own evil giggle.

“Why do you say you got lucky?”

“They were stalking me. Police couldn’t do anything. Videos of the attack were sent to my phone and disappeared afterward.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah. That is when I started as a cam girl the first time. I was wary of stuff online, but I had to do it anyway.”

“Why did you do it?”

“Dad gambled away my college fund, and I really wanted to go to college. Everything costs money.”

“And then you had to pay off the debt to me.” He settled her on the bed.

“Yup. But that was the second time I met you. Well, bumped into you.”

He stared at her. “Really, when was the first?”

“I was behind you in line at a coffee shop, and you got the last chocolate croissant. Bastard. That’s when that stupid thing showed up on my shoulder.” She yawned.

“Huh. I am going to get you that glass of water.”

She smiled. “Mmkay.”

Tobias wheeled in and had a tray across his lap. “I brought the water.”

She sat up, and Sven handed her the cup with the straw. She drained it in seconds and asked, “Could you fill it again, please?”

Tobias filled it, and she took it and put it on the bedside table.

Sven stroked her hair. “Good night, Arty.”

Tobias rolled close and kissed her cheek. “I think you are pretty, too.”

She stared at him. “Good night, Tobias.”

They left her room with the light dimmed, so she could still see her way around. It was fairly comfortable, so she kept herself on her side and dozed off.

Chapter Three

Arty's head ached lightly but not horribly. She looked around and grabbed the water glass. She wrapped her lips around the straw and drank. Once the water was done, she headed to the shower and washed her scent off.

She wasn't at the club. She was safe for four weeks. She looked into the rainfall shower and let the fat drops wash away the smell of the club.

When she stepped out of the shower, she wrapped herself in a towel and tiptoed into the bedroom, looking through the drawers to see what had been provided for her. She went to the wardrobe and grabbed a dress. From there, she chose underwear that matched and wouldn't gouge her. The welts from yesterday's underwear had already faded.

The dress was a silky infinity dress, so she arranged it with cap sleeves. Once she dressed, she crept through the silent house. She tiptoed, opened one of the patio doors, and walked toward the dock to watch the sunrise.

She heard the roll of wheels and turned to see Tobias heading toward her.

He smiled. "Should I roll quieter?"

"No. I am fine. Water and a hot shower cure a lot of ills. Sorry if I got nosey last night."

"It's fine. You were a lot less invasive than a lot of people. Several have asked me how I could do that to myself." He huffed and rolled forward. "So, why are we out here?"

"I haven't seen a sunrise in a while." She looked back at the water and the pinky-orange of the sky.

"Arty? Can you come here and sit on my lap?"

She blinked. "Why?"

“Because one of us is shivering, and it ain’t me.”

“I am fine.”

“Artemis. Get over here.”

She sighed and hesitated, but he grabbed her and arranged her across his lap. He settled her with an arm around her hips. “Now, we can watch the sunrise.”

She smiled, leaning her head against his, and they watched the sunrise.

* * * *

Through the glass door, Sven watched his omega bully the beta. Arty agreed after a moment, and he guessed she was calculating risk every time she hesitated.

Tobias was in love. Sven had known him long enough to know that. They just happened to be in love with the same woman, but she was not in love with them. Yet. They had a month to woo her.

He smiled as they cuddled together, and Tobias wrapped his arms around her to keep her warm. He was going to be twelve feet tall for the rest of the day.

After the sun was up, Tobias turned and began to wheel them back to the house. Arty kept trying to get off his lap, and he rocked the chair so that she clutched him. His grin was visible from thirty feet away. It seemed Sven had to start making breakfast.

* * * *

Arty kept herself curled in a ball as he wheeled them through the door Sven opened. She opened her squinched eyes as the warmth of the room kicked in.

She shivered a little. “Can I get off now, Tobias?”

He chuckled and whispered in her ear, “Well, I don’t think we are that far, but why don’t you dismount from your trusty steed and head to the living room to get a throw from the couch.”

He helped her off his lap, and she pattered into the living room to get the throw.

When she came back, Tobias had a cup of coffee in his hand, and Sven was pouring a second.

“So, why did you spend all that cash just to get me out for a month?”

Sven smiled. “It isn’t that much compared to your life, and the one month will let us figure out a way to get you free. I have some suggestions, but they are final solutions. They would just trap you again.”

She wrinkled her nose. “I don’t like the sound of that.”

Tobias sipped at his coffee. “Neither do we, but we will try everything else first. You locked in an arrangement is not a desirable result.”

She nodded. “So, do either of you have to work?”

Tobias finished his coffee and set the cup down on the counter. “I do. Right now. If I take a break in the afternoon, can I come and get you to go for a walk?”

She looked at the wheels.

“I have crutches, Arty.” He grabbed her by the hand and pulled her down for a kiss.

She blinked as his lips pressed hers but didn’t go further.

Arty swallowed when he let her go, and he wheeled himself away, whistling.

Sven handed her a cup of coffee, a smile on his lips. “Well, he’s in a good mood.”

“Um, yes. I think I moved around too much while I was on his lap.” She bit her lip.

He paused and then laughed. “He woke up that way, and when I asked, he said he was dreaming of you.”

“Oh, right. You sleep together.”

“Yes. We do. Tobias doesn’t like being alone at night. He wakes up in the dark, screaming about being trapped.” He nodded. “Now, what would you like for breakfast?”

“Eggs and bacon?”

He smiled. “I can do that.”

He made breakfast and set it down on the kitchen table. She refilled her coffee, and they ate together.

“Why did you say no five years ago?”

“The title of mistress is hard on my ego. I had plans. I was going to finish my education and become a social worker and help people who had parents with self-control issues like I do.” She waved a piece of bacon in the air. “I was going to be respectable. I had it all planned out.”

“What happened?”

“My dad got into debt, and I got him out of it, and six months ago, he had a heart attack and shot himself in the head.” She grimaced. “Mom grabbed me a few weeks ago and told me that dad had left behind a half-million-dollar debt. Off I went to the cam. As time went on, I began to suspect that the debt was hers. She’s collecting more and trying to tack it onto my ledger.”

“Did you take it?”

“No. Fool me once...” She rubbed her forehead. “When I hit you, I was mad at my father for taking chances, and I was furious at myself for bailing him out the way I did. You were just the embodiment of the stupidity.”

“Thanks.” He snorted. “You have quite the right hook.”

“It was an uppercut. You are too tall for anything else.”

He smiled and then sobered. “I would still like to pay off your debt if I can get that old asshole to take it.”

She must have changed her expression because he asked, “What? Has he been forcing himself on you?”

“No. That’s technically illegal, and he is all about the technicalities.” She ran her hands through her hair. “He’s just been making... offers.”

“Oh.”

“He’s getting more insistent.”

“I see.”

“And those little outfits that his lap sitters wear don’t look comfortable at all.” She shrugged.

He stared at her. “Is your hair dyed?”

“Yup. Nice, boring brown. Nobody looks at brown hair.”

“What colour is it actually?”

“A weird-ass purple.”

“Are your eyes bigger than they are supposed to be?” He stared.

“Are you trying to give me a complex? Yes. They grew bigger, and my hair purpled when the shamrock appeared. Funny, you don’t look Irish.”

He smiled. “My mother is. My father’s family is Russian.”

“And your name is Scandinavian. That covers a lot of ground.”

“They liked the sound of it, and my father’s family is huge, so they needed a name no one had. This fit the bill.”

She nodded. “You have a little sister?”

“Yes. She visits Tobias often. She likes to test his code.”

“Well, at least he has someone to talk to. What do you do during the day?”

“Well, I have a lot of investment income to live off, so I spend my days running errands for family, playing in the lake, and visiting family, with or without Tobias.”

“Playing in the lake?”

“You are welcome to use any and all equipment. I don’t know if Tobias ordered you a swimsuit though.”

Tobias came in using his crutches. “I did. Third drawer on the second dresser. Two pieces and one piece.”

“Okay, where did you get all these clothes, and why do they fit?”

He grinned. “They fit because your measurements were posted on your cam page, and I just ordered the stuff online. It isn’t magic. It showed up in a few business days, was inspected, laundered, and put away.”

“Oh.”

Tobias grinned. “Now, please, come here and give me a kiss just because.”

“Why?”

“I have never kissed someone my height before.”

She kept the throw on her and walked up to him. “This is silly.”

“I know. Keep telling yourself that. Now tilt your head and lean forward.”

She did as he asked and nearly sighed as the sweetness of his breath gusted to her.

His tongue caressed hers, she did the same, and soon, they were standing there, sliding tongue against tongue, and she pressed her body to as much of his that she could reach. She wanted to grip him but didn’t want to knock him down.

She tried to lean back, but he followed her. She returned to her full height, and the kiss continued on and on.

Tobias was making growly happy sounds, and she was shocked that one of the pretty ones was making out with her in his kitchen.

“Arty, he can do that for days. If you want to save your sanity, back away.” Sven chuckled.

She heard him through the roaring in her ears, and when Tobias tilted his head, she jumped backward. He looked at Sven with narrowed eyes. “I was enjoying myself, she was enjoying herself, and you are just a spoilsport.”

“Go back to work, Toby. You have that status meeting tomorrow, and it is in person.”

Tobias sighed, then smiled slyly. “Arty, can I kiss you later?”

The question was both innocent and nefarious.

“Uh, if you get all your work done, I guess so?” She pressed a hand to her lips.

He laughed and left the kitchen.

Sven sighed. “You didn’t set a time. You didn’t set a location. He likes kissing. A *lot*.”

“Location. Like, living room or kitchen?”

He walked up to her and whispered, “Mouth or elsewhere. He really likes kissing.”

“Uh-oh.”

“Indeed.” He grinned. “Anyway, treat this as a holiday home. There’s a hot tub, the lake, kayak, paddle board, and do you know how to drive a boat?”

“Okay, and no. I think I will just relax a bit today and figure out exercise tomorrow. I have been stuck in that cage for a month. I need to stretch.”

“Then, use the property as you like. Just don’t try and leave. I don’t know if Wilhurst has figured out where you are, and I would prefer he not find out.”

She nodded. “I agree. I am relatively safe here, so it is the most comfortable option.”

Sven laughed. “Relatively safe.”

She headed back to the room she had been given, grabbed a towel, put on a bikini, and found some sunscreen. She was going to spend the day in the sun.

Arty had covered herself in sunscreen when she heard the distinctive sound of Tobias approaching. He pulled up a chair and said, “I will do your back. Flip over.”

“I thought you were working.”

“I am taking a break and nearly done anyway. Now, flip.”

She nodded and flipped over. She heard the *snert* of the sunscreen, then the slick smacking sound, and then his hands were on her. The first thing that he touched was her four-leaf clover. “You have fairer skin than Sven.”

“Observation?”

“Yes. But you feel so much softer. He’s like smooth leather; you feel like... me.”

He rubbed his hands across her midriff, and then he untied the string of the top. “Don’t want any unsightly tan lines.”

“By that logic, either I shouldn’t be out here, or I shouldn’t be wearing anything.”

“Is there anything I can do to persuade you to do the second?”

“Today? Absofuckinglylutely not.”

He started to work on her thighs and then her calves. Her toes curled and uncurled as he rubbed her down with the sunscreen.

He ran his thumbs under the edge of the bottoms and sighed. “Flip over.”

She squawked, “What? I did the front.”

“I bet you missed a spot. Flip.”

“Why are you so bossy with me?” She grunted and rolled to her back, holding her top in place with one arm.

He grinned. “Because something tells me you will give in. After the accident, I was ordered around a lot, and I didn’t take to it. The omega centre dumped me, and then Sven met with me, and I could see that he understood what I was after in a union. We both understood that we were comfort objects for

the other.” He snagged her top with his pinky and pulled it aside. He rubbed the sunscreen onto her shoulders and down to her breasts. “What I wanted most was someone who comforted me by their very presence. When I saw you on the cam, I knew that you were what I was looking for. You were perky, sexy, and fun, but you had a still silence in you that was visible in the moments you changed location or got a request you didn’t like. I wanted to rescue you. Then, I showed Sven, and he had me send that message about rescue, and you responded. I felt nine feet tall, but I also knew that the on-screen you was an act. I wanted to learn the real you. You are softer than I thought.” His hands massaged her breasts with a gentle touch that surprised her.

Arty kept her thighs touching as heat from the sun and his hands warmed her up. His fingers skated over her belly and under the edge of her bottoms. “See, I told you, you missed a spot.”

Her voice was high. “Don’t you have work to finish?”

“I will go if you promise to keep the top off for half an hour.”

She blinked and then saw the orb. “You saw me on camera.”

“Closed circuit to the house. Yeah.” He leaned in and rubbed his nose against hers. “Just half an hour. Please?”

“Why?”

“I am nearly done with the project, and I find the sight of you inspiring.”

“Well, I don’t have a phone and can’t time it, so I will have to guess.”

He nodded, hopped inside, and returned with something in his teeth. “Here you go.”

She laughed. “Egg timer. Fine. Half an hour. Shoo.”

She set the timer and listened to him moving through the house. She settled on the lounge and fell asleep.

Chapter Four

The shrieking timer woke Arty. She hushed it and rolled to her stomach, setting it again. Something about being mostly naked outdoors was nice.

“Arty, did you have any thoughts for lunch?”

She went up on her elbows.

“Holy hell!” Sven was staring.

Arty followed the line of his gaze to her breasts. Her nipples weren't visible, but that was it. “What?”

“You... know he can see you, right?”

“Yes. He told me. He asked me to remain on my back for half an hour, so I did, but when I flipped, I didn't need to put my top back on.” She gave him a direct look. “Do I?”

He held up his hands. “Not on my account. If that is your thing, you are welcome to go topless anytime you want. We will warn you if there is anyone expected and stow robes strategically around the house.”

“It isn't a thing... I don't think.” She reached for her top without rising, and after groping around, she just said, “Fuck it.” She went up on her knees, grabbed her top, and put it on.

“It's Tobias. You respond to him. Very strongly.” He smiled. “You will hate me, but it is fun to watch. He steps away from his terminal when you are around. That never happens. He has been living for his work. He's taken two breaks today and gotten out of his chair. That's huge.”

“Is he listening through the camera?”

“Probably, but he knows how I feel about his lack of motivation. What do you want to know about him?”

“What kind of prosthetics does he have?”

“The standard issue, a carbon fibre, and a carbon fibre with an athletic foot. I was optimistic on that last one.”

“It’s too bad. I always wanted to cuddle with a cyborg.” She smiled. “Nerd alert.”

Sven said, “Come on. I will get you some iced tea or something. You have been in the sun for an hour.”

She wrapped herself in the towel and followed Sven back into the house. He got her some iced tea and cookies. She looked at him. “So, do you actually have a housekeeper, or is it actually you?”

“We have delayed her a few days. I will get you out of here for a day before she arrives. I don’t want you subjected to an interrogation.”

“Oh. Right. So, chain me in the boathouse?”

He smirked. “Let’s save the fun and games for when we are better acquainted.”

She snorted and nibbled at a cookie. “Funny.”

“Glad you think so, but tying you to a wall so I could lift your hips and pound into you until my knot locked us together...”

She shivered and got splashed. She frowned at him. “I dropped my cookie.” Her pulse had taken up unusual locations in her body.

He had a smug gleam in his eyes. “I will get you a fresh cup of iced tea and a new cookie.”

He took away the cup with the accusing cookie floating in it. She got a napkin and dabbed at the splash on her face.

Sven looked at her with a grin as she dabbed at her skin and grimaced. “Sticky.”

He groaned, and his shoulders shook. “Oh, man. The jokes are just coming one after the other. Hah! There’s another one.”

Tobias came into the kitchen, and he was grinning. “All done. All my work has been handed off, and now, I can relax until the end of the day. It has been confirmed received.”

Sven smiled. “He was trying to get the project done before you arrived, but he had a few hours of work left. Tomorrow we have to go to his company offices so that he can sit at the project report meeting, and I have to go to the shareholder meeting.”

“So, I will be here and reminding myself how to swim?” She smiled hopefully. “Or is the boathouse coming into play this early?”

Tobias murmured, “We also get every channel known to man. Some of them are even legal.”

Sven sighed. “You will come with us. We’ll get you a phone and see if we can get you a tour of the company.”

“A whole bunch of terminals and folks with glazed eyes?”

Tobias smiled. “Aw, you understand my people.”

She looked to Sven. He looked back. She drew in her breath and shouted, “Cookie!”

Sven jolted and threw her a cookie. She caught it and started to nibble. “Thank you. I am still getting used to the outside world.”

Tobias smiled. “But now you know that screaming cookie gets you to see the whites of his eyes.”

She grinned and ate the cookie. “Not gonna drop this one.”

Sven snorted.

“Wait, what?” Tobias looked between them. “What did I miss?”

Sven brought her another glass of iced tea. “She’s sensitive to dirty talk and possibly bondage.”

Arty sipped at the iced tea, but her cheeks got warm. “No comment and no clue.”

Tobias came and sat next to her. “I am wondering what he said to get you to blush like this.”

Sven chuckled and brought Tobias a glass as well.

“So, we have the afternoon off.” Sven shrugged.

Tobias sipped at his tea. “We do.”

“A trip around the lake? I just have to call my cousin for a few minutes. He should be off his omega by now.” Sven got up and left.

Arty blinked.

Tobias snorted. “Yeah, his whole family is really frank about that stuff, and it is a huge family. Thankfully, he doesn’t make me go to a lot of those parties. I am pretty sure they don’t even know I am an omega yet, so I am safe from their worship. It’s like an omega cult.”

“Oh. That sucks.”

“Not really. I am not up for big parties.”

She nodded. “I get that.”

She finished her tea and took it to the sink. He finished his, and she removed it and put it in the sink before she started washing up.

He got up and came toward her. “Why are you so cool with the leg?”

“My grandma lost her leg before her first child was born. Farm accident. She had a prosthetic and worked until she walked as if both legs were organic.”

“Ah. Got it.”

“Can I see your carbon fibre leg?”

He blinked. “Really? I am not going to put it on.”

“That’s fine. I just want to see the tech. They are amazing. All the tension and weight springs.” She smiled at him as she put the glasses on the drain board.

He narrowed his eyes. “I am still not wearing it.”

“That’s fine.” She pressed herself close. “Show it to me.”

Tobias blinked. “Wow. You really are good at that.”

Arty shrugged. “It’s kinda fun. At least I don’t have to be afraid when I play like that here.”

Tobias smiled and smoothed her hair. “No fear here.”

She smiled. “No fear here. Now, show me that long, hard leg of yours.”

He burst out laughing and nodded. “Follow me.”

She followed him, and they passed his and Sven’s bedroom. The scent was proof enough that the two males occupied that space.

Tobias opened another door, and to her surprise, there was a gym and a case on the side that he approached. “I wish I had stripper music going. Well, here is the big reveal.”

He opened the cupboard, and the three glossy legs were there for all to see.

“What happened to your original phone?”

“Oh, I did a factory reset so that Wilhurst couldn’t get any of my information off my phone. Then, I did it again.” She chuckled as she crouched to caress the carbon fibre. “Wow. To think of what my gran could have done with this beast. She would have taken it to the local motorcycle customizer and gotten it tricked out.”

“Wait. What now?”

“Guys that paint on motorcycles can customize this beast. Well, if you wanted to use it, or if you just wanted it as an art piece.” She shrugged. “It is lovely, and the sport one is amazeballs.”

She stood and closed the case. “They are very pretty.”

He frowned. “You don’t want to see me use one?”

She touched his face. “If you aren’t comfortable, don’t do it.”

He smiled slightly. “I feel comfortable right now. Will you help me put it on?”

“Why am I suddenly glad I am on birth control?”

His chuckle was soft. “Okay, let’s see if I remember how to do this.”

He took off his cargo pants. “Sorry, wasn’t planning on this when I got dressed.”

She looked at his erection and blushed. “Commando it is.”

He chuckled. “I am an omega. We generally wear as little as possible.”

