

MILA SIN



EMBERS &
EFFIGIES

(FAIRYTALES WITH A TWIST)

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To my readers, thank you for following me on my genre-hopping adventures.

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AUTHOR NOTE

As in all of my books, this one contains open-door bedroom shenanigans in detail. It is an MMMF omegaverse reverse-Cinderella retelling that features a thong instead of a glass slipper, a business princess instead of a prince, and three stripper Alphas instead of the blonde we're all used to. Please be advised this book is for adults.

Content warnings include: religious views on pairings, attempted assault, chronic illness, blindness, systemic oppression, controlling parenting

CHAPTER ONE

Hana

THIS IS THE WORST IDEA IN THE HISTORY OF BAD IDEAS.

I've always been uncomfortable in places like this, filled with writhing bodies and the overwhelming scent of repressed sexuality. I'm exposed, vulnerable, and nauseous as I clutch my tiny purse to my chest as if it can shield me. Hailey and Lana, my best friend and younger sister, respectively, seem unaffected by the atmosphere and excitedly watch the performers. Then again, why would it bother them? In addition to being self-assured and confident women, neither of them is an Omega. Scents, sounds, and overwhelming stimuli aren't an issue for them like they are for me.

To our left, five well-dressed women dance near the bar, getting refills on cocktails and ogling the men on stage. To the right, a bachelorette party shrieks as the sacrificial bride-to-be is gyrated on by one of the dancers.

And those who sprung for first-row tickets are positively feral.

I'm thankful for the foam earplugs shoved in my ears because the music thunders like a hammer on an oil drum. Everything feels too loud, too big, too...sticky. I cringe, knowing the soles of my pale pink Jimmy Choo stilettos are most assuredly ruined. I recross my ankles as I shift on my seat, trying to keep a healthy distance between my favorite heels and the questionable puddle a few inches away.

Security guards are stationed along the room's edges, watching the patrons grow rowdier and rowdier as the dancers increase the sex appeal. The clinical smell of industrial-strength descenter and an undercurrent of sweat hang heavily

in the air, but it's not enough to block out some of the pheromones the audience members are throwing out like confetti at a parade.

Cheers swell around me, and I angle my face toward my phone in my lap. The club's lights are dim, but there's a neon glow illuminating the stage.

"Come on, Hana!" Lana screams beside me with one hand shaking my arm and the other tightly clutching a glass of soda. "They're hot as hell!"

My heart beats faster as I scan the people around us in the second row. I look over my shoulder, expecting someone to recognize us and call the cops or, worse, our mother. Not like it's illegal for us to be here—Hailey and I are twenty-three, and Lana is eighteen. But our mother would throw a fit if she found out we were here.

I roll my eyes, but the youthful grin on my sister's face forces me to look toward the stage.

There's no denying it. The men on that stage are hot as hell.

The dancers move their bodies in perfect synchronicity, gyrating around the poles on stage and coaxing women from the audience to join them as props for their dances.

"This is a lot," I say, giving Lana a hesitant smile. I'm not comfortable whatsoever.

"Don't be Mom 2.0! Put your phone away," she snarls at me. With that attitude, I wonder if she'll be an Alpha like I was supposed to be. Instead, I drew the short stick and presented as an Omega. Giving in to her demand, I let out a heavy sigh and stuff the phone in my clutch.

"Better. Now watch these fine men shake it for us."

Lana has the distinct advantage of being a bright-eyed, designationless woman who isn't currently engaged to someone she's only met in passing.

She revels in the freedom while I stand stiffly in the moment.

Looking at the sash she and Hailey draped over me as they dragged me out of the car, I let the conversation that started this whole mess flood me.

Mom and Dad sat me down and told me I was to marry Beau Richardson, a business associate of my dad's. Having only met him in passing over the last few years, I'm surprised, to say the least, at my upcoming nuptials. But I can't say no to their request. He's an up-and-coming entrepreneur who recently signed a lucrative contract with my father's company. A contract that will make my family millions, keep the company afloat, and ensure Beau receives similar compensation—giving my father peace of mind that I will be taken care of for the rest of my life.

After all, it's not every day someone who always assumed she would be an Alpha turns out to be an Omega. A "late bloomer," my mom calls me. Instead of emerging as most Omegas do when they're between eighteen and twenty, I emerged at twenty-two—at my university graduation, no less.

But at least I'd graduated. All for nothing, of course. Because Omegas aren't hired in corporate environments. Even being the boss's daughter wasn't enough reason to give me the job, despite my double major in business and marketing with a minor in communications.

Instead, I took my shiny new degree and hung it in my childhood bedroom when I moved home. My life had changed overnight, and despite not being able to work for my family's

company, I have a duty to help if I can. It's not like I'm doing anything else. I'm an Omega without purpose, and this engagement is giving me one.

It's not like my parents would be okay with me joining an Omega center and finding a match that way. It simply isn't done in our circles. Arranged marriages are the way of our elite community, and that isn't changing any time soon.

Dad clarified that this union is for business, not love. He's less than concerned about that, but Mom's sure it'll eventually blossom as we spend time together—the way hers and my dad's marriage had gone from simply business to a partnership. Dad, however, expects me to be Beau's perfect wife and Omega, which I know I will be. I've been raised to put my all into something, and though I've floundered a bit in recent years, I know, somehow, I can get my spark back.

And who knows? Perhaps Beau won't be so quick to dismiss my education and interest in business just because of my designation like Dad did.

I take another sip from the drink in my hand, hoping the alcohol will numb my anxiety. It's been my constant companion since graduation—three years ago. That one moment changed everything, and having it happen so publicly has been the single most shameful moment in my life. My scent and designation struck me like lightning, disrupting my entire college graduation ceremony in front of prospective clients, potential co-workers, and a hoard of Alphas who were triggered by my newly bloomed scent. As much as I'd like to forget that moment, willing it to disappear like smoke in the wind, every time I see my dad's frown or my mom's pursed lips, it all comes rushing back in. And they make those faces a lot.

As the current dancers finish their routine, a new set of performers take the stage, and I lift my eyes to see what all the fuss is about. The crowd is going wild, and Lana is jumping up and down beside me.

The first one is tall, with broad shoulders and a chiseled jawline. His hair is pulled into a topknot, and his beard is expertly groomed, cropped close to his impeccable jawline. He oozes confidence as he steps onto the center of the stage and smiles a panty-dropping and cocksure grin.

My heart skips a beat as his eyes lock on to mine, holding my gaze as the first beat of the new song reverberates around the room, and he moves his hips in time with the music.

I tear my eyes away to look at the men to either side of him. The man on the right is blond, with loose, long hair past his jaw. He's leaner than the first, his body a stretch of corded muscle decorated with geometric and mandala tattoos. The glimpses of skin between each pattern feel like I'm seeing a part of the real him. An obscure and errant thought, sure. But I can't help it.

The other one on the left has dark hair and a cut body, almost as tall as the first and equally muscular, but I can't see his face. He's wearing a black-and-gold Venetian-style mask that covers his face from nose to forehead. Still, he uses his body language perfectly, conveying to the audience that he's watching us all, turning his torso so the lights carve out every contour of his abs.

"Holy smokes," Hailey remarks, shoving her dark hair out of her face like it will help her view. "It's them."

"Who's *'them'*?" I ask.

Hailey gets excited about exactly two things in her life—pissing off her parents and art—so her enthusiasm for the dancers is a little mind-boggling.

“Hana!” Lana chastises. “Did you not pay attention at all on the way here?”

“You blindfolded me, put a gag in my mouth, and covered my ears with earmuffs before throwing me into the backseat of the car! How could I possibly have heard anything?”

“Touché. The earmuffs were a nice touch, by the way,” Hailey says with a smirk to Lana, who fist bumps her waiting knuckles.

My sister, ladies and gentlemen. The up-and-coming prankster with a heart of, well, mischief.

“Thank you.” Lana inclines her head with mock politeness. “It was one of my finer moments, I think.”

“Shh! It’s starting!” Hailey grips my hand and directs our attention to the stage.

The three men begin rolling their hips in time with the heavy beat, causing the lights to reflect off their oiled-up bodies. Each move highlights their muscles, and it’s easy to see that each step is choreographed, well-synchronized, and well-rehearsed. *Alphas*. They have to be with their size and presence.

Although some of the other dancers were appealing, something about this particular act captivates me. Despite my best efforts, I can’t tear my eyes away from them, and my body leans forward in my chair like they’re magnets and I’m destined to be pulled in. I forcefully push myself against the back of the chair, putting some distance where it’s sorely

needed. The lust coursing through my body is ridiculous, and I need to get hold of myself.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” the emcee calls from his booth. “We hope you’re enjoying the sexiest night in Houston! Up next is the Alpha Trio, on their final tour and their last time performing in this great city! Give it up for Eros!” The blond man lifts a muscled arm to the raucous cheers of the women around me.

“E-Z!” The man in the mask yanks off his unzipped hoodie and throws it into the crowd.

“And, Boss!” The man in the middle tugs the hair tie from his topknot, letting his dark brown hair loose, and rakes his fingers through it, winking at the shrieking women at the bar.

The emcee cheers into the microphone and cranks up the music as the three men on stage start their routine.

The heavy bass rattles the floor, and I find myself standing with the others. It’s a sea of women and a fair few men lusting after the guys on stage. I am immensely grateful for the scent suppressants pumping into this space and my usual scent-nullifying perfume because *things* are happening. And I. Am. Mortified.

My face flushes, and my heart beats out of time as I take in the three men standing before us. My body is drawn to them, and I have to force myself to look away.

Lana’s eyes sparkle with delight as she bounces on her toes and squeals, “Isn’t this amazing?” Her enthusiasm makes me feel awkward as I restrain my emotions and the surprising reaction.

“It’s awesome, but what’s so special about these guys?”

Hailey rips her gaze from the stage and pulls her lengthy locks into a bun. “They’re some of the hottest Alpha strippers in the country, *and* they’re on their last tour. Lana scored us tickets a couple of weeks ago, and they were damn near impossible to get.”

I glance at Lana, who is already nodding in agreement. “I had to pay a premium, but I put it on Mom’s card.” She shrugs nonchalantly. “Better hers than mine when Daddy pays the bill.”

“Lana, you can’t—”

“Shh!” Hailey cuts me off. “Look!”

The men on stage are gyrating and pulling other bachelorettes onto the stage, using them in their routines. The biggest guy, the one who made eye contact with me earlier, scans the crowd until his eyes settle on me.

I drop into my chair, yanking off my sash and shoving it under the seat in front of me. No way am I going up on that stage.

Lana’s fingers curl around my forearm, her small hand tugging me to get up. I resist the pressure, every part of me screaming to stay in my seat. No way. No how. I’m not prepared for the type of dancing they do on the participants. Lana can do it if she’s so desperate to see one of us on stage.

“Come on, Hana!” she grouses.

Hailey laughs. “Yeah, right. Hana wouldn’t go up there. Besides, he’s already found someone else.”

Disappointment fills me. When I thought I was still going to be an Alpha, I’d be making that stage my bitch. But now? Not a chance. Hailey’s right, and it stings. My gaze rises in

time with the lights on stage as they reach a crescendo in the music. Thankfully, the rosy hue hides the blush on my cheeks.

What must it be like to feel free again? I might be brave when doing what's necessary to keep my family in their current position, but for something like this? I'm no longer the fearless girl I once was. Now, I'm the model Omega with perfect behavior and decorum. And deep down, if I choose to peek into those cobwebbed corners of my mind, I fucking hate it with all the passion I once had. As far as Hailey and Lana know, I tolerate it, but neither knows the depth of my agony at being an Omega.

The men continue, the blushing bachelorettes being flung here and there, their eyes glassy with want and their fingers trailing over the men's muscled torsos. The sordid nature of the show makes me want to remind these women we are out *in public!* The instinct to bat their hands away rises within me like a tsunami, and I shove it back down.

The songs roll on, one after another, the DJ seamlessly blending them until the soundtrack and writhing bodies on stage seem like the most natural thing in the world.

I'm transfixed.

Captivated.

Unable to look away.

A pair of green eyes ensnare mine, and I gaze into the face of the lithe blond as he takes center stage, putting on a sensual show when the music changes.

His hands run up and down his body, and while my eyes are riveted on his movements, the other two Alphas step back, blending into the shadows at the back of the stage, leaving the last Alpha on his own.

He slows his movements, sensually dragging out every touch, skimming his fingers over the tattoos and ridges of his toned torso.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the emcee whispers into the microphone, layering their sultry voice over the music and adding to the experience. “Eros is here to fulfill your every desire. Your every whim. He is yours to command, and the god of carnal love is desperate to give you everything you want.”

No one in the audience makes a sound. We all watch, enraptured, as his movements continue.

Eros peels off his black boxer briefs, dragging them down his thighs and kicking them off to the side, leaving him in a silver, glittery, tight pair of underwear.

Then he turns around, and the crowd goes wild.

The underwear is, in fact, a thong.

His ass is toned and the same bronze as the rest of this wet-dream-given life, conjuring images of him tanning nude to get that all-over golden glow, and I realize that I’ve never admired a man’s ass before. Or, at least, not like this.

His moves are playful as he tugs on the waistband of his thong, teasing us with the promise of pulling it off for endless seconds.

My breathing is choppy as I watch, as anticipatory as the rest of the audience.

Outside, I am the picture of grace—not one hair out of place and a gentle smile on my lips.

Inside, I don’t recognize myself as I chant, *Take it off. Take it off. Take it off.*

And then, he does.

The garment slips down his legs, and he hooks it with one foot as his hands cover his cock, shielding it from his audience.

He kicks his leg out, sending the thong flying into the audience. Right at me.

My reactions are delayed as it sails closer. Before I can even lift my hand to block my face, the thong lands, and I gasp in shock, inhaling a deep and powerful scent reminiscent of the salt from a beach, the whisper of a pina colada on the breeze, and something that makes my mind scream, *MINE!*

Eros, whoever the fuck this man is, is my scent match.

CHAPTER TWO

Christos

THE CROWD ROARS AS ACE FINISHES HIS SOLO ACT, AND HE slips behind the curtain to the backstage area where Ezra and I are waiting for him.

“Great performance tonight,” I say as I throw an arm over his shoulder and kiss the top of his head, his long blond hair tickling my lips. He’s sweaty, but I don’t care one bit.

“Thanks.” He’s breathless from his performance, and I don’t blame him. Dancing is one thing, but coordinating it to be sexy while keeping track of how many layers you’ve removed is an art form. “I misstepped during the second song, but I think I saved it with a body roll. Oh, and I hit a woman in the face with the thong.” His grin turns sheepish.

We laugh, and I reassure him with a shrug. “Sometimes we can’t control where the clothing goes. It happens. Who knows? Maybe she was into it.”

“We’ll work on the misstep during rehearsal tomorrow,” Ezra says, dragging his mask back on for our final bow. For someone with the stage name E-Z, he is the least “easy” guy I’ve ever met. He demands perfection, and our performance is better for it.

“Yeah, yeah,” Ace says with an eye roll. “But only after we relax in the morning. We’ve had five shows in as many days, and I could use a breather.”

We wait for the announcer to re-introduce everyone so we can do our final bow. After we’re called as the last three names, we step out and wave to the crowd.

I look to the closest rows, searching for those bright blue eyes I noticed when we stepped onto the stage for our act, but I can't find her. I'd searched for her when we were pulling bachelorettes up on stage, but she was noticeably absent then, too.

We bow, adding in a hip thrust—Ace more carefully than the rest of us because he's still nude—and wave to the crowd.

It's probably better that the woman with bright eyes isn't here anymore. She looked ill at ease, sticking out like a sore thumb amid the other raucous women. Her perfectly done hair, tight-lipped mouth, and tense shoulders didn't exactly scream that she was excited to be here. That was why I wanted to pull her on stage, to show her a good time and remind everyone that even the most uptight of us can let loose now and then.

She seems so far out of our league—and probably everyone else's—that I bet she's halfway to Dallas by now, safe in the comfort of her sensible Volvo and no-nonsense life.

We give a last wave and head backstage as Gray, our emcee, thanks everyone for coming out and seeing us on our farewell tour.

The troupe will continue under our ownership, but my pack and I are retiring from the spotlight to work strictly in a managerial capacity. This is our last hurrah, and goddamn, it's been good for business.

I started Beasts of Bacchanal when I was twenty, using the house one of my grandfathers left me as start-up capital. I was lucky to have the funding to kick things off, but it was far from enough, and I'd struggled for a long while.

After meeting Ace and then Ezra, we banded together in more than the business sense. They were pack, and we'd

known it almost instantly. We might not be fated scent matches, but we all chose one another, and sometimes, that feels stronger than a scent match might. It means choosing one another every single day and fighting for our family, all while knowing Fate had nothing to do with it.

“Huddle up!” I bark, and the other guys close ranks. They’re a mixture of excited and exhausted, and I realize Ace is right. We need to take a break soon. Our schedule has been jam-packed lately, but everyone’s earning more than usual, so they don’t complain. Much.

“Great work tonight, guys. We’ve got a travel night and a day off after that. Rest up, hang out, or unwind on your own, but you know the rules. Don’t get into any trouble. We can’t afford to lose any of you to a night in jail, and I won’t be posting bail.” The guys chuckle as I give my usual end-of-night speech. Everyone puts their hands in the middle, and we break apart, packs going with packs and lone Alphas grouping together to split tour buses.

“Christos!” Cole Porter, our assistant, calls out as he approaches. “There’s a call for you on the bus. They wouldn’t tell me what they wanted but said they were with the Omega Trust and that it was confidential.” My heart tumbles into my stomach. “I *explained*,” he emphasizes with so much frustration it’s palpable, “that I was your assistant and would convey the message, but they were adamant they only speak to you.”

I tear off toward the club’s back door to get to the bus with Ezra and Ace behind me.

“Watch out!” Cole shouts. “It’s the usual out there!”

Of course it is. We push through the security team, who are forming a barricade between us and the fans that hang around

after the shows. Most of the time, they're innocuous and want a signature on their tits or something, but sometimes, it gets weirder. Okay, a lot of the time, it gets weirder. Stalkers aren't uncommon for us, and after the last few received restraining orders, we hoped word would have spread and we'd have a little break from it.

I barely hear the shouts over the rushing in my ears. I need to get to my phone, and thankfully, Ezra and Ace are stopping to sign things, quelling the fans enough that I can trudge forward and onto our tour bus undiverted.

Our driver, Robert, is waiting at the door, opening it to usher the three of us in before closing it. "Should I start driving? Get us out of this mess?"

"Please do. Thanks, Robert," Ace answers before steering us toward the back of the bus, where my phone is charging in our bedroom. The engine rumbles to life, the vibration under my feet promising peace for the next few hours.

I snatch up my phone, but before switching it on, I look between Ace and Ezra. "It might be nothing."

"It might be something," Ace counters, ever the optimist and believer in good things.

"We don't need an Omega," Ezra says, ever the pragmatist and believer in nothing.

Quite the trio we make with our varying degrees of outlook on life.

With a slight tremor in my hand, I press the button and call back the most recent number.

"Omega Trust," a cheerful voice answers. Thankfully, they have a 24-7 reception desk for Omegas in need.

“Hi, this is Christos Bakas of Pack Bakas. I had a call from your offices?” I try to keep the hope out of my voice, but it’s there, highlighting every inflection and making the question rise higher at the end than it should. Maybe they have an Omega who liked us? What if, after all this time, someone finally picked us?

“Yes, hi, Mr. Bakas. My name is Carol. Let me pull up the file.” The clicking of keys tests my patience like a motherfucker, but I endure, clenching my fist repeatedly to expel some of the nervous energy. “Ah, here it is! The payment for this quarter’s billing won’t go through. Your card has expired, and we’ve sent four email notices to the address on file, so this is the time to update or terminate the account.”

“I didn’t get any emails! How long has our profile been out of circulation?” Anger laces my veins at yet another bullshit Omega matching service out to take money from those who haven’t been lucky enough to meet one naturally. Their rates are exorbitant, but it’s one of the more reputable centers.

“I’m looking now and see that we sent four notices to Christosbbakas@alphamail.com.”

I pause. “Could you repeat that?”

She rattles off the email again.

“There should only be one B. Bakas. B-A-K-A-S.”

“This is the email you entered last year when we sent you the notice that you needed to update your contact information. But the plus side is we did not put your pack’s account on hold while we waited for your reply since you’ve been a loyal customer for... Oh, gosh. Ten years.”

“Yeah, I’m surprised too,” I deadpan. Their projected timeline back then was about two years; when that came and

went, I stayed on the list. Hopeful but not expecting much. With how it's gone so far, I'm beginning to think no Omega will find us worthy.

She blusters for a second, then rattles off the webpage for the Omega Trust and reminds me to update my card information for *uninterrupted services*.

There have been a few potentials over the years, and we even met with an Omega from their program about a year ago, but nothing came of it. None were scent matches, of course. Just Omegas looking for packs or lone Alphas and willing to meet possible candidates.

The one we met with wasn't comfortable with what we do for work, and that was that. She asked us if we could quit and get regular jobs if she chose our pack. But stripping was paying our bills, and we were in the thick of expanding our brand, adding merchandise, doing various publicity for the show, and even in talks to get it into a Las Vegas hotel as one of the residency acts. That deal fell through, and so did the meeting with that Omega when we told her that we loved our work.

For a brief moment, I thought of giving it all up, resigning myself to living a life behind a desk to appear more acceptable. But Ezra, being the pragmatist he is, reminded me that an Omega should mesh with us and us with them, not change who we were altogether. I railed against the notion at first but eventually realized he was right.

We would never be upper-crust, white-collar, properly mild-mannered Alphas. We were dirty, raunchy, business-minded—but in a home-grown kind of way—Alphas. Blue collar through and through, except for Ezra for the first part of his life, but that's neither here nor there.

I doubted we would ever be a truly respected and established pack. Still, Pack Bakas was my family. I owed it to all of us to keep the option open for adding an Omega into our dynamic, no matter how hopeless Ezra had become.

The receptionist hangs up, and Ace is the first to speak. “So?”

“My card had expired, so they reminded me to update the info.”

Ezra scoffs and turns on his heel, leaving our bedroom on the bus and heading toward our living area. Years of living together mean I know he’s about to make himself a protein shake, eat a banana, and watch something on Business Insider as he scrolls through his phone.

“He’ll come around,” Ace says, keeping that optimism. “And we’ll meet our Omega when we’re supposed to.”

He moves closer, and I open my arms to him, wrapping him up in a hug and inhaling his sun and surf scent. “Am I being foolish for continuing to hope?” I ask. I’m the leader of our pack, but I often wonder if I’m doing the right things. Ezra and Ace look to me for direction, and I’m happy to give it. But, like everyone, I question my instincts.

“You’re not foolish. You’re hopeful. And we all agreed to this when we became pack. It doesn’t mean you love us any less because you’re looking for an Omega. We know that our relationship is good. Solid. But it’s also missing something.”

I look down at Ace, his bright blue eyes twinkling with teasing mirth. “Not in that way. We could be content forever with us three. No one is saying that we’re lacking.”

“I know.” We’ve had this conversation before, and Ace always reminds us that it will happen when it happens. It

probably doesn't hurt that I've got accounts with as many reputable Omega matching organizations as possible. I want to give Fate a helping hand.

My phone rings in my hand, and Ace chuckles as he hears Cole's ringtone. It's "The Imperial March" from *Star Wars*, and it makes me laugh every time I imagine the Beta as Darth Vader as he stomps down the halls.

"You going to answer that?" Ace asks. "You know if you don't, he's going to call me, and then finally, Ezra."

"You're right. No one wants that." I steal a swift kiss from Ace before answering the call. "What's up, Cole?"

"Well? What did that horrible woman want?" Cole asks in exasperation. Carol was perfectly nice, but she's on his shit list for not giving him the details.

"Just an update on a payment method. I got it."

He huffs. "How am I supposed to run your lives if people won't cooperate?" Before I can point out that it was, in fact, a personal call, he barrels on, "Now, get everyone together because we have to go over a few things."

"Sir, yes, sir!" Ace says into the phone and drags me down the bus, where we join Ezra at the table. "Okay, you're on speakerphone."

Cole begins, "Okay, so tomorrow you have a group rehearsal at a local gym in Dallas, then you have all of Sunday off to rest. Ezra, your mom wants to see you and demands you make time. Monday, you have a show there, along with a couple of promo spots on radio shows, and then there's the taping for one of the morning shows in the area. Don't forget to compliment the hostess's dress; it's like a thing every guest does. Mention our sponsors a few times, but I'll brief you

closer to the taping. Pack Johnson is infighting again, but I told them to figure their shit out before you hit the stage in Dallas, and then I ran for my life. Oh, and I think Martinez and Holmes might be a good pack, but they won't admit to it—stupid, stubborn, lone Alphas. Otherwise, your meals are prepared and in the fridge, and if you want a night in a hotel room instead of the bus, there's still time to arrange that. Any questions?"

Did he even breathe as he was listing all of that? I swear Cole would make a better general than an assistant. No one answers, and he continues, "Perfect. Night."

He hangs up, and we stare at the phone the way we do after every evening call with Cole as he runs down his checklist.

"How does he keep all of that straight in his head?" Ace muses.

I shrug. I'm getting too old for this shit, and I'm glad I'll soon be working from our home office instead of on a tour bus. I've got financials to review, and a few of our sponsors are pushing for more appearances to promote their products. It'll cost them, but if it means sacrificing a few days for more capital to expand, I'm willing to do it.

CHAPTER THREE

Hana

HAILEY AND LANA GO OVER EVERY BOOTY SHAKE AND ADONIS belt in the front seat while I panic in the back. I make the appropriate sounds when they ask me a question but can't muster the voice—or courage—to do more than that.

Hailey drives us home in her vintage VW van; the awful olive green color from the exterior is used as piping along the white seats. It's still somehow cute-ish, but it must have the original shocks because my teeth rattle every time we go over a pothole.

“Wasn't it so hot when you caught that thong?” Lana gushes. She turns to face me, and I grip my clutch, hiding said thong so she doesn't see that I stashed it away like a deranged squirrel.

When it landed on my face, and the blond god sauntered from the stage, flexing his ass muscles with every step, I tore off for the bathroom. I needed a moment to collect myself because my entire universe had realigned. Scent matches are rare. So rare, in fact, they're basically a pipe dream, and most Omegas use a matching service—or, in my case, my family—to find a partner, scent match or not.

I'm not the type of girl who has good things happen. Late to bloom, hoard of Alphas at graduation, the worst first heat ever, losing my job prospects, on and on and on the list goes. Don't get me wrong, I live in a gorgeous house and have the best sister in the world, but scent matches don't happen to people like me. Arranged marriages do.

It wasn't until my phone was blowing up with texts from Hailey and Lana that security was kicking them out that I

finally emerged and hustled us all to the van.

I've been quiet on the ride home, but I can't stay silent forever. Eventually, one of them will make me spill it, and I want to get ahead of that moment. Besides, I need to talk to someone about this, even if it's only to say the words out loud and get the unending repetition of it out of my head.

I caught a whiff of my scent match off a piece of material that was literally *swallowed by his ass*.

This is insanity, and I need a level head to sort all this out. Because even if scent matches don't happen to people like me, it seems like the universe fucked up and handed me one while I'm engaged to someone else.

"Hailey, can you stay the night?" I ask, breaking myself out of the constant swirling of questions and what-ifs in my head. I could talk to Lana about this, but she's only eighteen and about to graduate high school in a few weeks. She doesn't need this distracting her from her finals. Despite being a mischief-maker, she tries hard in school, and I won't be the reason she loses focus this close to the finish line.

"Yeah, I can do that. You okay? You're kinda quiet."

I nod as she looks in the rearview mirror, but she sees the worry on my face. You'd have to be blind to miss it. "Just tired from the surprise kidnapping, is all," I say when Lana glances up from her phone and looks at me.

She snorts. "That was pretty awesome. Next time I'll add blaring music in the car."

"Next time?" I blurt, panic and excitement swirling inside of me. "We're going to another show?"

"*Nooo*," she drawls, but I can tell by her voice that she wants to watch me squirm again. Isn't that what little sisters

are for?

“Better not be,” I say decisively. Nothing good can come from seeing them again. I’m engaged. That’s all there is to it. I fold my arms over my chest and sink back against the seat.

Hailey laughs, but she’s watching me in the mirror too closely to miss the panic in my eyes. She pulls up to the community gate, and the guard recognizes her and waves her in. “Evening, Miss Gonzales. Misses Henderson.” He tips his cap at us before letting the gates swing open.

“Thanks, Stu!” Hailey calls as she inches forward, ignoring the awestruck faces Lana and I are sporting.

“What?”

“You know his name,” Lana says. “I don’t know his name. Why don’t I know his name?” She turns in her seat and looks at me wide-eyed. I shrug. I don’t leave often enough to know everyone’s names, and that’s its own kind of sad.

“It’s not your fault,” Hailey offers with a pat on Lana’s leg. “Everyone here is raised to ignore others. But since I moved out, I realized it was pretty dickish. But I swear to God, if you two raise your future hypothetical kids in this community and perpetuate the snobbery, Auntie Hailey will come and kick everyone’s asses. Alpha, Beta, Omega, you name it, they’re fair game. Be better than our parents.”

Lana and I slump back into our seats, properly chastised.

Hailey drives past the quiet, opulent cul-de-sacs and along the main road of our gated community. The houses grow more massive the further from the entrance you get, and they aren’t small to start with. Finally, she pulls into the circular drive, parking the van to the side of the house, as Mom instructed her to do in the past. I think her words were something along the

lines of, *Hana, I know she's your friend, but that monstrosity ruins the front of the house. That bucket of rust needs to stay out of sight. The last thing we need is for Hailey's parents to think she lives here now. They kicked her out for a reason, Hana.*

Hailey sleeps here almost as often as she stays at her place. She has ever since high school, but after college, I needed her more than ever. Mom had to come to terms with Hailey visiting because she was the only one who could get me downstairs and feed the first few months.

I asked her to move in, but she loves her little studio apartment downtown and says that if she moved back into this neighborhood, she'd have to hand over her independent woman card. But still, she made the trip daily back when I needed her brand of tough love more than air.

We pile out, and I look up at our gilded cage. The house is gargantuan and gorgeous, and everything someone with old *and* new Texas oil money is expected to have. Sandstone walls, more flowers than necessary, an expansive front and back yard, two floors with black framed windows dotting the facade, and a massive pool in the backyard. Oh, and stables—even though we've never had horses, or any other animal for that matter. Mom says the smell is enough to ruin the neighborhood.

I unlock the door, and we sneak in. Mom and Dad are protective, and they wouldn't be happy with tonight's activities or that we're coming home at one in the morning. It didn't use to matter so much before, but since my designation, my parents have taken "strict" to a whole new level. Lana goes up the left staircase, and Hailey and I take the right side. The

staircases curve toward the landing up top, and our rooms are on either side while our parents' room is down the central hall.

Lana waves as we creep upward, and Hailey and I wave back then head down my hall to my room. I carry my clutch in a death grip and drag Hailey with me, snicking the door shut once we're inside.

“What the hell is happening?” she asks.

“I have a problem.”

“Did the guys give you a lady boner? I thought that was why they did the scent suppressors. You and your delicate Omega sensibilities. It's normal to get slick when you watch a bunch of Alphas gyrating on a stage with little to no clothing.”

She shrugs and turns toward my bathroom. I follow her, and when she tries to shut the door, her brown eyes widen when she sees me bracing my hands on either side of the doorframe. “That is *not* what I'm talking about.”

“Okay, then what is it?”

I look past her, avoiding her inquisitive stare that's sure to sift out any answers I'm still uncovering. I'm still wrapping my head around it and want to take my time explaining. My eyes land on my favorite dildo, Vlad—*yes, the destroyer*—suctioned to the bathroom counter. It's bright pink, has a clit stimulator, a knot, and six vibration and gyrating settings. It's drying on the other side of the sink because I'm a responsible sex toy owner and had an itch to scratch today. I wonder if the blond stripper's cock looks like this? I tilt my head to the side as I imagine his knot and if I can find vibrating cock rings to recreate Vlad in person.

Hailey snaps her fingers in front of my face. “Focus!”

Ah, but Vlad doesn't judge me.

“I think maybe, quite possibly...it’s an impossibility really, and I’m probably imagining things. But, I mean, I smelled it?”

“Smelled what exactly?” Hailey asks, her brows pinched and a look of disgust on her face. Her eyes widen with realization. “*The thong?!*”

“No! I mean, kind of. It—God, why do I sound like an idiot right now?” I shake it off and try again. “When the *garment* landed on my face, I swear I caught a whiff, and I think...”

“Spit it out, Hana!”

“It’s my scent match.”

“The thong?”

I shake my head, mortification coloring my cheeks and making me tremble with embarrassment. This is ridiculous. It can’t be.

“**THE STRIPPER?!**”

I nod.

“Holy fuck,” Hailey breathes out. She crouches a little to meet my eyes. “Are you okay?”

A disbelieving laugh leaves my lips. “I don’t know,” I admit between gasps. I hunch over, dragging in air, hyperventilating, and feeling feverish. “This wasn’t supposed to happen. This kind of thing *doesn’t* happen! How many Omegas meet their scent matches in the wild? How many use Omega centers and still get no results? This kind of thing *doesn’t. Happen.*”

“Well, apparently, it does,” Hailey supplies unhelpfully. I smack her thigh with the back of my hand and use the other to hold onto the bathroom counter. She walks me over to the

toilet and makes me sit on it, pushing my head between my knees. “Breathe, Hana. That’s it. In and out, take your time.”

A couple of minutes later, the worst of the panic subsides. It feels like it did when I was in college during finals week, and I thought all the studying would kill me—like everything would wash over me and send me down to the depths, swirling in statistics and figures, dragged down by the anchors of marketing principles.

I lift my head, finding Hailey sitting on the floor across from me on my bathmat, the beige carpet a horrible contrast to her teal skirt.

“Want to try that again?”

I open the clutch and withdraw the glittery thong.

Immediately, the scent of powerful ocean waves—sea, sun, and salt—permeate the space, and I groan without thought. The hint of a summery cocktail undercurrent cuts through the saltiness, adding a richness I’ve never experienced before.

“Uh, Hana?”

I open my eyes, unaware I’d let them fall shut, and slowly lower the thong away from my face.

“You were sniffing the thong again, and you’re perfuming enough to choke an elephant.” Hailey shifts where she’s sitting—my stupid Omega need making her Beta feel like she has to attend to me, despite not being into me like that.

“I am aware.” I drop my hand but refuse to let go of the material. “What the fuck is wrong with me?”

Before the first tear slips free, Hailey is there, wrapping me in her arms. I return the embrace, and the thong ends up in front of my face again.

Yes, I sniff it. *Again*. I have a problem.

