

A woman with long, flowing green hair stands on a sandy beach at night. She is wearing a green strapless tube top with a silver ring detail and a long, green, high-slit skirt with a silver ring at the waist. The background features a large, bright full moon, a dark sky with stars, and a glowing volcano in the distance. Two dragons are flying in the sky, and a shark is visible in the turquoise water. The overall scene is fantastical and dramatic.

Watering Stone

VIOLA GRACE

♡ Betas In Waiting

Bumping into her ex-boyfriend ten years later was unexpected, but having their attraction flare and include two other alphas was shocking, even without the dragons.

Eliana was travelling to become her friend's nanny. The journey on the private plane was long, but the presence of a familiar face made it an eternity.

Ten years earlier, her then-boyfriend had marked her and left town. It had been a shocking turn of events. He had told her he loved her, then morphed into a dragon and pressed fire onto her back. Efforts by friends had stilled the fire in her and left the mark hollow, and now... here he was with two friends, and they were all staring at her.

Life as a nanny was short. Keahi, Nalu, and Mano all began courting her, and her new boss decided that she could start later or not at all.

Dealing with a decade-long hurt was difficult. Dealing with two dragons and a giant shark was easy in comparison. Can the fairy tale restart with a deep dive into the ocean, or will it sink before it swims?

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

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Watering Stone
Betas in Waiting Book 14

By

Viola Grace

Chapter One

Eliana held the bouquet as her sister said her vows to her doting fiancé. Her words transformed him into a husband. It was a lovely spell to behold.

Her sister, Gwen, smiled at her as she and her husband turned to walk down the aisle. Eliana handed her the bouquet, and the couple raced down the path together. Eliana ran next to the best man, and they joined the couple for photos with the rest of the bridal party.

The day was torture to Eliana, but she smiled, chatted, didn't punch out the groom's uncle, who pinched her butt, and ate the undefinable meal that was certified vegan. A burger was on the agenda when she left.

When she crouched by her family table, her aunt called out, "When are you going to get married, Elly? I know a few charming boys who would be perfect for you."

"No thanks, Auntie, I can guarantee they aren't my type."

"You didn't even give them a chance."

"I have a job lined up, and having a love life will just get in the way."

Her mother smiled. "What is the job, Elly?"

"I am a bodyguard and nanny for a very wealthy family on Emerald Island. They are expecting twins and need the extra help." She chuckled. "I am being flown out to them when this party is over."

Her mother spluttered a laugh. "You? A nanny?"

"I took early child development, Mom. I have degrees, and I am really good at hand-to-hand combat."

"Who is the couple?"

"It's a triad. An omega, an alpha, and a beta. They already have one baby girl, and this will overload them a little. I am going to help."

“For how long?” Her mother blinked.

“As long as they need me. Or as long as I want to be there.” She smiled. “I can surf every day, so I am thinking I want to see those kids to college.”

Her uncle laughed. “Can I be a nanny?”

“Probably.” She smiled and got up, heading for the ladies’ room.

She was intercepted by the bride. “Elly, I need you to move the gifts tonight and bring them to our place tomorrow.”

They got into the restroom, and Eliana said, “I am going to tell you again. I leave town as soon as the dancing is underway. Passport is ready and suitcase is packed. I thought Nadine was going to do it.”

Gwen stomped her foot. “I want *you* to do it.”

“Honey, I don’t work for you. I was here to make a statement that you were friendly with your family. I got Mom and the aunts to come. I even wore this damned hot wig, but you want more? No. Absolutely not.”

Gwen whined and jumped up and down.

Elly washed her hands and let her younger sister throw a tantrum. “This doesn’t work on me, Gwen. Enjoy your little dance. Oh, hey, the music is starting.” Gwen stopped her tantrum and made concerned noises as she ran back to the party. Eliana didn’t yell what she wanted to though. Gwen hadn’t washed her hands.

The bridal party had to dance, and the party kicked into gear. Eliana went through four dances and then called it a night. She kissed her mom, hugged her aunts, and took off her wig, leaving it at her place setting. The ocean green and blue hair writhed down her shoulders and waved like the tide near her knees.

She left her sister’s wedding, and only ten people seemed to realize what they were looking at. Eliana got her bag from her mother’s car and then summoned a rideshare. Time to head to the airport.

An hour later, she was sitting in the private plane waiting for a series of VIPs to arrive. She sipped at her coffee and chatted with Ven regarding the procedure when she landed. She heard voices and the thud of feet climbing the stairs. “Well, looks like my company has arrived. I look forward to seeing you again, Ven. I can’t believe you have taken to domesticity so hard.”

Ven grinned. “*Hard has something to do with it.*”

Eliana giggled. “See you soon.”

Five men stomped onto the plane and took seats in the four grouping while their extra dropped into one of the seats across the aisle. His black hair had red highlights, and Eliana tried to figure out the odds of running into him again in this lifetime. She glanced at the set of four and blinked when there was a second black-and-red head. What were the odds?

The attendant told her to buckle up, and that was when the others realized they weren’t alone. When the attendant walked up to them, one of the dark-haired men asked, “Who is she, and why is she here?”

“She is the invited passenger of the royal family.”

Eliana picked up her notebook and kept writing the story she had been working on for years. Suddenly, her teen romance had gotten some inspiration.

She had eaten her drive-thru hamburger an hour after they were in the air. Her sister had thought folks would be impressed her wedding was vegan, but her husband was vegetarian, and no one else really gave a hoot.

The attendant came by. “Can I get you anything else, miss?”

“No, Joy. Thank you. I... wait. More coffee?”

Joy laughed. “Of course. Back in a moment.”

She was on her third cup of coffee, and then a human made of heat walked by. She looked up from her mug and met his weird gaze. He could make his eyes dark brown, but right now, they were swirling orange and red.

“Elly?”

She set her coffee down. “Yes? Do I know you?”

He stared at her hair and skin and met her gaze. “You know me.”

“No. I don’t think I do.” She lifted her coffee and sipped again.

“It was ten years ago.”

“Still drawing a blank.”

“My band and I hung out at the diner you worked at on Saturday nights. We went for picnic breakfasts after your shift.”

She cocked her head. “Still don’t know who you are. Go have a seat.”

He looked outraged. “We dated for six months.”

“I dated someone. I don’t know who he was. You see, he gave me his brother’s name.”

He blinked and stepped back. “I... did?”

“You did. When you disappeared and I tried to call, he told me what you had done to keep a clingy bitch like me from following you around.” She nodded. “It was effective. I stopped. You are wrecking this very nice flight. Fuck off.”

He blinked. “He told you what?”

“What I said. Shoo. If you remain here, I will get violent, and this is a nice fancy plane, and Joy is a pleasant person. I don’t want her to have any trouble. We still have a few hours to go, so take yourself elsewhere.” She sipped her coffee and waved him off.

With effort, she returned to her book. And started scribbling.

She watched him open and close his mouth, and then he stalked back to his doppelganger. His brother seemed clueless as to the issue. The omega snorted and glanced at her with a sneer that faded. He spoke quietly, and his alpha was stunned.

Apparently, it had been settled. She had figured it out when she heard their voices. The omega's lighter voice had been the one sneering at her over the phone.

There were raised voices starting at the far end of the flight, and Joy looked nervous. Elly got up and walked to where the two alphas were fighting with the omega. She spoke softly. "Shut up. All of you. It's done. It's in the past. Sit down. You are upsetting the attendant."

The alpha she had known was staring at her. His face flushed, and he opened his mouth. She wrapped all of them in tendrils of water and shoved them into their seats. She then wrapped them in place until they stopped struggling. Her ex-boyfriend was staring at her in shock.

She looked at them. "You can discuss whatever you like when we have landed, but servers have a rough job, and you don't want to make her life awkward. Now, behave, or I will waterboard you until you are more compliant. Are we clear? You? Sparkletits. Are we clear?"

The omega looked down at his glittery shirt, and he looked up and nodded. "I am sorry. I thought he would straighten things out when he got back."

"Yeah. I am sure." She turned her back and walked to her seat.

An entire carafe of coffee, cream, and sugar was brought to her with a grateful, *Thank you*.

She recalled the water from around the other party and poured herself more coffee. "Thanks for the carafe, Joy. I live on this stuff."

"I can tell. Are you sure you don't want anything to eat?"

"Do you have something sweet?"

Joy grinned. "I do. Back in a moment."

A towering strawberry cheesecake arrived in front of her, and Eliana grinned, looking up at her. "I love you."

Joy blushed and ducked her head. "Best compliment I have had all week. You were at a wedding?"

“Aw, the tacky dress gave it away?”

“A little.”

“Yeah, my little sister got married, and as soon as I could, I got out of there.”

“How little?”

“She’s twenty-four and wants to be a mom and housewife more than anything. So, this was her entrée into playing house.”

“You don’t look happy about it.”

“My sister lived with my dad, and I lived with my mom. She went vegetarian, and I know how to make a french fry sandwich. I was able to get family to the wedding. Not even our dad showed up for her. He just paid for it.”

“Ouch.”

“Ah. She’s a brat. She even tried to give me extra tasks for after the wedding that would have delayed my arrival on the island. I was extremely specific to highlight how I was leaving tonight. She thought she could use scary bride powers to make me do what she wanted. She was mistaken.”

Joy laughed. “Well, I have to go work. Enjoy the cheesecake.”

Joy walked over to the others and got orders for food. She returned to the galley and did her thing.

The omega got up to go to the restroom, and when he came out, he walked over to her.

She finished her dessert and pushed the plate aside. Her coffee returned to her hand, and she kept writing.

“Um. Excuse me. Miss?”

She didn’t look up. “Omega?”

“Uh, I wanted to apologize for that call. I didn’t tell my alpha about it.”

Elly looked up. “I get it. I was ghosted. Right. Fuck off. I am no longer a terrified girl whose boyfriend had

suddenly disappeared. I was ghosted. I understood it after your call. It's done. It's over." She smiled. "I am all grown up. I have my own life now. He isn't in it. Shoo." She flicked her fingers, and a ball of water appeared next to his face.

The omega scuttled back to his alpha with wide, scared eyes.

She continued her coffee orgy until the inevitable happened. She got up and walked to the restroom. Once she had finished washing her hands, she opened the door, and an alpha was standing there. "Which one are you?"

He blinked. "You know I am not him?"

"Of course. It's obvious, and your eyes don't go red and orange when you look at me." She looked at him. "You have one minute before I get past you and back to my seat."

"Henry's really upset. It was ten years ago, and our bond was new. My brother had given you my card, so that is who you asked for?"

"Yup. He heard a woman, panicked, and was a jealous twit. That just confirmed that he wanted me out of his life. I was not going to chase him, so I let him go. Henry can just think about the impact of his actions." She looked at him. "Step aside."

"I really need you to listen."

She looked at him. "Then make a fucking time machine and go back ten years to when I gave a fuck."

She shoved him aside, and he was shocked. Really? They should have been more aware by now.

She walked back to her seat, and he followed her.

She stopped and turned to face him. "Get away from me."

"I have to explain. I need you to understand."

She screamed, and everyone stared. "I don't care! You are trying to make yourself feel better. Fuck off. I don't

care how you feel; I don't care what you think. I don't care about you at all. Your opinion and regret don't matter. How do I know that? Ten. Fucking. Years. You feel bad? Tough fucking luck." She prodded two fingers into his chest. "It. Nearly. Killed. Me. I kept myself alive because there was no one else. Go. Away."

She sat back in her seat.

Joy brought her a bottle of water.

Whatever his name was headed back to his seat with a stunned expression. Her ex-whatever was looking at her with sad eyes. She moved around and settled so they were at her back. She didn't need to stare at them.

Her phone pinged. She got a live call from Ven. "Hey, Venetia. How are you?"

"Super round. Uh, what's going on there?"

"Nothing. I am just stuck on a plane with my ex-boyfriend, his twin brother, and his omega. And two other dudes I haven't had a chance to yell at. Let me guess; we are all getting the same transport to the village."

"Um... yeah."

"Fine. I will walk."

"No. Can you ride a horse?"

Eliana smiled. "I can. Does the horse know where we are going?"

"Yup. Do you need a saddle?"

"Nope."

"Okay. You will get the horse. They get the carriage. I am going to have a chat with Syar."

"Ven, don't do it on my account. My past is past. I am good with that. I guess it is funny that he radiates fire, and I am water. I guess some things got lost in translation."

Ven shook her head. *"I need to know why they are here. I know they are his relatives, but I still don't know*

why they are coming.”

“You look into that, and I will pretend I am alone on the plane.”

“Big awkward hug waiting for you when you touch down.”

“Excellent. And if Syar gets any more complaints from the other passengers, I will sort them out the moment we have landed.”

“Uh, they are,” she finished in a rush, *“staying with us at the residence.”*

“Shit. Right. Well, can I bunk with the babies?”

Ven smiled. *“Sure. Pen just wakes up once in the night, so having someone there will be a good thing.”*

“And to be there for her when you are occupied producing her siblings.”

Ven exhaled. *“While I appreciate the speed of the pregnancies and the health of the babies, the rush takes a lot out of me.”*

“Well, I am good with the little ones. I am there as long as you need me.”

“Thanks. You are the only one who can do your regular job in your downtime.”

“Yeah. In the wee hours while I am with Penina. I have gone to pen and paper to keep things quiet.”

“See you in two hours, Eliana.”

“See you and your occupants soon.” She kissed her fingertips and held them to the screen.

The picture swung, and Venetia’s alpha grinned. *“She’s eager to see you. I have been keeping her awake all night.”*

Ven’s phone swung again, and her omega was there with a grin. *“I helped.”*

“Oh, good grief. See you when we land.” She grinned. “I would say don’t stay up, but I guess that is a fluid situation. Bye.”

She disconnected, and Joy smiled at her. “I was onboard when the princess first came through. They were definitely trying to ease her into the idea of joining their grouping with all the delicacy an alpha can muster.”

“Yeah, delicacy with those three is only something you see when you squint.” Eliana chuckled. “They are cute though. Penina is adorable.”

“Are they planning on having more after this pregnancy?”

Eliana smiled. “I think they want to give the island population a solid bump.”

Joy nodded, and Eliana went back to writing. It was how she made her living, but this book was for therapy. It told the story of a young woman who worked midnight shifts on Friday and Saturday nights at an old but clean diner and the day an alpha walked through the door. He walked her home after her shifts and courted her slowly. He courted her for two years, and the day she turned eighteen, he disappeared. All she had was a business card from his manager, and when she had called that, she had gotten the put-down by the omega.

Now, she had to write what happened next while skirting the outline of how the water had refused to take her and keep her.

Luna had found her sobbing on the shoreline and had soothed her. Other ladies had helped her and gotten her to a safe place where she could learn how this new situation worked and what she could do with it. From there, Luna and the others had encouraged her to write the stories of the ladies who wanted to share how they had settled with their mates. She had written a few of those stories and then gone headlong into romantic fantasy. Her desperate longing for a better ending to her own story drove her on. She was introduced to a publisher, and after tweaking that first story a lot, she got a pen name and started on her second book. She hadn't stopped in years. It was so soothing.

She wrote about meeting her friends and wiped her tears away. Four years after that moment, she would

meet Venetia at her worst moment, and seven years later, they were here. Tropical island, Ven having another chance at a family, and Eliana willing to help in any way she could. Plus, she got to play with the ocean every day. That alone was worth the price of admission.

Chapter Two

Eliana slipped her backpack into place as she got off the plane, and she headed for the far end of the tarmac, where the horse was being held by the bridle. She grinned. “Is that for me?”

The man smiled at her and looked her up and down. “You are the new nanny.”

“I am.”

“Your skirt won’t work.”

She nodded, bent, and tore a thigh-high slit up her skirt.

“That will now work.”

She laughed and accepted the help onto the back of the horse. “He knows where to go?”

“He does.”

She settled the reins, and he let go. The others were getting into the carriage, and she waited and got a nod of approval from the man who went to hold the other horses’ heads.

Her horse caught her urgency and sidled.

The omega snarked, “Losing control?”

She looked at him in astonishment and cued the horse with her heels, where he reared and pawed the air. He came down with a thud, and they were off. The carriage horses lunged, and there were a lot of outcries behind her. The hooves hit the ground steadily, and she enjoyed the run.

It was like holding onto thunder. She laughed and stroked his neck as the horse snorted while they pounded past tropical plants and trees, inhaling rich green scents and the tempting tang of the ocean.

Part of the path took them out of the trees, and she saw the blue and green of the midnight-kissed ocean, fighting

the urge to dive in. The moon was huge and hung low over the ocean's surface. She smiled, and the horse tucked back into the treed path before thundering through a very tidy village and stopping next to a long, low building.

A man walked up to her and held the horse while she dismounted. He led her new friend away, and the double doors opened to display the royal family. Ven ran to her and tried to hug her, but her belly and Eliana's backpack got in the way. Eliana eased her pack down, walked to the side and hugged Ven from there. "You look wonderful."

Ven's omega grinned. "Yes, she does."

The tiny girl in her father's arms blinked at Eliana. Elly walked to her new charge, and she did a quick dip of a curtsy. "Your Highness. You are up past any normal bedtime."

There was a chubby fist in her mouth, and a giggle was her greeting. The little arms stuck out straight, and her father handed her over.

Eliana stroked the little cheek and the stubby arms. "You are adorable, Penina."

She looked to Syar. "Can I take her and put her down? You guys can greet the asshats behind me."

"Uh, sure. Reynaldo, can you show her the room?"

The alpha nodded. "This way." He grabbed her bag as he led the way.

The building was huge, but they went straight to the royal quarters. "This is the queen's room and our nursery. You have a bed here, and when we don't need help overnight, you have a different room that doubles as your study. We had a reno here that added a shower to your bathroom, and the adjoining door can only be opened from the other side."

"Okay. Great. Now stop fidgeting, and go guard your family. I have this one."

She put the little girl down in her cot and quickly went to change clothes. A light halter top with a handkerchief design was the top, and the skirt was loose panels that overlapped. She had her own sandals and sighed as the air wasn't smothering her skin now.

Penina was watching her, and she let her hair move like it wanted to, like waves on the surface of the ocean. The baby was fascinated and reached out, so Elly let the waves move toward her. Elly was letting the little girl grab fistfuls of her hair. She smiled and let her eyes go to their normal shining silver.

She chuckled, and Penina got tired and fell asleep.

She got a glass of water for herself and drank. There was a soft scratching at the door. She got up and went to answer it, and then she stared at her ex once again. She eased the door almost closed but kept her hair in it and monitoring the baby.

“Uh, Venetia said you would bring the baby so that we could meet her. What the hell is going on with your eyes and your hair?”

“Oh, this happened a long time ago.”

She went into the room and eased the baby into her arms.

Penina soundly slept as they walked to the room where the alphas and omegas were collected.

Her ex was confused, and a flicker kept happening in his features. His beast was confused as well. “You developed a beast after you fucked off?”

“Uh, yeah. That was why I had to go. I wanted to keep in touch with you.”

“Hush. It is weird to have a thirty-year-old man talk about his younger self. Leave it. Done. Gone. Over.”

They walked into the space where Ven sat with her alpha backing her, and Syar stroked her very expanded belly.

Syar held out his hands for Penina. “You got her to sleep?”

“Yeah. I have practice.” She eased the baby into his arms.

She stepped behind the family and stood with her hair moving in the air.

Henry the omega said, “Uh, you didn’t look like that on the plane.”

Ven smiled. “That’s not the half of it. You should see her in the water.”

Reynaldo smiled. “Tomorrow at the beach?”

“Do the locals freak out at much?”

The alpha chuckled. “Nope. Swimsuits are not commonly used either.”

She sighed. “I am going to have to wear a bodysuit.”

He looked at her curiously. “Shy?”

“Scar tissue. Nobody’s business if they are feeling nosy. Past is the past.”

He stepped behind her and looked at her back. He whistled softly.

She looked at him in astonishment. “Subtle.” Her hair floated into a concealing cape.

He winced. The newcomers looked at her, and Penina started to snuffle and make distressed sounds. When Henry asked if he could hold her, the baby started wailing.

“Uh, Eliana?” Ven asked with a smile.

Elly walked to the baby and held her, soothing her. “It’s okay, little lady.”

Henry looked nervous but said, “May I hold her now?”

Elly glanced at Syar and Ven. They nodded.

Elly looked at Henry. “First off, relax. She can smell fear. Second, the worst thing she will do is scream or take a dump on you. The diaper takes control of that. Now.

Exhale. And inhale, hold out your arms.” She eased Penina into his arms, and the baby fussed. She smiled and stroked the baby’s cheek, and Penina settled.

She stepped back. “There. Training wheels are off. You can walk around with her if you like.”