He sat down and got a shrinker, lining up the ring at the end before he wiggled it on. “Can you help me smooth it and then get the leg out for me?”

She nodded and helped him get the band around his waist before she got the plain leg out and offered her shoulder as he got up. He grunted. “It’s been a while since I used it. It’s going to be a tight fit.”

Arty smiled. “Oh, the jokes.”

He leaned over, and there was a click. He smiled. “It’s in.”

“Oh, the jokes.”

“The things I will do to impress a girl.”

Arty smiled at him. “Stand there with your cock out and a strap on?”

He laughed. “Help me over to the balance beams.”

She nodded, and he slowly walked over there with her for balance. He started walking.

She looked at him and said, “You are so lucky that I don’t have a phone. This is the most mystifying image. An omega with one synthetic leg and two flesh ones.”

He laughed and kept walking until he reached the end, and then he returned to the starting point. He chuckled. “If I am going to keep doing this, I will need to keep the reducer on. Hurts like hell.”

He turned back and lifted his hands off the bars as he kept his back straight. They remained in the room for half an hour with him walking, and when he went to the cupboard, he took out the carbon fibre leg. He released the first leg and put on the second.

He went to walk with the slick leg, and Arty stood back, swallowing hard. Unfortunate fetish *unlocked*. Tobias walking on his own was hot, but the sci-fi component added by the limb got her hot. Oh, she was going to hell.

He walked to her, and with the leg, he was an inch taller than she was. She tilted her head back, and he whispered, “Why are you hot, Arty?”

“I have impulses that are all kinds of wrong.” She put her hands behind her back. “Hands to myself.”

“What kind of impulses?”

“Um, never mind.” She blushed and refused to look at him.

“You honestly just like the leg.”

“Well, I like you being a little taller than me.” She looked at him. “But it is you and the leg that do it for me. You are hot, but with that accessory, you melt my... never mind.”

“Yeah, I can smell that.”

“Consider it my brain’s version of black lingerie on you.” She shrugged.

He moved her against the wall. “Really?” His expression was skeptical.

“It’s so hard and so slick.” She drew her finger down his thigh to the compression piece.

He shuddered, and she felt heat dropping on her thigh. He moaned and whispered, “Arty, you are driving me nuts.”

“Did you just cum on my thigh?”

He snorted. “Yeah, I have a hair trigger. I do apologize.”

Sven came in. “Hey, here you are. Tobias, you are wearing it.”

Tobias nodded. “It is going to be more frequent.”

Sven grinned. “And no pants?”

“I wasn’t expecting it, but Arty is fascinated by it, so I tried it on. I am going to have to wear it more frequently.”

She scooted the towel lower to hide the splash on her thigh. “Oh, yay.”

Sven’s nostrils flared. “Are you still wanting to go on the lake?”

“Sure, I just need to tidy up and change.” She pressed gently on Tobias, and he took a step back.

She scooted along the outer wall and slunk past Sven. Fooling around with someone’s omega without express permission was tacky and unacceptable.

She changed and cleaned up. The stream of cum went from the top of her thigh down to mid-calf. She pulled out a modest one-piece for the trip on the lake. Time to stop playing with Tobias. He played back.

She found a gauzy beach wrap and covered up. She pattered outside to where Tobias had his crutches and no sign of the leg. He was wearing his compression item on his leg, and it was fairly close to his skin tone.

Sven got into the boat and checked something before he turned to help Tobias into the boat. He caught sight of her and snorted, but he steadied his omega as he got into the boat.

Arty stepped into the boat and quietly found a seat. Her period had started, and she had gone from feeling frisky to feeling like heck. The rapid shift always made her head spin. The stunning identification of feminine supplies in the guestroom confirmed that it was used for random females who were not romantically involved with the two.

The boat was slamming up and down against the water, and her cramps played along in a twisted symphony.

The boat slowed and then stopped. She looked up, and her arms were wrapped around her abdomen. Arty raised her head and looked around.

“Arty, are you okay?” Tobias looked at her and frowned. “You look grey. Are you seasick?”

She smiled weakly. “No. Cramps. They hit me just after I left you. They will mostly be over tomorrow.”

“What do you normally do?”

“Painkiller, water, cushion, or hot water bottle, and hours of random stuff from the internet.”

Sven crouched next to her and smoothed her hair back. “You should have said something.”

“What? Mother nature just kicked me in the box, so I want to curl up and cry?”

“Succinct.”

“If I ever see that bitch coming, I am going to return the favour.”

He growled.

She leaned back. “What the hell is that about?”

Tobias snorted. “You smell like you are wounded, but he can’t fix it, so he’s frustrated. He got the same way when I had my wounds dressed.”

She looked at Sven. “You go back and drive the boat. I will just curl up on that bench, and I will be fine. You two enjoy yourselves.”

He paused. “You are kidding.”

“No. Life goes on, and this happens several times a year, like thirteen.”

Tobias murmured. “Sven’s family raised their alphas separately from their betas. Periods weren’t a thing.”

She had another cramp and grunted. “Did you have siblings?”

“Three older sisters. All are married with kids. They take turns visiting here.”

“Oh. That’s nice.”

“How about you? Any other siblings?”

“I had a younger brother. He was killed by a drunk driver when he was twelve. That is when my parents started to spiral.”

Sven started the boat, and Arty went to the back of the boat and curled up on the bench. She closed her eyes and tried to get comfortable. It was rough, but she managed to nap for a few minutes.

When she woke up, she was being carried down the dock. “Aw, come on.”

Sven sighed. “We aren’t going to spend time out there while you are in pain.”

She felt overwhelming hormonal sadness. “And you are tethered to me until I go back.”

“We are not bringing you back. You are staying with us.”

The emotional dam broke, and she started talking and blubbering in high-pitched squeaks. Sven set her on the couch, and Tobias put an arm around her and translated her incoherent babbling. “No, you aren’t a burden. Yes, Sven made that much this morning. Yes, he looks good in those shorts. No, we don’t have that in the house.” He smiled. “Now, can I put my hand on your tummy? You look like it really hurts.”

He lay her over his thighs and pressed a hand to her belly. He massaged gently, and she relaxed.

Sven blinked. “How the hell did you do that?”

“Her uterus is contracting, and it is a smooth muscle. Studies are showing that for some women, the cramps can equate in pain and intensity to a heart attack.” Tobias sighed. “And they go through it monthly.”

“I haven’t heard that.”

“That’s because folks are starting to pay attention to how some women can be knocked flat by the pain.”

“Shit.”

“That’s a discussion for another day, but I made a comment to Rebecca one day, and she had me pull a ton of videos up online, and we sat and watched them. It was an eye-burning education, but I got it.”

“Can you recommend some videos?”

Arty reached for the remote and flicked through channels until she found the one her mother had used to educate her.

Sven watched the fifteen-minute diagram that explained what was currently going on. When it was over, she flipped to a Chinese drama. “You are right. You do have all the channels.”

Tobias still kept one hand on her belly, and the heat was relaxing. The other hand was stroking her hair.

Sven crouched in front of her. “Now, what can I get for you?”

“Put a shirt on; I’m drooling,” she muttered.

Tobias laughed. “She needs a sports drink. Dehydration makes things worse.”

“Got it.”

She watched the subtitles, and when the drink arrived, she obediently sipped until she dozed off.

* * * *

Tobias asked, “Do we have any painkillers?”

Sven frowned. “I don’t think so.”

Tobias blushed. He had had a painkiller addiction after his accident. When he was physically healed, Sven removed all painkillers from the property.

“Sorry, Arty. My lack of control is causing you pain.” Tobias stroked her head.

She was boneless against his lap. The scent of blood was unmistakable.

“Will she do this every time?”

Tobias shrugged. “She said she had an implant but might need it refreshed. They only last a few years.”

Sven frowned. “How is that done?”

“You just make an appointment, and she goes. Well, we take her.”

“I meant, how do they replace the implant?”

Tobias nodded to her arm. “They cut a slit and remove the old implant then slide in a new one.”

Tobias pulled the remote from Arty’s slack hand. “Let’s find out what the best methods of birth control are.”

Sven nodded and sat next to them, getting a crash course on beta female reproductive health.

Chapter Five

Arty woke up when the pain stopped. She sat up, and Tobias asked, “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I have to attend to things.”

Tobias said quietly, “What is your average timeline?”

“One heavy, three light.”

“Ah. You are going to face a ton of questions. We spent the afternoon learning about beta females. I mean, I knew most of it, but there were still a few things that surprised me.”

She blinked. “That sounds wild. Hold that thought until I come back.”

She returned in five minutes, a light ache in her belly. It was a lot better. She went back to the living room, and Tobias patted his lap. “Lie down again.”

She had put on the dress she had worn earlier as she wasn’t going to be near the water again today.

“Sven has been on video calls in his office, asking his siblings and their mates about what makes them feel better.”

She blinked. “You guys are putting some effort into this.”

He stroked her hair. “Of course. If we can’t stop it to help you, we can at least understand what is going on. It’s only sensible.”

She smiled. “Has he gotten a consensus yet?”

“Yes, but we won’t be using that method this time.”

“What?”

“Sex.”

She stared into space. “That’s... well, I could see how that would work. I use a vibrator now and then. The orgasm helps

the cramps.”

“That is good to know. I believe I have one in my collection that I haven’t used yet.”

She coughed. “I am good. I can just use my hand if I need to. I get the feeling that any toy used by an omega might have a jackhammer action.”

Tobias snorted. “Well, you aren’t wrong.”

She giggled and clutched his thigh.

Sven wandered back and met her gaze. There was stunned horror and determination in his eyes. Yeah, he had been asking about periods.

Arty looked at him. “You don’t look so good.”

“My sisters-in-law have given me some blunt details. For hours. It seems that they have just been waiting for someone to ask.”

He wandered over to her and sat next to Tobias’s leg and her head. She stroked his red hair and sighed. “Your hair is pretty, and you look like you are in shock.”

“It was a lot to take in. They didn’t cover this in the sexual health class. They taught more of seducing betas than soothing them.”

She patted his head. “Don’t worry. Forget everything you had learned in a day or two. It will be over, and by tomorrow, I won’t look like the undead. This has been a bad one due to stress. When I can give into it earlier, I can stop this from happening or, at least, minimize it.”

She sighed. “But it will happen again before the month is up.”

“Next time, we will be ready for it.”

She laughed and said, “I am never ready for it. I am just trying to live my life in between.”

“When you were wearing the bustier and mini skirt, that was the other one, right?”

She paused. “That isn’t creepy at all, fan boy.”

Tobias laughed. “I liked analyzing your moves and interactions. You are good with people.”

“I am good with a projection of people.” She sighed. “Live people, not so much.”

“But your patrons?”

“Words on a screen giving suggestions.”

“Do you guys have any mac and cheese?”

Sven chuckled. “I can make some in twenty minutes. That is your comfort food?”

“Aw, you are learning my language.”

He grinned, turned, and pressed a kiss to her lips. She responded, and he was gone.

She made a soft sound, and Tobias laughed. “We will have you begging like an omega in no time.”

She looked up at him. “What?”

“That sound you made is close to an omega whine.”

“Oh.”

Tobias smiled. “Oh, yeah. I get to kiss you again.”

He pulled her up across his lap and kissed her before she caught on that he was serious.

Tobias slowed and moved his hand from under her skirt. He softly kissed her lips, cheeks, forehead, and temple. “There you go, Arty. Sven has made your mac and cheese.”

She blinked at her throbbing body. “Oh. Okay.”

She sat up and pivoted to sit next to him on the couch. “Um, you are really good at that.”

He grinned. “It’s one of my favourite things to do. Kissing people that I care about until they are all happy and relaxed.”

“Right.” She put her feet on the floor and stood up. She was a little dizzy but made it to the kitchen.

A bowl with crumbled bacon on it sat next to the stove. The white and glossy noodles looked great, and she kept her mouth clamped tight while she drooled. Sven came back from the pantry. “Did you want any white pepper on it?”

She stared. “Yes, please.” She spun around. “Where do the forks live?”

He reached over and opened a drawer for her, getting her a fork. “Here you go. Do you need anything else?”

“Glass of water?”

He smiled and got her a glass of water. “Anything else?”

“Put a restraint system on Tobias’s tongue. That thing is deadly.” She glided across the kitchen to the table.

Sven chuckled and joined her a minute later. “I told you he likes kissing.” He ate some of the mac and cheese and grinned. “I am out of practice, but it’s pretty good.”

She ate her mac and cheese and nodded. “You are right. It’s very good.”

He smiled, and Tobias came in. “Hey, what about me?”

Arty lifted her head. “There is some on the stove.”

Tobias looked at her and whined. “Can you get it for me?”

“Sure. Price is no kisses for two days and no touching for three.” She glanced at him, and his appalled expression was enough to make her smile.

He frowned.

“Come on. My grandma could manage no problem, and she had babies to run after, so to speak.”

He put down one crutch and moved to get a bowl. “Sven, little help?”

“I coddle you too much, which is fun, but you can do more. You just choose not to.” As Sven was speaking, Tobias moved over to the oven, put down the bowl and picked up the pot. The sticky squishing sound of the mac and cheese brought some colour to her face.

Sven smirked. “Penny for your thoughts?”

“Shut up.” She finished her mac and cheese and grabbed it to go wash it.

Sven said, “Sit. Let Tobias eat his obscene-sounding food.”

Tobias grinned and came over using one crutch. He knew where the forks were. He sat down and smiled. “So, what kind of reward do I get?”

She blanked, and Sven laughed.

She looked to Tobias, and he squished the mac and cheese around before he took a bite. “Uh, I am not sure what would constitute a fair reward.”

Tobias smiled. “I can think of a few things. They might need to wait a few days.”

She blinked. “Uh, I am going to need specifics for something equivalent to you serving yourself.”

He wrinkled his nose. “Fine. Cuddle with me for half an hour. Clothes on.”

Arty thought about it. “Done.”

Tobias smiled. “In my bed.”

“Fuck.”

“Maybe if I wear pants with two legs. Pace yourself.”

Sven laughed and gathered the bowls and forks. Arty smiled. “Thanks, Daddy.”

He had already turned his back, but he froze and turned back to her. “What did you call me?”

Tobias had frozen, but his eyes were dancing.

“Um, Sven?”

He nodded and set the dishes in the dishwasher.

He walked back to her, lifted her out of her chair, and sat her on the table as he stood between her thighs. “Now, what did you call me?”

She bit her lip and looked up at him through her lashes. “Hey, Daddy.”

The kiss wasn't like Tobias's kiss. This one felt like he was etching his name in her dental work. She flailed for balance as he pressed her backward, and she ended up holding onto him. The growl that was coming from him ran through her body. She waited until he finished, and then he lifted his head, and her entire body was one throbbing pulse.

She was holding onto him, and he looked into her eyes and grinned. “Say it again.”

She let go. “No freaking way. That... was unexpected.”

Tobias chuckled. “You hit the perv button.”

Arty jerked her hands back and pressed them behind her. “I didn't press anything.”

Sven nuzzled her cheek and jaw. “I am gonna spoil you.”

She muttered, “I have no idea what you are saying. You two are a couple. You are working to bail me out, but that's it. Right? I will pay you back... somehow.”

“If it were just bailing you out, we would have done it already, but Wilhurst won't part with you, so we have to bring pressure to bear.” He smiled. “Fortunately, a few of my uncles have been involved in similar situations in their actual occupations.”

“What?”

“One of my uncles owns strip clubs. Another just owns some bars. Pretty staff are frequently targeted. They are trying to put pressure on Wilhurst, but it will take a few days to find out if it worked.” He was playing with her hair. “Your hair is purple?”

She nodded. “Yes. Brown is easier to use to blend in. Also, cheap and easy to find.”

“Hmm. Would you consider going back to purple?”

“Uh, yeah, if I didn't have to cam again. The purple is conspicuous. Also, the fans are fun, but some of them get a

little overeager.”

Tobias smirked. “I resemble that remark. You want her to get a salon appointment?”

Sven sighed with a fist full of hair. “I like purple.”

“Yeah, I figured.” She snorted. “You are very lucky with your investments, huh?”

“Obscenely,” Tobias smirked. He took out his phone and texted. “Now we wait.”

Arty turned her head away from Sven. “Wait for what?” She was getting stressed.

“The salon to contact me with appointment availability. I used to have a pretty regular schedule, but I let it slide. I look forward to having a salon buddy.” He grinned.

“A salon bu—” Sven nipped at her neck, and she yelped.

“And a shopping buddy and a driver when he needs it.”

Tobias smiled. “We get to use the handicapped placard. You can park in all kinds of places.”

She laughed. “That’s quite the perk.”

Sven leaned back. “So, what do you need to be comfortable?”

“A winch to get the alpha off me, a phone, and a watch?”

Tobias chuckled. “Got it. I mean, I can get him off but not the way you want. You certainly don’t want me doing it while he’s in that particular position.”

Arty blinked and tried to scoot backward. Sven pulled her against him, and her body twinged.

He frowned. “Pain?”

“Just an ache and not a good one.” She shrugged. “Fun and games are over. I just need some water and to head to my bathroom for a while. Sorry if it’s too much information.”

He eased back and helped her stand up. He hugged her, and that surprised her.

“Hugs?”

Sven chuckled. “We are touchy people. You will get used to it.”

He kissed the top of her head and patted her on the backside as she walked away.

Arty went to take care of herself and then came back for her water. They were talking quietly near Tobias’s workroom, and she didn’t sneak in to listen. She drank a glass of water and then another. Her belly was puffed out, and she felt moody and gross. She smiled and headed back to her room to go to bed.

Arty felt a hand stroke her hair. “Arty, you owe me thirty minutes.”

She blinked, and Tobias solidified in her vision. “Oh, hi.”

“Get up and follow me. Sadly, I can’t carry you.”

She rubbed her eyes and blinked. “What?”

“Come with me.”

“Okay.” She pushed her blanket down and followed him. The house was quiet, and he went into their bedroom. There was a wad of blankets in the middle, but it didn’t matter. Tobias sat down, set his crutches aside, and lay on his side. “C’mon in.”

She crawled in and cuddled against his bare chest. He wrapped her in the sheet, and she was in a warm tent that smelled like a cuddly omega. “Set a timer.”

He chuckled and asked, “For how long?”

“Only thirty minutes.” She yawned and brushed her lips against his chest. She licked at his skin, and he chuckled.

“I promise. I will set the timer for thirty minutes.”

She slid her knee between his thighs and exhaled. His arms came around her and held her around her shoulders, ribs, and hips. She was held securely, but she was so warm and sleepy that she didn’t care.

Arty came awake with a jolt. There were hands on her, and she was warm and snug.

She tried to ease out of the person sandwich, but hands tightened. She looked at Sven, whose green eyes were looking down at her sleepily. “Where are you going, baby girl?”

“The guestroom. Where I am supposed to be.” She whispered it.

She tried to look over her shoulder, but all she could see was a dark head, and she felt breathing against her lower back and the arm around her thighs.

She looked to Sven. “Can you get him off?”

Sven started to laugh softly. “I could, but I don’t think you are emotionally ready for that.”

“I am not awake enough for this. He has a death grip on my thighs.” She fidgeted.

He stroked her arm. “He will sleep for another hour and a half.”

“Balls.”

Sven pulled her close, and Tobias snuffled and followed. Sven murmured, “You know, you and I are destined to be together.”

“You mean the shamrock? That little thing?” She stroked his chest, and he shivered. “You have an omega. You don’t need me, and I need to be needed.”

“You are mistaken. *We* need you. We really need you. Tobias fell for you the moment that he saw you. He subscribed to your feed immediately and tried only to sleep when you slept. He laughed when you laughed, and when I finally watched over his shoulder, I recognized you, and we sent the message. Once he knew I was willing to help, we stepped into action. I wasn’t going to force myself into your life, but since you knew it was me and came anyway, I had hope. Tobias went online shopping with disturbing accuracy.” He caressed the thin straps of her night gown. “This is pretty.”