“First, stop smelling that *thing*,” Hailey says. I reluctantly comply. “Second, it looks like that stripper is your scent match. Have you ever reacted like this?”

I shake my head, thinking back to all the interactions I’d had with Alphas over the years, and while there had been some great guys, no one’s scent had ever sent me spiraling like this.

“Okay, so then that leads us to the next topic. Do you want to meet this guy?”

“What? No. I’m engaged.”

“Yeah, to a dude you’ve seen fewer times than your gynecologist. This is a *scent match*. Do you know how rare that is?”

Nodding, I rack my brain for the figures and statistics, but none come to me. All the information Mom made me read when I bloomed has slid out of my brain to make room for a blond stripper and fantasizing about his knot.

I inch the thong closer to my face again because I can’t help myself. Hailey bats it away, sending it flying across the tile. I lunge after it, but she catches me around the middle. A sound I’ve never heard before escapes me. It’s a cross between a whine and a growl.

I sneak under her arm when she loosens her grip in surprise and curl around the thong.

“Hana, honey, look at me.”

I lift my gaze, finding her staring down at me with concern etched on her brow. It’s then that I realize what I’ve done. I

growled at my best friend to get hold of sequin butt floss so I could sniff it some more.

“Holy shit. Get this thing away from me.” I fling the thong at her, and in what can only be defined as a godly moment, it arcs through the air and lands on Vlad the Impaler.

The ideas are endless.

My slick grows again—*then again, did it ever really stop?*—and I fling myself into the shower, closing the glass door after me as if that will help. The whole top is open, so the air here smells like it does on the other side of the door, but the coconut shampoo bar adds to it.

I whimper.

“What are we going to do about this?” Hailey asks again. “Clearly, this isn’t a sniff-and-forget type of situation.”

“I can’t do anything. I’m engaged. Even if I have a scent match, the arrangements are made aside from a few details. Beau is a good Alpha. He has a business and a house, and his investments are sound.”

“Hana—”

“No, it makes sense. He’s perfect for me. I can’t chase after some Alpha I’ve never met. Never mind a stripper. Oh, God.”

“Beau might be good on paper, but you barely know the man. And his scent certainly hasn’t elicited anything like this.” She waves her hand at me, barricaded in the shower.

We’ve had this argument countless times, but it is what it is. I have a duty to my family, and if I can’t be part of the business by working in the boardroom as I’ve always dreamed, I would do my part how I can. That means helping

my father make a deal with another company, both of which would profit from the contracts. I'd reviewed them myself when Dad was golfing one morning. His business is stagnant, and he needs an influx of cash and better marketing.

"Hailey," I sighed. "I can't. We're going to chalk this up to a day's insanity, and tomorrow, it will be like it never happened. I just needed to say something because it was so strange."

"Strange how?"

"It felt like... I don't know how to describe it. Like being comforted and challenged all at once. Like the sun was rising and setting, the intricacy and impossibility of it all. It was complex and confusing—like a knot I wanted to untangle, picking at each thread until I knew every facet of the material."

Hailey stares at me for a few beats. She clears her throat pointedly. "And you're sure—"

"I'm sure." *I think.*

"But Eros?"

I snort. "I will not fall in love with a stripper named after the Greek god of sex. It's not a thing that happens. It's not even worth considering."

"I googled it. It's the god of love and desire mostly, but fine. You know my thoughts on your engagement."

I hold up my hand. "I know the arguments, and I even understand them. But I need to think about Lana. First, she has college in the fall. The investment from Beau will make sure Mom and Dad have the funding for that. Then what happens? What if she's an Omega like me? I can start scoping out

options for her so she's not blindsided like I was with Beau. If this keeps Mom, Dad, and Lana afloat, I'm happy to do it."

Hailey bites her lip, but I see the words forming on her tongue, trying to push through. I can't argue this again. She knows my reasoning, and I understand hers. It's a stalemate. I'm marrying Beau, and there's nothing we can do about it. And more importantly, I'm not opposed to it. I'm just not excited, either.

"Fine. It's not like we'll even get access to him if you change your mind. The production is probably already onto the next venue, wherever that is. Besides, did you see their security? Insane. Now, can I pee?" she asks.

I climb out of the shower, snag up the new object of my obsession from Vlad, and head into my room to prepare for bed. I stuff the thong under my pillow because I've turned into a woman I don't recognize and go about grabbing my matching pajama set and brushing out my hair.

Hailey emerges from the bathroom with her hair done up in a messy bun and flops onto my bed while I go clean up the slick mess in my panties, change into the silky pajamas, do the nine-step skincare routine Mom taught me, and brush my teeth.

Once we're both in my bed, Hailey leaves the topic alone. She's softly snoring within minutes, and I've buried my face in the material again.

Today was a weird day.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ace

“WELCOME TO ALPHA TALK, THE PODCAST WHERE WE MEET up with celebrity Alphas and ask them the questions you wish you could,” Bree, the host, says. “I’m live today with the Alpha Trio from Beasts of Bacchanal as they travel to their next performance. How are you guys?”

“Doing well, Bree, thank you,” Christos answers, his deep and calm voice sending a reassuring wave through my body. He looks across the table at me and gives a wink, knowing exactly how he affects me. “We’re happy to be here.”

“Introduce yourselves, if you will?” she prompts.

“I’m Boss, owner and operator of Beasts of Bacchanal, and our pack leader.”

Christos points at me to go next.

“I’m Eros, self-care enthusiast and finale performer for our group. Thank you for having us,” I say.

“E-Z,” Ezra says in a bored tone. I kick him under the table, and he glares at me. “Choreographer.”

See? That wasn’t so hard.

Bree asks a few questions about the tour and performances that Christos easily handles, his all-business attitude keeping the questions on track. This is our fifth—yes, *fifth*—interview today. Twelfth in the last two days. We’re about to be broadcasted everywhere between the various radio shows and podcasts we’ve done, but Bree’s is the only one we agreed to do live because it’s the only way she operates.

Her listeners are ravenous romance readers, and she's got the numbers to back her reputation. When someone appears on her show, their profits soar because the listeners will buy the guests' products. Our shows are sold out, but there's plenty of merch to move on the website.

Cole bounces on his toes in the kitchen area of our tour bus, watching the whole thing unfold. He holds up a paper with a scrawl on it, prompting Christos to bring up one of our sponsors' names. It's difficult to slide a quick promo about *Slick-Be-Gone* into a conversation, but somehow Ezra manages it when he fields the next question.

“So, what are some dangers you face with your job?” Bree asks.

“Well, there are always physical injuries to be wary of, so we do a lot of training and extensive stretching before every performance. And at least twice, there was—to say it delicately—some excess, uh, arousal on the stage after a bride-to-be got a little excited, understandably. Thank God for *Slick-Be-Gone*, or we'd have had to cancel the show. That stuff works wonders, and we could continue as scheduled and pull the next participant up on stage.”

Smooth bastard.

“And how do you like to unwind?” Bree asks.

Christos points to me to get me involved again. “Oh, that's definitely a question for me; these two never take time off. I encourage afternoon naps, good food, meditation, walking around whatever city we visit, and doing things to pamper ourselves, like spa days, pedicures, or just sleeping in on our off days.”

“Pamper yourself?” Bree asks. “That sounds more like an Omega trait than an Alpha one.”

I laugh, not having heard that for the first time. “I know, but who decided Omegas are the only ones who can indulge? You want to get lost in a good book? Read a book—a deliciously smutty one,” I amend, remembering this is a podcast for romance readers. “Want to get your nails done? Do it if that makes you feel good. Truly, it doesn’t matter what we do so long as we’re listening to ourselves and being mindful of what our subconscious is crying out for. Personally, I like to be alone to meditate, which is hard to do on the road, so I find a quiet place on our tour bus or at the venue and sit with my thoughts for fifteen minutes. It does wonders for my temperament. You’ll notice I’m less growly than these two.”

“That’s an interesting pack dynamic,” Bree comments. “Boss, E-Z? Do you enjoy the ideas Eros brings to the table?”

The corner of Christos’s lips curl. “Very much.”

The last time he’d found me in a dressing room at a venue taking a few minutes to myself, he waited until I was done and then pushed his way inside, leading to some pre-show stress relief more vigorous than meditation.

But honestly, if these two didn’t have me, they’d have worked themselves into the grave a long time ago.

“It sounds like there’s something more to your words, Boss,” Bree entreats.

Christos chuckles, his deep bass sounding all-consuming over the headphones. “Packs will be packs, I guess.”

“Oh, listeners, he’s keeping quiet on the details, but I’ll leave it up to you to read between the lines.” Bree moves on to

perfecting a hip thrust on stage and our choreography, which Ezra answers, and then we list our favorite books.

“Now, we have a few calls coming. Let’s take the first one.” A soft chime sounds as Bree’s crew patches the caller in. “Welcome to Alpha Talk, Stella. You’re on live.”

“Oh, um, hi,” Stella says, her voice trembling.

“Hi, there,” I say back gently, trying to imbue her with some of my confidence. “You sound lovely. Did you have a question for one of us?”

She giggles. “Yes. Thank you. My question is for E-Z. Why do you wear the mask on stage?”

Ezra’s usually serious expression softens a fraction. The girl is obviously nervous, and he’s not an asshole. “I wear the mask because it gives me a sense of anonymity. It’s the same reason we use stage names. The same reason your confidence grew after being on the air for a minute and having a word of reassurance from Eros here. Being behind the mask is like wearing a superhero suit. I can do more from behind it. Be different. I’m not as naturally outgoing as my stage persona, but the mask helps me pretend.”

“That makes sense,” the caller says. “Besides, I like it. It’s hot.”

Ezra chuckles, his empathy showing as he connects with this caller, who has gained her confidence since the call started.

“Thank you, Stella,” Bree says before returning the focus to us. “I like that idea of letting your inhibitions fall away by protecting your identity. All three of you, and a fair number of your other dancers, are well protected, and you keep your

private lives very private. Is that at the insistence of your Omega?”

Christos smothers his cough with his hand, so I take this question. He’s feeling a little shaken after the call with the Omega Trust.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have an Omega.”

“Oh. Not met the right one yet?” Bree asks as if she’s not treading into dangerously personal territory.

“Not yet,” I say. Ezra rolls his eyes at me, unable to believe we’ll ever find one.

“But you’re looking?” Bree’s voice takes on a curious, prying tone that makes me uncomfortable. But what is the point of having these platforms if we only think of our business and not our personal lives? We’re in a unique position and have a platform, right?

On a whim I’m sure Christos will chastise me for later, I answer, “We are actively looking. But we’ve been unsuccessful in the past. Our pack is solid, and we’re retiring soon and ready to take the next step for our family. If it happens, it happens, but if it doesn’t, that’s also okay. We are already a family, and that is the most important thing.”

“Hmm,” Bree intones. “Are you all in agreement on that?”

“Yes,” Christos says as Ezra says, “No.”

Bree laughs. “I guess not.”

Ezra thinks no one will take us seriously as suitors while we’re stripping. I disagree, but the bastard has this chip on his shoulder that won’t let up.

“Well, while you guys work that out, let’s take another call.” The chime sounds again, and Bree greets, “Hello,

Hailey, welcome to the show.”

“I found your Omega!” the caller shouts, nearly deafening all of us with her volume. “She was at the Houston show! Her name is—”

“That is enough!” Bree shouts as she cuts off the caller. “Listeners, you know the rules. Do not accost our guests, or we won’t have any more guests to host. Listener, your details have been recorded and sent to our security team along with that of our guests. You are barred from participating for the next six months on this podcast. Let that be a harsh warning to all of you. This is not a matchmaking service. Please see your local Omega center for that.”

Bree’s voice takes on a softer tone now that she’s done warning her listeners. “Sorry about that, gentlemen. That was uncalled for, but unfortunately, it happens probably once every three or four shows. Let’s move on, shall we?”

After another call about our preferred snack choices, we end the podcast with Bree after saying goodbye. As soon as it ends, we take a collective sigh.

Cole lists our next responsibility and sees himself out and back to his bus. The three of us look like roadkill as we slump back in our seats. It’s time to shake things up.

“Right,” I say as I clap my hands together. “I need a pick-me-up after all of that. Shall we?”

Christos rubs a hand over his jaw, his short beard sticking out at odd angles as he roughs it up. “What did you have in mind?”

Ezra’s eyes take on a sensual gleam as he traces my bare chest with his eyes.

These two, I swear. You'd think after this long together, they'd know my mind isn't *always* focused on sex. Just most of the time.

“Something decadent. Something we haven't done in a very long time...” I let my voice trail off, letting the words lead their imaginations into the gutter. Their eyes light up with interest and Christos adjusts himself in his sweats. It's comical when I continue with, “We're going to the spa.”

Ezra groans. “Again?”

Christos chuckles and claps a hand on Ezra's shoulder. “I have work to do, but you two have fun.”

“Uh, uh. Not a chance. I booked this last night, and I know you two would rather work yourselves to the bone than take time off, but too bad. It's my turn to decide what we do on our off day, and I pick this.”

Christos looks at me, testing my resolve, and finds my narrowed gaze.

“Fine,” he grumbles.

“Oh, come on. You're supposed to be the strong one,” Ezra grouses.

“And I am.” Christos flexes his massive biceps. “But I've already done a workout today, and we've had too many interviews sitting at this little table. A massage sounds pretty good.”

Ezra, effectively outvoted, stalks toward our bedroom, calling, “Fine. Let me know when we're leaving. I have to check on my mom.”

We saw Mama Barnes a couple of days ago in Dallas, but Ezra is a dutiful son, and the two of them talk more than most

mothers and sons. It's pretty cute, but if Ezra ever heard me call him that, he'd put me in a headlock.

Forty minutes later, we're at the spa and in the pack massage room. The three of us are lying face down on our massage tables, and our masseuses ease our tired muscles.

"What do you think about adding a few more performances?" Christos asks. Before Ezra or I can respond, he continues, "There's enough interest to keep us going for at least ten more shows. It would pad the bank accounts nicely and only adds a few weeks to the schedule."

My masseuse hits a sensitive spot, and I groan. "If you keep making those noises, we're going to have to leave," Ezra warns.

The Beta working on me stops her hands and moves further up my back. My cock perks up at the thought. While I'm tempted to drag us all out of here, I know we all need this, and if I don't insist on it, Christos and Ezra will be hunched over like old men by the time they're forty.

"I think it's a good plan," Ezra says. He doesn't sound relaxed at all, the ornery bastard. "We should strike while the iron is hot and make it a big deal that we're adding on shows."

"I don't know, guys," I admit. "We were supposed to be done when the tour ended." We're careful not to say too much in front of the masseuses, not knowing if they're fans or if they know who we are. It's also why we don't use our real names anywhere. Hell, I booked our appointment under the name, Warren Peace.

"I know, I know," Christos says. "Let's think about it and put it to the other guys in a couple of days. We don't have to decide anything now."

The rest of the massage passes in silence, and before I know it, I'm a relaxed puddle of goo on the table, and my masseuse is telling me to take it easy when I get up and to drink a lot of water. I beckon her closer before she follows her colleagues out of the room.

"I tend to take a little while to come back to myself after a good massage. I left a note on the reservation booking. Is that okay?"

"Certainly, sir. The room is yours for half an hour. Take your time."

I hum my contentment and sink into the padded table below me, closing my eyes and focusing on my body and how much better it feels after the knots have been worked out. Stripping is hard work, and anyone who says otherwise hasn't done it before. Keeping a sultry smile on your face while counting out steps and keeping in time with the music took a lot of getting used to, and still poses a challenge, but I enjoy it.

The most challenging thing for me is being careful with my movements when I pull a participant onto the stage. I don't want to rub up on them more than they bargained for, nor do I want them groping me if they're too enthusiastic.

The reluctant bachelorettes are more Christos's thing than mine, and his ability to show someone that there's nothing to be ashamed of as they touch us during our set and encourage them to have fun is truly his superpower. I choose the women who are clamoring to get onto the stage.

A hand runs up my leg, and when I open my eyes, I realize I've been thinking so hard I didn't hear Christos get up from his table beside mine. "How are you feeling, Ace?" he asks.

"Mmm. Good."

“Let’s turn that *good* into *great*.”

A shiver runs through me, my body tensing with excitement after all the work my masseuse did. I nod, and Christos lifts the sheet draped over the lower half of my body. My cock stirs to life at the promise in his russet eyes.

Ezra saunters over from his table, his steps slow and measured. He has incredible control over his body and movements—more than any other dancer I’ve ever seen. He’s the same with his speech. He is the quietest among us and uses his words with intention. There is no frivolity, no exuberance, no wasted breath.

He reaches my head as the sheet slips away, and Christos kneads my thighs, working his hands higher until my thighs tremble under his touch. Ezra leans down, kissing my lips and stealing my breath. Their attentions make me grow harder. My cock bobs, and Christos groans at the sight.

Ezra’s light blue eyes close as he slips his tongue into my mouth, coaxing a moan from me and causing me to arch my back. Christos braces himself with a hand on either thigh and runs his tongue up the length of my dick, keeping me in place and grounding my body in the here and now more than any massage ever could.

Christos flicks his tongue along the sensitive underside of my cock, feathering his licks until I squirm, my cock demanding more, more, more. He lets out a low rumbling chuckle and wraps a big hand around my length, angling me upward until he can take me into his mouth.

Every time we come together, even after all this time, it’s new. Our roles are loosely defined, but every touch, kiss, and experience feels like the first time.

Christos is the giver. He will suck a cock like his life depends on it, giving Ezra and I so much pleasure that we can't stand it, and he will fuck us into the mattress any time he can.

Ezra is vers. He enjoys being dominated and dominating, effortlessly switching between the two roles depending on his mood and needs that day.

I'm down for anything and everything, so long as it feels good and there's understanding and respect between everyone.

I gasp, Ezra swallowing the sound and wrapping a hand around my throat to keep me in place. The exquisite pleasure of their mouths on me sends me spiraling into a lust-filled haze, and my knot begins to swell. Christos works me over with his mouth and hand, humming as his grip tightens.

My hands slide down Ezra's naked and oiled body until I find his cock. He steps closer into my grip, and I find him hard and ready, his knot bulging at the base of his dick.

With a hand on his hip, I reposition him and move my body so I'm lying perpendicular on the table. Christos reluctantly lets me go until I can get into a position that works for all of us.

I dangle my thighs off the table and hang my head off the other side, opening my mouth. Christos kneels between my spread thighs and sucks me into his mouth as Ezra slides down my throat—his pierced cock giving the familiar and exhilarating sensation it always does.

He groans as he slides along my tongue. At the same moment, Christos takes me to the edge by sucking me deep and squeezing my knot with the perfect pressure. I mirror the movement on Ezra's cock, bringing my hands to his knot and

doing the pulsing squeezes he likes. The three of us know each others' bodies as well as our own.

Our love is deep and unending. Starting as a pack borne of friendship and eventually exploring our attraction was a slow ride, but it felt like the most natural thing in the world as we tumbled from friendship to lust to love.

Christos swallows around me, and I moan, causing Ezra to dig his hands into my pecs as he fucks my face. "Yes, Ace. Just like that," Ezra says. His nails bite into my skin, giving me the pain and pleasure I crave. I'll have marks for the next few hours, but they should wear off before the performance. "You took care of us today. It's our turn to give you what you want—what you *need*. You need to get off?"

I nod, his cock still working in and out of my mouth and removing my voice. He pushes forward, and I hold my breath, taking him as deep as possible at this angle.

Christos swirls his tongue around the head of my cock, and I see stars when he grips my knot hard. Fucking hell.

"You're almost there, aren't you?" Ezra taunts, his leather and smoke scent growing stronger as he approaches his own finale.

I nod again. They know exactly how to push me over the edge, and it's always with a mix of pain and pleasure. Giving myself over to them entirely and trusting they know what to do and how to give me what I want.

Ezra slides forward, holding himself in my throat as I swallow around him. He pinches my nipple, and I groan. A shiver works through him, and he comes with a roar. "That's it, Ace. Yes. Take it all."

I swallow his cum as my hips rock in Christos's warm hands. He presses a finger to the skin behind my balls, pulsing it with the same rhythm as he squeezes my knot. I grip his long hair, warning him that my release is right around the corner. I'm an Alpha, and even if they are, too, it's in my nature to care for them. To protect them from everything, including my hard-as-fucking-stone cock.

I come undone, crying out my release as Ezra withdraws from my mouth. Lights flash behind my eyes, and my scent permeates our room.

Christos doesn't stop until I'm begging him to ease off. I'm sensitive and boneless as I lie in a puddle on the table.

Best. Massage. Ever.

Ezra chuckles as he gasps for air. His head bent forward as he looks at me with a soft smile on his lips. He's been the most interesting to watch as we formed our pack. He would never have put this much trust in Christos and me at the start of our pack bond. He had all these antiquated notions about what relationships between Alphas had to be, and it took him a great deal of time to initiate something between himself and Christos. No one ever pushed, hinted, or tried to sway him to affection because it needed to come from him, while Christos and I were happily bonded in all ways.

One year into our pack bond, he changed his tune. He saw what we had, and it was like a switch flipped one day. Not all packs are polyamorous as we are. Some Alphas don't fuck each other, and that's fine; it's their prerogative.

But I'll never forget the day Ezra walked up to Christos after rehearsal, in view of everyone, gripped his neck, and stole their first kiss. Christos hesitated for a moment,

overtaken by shock, then once his senses caught up with him, Christos kissed him right back.

I smile at my bondmates from my spot on the table, and they return my grin. I love these two with all my heart, and I'll never stop. My love is returned in the bonds we share, and the completeness in my soul is staggering.

Our connection is the one thing that worries me about our search for an Omega. I refuse to let one into our pack who doesn't accept us and the relationship we've fought hard to build. If an Omega can't see the prize we are—can't *accept* us for who we are and that we love each other with everything we've got—then that Omega has no home with us.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hana

I'M LYING IN BED, WATCHING THE SUNLIGHT DANCE ACROSS MY comforter and uncharacteristically lazing around, when my mom bursts into my room.

“Hana, are you still sleeping?” she exclaims. “It’s time to get up. We have to be at the club in forty-five minutes, then we have the dress shop at one o’clock.”

I grimace and pull my blanket over my face. It’s eleven, and I can’t remember the last time I had a late morning like this. I might be an Omega, but self-care doesn’t come easily to me, including sleeping past seven. I like to get up early and get things done—not that I’m doing much these days, but it’s the intention that counts.

But this morning, when my alarm rang, I turned it off and rolled over for some more sleep. I’ve been feeling weird since the night of the strip show last week, and late mornings are the latest in my symptoms. If this doesn’t improve soon, I have to schedule something with my doctor.

Mom rips the comforter away with more strength than I’d give her credit for just by looking at her. She’s got a tiny body and wears very feminine clothing, which suits her, to be honest. But she looks petite, calm, and demure like a good Omega. In many ways, she is—calm, that is—unless it comes to her schedule.

“*Now*, Hana,” she insists.

But I can’t move because I feel the glitter thong under my shoulder. If I get up, she’ll see it.

Of course, I've been sleeping with it every night. It's usually tucked under my pillow, but it must have moved in the night. Dammit.

"Hey, Mom?" I ask. She's picking up a scarf I left folded on my unused desk chair.

"What, honey? You know you have to put things away. You can't leave them out and strewn across every available surface. We take care of our items, not toss them around our rooms."

I nod and act appropriately chastised. Mom is diligent about the cleanliness of the house and maintaining perfection. I'd rather not bother arguing with her about it today than no one comes into my room anyway, so I just say, "You're right. You're right. I'm sorry. I must have forgotten to put it away yesterday. It's my mistake."

Everything else is, of course, in its correct place. My mom is a huge proponent of the Marie Kondo method. When it came out on Netflix, she and her friends had viewing parties with lots of wine as they judged the people that appeared on the show.

Everything has a home, including, if you're lucky like us, your emotions. They're never exposed, especially in front of company.

An idea strikes to get Mom out of my room so I can stash the thong. The scent of Eros is faint now, so there's no chance Mom will smell it, but I swear, I can still catch hints of his beachy aroma. "Can I borrow your tan Tory Burch sandals?" I ask. "They'll go well with the white dress I want to wear."

"Fine, fine. I'll get those and meet you downstairs. You get up, get dressed, and get ready to go. You've got twenty

minutes; make them count,” Mom responds, bustling out of the room.

I roll over, snatching the silver thong and shoving it into my underwear drawer. That way, if she finds it, it will blend in. Of course, I stop to fold it correctly. And sniff it.

Once I tidy my room and don the knee-length white dress, I go downstairs. I don’t even know why brides-to-be wear white to pick out a wedding dress, but Mom said it’s what people do, so here I am. Padding down the stairs, I find Mom waiting for me in the kitchen at the table, flipping through an *Architectural Digest* magazine—no doubt with plans to reorganize or renovate again. Not that we can afford it right now. Not if the spreadsheets on Dad’s computer are anything to go by and the slightly frazzled and overly obsessive cleanliness binge Mom’s exhibiting. Maybe after Beau’s and Dad’s companies merge?

After my *wedding*.

The shoes are by the door, and once they’re on, she hustles me out and into her white Mercedes sedan. We exit our gated community, acknowledging everybody we pass with smiles and polite waves, the picture of a perfect family.

Once we’re finally on our way and taking the main street, Mom turns to me. She keeps one eye on the road and the other on me with this uncanny ability she seems to have.

“Remember, sweetheart, don’t commit too quickly. We’re trying the meals they’ll be serving at the wedding, and they have to be perfect. Take notes of flavor and presentation, and let me know if anything isn’t to your liking. But I’ve already pre-checked the menu, and everything should be fine.”

“Yes, Mom,” I say distractedly as I look out the window at the people on the street. Some are hurrying along like they’re late for an appointment, and others are strolling hand in hand with their partner without a care in the world. Both of them look nice, and I fight the pang for a purpose as it clangs around in my chest. “Anything I should pay attention to that you’re not sure of?”

“At the club?” She scoffs. “No, Hana. Your father and I have been going there for nearly four decades, and our parents before us. We know the food will be acceptable. This is a mere formality. If they hadn’t insisted we test everything first, I would have ordered it and moved on. But that’s not the case, so we might as well make a day of it.”

“Are we meeting anyone there?” I ask. Lana is at school, so I know the buffer she usually provides will be sorely lacking.

“You know how it is at the club, honey. There’s always somebody there.”

This is true, unfortunately. While I don’t mind the life that I was raised in—in fact, I’m grateful to have been raised with so many opportunities—sometimes, it feels like the masks we’re all wearing and the perfection we’re presenting is so goddamned fake.

We have to dress a certain way, sit a certain way, eat a certain way, and *be* a certain way. It’s as if this old-money Texas high society has been so closed off for so long that many things are antiquated instead of “traditional.”

Every time someone new marries in or is different in some way, they’re molded and pressured until they’re like the rest of us. Shaped into the diamonds society expects and thinks they ought to be.

It's the rare gem like Hailey, who, despite being cast out because she's a Beta, is unapologetic in who she is. Instead of needing to conform, she's found her own happiness. In this little slice Texas and with the sharks circling, if you're not an Alpha or an Omega, you're out. I've always hated that bias against Betas, but never more so than when Hailey's parents tossed her out. It took a good few months for her to get her feet under her, but once she did, she fucking ran with it.

"Look at that," Mom says, the disdain clear in her voice. I follow her narrowed eyes and see what appears to be a pack walking down the street. "Pack life is not natural," she says. "Bonds should only be between an Alpha and an Omega."

I've argued this with her a thousand times. I've talked until I'm blue in the face. All it resulted in was being grounded when I was a child or cut off for months at a time while at college—merely because I disagree and am not shy about voicing that.

"It doesn't matter if they're Alpha or Omega or Beta or male or female or trans or nonbinary or any combination of mates. Their life doesn't impact yours, Mom. It's none of your business who someone loves or if that's more than one person. Packs make up nearly 20% of society." Sure, they're not the majority, but they're pretty damned prevalent. But not for me, despite my curiosity. Nope, for me, it's all monogomy and marriage and one man for the rest of my life.

"Our church teaches differently," she says—the typical argument every time this comes up. You would think, over time, she'd learn not to bring it up.

"Your church is wrong," I snipe back.

"Hana, I will not argue about this with you."

“We shouldn’t *have to* argue about this,” I say. “I hope you see past the judgment we’ve been taught one day.”

Hailey was right the other night. I’ve been so indoctrinated in this life that sometimes it smacks me upside the head when I realize how sheltered and closed off we all are here. But when topics like this come up, I realize I might not be the type of Omega our community is so fond of.

Going away to college and meeting different people opened me up to an entire world I didn’t know existed. Once I was off at school, I realized there was more than just our small and exclusive group. There are so many other perspectives to examine, and how on earth can the world move forward if we don’t take those into consideration? It still surprises me that Dad went there too, because he’s as closed off as anyone else in our little pond here. Maybe it was different back then? Or maybe he just spent so long here growing up and then returning from college that he forgot everything exposure to others would have shown him.

Moving back home after emerging as an Omega was devastating for me. All of my dreams and hopes had come tumbling down around me, and my welcome to Omega life was less than stellar. Instead of railing against it, I’ve been living a comfortable life with Mom and Dad directing me as I wallow. But this is one argument I’m happy to keep having with my mom instead of conceding to her beliefs.

It’s somewhat understandable that Mom is still so closed-minded after being on this earth for nearly fifty years. She was born here, raised here, married here, and has barely even left the town, let alone the country. She’s firmly planted in this life, and by only surrounding herself with other like-minded

Omegas and women, prying her out of her mindset is like pulling teeth from a crocodile.

Eventually, we pull up at the club, are treated to the usual valet service, and led into the dining room.

We stop on the way to our table and say hello to the various families there, and it isn't long before the first course is in front of us. While the club's food is usually good, they've pulled out all the stops today.

Two different salads, two meat dishes, two fish dishes, little appetizers, and a plethora of desserts have me feeling so stuffed I couldn't possibly have another bite.

I eat bits of each, jotting down notes on my phone, which all pretty much say, *This is good*.

All of it is good.

The club is good. My life is good. My mom is good. I'm good.

There's no contention anywhere. Not that it's necessarily a bad thing. But after spending four years fighting for my spot at university to prove that I could do it and deserved a seat in my father's company, I miss challenges and contention.

My mom makes gentle conversation throughout it all, thanking the chef when he comes over. I agree with her assessment, taking a moment from counting bricks along the west wall. It's my usual way to pass the time in the club dining room, and I know there are 1,667 bricks on that wall, but today I've only made it to 806.

This is the space we use most here. Mom, Lana, and I never actually use the club for anything athletic, but my dad plays golf here. Lana and I tried playing tennis once, but that was squashed almost immediately. Despite how graceful some

women can be on the court in their cute little outfits, running back and forth, gently hitting the ball over the net, we got a little too involved. According to Dad, “No one enjoys watching two red-faced and sweaty women grunting as they hit the ball like twin Xena Warrior Princesses,” whoever that is.

The lunch doesn't take long, especially since they were expecting us. So within an hour, we're back in the car and headed toward the dress shop a few miles away, right on schedule.

I text Hailey that we're on our way, and she responds that she's already down the street at a cafe. At least for this, I could bring a friend. It was a disagreement that Mom and I carefully danced around until I reminded her that this was *my* wedding day and that if I wanted my maid of honor with me to look for a dress, it was my right to do so.

I might be marrying a man I've barely met against my better judgment because it's necessary for the family, but I would be damned if I didn't have my best friend by my side. She's as much a sister to me as Lana, and I refuse to do this without one of them by my side and Lana has Calculus right now.

Beau is an attractive Alpha, a fair bit older than me at thirty-four, with a shrewd business mind. Most recently, he took a failing company and turned it around in a short fifteen months, making a record profit and saving thousands of jobs in the process.

It takes grit and skill to do that, and I can admit even I was impressed.

I never noted him as a potential partner because I hadn't bloomed as an Omega the last time I saw him. He was firmly

in “business contact” territory. Our interactions had been short and focused on my schooling or his portfolio. After all, he was an Alpha, and I thought I was too.

There isn't much connection between us, but this kind of thing happens all the time. Bonding unites families, and businesses remain lucrative because of strategic alliances. As Mom drives along the streets toward the dress shop, I try to envision what I want to look like on my wedding day and come up blank.

Here's hoping the dress shop can change that image in my mind.

CHAPTER SIX

Hana

MOM AND I PULL UP AT *HISTOIRE D'AMOUR*, HOUSTON'S premier wedding dress shop, if that wasn't clear by the pretentious name. Hailey stands to the left of the shop's door, fiddling around on her phone and waiting for us to arrive. Before Mom can remind me of the behavior I need to exhibit, I open the car door and meet Hailey on the sidewalk.

"Thank God you're here," I say. "I might be literally dying of boredom. Do you know how many types of salad there are? Let alone how many types of dressing. Why would anyone go through this willingly?" I whisper.

Hailey laughs at my misery—*because doesn't every best friend?*—and looks past me at my mom, who locks up the Mercedes and steps toward us.

"It's usually not so bad because people, ya know, want to do this. Marry for love, then do that fun bonding afterward instead of treating it like a business transaction. Hell, only religious people still get married. Everyone else just bonds." She grins widely, putting away her snarkiness. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Henderson. Lovely weather today, isn't it?"

Thunder cracks in the sky, and my mom looks at Hailey like she's got a screw loose.

The door to the shop opens, and a primly dressed assistant pokes her head out. "Mrs. Henderson, Miss Henderson, and friend, welcome to *Histoire d'amour*. Let's find you a dress." Her voice is relatively calm instead of exuberant like I had been expecting for a bridal shop, and it instantly puts me at ease.

The wind changes direction, and I catch the scent of lilacs and old books.

Alpha. No wonder I felt calm.

“My name is Eileen, and I’m here to help you find your dress. Is there anything, in particular, you’re looking for? I know your mom sent over a couple of examples—”

Mom speaks before I can. “Those dresses will be perfect for Hana. I assume you have them in the dressing room already.”

“Yes, ma’am. Of course. Just double-checking,” Eileen replies. She looks at me as if I’m going to contradict Mom, but I only shrug and nod. If there’s one thing I know, it’s that Prudence Henderson has good taste.

Hailey puts a hand on my arm, slowing me down as we follow Eileen. She leans close and whispers, “I have to talk to you about something.”

I look around the shop, devoid of other customers but stuffed to the brim with dresses. “Now?” I ask, holding up my hands and gesturing at the poor location.

“Before you get further into this whole wedding thing.”

“That is enough, Hailey,” Mom snaps. She’s following behind Eileen and plucking extra dresses off the racks.

“Mrs. Henderson and friend...”

“Hailey,” my bestie offers.

“Right. Mrs. Henderson and Hailey, if you would have a seat here, I’ll bring you some champagne, and we’ll get started on the fashion show.”

