



Spring  
Blossoms

Kitt Lynn

# SPRING BLOSSOMS

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ORIGINALLY FOUND IN BRED: A CHARITY  
ANTHOLOGY

BOOK 2 IN THE MADRA VILLAGE SERIES

KITT LYNN

LUPO PUBLISHING

## **CONTENT WARNING**

This book contains possibly triggering content.

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Please do not struggle in silence. You are not alone.

If you need a more detailed list of the triggers within this book, please reach out to me at [misskittlynn@gmail.com](mailto:misskittlynn@gmail.com).

I don't want to be the reason for someone to be hurt, upset, or traumatized.

- Kitt -

# THE ENCHANTED LANDS OF HAVRE



To see a full map of Havre, visit [www.kittlynn.com](http://www.kittlynn.com).

## THE OMEGA ORIGINS



IT HAS BEEN SAID that hundreds of years ago, werewolves roamed free, dominating the land and all other creatures. Men that easily slipped into their wolf form at will, they were savage and unforgiving. Destroying anything that crossed their paths.

Humans kept their distance from the unhinged animals until a young noblewoman found herself lost in the enchanted forests. A werewolf found her and they fell in love, and she birthed twins. The first Beta and Omega.

The Omega, unable to transform into its wolf, was a gentle creature, fragile and obedient. The perfect mate for the more aggressive Alpha werewolf.

The Beta had more beastly characteristics but could only shift into its wolf when the Moon hung at her fullest. Calm and smart, the child held the perfect balance between human and wolf.

The birth was hard and bloody, and the noblewoman died, her body unable to handle the horrors of birthing beasts. But she left behind a new breed of weres, creating a fragile balance between wolf and man.

The villages grew, bursting with werewolves of all kinds: Alphas, Betas, and Omegas. And soon, the humans realized the wolves finally had a weakness. Their mates, the Omegas.

The humans attacked, slaughtering hundreds of the gentle creatures, pushing werewolves almost to the point of extinction until the fairylands came to their rescue. Fighting the humans and staving them off. Reclaiming Havre as a land of enhancement and magic.

To protect their kind from any further attacks, the Alphas locked their Omegas away in villages fortified with large border walls, shutting them in and keeping them safe.



ONE

## LILY'S BEDROOM

Lily



“ARE YOU NERVOUS?” Summer asked, pulling the brush through her long blonde hair. It was still frizzy even though she had been brushing it for the last twenty minutes. The young omega had managed to play with every object on my vanity, not touching the bouquet she was supposed to trim.

“A little.” I forced a smile. In truth, I was so nervous that I hadn’t eaten properly in days.

“You’re going to look amazing.” Summer looked at my dress with a longing expression.

The red knee-length gown hung from my wardrobe. The silky, red fabric was fitted at the bodice and flared from the waist. Tiny beads decorated the waist and neckline, making it shimmer. The fact that I was going to get to wear something so lovely still felt like a dream. While I grew up with everything I ever needed, my parents were simple bakers. My clothes were plain and functional. But my bonding dress looked almost magical.

Summer leaned in and dropped her voice. “Have you seen his thing yet?” Her bright blue eyes widened with excitement.

My mouth dropped in shock. “You are far too young to be asking questions like that!”

“You’re only two years older than me.” She playfully swatted my arm with the back of the heavy wooden brush.

I settled my hands on my hips, glaring at the youngling. “You’re supposed to be trimming those flowers, Miss Still Underage.”

“I’m only underage until the end of spring,” she pouted, looking every bit the child she was.

Ignoring her, I pulled my hair tie out and threaded my fingers through my black tresses. It had been a very long day of preparations, and my scalp hurt from wearing it up for so long. Like a bee to honey, my eyes pulled back to my dress. By this time tomorrow, I would be mated. I was barely able to contain a squeal of excitement.

“I cannot wait to be an adult.” Summer tossed the brush onto my bed and picked up a hair ribbon, tying her hair up. “Only two cycles of the Moon, and then I’ll be free to kiss whoever I want.”

I laughed. “As if your father would let you run around, ruining your reputation.”

“Just you wait,” Summer smirked, her blue eyes bright at the idea of her sordid future. “I plan on being wild. I’m going to kiss all the alphas and maybe even a few betas.”

“Your lips are going to fall off,” I teased.

“Sounds like you’ll be very busy.” My best friend, Mina, pushed my bedroom door open, her arms loaded with a mountain of red tulle and a sewing box. She leaned forward and kissed my cheek, then blew another to Summer. The young omega pretended to catch it, pressing it to her heart.

“How is Ivor?” I asked.

Mina sighed as if caught in a dream. “He’s wonderful,” she hummed, letting the tulle fall to the floor.

She was mated only this winter, and I swore she hadn’t stopped smiling since. She floated. She was all wavy dark hair,

wide eyes, and pure bliss. And every time I saw her and Ivor together, they were touching as if even an inch of separation was torture. Honestly, it seemed a bit inappropriate at times, but I couldn't blame them. They didn't get to court. Their union was sudden and scandalous, and I prayed my mating to Rowan would be just as passionate.

Mina pulled my dress off the hanger, then motioned me forward. I had lost some weight over the last few weeks, forcing her to make alterations. I simply couldn't find my appetite.

Pulling off my fluffy pink robe, I stepped into my dress. Mina quickly cinched the waist, giving my small bust a lovely shape. I turned to look in the mirror, and the reality of what was coming slammed into me. I clasped my right hand over my wrist, letting my thumb run down the thin scar along the side. I had spent weeks bouncing between pure excitement and deep-seated fear. It was exhausting.

"You know," Mina hummed, smoothing the fabric down my hips, "I did an excellent job on this, if I don't mind saying so myself."

I smoothed my hands over the soft lace along the bodice. "It's the most amazing gift." I leaned into my friend, hoping she could feel my deep gratitude. "I can never thank you enough for making me such a perfect dress."

She blushed and hugged me hard before looking at my reflection in the mirror.

I looked so grown. Not a pup, but a woman. And even though I was twenty-one, a part of me still felt like a baby. Too young to take a mate.

"Your waist is so tiny," Summer said, turning to Mina and poking her middle. "I'm a little surprised Ivor hasn't put a pup in you yet."

My hand moved on its own, settling over my flat stomach.

A flicker of excitement bloomed inside my chest, making my heart quicken. I always wanted to be a mother, and Rowan was a good, honorable alpha. For the longest time, I had only

known him by reputation, but since he started courting me, I had learned all the rumors of his kindness and patience were true. He was going to be an amazing father.

“Stop staring at my stomach.” Mina glared playfully at me. My eyes snapped to her annoyed pout. “I am *not* with child.”

I pressed my lips together, a little embarrassed at being caught staring. “Sorry,” I mouthed.

“Besides,” she said, returning to her work. “Ivor only wants one, and I am more than okay with that. We’re taking our time. Enjoying one another.”

“Agreed,” Summer nodded fiercely. “One. *If* that.”

My mind wandered as I traced the soft lace around my middle. What if Rowan only wanted one pup? What if he didn’t want any? It was rare for an alpha not to want a mess of pups, but it did happen.

I suddenly felt stupid for not having such an important conversation with him. He had been courting me for only a few months—which was typical for our kind—but our families didn’t move in the same circles. We didn’t have much of an opportunity to get to know each other as well as we probably should.

“Why do you want pups so bad?” Summer asked, fanning herself with one of my notebooks. I snatched it from her, thankful she hadn’t opened it. It was filled with little sketches of Rowan’s name surrounded by poorly drawn flowers. *Greatly* embarrassing given my age.

“I’m an only child,” I said simply, tucking my notebook securely inside a drawer. “It gets lonely sometimes.” I wanted to add that it didn’t help that both my parents were betas, but I kept my mouth shut. Their status didn’t bother me, but the uncommon occurrence of betas birthing anything other than more betas meant they had no idea what to do with me.

Summer secured a barrette in her hair, pinning her wild mane out of her face. “I wish I had the chance to be lonely. There is never a moment of silence in my house. With seven kids, it’s impossible even to think sometimes.”

“I just want a house full of young,” I said. “I want my kids to have someone that understands them and can help them...in case....”

“Should they be born different from you or Rowan?” Mina asked, giving me an understanding look.

I sighed hard, twisting my fingers together. “My mother has tried so hard to guide me. She really has,” I added quickly, not wanting to seem ungrateful for everything my parents had done for me. “But betas are so different from omegas. We have very different needs and expectations within the pack.”

Mina channeled her fingers through my hair, soothing me. Even Summer went quiet.

Lowering my voice, I whispered, “She tried to talk to me about what to expect when mating an alpha.” I grimaced at the memory.

Summer laughed loudly, leaning in. “Please, oh, please tell me what she said.”

“It was horrible,” I groaned, my eyes cutting nervously to the bedroom door. “She sat me at the kitchen table then rambled on about knots and ruts and heats. All I could do was stare at her forehead as her whole face went beet red.”

Mina snorted loudly, then covered her mouth with her hands. “The very idea of your wildly conservative mother saying the word ‘knot’ makes me want to gag.”

“You and me both,” I shot. “I barely listened. I just nodded and prayed it would be over quickly. It was so much worse than when she told me where pups came from.”

“You know,” Summer said, trying to contain her giggle, “you have to respect her for trying to warn you.”

“I guess.” I shook my head, trying to shove away the image of my mother making a fist and stuttering wildly while trying to explain a knot. I knew what a knot was. I had friends who were mated and had a good understanding of the basics. And honestly, that was enough for me.

“Will you and Rowan try for a pup immediately?” Mina asked.

“We haven’t talked about it yet,” I admitted. “But I hope so. I want a dozen fat babes. I just adore their squishy cheeks and little chubby hands.”

“More like snotty noses and sticky hands,” Summer said flatly.

Mina held a needle up to her face, carefully threading it. “I take it your sisters have been making you babysit again?”

“I come from a big family,” Summer said as if we didn’t already know, “and between my sisters and me and the twins, my mother’s hair has gone white, and my father doesn’t have a stitch on his head to call his own. He’s been bald since he was twenty-five. So be careful what you wish for, Lily.”

“Don’t pretend that has anything to do with your kin,” I snorted. “Everyone knows what a hard time you give your mother.”

“That’s true.” Mina fussed with the buttons along the back of my dress. “You need to settle, or you’ll ruin your reputation before you’re even old enough to have one.”

“Who needs a reputation when you can have fun?” Summer laughed, not bothered in the least. I loved how carefree she was, and I couldn’t wait to meet the alpha that could handle her.

Mina pulled at the material along my back, securing it into place. The whole dress suddenly fit like a dream—snug in all the right places. “Are your parents excited for tomorrow?”

“I think they’re relieved that a respectable alpha pursued me so quickly. I’m no longer a burden to them.”

Mina swatted my hip. “You have never been a burden, and you know it. Your parents adore you.”

“And I adore them, but that doesn’t stop alphas from being dangerous to unclaimed omegas.” I squeezed my wrist. “I don’t have any alpha kin to keep unruly suitors in their place,

and I'm very lucky someone as respectable as Rowan chose to claim me."

"He's the one that's lucky." Mina crossed her arms. "You are a dream, and if he's smart, he'll know that too."

I smiled wide at her sweet compliment. Rowan truly was a treasure. So kind and loving toward me. I just prayed it wasn't an act.

"Lily," Summer's sweet voice pulled me from my thoughts. "You know Rowan would never hurt you." Her eyes fell down the length of my arm, watching me trace my scar. "My family knows him and his kin very well. They're all really good people. Not all alphas are bad."

I released my wrist and spoke in my most cheery voice, "I know." My throat was suddenly very dry. "I adore Rowan. I really do. I just get nervous sometimes." I swallowed hard, trying like crazy not to become emotional. "I just don't know what it's like to live with an alpha. I don't know what to expect, and I'm...a little nervous," I repeated.

"I think you'll be surprised to find how gentle alphas can be," Mina pushed my hair forward to fix the buttons at the top. "Have you and Rowan had a chance to get to know one another?"

I knew what she was asking, and my face warmed.

"I guess that is a much nicer way of asking if you've seen his thing." Summer let out a hearty laugh, not a drop of shame on her pretty face.

"You did not ask that!" Mina gasped.

"I did." Summer smirked, holding her head high. "And she *refused* to answer."

Mina tutted the young omega. "One day, you will find an alpha that will control that sass, and I do not envy him."

Summer winked at Mina before turning her fierce energy back to me. "I just can't believe Rowan hasn't snatched you up and ravished you in the temple gardens."



“Who does that?” I balked, my mouth hanging open in shock. Summer gave Mina a very pointed look, and my friend’s cheeks went bright red. “Mina!” I gasped. I simply couldn’t imagine anyone doing that where someone might see. “Your mate is a downright animal.”

Mina smiled wide, despite the blush moving over her ears and down her neck. “Given that our mating was a little... sudden,” she scrunched her nose up with pure bliss at the memory, “we’ve been making up for the things we missed. Ivor is eager. Not an animal,” she quickly added, but the color in her cheeks said otherwise.

I crossed my arms, judging her. “You are scandalous. And Ivor *is* a beast. Everyone knows he took you during that snow storm, not the rushed, private bonding afterward.”

She bit her bottom lip before continuing, “We might have skipped a few points of etiquette—”

“Like a ceremony,” Summer cut in.

“But things were a little out of our control.”

“Like your hormones,” I shot.

“And I wouldn’t change any of it for the world.”

“Would you still have your mom walk in while Ivor was rutting you?” Summer smiled wide.

I laughed. I couldn’t help it. I laughed until my ribs hurt.

“That is not what happened!” Mina smacked Summer’s arm hard, making the youngling pout. “My mother did not walk in on us,” she said in a harsh whisper, acting as if the whole village might overhear us.

“It’s true,” I doubled over, clutching my side. “My dad walked in on them!”

Summer and I fell into a full-on fit of giggles. Mina scowled, then bashfully smiled, finally laughing with us. “It was horribly embarrassing,” she whined.

“And you call me a tart,” Summer teased, sticking her tongue out.

A soft knock on the door made me jump. I rushed to it, worried we were being too loud. “Lily, sweetie,” my mother said, slowly pushing the door open. “You have a visitor.”

My heart thundered in my chest with both excitement and a flurry of nerves. My closest friends were sitting on my bed which meant there was only one other person it could be.

*Rowan.*

Mother looked lovingly at my dress, then tucked a strand of my hair behind my ear. Her eyes were tired and dark, and her black hair was a little unkempt. She had been working very hard to make my ceremony perfect. My parents didn’t have the means to throw something as extravagant as Rowan’s family might expect. But my parents tried, and I loved them for it.

“I told Rowan you can talk to him for a few minutes on the porch,” she squeezed my hand lovingly, “but no sneaking off. I know you’re about to be mated, but it’s still inappropriate for you two to be alone.”

“I’ll be quick,” I said, opening the door wide enough to step through it.

“Lily!” Summer gasped. “Your dress! He can’t see it.”

Not wanting to keep him waiting, I rushed across my room and grabbed my robe, but the moment I stepped into the hallway, dread settled heavy in my gut. I had never been alone with Rowan before. What did he want that couldn’t wait until morning? Did he change his mind about mating me?

Our little cabin suddenly felt teeny, the front door greeting me far too quickly. I pulled it open and stepped onto the small porch. The scent of spring blossomed all around me, making the air sweet and inviting. Rowan stood in the grass with his back to me. His enormous body somehow seemed even bigger in the dim moonlight. I pulled the door shut, and he turned to me.

The second our eyes met, my skin tingled with a warm, soft energy.

He smiled that slow sexy smile that revealed a dimple in his cheek and a glimpse of his straight, white teeth. His dark eyes sparkled, and a bit of my nerves drifted away.

“Good evening, Alpha,” I whispered, clutching the front of my robe just under my chin.

He was clean-shaven, despite it being past sundown, and the slight burn of whiskey drifted toward me. His friends probably threw a party to celebrate. While omegas tended to hate the tradition of getting very drunk on the eve before bonding, most alphas enjoyed it.