She backed up and kept going until she was on the edge of the room. The newly arrived alphas smiled at the omega who was playing house.

She relaxed her expression and remained in the shadows until the baby called her. She waited until Ven called, “Eliana.”

She stepped back into the light and walked to Penina, draping her over her shoulder and rubbing her back. She collapsed and drooled.

Ven chuckled. “That’s a nanny you feed every day. Take her to bed and take a load off. We will see you at breakfast.”

“What is she eating?”

“Oh, shoot. Her fridge is in our room. Reynaldo will move it back to the nursery the moment that we get there.”

“Good, because this little miss is hungry, so the tantrums are going to keep happening.” She kept stroking Penina’s back. “I am going to raid the kitchen.”

“There are bottles in the fridge.”

She nodded and headed to heat a bottle for her employer. When she had the bottle warmed, she popped it into Pen’s mouth and walked slowly back to the nursery. It was going to be a busy day when she woke, and Penina had been up far too long.

She finished the feeding, changed the little princess, and put her down in her cot. Elly removed her outfit and got into bed with a light sheet over her. It was warm, and it would take some time to get used to it, but she was exhausted, and her brain was fried. What was he doing here, and what the hell was his name?

* * * *

Ven's smile faded as she looked at the twin alphas. "So. You are the guy."

Keahi winced. Keoki ran a hand over his face. Henry blurted out, "I thought she was talking about Keoki when she called. We were new, so I just sent her off, telling her he was already taken."

Keoki muttered, "I am doubting that you were that polite."

Keahi leaned forward. "What happened to her when I left?"

Ven rubbed her neck. "She was still a teen, she thought she was in love, and the person she was planning the rest of her life with ghosted her because he had an omega, and she was a filthy beta. Oh, yeah, Henry. I know what you called her. And as a filthy beta myself, you are going to have to watch your mouth." She sighed and said, "Right. So, she jumped off a bridge, and the dragon Rickart rescued her with his daughter Luna helping her through her grief. She wasn't in any danger; the water didn't want her."

Keahi gasped. "She tried to..."

"Yeah, well, you were gone with no word, and some asshole marked her right before he left. She said she regretted the jump the moment she let go of the railing, but she can breathe water, so nothing happened. She just sat at the bottom of the river and screamed. That is when Rickart scooped her out."

Keoki stared. Henry blinked. "You marked her? You didn't say that."

Keahi rubbed his head. "I didn't. *He* did. He was in control more than I was those days."

Ven nodded. "Your dragon."

The four assembled alphas jolted. Keahi frowned. "How do you know?"

Ven snorted. “Rickart analyzed the power. He was ready to find a surrogate for her if she needed it, but you two weren’t intimate. So, the burns faded, and the scar is all that’s left.”

One of the other alphas cleared his throat. “So, we can pursue her?”

Reynaldo laughed. Syar rubbed his temples. Henry was stunned. “Why would you want her? She’s a beta.”

Ven grinned. “Seriously, Henry, I am thinking about giving you a facelift, starting at your knees.”

Keoki grabbed his omega and covered his mouth. “He is an idiot. His family instilled into him that omegas are the ultimate prize for an alpha. He has mistaken many of the newly enhanced betas for omegas, and it makes him angry that he was *fooled*.”

Ven grunted. “Henry, we don’t give a fuck. We don’t want alphas following us around, and we could do without the physical modifications. In my case, the claws are nice, but the eyes freak people out. However, it is the alphas themselves that kick off these changes; the betas don’t even get a vote. Face it, Henry, you just wanted both twins to yourself. The sooner you admit it, the sooner you can come to peace with the fact that Keahi hasn’t looked at you once since you sat down.”

The two quiet alphas chuckled. Mano asked, “But we can pursue Eliana?”

Syar shrugged. “Why not? Just respect it when she tells you to fuck off.”

Mano nodded with a slow smile.

Nalu smiled slowly. “Good.”

Keahi looked at them and growled. “Don’t even think about it.”

Mano returned the stare. “You abandoned her.”

Nalu nodded. “That means she is fair to pursue or court.” He smiled slyly. “And as she is water powered, we have an advantage. She will be in our element.”

Keahi growled, and his beast started flickering out.

Syar said, "Take it outside, and you will pay for any property damage."

Mano and Nalu smiled. Nalu said, "We don't need to fight. We aren't the ones who discarded a jewel."

Henry asked, "You really want her? Why?"

Mano said, "She smells like the open ocean with a lot of heat under the surface."

Nalu nodded. "She is like a storm at sea. Wet and hot."

Keahi growled.

Syar pointed toward the door. "Out."

Keahi stalked out, and there was a weird pressure wave in the air. The lava dragon was going to cool off.

Ven wished she could have warned Elly about Keahi, but she didn't have things confirmed until they were all in front of her. She sighed. She would tell Elly in the morning about why he had to leave.

She worked her way to the edge of the couch, and Reynaldo snorted. "Come on, kitten."

She grunted as he got her to her feet and then picked her up. The two water alphas were talking strategy, and Henry was sniffing next to his alpha. Keahi was looking lost.

Ven blinked. "That wasn't a great homecoming."

Reynaldo sighed as Syar went to talk to Henry. They were in the hallway when they felt a flare of fury in their omega, and then a loud slap sounded. Syar wasn't in pain, so Ven sighed. "Henry doesn't learn."

"He insulted you."

"Yeah, but he is acting out of some kind of pain. Well, that or he's just an asshole. Has he been like this before?"

"No. He is usually even-tempered."

"Then, something has happened."

He opened the bedroom door and nodded to the guards. They smiled, and she picked up her phone to call Wren. She was always awake.

“Hiya, Wren, it’s Venetia. I need to know something.” Reynaldo set her on the bed.

“Shoot.”

“Is there any member of the book club that can do emotional diagnostics? I am way too fat to be investigating this kind of thing.”

Wren laughed, *“We have one. Do you want me to send her over?”*

“I have to run it past Syar first. There is an omega here who is acting hostile toward betas. Like, really hostile. Like Syar just smacked him in the face hostile.”

“Got it. I will ask her and let you know if she says yes.”

“Great. I will do the same here. I have to get his permission to send the plane. He’s the king, after all.”

Syar came in and said, “Send the plane. Something is really wrong with him.”

“I heard that. Well, let’s see what Amelia says.”

“Wow. Amelia can do that?”

“Sure. And I don’t need a plane. Wait for the answer.”

“Great. I might be in hospital for the reply.” She felt the squeezing near her spine that began to wrap around her belly.

“You will be. Get some sleep, and then have your twins. Your alpha is trying to stay ahead.”

Ven was unsurprised that Wren knew about the twins. She knew everything else. The call was over.

Syar held her and whispered, “Tell me I was never that stupid.”

She stroked his hair. “You were always charming and horny. It came through in everything you did and said.

You were also a wingman for Reynaldo, which I don't think you get enough credit for."

Reynaldo got her up and carried her to the bathroom for a warm shower and then returned her to bed.

She curled in to be with her mates and muttered, "Wren is looking for a beta with diagnostic capabilities."

Syar smiled and snuggled against her breasts. "That's helpful."

There were a few moments of silence. Reynaldo chuckled. "What did she mean that she didn't need a plane?"

Ven smiled and let herself sleep. It would be explained in the morning.

Chapter Three

Eliana watched Ven sweat and said, “Shouldn’t you be in hospital?”

Ven grinned. “Not quite yet. Baby one is in position, so it will go pretty quickly once we get there. The guys need breakfast, and I need juice. This is going to be a rough day.”

Eliana smiled and ate her own breakfast while Syar fed Pen and ate his own meal with his other hand. She had offered, but these were Pen’s last moments of being an only child. He was sitting with his feet propped up on the seat next to him and the baby on the slope of his knees. It was cute.

Ven sighed. “I used to have knees.”

Reynaldo rubbed her belly. “They will be back soon. Your ankles as well.”

Ven gasped and held still. “Okay. I think now is good.”

“Pen’s nearly finished.” Syar held her bottle, and the liquid disappeared. “There she goes.”

Eliana smiled. “I’ve got her. You go get the other two.” She waited until Syar kissed his baby’s forehead. She picked up the baby, Reynaldo picked up Ven, and the family headed out to get their new members into their arms. Elly rubbed the baby’s back until a series of burps emerged. “Well, aren’t you a little gassy?”

She took care of the diaper, grabbed some toy mats, and headed to the great room with the baby on her hip. The mats went down, and Penina giggled happily, and they played for a few hours until a notice from Ven’s phone that baby one had arrived.

Elly jumped when someone asked, “Was that about the babies?”

Henry was near her, looking down as she played with an increasingly sleepy baby. Eliana got to her feet and looked at him. “The first baby has arrived.”

“How old were you when you called?”

“It was four days after my eighteenth birthday. The burn on my back occurred on my birthday.”

Henry frowned. “He was waiting until you were legal.”

“To scar me up and dump me? Yeah. Apparently.”

Penina was creeping slowly toward her. She lifted her charge, and Henry’s face got soft.

“You don’t have any children?”

Henry’s expression took on a desperate look. “No.”

“There is something causing a problem?”

“They can’t find anything.”

“I have asked a friend for a diagnostic specialist for you.”

He blinked. “You have?”

“Sure. You are in some sort of pain, whether it is emotional, physical, or situational. Best to get to the bottom of it.” She smiled and moved with Pen. “Speaking of.” She checked her phone.

She typed in a message and smiled. “Any minute now.”

“Really? I have been to every specialist that there is.”

“She’s special... and here she is.”

In the centre of the room, a glow started, and soon, the ball expanded, and Amelia slowly stood from a crouching position. She stood up in her jeans and t-shirt. “Wow. It is hot as balls here.”

Eliana grinned and went over to hug her friend. “Thanks for coming, Amelia. How are you doing?”

“Need coffee. You know the drill. Also, where can I get something lighter to wear?”

“You can have one of my outfits.”

“Uh. Is there anything with more fabric? You know I have issues with me.”

“I think we can get you a caftan, but we have to wait until I get a pay chip. I don’t have one, so I can’t buy squat.”

“No cash?” She plucked at her shirt.

“Not in the royal village. No.”

Amelia smiled at the omega. “Are you the one who needs analysis?”

He nodded. “I am. I just feel wrong.”

“Well, I might be able to analyze you and go. Then I can deal with sweaty clothing.” She looked around. “Come on and have a seat.”

Eliana watched them sit down, and Amelia flipped her palms up and told Henry what to do. Penina watched as Amelia began to glow, and Henry caught on.

Eliana watched for the five minutes, and then something strange happened. Henry turned dark, and the energy flowed to Amelia, and then it happened again until a swirl of energy was getting lighter as it cycled from Henry to Amelia.

Ten minutes later, Henry was looking around as if everything was bright and new. Amelia smiled, but Eliana ran to her as she dropped in exhaustion. Juggling big human and little human was awkward.

“What happened to her?”

“She ate the darkness. It is going to make her weak for a while.” She looked around and frowned. “She needs to lie down. I didn’t think you were that bad off.”

Amelia sighed. “Sorry. I will just scoot myself into a corner and recover. Just mop up the sweat around me and leave me be.”

“What was it?”

“You called it. He had a shade. Major shade. It is going to take a few hours to digest it, and I will be out of your considerable hair.” Amelia struggled and got herself sitting.

“How long has he had it?”

“Twenty years. Maybe more. Omegas are common targets for curses.”

“How did you learn all this?”

“Old books and midnight chats with Wren.” Amelia got herself sitting, but her skin was grey and eyes glazed.

“Come on. You can take my bed in the nursery. You just have to be quiet when Penina goes down for a nap.”

“Will do.”

Eliana looked at the dazed Henry, who had tears tracking down his cheeks. “Can you help me lift her? I can’t hold her and the baby at the same time.”

He nodded and got Amelia up with an arm around his neck. He smiled. “You smell nice. Sweaty but nice.”

She chuckled. “Flatterer.”

Eliana wrapped an arm around her waist and heaved her friend down the hall and toward the nursery.

Keoki blocked their path. “Where are you going? Who is that?”

“She’s a friend of mine, invited by Syar and Ven, and she has done an analysis of Henry.”

Henry was crying, but he was smiling. “It’s a good thing, Keo. A real good thing.”

Keoki blinked and then snorted. “Where are you trying to bring her?”

“The nursery. Penina needs a nap, and Amelia just needs to rest a bit.”

He stepped forward and picked her up. Amelia chuckled. “I can see my house from here.”

He snorted and carried her to the nursery. He settled her on the narrow bed. Eliana put Pen in her cot and pulled a sheet over her chubby legs.

Amelia was lying with her eyes closed and panting heavily. Eliana stroked her forehead. “You good?”

Amelia opened her eyes, and they were solid black. “Coping. You have a baby monitor?”

“I do.”

“Keep it handy. If I start swallowing my own tongue, I will gargle at you.”

“Is the baby okay in here?”

“Yup. This one isn’t getting out.” Amelia smiled, which was distressing with her black eyes. “It’s nice and crunchy.”

“Okay. Enjoy.” Eliana smiled. “Now, close your eyes. You are going to haunt my dreams.”

Amelia laughed softly, and to Elly’s surprise, Keoki murmured, “Good rest.”

Eliana looked at him in surprise, and then they left Amelia to digest the curse she had eaten.

“Thank you for helping,” she said to Keoki.

“You are welcome. Why is Henry’s link with me fizzing and swirling with joy? He is never joyful. He is snide at the best of times.”

She indicated that she was heading down the hall. “Ah, that would be Amelia. She will tell you what she pulled out of him, but she needs to break it down first.”

“What?”

“He was afflicted with dark energy. If I believed in that kind of thing, I would call it a curse, but then I can fly in water, so what do I know?”

Keoki rumbled, “What else can you tell me about it?”

“Talk to Henry about how he’s feeling. Take him for a walk among betas and see if he turns into a psycho bitch again. You run your own tests, and I will wait for Amelia.”

“It is time for lunch. Will you join us?”

“Uh, yeah, I guess it’s time. I am on Penina time.” She made sure the baby monitor was on, and the deep and even breathing made her smile. “Sure. Lunch.”

He nodded. "I want to ask you a little about your relationship with my brother."

"Wait until I get a salad or sandwich in front of me, so I have something to stab."

They walked into the dining room, where an excited Henry was shocking the others. She took a spot several seats away from the others. Being that close to that many alphas wasn't a great idea.

Kane came in and blinked. "Right."

Eliana smiled. "Sorry. I forgot to warn you."

"You good with a salad?"

"I am. Oh, the babies are out, and both are healthy. So is Ven."

Kane grinned.

She held up her phone. "Just got the final head count. Still, only two babies. Ven is healing rapidly, as she does."

Kane nodded.

Keoki spoke from the other side of the table. "Do you heal rapidly as well?"

"Oh no. The altered betas are all very different. They change for one type of alpha. Ven changed to deal with all the small cuts she gave herself when her claws came in." She smiled. "So many destroyed clothes."

Kane smiled. "A brother and sister for the princess."

Henry frowned. "Aren't the babies prince and princess?"

Kane shook his head. "No, technically, Penina is Syar's, and the new babies are Reynaldo's."

"But I thought Venetia was the mother of Penina. Syar is infertile." Henry was genuinely struggling to understand.

Eliana smiled. "Syar fathered her. Got it?"

“What? Oh.” Henry’s eyes got wide. “Wait, he did that?”

Eliana smiled. “Apparently. You can quiz him after they come home and rest. I wasn’t a witness to the event. Thankfully. You should only bleach your eyes so often in one lifetime.”

There was a rumble of chuckles. And Eliana remembered the very large and attentive audience between her and Henry.

Kane chuckled and headed into the kitchen.

Keoki spoke to her. “So, Eliana, what was your relationship with my brother?”

“I don’t know. Who is your brother? The name I was given didn’t work when I tried to find him.”

Her ex coloured. “Keahi. I do go by Key, but so does my brother.”

“Ah. Keahi. Right. Well, he and his band, of which these two are also members, I am guessing?”

The other alphas nodded.

“Right, well, they came into the diner that I had the dubious honour of manning on Friday and Saturday nights until after midnight. Key—Keahi started to talk with me, and when he found out I was underage, he reeled himself in. We talked about books, movies, occasionally music, and he would return to the diner and walk me home. This happened over two years until I turned eighteen. Then, he set me on fire, and I didn’t see him again until yesterday.”

Keahi jolted. “I didn’t. My beast did. It was why I had to leave. I had an apprenticeship with another dragon arranged, and he taught me how to work with the power I had.”

“Well, that’s good.” She sat back and smiled at Kane as he brought her the salad.

Other servers brought the gathered alphas and omega their meals.

She ate quickly, drank a litre of water, and excused herself.

Keoki looked at her. "You are leaving?"

"Watching people eat has never been a fetish of mine. Enjoy."

She walked into the kitchen and smiled at Kane. "Would it be possible to get some fabric? I need to make a top for Amelia. She's wearing jeans and sneakers."

"I am sure I can arrange it. Does she need a dress?"

"Mid-hip loose tunic and skirt?"

"Done." He smiled. "Does she mind that she will look like a tourist?"

"No. She just wants to be comfortable."

"Right. Sure. I will get on that. Colour preferences?"

"Dark purple, blue. Colours of midnight. She likes midnight." She smiled.

"Okay. I will go and ask around."

"Thanks. She's sweating like crazy, so get two sets if you can."

"Of course."

"Charge it to my tab."

Kane smiled. "Did King Syar request her appearance?"

"He did. And approved it."

"Then he will bear the charge of the outfits."

The baby monitor let loose some pre-crying snuffling and whining. Eliana smiled. "My master's voice."

She bowed, then darted through the dining room, and then walked briskly toward the hallway that led to the royal suite. The guards gave it away. She flicked a salute and went to the queen's room. She checked on the baby and changed her, then picked her up and checked on Amelia. Her eyes were fading to white when Eliana peeled the lid back. She whispered to Penina, "We have to be quiet and go play. Okay?"

The huge eyes just blinked, and then she giggled.

They left the nursery and headed back to the great room, where Penina squealed with excitement and reached for the ducky on wheels. Eliana set her down, and the little girl scooted to her toys.

“Soon, Mommy and Daddy and Daddy are going to come home with a new brother and a sister.” She laughed. “And though Mommy wants a break, I think you will have another sibling before you are two. There is just something about the gleam in her eyes.”

“So, you think the beta has a choice?” Keahi was sitting on a couch.

“Yes. I do. Well, unless she has a heat, but not all enhanced betas do.” She shrugged.

“Do you?”

She turned her head to stare at him. “None of your business.”

“Do you still have the mark?”

“No. I put it out.” She looked back to Pen and wagged a toy for her to grab. It went straight into her mouth.

“Put it out?”

She looked at him. “From the day you put it on, it burned. It burned for days, and I couldn’t find the business card you gave me. After I talked to Henry, I was insane with pain. I went to a bridge and looked at the water, knowing it would put out the fire. Then, I fell back and knew I had done something stupid. The water didn’t put it out. A dragon fished me out of the water. He had smelled the dragon fire and came to investigate. He used his fire and shorted out what you had left.” She smiled at the memory. “He called you young and clumsy.”

Keahi leaned forward. “I was.”

“Rickart told me about dragons and that your beast had marked me without your consent or mine. So, that made me less furious, but I... you broke my heart and

ghosted me.” She kept her focus on the baby. “I was young and naïve.”

“Keo didn’t know about the call until months after when he and Henry were having a fight. When he found out, he called me, but I was stuck in my large form and didn’t get the message for a few months. By the time I was back in the city, you were gone.”

“Yeah, no shit. If I hadn’t, I would have found another way to stop the fire.” She sighed and tiptoed her fingers over to the duck on wheels. She dragged it, and Penina wiggled after the toy.

He knelt next to her, and the heat coming off him was intense.

“Have you had boyfriends since I was gone?”

“Of course. Rickart recommended it, and Luna didn’t disagree.” She smiled. “The ladies of the book club went after it like the dating app from hell. They went through alpha after alpha and then introduced me to some nice ones who had experience with betas. We take a little more coaxing. Oh, you know. While I didn’t know your actual name, I followed the tabloids when you performed. You got around.”

His cheeks went red and got a few degrees warmer. “You followed me?”

“Yeah. I did. I wanted to know what was wrong with me. Why a glitzy emaciated blonde could run their hands over you, and I had been scorched and dumped.” She smiled. “It was a puzzle, but then Rickart told me the dragon picks. That was when I knew you hadn’t wanted me all along. It was sobering and painful, but the dragon chose, and the man ran.”

“That wasn’t how it happened.”