“Hana, darling, you can head into the fitting room and get into the bustier. I’ll be there in a couple of minutes to help you with the dress,” Eileen instructs.

“Thank you, Eileen,” I say as I enter the changing room. It’s lined with a dozen dresses Mom picked out in advance.

I strip down and get the bustier on before strolling around the room. The dresses are all quite similar, all demure, and all the perfect cut to accentuate my body in photos. I hate them all.

Muttering to myself as I wander, I resign myself to doing this. I need a dress, even if the thought of wearing one makes me feel itchy already.

When Eileen knocks on the door and enters, I point to a random dress. “I’ll start with that one,” I say.

“Excellent choice,” Eileen enthuses.

She helps me get it on, laces up the back, and adds clamps to cinch the excess material out of the way. Immediately, I can tell it’s not the one for me. It’s gorgeous, but I don’t feel anything as I look at myself in the mirror. It’s got a strapless sweetheart neckline, and yes, the skirt is as poofy as the rest of them.

“This looks lovely on you,” Eileen says. She keeps her distance, only touching me when absolutely necessary to gather the fabric and keep it out of the way—the standard operating procedure between unfamiliar Alphas and Omegas.

“I’ll give you a minute and make sure your mom and Hailey are ready for your debut. If you need anything, holler. Take your time; we’ll be out there.”

Her words are reassuring, and her tone is still calm. Despite the wrongness, something about her soothing voice

settles me. I hate this part of myself—the part where I hear an Alpha upset, excited, or calm, and it has a bearing on my mood.

It wasn't a problem when I was younger—even when it came to older Alphas with commanding barks. It never affected me as much as it did others, which is why it was such a surprise when I presented as an Omega. I didn't display any of the signs most young girls do. Hell, I was more “Alpha” than some of my actual Alpha friends who, let's face it, are no longer my friends because Alphas and Omegas are rarely friends, especially in our community.

The picture-perfect Omega bride stares back at me from the mirror. My hair is perfectly done. My skin glows because of the many skincare products I use. My makeup is expertly applied, and the pale pink lipstick on my lips makes me look like I'm smiling when I'm not. Combine all of it with a wedding dress, and honestly, I look like an actual bride today and not a woman shopping for a dress.

Who does this? Who puts this much effort into going out so they look wedding-ready daily? It's not normal. Sure, it might be standard for this life, but it's not normal for the rest of the world, and I'd like to feel normal for a little while.

Shoving those thoughts aside because three people are waiting for me, I push through the door and enter the waiting room. Mom gasps. I look up and see that she's covering her mouth with shaking fingers, her eyes wet with tears.

“Oh, Hana, honey. You look beautiful!” Mom exclaims.

The words don't land as the compliment she intends. They feel like pokes of needles, reminding me that this is how I'm valued now. Not for what's in my head and what I'm capable of doing, but that I am now for someone else's pleasure. My

only role is to be a homemaker, have babies, and be pleasing to Beau.

I don't even know if I *want* babies.

My gaze moves from Mom to Hailey, and her face is stoic. She's not showing emotion one way or the other. She doesn't say a thing. She looks at me as if she's never seen me before—the way I did when I looked into the mirror.

“This is a gorgeous dress,” I tell Eileen, trying to redirect the conversation. “But I don't quite think it's the right one. Do you have something maybe a little less poofy? Not that there's anything wrong with it. It's just not my style.”

“Of course,” Eileen says as she rounds the corner to the main salon.

Mom asks, “What do you mean? This dress is perfect.”

“Yeah, Mom. For you. Not for me,” I reply, mustering the courage to voice my opinion on something directly relating to me for the first time in a long time. It's easy to argue about packs or religious views I disagree with, but in small doses. For everything else, I let Mom take the lead most of the time. Something in me is pushing me to stand up for myself today, and I'm tired of fighting it. “If I'd known we could send in ideas or styles we liked, I would have done that. But I'd like to have some say in this. After all, I have to look at these pictures for the rest of my life. And it is my day, right?”

“Oh, honey. I know how stressful this is. I wanted to take some of it off your plate so you could focus on yourself.”

I know my mom was only trying to help, but I literally have *nothing* else to focus on, and I'm so damned tired of whittling away my days, contributing nothing.

Eileen brings back dress after dress after dress, and I've tried them all on, wondering why each one feels worse than the last. It's not like Beau, or I care about this. Aside from the sporadic email or text, he and I don't talk.

But I am apprised of his schedule. He's away on a business trip in Charlotte, and after that, he's heading to New York. Other than that, I know nothing, really.

Every single dress feels like there's either too much material or too much skin showing. There's too much lace, too much tulle, too much beading, too much everything. It feels like I'm suffocating every time the laces get pulled tighter and tighter.

After the eighth dress, Hailey stands up.

"Come on, Hana. Let's check what else you've got in that dressing room, and I'll help you with the next one. Eileen, take a short break if you don't mind," Hailey says.

My mom objects, but Hailey is quick to shut it down. "Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Henderson. I don't mind at all. That's why I'm here. Every girl needs her best friend when looking for a wedding dress—unbiased eyes and all that."

With her hands on my shoulders, she marches me into the dressing room again. The door snaps shut, and I exhale roughly.

"I can't do this," I say. "None of these are right. None of them. How is that possible? This is an entire wedding dress store. I should be able to find one, if not more."

"It's the same reason it's difficult to pick a salad dressing," Hailey says. "It's because it's not a wedding you want to be planning."

"Hailey," I groan. "Not this again."

“Look, I can’t tell you what to do—clearly—but I can encourage you to do what makes you happy. If marrying Beau will make you happy, I will get on board. If not, well, it’s not as if the wedding is fully planned yet, and it’s not like you love the guy. It could be a clean break. But before you decide anything, I’m going to send you something, and I want you to listen to it. Okay?”

“It’s not a poem, is it?”

She rolls her eyes at me and takes her phone from her pocket. “No, it’s not a poem. That phase only lasted for like a week.”

It was a long and awful week. “Good, because I’m still trying to get that one about the man from Nantucket out of my head.”

My cell dings with an incoming message, and I fish it out of my purse. “What is this? A podcast?”

I read the text below the link, and my eyes bug out of my head. “Hails, no!”

“Just freaking listen to it. I’m pretty sure I’m on a watch list after pissing off the host, but it was worth a try.”

“Oh, Hails. What did you do?”

She smirks. “I took a chance.” She taps the screen insistently. “Listen to it!”

I check the door is shut and start the podcast, then I feel the floor drop out from under me when I hear that Eros is part of a pack. A pack of strippers with alluring voices and a genuine bond, if their banter and easy conversation is anything to go by, who have sold out shows across the country and are basically untouchable. Listening in a daze, I only snap out of it

when Hailey's voice comes shouting through the speaker about having found their Omega.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ezra

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER CITY, ANOTHER PERFORMANCE, another morning of reviewing our performance—like watching game tape before a big sporting event.

I stare at the second most popular group from our cast, Four Studs—*I know*—looking for inconsistencies or missteps along the way. Jake, one of our more popular dancers and a member of Pack Johnson, had a hip injury recently after a pickup football game, and he's been favoring his right leg. He swore he'd been taking care of it and was good to dance, but it doesn't hurt to be cautious.

Besides, I do this for every group who performs with us. It's how we stay sharp and perform well every single time. Getting lazy is not something I'm interested in.

In the third song, I notice Jake, AKA Adonis—*groan*, but it's better than his original suggestion for a stage name, Sword Lord—put his weight on the wrong foot and falls out of time with the rest of his pack. It's bound to happen occasionally, but I noticed the same misstep the other night in another performance.

It's easily fixed, and I don't bring things up on the first error unless one of the dancers asks for it. But it's time to step in when there's a pattern.

I've been our lead choreographer for three years now, and that role doesn't come without dedication. I want our show to be the best damn performance this country has ever seen with no room for criticism—which isn't realistic, but fuck, I'm going to try. Because what's the point of doing something if you're not going to give it your all?

I pull up the older footage and check, and sure enough, it's the same issue—the same incorrect weight distribution and the same delayed movement, making for a clunky maneuver. It's not noticeable unless you're looking for it, but it's enough to grate on my nerves.

The coffee machine beeps with my second cup, pulling my focus away only long enough to caffeinate. When I grab it, I see it's almost seven, meaning Ace will wake up for his morning meditation soon.

Christos, however, will sleep until around nine if given the chance. I was surprised about his late-morning tendencies when I first got to know him. He was the company's owner and always presented himself as a hard-ass, but as we got to know each other, other bits of his personality came through, making it easy to admit we were pack.

He's demanding and stubborn but makes a fantastic pack leader because his concern is ensuring we have a future—one that I'm not sure I'm ready for—though I haven't told him that yet.

I'm only twenty-six and about to be retired. It seems like something to do when you're older, and I'm not ready to stop dancing. People would tell me I'm crazy for turning down the early retirement option, but that's not me.

While it's not the same, my dad tried to cheat his way to an easy life, which ended poorly for our whole family. We were ostracized, kicked out of our community—essentially shunned by everybody we'd ever known. The worst part is that Mom and I had no idea what he was doing, but we were the ones to pay the price of losing our home and friends.

It's because of my dad that I started stripping in the first place. He ruined our lives and left my mom and me penniless

as he rode off into the sunset with whatever funds he'd embezzled from his former partner.

Someone had to provide for us, and it was difficult for my mom to work with her disability. Not to mention that she's an Omega, and she was married off as soon as she emerged—the way most Omegas are in that society.

So, instead of wishing for an impossibility in the form of a suddenly stuffed bank account, I laced up my boots, put on my mask, and started dancing for cash. I know I could have gone any other route, but this was the fastest way to pay the rent and put food on the table.

Besides, there's nothing shameful about stripping—in using what God gave me—to provide. How was it any different from using my intelligence or the connections that my family once had? I could have gone crawling back to that hellhole of a town, hat in hand, but I wanted to prove that I could do it alone. Prove to everyone that I didn't need their help.

And for what it's worth, I'm fucking good at stripping.

Making people lust after me on a stage without ever showing my face is a high I'll never get over. Hell, it's a kink for some, and feeding that fantasy is fun. They enjoy seeing the mask and imagining all the depraved things I could do to them without ever revealing my identity.

In any case, it's a stupid double standard that male strippers are revered and lusted after, while so many female strippers are looked down on. Ridiculous if you ask me.

Christos surprises me a few minutes later, emerging from the back room like a bear from hibernation. His chest is on full

display, the hair across his massive pecs well groomed and leading down, down, down, into his low-slung sweats.

My eyes follow the trail, and I'm well aware he's watching me watch him. Fuck, he's built. Try as I might, I can't pack on the muscle like he can, and it's a mix of envy and attraction running through me every time I study his body.

"Ezra, eyes up." His voice is laced with his Alpha bark, and while it's not as effective on me as it would be on a Beta, Omega, or Alpha from another pack, it threads under my skin.

"Or what?" I drag my eyes along his torso, taking my time with it and daring him to do something about my impertinence. I'm not a brat, exactly. I just like fucking with people, and I don't love being told what to do. Okay, so I'm a little bit of a brat.

"Or I'll bend you over this table and fuck you." He shifts, touching his hardening cock through his sweats and giving it a slow stroke.

"Promises, promises." I smirk, and he takes a step forward. My phone rings, and I hold up a hand.

"Later then," he says without a small measure of threat lacing his tone. He heads to the coffee machine and pulls his phone out to scroll, no doubt checking the social media chatter about our performances.

He works too hard and likes to shoulder everything alone. The stubborn man refuses to ask for help but won't find two more dedicated pack mates than Ace and me. We work just as hard and wrestle some of that burden away from Christos when he's not looking.

For example, today, he'll find I've already posted a selfie of me in the mask and nothing else on Twitter, steering the

conversation away from Omegas claiming to be *our* Omega.

My phone continues ringing, and a smile spreads across my face when I see “Mom” across the top.

“Good morning, Eloise,” I say cheerfully. “You’re up early.”

“Call me Eloise again, and I’ll tell everyone you slept with a blankie until you were ten,” she fires back. Christos chokes on his coffee.

I take Mom off speaker and put the phone close to my ear, teasing back, “I’ve missed you too. Are you okay? How was your appointment yesterday?”

“Yeah, fine. The stupid ophthalmologist says I need new glasses again.” She sighs heavily.

“Well, then you should get them. Can Ron from next door take you to pick them up, or do you need me to come home? I can get there if you need me. It’s no problem.”

Mom’s vision started diminishing about two years before my father left us, but as most of us do, she kept putting off appointments, thinking it was nothing serious. By the time we were on our own, the early-onset macular degeneration had morphed and taken most of her central vision.

“Thanks, honey, but the doctor said they’d ship the new ones directly to the house.”

While the glasses won’t correct her vision, they will maximize what little vision she has left, and that has to be enough.

“That’s good. I’m glad to hear it. What else is new? It’s been a couple of days since our visit,” I say, sitting back against the seat and relaxing as Christos takes up the spot

opposite me and threads his legs around mine, squeezing my calves with his and grounding me. Mom's diagnosis is nothing new, but it still fucking sucks every time we discuss it.

"I, uh, I heard from your father."

Christos's legs tighten around mine as I tense up. "You what?"

"He's trying to make amends. He apologized for everything and wants to talk to you."

"I hope to Christ you didn't give him my phone number or tell him where to find me."

"Don't take that tone with me, Ezra Wilson Barnes Bakas! I might be blind as a bat, but I'm not so disabled I won't come out there and put you over my knee like when you were a kid."

I laugh at the image but apologize. "You're right, Mom. Sorry. It was a gut reaction." I clear my throat, trying not to imagine how my smooth-talking father might have wormed his way back into Mom's life. Fuck, I hope she didn't fall for his shit.

"I told him to take his apology and shove it up his ass. Bless his heart; that man wouldn't know common sense if it whacked him upside the head. He wanted to send money, and I told him I only wanted him to sign the divorce papers that have been sitting with his old lawyer for nearly ten years."

"And?" I ask.

"He's signing them," she says, her voice warbling with tears.

"Hallelujah," I breathe.

I blame my dad for a lot in my life. The first half was great—idyllic, even. But when he decided to try and make a quick

buck, everything came crashing down.

We lost everything: the money, the house, the community, and most importantly, my best friend, Hana Banana.

My mom doesn't need my dad. I can send her anything she needs, and soon, we'll be retiring and closer than ever. That pang of stopping work resounds in my chest, but my mom is more important. She'll be close by, and I'll be able to take care of her however she needs.

She has me, and I have to be better than he ever was. I can provide for her, and the last thing she wants is his dirty fucking money and hearing the whisper of "thief" whenever she opens her wallet.

"You guys will be in my neck of the woods after the tour, right?"

"Yeah, but we might be extending it. It would add a couple of weeks."

"Good," she says. "Strike while the iron is hot, and if you boys are willing to do a bit more dancing, that would add a nice chunk of change. I've been listening to your radio interviews and podcasts. Heard you've got about four hundred Omegas claiming to be yours," she teases.

"You're our favorite Omega, Mom," I answer like always.

"Such good boys," she coos. "Now, put Christos on the phone. I know he's hovering around there somewhere."

I smirk and hand the phone to Christos.

"Mama Barnes!" he greets, lowering his voice an octave so he doesn't wake Ace.

Mom's voice is muted, but I hear every word she says as she makes him promise not to work too hard. She tacks on that

he should look out for me and ensure I don't do the same.

Christos's cheeks turn red as she praises his hard work, and it's adorable to watch. My five-foot-nothing mom is sweet as pie, and Christos and Ace are like surrogate sons to her. They feel her love as deeply as I do. All I ever wanted was for my partners, Alphas, Omegas, or Betas, to feel embraced by her.

My mom is a goddamned blessing to our pack, and I'm glad the guys adore her as much as I do. Hell, Christos even offered to have her move in with us when we retire. He built her a little pool house behind the main house, swearing it was just for guests. But I see the way he laid it all out. The furniture is sparse, and the lines are clean, making it ideal for a blind person to memorize the layout.

My heart swells as Christos asks about the blankie Mom mentioned, and he hangs on her every word. His deep chuckle rumbles from his chest, and he winks at me, telling my mom she should treat herself soon.

I move my feet until they squeeze Christos's legs under the table this time, returning the affection he showed me.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Hana

I FIDGET IN THE BACKSEAT OF MY DAD'S SUV, TOYING WITH the hem of my yellow sundress—such a cheerful color. It goes perfectly against my lightly tanned skin but does nothing for my mood.

The podcast lives on my phone; every time I look at it, it makes me twitch. I've listened to it only once more since the dressing room and have parsed every word, phrase, and intonation of the dialogue between Eros, Boss, and E-Z. It took everything in me not to throw all reason out the window and let myself obsess over them even more. Sleeping with Eros's thong is more than enough crazy for one lifetime; I can't invite more temptation like that. So there it lives, untouched since a particularly weak moment six days ago, taunting me.

My role is clear. Keep my family afloat and ensure Lana can attend college without fear of her college fund being drained. Getting distracted will help no one in this situation.

Lana is graduating today, and I've never been more proud. Dad is in the driver's seat, cruising the short distance from our home to Hillcrest Academy as Mom sits beside him, the picture-perfect Omega.

It's been a few weeks since we went to the strip show, and since then, Lana's kept her head down and studied her ass off. She works like crazy to maintain a healthy passing grade in each of her classes, and today is the culmination of four years of hard work, late nights, and study sessions in the kitchen.

"Damn student drivers," Dad grumbles from the front seat. His salt-and-pepper hair is freshly trimmed and swept to the

side. His beard is neatly groomed, and his aquiline nose looks like it could cut glass. His suit is pressed how he likes it, and his hand grips the top of the steering wheel, commanding the vehicle with an ease I've never felt in such a large piece of machinery.

"It's okay, Forest. They have to learn somehow, don't they?" Mom's voice is tense, feeling the agitation from Dad and trying to calm it. The little red car ahead of us slows and puts on the indicator to turn right. We're moving at a crawl now, and it's irking my dad not to be twenty minutes early. Because, according to him, if you're on time, you're late.

Mom checks her lipstick in the drop-down mirror in the front seat. Her hair is perfectly coiffed, and her makeup is flawless, as always. Lana left earlier with a friend, and she looks like a proper graduate in her black cap and gown.

We finally reach the academy a few minutes later, and before stepping out of the car, Dad turns to me. "We're here to see your sister graduate in a manner befitting the Henderson name. Let's hope there isn't another incident like your college graduation. Some of my colleagues also have children graduating, and we need to make a good impression. So, smiles on," he orders.

I plaster the fake grin on my face, relaxing my eyes so it doesn't look so forced, and my dad gives a nod of approval. My mom looks like she always does, and part of me wonders if she's always faking it.

He exits the car and comes around to open the door for Mom as I climb out of the backseat. We make our way to the front of the bleachers on the football field and take up a section in the front row, as we are indeed quite early, but not as early as Dad had intended.

There are rows upon rows of folding chairs down on the grass, and they set the stage at the fifty-yard line so we can all watch our graduates as they cross to the other side.

Someone stops in front of Dad approximately every thirty seconds to talk, shake hands, or kiss his ass. Dad puts on his affable face, laughing at the terrible jokes and reminding people exactly how much power he holds in this town. Or how much power he *pretends* he still holds. Without the financial backing, his influence would be a thing of the past, and it all hinges on my marriage to Beau.

Blessedly, the graduates emerge before too long, and the band strikes up, ushering them in with fanfare.

Just over the band looms Henderson Hall. Yes, we have a building named after us because my family has donated to the school for the last fifty years. It started with my grandfather, and my father continued when he became CEO. I'm curious if he was able to donate this year.

Henderson Hall houses all the government, economics, and business classes the students are required to take. I remember my unease whenever I entered that building when I attended Hillcrest, constantly feeling like I was showing off.

I might have thought I would be an Alpha, standing up for myself and others while I was here, but a part of me I never showed anyone else was always a little shy, and I wonder if it was the Omega in me that I was denying.

The graduates take their seats, their little square hats facing us as they look toward the podium. My dad is conversing with the man next to him about the future of oil because, of course, he is. Business doesn't stop because a graduation ceremony is starting.

Headmaster Collins welcomes everyone and gives a pretty speech about how the rest of the graduates' lives are ahead of them and how what they've learned here will carry on in their lives, leading them to greatness, whether as Alphas, Betas, or Omegas.

And he's not wrong. Graduates from this academy have led Fortune 500 companies and represent their communities in government all over the state and country. It grates on my nerves that I will never be one of them. Hell, our own mayor was a graduate of Hillcrest. And the Omega graduates are well taken care of by their Alphas, which is apparently all we're suitable for once we bloom.

Thinking of Hailey, another graduate from this school, I wonder if she's had it right the whole time. She pursued art after graduation and is doing something she's passionate about without worrying about the upper-crust society and how stifling it can be. She chases what she loves, and I don't know that I've ever seen her happier.

"Oh, Hana, darling, you look so pretty," Mrs. Pearson says from behind me, tapping me on the shoulder to get my attention. The urge to roll my eyes consumes my body, and I bite my lip to keep from doing it. We are the Hendersons, and we can't portray our every thought on our faces.

"Hello, Mrs. Pearson. Thank you so much," I respond, turning toward her and keeping my smile plastered on my face. Her son was in my graduating class and now works at a venture capital company in town.

"You know, when Jason heard you were an Omega, he was most intrigued. Too bad we couldn't get a meeting before your betrothal."

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. Jason was a bully throughout school and is one of the last people I would ever consider for a potential Alpha and husband. “Yes, too bad,” I murmur, keeping my simpering smile and twirling the engagement ring on my finger as if pointing out how much more successful Beau is.

Mrs. Pearson watches the movement, her eyes nearly bugging out of her head at the massive rock on my finger. I tend to wear it only when we go out and about, otherwise keeping it tucked in my underwear drawer beside the glitter thong. That spot has become the dumping ground for my weird non-romantic trinkets.

Mom turns in time, saving me from telling Mrs. Pearson how her son would be lucky to get any Omega in the future, let alone someone with as much self-respect as me. “Oh, Joan! I didn’t see you arrive.”

“I know, I know. We snuck in last minute. The parking is horrendous. You think they’d have valet service here for how much we pay for this school.”

Mom and Mrs. Pearson titter with laughter like they always do, but Mom gently rests a reassuring hand on my arm as she speaks with the other Omega. She knows Jason teased me when we were younger and that as often as I put him in his place with cutting words, it hurt me to do so. Mom was there for me when I cried afterward, nestled in the safety of our house and away from my peers. I hated being as ruthless as he was to me and the other students, but someone needed to take a stand.

It doesn’t hurt that Mom hates Mrs. Pearson. She thinks Joan stole a recipe from her about two years ago and claimed it as her own when, in fact, Mom’s recipe was taken off the

back of the Toll House chocolate chip cookie bag. I've heard more than once that Mrs. Pearson is a no-good, dirty, rotten thief. Poor Joan is just one example of the pettiness that goes on in this community. The women pretend to support each other, but that's not true.

When someone's husband does something unforgivable, the whole family is ostracized and kicked out of their little club. I experienced the effects of it once when I was a kid, losing my best and oldest friend because his dad did something illegal, and yet the whole family suffered, despite not knowing what Mr. Barnes was doing. I don't even know where they ended up after everything.

After that, I decided to keep my circle small, hanging on to Hailey with a death grip because we'd already been friends, and I couldn't stand to lose another person I loved. She saw the aftermath of losing Ezzy and swore I'd never lose her too.

I tune back into the graduation ceremony as the valedictorian gives his speech from the podium on stage. He looks out over the other graduates and the audience like he's doing a State of the Union address, talking about taking the world by storm and making their mark on society once they leave this nest behind.

It sounds almost exactly like my speech when I graduated as valedictorian. I had so much stupid hope back then. Little do these graduates know that what awaits some of them is a life of servitude and coming to grips with their designations if they're not the Alphas they've been planning to be.

The salutatorian goes next, incorporating classic hits in their speech with lyrics pulled from ten songs like they were listening to a playlist while writing the speech, and the lyrics bled through.

All it does is put “Wind Beneath My Wings” by Bette Midler in my head.

Dad’s disappointed that Lana wasn’t one of the top two in her class. She’s firmly middle of the pack, but for someone that school doesn’t come easily to, she kicked ass. Lana doesn’t care much about school and grades, but she did her best because she knows it’s what our family expects.

As the headmaster stands to retake the microphone from the student, there’s suddenly a muted explosion.

Cannons filled with colorful powder explode from either side of the graduates—blues, reds, yellows, and the brightest pinks all plume big and tall, covering the graduates in a riot of color. The wind picks it up, sending it all back toward us in the audience. Women scream and cover their faces and dresses, and husbands stand in anger, trying to block the imaginary threat from their families.

Headmaster Collins shouts to calm down, the microphone amplifying his Alpha bark. Some of the Alphas in the stands behind us growl at his command, seeing it as a challenge, but slowly, the fog of color dissipates, and what I see below makes me laugh. The graduates, who had all been in their stoic blacks, now resemble the pages of a toddler’s coloring book.

I look for Lana in the mass of people, and when I find her, she turns in her seat and shoots me a wink and a grin.

That cheeky sister of mine. I would’ve bet my entire inheritance—or what’s left of it—that she’s behind this, and that look confirms it.

“Please, everyone, calm down,” the headmaster requests. He’s got his hands raised in supplication. “You all know we love a good prank, and the seniors were remarkably quiet this

year. But in this academy, we teach you to roll with the punches, and we intend to do the same thing today. Graduation will continue as planned. There will be no rescheduling, as the field is being re-sodded tomorrow, so this has to happen today. I hope you're all okay with your graduation pictures looking like a crayon box threw up on you. Now, we shall begin."

Three hours and two showers later, our family congregates in the foyer of our home, Lana at the center.

"Lana," my dad warns, "you will tell me who planned this prank. It's unbecoming of students at Hillcrest Academy. The news stations are going to have a field day tomorrow."

I don't have the heart to tell him it's already all over social media, and the local news is running loops of cell phone clips from the event.

"But, Dad, how could I possibly know?" she asks, putting on an air of innocence I can see right through, but apparently, our parents can't.

"Lana, honey, your dad is right. This was a disaster of a graduation," my mom begins, then cuts herself off, looking over at me.

"She says she doesn't know who did it," I say, feeling the sting of a ruined graduation all over again. I know what Dad has planned today, and the last thing I want is for Lana's gift to be taken away. She deserves it after all the work she's put in over the last four years, even if she isn't at the top of the class.

"Fine," Mom sighs. "Let's go to dinner, please, and try to salvage what's left of this evening."

Dad grumbles, assuaged by Mom's Omega calming, adjusts his jacket, and opens the front door. I look at Lana, and

instead of confirming or denying anything, she threads her arm through mine and grins up at me.

For a moment, I wonder how freeing it must be to go against the grain, to break a rule or two and get away with it. I envy Lana. She's still undesignated, though she's showing more signs of Alpha or Beta than I ever did. My money is on her being an Alpha like Dad.

Until her designation comes through, I want her to enjoy herself. She should live her life to the fullest before she's shackled back in this community or married off to somebody else like I'll be soon.

For now, we have a dinner to attend, and it's my fault that she's not getting a graduation party. Mom and Dad planned a massive one for me when I graduated college, but it was all for naught when I perjured at the ceremony. The whole event went out the window and secured me a hotel room as my first heat overwhelmed me for five straight days. Riding it out became crucial, causing Mom to cancel the party and send everyone away. My parents had invited dozens of people to the party, most of them being potential business partners for my father, and he planned to use the social event to work on some negotiations.

I'm the reason my parents didn't plan one for Lana. She's eighteen, and there's a chance she could emerge at any time, and they wanted to be spared the embarrassment of canceling a second event.

We step out of the house, and my dad has a big smile, a rarity if it's not a business deal. In the middle of the driveway is a smaller version of Mom's white Mercedes with a big red bow on top.

Lana squeals and rushes forward, reaching for the car's hood as if to hug it. She stops, turns around, and launches herself into Dad's arms. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" she chants excitedly.

"You're welcome, sweetheart," he says. "You've earned it. Besides, you need something fun to drive in Florida."

"I can take it with me?" she asks.

"Of course. You can't rely on Grandma and Grandpa to drive you around, can you?" Dad asks.

Lana hugs him tighter and then hugs Mom. She's leaving in a few days to stay with our grandparents over the summer, spending time with them before college obligations come to rest on her shoulders. Mom's parents are from our little community but opted for senior living in Florida a few years ago.

I'll miss the hell out of her, but maybe it's for the best. The more I think about the situation with Beau, the less I want her worried about me, and I'll see her before the wedding in August. I'll soak up the time I have with her before she takes off, assuring her everything is one hundred percent totally fine.

Lana dances away, climbing into the car and playing with the buttons on the steering wheel.

Mom stands beside me, adjusts my dress straps, and then tucks a lock of hair behind my ear. "There, that's better," she coos, reminding me once again that we must always display perfection.

CHAPTER NINE

Hana

MY PHONE CHIRPS ON MY NIGHTSTAND, AND I REACH FOR IT, knocking a dildo off the bed. It takes the glitter thong with it, and I dive for the sparkly material, ignoring the knotty peen's *thump* when it hits the floor and bounces under my bed.

No, I haven't stopped sleeping with the thong. Nor do I plan to.

It comforts me, and while I have to keep hiding it in my underwear drawer and spraying descenter on my bed every morning, nothing can stop me from dragging the underwear to my bed every night and coming with the faint scent of Eros in my nose and a big, fat, knotted dildo in my pussy. I'm mourning that the scent is so faint, and I know it's only a matter of days before it smells like me more than him.

This is getting ridiculous, and I know it. I just can't stop. No matter how often I lie in my bed at night and promise myself that tonight will be the night I give it up. My brain is resolute that this isn't helping things, but I wake up in the middle of the night and dig the damn thing out of my drawer to sleep with. It's like some kind of hex calling to me at all times.

Shoving the cursed material under my pillow, I finally pick up my phone.

Doctor Attwood 8:00.

Dammit. The appointment I'm dreading but desperately need.

I've been on suppressants since my first heat and the surprise designation. My doctor reluctantly agreed I could use

them until I came to grips with being an Omega. However, the medication is working less effectively as time goes by.

In the last month, I've had random fevers and hot flashes, and my slick has been out of control. At least there's *Slick-be-Gone* to deal with the laundry, but I know the scent of Eros is bringing my heat to the surface and causing reactions in my body I'm not ready to have.

Over the phone last week, Doctor Attwood's office nurse suggested that my body has developed a tolerance to the medication. But I'm still taking the pills and need a higher dosage to keep it at bay so I don't ruin the wedding like I ruined graduation.

That damn incident has cast a shadow over every event since, and I'm so tired of it.

I get up, spray descenter on my sheets, dress, and drive to Doctor Attwood's office.

"The doctor will see you in a few minutes, Miss Henderson. Have a seat and fill this out." The receptionist hands me a clipboard, and I settle on an uncomfortable plastic chair in the waiting room.

I fill in the usual information, noting that the suppressants are wearing off and that I need to up my dosage. My prescription is running out at the end of the week, and we need to fix this. Now.

I'm called back and go through the usual procedure with the nurse, then I wait in the office, sitting on the padded patient table.

"Miss Henderson, good to see you again," Doctor Attwood says as he strides into the office after a perfunctory knock. "I see here we've got some suppressant issues?"

“Morning, Doctor. Yes, they’re not as effective as they were, and I need to up my dosage.”

He peers over the clipboard, his friendly face now downcast in pity. “I’m sorry, Hana, but we have you on the strongest dose we can legally provide without a medical emergency. We knew this time was coming, and with you being suppressed for so long, it’s only a matter of time before it comes back with a vengeance.”

I wring my hands together in front of me. “This *is* a medical emergency. I’m getting married and can’t be in heat for the wedding. Is there any way to know when it’s coming?”

“I’d heard you were getting married! Congratulations, dear. It would be good for your heat to return in time for the honeymoon. Unfortunately, there’s no way of telling exactly when it will occur. Are you currently having any symptoms?”

I think back over the past couple of days. “Nothing too serious. A bit of an elevated temperature and more sensitivity to sounds and crowds, but otherwise, I’m okay.”

“And your slick is manageable?” Doctor Attwood asks.

A flush of heat runs up my cheeks. Talking about slick will always be weird, so I do what any self-respecting and uncomfortable-with-her-designation Omega would do. I lie. “Yep. Totally.”

Anyone would get wet watching those strippers dance the night away. I’m chalking it up to being a horny bitch and not my heat returning. I’m setting up my tent in camp denial, and there’s nothing Doctor Attwood can say that’ll make me pack it in. “I only need another prescription for the suppressants, please. At least until the wedding.”

“I’m sorry. I can’t do that, Hana. According to Texas state laws, you’ve reached the maximum dosage, and because your body is adapting to the medication, we have to take you off it. If, God forbid, something happens to you, and you end up in the hospital, they’ll need to put you on a suppressant for the safety of you and the other patients. If your body rejects them, you’re potentially putting everyone at risk.”

“What am I supposed to do? The wedding is in a couple of months, and a lot is riding on this wedding happening. I can’t cancel it for something as silly as a heat. Could I bring it on sooner rather than later?”

He looks at me with his brows raised. I doubt many Omegas have called their heats silly in his presence. “Well, a couple of things could work. Try spending time around some Alphas in a safe environment. The pheromones could nudge your body into heat earlier. It’s not a guaranteed method, but with your medical history, it would be around a fifty-fifty chance. Your body wants to have a heat; we’re the ones who have been preventing it. You can also partake in physical activity. Perhaps joining a gym would cater to both suggestions simultaneously.”

He sighs as I start mentally mapping out gyms in the area. “But I think you’re right. Your best bet is to trigger it before your wedding so the possible disruption isn’t hanging over your head. Oh, and try to avoid high-stress situations. That can delay your heat.”

I laugh, and Doctor Attwood joins in. “I know planning a wedding isn’t especially calming, but if you feel unsettled or uncomfortable, your body might defensively delay your heat. Perhaps spending more time with your fiancé is the way to go here.”

Yeah, like marrying a stranger isn't a stressful situation. Imagining having sex with him, even though I barely know him, only makes it all seem more absurd.

“Okay, thank you, Doctor Attwood. I’ll try those.” I make a mental note to call the local gym and join with a month-long membership. All those Alpha pheromones have to trigger something. Maybe Doctor Attwood is right. Getting it out of the way is the best option right now.

“Your birth control is still valid for another year, and the rest of your vitals seem fine. Think of this like a gift, Hana. I know your designation came as a shock to you. Your first visit here after you emerged was heartbreaking, but I hope you’ve found some peace with what God chose for you. Listen to your urges and do as your body begs. I promise you’ll be healthier for it, and who knows? Maybe the first heat you have, consciously aware you’re an Omega, will be amazing. Fate, God, biology, whoever or whatever it is that designates us, doesn’t do so at random. You are exactly who you’re meant to be.”