“Omega Lily.” He bowed his head. His expression grew intense as he moved toward me. I took a step back, keeping the space between us respectable. Thankfully, he didn’t come any closer. I was sure both my parents were watching us carefully from the living room window.

“You look,” his gaze fell down my body, then back up to my face, “lovely.”

It was suddenly impossible to look him in the eye. The horrid conversation with my mother leapt to the front of my mind, staying put. Learning about all the carnal things alphas do to omegas made it hard to breathe around my soon-to-be mate. How did people live knowing these kinds of things?

“You always look lovely.” Rowan’s voice was deep and smooth.

I smiled, and my pulse quickened once again as I waited to hear what he wanted. But he didn’t say anything else. In fact, looked as if he were in a trance, and I wondered if I popped him on the nose if he’d even flinch.

I couldn’t stand the silence a moment longer.

“So...” I said, not exactly sure where my sentence was going but needing to fill the space between us with something. But my brain stopped there, and nothing else left my mouth. The single word just hung in the air, a reminder of just how uncomfortable I was.

Rowan stared intensely at my mouth and I took another step back. His attention seemed to snap, and he quickly

slipped his hand into his pocket. “I brought you something.” He pulled out a small box wrapped in red paper. It didn’t escape me that the color almost exactly matched my dress.

He placed the gift in my hand, watching my expression carefully.

My heart fluttered at the sight of the poorly tied ribbon. He had clearly wrapped it himself “You didn’t have—”

“I did,” he said quickly, his eyes flashing in the moonlight. “There’s so much I want to give you. And I wanted to have this delivered in the morning, but...” He smiled, his mannerisms almost bashful. It was so odd to see such a big, strong alpha look so young and timid, and it made me want to squeal that I made him act this way. “I needed to see you tonight. Even for a moment, and this was a good excuse.”

I bit my bottom lip, his intense gaze making my cheeks warm.

“Open it,” he whispered.

With one pull, the ribbon fell away, and I lifted the snug lid. A pair of stunning pink earrings sparkled up at me. The small stones dangled from silver spokes. They were breathtaking.

“They match the bracelet I gave you at the winter festival.” He tucked his hands behind his back. “I know you don’t wear jewelry often, but I thought you might wear the bracelet and earrings tomorrow.” He smoothed down the front of his shirt, the dark color complementing his dark complexion.

“Rowan.” My mouth hung open while I tried to find my words. They were gorgeous, but my ears weren’t pierced, and I didn’t want to embarrass him. While his generosity touched me, the pretty earrings only reminded me how little we knew each other. “Thank you,” I whispered, placing my hand over my heart. “Thank you so much.”

Rowan raised his hand as if he was going to tuck a strand of hair behind my ear, and I jerked, quickly brushing my hair over my shoulder to keep him from touching me. It was a horrible reaction to have toward such a sweet alpha, and

shame replaced fear, making the backs of my eyes burn with tears.

I hated being like this, and I had to get over it. By this time tomorrow, we would be mated, and I would be claimed. And no matter my fears, I was determined to be a good mate for him, but it was just so hard to shake a feeling growing inside you for so many years.

Rowan glanced at my ear, and his smile fell. “Your ears aren’t pierced,” he whispered to himself.

I shook my head, moving toward him. I was so close that the heat from his broad chest warmed me. “Please don’t be mad. The earrings are so lovely.”

“I apologize,” he said quickly. “I thought...” He pushed a hand through his short, clipped hair. “I thought it was a good gift.”

“It’s a wonderful gift. Please don’t think I don’t love them,” I implored, hoping he could see my sincerity. “I’m just sorry I can’t wear them.” I held out the box for him to take.

He shook his head, refusing to take it. “Please,” he said softly, “keep them.”

I tilted my head, trying not to offend or anger him. I had only angered one alpha in my life, and I’d never make that mistake again. “But I can’t wear them,” I whispered, struggling to meet his eyes.

“Yes, but perhaps Mina can sew them into your dress or something like that.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “That’s stupid, isn’t it?”

“No, no. That would be wonderful.” I held the little box to my chest. “I’ll find some way to wear them tomorrow. I promise.”

As if filled with a renewed energy, Rowan closed the space between us so fast I flinched as he touched my cheek. “I cannot wait to be bound to you.” Then he leaned in and pressed his mouth to mine.

I remained completely still, not sure what to do.

I had kissed my parents on the cheek and nuzzled other omegas, but this was entirely new. His lips were so soft against mine, his big hands cradling my entire face. He felt so strong and controlled, holding me to him. It was lovely and terrifying at the same time.

And I wanted more.

He tilted my head a bit, slotting our lips together, then he hummed. The slightly sweet taste of whiskey lingered on my lips, followed by his rich masculine scent. Cedar and sweet moss wrapped around me, pulling me into a warm sense of safety and calm. My wolf was alight with a shocking desire to press up against him. *I needed to be impossibly closer.*

Slowly, Rowan pulled back, pressing his forehead against mine. "I cannot wait to see you tomorrow," he whispered, brushing his thumb over the column of my neck.

A little dizzy, I hummed in response.

"I will dream about you tonight," he whispered, moving his hand down my arm and circling it around my wrist. He squeezed ever so slightly, and fear so thick and real erupted from my chest. The fierce memory of glowing red eyes and pointed fangs burst into the front of my mind, and I jerked back.

Rowan's scent was suddenly too much, making it hard to think or breathe. Feeling dangerously overwhelmed, I turned and rushed inside. Slamming the door behind me.

TWO

## THE NEXT DAY

Rowan



“WILL YOU SIT DOWN?” Ivor groaned, watching me pace. He stretched his long legs, easing deeper into the weirdly bright yellow couch. “This sitting room is far too small for someone your size to be stomping back and forth.”

“I wish you could have seen her face last night,” I said, raking my nails through my hair and scratching my scalp. “She was scared of me.”

Ivor snorted, pushing his long blond hair out of his face. “There’s no way. She’s just nervous. She’s the daughter of a couple of shopkeepers. I’m sure she’s not used to so much fuss.” He narrowed his eyes at a vase overflowing with far too many tulips. Every flat surface in the small room seemed to hold a massive arrangement of flowers.

“No,” I said, crossing my arms. “I’m telling you, she was scared of *me*. But I don’t know why.”

“Did you ask her?”

“I didn’t get a chance. She practically ran inside.” I scrubbed my face. “You know, when I first approached her last winter, she was very skittish, but for the last month, she’s been



calm and friendly, even happy to see me. I thought her nerves when it came to alphas were just because she didn't grow up around us. But this wasn't nerves." The memory of her dark eyes widening, bursting with terror, consumed me. "It was fear."

"Maybe the kiss was overwhelming. Omegas are sensitive, and I doubt she's ever been touched like that." He pulled at the collar of his shirt. "Or maybe she just hated the earrings."

I groaned, sitting down next to him. "How did I not know her ears weren't pierced?"

"Hell, if I know," he snorted. "You spend every waking moment staring at her."

I stood and crossed the room once more, then back again. My dress shirt was suddenly too tight, and my slacks were overly stiff. I hated wearing my dress uniform, but I was also thankful to be a member of the guard. It would have been infinitely worse to wear a full-on suit this time of year.

A soft knock on the door made me rush across the room, and I ripped it open, the doorknob rattling hard in my grasp. Nix, Mina's younger brother, looked past me at Ivor. "Mina says it's time."

Ivor stood, adjusting his collar.

"Rowan," Mina's soft voice drifted toward me as she rounded the corner. Her eyes went wide as she almost ran into Nix, and a nervous laugh bubbled from her throat. "You startled me!" she giggled, edging around both of us to get to her mate.

Ivor kissed her, whispering how lovely she was. Mina blushed, fluttering her eyelashes at him. I couldn't wait to hold Lily like that.

"Lily wanted me to give you this," Nix said, holding out a small note. He cut a weary look at Ivor, grimacing as the alpha kissed his sister again. "She gave it to me without a seal or envelope." He held up his hands. "I promise I didn't read it."

"I made sure," Mina quickly added. Ivor pulled at her waist, hugging her from behind. They were hard to watch

sometimes.

Nix grumbled at his sister, pushing his dark brown hair out of his eyes. He looked just like Mina. Wavy hair, brown eyes, and the exact same nose. There was no denying they were kin.

I smoothed my hands over the soft, cream-colored parchment. Perhaps Ivor was right, and the kiss was a bit much for Lily's innocent heart. Or maybe she was upset about the earrings, or maybe she was scared of mating me.

I took a deep calming breath and then opened the note.

*Summer helped me with the earrings. When you see them, I hope they look as lovely as you had hoped.*

*xoxo, Lily*



I RAN MY THUMBS ALONG THE EDGE OF MY BELT FOR THE hundredth time, waiting for the temple doors to open. The packed room of family and high-standing wolves whispered among themselves, waiting. Finally, the priest chimed the bell, and the heavy wood door was pulled open. All thought fell from my head as my soon-to-be mate appeared.

Lily walked toward me in a red dress made of sin. It hugged her in wicked places, pushing her breasts up and out and teasing the top curve of her ass. She normally dressed plain but sweet—her clothes let her natural beauty shine through: her soft lips and dark eyes, long lashes that touched her high cheekbones, and her silky black hair. It didn't matter what she wore because her features outshined everything else in the room.

But this dress....

My sweet omega came to a stop next to me, then tipped her head up, looking deep into my eyes. Her pulse fluttered wildly in the vein in her neck as she slipped her freezing

fingers into my hands. I took in her blushing cheeks and rose-tinted lips. Then I noticed her ears.

She was wearing the earrings I got her.

Unable to help myself, I grazed the bottom of her soft earlobe, brushing the pink stone. They complemented her soft complexion.

Lily smiled wide, biting her bottom lip. “Mina put clasps on them so I can wear them.”

The priest cleared her throat, and we both turned to her.

The ceremony was quick. We both recited our promises, Lily’s mother read a poem, and my sister sang a song. I honestly didn’t hear much, too busy staring at the gorgeous omega that was about to be my mate.

Finally, the priest declared us bonded and asked us to kiss to prove our affection to the pack. Lily’s lashes raised, her eyes wide as they took in the crowd around us. For a brief moment, the same look from last night shone through her dark eyes. My wolf growled at her slight distress. The urge to scoop her up and run away was all-consuming, but there was nothing I could do.

Ivor was right. This was all too much for my sweet omega, and I suddenly wished we had bonded in a simple ceremony with only family and close friends.

Feeling everyone’s eyes on us, I leaned in and softly kissed her. Lily’s lips trembled against mine and when I pulled back, tears glistened in her eyes. I hated myself for putting her through this.

A chorus of bells chimed, and we walked down the long aisle as the crowd clapped and cheered. Once outside, Lily sighed deeply, as if a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. The cool spring air was a welcome change from the stuffy heat inside the temple.

She brushed a few tears away and then looked up at me.

“Are you okay?” I whispered.

She nodded, clasping her hands in front of her. She looked so small. “I didn’t expect so many people in such a small space. The smell of so many alphas was...a bit much.”

“Lily!” Summer squealed, bursting out of the temple and straight into Lily’s arms. “It was all so lovely!” She leaned, whispering rather loudly. “Would you and your new mate like to tour the temple gardens before the party starts?”

Lily’s mouth fell open, and she stuttered out a quick “no” before pushing the young omega away so she could hug Mina and greet Ivor and Nix.

The rest of the guests poured out of the temple, shaking my hand and greeting Lily. Even though the village wasn’t as big as some, mine and Lily’s families didn’t move in the same circles, and I spent quite a bit of time introducing her to my father’s colleagues from the packhouse and my brothers in the guard. She was sweet and complimentary, saying all the right things.

*She was perfect.*

“Rowan!” Dage’s unmistakable voice boomed as he slowly exited the temple.

I smiled wide at the older alpha, shaking his hand. He was an advisor to Pack Alpha Caz, just like my father. I had known him my whole life. He was stern, loud, and had many opinions that he freely shared at every opportunity.

“Where’s Luca?” I asked, looking for his son. While we were around the same age and joined the guard at the same time, we were never more than just acquaintances, but I still expected him to attend.

“We thought it best he not come,” Dage whispered, his eyes flickering to Lily.

Swallowing hard, she squeezed her wrist, angling away from us so I couldn’t see her face. The sharp scent of distress mixed with her sweet cherry blossom scent. It sent my senses into overdrive. The need to protect my mate from any threat that scared her pushed hard at my shoulders.

I turned back to Dage. “Why would it be best that Luca not come?” I asked, studying the tick in his jaw.

Dage opened his mouth but immediately stopped, smiling wide and patting my shoulder. “It’s so good to see you mated and happy.” He squeezed my arm, then marched off, not giving Lily a second glance.

Placing my fingertips on her elbow, I pulled her gently to me. “What was that about?”

She shook her head slightly, her eyes still firmly on her feet.

“Lily,” I whispered, leaning down and forcing her to look at me. Her eyes widened slightly at how close I was, but she didn’t back away. “I just need you to be okay.”

Her lips parted, and her little tongue brushed over her bottom lip. “I...uh...he....”

“My sweet baby.” Lily’s mother, Charis, stepped out of the temple, dabbing her eyes with a small white handkerchief. My parents followed, my own omega mother blowing her nose. Charis grabbed her daughter’s hands and kissed her cheeks. “I can’t believe you’re mated.”

Lily’s father, Samuels, shook my hand with a proud smile on his face. I nodded at my new father, and he quickly bowed low in return. Just like Lily, he had a calm demeanor and was soft-spoken.

“Rowan,” Samuels smiled, “my new son. Take care of my little girl.”

I bowed again, squeezing his hand to reassure him. “I give you my word.”

Charis turned to me, placing her hand on my forearm. Her expression fell from one of joyful sadness to twisted with fear and worry. “Promise?” she whispered.

The tremor in her voice caught me off guard, and I jerked slightly. “Of course. I will always protect her.”

Lily grabbed her mother’s shoulders, guiding her away from me. “Of course, he will, mama,” she whispered. “Rowan

would never let anything happen to me.”

Samuels forced a smile, then quickly followed them. I narrowed my eyes at Lily’s back. There was something here that wasn’t being said. Fear and anger thumped in my veins at the thought of something bad happening to Lily, but I couldn’t see any other reason for their odd reaction. Once I was able to get Lily alone and complete our mating, I would be able to find out. I just needed to be patient with my mate.

The party overflowed with food, dancing, and even more wine. People chatted at little tables situated under the trees or danced on the large patio. The lush garden of lilies, roses, and a smattering of wildflowers were illuminated by lanterns hanging from poles and lining the pathways.

Lily sat at a small wrought iron table on the other side of the garden. Mina sat on one side of my mate and Summer on the other. Lily smiled politely as Mina and Summer talked, but her eyes kept darting around the crowd.

A heavy slap landed on my back, followed quickly by a drink pushed into my hand. “Well,” Ivor said, scanning the mess of people in front of us. “It’s all over. The ceremony was...” he paused, pretending to think, “...long.”

I chuckled, my attention pulling back to Lily. She didn’t look very happy. Her mouth was set in a polite smile, but her eyes....she looked tired. “Does Lily look okay to you?”

“She’s gorgeous. Not as gorgeous as my mate, but still gorgeous.” He popped the top two buttons on his shirt. “Now, if you’ll excuse me. I need to dance with my mate. Her dress is far too short and needs exploring.”

Ivor winked at me, then pushed through the crowd, practically racing to Mina. He pulled his mate away from the table, both of them pawing at each other before they even made it to the dance floor.

Lily’s shoulders hunched forward as she watched them disappear into the crowd.

“Go ask her to dance,” my father said, stepping up behind me. His voice was as big as him. Loud and commanding.

“She looks miserable.” I narrowed my eyes, wishing I could see into her head.

He laughed, and I turned to him. He had a tumbler of whiskey in one hand and a cigar in the other. “Do you think your mother was happy when we mated?”

“Of course,” I said, a little shocked. My parents were so happy together. It was hard to picture them any other way. “I always assumed she was thrilled to mate you.”