“When I feel crappy, I like to dress pretty. Sort of a fake-it-til-you-make-it thing.”

He frowned. “I recall that you were dressed in a cute outfit when you knocked me on my ass.”

She blushed. “Uh, yeah. I was a little tense that night. I had also never been on the receiving end of that kind of offer by someone who meant it, and I was dealing with flashbacks from the assault.”

He sighed. “You know, I would deal with them for you if I could.”

Tobias’s lips moved against her back. “Me, too.”

She felt him moving up her back, kissing his way until he was licking softly at her neck. She whined and felt him grin against her neck.

Her voice was thick when she said, “Stop smirking. I can feel it.”

“But, you sound so pretty when you get hot.” He wrapped his arm around her and stroked her breasts. “And you are so warm and slippery.”

“There is a special place in hell for those who use double entendre.”

Sven kissed her. “Welcome to hell.”

She lay between them for another few minutes and then had to leave. As she took care of her body then got in the shower, she wondered how she could escape when her body wasn’t giving her a visual excuse. She might need to trust them and go where her body was leading her. Pulling herself out of their bed had been painful.

When she came out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel, she found Tobias in her wardrobe, pulling out an outfit. She chuckled. “I knew you were out of the closet, but this is a little much.”

“Ha, ha. Wait, did you put your leg on?”

He grinned. “Yeah. The meetings are only in the morning. We will be done, and then we can make appointments for you.”

“Appointments?”

“Yeah. Sven is really concerned with your hair and alternative birth control. Did you know you can just take the pills once a day without a break, and it’s perfectly fine? The period in the middle was just part of the psychological dependence of the time.”

“Oh. Right. I had heard something like that.”

“Sven thinks your implant is broken.”

“It probably is just dead. It’s a quick fix.”

“There might be a better fix.”

“By better, do you mean more expensive?”

“Well, that too. Now, I have picked this stuff out, and I think it will be really cute with those heels.”

She rolled her eyes. She put the underwear on, locker room style. After that, she slid on the strappy blouse and the short pencil skirt. The shoes went on, and she looked at herself. “I look like the secretary that makes the wife show up daily.”

She took her towel back to the bathroom and put her hair up in a twist. May as well go full office flirt.

Tobias was moving cautiously, but he was operating without additional support. She wanted to tackle him to the ground, but it was counterintuitive. She liked him up and walking around. He looked happy.

Arty offered him her arm, and he smiled but threaded his fingers through hers. When he was wobbling, he tensed his arm against her. They walked into the kitchen at a slow walking pace, and Sven looked up. “She can’t wear that.”

Tobias scowled. “Why not? She looks great.”

“She does. She really does, but we aren’t going to be there with her all morning.”

“Guys. I am right here. I will be fine.”

Tobias scowled. “Your hair is wet.”

“It will dry when I let it down.” She walked him to the table and stroked his hair when he sat down. “It always does.”

He pointed at his lips. “Kiss.”

She smirked and kissed him, brushing her lips against his. He grabbed her and pulled her across his thighs. She gasped. He smiled. “Sucker.”

Sven finished making breakfast and set two plates in front of Tobias. “You’ve got her. You make sure she’s fed.”

Arty sighed. “And coffee’d.”

He nodded. “Coming up.”

She reached for the bacon, but Tobias caught her right wrist, then her left wrist and held them behind her. Arty quivered. “Very bad way to start the day.”

Tobias held the bacon to her lips. “Why? Don’t you like bacon?”

She took a bite and mumbled, “That is not what I am referring to.” She flexed her wrists against his hand. She was grateful for her period. None of her arousal was blatantly obvious.

“Oh, that. I just want to make sure that what Sven said is right.” He turned her head to his, and he smiled. “Yeah, he was right.”

She blushed and refused to eat anything. Sven sighed. “Arty, come over here.”

“Um. That’s a no.” She whined. “My breakfast is getting cold.”

Tobias hugged her. “Okay. Go ahead.”

He let her wrists loose, and she sat on the opposite side of the table from Sven. She finished her food in ninety seconds and then took her plate to the sink while her chipmunk cheeks chewed.

She finally swallowed and turned to look at two surprised men. “Coffee?”

Sven gestured to a carafe on the counter, and she found the mugs. She poured and then took the first sip, making her jump. She pressed her lips together.

Sven sighed. “Burn yourself?”

“No. Yes. Maybe.” She grimaced.

He beckoned to her. “Come on. Sit. No holding you.”

She eased over with her cup in her hand. “What is with all the lap sitting?”

“We are going to a business that has a lot of alphas and a few omegas. Since you showered, we have to put our scent back on you. You are cute, and we don’t want anyone trying to sweep you away.”

“Sweep?”

“Picking you up, tucking you over their shoulder, and making a run for it.” He took her cup and blew on the coffee. He took a sip and then pressed the cup to her lips.

She sipped, and that is how she got her coffee, with the taste of him still on it. Tobias got his own.

When they had gone through a second cup, she shivered. Sven kissed her cheek. “We are running early, and we can get you a phone.”

Arty nodded, and they headed to the car. Sven brought Tobias’s crutches just in case he needed them. She asked, “Where do I sit in the car?”

Tobias grinned. “In the back. With me.”

Sven smiled. “Probably less distracting.”

They got into the SUV, and everyone buckled up. Sven looked back at them and then put the car into drive.

They left the lake house and went down the drive in silence.

Tobias smiled. “So, how surprised were you to wake up where you fell asleep?”

“Uh. Pretty surprised. The last time I woke up with something in my bed, I screamed for five minutes and kicked the crap out of it.” She shrugged. “It was my body pillow.”

Tobias frowned. “Why didn’t you freak out this morning?”

She blushed. “I could identify the scent of both of you before I woke up.”

He reached out and took her hand, kissing the back of her knuckles.

She looked at him. “Also, you were making out with my spine. It was just too weird to be threatening.”

He chuckled, turned her palm, and pressed a kiss to her skin. “You are tasty.”

Sven chuckled. “You are not wrong, Toby.”

She tried to pull her hand back, but he held onto her fingers on the seat between them. She sighed and watched the city get larger as they got closer.

“This feels weird.”

“Holding hands?”

“That too, but going back to the city. It was nice and quiet at your place.”

“Yeah. When we get there, can you carry my laptop into the building?”

“Sure.”

Sven chuckled. “We will be at the phone shop in ten minutes.”

“Okay.” Arty looked at Tobias. “Why do I need one again?”

“Because if you need us, we want you to be able to call us.”

“And he is tricking it out with a billion trackers.” Sven chuckled.

“Ah. That makes more sense.”

Tobias leaned over, and she met him halfway. By the time they got to the phone shop, her lips were numb, and Sven had

cursed at them several times.

As they got out of the car, Tobias chuckled. “On the way home, sit next to me in the middle.”

“Why?”

“So we don’t have to lunge over in our seatbelts.”

“Oh.”

He offered her his arm, and they followed Sven into the shop. Tobias whispered in her ear, and she looked at him with wide eyes. “Are you insane?”

“It’s public. He won’t do anything. Promise.”

She did have fun playing, and Sven looked at her with a curious quirk of his brows. She walked to Sven, curled up against his side, and whispered, “What are you going to buy me, Daddy?” She rubbed her breasts against his arm. “Can I pick something pretty?”

Sven’s body was vibrating with tension. “Tobias’s idea?”

She hummed as she drew a finger down his arm. “Maybe.”

The clerk was grinning. “What do you plan on doing with it?”

“Hmm. Photography.”

The beta scrambled and had a phone and five sparkly phone cases. Then he sprinted off for some earbuds.

She looked at Sven and bit her lip. “Sorry, Daddy.”

He leaned in toward her. “You will be, baby girl. I will have you over my knee as soon as we are home. Or sooner if you do this again.”

“Yes, Daddy.”

He groaned, and they could both hear the rapid breathing of Tobias as he laughed his ass off.

She picked a glittery blue case. Sven registered the SIM card and got her an unlimited plan. The clerk set the phone up. Tobias came forward, snagged the phone, put his and Sven’s numbers in her contacts, and then started downloading apps.

Sven got a case with a strap for her and a few other things, and then he paid for the works. She wrapped her arms around his back. “Thank you, Daddy.”

He growled, and she slowly drew her fingers back and then just stepped away from him.

Sven handed her the bag of goodies. She was about to turn, but he tapped her cheek, and she turned back to him. “You will be thanking me later. Privately. In great detail. Not for the phone but for not turning you over my knee right here, baby girl.”

She blinked, and her mouth was a perfect *o*.

Tobias grinned. “Let’s get to the meetings. I think you broke her brain.”

“Her brain isn’t the problem.” Sven stroked her cheek with his knuckles. “Is it, baby girl?”

She exhaled slowly. “Hoo boy.”

He grinned. “C’mon. The meeting starts in half an hour, and we need to get you settled.”

“Okay.” He took her hand, and they returned to the car. She could see the clerk recording with his camera reflected in the windows.

Tobias followed behind her and blocked the view. Sven unlocked the door with the remote, and she put her hand on the handle, but he turned her and lifted her, pinning her to the car with his hips against hers.

She kissed him, but he pulled his lips away. She stared in confusion.

“How are you feeling today?”

The change in subject matter was dizzying. “Um, fine. Better than yesterday.”

“No cramps? Aches, twinges?”

She shook her head. “No. I usually just have one bad day, and then it peters off pretty quick.”

He looked at her seriously. “I need you to tell me if you are unwell at any time. Right?”

“Yes, Sven.”

He smiled. “That said, you can call me Daddy anytime you like as long as you are willing to deal with the consequences.”

“Uh-huh. Tobias made me do it.”

Gales of laughter came from the car, and she saw the window behind her open an inch.

“Tobias likes to see me out of control, especially if that is directed at someone else.”

“Noted. I will stow the banter.”

“Oh, don’t stop it. I enjoy it.” He rubbed his cheek along hers and murmured hotly in her ear, “A lot.”

She whispered, “Your meeting.”

He smiled. “Thanks for that.”

He slowly eased her to her feet, kissed her forehead, and then opened the car to tuck her inside. They were on the way in a minute, and she spent the rest of the drive glaring at Tobias while he finished updating her phone. Tobias beamed at her every few minutes. “I don’t care how pissed off you are; it was both magnificent and hilarious.”

She huffed and looked out the window.

They pulled up at the building with a strange arrangement of letters, and she got out of the car and waited. Tobias got out and handed her the phone. She inclined her head, and he looked stricken. “Arty, I am sorry. I just thought it would be fun.”

“Tobias, if it weren’t my time of the month, I would have been fucked on the side of the SUV, in public, in front of morning traffic! In front of that clerk that was taking video of my ass!”

He blinked. “It was just a little fun.”

“Good. I will enjoy it when it is your dignity on the line.”

His eyes got wide.

Sven looked at them. "Come on. We need to go in."

She stalked past Tobias, muttering, "That's what he said."

Tobias stuttered a laugh and walked with her, taking her hand with his free one.

They walked through the doors, and Sven was greeted. Arty blinked. "Shit. I need to get your laptop out of the car."

Tobias turned and patted his left hip. The bag was there. "Got it, but thanks for remembering."

She huffed, and Tobias checked in and said, "I believe Sven asked for a tour guide for our beta?"

The receptionist blinked. "Ah, right. He's been delayed. She can wait here in reception until he arrives."

Tobias hesitated.

Arty smiled. "Go ahead. I can stay put if I have to."

Frowning, he went through the security check. He caught up to Sven, who was talking to a tall alpha with greyish-cast skin. The man lifted his head and looked at her. She smiled and waved. The alpha nodded and spoke to someone who skittered away.

Sven beckoned to her, and she walked to security, and the man said, "Phone in here."

She put the phone in, and he checked the screen. "The phone hasn't been used?"

"No. It's new."

He nodded. "Right. Go on through."

She walked up to Sven. "Did you want something?"

He grinned. "Yes. Absolutely, but I can wait for you." He turned and smiled at the other alpha. "Antonio, this is Artemis. Arty to friends."

His nostrils were flaring as he looked down at her. "What kind of beta is she?"

“She’s my good luck charm.”

She got her hand back and said, “So, why am I here and not waiting for the dude who was going to show me around.”

“My wife will do it. She is familiar with everyone here and is bored out of her mind. Our omega is here as well. It should be a lively tour.” Antonio smiled.

Two women came from one of the offices, one slightly pregnant, one heavily pregnant. The taller of the two had to be the beta The omega was tiny.

Antonio made the introductions, and the omega shook her hand, stroked her skin, and then hugged her with a sudden move.

Dell smiled. “She likes you.”

“No shit.” She hugged Andrea lightly. “Is there a command to get her off?”

Andrea looked up. “You almost smell like Dell. You are clover and lemon; she is primrose and lemon.”

Dell smiled. “Stop molesting her, Andrea. We are going to go on that tour. It means time in the motion capture area.”

Andrea snapped back. Antonio chuckled.

Sven smiled. “You are in good hands, baby girl. Be nice.”

The guys left, and the girls linked arms with her and hauled her off into the depths of the building. Everyone knew Dell and Andrea, and it made sense when they walked past promotional posters of both of them.

She saw the script writers, the character design, and the intense coders, and then Dell got bored and took them into an area the size and structure of a gym but with rigging along the walls and ceiling. There was a woman running with two whip handles in her hands. She was wearing a grey suit with dots and more dots on her face.

Arty saw her and was shocked to see a familiar face.

When they finished the segment, Penelope Briden walked toward her.

“Penny!” Arty stepped forward. They hugged and grinned.

“Arty, what the hell are you doing here?”

“Uh, remember the guy I bumped into a few years ago?”

“The one you turned down flat?”

“Yeah, well, he is my knight in shining armour. He’s saving my bacon, so here I am.”

Dell frowned. “He isn’t your mate?”

Andrea looked hopeful. “He isn’t?”

Penny frowned. “You two can’t have her. She’s independent.”

Arty blinked. “Not as much as I used to be.”

Andrea nearly shook Dell. “See? Ask Antonio if we can have her.”

The camera operator cleared his throat. “Penny, we need another run.”

Penny nodded and got back into starting position. Dell got them into place behind the camera, and the monitor showed a woman who was purple with crests of black hair down all her limbs.

“Oh, that is so cool. It puts a bunch of weird ideas into my head.” Arty grinned as Penny finished her run.

The cameraman grinned. “What weird ideas. We can do a lot.”

“Orc thirst traps?”

He blinked and slowly grinned. “Let’s put some dots on you, and we can try it.”

She looked to Dell. “Can I?”

“What’s a thirst trap?” Dell blinked.

“It’s a short video with a sexual tease element that is trying to catch people looking.”

Dell frowned. “Can you demonstrate?”

She shrugged and walked away from her, crouched, and slowly stiffened one leg at a time to show off her ass and then twisted sideways to show her boobs, and she looked toward Dell. She stood casually. “Like that.”

Dell grinned. “Oh, I wanna do that.”

The cameraman laughed, and they spent the next few hours of company time filming thirst traps with overlays of different fantasy races.

When they were done, the cameraman, who’s name was Dave, promised to do something useful with the footage.

Penelope had to head off to run errands as it was her day off, but the other three headed to the commissary to get snacks and beverages.

Dell got the selections Arty wanted, and they all sat down at a table in the commissary and ate a bunch of desserts.

Andrea smiled. “Best part of being pregnant. Desserts.”

Arty said, “Thanks, Dell. I had forgotten that I don’t have money.”

Dell waved that off. “There is probably an app on your phone with a credit card. You just got your phone, so you have to find out how it works.”

Arty ate a chocolate mousse cake and had another cup of coffee.

Her phone started to buzz, and there was a call from Tobias. “Um, hi, Tobias?”

“Where did you end up, Arty? Are you still in the building?”

“Yeah. I am in the commissary having a snack.”

“Stay there. I am coming to get you.”

The call dropped off, and she stared at it. “It sounds like Tobias is about to mount a rescue.”

Andrea blinked. “Tobias? Is he an omega with one leg?”

“Yes. Have you met?”

Andrea smiled hopefully at her. “I am a much better omega. We have five alphas, two are mainly Dell’s, but they are all flexible.”

Dell chuckled. “Your omega is here.”

Arty twisted in her seat, and Tobias was striding toward her. She got up, and he hugged her. “Dude, it has only been two hours.”

“You smell like another omega, and I am trying to obscure it.” He looked at her at arm’s length. “You can wash her off at home.”

Arty chuckled, and Andrea got up and put her fists on her hips. “Hey. You can’t have her. I just need to ask my alpha if we can keep her. He will say yes. He never says no to me.”

“Andrea. I don’t think that I will be going with you.”

Dell had her hand over her eyes. “She has an omega and an alpha, Andrea.”

Andrea huffed. “But she isn’t marked. I can smell it. I don’t want her getting lonely. She’s like you. She shouldn’t be lonely.”

Tobias pulled her to him. “She’s not lonely.”

“Well, she doesn’t have an alpha!” Andrea shrieked.

Dell got up and hugged her omega. “It’s fine. She’s okay. She’ll be okay.”

She turned to Tobias. “Want some of my dessert?”

Andrea started sobbing, and she turned, attacking with a lot more competency than Arty expected. She stepped between Tobias and Andrea and caught a fist to her cheekbone and a kick to her knee.

Dell grabbed Andrea and hauled her out of the commissary. Folks were staring. Arty got back to her feet and snagged some ice out of Andrea’s drink, putting it in a napkin. She pressed it to her cheek and turned to see Tobias concerned and angry.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Let me grab my phone, and we can... and never mind, he’s here.” She sighed. Antonio and Sven were standing there, looking at her with concern. She tried to walk casually, but her knee gave way. “Fuck.”

Sven picked her up. “You must have infuriated her.”

“She was trying to fight Tobias for me.”

Antonio had arrived. “Oh. Is that why? I have never seen her attack before. You didn’t fight back?”

She snorted. “No. I only hit alphas. Maybe betas if they deserve it.”

Tobias was murmuring to Sven. Sven nodded to Antonio. “I will take her for some first aid. I need that leg checked.”

She muttered, “It’s probably just bruised.”

“We will find out. Tobias, can you call your orthopedist?”

“Right. One call to Dr. Lemur coming up.”

Sven started moving, and Tobias darted away to get his laptop.

She was tucked into the car and mortified at the fussing. “I’m fine, just bruised.”

“You are not fine. You are in pain.” Sven frowned.

“A teensy omega punched me in the face. It should hurt, but it will get better. The little twit could have broken my nose.”

Sven checked that Tobias was in the car and smoothed her hair. “Right. Let’s go.”

He closed the door and walked around to the driver’s seat and took her to get checked out.

Chapter Six

Arty was upset. They had given her painkillers and sent her home with some. She tried to get Sven to toss them, but he wouldn't.

“If it is going to give Tobias any problem, I am not going to take them.”

Tobias sighed. “It won't give me a problem if it stops you from being in pain. It's only a few days.”

She was supposed to stay off the leg for a few days, and Sven had promised she would. “Sorry, Tobias. Looks like salon buddies won't be any time soon.”

“It's fine. When you are ready, I will be ready.” He chuckled. “We can do it all together. Even waxing.”

Arty winced. “Waxing what... ohmygod.”

He laughed. Sven grinned.

She was set on the couch like she was made of porcelain, and the remote was set in her hand.

Tobias came in and sat behind her, lifting her so that his arm wrapped around her torso. “Thank you for defending me, Arty. I think the little psycho was aiming at my leg.”

“She was. Dell mentioned that Andrea had some job-related combat training. It's no joke.”

“No. It isn't.” He leaned down and kissed her upturned lips. The kiss was sweet. He lifted his head and grinned. “And now you have met Dr. Lemur.”

“It's Dr. Lemar.” She smiled.

“Not if you check my phone. It was nice that we could go straight to his department.”

“Yes, but did you have to bring in a gynecologist?”

“We were already there.” He chuckled. “And you are at the right time in your cycle.”

“Oh. Hooray. It is nice to have the thingy out of my arm.”