“It was. I was describing my perspective. All these years, and I don’t know what yours was. Is it a good story? Mine makes people cry.” She chuckled and caught Penina as she lunged toward her lap.

“I... Elly.”

She looked at him and waited.

“I had to go. I didn’t want to tell you. I had a present in my jacket pocket for you, then he took over, and I woke up on the plane to my mentor. I nearly brought the plane down, but *he* told me things were fine. That you were ours and were safe. I could feel something, and I guess that was the link, but you were definitely there. Then, you were gone.” He ran his hand over his head. “My mentor had to hold me down. My full form was trying to rip out to go find you, but he pinned me and kept me there until I calmed. He gave me a lecture about betas being frail, and if you were really my mate, I would have sealed the mark. We trained for months until I could have equilibrium with my two other forms. That was the point where I got my phone back. Keo played the call for me. All the calls to our home were recorded. I had a few stalkers.” He sighed. “My mentor had to keep me down and tell me the call had been months earlier, which was why our link broke. You were gone.” He sighed. “Also, I didn’t know your proper name either. I thought Elly was short for Eleanor. I have had investigators looking for traces of you for years.”

She chuckled and rocked the baby, who had decided to use her as a cradle. “Yeah, Eliana is a little odd, though you are not one to throw stones, Keahi.”

He shivered when she said his name.

“So, you are local?” She changed the topic just like that.

“Yes, second cousin to Syar. There is one of my kind born every generation. We keep the island from blowing up in an eruption. That’s my job, and since there is a volcanic event brewing right now, it is my job to lance the volcano.”

“Delightful. Like a zit?”

He smiled. “Something like that. I had forgotten how easy it was to talk to you. I mean, we were talking together in my dreams, but then you were hot and sexy and climbed all over me.”

She snorted. “Well, none of that is happening.”

Penina snuffled and sucked her fist. Eliana stroked the chubby cheek and looked at Keahi. “There. We have talked. We have closure.”

“Yup. You are really good with babies.”

“I am, and your dragon is an arrogant pain in the ass.”

He smiled. “Where did you learn about babies?”

“Oh, I babysat from the age of twelve until I could get the job at the diner.” She smiled. “Babies like me.”

“May I see the mark? I need to know what he did.”

She narrowed her eyes. “If I feel one spike of heat, I am going to water cannon you right out that door. I am holding a baby, after all. Let that horny salamander inside you know that. I no longer scream and cry. Now, I yell and punch.”

He blinked. “Right. He’s been warned.”

Her hair moved up and out of the way, swaying and waving in the invisible current. Keahi got up and moved around, gasping at the remains of the mark he had left behind. The thick encapsulated spiral was right between her shoulders. She felt warmth, and she snapped quietly, “No touching.” Her hair covered the mark again.

“What colour was it when it was new?”

“Bright orange and red.”

“Ah.”

She turned and glanced at him. She laughed. “You got aroused by seeing a scar?”

He looked at her ruefully. “It is a lovely scar.”

She got a text from Ven and smiled. “Well, that was quick. They are coming home. I need to tell Kane.”

She rose to her feet with the baby in her arms. “Come on, Penina, we have to get the sleeping beauty up, and we need to know if Kane has an extra room for her.”

Keahi followed her. “Do you expect her to answer?”

“No, but she is a wonderful sounding board.” She smiled and swayed into the kitchen to talk to Kane. The family was coming home.

Chapter Four

They greeted the family and new babies as they came into the residence. Reynaldo was carrying his babies, and his grin was going to split his face. Syar supported Ven, and she beamed when she saw Penina. “There’s my big girl. Have you been good for Elly?”

Penina kicked and giggled, reaching for her mother. Ven held her and put her on her hip. She looked at the line of house staff and guests. “Amelia! You look... sleepy.”

Amelia walked forward in her dark purple outfit and smiled. “I usually am. You are looking prosperous.”

“Thanks. A little sleepy but really impressed with what I accomplished today. The link with Reynaldo is filled with giggles.”

Amelia looked at the two little bundles and then up at the alpha. “Cute little people.”

Ven smiled. “They are called babies, Amelia.”

Elly laughed. “Are you good with Pen for a bit?”

“Of course. Oh, shit. You haven’t been to the water yet. Gogogo.” Ven waved her off.

Elly nodded to Amelia and bolted out the door.

The ocean called to her, and when she got there, she stripped and walked to the water. Introducing herself was important. She felt the ocean tickle her toes, and when it recognized what it was tasting, a surge of water covered her with a bubble that went from head to toe. She smiled and quietly asked it if it could show her the island.

She rose on a flat puddle of water, and the ocean pulled her along at an incredible speed to round the coastline toward the volcano. She crouched, a strand of water came up, her puddle turned into a surfboard, and when they left the area of the village, the water and strands of kelp became a suit. She focused and rushed

past the jagged rocks, seeing the cracks in some parts of the hills and steam in others. It was going to blow, and it was going to blow soon. She cruised along while dolphins raced her, and the slow bellow of whales sounded in the distance. Something flashed underneath her, and then another flash happened. Her board turned into a sailboard, and she swung around to return to the village.

Another flash under her, and then a wall of water rose in front of her. She hadn't seen a sea dragon before, but fuck, he was huge. She did what she could and dropped into the water and pulled herself past him when a shark with human eyes pulled up next to her and nudged her. Abrasive fuck.

She moved to his dorsal fin, and he sped up with the dragon following them at the same time. It was kind of fun as long as she kept a thick layer of water between her and him.

A heavy rockslide made her ride flick and turn to the side. She pushed away from the heat and rose out of the water on a column of fluid. She had expected a lava dragon to be smoother, but he was glowing with his tail lashing, covered with an aerated jagged surface.

“Keahi, what the fuck?” She rose higher, and he made a soft sound. He turned so his red-orange eye was fixed on her.

He held out his palm and nodded. She crossed her arms. “Absolutely not.”

He shrugged and sliced his hand under her, and when she was cut off from support, she dropped into his palm. “Twat.”

He snorted, and steam shot from his nostrils. She looked over the edge of his palm and down at the water. He closed his clawed fingers around her.

She should have jumped, but when the smooth fingers closed in on her, it was a weird full-body hug with thermal properties.

She glared at him as he sniffed her. He pulled her under his beaky nose and sniffed so deeply that her hair

pulled upward.

“Dude. That’s not right. Stop snorting me.”

There was a sound behind her, and she tried to look, but he shifted his index finger, and she couldn’t see past him. There was cool snuffling behind her, and the shadow that cooled her head got thicker as he got closer.

Keahi snorted and growled, pulling her away from the cool air circling her head. She wasn’t quite sure which male was the sea dragon, but he followed Keahi’s hand. The blast of water struck, and a cloud of steam blasted toward her. She pulled water from the ocean, wrapped it around her, and dropped into the water as the dragons started the equivalent of a slap fight. The shark came by, and she grabbed the fin. He pulled her toward the shore and carried her out of the water.

“Oh, hey, Mano.”

He grinned. “Good evening, Eliana. You are very fast underwater.”

“As are you. Scratchy though.”

He sighed and sat down on the sand with her in his lap. She looked out and watched the dragons blasting fire and water at each other.

“Oh, dude. He’s making an island.” The lava being thrown was striking Nalu and cooling as it dropped. It was a glowing pile of molten rock. She frowned, reached for the water, and made a bulkhead of moving water around them while she pushed the nearby fish past the barrier. She frowned and focused.

Mano whispered, “What are you doing? I can feel you are doing something.”

“Making the water equivalent of a fire break. I don’t want to be eating poached fish for days.”

“Aren’t you considerate?”

“I also want to go surfing tomorrow, and dead fish on the shoreline would wreck my mood.”

He chuckled. “You surf?”

“When I am near the water, which is not often.” She smiled. “Sometimes, I even use a board.” Keeping her focus was difficult, but she asked, “So, did you grow up around here?”

“Yes. Nalu and I grew up in the city and got jobs here when we were out of school.” He chuckled. “I was here a few years ago and helped my brother court his mate. Let the bugger punch me in the nose. He nearly lost a hand. Instinct is instinct.”

She smiled. “Nice wingman.” She kept her focus.

“Thanks. I have done the same for Nalu but can’t do the same for myself. My physiology is not conducive to hookups.”

“What?”

“You are sitting on it.”

She blinked and flipped out of his lap.

He laughed, and when she looked, she saw one semi-erect penis, and as she stared, the second showed itself.

“Oh, geez. Great, two man-whores and that.” She turned back to the duelling dragons and saw that they were both looking at her. She had been in the water long enough that her swirls were showing. Blue and dark-dark red were moving over her torso in twists and turns. They only showed up when she was near water for over an hour.

Keahi and Nalu shrank back to normal size and waded toward her.

She worked to cool the water they were wading through, and when she got the temperatures close, she removed the bulkhead that she had created, and the sea was comfortably cool in seconds with hopefully minimal damage.

She got up and stretched, heading back toward the village. Keahi walked in step with her. “You called us man-whores?”

“Well, I have seen the paparazzi photos, and if even half of them are dead on, you got around. Mano just said the same about Nalu. And Mano’s issues are his own. I am just walking away from it. Buck naked, through the jungle.” She stopped and went back to the beach. He followed along.

“What about your own experiences? They don’t count.”

She laughed at him as she kept walking. “They do not.”

He blinked. “They don’t? You said you had boyfriends.”

“No, you asked about boyfriends. The only boys who are friends are currently under three feet tall and wondering when they can ask their friend in class out for ice cream.”

He stared. “Children?”

“Yes. I babysat the kids at the book club parties; lots of guys who were excited to see me so I could help them tie their shoelaces. Yeah, so whatever you guys have gotten on your dicks, I don’t want it to ruin the brand-new upholstery.”

She glanced at him, and his eyes were wide. She made it to the beach and got dressed.

Keahi walked over to the other two, and she snapped, “Wait until I am out of fucking earshot before you gossip about me.”

The three alphas froze in place. She got her top back on, sat to put on her sandals, and when they were on, she walked back to the village, enjoying the silence.

* * * *

Keahi looked at the others and said, “Uh, slight problem. Are either of you experienced with angry virgins?”

Nalu blinked. “No, I steer clear of... oh.”

Mano whistled. “Okay. That explains why she could be plastered against me and not a flicker of anything.”

Keahi put a finger to his lips. “You have to kiss her to wake her up.”

“By what means? Literal?” Mano smiled. “I hope it’s literal.”

“Yeah. She also likes blank books, fun pens, and music.” He mused. “She liked kissing a lot.”

Nalu smiled. “She was a teen. You were a teen. Makes sense.”

“Yeah, this wasn’t that. She’s just a woman who likes kissing. She’s deeply romantic. She would stare into my eyes and smile. I thought I was leaving her safe, that she would be waiting for me when the mentorship was over, but then she was gone.”

“And you couldn’t find her.” Nalu nodded.

“No. She had been rescued by another dragon, and he helped her burn out her mark.”

Nalu blinked. “He didn’t try and take her as a mate?”

“No. His daughter helps betas get through their changes. Venetia was another one who was part of their group.”

Mano asked, “How do you know that?”

“I asked her. Venetia told me about it when I texted with her last night. Well, sort of. She answered me until Reynaldo told me to fuck off.” He grunted.

Mano cocked his head. “But we are still going to try and seduce her, right?”

Nalu chuckled. “I hope I make progress before the dragon does. I think he is plotting something.”

Keahi checked. “Oh, fuck. He’s gone quiet. I swear, if he goes after her again...”

Nalu checked, and his eyes flickered. “Damn it.”

Mano watched them for a moment, and the last thing Keahi heard was, “Oh, fuck.”

* * * *

Eliana heard the pounding of feet behind her, and she turned to see Mano racing toward her. He shouted, “Run!”

She used a water jet and headed into a tree. She sat up there and watched the two dragons from a safe distance. This was the smaller form that had blasted her that time, but now, there was one fire and one water.

There was a bit of silence, and then they started climbing the tree she was on. Both of them. They looked like giant salamanders with sharper faces. She heard a sound that she recognized, and it turned into a voice. *“Precious beauty. We have found you again.”*

“Oh, no. Not again. I am not in the mood to be dumped. I have shit to do.”

Nalu’s beast moved toward her. *“We will care for you, pretty one.”*

“I care for myself. I take care of myself. I control myself. Hooking myself to an alpha is not necessary, and I am not going to go for it now.”

“You do not have a choice. You are dragon mate. We are for you.”

“I don’t care. I am nearly thirty years old. My sister just got married, and I am acting as a nanny for a friend and finally in a place where I can surf or play in the ocean every day. I am not just going to throw that away. Don’t you guys have a concert or something to do on the other side of the island?”

The dragons both halted.

“Aha! You didn’t think I knew about that, did you? Yeah. Right. You go off and rehearse, and I will get some sleep because I have three babies to help take care of in the morning. You need to be doing what you came for and then fuck right off.”

They looked at each other.

“What, you guys claim me and then leave me here while my mates disappear for another ten years? No thanks. You can keep your dicks or play with each other. Now, get down, so I can get some water and go to bed.” She hadn’t topped up her stores while playing in the ocean, and blasting herself up the tree had taken her levels low. She could only use the water she could summon or keep in her body, and she was too far from the beach to summon the water she needed.

She swayed and waited for the dragons to decide whether to leave her alone or not. The dragons slowly backed down, and she exhaled in relief. She felt heat in her back as she went to descend but paused and held onto the trunk while gathering her senses into focus while she descended. She slipped in two places, cursed, and slowly continued her descent. When she was standing with abraded hands, she turned away from the tree, and the dragons were both standing there. “Aw, fuck.”

Each of the dragons took a hand and exhaled fire over her raw palms. She stared at them and flexed her hands. “Uh, thanks.”

She was braced for it, but when she was tugged forward, her back burned as Keahi blasted it, and to her shock, Nalu hit her with fire after Keahi stopped. She howled as her skin protested the mark he was making. She gritted her teeth and shrieked, “Assholes!”

Villagers were coming out and watching. Eliana was mortified. When Nalu set his mark, she looked at him and slapped the lizardy face before whirling and doing the same to Keahi. She turned and stalked back to the beach. Mano caught up with her and walked with her in silence. She didn’t get undressed. She walked into the ocean and dove in to stop the burn on her back. She was furious, she was hurt, she was embarrassed, and she just wanted to be alone, but there was a giant shark with her.

Eliana continued swimming in a straight line and started pulling water in through her skin and using it for

propulsion.

When she finally got out to deep water, she silently screamed and kicked her legs while flailing her arms. She let herself sink slowly, and Mano followed her down.

She sat on an outcropping and let her hair flow around her. Other sea creatures came up and examined her. She felt tears emerge and leave her face. How could they? She knew why they waited. They didn't want to jump her and knock her out of the tree.

Mano swam back and forth, keeping other creatures away from her. She sat there for two hours, according to her sports watch. When she got to her feet to head back to the residence, Mano came up to her, and she nodded as she floated over his back and grabbed his fin. He swam leisurely back to the shoreline, and she floated loose when his belly touched sand. Eliana walked out of the ocean toward the two silent figures who were waiting for them. Mano walked behind her.

She paused and looked at them, then walked past them, heading back to the residence. The three of them filed after her. When they got to the house, she turned and spoke to them. "I am going to get some sleep. We will discuss this in the morning or when you guys come back here."

She turned, and the wind caught her hair, showing them what she already knew. She had one spiral in fire and the other in water moving in the opposite direction. She was a fucking pinwheel.

Chapter Five

Amelia must have gotten a guestroom because the nursery was empty, and her cot was waiting. Eliana took a shower, hung her clothing up to dry, and then climbed into bed, covering herself. She was going to have to call Luna and look for a replacement. She couldn't stay here. She had just been marked like livestock in the middle of the village. It was humiliating.

The crying of Penina set off the newborns, and Eliana sat up when the door opened. Reynaldo looked at her. "Help?"

"There in a minute."

She put her clothes on, grabbed a bottle, and warmed it in her hand before walking through the door to see Ven in bed with the twins feeding and Penina wailing with her little fists in the air.

Syar looked at her and the bottle with relief. "I've got her. Thanks for getting it ready."

"No problem. Should I arrange breakfast in bed?"

Syar sighed. "I wish. We have to do a photo op with the babies. We will be out for breakfast in a minute."

"Well, call on me if you need me." She nodded. She turned and headed out through the nursery. Breakfast called.

She was working her way through rice porridge, smoked ham, and a fruit salad when she was no longer alone at the table, and it was hard to swallow. Nalu sat on her left, and Keahi was on her right. Mano sat next to him, and she was silently still eating when Henry, Keoki, and Amelia came and sat down.

Amelia whistled slowly. "Wow. That is quite the energy signature. It's not attached though. I haven't seen free-floating energy like that before."

“Yay. Happy you have seen something new.” Eliana looked at her.

Amelia winced. “Yikes. Sorry.”

Keahi explained to his curious brother, “The beasts took over and marked her... again.”

Henry blinked. “Plural? Oh, what fun.”

Eliana cleared her throat. “We didn’t...” She rolled her wrist and asked Amelia, “What is the hand gesture I am looking for?”

Amelia made a circle between her index finger and thumb and jerked her hand violently.

“No, that’s a hand job.” She watched. “That’s a nipple twist.” She propped her chin on her fist. “Digital stimulation.” She blinked. “I don’t know that one.”

Mano piped up. “Oral sex.”

“Oh. Thanks.”

Finally, there was a contortion of fingers with two holes and two fingers. Eliana snapped her fingers. “That one. That’s the one that didn’t happen.”

Henry was laughing and wheezing.

The royal family arrived, and Ven and Reynaldo each had one baby while Syar held Penina.

The guys around her got their breakfasts, and she finished hers. She tried to stand, but each had a hand on a thigh. Kane smiled at her. “More coffee?”

“Please. Oh, and another fork.”

Kane smiled. “Sure.”

Amelia smiled. “Well, Henry is sorted, so I can get going as soon as I eat.”

Henry’s face crumpled. “But I have enjoyed being with you. I was hoping you would stay.”

Amelia shrugged. “The weather is nice, but I don’t want to put my hosts out.”

Syar shrugged. "It is no skin of my nose. We have plenty of room, and Keoki and Keahi's house is just about finished."

Amelia asked, "What was wrong with it? New build?"

"Storm damage that we didn't fix until it was necessary, which it now is." Keoki smiled. "We have been on tour for so long that it didn't seem urgent. With volcano day coming, we thought it would be nice to have a place to crash until the time comes, and then we can leave a nice, shiny home for us to come back to."

Eliana nodded. "How nice. Just leave it there, and you can just come back whenever you like, and it will still be in the same condition and waiting. How pleasant."

Ven looked at her. "Elly, what is going on?"

She smiled brightly. "Nothing. Just got marked again by these two bozos' beasts, and they are going to leave again. I love that. It brings everything full circle. Doesn't it?" She paused. "Maybe Rickart would be willing to subdue the marks again or Niko or Jack."

Keahi got hot, and Nalu got cold. It was disconcerting.

She was taunting them. She knew it. When Kane brought her coffee and the fork, she smiled pleasantly. She drank the hot coffee in one draught, took the fork in her fist, grabbed the other fork, and jabbed one each into the hands that held her down.

They released her, and she got loose. She looked at Ven. "Call me if you need me. I will be working otherwise."

Ven nodded, and as Eliana left, she heard her friend tearing a strip off the alphas. She went back to the nursery, got her pen and notebook, and found a hammock on the edge of the deck. She settled in, cleared her mind, and started writing. Her heroines always had better endings than she had. She owed them that much for paying for her house, car, and peace of mind.

She flipped page after page and scribbled away. She paused her writing. “You are staring.”

Three large figures came out of the shadows.

“Now, you are looming.”

“Out of all the things that the dragon has done, I regret you the most.”

Eliana lifted her head. “Wow. There is no walking that back. I regret you, too.”

He growled, ran his hand over his hair, and then to her surprise, he kissed her.

She yelped and pushed at him, but he wasn't holding her. The only place they touched was their lips. She held still and ignored her body warming and relaxing. She loved the way he tasted, and her heart was breaking. She had been stuck, and he had been catting around while she was stuck. She reminded herself of all the women he had been in the tabloids with, and that worked to calm her down. Her body went cold, and she turned her head away.

He nuzzled her neck. “What happened there?”

“My brain just replayed every woman I have seen you cuddled up with on red carpets for the last decade. That pretty effectively stopped any interest I had.”

He froze. “We were no longer together.”

“You weren't with me, but I was stuck with a giant scar on my back. I had a few attempts to have social interactions, but when they touched that mark, they pulled back as if burned. So, I wanted someone else, anyone else, but couldn't have them.” She felt the fury boiling over. “Do you know how frustrating that is?”