I smile at Doctor Attwood, but it’s one of my forced ones, and I’m sure he knows it. “Here,” he says as he scribbles on a pad, rips the page off the stack, and hands it to me, “your prescription.”

“Listen to your Omega urges,” I read aloud, restraining myself from reaching out and slapping Doctor Attwood. First, he brings up God, and now this? Surely, there’s some kind of breach of ethics happening here.

“Doctor’s orders. Now, is there anything else you need today?”

“No, that’s it.” *You whackjob.*

Disappointment and anger rock through me as Doctor Attwood leaves. I was sure I could go another round of suppressants, at least to get through the wedding, but with those hopes dashed, I need to find another way to get this stupid heat over with so I don't embarrass my family again.

I gather my things and leave the office, waving goodbye to the Beta at the front desk. She sends me a sad smile, telling me she knows exactly what happened and how disappointed I am.

She was here the first time I came in, demanding the suppressants. I didn't have a good first heat and was desperate to avoid them for as long as possible. All that heat did was remind me I was a designation I wasn't expecting and that despite my mind wanting to engage in all things business, all I was fit to do in society's eyes was be bred.

I start my car and leave the parking lot, not bothering to put on music as my thoughts fill my head with enough noise. Adding any more might send me into sensory overload.

I'm at the intersection of Main Street and Orchid Lane when I see a pair of workers changing out a billboard for a new advertisement. The Alpha Trio stare down at me as sections of their poster are removed, their taut muscles on display, and their bulges larger than life on the massive canvas.

Slick floods my panties as I trace the muscles of not just the blond whose thong I caught but all three of them. Embarrassment creeps up my cheeks again, making me feel like I'm back in that audience, watching their bodies gyrate on the stage.

In this moment, I hatch a plan so dumb, they'll be writing about it in Omega guides for what *not* to do.

I press a button on my phone, and Hailey's cheerful voice comes over the speakers. "Hey, girl. What's up?"

"I'm freaking out, and I need your help." I look at the prescription page as it pokes out of my purse.

"Uh oh. What happened?"

"I can't get any more suppressants and am supposed to spend time with Alphas to trigger my heat. I swear, even Doctor Attwood knows about the graduation incident, and the new plan is to get it over with before the wedding so I don't ruin that day, too."

"You ruined nothing," Hailey interjects with a growl. Her Beta bark isn't as strong as an Alpha's, but the surety she speaks with makes me feel better, if only for a second.

"Look, Lana is leaving for Florida today to stay with Grandma and Grandpa, so I need to say goodbye, but how would you feel about working from the road for a day or two?"

"I can take time off. I'm working on a graphic design project this week and can do that anywhere. What are you planning?" Hailey asks warily. "I mean, I'm in, but I want to know what I'm agreeing to."

"Doctor Attwood's prescription says, 'Listen to your Omega urges.' So I'm doing exactly that. I need to meet the blond." If he was able to get me slick just from a sniff, then surely being around him could trigger my heat. My head fills with visions of Eros—and his pack—triggering my heat in other ways, but I shake my head, trying to clear the lurid thoughts as my panties grow damp. Again.

I worry it's cheating for a moment, but then I remember that Beau and I have never even *dated*. Hell, we spend so little

time together that I'm not even sure what color his eyes are. This is a business arrangement, and until I sign the paperwork, I'm free to do what I need to.

“What blon—Oh, shit. You mean the stripper?” Hailey exclaims. “Girl, they're sold out at every venue.”

I shake my head even though she can't see it. “It doesn't matter. We'll figure it out.”

“For fuck's sake, Hana. The blond, Eros, is part of a pack. You know what your parents will think, right?”

“I know! But at this point, what is there to lose?” My brain goes into overdrive. What if Eros's packmates don't let me near him? What if they hate me? What if *he* hates me? What if he's committed to them so much that even meeting him isn't possible? He's my scent match, but he's their packmate. There is no easy answer to this, but until I try, I'll live in a constant state of anxiety and unease.

“I might not be the best co-conspirator on this. We have to register with our ID before we're patched into the podcast for security reasons, so they have all my information. I've been trying, but I haven't been able to contact anyone from the Beasts of Bacchanal show. But hang on, gimme a second.” Hailey's side of the conversation is filled with the sound of a keyboard and her mouse clicking. A moment later, there's a rustle, and her voice comes through. “Yeah, they're sold out literally everywhere, but I have their schedule. How do you feel about a little light stalking?”

“At this point, I'm willing to break about forty laws to trigger this goddamned heat. I *cannot* fuck this wedding up. Lana's first-semester tuition is paid, and if Dad doesn't secure this deal with Beau's company, that's the only semester she can attend. No one will give Lana a school loan because our

family will have lost everything by then. The loan officers will take one look at our situation and deny her the money while laughing in her face.”

“Stalking it is. Okay, go home, say bye to Lana, and pack a bag. I’ll shuffle some things around and pick you up in a bit. If we drive the rest of the day, we can make it to their show in Tulsa and try to scalp tickets for their performance tonight.”

This is insane. This is downright ridiculous. “This has to work,” I grumble into the phone. After all, where better to be around a bunch of Alphas than at a strip show teeming with them? I’m taking Doctor Attwood’s recommendation and following my Omega urges, even as they lead me down the road of stalking.

“It might. It might not. But it’s sure as hell going to be fun. I’ll text you when I’m on my way.”

Nerves take up residence in my stomach. Now that we have a half-cocked plan, it feels real. We’re doing this.

“Okay. And, Hails?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

She laughs. “If ever I wanted to stalk a hot Alpha, you’d be my first call too, and I know you’d go with me. It’s what we do for each other. Now, think of something to tell your parents and Beau because they’ll notice if you suddenly disappear. We might not get tickets to Tulsa’s show tonight, and it might take longer than a weekend.”

“Good call. I’m on it.”

I hang up and pull over to the side of the road to send Beau a text.

Me: *I'm visiting our grandparents in Florida with Lana before the wedding.*

There. That sounds fine. Right?

The dancing dots that tell me he's typing appear, and I wait, fidgeting as I stare down at my device.

Beau: *Okay.*

Okay.

OKAY?!

I know we're not particularly close or friendly, but "*Okay*" is not a great response when someone's fiancée says they're leaving town. Not even a "have fun" or "text me when you get there safe."

I shouldn't even be marrying Beau. I know it's a business deal, and it's for Lana's future, but there has to be another way.

There have to be options for a desperate Omega. I could sell off my closet; those designer labels should fetch a pretty penny. Hell, I'll work remotely to pay for her schooling, never giving my designation, so they can't refuse to hire me because I'm an Omega. A fiery pit of indignation at my situation roars in my belly, and I put my hand over my abdomen, trying to quell it. But it's too late.

I can't marry Beau. *I can't marry Beau! I CAN'T MARRY BEAU!!!*

He evokes absolutely nothing in me. No feelings. No excitement. No jealousy. No passion. Nothing!

I can't live my life feeling *nothing*.

A switch flips as my mind whirls with the implications and the consequences of canceling everything. Mom would take it

the hardest, clinging to that facade of perfection she's spent so long cultivating. Dad would yell at me until I caved, using his Alpha bark to get me to comply.

But I'm doing something for myself for the first time since I emerged as an Omega. Euphoria fills me as I contemplate taking control of my mundane life and putting a crack in the shiny veneer of perfection we've been taught to maintain.

A car honks behind me, clearly needing the driveway I've stopped in front of on the residential street, and I pull away to head home. I immediately dial my dad on speaker, ready to end the arrangement with Beau. Calling my mom would send her into a coronary, so I choose the more strict but less dramatic option.

It rings twice, and he sends me to voicemail. I demon dial him. Over and over again, I get sent to voicemail. This is an emergency! What if I was dying on the side of the road?

A text chimes, and I look down, finding the autoreply I've had memorized since I was a child.

Dad: *Sorry, I can't talk right now. Please contact my assistant, Margie, at (555) 943-1987 if urgent.*

Fuck it. I tried to end it, but he wouldn't listen.

I pass through the community gates and reach the house. Lana is in the driveway, putting her bags in the back of her new car. I stumble from the driver's seat and grip her arms.

She looks from our point of contact to my eyes. "Hana, what?"

"Listen to me," I beg. "I'm not coming with you to Florida, but that's what I'm telling Mom. I can't do it, Lana. I can't, and I'm so sorry."

“What? Hana, you’re not making sense. You can’t do what?”

“I can’t marry Beau. But I’ll make it all work out somehow.”

Her face cracks into a big grin. “Thank fuck. But make what work?”

She doesn’t know about our money problems and the impending loss of everything she’s ever known. Dad buying her a Mercedes was reckless and stupid, but it’s what you do in this community. You fake it. You fake everything.

Well, this girl is done faking.

“So if you’re not going with me, where are you going?” Lana asks.

“On the road with Hailey for a quick trip. Don’t you worry about a thing. We’ll be fine. I have to get out of here before Mom can convince me that marrying Beau is a good idea. I tried to call Dad, but he kept sending me to voicemail. He’s the one who arranged the whole damn thing, so he can be the one to unarrange it. I can’t have them breathing down my neck and insisting I marry Beau. At least out there”—I wave my arm at the world’s vastness—“I can hang up the phone. Here, there would be nowhere to hide from Dad’s orders.”

Lana wraps me in a big hug. “I think this is a good thing. It’s like the wild summer before college you never took. Where are you guys going?”

“Uh, around?” I answer. I don’t need her knowing I’m off to stalk some strippers as they drop their glittery thongs for other women despite one of them being my scent match.

“Oh, *around!* Yes, yes, I’ve heard it’s nice there.”

I smack her arm. “Just help me sell it to Mom that Hailey and I are going with you to Florida in her car because she has some art things to attend there. We’ll leave when you do.”

“For sure.”

Mom is at the club for brunch, so it takes me no time to tear through the house and gather everything I’ll need for a week on the road.

I also raid my little stash of cash in my bedroom and make a mental note to grab some from the ATM on our way out of town. As soon as Dad finds out I’m canceling the wedding, he’ll definitely cut me off, but he doesn’t know about my tiny nest egg. During college, I tutored a bunch of other students, and other than paying for a few nights out, it’s been sitting in a little box for the future.

As it turns out, that future is today.

CHAPTER TEN

Hana

HAILEY GLANCES OVER FROM THE DRIVER'S SEAT FOR THE hundredth time since we left Houston an hour ago, and I smile reassuringly at her, convincing neither of us that I'm okay with all this. Saying goodbye to Lana was harder than I expected, but leaving the note for Mom and Dad was surprisingly easy. Despite all that, having Hailey on this wild goose chase with me gives me confidence that this will all work out. Somehow.

About four hours later, we're singing along to Ed Sheeran, as one does when contemplating one's life choices when my phone rings. The shrill ringtone cuts through the soulful Omega's crooning, startling us from our ballad. I grab it from the dashboard where I've tossed it so I can double-fist my massive burrito and pretend it's a microphone.

"Fuck," I mumble. "It's Mom."

Hailey hands over a stack of napkins from her lap, and I put my microphone aside and wipe my hands, still staring at the screen. She nudges me, and I look up, finding her cheeks puffed like a chipmunk's and a bit of salsa at the corner of her mouth. "You going to answer that?"

"I think I have to. If I don't, she's only going to call again." I clear my throat and bite the bullet as Hailey makes the sign of the cross over her chest before shoving more burrito into her mouth.

"Hi, Mom," I answer, flooding my voice with false cheer. As far as she knows, I'm caravanning to Florida with Lana.

"Hana Henderson, what the hell do you think you're doing?!"

I cringe at the shrill nature of her voice. “What do you mean?”

“Really?” Mom asks, skepticism coloring her voice. “That’s how you want to play it? I just got off the phone with Lana. She says you’re going to Grandma and Grandpa’s house with her, and Hailey is coming with you?”

“Yes. Hailey has an art show there, so we figured we’d make a road trip of it and enjoy the summer a bit.” I can’t remember the last time I outright lied to my mom like this. It must have been in college.

“Is that so?” Mom asks. “Tell me, when and where is the art show?”

“I don’t know when exactly,” I say, cursing myself for not saying Tuesday or something. “But it’s in Sarasota.”

Mom hums. “How convenient that it’s in the same city where Grandma and Grandpa live.”

“I know! Lucky coincidence.” *I’m going to hell for this, aren’t I?*

“Hana,” she warns, her voice angry. “If you’re headed to Sarasota, why on earth are you in Oklahoma?”

I rear back in my seat, knocking my burrito to the floor and swallowing my curses at the loss of such deliciousness.

“How—?”

“All our phones have tracking. Did you think I wouldn’t know? Did you think I wouldn’t check that you were safe after hearing from Lana that you took off with her? No word? No note? You are my daughter, Hana. Of course, I’m going to track you.”

So she hasn't found the note yet. That'll be a fun discovery for her later.

I can somehow hear her grimace over the phone. Mom takes a deep breath. "Turn around right now and come home. You can't drive off without warning to God knows where."

"And why not?" I ask, finding my backbone buried under all the Omega bullshit I've been fed.

"Because you've got a wedding to plan! Because people are counting on you! Because if you don't come home, your father will find you and drag you back here. I haven't told him yet, but I sure as hell will if you don't turn around right now."

I know exactly what my dad will do. He'll use his godforsaken Alpha bark to get me to toe the line.

"I'm an adult, Mom. I can't believe I have to remind you of that. I'm about to get married, and you're telling me I can't even go on a road trip?"

"Hana, so help me God, if you don't turn around and come home right now, I'm calling the police."

"You can't call the police on me, Mom."

"Watch me."

"And what are you going to say? That I'm a missing person? I willingly left! It's not like you can say I stole your car. I didn't take mine."

"Are you having cold feet? Is that what this is? Or is it some rebellious phase coming around late, like your designation?"

Anger streaks through me. I know Mom is aware of the danger Dad's company is facing, and instead of helping, she's all too eager to offer me up as a trade deal.

“I don’t even know Beau, and suddenly, I’m supposed to marry the guy?”

“He’s a good Alpha, Hana. You didn’t say anything when we brought this up months ago. Why now? He’ll take care of you.”

“Admittedly, I made a mistake in agreeing. But what else was I supposed to do? It’s not like I can go off to work on Monday and use the degree you and Dad paid through the nose for, and if marrying Beau meant Lana could go to college, then I was happy to do it. But it’s like the wool has been yanked off, and I suddenly saw how quickly my life was going downhill at a hundred miles an hour, and the steering wheel was gone!”

My heart is in my throat as I finally spill it all to Mom. My stomach churns with nerves and guilt, the fear that I’ve just condemned Lana to a shitty life is resting heavy on my shoulders, and I feel like I’m being buried alive under the massive responsibility I’m carrying. But enough is enough, right? I’ve done everything Mom has since I became an Omega, and I’m honestly sick of it.

“Hana, this is the life of an Omega. We do our duty to our families. Besides, I barely knew your father when we got married, and look how well it turned out.”

I fight the urge to roll my eyes because, oh my God, look how it turned out. An Alpha who barks at his Omega, and the only thing more important than business is appearances. I refuse to get sucked into that life. Leaving city limits has only reinforced that notion, and I am sticking to my newfound principles.

After college, I let myself get complacent, slotting right back into our little society and letting Mom and Dad call the

shots because I was freaked out over being an Omega. But now, having had the entire car ride to face some hard truths about perpetuating our ridiculous society, I've gained a little clarity.

That life isn't for me. No matter how long I'd been raised in it.

"Hana, I mean it. Turn around right now. Get your ass home."

"Or what?" I ask, raising my voice in a way I'm honestly uncomfortable with. "You're gonna cut me off? I'll find a job. You want to kick me out? I'll move in with Hailey."

The Beta in question turns to me with raised eyebrows. Yes, I know she lives in a tiny studio apartment, and there's not enough room for a houseplant, let alone me, but this is where I'm at on this crazy train.

My entire life has had the rug ripped out from under it. All because I caught a thong with my face.

"I'll figure it out. And as far as Dad and his business go, *he* can figure it out. The company's success can't hinge on a twenty-three-year-old girl getting married to some Alpha. If it does, then the company is fucked, anyway."

I don't know how bad it truly is because I've only been able to sneak peeks at the paperwork Dad leaves on his desk. My degrees gather dust while I put on a fake smile and simper around at the club instead of sitting at the table and helping.

"Hana, you're being ridic—"

I don't let her finish the word. Instead, I hang up the phone and head into the settings. I take approximately fifteen seconds to start a factory reset on my phone. I'll toss it in case she has

some kind of parental control on it to track it, but I'm covering my ass first.

Hailey grips the steering wheel tightly and finally turns toward me. "So, that sounded fun," she says sarcastically.

"Oh yeah, just another day in the Henderson house."

"What are you doing over there?" she asks.

"I'm resetting the phone. I'm going to throw it away, but I've got cards linked to it. And in case it's not like the movies where it shatters on impact and is irreparable, I'd rather someone not clean out the rest of the accounts."

"Fair enough," Hailey says. "We've still got about another hour and a half till Tulsa if you wanna talk about it."

She's gentle in her approach, and the Omega in me appreciates it. I'm a fucking wreck, and there's nothing to do but stew in it.

"Having second thoughts?" Hailey asks quietly as she focuses on the road ahead.

"And third and fifth and hundredth," I say with a laugh. "I've rethought this a few times, but I'm committed. I want to trigger my heat, even though there's no rush anymore since there won't be a wedding. It's time to get it over with. It's safe to say I've been avoiding it for too long. The best way to do it seems to be finding Eros because, if that thong is any sign, it'll happen if I spend even ten minutes around him."

"The god of love." Haley laughs. "What a stage name, huh?"

"Suits him, though, don't you think?" I ask. I can hear the hearts in my voice and envision the flutter of birds above my

head, like a Disney princess thinking about a prince. What is happening to me?

I never thought I'd have a scent match. Hell, I never thought I'd be an Omega, but here we are. My instincts are driving me to meet this Alpha to figure out what exactly we could be to one another. Scent matches are incredibly rare, and it would be irresponsible of me not to explore it.

As we get closer to Tulsa, we lapse into silence. Hailey hands me her phone, and I pull up directions to the venue. I ditched mine at the last gas station, leaving it in a bathroom garbage can. Mom might know we're in the area if the phone tracking feature still works, but she won't know where exactly. I'll check in from payphones if needed. I don't want to worry her unnecessarily, but I refuse to give in to her demands.

Tonight's Beasts of Bacchanal show is being held at Rodeo Nightclub and starts in about an hour. If anyone is selling tickets, they should be out front soon enough.

We head to the venue—a massive red-painted warehouse—and join the long line of cars ushered into rows for parking. This show is one of their bigger ones, accommodating an audience in the thousands.

Once Hailey grabs her spot, we pour from the van, my legs feeling like jelly after sitting still for so long, aside from the nervous fidgeting.

“You ready for this?” Hailey asks.

“Not in the least, but it's happening.” Determination steels my shoulders as I face the rows of cars and look toward the venue. Spotlights light up the sky, waving here and there like phallic beacons to watch hot guys shake their asses on the stage.

Hailey stops me with a hand on my arm. “I’m proud of you, Hana.”

I try to brush her off, but she tightens her grip, and it causes me to turn and look at her. “No, seriously,” she says. “I’m glad to see this spark in you again. I didn’t want to say it, knowing what you were going through, but you lost this side of yourself after your designation. It’s understandable, of course, when thinking you’ll be an Alpha and end up emerging as an Omega, but I’m glad to see you retaking control of your life—the way the old Hana would have done.”

Tears prick behind my eyes, and I swallow roughly, shoving the emotion down. “Thanks, Hails. I’m glad to be feeling like the old me, too.”

We reach the entrance, and my jaw drops as I look at the line snaking around the corner of the massive warehouse. “Holy shit.”

Hailey follows my gaze, craning her neck to see to the end of the line. “Come on. If anyone is selling tickets, it will be at the end where security won’t see them.”

She grabs my hand and pulls me forward, passing excited groups of attendees waiting for the doors to open. The air smells heavily of descenter, the standard when going out among company. Like in Houston, I’ll bet they’re pumping the stuff into the venue too.

After what feels like a mile-long trek, we reach the end of the line, where a group huddles together a few yards away.

“Nothing left,” I hear one woman in the group say. She has bright rainbow-colored hair and is wearing a neon pink T-shirt, denim shorts, and rainbow cowboy boots. She looks more comfortable and approachable than the rest of her group.

Hailey leads me toward the women. “I’m sorry to interrupt,” she says, cutting into their low chatter. “We’re looking to get some tickets for tonight’s show.”

“Girl, aren’t we all,” the rainbow-haired woman says. “Someone here was selling their tickets about ten minutes ago, but we haven’t found anyone else.” She shrugs and sticks her hand out. “I’m Julie, by the way.”

“Julie! Don’t fraternize with the competition!” a blonde says, rolling her gorgeous green eyes at Julie.

“Technically, you’re the competition, too,” Julie fires back. “Don’t be a bitch, Char. We’re all here to watch those men shake it on stage. Take pity on a fellow fan.”

I get my hackles up at the idea that they’re all here lusting after my Eros. Eros. Dammit. Not *my* Eros.

“Oh, we’re not—” I start, but Julie cuts me off.

“Girl, no shame here.”

A man rounds the corner, and Julie suddenly whisper-shouts, “Disperse!”

The six huddled women suddenly take off in pairs in different directions, Julie whistling as she links arms with Char and joins the end of the queue.

“Julie, honey, you know I can’t let you in,” the bouncer says when he catches sight of her.

“Oh, come on, Xavier! I’ll be really good this time. I promise!”

Xavier looks sympathetic as he shakes his head. He looks over at Hailey and me and points at us. “Take your friends and head out, Julie. You know the rules, and I can’t bend ‘em, no matter how much you sweet talk me.”

“Oh, Xavier, I wouldn’t dream of it! How would we continue this torrid love affair if I tried to trick you?”

Xavier rolls his eyes at Julie’s teasing. “Come on. No tickets, no show.”

“Fine,” Julie says with a huff, dropping Char’s arm and heading over to us.

“And don’t even think about trying to catch the guys on their way out. Security knows your face, Julie.”

With that ominous threat hanging over us, Hailey and I take off in the other direction. I’m not getting involved with someone whose face the security team has studied. That just seems like prematurely shooting myself in the foot.

But Xavier left us with one crucial piece of information. “They’ll be accessible after the show,” I say to Hailey. “Let’s take a walk around the building to get an idea of where they’ll leave from.”

“I like your thinking, Hana.”

She grins wide, and I mirror hers with my own. We might not see them perform and get to them, but this might be better. I’m not above following them to whatever hotel they’re staying at.

Should be a piece of cake.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Hana

HALF AN HOUR LATER, THE LINE DWINDLES TO THE LAST OF the stragglers, and Xavier comes back to warn us we're loitering. Soon, there's no one else but us and the ticketless women, including Julie.

At Xavier's warning, we headed back to Hailey's van. The show lasts about two hours, and we have absolutely nothing to do until then, so we wait.

Hailey drifts off, catching some shut-eye after driving for so long today. Me? I sit on the bench seat, thinking about how ridiculous this is. I've had far too much time alone with my thoughts today, and I can't even distract myself with stupid mobile games on my phone because that's in a garbage can thirty miles away.

I close my eyes, trying to tune out the racing thoughts in my mind, and instead, I turn to numbers. This show alone must be collecting about a hundred thousand dollars between the size of the audience and the cost of the tickets. Then, if you consider merchandise, it would be much more. I wonder if they're using social media to create additional income. Then, if they invest, they could see returns for the next forty years, depending on their holdings.

My brain finds its happy place as I calculate the numbers, and I drift off for a moment.

"Hana!" Hailey shouts, shaking me awake. "Hana, wake up!"

My eyes fly open as I wince at the volume. Through the windshield, I see a line of cars leaving for the exit. "Oh, no!

No! No!” My heart rate spikes as I spin on the bench seat, finding the spots in our row mostly cleared out. “We missed it!”

“I’m afraid so,” Hailey says. She keeps her tone calm, but I hear the disappointment in it. “But we’ll try again in Wichita tomorrow. Then, if that doesn’t work, they’ll be in Denver for back-to-back shows.”

It feels like we’ve failed, and I hate failure. A whine gets caught in my throat, and I choke on it. I’ve never made that sound before outside of my first heat. That moan of desperation that haunts my dreams. I clear my throat and force words through it. “That’s something, I guess.”

Hailey pats my hand and turns the key. We follow the line of cars as they leave the parking area. There’s no sign of any tour buses or vans for the performers, so either they left or took cars to wherever they’re staying.

“I found a few places we can park overnight with security. There’s one a few miles away,” Hailey says quietly, keeping her voice docile and calm. Probably so she doesn’t agitate my stupid, sensitive Omega self. “Don’t worry, Hana. We’ll make this happen.”

I nod, afraid to open my mouth again and let my whine slip free.

Five minutes later, we check in at the campground. After a quick trip to the shared bathrooms in our section, we settle in on Hailey’s bed in the back of the van. At least this way, we won’t be spending what limited funds we have on hotels. More money to buy tickets with, should the opportunity arise.

I lie down beside Hailey, and she smiles softly. “You okay?”

I nod. “Thanks for doing this with me,” I whisper.

“Always, Hana Banana. I promised to stick with you, thick and thin, and I’m not quitting now. I don’t know if you know this, but we’re best friends.” She kisses my forehead as I laugh before flopping onto the thin mattress.

I haven’t heard that nickname in forever, but Hailey tends to whip it out when I’m all up in my feels. The last time she used it was right after my first heat passed, and I was a wreck about my new designation. “Love you too, Hail Storm.”

Drifting off with some hope still in my heart, I dream about Eros again. But every sound that night wakes me up with a start. Despite my exhaustion, my body can’t relax out in the open. Hailey sleeps like the dead, but I feel at sea. Adrift. Unprotected. It stirs something in my Omega self, and I can’t shake the feeling I’m exposed here.

The van is a godsend, but there’s nothing homey or soft about it. I miss my duvet and pillows. I haven’t made a nest before, but I realize I’ve unconsciously been filling my room at home with soft things to be more comfortable. It starkly contrasts the van’s hard edges and messy bric-a-brac along the sides, including our bags and some supplies for Hailey’s work.

By the time the sun rises, I’m a jittery mess, ready to hit the road again. But Hailey needs to sleep after all her driving yesterday, so I take her phone and crawl into the front seat.

I open her socials and find the Alpha Trio. Watching video after video of Eros, E-Z, and Boss, I lose myself in their accounts, only emerging when Hailey stirs in the back.

“Hana?” she mumbles.

“I’m in the front seat. Keep sleeping. I’m good up here.”

“You have my phone?”

“Yeah,” I answer, waving the device so she can see it.

“Listen to the damned podcast.” She lies back down and pulls the blanket over her head.

I open our text thread and find the message she sent me. I click play and lose myself in their voices, closing my eyes as I listen. *A pack. A pack.* And they seem like genuinely good guys, too.

WE REACH WICHITA, AND IF I THOUGHT THE CROWDS IN Tulsa were terrible, this is a nightmare. The performance is being held at the Intrust Bank Arena, which is massive, meaning more opportunities for ticket resellers. Or so we hope.

Hailey follows the line of cars into the parking area, and as we get closer, we see someone checking tickets.

“Oh, fuck,” Hailey says.

“What are we going to do?” I ask, panic bleeding into my voice. I start digging through my purse like I’ll find some imaginary tickets at the bottom of my bag to show the guard.

“I don’t know! Oh! Oh, wait! I have an idea!”

Thank fuck, because we’re next up. Hailey lowers her window and leans toward the guard. “Hi, sorry if this is weird, but we’re not here to stay. I just saw on my sister’s social media that she’s here, and she’s only fifteen. I don’t know how she got a ticket, but she’s loitering around out front. I’ve already called to yell at her, and she’s waiting for me to pick her up. I’m so sorry for the inconvenience, and I’m sure

neither of us wants her to get in trouble. Imagine word getting out that you let a fifteen-year-old into the venue...”

The guard’s eyes widen, and he lifts a radio to his mouth, barking out orders that a minor is on the grounds. He waves us through, and Hailey feigns her concern as we pass the next checkpoint.

“God, that was too easy.”

“You threatened his job and his ability to find another one,” I say with no small measure of mirth.

She shrugs. “Anything for you. Now, let’s find a spot.”

We follow the other cars and eventually grab a spot toward the back.

Guards speak into radios as we pass by, keeping our heads ducked in case the guard we spoke to gave Hailey’s or my description.

As we walk along the unending line, Hailey shouts, “Willing to buy tickets! We need two tickets! Willing to pay cash right here, right now!”

People avoid eye contact and shake their heads at us, the two desperate women begging for tickets at a sold-out venue.

“A thousand bucks for two tickets!” Hailey offers. One woman perks up at that, but her friend tugs on her hand, whispering furiously into her ear.

“Five thousand,” the friend counters.

“Yeah, right. You think we’re walking around with five thousand dollars cash right now?” Hailey argues.

“Maybe,” the first woman answers. “You’ve already announced to everyone you’ve got a thousand.” Okay, she’s

right, and I grip my purse a little more tightly so no one gets any fun ideas about robbing us blind.

Hailey scoffs at the woman. “You’re insane. Come on. I bet a thousand is more than you paid for your tickets.”

“Of course it is. We bought them as soon as they went on sale—like you should have.”

I step in before Hailey verbally smacks down the woman. “Please. It’s an emergency.”

The original woman who looked interested scoffs. “How is a strip show an emergency?”

I can’t exactly explain that I think I’m Eros’s scent match, so I sob, “My fiancé and I broke up, and this was my best friend’s idea to help me get over it.”

The women look sympathetic, but with a final shake of her head, they say no.

We continue, and once we reach the end of the line with no takers for our offer, I slump against the side of the building. “This is hopeless.”

“Hey, girls!” someone cheers, probably meeting up with her friends for the show we’re definitely not getting into. “*Yoo-hoooo!*”

Ugh, she’s rubbing it in at this point. Probably all hyped up with her fancy ticket and meeting her friends for a night of watching *my* scent match strip down to nothing.

A brunette bounces up next to us, putting a hand on Hailey’s shoulder. “Fancy meeting you two here!”

It takes me a second, but I recognize her when I finally look at her face. “Julie? Where’s your rainbow hair?”

“Oh, that’s only for Sundays.” She runs her fingers through the new wig. “Gotta throw off the bouncers somehow, yeah?”

“Uh, yeah,” Hailey says, looking Julie up and down. “So, did you get tickets?”

Julie makes a disgruntled sound. “No, and I don’t think anyone is selling here. This is the only show they’re doing in a 300-mile radius, so they sold out quickly.”

“We haven’t had luck either,” I admit. “Not unless we want to spend five thousand on two tickets.”

“What?! Who has that kind of cash sitting in their wallet?” Julie cries.

The three of us prop up a wall behind the end of the line, following it from a few feet away and pretending not to loiter.

“There’s something that might work, but I’ve only heard of it happening once,” Julie says, lowering her voice into a reverent whisper. “We could try the will call window at intermission. You know that little office people go to when they win tickets or pick them up at the venue? They might resell if people haven’t come for their tickets or canceled last minute.”

“Oh!” Hailey and I exclaim at the same time. It’s a long shot, but it’s something. Worst case, we can try bribing the guy. We do have a thousand bucks between us.

“Then again, like I said, it’s only happened once that I know of, but dammit, it’s better than throwing five thousand dollars at those conniving bitches.” Julie makes a vulgar gesture at the rest of the line ahead of us.

I grab her hands and bring them back down before anyone can see them. “Julie!” I hiss. “You can’t do that.”

She studies my face for a second, looking genuinely curious. “And why not?”

“Because people will see!”

“Uh, that’s the point.”

Hailey snorts. “Not in our world.”

I smack her with the back of my hand, and Julie watches the whole exchange with a kind of scientific curiosity. “And what world is that?”

“The high society, old money, oil tycoon world of Houston,” Hailey mutters. “But we’re working on broadening our horizons.”

“Sounds stifling,” Julie says. “Is that like where they do those cotillions and shit for Omegas who need to find a fancy-ass husband to keep the gene pool limited?”

My cheeks flush. My mom made me do a coming-out gala-type thing when my first heat was over. She said it was what was expected of me now that I’d emerged.

“Yeah, that’s exactly the place,” I admit.

Only a handful of people are left waiting to get into the venue, and soon enough, we’re the last ones loitering around outside.

“Come on. We’ve got a while until we can check will call.” Julie leads us to a planter where we can perch as we wait.

Hailey sits between Julie and me, unconsciously guarding her Omega friend against an unknown designation. The wind shifts, and all I smell is descenter coming off our new friend.

“What’s your designation, Julie?” I ask, cutting right to the chase.

She chuckles. “We’ve got time to kill. Want to play a game and guess?”

“There are only three designations.”

“I didn’t say it would be a good game.”

“Beta,” I guess.

Julie cackles. “Fuck, that ended too quickly. What about you guys?” Hailey goes to answer, but Julie holds up a hand. “It’s my turn now. Hmm, you’re a Beta if I’ve ever seen one,” she says to Hailey, who rolls her eyes. “And you? I’m not sure what you are. I want to say Alpha, but that doesn’t seem quite right. Nor does Beta. But Omega feels off too. Any chance you have no designation?”

I shake my head.

“Beta?”

“Omega,” I say quietly, trying not to feel the sting Julie has inadvertently poked at. I don’t fit into any designation. Or I didn’t before. Now, I’m like a strange amalgamation of the two.

“I didn’t get to finish the game.” Julie pouts. Then she lets out a low whistle. “An Omega on the road? I never thought I’d see the day. Aren’t you missing your nest?”

Hailey looks over at me, concern in her eyes. I pat her on the arm in reassurance and say, “Yeah, a bit. But I needed to get out.”

“Why?”

“Uh, I’m not sure we’re really close enough for all the details,” I say, sidestepping the question because I’ve asked myself that question more than once, and the best I can come up with is that my body demands it. Omega urges and all that.

“Are you going to all the shows in this area?” Hailey asks Julie, taking some of the pressure off of me.

“I’ll go to all of them in the country if that’s what it takes to talk to Boss.”

My hackles immediately rise, and I swallow down an unexpected whine. He’s part of Eros’s pack, and my body is screaming at me that if he’s with Eros, then he might belong to me, too.

If we’re indeed a match.

If he agrees.

If I want a pack.

There are too many ifs to feel settled in my life these days.

“Why do you need to talk to Boss?” I ask.

Julie sits up a little taller. “I’m a DJ, and I heard their guy is retiring soon. I intend to make that job my bitch with my very limited experience. Think about it! Living on the road, exploring new cities, states, and one day, maybe even countries...The production can totally take this thing international, and I want to be part of it. I’m good at hyping people up and have a playlist for everything. I was made for this job.”

Oh. *Oh!* She’s not after any of the guys; she wants a job.