He kissed her again. “There. So, now you are ready whenever.”

“Neither of you has barbs anywhere, right?”

“No, Arty. Just nice smooth skin.”

She chuckled. “Can I take a nap? Those injections made me sleepy.”

“Sure.”

* * * *

Sven came in and exhaled when he saw his beta asleep. He crouched in front of her and stroked her hair. “Antonio knew something was going wrong. I got something from you, but I didn’t know what it was.”

“You have been with her for two and a half days.”

“And bound to her for years.”

Tobias reached out and squeezed his hand. “But not the way it counts, and I had no idea what was making Andrea foam until Arty explained the scent confusion.”

“Confusion?”

“Dell and Arty have related scents. Andrea was worried about losing part of her beta, so she wanted to keep Arty close. I was a threat.”

Sven reached for her hair and pulled the pins before unravelling the column of her hair until it was a damp curtain over her body. The scent of shampoo and Arty hit him hard.

She snuffled and batted at her hair when it slid toward her nose. He smiled and brushed her hair back. “Look at you. Strong as a wet kitten, and you stood between Tobias and a police-trained omega.”

He stroked her cheek and looked up at Tobias. “What do you think?”

“I want to shave Andrea’s head.”

“Well, that is less homicidal than I thought.”

“Only after the doctor said it was only a sprain and a bruise.”

She breathed deeply. “I have never been to a gynecologist that gave me a lollipop before.”

“It is an omega-focused facility. That is how they treated you.”

She chuckled. “Tobias? You get candy for going to the doctor? Do you get blow jobs for going to the dentist?”

Tobias wound his hand through her hair. “Of course not. I get more sweets there as well, so I come back.”

She chuckled. “This is nice and all, but I think I need to rest in an actual bed.”

Sven watched her struggle up and sighed. “I’ve got you.”

He picked her up and ignored Tobias’s soft whine. “If you want to cuddle with her, come along. I have some things to do online and calls to make, but if you can keep her comfortable, it would be great.”

He set her down on their bed and kissed her forehead while he went to finish his communication with Antonio.

Antonio looked at him solemnly. “*Was she badly hurt?*”

“Injured knee and bruised cheekbone.”

“*Andrea has grown attached to your beta. Would you be willing to part with her? I would take good care of her.*”

“Respectfully, she’s mine. Fate marked her for me, just as it marked Dell for you.”

Antonio sighed. “*Then mark her. Her scent is close to Dell’s, and even my beast stood up to double-check.*”

“I understand, but I want her consent and awareness. She knows we’re a match, but her body has thwarted me so far.”

“*How so?*”

“Standard betas don’t go into heat until they are bonded or have been bred. Her cycle has thwarted me. I am fine with it, but she would be appalled if she had a heavy day and it got on the sheets.”

Antonio rolled his eyes. “*Ah. It was easier with Dell. She had had an alpha before. Right. Well, I hope she is doing well, and Andrea will send an apology gift. Probably several.*”

Sven nodded. “So, you mentioned the ladies getting up to something?”

Antonio tapped keys, and on the screen, some rough renders of female monsters posing and flirting streamed. Sven laughed. “Yeah, that seems like something that Arty would do.”

“*We want to use them. We are doing some social media, and these thirst traps are just what we need. Now, can you ask her to come back and direct some of the guys to do the same thing?*”

“She is off her feet for a few days.”

“*Ah. Right. Well, if she is interested, let me know, and I will get the guys lined up. We need to pay her for the modelling and directing work she has already done. Can you send HR her information?*”

“When we have set up her accounts.”

“*Ah. Right.*” He smiled. “*I am going to have Dell’s playing on a loop every time I have to travel away from her, which is fortunately not often.*” He chuckled. “*Amble will enjoy it.*”

Sven looked at the images and made a special folder for all of the ones Arty was in. Even behind the effects, he knew how she moved. He chuckled. “This is going to distract the hell out of Tobias.”

Antonio snorted. “*He’s one of my best coders. Don’t distract him.*”

Sven grinned. “He finishes his work quickly and efficiently now, so he can go play with Arty. He’s been on time with his scheduled work all week while we waited for her to arrive.”

Antonio chuckled. “*She wields a lot of power with him.*”

“He’s not the only one affected.” Sven’s tone was wry, but he acknowledged it. He had ached for her since the moment she had rejected him. He understood her motivations now, and confirming that the two men who attacked her had died in a run of bad luck, he was left frustrated. A normal relationship would have him confirming that she was well and whole in bed, but he was left waiting. That was fine; he could wait. For a while.

They chatted regarding Tobias’s work progress, and then Sven’s watch pinged. Antonio blinked. “*Message?*”

“Time for Arty’s painkiller.”

Antonio’s face clouded. “*That bad?*”

“She can’t bear weight right now. Andrea knew where to hit.” Sven nodded. “New project looks good. Send me the specs, and I will get back to you by the weekend.”

“*They are on the way. Sorry again.*”

“It should heal. Should. We told her it was a sprain, but it was a dislocated kneecap. The orthopedist snapped it back in, and then Tobias kissed her as a distraction. She’s going to wear it wrapped for a while. It’s a shame. I love her legs.”

Antonio sighed. “*Andrea’s going to get a timeout for this.*”

“Right. Well, it’s medication time. Talk to you soon.”

Sven got up, took the small bottle of pills out, and got a glass of water as he passed the kitchen. He paused when he walked into the bedroom. They were both in their underwear, and Tobias had a raging hard-on. He shrugged. “She’s more comfortable.”

Tobias helped her to sit up, and Sven gave her the pill and water. She took it and said, “You know, when I was ten, I slipped on the grass and knocked my kneecap out. It made the

same sound as the,” she used air quotes, “*sprain* that the doctor snapped in.”

Tobias sighed.

Sven nodded.

She sighed. “Well, instead of two weeks, it is now six weeks on the roster. Fucking hell.”

She looked at Sven. “Folks are going to start thinking you have a weird-ass fetish, dude. They are going to be wondering if either you will eventually get an entire person in your bed or you are hobbling us to keep us slow.”

Tobias snorted.

Sven sighed. “I would take you over Tobias’s knee for that.”

Arty frowned, and then he saw the image taking form in her head, and she turned pink. “There it is.”

Sven nodded. “You will heal faster if I mark you, but I want your permission to do it. Yes, Tobias will be there.”

“As soon as the red tide is over, I will let you know. Okay?” She smiled at him.

He smiled at her nervous expression. She was adorable.

Tobias said, “Come on, Arty. Back to napping.”

Arty looked at him. “You are lucky that these things knock me out.”

She looked woozy and collapsed into Tobias’s arms. She mumbled, “I don’t have much resistance to drugs.”

Sven kissed her forehead. “See you in six hours, baby girl.”

Tobias carefully wrapped himself around her. “I’ve got her, Sven. She’ll be fine.”

Sven left and returned to go online and wait for his instinct to point out investments with a high return. He wanted to set Arty up with her own account. He was pretty sure that she would take to it with ease.

* * * *

Arty woke up between them again and just got up to scoot out of the cocoon, and she hopped down the hall to her bathroom. She wasn't sure, but she thought the red tide was over. She wasn't sure what the alpha with the miner's headband had done, but it seemed that it had put her body into a different gear.

She washed her face, brushed her teeth, and then hopped out of the bathroom. She looked at the neatly made bed then leaned against the wall and hopped along to their bedroom. When she peeked around the corner, she saw they had fallen back together. She paused, ignored her insecurities and hopped to the bed, curling up against Tobias's back. He was still wearing his flesh-toned prosthetic, but he moved it like a leg when he rolled over, put an arm around her, and rolled her back between them. He nuzzled her ear and murmured, "Stay where you are put, beta."

She stroked his jaw gently. "Yes, omega. You pretty bully."

He grinned and kissed her, filling her with heat and shivering energy. She moaned when he moved his kisses to her neck and thrust his thigh between hers. Hands gripped her hips, and another mouth caressed her neck.

"Sorry for waking you, Sven."

Hands cupped her breasts, and she moaned. He murmured, "You sound very apologetic."

She gasped as his hand slid into her panties and caressed her folds. She could only describe his technique as doodling. He dipped and slid his fingers around, and when he eased them out of the cotton lace, he admired his digits. "Huh. Clear."

She covered her mouth with her hand when Tobias lunged and sucked on Sven's fingers.

Tobias smiled. "Clover, lemon, and sex."

She blinked at him until Sven said, "Really? Let me check."

She squawked and tried to grab his wrist, but he slid two fingers into her, plunged them deeply, and withdrew them several times. She was panting and bent over, clutching at Tobias.

There were smacking sounds, and Sven purred. She jolted, and Tobias caught her. “They actually make that noise when they are happy. It’s amazing when they do that while they are inside you.”

Sven growled, “You had better only be referring to me and not other alphas, Toby.”

Toby snorted. “Of course, my alpha.”

She shivered, and her bra loosened while the panties were edged down her thighs.

Sven whispered, “Do you want to pause things?”

She thought about the years without him because she didn’t like the way he described the relationship. She genuinely liked both him and Tobias and that was a good place to start. The mark on her shoulder that matched his eyes was also an arrow that pointed to this being the right decision.

“No, this seems to be progressing fine.”

The purring nearly loosened her skeleton.

Their clothing went after hers, and Tobias took his leg off along with the compression sock. She was confused by that until he thrust his shorter limb between her thighs and rocked her against it. Sven’s fingers stroked her clit, and she opened her mouth to wail, but Tobias caught it and took it. She threaded her fingers through his hair and did the same with Sven’s head behind her. It was a little hard to figure out who was touching her where, but if she had been brave enough to open her eyes, it would have been easier.

When bars of heat started pressing against her thighs, she knew who was which because Tobias’s cock was slick. His cock dipped and rubbed against her slit, getting her hips to arch and rock against him. As he edged into her, they both froze. Sven was growling, “Omega, don’t even think about it.”

Tobias scooted further inside her. “But she feels so good.” It was a whine and a groan.

“And she will still feel good in a moment, but if I mark her, you can feel what she feels.”

“But...”

She kissed Tobias and kept their mouths fused as he eased out of her. She whimpered when he was gone, and then there was more heat pressing in. She moaned as he worked himself into her. Sven was careful, but then she felt the licking on the shamrock on her shoulder, and her blood surged in her veins as she rocked her hips to take him in faster.

“Easy, Artemis. Just hold onto Toby and try and stay relaxed.”

He slid deeper, and when his knot pressed against her, he licked at the mark and moved his hips, moving in and out of her while she shook and held onto Tobias.

The first orgasm caught her by surprise, but the friction against the front wall caused something she wasn't expecting. A surge of slick covered Sven's cock.

“Aw, baby girl. You have a surprise inside.”

She moaned, pulled her mouth from Tobias, and buried her head against his chest. She felt tears leaking from her eyes, but they weren't sad tears.

Tobias touched her chin. “Too much?”

She looked up at him, and he made a soft sound and kissed her until Sven gripped her hips and moved into her with wet thuds that left her twisting against Tobias until Sven grunted, and his knot wedged into her as heat spilled through her. The bite came, and she clenched hard around him as she came again.

There was wet heat against her belly, and Tobias chuckled. “You got me again, Arty.”

Her voice was hoarse. “I think you got me.”

He stroked her cheeks, smoothed her hair back, and kissed her forehead. “Can you feel it?”

She felt a thick silvery link weaving between her and Sven, but through that, she felt a bright gold link that seemed to be giggling. Sven released his bite and licked softly at the mark that his teeth had made. He was purring hard, and he was inside her. The breath rushed out of her lungs, and she squeaked. Sven caressed her breasts and continued to lick at the mark. He purred the whole time, and she panted and whined while clinging to Tobias.

Her back arched hard, and it felt like her spine would crack as a hoarse scream broke from her throat. She felt another surge of heat inside her and hoped the new birth control was holding. It was under duress.

Tobias was still giggling in the link while she was exhausted. Sven kissed her neck. “Thanks for being open to that.”

She weakly lifted a thumbs-up. They both laughed.

When the knot finally released her, Sven lifted her and took her to their shower. Tobias hopped and took the brace off her knee. The shower had a dozen heads, and they took turns holding her and washing up. Tobias was still giggling in the link. He was really happy about this. When she was cleaned of most biologicals, Tobias held her up while Sven got a towel. He wrapped her up and walked off with her, telling Tobias, “Stay there; I will be right back. I don’t want you slipping.”

She was settled in a chair, and then he went back to support Tobias. Tobias grinned. “Yeah, I concede. Are you starting a weird collection, Sven?”

Sven towelled his hair. “It is not a collection; it is a harem. In the classic sense of the word. Anyone else is forbidden from getting near you.”

Tobias grinned. “You will get protective? Aw, it’s a cute look on you, Sven.” Sven tossed him the knee brace.

“Brat.”

Tobias moved over to her and settled the knee brace around Arty's leg. "If it is going to be several weeks, we need to get you some spares."

She muttered, "Here, I wanted to go jogging this week."

"Nope. But you can come with me on slow walks in the sun." His eyes twinkled. "I have a cane you can borrow."

She ran the back of her fingers down his penis. "Just have to get it a little longer."

He slapped her fingers lightly. "Don't tease. Now, do we want to just go for a walk and laze around?"

"Don't you have to work?"

He grinned. "No. That was taken care of this morning."

"Was it just this morning?" She rubbed her forehead.

"It was."

"Yikes."

Sven picked her up. "It's mid-afternoon."

She was carried to her room, and he picked out a red bikini that would barely cover her nipples. "Here you go."

She dangled it from her fingertips. "Where's the rest of it?"

"That's all you are getting until you aren't so naughty, baby girl."

She grimaced. "So, dental floss tomorrow?"

He grinned. "Do you need help getting dressed?"

She looked at the bottoms. "It would make things easier."

He nodded and took the bottoms, sliding them up her legs and then over her brace. It sucked not being able to bend her knee. He got the bottoms in place and smiled. She tied the top on and looked down. "Yeah, that's about what I thought."

Her breasts were obscured rather than covered. They looked like they had racing stripes. "You guys have weird taste."

Sven smiled. "You can blame this one on Tobias. Hell, your entire wardrobe is to be blamed on Tobias."

The omega in question hopped into the room using his crutches. “My ears were burning. Oh, that looks cute on you.”

She snorted and then paused. “How am I going to make money?”

Tobias frowned. “Sven gives us spending money.”

“He does? But you also get money from work.”

“Well, yeah, but I... oh.”

She bit her lip. “See?”

Sven nodded. “I will show you how to do something online. You can make quite a profit if you do it right, and I think you can use your weird luck to make some money.”

“Can you show me now?” She paused. “After you put some shorts on?”

He grinned. “Yes, I can, but we are skipping the shorts.” He picked her up, and Tobias followed them.

While she watched, he opened an account in her name and showed her how to invest the ten thousand he had settled in her account. She sat on his lap, went over the options, and when she found a tingle in her shoulder, she made a purchase. She repeated it and then spent half the money he had set in her account.

Sven kissed her temple. “All good choices. Now, let’s settle you on a lounge.”

She smiled and squelched the urge to call him *Daddy* again. She would save that for later.

Chapter Seven

Arty was out back on the lounge, sipping iced tea.

Tobias was lying in the lounge next to her, looking over at her and smiling as he sat in the shade with his laptop.

Sven was on his phone, and it sounded like he was talking to family. There was a certain familiarity that was in his tone.

Arty looked at Tobias. “Is he speaking Russian?”

Tobias nodded. “Definitely talking to family.”

“Ah. I have some aunts and uncles and two cousins left. No one I am close to.”

“What about your mom?”

“She keeps trying to sell me, so I think that ship has sailed. She’s going to have to pay for her own indulgences, not charge them to my back.”

Tobias reached out, and she put her hand in his. He gave her a squeeze. “Well, most of my family will take to you immediately. The rest will treat you like a servant. You can tell those to fuck off. Same thing with Sven’s family. Don’t take any disrespect, not even from the teenagers. They are a weird omega-worshipping cult.”

Sven tapped the table with a finger and shook it, indicating they were being naughty.

Tobias snorted. “Well, sort of. Their matriarch is convinced that omegas are better than everyone, which means she is better than everyone, and in order to get at her, her alphas have agreed to her mindset. She did bear very powerful children, and her grandchildren are no slackers either. The entire family is a ridiculously good-looking army.”

Sven looked at them and rolled his eyes.

“Tobias, how much weight can these chairs hold?”

He shrugged. “Dunno. A few hundred pounds?”

She looked at him with a smirk. “How much weight do you think I can hold?”

He put his computer on the table and pulled their loungers together, laying on his side and trailing his fingers over her hip and thigh. He slid his fingers inside her bottoms and found her clit.

She gasped and shivered as he circled, slipped, and slid. He bent down to her breasts and took the top in his teeth, pulling it away from her nipple so he could, lick, nibble, and then suck at leisure. She moaned quietly with her hand over her mouth. Her thighs were moving together against his hand, and she felt like a fucking cricket. Tobias slid his fingers into her, and she gasped slowly, holding still as his fingers moved inside her and then scissored slowly. He moved to her other breast, and she gasped, twitched, and then short flutters held his fingers. He rolled onto her with a grin, and her bottoms were tugged, giving away at the sides. He bent her good leg up and wide. He adjusted himself and then pressed into her. She inhaled sharply, and he met her gaze as he slid into her, fitting perfectly.

He took her hands, pressed them to his shoulders, and kissed her, and then, his hips started rocking. He was very good at this.

The feel of him slick, thick, and hot moving inside her took all of her focus, and when she came, he jerked into her, and there was a *lot*.

Tobias lifted his head and kissed her softly. “I could have warned you, but the feel through the link was hilarious.”

“Butthead.”

He laughed, and when she clenched on him, he groaned.

“If you are trying to inflate me, you are doing a good job.” She paused. “Oh geez, the lounge is going to be a wreck.”

He grinned. “Omega side effect.”

Sven's face loomed next to them as he crouched next to them. "You two are menaces."

Tobias grinned. "Hey, Sven. Finished the call?"

"Yes. Grigory could hear you, by the way. He thinks it is hilarious that I am being tormented by my omega and his pet."

"Oh. I am a pet? I demand a sparkly collar, my own water dish, and a leash that I can use for funzies."

Sven smirked. "Done."

He nodded to Tobias. "Off."

"Aw, you have had your turn." Tobias eased out, and the rush that she guessed at happened.

Sven sat her up and handed her the pill for pain. "Take it."

He handed her a glass of water, and she took it. The brace was good. She was only getting twinges; mind you, she was being carried around, so she wasn't stressing her knee out.

She made a face. "How long do I have to take them?"

"A week, and then as needed."

"Bleah."

"You like pain?" Tobias asked.

"Sometimes, it reminds us that something is wrong and keeps us from overtaxing healing tissue." She chuckled. "Currently, it hurts less than my period, so it is a basis-for-comparison thing." She touched her cheek. "But my face has healed fast."

Sven smiled. "Yes. We will take you back for scans in a week to check your progress. Then it will be careful motions only, and no high heels."

"Fine."

Tobias grinned. "Hooray!"

She snorted. "He likes it when I am shorter than him."

She looked down. "Guh. I am covered with omega juice. Sven, can you drop me in the lake?"

He chuckled.

“I am serious. Swimming moves the large muscles and will help me keep some flexibility in the joint.”

“Not today and tomorrow is salon day. A car service that I use will come to get you and Tobias at eight. You will spend all morning at the salon, and they have orders to keep you together. Tobias will let me know how things are progressing, but your hair is going back to its natural purple.”

She sighed. “Fine. What else?”

“Oh, it’s a surprise.”

Tobias laughed. “That means the works.”

“It isn’t necessary.”

Sven stroked her cheek. “Of course, it is. I want you smooth, pretty, and happy. They know of your injury, so they will accommodate you.”

“Oh. Right. Fine.” She looked down. “Can someone help me to my room so I can hose myself down? I am all sticky and kinda hungry.”

She boosted her good leg out of the chaise and tried to get up. “Little help?”