He stared at her. “I am beginning to get the idea.”

“Great. Stay celibate for ten years, and then we can have a conversation.”

“I don't want to.” He looked at her sadly.

“Neither did I. Your beast left me that way without a second thought. And now, you idiots just did the same thing.”

“We are not going to leave you.” He stroked her cheek.

“Dude. You are going to go and perform wherever, and you may or may not come back to your house here. You will drop me, and I don’t want to have had sex with you before then because if I am pregnant and there is no dragon around, it could cost my life.”

He blinked. “What?”

She wrote Luna’s number on a piece of paper and handed it to him. “Here. Call her and ask her about her life without her dragon. His beast bred her, forgot about it, didn’t tell the alpha, and it cost her.” She sighed. “When she told me her story, I was very glad that I was simply marked and abandoned. It reduced the side effects.”

He frowned. “I will be back.”

“Yup. I am sure you will be.” She started writing again, but when she squinted at her handwriting, she quickly scribbled over the sentence. *Stupid alpha going to break my heart again* wasn’t going to get her manuscript any further.

Nalu walked up to her and looked down. “May I kiss you?”

“Why?”

He shrugged.

She put her book and pen down and got out of the hammock. “Fine.”

She stood up, and he bent and kissed her, again keeping his hands behind his back.

Where Keahi was hot, Nalu was cool, and she had enjoyed the water a lot more than the sun lately.

Eliana closed her eyes and opened her mouth as his tongue requested entry. Her body flared hot when his

tongue slid along hers, and signs of arousal activated all over her body.

She moved toward him as the kiss continued. Eliana touched his jaw, and the kiss got wilder, and she moaned. She was getting slick. She knew it, and when Nalu's arms wrapped around her, she knew he had figured it out.

Eliana pulled her head back. "Keahi is a fucking squealer."

"I didn't understand what he was referring to, but I do now." Nalu's erection was pressing against her belly.

"It's not exactly normal."

He chuckled. "I like it. I haven't properly made out with someone since I was a teen."

"That's not the not normal part."

He frowned. "I don't get it."

"I know. Come back down here." She kissed him again, and as he held her close, she started whimpering after a few minutes, and then her breath hitched, and she held onto him as she came.

He slowly moved one of his hands between her thighs, under her skirt, and hissed. She pressed her head against his chest. He stroked the slick wetness slowly, and she shuddered as her body tried to catch his fingers. He dipped a finger into her and sighed. "You are really tight."

"If some internet trolls are to be believed, it's a freshness seal."

He chuckled, and she felt a flare of fury in her mark as Keahi returned with his phone in his hand.

Nalu removed his hand from under her skirt. It was shining... a lot. He lifted his hand to his mouth, and she looked away as he tidied up.

Keahi was growling, and she looked at him. "What? I have his mark as well, and you told him about the kissing

thing, so I just had to show him what happens when we keep it up.”

Keahi paused and held up his phone. “I talked to Luna, and you definitely have reason to be extremely wary.”

“Well, unless you want me whoring myself out to other dragons or the elite.”

He tensed.

Nalu was still holding her, and it was... really nice. Nalu asked, “What is she talking about?”

Keahi came forward and gave them the briefing. Nalu’s grip on her got tighter. “So, there will be a lifestyle change.”

Mano chuckled. “I can enjoy some more time in the water with Eliana.”

“We have concert dates,” Keahi grumbled. “Video shoots.”

A new voice said, “They can be cancelled. I have to delay some stuff anyway. Henry is going into heat.” Keoki smiled. “Good thing we fixed the house.”

Keahi smiled. “Really? I thought he didn’t.”

“He didn’t, but his scent is changing fast.” Keoki smiled. “I will cancel some off-island events. The concert in the city will be fine. But then, several months with nothing will be good for Henry to recover.”

Eliana covered her grin with her hand. It was sweet, caring, and funny all at once. How rough was he going to be on Henry that months would be needed for recovery?

Nalu lifted her and said, “Let’s go check out the house.”

“I can walk. I have feet and everything. Even put my shoes on.”

He swung her up so her head was next to his shoulder and his arm was under her knees. “I have never had a mate before. There is something different about how I think of you. How *he* thinks of you. It is odd.”

She was nervous as he moved casually, and locals stared and called out to their party. Several folks came over, and Keahi spoke to them. Eliana was embarrassed when she was introduced from her perch on Nalu.

Keahi introduced her as their mate. The folk usually said something about *the entire band?* Mano cocked his head, and the other two went cold. The people stammered and said that she looked like a very pleasant person.

Eliana covered her face. “This is humiliating.” Her hair drifted around her and hid her from view.

Nalu kissed her forehead. “No, it is necessary. You need to be seen with us.”

“Well, that’s going to have to wait because I am not coming out.”

He chuckled, and they made their way through the village and down a worn pathway. She peered out from behind her hair and blinked. That was one big house.

Keahi walked next to her. “This house was built on the original village chief’s house. When families got smaller, the house in the village was created.”

“So, you are related to Syar?”

Keahi nodded. “Cousins. Well, second cousins.”

Keoki spoke, “There are a lot of cousins around here. We all had to make ourselves scarce until Syar had a mate. Now we can come home.”

Eliana remembered coming home after being marked. Her sister had been obnoxious, and her mother had been caring. Luna came to the house and talked to her mother, who let her get her stuff and leave. Her power was evolving fast, and at that moment, she thought she would never get to go home and just have a Sunday dinner. Well, training herself had only taken a year. Then, she had already had her first book out on submissions and was able to tell her family that her life had changed direction. She had been able to come home after all.

They had cleared the villagers, so she moved her hair out of the way and watched as they walked to the large building with two levels. She looked at the new repairs to the exposed beams and the open rear of the building that looked out with an amazing view of the ocean. It was stunning.

She started squirming, and Nalu set her down. She walked over to the open walls and stared out at the view. The ocean was everywhere. A steep pathway led from the deck and down to the water. This was the kind of place that she used to see in travel magazines, and she cut out the pictures of the views and tucked them under her pillow.

Keahi stood next to her, and she said quietly, “It is a lovely view.”

“Yeah. Stunning. It was agony to leave it.”

She nodded. “I can imagine.”

He sighed. “I don’t think you can.”

She looked at him, and he was standing and facing her. He was lovely. He always had been. Strong masculine features, gorgeous eyes, hair that made her fingers curl for want of stroking it. She stared at him and realized that he had been talking about her. “Ah. So, where is your mentor?”

“He’s in the salt flats. Why?”

“I want to kick him in the balls.” She sighed. “Until I get tired.”

He smiled and reached out to pull her against him. He held her just like he used to, and her mind spun through two years of memories. She muttered, “You got bigger.”

He laughed. “So did you. Cheesecake?”

She snorted. “Pancakes.”

“With the butter in little hearts?”

She smiled. “And warm syrup.”

“And lots of coffee.”

She exhaled slowly. “Oh, yeah.” She cuddled in closer, breathing in his scent of fire and salt and Key. “You know what I like.”

She looked up and winked, and they both burst out laughing. When the laughter faded, he bent his head to kiss her, and she looped her hands behind his neck and pulled herself up against him until his hands around her waist kept her steady, but she was supporting most of her weight.

He tasted the same, and she was swamped with memories as they kissed. Her mind was caught in the past, and when arousal started to pound through her, she jerked back, her chest heaving and everything throbbing.

He asked her in a soft rumble, “Why did you stop?”

“I was stuck in memories. Going further is new. I...”

“Anything from here on is new.”

“I hate how easy I am,” she muttered.

Mano spoke from nearby. “We are big fans. Huge fans.”

“Can we find out if you will respond to me like you did to Nalu?”

She looked at him. “Is this a weird alpha thing?”

“Yes.” He lifted her and pressed her against one of the supports. The kiss started again, and she let herself relax, and when she relaxed, the heat surged out and turned to liquid. She heard the sharp intake of breath as he kept teasing and taunting her. Her gasps and whines were desperate. When he moved his body against hers, she moaned as her body pulsed and shook while he held her head, and his kiss continued. Slow ripples of pleasure went through her, and he gently eased the kiss to a conclusion.

She dropped her head in embarrassment. He raised her head and kissed her softly from chin to forehead with dozens of small kisses.

Her inner thighs were hot and wet. She whispered, "Put me down, please."

He slid her down the polished post, and it took her some effort to stiffen her knees. Her body was hot, and instinct was telling her to knock him on his ass and climb on top.

Eliana panted and then glanced at Mano and groaned. "Don't even think about it."

He shrugged. "I wouldn't dare." He held out his hand. "I just want to show you the path to the water."

She was wary. "That's it?"

"That's it."

She put her hand in his, and he walked her out of the home and down the path, supporting her wobbly knees.

He murmured, "So, this is weird, huh?"

"Ya think?"

He chuckled. "For the record, we don't gang up on a single woman. I've been in the band for twelve years, and this hasn't happened before."

She swallowed. "I don't think that participation is mandatory. You can skip it."

He wrapped an arm around her waist. "That isn't what I meant."

"Did you want a mate with your needs in mind?"

"If you can withstand the guys, you can tolerate me."

"Uhhh."

"We are a contracted grouping. A shiver. They named it for me since I was the smallest representation."

At the bottom of the hill were a wood patio, tables, and lounge chairs facing the ocean. He guided her to the lounge and settled her.

He sighed. "I can't kiss you as they can. My teeth are too sharp, but there are other things that I can do. An alternative kiss. May I?"

Eliana frowned. She had let two alphas kiss her. What could it hurt?

She nodded. “Uh, go ahead.”

He grinned. “They wore down your resistance?”

Eliana was honest. “Yup.”

“Excellent, then maybe this won’t make you flinch.”

He leaned over her and brushed his lips against hers. He was bracing himself over her, so technically, he was just kissing her, but the heat of his body and the implicit threat of him hanging over her was dizzying. His skin had the iridescence she associated with pearls, and his hair was a charcoal black, not quite black, not quite grey.

He kissed his way down her body, plucking at her nipples with his lips, swirling his tongue around her navel, slid her skirt panels aside, and chuckled. “Thanks for that.”

She frowned. “What?”

He licked the juices from her thighs. “The feast and the lack of confinement.”

Oh. Underwear. She whined as he moved his head from side to side, working up toward her folds where the frenzied focus of his tongue had caused another surge of slick.

When he speared his tongue into her, she screamed and arched toward his mouth. He pushed her thighs wide and kept at her until her scream was low and throaty while her channel fluttered around his tongue. He drank from her until her body finally relaxed.

He lifted his head and licked his lips. He smiled slowly. “That is an image I want to remember.”

She tried to sit up but felt like she was made of hot syrup.

He stroked her thighs before helping her to sit up. He smiled. “You genuinely enjoyed that.”

“Uh, what was your first clue?” She was trying to get herself together, but it was difficult. All of her nerves were asking her why she hadn’t done this years ago.

“You aren’t as tight as I thought. I was worried and am now really impressed. You have relaxed quite a bit.”

“Uh, I think that’s self-defense.”

He grinned, showing his intimidating teeth. “Excellent instincts. I think you are going to manage us just fine.”

She thought about it as they headed up the walk. That was what this was about. Her managing three alphas. She hoped it wasn’t at the same time.

Chapter Six

Eliana was caught by two surprised gazes as they returned to the structure. Keahi came over to her and rubbed her arms. “We heard a scream.”

Her skin caught fire. Literally. She found a place to stare at his chest and tried to calm the blush that had activated the mark.

Mano chuckled. “It wasn’t a bad scream.”

She flared up again. Nalu chuckled. “She won’t forget that hand signal anytime soon.”

Keahi chuckled, and Eliana tried to step back. He pulled her against his chest and held her, stroking her marks. She knew that they had missed something so far. Something important. *Mate fire*.

Without giving her mate fire, they wouldn’t be able to make baby dragons. He wouldn’t fit. Well, the man might fit, but the dragon wouldn’t. Who would have thought a shark would have been a more comfortable sex partner? Two dicks and all.

Eliana eventually calmed down from her embarrassment, and she exhaled softly. She pushed away from Keahi, and he stroked her hair. He smiled. “Not scary so far?”

She took a deep breath and sighed. “I was never scared of you. I was scared of me.”

He frowned. “What?”

“I can cum from making out. If I don’t keep myself in check, I am going to be seeking that out frequently. So, I don’t give myself an opportunity to lose control.”

“And what happened with Mano?”

“I was in a safe place, so I let control slip a little.”

“A safe place?”

“Next to the ocean. I can use it if I need to defend myself.” She chuckled, “I could even drown Mano if I wanted to.”

Mano chuckled. “Aw, sweetie, you did.”

Nalu snorted and looked at her curiously. “No objections?”

She looked at him. “Are you saying I should?”

“Absolutely not, maiden.” He grinned.

She sighed.

Keahi chuckled. “I am very glad we were meeting with that agent and doing small gigs all those years ago.”

“Jack?”

He blinked. “How did you know? He’s the one that hooked me up with my mentor.”

“He’s Luna’s mate, but back then, he had a son he didn’t know about.”

“Ouch.”

“She’s the cautionary tale for getting involved with dragons. And two dragons never do this kind of thing.” She flipped her fingers between him and Nalu.

Keahi smiled. “That is because we are not fighting for territory. I am lava; he is ocean.”

Mano chuckled. “And I don’t care.”

She smiled slightly. Mano was the drummer. Not much ruffled him.

She paused as she remembered the comments. “Oh... this isn’t good.”

Nalu asked, “What is it, maiden?”

She blinked. “Uh, I am going to look like the most determined groupie ever.”

Mano snorted.

A woman with a little girl came in and knocked on the wall. “Hey, cousins, someone said they had seen you this

morning. Where's my hug?"

Keoki came over and hugged her. "Good morning, Solai, Haril. Is that Arfloof? He's grown."

Haril giggled and explained that Arfloof was the same.

Keahi kissed Eliana's cheek and walked over to hug his cousin and greet her daughter's stuffed animal.

The little girl hugged him when he crouched, and that got Eliana right in the ovaries.

Mano had moved next to her and said, "He's good with kids."

She glanced at him. "Uh-huh."

Keahi hugged the stuffed animal and gave it back to the little girl.

Solai looked at her and smiled. It wasn't an unkind smile. She asked Keahi, "Trolling for tourists?"

He took Solai by the hand. Eliana knew the name from her conversations with Ven.

"Solai, this is my mate, Eliana. Eliana, this is Solai."

Eliana extended her hand, and Solai looked her over and then blushed. "You are wearing an outfit from the royal household."

Eliana smiled. "I am the nanny for Penina and the new littles. The as-yet-untitled babies. The family wanted to do interviews and photo shoots today, so I have the time off."

Mano walked up behind her. "So, she is out playing with us. Courtship is hard, sis."

She pinked, and Solai blinked and grinned. "Aw, you are going to be my sister-in-law. Mano is my husband's brother."

"I am fairly sure that isn't how it works. I will just be a mate with an attachment to their grouping. Like a contract employee." She smiled. "Wait. How did you pick out the clothing?"

“Oh, I made most of it, so when Ven needed something that could deal with her bustline, I picked that design, and Kane used it when he needed to get stuff run up for visitors to the residence.” Solai smiled. “Can you give me a turn? I want to see how the straps are sitting.”

“Oh. Sure.” She swept her hair over her shoulder and turned her back, realizing what she had done when Solai inhaled sharply.

“Oops.”

Haril asked, “Mommy, what’s that? It’s pretty.”

Eliana dropped her hair back into place. “Sorry. I forgot it was there.”

Solai blinked and explained to Haril. “That’s a mark, baby. That means that her partners made that mark on her back so other alphas know that she has partners.”

“Like the one daddy made on your neck?”

“Yup.”

Haril wandered to the corner and explained it all to Arfloof.

Solai looked at Mano. “No bite.”

He smiled. “Not yet. But courting has started.”

Eliana blushed again.

Solai grinned. “They do it in weird ways. My husband kept catching me when waves knocked me over. Then, he punched the shark behind me. Of course, if I had known it was Mano, Haril might not have made it into the world as soon as she did.”

Mano grinned. “It wasn’t me. I just convinced it to head into the shallows, approach you, and swim away. It seemed he got a little too close. I had to apologize and get him some fish for the nose punch.”

Eliana sighed. “Wing man.”

He shrugged. “Dalnet was driving me nuts. Solai was clever and sweet. They needed each other.”

“I *was* clever and sweet?” Solai raised her brows.

“Now you are a stunning intellect and graceful partner for my dipshit brother.” Mano smiled.

“Nice save.”

He grinned.

Eliana looked around and saw the others heading upstairs. “Where are they going?”

“They are going to check the repairs to the upper part of the house and probably check on the nest for soundproofing.”

“Oh, right. Henry.”

Henry and Amelia came in as if on cue.

“Hey, Elly! We wondered where you had gone.” Amelia smiled. She walked away from Henry, and the omega pouted.

Elly got a warm hug and smiled at Henry. “The guys are all upstairs.”

He looked at Amelia and sighed. “Right.”

Elly introduced Solai and Hiral to Amelia. They all smiled, and Solai chuckled, “So, what do you do?”

“The technical term is a sin eater, but I can consume curses, spells, any of the stuff I used to think was bullshit.” She looked down at Hiral. “Sorry for the bad word.”

The little girl smiled and ran to the corner to get her stuffed animal.

Solai grinned. “Her dad cusses like crazy and then freezes when he sees her standing in the corner, taking notes.”

Elly chuckled. “So, Amelia, why is Henry watching you like his favourite toy is being taken away?”

“I have to call Wren for a transport. Henry has asked me to stay, and it is kind of tempting ‘cause he is cute and charming, but Keoki has a dark, angry stare that I am not a fan of. So, since they are a package deal, I don’t

want to create any rifts.” She shrugged. “I also don’t want to get involved in his heat. That’s not a good idea.”

Elly put her arm around Amelia and rubbed her shoulder. “Do what you feel is right, but make sure they know what’s going on before you leave.”

“Why?”

“Because if Henry is attached and thinks you were whisked away, he would make Keoki go after you. And then you would have to explain it anyway, but everyone would be pissed off.”

Amelia sighed. “Sensible. Will you come with me upstairs so I can tell him, uh, them?”

“Sure. Coming, Solai?”

“No, I am going to head down to the village to get some heat supplies for Henry. No sense in waiting until the last minute.”

They said farewell to the mother and daughter and headed up the stairs.

Amelia clutched her hand, and they came around the corner. The rooms were all open, the beds were low, and the windows caught all the breezes. They could hear the guys down at the end of the walkway, and Amelia dragged her along. Elly chuckled, and then they saw the guys in one of the rooms, next to a door that probably led to the nest.

Amelia smiled at Henry, and the omega nearly came bounding over. Amelia’s hand tensed on Elly’s as she murmured her explanation to Henry.

“What the fuck? What do you mean you are leaving me?”

Keoki came to Henry’s side and put his arm around him. “What did she say, Henry?” He was scowling at Amelia and looking at Henry with concern.

Amelia nodded. “And that sums it up. Henry, I do hope you can find a beta that you get along with, but based on

the hostility coming from Keoki, it can't be me. I wish you luck finding someone who suits you both."

Henry turned to Keoki and started to yell at him while the omega cried through the shouting.

Amelia stepped in and snapped, "Henry! He's your alpha and deserves your respect. Not all alphas with omegas are looking for anything else. You two are a solid couple. Just because Syar has a beta doesn't mean you need one, too." She sighed. "We aren't collectibles."

Henry lunged for her, and Amelia squeezed Elly's hand as Henry's arms wrapped around her friend. He was sobbing out loud, and Keoki looked worried. He looked to Eliana. "What should I do?"

She pried her hand away from Amelia's and stepped out of the room. She looked at Keoki and asked, "What do you want to do?"

"Make Henry happy. He is so different now. Why does he want her?"

"He wants to wrap himself around her because she is strong and stable and meets his gaze. She helped him for no other reason than that she could." She asked him, "What is the problem you have with her in general?"

He leaned in and whispered, "She isn't pretty."

He didn't see her hand coming, but when he slammed into the doorway, she knew that he had felt it.

Amelia looked at her. "Elly? What's wrong?"

"Can you do that makeover spell you developed?"

"Uh, don't want to. People will stare."

"I just need you to do it and hold it for a minute."

Amelia stepped away from Henry, whispering words that refused to stick in Elly's mind. A flat disk appeared over Amelia's head and lowered, and as it passed down, her hair curled, makeup softly coloured her face, and a dress that highlighted her exaggerated hourglass figure was left in place. Keoki stared and blinked. "I didn't

guess. I just didn't want Henry to feel self-conscious in public."