“Fuck, no!” He laughed again. My father wasn’t a drinker, and the whiskey worked him over rather quickly. He pointed at Lily, not being discreet in the least. “That little omega is terrified. Her parents are betas which means she has no fucking clue what to expect being mated an alpha. And you.” He pushed his finger into my chest, a goofy smile on his face. “You’re standing all the way over here chatting up your friends instead of lavishing her with attention. Go dance with her. Kiss her. Omega’s need affection. Go be a good mate!”

I sighed hard, realizing my shortcomings. It was the earrings all over again. I wasn’t paying attention. “You’re right.”

“Of course, I’m fucking right!”

My mother’s voice carried over the crowd as she yelled at my father, “How much have you had to drink?” Dad whipped around, his eyes wide.

I rushed off, not interested in listening to her scold him. She harassed him endlessly about what he ate, when he slept, and if he was stressed. He complained about her fussing, but he also loved it. Mother simply adored him and wanted to keep him for as long as possible.

Lily looked up as I approached and our eyes locked. A slow, sweet smile spread across her face, and everything went quiet. She was the only thing in existence anymore. My beautiful mate.

“Lily,” I said, holding out my hand. Her big eyes sparkled as she looked up at me. “May I have this dance?”

She ducked her head for a moment before whispering a quick “yes” and slipping her hand into mine.

The dance floor was crowded, everyone enjoying the lively music.

I stayed near the edge of the dance floor, trying to keep some distance from everyone so Lily wouldn't be too overwhelmed. Encircling my arm around her waist, I held her gently. It was the closest we had ever been to each other. My resolve to be patient, and wait for the end of the party to take her to our new home suddenly became razor thin.

“I didn't think you'd ever ask me to dance,” Lily said, tipping her chin up to look at me. She was a little over a foot shorter than me and smelled un-fucking-believable. Sugared honey and cherry blossoms. The intoxicating aroma was so thick this close, and it made my canines tingle.

“You were talking to your friends. I didn't want to be rude.”

“Well, I'm glad you changed your mind.” She smiled sweetly, and I pulled her a little closer. Her body pressed against my chest, and a shiver worked through her. My wolf grew restless, urging me to claim my mate.

“Rowan,” she whispered, her fingers trembling as they lay flat against my chest. “I know we should wait for the speeches, but...” Her cheeks blushed a violent red, and she looked everywhere but at my face.

Realization hit me, and I leaned down into her ear. “Are you wanting to leave?”

Forcing herself to look up, she bit that perfect plump, pink lip. Then she shocked me by nodding.



THREE

## A NEW HOME

Lily



MY PALMS DRIPPED WITH SWEAT, but Rowan didn't seem to notice. His fingers twisted around mine. Proof of just how big he was was evident in how his thick fingers spread mine apart very wide.

I tipped my chin all the way to see his face. A faint trace of a red glow burned through his brown irises. His beast was ready to consume his prey...*me*.

*Why did that excite me?*

While I was thankful that Rowan let me sit with my parents and talk to my friends before calling it an evening, I was eager to start my new life with him. When he kissed me last night, something inside me cracked open. A need to be near and with the alpha kept me up all night. I had never felt this way before.

Rowan pulled me to a stop in front of a small cabin. I looked around, surprised to see we were in the main part of the village housing. Mina and Ivor's home was only three doors down, and Summer's parents were at the end of the road.

“You look surprised,” Rowan said, squeezing my hand gently.

I pushed out a nervous laugh. “I expected us to live near your parents.”

“Only the high-ranking officials live there,” he said. “I’m just a lowly guard.” We both knew that wasn’t true. Who your parents were was very important, and mine were considered lowly as far as influence went. Rowan leaned down into my ear, “I thought you’d like to live near your friends.”

My chest warmed, and I smiled at my kind alpha.

“Come, my omega,” he said, his voice a little husky.

My pulse quickened, and I inhaled deeply, readying myself to complete our bonding. Rowan pulled me inside and through the living room. I didn’t stop to look at anything, too nervous about what was waiting at the end of the hall.

A huge bed sat in the center of the room covered in heavy blankets and pillows. My eyes pulled to two familiar quilts folded neatly at the foot of the bed. I released Rowan’s hand and walked to them. One of the blankets was from when I was a pup, and the other I had slept on every night since I presented as an omega. The comforting scent of something so familiar made the tension in my shoulders ease a bit.

“I asked your mother to bring them,” Rowan whispered. He placed a hand on my hip, and my skin tingled, my abs tensing. I was so aware of his every movement and breath. I was both scared and excited at what was coming next. “I thought it might help make our new house feel like a home.”

I looked over my shoulder at my mate. My affection for his thoughtfulness made my chest warm. It clashed wildly with the tension sitting heavy in my gut. I was all tangled up inside.

Rowan cupped my cheek, then placed a soft kiss on my lips. “I didn’t tell you,” he turned me to face him, “but you look so beautiful today.” Big hands circled my waist, pulling me flush to his chest. He was so warm. “Don’t worry,” he rumbled in my ear, his breath hot. “I’ll take care of you.”

Moving his hands up my back, he slowly caressed me. Over my hips, up to my sides, then lingering at my breasts. He gently squeezed my small mounds before wrapping one hand around my throat. It was weirdly soothing. He held me firm while the other hand undid the buttons along my back.

I had never been naked in front of anyone other than my mother, Mina, and Summer. What would he think of me? I didn't have the impressive curves Mina did, nor Summer's desired bust. I was thin and narrow. My grandmother called me a waif.

My dress hung loose as he undid the last few buttons, then it fell, puddling at my feet. I squeezed my eyes shut, waiting. Rowan's hands disappeared from my body, and my face burned with embarrassment. What was he doing? Was he disappointed in what he saw?

The jingle of a belt sent fear skating across my skin, but my wolf purred loudly. This was it.

I breathed deeply.

He was going to take me.

In and out. I filled my lungs.

My wolf inched forward, her desire to be claimed edging out my fear. I pulled her as close to the front of my mind as I could, willing my instincts to take over, to wash away my fear and uncertainty. I wanted to be so perfect for Rowan, and I cursed myself for not reading one of Mina's dirty love stories before my bonding. She had offered, but I declined, too embarrassed to actually read one.

Gentle hands brushed from my elbows up to my shoulders. I opened my eyes to see Rowan looking down at me. His dark eyes sparkled as they moved lovingly over my face and down my chest. He licked his lips, and his gaze dropped even lower.

"You are so gorgeous," he whispered.

Unable to help myself, I looked down his great, big body, then immediately regretted it. His member was huge. Thick and veiny. The base was a slightly darker color than the enormous tip, and his balls hung heavy between his thighs.

There was no way he was going to fit inside me. My mother said it might hurt. This was *definitely* going to hurt.

Rowan cupped my face, and I flinched hard. “Don’t hurt me,” I blurted out.

Shock, followed by deep sadness filled his eyes. “Never,” he whispered, gently pulling at my earrings. They slipped free, and he dropped them carefully onto my dress. “I would never hurt you.”

I cursed at myself, concentrating hard on breathing. How was I already messing this up?

Trying to be better, I forced myself onto my tiptoes and placed my mouth on his. I expected him to devour me, to handle and bite me, but he was soft, kissing me slow to ease my inexperience.

His tongue brushed over my top lip, and I smiled. It tickled.

Rowan caressed my jawline, licking my lip again. “Open your mouth, beautiful.”

Feeling a little awkward, I did as I was told, surprised when he put his tongue in my mouth. I thought only harlots kissed rogues like this, and the shock made me go stiff.

“It’s okay,” Rowan purred into my mouth. He swept his tongue across mine, tasting and feeling me. It felt scandalous and wonderful at the same time.

The vibrations from his chest warmed and soothed me, my omega nature quickly pulling me into a sleepy state. Growling softly as I melted in his arms, Rowan splayed a big hand against my back, moving down to cup my bare bottom.

He purred louder.

My belly pressed flush against his hips. His enormous member squished up between us, and something wet coated my skin. My mind wandered to the conversation with my mother. She said omegas started out wet. Then alphas made everything wetter at the end. But he was already leaking. Did I do something wrong?

Rowan pinched my nipples, and I squeaked at the sensation. It hurt.

He did it again, and it hurt a little less, making my sex twinge. It felt incredible, and I arched my back to urge him to do it again.

Palming my breasts, Rowan switched between firm squeezes and sharp pinching. He made my nipples so tight and puffy I felt as if I might come just from his rough handling. Breaking the kiss, he attached his lips to my breast. The feeling was divine. His hot tongue lapped at me, followed by sharp teeth nipping.

My fingers raked through his short hair, my hands moving without meaning to. His attention to my breasts suddenly had me restless, and I clawed at his shoulders, shamelessly needing more.

The familiar open feeling from my heat bloomed between my legs, and I gasped. My thighs shook as slick gathered and dripped. He was bewitching me.

Rowan growled, popping off my nipple. “That’s my sweet girl.” He swept me up in one fierce movement, then threw me onto the bed. I bounced slightly before coming to a stop. My big alpha stalked up the bed, crawling over me. His eyes glowed red, and I squeezed mine shut.

I was excited to lay with him—his hands felt so good on my sensitive flesh—but it was all still so unbelievably embarrassing.

Demanding lips covered mine, and I was consumed once again by a fierce kiss. It was deeper and more frenzied than before, and, this time, I found myself moving my tongue with his.

I decided I liked his tongue in my mouth...even if it did make me a harlot.

Rowan gripped my chin and turned my head, dragging his fangs over the column of my throat. “Have you laid with anyone before?” he whispered against my wet skin.

My brain went fuzzy, and I hesitated, not sure what to say. Would he be disappointed to know I didn't know how to do anything? Or did he think I was a tart? Used and ugly.

Leaning up, Rowan looked deep into my eyes, caressing the side of my throat with his thumb. "I don't care if you have. I only ask to know how to handle you."

I shied away from his intense stare, shaking my head 'no.' But a bit of pride bloomed in my chest as I realized he couldn't tell I had never kissed before. Maybe I was good at it?

Rowan smiled at the look on my face, then looked down my naked body. "Open for me." He tapped the side of my thigh. I didn't move. Why did he need to see me there? Wasn't he just supposed to put himself inside me and be done?

"Omega," his alpha tone saturated his voice, and my body instantly responded. Slick wept from my sex as my body readied to accept my mate. "Open," he commanded.

My legs fell open, and I draped an arm over my face, mortified to have him staring at me.

"So innocent," he chuckled.

Fingers traced from my collarbone down between my breasts. He stopped at the top of my sex, and my legs jerked shut, but hard hands quickly pried my knees apart, holding me painfully open. Cool air danced over my wet skin, and I shivered, too sensitive.

"Look how pretty and pink you are." His voice was so deep and gravelly. It pushed through me, slipping up and down my spine.

Then he licked me.

I squealed and shot up.

Moving quickly, he pinned my hips down as he licked me again. He lapped at my wetness, my face burning with embarrassment. This couldn't be normal. Who did this?

"You taste so good," he growled, nuzzling the inside of my thighs.

I had no idea what to say. “Thank you.” Another deep chuckle left his chest, and I grimaced for saying something so stupid.

His long tongue flicked over my little nub, and my back arched far off the bed. “Oh!” I gasped. It felt *very* good.

Rowan moved up my body, then pressed his wet lips to mine. My slick covered his face. It felt so dirty having it smeared all over me, but it also thrilled me to have my scent covering him. He was mine, and now everyone would know.

“Omega,” he growled, his wolf distorting his voice. His eyes flashed a brilliant red as his beast inched forward, his instincts taking over. Then he pushed his tongue between my lips, forcing me to taste myself. My slick was musky and sweet. It was weird.

Something hard poked between my legs, and I squeezed my eyes shut tight.

I was scared and excited and painfully aroused all at the same time. I wanted to run away, but more than that, I wanted my alpha to take me.

The wide tip of Rowan’s member caught on my entrance, then pushed just inside me. I gripped his shoulders at the burn as he stretched me. He drove in deeper, and it pinched, then stabbed. I whimpered at the sensation, but he didn’t stop pushing and pushing and pushing. His thing seemed to go on forever.

His hips hit mine, and a sob burst from my throat.

“Don’t move,” he growled, his big body shaking over mine. Did it hurt him too?

“Is it over?” I sniffled, wanting him to take it out and leave me alone.

“I’m trying...” he snarled, his fangs so long they pushed into his bottom lip. “I’m in control,” he said firmly, seeming to be talking to himself. “I won’t hurt you.” But he looked like he might break apart the second he moved.



My stomach cramped hard, and I let out a pained whine. “Rowan. Please,” I begged, not sure what I was asking for, but I knew he could give it to me, whatever it was. “Alpha.”

As if snapping out of a trance, Rowan pulled his thing out of me, then the shock of pain returned as he entered me again. I dug my nails into his biceps as he did it again and again. It hurt so bad and felt so good at the same time. It was all so confusing. Why did I like it?

His thick muscles bulged as he held himself over me, settling into a steady rhythm. He slid in and out. Slowly, the burn lessened, and I was able to breathe. Angling his hips, Rowan hit something so deep and wonderful inside me. I gasped loudly. Then I moaned.

“Sweet Lily,” Rowan purred. “You’re mine.”

“Yes,” I panted, a beautiful pressure building up inside me.

Rowan pressed his chest to mine, my soft breasts against his hard muscle. He kissed me possessively, nipping at my tongue and lips. He slammed his hips particularly hard into me, and I grunted. It still hurt a bit. Why? Was I broken? Was I doing it wrong?

Looking down, I watched him move in and out of me. Then I saw it. A streak of blood mixed with slick covered his shaft.

“I’m hurt,” I mumbled.

Rowan placed his thumb on the little nub between my legs, and a deep guttural noise burst from my throat. I had touched myself with clumsy fingers while in heat, but Rowan’s fingers...

*He knew what that hidden place was for and exactly how to touch it.*

His thumb circled and squeezed, then flicked. The pain inside my sex completely disappeared, replaced by a twist of incredible desire. Slick gushed, and my body exploded with a fierce and sudden climax that made my knees shake and my toes curl.

“That’s it,” Rowan growled, moving his hips faster and faster. “Come for me, Lily. Let me feel that sweet pussy flutter.” He pounded into me, his movements rough as he continued abusing my little nub. The twist in my belly quickly returned, and I tensed as he pulled more pleasure from me. I panted hard, riding my second climax until I was gasping for air and covered in sweat.

Rowan’s shaft seemed to double in size as he roared above me. He dropped his face deep into the crook of my neck. Then sharp teeth breached my flesh. I screamed, trying to shove him away. His big body pushed me deep into the mattress, making it hard to breathe.

The stretch from taking his knot was nothing compared to the pain in my throat.

I was dying.

Rowan growled deep, sucking hard at my throat. Then he finally removed his canines.

Something like a fog slipped over me. My body was disconnected from my brain as Rowan’s consciousness forced its way into my mind, making my lips go numb. It felt as if my thoughts were being squeezed and shoved about as someone else pushed themselves inside my head.

Realizing I couldn’t see, I weaved a hand through the air. Rowan grabbed it, then pressed my palm to his cheek. His short stubble was rough, but feeling him so close made my heart ease.

He whispered in my ear while he cleaned the mark, but I couldn’t make out his words. It didn’t really matter, though. The soft vibrations of his voice was enough to soothe me.

Then he moved his hips again.



WHEN I FINALLY OPENED MY EYES, IT WAS LIGHT OUTSIDE. The bedroom seemed so much bigger than it had been last night. The walls were a lovely cream color with a dark oak wardrobe in one corner, and the curtains were a cheery yellow.

I rolled onto my side, immediately regretting it. The ache deep inside my sex made tears gather and leak down the sides of my face. I thought of Mina and how she always seemed to crave her mate. How? Did all omegas hurt like this, or was it just me?

I had no idea how long Rowan's knot stayed lodged inside me last night or how many times he rutted me afterward. All I could remember was screaming out climax after climax until my voice was rough and my body was numb. It was far better than anything I had ever imagined—even the scariest moments. But now, in the light of day, everything ached.