Sven helped her up and handed her a cane. “This is one of Tobias’s, and it was too short for him so should be good for you.”

Tobias got up and grabbed one of his crutches. He walked her through how to mimic her walk using the cane to bear her weight when she took a step.

She grinned. “This is cool.” She managed to take a few steps and then headed inside and made it all the way to her room. She didn’t look in the mirror and hung the cane on the towel rack while she got the brace off. She sluiced herself off, and when she was tidy, she carefully made her way back to the cane and then to the towel. She got some underwear that didn’t look like it did tricks and then found a cotton sundress. She wanted jeans, but there was no way she could get them on with a leg that couldn’t bend.

Arty used the cane and walked back into the living area. She hummed and went scavenging in the kitchen. She found some cheese and then looked through the shelves for crackers when hands gripped her hips.

Sven murmured, “What are you looking for, baby girl?”

“Crackers. I am hungry.” She looked back at him and smiled.

“Can you wait until dinner?”

“No. I just want a few.” Her stomach rumbled. “The meds make my stomach more acidic.”

He tutted. “Right.” He reached into a cupboard on the right and got a box of crackers out for her.

“Knife for cheese?”

It was set on the counter, and she got a small plate and cut small squares of cheese before she arranged them on the plate and put everything away. She picked up her plate, grabbed her cane, and got herself to the table. She sat down, ate the handful of cheese and crackers, then brought the plate to the sink and went to get a glass and the pitcher of iced tea. She carefully made her way to the table and set the pitcher down, then the glass, filled the glass, and then went back to the fridge.

“It took Tobias a few weeks to figure that out.”

She returned to her iced tea. “I have problem-solving intelligence.”

He chuckled and then crouched next to her. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine. Super happy to be up on my feet. Foot. I hope that Tobias ordered flats or tennis shoes.”

He chuckled. “I will check. I mean about the mark.”

She lifted her hand toward her shoulder. She blushed. “Oh. That’s okay. It’s fine. I mean, it’s just kind of throbbing there, and with my leg, I have a lot of weird sensations going around.”

He nodded. "I guess that is accurate. Tobias being one of them."

She checked the links, and she felt concern from Sven and a bland happiness with flickers of giggles from Tobias.

"You, don't be worried, and what the hell is Tobias watching?"

"He's working on project specs and has a picture of you in the corner of his screen."

"Oh. That would do it." She sipped at her iced tea.

"You like to be independent."

She twisted her lips. "My life has been filled with people who are supposed to watch out for me and are stuck in their own heads. It means I am more comfortable if I know I can count on myself, so I try to keep myself competent. I am not one to flap my hands and wait for help. In some of the situations I have been in, I would be dead."

He nodded. "In public, if I am near, would you call on me?"

She put her cup down and tested the link. He was serious.

"If it means that much to you, yes. There is a specific scenario that you have in mind."

"My family. My cousins can be predatory. They know not to go after Tobias, but you are new and smell like sex."

She sniffed. "I do?"

Sven smiled. "You will. You are in my thoughts, are in his thoughts, and although we have been with you, the hunger has only grown. I think it will continue to grow."

"As long as we don't reach the point where you are wearing me like a puppet, I think we can be okay." She smiled.

He tilted his head. "I think we can pull back before then. So, when Tobias has a heat, there are some things you will need to know."

"Oh, geez. I forgot about that."

Sven got his own glass of iced tea and brought the jug to the table. “First off, he’s in love with you, so you are going to be his primary, which might make you very sore. I will try to take the heat off you, but he is a stubborn little shit.”

“Whoa. Back up. He’s...”

“In love with you. Or at you, I suppose, is the correct phrase. I am, too, but to a lesser extreme.”

She kept going from hot to cold and back again. “What? Why?”

Tobias’s voice spoke from behind her. “You are beautiful; you are clever; you are strong and witty. You know the power your body has, and you use it to play. This is why I love you.” Tobias wrapped his arms around her and kissed her neck then her mark.

A heavy throb went through her sex as he nuzzled and licked at the bite left by Sven. Sven smiled. “Ah, it’s healed.”

“*That’s* what it does? I thought it just made a link.” She whined softly and gripped the table.

Tobias kept driving her higher and higher using his lips and tongue on the link, and then Sven said, “Toby, knock it off.”

Tobias held up his hand, grazed his teeth across the bite, then circled his thumb over her mark. She bucked hard, gasping and shaking as her body clenched on nothing. He kissed her neck, and she just dropped to the table and groaned.

She gasped when Sven lifted her and set her on his lap. She cuddled him and said, “Great, just what I need. Another weakness.”

“That is what I am here for, love. I accept what you give and protect everything else.”

She muttered against his chest, “So, that is what alphas are for. I always wondered.”

“Well, that, and fucking and lifting heavy objects.”

She nodded. “Right. So, since I don’t have anything to lift, and I don’t have any need to be protected here... what does

that leave?”

“Fun after dinner.” He chuckled.

Tobias chuckled. She could feel his excitement through the link. Tobias took a seat, and she was dropped on his lap as Sven went to make dinner.

Tobias looked at her. “Yay. My two favourite things.”

It was all the warning she got before he kissed her and kept kissing her until an hour had passed and dinner was slid on the table with plates and cutlery.

Chicken breasts, cream sauce, noodles, and vegetables mixed in. They sat around and discussed the logistics of things for the following day.

Arty blinked. “Sven, where did you learn to cook?”

Tobias smiled. “He learned to cook for me. When he first took me on, I needed quiet to get used to the changes in my body. He bought this place, but takeout wasn’t that accessible, so he learned to cook. I would sit, we would talk, and he would cook. He’s really good at it.”

Sven smiled. “I like it. I like seeing you here while I do something essential. And my business is only a little draw on my time. So, it is a necessity and a hobby.”

Tobias ate and said, “I just have to send him recipes that I find online, and he gives them a try.”

Arty finished her serving and took her plate to the sink. She turned using her cane, and Sven wrapped his arms around her. They stood like that for over a minute before Sven stroked her mark. She clutched at his back as she shivered, and then a noise shocked her.

The doorbell rang.

He righted her and kissed her forehead before he left her to answer the door.

Tobias chuckled and finished the rest of dinner with fast gulps. “I know who it is. Come on.”

They both walked out of the kitchen and down the hallway toward the entryway. “Hey, Mitski,” Tobias called out, and a teenager walked toward him for a hug.

“Uncle Tobias! Wow. You are walking without crutches.”

Sven was talking with an older version of Mitski, and he looked toward Arty and smiled. “Artemis, come here.”

Arty moved around Tobias and Mitski, who were still close together.

“Artemis Winter, this is my sister, Ilsa, Mitski’s mother. Ilsa, this is our beta, Arty.”

The tall woman with brilliant green eyes and black hair looked her over. “You have an injury?”

“Yeah. I was clumsy.” She shrugged.

Sven looked at her and sighed. “She took the brunt of an attacking omega who wanted to break Tobias’s good leg.”

“Where is he? I’ll kill him.”

Arty sighed. “She is five foot four and was in a bit of scent confusion. It was her fault, but there were mitigating circumstances. She is also incredibly spoiled by her alphas and beta. She isn’t used to hearing no.”

Tobias came up from behind her and wrapped his arms around her. “Andrea wanted to keep her, but Sven said no.”

Arty felt Ilsa’s eyes on her. “Why would they want you?”

Sven and Tobias got offended, but she said, “My scent is similar to that of their breeding beta.”

“Wait. You have a scent?”

Tobias was eager to show her off. “Yeah. It’s really pretty.”

Ilsa leaned in and sniffed. “That’s you? It’s... lemon, and what is that?”

Tobias smiled. “Clover.” He buried his nose against her neck and snuffled.

Mitski said, “So, how much is my uncle paying you to stay with him?”

Sven growled, and his niece flinched. “I am not paying her to stay with me. I have offered her an allowance, but she wants to make her own money.”

Tobias kept snuffling and started licking.

She stroked his cheek. “Tobias, please.”

She kissed him when he turned his head.

He set his chin on her shoulder. “Arty is my person.”

Mitski looked wary. “I thought my uncle was your person.”

“He’s my alpha. It is very different. He and I are together forever because we called to each other, and he got lucky.”

Sven chuckled.

“Arty was supposed to be his years ago, but she decked him and told him to fuck off.”

Ilsa smiled, and it was genuine. “You punched my brother?”

“He wasn’t expecting it. I got lucky.”

Sven said, “It was early days with Tobias, so I didn’t want to offer her anything that would make him insecure, so I said she could be my mistress.” He rubbed his jaw. “She declined.”

Mitski asked the question that Arty had been dreading. “So, why are you here now?”

Arty blushed and stammered. Sven just said, “She got her mother out of trouble by getting herself in trouble, and now, I am trying to help her out of that trouble.”

“It’s money. Isn’t it?” Mitski crossed her arms.

“I could do the money in another three months. No, the crime boss that my mother owed money to has decided he wants to keep me as a decorative accessory.”

Mitski snorted. “He wants a mistress, too?”

“No. Just a lap warmer.”

Ilsa exhaled. “You are ready to deal with that?”

Mitski scowled and pulled Tobias to the corner of the living room. They talked urgently for a while, and then Tobias came

back with a grin. He hauled Sven off, and they disappeared.

Mitski looked at her. “So, what do I call you?”

“Uh. My name? Arty.”

“I don’t think so. Grandma would box my ears. Aunt Artemis, that sounds better.”

There was warmth in her mark and spirals of excitement in Tobias and Sven. That wasn’t good.

Ilsa looked at the very smug teenager. “What is going on?”

Arty tested her knee a little and smiled. “My knee feels better.”

Tobias sauntered back, and she loved seeing him happy. He wrapped his arms around her, and she chuckled. “What’s up?”

“Nothing. Just adding something to salon day tomorrow.”

“All that whispering and shenanigans?” She stroked his cheek.

“Why don’t you ask him?”

She turned her face, and Sven was right there. “Geez!” She shivered. “Sven, did you want to say something? Maybe leave my corpse in the lake? That is a serious fucking face.”

Sven smiled and kissed her. “I will tell you tomorrow after your time at the salon.”

Mitski chuckled. Tobias chuckled, and Ilsa frowned. Sven smiled. “Sis, I need your help with something. Toby, why don’t you take Arty and Mitski and show them the new jet skis delivered this afternoon.”

Arty blinked. “When the hell did that happen?”

Tobias snorted. “Get used to it. He likes to plan surprises. And give surprises and jewellery, boats, small islands.”

Arty laughed as they left the house until Tobias’s expression said that he wasn’t joking.

Mitski giggled. “Well, that settles that. Not a gold digger. They would know their target.”

“Is there a class in high school about financial predation that I don’t know about?” Tobias muttered.

Mitski laughed. “It’s called the internet.”

Arty realized she was holding hands with Tobias, and it suddenly struck her that they had tumbled together, and she hadn’t been hurt, and they had been at it for a while.

Tobias leaned in. “Penny for your thoughts?”

She flushed hot. “Uh, better not.”

Mitski smiled. “When Uncle Sven brought Tobias home, I could see that he was good for my uncle. It helped him focus on the nurturing side of his personality.”

Tobias nodded. “He was a bit of a bastard before he had to take care of me. Now, he’s practically cuddly. He took to caregiving with enthusiasm.”

Arty smiled. “He certainly did.”

Mitski chuckled. “And when I see Arty, I see a princess.”

“If I had a drink, that would be a spit take,” Arty muttered.

Tobias chuckled and squeezed her hand. “She’s from the family line that has sight.”

“Sight?”

Mitski nodded. “Foresight. I can see representational iconography. Tobias is a beautiful knight, and you are a glittering princess.”

“Oh, good god.” Arty blinked.

Tobias preened. “I am beautiful. So, what is our dear Sven?”

“A terrifying warrior.” Mitski grinned.

Tobias nodded. “I can see that.”

“With gold armour.”

He cackled. “That too.”

“And swords in either fist. And a tiny little clover over his heart in emeralds.”

Arty blinked. “Uh, weird.”

Tobias looked at her and hugged her hard before kissing her enough to make her squirm and pull away. “Dude. No making out in front of Sven’s niece.”

Mitski laughed. “I have seen way worse when they were watching over me.”

Arty glared at Tobias. “Really?”

He stroked her hair and kissed her jaw. “Isn’t it better to see adults who want to be together?”

Mitski smiled and cleared her throat. “Can I see those jet skis now?”

They sighed, parted, and continued to the boathouse.

Chapter Eight

Hours after the visitors had left, Arty was led to bed. She was nervous. "I am a little tired."

Sven nodded. "That's fine. You will get ready for bed, and if you don't want sex, you don't. We can all still cuddle."

Arty was suspicious, but she hopped over to her room, and there was a nighty and robe lying on her bed. She smiled and brushed her hair before she brushed her teeth and got changed.

She used the cane for balance, even though her knee wasn't sore. The robe and nighty were satins again, and she peeked around the door.

Tobias and Sven were forehead to forehead, whispering quietly. Sven saw her and smiled slowly. "Come on in, baby girl. We were waiting."

She set the cane next to Tobias's crutches and carefully walked to the bed. Sven frowned. "Are you okay?"

"Getting better. Swelling is going down." She approached them warily. "I am not quite sure where to go."

Tobias smiled. "Always in the middle."

"What if there is no room?"

"We will make room, Arty."

Sven held his hand out to her, and she walked toward him. He pulled her in. "We will always make room."

Tobias spooned against her, eased her robe off her shoulders, and it slithered away and onto the bed. Sven made a strange sound, and the lights dimmed.

Tobias lay down, pressing himself against her from shoulder to ankle. Sven pressed against her front, and his hands gripped her shoulder and hip to pull her in close. She now understood

why they didn't need thick duvets on their bed. They were furnaces.

She lay between them, softly breathing when the combination of scents swirling around her caused her to shift a little. Her thighs were slick.

“Aw, crap.”

Tobias murmured sleepily, “Something wrong?”

“No. It's fine.” She said it softly.

Sven's hand moved lower and then dragged up her hip, taking the nighty with it. Once it was up, he moved his hand to her inner thigh and drew small circles in the slick offering her body was producing.

Sven smiled. “It feels very distracting.”

He slid his thigh between her legs and supported her bad knee.

She looked at him and blinked. “Whoa.” His eyes were glowing. Brilliant emerald green.

His striking features were cast in the glow. “So, this is me.”

She cupped his jaw and smiled, leaning up for a kiss. “Your eyes are sparkly.”

“They are.” His lips brushed against hers.

“Pretty.”

His mouth curved against hers. “Thank you.” His fingers slipped and slid against her folds.

She gasped and softly whined as he circled her clit. He continued kissing her as she whined and started to twist against his hand. Tobias licked at the bite, and she shuddered.

Fingers slipped inside her, and the kiss between Sven and her got savage.

Tobias was chuckling as he moved to work on her neck and stroke her breasts under the nighty. He murmured, “Are you sure sex is off the table? This is what we qualify as enhanced cuddling.”

She growled and reached between her and Sven to wrap her hand around his cock, stroking him carefully.

“Is that an invitation, babydoll?”

“Well, I could see how long it took to get you off at this pace.” She slowly moved her fingers up and down his length through the fabric of his shorts.

He growled and rolled her to her back. Causing Tobias to laugh and move aside. Sven paused and said, “Tobias, move over.” He lifted Arty, and Tobias moved under her. He then eased her over and draped her over their omega, who had gotten rid of his shorts somehow.

She blinked as Sven pressed into her and could feel Tobias’s erection pinned between them.

Tobias moved her so that her belly pressed against him, and the slick stickiness was already making her body slip against him.

Sven surged in, Tobias held her, and her grunt was less than ladylike. Sven’s purr started, and she sobbed as the sensations ran through her.

Tobias took her hands, kissed each palm, and then met her gaze as Sven thrust steadily.

The links between them flared and thickened. She could feel her new lust, Tobias’s cheerful lust, and Sven’s careful lustful fascination. He was fucking smug in every use of the words. He wanted them both beneath him because they were his.

She caught the wave of his enjoyment, and it pulled her into a tight orgasm when she tightened around him, trying to hold him. He paused for a moment while her body held onto him, then he reached to touch her clit and circle the tight skin as she whined. She relaxed, and he thrust again.

Tobias’s eyes were closed as he tried to hold his control, but when she leaned forward and licked his jaw, he bucked upward and grunted. The buck drove Sven in to the knot, and he groaned as he spilled into her. The squeak that came out of her ended with a moan while her sex clenched around him and held his knot tight.

He purred, and she yelped as the sounds and sensations of the deep rumble reached inside her... everywhere.

Sven purred and nuzzled the back of her neck, brushing his lips over her shoulder and mark, then moving to the side of her neck where he continued purring and licked softly.

The purr shook her, and tension built and built, and then it released with a snap, and she shouted against Tobias. The burn of energy in her body caused tears to leak from her eyes.

Sven whispered in her ear, words she didn't understand. He stroked her hair and comforted her while his knot held him inside her.

Tobias wrecked the sweetness when he murmured, "Now imagine that knot in your ass."

She jolted, Sven growled, Tobias grinned, and then Arty laughed.

Arty started to rock against Sven and on Tobias, and their omega stared and gasped as a twist of her hips set him off while using the link between them to share how she felt. She was going to be a mess when they were done, but she didn't mind. In a weird way, she earned it.

Sven groaned as his knot came loose, but instead of pulling out, he just leaned to one side, and they went from stacked to lying side by side by side.

Sven murmured, and Tobias backed away. Sven pulled out, she was rotated and pulled tight to Sven, and Tobias pressed against her back. She muttered, "Great. I am now going to have to shower in the morning. I am covered in cum."

Tobias rubbed his chest against her back. "We know. Our scents will become part of yours and remain in your blood with regular top-ups."

She yawned and hugged Sven. "Was that Russian?"

"What, princess?"

"When you asked Tobias to back up. What was that?"

“Ah, no. It was just a language that I use to speak to Tobias. It comes along with the green eyes, and I don’t even think about it.”

She snuggled close. “Oh. That’s nice.”

Her body relaxed, and she ignored the slow creep of cum from inside her. He murmured in her ear, and she eventually smiled in the glow of his eyes and said, “I don’t think that is physically possible.”

Tobias gasped and then laughed.

Sven chuckled. “Dream of it, princess.”

After a quick shower and breakfast, Tobias wore an expensive suit and had set out a designer outfit for her. It was a simple dress, but the fabric was soft as a kitten. She got dressed and put on the discreet flats, then strapped on her brace. She pulled her hair back in a ponytail and blinked when she took in Tobias. He was standing with his back straight, the cut of the suit making his shoulders broad and waist narrow. He had a gold ring on his left middle finger, a large diamond in his left earlobe, and she could swear that she saw cufflinks.

She stepped out to where he could see her, and he smiled. “The car is almost here. Do you have your phone?”

She blinked. “Oh. Right.” She went to her closet and found the purse that made her nervous to touch. She swallowed and slipped her phone into the purse, settling the strap on her shoulder before grabbing her cane.

She walked out, and Tobias smiled while Sven scowled. “You look like a wren next to a peacock.”

Tobias shrugged. “Peahens are less flamboyant in nature. Wrens are coloured in subtle ways so they can hide.”

The car pulled up, and Tobias said, “He’s here.”

Sven sighed. “Right, well, have fun, you two. Toby, keep it below twenty grand.”

Tobias sighed. “Fine. Twenty grand of yours and twenty of mine.”

Sven scowled. “Toby.”

Tobias grinned. “Come on, Arty, we are going to be late.”

Sven caught her before she could pass him, and he kissed her. He whispered, “Do anything you want to do. Have fun.”

She nodded, and Tobias held his hand out to her. Together, they went out to the hired car, and Sven nodded to the driver.

They settled in the back seat, and Tobias confirmed their destination. At that point, they sat back and were whisked to the salon.

Massage, hair, nails, and waxing. Each stage of the process was done with Tobias at her side. He held her hand through the waxing, and she returned the favour.