“Plus, I wouldn’t mind catching a ride on that disco stick.”

I don’t think. I just lunge.

Hailey wraps her arms around my middle, catching me before I reach Julie.

“Woah, woah! What the hell?” Julie shouts.

“Take it back,” Hailey warns.

Julie looks from me to Hailey and back again and says, “I was kidding. I’m not into the older guys. It’s okay, Omega. Easy. It was a joke. I’m not going near him.”

Slowly, my body relaxes, and Hailey lets go of my torso, still keeping a hand on my arm as if to calm me. “He’s not old,” I grumble, catching Hailey and myself off guard with the sudden defensiveness.

“He’s thirty-five, according to some insider knowledge. But I promise, I’m not moving in on Boss or his pack. Can I say there are others I might be interested in?” Julie asks. I instantly think of Xavier, the guard who knows her by name, but keep my lips zipped as I nod.

“How long have you been trying to get in to see them?” Hailey asks, expertly diverting the conversation.

Julie scuffs her rainbow sneakers on the floor. “Since their first show. They’ve been sold out for months, and I didn’t even find out about them until a couple of weeks before the first performance on this tour. I’d been on a social media cleanse for the last three years while studying music and missed so damned much. By the time I was back online, there were no more tickets, but I spent the better part of two weeks watching their shows online and knew this was what I was meant to do. I have some money saved, so I figured if not now, when?”

Julie speaks with so much passion; I’m envious. I don’t know if I’ve ever been that motivated to do something—to have that kind of calling and go after it like you’ll die if you

don't get it. But she looks exhilarated, as if she only needs one tiny introduction and all her dreams will fall into place.

I don't have the heart to tell her she's setting herself up for heartbreak.

“So I guess we'll see you in Denver, huh? We seem to be in this for the long haul and haven't had luck yet.”

“Fuck yes! We'll caravan it over there. I already researched a few places to stop for food and found some decent campsites and motels.”

Hailey and Julie talk logistics while I stare up at the stadium. We approach will call after an hour and discover—surprise, surprise—they aren't reselling tickets. Julie also sneaks around to the back of the stadium and finds they have indoor garages so the guys won't be exposed as they leave the venue.

It turns out Julie's overall plan is to shout at them to get their attention and garner a meeting.

At this point, mine is to throw my underwear at Eros in retribution and get him to recognize the scent match the way I did.

The three of us sidestep Xavier as he wanders around the back of the venue and head to the parking area. We follow Julie to the campsite she'd picked for the day, her rusted-out station wagon backfiring twice along the way.

It's an odd situation—one I couldn't have imagined for myself even a week ago, but honestly, I'm glad to have someone else along for the ride, even if security has her on some kind of watch list.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Ace

DENVER IS CHAOS.

We've just finished our set, and this venue doesn't have the underground garages that the stadium in Wichita had. Right now, I'm regretting that.

The venue is smaller, but we've got two shows here, so we avoided the high cost of the stadium-style venue and kept it more intimate. The crowd was wild tonight, and as we huddle up before heading to our buses, Christos gives us all the affirmation we're looking for.

"Great show, everyone. We're killing it lately. We've got rehearsals here at twelve tomorrow, so get some rest and don't get into trouble tonight. We can't afford to lose any of you to a night in jail, and I won't be posting bail."

The guys chuckle at the usual send-off.

"One more thing," Christos says, rubbing a hand along the back of his neck. "I want you guys to think about extending our tour. Our sponsors are putting pressure on us to add a few weeks of additional shows."

One of the younger guys, Ethan, asks, "What do you think, Boss?"

Christos is a leader through and through, and everyone in our company looks to him for his opinion. But he's a good Alpha, meaning he wouldn't have posed the option to the group if he didn't think it was a solid idea.

"It's a good plan, and if you choose to continue, I've worked in bonus pay for the unexpected extra time. I know some of you are bonded and want to get home to your

partners. I won't begrudge you that, nor will I exclude you from upcoming shows. This is a lot to consider. There will be some additional shows, and while the thirty percent bonus is nice, it's not nicer than your relationships. Think about it and let me know by the end of the week."

"Thirty percent," Ethan whispers under his breath. He's definitely in, and we're not expecting everyone to join us. We know it's a lot to ask, but the sponsors are supplementing the payment because their sales have skyrocketed after every show.

"Okay, guys. Break," I say, clapping Ethan on the shoulder.

The guys scatter, heading through the exit hall, chattering all the while.

"What do you think?" Ezra asks.

I laugh. "Thirty percent bonus for those weeks? I think most will join us. The Langston Pack will probably be out. Their Omega was hesitant about this tour already."

"Yeah, that's fair. This is a lot, especially for a bonded pack," Christos says. "Still, if most stay on, we can make this happen. Ezra, we can rework their section and fill it in with an ensemble performance, right?"

Ezra looks at Christos as if to say, *Duh*.

Cole rushes up, his perfectly pressed suit not creasing one bit despite the acrobatics he does, hopping over the bags piled all over the place. "We've got a massive crowd outside. It's time to go. The others took their buses or transport to the overnight spot, and your bus just pulled up."

"Any of the usual stalkers you've been keeping tabs on?" I ask. Thank God for Cole. He keeps all that away from us and

is our liaison with the security team, so the guys only have to focus on the performances. We also handle the business side of things, but our overly full plates are manageable with Cole, our self-proclaimed fairy godfather, at the helm.

“A couple, but we’ve got security lining the fences to make sure they stay on the other side of the barricades.”

“Fine. We should get moving. Cole, you’re with us. We need to discuss the additional leg of the tour.”

“Got it.” He pulls out his iPad and types something.

“Sounds good, Cole!” Brody, one of our stagehands, shouts down the hallway as he looks up from his smartwatch.

“That thing is like mission control,” I say, pointing at the tech in Cole’s hands.

He rolls his eyes. “You guys focus on the show. I focus on making sure everything runs smoothly. Of course, I need a battle station.”

We move in single file formation toward the exit with Cole sandwiched between us. He might be able to hold his own in business, but he’s smaller than us, and about two years ago, he was jostled too hard, went down, and broke his arm. Now, we know to take the crowds seriously.

All I want is to flop into bed on the bus, but the only way to get there is through the throng of fans gathered outside. I hear them chanting for us, calling our names.

As Christos goes first, screams go up. This is always so fucking surreal. Who would have thought we’d ever find this much success, let alone our very own cheering fans? Not me, that’s for sure.

Christos stays in formation but signs a few of the programs from the show as they're thrust in front of him. Cole follows Christos, sticking close to his back. I'm behind Cole, hands on his shoulders as we rush down the center of the barricades. Ezra, still masked, brings up the rear, trailed by two security guards.

"Eros!" a few voices call. I lift one hand to wave and give a winning grin at the crowd. Some kind of fabric sails past me, hits Ezra's shoulder, and falls to the floor.

I look down, finding a pair of panties on the ground before Ezra's booted foot comes down across the crotch of them. Security is rushing us toward the bus, keeping us moving steadily.

We climb up the steps of the bus, and once we're all inside, I poke my head back out and shout, "See y'all tomorrow! Keep your panties on!"

The gathered women all shout with excitement, and I close the door as Robert rolls away from the crowd and starts heading to the secured area for us to sleep tonight in the buses.

"They're throwing panties now?" Ezra says as he takes off his mask. "This is getting weird."

Cole shrugs and takes a seat at the built-in dining table. It's a short ride to where the buses will be parked overnight, but we have a lot to go over. "With your sponsorships, you're getting more airtime on social media, radio shows, podcasts, and YouTube. It's the burden of being a celebrity, Ezra."

Ezra doesn't respond; he just crosses his arms over his chest.

"Anyway," Cole says, "before we get into the additional dates, let's talk about tomorrow. You have a meeting with one

of the local radio shows at ten, and you can call in from here. Then, at eleven, a famous TikToker from the area will meet you at the rehearsal to get some behind-the-scenes footage. They'll shoot some B-roll before the others show up, and then they'll take part in some dances, but they're only with us until one o'clock. Rehearsal should be done at three. Then you've got a bit of a rest. Then there's the private company dinner at 54thirty Rooftop restaurant at five, back to the venue at seven. The show starts as normal at nine after soundcheck. All good?"

"Sounds good. Goddamn, Cole. What would we do without you?" Christos says with more than a little awe in his voice. He used to handle all of this on his own—granted, the production was less elaborate, but organizing all of this is well worth the small fortune we pay Cole.

"You'd fail," Cole says with a shrug. "Besides, I love this. Organization is better than porn, honestly."

"You're not watching the right porn," I whisper with a laugh.

After an hour of logistics for the new portion of the show, Cole leaves, heading for the bus he shares with a few crew members.

Ezra stalks through the hall and heads to the bedroom, pulling his T-shirt off over his head with one hand. The muscles of his back flex as he pulls the shirt, but he suddenly stops as the shirt is halfway over his head. He stands there, not moving for a second before I say something.

"Hey, you okay?"

He pulls the shirt off the rest of the way and lifts it to his nose. He sniffs it, shoving the material against his nose like

he's hunting for something.

Ezra stills. His whole body goes rigid and on high alert. His head snaps toward the door.

“Go back.”

“What?” Christos asks, confusion in his tone. “Go back where?”

“Back! Go back to the venue!” Ezra turns and starts barreling toward the door of the bus. He presses the button, and the hydraulic door slowly opens, but not fast enough. Ezra's hands are on the lip of it, and he's trying to shove it out of the way. “What the fuck, Ez? What's going on?” I ask.

He pins me with a look, and his eyes are crazed, the light blue of his irises almost non-existent as his pupils blow wide. “She's back there. The panties. Our Omega.” The last word comes out as a growl.

“What?” Christos barks. “Robert! Start the bus and get us back to the venue! Ezra, you can't run back there. It's miles away.”

Robert stomps out his cigarette where he's standing in front of the bus and hops back inside. The engine's rumble starts, and Ezra steps back into the bus, appeased that we're on our way. He throws his shirt to Christos. Our leader inhales deeply, and his eyes do the same as Ezra's. A deep purr starts in his chest, the sound sending a bolt of lust through me.

I reach for the shirt, and Christos growls at me. *Fucking growls!*

“Hand it over, Christos.”

Reluctantly, he passes it over, and my body jolts when I put the material to my nose. There's a kind of bone-deep

recognition there as I catch the faintest hint of gardenias. My Alpha instincts come roaring to the surface. My cock grows hard, and my vision narrows on the garment in my hand.

The residual scent of our Omega.

“Drive faster, Robert.”

We barrel through the open gates, and security stares at our bus as we speed by. Once in the compound, it’s generally expected that we stay put or Uber wherever we want. It’s rare to see a whole-ass bus taking off into the night.

The ride back to the venue is tense and silent—we’re too focused on finding the Omega. *Our* Omega, because if she isn’t our scent match, then the concept doesn’t exist.

It feels as if something inside me that’s always lain dormant has awoken with a roar.

Finally, the venue comes into view, and we all hover at the door. Ezra smashes his hand against the button so hard, I swear it’s going to break. We spill off the bus and take off in different directions. There’s no one around, and it looks like the cleaning crew is already done with the outside. The parking lot is empty, so I take off for the back exit.

The barricade fences are gone, and only a few security guards and venue crew are out back, hauling the last of the equipment inside.

“Where is everyone?” I ask breathlessly as I reach them.

One guard looks at the other, and they share a confused expression. “We cleared everyone out. Once you guys took off, the stragglers left too.

“No!”

Christos reaches me, his chest heaving with exertion. “And there’s no one inside?” he asks.

“Just the cleaning crew,” the second guard says. “You’re welcome to come in and look for whoever you’ve lost.”

Ezra strides past us and through the door, his shoulders tense as he slips inside. We follow him in and find no one but the cleaning crew.

“Fuck!” Christos roars when we step back outside. He tips his head back, staring up at the night sky. His breaths are heavy, and the despair radiating through our bond feels like hope has abandoned him.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Hana

WELL, I DID IT.

In a fit of frustration at the whole ridiculous situation, I shimmied my underwear off from under my skirt—the only item of mine with my scent on it because there’s no way I’m spraying descenter up in there—and threw them at the Alpha Trio as they were leaving the Denver venue.

But I’m not a sports person, and my aim is horrible.

I’d hoped to hit Eros and completely missed, hitting E-Z, the masked dancer, behind him instead. I watched as they fell and got trampled on, a bit like my hopes of getting this goddamned heat over with. It feels like I can’t make any plans until I get this damned thing behind me, and they’re pretty much my only hope right now. The thought of going to a gym or a bar to hang around Alphas makes my skin crawl now that I’ve found my fated scent match.

It turns out that pretty much everyone who follows the show around as it travels is a Beta, so not even the other attendees can help me bring on my heat. Julie spent yesterday introducing us to everyone she could, knowing all the other women by name, and giving us little tidbits about their personalities and why they’re on the road. There is, however, one Alpha female in the group, but she’s worse than Char from the show in Tulsa, and her scent makes me want to curl up and hide. Cinnamon and clove are clearly not on my list of acceptable scents. Her judgy tone and Alpha smugness are not appreciated either.

I’ve kept myself doused in descenter, especially around the others, as I don’t want to give my designation away. I like that

they see me as an equal, even if I'm one of the quieter among them, and that they're not holding the Omega thing over my head. It feels like it did in college when I thought I was an Alpha, and no one looked at me differently because of my designation.

“Did you just throw your panties?” Julie asks incredulously. Her smile is wide, and she breaks from cheering for the groups as they go through the tunnel of fans. The Alpha Trio is the last group to hop on their bus, and as it rumbles away, taking today's chance with it, I let out a harsh exhale.

“Yes.”

“Isn't it too breezy now?” She looks me up and down and then turns to watch a cleaning crew member sweep up my underwear into a dustpan with their broom.

I smother a laugh. “Yeah, it kind of is.”

“Come on, Hana. Let's get back to the parking lot,” Hailey says, keeping her own laugh in check. “I can scent you from here, and we should move it before the others can, too. I think there's still some *Slick-be-Gone* in the van.”

Bye, self-respect. I thought I had thrown the last of you out with the panties, but there was just enough left to make me feel that twinge of embarrassment at Hailey's comment.

Hails throws an arm around my shoulder, tucking me in close. Julie takes up my other side, and they usher me toward the parking area.

“So today wasn't our day. Tomorrow will be for sure,” Julie says. She's way too optimistic for her own good.

We reach Julie's station wagon, and she waves us in. “Come on. I'll drive you to your van. The less time you spend with your scent wafting around in the open air, the better.

There might be more Betas and Omegas than Alphas here, but there *are* Alphas all randy from the performance.”

She’s right. The venue may be smaller, but there are still crowds of people in the parking area chatting about the show, and more than a few of them are beyond tipsy. Safety first.

I climb in the front seat, and Hailey slides in beside me so all three of us are on the bench seat with me squashed in the middle. Now that Julie knows I’m an Omega, Hailey is less inclined to act like a wall between the two of us.

Julie puts the key in the ignition and turns it. A clicking sound fills the silence, so she huffs and tries again.

Nothing.

After a few more tries, the car whines, starts, and suddenly dies as smoke pours from under the hood.

“Well, maybe not. Anyone got the number for a tow truck?” Julie leans forward and bumps her head against the steering wheel repeatedly.

Twenty minutes later, Julie’s car is on the way to a mechanic, and we’re all piled in Hailey’s van, following the cheerful yellow tow truck so she can give her details to the auto shop.

“Thanks, guys,” Julie says. “I thought for sure I had another week or two before it crapped out.”

“What would you have done in a week or two?” I ask.

“Well, by then, I was hoping I’d have the job so I could travel with the production.”

Hailey snorts. “Solid plan, Jules.”

“Anyway,” Julie says loudly, redirecting the conversation, “thank you. I’m sure it just needs a tune-up.” As she says it, the back bumper falls off the station wagon, and Hailey has to slam on the brakes so we don’t run it over.

I look at Julie, whose eyes are wide as she nods. “Yep, that feels about right.”

The three of us dissolve into giggles as Hailey puts the van in park, and we climb out to put the bumper in the back seat with Julie, who holds it across her lap like an industrial-strength seatbelt.

At the auto shop, she leaves her information with the sleepy-eyed attendant, who thankfully came in during off hours to take down her details, and we head off to the campsite. Julie’s staying with us tonight, and while the three of us won’t fit on the bed, one of us can easily take the bench seat up front.

“So, what were you trying to accomplish with the underwear toss?” Julie asks from the shower beside mine.

We’re in the shared bathroom at the campsite, Julie and I showering first while Hailey brushes her teeth, then we’ll switch. It’s the same thing Hailey and I have been doing since we started the trip, and now, I think she’s a little relieved I won’t have to stand by the sinks alone while she washes off. Having another Beta with us calms some of her anxiety that an Omega is alone in an unfamiliar bathroom. Mine, too, if I decide to listen to my Omega self, who demands more protection than Hailey can provide alone.

At least now, Hailey won’t have to rush through her shower to get back to me as soon as possible.

“Just wanted to get their attention,” I call back, rinsing the last of the conditioner from my hair. I scrub the descender body wash all over me, cognizant of the risks when it wears off. Lately, I feel like I live in the stuff, but it’s better than alerting some errant Alpha that there’s a random Omega nearby.

I rinse, turn off the shower, and dry off, immediately slathering myself with the descender lotion. The clinical smell is off-putting to my sensitive nose, but it does the trick.

Julie’s shower turns off too. “Well, that was one way to do it. I’m ashamed to say I hadn’t thought of it myself.”

Hailey laughs from outside the stalls. I pull on some leggings and a loose T-shirt, ready to go to bed and get today over with. As I emerge from the shower stall, Hailey greets me with a smile. “You good?”

“Yeah.” I can’t help the deep sigh as it escapes. “I’m getting tired of the runaround.”

“I know. But we’ll figure this out.”

Julie steps out next, and Hailey ducks into a cubicle.

My new friend and I brush our teeth side by side, and then I braid my long hair back. Julie’s natural hair color is a medium brown, like mine, and it’s chopped into a chin-length bob. It’s pretty, and it’s almost a shame she wears wigs to cover it up.

She catches me looking and shrugs a shoulder. “It’s easier to pin up at this length.”

“Oh, I was admiring it, not judging it.” I look down at the tail of my braid. “I cut my hair short once, and my mom nearly lost it. She said it was unfeminine and didn’t suit my face.”

Julie snorts, and Hailey curses colorfully from her shower. “Your mom wants you to look like a beauty contest winner from the nineties. Like her.”

I laugh and put my toiletries back in the bag. Hailey emerges a few minutes later with a satisfied *Ahh*, and together, we head back to the van.

The rest of the campsite is alive with the sound of cicadas and laughter as we follow the gravel path toward the end of our parking row. There are groups of people gathered around their RVs with little foldable tables set up for the occupants to share, and a few people even have fire pits. Despite the late hour, it’s bustling.

We pass a louder group, one that seems to be a pack, and I slow my steps as we walk by so I can observe them. It’s not like there’s been much chance to see a pack where I’m from, and curiosity at the Alpha Trio has gotten the better of me.

There are three males and two females in their group. They’re lounging around their fire pit and making s’mores. One guy’s marshmallow is too close to the fire and is about to ignite when a female takes the stick and shows the male how to do it so it doesn’t burn.

The male looks at the female with adoration, and the emotion is palpable, even from here. It sends a knot of emotion to my chest, wondering how it must feel to be loved and secure in your bonds.

Moments later, another male holds out a graham cracker with the chocolate already placed on it. With a coordinated effort, the female and the male with the crackers get it sandwiched, and he holds it out in offering to the s’mores newbie they’re helping. Before handing it over, he steals a kiss from the other male, and the group smiles around them.

It's such a sweet and intimate moment, and it feels like I'm intruding as I watch them, but I can't tear my eyes away. Together, the group looks whole. They look content and happy. Isn't that the most important thing?

Despite my mom's vehemence that packs are unnatural, I don't know how anyone could think that after looking at these five. It's love—the most natural thing in the world.

Two of them spot me and wave cheerfully, entirely comfortable and secure in their pack that they don't feel defensive despite some stranger lurking on the path. Only welcoming.

I wave back with a jerky movement, in awe at their dynamic. Hailey tugs on my arm, and I realize I've stopped walking. "Come on. We should go." Julie is a few paces ahead of us as she leads the way.

"They look like a good pack," I whisper.

Hailey looks over her shoulder at the group as we shuffle away and nods as she watches them. "Yeah, they do."

There's a note of longing in her voice, one I've never noticed before. Is she feeling ready to find her partner or pack? She's never mentioned it before, citing her work as the most important thing in her life. It's not the time to ask about it, so I shut my mouth and decide to bring it up another day.

We skirt around the van and pull up short when we find Julie crouched in a fighting stance. The reason becomes immediately apparent when I see a massive Alpha standing in front of the door to the van.

"Well, well, well," he says. "What have we got here?"

"Hana, get behind me," Hailey mutters.

I do no such thing. I plant my feet beside her and look at the beast of a man standing there despite the voice in my head telling me to flee as far and as fast as I can. But I can't leave Julie and Hailey here alone.

He's massive, at least six feet tall. His shoulders are wider than the van door, and the muscles on him are the stuff of bodybuilders' dreams. This is a very, very bad situation to be in. The big Alpha scents the air, and I send up a silent prayer to the descender gods that the body wash and lotion are working double-time.

"Hey, asshole!" Julie shouts. "Get the fuck out of the way and go back to your RV."

Her voice is loud and carries across the area.

"No need to be so defensive. I just noticed the three of you were on your own. It's the neighborly thing to do, checking on you."

Julie snorts and tosses her toiletry bag onto the dirt by the back tire. "Trying to gaslight us? Fat chance."

She takes a step toward him, and my body tenses. I try to reach out for her to yank her back beside us, but Hailey grabs my arm and shoves it back down. "Get behind me, Hana!" she whisper-shouts like if she speaks any louder, she'll draw the male's attention.

I shake her hand off and step in front of her. "Walk away, or I'll scream. We both know others are awake right now, and it wouldn't take long for them to arrive. So you have two options. Leave willingly, or take your chances with the others. Either way, you're leaving."

"Yeah!" Julie says, a slight growl in her throat.

The Alpha cocks a brow at us, and I go numb the moment he summons his Alpha power. My knees begin to buckle, and Hailey puts a hand on my back to keep me upright. She and Julie feel the effects too, and they waver where they stand, but for an Omega, an Alpha's power can be wholly soothing or devastating. Right now, I'm feeling the latter.

Before I emerged, I was more resistant. But now? Now my body bends to his power, and I fucking hate it.

"Omega," he growls, taking stock of my pale face and sinking body. I've never met an Alpha with this kind of power, and it petrifies me.

I try to close it off—to find that thread of his power and cut it somehow before I end up at his mercy. A wave of sickness rolls through me, and my stomach turns as I fight.

Heat flares in my body, and my slick responds to this asshole's Alpha call. I hate it. I hate that my body reacts in any way to this predator, and I clamp my thighs together, trying to muffle the scent.

"No!" I shout, finding my voice when his nostrils flare. His power wavers as he scents me, and in that split second of distraction, I scream bloody murder.

The Alpha advances toward me, his steps sure and commanding.

Hailey drags me behind her, and Julie hustles to stand beside Hails, putting themselves between me and the Alpha, making it clear he'll have to go through them to get to me.

"Hey!" a voice shouts from behind me. Bodies go rushing by, and belatedly, I realize it's the pack I was staring at before.

The female is out front, her Alpha power flooding our little clearing around the van. She's stronger than the predator

Alpha, pumping out her power in waves as she commands him to his knees, and reluctantly, he goes. He must be unbonded. Gee, I wonder why?

I crumple to the ground as her power washes through me, feeling an insane need deep in my soul.

Hailey kneels beside me, cushioning my head, and a male is on the other side of my body. He smells of clean laundry and freshly cut grass. Omega.

“You’re okay. They’ll handle it,” he says, whimpering right alongside me as his pack stands firm between the other Alpha and us as they create a wall and shield our bodies.

One of the pack members pulls a phone from their pocket, and I hear them barking orders at someone. The Alpha who’d threatened us backs down, retreating until his back is against the van.

Two pack members step forward, and I struggle to raise my head to watch what’s happening. It feels like my body’s underwater, and I’m fighting for every movement. Our little clearing is so rife with unfamiliar Alpha pheromones and dominance that it makes my unbonded Omega want to cower, hide, or flip onto all fours and present. It’s a very confusing time for me.

The pack restrains the asshole Alpha, and a minute later, one of the campsite guards arrives on a golf cart. “This him?” he asks.

“Yeah,” one of the males says. “He was trying to scare the women.”

“This is bullshit,” the Alpha says as the guard puts his hands into cuffs behind his back. “You’re not a cop! You can’t do shit!”

The guard chuckles darkly. “Nah, but I can bring you to them. They’re arriving now.” He looks over at Hailey, Julie, and me, and I belatedly realize they’ve joined me on the ground with the male Omega. “You want to press charges?”

Hailey nods. “Absolutely.”

The other Omega helps me up, and his pack surrounds us. The female Alpha, who arrived first from his pack, stays a respectable distance away and softens her voice. “We can come with you to the police station.”

I nod gratefully. “Yes, please. Thank you.”

She extends her hand. “I’m Becca Wiles, and this is my pack.”

Hailey gasps beside me, and Julie looks starstruck. Clearly, I’m missing something. “Nice to meet you. I’m Hana. This is Hailey and Julie.”

“An honor,” Julie sputters. At my curious look, she breathes, “*The* Becca Wiles. Pack Wiles? Nothing? Really?! They’ve only had some of the biggest hits in the last few years. Their songs are amazing! I binged their stuff when I found them on social media after my break.”

“Oh. Cool. Still nice to meet you,” I say, immediately thinking that I should probably get on my music app to find out what they sing because, for the life of me, I can’t remember.

“We’ll follow you guys there,” the Omega says as the guard attaches the assailant Alpha’s handcuffs to the golf cart. Honestly, it looks like the two of them could flip the damn thing if they tried hard enough, but the guard looks unfazed. “I’m Callum, by the way.”

Slowly, I'm introduced to the rest of the pack, the two Alphas and two Betas keeping a respectable distance and trying not to overwhelm me.

We get into the van and follow the little golf cart to the main office, where there are indeed two police cruisers. Then it's off to the police station we go.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Hana

“THAT’S ALL FOR TONIGHT, MISS HENDERSON. IS THERE someone you need us to call for you?” Officer May asks. He’s been kind as he took my statement and reviewed the evening’s events with me, but I still feel uncomfortable in the sterile, cold conference room.

I tighten my arms around my chest and shake my head. I’m still feeling the residual effects of the Alphas’ power and display of dominance, and all I want is to get back to Hailey’s van.

“No, I’m fine.”

Another officer pokes his head in and beckons Officer May over. They whisper to each other, and after a moment, the new officer retreats, and May turns back to me.

“Hana, I have to ask you something.”

“Sure,” I say with a shrug. I’ve been here for hours already. What’s one more question?

“My colleague has to log your names into the system to draw up charges against Charles Wyatt, and when he plugged yours in, something curious came up.” I tilt my head, waiting for whatever he’s going to share. “Are you in Denver of your own volition, or have you been kidnapped?”

“What?!” I exclaim. “No, I haven’t been *kidnapped!*”

“There’s a report in the national database that you’re missing. It looks like your mom filed a missing persons report and has posted a reward for information on your whereabouts. They seem to point to Miss Gonzales as the person who stole you away.”

I bet they pooled what was left for the reward money. Weighing what they have now versus what they'll have if I marry Beau, they must have sided heavily in favor of spending the money now to get me home.

“Oh my God,” I breathe. *Mom*. If she couldn't get me to come home on my own, she would try to use the country's civil servants to do it for her. And what about Hailey's reputation? I'm so mad I could spit.

“I was not kidnapped; I left,” I enunciate, holding onto my anger toward Mom like a lifeline. I can't lose it in here, because what if they send me back? Can they do that? Omega rights are a damned joke in the South, and while we're not too far from there, Colorado tends to be a little more open-minded.

Officer May sits in his chair across the table from me. “Look, Hana. It's just you and me.” A soft pulse of his Alpha power tries to coax me into spilling my guts. I throw him a glare.

I can't tell him I'm stalking a strip show, can I? Looking up at his no-nonsense mustache and the rigid set of his shoulders, I quickly decide against being entirely forthcoming. “I'm on a girls' trip. I'm an adult and don't need their permission to go. My mom just didn't like that I left. This is a gross misuse of public resources.”

“You're an unbonded Omega traveling alone. Your parents are going to worry.”

My shoulders inch up with tension, but I shove them back down by sheer force of will. “That may be, but it is my choice to do so. And I'm not alone; I have Hailey and Julie with me.”

“Betas.”

So much for that “more open-minded” thing.

“Yes, Betas! The most prominent designation in our world, and it would be considered discriminatory if you were to suggest that somehow they were lesser than others because they’re not Alphas. So, I ask you, Officer May, what seems to be the problem?”

He weighs his options, and thankfully, common sense wins.

“Fine. You’re free to go now that we’ve got everything for Mr. Wyatt. We have your contact information—Hailey Gonzalas’s phone number and your email for a copy of the report—and will let you know if we need anything else to move forward with the charges.”

“Thank you, Officer May. And if it’s not too much trouble, could you wait a day or two before you log it into the system that I was in Denver? The last thing we both want is for my parents to show up here.”

Officer May sighs. “Officer Wilkes out there has already flagged it in the system that you’re in Denver. I’d skedaddle if you want to keep your distance.”

I hop out of my chair and head out of the conference room. He directs me down a hallway, where I see a frazzled-looking Hailey in a furious conversation with the officer behind the desk. “Where is she? You can’t hold her here!”

“Hey, Hails,” I say, pulling her attention away from the Beta at the desk.

“Oh, thank God.” She rounds the desk and throws her arms around me. I feel calmer already, and when she holds me at arm’s length and looks me up and down as if assessing for injuries, I smile.

“Missed you, too. Let’s blow this popsicle stand.”

Hailey tucks me under one arm and points at her eyes, then at the desk officer, who visibly shrinks.

“Stop it. Everything is fine, but we gotta go.”

“Where’s the fire?” Julie asks, popping out of the chair in the waiting area and joining us, taking up my other side. “The Wiles pack invited us for breakfast. Can we go? Please, pretty please?”

The sun crests over the horizon as we exit the police station, and I let out a tremendous yawn. “Either coffee or sleep, but I need something before I fall over.”

“Yes!” Julie cheers. She pulls out her phone and texts something, then starts heading toward Hailey’s van in the parking lot.

Hailey starts the van, and the questions begin. I tell them about rehashing the details of the night and the fun, unexpected twist from Mom. I’m mad all over again about her insinuating Hailey kidnapped me, but she reassures me that none of her clients would ever watch the local news, so she’s okay.

“Geez, that sucks,” Julie commiserates. “Though, it is kind of nice that your parents are worried about you.”

I realize then that Julie has said nothing about her relationships outside of the other women following the show around. There has to be a story there, but before I can ask, the GPS announces we’ve arrived at our destination.

Hailey grabs a spot, and we pile out of the car. I look up at the cute little brunch place Pack Wiles has picked out for breakfast. There are cheerful red and white striped awnings decorating the wood-cabin-type structure. I love it already.

We step inside, Julie going first, me in the middle, and Hailey bringing up the rear. “Hey, guys!” Julie shouts and waves across the crowded restaurant.

One of the members of Pack Wiles raises their hand and waves us over. The hostess greets us with a smile and hands over menus as we pass by her stand.

I see the whole pack is in attendance and quickly recall their names since I was only briefly introduced at the campground.

Callum is their Omega, the one that crouched beside me by the van. Then there’s Alice, a Beta with a cool mohawk and tons of earrings. Phil is another Beta and the quiet one of the bunch with round glasses and a preppy haircut. Dane is the male Alpha of the group; his bulging arms and tattoos snaking from knuckles to neck scare the hell out of me, but he’s only spoken to me with gentleness. And Becca is the female Alpha and leader of their pack.

“You guys okay?” Becca asks.

Hailey slides into the bench seat of the massive horseshoe-shaped booth and scooches in, pulling me in after her. Julie is again on my other side, and it feels a bit like I’m a rockstar with bodyguards flanking me.

“Yeah, we’re fine,” Hailey answers for the group. “But we might have to leave town earlier than expected.”

“Oh, why?” Callum asks.

“Because my parents want me home, and apparently, our filing a police report just pinpointed our location, and the last thing we want is my mom dragging me back,” I ramble with one long, drawn-out sigh to punctuate it.

“It’s bullshit, isn’t it?” Callum asks. “My parents were the same when I was unbonded.”

“It *is* bullshit! Thank you, Callum.” I smile, and he returns it easily.

Dane, the male Alpha, tucks him under his arm a little tighter. “We get it. The hoops we went through when Callum chose us were extensive, and it seems par for the course for Omegas’ parents.”

Dane looks down at the slightly smaller Callum beside him. His eyes are soft as he says, “Worth it, though.”

He presses a sweet kiss to Callum’s temple, and I swear, I melt into my seat.

“You’re a lovely pack, truly,” I say wistfully.

“Looking for your own, then?” Alice asks, her mohawk tilting when her head does as she asks.

“In a manner of speaking,” I say.

Hailey snorts, and Julie, still unaware of the whole stalking-because-they’re-my-scent-match thing, shrugs.

“Well, if you’re looking to get out of town, we have just the thing,” Becca says. “We’ve got a concert in Boulder tonight. Still somewhat close, but not close enough that you’ll run into your mom there. You can come.”

Julie bolts upright, and her jaw drops open. “Come? As in, with you? As in, we’d be *with* the band!?”

Heads turn in our direction as Julie’s voice reaches a piercing note I didn’t even think was possible.

The entire table laughs, and Alice answers, “Yeah, with the band. Phil is our manager, and we’ve got three backstage

passes with your names on 'em. Say the word, and they're yours."

Julie's head turns slowly until she's looking at Hailey and me. She is the human embodiment of that emoji with the big, glassy, pleading eyes.

"Okay," I say. "That sounds like fun."

Part of me is gutted we won't get the chance to try and meet the Alpha Trio again tonight, but if history is any indication, tonight wasn't going to be our night either. We might as well have some fun on this crazy-ass road trip.

"Awesome," Becca says.

Phil pulls out a tablet from God knows where and begins typing away on it with his stylus. "Fill this out for me, and we'll make sure everything is ready when you arrive. You'll have to show some ID at the gate, and they'll let you in."

Hailey fills out the form for the two of us and hands it over to Julie.

She pauses. "When it says here that we've never been arrested, do you mean 'convicted?'"

Alice looks Julie up and down and barks out a laugh. "Depends. Arrested for what?"

"Nothing, really! It was all a big misunderstanding. I promise it was nothing violent. Just a wee mix-up of identities."

Well, that doesn't make me feel better.