“Good morning, my sweet mate.” Rowan's voice was soft as he entered the bedroom. He looked freshly showered, his hair a bit wet. He wore lounging pants and nothing else, his muscular chest on full display.

I pressed my face into a pillow, unable to look at him. Not after what we did.

A gentle hand brushed the hair away from the neck, tracing my mating bite. “Did you sleep okay?” he whispered. “How do you feel?”

“I'm okay,” I mumbled into my pillow, wishing I could disappear. The bed dipped as he sat down, placing a bowl of water on the bedside table.

“Let me look at you,” he said, resting a hand on my knee. Then to my absolute horror, he spread my legs apart, looking at the apex of my thighs. It shouldn't have embarrassed me, but it did. The room was bright and filled with the early morning sun. He could see *everything*.

“I didn't expect you to be so tight,” he whispered, looking over my sore entrance. “I should have prepared you better, but I didn't think my instincts would be so powerful. I lost myself

completely.” Regret pulled at the corners of his eyes, and he whispered, “I’m so sorry if I hurt you.”

His apology caught me off guard, and my heart fluttered. “I’m okay,” I whispered, unable to stop my smile. “I’m sore but okay.”

The crease between his eyes eased, and he kissed my lips. It was sweet and soft, and I had to fight the urge to giggle. I was far too old to giggle.

Rowan grabbed a cloth out of the bowl and wrung it out before placing the cool fabric on my sex. I hissed, wanting to snap my legs together, but I didn’t want to annoy him. “Your pussy looks a bit swollen.” He examined me, moving the cloth in gentle circles. I pressed my lips together at his vulgar language, trying not to laugh. “I’d be lying if I said my cock wasn’t a bit chafed this morning too. You drained me thoroughly.” He smiled as if making a joke. I snorted, unable to help it.

*Who talked like that?*

My mate carefully cleaned me, then wiped the dried fluids from my thighs and stomach. He lingered at my middle, his fingertips brushing just beneath my belly button. He looked lost in a trance, just staring. “I can’t wait to see you swollen with my pups.”

And just like that, all the deep aches and stiff muscles disappeared, and I pressed my palm over my stomach. “I could be pregnant,” I said with absolute wonderment.

Rowan smiled, placing his big hand over mine. “Maybe not right now,” his dark eyes sparkled, “but soon I hope.”

I smiled wide. I couldn’t help it. In the midst of all the embarrassing touching and looking and the flood of fluids, I completely forgot that this was how pups were made. I could be with child.

And if I wasn’t, I would be soon.

*I hoped.*

“Do you want pups?” Rowan asked, but judging from the look on his face, he already knew my answer.

“I want a whole mess of them,” I said, hoping he felt the same way. “Do you want lots?” All alphas wanted an heir, but I wanted a pack.

“I want as many as you will give me.” His tone was serious, his thumb brushing over the back of my hand. “Just promise me you’ll smile like that again.”

I bit my bottom lip, staring at Rowan’s handsome face. I wanted to crawl into his lap and beg him to make me gasp and moan like he did last night. I finally understood why Mina would let Ivor defile her behind the temple.

I was officially a harlot.

FOUR

## THE BEDROOM

Rowan



THE LOOK of pure bliss on Lily's face was everything.

I had woken up several times throughout the night as her nightmares bled into mine through our bond. While I couldn't see what she dreamt about, I felt it and hated how frightened she was. Did she always have bad dreams? Did it have something to do with our mating?

But right now, she was pure happiness. Her hands trembled under mine as she caressed her stomach. I could practically see her imagination playing out in her big brown eyes. My sweet omega wanted pups, and I was going to give her as many as she wanted.

"Are you hungry?" I asked. She sat up, and I quickly placed a hand on her shoulder, easing her back down into the pillows. "Don't get up. I'll bring you breakfast."

A shy smile lifted her lips, and she leaned back against the plush pillows.

I returned quickly, pleased to find her rearranging the blankets. It was good to see her nesting, making the space her own. Lily's eyes went wide as I sat the tray next to her. Not

knowing what she liked to eat, I grabbed a bit of everything. Dried meats, nuts, berries, and a loaf of grain bread her mother left yesterday after preparing our cabin.

“You brought so much,” she said in awe of the spread.

“I didn’t know what you normally ate for breakfast.” I grabbed a strawberry and held it up to her mouth. She eyed it before slowly parting her lips and letting me slip the sweet fruit into her mouth.

She moaned at the taste, then picked up a slice of bread. “We eat a lot of bread in our house...or at my parent’s house.” She took a big bite, then gasped. “This is fresh!”

I laughed at her reaction. “Of course it is. Who eats stale bread?”

Her chewing slowed, and her gaze fell. I silently cursed at myself. Of course, they didn’t eat the fresh bread her parents baked. They needed to sell it. I frequently forgot the realities of the lower stasured pack members, and I felt like an ass for assuming she had the same luxuries as my family.

“Did you grow up hungry?” I asked, eyeing her slender frame.

“No,” she said quickly. “We had some hard winters, but we always had plenty to eat. We were very lucky in that. But the Pack Alpha is good to us. He always sends down extra meat and grains to those who live near the gully when things get too thin.”

“I didn’t know that.” A slip of shame twisted in my chest. I had no idea some of our pack struggled like that.

“Caz is a good Pack Alpha,” she smiled sweetly. “He takes care of us.”

Speaking of the Pack Alpha made my mind drift to his advisor, Dage, and what he said after our bonding ceremony. I hated the way Lily’s hands trembled as he spoke. I didn’t know if her fears were tied to Dage or his son, or if they were just the result of being near such a powerful alpha in general, but my wolf demanded an answer. It was near impossible to protect her from the unknown.



“What happened with Dage?” I asked.

She froze mid-bite, her eyes going wide. “Um...” She sank her teeth into the soft bread, chewing slowly. “Nothing.”

She was an awful liar.

Even without the dishonesty of her words tumbling through our bond, her expression gave her away. Keeping my tone light, I warned my sensitive mate as gently as I could, “Don’t lie to me, Lily. You’re mine to care for, and I need to know if someone hurt you.”

She set the bread on the tray and placed her hands over her heart. I could hear it thundering in her chest. “He didn’t hurt me.” Her expression was so earnest, but our bond burned with her fear. “Honestly. Alpha Dage never hurt me. I was just so overwhelmed yesterday. I’m not used to being around so many alphas, and their scents...” one hand fell to her wrist, and she squeezed it, “...the temple was just so small, and there were a lot of alphas in there.”

Her blatant lie after my warning both enraged and shocked me.

I wanted to press her further, force her to tell me the truth, then correct her behavior—spank her pretty ass red. But Lily was too delicate for such rough handling. To build a solid bond with her, I needed to tread carefully and be patient.

“Please, Lily.”

Her shoulders curled inward, her slight body suddenly teeny. Her voice dropped to a hushed whisper, “Nothing happened to me.”

My wolf growled low and slow, and I stood, making her flinch. I might not be able to force her to tell me, but I couldn’t leave this be. Even now, Lily’s scent flooded with bitter fear. Dage did something to her. Or Luca did. And I was going to find out what the fuck it was.

“I’m going to run into the market.” I grabbed the bowl off the side table and took it into the kitchen. The patter of feet told me Lily was right behind me.

“You’re leaving me?” Shock made her voice crack.

I placed the bowl in the sink, then leaned against the counter. My mate stood at the end of the hallway, one of the blankets from her parent’s home wrapped tightly around her shoulders.

Crossing my arms, I tried to stay calm. The thought of someone hurting my sweet omega had me on the verge of shifting into my wolf and ripping the village to pieces. Instead, I pushed out a slow breath and forced a smile.

“Our home is brand new,” I said. “We don’t have much food.”

“But the kitchens bring meals to newly mated couples,” she mumbled, following me into the living room.

“I’ll be back soon.” I kissed the top of her head.

Her voice pitched higher. “Can I come with you?” Her tortured expression pulled at my heart, but my wolf wasn’t deterred in the least.

“No,” I said firmly, scooping her into my arms. I carried her back into the bedroom and tucked her in. “You’re newly mated and freshly bred. Stay here. Stay in bed.” I could smell her tears even though I couldn’t see them. And as badly as I wanted to stay and comfort her, I needed to know about Dage. It couldn’t wait. “I’ll be right back,” I whispered, placing a soft kiss on her lips.

Her fingers wrapped around my forearms, trying to hold me to her. “Please, stay,” she whispered.

Not answering, I kissed the top of her head, then without another look, I turned and left. I shut the front door behind me, then stopped, listening. Waiting. There was no sound of footsteps or crying inside the house. I hoped Lily would listen to me and rest.

“What the hell are you doing?” Ivor asked. He stood on the pathway just next to our house. He appeared to be heading toward the packhouse.

“Lily needs a few things from the market,” I said, not wanting to admit my mate’s willingness to lie to me so soon after bonding. It was a shameful alpha that couldn’t earn the trust of their mate.

“Do you want Mina—”

“No,” I said quickly, walking in the opposite direction.

Ivor said something, but I couldn’t hear him. All I could focus on was the market in the distance. I knew Dage wouldn’t be honest with me. That was clear yesterday. But I knew someone that would.



“ROWAN!” MY SWEET GRANDMOTHER SMILED WIDE AT ME, flashing her gums. The skin around her eyes crinkled like crepe paper, proof of her long and happy life. “What the hell are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be tending to your mate instead of hanging around us old folks?”

“Don’t stand,” I held out my hands, motioning for her to settle back into her rocker. “I’m sorry we didn’t get to speak much yesterday.”

“Awh, it’s alright. That’s how bondings go. Young couples having fun with their friends.” She placed her hand behind my neck, pulling me into a quick hug and a kiss on the cheek. “You and your omega looked so sweet at the bonding.” She rubbed her thumb over where she kissed me, wiping off a bit of spit. “Her dress was as pretty as she is.”

“I am very lucky. Lily really is beautiful.” I smiled wide, sitting in the chair next to her.

“So spit it out then. Why are you chatting with old ladies instead of with your mate?” She leaned back, rocking back and forth.

“Actually, I wanted to talk to you about Lily.”

“That so?” She pulled a paper fan from her side and popped it open, fanning herself. “We omegas aren’t as easy to handle as alphas think, are we?”

“No, ma’am.” I smiled at my grandmother. “Do you know Lily’s family well?”

“Yes!” she beamed. “Lovely girl. Born to betas. That poor thing,” she tutted. “Betas have no business raising omegas. No one to protect the sweet creatures.”

I nodded, agreeing. “Do you know of anything happening between her and Luca? Or Da—”

“Who the hell is Luca?”

“Dage’s son.”

“Who?”

I forced down a groan. Granny and her twin sister, Helena, were the eldest members of the pack, having lived through four Pack Alphas in their time. They both also loved to gossip, filling our home with tall tales every chance she got. If something had happened to Lily, I knew my Gran would know.

“You should go home to your mate,” she said, shaking her fan at me. “What kind of alpha abandons their mate so soon after bonding with them just to chat with an old lady?”

Shame and anger twisted inside me, but my wolf was too committed to protecting Lily just to return home. I needed to know what Dage or Luca had done. My pride as an alpha and as a mate demanded it.

“Poor thing isn’t used to being alone,” Granny scolded me. “Her parents never left her alone growing up. Especially after that alpha attacked her.”

“What alpha?” The blood drained from my face, my fists tight. “Who attacked her? Was it Luca? Dage?”

A stern-looking service beta glared at me, her hands on her hips. “Keep it down or you’ll have to leave.”

I shot the beta a look, not caring for her tone. Leaning a little closer to my grandmother, I asked again, “Was it Luca?”

“I told you,” she smacked me on the head with her fan, “I don’t know him. But it doesn’t matter now anyway. Lily’s got you to keep her safe. Or she would if your butt wasn’t sitting here, annoying me.” She raised a wiry, gray brow. “And if you want to know so bad, ask the girl yourself. You are mated to her,” she shot. “I assume you live together now, so you should be able to find her.”

My wolf snarled, ready to leave. “You’re right,” I said respectfully. “I’ll speak to Lily. Maybe I’ll bring her to see you and Helena later this week.”

“That would be lovely!” She smiled, displaying her gums. “Bring me some sweets from the sugar shop when you do. Helena likes that lemon shit.” She grimaced. “So get that while you’re there.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I bowed my head before leaving.

I didn’t want to stress my mate, but I couldn’t let it go. I could feel her very real fear pulsing in my head. I needed to fix this. I needed her to feel safe.

FIVE

## THE BED

Lily



I WAS FROZEN IN PLACE, staring at the bedroom door.

*Rowan left me.*

Not even twenty-four hours after he claimed me as his mate. The mark on my neck was still tender and raw, his orgasm from last night slowly leaking out of me, and he just left. Was he rejecting me? Leaving me? Would my parents take me back?

He was so sweet this morning. I honestly thought he was happy.

Staring at the massive bed around me, I rubbed the back of my neck. The need to nest was making my skin itch. My sex—or pussy, as Rowan called it—ached deep.

Restless, I stood up. The whole room suddenly felt so open and airy. All the space around me felt wrong. I was too exposed. I opened the closet door, searching for somewhere cozy, then immediately shut it. It was far too small. Unfortunately, the closets in the other rooms were the same size. On the verge of tears, I entered the kitchen. The urge to run back to my parent's house beat hard in my chest.

My eyes slid around the room, settling on a white, flimsy door next to the kitchen table. I pulled it open and let out a long breath of relief. The pantry was dark, long, and empty. It was perfect.

Thirty minutes later, every blanket and pillow in the house filled the tight space. I arranged and fluffed pillows, molded the blankets just so, then snuggled in deep. Rowan's cedar and moss scent clung to my favorite blanket, and I pressed it to my nose to it, inhaling deeply. The slight trace of his climax filled my lungs, and my body shivered involuntarily.

The front door opened, and I froze. Heavy feet moved down the hall. A door creaked, then after a moment, it shut. Two more doors opened and closed. Then the feet moved toward the kitchen.

"Lily?" Rowan called out.

The pantry door was slightly ajar. I reached out to close it, then yipped as it whipped open. I burrowed deep into my nest, hiding my face.

"Omega." His voice was loud. He sounded angry. What did I do wrong? "Lily?" He sounded closer, his tone a bit softer but still scary. "Come out here."

I pulled my knees under my chin, curling into a tight ball. He wouldn't come in here. No decent alpha would enter an omega's nest without permission. In here, *I was safe*.

He sighed hard before speaking in a firm tone. "I don't like that you lied to me this morning. You said Dage did nothing to you, but that's a lie. Isn't it?"

I didn't move or speak, praying he'd go away.

"Did Dage hurt you? Did his son? You need to tell me what happened." His voice rose as his anger grew. "I can feel it in our bond, Lily. You're scared. Really scared. What kind of mate would I be if I let you stay this way? You have to let me fix it. Please, tell me what happened."

He wasn't forcing me to speak, but my wolf still pulled hard within me, begging me to answer my mate. Scared and conflicted, a soft whine left my lips.



“Omega,” he whispered softer, clearly trying to tamp down his anger. “Please, don’t make me order you,” he begged.

I peeked over the edge of my blanket. Rowan stood in the doorway. His feet touched the edge of my nest, and I suddenly felt trapped. Fear gripped me hard, and my feet moved before I could stop myself. Scrambling on my hands and knees, I darted between his legs, then ran toward the front door as fast as I could. A big arm circled my waist, jerking me back.

“Let me go!” I begged, tears pouring down my face.

He spun me, forcing me against his big body. I raised my hand to hit his chest, but he grabbed my wrist, then squeezed.

All the air in my lungs whooshed out in one fierce breath.

The memory of that horrible day slammed into me at full force. The images that repeatedly haunted me in my sleep, kept me from leaving the house at night and kept me too scared to live a normal life, hit me like a rolling boulder to the gut.

Fierce red eyes.

Long sharp fangs.

Strong, angry hands.

His thick oaky scent.

It was all too much, and I screamed.

I screamed and cried, hitting at anything I could reach. I needed to run, to get away. He was going to hurt me.