Henry winced. "I would have. Four days ago even. When I was wrong. The darkness is gone now. She glowed to me before she did this." He waved at the makeover.

Amelia wrapped her arms around her waist. "Can I dismiss it?"

Keoki nodded. "Yes, I am sorry for your discomfort."

Amelia sighed. "It's fine. I am just not a fan of my body. My activation wasn't comfortable, but I managed to kill him and get loose, so that was something. My body was the catalyst to the initial abduction."

She moved her fingers, and the disk rose, lifting over her head and disappearing. She was back to her hair in a thick braid, no makeup, a tired complexion, and the concealing clothing that Kane had obtained.

She looked at Keoki and gestured at her appearance. "This is where I am safe. This is where people ignore me and look past me."

Henry lunged at her and held her.

Amelia said, "Ah, hey, hey. You don't get it. I like people to look past me. It is my favourite thing." She stroked his hair. "Come on, Henry. You are going to be in heat in the next day or so. You and Keoki will manage just fine. You can send me a text when you can think again."

"You will come and give me a hug?" Henry looked so hopeful.

She chuckled. "No, honey, but I will cheer you on and congratulate you on the possibility of pregnancy."

"I can't have kids."

"Yeah, but I removed the blockage. There is a lot more energy available to your body now." She kissed his forehead. "Now, go get ready for your heat. Get your

favourite snacks, water, sports drinks, and something with a calming scent.”

“Can I have your shirt? The one that you arrived with,” he whispered.

She nodded. “Of course, sweetie.”

“And your underwear?” His expression went from hopeful to sly.

“It isn’t your size.”

He laughed and rubbed his cheek along hers.

Keoki turned his head toward Eliana. “So, what do you think my odds are at asking her to stay for him?”

Amelia looked at him. “I am right fucking here. Twat.”

Eliana’s group, who had watched it all, walked toward her and muttered about privacy for grovelling while Keahi grabbed her and carried her to one of the other bedrooms. Eliana was going to head back to the other trio the moment she was loose.

Nalu grabbed her around the waist and kept her from getting away. “Let Keoki grovel without witnesses. He doesn’t have much practice.”

Keahi grabbed Eliana’s right hand and sighed. “So, you really hit him.”

“Uh, yeah.”

“You broke your knuckles.”

“That explains the pain.” She chuckled.

He sighed and lifted her hand to his lips. He exhaled fire, and it ran across her knuckles. Her hand got warm, then hot, and then the throbbing ache that had been starting disappeared. It took a few minutes, and she was feeling distinctly warm afterward. She flexed her hand and smiled. “Thank you for that, Keahi.”

He smiled. “The service wasn’t free.” He tapped his lips.

“You are joking.”

“No. I never joke about kissing you.”

She looked at the bed platform. “Either I go up, or you come down.”

Mano laughed, Nalu snorted, and Keahi sat down. She smiled at Keahi, face to face. “Thanks for the healing.” She tried to get away with a quick kiss, but his arms snapped around her, and the kiss was anything but quick. Somehow, she ended up shivering under him with his hand pressed to her breast under the fabric.

She tried to say something witty and ended up with, “Oh.”

He smiled and brushed his lips against hers. To her shock, it was the dragon’s gaze staring at her.

“Hello, maiden.”

“As an endearment, it lacks a certain something,” she whispered.

“Oh, for Nalu and I, it is the most loving thing we can call you. When we begin, we crave a maiden of our own, and we wait. He stumbled across you when both of you were too young, so I marked you, so he could find you when he was ready, but you got the mark silenced.”

“I did. It hurt.”

He rubbed his cheek against hers. *“I am sorry for that. I am very sorry for that. Once the mark went silent, I was furious. I attacked my mentor, and he stomped me flat. He told me that betas were not suitable mates, and I should seek out an omega.”*

She chuckled. “There is only one dragon omega on the planet, and she isn’t with your mentor. He has his first newbie right now. Luna’s son.”

“You mean Jack’s son.”

She narrowed her eyes. “If he was going to claim him, he should have shown up at any time in the first seventeen years.”

He closed his eyes and opened them slowly. *“I don’t wish to debate this with you.”*

“Fine. Get your hand off my tit. It’s distracting.”

Keahi grinned. She recognized that smile. She had gone to sleep hugging her pillow, remembering that smile. “Not fair.” She ran her thumb along his lips.

He licked her thumb and leaned in for another kiss.

Nalu cleared his throat. “Kane has come by to ask if you want food.”

She thought about it. “Actually, I am hungry.” She met Keahi’s flashing gaze. “Off.”

He grumbled and backed off after one last stroke of her nipple.

She shivered, and he helped her to her feet. Mano wrapped his arm around her waist. “So, my wet darling, can I request an appetizer?”

She snorted. “No appetizers. Sometimes you just need a sandwich.”

There was a heartbeat of quiet, and the three started to laugh. She went hot. “Oh, balls.” More laughing. “Oh, god.” She covered her face with her hands.

They walked down the path to the residence, and she didn’t uncover her face until she had been steered to a chair. Ven, Syar, and Reynaldo were there. No kids. Ven put a finger to her lips. “Naps.”

Eliana smiled. “Precious time.”

Amelia, Henry, and Keoki came in and sat down. They looked calm, and Keoki was looking surprised, but Henry had a grown-up expression on his face, and Amelia was politely amused.

Syar stared at Henry as the food platters were dropped off. “Why do you look irritated?”

Henry looked at Amelia. “She won’t sleep with me just for fun.”

Amelia snorted. “I told you I would stay here. Fucking you was not in that sentence. Keoki isn’t my alpha, so

getting too involved with you isn't a smart idea. But... free hugs."

Henry huffed and grumbled, but he leaned over and hugged her, and peace crossed his features.

Keoki frowned. "And she won't tell me what her alpha is like, so we can't even find one to match her with."

Eliana smiled. "And after matching her, you would negotiate with him to keep her nearby or join your pack."

Henry looked sly. "Maybe."

Amelia snorted as she started to serve herself. "Good luck with that."

Eliana smiled. "Excuse me for a minute." She got up, crept to the nursery, and got her phone off the charger. She made a call and smiled at the answer to her query. She carried her phone to the table and handed the phone to Keoki. "Here you go. Ask what you want to know. There will be details, so remember them."

The alpha got up and spoke into the phone, introducing himself.

Henry got up to follow. "I will go along. He's not great with remembering things."

They were speaking into the phone that was now on speaker as they left the dining room.

Amelia looked at her. "Who is on the phone?"

"Wren."

"Really? Why would you do that?"

"Because she knows and is willing to help them arrange it. If she is willing, it means that he wouldn't show up in your path on his own." Eliana shrugged. "Or she. I know you aren't fussy."

Amelia shrugged and started eating. "True."

Syar cocked his head. "You're..."

"Demisexual. I used to think it was asexual, but I once found someone sexually attractive, so then the label

shifted a little.” Amelia smiled. “Are you going to be able to eat all of that?”

Eliana looked down and stared. There were three neatly assembled sandwiches on her plate. She looked up in outrage. “Which one of you perverts made the triple-decker?”

Mano laughed, and it was enough of a confession.

She started on the triple-decker and drank a lot of water. Her mother had always insisted that she finish everything on her plate. She made it through and then thudded her head to the plate. “I am *not* having dinner.”

Amelia smiled. “Just find some sushi.”

Keahi said, “There aren’t any sushi places in the village.”

Ven nodded. “True. I have been looking up listings, and all the fun restaurants are on the other side of the island. I couldn’t hunt sushi down until the pregnancy was over, but guess what... it’s over.”

Eliana gasped, “Even pizza?”

Ven nodded sadly. “Even pizza.”

Reynaldo snorted. “We can make pizza.”

Ven looked at him with a skeptical eye. “Really? We?”

He blushed. “Right. I will ask Kane.”

“Good plan, sport.”

Ven yelped as she was hauled onto her mate’s lap.

Eliana chuckled and coordinated her hands into a massaging of her abdomen. That was a lot to take in in one sitting, and she was wary that it was a sign of things to come... so to speak.

Chapter Seven

Eliana groaned as Keahi pulled her onto his lap. He placed a hand over hers on her tummy and tutted. “If you are uncomfortable, you need to stop.”

“Oh, why are there so many reference similarities between sex and food?” she muttered.

Nalu chuckled. “Because it makes it more fun.”

Keahi murmured, “I can help with the discomfort if you like?”

She opened one eye and squinted with the other. “That sounds nice, but do I get to keep my clothing on?”

“Of course. Just open your mouth.”

She was suspicious, but discomfort won out, and she opened her mouth. Fire blazed into her, and she grabbed hold of his shirt and hung on. *Mate fire. Damn it.*

The fire roared through her, and she heard that rush in her ears, and after about two minutes, he stopped.

Eliana slumped against him. “An antacid was out of the question?”

Keahi chuckled and stroked her hair. “I would have had to go to the bathroom for that. This meant I didn’t have to stand up. Feeling better?”

Her body was rippling with arousal, and there was a weird throbbing behind her navel. “No. There is just weird stuff all over. Like it scattered.”

He nuzzled her temple. He softly said, “You know what that was, right?”

She grimaced. “I know.”

Amelia was chuckling as Henry and Keoki came back. “Was that mate fire?”

Keahi nodded. “Yes, it was.”

Amelia asked, “Does it hurt, Elly?”

“No. But it’s weird.”

“That’s definitive.” Amelia laughed.

Keoki handed Elly her phone. “That was very informative, and she is willing to assist. There are two very interesting candidates within her sphere of influence.”

She grinned.

Amelia blinked. “What now?”

Henry explained. “Wren came up with two possible partners for you who would also be willing to attach to us via me. Keoki is less thrilled about that, but if it gets him help during my heat, it will be worth it. The two in question will be here before the concert tomorrow. If you like them, you can keep them.”

Elly stared at her friend. “Wow. You get to go shopping. I just found mine at the beach.”

Cool fingers ran over her back, and she tensed. She turned to look at Nalu. “I found you under a rock?”

He narrowed his eyes. “Try again.”

“If I put my head against your chest, I can hear the ocean?”

He snorted. “Slightly better.”

Mano finished his lunch and chuckled.

She looked at him and said, “And when I saw you, there was this weird orchestral riff.”

He chuckled.

Elly looked over to Ven and found her friend and her alpha and omega looking at their grouping with rapt attention. She cleared her throat. “And that is how to be obnoxious about being a new couple, triad, quad?”

Keahi rubbed her hip. “You are getting it.”

She blushed. “I am super embarrassed right now.”

The wail of a baby gave her an out. “I’ve got it.” She bolted out of Keahi’s embrace and headed for the

nursery.

Penina was in her crib, and the door was now propped open. The twins were starting to twist and fidget, but they were asleep, so she picked up her charge and wiped the tears. The diaper was dealt with, hands washed, and then she carried Penina to the kitchen to get her something to eat. Syar came into the kitchen after her and grinned. “I believe she’s mine for the day or the week.”

“I thought I was here to be a nanny.”

Syar shrugged. “Times change. Adapt.”

“Are you sure you don’t want another alpha? I have extra.”

Nalu’s voice rang out, “Eliana!”

Syar chuckled as he rocked his daughter. “You are very clever. Ven has mentioned that you are a writer.”

“Yup. It’s the normal day job.” She smiled. “Well, abnormal day job.”

“Can I read some of your work?”

“Sure. Snag Ven’s phone. She has a good chunk of my work on there.”

He chuckled. “I shall.”

She smiled, and they got some of Venetia’s milk and warmed it in a bottle. He grinned as she used warm air from her hand to heat the bottle. “Neat trick.”

“I think so. It’s a fun party trick and makes taking care of babies a lot easier.”

Penina got her bottle, and her fussy face eased.

She spoke to Syar, “So, what kind of books do you like?”

He grinned. “You are stalling.”

“Yes. Answer the question, please.”

“When I read, I like action romance.”

She smiled, and while he rocked Panina, they discussed books.

Keahi let them get through fantasy settings before he came in and asked her, “How are you feeling?”

She growled and glared at him. “Hot.”

His smile was slow. “Would you like me to help you with that?”

She thought of a billion answers, but the one she used was, “Either you help, or I get Nalu to go first.”

He picked her up and kissed her cheek. “It’s okay, maiden.”

Syar’s eyes went wide. “Mai—”

Eliana held her index finger up. “Shush.”

Keahi chuckled and said, “It will be fine, Elly.”

“Says you, it isn’t your junk in peril.”

He grinned. “I have missed you.”

She tucked her head against his shoulder. “I missed you, too.”

He shivered and nodded to Syar before leaving the kitchen and the amused staff.

He walked past the dining room and left the residence.

“Where are we going?”

“My room in the old house.”

She blinked. “Oh.”

She turned her head and saw Nalu and Mano walking casually in their wake. “They have to be there?”

“No, but it will help them understand how you react. They can also tackle my dragon if he takes over.”

“Oh. Are you worried about him?” she asked quietly.

“He’s quiet and satisfied with the fact that you will submit to me.”

“I am not sure I will call it submission.”

He grinned as he carried her up the steps. “We will do an analysis of events when you are exhausted in my arms.”

She pressed her lips together. “I want it double-spaced with bullet points.”

He walked into one of the rooms that overlooked the ocean. “Here we are. Keoki and Henry have the room with the nest. If you feel you need one, we can make one in one of the empty rooms.”

As he spoke, he untied the base of her halter top before he released the neckline and pulled it. The fabric slipped downward, and Keahi pulled it away and tossed it aside. He smiled. “You’ve grown.”

“I am going to punch you right in the nose.” She moved to cover her breasts.

He knelt in front of her and pressed a kiss over her heart. She wrapped her arms around his head and held him to her. He looked up at her and smiled. She threaded her fingers through his hair. She leaned down and kissed him. Her skirt rustled down around her ankles. She paused, “Busy fingers.”

He grinned and settled her on the bed, flicking off her sandals. He leaned over her and continued the kiss. She moved against him restlessly, and he slid his fingers between her thighs.

He continued the kiss as his fingers entered her. She gasped and arched her back. She felt his smile against her mouth, and she continued to let the kiss work on her as it always did. His fingers moved easily, and the heat in her abdomen felt like she was melting all over his hand.

He worked in one finger after the next, and when he felt whatever he was looking for, he kissed her until she moaned as she gripped him, waves of pleasure moving through her.

He pulled his fingers from her body and stripped out of the loose shirt and trousers he had been wearing. She tried not to react, but he was stunning. She had started going out with him because of his smile and sense of

humour. She had figured out the body later, but thirty was very different from twenty. Maturity did fun things.

He came down over her, and she felt his erection pressing into her. She gasped and held her breath as he eased into her. He got in so far, and then there was resistance. She tensed, and he paused.

“Breathe, Elly.”

She gasped and muttered, “You’re not the boss of me.”

He chuckled and reached between them, rubbing slowly at her clit.

She breathed in and out, and he moved in another centimetre. Her clit was getting a serious massage, and he kept sliding further and further into her.

She grunted when she felt his pelvis against hers and his thighs holding hers apart.

Elly looked up at him and said, “That’s it, right?”

He chuckled. “That’s it.”

She exhaled slowly and inhaled when he withdrew.

He moved carefully, and when he had a slow rhythm going, he asked her, “So, how does it feel?”

She twisted under him. “Oh, shut up.”

He chuckled. “That good, huh?”

She arched until her nipples scraped his chest. Elly felt him grip her thigh and pull it high on his hip. His beat picked up speed, and she felt a different kind of orgasm building. Elly started shaking, and as he thrust in, she broke apart as pleasure rushed and burned her nerves. She was sweaty and quivering, and he moved fast before he growled, and a weird rumble came from his chest.

She felt a spear of heat inside her, pooling where her organs didn’t use to be. She was glad she had been warned about the side effect. Dragons needed more space; that was what the mate fire did. It remade her into a suitable vessel for the dragon.

Elly closed her eyes as her body dealt with the ejaculate and her awareness of the fact that she had just had unprotected sex. With Key. Oh, boy.

He nuzzled her cheek and told her she was the best maiden ever.

She kept her eyes closed and turned her head to the side.

“Elly, are you okay?”

She opened her eyes at the concern in his tone. “I’m fine. I am good.”

He slid out of her and rolled her to her side. He wrapped his arms around her and held her close. He let out a soft hum, and she asked, “What are you thinking about?”

“How hard you would punch me if I went to do that again but with some more energy.”

She swallowed. “I don’t know. Where did the guys go?”

Mano’s voice spoke from the door to the deck. “We are over here.”

She turned her head and waved. “Oh. Hey.”

Nalu chuckled. “That was very delicate and dainty, but well done, Keahi.”

Elly muttered, “Now I am just worried about when the dragon jumps me.”

Keahi murmured, “You aren’t receptive yet, so that is what he is waiting for.”

Nalu nodded. “Same with mine.”

Mano grinned. “You have already met my beast, and you are not equipped for him, so no worries here.”

She remembered the extended claspers and shuddered. “Nope.”

He chuckled. “Glad you do not have the ego of a drunk sorority chick.”

“That was... weirdly specific.” She looked at him.

He rubbed his chin. “It does sound that way, doesn’t it?”

Keahi ran his hand down her body and covered her sex. She gripped his wrist, and he slicked his fingers and circled her clit. Her body stiffened, and she struggled.

“What’s wrong, Elly?”

She blushed. “They are staring.”

“They were staring before.” He dipped a finger inside her, and his other hand cupped her breasts.

She bit her lip as she met Nalu’s gaze. He smiled and approached, kneeling and kissing her. The kiss was what she needed, and she relaxed into his grip. She shivered, put her self-control in neutral, and waited to see where they took her.

Elly gasped and clung to Nalu as she throbbed around Keahi’s hand. He slid into her again, and this time, it was slow, deep thrusts that moved her around on the sheet. Nalu sucked at one nipple while Keahi kneaded the other breast. She braced against Nalu as she was rocked forward, and then she softly wailed and pressed her head to the other dragon.

The deep thrust lifted her into Nalu’s arms, and the growl out of Keahi accompanied the heat inside her, and then he was nuzzling at her neck again.

Nalu stroked her hair. “Are you okay, Elly?”

She nodded. “I’m good.”

“Are you amenable to us each having a day with you so as not to be overwhelmed?”

Elly nodded. “Yup. Sounds good.”

“You would agree to body piercing in order to get back on your feet, wouldn’t you?” Nalu chuckled. He tapped her cheek.

“Yup. Sounds good.”

He laughed, and Keahi laughed, but she could feel that. There was a lazy joy that was in her mind that

didn't belong to her. It was him.

She froze. A comforting wave came through to her, and he kissed her ear. "It's okay. I have been wanting to have this with you for a decade."

He wove her fingers with his, and she relaxed. When he tilted her head back, she opened her lips slightly and then the fire tumbled over her, and when he withdrew, it flashed between her thighs. She sighed as the flame made it down to her toes.

"There, all tidy." Nalu chuckled, "At least dragons clean up after themselves."

She stretched and slowly sat up. She slumped a little. "Whoa."

Once they got her to her feet, Nalu helped her dress and kissed her softly.

Mano came over, and he kissed her as well. "Well done, maiden."

He smiled. "Want to go for a swim?"

She looked at his black eyes and nodded. "It sounds like fun."

Nalu nodded. "It sounds like a good idea. Oh, did you know we are a registered shiver?"

"A what?"

"Group of sharks. Since Mano doesn't have wings, we took the plural of his beast." They started moving her toward the stairway while Keahi dressed and grabbed her shoes. She walked down the steps and out to the pathway. Mano picked her up and carried her down the steep walkway.

He set her down, got her naked, got him naked while Nalu was stripping, and then he picked her up and carried her into the surf.

Playing in the sea and having Mano take her to some wrecks was a lot of fun. Nalu's small dragon moved

through the surf and occasionally snagged her off the shark to take her deeper to the wrecks.

She saw the occasional skeleton and a few flat-topped treasure boxes the dragon popped open for her.

She smiled, ran her hand through the gold, and then turned and swam carefully out of the wreck. She looked up, and a huge, dark shape came between her and the light. Nalu grabbed her and took on his larger form. He gripped her in his claws and darted through the water. There was just one problem; he was moving so fast that she couldn't breathe.

She forced her hand through the water and tapped his claws.

He shot out of the water, and she gasped for air.

He *threw* her through the air, and she flipped end over end to land in Keahi's claws. They formed a protective cage around her, and she was able to see the dark vessel that had pulled up, lowering the zodiac into position with two occupants. The boat shot out and then headed for the private beach area of the village.

Keahi was concerned as she panted to catch her breath. She sent a comforting emotion to him and curled up on his palm. He was warm, and she dried before he headed to the shore.

This was not going to go in a book. She would never flip a naked heroine around.