Dane and Becca assess Julie from the other side of the table, then look at each other and shrug. "It's fine," Becca says. "We saw how you were defending Hana back at the

camp. That alone proves more than any arrest record ever will.”

Julie smiles and taps away on the device, finishing her details as the waitress arrives to take our orders for breakfast.

Looks like we’re going to a concert instead of a strip show tonight.

What are the chances tonight would be the night the guys noticed me anyway?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Ezra

IT'S AN HOUR BEFORE THE SHOW, AND INSTEAD OF WARMING up with the other performers, Ace, Christos, and I are walking the line outside the venue in Denver. It's our second night performing here, and instead of a group meeting with the guys, we're out here sniffing anyone who comes close enough.

Security hovers behind us like we're about to be kidnapped, but this was the best thing I could think of to find our Omega. If she was here last night, there's a good chance she'll be here again tonight.

"E-Z, can you take off your mask?" an excited woman asks as she looks up at me with hearts in her eyes. I inhale deeply and note the cardamom and vanilla in her scent. Not our girl. "Please, for me."

I look around at the others, exaggerating my movements because my mask hides my cocked brow, and she can't see my shock at her audacity. Lowering my voice, I lean in and whisper, "Ah, but it wouldn't just be for you, would it, darling?"

I swear to fuck, she swoons dramatically, leaning on her friend for support. This is bullshit. I can't scent her, and we're running out of time.

Ace is fending off wandering hands, and Christos is half-ignoring anyone who gets close to him. He's a bit taller than me and using his height to his advantage, keeping his head up and inhaling deeply as if, by sheer will, he'll find our Omega.

I wonder what she'll look like. Though, at this point, I don't fucking care. She smelled like home, and that one whiff

off my T-shirt wasn't enough.

We sign things as we walk the line, carefully scenting everyone as we hunt for our Omega, but it's proving impossible to find her. And we know she's a woman because Ace remembered what the panties looked like, and unless our Omega is a male with a flair for pink lace panties, we're looking for a woman.

Everyone smells like descenter except for the bold few who try to sneak in without wearing any despite the show's terms of service when buying a ticket. At least inside, we have it pumping in to cover our asses.

Christos leans close to my ear and says, "We have to go. The show starts in fifteen minutes."

I shake my head. "No. Not a chance."

"Yes," Christos counters, not using his stronger Alpha influence but putting some pleading in his voice.

I don't get it. He's the one that's been on this Omega crusade for years, not me. Fuck, I hate to admit that I didn't think it possible to find her after all this time. All those Omega centers and matchmaking services couldn't do what one pair of errant panties could. And she's *here* in Denver! How could he want to give up so quickly?

"Look, we'll check after the show as planned, but we have all these people waiting for us to perform, and if word gets out that we're fucking around and not doing our jobs, that will impact the company for years. Then what? We find our Omega and tell her how we *once* had a company? That we can't provide for her?"

I know he's thinking of our futures, but my feet refuse to move.

“Come on, E-Z,” Ace says, touching my tense shoulder. “We gotta go. We’ll come at this with a clear head after the show. And who knows? Maybe she’ll be the girl you pull up on stage today? Don’t pick the bachelorettes, and we’ve got a chance.”

“Ten minutes, gentlemen,” Xavier says from behind me. “Let’s get you backstage.”

Christos thanks the attendees and propels me after the security team. Once we’re inside, he puts his hands on my shoulders and looks me in the eyes. “We’ll find her, Ez. I promise.”

The words feel hollow when we can’t even pick up her scent.

The show goes by in a blur; every performance could be monkeys riding on unicycles while fireworks burst above the dancers’ heads, and I’d be none the wiser. My focus is on the audience.

Now that we’ve scented our Omega, no one else will call to our Alphas, and I spend our usual backstage time scanning the audience, looking for anyone who might draw the eye the way I imagine our Omega would.

Before I know it, it’s our turn to take the stage for our trio act, and as we agreed earlier, none of us would pull soon-to-be brides onto the stage for our dances. Instead, we’ll pick from their friends and the women out for a girls’ night between our sets on the poles.

But there’s nothing—absolutely nothing—calling to me tonight.

We worked it out with Gray, our DJ and emcee, to double our set, using the time between coordinated dances and turns

around the poles to pull more women onto the stage and spend more time dancing through the audience.

Six women for the dances and four rounds through the seating later, my scowl pulls my lips downward behind my mask. It's good that no one can see my face, or they'd be running for the hills.

Frustration and anger at the whole situation are riding me hard.

Ace does his strip tease at the end, flinging his thong into the audience as he always does, and I can't help but draw the comparison between his move and the panties our Omega threw at us last night.

Realization dawns on me.

What if she was the girl who caught Ace's thong last night? Ace finishes his dance, grabs a towel, and joins us on stage for a last bow as the idea rocks through me. My movements feel stilted and jerky as my mind works through the idea.

As soon as we're all done with the final bow and backstage, I grab Christos and Ace, pulling them into a darkened corner. "The thong," I say like they can follow my thoughts.

"I'm gonna need a little more than that, Ezra," Christos deadpans.

"The thong! What if she caught Ace's thong last night? Do we have footage of that for our promo and ads? I know Cole films sometimes."

"He wasn't filming last night," Ace says with a frown. "Remember, he was busy with Xavier planning our exit. There were more fans out back than he was anticipating."

“Fuck. Do you remember who caught it last night?” I ask. “I didn’t see the similarities until you flung yours into the audience tonight. Maybe that’s why she threw hers at us?”

“She wouldn’t be the first to throw undergarments at us,” Christos says, trying to keep my hopes from rising, but his voice betrays him. He feels that little niggles of hope, and I refuse to let him brush it aside.

“Then security footage? There has to be something.” I turn toward the rest of the guys backstage. They’re standing in a circle, waiting for Christos to do his post-show speech. “COLE!” I shout.

The Beta comes rushing through the crowd of our dancers—his faithful iPad clutched in his hands. “I got everything settled for your exit. Making a note not to use this venue in the future. It’s way too hard to keep the barricades in place, and the women of Denver are ruthlessly trying to get through security.”

“Cole—” I say, trying to get a word in.

“Oh, don’t worry, I’ve already put a note in the files for the next tour the guys do, so next year we can organize better for this area. I tried to get us into the Fox Theatre in Boulder since it’s not smack in the middle of the capital, and they have a great bar, but Pack Wiles was already booked there for our dates.”

“Cole!” I shout, trying to keep my frustration at bay and failing miserably. “We need to look at the security footage from last night. Can you get that for us before we go to the bus?”

He tilts his head to the side. “Uh, sure. Gimme three minutes.”

Cole is off like a shot, weaving through the dancers and our stagehands. Christos leads us to the guys and gives his usual speech, saying we'll be on the road overnight, arriving in Salt Lake City in the morning. We've got the day off; then we're there for one show before taking off again.

Cole is tapping his foot impatiently off to the side while Christos finishes telling everyone there will be no bailing out tonight since they'll all be sleeping in their buses.

We break, and security coordinates the exits for the other dancers. We rush over to Cole. "What have you got?" I ask.

He hesitates for a second, then hands over his iPad. The audience is on the screen, and I quickly tap through it, looking for Ace's thong performance. My eyes scan the audience the whole time, and then there it is.

The glittery underwear flies, and a bachelorette catches it. She waves the sparkly thong over her head like a lasso and immediately throws it back onto the stage.

I zoom in as much as I can, but despite how much I wish for it, this is nothing like those criminal procedural shows, and her face becomes grainier the more I push in to get a look at her.

Flipping through the various angles, I ask, "Is there footage from our exits?"

Cole clicks a couple of things, and suddenly, we're looking at the gathered crowd with us going through the cleared middle. Something streaks across the screen, and I pause it. "There!"

I rewind and follow where the underwear came from. The black-and-white footage isn't clear, but I see a woman standing there. There's movement behind her, but it's all

elbows, and suddenly, she's slipping her panties off over her shoes, and I watch as her arm pulls back, and she throws them.

They arc through the air and hit me, then drop to the floor, but I'm not watching them. I'm praying the woman beside our Omega moves so I can see her face.

The past versions of us enter the bus, and the woman next to our Omega tucks her under her arm, and the angle means she's still hidden from view. I screenshot the other woman's face—grainy as it is—and they move to the parking lot with the crowd.

“Fuck!” I growl. “Come on!”

I stomp away, mask still in place, heading out of the tunnel and through the exit toward the bus.

The barricades are there like last night, and I scan the gathered fans. There's no sign of the woman who caught the panties or the woman who was with our Omega last night. There isn't even a whiff of her in the wind. She's not here.

We spend far too long outside again, autographing anything put in front of us and taking photos with the crowd gathered.

Where is she?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Hana

THE PACK WILES CONCERT STARTS AFTER THEIR OPENER, AND the crowd goes wild. We're in the wings of the stage, Hailey and Julie dancing beside me.

As they start a song, I realize it's the one I've heard blaring from Lana's room. "Gimme your phone, Hailey!"

She hands it over, and I open up the camera app, filming the song from the side, getting a view of Alice, Callum, Becca, and Dane as they play. I hesitantly sing along, not entirely sure of the words; my voice is drowned out by a very loud Julie beside me. I pan the camera, getting footage of the audience at the Fox Theatre, the venue for the night. Then, I turn it toward me so Lana can see I'm fine and having the time of my life. I fire it off in a message and watch Lana's responses pour in. There are so many emojis and exclamation points that I'm not even sure there are words buried in there.

The energy in the venue is electric, and it's easy to get caught up in the excitement and fun as I bop along to the music.

This is the second night of their three-night performance here, and then they're heading east as we go west to keep following the strip show. I'm sad we won't be able to see them perform again because this is amazing, but we need to head to Salt Lake City in the morning to keep up with the Beasts of Bacchanal.

I return the phone to Hailey, who tucks it in her pocket with a smile. I have to get a new one soon. "Having fun?" she asks.

“So much fun!” I answer, letting my grin completely take over my face.

“This next one is for a few new friends we met along the road,” Becca says into the microphone as the crowd goes wild. Dane pounds a beat on the drums, and Becca looks at us. “Get out here, girls!”

Alice starts a clapping rhythm in time with the drumbeat, leaving her guitar hanging from its strap.

“Oh my fucking God,” Julie says, taking my arm and dragging me forward.

The three of us stumble onto the stage, and Becca beckons us closer. “These are our new friends, and they’re here to have the night of their lives!”

Callum starts up the bass and smiles broadly. I recognize this song too, and it’s easy to sing along when Alice hits a riff on her guitar and Becca croons the opening lyrics into the microphone. Julie and Hailey each have an arm around me, the three of us acting as terrible backup singers for Becca, swaying together behind her.

My smile stretches far and wide, and I let go for once, throwing my hands in the air as I shake my hips and jump up and down with my friends in front of the crowd without a care in the world. For the first time in my life, I’m not correctly attired for an event, and my hair is up in a weird bun that must look like a bird’s nest on top of my head. I throw my head back and howl out the lyrics with the others.

The audience is singing along, lending me their confidence as the music moves through me, and I grip Hailey’s and Julie’s hands as we dance together and enjoy this moment.

“This is fucking amazing!” Hailey cheers. She throws her hands up, and Julie and I follow suit, waving our arms around and dancing together on the stage, careful not to get in the band’s way.

The song is over all too soon, and Phil, their Beta and manager, waves us back to the edge of the stage.

Breathlessly, we reach our spot from before and clutch each other. “That was incredible!” I cheer, my voice barely audible under the next song.

We spend the evening dancing and having a great time, watching as Pack Wiles entertains the venue. Drinks are flowing, and by the end, I’m a sweaty, red-faced, slightly tipsy mess, but my God, I’ve never had this much fun in my entire life.

The band plays two encores for the audience, and eventually, we’re all back in the green room, collecting our things and heading for the underground parking.

Hailey’s van is parked beside the band’s RV in the garage, looking shabby and well-loved next to their pristine motorhome. We’re camping nearby, but before we leave in our vehicles, their tour bus is heading off in another direction to distract anyone wanting to follow the band. It’s wise to have a decoy vehicle.

I asked them earlier why they prefer campgrounds to hotels or the tour bus, and Callum shrugged. “They indulge me. Hotels feel so impersonal, and the tour bus doesn’t quite fit all of us comfortably. The RV makes it feel like a home away from home. You get it, right? You’re an Omega.”

Hailey looked at me when Callum said that, and I smiled, reassuring her that I was fine in her van. I felt comfortable

with her, no matter where we were. Sure, my Omega side wants a few more soft things in the van, but I can't be picky, and I'm not in heat. Demanding the moon feels like a dick move. Hailey's already doing so much for me; complaining isn't even remotely on my radar.

We follow the RV out of the garage an hour after the show ends, seeing no one waiting at the back entrance like we did at the Denver venue for the Beasts of Bacchanal show. It's a short ride to the new campsite, and I'm asleep on Julie's shoulder before we even arrive.

I wake to the sound of birds and sunlight coming in through the gaps in the windshield cover Hailey must have put up last night. I'm sprawled across the bench seat in the front of the van and blink a few times to clear the sleep from my eyes.

I sit up slowly and turn toward the back. Hailey and Julie are on the mattress in the back; Julie is snoring, and Hailey's working on her tablet, tracing out a new design.

"Morning," I say quietly.

She smiles as she looks up at me. "Morning."

"Bathroom?" I ask, hating that I want her to come with me even though she's clearly in the middle of work.

"Yeah, let's go. Julie," she whispers. The Beta snorts herself awake. "We're going to the bathroom. Want to stay or go?"

Julie rolls over, pulling the blanket over her head. I guess it's just the two of us. We use the facilities and run into Callum and Dane on our way back as they sit outside their RV at the folding table and chairs. Their hands are laced together, and they look like a commercial for Folger's Coffee as they sip from their mugs.

“Want some?” Dane asks when he spots us.

“Please,” Hailey begs.

Callum hops up and gets two more chairs into place so we can join them while Dane gets us mugs from inside the RV. I can hear Julie’s snoring coming from the van, which is only about four feet away from the Pack camper.

“Where are you guys off to today?” Dane asks as he pours us some coffee.

“Heading to Salt Lake City. We should get going soon,” Hailey says as she checks her phone. “It’s already nine.”

I nod. Last night was a great way to break up the monotony of fruitlessly stalking the Alpha Trio, but I’m ready and itching to get back to it.

Eventually, everyone else wakes up, and Julie emerges like a zombie from the van. We spend the morning sipping coffee, not from a gas station or diner like the last few days, and chat, reluctantly saying our goodbyes at the end. I hug everyone from Pack Wiles, thanking them for the experience and wishing them a good time on their tour.

We exchange numbers, theirs being the newest numbers in my blissfully empty new phone we picked up after our diner breakfast. Before I know it, we’re on the highway, heading away from Boulder and toward Salt Lake City.

Julie is tapping away on her phone in the passenger seat beside me. “Oh my God!” she shouts suddenly, causing me to jump and Hailey to jerk the wheel.

“What the hell, Julie!?” Hails shouts, glaring at the other Beta when the van is back on two wheels.

“Turn on the radio! Fuck, does the signal go this far?” She fiddles on the radio and smacks her hand on the dash when nothing but static comes through on the station she’s hunting for. “Argh! Hailey, give me your phone!”

She hands it over, and Julie opens the browser, eventually finding some kind of radio station on the internet. Hailey turns off the van’s static radio, and we hear the announcer over the phone.

“Today, we’re giving away five pairs of tickets to tonight’s Beasts of Bacchanal performance here in Salt Lake City. Adonis, one of their performers, is from here. Welcome back, man. We’re happy to have you, if only for a night. Listeners, be lucky caller number five every hour, on the hour, and the tickets are yours!”

My jaw drops. Holy fuck.

Hailey groans. “Remember, they have me on some kind of watch list.” All of our phones are tied to our identification numbers, and if Hailey’s was flagged after the podcast she called on, I doubt she’d be able to win the tickets.

Julie shrugs. “Me too.”

“But not me,” I offer, waving the prepaid phone. Part of me enjoyed not being attached to a device at all times, but if we get separated, I need to be able to get ahold of Hailey and Julie.

“Yes!” Julie cheers.

The radio host starts the music, and I watch the clock as Julie inputs the radio number into my phone. We watch as the minutes tick down, and before we know it, it’s 11:59, and my thumb is hovering over the call button.

As soon as it switches over, I jam my finger onto the button and put the phone on speaker. It rings.

And rings.

And rings.

“Caller number five, you’re our winner for twelve o’clock!”

Hailey, Julie, and I groan as the host announces it over the airwaves and my call drops.

“Motherfucker,” Julie gripes. “Well, we’ll try again in an hour.”

And try we do.

Again.

And again.

And *again*.

And at two minutes to four o’clock, as we’re passing somewhere called Little America, Wyoming, when the host announces the last chance to win. I look at the signal at the top of the screen and groan. I have one teeny, tiny bar.

“NO!” I shriek. It was always a long shot, but I *refuse* to let something as stupid as cell phone service put me out of the running. “Step on it, Hails!” I shout. “I have no signal here!”

She floors it, and the van whines as it tries to push past our usual cruising speed of 60. One minute to go, and a second bar appears at the top of the screen.

“Go, Hailey, go!” Julie shouts, watching the screen with me. “Two bars!”

It clicks over to four o’clock, and I smash my finger against the button. It rings, thank God.

“Congratulations, caller number five! You’re our winner for four o’clock! Stay on the line so our management team can get those tickets in your name.” The phone in my hand rings out, the call ends, and my hopes come crashing down.

Of course, we didn’t win. Salt Lake is a big-ass city, and there are plenty of people looking for tickets, especially since there is only one show before they move on to the next venue.

A song comes on, and instead of changing it, the three of us sit there in silence, Julie’s hand on one knee and Hailey’s on the other as we listen to the singer croon about falling in love. I wipe a tear of frustration from my cheek. It feels ridiculous to be upset about not getting tickets, but I can’t help it. My Omega is calling for me to meet these guys.

After the song, the host comes on again. “Our last winner was ineligible for the tickets for a previous transgression against the Beasts of Bacchanal’s organization, so we’ll have one more chance for you at five o’clock.”

I move to turn off the phone, and Julie stops me. “We probably won’t win, but we’ve got to try. You’ll kick yourself if you give up now.”

So we wait anxiously until five o’clock, letting song after song play, listening to commercials about everything from new cars to *Slick-Be-Gone*.

We see a bumper sticker on a lifted truck proclaiming, “My beau is Beau,” and I think of Beau Richardson. The thought of him makes me want to be sick. I need to end things officially. The longer I’m on this trip, the more confident I am that ending it is the right move on my part.

At five, I press the green button for the radio station call and wait.

The song ends, and the host shouts, “Congratulations, caller number five! You’re our Hail-Mary winner at five o’clock.”

I groan and go to end the call, but Julie swats my hand away. “That’s us,” she whispers. She blinks and then shouts, “THAT’S US!”

The host chuckles from the phone on the dashboard we’ve been using as a makeshift radio, and I stare at the device in my hand. The call is connected, and the voice is coming from both, with a slight delay on Julie’s.

“Holy shit,” I breathe.

“Caller, stay on the line so we can get your details for the tickets,” the host says before there’s a click on the line. The host talks about the show and Adonis, the dancer from Salt Lake.

A loud woman comes on the line, speaking so quickly that I almost drop the prepaid phone in the footwell of the van. “Please confirm your ID number with this phone number, and if it comes up on any of the security lists the show has sent over, your tickets will be voided. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” I say, reaching for my purse under the bench seat. “Just a second. Sorry.”

I hand the phone to Julie, who’s bouncing in her seat, and finally drag my giant bag out from under the bench. I shove my hand in there like an Omega in heat, and there’s a dildo with a knot at the bottom. Hell, maybe there is. I didn’t pay much attention when tearing through my room and packing.

“Okay, I got it!” I shout as I finally find my wallet buried under too many things.

“You don’t know your ID number?” the woman asks like she thinks I’m hunting down a random number to give her. After the security check failed on the last person, I’d be suspicious too.

“I emerged late and haven’t memorized my new number yet.” Our IDs change based on our designation once we know what we are. For example, Hailey’s and Julie’s will start with a BE for Beta.

The woman sighs, the judgment clear over the phone.

“It’s OM9485C284,” I read off.

“Name?” she asks.

“Hana Henderson.”

She asks me for my address and driver’s license number, probably to ensure I’m not stealing some poor Omega’s ID number to get in, and once I’ve given her everything but my measurements, she tells me the tickets will be at will call and hangs up.

I stare down at my phone, unable to believe it.

Hailey glances at me, and that’s when I realize we’ve pulled off to the side of the road. She’s almost as excited as Julie, and her smile is beaming. “You did it, Hana! You’re finally going to meet them!”

Hailey wraps me in a hug, and her familiar scent helps to quell some of the unease I’m feeling about hiding why we’re following the guys from Julie. “You’re doing a great job, and tonight, you’ll be in their vicinity again. You can make this happen.”

“I sure hope so.”

Julie is still staring at me like I've hung the moon. "So when you finally meet them, think you could put in a good word about my DJ skills?"

We burst out laughing, and after we collect ourselves, Hailey gets back onto the highway, and we follow the signs to Salt Lake City. "I don't get to meet them. I get to attend the show, but I'll do my best because fuck knows I can't go and not try."

We arrive early and find the will call window. It's open all day for ticket pickups, and I count my lucky freaking stars again that we won.

I walk up to the window alone, leaving Hailey and Julie in the idling van, and show my ID. The Beta there is on the phone, arguing with whoever is on the other side about the best salad dressing—I kid you not—so he hands over an envelope after taking a quick peek at my name.

No muss. No fuss. No checking who the second ticket is for. Just a plain white envelope with my name on it.

I turn around and hot-foot it to the car, nearly sprinting by the time I reach it. "I got 'em!" I cheer, piling in and pulling the door shut after me.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Hana

JULIE IS STANDING WITH THE OTHER WOMEN FOLLOWING THE show while Hailey and I are in line, inching closer to the entrance with our tickets in hand and hopes high.

I look behind me, and Julie does a fist pump before turning back toward the rest of the group as Xavier, the security guy we've run into a couple of times, rounds the corner. It's why Julie couldn't take the other ticket. She's too recognizable.

The women in front of us move forward, and suddenly, we're next.

"Tickets?" The security member at the door holds his hand out. We give him our tickets, and he looks down at them. "Radio winners, huh?"

"Yeah, we got lucky with the last win," I say, trying to keep the nerves out of my voice.

He tears off the edge of the tickets, and with a quick stamp on our hands, he lets us inside.

"Holy shit," Hailey breathes as we walk through the dim hall. "I thought for sure he'd ask for ID or something."

"I think the guy at will call was supposed to do that, and they'll definitely be checking ID at the bar for alcohol, but the performance is for over-eighteens. I think we're good."

We pass some other women milling around at a bar and slowly pick our way through the space, finding our seats smack dab in the middle of the room. Scooching our way into the row, we pass a few already tipsy audience members, doing that awkward crab shuffle and inadvertently shoving our asses

in their faces to squeeze by and plop down without one iota of grace.

“I can’t believe we’re here,” I say, looking around. My eyes can’t decide what to settle on. The plush velvet curtains look sumptuous with the dark blue neon lights, and the music pumps into the space. There are at least five hundred people here, and about a quarter belong to bachelorette parties.

Hailey takes out her phone and snaps some pictures before turning it toward me and asking, “So, where are we, Hana?”

I laugh. “We’re at the Beasts of Bacchanal show in Salt Lake City.”

“And what are we doing here?”

“Stalking someone,” I deadpan.

Hailey cackles and pans the camera around until the lights dim.

“Welcome, guys, gals, and nonbinary pals, to the greatest strip show you’ll ever see,” the emcee says, his voice booming through the space. I can’t help but imagine Julie’s voice welcoming the attendees, and I smile. She really would be good at that job with her infectious energy.

“Let’s get the guys out here and see what they’re working with tonight.”

One by one, the performers are all introduced with the groups they dance with, and I hold my breath through it all, waiting for the Alpha Trio.

“Last up, we have our crowd favorites getting ready to retire, so this will be their last time on the stage in Salt Lake! Give it up for Boss, E-Z, and Eros!” The announcer wolf

whistles into the mic as the three men enter the stage, joining the other performers.

Instantly, my body goes on high alert. A live wire has taken up residence in my chest, and I stare at the men in rapture. They look the same as last time, except there's a harder edge to each of them. Boss looks like he'd step on anyone who ticked him off today, and the fluidity of Eros is completely gone. His movements are stilted instead of graceful, his booted feet falling hard on the stage below him. As always, E-Z is wearing his mask, but I can *feel* him frowning under it. The three of them are pissed about something.

If it weren't for the descenter pumping into the place, I bet I'd be able to scent their unease as easily as I can smell my own right now. I skipped the usual neutralizer body wash and perfume today, taking a risk with other Alphas nearby, but I need to get their attention somehow.

I try to lift my voice over the others, shouting and hollering their names, but it fades into the surge of screams around me. Hailey catches on and starts shouting with me, but it's useless. This isn't going to work. Eyeing the security stationed on either side of the stage, I know sneaking back there is definitely not an option.

Most of the dancers disappear, but three dancers remain on stage. They strip their outfits, slowly taking off item after item until there's no longer a firefighter, cop, and doctor on stage but three gyrating men with tight black briefs. Two of them work the poles on either side of the stage, while the third does a solo strip tease in the middle, flexing his muscles as he dances.

After that, they work through the audience, pulling up a woman each as they head back to the stage. They select three bachelorettes, and when they pass our row to pick from the crowd, I duck down in my seat. If I go up on that stage, it'll be with one of the Alpha Trio.

They put the bachelorettes in three chairs that slide out from the eaves of the stage and grind on them in time with the sultry music pumping through the speakers. They're all so talented as they dance on the participants, putting on a show for the rest of the audience while making the girls on stage feel like the whole universe revolves around them. It's quite technical when I watch it for the second time, and the shock factor is gone. Their steps are in synchronicity as they dance around one another, and their faces remain relaxed throughout it all.

After three songs, their set is done, and the next group emerges—a quartet that snags Hailey's attention. She sits on the edge of her seat as she watches them.

She gives me a mischievous smirk, and I know if she had her way, she'd be climbing those strippers like I would climb mine. Not that they're *mine*.

"I have an idea," Hailey says. "Give me a hug and scent mark me."

Baffled but desperate, I do as she asks and rub my cheek against hers, leaving traces of my scent on her skin. It's not recommended to scent mark anyone who's not your bonded mate, but the determination in Hailey's gaze gives me confidence.

Hailey pulls back and watches the strippers wander the aisles, looking for a participant. When one of them is close enough, Hailey throws herself out of her chair and into the

arms of a passing stripper, vaulting over the other four women between her and the dancer like human hurdles in a track meet.

The guy laughs as he catches her, his steps faltering for a second. He shakes his leg and swoops Hailey into his arms, carrying her bridal style to the stage.

I see the instant he smells me on Hailey, and the man whips his head back toward our seats. Heat suffuses my cheeks, and I play it off like it was a mistake, shrugging and giving doe eyes.

The guy turns and continues toward the stage, Hailey whooping and cheering in his arms, doing fist pumps all the way. She leans close and rubs her cheek against the stripper's as she whispers something in his ear. I see a bit of blush creep up his neck, and I applaud my bestie for going after what she wants.

He pulls away, sets her down on one of the chairs on the stage, and chastises her with a wagging finger in her face. I watch his lips move, and I can almost hear him saying, "Naughty Beta."

She grins, flicks her long, raven-black hair over her shoulder, and says something that makes him roll his eyes.

Another woman joins Hailey, and the four dancers focus on the two participants on stage. It's like watching the most erotic show on earth as they sandwich the women, lifting them out of the chairs and pressing them between two hard bodies each. The beat thunders on, and Hailey laughs and smiles, happy to be used as a human pole for the guys to grind on.

The song ends with Hailey upside down between them, her hair hanging wildly toward the floor as her thighs are wrapped

around one of their necks. Hailey looks like she's having the time of her life, and I'm glad she's getting some fun out of this road trip, and it's not all been about me and my stalking.

She's escorted down the steps and toward our row. She slips past the women she clambered over earlier, earning a few scowls and scoffs, but she brushes it off like nothing.

"That was fun!" she says when she turns toward me. "Plus," she adds, "when those strippers go backstage, they'll carry your scent on their faces! We need Eros to get close enough to sniff it out."

"That's... Fuck, Hailey, you're brilliant!"

I throw my arms around her again and hug her tight. "Thank you, thank you, thank you for helping me with this, you marvelous and ingenious woman!"

"It's not like that was a hardship." She laughs, but her face turns serious. "You know I'd help you with anything short of burying a body. I don't enjoy digging." She makes a retching face. "Bugs."

I laugh and turn my attention forward, where another group has taken the stage. In my obsessive research over the last few weeks, I've learned there are six groups of dancers, each going one after the other, with the Alpha Trio closing out the show. Just a few more, and I can shoot my shot.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Christos

“THAT’S A WRAP ON THE FOUR STUDS!” COLE SHOUTS FROM backstage, signaling the end of their performance. “Next up, Three’s Company!”

I’m focused on the contract I’ve signed and sent over for more shows when someone flops onto the cushion beside me on the couch.

“Jake,” I greet. “How’d it go?”

“Good, fine,” he says, but I know he’s lying. His body is tense, and he’s bouncing his heels against the floor.

“Wanna try that again?”

He groans, running his towel over his face and mopping up the sweat. “Ugh, fine. I think I tweaked my knee when I caught one of the girls.”

“Caught? Was she falling from somewhere?” I raise a brow. Ezra will flip a lid when he hears Jake’s injured again. He’s supposed to take it easy and get his choreography up to snuff again, not catch women as they fall out of the sky. No setbacks. No antics.

“She flung herself at me from her seat. I had to catch her! We might have had some bad press when she face-planted and broke something if I didn’t. You know better than I do that we can’t afford it. Not with the new dates added. I have my eye set on a packhouse and need the cash.”

“Oh, yeah?” I ask, feeling the wistfulness I’ve been trying to kick since we scented our Omega and then fucking left town because our sponsors would have collective aneurysms if we

stayed in Denver and missed this performance. “Thinking about settling down?”

“Eh, not yet, but it doesn’t hurt to be prepared. Brandon, Brody, Jensen, and I have been talking about the future lately, and if we don’t pull the trigger on a place soon, we never will. That’s what we’re supposed to do, right? Settle down, get a house, maybe a couple of kids one day?”

He looks unsure as he repeats the steps we’ve all been taught as Alphas since we emerged. “You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to.”

Jake shrugs, his young face seeming to age as the thoughts settle in. Cole wanders by at that moment and looks us over. “Jake, get some ice on that knee before it swells and get looked over by Heath,” he says, referring to our traveling medical professional.

“How did you know he injured it again?” I ask.

Cole scoffs. “Boss, I see everything. I know everything.” He taps his iPad. “I am a benevolent god unless someone takes the last cup of coffee in the pot.” He glares at Jake, who winces.

“Yes, sir,” Jake says, standing and taking one measly step toward Heath’s office. Cole rushes off to the next item on his to-do list, his iPad dutifully tucked under his arm. As soon as the bossy Beta is out of earshot, Jake looks over at me as I smother the laugh bubbling up. “Don’t judge me, Boss! Cole could run the army if he wanted to. I’m not going against orders.”

“You took the last cup of coffee this morning, didn’t you?”

He hangs his head. “Yeah.”

I howl with laughter and clutch my stomach. Oh, Cole is going to fuck with him soon. It's the rule of the traveling troupe. No one, and I mean *no one*, touches the last cup.

Jake throws his sweaty towel at me, and I'm too busy laughing to catch it before it hits my face.

As soon as it does, my senses go on high alert. I stand in a rush, bellowing, "Ezra! Ace!"

Jake jumps three feet in the air, thankfully landing on his good leg when he comes back down. "What the fuck, Boss?"

Stepping up to him, I resist the urge to put my hands on one of our performers for smelling like my Omega. "Where is she?"

"What? Who?!"

At the lack of answers, my Alpha power floods, causing my scent to change as the pheromones soak the air around us. Jake averts his eyes in a show of submission. He struggles against it, lifting his head but keeping his gaze on my chest instead of my face.

"Where did you pick up this scent?" I ask carefully, my voice coming out gravelly and demanding.

"The girl who almost fell on her face. She had the scent on her, but it wasn't hers."

"What row in the audience?"

"I-I don't know. Somewhere in the middle?"

I growl low in my throat, a sound I'm wholly unfamiliar with. Fuck, I need to talk to the guys. I shout for them again and point Jake down the hall toward Heath's office to shoo him away.

Ezra and Ace barrel down the hallway, both looking on edge after hearing the desperation in my voice.

“What’s going on?” Ezra asks, his body tense like someone is about to jump out from behind the couch and attack.

“Smell this,” I growl, tossing the sweaty towel at him.

He catches it midair and lifts it to his nose with a dubious look on his face. I see the moment he catches the faint whiff of our Omega. His pupils blow wide, and a rumble starts in his chest.

Ezra passes the towel over to Ace, and the man lifts it to his nose, inhales subtly, then buries his face in the material when he catches the scent.

“Let’s fucking go,” Ace says, taking three strides toward the stage before I wrap a hand around his forearm, halting him.

He turns and growls in my face, but I remain unmoved. “Wait a damn minute. There’s only one more act before we’re up. We can’t fuck up their performance and cause a stir. The business, man. She won’t leave mid-show.”

“Bullshit. What if she does?”

“Christos is right, Ace,” Ezra says. “Take a breath. Let’s make a plan. How are we going to find her out there? We still have to perform. We can’t abandon everything to hunt her down. The other guys depend on us keeping them employed.”

Ace growls, but it’s more subdued this time. He knows we can’t go out there half-cocked. And after talking with Jake, who’s thinking about buying a packhouse, we have to remember that it’s more than us with our future on the line.

I flop down on the couch to wait, Ezra and Ace taking up the rest of the three-seater. Together, we fidget our knees in unison, counting down the seconds until we can get out there on that stage.

The next group of performers takes the stage, and my impatience grows. “What do you think she’s like?” I ask, trying to keep myself sitting on the couch, not prowling through the audience and sniffing the attendees.

“I don’t know,” Ace says, throwing his forearm over his eyes as he leans against the back of the couch, slouching until he’s in prime napping position. “I hope she’s cool with a pack because I’m not splitting from you guys.”

Ezra and I nod, firm on that point. There are some judgmental pricks in the world, and they preach that packs go against nature and religion. Idiots.

What if she’s one of them? The feeling of unease washes over me. I could never give up Ace and Ezra. They’re a part of me.

An eternity and a half later, we’re called onto the stage, and we huddle up for a second before we go out there. “We can do this,” I say, shifting my gaze between them. “Eyes on the prize, gentlemen. We just need an introduction.”