*Someone needed to help me!*

My back was suddenly flush against soft blankets, a big body hovering over me. I tried to fight, but an enormous weight pressed into me, pinning me in place.

Then someone purred.

My mind raged, wanting so badly to scream and run and fight, but my pathetic body obeyed my alpha, and I felt limp against the plush fabric. “Help me,” I mumbled, my mind still

raging. “P-please, help.” Hot tears leaking down the sides of my face.

“You’re safe,” Rowan whispered. The rolling purr that poured off him intensified.

My insides smoothed, and I took a deep breath. My mate’s thick scent flooded my lungs, soaking into every pore. I felt sluggish, and my wolf was calm. For a brief moment, I couldn’t remember why I was scared.

Rowan’s soft lips brushed over my cheeks, lips, and eyelids. Even our bond flooded with his deep comforting presence. I relaxed as he gently pulled all the fear out of my body, bringing me back to him.

“It’s okay,” he said, his voice a gravelly purr. “I’m here, Lily. You’re safe, my mate.”

I nodded, unable to speak. My eyes grew heavy, my lids falling. I wanted to sleep. But before I could close my eyes, Rowan’s mouth found its way to mine. He kissed me sweetly, then deeper. His tongue was so soft in my mouth, and his warm skin pressed against me. Slick gathered between my legs at having him so near.

Rowan’s hands moved between us, undoing his belt as he continued to kiss me. Then big hands parted my knees, and he slipped his thick cock inside me. I grunted at the stretch, still sore.

“Feel me inside you?” he whispered, kissing the corners of my lips. “Feel my heart beat against your chest? You aren’t alone.” He rolled his hips, and I closed my eyes. “You aren’t alone.”

The feel of his big body covering mine calmed me like nothing else ever had. He pushed into me again, and I wrapped my arms around his neck, needing him closer.

“I love you, my sweet Lily. You are mine. Let me care for you.”

He kissed me deeply as his cock slipped in and out of me. A sweet flutter in my belly grew, then twisted. Rowan’s knot expanded, and the pressure inside me heightened. This wasn’t

the barrel of pleasure he gave me last night, but something sweeter. It was just wonderful but tender and lush. Rowan pushed his knot inside me with a muffled grunt, and a tingling orgasm washed over me. His cock pulsed as he emptied into me. I was warm. Loved. *Safe*.

The thought made me smile. This was my worst fear: trapped under a massive alpha with his cock stuffed deep inside me, *and I felt safe*.

“Are you okay?” Rowan pushed the hair out of my face, his thumb brushing over my temple.

“I thought you were going to hit me,” I said honestly.

“I would never hit you.” He lifted a bit onto his forearms, cradling my face. He looked so serious. “I thought about spanking you this morning when you lied to me, but I would never raise a hand to you in anger.”

I looked down, not sure what to say.

“Lily.” I looked up. His eyes were filled with fire, even though his voice was soft. “I understand you’ve always been nervous around alphas, but I’m your mate. It’s my job to protect you, but I feel like I can’t do that right now. The things floating around in your head are fucking killing me. Let me fix this.”

As much as I hated remembering what happened, Rowan was right. He was my mate, and as long as I suffered, so would he. Every flashback or nightmare would travel to Rowan through our bond. I was hurting him by not telling him.

It felt a little awkward to have such a serious conversation with his cock still inside me, but I liked him so close. It somehow lessened the pain of reliving what had happened.

“When I was thirteen, Luca,” I whispered, “Luca h-hurt me.”

A soft growl pushed from Rowan’s chest, but he didn’t say anything. He simply flooded our bond with his love and protection, urging me to continue.

“I had just finished my first heat and wasn’t supposed to go outside. My mother said I was to stay home while she and my dad went to the bakery. But I had been stuck in my nest for over a week and just wanted some fresh air. I didn’t know that omega pheromones clung to you after a heat. That I needed to bathe before going anywhere. I...um...I....” Rowan’s big hand smoothed over my hair, cupping my cheek. He looked at me with so much love.

My voice dropped to barely a whisper, “Luca was able to scent me, and he attacked me in the field behind the northern valley. We were all alone.”

Every muscle in Rowan’s massive body was tense with rage, but when he spoke, his voice was as gentle as his hands caressing the side of my face. “Did he violate you?”

Resting my hands on his shoulders, I stared at the scar along my wrist. “He tried. He tore my dress and slapped me when I fought back. He broke my wrist, and my screams alerted a nearby guard. He was able to restrain Luca, and they took me to the infirmary.”

Unable to hold myself together any longer, my voice slipped into a high-pitched whine, “Everyone there said it was my fault,” I sobbed. “That an omega should know better. Luca called me a wh-whore. My parents were so angry. Everyone was angry.” Shame beat hard in my chest at the memory.

“It’s not your fault,” Rowan growled softly, holding me closer. “Weak alphas blame others when they can’t control their beast. You did nothing wrong.”

I cried while he purred and soothed me. Slowly, his knot went down, and he slipped out of me, allowing him to cradle me properly. His hands channeled through my hair, rubbing from my temples to the back of my neck.

“I was so ashamed,” I whispered, trying to force myself to calm down. “Alpha Dage said it would be b-best to stay quiet. That not telling anyone what happened would keep my reputation intact. No one would want me if I told everyone how I tempted his son. So I stayed quiet.”

“It wasn’t your reputation he was worried about,” Rowan said, his voice dangerously low. But his fingers were so light as he brushed the tears from my cheeks. I swallowed hard, embarrassed that I had never thought about how telling my secret might affect Luca. “I will fix this,” Rowan said, and I jerked, fear making my head spin all over again.

“Please, Rowan,” I begged, my words coming out in jittery pants. “D-don’t do anything. I don’t want to go through all this again. I c-can’t.”

Rowan quickly shushed me, caressing my back and kissing my hair. “I can’t just let this go.”

“Please,” I sniffled, tears pouring freely once again. “Don’t make me face him. If you attack him, everyone will force me to talk about it, and he’ll say awful things about me, and, and —”

Rowan growled, his jaw clenched tight, and then he took a slow, deliberate breath. “Fine. But if that fucker so much as looks at you, I will fucking gut him. I will rip his entrails out and decorate the village square with his innards. I will *never* let him scare you again, Lily. You are mine, and he deserves to die for touching you.”

I could feel the honesty in his words, both in his fierce eyes and through our bond. And for the first time, I realized that I was mated to a big, strong, scary alpha. I didn’t need to be scared of anything. My mate would keep me safe.

My lips twitched in the corners as I tried to fight off a smile. “I wasn’t yours at the time,” I said, biting my bottom lip.

Rowan placed a finger under my chin, tipping my head up. “You have always been mine, Lily.” He tucked a lock of hair behind my ear, his anger dimming a bit. “The first memory I have of you was when you were six years old. You were in the park, and your blue dress was covered in flour. The other kids were teasing you about it, calling you a bunch of bullshit names. You cried. Big fat tears falling down chubby cheeks.” His thumb traced the motion. “I wanted to rip every child in that park to pieces. I was only ten years old and lusting for

blood for a pretty girl in a blue dress. I knew right then and there you were mine.”

I snuggled closer to his warm chest and whispered, “I didn’t know.”

“I have always felt that way about you,” he whispered. “I used to go to the park every day to catch a glimpse of you. But after I presented as an alpha, I had training and lessons to attend to, and the only time I saw you was on Sunday mornings in the market.”

I smiled, remembering him coming into the shop every week. I’d catch him staring at me, but I was always too shy to speak.

“My mother would buy flax seed bread from your parents’ bakery. It was the only bread she’d buy. She said anything else was unhealthy. I fucking hated that bread, and if there was any left on Saturday evening, I’d eat every last crumb to make sure we had a reason to go to the bakery.”

My heart swelled, practically bursting at the seams.

“You are mine, Lily. Every part of you is mine. And soon, you’ll have my pup in you.” He caressed my stomach, his thumb circling my belly button. “Then I’ll own all of you, and you’ll own all of me. Every inch.”

“You own me now,” I whispered, my cheeks warming at the intense look in his eyes.

“I guess I do,” he growled, the tips of his fangs flashing. The sight made me warm and restless, a deep need gathering in my belly.

Rowan rolled me onto my back and spread my legs with his firm hands. Warm fluid from our lovemaking trickled down to my backside, and this time, I liked that he was looking at my sex.

“Look at all that mess dripping out of you.” He swiped a finger through my folds, making me shiver. He plunged two thick fingers inside me. “I want this belly fat with my cum,” he pushed into me knuckle deep, “then fat with my young.”

I moaned, and wiggled my hips, needing more of him. Everything he did felt good. Too good.

He ducked his head, pulling my nipple deep into his mouth. Wet, sloppy sounds filled the air as he pumped his fingers into me, reaching deep.

“I can’t wait until you’re big and round,” he whispered against the peak of my breast. “So big I have to fuck you on all fours. I want to see your pregnant belly touching the blankets while I take you from behind.”

Intense desire burned through me, and I flipped onto my stomach, immediately lifting my bottom high into the air. I arched my back, presenting the mound of my pussy for him to take.

He moaned deep at the sight, his big hands covering my bottom. He squeezed my ass, palming the flesh. Kneading it, then spreading me wide. All traces of embarrassment were gone. I was too lost in his scent and desire to care how exposed my body was.

“Look how pretty and tight this asshole is,” he said, pressing the pad of his thumb to it. I squeaked but stayed still for him, letting him do whatever he wanted. “I’d fuck this sweet ass, but it would be a waste of cum. I need every drop in this pussy.” He tapped my clit, and I gasped.

His fingertips curled deep into my hips. Then in one fierce thrust, he impaled me on his cock. The harsh movement shoved my face into the blankets. My cheek rubbed against my nest as he set a brutal pace, pulling my hips back and forth onto his cock, over and over again. Thrusting so hard, my bottom was sure to bruise.

“Fuck, Lily.” His voice was like gravel. The dulcet tones slipped up my spine, going straight to my nipples. “You are so fucking wet.”

Deep rippling pleasure pulled tight within me, and I burst apart. I came so hard slick gushed from my sex, leaking around Rowan’s expanding knot. He roared, shoving his cock deep inside me. It pulsed as he emptied his orgasm inside my

swollen pussy. Warmth bathed my insides, and I collapsed. Rowan dropped onto my back, his knot keeping us connected.

He rolled, spooning me so as to not crush me.

Feeling so safe and warm, I fell asleep. Not a trace of fear in my body.





# THE ALPHA DEN

Rowan



THE NEXT WEEK went by too fast. I hated leaving Lily, but sadly I had to report back for duty. It was such a shame too. Lily had grown very comfortable with me, even edging a little wild in bed.

I smiled wide as I thought of my sweet mate, standing completely naked in the kitchen while she made me breakfast this morning. My cum dripped down the inside of her thighs while she worked the stove. She was an awful cook, burning everything she touched, and I couldn't wait for her to make me dinner.

“What are you smiling about?” Ivor asked.

“Lily.” I grinned even wider.

He laughed, tipping his head back. “How quickly mighty wolves turn into sheep at the sight of a lovely omega.”

I search out Lily through our bond. Whatever she was doing, she was content. I pictured her flitting about our house and snuggling in her nest. Maybe even growing my pup in her belly.

Nix stomped down the long staircase, his heavy feet pulling me from my thoughts. The young alpha had dark circles under his eyes, and his hair stuck up in all directions.

“Long night?” I asked.

“Yes, sir,” he said in a clipped tone. “Ivor wasn’t able to cover your shift last week, so the patrols got all shifted about, and I ended up pulling doubles three days in a row. In the marketplace,” he added the last sentence with emphasis as if that proved just how awful his week had been.

“Mina was in heat,” Ivor smirked, hooking his thumbs into his belt.

“Don’t talk about my sister being in heat,” Nix groaned, walking around us to the door. “That’s just...gross.”

“Well, thank you for picking up the slack.” I followed him outside. It was already warm even though the sun was barely above the treeline, and the air smelled sweet. I couldn’t remember a spring day ever smelling so good.

Awareness pricked my skin, and I turned to see Ivor and Nix staring at me. “What?”

“It’s unnatural for anyone to look that happy,” Nix scowled.

Ivor gave me a knowing smirk, playfully pushing at my back.

My day was ordinary, giving me plenty of opportunity to think about my mate. I patrolled the packhouse grounds, showing Nix the ropes. My usual post was inside, but Nix had been doing well, and the captain of the village guard wanted him trained to move up. The youngling was smart, strong, and a fast learner.

We were going over the weak points in security around the gardens when my bond with Lily shifted from contented happiness to downright lustful.

I cleared my throat repeatedly, trying to ignore the thumping at the base of my cock as my mate worked herself up. Her pleasure pulsed in my head, along with a teasing bit of

satisfaction. The little brat knew she was distracting me, and I loved every moment. I pictured my sweet omega naked and panting in her nest on the pantry floor, her little fingers working wildly in and out of her tight cunt.

“That makes no sense,” Nix said, scrunching his face.

I snapped to. “What did I say?” I had no idea.

“You said the only way into the packhouse from here is through the pantry.”

Lily’s pleasure hit a crescendo, and I swore my vision went white. I stumbled, then cursed.

“You okay, Rowan?” Nix asked, placing his hand on my shoulder.

I shook my head, my temples pounding in time with my cock. “I’m good,” I inhaled deeply and rolled my shoulders. “It’s just hot out today.”

“It really fucking is.” Nix looked up at the sky, squinting. “Summer is going to be brutal this year.”

“Come on.” I motioned him to follow. “I’ll show you the stables.”

Nix smacked my chest with the back of his hand, motioning with his eyes for me to turn around. Luca strolled out of the packhouse, following his father and Pack Alpha Caz. I watched Luca carefully, my fangs slipping forward. The urge to rip his throat out was almost too much to bear.

Nix leaned into my ear, whispering, “I heard a rumor Luca is being considered for Alpha Caz’s personal guard.”

I shook my head at the news. “He’ll never get it. He’s far too young and inexperienced for such a position. Caz is humoring Dage.”

“Well, if he does end up their guard, it’s a good thing Caz’s children are all alphas.” Nix crossed his arms, staring daggers at Luca. “I wouldn’t want that fucker anywhere near my sister.”

Dread pulsed under my skin. “What makes you say that?”

“When Luca was a teenager, he was sent away for attacking an omega here in the village. Then Summer told me that two years ago, he cornered her oldest sister and tried to force a mating.”

Disgust burned in my throat. “Why the fuck has no one stopped him?”

“You know why. He’s an adviser’s kid.” Nix pulled a face. “Those fucker’s can get away with murder, and no one gives a shit. If he were anyone else, he’d be branded and banned from the village.”

I tilted my head at his words, waiting for him to realize.

His expression dropped, and his voice pitched a full octave higher. “Except for you! You’ve always pulled your weight, Rowan. You’ve never used your father to—”

I held up a hand to quiet him. “I understand what you mean.” I smiled, letting him know I wasn’t offended.

Nix was right, though. I had more than one opportunity to jump to a higher position or skirt the rules. But I could never do that and continue to hold my head high. No self-respecting alpha could.

Luca’s high-pitched laugh carried across the garden. I narrowed my eyes, wishing like hell he was alone. He had the balls to touch my mate, then tried to hurt someone else. Who knew how many omegas he had terrorized over the years.

Unable to stand being away from Lily for one more moment, I turned and marched off. “I’m heading home.”

“What about the stables?” Nix called out.

“They’ll be there tomorrow.”

I shook out my hands, trying to force the tension from my body. The last thing I needed was for Lily to see me so wound up. Our bond was still so new, and I was shit at blocking my feelings out. Lily, on the other hand, was already very good at controlling what emotions she shared, and right now, she was silent. I was sure she could feel my anger and was buried deep in her nest, scared of why I was upset.



“LILY?” I CALLED OUT, SHUTTING THE FRONT DOOR BEHIND me. It was silent—deadly silent. I walked straight to the pantry, knowing she’d be there.

Big brown eyes stared up at me from the edge of a blanket. “Are you mad at me?” she whispered.