She was brought back to her clothing and got dressed quickly.

She poked Nalu with two fingers. "Don't grab me and swim like that. I nearly passed out."

He winced. "Sorry. When we have an active link, I will be able to feel your distress."

She nodded. "Uh-huh."

Mano wrapped his arms around her, kissing her neck. "Do we want to see who the newcomers are?"

She nodded. "Sure."

Dressed and ready, they marched back to the residence, where there was a line of alphas waiting to greet the newcomers. Elly walked toward the family and took Penina from Syar. He nodded.

Ven, Syar, and Reynaldo stood to greet the newcomers.

The smaller alpha of the two looked elegant, graceful, and had a provocative sexuality that beamed out of him through the blond crewcut, tight black tee, and black cargo pants. The combat boots that both wore were a nice touch.

The taller one had an eye patch, a scar down his face, and was a calm seven-foot-tall. The rest of him was severely bulked out.

Syar smiled. "Hello, visitor. Normally folk pull around to the city."

The big fellow rumbled, "Wren sent us."

Henry and Keoki came out, and Henry's jaw dropped. "Wow."

Amelia came out in her concealing clothing and said, "What's the fuss? Oh."

Elly played with Pen while Amelia looked at the new people. "Why are they here?"

Elly grinned. "It is Wren's offering to you. One of them is your mate."

Amelia put her hand to her throat. "Oh, geez."

The smaller of the two males came forward with a charming expression. "So, which of you charming betas is destined to be mine."

He reached for Elly, and she reacted before her men could. Her hair whipped out, wrapped around his arms, twisted his hands behind his back, and forced him to his knees. "Ah, ah. Not for you."

He was kneeling, looking at her shiver, and he nodded. "Ah. Taken. Got it."

She leaned in and whispered in his ear, “And only a few hours ago, so try and touch me again. They bite.”

“Uh, I may have been over-eager.”

“Yeah, and this is not a guaranteed thing. I don’t know why you both were tapped, but she only needs one of you.” She stood, and he flickered. She saw horns and smelled sex. “But I know who you do belong to. She just isn’t here right now.”

Amelia looked at her curiously. “Whose is he?”

“Gia. She might throw him back if she sees him crawling around on other women.”

He spoke calmly, “Actually, miss, it is the alpha who does the choosing.”

Ven snorted, Elly cackled, and Amelia sighed and shook her head.

The one-eyed male murmured, “Please, let him go. He loses his head around the ladies but is steadfast and reliable.”

Amelia nodded. “Let him go, Elly. I think your assembly is a sufficient deterrent.”

Elly growled, “You know how much I hate that bullies only leave you alone when you have a scarier bully on your side.”

Amelia snorted. “You are strangling him with your hair.”

Elly unravelled her hair and let the alpha go.

Amelia walked up to the one-eyed giant. “Hello. My name is Amelia.”

She stuck out her hand, and he twisted his lips and shook her hand. “Tor. Short for Victor.” When their hands collided, there was a definite spark.

Amelia smiled. “I thought it referred to the rocky hill.”

“That, too.”

Amelia chuckled. “Who’s your skanky friend?”

“Armin. Armin Vendil.”

Elly picked up her phone and sent a message to two people. Amelia nodded with a smile. The message was sent, and now they had to wait to see if Gia was interested in the man who had saved her and set off the alteration seven years earlier.

Chapter Eight

The locals had moved some furniture in, and they were having refreshments overlooking the ocean from the old house.

Amelia was explaining things to Keoki when something happened. She lifted her head and smiled. “Gia’s here.”

Syar laughed. “I am suddenly drowning in charming women, but I honestly don’t mind.”

Elly shuddered. “Don’t say drowning.”

The scent of a woman in heat hit them before Gia rounded the corner.

Amelia got up and walked over to the woman in the jean jacket, t-shirt, jeans, and hiking boots. “Gia. Hey. Nice jacket.”

“Thanks. I was chopping wood when Wren called.”

Armin got to his feet, and she glanced at him. “Oh. Hell. Yeah. He’s the one. I have identified him. Can I go?”

Elly smiled. Gia was not in the mood for bullshit today, but she was intrigued, or every guy at the table wouldn’t be sporting a boner from her scent.

Amelia stepped aside as Armin loomed over Gia.

Gia stared up at him, and her pheromones blocked his.

Armin frowned. “You are familiar.”

“So are you. We have met.”

He scowled, “Where?”

“I was adrift in a lifeboat and had just blown myself up to get your attention. I don’t do that for every guy.” She grimaced.

His eyes went wide. “I thought you died.”

Gia looked at Amelia. “Dear god. I am dead. Get Wren to send me to my cemetery plot.”

Amelia grinned. “Call her yourself.”

Armin frowned. “No, they told me you died.”

“Oh, I did. Twice. They managed to get me back. Cardiac arrest. I nearly bled out, and I had some unlocated particles that made me septic. I felt so fucking pretty waking up rigged like an elementary school plumbing project.”

She looked at him. “So, thanks for hauling me out of that sinking boat.”

She extended her hand to him, and he grabbed her hand. There was a spark, and his horns were visible. Of course, Gia flashed into a stunning woman in a soft gown, but when the flash was over, she was in her heavy gear and boots.

Elly knew what Gia looked like when truly relaxed for a social event. She could make angels weep; she was so gorgeous. It took a lot of effort to butch up as much as she had, but she considered it worth the work.

Armin looked at her. “Do you always look like this?”

Gia grinned. “Every chance I get.”

He sighed. “I had hoped you would be more feminine.”

She laughed. “Send me home, Amelia.”

“I can’t. Luna says you are requested as the opening act for Emerald Shiver.”

Keahi grinned. “That’s us.”

Gia groaned. “Oh, come on. The band isn’t here. What would I do for backup?”

Elly asked, “Solo? Acapella?”

Gia grimaced. “I guess it will have to be unless... Amelia, did you ever make headway with the drums?”

“Nope, but my nephew taught me the keyboards.”

“Amelia, will you be my backup band?”

Amelia grinned. "I will... but we need stage clothing."

Ven laughed. "We will be able to help with that. Solai has an excellent fashion sense."

Henry perked up from where he had been pouting and glaring at Tor. "I can help with that."

Gia sighed. "Right, when is this thing?"

Syar smiled. "Tomorrow night."

"Good. Then, Armin can continue his search for his pretty princess, and I can finish dealing with that stand of oaks."

Ven got up and smiled. "Come on. I can get you some clothing more suited to the climate."

They walked away, and Armin stared at Gia's denim-clad ass. Elly grinned, and when Gia was gone, she burst out laughing. Armin looked pissed.

Tor smirked. "Buddy, you look upset."

"I have seen some of the mates that other alphas have gotten. Why do we get the boring ones?" Armin sat down in frustration.

The alphas at the table looked at him in astonishment. Amelia smirked, "Figures. Don't worry, Armin. The match isn't legally binding. You can go and attract dozens of beta ladies, have them all climb over you, and know that you won't have kids, or at least not ones that carry a designation beyond being alpha or beta." She grinned. "There is also the factor of never being able to let loose and be yourself with a partner you can trust... but you don't have a problem with that, do you?"

Elly grinned, and Keahi wrapped his arms around her from behind and propped his chin on her head. He went from human to dragon, and she stroked his jaw. Armin and Tor looked from the dragon to the woman in his grip. He shifted back to human. "Knowing that she can see me like that and not run is enough to give her all the treasures of the earth."

Nalu grinned. "And the sea."

Mano chuckled. “And she can ride a shark without flinching.”

Elly shrugged. “He’s still abrasive.”

Mano grinned. “But your thighs wrap around me so tight.”

She sighed. “It’s just easier. When you are going down. Shut up!”

Mano’s snorts and giggles made her grimace.

Elly covered her eyes.

Armin stared at them. “Dragons don’t do that.”

Nalu and Keahi lifted their heads and said in unison, “What?”

“They don’t share. They are greedy by nature. Plus, there is little likelihood that she will survive the first pregnancy.”

Elly smirked. “You think so? A mate who has access to her dragon during pregnancy has a nice and normal gestation, aside from having to eat fire once a week. And then... they are fine.”

Amelia chuckled. “We aren’t your normal betas.”

Tor looked down at her and nodded. “I am beginning to understand, I think.”

She looked at him, and there was a considering look in her eyes.

Armin was pouting until he saw Gia and Ven returning. “Holy shit.”

Gia was a queen. Head high, back straight, a wave of rippling opal-coloured hair behind her. Her eyes were a sparkling opal as well. Her feet were bare, and the hip wrap and breast band were iridescent.

Elly smiled. “Lovely as always, Gia.”

Gia inclined her head. “Thanks, Eliana. You are looking... well protected.”

Amelia grinned. “Not that she needs it. She can kill with a glass of water, and she has.”

Elly shrugged. “We all have our hobbies.”

The ladies all chuckled, including Ven.

Nalu smiled. “That is an unsettling sound.”

Tor shrugged. “I thought it was kinda hot.”

Amelia’s cheeks got slightly pink. Elly was stunned. It looked like Wren was right again. Then Elly looked at Armin, and Wren was way off at the same time.

Armin got to his feet and came over to Gia. “How can clothes make such a difference?”

Gia looked at him. “Because you are fucking your way through the population with abandon. With only an initial impression to work on before your scent wears off, you really don’t have the time to be as fussy as you are.” She snorted and shook her head. “Saytrs.”

Tor snorted. “She’s not wrong.”

Armin muttered, “Traitor.”

Tor chuckled.

Elly looked over at the babies in their father’s arms and Penina, who was held by her father’s arms.

Penina started snuffling, and Syar expertly soothed her. He had practice, after all.

Keahi leaned down and whispered, “Do you want one of those?”

“Omega? No, I am good.” She smiled, turned her head, and kissed him.

Gia smiled and then walked to take in the view.

Armin stood next to her, and they talked.

Elly watched and crossed her fingers. This was going to be tricky.

She knew it was midnight when cool hands pulled her from Keahi, and there was some growling back and forth. Nalu carried her to his bed and just wrapped her in his arms. He waited a few hours, gave her mate fire, and then they slowly had sex until dawn crept through the window. With Nalu, there was no friction. Everything was fluid, and his bed was wrecked, but when they were both satisfied, he blasted them both with fire, and they were able to slump together and sleep.

Keahi brought them breakfast and chuckled. “Fine, Nalu wins for stamina.”

“It isn’t a competition, Key.”

Nalu sat up. “It is a little, Eliana. That’s nature.”

“Huh?” She looked between them.

Mano came in yawning. “The one you like best has a better chance of getting you pregnant.”

She had a mouthful of fruit. “What? I don’t think it works that way.”

Mano crouched and said, “The one you like best will be the one you start turning to when you are receptive. More to the point, the one your body likes best is going to be the final deciding factor. So... it is a competition on the basic bias of wanting our genes to carry on.”

She chewed and swallowed. “Oh, that. Don’t you guys have to get to rehearsal?”

Keahi shook his head. “That’s where we were a few days ago. We know our marks and settings. Your friend might find things difficult.”

She shrugged. “Gia can call for reinforcements. The help that the book club can offer is growing with every video and concert. A lot of the ladies either had experience with music or got it after their alteration. It is also good therapy to get comfortable with your body again. The ones who altered via violence have trouble with the transition.”

“Are there a lot of them?”

“Only in our city. It is weird.” She shrugged. “But Wren knows and isn’t telling.”

Keahi stared. “So, if we hadn’t been shooting in your city...”

“We would never have met. Your dragon wouldn’t have marked me, and I wouldn’t be having breakfast with Nalu’s cock pressed to my back.”

Nalu chuckled and massaged her neck with his hands. She let out a warbling sound she didn’t know she owned and froze. He laughed and kissed her ear. “There are many new things to discover about each other.”

“That was so weird.”

Keahi chuckled. “My beast just perked up and got the urge to go looking for something pretty for you.”

“Aw, you guys *are* something pretty.”

Nalu chuckled and continued the neck and back rub. She made the sound again and groaned. “That’s going to get old fast.”

Nalu murmured, “Not for me.”

She stretched. “I need a shower. Or a swim. Or both.”

Nalu sighed. “A swim, I can’t do. We do have to practice after lunch.”

“What time is it?”

Mano spoke from across the hall. “Ten. Jack should be here on the next commercial flight.”

She paused and looked at him. “Jack?”

Mano nodded. “He’s your friend Luna’s mate. He’s bringing along some friends to help Gia out.”

Elly sighed. “Well, he is representing some of the betas, including Luna. Well, when she isn’t preggers. She’s the drummer. Her son is adorable.”

Nalu chuckled. “The baby?”

“The eighteen-year-old.” She laughed. “Eric is very cute, sweet, and helpful.”

He hummed in her ear, “He’s an alpha?”

“You could say that. Since he’s Jack’s son, you can guess at what he is.”

He wrapped his arms around her. “Don’t you even think about it.”

“Aw, I can think about it. Check my emotional state.”

He frowned and used the link. “You think of him like a puppy.”

“Yup. As I said, he is cute and sweet and helpful. But don’t tell him that.”

He squeezed her. “I won’t.”

He tilted her head back, and fire cascaded down her throat.

She was not going to put this into a book.

She was back at the residence when the guys had to go do their practice and wardrobe finals. The babies were all happy and slowly waving little fists in the air. Penina was being instructed on the details of becoming queen one day while Syar wore her in a baby wrap.

Ven sat with Elly, and she smiled. “I hear that a bunch of club members are going to be performing.”

“Yup. Sounds like quite the party.”

Ven cleared her throat. “So, when do you think we should head out?”

Elly rocked the twins. “I think that the littles need you and myself more.”

“Well, according to Syar, there is a royal box that we can settle in, and Reynaldo’s mother is coming in to meet her grandbabies, and she’s willing to watch Penina as well.”

Elly cocked her head. “I haven’t been to a concert in years.”

Venetia smiled. “I’ve got great seats.”

“When do we leave?” Elly grinned.

Ven checked her watch. “Our ride will be here in two hours, and a change of clothes is needed.”

“What? I have just been wearing this for a few days.” She chuckled.

“You have been washing it out?”

“They drip-dry really well.” She ran her hands down her skirt. “I thought that Nova was around here?”

“She and Mort are having a honeymoon. He locked her down right away. I think they went to see the Mariana Trench.” Ven smiled. “When they get back, they are going to be our household bodyguards, with occasional jaunts into the sea to find foundering boats.”

“Gia and Amelia?”

“Already in the city and practicing.”

“Huh. I missed a bit.”

Ven grinned and shrugged. “You were busy.”

“How do you deal with... more than one?”

“Oh. That. Well, with Syar, there’s a lot of lube, and with Reynaldo, he uses that to his advantage. There is one thing they do that your guys won’t, so no need to worry about that. Basically, just relax. Why? You think they are going to double-team you right away?”

“Oh. No. It’s just Mano is doubled up, so I am guessing that they either go in one at a time or both at the same time. I am hoping lube is a factor.”

“Seriously? Like a shark?”

“Very much like a shark, but one in front of the other, not side by side.”

“Wow. That’s... going to be tricky.”

Elly shrugged. “Well, that is a worry for another day. As in, tomorrow.”

Ven laughed. “Maybe they will be tired after the concert. Syar has high hopes of the charity benefiting.”

“What charity?”

“Oh, Syar puts on some kind of event for the kids on the island to go to the mainland to museums and a scholarship program for the folks who are near graduation.” She smiled. “They only have a marine biology course here.”

Elly chuckled. “Makes sense. I think vulcanology would also be an option. Is that a thing?”

“I think it is a side subject of geology.”

“Hm.” Elly chuckled. “Maybe I should get some work done before we head out.”

She got her notebook and sat curled up in the great room on a couch. She kept flipping pages until Ven came to her with a new outfit and pried the notebook out of her hands. She whined and pouted as she was bullied into the nursery to change. Elly emerged a few minutes later in heels, a glittery skirt that was a wrap ending at mid-thigh, and a halter top that barely covered what was necessary.

She walked out and looked at Ven in a similar outfit. “Are we going to *da club*?”

Ven laughed. “Well, it’s going to be a fun night, and I get to spend it crawling all over my mates and getting Reynaldo to purr.”

“How close am I going to be to you?”

“Well, I have the royal box... no jokes. You have a backstage pass. VIP. You may get to hang out with the band.”

Ven dangled a lanyard from her fingers and handed it to Elly. “We have to get to the city.”

“Wait, so you dress me up like a horny groupie and then dangle me in front of them?”

Venetia laughed. “Too much?”

“Nope. Just enough. Let’s go.”

Reynaldo's mother was crooning over the twins while holding Penina in her arms in the dining room. Bottles were lined up, and Kane knew what to do.

Venetia spoke to her mother-in-law and gave her her number and Syar's. She obviously had Reynaldo's. "Anything. Anything at all, and we are back here in ten minutes."

Mary grinned. "We are fine. Horatio is just out petting the horses. We love visiting the horses when we come here. It was so nice of you to join the boys. They are so happy it is ridiculous."

"Yeah, well, it was an altruistic thought gone wrong." Venetia smiled. "So, you are good?"

Mary nodded. "We are good. Have fun, and don't come back too early."

Venetia kissed the babies one by one, and then she held her hand out to Elly. Elly took it, and they headed out to the city in a carriage.

"So, how are the big cats dealing with the increased traffic at the residence?" Elly chuckled.

"They come in in the early hours. I scratch chins, cuddle the babies, and then they head back to the mountain."

They chatted, and when the driver pulled up next to a pathway, Ven said, "Down there is the entertainer entrance. Keep your lanyard front and centre, and there won't be a problem. If there is, call the boys." Ven winked.

Elly stepped down and let her hair ripple and wave in the night air. She walked down the gravel path for half a kilometre and came out of the jungle to stand in front of a fence with two hulking alphas. She waved. "Hello."

One of them sighed and stepped forward, gesturing for her to show her lanyard. The UV showed a dragon imprint behind the logo of the roaring jaguar.

"Name?"

“Eliana. Elly.”

The man stiffened and nodded. “Right. Just wait here, and we will have someone bring you to the dressing room.”

“Oh. Okay.”

She walked in and stepped to the side, waiting.

The alphas looked her over. One of them asked, “So, how do you know the band?”

“Oh, I used to date Key when I was sixteen and he was eighteen. We just reconnected.” It was true and not too embarrassing. She was still coming to grips with the whole idea of all of them.

A familiar face with scraped-back hair and a tight shirt that said *staff* was an excellent identifier. “Hey, Taz.”

Taz grinned. “Come on Eliana. Your mates are waiting for you.”

The alphas yelped, “Mates?”

Elly grimaced and followed her friend. “What are you doing here, Taz?”

“Emergency electrical staff,” Taz smirked. “You know me and power.”

“Yeah. I do.”

They walked through the backstage area to a series of dressing rooms with labels on the doors. Emerald Shiver was where Taz stopped. She knocked on the door and called out, “Guys, there is a fan here to get something signed.”

There was a groan from inside that she identified as Mano’s. He was urged to open the door, and when he did, the resigned look on his face turned to delight. “Elly!” He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her inside while slamming the door in the laughing Taz’s face.

The other two were laughing. They had felt Elly outside the door.

He popped something into his mouth before Mano kissed her, and she held onto his shirt while he pressed her to a pillar at the edge of the dressing room. The ridge in his jeans rocked against her sensitive bits, and she started gasping and moaning until she shuddered against him and moaned softly. He pressed soft kisses to her cheek and temple. She blinked as her body throbbed and pulsed. “What’s in your mouth?”

He chuckled, sucked, and pulled out two pieces of plastic or silicone. “Nalu suggested a bite guard, and I had one when I was eighteen, so I just asked my mom to bring it.”

“Oh, right. Mom. Shit. How am I going to explain this to my mother? Or my sister? Shit. She’s vegan.”

Mano started laughing, and the other two joined in. She had seen them eat. Vegans were just something that had the potential to end up on the plate. Sure, they ate fruit and salads, but meat was the main.

She blushed. “You might want to back up to let your jeans dry. Or change them.”

He grinned. “I will have it to remember you by while we are performing.”

She groaned. “Go change.”

He shook his head and pressed more firmly against her. “By the time we get out of here, it is going to be after midnight, and then it’s my day.”

Nalu got to his feet. “Hey, that’s right. It’s my day.”

Mano laughed and eased her to her feet. “Really like the skirt, by the way.”

“Yeah, yeah,” She muttered before Nalu grabbed and kissed her until she moaned and bit his lip lightly.

He grinned and pressed his forehead to hers. They remained there with his growing affection for her surging through the link.

She sighed and smiled. “When do you guys go on?”

“In an hour.”