By the time the salon had finished working her hair over completely, it was back to its natural purple. When the trim started, she watched carefully and was thankful that the stylist wasn't too chatty.

There was one question, and Arty thought about how to answer it when she heard, “So, you have had quite the overhaul. Any occasion?”

“Yes. I have joined Tobias and his alpha.”

The stylist smiled and continued to snip. “For an evening?”

“No, a permanent arrangement. They are picking my clothes and everything.” She put a vapid giggle into play.

Tobias snorted. “Arty. Behave.”

Arty sighed and put on her university public-speaking voice. “Yes, Sven and I ran into each other a few years ago and again last week. We chatted, and with Tobias's agreement, we are now a triad.”

Tobias was getting the last touches of a charmingly tousled style. “Like I had a say in it.”

“Don't be like that. You were the point of contact and the one who saw me in distress, to begin with.”

The stylist began to flat iron her hair into a purple sheet that covered her breasts in front and went to mid-back.

Tobias said, “Make sure that there is no speck of hair on her dress. Sven is super fussy about appearances, and we are going out for lunch.”

Arty said weakly, “Lunch?”

“Late lunch. They just need to freshen up the lip stain, and I will call the car.”

Arty blinked as an esthetician swooped in and did the touch-up.

The hair was finished, and the cape was removed with precise care. Tobias helped her out of the chair and smiled. “You look lovely and so smooth.”

“Shut it, Tobias.”

He laughed and offered her his arm. She linked her arm with his, and they headed for the entryway, where Tobias filled out a small card. One of the staff rushed to them and handed him a bag. “Everything we used on her.”

“Thank you, Linda.” He smiled at her and checked his phone. “The car is here.”

Arty went with him, walking slowly. Getting on and off those tables had not been easy.

She looked at the car that he was walking toward, and she felt something suspicious. “Tobias?”

“Yes.”

“Does the car service change drivers?”

“No.”

“Stop.”

She shifted her grip on her cane and sent a distress call to Sven. If he wanted her to call, she would.

The driver didn’t get out, which was strange as well.

Tobias muttered, “Shit.”

The door of the car swung open, and Wilhurst stepped out. “There you are, you little whore.”

“Tobias, if I say back up, back the fuck up.”

“Why?”

“I am about to wreck this dress.”

She released the knee brace and flexed the stiff joint as Wilhurst approached her, all alpha’d out. Veins stood out on his forehead, his neck was thick, and his jacket was straining to contain his chest and arms.

She heard the squealing of tires but kept an eye on Wilhurst as he lowered his head and charged. “You are coming with me, bitch.”

Betas were running and hiding in the variety of shops as he took the first few steps toward her, and he had taken a third step when he was sent to the ground.

Tobias put his arm around her and eased her back and away from the alpha, whose broken nose was leaving a smear on the sidewalk. Sven stepped off Wilhurst and made a chuffing sound.

Sirens were wailing in the background as officers raced to the scene of an out-of-control alpha.

Sven growled out, “Toby, a car is coming. Get her safe.”

Their driver pulled up, bloody, but he got out of the car and waved them in.

Tobias picked her up and ran with her to the car.

She was stunned. “How are you doing this?”

“It’s a leg, Arty. It works like one with some minor accommodations.”

The driver held the door and closed it behind them, ran around the car, and then got them away from the scene where the alphas were beating the hell out of each other.

Tobias got his phone out and got the feed of someone who was recording the battle or possibly the massacre. Sven was

very good at fighting, and there wasn't a joint on Wilhurst that was where it was supposed to be. Precise strikes were delivered, and the alpha rage was going to wear off pretty soon for Wilhurst. Sven seemed irritated but calm.

The police were just waiting, and the edge of an ambulance could be seen in the video.

"Well, there goes lunch." Tobias sighed.

His phone rang, and he answered it. "Hello?"

She sat and watched him while he spoke and nodded. He hung up and looked at her. "Well, we are still getting lunch. It is being prepared by Sven's cousin, Yorgi. Our driver has been ordered to take us there. He can get some more first aid as well."

The driver gave a thumbs-up on a very swollen hand.

They drove through the city, and when they finally got out of the car, they were greeted by a lovely woman with golden hair and a large alpha with white-blond hair and piercing blue eyes.

Tobias kept his arm around her waist as she carefully stepped using the cane.

"The guy is Grigory, Sven's uncle, and the female is Lexa, Grigory's omega."

She nodded, and Lexa smiled. "Hello. Tobias is hovering over you like an eagle with a chick."

"I am Artemis. Arty."

Grigory blinked. "Why do I know that name?"

Tobias smiled. "Same beta as five years ago."

"Oh, holy shit. Come in. Come in. You little ones must be starved. You look lovely though. Is your hair purple?"

"Yes, it came with the mark that got Sven's attention." She walked with Tobias into the house, and Lexa led the way.

Grigory followed them in, and when they got to the kitchen, Tobias helped her sit at the table, and he waved to the

youngish male in the kitchen. “Hey, Yorgi.”

“Tobias! I heard you were coming. We do not see you often enough, and you are looking stunning today.”

Tobias nodded. “Thank you, Yorgi. Can I get some coffee for Arty?”

Lexa smiled. “You hurt your leg, Arty?”

“Yeah. Clumsy me.”

Tobias’s head swivelled to Arty.

Lexa smiled. “Those heels are bastards, huh?”

“You know it.”

Tobias sighed. “Arty, you don’t have to be agreeable. She got between me and an omega who wanted her to join her pack. The little lady wanted to take me out, so she was aiming for my good leg. Arty took a hit to the face and then a solid punch to the kneecap by an omega who had police training. Today, she put herself between me and that raging alpha downtown. She also had the sense to call Sven as soon as she realized what was going on.”

Yorgi whistled. Arty looked over at him, and he turned his hand to show the screen of his phone. “She actually did. She also took something off her leg. A brace?”

The coffeemaker hissed and steamed. He got her a cup, and Grigory frowned. “As Sven’s beta, you should not be risking yourself. You are difficult to replace.”

Yorgi brought her the coffee, and her hands were shaking. Tobias put his hand over hers. “Yorgi, can we get some sugar? I think she’s in shock.”

Lexa took her other hand and cursed. “She’s ice cold. What happened?”

Grigory looked at the image. He glanced at Arty. “This is Wilhurst?”

“Yeah.”

“He wished to kill you?”

Tobias shook his head. “No. He wanted to get her back. We were supposed to have bought a month, but this is only a few days in.”

Grigory sighed. “Perhaps my queries are not as subtle as I had hoped. I have reached his superiors, and they are more than willing to take the payout that Sven has offered. It seems he disagreed.”

The coffee cup spilled across the table.

Lexa hissed. “Grigory! Shut up!”

Her fingers were burned a little, and Yorgi came to clean up. “Sorry about that.”

Tobias pulled her onto his lap and sent her soothing waves through their link. She leaned her head against his shoulder, and he stroked and soothed her.

He tilted her chin up and kissed her. It was a welcome distraction, and she sighed into his mouth as she let him drain the nervous energy from her.

She pulled her head back and kissed his neck above his collar.

Tobias cuddled her as she slowly crept away from the ice that had filled her.

Grigory was staring at them with wonder. Lexa propped her head on her chin. “I want a male omega and a female beta to cuddle with. It looks like so much fun.”

Grigory chuckled. “You have babies, treasure.”

“Oh. Right.”

Yorgi returned, and he set down a mug with coffee, cream, and probably a ton of sugar.

Tobias picked it up and blew on it. When he was satisfied, he held it to her lips.

Fuck! That's sweet! She shivered and took another sip.

Tobias smiled.

Lexa asked, “What’s funny?”

“She drinks her coffee black. She doesn’t consume a lot of sugar. This should help her blood sugar, but she might get a little twitchy.”

Yorgi was staring at Arty and frowning. “Where do I know you from? I am sure I have seen you before.”

Tobias chuckled. “How often do you go scrolling through cam girls?”

Yorgi stared and then gasped. “Felicity?”

She started laughing. “Yeah. Well spotted.”

Grigory nodded. “He said you were a cam girl. It was to finish a debt?”

“Yes. I took it on after my father passed. I had done it before when I needed a lot of money quickly.”

Lexa nodded. “I get that. You do what you have to do, and men with disposable income are the best place to get fast cash.” She smiled. “I used to strip, then was a courier, and then did some work in music videos.”

“She writes pop songs as well.” Grigory smiled. He was proud, and it was cute.

Tobias got a ping on his phone and sighed. “Sven will be here in an hour.”

Arty nodded, but she sent a curl of relief through the links. Tobias held the cup up and got the entire sickly sweet cup into her, and she did feel better.

“Hailey is at school, or I am sure she would enjoy meeting you.”

Tobias murmured, “Hailey is Lexa’s daughter.”

“Oh. Neat.”

“Her eldest daughter. She has twin girls. One is mine; one is Delun’s.”

Lexa smiled. “My family has a lot of twins, which came in handy when my heat came in. Less pressure to produce another one for two of my three mates.”

“Three. Yikes.”

Lexa laughed. “We are not usually all in the same bed at the same time.”

Arty looked at Tobias. “I wonder if that is an aberration.”

He grinned and rubbed his nose against hers. “Deal with it.”

Yorgi seemed to have shaken off his astonishment. “What can I get you to eat?”

“Bacon cheddar quiche?”

“Coming up. Tobias?”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Cool. What do you think Sven will want when he gets here?”

Tobias laughed. “Arty.”

Lexa laughed. “I will be right back. I am going to make sure that an available guestroom is ready for... reasons.”

Arty blushed and turned her face away from the alpha who was hosting them.

Grigory chuckled. “Sven does like to keep his people in the best condition. What did you all get done?”

Tobias listed all the treatments. “And Arty got her makeup done. It’s holding remarkably well.”

She looked up, and his lips were slightly pink. She licked her thumb and wiped at his lips.

“I wouldn’t do that, Arty.”

“Why?”

“Because my heat is going to start the day after tomorrow, and every time you touch me, I get closer.”

She jerked her hand back, and Grigory laughed. “I have never seen someone who wasn’t looking forward to an omega’s heat.”

She looked at Tobias and was going to ask if that was the only reason she was there, but she knew the answer. No. She

was there because Sven had been given a chance to claim her, so he had. She was there because she was wanted and cherished by both of them. There was a surge of affection through their link that reinforced it.

She didn't have to solve things alone anymore.

Chapter Nine

Arty lifted her head when she felt Sven get close. Tobias smiled as he held one of the babies. “He’s here.”

Lexa took the baby Arty had been holding. Tobias was getting into practice in case his heat was productive. Knowing him and Sven, the result would be adorable.

Arty excused herself and walked through the house until she saw Sven talking to Grigory. Sven ceased talking and turned to her. He walked up to her and smiled. “Right instinct, princess.”

He still looked beautiful and terrifying, but he picked her up and held her, her feet dangling off the ground. He snuffled softly against her neck and visibly relaxed.

She whispered, “I am safe, Tobias is safe, and I didn’t even chip a nail.”

He chuckled. “And you called me. That is what is saving you from being over my knee. I have seen the recordings. You were ready to take on an alpha in rut.”

She blinked. “Oh. Shit. I had no idea.”

“And Tobias didn’t tell you.”

“No.”

“Probably a good thing. If you had run, this would be a different conversation.”

She pulled her face from his neck, and he held her there with a hand on the back of her head. She muttered, “Yorgi made quiche.”

“I will have some later.”

“Later, like after you and Tobias get reacquainted?”

He chuckled and carried her upstairs to the room Lexa had mentioned. "Tobias and I are already acquainted."

She hid her face against him as he set her down on the bed on her feet. She was a few inches taller than he was but only just.

He looked up at her with glowing eyes. "You are all right?"

"I was shocky, but Tobias held me, and Yorgi gave me sweet coffee."

He smiled. "Good. How did Lexa treat you?"

"Like I was a sick toddler."

"They didn't treat you like a pet?"

She smiled and put her hands on his shoulders. "At first, but Tobias stopped that in its tracks."

He unzipped her dress and eased it off her shoulders and past her hips. He grinned. "You look so smooth."

"They went after every follicle with a vengeance. Tobias found it hilarious."

He slowly removed her underwear and slid it aside. "Can you support yourself by holding onto the canopy frame above you?"

"Boost?"

"Of course, princess." He put his hands on her waist and lifted her directly into the air. She gripped the canopy, and he draped her legs over his shoulders.

She felt the heat of his breath on her folds, his tongue lapped at her, and she nearly lost her grip. Arty shouted, "Stop, stop, stop!"

Sven paused and leaned back, licking his lips. She burst into tears, and he shifted, wrapped his arms around her waist, and caught her when she dropped.

She did something she never did, and she sought comfort from someone. He sat on the bed and held her until her

sobbing was done. He asked her, “So, princess, why the storm?”

She sniffled and wiped her cheeks. “I was facing down a psychotic alpha who had an interest in me. An aggressive interest. And he called me a whore, so his brain was skittering through a sex path. That wasn’t something I was prepared for.”

“He was in rut. He had just spent over fifty thousand dollars to find you.”

She started shaking again.

“Oh, so you had figured that out.”

She nodded and pressed herself to him.

He held her. “You are safe, Arty, but I don’t think you are up for playtime. Not here, not now.”

She sniffled. “Sorry, alpha.”

“Oh, no. That isn’t how you address me when you are naked on my lap.”

She looked up, and his eyes were gleaming. “Sorry, Daddy.”

He patted her thigh. “That’s my baby girl. Now, get up and get dressed. We don’t want you getting cold.”

She elbowed him for the waxing reference and then hopped off his lap. She was putting her underwear back into place when she realized her knee was fixed. “What the…”

He grinned. “I told you, you heal faster after bonding, and we bonded you thoroughly.”

She pulled the dress on and flipped her hair out before stepping into her shoes. He took her hand, and they headed downstairs.

“Tobias is playing with the babies.”

Sven smiled. “He loves the babies, but he hasn’t felt confident enough to try and have one of his own yet.”

“I can help him there if he wants. I babysat in high school. I know which end is up.”

Tobias blinked in surprise as they appeared in the day room. “I wasn’t expecting you two.”

Arty sent her panic and freakout to him through the link.

“Ah. Right. Here. Hold a baby.”

Lexa was sitting in the corner and smiled as Tobias got up, handed Arty a baby, and then went to hold the other twin himself.

She looked down at the little girl and smiled. Sven stroked her hair, and Lexa said, “You have chosen interesting mates, nephew.”

Sven smiled. “Fate chose them for me, and I have no complaints.”

“We are having some family over for dinner if you want to stay. Three more is easy for Yorgi to manage.”

Sven shook his head. “No, we will head home. I have some business I wish to attend to, and then I will make dinner.” He continued to run his fingers through Arty’s hair.

Lexa smiled. “I don’t think I have ever seen Grigory in the kitchen unless he was seeking food.”

Sven smiled. “He is missing out. These two keep wandering in for treats, and it can lead to a lot of fun.”

Tobias said softly, “Before you get any ideas, he means tickle fights to get cookies.”

Lexa grinned. Grigory came in and looked at them in surprise. “I thought you would still need to be alone.”

Arty shrugged. “I can’t properly have a freakout here.”

Grigory blinked. “You seem very calm.”

“Of course, I am. I am holding a baby.”

Lexa got up and leaned on her mate. “Women, in general, can keep themselves calm while we do what needs to be done, as can some men. Arty is still in that mode. She hasn’t let herself relax yet. Her mind is still facing that alpha on the sidewalk with her omega next to her. It will be until she lets

herself relax, and she can't relax here. She can crack but not relax."

Grigory picked up the daughter that Arty had been holding. Lexa took the baby from Tobias.

Sven kissed Arty on the head. "Come on, princess. Toby."

Grigory paused and said, "Does this mean the family can finally welcome Tobias officially?"

Arty looked at Tobias, and he smiled and looked at her. "I don't see the harm."

Sven sent a happy burst through their link. "I think that's a yes."

"I will let Mother know."

"Let her know that she can fuss over Tobias, but if she lets out one word against Arty, I will cease to manage her funds, and we will not attend another family function."

Grigory winced. "Understood. You and I are still okay, right?"

Sven nodded. "I knew I could send them here, and they would be safe. I don't trust many with what is most precious to me."

Arty looked up at him. "Your pasta sauce recipe?"

The hand that swung down and smacked her butt lifted her off the ground. She yelped.

"Clever little princess."

Tobias grinned. "It looks like you are all recovered. He only starts roughhousing when he knows he won't hurt you."

"Yeah, well, I don't know if I can sprain my ass, but I am thinking about how to manage it." She bowed to Lexa and Grigory.

They laughed at her, and Sven picked her up and carried her out of the house with Tobias at their side.

"Whoa."

Sven's car roof had been torn open from the inside out.

Sven smiled. “The car service is almost here, and some of my cousins have a body shop. They are coming to take this poor thing off for repairs.”

“Did you hit a stanchion?” Arty looked at the dent on the side.

“Probably.” He shrugged. “The dealership will deliver a new one in the morning.”

Tobias muttered, “Get used to it, Arty.”

Sven went to the back seat, and a whole bunch of bags came out with him. They were all the same series of discrete names with the word *Jeweller*.

Sven looked at her and smiled.

“Please, tell me that Tobias is going to bleed out in a terrible piercing experiment.”

Tobias laughed, “Hey!”

She got another swat to her backside, but this time, it was the omega. She yelped again, and then the car service returned, and their battered driver came out to open the door for them. The salon bag was still in the back seat.

Tobias got in, then Arty, and Sven got in behind her, but it left her popped up on their legs to fit.

The driver got moving, and Arty tried to get comfortable. She was calm and secure until Sven slipped a hand under her skirt and two fingers past the panties and inside her. That one move made every bump, pothole, and lane marker shiver through her.

The ride home was thirty minutes, and she came twice, biting her lip to keep silent.

When they got back to the lake house, Sven had already retrieved his digits. He helped her out of the car before he got the bags, and Tobias came around the other side with the salon bag.

He put an arm around her and murmured that now that she was home, she could relax. She muttered, “Yeah, I saw the

look on his face. Relaxing isn't part of the plan."

"Lie back and think of England? I can talk in a British accent if it will help." He chortled.

"Uh-huh. When is your heat due to start?"

"A couple of days."

She nodded as they headed inside. "So, is there a backpack or duffel bag I can use to make a run for it?"

Arty heard a growl from behind her. "Oh, do run. I haven't had a chase in ages."

She slowly turned to see him walking to his office with the bags. He paused in the doorway, and his eyes were glowing.

Tobias tutted. "That's not good. If he's that close to the surface, he is going to set me off, and then the heat starts. Oh, did you want to see the nest?"

"Wait. You have an actual nest?"

"Sure. It has to be safe and secure because we aren't going to be in any shape to ward off predators."

"I can stay outside the door with a bat."

Tobias stopped and stroked her hair. "I always hoped you would be there with me."

She looked into his beautiful eyes and groaned. "Fine, but if I pass out, leave me alone."

"I'll try. If Sven lunges at you, I will throw myself on him. Ah, the things I do for the ones I love."

She giggled, and Tobias pressed a part of the wall that looked like a flat piece of wall. A Sven-sized doorway opened up, and Tobias led her downstairs to a room that also opened to his handprint.

"So, the doors are set to you and Sven?"

He stepped into the warm, comfortable space with stacks of pillows, small fridges, and a bathroom with a large shower, big enough for two.

She smiled. “There isn’t much room here for three. I can bake cookies, and I can hang out up top.”

Tobias looked around and rubbed the back of his neck. “I guess it is kind of snug.”

“I know it was designed for you two, and it’s your space. If you are happy with it, it’s all good.” She stroked his jaw. “Your comfort is the most important thing.”

He leaned into her hand. “Maybe we should go to the city house. The nest there is bigger.”

“Sweetie, are you more comfortable here?”

He nodded.

“Then this is the best place for you.”

He leaned forward and kissed her. She melted against him, and they swayed together.