“Why would I be mad at you?” I knelt, hovering my hand over her nest, silently asking if I could come in. She tensed, making sure I didn’t actually touch it, then she nodded. I crawled toward her, pulling her to my chest. She was naked. I had kept her that way since the day we mated.

“You weren’t mad that I touched...” she trailed off, her gaze falling down her body.

I kissed her temple. “I am not mad about that.”

The tension eased from her, and her expression shifted from fearful to worried. “Did something bad happen at work?”

“Yes,” I said flatly, nuzzling her neck. I kissed my mating bite, loving the way she shivered. “I was forced to leave my sexy mate. It was hell.”

She laughed, wrapping her arms around my shoulders. “You are awful.”

“I’m not the one that spent the morning doing sinful things to myself.”

Her cheeks blushed, and she pouted, “I missed you.”

I settled back, allowing the soft scent of her nest to calm me. This was the kind of happiness that fairy tales promised. I just didn’t imagine it taking place on the pantry room floor.

Lily let out a contented sigh, threading her fingers through my hair. “You aren’t going to tell me what happened, are you?”

“I have a demanding job.” I kept my voice soft, hoping she’d understand. “I train, fight, and occasionally get mad at new recruits. I’m sorry you’re bound to those feelings, but I’ll try harder to block them out.”

“It’s okay. I like feeling you throughout the day.” She bit her bottom lip, then added, “I was thinking of spending some time at the bakery tomorrow. I want to see my mom and dad.”

“Bring home some bread. Something sweet.”

“Got it,” she nodded. “Flax seed. Extra flax.”

SEVEN



# THE BAKERY

Lily



“MATED LIFE SUITS YOU,” Mom said, giving me a knowing smile.

I turned away from her. My sex was far too sore for my mother to give me a look like that while mentioning my mate. “Rowan is a good alpha,” I said simply, placing the last loaf of warm bread into the basket. I wrapped them with a tea towel, then handed the basket to my mother.

She stepped a little closer, restrained excitement pouring from her big brown eyes. “Is he catering to you?” I pulled my brows together, not sure what she meant. “Omegas showered with lots of...affection...tend to become pregnant much faster than ones that—”

“Mom!” I gasped, walking around her toward the front of the shop. She quickly followed, the basket clutched tight in her hands.

“I just want to make sure Rowan’s caring for you. That he’s being a good mate. The early days of bonding should be the best of your life.” She smiled as if remembering something blissful. “In fact, your father and I—”

“Rowan is a wonderful mate,” I said loudly, desperately trying to end the conversation. “I am *very* happy.” My cheeks burned as I gave her my most sincere smile. Hoping she’d drop it, I grabbed a dust rag and began wiping down the countertop as if my life depended on it.

She placed a hand on my shoulder, forcing me to turn. “Have you talked about pups?”

“Of course.” I paused, refolding the rag.

She hesitated for a moment, placing the basket on the counter. It was a look she held every time she wanted to talk about something that made me uncomfortable. “I don’t want to tell you what you and Rowan should do. But...” She sighed hard, then grabbed my hands, squeezing them gently. “I just know you’ve always wanted a big family. And your father and I struggled to have you, and—”

“I know, mama,” I cut her off, trying not to be snippy. Her pain was real, and I didn’t want her to feel as if I was dismissing her. “You’ve told me before. You and Dad waited until you were older to have young, then you couldn’t have any for the longest time.”

She smiled, but it didn’t quite reach her eyes. “I know omegas tend to carry well. It doesn’t take you as long as betas or alphas, but I still worry. I don’t want you to go through what I did.”

I leaned into her soft scent, snuggling into her neck. “Rowan and I are on the same page when it comes to making a family.”

She kissed my head, then grabbed the basket. “Okay,” she sighed as if a weight had been lifted. “I’m going to take this bread to the packhouse. Lock the door behind me and—”

“I’m mated now,” I reminded her, smiling wide. “We don’t have to worry about someone snatching me up.”

Her eyes went wide at the realization, then softened with relief. “You’re right,” she smiled. “Well then, I guess I’ll be right back.”

I gave her a little wave as I sat on the stool behind the counter. I had been in the shop a million times since I was a pup, but never alone with the door *unlocked*. It felt wild and dangerous, and made the whole space smell sweeter. The aroma of warm flour, blooming yeast, and toasted almonds filled my chest, making me feel so serene. My bond with Rowan seemed to float with happiness. He could feel my joy. I was sure of it.

Wanting to be productive, I grabbed the broom and began sweeping up the front of the shop. Grains and flour were like pollen in a windstorm. They had a mind of their own, covering every inch of the floor in a matter of seconds. I pushed the rubbish next to the door, then went to the back of the shop to get the dustbin.

I was stooped over, rummaging through the closet when the bell over the door chimed. “How can I help you?” I yelled as I rushed back to the counter.

Terror exploded within me, making my eyes water and my palms sweat.

Luca’s big body consumed the entire doorway. I immediately searched out Rowan through our bond. My mind flared with his anger. He was coming for me, but how long would it take?

“You aren’t allowed here,” I whispered, my voice weak. I wanted to run into the back of the store, but there was nowhere to go—Luca blocked the only exit.

His lips turned up into an eerie smirk. “I wasn’t allowed here while you were a danger to me. But you’re mated now.” He narrowed his red eyes, walking slowly toward the counter. “Now, I can be around you and not worry.”

Rage burned down my throat, overpowering my fear for a moment. I wanted to scream at him, but when I spoke, my voice was jittery and soft, “*I’m a danger to you?*”

“All omegas are a danger to civilized society. Your pheromones fuck with alphas.” His eyes raked over my face and down my body, his hips pressing against the counter.

I crossed my arms, taking two quick steps back. My bottom hit the wall, and I froze. “What do you want?” I whispered.

“I want to talk to your mate.” He craned his neck as if trying to see into the back of the shop.

“Rowan is coming right now, and he won’t be happy to see you here.” I pressed my back against the wall harder. My wolf whimpered, begging me to run or hide, but there was nowhere to go. “You should leave before he gets here.”

“Should I now?” He leaned forward, pressing his palms into the countertop. He was so close. If he reached out he could easily grab me. “I looked for your mate at the packhouse and stopped by your cabin, but I think now I want to talk to you.”

Ice tipped into my veins at the thought of Luca standing on my porch. Would he come to our house again? Would he break down the door to get to me? Was he really looking for Rowan, or did he just want to hurt me again?

Luca’s teeth flashed as he spoke, “Let your mate know that I don’t fucking appreciate the shit he’s been saying about me. The lies he’s spreading.”

The tips of his fingers went black as his claws pushed forward. I stared at them, remembering how he had shredded my dress and ripped it from my body—the memory of his claws pushing into my skin when he palmed my exposed flesh made me want to scream. Bile rose in my throat, and I swallowed convulsively, trying not to throw up.

“Rowan wouldn’t do that,” I whispered. “He wouldn’t lie.”

Luca laughed, the sound booming in my ears. “You know, I actually believe that. I’ve known that fucker since we were young, and he follows the rules as if his fucking life depends on it. But that just means he believes *your* lies, doesn’t it?”

I swallowed hard, hugging myself tighter. “I d-didn’t lie.”

He slammed his fist into the countertop, making me jump. “Yes, you fucking did!” His voice dropped dangerously low, his breath hitting the side of my face. “Alpha Caz is

considering me for his personal guard. It would put me in line to one day be an advisor. And I will not allow a whore to fuck it up.” His clawed hand flung out, wrapping around my throat. I gripped his arm, trying to pry him off me, but he was so strong. “Don’t force me to tell everyone how you played with my instincts that day, strutting around, wanting to be noticed.”

I pushed my nails into his skin, wishing I could rip him open. I wanted to beat him senseless. Chop him into pieces and shove him in the oven.

An angry growl left my mouth and a slow-spreading smile consumed his face. He squeezed my throat and pulled me to him. My hips dug into the countertop, and I jerked. I scratched at his arms, trying to pull myself free, but he didn’t budge.

“I will not let you destroy my life. You almost cost me everything once, and I was sent away for three fucking years because of you. If anything happens and I don’t get this position, I will come for you. Do you fucking understand me?”

He squeezed tighter, making my eyes bulge and tongue push forward. I couldn’t breathe. He was going to kill me.

*Where was Rowan?*

The bell over the door chimed, and Luca released me, sending me crashing onto the floor. I choked on my breath, trying to suck in as much air as I could. Soft hands rubbed my back, and Summer’s soft citrus scent filled my lungs.

Luca’s footsteps faded and the bell chimed again.

“What the hell was that about?” Summer snarled at the door. She looked over my neck before glancing around the shop. “Where are your parents? We need to get a guard.”

“No!” I grabbed her arm, forcing her to stay with me. “I’m fine. Please don’t.”

“What the hell, Lily?” She wiped the tears off my cheeks. Her blue eyes were wide with anger and concern. “You’re not fine, and Luca was...” She leaned in, her eyes glassy. “He looked like he was going to kill you.”

I shook my head, then immediately regretted it. My head spun and pounded at the same time. “Just please let it go. I can’t—”

The bell over the door chimed again. The usually cheerful sound made the hairs along the back of my neck stand on end. Every muscle in my body tensed as I looked up at the edge of the counter, waiting to see who it was. Rowan’s face came into view, and a gust of relief whooshed out of me.

Rowan took one look at me and hopped the counter. “Lily,” his tone was urgent but soft, “what happened?”

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, reaching for him. “I got myself all worked up over nothing. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Summer narrowed her eyes at me, then stood, letting Rowan hold me. I was thankful when she didn’t say anything.

My mate scooped me up and placed me on the counter. He looked over my face and down my chest and legs. Not sure if my throat was red or not, I leaned forward and pressed my forehead to his chest. My hair fell forward like a curtain, hiding my neck.

Concentrating hard, I did everything I could to block Rowan out of my mind, to shut down our bond so he couldn’t feel my lie. I had no idea if it was working. Big hands trailed over my back, rubbing at my shoulders.

“Summer?” Rowan said. “What happened?”

I turned my head slightly, glancing at my friend through my hair. Rowan wasn’t using his alpha voice, so she could lie if she wanted. But if he forced her....

“I don’t know,” she pressed her lips together, and I dropped my gaze to the floor, ashamed and relieved at the same time.

“Where is your escort?” Rowan asked her. “Are you here alone?”

“I came to the market with my sister and her mate. They’re in the shop next door.”

I could feel Summer's eyes on me, but I couldn't bring myself to look at her. I was scared she'd demand to know why I wasn't telling Rowan what happened or why we couldn't get the guard involved. But Summer didn't know Luca or his father like I did. It didn't matter what Luca did. He was untouchable. And he'd find a way to hurt Rowan too.

I needed to keep quiet, and it would eventually go away.

If we all just stayed quiet, it would be okay.



I SAT ON THE KITCHEN COUNTER, WATCHING MY MATE FLIT about, making us dinner. Rowan placed two perfectly cooked steaks on one plate, then started cutting them up. He pierced a piece with a fork, then held it up to me. I smiled, opening my mouth and letting him feed me.

All the tension from this morning was gone. After my mom returned from her delivery, he took me home. I was grateful when he didn't tell her how I had panicked. Thankfully, he seemed to believe my stupid story about getting spooked from being alone.

Once we arrived home, Rowan stripped me naked, then bathed me, caressing every inch of my body. Afterward, he placed me in my nest and sunk into my body, loving me slow and soft, then hard and passionate. His knot still pulsed inside me as he moved us onto our sides, holding me tight against his chest. He purred, pulling me into a deep sleep.

Since waking about an hour ago, all I could think about was how lucky I was. My fierce, protective mate, intent on making me happy.

I admired Rowan's powerful body while he cooked. His muscles flexed as he moved, his abs tight and tempting.

"Does it taste okay?" Rowan asked.

My gaze moved up to his face as I swallowed. The memory of how hard he made me come this afternoon still played out in my mind. “It’s very good.”

I had no idea if it was good.

“Lily,” he said, his tone a little firmer, “it’s my job to take care of you.”

“And you’ve done a wonderful job.” His lips were so tempting, his skillful tongue hidden behind them.

“I haven’t,” he said firmly. The desire gathering between my thighs died at his sharp tone. I didn’t know what to say. How could he think he was anything but perfect?

Rowan sat the fork down. It clattered against the plate. “Is there a reason you don’t want to tell me things? Have I done something that makes you think you can’t be honest with me?” He watched my expression carefully. “What happened at the bakery?”

“My mother struggled for years to have pups,” I blurted out, needing something to satisfy his curiosity. “She and my father tried for so long to have young. And this morning she asked me if we were trying. Then she left to make a delivery, and I started thinking. What if I can’t have pups?” My voice dropped, struggling to look into his eyes. My words were honest but still a lie at the same time. “If I can’t give you young, will you leave me?”

“Lily.” He said my name so softly, pulling me to his firm chest. I nuzzled between his pecs, letting his cedar scent wash over me. “I will always want you no matter what.”

“But what if it’s passed on? What if I have the same problem my mom did, and I can’t give you pups?”

It was all true. They were fears I had since I was young, and my mother told me stories of how I was her miracle baby. It was clear she believed they were sweet stories, meant to show how special I was to her, but they just scared me. After I presented as an omega, they scared me even more. Betas were still skilled and useful when they couldn’t have young. Barren



omegas had no purpose or meaning. We were meant to birth babies.

Rowan pulled back, placing his hand at the base of my throat. “If we never have pups, I will die buried in bliss at being able to spend my life with you. I want *you*, Lily. Not what you can give me. Just you.” He bumped his nose to mine, kissing my lips softly. “If we have a dozen pups, I will thank the Moon for such a blessing. If we have one pup, I will spoil her rotten. If we have no pups, I’ll be forced to spoil *you* rotten.” He grinned, and I couldn’t help but smile too.

“Her?” My chest warmed at his words, and my heart swelled with my growing love for my mate. “You think we’ll have a girl?”

“I hope for a girl. One with your eyes and hair and sweet face and lovely temperament and kind heart.”

“Will she have nothing of you?”

“If the Moon loves me, she will bless us with a pup that is all you. She won’t force a poor youngin to look like this.” He motioned at himself as if he wasn’t the sexiest alpha in all of Madra.

I bit my bottom lip and shook my head. “You are ridiculous if you think you aren’t a very impressive beast.”

Leaning in, he pressed his mouth to mine, kissing me softly at first, then deepening it. His tongue moved possessively with mine, his big hand cupping my cheek. How did he always make me feel so loved and cherished?

He broke the kiss, channeling his fingers through my hair. “You keep too much inside you.” He pressed a finger between my brows, easing the lines away. “You worry too much. I want to take the reason for these little lines away.”

I sighed hard, wishing he could. “I know.”

“No more battling your mind alone,” he said a little firmer as if scolding me. But he wasn’t. He was horrible at punishing me. “Let me care for you.”

“I promise.” I rested my chin against his chest, looking up at him. His dark eyes sparkled down at me. My words were true. I would be better at letting him protect me, but it was also my job to protect him. Even from Luca. “I’ll let you care for me.”

Rowan kissed my nose, then continued feeding me. My tummy was full and happy, a sleepy sensation washing over me. My mate collected the dirty dishes, setting them in the sink.

I twisted my hands together before finally deciding to ask the question that had been burning inside me all day. “Alpha?”

Rowan hummed in response.

“Is it hard to move up in the ranks as a guard?”

He turned, leaning against the counter. “It’s not hard if you are willing to work for it. Why?”

I paused, trying to word my question just right so he wouldn’t be suspicious. “If you wanted to be a member of the Pack Alpha’s personal guard, would it take you long?”

He crossed his arms. “Why are you asking?”

“I heard the Pack Alpha had an opening and was looking to fill it. I was just curious how long something like that might take.”

Rowan scratched at the scruff along his jaw. “It’s hard to say. If Caz has an alpha with the training ready to slip into the role, it can be filled immediately. If he doesn’t it can take months of trials and tests to find the right wolf. Are you wanting me to apply—”

“No!” I said quickly, hoping I hadn’t offended him. “I would never tell you what to do with your work. I really was just curious. Summer and I were talking about it.”