Nalu guided her hand to the snap of his jeans.
“Whatever can we do for an hour?”

Shit. He could do it, too. She looked at the bright light of his eyes and felt anticipation through the link. It was research, after all.

Chapter Nine

Eliana stood behind the stage and watched their performance. The ladies had knocked it out of the park and warmed the audience up nicely.

She listened to Keahi sing, and it was just as lovely as it had been when they stood overlooking the lake and he had his arms around her. They had slightly swayed as he sang to her, and that was where she first fell in love with him. The song had been sweet, but she had never heard it on an album. It was theirs.

They took a break for a few minutes. Sweaty and exhilarated, she was hugged on all sides.

They went to the table of water and snacks, checked the time, and then Keahi smiled at her. “I really want to sing it. Can I?”

“Sure. Just don’t fuck it up.” She hopped up and kissed his cheek. He lifted her and kissed her then set her down on her feet.

From the wings, Elly watched them settle in, and Taz came up and murmured, “All his songs are about you.”

“What?”

“Every single one. *Nights at the Diner, Kisses and Shivers, Running from Love.*”

She looked at Taz blankly. “What?”

“How do you not know that?”

“I only listen to the instrumentals. Listening to his voice hurt.”

“Well, he’s now getting ready to sing your song.”

She swallowed and actually listened to the lyrics while her mind couldn’t grasp what she was hearing. He sang about slow walks and slower kisses, her in his arms under the stars, and the feeling of her heart in time with his. Elly blinked and knew she would demand that he sing her his entire repertoire.

Through her link, she felt love. It poured through her as he sang, and she really wanted to hold onto the resentment that had driven her forward.

When the song wound to a close, he said into the mic, “I wrote that song over ten years ago for Elly. So, Elly, can you come up here for a minute?”

Taz put a hand on her back and guided her to the stage.

Elly blinked and didn’t know where to look to get a path to him, so she just used the mark to guide her along. She waved at the crowd, and there was a surge of enthusiasm.

She saw Keahi and held her hands out as he approached, but he wrapped her in his arms and dipped her backward for his kiss. He righted her, took the mic, and said, “Congratulate us. We have managed to capture a bestselling author in the wild. Ingrid Adler, you are now my inspiration.” He continued, “And if any of you knew how hard it was to get an author into daylight, let alone out to an island, it was a superhuman feat that just one alpha could not accomplish.”

The crowd laughed, and Nalu came over and kissed her, spinning her around. She could feel her mark moving on her back, and there were gasps and more cheers. Wild screams happened when Mano lifted her, tucked her against him, and kissed her face to face. He grinned and whispered, “I’m a crowd favourite.”

She snorted, and he spun around before setting her back on her feet. Keahi retrieved her and told the crowd, “She has been the inspiration for every song I have written in the last ten years and all the ones not yet written.”

He kissed her cheek and then geared up to finish the second set. She retreated and walked back to the wings. Taz was laughing at her expression.

She got a bottle of water and drank it, leaning against the table. “That was embarrassing.”

Taz laughed. “And hearts broke all over the world.”

“Meh. I don’t know how much touring they are going to be doing in the future.”

A familiar figure walked up to her. “So, you are the one that Bertold pulled him away from for mentorship.”

“Hey, Jack. Yeah. I am.”

“Do they know you can sing?”

“Nope, and they are not going to. How did the ladies do?”

“Great. I wish they were willing to tour.”

She laughed. “No, we like to keep our freedom. The videos are all we need. They are keeping the club able to buy homes for those who have been dumped by their families. You know, like Tiffany or Bex.”

He nodded. “Bex was here today. She was dancing.”

“Geez. Was there a riot?”

“No, she has it under control right now.”

Elly winced. “Oh.”

He shrugged. “Well, she’s gotta eat. After Luna’s situation, I have a much more open mind about this kind of thing.”

“Yeah, her story will do that.”

He nodded.

“So, how’s Erik?” she asked impishly.

Jack sighed. “My son is going to have no trouble with the ladies. All of you dote over him.”

“He’s adorable, and he takes care of his mother.”

The frost dragon nodded.

“How’s the new baby?”

He laughed. “Loud but healthy. I am actually enjoying being there.”

“And yet, here you are.”

“Luna asked me to come out here, and this is Shiver’s final performance, so I thought it was proper that I come here to see them off. There is going to be a bit of a fuss over the announcement that they are sharing a mate. They each had very different preferences in females.”

She shrugged. “Yeah, I don’t get it either. Keahi is the only one who loves me, but Nalu feels a kind of giddy bubbling when he holds me. Mano is physically affectionate, so I think he actually likes me.”

“You are content with that?”

She laughed. “When your beast jumped Luna and dumped her, how much affection did you feel?”

He winced. “Right. So, you are willing to give them the benefit of the doubt?”

“There is no doubt. They each show affection in different ways.”

“You really write books?”

“Luna didn’t tell you?”

“No. What do you write?”

“Books. Romances where men and women get together against all odds, and the guys realize they did something stupid and careless that they need to work on before the woman will trust them again. I worked some shit out, and people paid me for it. Apparently, pain, stress, and heartache are tasty.”

He blinked. “Wow.”

She smiled. “So, Bertold is his name? Good. I owe him something. If Rickart hadn’t helped me, I would have burned out or lost the plot.”

“What do you owe Bertold?”

“A solid kick to the nuts.”

Jack chuckled. “Have someone record it. That is something I want to see.”

She smiled. “I didn’t know what or who, but I have been hanging onto the thought for a decade.”

“Keahi has done a one-eighty. He used to be so broody. He’s practically skipping, Nalu is grinning, and Mano is making direct eye contact. You have ruined my broody hunks.”

“I regret nothing.” She chuckled.

They stood next to each other and watched for them to wind down their performance. When they finished and took their bows, they thanked everyone for coming and donating their time to such a great cause, and then they took their instruments and headed backstage.

She gathered water bottles and handed them each one, and when they had hydrated, she was picked up and spun around.

Keahi pressed his lips to hers, and fire blazed through her system.

Jack filled in, “He’s trying to make you receptive with that, by the way. Just a head’s up.”

She gave him a thumbs-up. She knew what the guys were doing. When she was set back on her feet, she patted her chest. Mano circled around and got her into his arms. “Almost my day.”

Nalu laughed. “Still my day.”

She checked her watch. “The way you do it, we won’t be done by midnight.”

He grinned.

Jack looked at his watch. “It’s eleven fifteen.”

Nalu was smug. “The sea isn’t in a hurry.”

She smiled.

Mano chuckled. “Sharks can wait... but we are hungry.”

“Keep the bite guard handy.” She chuckled.

He hummed and pressed a kiss to her neck. She stilled as she realized he hadn’t marked her yet and remembered his teeth. “Oh, boy.”

He chuckled. “Boy, girl, when the time comes, we will welcome either.”

Elly exhaled. “Right. I am going to go and say hi to my friends. It’s been a while since I saw Bex.”

Mano stated, “But I am going with you.”

“Fine.”

She waved to the gathering of dragons and headed for the dressing room of the visiting entertainers.

The ladies were all sitting together and having a party with fruit, crackers, and wine. When Eliana came in, she was greeted by tipsy giggles, and she introduced Mano and then told him to stay outside. He grinned. “Thirty-five minutes.”

“Yeah, yeah. Keep it in your pants. Twice.”

He winked and backed out of the room.

She turned and flung her arms wide. “Bex!”

The woman with wine-dark hair, black and silver eyes, and a slow smile came forward for a hug. “It’s good to see you, Eliana. Even better to see you mated and happy. It looks like Gia is going to be single for a while.”

Gia smiled. “Armin likes being single. He likes women falling onto him. So, Wren has offered another candidate. I am not worried though. Amelia has found someone she doesn’t want to punch.”

Amelia shrugged. “When he comes to the city, Tor and I are going to start dating. Holding hands, going to movies, sitting in the back so folks don’t have to try and look over him, that kinda thing.”

The others grinned, and Elly looked at Gia. “Disappointed?”

“Nope. Just nice to know that my instincts were right. He’s a tool who just wants to get his rocks off. He wanted to know if I survived because he gets a live rescue bonus from the company he works for.”

Amelia smiled. “It just happens to be her company. Armin and Tor work for her. That was a hard pill to swallow. She may be gorgeous, but she has too much power for him. Wren will try again.”

Bex chuckled. “Just like my opposite. He apologized for the activation, but I was on my own. Not even a pamphlet to explain what I needed to do. Twat.”

“Have you seen him since?” Elly asked.

“Nope. I finished my degree and stopped delivering drinks.” She sighed, “I do miss the tips.”

Gia snorted. “You make enough as my physiotherapist.”

“Yeah. Right. Your hip was drooping during the songs. You need to get back to squats.”

Gia laughed. “As soon as we land, you can order me around. Right now, shut it.”

Elly smiled. “You are taking the plane home?”

Gia nodded. “I brought my passport.”

Amelia snorted. “I didn’t. Lack of forethought, so I am going back via Wren. I also have to talk to Henry. He is not a fan of me leaving.”

Elly nodded. “True. But it’s not about him. It’s about you.”

“True.” Amelia sighed. “I just have to remember that. He just wants to snuggle with me anyway. Tor doesn’t seem the type to settle here on the island. Though, the thought of him in a sarong is intriguing.”

The room full of ladies turned and stared at Amelia. Elly smiled. “Maybe we can get him to flash some ankle, and you will just swoon.”

Amelia snorted. “Maybe. His shoulders are nice.”

They sat around and chatted, and Bex admitted that she wasn’t ready to meet her match before, but since all her friends were pairing off, she might consider it now.

Gia smiled. “I haven’t seen an incubus before. What do they look like?”

Bex snorted, “Like everywhere they walk, women drop their panties to make them a path. At least the one I saw was that combination of beauty and fitness model, with the personality of a hungry vampire.”

They were still chatting when there was a knock on the door.

Elly smiled and hugged everyone. “Sorry. It’s midnight.”

Bex grinned. “Going to see if the slipper fits?”

“Think less slipper and more... me.”

The ladies laughed and wished her well.

Eliana opened the door, and Mano was standing there. “You owe me five minutes.”

She grinned. “You have infringed far more on Nalu’s time today.”

“Good point. So, my place or your place?”

“It’s the same place.”

He chuckled as they walked. “Isn’t that convenient?”

“Oh, very.”

Up the path and in the shadows, a horse was waiting next to the guard gate. She chuckled as Mano lifted her up and onto the horse then vaulted up behind that. The man holding the horse grinned and let the reins go, and they were off.

The side of her neck tingled, her body ached, and she was held against him. The marks from the other guys were pulsing, and her skin was repairing rapidly. She muttered, “I need Nalu.”

“Why?”

She chuckled. “He’s like a cold compress everywhere.”

Mano sighed. "Sorry. I couldn't stop. You are just so warm, wet, and perfect."

She sighed. "I think that is the problem. Just a little too long, and I am not used to having anything back there, so it was too much. However, it started off amazing. Some of the middle bits were a rush, but I was just so tired by the time you called a halt. You are an enthusiastic dude, aren't you?"

He laughed and licked her new mark. "A mate of my own. I might have overdone it."

She looked back at him. "What time is it?"

"Dunno. Noon?" He smiled against her skin. He sighed. "We need to make a restaurant reservation in the city so you can meet all of our parents."

She froze. "Oh, shoot. At some point, I am going to have to either bring my parents and..." She grunted, "My sister and her husband here."

"Syar will help with that. I honestly think that he is enjoying the hell out of this."

"What?"

"Actually, having alphas with mates around, and he is loving having a mate of his own." Mano lifted her hand and kissed it. She sighed. "I look forward to spending time with you once the frenzy has worn off."

He chuckled. "As do I."

His arms were wrapped around her, and she yawned. "Well, that confirms one myth."

He kissed her ear. "What?"

"If a shark stops moving, he sinks to the deep."

He laughed. "Right to the hilt."

She turned her head, and they kissed, and she yawned again. "I am still putting in a bid for Nalu. Heck, even Keahi's fire getting blown up my whatsit. That will be good as well."

He chuckled and kissed her neck. “I will see what I can do.”

She nodded and patted the side of his head before she gave in to exhaustion. She felt him in her mind next to the other links and knew he could feel the affection and humour in her thoughts.

She felt a cool drip on her nose and felt the bubbly joy. She opened her eyes. “Hey, Nalu.”

“I heard you needed some cooling down.” He kissed her softly.

“What time is it?”

“Oh, dinner is in an hour and a bit.”

She chuckled, “Just enough time then.”

He moved over her. “It’s only fair. He was encroaching on my time.”

She laughed, and a few minutes later, she was cool and hot at the same time.

Cleaned up and dressed, they headed downstairs where the royal family, the babies, Amelia, Henry and Keoki, Tor, and a pouting Armin were all seated with Mano and Keahi sitting next to empty chairs meant that they were what everyone was waiting for.

Elly blushed. “Sorry for delay. Apparently, there was a mystery smudge somewhere on me that he was determined to find.”

Nalu sighed. “Still haven’t found it, but I just *know* it’s there.” He held her chair for her. “I am willing to keep searching.”

Keahi and Mano laughed. Their emotions swirled through her. Their little group was seriously giddy at being complete.

Halfway through the dinner, Elly had to ask. “Armin, what the hell happened to you? You have lost all... your

sleaze.”

Amelia started snickering, but surprisingly, it was Tor who answered. “He was hitting on that friend of yours with pale skin and dark red hair.”

Elly’s eyes widened. “Bex? He hit on Bex. Oh, okay.” She tried not to laugh.

Tor sighed. “She declined, and he grabbed her, so she kissed him, and he came and dropped to the floor.”

Keahi frowned, “He...”

Elly held up her hand. “Yeah. She’s a succubus. She drains male energy but lets them cum, and they recover. In about two weeks.”

Nalu blinked. “Oh. Cool.”

“But she only does that to men with free hearts.” Elly chuckled. “They are the only ones she can digest. It is funny. She has volunteers to provide her with energy, so she was full when she arrived. You must have really been obnoxious and grabbed more than her waist.”

Armin growled but slumped. “I grabbed her ass. Possibly a bit more.” He stabbed some of the roast vegetables on his plate. “The pleasure was... astonishing.”

Tor snorted. “That was the expression on your face.”

Armin looked at Amelia. “Do you think I could get her number?”

Amelia chuckled. “She told me that satyr tasted bad. Like, hunger with petulance thrown in.”

He blinked. “What?”

“Yeah, she tastes your soul when she takes your energy. You tasted bad.” Amelia chuckled. “She did say you were filling though. A lot of lust to consume. So, that’s something.”

He sighed. “That does explain why I feel so... normal. I haven’t felt this calm since I was a teenager.”

Tor patted him on the shoulder. “You will be back to your horny asshole self soon enough.”

Those gathered at the table chuckled as Armin shrugged.

Elly finished her food and said, “So, what is your situation, Amelia?”

“I was going to head home, but Syar offered me a temporary place as nanny. You know... since you are busy, and Nova is only getting back tomorrow.”

“I can do it.”

Keahi cleared his throat. “Don’t you already have a day job?”

“Oh. Yeah, I should go back to that. My small group of fans will be eating each other by now, and then where will I be?”

Nalu smiled. “Here on the island.”

There was a rumble, and Keahi and Nalu got to their feet. They excused themselves, and Syar got to his feet and nodded to them.

Elly blinked. “Wait, is this the volcano stuff?”

Syar was about to answer, but the table rattled. “Yeah. It is.”

She looked at Mano, and he put his arm around her. “Did you want to go watch them work? We will have to keep a distance.”

“Sure.”

They excused themselves and headed down the path the other two had taken a moment before. Keahi and Nalu were discussing their tactics, and Eliana removed her shoes and walked into the sea. She was caught with an arm around her waist. Keahi murmured, “Where are you going?”

“Just making sure that no one brings one of those observing vessels too close. Safety first.”

Mano grinned. “I am here to guide her.”

Keahi tugged on her top. “Not stripping?”

“Nope. Not with all those observer vessels pulling in.” She looked out to sea, and there were several ocean-going ships coming in.

Keahi chuckled. “I love you, you know?”

She felt it through the link. “Yeah, I actually do. Bertold is still going to get it in the nuts if I ever see him. A decade lost.”

“And a lifetime found. Now, go and ride the scary shark and warn the vessels to stay back.”

She smiled, and he kissed her, but Mano snorted and pulled her away. “Still technically my day.”

Nalu inclined his head, and then the beach had dragons on it before they took off.

Watching Keahi lancing the magma out of the side of the volcano was rather fun, even from the distance that Mano maintained.

As the orange-red molten rock flowed free, Nalu jetted cold water on it, and a new island extension began to form. They worked through the night, and in the cool light of dawn, they all returned to shore.

Mano carried her until Keahi used his fire to dry her, and then Keahi picked her up, and they all staggered back to the house. The island had grown by ten acres overnight.

She drowsily stripped and then crawled into bed with Keahi. Everything was good; she just needed a nap.

Eliana woke, and she was warm and sweaty. She grunted and tried to ease out of the sandwich between dragons. Hands pulled her back between them. She settled facing Keahi. “I wanna get up.”

He yawned. “You are tired. We are tired.”

Nalu kissed her shoulder. “Stay in bed. Please.”

She thought about it, shrugged, and burrowed against her ex-boyfriend, who was now her current mate.

Nalu chuckled. “You know he can hear that, right?”

“Hmm?”

“We can hear your thoughts. He didn’t tell you?” Nalu chuckled

“No. He didn’t.” Make that ex-mate.

She was grabbed and squeezed tight. Keahi murmured, “I just wanted to make sure that you wanted us for us, and if there were a weird fangirl thing going on, we would accommodate. Imagine my surprise when I saw walls of text when you looked at us with all the sexy words scribbled out, even in your thoughts. You are weird, Eliana, but you are ours. And we aren’t going to censor our thoughts anymore.”

Elly was blushing then frowning and then gasping as she spent the rest of the morning wrapped in dragons.

Mano walked with her through the village and got her some flowers. “In answer to your question, I am good with it. I haven’t ever thought I would find a mate, let alone one who knew who I am at the base of me.”

Elly was holding onto his arm and smiled. “Sharks don’t scare me.”

“I mean, you actually seeing me and brightening when you look at me. That means more to me than you can imagine. I expect to see it for the dragons but never expected it for a lowly shark.”

“Dude, you are huge. I love it when you frighten the smaller sharks.” She chuckled.

“Well, Mort is back in the area. He’s bigger and easier to ride.”

“You are no slouch, Mano. You are just the right size to park my thighs around. With a lovely swish when your tail puts on the power.”

“Talk dirty to me,” Mano murmured close to her.

She giggled and held the flowers close. “Rough grey skin, pale belly, and those eyes... oh, those eyes.”

He swung her in his arms, and she laughed as he ran into the jungle to find some privacy. It was just kissing, but he settled on the grass and flipped her skirt out of the way. The kissing took on a different tone, and she kept her hand over her mouth to stop her from scaring the birds. Then she screamed into her palm, and he let her wind down before he started again.

They emerged from the jungle half an hour later, and there was a bit of applause from the local vendors who were near where they exited, and her face turned crimson and stayed that way until they were home.

“Where are the guys?”

“Getting a surprise from the city.”

“Oh. Okay.”

She put the flowers in water and pattered around the kitchen that had been assembled until she had a glass of iced tea. She got her laptop, heading out to her office. It was just there this morning, and she took it to be hers.

She turned on her laptop and got to work. She tapped at her keys until she felt a warmth behind her. “Hey, Keahi. Finish your errand?”

“Turn around, and you tell me?”

She finished her sentence, saved it, and closed her laptop. She rotated and blinked. “Oh. People.” She stood up and rubbed her eyes.

“Eliana, what the hell are you wearing?” Her sister’s strident shriek cut through her skull.

“Oh, Gwen. What a lovely singing voice you must have.” She grimaced and walked into the shadows. There were a lot of people.

Keahi chuckled. “We thought it would be best to get everyone here.”

She nodded and walked to her mom, hugging her.

“Gwen, I am wearing what half the people in the royal village are wearing. You are going to sweat into a puddle if you keep those clothes on.”

Her mom grinned. “Do they come in my size?”

Nalu came up and nodded. “We can head into the shop to find you something, ma’am.”

“Oh, Nalu, this is my mom. Carrie. Mom, this is Nalu, and that is Keahi, and that is Mano.”

Carrie blinked. “They mentioned... but I didn’t know it was... three of them, dear?”

Eliana blushed. “Not at the same time, Mom.”

“Not for want of trying,” Nalu muttered. “Ladies, please, come with me, there is a shop where Mano’s sister-in-law can be found, and she is experienced with more concealing fashions.”