He pulled her to the firm and yielding surface of the nest, and he murmured softly, and the lights dimmed as he undressed her. She yelped when she was flipped to her back and Tobias dove between her thighs. He had a specific target for his tongue and soon had her thrashing on the floor, clutching at the thick, plush throws.

* * * *

Sven listened through the open door and grinned. He had been unsure if she would be able to relax in the nest. The air would be thick in there after the standard three days that Tobias took to clear his heat. Betas didn’t do well in that atmosphere, even with the air scrubbers. He hoped that she did well.

He heard her calling to Tobias, and there was concern in the link. He was down the stairs in seconds. He looked at Toby’s flushed skin, dilated pupils, and rapid breathing.

“He’s just been knocked into an early heat. Toby, do you want Arty to help you get settled?”

Toby lunged for her. She was already naked, so his hands ran over her. Arty grabbed his hands. “Easy. Let’s get you settled, get that pretty suit off, and detach your leg. I think it might get in the way, right?”

Sven murmured, “What do you need from the upstairs pantry?”

“Jerky and fruit cups. A lot of them.”

“Good choices.” He kissed her then left her to peel the frisky omega out of his clothing.

Sven went upstairs, made a few quick texts, and grabbed a bag of non-perishable groceries from the pantry. He removed his jacket and shoes, complete with socks.

He headed into the hidden doorway and then into the nest. She was pinned under Tobias, and he was nuzzling her breasts. His scent was thick, and Sven was having difficulty concentrating. He dropped the bag near the fridges and stripped out of his clothes. His pulse was thundering in his ears. When he was naked, he crept over Tobias’s back and nuzzled his ear. He thrust into his eager omega, and the marathon began.

* * * *

Arty moved quietly and got up to stagger to the shower. She didn’t moan; she didn’t groan or grunt. Any of those sounds would get her dragged under a male body.

The shower took the sticky residue from her, but the bite marks from alpha and omega were going to take a while to heal. She tried to purge her channel by clenching and got more out.

When she was finally clean, she wrapped herself in a towel and dried off. She tiptoed to the snack area and opened a fruit cup. There were no spoons, so she went full fingers. Sven still had Tobias curled against him sweetly.

She wanted to be jealous, but she was the second acquisition. She didn't have a heat, and she had birth control, so there was no need for this kind of event. As she finished her fruit cup, she looked around and saw something white and plastic. *What the hell?*

She moved quietly and picked up the bow with long strings. She went cold and started to hyperventilate. Her IUD was out, and she didn't know when it had happened, and she wasn't due to ovulate for a few more days, but her body had never been predictable.

She sat in the corner and had her quiet freakout. They looked so peaceful, and hopefully, Tobias was pregnant.

She leaned up against the fridge and tried to make a plan that didn't involve her holding a baby with glowing green eyes.

Arty was stroked on the cheek. Sven was naked and crouching near her. "Baby girl, why are you so far?"

"Every time I so much as cough, it alerts one of you, and I am under someone in under a minute." She grimaced. "Or between you."

Sven smiled. "The memories come back slowly."

"Oh, I have them all." She felt tears drip down her cheeks. "And some I want to get rid of."

Sven was concerned. "What happened? What did we do?"

"It came out."

"What?"

She opened her hand and showed him the plastic. "It came out."

He frowned, and then his brows cleared. "Oh. Oh, no. We will get you a pill, baby girl, if you don't want to risk it."

She shook her head. "I don't know when it came out. I just have to wait... for weeks."

He reached for her, and she backed up. “No. I can’t. Not if there is a chance I am not pregnant. I’ll sleep in my room when I can get out of here.”

Sven frowned. “It’s a biometric lock.”

“Not on the system yet.”

“Right. I thought we had more time.” He got up and hit the open button.

She nodded. “Thanks.”

Sven asked, “Why don’t you want to be pregnant?”

“My mom said that getting pregnant was the worst thing that ever happened to her, and I wasn’t wanted, and I was an accident. I never want to think that way about my own baby.”

She carefully walked up the steps and headed to her bedroom. She just needed to sleep.

* * * *

Tobias stood as Sven took care of him and made sure that all the sweat and debris went down the drain.

Tobias groaned. “You’re a good alpha. A lot of them skip this part, or so I have heard.”

Sven chuckled. “Dude, you tip over if I have you shower yourself after a heat.”

“Yeah.” He laughed. “I wish Arty was in here with us, complaining about needing more space. But she got her shower. Was she able to walk when you took care of her?”

“She was already showered when I woke up. She’s going to be spending nights in her room, and no sex during the day, either.”

“What? Did we hurt her?” He looked at Sven over his shoulder.

“No. Her implant came out. It opened an unpleasant memory for her, and she needs to wait until she finds out if

she's pregnant. So, you both get an appointment in two weeks."

"Oh, shit. So, she's been so willing because she was protected. Does she know when it came out?"

"Nope. Between both of us, it could have floated out."

"I want to go up and cuddle her."

"If you do, put her under the covers and you over them. Just so she doesn't worry."

Tobias looked at him. "You will come to us?"

"That bed is small."

Tobias whined. "I want to be with both of you."

"We will figure it out. Don't worry, Toby. She's still here, but there is something I need you to look into."

Tobias perked up. "What?"

"Artemis Winter and her family. I want everything."

Tobias smiled. "I can do that. Give me a towel and help me up the stairs. I am not in the mood to put the leg on."

Sven towelled him dry, wrapped a towel around his hips, and then did the same for himself. They left the wreck of the nest, and Sven carried him up the stairs and to his crutches. Tobias headed for his office and got to work.

Two hours later, Tobias found Sven and handed him a thumb drive. "Here you go. She's adopted, but she was with her mother for the first five years. It was not a good first five years, but she is a caretaker, so she taught herself to call emergency services for her mom when she overdosed."

Sven nodded. "It explains her efficient social manipulation skills and caretaking tendencies. The draw toward social work."

"I like those tendencies."

"It also explains why she faces monsters. She's done it before."

He got his laptop and went through the social media posts about drug use with little Artemis standing in the background with wide eyes. “Damn. Look at those huge eyes.”

“Wait until you see her social services intake photo. She looks like a doll.”

Sven looked at him with a raised brow.

“What? You said everything.”

They stood in the kitchen, stared at the screen, and learned about why their mate had specific reactions to a crisis.

Chapter Ten

Arty couldn't sleep. She felt like a toddler but got up and went to get a glass of water from the kitchen. She paused when she saw two towel-wearing mates staring at images and assessments from her files. "I would have told you what you wanted to know if you had asked."

They turned. Sven sighed. "It suddenly struck me that while I know you now, I don't know anything about how you came to be the woman you are. The Winters were good people?"

"Aside from financial mismanagement, they were good. My dad bent over backward for me, and I was always fed and clothed." She smiled weakly. "But the person you want to know about is my birth mother. She was addicted to whatever was accessible in three blocks. She would leave bread down where I could get it, and I lived on it until after it moulded. That was when I was three. After I turned four, I could open the fridge, and she got me a plastic chair to climb on. When I was five, I was cooking grilled cheese. That is when she dosed herself in the home. When she was home, I ran around with a phone in my hand. When my mom overdosed, I carried that phone with me until the battery died."

Tobias blinked. "Shit. I thought the picture was cute."

"It sort of is. I was prepared to call for help from any of the people around me. I didn't understand home stations."

Sven looked at her. "The daddy thing?"

Arty shrugged. "Something told me you would be up for it. My actual dad was five foot six and eighty pounds overweight and bald. There is no conflating of the two rolls."

Sven sighed in relief.

"I had a father figure; he was a good father figure. He's gone. But, when I call you Daddy, I just want not to think, not

worry, not anticipate.”

Tobias muttered. “Cool.”

Sven asked, “Can I hold you?”

She smiled. “I couldn’t sleep because I can’t not sleep in a sandwich anymore.”

“I will take that as a yes.”

Tobias hugged her from the front, and Sven wrapped his arms under her breasts.

“I don’t know if the addiction and meanness are hereditary. I don’t want to regret the life I bring into the world if I am pregnant.”

Sven sighed. “We will take care of you and it. Any child born into this household will be loved and spoiled. If you are ever unsure, we will take over.”

She stood wrapped in their arms. “I also won’t know who the father is for several weeks.”

Tobias lifted his head. “What?”

Sven chuckled. “Ah. Right. Well, any children born to my omega or beta will be considered mine for family and legal reasons.”

“Can we get that in writing? I want my babies to have computer equipment. Really good computer equipment. And nice cars.”

“Ilsa is coming over with a contract for Arty. Tobias already had one in the omega contracts.”

“Oh.”

“My family has a lot of lawyers, and I am one when I am not practicing my hobby. The hobby makes more money.”

Tobias sighed. “What he is saying is that Ilsa will be acting in your best interest and drawing up the contract in your favour.”

“But, she’s his sister.”

“Mitski likes you, and that goes a long way.”

Sven chuckled. “It really does, at least in my branch of the family.”

“Branch?”

Tobias sighed. “Olyna is the matriarch, the head omega of their clan. She has several alpha mates and a few betas. Sven is a grandson, and Grigory is a son. It is a complicated genealogy that I hope the little ones don’t have to draw in class.”

She could barely move her arms, but she stroked Tobias. “So, what happens if they gild you?”

Tobias blushed and whispered against her lips, “It’s embarrassing.”

“They surround him and give him jewellery as gifts.” Sven chuckled. “He gets covered in it.”

“I am having flashbacks to the heat.” She smiled.

They both chuckled, and Tobias said, “But I have to stand there, and they put the necklaces and armbands on me.”

“Oh, I am guessing that you only wear minimal clothing for this.” She understood. “I can stand there looking at you and your carbon fibre buddy with lustful eyes. Would that help?”

Tobias smiled. “Actually... yes.”

“Too bad you don’t have a nice bejewelled garter on the leg. Flat enough that it isn’t too visible under your trousers.”

She perked up. “Hey, I can go running tomorrow. Wanna run with me?”

Sven chuckled. “I think we all need to recover from the heat. The housekeeping team arrives tomorrow.”

“Before we unclench from this, what happens if I am not pregnant? Do I put the IUD in again? I mean, I know they will put in a different one, but still.”

“Why don’t we go out on the water tomorrow, and while we are out there, we can do pros and cons?” Sven chuckled.

“Deal. Any more questions about my past can always be asked in a hug like this. I took sociology to figure out why I am the way I am and worked to keep despair from bleeding through. I think I did a pretty good job.”

Tobias kissed her. “You are amazing.”

Sven kissed her neck. “Whatever happens, we are with you. Pregnant or not, we are together, plus Tobias loves babies and is going to be an excellent nanny and Daddy.”

She yawned and nodded. “Okay. Good night then.”

She wiggled, and they let her go.

By the time they went to bed, she was in the middle of the bed and hugging a pillow. They came in and paused, but Tobias said, “That will work.”

She was wearing a nighty and running shorts. Sven laughed, and soon, she was wrapped up in them, and she could finally rest.

Tobias’s gilding was scheduled for the same day as her appointment. They hadn’t been able to get them into the clinic at the same time because the receptionist finally realized she was a beta and made her wait a week. Sven’s sister Ilsa offered to take her and bring her straight to the party afterward.

Tobias was upset, but they needed to know what the situation was, so she had to go. Sven had to stay with him, which frustrated him as well.

Ilsa drove to the clinic and smiled. “It’s okay. He will be here for the other visits.”

Arty nodded. “I know. You’ll see when we get there. The receptionist has a crush on Tobias, and she hates my guts.”

“Why?”

“Because Tobias was kissing me in the hallway to get over his nerves.”

Ilsa nodded. “Ah. Right. Well, your omega is pregnant, so that is a reason for excitement.”

Arty smiled. “He’s excited about it. It’s exhausting.”

They crossed the parking lot. “I thought you were on an abstinence thing until you found out if you were carrying.”

“I am. That is what is exhausting. He does everything else, and once they remembered I couldn’t get pregnant from... uh... alternative insertion... that is when things went wild.”

Ilsa covered her mouth and laughed. “And since you had already been through a heat, that avenue was now open.”

Arty sighed. “Yup. Disconcerting as hell.”

Ilsa checked her in, and they were whisked right in.

Her bloodwork was drawn, and they were put into the exam room.

Ilsa frowned. “Seriously? This place is tiny. How is the OB going to fit?”

“The obstetrician is a beta. Now.”

Ilsa had an outraged expression take over her face, and she picked up her phone and dialled frantically. “Hey, Stephanie. I am here with my brother’s beta, and I thought we were seeing you today, but we are stuck on the first floor in a closet of an exam room with a weird smell.” She nodded. “Meet you there.”

Ilsa escorted her out of the tiny office, down the hall, and back into the entryway. The elevator was counting down to their floor, and when it arrived, a female alpha stepped out in an open lab coat. She walked to the reception desk and asked a few questions. After that, the doctor returned to them and smiled. “Your file has been returned to my office, Artemis. Now, come with me.”

She nodded. “Yes, Dr. Oriel.”

Ilsa smiled.

In the elevator, the doctor said, “Why didn’t you come in for a check with Tobias?”

“We were told that you didn’t have time in your schedule, so I was given an appointment today. I thought it was with you.

Did the doctor I was seeing have beta cross experience?”

“No. He’s a general practitioner with sweaty palms. This is the floor.”

They walked out, and she was soon tucked into a large office in a gown that smelled like clean cotton, and she got a physical from a very careful obstetrician who was gentle but thorough.

“Have you experienced any cramping?”

“About a week ago. Yeah. Left and right radiating. And then it stopped.”

“Did you tell your alpha?”

“No. Tobias wasn’t feeling right at the time. I blocked it off.”

“Why isn’t Sven here today?”

Ilsa answered, “The gilding of his omega is tonight. They are already at the party.”

The next part was the internal, and the doc said, “It is a little early, but if you felt the attachment, we should be able to see something.”

After a little bit of sliding around, there was a spot and then another one. “There you are. Sven’s going to be over the moon.”

“They might not be his, but yeah, he will be.”

The doctor blinked. “Oh, you have a full partnership with your alpha and omega. Why didn’t you say last week?”

“Well, I was within grabbing distance during Tobias’s heat, and my IUD floated out. I didn’t feel it go, but by then, I might have been numb.”

Oriel smiled. “Well, there are two embryos in there doing well. Paternity tests are scheduled?”

“Not yet, but I would like them to be.”

Oriel removed the wand and rubbed her fingers together. “You slick up fast.”

Arty blushed. “That was a learned reflex.”

“It’s a handy one.”

She sat up as the doctor moved back and removed herself from view, knees together and sitting up.

She glanced at Ilsa. “Sorry you had to come. This is TMI, I am sure.”

“Nothing too awkward for my sister-in-law.”

Shock ran through Arty. “What?”

Ilsa frowned. “Sven said he was going to propose.” She said weakly. “He didn’t?”

Arty’s voice felt harsh in her own throat. “When?”

“Salon day.”

“Oh. Right. That would explain a lot.” She shrugged. “I guess he changed his mind.”

“Maybe the timing hasn’t been right.”

“We will just say that is it.”

The doctor said, “I have sent the prenatal prescriptions to the pharmacy on two. Just swing by and pick up the vitamins. Call my office with any pain or confusing symptoms. Same rules that I gave Tobias. If something bleeds, cramps, or if you end up vomiting to the point you start losing weight, get your butt in here.”

She nodded and got up while the part of her mind that controlled her emotions wailed.

Dr. Oriel looked at her when she was dressed and said, “There’s something wrong.”

Ilsa cocked her head. “Doesn’t she deserve a lollipop?”

The doc looked at her and then took out a lolly. “Here you go, Artemis.”

Arty took the lolly and stuck it in her mouth after removing the wrapping. The little bit of sugar soothed her. She was good, and everything would be fine. Ilsa put an arm around her

and rubbed her shoulders. “It will be fine. Sven will be delighted.”

“I know, but if you tell him, I will leave and find somewhere else to be a sandwich filling.”

She was wrestling with uncertainty the whole way home. If he changed his mind about proposing then maybe he had changed his mind about her being pregnant. She looked up, and they weren't home. They were at Lexa and Grigory's.

“What?”

“Come on. This is where they are. You look really strange.”

“I am working through some stuff.”

“Okay, go on in. I have to get my brood.”

“Okay. Thanks for taking me today, Ilsa.”

“I am looking forward to hearing from Sven about how excited he is to be starting his legacy.”

Arty nodded and got out of the car before straightening her shoulders and walking up to the door. The door swung open, and a blonde woman with icy blue eyes looked at her. She said, “I am here to talk to Sven and Tobias.”

“They are occupied elsewhere.” She lifted her chin and sniffed.

Arty opened her link a crack, and her mates were having sex somewhere in the house. “Fine, they are fucking in the middle of the second floor. I still need to talk to them.”

She opened the mark to both of them and wailed her distress, insecurity, and loneliness. She went to sit against the wall and continued pouring her emotions through the link, and nothing happened. Well, nothing happened for sixty-four seconds, and then two sweaty men in thrown-on clothes were holding her as she sobbed.

Looking beyond Tobias, Lexa was standing there with a concerned expression. “Bring her to my study. It's close.”

They carried her into the house full of folks setting up for the party.

Sven sat, and she curled up on his lap while she waited for her mind to stop the storm. She kept her link wide, so they knew it wasn't an angry upset.

They waited, and she wiped her eyes on the tail of her shirt then breathed in. "Got the bloodwork. Finally saw Dr. Oriel."

Sven frowned. "She's your doctor."

"Receptionist didn't think I needed her so assigned me to a guy with sweaty palms, but Ilsa rescued me. I could have seen Oriel last week, but I guess the receptionist thinks that omegas need more privacy during their exams or something. The doctor had a chat with her."

"Anyway, Dr. Oriel checked the bloodwork and an exam confirmed."

Tobias frowned. "I am so sorry."

She blinked and looked at him. Sven was silent. "Why are you sorry? I'm pregnant. Twins so far. It is really early, so one or both could have an issue, but they are spaced pretty far apart, and I just ended up with a purse full of vitamins."

She looked up at Sven's shocked face. "Shouldn't I be? Is it a problem? I don't have my ID anymore because Wilhurst took it. I don't know where it ended up. If I get my ID, I can get new bank cards, and I have some savings. I can go somewhere else and get a job, and when I find out whose it is, I can let you know so you can see it." Her words came out fast, and when she finished, she gasped.

Sven kissed her and wiped her tears away. "We are happy. Really happy. We just thought that when we didn't feel anything from the appointment that it wasn't good news. Don't think about leaving us."

She snorted. "I really don't like your family for scheduling it on the same day as my first obstetrics check. But there was obstetrics to check. Six weeks until we know who's going to pick out tiny outfits in thirty-seven weeks."

Arty got control of herself, and Tobias asked, "Why did you need us today?"

She frowned. “To hold my hand and tell me it was going to be okay. Same as I did with you.”

Sven sighed. “I am sorry. Ilsa was there.”

“Trying not to look into my lady bits. I was glad she was there because she called Dr. Oriel before I had to face the guy with clammy hands, and his office smelled weird and was tiny. I would have had to sit on Sven just to fit.”

The sun was dark red, and darkness was creeping up fast.

“Right. I should get up, and Tobias needs to get dressed. I will close the link, so I don’t mess up the night.”

Sven sighed. “You don’t have to do that.”

“This is a big deal for your family. Tobias needs to be calm and not getting insecure snivelling from the beta in the bunch.”

Tobias smiled. “You don’t snivel. You have genuine concerns for genuine issues.”

Sven hugged her. “Don’t you dare leave this party. If anyone disrespects you, walk over to me. And if you can’t find me, Grigory and Lexa will drive off any obnoxious ones.”

Tobias said, “Barring that, scream the house down.”

They got up and headed upstairs to get Tobias dressed. She brushed off her clothes, and Tobias asked, “You didn’t bring your dress?”