I tried to force happiness through our bond. The fake emotion made me feel a bit nauseous, but it was all I could do to hide the fear washing over me. Months. It might take *months* for Luca to get the job, and until then, he would be watching me and maybe even Rowan.

“You promised,” Rowan’s deep voice broke through my thoughts. He narrowed his eyes. “What’s going on in that beautiful brain of yours.”

I hesitated for only a moment, then I cracked—just a bit. “I heard Luca was trying for the position. A lot of power comes with being so close to the Pack Alpha, and if he gets it—”

“No,” Rowan’s voice was harsh and loud, making me flinch. He placed a long finger under my chin, forcing me to look up at him. “I forbid you from ever thinking about that fucker ever again.”

I opened my mouth to argue, but I could sense him warring with his wolf, so I closed it, saying nothing.

“Omega,” he cleared his throat, trying to calm down, “I cannot change what happened to you, but I can protect you going forward. Luca is not your problem anymore. He’s mine. And right now, the best thing for us is for him to get that job.”

I jerked at his words, not understanding. “How can you say that?”

“Luca has spent his whole life protected by his father’s status. I guarantee Caz has no idea of the shit he’s pulled. But working so closely with him, Caz will see through Luca’s bullshit. It’ll only be a matter of time before he’s branded a rogue and out on his ass.”

“But,” I whispered, “what if he doesn’t get the job?”

“Does it matter?”

I shook my head, twisting my fingers together. “No, I was just curious.”

“No more thinking about that fucker.” He picked me up, locking my ankles around his hips. “I need to fuck you again. Maybe spank this ass for being too unruly with your thoughts.” He smacked my bare bottom, making me squeal, before laying me in my nest.

EIGHT

## TWO MONTHS LATER

Rowan



I DIPPED my fingers deep into Lily's tight cunt, humming at the drenched feel of her. "Look at all that cum inside you," I growled, watching it squish up around my fingers. She nodded, still delirious from the force of her last orgasm. "Do you need more?"

She bucked her hips in response. "Please," she whined.

I chuckled, thrilled at her insatiable appetite. Her craving for my seed had been out of control lately. She needed me near her, beside her, inside her at all times. And I allowed the change in my mate to feed my hopes. Even my mother noticed the changes in Lily, pointing out her increased appetite and sleepy demeanor.

"Rowan," Lily groaned, digging her fingernails into my shoulders. "Your cock. Give me your cock."

I growled deep in my chest, eager to give her what she needed. Gripping her hips, I rutted forward, filling her in one fierce thrust. She gasped, then moaned, exposing her neck to me.

“Fuck,” I gritted out, already on the verge of coming. The things this little omega did to me.

Looking down at her flushed body, I stared at where we were connected, moving my hand between us. I rubbed Lily’s swollen clit, then moved lower to where my cock was stuffed inside her. I traced her stretched flesh, feeling both her and my shaft at the same time.

I snapped my hips hard, and her pussy clenched tight around me. Her sweet scent heightened as she screamed, coming apart almost instantly. Slick gushed, pushing out around my expanding knot and dripping over my balls.

“Look at you coming so sweetly for me,” I growled, pounding into her. My knot pulsed, and my balls tightened, ready to come. I let out a vicious roar, then sank my fangs deep into my mate’s soft throat, reclaiming her.

Her body tensed beneath me, shaking hard. “Rowan,” she whispered, a soft whimper leaving her throat.

I removed my fangs, lapping at her skin. “What is it, my love?” I asked as I continued to pump my orgasm inside her wet heat, filling her to bursting.

“I’m hungry.”

I chuckled, and my cock flexed inside her, making her hiss. “I promise I will feed you the second my knot goes down.” I kissed her cheek, unable to help the pure bliss thrumming in my veins.

“What?” Lily whispered, her eyes finally focusing on my face. “Why are you smiling like that?”

“I think before we head to the festival, we should go to the infirmary first.”

Lily’s eyes went wide, and she placed her hands on both sides of my face. “What’s wrong? Are you sick? Hurt?”

“No.” I kissed her lips. “I think having them check you over might be a good idea.”

Her brows pulled together. “I’m not sick, though. I know I’ve been kind of sleepy lately, but I feel fine.”

“You’ve also been hungry and needy,” I paused, hoping I wouldn’t offend her, “and a little moody.”

Her mouth pulled tight, and her eyes narrowed. “I’m not moody or needy,” she said, her usually sweet tone edging sharp. “I’ve just felt a little off lately. It’s not very nice of you to—”

I kissed her to shut her up. Her lips were tight against mine, but she slowly eased as I kissed and nuzzled her. “You’re not hearing me,” I whispered against her lips. I moved my hand between us, touching her stomach. “You’ve been feeling a little off?” I gave her a pointed look, smiling as her eyes went wide.

“Do you think...Could I be...” She covered her mouth, tears gathering in her beautiful eyes. Then she laughed. “I might be pregnant?”

“I don’t want to get your hopes up, but—”

Lily crashed her mouth to mine. Pure joy flowed through our bond like a river. Tears slipped out the corners of her eyes, falling into her hair and over my fingers.

“Rowan,” she squeaked, pressing her cheek to mine and holding me close, “I hope it’s true. I want it more than anything.”

And so did I.

Despite Lily’s promise a few months back about being more open and honest, she had been agitated and closed off. Since that day when she freaked out in the bakery, she rarely left the house unless I was with her.

Thankfully, Mina and Summer were very sweet, taking turns visiting her almost every day. They kept Lily relaxed and distracted while I worked long hours at the packhouse.

I just hoped a pup would help ease her back to normal.



LILY PRACTICALLY FLOATED AS WE LEFT THE INFIRMARY. SHE walked with a euphoric look on her face. Her small hands stayed firmly over her belly as if trying to cradle the life growing inside her. She looked so happy. I wanted to keep her this way forever.

“I need to tell our parents.” She turned her dreamy expression to me. “My mother might die of happiness.”

I pulled Lily in front of me, pressing her back to my chest, then wrapped my arms around her. Placing my hands on her flat stomach, I whispered in her ear. “I can’t wait for this belly to be big and round.”

“Me too.” She placed her hands over mine.

“You look happy,” Mina said as she strolled toward us. Her little dress bounced up as she walked, Ivor’s eyes squarely on her ass. “What are you smiling about?”

Lily looked over her shoulder at me, biting her bottom lip. I whispered, “You tell whoever you want, my mate.”

“I’m pregnant!” she blurted out.

Mina’s mouth fell open with shock, then flung her arms around Lily, pulling her from me. The two omegas squealed and laughed, fawning over my mate’s tiny tummy. Ivor shook my hand, immediately saying he hoped the Moon would curse us with twins. I laughed, silently liking the idea.

We made our way toward the town square. Lily sought out her parents, finding them near the feasting table, setting out baskets filled with rolls. My overly excited mate ran to them, pulling each into a tight hug. The moment she told her mother we were expecting, the beta burst into tears. Which, of course, made Lily cry too. Beta Samuels smiled wide at his mate and



daughter as they hugged and cried, and I couldn't help but do the same.

“What's going on?” Summer asked, stepping up next to me. Lily was too wrapped up in her mother's affections to hear anything else.

“They're going to have a pup,” Mina said.

Summer laughed, then slapped me on the back. “Good luck with that.”

I narrowed my eyes at the small, blonde omega, then glanced around. “Where is your escort? How is no one ever with you?”

“They're over there.” She gave a lazy wave in no particular direction.

“Summer,” I said, feeling a little fatherly, “you need to be careful. There are lots of alphas that would snatch up an unclaimed omega like yourself.”

“Like him?” Summer shot, motioning to the fountain near the temple.

I turned, and my whole body went tight. Luca walked along the edge of the square, his eyes firmly on my mate. My fangs punched forward, not caring for the look in his eyes.

“Luca is so creepy.” Mina pushed into Ivor's side.

Summer snorted, crossing her arms. “Why are all the advisor's sons so weird?”

“I'm an advisor's son,” I said, raising my brows at the omega's assessment.

Her smile grew, her cocky grin consuming her whole face. “I know.”

I shook my head at her boldness. “One day, someone is going to put you in your place.”

“Maybe, but until that day comes, I intend to spend every moment having fun.” She grabbed Lily's hand, pulling my mate and Mina toward the center square to dance.

The omegas had a wonderful time laughing, eating and drinking. Lily stuck with water, radiating pure joy as she declined more than one drink. Every time she came near me, my hands gravitated to her stomach, making her giggle and blush.

The sun set and the festival grew and the music became more lively as the drinks flowed. Sitting at a small table, Ivor and I watched our mates closely while they danced and laughed.

“Sir.” Nix’s familiar voice made me look over my shoulder. He looked tense.

“Are you on duty tonight?” I asked, noticing the way he was scanning the crowd.

“No.” He took a seat next to Ivor. “I’ve just been keeping an eye on everyone.” I nodded, understanding. It was hard to turn off the instinct to protect the pack when off duty. “Luca has been acting odd this evening. He’s pacing the perimeter of the square and seems to keep glaring at you. Or at least in your direction.”

Ivor let out a bitter laugh. “Doesn’t surprise me. I heard he was kicked out of the packhouse yesterday.”

“What for?” I asked, scanning the crowd. I found Luca standing near the temple, arms crossed and scowling at no one in particular.

Ivor spoke loudly, not caring who overheard. “Apparently, he actually thought he’d qualify for a job working with Alpha Caz’s family on merit alone. We all know Luca relies on his father to secure everything for him. But the fucker didn’t have enough grit to qualify. My dad said Luca acted like a common rogue when he found out. Almost tried to challenge his own father for not doing enough.”

I narrowed my eyes at the fucker, noticing how his glare pushed through the crowd, straight to Lily. It made my hackles rise, and I stood.

“Want me to go talk to him?” Ivor asked, cracking his knuckles.

“No.” I edged around the table, trying to remain calm. “I’ve got it.”

The crowd parted as I marched toward Luca. Several alphas stopped to see who I was glaring at. I was a few feet from the fucker before he even noticed me. He had shit instincts and no business protecting our Pack Alpha’s family.

“What the fuck do you want?” he shot, puffing out his chest to look bigger. He had a few inches on me, but he was lanky. Wiry muscle. Easy to subdue.

“I want to know why the fuck you’re looking at my mate like that.”

His eyes flashed red, his fingers flexing with heavy claws. I prayed he was dumb enough to attack me in front of the whole pack. It would get him out of my village once and for all. His father couldn’t protect him with so many witnessing his violence firsthand.

“She looks pretty happy over there,” he said in a forcefully controlled voice. “I heard Charis gushing to my mother that you’re expecting.”

I snarled, not caring for the way his teeth flashed as he spoke. “Don’t fucking talk about my mate.”

His shitty grin pulled tighter, and I reminded myself that I couldn’t lose control. Not in the middle of the town square.

“You might want to make sure it’s yours.”

My blood pounded in my ears, and my muscles strained to react, but the sound of pups squealing and omegas laughing kept me grounded. The pack danced and mingled behind me—my mate one of them.

My bond with Lily twisted as she sensed my tense emotions. I immediately sent her soft reassurances, concentrating as hard as I fucking could so she wouldn’t feel my growing rage.

“Be careful, Luca,” I snarled. “One day, you’ll fuck with the wrong omega, and your daddy won’t be able to save you.”

His lips twitched, pointed fangs on full display. I readied myself, feeling his attack coming. But then his eyes pushed past me, and his expression softened. He smiled wide, then shrugged. “I have no interest in picking fights with welps.”

Ivor’s familiar presence moved at my right. Nix on my left.

“See you around, Rowan.” Luca clicked his tongue, walking off. He tried to move slowly as if not having a care in the world, but his fists were still curled tight.

I kept my eyes on him, not turning away until he disappeared behind the sewing cottage.

“Where’s Lily?” I spun, scanning the crowd.

“There.” Nix gave a jerk of his head. “I’ve kept her in my periphery. She’s dancing with Summer and Mina.”

I followed his gaze, finding my gorgeous mate, twirling and laughing. Her silky black hair swung around her shoulders, falling into her eyes.

She looked so carefree and beautiful.

And I’d fucking kill anyone that tried to steal her joy away from her.

NINE

# THE TOWN SQUARE

Lily



“YOU’RE GONNA GET SO BIG!” Mina teased, poking my side. I sighed at the thought, smiling so wide my cheeks hurt.

“Will you still work at the bakery?” Summer threaded her fingers through the tangles in my hair. It felt good, exposing the back of my sweaty neck to the warm summer air.

“I don’t think so.” I leaned into Summer’s touch. “I like being home.”

“You like waiting for your stud to get home,” Mina snorted, fanning herself with a small stack of napkins.

My mother caught my attention out of the corner of my eye, holding up a glass of water. She lifted it, indicating I needed to drink. I smiled at her, picking up my cup and taking a quick sip. She nodded in approval and then went back to chatting with her friends. Both my parents were smiling just as much as me. Even my father was a little more relaxed, saying he was officially old and ready to retire.

It was all so perfect.

But the nagging feeling that it could all end crawled out of the darkest parts of my mind. I scanned the area looking for Rowan. He was very irritated earlier, and I needed to see his face to make sure he was okay.

Sensing me, Rowan sent a warm pulse of happiness through our mating bond. My sexy alpha stood on the other side of the dance floor, his heated gaze directly on me. He tapped between his brows, and I relaxed my expression, smiling.

Feeling a little flirty, I rushed to him, flinging myself into his arms. He laughed deep, holding me to his sexy, bare chest.

“Are you having fun?” he asked, his deep voice tingling my spine.

“Very much. Dance with me?”

He gave me a sheepish smile, nodding. He was a horrible dancer and it made me love him even more.

Well after midnight, after all the pups had been dragged home by tired parents and all the whiskey ran dry, Rowan finally declared it bedtime. I kissed my friends, and all our parents on their cheeks then took my mate’s hand.

I was exhausted. It might have been my imagination, but my stomach felt a little heavier like I needed extra rest for the little bun growing inside me.

Without waiting for Rowan to offer, I raised my arms, silently asking him to pick me up. The desire to have him as close as possible was intense. His forearm hitched under my bottom, pulling me up, so my legs dangled on either side of his hips. I pushed my nose into the warm column of his throat, humming as his rich, warm scent enveloped me completely.

Rowan cupped my bottom, smoothing his palm from one side to the other, then up my back. And before I knew it, I was asleep.



I ROLLED OVER, AND THE SUN CUT A FIERCE BEAM ACROSS MY face, burning through the back of my eyelids. Groaning, I moved back onto my side. The bed was cool to the touch on Rowan's side, and the house was very quiet. Sitting up, I was a little disappointed that he hadn't woken me before going to work. I missed him already. He had stayed home for the last week, helping me clean and nest. I wasn't very far along, but the desire to have every inch of the house smell like me and my mate was intense.

Grabbing my robe, I headed toward the kitchen, happy to find a plate of fruit and fresh bread on the table. It made me smile. My sweet mate, taking care of us.

I placed my hand on my belly, imagining the teeny life blossoming inside me. Was it a boy? A girl? Alpha? Omega? Or maybe even a beta?

There were so many unknowns, and I couldn't wait to meet the little pup.

After washing the dishes and wiping down the counter, I moved to the bedroom, ready to strip the bed. The sheets were overdue for a cleaning and needed to be re-scented. I had an arm full of pillows when the front door creaked open. I suppressed a squeal and hurried down the hall, excited to have Rowan home early.

I stepped into the living room, and shock ripped through me.

Luca stood in the doorway, scanning the sitting area, then the kitchen, before seeing me. His eyes met mine, and his fists curled tight. I jerked to run, racing back toward the bedroom. Luca's heavy feet were right behind me, his angry snarls echoing in my ears. I grabbed the edge of the bedroom door,



but before I could slam it shut, Luca's big hand slapped against the soft wood, forcing it back open with a thwack.

"Rowan is on his way home right now!" I screamed, fear making my voice crack.

Suddenly, my left eye stung and watered, followed by the distinct taste of blood in my mouth.