They nod, and we pull in for a group hug. “I love you guys,” I say.

“Love you both, too,” Ace says.

“Until the end,” Ezra echoes as he slides a Guy Fawkes mask over his face. He rarely says the words, but he feels them, and, more importantly, he shows them every damn day.

We break and emerge from the wings as we’re introduced. I murmur, “Jake said she’s somewhere in the middle.”

They nod, and we step into the spotlight. Immediately, I lift my nose into the air and inhale deeply. All I can smell is descenter and alcohol as the noise rises from the audience. But deep in my soul, I know she's out there. The panty thrower. The one we had given up hope of ever finding. Our Omega.

It doesn't matter what she looks like. I would just be happy if she's a kind person. The three of us have suffered enough disappointment in our lives to tide us over, and if Fate was cruel enough to scent match us with a horrible person, I don't think we'd ever recover.

I scan the crowd, disappointed that Fate—the bitch—doesn't have a neon sign hanging over our Omega's head to point her out. Ezra and Ace are doing the same thing, taking up their positions on either side of me and looking into the audience. Their jaws are set in mirrored determination, and I'm struck again at how perfectly our pack is in unison.

Gray is riling up the crowd even more from his emcee booth, and the audience gets way into it, drinks sloshing here and there, and catcalls and whistles rising around us and cutting through the heavy bass of the music. And all the while, we go through the motions, dancing and doing the choreography Ezra has painstakingly laid out for us while looking for our Omega.

When it comes time to bring up audience members, I let my nose lead the way. Ezra heads to the right, Ace to the left, and I cut through the middle. Hands reach and grab for me, touching where they shouldn't be touching—not with my Omega somewhere in this room—and a few women throw themselves into my arms, but I gently put them back down after giving them a subtle sniff.

As I reach a row in the middle, my head whips to the right, finding piercing blue eyes staring at me from the center. A dark-haired girl pushes the blue-eyed beauty toward me, and I freeze. I've seen those eyes before. I remember them from the show in Houston.

My lips part, and I take a deep breath, catching faint notes of gardenias, lavender, and a barely-there hint of clove. It's an intoxicating blend of floral and spice; all I want to do is bury my face in this woman and inhale her for the rest of my life.

A purr starts up in my chest, and although the music and the other patrons are deafening, I swear, my Omega hears it, and her knees buckle like she can sense the rumble from four yards away.

"Come, Omega," I say, extending a hand to her. I look past her and find Ezra and Ace at the other end of her row, our noses or Fate finally playing ball here, having led us all to her. They nod and head back up to the stage. None of us wants to grind up on some stranger when our mate is here.

No. The only woman we dance for tonight is our Omega.

The dark-haired girl beside her gives a little nudge again, and our Omega stumbles past the women between us. I keep my hand extended, waiting for her to take it and let me show her everything I can give her.

Slowly, she lifts a delicate hand, and I engulf it with mine, giving her a little tug and pulling her closer. Once she's free of the aisle, I stare down at her, those blue eyes captivating me like they did in Houston.

"Omega, we've been waiting for you," I say, my voice nearly unrecognizable as it comes out in a rumble. She shivers, and her pupils grow impossibly large as she stares up at me.

This delicate and tiny Omega feels precious and fragile as I wrap her in my arms and take a deep inhale.

Her long brown hair dips down to the top of her ass, and even over the descenter permeating the space, I can smell her and the relief in her scent. Relief at finding us? Fuck, I hope so. My cock grows harder the longer I hold her in my arms, and all I want to do is rip the white dress she's wearing off her body and mark her as mine. As ours.

"Boss seems to have found a participant for the show," Grey says into the mic. "Why don't you bring her up to the stage? It looks like the rest of your pack is waiting."

I withdraw slightly, never letting my hands leave her body. I bend down so I can whisper in her ear, and her scent blooms a little more potent, intoxicating me and making me fear that if I don't get my shit under control soon, we'll give the audience a different show than they thought they'd get. "We have to perform, but we're all yours after that."

She nods with her lips pursed as I stand to my full height. Why is she not smiling? The ghost of a grin is still on my lips, and her lack of one scares me.

I lead her toward the stage, and at the top of the steps, Ezra and Ace are standing there with their hands outstretched to guide her the rest of the way. She looks over her shoulder at me, and I nod encouragingly.

"Hello, Omega," Ace says as she puts her hand in his.

Ezra doesn't say a thing, but his body tenses. His shoulders roll back, and he drops his hand, turning away and clearing the other two chairs we won't need.

My masked packmate stands with his hands gripping the back of the lone chair as Ace leads her to it. Our Omega's eyes

keep darting to the audience, and I forget how daunting it can be up here if you've never performed before. At this point, the guys and I block it out, focusing on our routine.

She sits carefully in the chair, her knees pressed together and her eyes wild as she looks at the three of us towering above her.

“Ready, Omega?” Ace asks, his honeyed voice dripping with lust.

She nods. Then, she shakes her head. Then nods again, steeling her shoulders and taking a deep breath. A small, needy whine escapes her as she scents us, and instantly, I drop to my knees in front of her.

“It'll be okay, Omega. What's your name?”

Her eyes are still darting at our surroundings, but finally, they settle on me. “Hana,” she whispers.

Ezra goes rigid, and Ace repeats it like a prayer.

“Okay, Hana. Five minutes of dancing on you, close out the show with a few more routines, then we're all yours. I promise.”

She nods, and her hands grip the seat of her chair. “Okay. Let's do this.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Hana

I LOOK DOWN INTO THE BIG ALPHA'S EYES AS HE KNEELS before me. While he knows my name now, I only know him as Boss, his stage name.

Eros, the blond who started all this, is staring down at me, his lithe body relaxed and at ease. My eyes trace the tattoos scattered across his torso, traversing the bumps and ridges of his abs until I reach the gentle smile across his lips.

“Omega,” he says as he dips his head in respect. “I think I remember you. Houston, right?”

I nod. “Your thong hit me in the face.”

He throws his head back in a laugh, and I'm transfixed as I watch his whole body become involved. Abs clenching, chest expanding as he sucks in air, his jaw sharp enough to cut glass is highlighted by the stage lights, reminding me why he's been in every one of my fantasies since that night.

“Can we touch you?” Eros asks.

I nod, but when he raises a brow, I speak. “Yes.”

He steps closer, falling to his knees on my other side. His scent reaches me, the surf and salt of it wrapping around me despite the descenter everywhere. I whine again, unable to keep the sound down.

“It's okay. We're here now,” Boss says. His amber and sage scent mingles with Eros's beachy aroma, causing my slick to begin. The two of them are setting off every Omega instinct I have, and I'd be shocked if they had no idea I was dripping under my panties. Hell, even I can smell it. I can't

stop it. It's a biological urge to have them closer. To feel them against me, to crave their bite on the curve of my neck.

E-Z, the masked man behind me, still gripping my chair back, groans. Okay, so maybe they do know that my slick has started because of their proximity. I press my thighs together harder, like that will help the situation.

Spoiler alert: it doesn't.

The music grows louder, and the men begin their performance. Boss runs a hand from my ankle up my shin and toward my knee as Eros does the same on the other side. E-Z's hands ghost over my shoulders, not quite touching, but the warmth of his hands is close enough that it feels like he's leaving a brand along my skin.

The audience goes wild as the three of them focus on me, and I can't help but stare down at the men kneeling before me. I feel powerful, like there is nothing in the world I can't do if I can bring these Alphas to their knees.

Just as Boss and Eros reach my thighs, E-Z grips my hands, finally making contact with my skin and sending a bolt of electricity through me. He pulls my arms above my head, crossing them at the wrist like I'm trussed up for their pleasure. Or that they're Alphas insistent on caring for their Omega, refusing to let her lift a finger as they ravish her for *her* pleasure. It's a heady feeling and one my body demands more of.

Eros inches backward, gently tugging my knees open as Boss slots himself between them, shielding me from the audience. My dress is knee-length and loose, so he easily finds his place between my thighs.

E-Z still holds my hands above my head, and Eros stands, comes around to my left side, and throws a leg over my waist. Boss ducks, avoiding a kick to the head as Eros straddles me. He leans close, his breath skating over the fevered skin of my neck. His inhale is loud, and he purrs as he drinks me in.

“Mmm, Hana, you smell so fucking good.”

Instead of feeling embarrassed, I moan because he smells just as good—like he was made for me.

I watch his face as he grinds on me from above, and my eyes find the mask of E-Z. He cocks his head to the side, and it drives me crazy not knowing what he’s thinking. I can’t see a damn thing, but I stare into the mask’s eyeholes, imagining what he might look like under the Guy Fawkes mask. He tightens his grip on my wrists, never letting up the pressure. My arms have gone numb from being raised for this long, and my fingers tingle. I wiggle them, trying to dispel the numbness.

E-Z gathers my wrists with one hand, and with the other, he lifts his Guy Fawkes mask a few inches, showing off a sharp and stubbled jawline. He pulls my wrists closer and sucks two of my fingers into his mouth. His warm tongue curls around the digits, and holy fuck, even with the numbness, I feel every tantalizing slide of his tongue and flick of it as he thrums it against the tips of my fingers, instantly making me think of what his tongue will feel like on my clit.

He nips the tip of my middle finger, the sharp sting of it contrasting with the sensual feeling of his mouth. I wrench my gaze away as a tongue slides against the inside of my knee. My head falls forward, and I breathe it all in. I’m overwhelmed and adrift—a ship without sails or an anchor,

destined to ride out the storm these three are building around me without hope of gaining control.

But when I catch E-Z's smoke and leather scent, it anchors me, suddenly providing the comfort I need. The three men around me become my only focus despite the pounding music and unending cheers from the crowd.

The men move around me, using me as a prop as they dance for the spectators. Eventually, I'm pulled up from my seat, and E-Z steps back, sliding the chair away so he's the only thing holding me up as I'm pressed against Eros, and Boss kneels at my feet.

Their touches are gentle and seductive as they trail fingertips along my feverish body, laying me down on the stage floor and joining me there.

Three sets of eyes stare down at me, E-Z still near my head, Eros shifting to my left, near my hip, and Boss taking his place, hovering over my torso and keeping his weight off me with his powerful arms. It's like I'm their entire world as they stare down at me, and part of me is petrified, causing my scent to change and grow sharper with the spice underlayer.

"Calm, Omega," E-Z says from above my head, his voice a rumble in my ear. My eyelids fall closed as his voice washes over me, his Alpha command permeating every conscious thought as it rushes through me like the smokiness of his scent.

For the big finish of their performance, which feels like it's lasted a lifetime, but has only been a few minutes, Boss rolls his body against me, his hips connecting with mine and his hard cock teasing me as it passes over my heat.

My legs fall open, and he brings his knees to my center one by one, planting them there and finding his spot in the cradle of my thighs.

I resist the urge to meet him thrust for thrust, knowing people are watching us, but it's no use. My body does whatever the fuck it biologically needs to.

Eros has stripped out of his pants, leaving himself in a new glittery thong. He positions himself so the audience can see his ass and winks down at me.

Boss plants his knees, wraps my thighs around his hips more firmly, and with a maneuver I didn't know was possible, he lifts me but gently presses my sternum, guiding me until my back arches. My hands scrabble for purchase on the floor above my dangling head, leaving me looking like a motherfucking rainbow.

I know I shouldn't do it, but I can't help myself. I press down against Boss, his hard length notching right against my clit, and I press my heels into his ass, encouraging him closer. I let out a groan as he purrs and thrusts against me.

E-Z slides his hands into the hair at the base of my neck, offering support for my shoulders and leaving my mouth at the perfect height for his cock to slide into. I lick my lips, and I hear his answering rumble.

Ace crawls under my rainbow bridge position between his packmates, and his hands wrap around my middle. They've positioned us until we look like we're mid-sex act, and the audience fucking loses it as the stage lights dim and the song ends.

Eros tugs me carefully upward, helping me go right side up again, and I grind on Boss one last time as he slides my body

down his so I can stand on my own two feet. He purrs against me, the comfort of it suffusing my chest and making me feel like I'm home.

“After the show, Omega,” he says, continuing to use the respectful term instead of my name. I know it's a deference thing, but the feeling of only being called “Omega” grates on my nerves, especially after the ordeal it was when I emerged.

“Hana, please.” Boss nods and smiles softly—a genuine smile for me, not for the audience.

Eros takes my hand and walks down the stairs. Instead of bringing me back to my seat, he stops at the security door where a bespectacled man is waiting with an iPad in his hands. “Bring her and her companion to the green room, Cole.”

Cole nods and taps something on his tablet. “What seat were you and your friend in?” he asks, barely looking up at me.

“Uh, H 14 and 15, I think. Her name is Hailey.”

“On it,” Cole says with a quick nod. “Come on.”

“I'm not going anywhere without Hailey.” I plant my feet. I've seen this true crime show. There is an abundance of Alphas back there, and I'm a lone Omega without descenter body wash and lotion on.

No way, no how, no thank you to murder on the menu today, sir.

Eros sighs from beside me. “No one back there would hurt you, but I get it. Cole, let's move this along.” He looks out at the crowd, half of which is watching E-Z and Boss work the poles on stage, while the other half is watching the three of us by the security door. Yeah, getting out of here would be a better choice.

I look toward the middle of the audience and see Hailey and a security guy moving up the aisle toward us quickly. “Hey, girl! That was hot!” she says when she’s closer.

The blush on my cheeks must be permanent by now, so I smile back. It must look like a grimace, though, because Hailey winces. “You okay?”

I nod and look up at Eros. “Go ahead, Hana. We’ll be back there as soon as this is over. Cole, watch over them. No one talks to them, and no one bothers them.”

Cole rolls his eyes. “Possessive much?”

“Extremely,” Eros answers, his eyes never leaving mine. “Ten minutes, tops. I promise.”

Nodding, I follow Cole as he steps through the security door, and Hailey follows behind me. Men dart around, some lounging on chairs and couches, others stretching and changing. I avert my eyes, avoiding looking at anyone’s bare asses, but Hailey doesn’t have the same hang-ups I do.

She mock salutes and shouts, “Gentlemen, cover it up if you want to keep your modesty!”

Joking catcalls and whistles echo around the corridor, but we’re mostly met with genuine smiles and nods as we head past the men.

I smack my forehead with my palm, a quiet laugh coming from Cole ahead of me. My steps are weird and stilted as I keep my thighs clenched together. I need a bathroom to clean up the slick gathered between my legs, and as we reach the green room, I sigh in relief when there’s an ensuite.

“I don’t know what kind of magic you pulled, but girl, you gotta teach me your ways,” Cole says as the door closes behind us.

“What do you mean?” Hailey asks.

“They have never, and I mean *never*, brought someone back to the green room.”

Hailey smirks as I hustle into the bathroom to clean myself up as she and Cole chat in the dressing room.

Holy fuck. I’m finally going to meet them. Everything we’ve been working toward for weeks is coming to a head, and there’s no stopping it now. What if they’re horrible?

As I ponder how this will go, I finish cleaning up and stare at my reflection in the mirror. My cheeks are still flushed, and I doubt that will go down any time soon. I’m warm and uncomfortable in my skin, which always happens when my nerves get the better of me.

This is stupid. I am Hana Henderson—Omega, business student, loyal friend, and all-around perfectionist. If this doesn’t work, it doesn’t work, and I trigger my heat another way. Even if these guys suck, being around them should help get this stupid heat out of the way so I can get on with my life.

I turn the handle and step into the green room, only to see Hailey on her knees with an Alpha putting handcuffs on her.

“Hey! What the fuck?!” I shout, racing toward her.

“Hailey Gonzales is on our list of stalkers and is being removed from the premises, as are you,” Cole says, tapping away on his infuriating iPad again.

“What?! No!”

“Hana, watch out!” Hailey shouts, her eyes wide with fear as she looks past me.

There’s movement behind me, and I realize when I came from the bathroom, I completely missed the Alpha waiting by

the door for me. He pulls my hands behind my back, and I hear the slide of the metal handcuffs as they lock into place.

Shit.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Ezra

“WAIT FOR ME,” ACE SAYS AS CHRISTOS AND I STEP BEHIND the curtain so he can do his solo ending and fling his underwear at someone new.

Gladly, I think, trying to school my face into my trademark scowl again after the shock. On the other hand, Christos is a giant ball of nervous energy as he fidgets while we wait.

I can't be sure, but the Omega looks like Hana Henderson—as in Hana Banana, my childhood friend.

And she came to the Houston show.

And she smells a little familiar.

But my old friend wasn't an Omega. She was an Alpha if I've ever met one. Her strong will and take-no-prisoners attitude was the reason we became friends in the first place.

I remember once when our dads were on a call that seemed to last forever in Forest Henderson's office. Instead of staying in the backyard as they'd commanded, we escaped the fence and booked it for the community gates, hellbent on getting to the ice cream shop before they closed. Our moms were at book club, and when that happened, our fathers used the time to continue working without chastising looks.

Hana scaled the fence like a little monkey, climbing so fast that I was sure she'd plummet to her death. Instead, when the guard at the gate saw us, she smiled broadly, threw herself over the other side, and rolled to a stop on the manicured grass. She stood triumphantly like the guard couldn't just walk through the gates to get us. I followed her, and we sprinted hand in hand for the shop. Only to be looked at with pity

because she'd stolen a hundred-dollar bill, and the shop didn't take anything larger than a twenty.

Our dads grounded us for three weeks after that stunt. But hell, getting ice cream on the house for our audacity was well worth it.

Ace's ass on full display pulls me from my trip down memory lane. He sends the thong flying toward one of the security guards, who snatches it out of the air. Xavier waves it over his head like a flag, and the audience roars with laughter.

We reemerge onto the stage to do our final bow, and then Ace grabs my hand and hauls me backstage with Christos hot on our heels, intent on getting to Hana.

The rest of the group is in the nightly huddle, and when we blow past them, Jake calls out, "Where's the fire?" He has a glint in his eyes, and I bet he thinks we're sneaking off to fuck.

"Don't go to jail!" Christos yells back. "I will not bail you out. Jake, take over the speech tonight!"

With his hands on our shoulders, Christos propels us forward until we reach our dressing room. All the while, Jake puts on his best—and hilarious—Christos impersonation and begins going through the details of the night.

"Ready?" Christos asks as we all stare at the plain, unremarkable, white door in front of us.

"Yes," Ace answers, while I say, "No."

Ace opens the door, and we're met by Cole, who has a bored look on his face. "Sorry guys, I don't know how they even got into the venue. I'm getting rid of them now."

"What?" Christos asks while I wonder if this is a blessing from the goddess. Maybe I don't have to face my past tonight.

But as Cole shifts, I see the Omega and her friend with their hands cuffed behind their backs, two of our security guards restraining them and beginning to march the women toward us and undoubtedly kick them out of the venue.

“This one,” Cole says, waving a hand at the dark-haired woman, “Hailey Gonzales, is on our list as a stalker. She shouldn’t have even been able to get a ticket. Believe me, I’ll be figuring out how that happened.”

Hailey Gonzales. She was in the security video with Hana from the other night in Denver.

Hana winces, and time slows. I spring forward, shoving Anthony, one of our longest-employed security team members, out of the way. He lets go of Hana’s wrists as he starts to go down, and I put myself between them in case he gets any bright ideas.

“Mine,” I growl, my Alpha pushing to claim her despite the time and abandonment we’ve endured.

Anthony raises his hands in surrender, and before I can take back the claiming, Christos and Ace step beside me, bracketing Hana.

“Easy,” Anthony says, keeping his voice calm and backing away even further, showing he poses no threat.

“Everyone out,” Christos barks.

Hana moves behind me, and Ace’s voice comes out like a command. “Not you, Hana. Nor Hailey. We need to talk. Cole, please get everyone onto the buses and clear out. Tell Robert we’ll be out later and to keep his phone on him.”

“But she’s—” Cole starts, but my growl cuts off his words. “Fine! Get chopped to bits and stuffed in a basement. Your call, but if I lose this job because you get kidnapped, I swear to

God I will find you and put itch powder in all of your masks and thongs.”

A giggle comes from behind me, and I know it's Hana. I expel a deep breath when Anthony, the other guard, Jose, and Cole leave the room, placing the key for the cuffs on the dressing table before they close the door. Christos grabs it and quickly unlocks the cuffs around their wrists.

I turn around, finding Hana tucked under Hailey's arm and rubbing her pink wrists. My Alpha rises at the marks on her skin, but I shove it down. They both look a little worried, but as if in slow motion, they straighten their posture under our gaze, and Hana, the spitfire that she's always been, asks, “So, who wants to get chopped up first?”

It breaks the tension, and Ace throws his head back in a laugh.

I lift my mask, and Hana stares up at me, tracing my face with her gaze. She tilts her head to the side, and I see the second it clicks. “Ezzy?”

“Hana,” I answer coolly. Hot and cold is where I'm at right now, and I can't find a middle.

“Holy shit,” Hailey whispers, bringing a hand to her mouth in shock.

Hana leaves Hailey's side and throws herself against me, wrapping me in a hug. “Oh my God! I haven't seen you since we were kids! You look so different! Where have you been? How's your mom?”

Her scent wraps around me now that we're not drowning in descenter and the underlying scents of so many other people. She smells like home, as much as I hate to admit it.

I press my hands against her hips and push her away from me, forcing her back a few steps so I can think straight again. “What are you doing here, Hana?” My Alpha bark floods the question, and her shoulders sag.

Her nose scrunches in confusion, and instead of shying away as most Omegas would, she lifts one arm and punches me in the chest. It feels more like a pat than a punch, but I catch her fist as it flies again and tighten my hand around hers.

“Answer the question, Hana.”

Ace and Christos are standing behind the women, both of their eyes wide with confusion and maybe a bit of jealousy that I already know Hana. Or, rather, I knew the girl that she once was before everything went to shit. It’s a story I’ll have to share with them, but right now, I want answers.

“What do you mean, why am I here?” she asks, wiping her brow with her free hand. “We’re scent matches?” she says, lifting the end of her sentence into a question.

“We are, but that doesn’t mean we need to act on anything,” I counter. “If nothing else, I know how your family treats people. I don’t think that’s the type of Omega I want.”

My words land like physical blows, and Ace growls from his spot beside Christos, taking a step forward and pulling Hana back another two steps until he’s in front of her.

She shakes him off and bites out, “I don’t need you to defend me. But thank you,” she amends.

There it is, the proper etiquette that’s been drilled into everyone in that horrid society—always keeping it polite on the surface until someone actually needs them to be kind, the way my mom did. No one wanted to be kind then, despite none of my father’s actions being her fault.

“Ezra, explain,” Christos says, cutting through all the chaos in my head and getting to the crux of the matter.

Hailey is quiet as she watches us but links hands with Hana as she stares at us.

“My father and Hana’s father were in business together. My dad embezzled funds from the company, unknown to my mother and me. She immediately filed for divorce, appalled that he would even consider stealing from anyone in our community—the community she loved wholeheartedly. It’s too bad the community didn’t love her too. They dropped her like a bag of day-old shit, leaving her to fend for herself as she deteriorated. Hana’s mom, Prudence, was Mom’s best friend, and she led the smear campaign. We were turned away from businesses, our house was seized, and instead of letting Mom and I crash in someone’s pool house, we were ostracized until we eventually had to leave and start over. No money, no Dad, no friends, nothing.”

Nearly fifteen years of resentment come pouring out of me, and Hana’s eyes are glassy when I finish.

“I had no idea,” she says, a tremble in her voice. “All they said was that you moved away. I was so fucking hurt that you didn’t even say goodbye.”

“Same,” Hailey says, her voice stronger than Hana’s. She and I weren’t particularly close, but she was Hana’s friend, so we’d played together a bit. I always liked her, finding her a quirky breath of fresh air.

From a young age, I’d always been drawn to Hana. In my adolescent mind, I’d imagined us being best friends forever. I knew what marriage was in theory, but as a nine-year-old, I always figured best friends got married and continued being best friends. Only as my family life crumbled around us did I

realize how damaging life could be when tethered to a single person.

“Yeah, well, I tried to get to you. I was turned away,” I bite out.

“Ezzy, you have to believe me. I didn’t know. All I knew was that one day, my friend was there, and the next, you weren’t at the club or your house, and my parents said you were leaving town. I tried sneaking out night after night, but they’d expected that and locked me in my room.”

“Then she tried jumping out the window from the second floor and broke her leg,” Hailey adds, cutting in when Hana trails off. “She dragged herself to the side gate where I was waiting for her. I swear to God, she didn’t make a sound as she crawled in agony to find you.”

Emotion gets clogged in my throat, thinking of that tiny six-year-old girl with a heart of fire so dead set on getting to me that she injured herself in the process. My Alpha instincts are already riding me hard as I stare down at her, but now? Now, they howl for the time we lost with Hana when the community shunned us. We could have had our whole lives together.

My eyes lift to Christos and Ace, and I know my life was supposed to go exactly like this so I could find them. It doesn’t make grappling with the truth of that past situation any easier, but I am a better Alpha today because of them.

Hana wipes at her eyes and continues where Hailey left off. “Hailey woke my parents up to get me to the hospital. I was cursing up a storm the whole way and demanding they take me to you instead of the doctor, but they weren’t having it. I was stuck in the hospital for days, and Dad stuck a

security guard outside the door when he was at work, and Mom was with Lana. I couldn't get to you.”

Hailey runs a soothing hand down Hana's arm. “I heard you left town the day after Hana broke her leg.”

It's all a blur, and not knowing the exact details of the days surrounding our departure, the jumbled mess gets more confusing.

Something strikes me as odd, and I blurt, “Wait, how are you an Omega? You showed none of the signs back then.”

Hana laughs. “I have no fucking clue, but here we are. It just kind of happened. Late, in fact.” She sways where she stands, and at once, Christos, Ace, Hailey, and I all reach out to steady her. “I need to sit down.”

Her words are garbled and slurred like she's drunk, but there's not a whiff of alcohol on her. She sags between us, and her eyes roll back as she faints, Christos catching her under her arms before she hits the floor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Hana

ONE SECOND, MY PAST IS BEING RIPPED OPEN, SLICING INTO A wound I thought had healed, and the next, my eyes flutter, and I'm met with four penetrating gazes, Hailey's including an eye roll.

I know what's coming. She's going to make jokes about swooning at the feet of my three hunky Alphas, and I'll never get her to shut up about it. But it's not because I'm currently looking up at the three hottest guys I've ever seen. It's because my heat is coming, and the symptoms are getting worse.

“Wha—?”

“You fainted a little bit,” Hailey says, holding her thumb and index finger an inch apart, thankfully bypassing the comment on swooning, but I see the twinkle in her eye. It's on the tip of her tongue, but she's keeping it under lock and key while we're with company.

“As opposed to fainting a lot?” I ask, feeling sheepish as I look at the concerned faces above me. I wince, realizing their first impression of me has been anything but stellar.

“We should go to the hospital,” Boss says like it's not the first time he's suggested it.

“I'm okay, really. Please, no doctors.”

“It's okay, Omega,” Eros soothes as he strokes my hand. His eyes are kind as he peers down at me, and I smile back at him. “No doctors, especially since you're already speaking normally.”

“What's your name?” I ask, then turn to Boss. “And yours? I can't keep calling you by your stage names. Unless those are

your real names, in which case your parents have a weird sense of humor.”

“I’m Ace,” the blond answers, holding his hand over his heart. He waves to Boss and continues, “And that hunk of Greek God is Christos.”

Christos’s jaw clenches like he’s trying to fight off the cause of my fainting by staring at it with determination. I feel his Alpha pheromones wrapping around me with concern. The notes of sage are more robust, and there’s a sharp bite of mint weaving through it that tickles my nose.

I reach toward him, taking his hand and squeezing it. “I’m okay. I promise. Just overwhelmed, I think.”

Finally, that kernel of courage I keep tucked away inside me blooms, and I meet Ezra’s eyes. The sharpness of his gaze has eased from earlier, and I hate that being a damsel in distress is what softened him. I push myself up to sit, and instantly, everyone’s hands support me on the way up.

Someone knocks on the door, and a voice shouts, “The venue’s shutting down! We gotta go.”

“Shit,” Ace mumbles. “Where are you staying? Come with us. Or we’ll come with you.” His eyes are hopeful, and as much as my mind rages that I don’t know these people well enough to take off with them, my body is screaming at me to wrap myself around them and never let them go.

The downfall of being an Omega, I guess. What if my scent matches are assholes? What if they’re dangerous men? What if my body is leading me into a trap, and my mind is trying to warn me?

“A campsite off Breaker Road,” Hailey answers before I can decide what side of the fence to come down on. Then, a

millisecond later, “Oh, shit. Julie!” She pulls her phone from her pocket and taps at the screen.

“Where the hell are you two?!” Julie shouts. “I waited in the van, but security kicked all the cars out of the lot. I’m driving around aimlessly now.” It was a good call for Hailey to leave the keys with Julie while we were in the venue.

“We, uh, got held up. We’ll be out soon.” Hailey winces and looks over at me in concern. Yeah, we fucked this up.

“We’ll drive you to the campsite,” Christos says, raising his voice so Julie can hear him.

“Holy fuck! Is that—DISCO STICK!!”

“Bye, Julie!” Hailey shouts, cutting off our friend and hanging up the phone. She fires off a text, likely the address and reservation for the campsite, and puts her phone down.

“Who’s Julie? No, the better question is: Why is Christos called Disco Stick?” Ezra asks. “You already have a pack?” He aims the question at me but looks at Ace and Christos. “I know what your parents think of group pairings.”

“Hailey and Julie are both friends. Great friends, in fact. Anyway, we met Julie while trying to get to you, and she’s been traveling with us for a little while,” I answer. And then, for clarity’s sake, I continue, “And none of us are bonded or looking to bond one another.”

“An unbonded Omega wandering around the country with a stranger?” Disco Sti—*I mean, Christos*—asks, his voice incredulous. I’m not about to argue about Omega’s rights, so I focus on Julie.

“Not anymore,” I answer, refusing to feel ashamed. Julie has been amazing, and I won’t let him call her into question.

“Guys! We have to go!” I recognize the voice this time as Cole, the man with the iPad from earlier and the one who had us handcuffed. I fight the little whine building in my throat even though it’s begging to come out, and I’m overwhelmed, itchy, and weird. It wouldn’t do to start whining all the time.

“Come on, we can take the tour bus,” Ezra says, holding out his hand for me. I take it and let him help me to stand.

In a move that shocks me to my core after the blatant hostility he displayed earlier, he pulls me closer and wraps his arms around my body. “I’ve missed you, Hana Banana.”

My whole being relaxes into him, taking comfort in the person I thought I’d lost all those years ago. It was a formative experience, losing my closest confidant and best friend. When I was about ten, I decided to close the door forever, knowing there was nothing I could do, and it broke me to choose that.

“I’ve missed you too, Ezzy.”

We emerge from the dressing room, and as if without thinking, they’ve taken up a formation around Hailey and myself, with Christos in the lead, Ace to our left, the wall to our right, and Ezra covering us from behind. We walk through the venue, finding the halls blessedly empty, aside from a cleanup crew and Cole.

He looks at all of us and throws his hands in the air. “Lord have mercy, here we go.”

Christos growls at him, and Cole rolls his eyes—a surprisingly ballsy move for a Beta. “You know I’m right, Christos. Your Omega is safe from me; just get on the bus. Robert is right through the doors.”

We follow the halls, get through the back door, and Christos opens the door to a black and white tour bus, ushering

us in with a wave of his hand.

I look at Hailey, who's assessing everyone and everything. Her warm hand wraps around mine, and she squeezes. "Ready?"

Nodding, I look up into her eyes, refusing to let the unfamiliarity of the situation deter me from doing what we set out to do at the start of this. "Ready."

She gets onto the bus and holds her hand behind her, stopping me from entering until she checks the space. Who knew Hailey was a security guard in a past life? But it's what Betas are genetically predisposed to do. They are the majority of the populace, but their temperaments are best suited for mediating between Alphas, who can be overbearing and domineering, and Omegas, who tend to capitulate and will suffer if it means the group is more at ease.

"All clear!" she calls from inside. I follow her in, taking Ace's hand as he offers it to help me like a Victorian-era princess into a carriage.

"Hello there!" the driver, a Beta with a Southern drawl, says with a surprised face as he spins in his chair. "This is a surprise."

"Hey, Robert. This is Hana and Hailey," Ace says good-naturedly from behind me. He sounds like he's got sunshine pouring out of his ass, but it suits his laid-back demeanor and slow, easy movements.

I wave at Robert, and he smiles back cheerfully. "Good to meet you two. And especially good to see you boys bringing someone around." He drops his voice to a whisper. "They've never brought anyone onto the bus before. I'm honored to meet the exceptions to the rule."

“Robert,” Ace chastises playfully. “You don’t have to tell them we have no game.”

“Please, with that hair and that smile, you know you have more game than a stadium,” Robert fires back. “Anyway, where are we headed?”

Hailey fires off the address to the campsite, and Robert nods, adding it to his GPS. Christos turns, looking around the tour bus, and hustles over to the pile of clothing beside the kitchen cabinetry. He gathers it up and launches it down the hall like a football. But it’s clothing, so as it flies, it loses bits and pieces along the way, creating a bigger mess than he started with.

A giggle slips from my lips, and I cover my mouth with my hand as Christos whirls toward me. “It’s not usually this messy,” he says, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck.

“It’s usually worse,” Ezra remarks.

I shrug. “You guys are on the road and working a grueling schedule. I don’t expect your tour bus to be immaculate.”

Tension melts from Christos’s broad shoulders, and he looks at the seat beside me on the bench. “May I join you, Omega?”

The way he says my designation is reverent, respectful even, and it sends a shiver through me. That deep voice does things to me that I am not prepared for. When he gives up the stripping, he should go into audiobook narration.

“Please,” I scooch over, making room for his massive frame, but he still ends up pressed against me.

“Sorry.” He scoots away, and I bet half of his ass is probably hanging over the cushion.

“Don’t be silly.” I grab his arm and pull him closer, bunching up against the wall on one side and relaxing into his touch on the other. I look up and find Ezra with a slight smile on his lips and Ace outright beaming at us.

“That looks cozy, but I think we’re going to need a bigger bus,” Ace says with a chuckle.

“Nice *Jaws* reference.” I smile at him, and his grin gets even bigger.

“Onward!” Robert calls, and the bus rolls forward. I scramble around for a seatbelt, but there isn’t one here.

Christos’s hand is along the back of our seating, and when he figures out what I’m looking for, he rests his hand on my shoulder, anchoring me in place. He tilts his head in my direction and asks, “Is this okay?”

I look up into those light brown eyes and nod. The strain across his brow has smoothed out, and now that he’s not on high alert, he’s more approachable. I’d easily place him in his early thirties. There’s a slight graying in the beard lining his jaw and protectiveness in his eyes as he looks down at me. Being surrounded by his scent calms me, and I push my Omega pheromones to calm him as well. He shifts in his seat, and I think I might have sent too many out because Ace and Ezra also squirm on their bench, and Hailey is blocking her nose and sending me a *Tone it down, girl!* look.