“Ilsa didn’t go home. She just dropped me off and had to get her family. This is it. As good as it gets.” She looked at her elegant companions. “I’ll just stay in here. I can see everything from the window. Sven can keep you calm.”

Tobias said, “You said you would be there.”

“I can’t go out like this. The actual designers of designer clothes are milling around down there.” She dragged in a deep breath. “I am not the one they are here for, and I am not going to embarrass myself or either of you. This is way too much family for me.” The one time she had met Olyna, she had been left feeling like the ugly help. She was going to be arranging things down below, and it was for family only.

She pulled back her shoulders and smiled. “Call me if you need me. I will brave the scowling crowds.”

She hugged both of them and smiled. “Go and have fun. I will be here.” She swallowed.

When they reluctantly left her alone, she curled into the corner, pulled a pillow over her face, and wailed in frustration that she was in such an unstable situation. Sven and Tobias were stable, but the world around them was full of jealousy and prejudice that she hadn’t experienced before.

* * * *

Ilsa ran up to Sven, “Hey, where’s Artemis? I have her stuff.”

Sven looked at his sister, and she was dressed to the nines. “She’s decided to stay in the house.”

Tobias looked at them and said, “Is that Arty’s stuff?”

Sven nodded. “It is, but Grandmother wants to start.”

Olyna was smiling tightly, and she walked up to Tobias. “Come, little one. Time for your big moment.”

“Arty isn’t here. We just need to get her dress to her.”

Sven saw Olyna’s expression harden. “This is a family event. We are here to celebrate an omega entering our family and the new life for your family that you represent.”

Tobias frowned. “But she’s pregnant, too.”

“There are many beta children, but omega children are rare, special. I told your beta this. This is a time for family.” Olyna smiled.

Sven forced open the link that Arty had closed, and he felt the icy core of her emotions. Tobias grabbed the bag, and together, they ran for their beta.

Chapter Eleven

Cold compresses helped the swelling in her face, and Arty held them there as she was tucked into her dress. It was special. The red beads matched Sven's hair, and the patterns moved down to give the whole thing a liquid shiver.

Sven put her shoes on her, and she heard a chirp of his phone. He paused while buckling on her heeled Mary Janes, nodded, and then the sound of a landing helicopter was heard.

Tobias covered her face with kisses, and then he gave her a five-minute makeover. Aside from her eyes being bloodshot, she had the same makeup as the day she left the salon.

“Arty, you are my beta, and there will never be another. Sven is my alpha, and ditto for him, but aside from those people who gave us life, family doesn't matter. Especially Olyna. I mean, my grandmas thought you were amazing.”

She smiled. “I liked them, too.”

“There. You are lovely, gorgeous. Stunning.” Tobias smiled. “Now, if anyone still wants to make me pretty, they are going to have to deal with you standing next to me. Because you have been on your own too long.”

Sven smiled, kissed her, and then Tobias and she laughed. “You did that on purpose. The colour looks good on you, and it is really obvious.”

They grinned with the dark stain on their lips. “Thank you for that bit of idiocy.”

They headed downstairs and back out to where Olyna had organized a group of people with polished boxes. Olyna had a swath of fabric over her arm, and Tobias held onto Arty as Olyna welcomed Tobias into the family. She asked him to remove his jacket, and that was where Arty started having fun. She took the fabric from the astonished Olyna and draped the

toga over Tobias's head. Then she undid his shirt and slid it down and off. She winked at Tobias and knelt to reach up and caress him before she unbuckled his belt and unzipped his trousers. She lowered the pants to his ankles and patted his head as he removed his shoes. Getting the shoe off his prosthetic was something she was good at. He wasn't wearing underwear, so his erection was visible. "Dude, shoes? Really?"

"It's more that I can see straight down your dress. Your rack is great now, so I can hardly imagine what your pregnancy boobs are going to look like."

There were murmurs around them, and she realized they weren't alone.

She stood, and Olyna started talking again. Arty put her hand up and said, "Wait, forgot something."

She grabbed the neckline of her dress and pulled at the gem trim. It came off in her hand, and she knelt next to his prosthetic and wrapped the garter around the top of the carbon fibre. It had silicone for grip, a little elastic to hold it, and a magnetic clasp.

Diamonds and platinum marched around his thigh.

Tobias teared up and kissed her, bending her backward. There was a howl of approval from the crowd, and he set her upright. She smiled. "Sven paid for it."

"Obviously." He grinned. "He gets his thanks later."

She laughed, and he kept her at his side as Olyna tried to regain the spotlight.

At the back of the crowd, a familiar group stood, and their omega had a box in front of her.

Tobias saw them approaching and said, "Take off my leg and hit her with it."

Arty smiled. "I believe they come in peace."

Dell was still pregnant and bowed. "Hello, Artemis, Tobias. We have come here to show our respects and apologize for our omega's actions."

Antonio inclined his head, and Olyna was staring at him.

Andrea looked at Tobias and Arty and said, "I am very sorry for trying to break Tobias's good leg and hitting Arty instead."

Arty arched her brow.

"I mean. I am sorry for trying to hit Tobias. I was jealous, and I was wrong."

Andrea opened the box and lifted the lid. The jewels were huge. Thumb-sized. The necklace probably weighed three pounds. Andrea picked up the bracelet and put it on Tobias's wrist, then she bent and held the necklace out. When Tobias bent, she said, "Not for you, dumbass."

Arty blinked and bent to take on the monster necklace. "Am I mayor of a town in England now?"

Andrea smiled, bent, and pulled a ring out of the box. She slipped the ring on Arty's index finger. "I am very sorry I hurt you."

"I accept your apology." She nodded.

Andrea lifted her arms. "Hug?"

She was one of the smallest omegas she had seen, so Arty hugged her and said to Tobias, "If she won't let go, hit her with the jewel case."

She cuddled the omega, and Andrea pressed her nose and snuffled against Arty. "You still smell really good, but now, you have omega and alpha on you and in you, so you smell better."

Arty looked helplessly at Olyna. "You might want to continue with the gilding. Andrea's a clinger. She can go ten minutes in a walk."

Tobias laughed at the blissful expression on Andrea's face. "I get that. She's a first-class cuddle target."

Dell muttered, "Andrea's also a fan of Arty's thirst traps. She plays them on a loop."

Tobias smiled at someone who gave him a thick necklace. Then he turned his head. "Thirst traps?"

Antonio chuckled. “The ladies spent a few hours using all the female overlays from the games. They put on the dots and got to work. We are working them into the online ad campaigns.”

Arty kept stroking her fingers through Andrea’s hair. Lexa came around and greeted the new arrivals. Antonio spoke with his arm around Dell, and there was a proud expression on his face.

Tobias was covered in necklaces and jewellery, and he grinned. “Well, that was fun.”

Olyna went over to introduce herself to the massive alpha. Arty watched as it was obvious that she asked Antonio why he preferred his beta to his omega. Whatever he said made the older omega pale and step backward while mirth danced in Dell’s eyes.

Arty blinked. “Oh, he just told Olyna how large his cock is. Some things you just need a beta for.”

Tobias asked, “How large is it?”

Andrea whispered the answer.

Arty smiled.

“You don’t want to...” Tobias held her from behind.

“No. Absolutely no. I don’t need that. I am very pleased with what I have access to.”

Andrea looked up hopefully. “I have four other alphas I can pimp out.”

One of the other alphas, who had arrived with Andrea, cleared his throat. “Andrea.”

Arty smiled. “I am very happy with my guys. I am not going to join your merry band of pervs.”

Andrea grinned. “Oh, yeah. Dell told you about that.” She laughed.

Arty looked at the alpha. “Can you pry her off me?”

“Yes, ma’am. You handled the family in the best way, by the way. These egos are never ignored, so it locks them in a logic loop.”

“I noticed. Andrea, if you try latching onto my boob, I am going to hit you in the head much harder than you hit me.”

The alpha pulled her away and flipped her over his shoulder. He patted her butt. “Come on, monkey. Let’s see if we can find you someone to play with. Maybe Philip is available. Let’s go look.”

Arty looked at Tobias. “Aw, you would have taken on that little hellion?”

“I would have. I am wearing so much gold, she would have broken her knuckles.” He lifted her hand and kissed the ring on her right hand. “This is pretty.”

“It is. I think you have to run around and greet family.” She looked around and saw Sven. “There he is.”

Tobias said, “If you don’t leave me, I won’t leave you.”

She kissed his cheek. “It’s your day to be pretty. Go be with your alpha. I will stay with you until you are safe.”

She walked him over to their alpha and smiled. “Time for his big introductions.”

She was at the edge of her control, and when Sven prodded the link, she dropped to her knees. She breathed deeply to calm herself down.

He picked her up and kissed her forehead while looking for a quiet place for them. It was a tall order. She apologized on an endless loop.

When he sat down and Tobias held her hand, she inhaled, and when Sven asked what the problem was, she said, “You were going to propose, and then you didn’t, so the link was there, and it’s too late, and I still love you both, and now it hurts. It hurts so much.”

Sven froze. “How... who... Ilsa. Shit. No wonder you are upset.”

They tried to calm her, but it wasn't working.

Sven finally murmured in her ear, and she relaxed and started hiccupping. He was speaking in that language that wasn't a language and smoothed her fear and told her that he hadn't changed his mind. Tobias's heat had changed the order of things. Ilsa knew about the jewels because they had to be included in legal declarations for insurance, and she was his lawyer. The engagement ring was also in his will to remain with Arty if anything happened to him, as she would have to take care of Tobias.

She looked at him. "How can I take care of him? The amount he eats in packs of cookies is astronomical."

"You will inherit the rest of my estate."

Tobias started grinning. "That will drive the family nuts."

Sven smiled. "It will, but I am hoping I won't kick in anytime soon, and we can train the kids to manage it."

"A family of lawyers and accountants, omegas and alphas." Tobias chuckled.

Sven smiled. "And programmers and game designers."

Tobias smiled. "Holidays will be interesting at the very least."

Arty asked. "How many kids are you two planning? It sounds like you want us to birth a corporation."

Sven chuckled. "That means we will need a larger house. Renovations to the lake house are in order. So, dorm-style housing?"

Tobias smiled. "Boys and girls? Or omegas and alphas, or split both and four rooms, and a nursery?"

She relaxed and let loose a shuddering sigh. Planning a future stressed some people out, but it meant she was going to be with them. "It will be a bit of a distance away, but maybe a bigger nest?"

Sven sighed. "A bigger nest so you can actually get some distance before we drag you back into the cuddle. I am eager

for a chase.”

“Aw, Daddy, you should have said something. I would let you chase me down anyway.” She stroked his jaw with her fingertip.

He tensed. “Really?”

“Once you introduce Tobias to all the family, I will prove it with a sprint down to the lakefront.”

Sven’s voice got thick. “Naked, baby girl?”

“Of course.”

He kept her tucked against him, and he and Tobias walked hand in hand through the crowd, introducing Tobias and the mystery scent on the white swatches they had gotten when they arrived. Tobias’s scent was on each swatch, and one of the dark-haired alphas said, “So, she is the other scent. Very pretty. You are lucky, Sven.”

She was sleepy and hungry. Throwing tantrums was exhausting. “Other scent?”

“Tobias thought it was best to introduce your scent as well but knew you would put up a fuss, so he just put a cotton cloth under you while you napped in the shade, and he added his scent to it later.” He kissed her temple. “Then it was cut up and sealed until tonight.”

She looked around, and a lot of folks were looking at them with smiles. There were a few unimpressed looks, but mostly, folks were happy to see them together. Sven walked them to an area where tables and chairs were set up, and he nodded to one of the staff that was serving. The woman with the tight black bun came over, and he asked for some food.

She nodded, and when she turned, Arty was startled into saying, “Penny?”

Penny nodded and came back a moment later with fruit juice, food, and tiny sandwiches in a huge pile. “Hey, Arty.”

“But, I thought you worked for a school.”

“Got fired for fighting. Or for theoretically sleeping with the administrator’s alpha son-in-law.”

“Oh, damn. You loved that job.” Arty was close to tears again. Sven rubbed her back.

“I still have my volunteer position at the shelter. The kids are still my favourite thing.”

There was an alpha in a server’s uniform clearing his throat.

“Right. Don’t want to lose this gig as well. Glad to see you and your alpha and omega all working together.” Penny got up and got back to serving.

Sven asked, “Is she a beta?”

“Yeah. She occasionally works for Antonio’s company, but she was a secretary at a posh school. I wonder what the hell happened in the last few weeks.” She looked at where Penny was working with her head down and moving efficiently. She ate some of the sandwiches and tried to figure out what had happened. Penny didn’t date alphas. Ever. Her ex had cheated on her because he was tired of waiting for her to be comfortable with sex. As far as Arty knew, she hadn’t dated since. When the plate was empty, she leaned up to Sven with her lips to his ear. She whispered a fantasy to him.

Tobias smiled. “Well, I feel that I am done socializing for the night.”

Sven grinned and got up.

Olyna blocked their path. “The party is just starting. You can’t leave.”

Tobias smiled. “We can definitely leave.”

Olyna stopped Sven. “Ignore what your beta has asked. Her desperation for you is appearing to be an addiction. What desperate thing did she just whisper to you?”

Sven sighed. “Stand aside, Grandmother. My next action is going to give my beta her fondest wish. Fettuccini alfredo.”

Tobias laughed, and Arty smirked. “What did you think I was asking him for?”

Sven laughed, nodded to his grandmother, and stepped around her. Their trio headed for the hosts and thanked Lexa and her sloth for hosting the event.

They left through the house and headed to the road where the car service came to pick them up.

They were on their way home for pasta and a nice run through the shoreline.

Artemis was panting against the tree, and Sven was locked into her. “You are really quick. We should do that more often.”

She laughed hoarsely. “Not until the pregnancy is over.”

She felt heat spill into her again. “Seriously? Another kink unlocked, Daddy?”

He chuckled and thrust as deep as he could. “Yeah. Between you and Tobias, I am not fit for human interaction.”

She smiled. “Ah, relationship goals.”

“This isn’t how I wanted to do it, but if you keep gripping me, I am not going anywhere.”

She heard a weird snap, and his arm came around her. There was a ring with three diamonds in a twisting spiral and a lot of tiny diamonds around it.

“Artemis Winter, will you marry me?”

She blinked. “Where did you have this?”

“Tied in my hair. Same place it was when I fought Wilhurst.”

“Oh.” There was a handful of heartbeats. “Yes?”

“It wasn’t enthusiastic, but I will take it.”

She chuckled. “It’s hard to be enthusiastic when there is a branch threatening your abdomen.”

He lifted her and put his back against the tree. She tilted her head and looked up at him. “Yes, please.”

Tobias came out of the woods. “Finally. Now, shrink that knot so we can go inside and start a new ritual. *Glittering the beta.*”

He was true to his word. Sven’s knot eventually shrank, and Tobias carried her back to the house. They bathed her, dried her, and then stood her in the middle of the kitchen while they opened a hefty stack of boxes and put the jewels on her. It was when the tiara came out that she started having fun.

Sven smiled, and Tobias looked relieved. “There’s our princess. Never doubt it.”

“Can we do a quick and quiet wedding?”

Sven nodded. “I think we can. Your identification has arrived. It’s in my safe.”

She grinned. “When neither of you is busy, can we just get married?”

Her alpha leaned down and nodded. “We absolutely can. Ilsa already got the prenup done.”

“Cool, can I see it?”

Tobias smiled. “Well, as we are both spectacular, I think we should celebrate our official statuses.”

Sven took out his phone. “Just a few pictures.”

“Hey, Tobias is wearing a toga under his gilding. I am naked!”

Tobias grinned and kissed her. Arty could hear the camera, but she ignored it and bent her leg to rest it on her omega’s thigh.

Things got heated from there.

Thirty-seven weeks later, Arty looked at Tobias and his baby boy. “He’s lovely, Toby.”

The lovely delivery suite had a couch, so Arty went to have a seat.

Sven was smiling at his omega and son. Tobias was careful with his stitches. He was up twelve hours after the c-section.

Tobias suddenly lifted his head. “Arty, are you doing okay?”

She smiled. “Of course.”

Sven caught on. “Arty, open up.”

She gritted her teeth. “No. They aren’t going to knock me out for this, and you don’t need to feel it. Tobias *really* doesn’t need to feel it.”

Arty pushed herself to her feet and waddled to the door. “I am just going to check myself into labour and delivery, and then we can get these little ones out.”

Sven looked from Tobias to her.

She eased around the door and staggered to the desk, gasping as she waited through the contraction before they started again. A nurse came by. “Hey, are you having trouble?”

“Just trying to get downstairs to register. These girls are coming fast.”

Dr. Oriel came by and paused. “Artemis?”

Arty was bent over and gritting her teeth. She waved. “Hey, doc. Tobias’s son is adorable.”

Sven suddenly picked her up. Dr. Oriel cursed. “Where is Tobias’s room?”

Arty and Sven gestured down the hall.

“Take her in there, put her on the couch, and get her clothes off. I will be there after I grab a kit.”

Sven nodded, and Oriel started barking orders.

Arty was carefully undressed, and a medical bed was rolled in and locked into place. The doctor gave a sharp whistle. Sven was moving her and laying her on the bed. Monitors, clips, and a sheet flew at her and settled. Tobias grinned at the baby. “I think your sisters are coming.”

Arty growled. “What was your first fucking clue?”

She gripped the rails of the bed and grunted.

Oriel said, "Have to push?"

She nodded.

An hour passed, and there was a lot of buzzing around, and then Arty was sitting up with her bed pressed to Tobias's. The baby girls were pressed against her bare skin.

Tobias grinned. "I thought there would be more screaming and cursing."

She chuckled. "Oh, there was. You just couldn't hear it."

Sven looked at them and said, "Well, at least there is just one birthday party for all three."

He came to Arty's side and stroked the tiny, delicate twins.

Tobias sighed. "Why did you hold back, and I think I know the answer."

Arty huffed. "I was trying to give you your own day. It's bad and weird enough that you and I have the same birthdate. Now three kids share a day. I hope they have good temperaments."

Sven smiled. "Are you going to tell the new princesses the best part?"

"Oh, and one day, little ones, your daddy gave me some money, just like he gave to your daddy." She turned her head from one to the other. "So, I played with my luck and went on the computer, and for five minutes a day, I played my hunches, and the money got bigger. So, little girls and little boy, you all have a million dollars each for school and warm socks."

Sven laughed. Tobias was shocked. "Three million?"

Sven smiled. "Arty has the same focused luck that I do, and like me, it only works to make money for family. The rest is just incidental."

Arty nodded to Tobias's little girl, and Sven brought her over. Toby smiled. "She's adorable, and she has a strapping-looking older brother."

Arty smiled. "Older by thirteen hours."

Toby smiled. "Still counts, junior."

She laughed, and their daughter was returned to her for feeding.

Sven's and Tobias's families started coming in, and after a pause, she shrugged. "I am not going to stop just because someone is in the room. Not practical."

The family smiled and got excited. The babies wouldn't be returning to the lake house until all renovations were completed. There was going to be a huge party at Sven's city house, which was said to be next to a dragon's. Exciting things were going to happen until they were back at the lake. Then, Arty looked forward to the peace of her family, a nanny, and a larger nest.

Author's Note

I was thinking about shamrock shakes and TikTok videos, and this is what happened. Apologies.

I think I know where the next book is heading, but I am not telling you in case I change my mind. Neener.

Thanks for reading,

Viola Grace

About the Author

Viola Grace (aka Zenina Masters) is a Canadian sci-fi/paranormal romance writer with ambitions to keep writing for the rest of her life. She specializes in short stories because the thrill of discovery, of all those firsts, is what keeps her writing.

An artist who enjoys a story that catches you up, whirls you around, and sets you down with a smile on your face is all she endeavours to be. She prefers to leave the drama to those who are better suited to it, she always goes for the cheap laugh.

In real life, she is now engaged in beekeeping, and her adventures can be found on the YouTube channel, Mystery Bees Apiary. Just look for the cartoon kittens.

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