It took far too long to realize Luca had slapped me, and I was now on the floor. I closed my eyes and screamed through my mating bond, begging Rowan to come home. His intense power pulsed through me, letting me know he was on his way.

Luca grabbed my upper arm, squeezing tight as he forced me to my feet. His anger was so thick it made my hands shake uncontrollably as he crowded me against the wall.

Unable to stop my body from submitting to him, I displayed the back of my neck. "What do you want?" I whispered, hating how weak and small I was.

"I just wanted to see you." He stepped even closer, pressing his nose into my hair.

Keeping my eyes down, I whispered, "I kept my promise. I didn't say anything. I—"

Luca growled, cutting me off. "I don't give a shit about that." He squeezed my upper arms tight. "Do you have any idea how bad you've fucked me up?"

Shaking my head, I didn't understand. "I didn't..." my voice slipped away, a high-pitched whine taking its place. I was so confused.

"You've destroyed me." He fisted my hair, jerking my head back, forcing me to look at him. His face was twisted with so much rage. "That day in the forest, when you tempted me. Until that moment, I was normal. I was happy." He smiled. The expression was pained and forced. "I wanted to be a guard like my dad and have a family. All the normal shit younglings are supposed to want. But since the second I scented you, it fucked with my wolf so thoroughly, it broke me. *You* broke me. Even when I lost the position at the packhouse, all I could think about was you."

He wrapped a clawed hand around my neck and squeezed, watching my face with rapt attention. Then he whispered so softly I almost didn't hear him, "Nothing else in my life matters. Only you. We are fated, Lily."

Shock stole my ability to think properly. "No," I whispered.

"We are," he said as if stating a fact. "I have thought about you and dreamt about you countless times in the last ten years. Every girl I have kissed has fallen short compared to you. They didn't taste as sweet or feel as soft." He slowly traced my mating bite, then he brushed his thumb right over it, sending a thick wave of nausea through my body.

And I lost it.

I screamed and snarled, bashing my fists against his chest, neck, and arms. He didn't even flinch. He was a statue of terror, growing roots in my house and in my head.

He would forever torment me.

"You belong to me," he growled, tightening his grip on my throat.

"Fuck you!" I screamed as loud as I could, my wolf snarling and snapping within me. "I don't belong to you! I am Rowan's mate. I'm carrying his pup! And if you ever come near me again, I will kill you!"

Another sharp slap to my cheek made my head spin, and my throat tightened, spit flooding my mouth. Forcing myself to focus, I settled my feet, then swung my knee up as hard and fast as I could, hitting him directly in the balls.

Luca doubled over, grunting hard. I stumbled back, desperately looking for a way to escape. A deep, guttural noise rattled from Luca's heaving chest. He panted hard as he forced himself to look up at me. His eyes were bright red, and his long fangs were fully distended.

I was trapped.

Placing my hands over my stomach, I squared my shoulders, ready to fight with everything I had...even though I

already knew it would be a losing battle.

A dark figure appeared in the doorway, and I let out a deep breath of relief.

Rowan's eyes locked on Luca's back, and I swore my mate doubled in size. Rowan was a mass of muscle and rage. He looked so terrifying I was almost scared to move. He roared, and I cringed, covering my ears. Luca spun, facing my mate.

Both alphas crouched to attack, and I dropped to the floor, pushing myself under the bed. The vicious sound of fists on flesh and pained grunts filled the room. I trembled, curling into myself.

My heartbeat pounded in my temples, and snot poured down my face as I sobbed. Cradling my stomach, I prayed to the Moon, begging her to help Rowan. I sucked down a painful gust of air, then froze, realizing the fighting had stopped.

I brushed my hair out of my face, shocked to see several pairs of feet in my bedroom. Two alphas were being dragged out of the room, several pairs of feet following them. Someone stepped up to the end of the bed, then they kneeled.

I hissed, growling low in my throat. I didn't want to see anyone but Rowan.

"Lily?" Nix's familiar voice drifted toward me, and I instantly relaxed. He settled onto his hands and knees, and his dark eyes framed by messy brown hair came into view. "It's safe to come out, omega."

Desperately needing to see my mate, I grabbed Nix's outstretched hand, letting him pull me out from under the bed. I stayed close to him as we walked through the house and out the front door.

"Rowan!" I yelled, running to my alpha, but Nix grabbed my hand, stopping me.

"He's still lost to his wolf right now," he warned. "Let him settle first."

I wanted to protest that Rowan would never hurt me, but he was right. Rowan fought like a beast against the two guards trying to hold him in place. He struggled and jerked, growling and cursing at a bloody mass not far from our porch.

Luca was slumped in the dirt, panting hard as if he couldn't catch his breath. His hand covered his throat, blood gushing out from between his fingers. His head rolled toward me, and his eyes widened as they focused on my face. He opened his mouth, but nothing came out. More blood poured from his wound, a river cascading down his bruised chest.

“Lily?” Nix said, making me turn away from Luca. “Can I pick you up and carry you to the infirmary?”

“But Rowan...” I pointed at my still feral mate. Ivor had joined the other guards, trying to get him under control.

“He'll be okay,” Nix said. “But he'll kick my ass if I don't make sure you're okay first.” He smiled sweetly at me, looking like the young pup I had grown up with. Without saying a word, I simply held up my arms, letting him carry me.



IT FELT LIKE AN ETERNITY WAITING FOR ROWAN TO ARRIVE AT the infirmary, but when he finally did, he insisted the healer check me over again with him present. The poor beta agreed to his ridiculous request.

“Your mate is okay, alpha,” Healer Stace said, placing a few herbs in a metal tin. “The bruise on her eye will probably be ugly when it finishes blooming, but don't let that worry you. Lily needs to take it easy for a while. Nothing strenuous. And I mean nothing.” She narrowed her eyes, giving Rowan a pointed look.

“Of course,” he said quickly, caressing my stomach. His knuckles were cracked, and dried blood was splattered up and

down his arms. Even though I knew it wasn't his, it was still a terrifying sight.

“Drink this tea tonight to help you sleep.” Healer Stace placed the tin into my hand. “Make him wait on you hand and foot.” She gave me a little wink.

I forced a smile. Everyone's soft tones and light comments were making me feel worse. I knew they were all scared I'd fall into complete distress, but it was stupid not to acknowledge what just happened. Luca could have killed me or the pup.

*He still could...*

“I'm so proud of you,” Rowan said the moment Healer Stace wandered away. “You looked so brave and fearless when I got to the bedroom. You kept yourself safe until I got there.”

“I didn't,” I whispered, rubbing my stomach. “Luca could have—”

Rowan quickly shushed me, cupping my cheeks. “You did. You protected our pup.”

I scrunched up my face. There was no point arguing with the alpha when he was like this. “What's going to happen to Luca?” I asked, unable to think about anything else. How long would it be before he turned up in my living room again?

Without a word, Rowan picked me up, carrying me out of the infirmary. Confused, I looked over his shoulder toward the cabins, wondering why he was taking me through the market. But before I could ask, the crowd thinned, and Dage appeared. He looked worn and old. Like he had lived a thousand lives since the last time I saw him. The older alpha marched past Rowan, glaring at him hard. Then Dage's eyes shifted to me. He looked almost sad...or ashamed? But before I could figure it out, he turned his head, walking past us.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

Rowan kept his eyes front. “You need to see this.”

Most of the crowd was gone by the time we reached the big iron gate, but a few younger alphas stood around with their

arms crossed, watching the fuss.

Luca lay in a heap next to the main gate. His eyes were open, not focusing on anything. A mangled gash covered the length of his throat, but no blood pulsed out of it anymore.

“Is he dead?” I asked, unable to believe it.

“Yes,” Rowan snarled, holding me a little tighter. “And he died trying to hurt a member of our pack, so his body will rot in the wildlands.” Rowan looked down at me, his dark eyes holding so much emotion. “You’re safe.”

I had no idea what to say.

I wasn’t happy or relieved or angry. I was just numb.

After a moment, Rowan turned to take me back home. I stared over his shoulder, watching as a guard heaved Luca’s limp body over his shoulder. A few others guards followed as they left the village, taking my nightmare with them.

I settled my hands over my stomach and let out a long, slow breath.

I was finally safe.

## EPILOGUE

Rowan



I RAN AS FAST as I could, hitting the porch of our little cabin and slamming my shoulder into the door. I spun, frantically searching for the healer, but not seeing her anywhere. She was supposed to be right behind me!

“Beta Tiff?” I yelled, panicked. “TIFF!”

“Right here, you beast. Calm down.” The middle-aged woman hustled over the hill, huffing and sweating. I raced back and picked her up. “I told you back at the infirmary. I don’t need to be carried!” She smacked me in the face with her bag, but I ignored her.

Once inside the cabin, I set the beta on her feet and made my way to the spare room—the pup’s room. Lily sat in the center of her nest, cradling her big belly. She groaned and moaned, rocking forward onto her hands and knees. Her mother sat behind her, rubbing her back and humming softly.

“She’s here! The midwife’s here!” I said far too loudly. Charis smiled sweetly and gestured for me to speak softer.

Tiff sat down in front of Lily and slowly opened her bag. I wanted to scream at her for moving so slow. “Can I get you to

sit as straight up as you can, sweetie? I just need to check on the progress of your pup.”

I settled next to my mate, helping her to lean back against her mother. Lily’s swollen belly seemed to tighten and squeeze, the pup eager to come into this world. It was such an amazing and odd sight.

The midwife placed a hand between Lily’s legs, causing my mate to whine in discomfort.

“You’re doing so good, baby,” Charis whispered, smoothing Lily’s hair away from her face. “So good, my sweet pup.”

I felt useless.

The adrenaline pumping through my body was insatiable. My wolf wanted to kill a bear, swim across the ocean, and split the center of the earth. Something other than just sitting and watching my mate writhe in agony while doing fucking nothing.

“Oh, yes,” Beta Tiff nodded. She removed her hand, and I jerked, my senses overflowing at the blood on her fingers. “Calm down, alpha.” Tiff wiped the mess off. She placed her hands on her knees and leaned toward me with a stern glare. “Birthing pups is hard. Your omega will be in a lot of pain, and there will be a bit of blood. You will not turn into an uncaged beast in this room. Do you understand?”

My wolf bristled at her tone, but I nodded, unwilling to say or do anything that might put Lily at risk. I needed this midwife focused entirely on my mate. Not me.

Lily let out a sharp whine that melted into a long groan. She squeezed my hand as I willed her to pour every drop of pain coursing through her body into me.

“I know, sweetie. I know.” Charis reached over and patted my arm. “Rowan, move here. Take my spot.”

She shifted, allowing me to slip behind my mate. Lily rolled forward onto her hands and knees again, rocking and grunting. Charis grabbed my hands and placed them on Lily’s lower back, forcing me to squeeze her tense muscles.



I rubbed and caressed and massaged every damn place I could reach. Gauging all of Lily's sounds and movements, I applied more pressure when needed and jumped back when she snapped at me for touching her too much. The whole process was exhausting and awful, and I couldn't help but wonder why any intelligent wolf would ever choose to do this more than once. And the pup wasn't even here yet!

The day wore on, and night quickly fell. My wolf wallowed within me, unable to take the sight of our omega in so much pain. Watching her sweet face, flushed and puffy, etched with agony and tears. It was the most horrible thing I had ever endured.

But then, just before dawn, the most amazing thing happened.

"That's it," Tiff whispered, helping Lily into a deep squat.

I sat just behind her, my hands hovering near her hips, too scared to actually touch her. I had been snapped at far too many times for being too close. Then for not being close enough. Then too close again. I waited patiently for Lily to tell me what to do.

"I see a head!" Charis squealed, angling herself down to see under her daughter.

"Yeah?" I wanted to yell how excited I was the pup had a head, but thankfully I just laughed, too fucking excited to get any other words out.

"That's it, Lily. One more good push."

Lily let out a guttural growl, then a sharp yip. She bared down and her whole body shook hard.

Beta Tiff jumped into action, reaching for the baby's head. I leaned back to see what she was doing. She unwrapped a bloody cord from around the pup's neck, then nodded at me. "You're going to help her lay back here in a second, alpha."

I nodded, ready for my next orders.

"Lily," Tiff said, "with the next sharp pain, I want you to push very hard. Just once more. That's it."

There was a horrible moment of silence as we all stared at my exhausted mate. She kept her head down, breathing steady, rocking gently on her feet.

Then she pushed.

Lily fell back against me as her hands instinctively went for the pup. She pulled the tiny babe up and against her chest. Beta Tiff threw a thin cloth over the pup, then rubbed its back vigorously. Her brutal movements made my fangs lengthen. She was being far too rough for such a slight creature. The pup let out a strangled cry, then learned quickly to use the full volume of its lungs, letting all of Madra hear its displeasure.

“There we are.” Tiff smiled.

Charis let out a deep breath, her hands over her heart.

“Boy or girl?” Lilly asked, wiping the pup’s face and cooing softly.

Charis lifted the edge of the blanket. “Boy,” she smiled.

I beamed. I couldn’t help it. We had a boy.



AFTER ANOTHER HOUR OF WAITING FOR SOME REALLY disgusting stuff to come out of my mate, Tiff walked Lily through a few basics of caring for our new son and reminded me of my duties as a mate. I’d normally snap at anyone that dared to presume I didn’t know how to care for Lily, but I was far too happy, nodding like a simpleton.

After Tiff left, Charis cooed and kissed the pup while I helped Lily clean herself. After cooking a meal and kissing the pup one more time, Charis headed home, giving us some privacy.

The three of us snuggled into the now clean and freshly made nest. Lily had scented the blankets beforehand, making

sure they were covered in a soft mixture of both our scents, letting our son get to know us. I spooned Lily, leaning over her to stare at our sweet little boy.

Pups didn't present until the age of twelve or thirteen, but some pups were born with characteristics of their status so clear you could almost instantly tell what they would be. And this sweet pup was most definitely an omega.

Everything from his tiny toes to his fluttering eyelashes and milky scent screamed omega. And I had never been so fucking happy.

"What's his name, alpha?" Lily kissed his little head for the hundredth time. I couldn't blame her. The smell of new life was like nothing else on this earth.

"Endon?"

"This is serious," she frowned. "Pick a real name."

"Endon is a real name. I knew a very trustworthy troll named Endon."

"I will not let my young be named after a troll." She raised her brows to convey the seriousness of the situation.

"My apologies." I held up a hand in surrender, not wanting to argue after seeing what she was capable of enduring. I was convinced Lily could be turned inside out and continue to live.

"Finn?"

She made a face.

"Ashor?"

She shook her head.

I suppressed the urge to groan and quickly went through the mental list of all the names I had thought of. It was a pack tradition to let the father name the baby, but it was also common knowledge that the person that birthed the pup had the final say. And after seeing what Lily went through, I couldn't agree more.

"Tate?"

Lily gasped. “Tate.” She leaned down, pressing several small kisses along his cheeks, lips, and nose. “Do you like that? Do you want to be Tate?”

The pup let out a soft gurgle and his little arms startled.

“Oh, he just loves it,” Lily declared, fixing the small blanket around him.

I leaned down and kissed her shoulder, watching my mate dote on our pup. He had a little button nose, a few little wisps of black hair, and his lips were drawn in the softest pout.

He was his mother.

He was perfect.



IF YOU’D LIKE TO READ **IVOR** AND **MINA’S** STORY, A WINTER Gift, you can find it [here](#).

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## THANK YOU FOR READING!

It means so much to me that you read my little book. I hope you enjoyed this story as much as I enjoyed writing it. If you did, it would be so lovely if you could write a short review on your favorite book website. Reviews are so important for authors and even just a single line can make a big difference. Thank you so much!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kitt lives in Oklahoma with her husband and stacks on stacks on stacks of fantasy books. She writes not-so-exciting technical things in her “real” job but lives for the evenings when she can visit her paper friends in their magical worlds.

She is obsessed with fantasy, fairylands, love stories, and horror in general. If you dig these things then you might enjoy her books. You can find pictures of her sweet puppies, her coffee obsession, and the ridiculous things she says to keep herself motivated on her Instagram @kittlynnauthor.

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