Gwen stared up at him, ignoring her husband next to her. “Huh?”

Elly snickered, and Nalu offered her mother his arm. Her mother beamed and took the heavily muscled arm, and they headed to the shop that sold Solai’s designs.

She smiled, and Mano said, “I could have shown them.”

“You can do the introductions. Don’t pout, or you aren’t getting laid this week.”

There was a surprised laugh, and she turned slowly, remembering that they had an audience.

Mano was laughing. “Mom, Dad, this is my mate, Eliana. Elly, this is Adelle and Kalei. My mom came for ocean research and stayed to get—”

Elly slammed her hand over his mouth and smiled at the couple. “Pleased to meet you.”

Adelle stepped forward and hugged her. “Knowing that you know what is behind your hand and did it anyway, I like you very much.”

Kalei smiled and stepped forward to shake her hand before the hug. “We have seen you swimming with the shark. Welcome, daughter.”

“Um, thanks.”

She saw Nalu’s parents and curtsied. “Hello. I am Eliana, Nalu’s mate.”

His father guessed. “We guessed as much. Can you turn around?”

She knew what he was looking for. “Um, sure.”

The mark drew a gasp from all three sets of betas.

She got the introduction to Nawai and his wife, Anela. After that, Keahi stepped forward and smiled. “Mom, Dad, this is my mate. Elly.”

Lani and Ipo were introduced to her, and she nervously stood as they looked at her. “Keahi had a girlfriend when he was younger who was named Elly.” His father was cautious.

“The devil, you say. She sounds fun.” She smiled, and when Keahi wrapped his arms around her and muttered, “She was shorter then,” she responded, “So were you. Scrawnier too.”

Lani blinked tears away. “He found you again? Oh, my god. That is so sweet. Oh, come here.” She grabbed Elly and hugged her. Ipo joined in, and she was squished in the middle. They were way smaller than alphas, but she was having flashbacks to negotiating her way out of bed that morning.

Keahi pulled his parents away. “Shoo, you two. The only people crushing her like that will be Nalu and me. Mano has his own thing.”

“I am not going to discuss Mano’s thing,” she muttered. Mano came over and kissed her.

“Thanks for that, Elly. Want to go for a swim?”

“No, I need to finish that chapter. Shouldn’t take me more than half an hour.”

Keahi eased her into his arms. “Can it wait?”

She twisted her lips but looked at the three expectant couples and the silent begging from Mano. “Yes, it can wait. No deadline yet.”

“Do you have a publisher?”

“Sometimes yes, sometimes no. If I think the book might make my family disown me, definitely self-publish.”

He laughed. “So, you will be self-publishing a lot then.”

She smiled. “Are you planning on inspiring me?”

“Oh, yes. Every chance I get. Nalu and Mano are in there as well. If you ever need an idea, let us know. We will throw ourselves at your feet.”

“If you aim for the feet, you will miss.” She smiled and patted his cheek.

He grinned, picked her up, and spun her around before he set her on her feet.

Mano leaned in and kissed her while Keahi held her.

When Elly’s family came back with the ladies looking dazed and Nalu looking smug, he had to introduce her to his family again. Ven and her family arrived, and more introductions happened. Then Keoki, Henry, and Amelia arrived, and the party could start.

Henry was having trouble having a friend for the first time ever, but Amelia was getting him through it. It was a strange transition for him, but he was managing to admit that he just wanted her to be with him, not to screw.

Tor, Armin, Nova, and Mort came in later.

It was two hours later that Gwen pinned Elly against the wall and hissed, “What are you doing? They are some of *those* alphas. You can tell. They look... more.”

“Uh, Gwenny, do you remember when I had to leave home, and I was crying all the time?”

“Yeah. Why? What does that have to do with anything?”

“Keahi was the reason I was crying. He had to leave town, and he didn’t come back. But you know what?”

“What?”

“He came back.” She watched her sister and could see when Gwen’s brain latched onto something.

“Three?”

“Yes, but not at the same time.” She waited.

“It’s indecent.” Gwen actually stamped her foot.

“Especially the way we do it.” She waggled her eyebrows at her sister.

“You are disgusting. First, you write that trash, and now, you do this? Your bizarre hair and weird friends. Why are you even walking loose?”

Elly tried to ignore her, but the words hurt as she got more worked up. Her aura of amusement cracked and shattered.

Keahi was next to her in a moment and said, “Perhaps inviting your sister to spend time in paradise was a mistake. Your mother seems to be having a nice time.”

“You. Why did you go after her? She was fine. A pathetic loser with green hair.”

Keahi looked at Elly, and he hugged her. “Come, love. It seems that someone smuggled a bitchy attitude through customs. She might need to be deported for illegal cargo.”

Elly smiled at him and tried to boost her mood as her mates came over. “Only if she gets put in the hold of the plane.”

“No, we were going to have Tor and Armin haul her behind their vessel.”

She smiled. “With Nova following with a speaker over her head.”

He chuckled. "I can see it now. Mano can summon some sharks to follow and make sure she stays in the boat."

Elly giggled, and her sister scuttled back to her husband in horror. She turned to Keahi, and he wrapped his arms around her, and she just stood and breathed him in. The other two stood next to them and let her have the moment of comfort she needed. "I think she needs to start eating meat again. That bitch is unbalanced."

He chuckled and softly stroked their mark on her back. "She is, but you are fire and water, woman and element, beta and delta."

"What the fuck is a delta?"

"It is like an alpha but with no weird junk."

"Oh. Okay."

He chuckled and kept praising her while rubbing her back.

She looked up at him. "You know you are getting laid tonight."

He chuckled. "There was a one-in-three odds."

"My sister is going to stab out her eardrums."

"Why?"

"I am gonna be loud."

He lifted her and sighed. "I do love you, you know."

He kissed her and kept it going until she felt a familiar shiver starting. She struggled a little and felt the joy and laughter from the inside out. When she moaned as she came, she blushed. There was a room full of people.

He nuzzled her neck softly before hugging her again. Nothing felt like his arms around her. It was a moment that she wished would last forever, but Nalu cleared his throat.

She sighed and turned to see the entire grouping glaring at her sister while she blubbered and kept stating

that it was wrong. Her sister wasn't an omega and shouldn't have a mate. It should be husband or nothing.

Elly sighed, grabbed her guys, and hauled them to her sister. "You know, Gwen, I am shocked that you weren't interested in your favourite band. Emerald Shiver, this is my narrow-minded sister, Gwen, and her husband, Mark."

Gwen froze, and her eyes bugged out. "What?"

Elly pointed to Key, Lune, and Nom with introductions. "I know they look different undressed and how genuinely gorgeous they are in suits, but the looser clothing here saves a lot of time."

Gwen stuttered. "They are... and you... and they."

Keahi held onto Elly and looked at her sister. "And we. We met Eliana when she was sixteen, and we were just starting out. I started walking her home on weekends, but the others thought she couldn't be as sweet and genuine as she seemed. She was. When we were coming home and she was coming here to help a friend out, we reconnected. And then, we kept doing it until all of us were all tangled up. I, for one, am never going to untangle again."

Elly smiled. She could literally feel the love.

Her sister was crying as she realized what she was looking at and batting at her husband as he tried to calm her down.

Elly's mother sighed and looked up at her daughter's partners. "So, since you seem to have an interest in my daughter, do you have an interest in a family? Children?"

The enthusiasm that swamped Elly nearly knocked her over. Keahi held her against him. She ducked her head, and her mother grinned. The guys explained that they were interested in seeing that Elly got settled in first. "We are all going to update our degrees and resume our positions here on the island. We make a good living and have plenty of family who will help us turn into a solid unit. We have considerable savings and can always turn to the courier trade for a few months. There are options,

but Elly will be encouraged to find inspiration for her writing here, among friends, with a spectacular view and the entire ocean at her disposal when she wants to swim.”

Her mother muttered, “Some of the other tourists were mumbling about a woman riding a shark. Is it safe here?”

Mano nodded. “She is perfectly safe.”

Her mother focused. “Who is?”

He grinned. “The woman on the shark.”

Elly blushed, and her mother’s jaw dropped. “Oh. Oh. So, you were the woman, and...”

Mano grinned. “I am the shark. The most benevolent of the beasts that make up her shiver.”

Her mother stared at them and then laughed. “Right. It is sensible that this is what Elly would consider excellent partner potential. She has always been rather fanciful when planning her life and practical in the execution of it. Well, boys, I am delighted to meet you all. Welcome to the family.”

Elly drank fruit juice and kept an eye on her mother, but when she talked to each of the guys in turn, she ended up more and more pleased with things.

Keahi murmured, “Mano works for the oceanography centre, Nalu works with the deep-sea research vessels, and I am into volcanoes.”

“Really?”

“I am into deep, hot holes.” He chuckled wickedly.

She glared at him. “That’s going in a book and possibly on a t-shirt.”

He pressed his forehead to hers. “Oh, I am full of inspiration.”

She laughed. “Full of something. So, how long do you think it will be to my heat?”

He opened his lips and inhaled her scent. “We have a few months to settle in.”

“Oh, good. I hate rushing.” She chuckled. “I don’t have Ven’s temperament or ability to heal rapidly.”

He smiled. “Yes, you do, but I understand the sentiment. You want to make sure I am not going anywhere.”

“Well, I don’t want you to have to head out to any weird training.”

He chuckled. “All classes and occupations will be carried out here on the island. So, we need to move all your stuff here.”

“I don’t think I have any clothing that is appropriate in my apartment.” She chuckled. “I do want my books, my computers, that kind of thing.”

“Will your mom pack for you?”

“Maybe, but it will be easier if Luna does it.”

He nodded. “Will you ask her?”

“I will. One of the ladies is super fast. She also loves books, so I would get them all here in one piece.”

Keahi nodded. “Let me know when you make the call. I will ask Syar to make the arrangements to have them brought over in the hold of the plane.”

“Okay.”

She smiled as they watched the families mingling together, and Elly was happy when her mother continued to smile and move around the room with Nalu’s mother. The moms eventually got together and got into a deep discussion with a lot of glances toward her.

She muttered, “It is still two months away?”

He caught on and chuckled. “Yeah, but we can do trial runs with the beasts just to make sure you are comfortable with it. Why?”

“Because the moms look like they want things to start right friggig now.”

“They can want what they want, but if we have children, they will be here in time. Even the beasts know

that, which is why they are showing restraint.”

“Is that what they are doing? I just thought I wasn’t their type, or I upset them on the night they marked me.”

He chuckled. “No, they held themselves back that night because Nalu and I threatened dire consequences if they did anything untoward.”

She turned in his arms. “Can I express my gratitude for you threatening yourself? I am sure you were harsh on the other half of you. Really put your foot down, cracked the whip.”

His eyes glittered. “Are you taunting me?”

“A little bit.” She swayed against him.

“Are you trying to seduce me, mate?”

“Will it get me out of this party? If yes, absolutely.”

He smiled at someone behind her, and she tried to ooze around to hide behind him.

“Hello, Mom.” His long arms caught Elly, and he eased her around to face his parent.

“Hello, son. I wanted to borrow your partner.” She smiled.

Elly blinked. “Um, okay.”

She ended up being towed to the mom gathering while she was introduced to Keahi’s mother’s occupation. She was an obstetrics specialist, Nalu’s mom was a surgeon, and Mano’s was a therapist. The fathers were also working professionals, which struck Elly as silly for a tropical island, but doctors and lawyers were needed. She hadn’t seen anyone outside the royal village. The city was still pretty much a mystery.

Having her mother-in-law taking a look at her was nerve-racking if it involved stirrups, but she wasn’t pregnant yet, so that visit was a distance away. Months. She muttered silently, *It had better be months.*

Laughter reached her from three sources around the room. It could wait, but it wouldn’t wait *too* long. She

wanted to get the next phase of her life going. She had waited long enough.

Epilogue

Eliana grinned as the carriage took her to the coastline, where the circus school was in full bloom. Venetia was there with three bodyguards and the babies, guiding people through swings, flips, and giving tips for balancing on a variety of objects.

Eliana got out of the carriage and walked to the shore where Venetia stood. “You are looking good. Getting some sun.”

Venetia chuckled. “How are you feeling?”

“Oh, god, I hurt all over. That dance instructor is brutal. She kept poking me when I stared at the guys.”

Ven laughed. “You would think after last week that you were sated.”

“I am full of surprises.” She wagged her eyebrows.

“Are you up to the demonstration?”

“Sure. Wait. Are the guys anywhere around me?”

Ven looked behind her. “Nope. Are you ready?”

She grinned. “Yup. As long as I don’t get my butt kicked when I get home.”

Ven chuckled as she helped Eliana get changed, and then she asked. “Do you have a catcher yet?”

“Nope.”

“Right, then it will be ribbons.”

She walked to the edge of the display, held the two ribbons, and took some test launches. When she confirmed the rigging was solid and that the angle was right, she nodded to Ven, who gathered the students, and she did a quick display of ribbon techniques, flying and soaring before sitting and swinging.

When she was done, she went over basic techniques and what kind of physical strength they would need in their arms and shoulders. The proper instructor was

arriving by the end of the week, but the students were getting anxious that that part of the school wasn't going to be offered, so this was a demonstration that the equipment was working. It had been rigged off the same stage where Emerald Shiver had done their last concert.

Once she changed into normal clothes, she hugged Ven and played with the little ones.

"So, are you waiting to be picked up?" Ven smiled.

"No. Mano and I are going to commute home together." She grinned. "I am taking the five-thirty shark home."

"It gives new meaning to carpool." Ven laughed.

Elly laughed until she heard the shocked tourists. "Oh, there's my ride. See you later, cuties." She waved at the babies and then ran past the inbound tourists to wrap herself in water and seek out her mate. She wrapped her hands around his fin, and he moved rapidly through the water, taking her around the island to the house near the volcano.

The other two would be home from work soon, and then they could celebrate Nalu's birthday. Keeping a secret present when all three could read her mind was difficult, but she had put extra effort into it.

The box was wrapped and on Nalu's bed when he got home. She sat and meditated, facing the ocean waves until the guys got home. She got to her feet and heard a burst of laughter. She smiled and walked inside to see Nalu walking toward them down the stairs. Keahi was checking his phone when Nalu said, "Key, I believe this is yours."

Nalu threw something, and Keahi caught it. The positive test was in his hand, and he frowned at it. "What the hell?"

Nalu grinned. "I got a coupon book for backrubs and slow dances in the moonlight. Oh, and blowjobs in any private place."

She shrugged. “It is hard to shop for you guys. We hardly wear anything, so a fancy watch isn’t going to do much. Shoes are iffy. Gift certificates are silly, and you already eat whatever you want.”

Keahi was still staring at the test. “Elly, what is this?”

“It’s an early response test. Why?”

“But this says positive.”

“I believe it does. It was easy to hide it under Nalu’s present. You thought I was just being sneaky once.” She smiled. “I doubled up on my sneakiness.”

Elly saw his eyes flare hot, and he began striding toward her. She had two choices. Hide behind Nalu or... She jumped up and launched herself at him, and he caught her in surprise.

She smiled and kissed him, her legs wrapped around his waist. “Disappointed that I haven’t finished my book yet?”

Keahi laughed. “Your book wasn’t even in my mind.”

“Well, you guys keep creeping into it, so I have to keep pulling you out. I thought you might have felt it. Come on; we have to cut the uh... cake?”

There was a pineapple cake sitting on the table, and food was being brought up from the residence.

Nalu smiled. “My birthday; I get to cuddle with her all night.”

Keahi looked at him. “You are kidding, right?”

Nalu negotiated. “Until midnight.”

Keahi nodded. “Fine, but *he* is going to come and get her.”

Nalu nodded. “Fair warning.”

The royal family showed up, Keoki and Henry arrived from their accounting practice, and Amelia was alone. Tor was off doing things with Armin for now.

They had a party for Nalu that was loud and riotous. His hand was constantly on her thigh, no matter what

was going on. When the wine was poured and Elly passed her glass over to the birthday boy, Ven shrieked and rushed around to hug Elly, who was still pinned to her chair.

Amelia gave her a fist bump, and Henry looked happy and sad at the same time.

Elly spoke softly to Amelia. “Can Wren find them the beta that they need?”

Amelia smiled. “She’s working on it. I was what they needed, but they need someone they want. I do like Tor though. I can see myself with him. That’s very new.”

“I know. You two look good together.”

“I have told him about the catalyst. He just hugged me and then asked me how I was feeling now. Not even a grope in sight.”

“How did you feel about that?”

“I wanted his hands to start sliding around a little. I was stunned.”

They talked for a few minutes, and then someone lit some candles, and Nalu blew out the small flames. He kept his eyes closed, and Syar asked, “What did you wish for?”

Nalu grinned and held up an IOU. “I will let you know in two years.”

The IOU was a chance for a baby in two years.

Keahi looked at her with glowing eyes, and Nalu’s had the same tone. Healing would be done in between, but not counting on that, her heat would tell her when her body wanted to try again. She didn’t have Ven’s metabolism, so they were going to wait the whole nine months. Once the first pregnancy produced a little person, they were going to have a schedule all worked out to get all of the guys at least one of their own. She wasn’t a fan of twins.

Elly kissed Nalu and leaned against his shoulder, thinking about what the next year would bring.

Eliana sat after the scan and heard the word she didn't want to hear. "Twins!"

Keahi was smirking. His dragon had done his own exam and had stated that one was for the lava and one was for the ocean. If it was true, it meant one more pregnancy, and she was done. Elly focused on that. Thirty-seven weeks to go.

Two little boys, one with black eyes and one with blue. Mano had been her birthing partner, as he was the most even-tempered of the bunch. The other two were now seated next to her bed with their little boys in their arms.

Mano was smiling, and she drowsily looked at him. "Why are you so happy?"

He chuckled. "Because when your body is ready, I can try without their beasts tearing me apart. It will still be touch and go, but I have a shot."

She yawned. "I will take a hint from Ven and start the festivities a day early."

"I will be there, any day, any time."

Elly nodded. "Good because we will have to be sneaky, and sneaky is hard for me."

"It comes naturally to me. Ambush predators for the win." He kissed the back of her hand.

The guys were besotted with their boys, and the waiting room was filled with family, with Elly's mother on the way.

She smiled as she napped. Mother's Day would be a landslide of gifts by the time they were done. She was pretty sure that no one wanted to stop at one, including her.

Elly woke as she heard Keahi singing to Kai. He sang in the language the islanders spoke from birth, but they had all gone to English when Syar took on Reynaldo as his

alpha. Reynaldo had a problem learning languages, so most folks spoke English for all public events. Elly was learning, and right now, Keahi was singing about waves and fire, ocean and lava, men and women. The push and pull were in every part of the song, but the baby was still wrinkly with his eyes closed.

She reached out to him and sighed. “That’s a beautiful song.”

“It put him to sleep. He is very cute.”

“He has a very cute daddy. Where’s Nalu?”

“Taking his turn to introduce the baby.”

She smiled. “He’ll be right back.”

“How can you tell?”

Kai screwed up his fists and let out a purring yell.

Keahi smiled. “Ah. Got it.”

Nalu came in with a squalling baby, and they helped her get situated to feed both at once.

The door pushed open, but Keahi’s mother pushed them back to the waiting room, and Elly was able to fumble through the first feeding with the three people she trusted most and the two new ones she had just produced. Keahi had blown fire into her, her body had cleaned out, and the raw spots were healing fast. She wanted to go home, see the ocean, and put the babies together in the same cot until they got too big.

Keahi nodded. “We are just waiting for Reynaldo to bring the carriers, and we will take them and you home. And my mother has to give you the all-clear. Don’t even think about making a run for it without her say-so.”

She chuckled and knew that in a few hours, she would be home, and from there, she could rest and recover with her family around her in Keahi’s arms. It was where she had always wanted to be, after all.

Author's Note

This is the first book involving an ex, aside from Luna's story. Dragon mates have a lot going on. Since we know the dragons are not great at courtship, and Syar's island was volcanic, it seemed appropriate.

Next book will be in a different series. I believe we are going to the Obscure City again. Wish me luck.

Thanks for reading,

Viola Grace

About the Author

Viola Grace (aka Zenina Masters) is a Canadian sci-fi/paranormal romance writer with ambitions to keep writing for the rest of her life. She specializes in short stories because the thrill of discovery, of all those firsts, is what keeps her writing.

An artist who enjoys a story that catches you up, whirls you around, and sets you down with a smile on your face is all she endeavours to be. She prefers to leave the drama to those who are better suited to it, she always goes for the cheap laugh.

In real life, she is now engaged in beekeeping, and her adventures can be found on the YouTube channel, Mystery Bees Apiary. Just look for the cartoon kittens.