Hailey looks between us all like we might spontaneously bond here and now. The absurdity of the last few weeks catches up to me, and I snort. Then, laughter erupts out of me, and I hold my side as I get a stitch.

“What is it?” Ezra asks.

I calm myself enough to answer, but it's between gasping breaths. "I got kidnapped by Hailey and Lana and hit in the face by a thong. Then we decided to track you down after I couldn't stop *sniffing* the damn thing, so Hailey and I went on a freaking road trip to follow you. We couldn't get tickets to anything. Then we met Julie, your superfan who wants a job with your company. Then her car broke down. We were almost assaulted, met Pack Wiles, and went to their concert, of all things. I threw *my* underwear at you, like some kind of weird tit-for-tat retaliation, then, somehow, someone couldn't keep the tickets they won from the radio station, and by some luck or Fate or manifesting—whatever the fuck that is—we won them. And here we are."

I laugh, and Hailey joins in, knowing how insane I was becoming after essentially stalking these Alphas on their tour. Hope was dwindling, but that kernel of it lived on in my chest, telling me I had to find them to get this goddamned dreaded heat over with so I could move on with my life.

"Assaulted?" Christos growls beside me, the tension rocketing back up again. I rest a hand on his arm and assure him we're fine.

"That's quite the adventure," Ace comments.

I nod, and Hailey groans, "You have no idea."

"And manifesting is—" Ace begins, but Ezra cuts him off with an eye roll and throws his seat cushion at him.

"You don't want to get him started. He might look like a surfer, but he could talk circles around anyone about manifesting your destiny and meditation and all that shit."

"Sweet," Hailey says, also throwing her cushion at him. He bats it away, and I see the easy camaraderie they could

have. “Let’s compare notes later if you’re not weirdos with my friend.”

A bit of teasing and a few miles later, we’re rolling to a stop at the campground check-in booth, and Robert handles the attendant, booking the bus in for the night. Thankfully, there are spots available, but none near the one Hailey reserved for us and where Julie is waiting with the van.

“We’re in 344,” Hailey says to Robert, who nods as he turns the wheel and follows the signs toward our reserved space.

“I can drop you close to it, but there’s no way the bus will fit down the smaller paths.”

Christos’s arm tightens around me. “We’ve barely even talked. And I still think we should go to the doctor.”

“We can talk after we check in with Julie.”

He starts to argue, but I hold up a hand. “I did not come and find you to have a keeper. Julie is our friend, and she’s worried about us. If two of your friends disappeared with unknown Alphas, would a phone call suffice, or would you need to see them with your own eyes to make sure they were okay?” I smile to soften my words but refuse to budge on this. We owe it to Julie to check in and reassure her that we’re fine.

Christos grumbles, and I know I’ve settled that argument before it can begin. “Fine, but we’re coming with you. I don’t like the idea of you two wandering around out here alone.”

“I won’t say no to that,” I say, surprising him if his lifted brows are any indication. I’ve already turned him down on the request for the doctor and spending more time with them tonight. He was probably expecting a fight on this too, but after Denver, I will take all the Alpha backup we can get.

Robert stops, and the hydraulic door opens with a whoosh. “I’ll be parked in 738. Text me so I know when to expect you back to open the doors.”

“Aye, aye, Cap’n,” Ace says with a salute before hopping down the steps and looking back toward us. “This way, ladies.”

I turn toward Ezra, whose blue eyes look brighter as he stares at Ace. “Is he always like this?”

“Pretty much. Ace isn’t one to worry about societal expectations or norms. He kind of does what he wants, when he wants. It’s annoying as fuck.”

“Hey!” Ace shouts back.

“Will both of you can it?” Christos says from beside me. “We have company. Keep the bickering to yourselves.”

“Better she knows who we are from the get-go instead of putting on the nice faces,” Ezra counters. He leans forward and kisses Christos, who slides his gaze to me before returning the kiss.

Oh. *Oh.*

Oh, buddy.

“I think I like this pack,” Hailey whispers beside me. I nod enthusiastically. I think I like this pack too. But I know next to nothing about them other than my childhood friend is one of the members and that they’re strippers.

“Move your asses,” Ace says from the doorway. Ezra pulls back and winks at me as he unfolds from the booth. Christos does the same, offering me a hand and helping me slide along the bench seat. It lets out an unholy sound, and my face flushes.

“It—It was the bench.”

“Sure it was, Hana Banana. Sure it was. Just like it was the ‘bench’ when we were on the baseball field on Ranch Road,” Ezra mocks, using the stupid air quotes. He saunters down the steps, chuckling as he goes and dancing out of range of my swatting hands.

“It was the base!” I call at his retreating back.

“You were between second and third!” he returns. Curse Ezra Barnes and his stupidly good memory.

“It happens to all of us,” Christos reassures me, but I don’t miss the chuckle in his voice. He does his best to hide it, but a fart noise is a fart noise, and if you don’t laugh at that, then there’s something wrong with your funny meter.

We walk along the gravel path toward the van, and I walk beside Hailey. The guys fall into another protective formation around us. Instead of feeling penned in or surrounded like I might have days ago, it feels comforting.

After our last late-night wander at an unfamiliar campsite, I’m glad to have their company.

And if Ezra hasn’t become an entirely different person in the years we’ve been apart, I know anyone he trusts is good with me. We were once each other’s person, and while time and distance have separated us, we’re still us.

Fart jokes included.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Ace

HAILEY STRIDES THROUGH THE DARK CAMPSITE WITH HANA beside her. They look uneasy, and I'm not the only one picking up on that. Christos surveys the area as if a rogue pack of Alphas is about to come out and swoop our newly discovered Omega out from under us.

Christos's eyes find mine, hope shining within. Since we caught her scent, Hana has consumed our thoughts, each of us wondering what she might be like, if she would have a problem with our jobs, or if our love for each other might be an issue like before.

But as Ezra kissed Christos on the tour bus, there was a bit of surprise on her face at first, but no one could mistake that scent of arousal that followed on its heels.

We reach a classic olive green VW van, and a woman with rainbow hair spills out of the sliding door. She reaches for Hana and Hailey, pulling them into a fierce hug. "Where the fuck have you two been? Do you have any idea how worried I've been?" The woman barely breathes as she continues. "Xavier had to warn me off the property *twice!* They're never gonna give me a job now!"

Christos clears his throat, picking up on our security guard's name. The rainbow-haired woman looks up, and her eyes widen when she sees him standing there.

"Julie," Hana starts, "may I introduce Boss? Boss, Julie." Hana is careful only to use his stage name with her friend, and I appreciate her care and attention to detail instead of spilling our carefully guarded secrets right off the bat. Speaking of, we

should probably have both Hailey and Hana sign an NDA of some kind.

“Boss. Eros. E-Z,” Julie whispers. “It’s an honor.” She steps forward and curtsies. Yep. Curtsies.

“Uh...” Ezra looks from Julie to Christos to Hana, unsure of what to do and assessing the danger level, considering her run-in with our security. “Likewise?”

“Julie here is an excellent DJ and emcee. She’s been trying to get a meeting to discuss a position on your group’s roster when the current guy retires,” Hailey says, looking between the three of us.

Gray is retiring at the end of this tour, and we need someone new. But we usually put up want ads or get references from other performers. “Call Cole on Monday, and we’ll set up an interview and trial run after the tour,” I say.

“Uh...” Julie looks at the ground and nudges a rock with the toes of her rainbow sneakers. “Is that your assistant?”

“Yes,” Christos answers.

“He might not be my biggest fan.” Another kick to the rocks.

“And why is that?” Christos looks wary, and I can’t blame him. This is starting to sound a little too off-the-wall for us.

“I’m on his list,” she whispers.

“His list?” Hana asks.

“The one presumably I’m on,” Hailey answers. “The stalker list.”

Hana shrugs. “Rightfully so, I guess.”

Ezra chimes in, keeping to his usual short words. “We’ll get it sorted.”

Julie’s head whips up, and she stares at him like he just told her she was getting a puppy. “Really?” She starts bouncing up and down on her toes, her quiet demeanor from earlier all but vanishing as she starts preparing a playlist out loud and practicing her announcer voice in the quiet woods. It echoes like a bullhorn, and she dives into the van, talking about the perfect sound effects for another group of our performers.

Ezra chuckles and turns toward Hana. “Are you too tired, or can we talk tonight?”

“I’m okay for a bit.” She looks over at Hailey, who gives her an encouraging nod.

“Do you want to come too?” I ask the Beta.

She waves me off. “I’ll stay here and help Julie calm down. She seems like she needs it.”

Hana leads us toward a clearing in the woods with picnic tables, the silence weighing heavily between us.

“Fate might have matched us,” she says when she finally stops. Her voice is low, and her formerly bright eyes are like steel with determination. “But that doesn’t mean I’ll agree to it.” I open my mouth to protest, wondering how she got the idea that we assumed she was a foregone conclusion, but she holds up a hand to stop me, continuing, “I wasn’t raised as an Omega. All my life, we thought I’d be an Alpha. I’m not some meek little thing that will blindly obey. I won’t roll over and accept this, not knowing who you are or what you’re like. It helps, I’ll admit, that Ezra is with you. But *I* don’t know you.”

Christos steps forward, his hand reaching out to brush against her cheek. “Calm, Omega. *Hana*. We don’t want to steal you away in the middle of the night. We want to know you. It’s rare to find a scent match, let alone one that matches our whole pack.”

He speaks for all three of us, and it’s true. While her scent is driving my Alpha up the wall with want and need, the more logical part of me knows this is as daunting for her as it is for us. We’re helpless to give her everything she wants because that’s what we’re biologically engineered to do. She is our Omega, maybe not in name, but in spirit, and we would be fools not to explore this.

Hana’s eyes soften at Christos’s touch, and the tension starts to ease from her shoulders. “I know,” she whispers. “It’s—I’m not used to this. I’ve never felt like this before.”

“Like what?” I ask, stepping closer to her, wanting some of her warmth for myself.

“Like I want all of you, not just one of you,” she admits, her cheeks pinking in the moonlight. “Like I can’t get enough of your scents and your touches. I’ve never reacted like I did when I caught your scent. And now, with all three of you around me, it feels like my skin is on fire, and my body is beyond my control.” Her clear blue eyes look up into mine, and my breath catches in my throat. Her floral and spice scent wraps around me, and I feel...settled.

The urge to touch her grows more potent. “We only want what you want, Hana,” I say, taking her hand in mine. “We want to explore this with you, but only if you’re comfortable.”

She seems to weigh the options but, thankfully, doesn’t pull away. “I want that too,” she says, her voice barely above a whisper. “I want to get to know you.”

A sense of relief washes over me as Hana's words sink in. That we've found someone who is not only compatible but willing to explore a relationship with us is a blessing. My thumb caresses the back of her hand, and electricity courses between us.

Ezra keeps his distance, but Christos steps closer, and I can see the fire in his eyes, the same desire that burns within me. "We want to get to know you too, Hana," he says, his voice husky with emotion. "We want to know you, worship you, and eventually cherish you forever—if you'll let us."

I bring my other hand up to Hana's face, tracing the outline of her jaw with my thumb. "But we'll take it slow and make sure you're comfortable with everything," I promise her, and I mean every word. We don't want to rush things and risk scaring her off.

Hana's eyes glisten, and she nods, a small smile playing at the corners of her mouth. "Thank you," she whispers. "I feel safe with you. All of you." She looks past me, and when she meets Ezra's eyes, a small, shaky smile plays at the corners of her lips. "We lost so much time together, Ezzy. I want to know the man you've become."

I brush my lips against the back of her hand, and Christos leans in to gently kiss her forehead.

"I—We want that too, Hana," Ezra murmurs as he steps closer, his voice full of longing.

The air around us crackles with tension, and I know we all feel the same thing—a deep connection beyond words, gifted by the universe but as fragile as a house of cards. Hana is nervous, but the spark in her eyes tells us she's willing to take a chance.

“I didn’t set out on this adventure to meet you in hopes of joining your pack,” she admits softly. “I’m not opposed, but more than anything, I need to trigger my heat.”

“Your heat?” Ezra echoes.

“I emerged late—at my college graduation, of all places. It was a goddamned frenzy as I was trying to get my diploma. It was a horrible experience, and I’ve been on suppressants while I was coming to grips with my designation. But they’ve stopped working, and now my heat is a guessing game with random flare-ups and spiking temperatures. My doctor told me to hang around Alphas, which might trigger it, so I can get it over with. It happened more and more after catching the thong.”

Her eyes are focused on the ground between us like she’s ashamed of a natural function of her body—something beyond her control that no one should be judged for. So what if it happened at graduation? My cousin first perfumed at her friend’s birthday party at a retro roller rink. She went round and round that rink, as the young Alphas chased her in circles until she skated out the door and into my aunt’s minivan. Shit happens.

“That wasn’t your fault,” I say loudly, refusing to believe this beautiful creature feels shame at such an integral part of her. Being an Alpha, Beta, or Omega isn’t the be-all-end-all of our personalities, but they do shape us in various ways. It would be like hating your blood type because it behaved precisely like blood does.

Hana looks up at me, her eyes wide in surprise.

“Your heat is a natural part of who you are, Hana,” I say gently. “No matter where or when the first time happened. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

Christos and Ezra nod in agreement, and Hana looks at each of us, her eyes searching for any hint of judgment. She finds none, only understanding and acceptance.

“I’ve never met anyone like you,” she says, her voice rife with emotion. I wonder how long she’s been ashamed of what she is. That’s no way to walk through life.

“You’ve barely met us yet,” I tease, ignoring Ezra, who protests, “But you’ll know us soon enough and discover there’s no judgment between us.”

She laughs, a soft and melodic sound that fills me with warmth. “I look forward to it.”

“And our relationship?” Christos asks, looking at Ezra and me. He’s fearful of her reaction, not that polyamory is uncommon in our society, but what if our Omega is opposed?

Hana looks between the three of us, her expression contemplative. “I’m new to polyam,” she says, her voice steady. “But I’ve never been in any real relationship before, so I don’t know exactly what I want. There were just fuck buddies in college.”

Christos, Ezra, and I let out a simultaneous feral growl at the thought of our Omega with others. Usually, I wouldn’t care, but something about her has me acting more beast than man.

“Enough of that,” she growls right back, rightfully putting us in our place. “It’s in the past, and if you can’t get past me fucking other people, how am I supposed to be present as you fuck each other? Or would I be? I don’t even know how that works or what boundaries you have. What I do know is that there’s a connection with all of you, and that’s enough for me right now.”

A sense of relief washes over me, and the tension dissipates. “We’ll take it slow,” Christos says, his voice gentle. “We’ll check in before we take any steps. As far as triggering your heat...What do you need from us?”

Hana nods, a small smile playing at the corners of her mouth. “Thank you,” she says softly. “I appreciate your patience. And my doctor said I needed to spend time around Alphas, and it would sort itself out. I haven’t thought past triggering it, and I would never ask anyone I just met to help me through it.”

Fuck, but I want to. “You don’t have to decide anything right this minute,” I say. “It would be our honor, but you have the final call in everything. We’ll do whatever it takes to help you.”

“Anything,” Christos confirms, his eyes smoldering with desire. I can feel his need coursing through him and that he wants to claim her for our pack. But this isn’t the olden days, and an Omega always has the choice. Always.

“What if we’re poorly chosen mates? It happens,” she says.

“Bullshit,” Ezra counters from behind me. He places a palm on my shoulder and steps closer until we’re in a loose circle. “I’ve loved you since we were kids—even when I hated you and your parents for turning your backs on us. We’ve been meant to be since we were born, Hana Banana. No turning back now.”

“I don’t think ‘Hana Banana’ will work if we’re mates. Not exactly a good name to moan out.” She claps a hand over her mouth like she’s ashamed of bringing it up.

Ezra lowers his voice until it's dripping in sex appeal. "*Hana...Banana...*" He follows it with a groan so obscene it makes Hana whine.

"Fuck, that works," I say, smiling as I look at Ezra. My cock is already painfully hard from being around our Omega, but throw in my two sexy as fuck partners, and I'm ready for anything.

"It kind of does," Hana says, her body slightly swaying toward Ezra.

"Come on, Hana," Christos says. "We'll walk you back; it's late. We'll meet tomorrow morning and spend time together to start triggering your heat. You can join us on the bus for more Alpha exposure during the tour, or if you'd rather stay in the van and visit with us, that's fine too."

Hana nods, her eyes sparkling with desire and arousal. "I'll sleep on it." Her eyes catch mine, and she bites her bottom lip. "But I'm already considering this a success."

Her scent wends its way around us, and Christos purrs from deep in his chest. Ezra and I growl as we move closer, our bodies barely touching her. Ezra grips her chin, tipping it up to expose the long column of her slender neck. "You're ours, Hana," he growls. "You know that, right?"

She gasps as his teeth scrape over the side of her neck, leaving a mark that will be forever embedded in our minds until we can replace it with our permanent bonding marks. "I may be still adjusting," she whispers, her eyes wide as she takes in Ezra's possessive stance. "But I know that I'm drawn to all of you, even if I'm not sure what that means yet."

I step in, needing to taste her, just once in case this is one elaborate dream, and I wake up.

My skin prickles with electricity as our lips touch, and she moans as I slide my tongue over her bottom lip, parting her mouth and tasting her for the first time. Her lips are soft and full, fitting perfectly under mine. She tastes like cherries and cream, and the scent of her arousal intoxicates me more than the strongest liquor.

Her small hands come up to my chest, gripping my shirt, and the slight pressure of her touch sends lightning through my veins. I'll never get enough of her. I want to kiss her every hour of every day for the rest of my life until we're old and gray. I want to kiss her and Ezra together at the same time. I want the taste of Christos mingling with the taste of her as I take sipping kisses from her lips. Her hands slide over my shoulders, her fingers tangling in my hair, and I groan into her mouth. She's perfect.

As quickly as it began, I end the kiss, putting distance between us so I don't succumb to my Alpha urges.

"What was that for?" she asks, her voice breathless and honeyed with desire.

"In case I was dreaming."

She chuckles, and the sound is one I'll never forget—it sounds like my future.

"Come on, Dream Girl, let us walk you back."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Hana

LAST NIGHT, AFTER HAILEY GOT JULIE SETTLED DOWN AGAIN, they waited up for me to come back, and then I spilled all the details of our conversation, including the fact that I was a scent match to all three of them. Ezra, Ace, and Christos. Three Alphas. My Alphas—if I wanted—who were willing to take it slow, get to know me, and help trigger my heat.

My mind is incapable of thinking past that aspect, and as I lay awake most of the night next to Hailey on the air mattress with Julie snoring in the front seat, I tried to imagine my life with them and came up blank.

My parents would throw a fit over their religious hang-ups, that was for sure. Would they let me see Lana? Would she still be living with them? Or would she be at college? Could I find a way to pay her tuition so her education didn't hinge on my marrying Beau? Round and round, my mind went, until the sky started to lighten a few hours later, and I was finally exhausted enough to sleep for a bit.

“Hana?” Hailey whispers from next to me.

“Mmm?”

“You awake?”

I wave at my prone body and lack of movement. “Clearly.”

“Julie needs to pee. Will you come with us?”

For the second time in two days, I crack open my eyes and find faces staring down at me. “I'm up, let's go.”

“You're not up,” Julie counters. “But you're making a valiant effort.”

I still haven't moved. I stick my tongue out at Julie, earning a chuckle from her. Tossing the blankets off, I groan and fake getting up, only to flop back down when a shadow crosses in front of the curtained windows. My heart seizes, and I point at the figure outside.

"It's Boss. He showed up about half an hour ago," Julie whispers reverently.

I narrow my eyes. "Do you even need to pee, or do you just want to talk to him some more?"

Since I told Julie about the guys being my scent matches, she's been apologetic but not at all ashamed of her earlier comments about his disco stick. "I really need to pee."

"Fine."

Before I can fully untuck myself, Hailey wrenches open the door, and I'm looking at Christos's handsome face.

"Good morning, Omega," he rumbles in his deep voice, somehow raspier in the morning than it was last night. Christ almighty, I could listen to him read the Spotify terms and conditions with rapt attention and on bated breath.

"Morning," I squeak out. "Why are you here?"

"We said we would talk in the morning," he says like it's obvious. I look down at my phone and realize it's six thirty. I look up at Christos, who's wincing. "I, uh, also figured you might want some backup if you all needed the facilities. You looked on edge last night as we walked through here."

He's right. Since the campsite adventure in Denver, we all jump at the slightest noise. Super inconvenient at a crowded and bustling site.

"Thanks."

We climb out of the van, and I look up at Christos as he towers above me. He leans down and kisses my crown, sending a tingle all the way down to my toes.

Julie calls out from a few paces ahead, “Let’s go!” She’s doing a mix of walking, jogging, and dancing as she leads the way to the washrooms.

As we make our way down the path, I can feel Christos’s hand hovering near the small of my back. It’s not quite touching, but the heat emanating from his palm makes me want to lean into him. It’s like he’s a magnet, and I’m the metal, helpless under his pull.

When we finally reach the door, Julie and Hailey rush in, leaving me alone with Christos.

“Can I ask you something?” he asks, facing me.

“Of course.”

“What are you thinking?”

I’m taken aback by his question. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, what’s going through your head right now? Are you scared? Excited? Worried?”

I swallow hard. “All the above, I suppose. I mean, the idea of matching with three Alphas is intimidating. And the thought of enduring another heat is pretty terrifying.”

“Why is it terrifying?”

I sigh, not letting the memories of my first heat pull me under. Being stuck in that hotel room as my mom came and went, berating me about my poor timing, is a memory I’ve shoved into a corner of my mind and locked away as best I could, but in my darkest moments, it resurfaces. “My first heat

was terrible. I'm afraid of how it will be now that I've been suppressing it for so long. My doctor said it could be erratic."

Christos nods slowly. "I understand. I can't imagine what you went through. But you're brave for facing it head-on, Hana. As for the three of us and our scent match, it's a lot to take in. But I meant what I promised last night. No one will rush you into anything. We'll take things slow and ensure you're comfortable every step of the way. No one will pressure you, and you're free to walk away anytime. Though, I'd be stupid not to say we hope you give us a chance. This is your choice, Hana. No one is going to take that away from you. We're here if you need us for more than triggering your heat. Or we can buy you anything you need to get through it and give you the tour bus as a safe space."

I look up at him, feeling a sense of relief wash over me. "Thank you. That means a lot. I'll-I'll think about it." For a woman who's made so few actual decisions since her designation, most of it by her own reluctance to face reality, it means more to me than he can possibly understand.

He smiles, and I notice how the sunlight brightens his eyes from a light brown to a golden whiskey. He's big and a little gruff, but damn, this man is gorgeous. It's no wonder men and women alike flock to their shows to watch them dance. I can't blame them one bit, and the stripper thing doesn't bother me at all. Even if they wished to keep dancing instead of retiring, I don't think that would make one iota of difference to me.

"You don't have to thank us, Hana. We want to take care of you. And we're honored to be your scent matches, whether or not you pick us in the end."

Before I can respond, the door swings open, and Hailey and Julie come out, signaling it's my turn. In and out in less

than five minutes, I emerge, finding the three of them in whispered conversation.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

“I was about to invite you all to breakfast,” Christos says, taking my hand when I’m closer to him.

Julie begins to answer, but Hailey elbows her. “Thanks, but we’ve got coffee in the van. Julie and I aren’t breakfast people, but Hana likes it!”

We head back to our site in silence. I yawn about a dozen times and yearn for my soft, comfortable bed back home and about forty-eight more hours of sleep—even if it means facing Mom’s wrath.

When we return, Hailey and I climb into the van, and she whispers, “Go get breakfast with them. Get to know them. This is a no-stress way to do that.”

“I know, but I hadn’t thought about what it would be like when I actually met them. We’ve been stalking them for how long? I was so worried about finding them, I never thought about what to say to them! I’m nervous!” I whisper-shout.

“We’re nervous too,” Christos answers from outside the van.

Fucking hell. I groan, and he laughs, the rumble of it doing funny things to my insides that I ignore.

“By the way,” Christos continues, “do you want to ride with us to the next venue? We have to leave in a couple of hours, and it’s a six-hour drive.”

Do I? *Do I?* “Do I?” I ask Hailey.

“You do. She does!” she shouts. She lowers her voice and turns to me. “Take your phone, and if you feel uncomfortable,

call me, and I'll bust their door open. We'll follow right behind the bus; it's not like that monstrosity could outrun us. It goes like fifty miles an hour tops."

Hailey's eyes are alight with humor, but this was the whole point of the trip, right? I sigh, feeling the bone-deep exhaustion of too few hours of sleep setting in. "Fine. But just until the next venue. We trust them, don't we? Especially with Ezra?"

"Definitely. Don't overthink it. We'll be right behind the bus. Here ya go!" Hailey thrusts my purse at me, a few things poking out of the unzipped top. "I took the liberty of adding some condoms just in case. I had a feeling things would go this way."

I shake my head. "You're the worst. And the best. But I don't plan on having sex with anyone today."

"Spontaneity is the spice of life, baby," she counters with a wink, and I shove her and then tackle her in a hug. "I love you too," she gasps as I squeeze her ribs.

Stifling a yawn, I dress in cutoff shorts and a tank top. I hop out of the van and join Christos and Julie outside.

"Okay, so what's the next venue?" I ask.

"Vegas," Julie answers. "Right, Donovan?"

I scrunch my nose. Who's Donovan?

"Chase?" Julie asks. Christos shakes his head. "Patrick? Zachariah? Roark? Oh, I read a why-choose book with a main character named Roark. Totally described as an Irish Viking with hacking skills. Brain and brawn, amirite?" she asks me, rambling on.

“I’m not telling you my name, Julie,” Christos says teasingly.

“Not yet, anyway,” she says with a pout.

Christos laughs again but confirms, “Vegas is the next stop.”

“Oooh,” Julie says, looking at the two of us with hearts in her eyes. “A White Chapel wedding.”

I fight the grin twitching my lips, wagging a finger at Julie. “I’m not eloping.”

“Not yet, anyway,” Christos says with a playful wink, echoing Julie’s earlier response. How someone so positively *Alpha* can also be so charming is beyond me. “Besides, E-Z’s mom would kill us if we did that.” His comment is quick, but it’s a strike to the heart. Mrs. Barnes was like a second mother to me; she was my mom’s best friend. “Oh, no. Don’t borrow tomorrow’s problems today,” Christos chastises, clearly putting two and two together that I know Mrs. Barnes from my past.

“But it will be a problem.”

“Maybe, maybe not.” He shrugs. “Is there anything you can do about it right now, at this moment?”

I shake my head.

“Then we worry about it later.”

“Bye, Hana! Have fun!” Hailey calls from inside the van, effectively sending me off. Christos leads me through the campsite and toward their bus. We walk silently side by side, waving to the other early risers and letting our hands brush more than necessary. Every slide of his skin against mine feels exciting and all too brief.

The tour bus is quiet from the outside, but when Christos opens the door, music assaults my ears, and there's a flurry of activity inside. Ezra is scrubbing the kitchen, and Ace is on his hands and knees, wiping down the baseboards.

"Uh, guys?" Christos asks over the music.

They look up, shock and horror on their faces. Ezra tears off his pink frilly apron, and Ace jumps up, far more graceful than I could ever hope to be first thing in the morning.

"You're early," Ace accuses.

Christos doesn't hide his grin. "She woke up early. Come in, Hana."

I climb the steps and dutifully ignore Ezra and Ace straightening their clothes and shoving things into drawers. The scent of bacon and eggs hits me as soon as I enter their space. Combine that with their delicious scents that haunted my dreams last night, and I'm a sensory-overloaded mess. My stomach growls, and Ace notices, hurrying over with a plate piled high with food. Letting them do this for me feels weird, but I know this is what good Alphas do. They support and protect their Omegas, caring for their well-being.

"Sorry for the mess," he says. "It can get gross mid-tour, so we just..." He waves around to encapsulate the chaos behind him.

I smile and take the plate gratefully, sitting at the small table. Christos joins me, wedging in like he did yesterday, his knee resting against mine under the table. We're drawn to one another, to be physically touching or within proximity. He did it earlier on the way to the bathroom and then again to the bus. He's a touch-focused person, and my Omega is preening about it.

“So, Vegas?” I say, trying to break the tension caused by my unexpected arrival. “That’s exciting.”

Ezra snorts. “Crowded and overpriced.”

I flush. “Sorry. I’m trying to make conversation.”

Ace rolls his eyes. “Ignore him. He’s grumpy because he hates doing the dishes and lost the coin toss.”

“I’m always grumpy,” Ezra retorts.

I bite my lip to stop myself from laughing. “Well, I appreciate you guys getting up early to make breakfast for me.”

“It’s the least we could do,” Christos says.

I smile, feeling a warmth spread through me at his words. It’s clear that they all genuinely care about me, even though we just met. “You guys have been on tour for a while now, right?” I ask, taking a bite of bacon.

Christos nods. “Yeah, we’ve been on the road for almost two months, and it’s been great. The shows have been amazing, and the fans have been incredible. We agreed to a few more shows at the end of the originally planned tour, so a bit longer to go now.”

“You mean, I could have just bought tickets for the new shows instead of stalking you?” I ask, my food forgotten and a laugh building in my chest.

Ace laughs. “Probably. They go on sale today, I think?”

Christos confirms with a nod.

“Anyway, while unexpected, this job has been a dream come true. I mean, we never thought we’d make it this far.

Sold-out stripper shows don't exactly come up a lot on career day."

I smile at them. "Well, you deserve it. Your show is amazing. I've seen it twice now and all of your social media videos."

Ezra snorts again. "You're only saying that because we're scent matches and you're polite."

I roll my eyes. "No, I'm saying it because it's true."

"Come on, Hana. You know as well as I do that no one in that elitist community would think what we do is amazing."

"Then I guess it's a good thing we're not there anymore, huh?"

There's a quiet moment as if it needs to sink in before Ace speaks up. "So, what do you want to do in Vegas, Hana?"

"What's your schedule like?" I ask before my ideas run away with me.

Christos rattles it off like he's got the whole tour schedule memorized. Maybe he does. "We've got rehearsal later this afternoon, then our show tonight. We're off for two days after that before heading down to Phoenix for a show and then San Diego after that."

"Then I'd like to take you all out for the day." Silence permeates the tour bus, and I suddenly regret my statement. "It's just, to trigger the heat, we need to spend time together, right? I don't know what comes after that or how long it will take, but if you're free one of those days, I can plan something?"

"Like a date?" Ezra asks with a smile, and I realize how rare it is with how it catches me off guard. His teeth are

perfectly straight, and there's a slight crinkling at the corners of his blue-grey eyes. "Hana Banana, I thought you'd never ask." He clutches his chest like he's full of emotion, and usually, I'd consider it an entirely teasing gesture, but I see the raw vulnerability in his eyes.

I consider his words and nod. "Yes. Like a date."

"I'm in," Ace declares immediately, and I grin at him. He has this way about him that makes me feel calm and supported, even though I barely know him. The feeling just settles in my bones and warms me up. "Anything you want to do, I'm game. But don't just pick something that you think we'll like. Pick something that sounds fun to you. Self-care should extend to dating."

I nod and smile softly. I've never planned a date, but what better way for them to get to know me than to show them who I am and what I enjoy?

Ezra looks gobsmacked, and I laugh, feeling a warmth spread through me at the thought of spending more time with them. It's strange, but it's like I've known them for much longer than one day. I know a big part of that is because they're Ezra's pack, and I once trusted him with absolutely everything. It seems I still do.

Christos takes over because even though Ezra is still a terse one, at least one of the Alphas is a bit more congenial. "We'd be honored, Omega." He places his hand on mine and squeezes it, engulfing it in warmth and security.

Robert slides open the door separating his front section from the rest of the bus. "Morning, Hana! Welcome back!"

"Hi, Robert. How are you today?"

“Right as rain. These guys put me up in the fancy hotel down the road for the night. Better for my back than the conversion seats up front. You guys ready to hit the road?”

Christos nods, and Robert gives him a thumbs-up before settling his overnight bag on the passenger seat and starting the engine. I text Hailey that we’re about to leave, and she and Julie drive toward the gatehouse to follow us onto the highway to the next destination.

We’ve got six hours on the bus until Vegas, and that’s a whole lot of Alpha pheromone time.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Christos

SHE'S HERE. SHE'S ACTUALLY REAL AND HASN'T RUN OFF because we're strippers. But she isn't looking for a pack. Our Omega aims to trigger her heat by surrounding herself with our scent and pheromones. And then what? Take off again as she suffers through it alone? Fuck no. I'm not saying we have to fuck her through it, but we can at least make sure she's comfortable and has everything she needs.

Hana lets out a little huff as she dozes beside me, and I look at her peaceful and beautiful face.

"You're not going to move even an inch, are you?" Ace asks from across the table.

"Fuck no. I'm exactly where I want to be. The only thing that would improve this is if we were all snuggled up."

We're about an hour outside Las Vegas, and I'm itching to shift to get my phone out of my back pocket. But no way in hell am I disturbing Hana's sleep.

"Can I borrow one of your phones?"

"Yeah, here." Ace hands his over, and I pull up Cole's contact. There's a thread of texts between Ace and Cole, consisting of Cole telling Ace what to do and Ace telling him to cool his jets.

I roll my eyes. "You're going to make Cole quit."

"Nah, he loves me. Besides, he needs to slow down a bit. He's going to overwork himself, and then we'll never find a replacement as good as him. I'm looking out for him. For all of us, really. Imagine doing this without our fairy godbeta. We'd be toast."

Ezra smirks and drapes an arm over Ace's shoulders. He kisses our blond Alpha's temple and cuddles him.

I text Cole to put Hana, Hailey, and Julie on the list for backstage passes and off whatever list he had them on previously. His texts are full of emojis; the mind-blown one is my favorite. But Hana would feel adrift without her friends by her side, and if there's one thing I'm good at, it's helping people feel at ease under pressure.

We roll up to the hotel, and I gently wake Hana. She stirs and blinks up at me, her big blue eyes heavy with sleep. I stroke her hair back from her face, and she leans into my touch, a soft purr escaping her lips. Her arousal and anticipation weave into her scent, but I think better of mentioning it or groaning out loud. But Jesus fuck, she smells incredible.

"Hey, sleepyhead," I say, my voice low and rough with emotion. "We're here."

Hana stretches and sits up, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. She looks around, her gaze flickering over the glitzy casino. "Wow," she says, her voice hushed with wonder. "I've never been to Vegas before."

I lead her off the bus, with Ezra and Ace following us. They're letting me take the lead on this as the strongest Alpha, and as much as I tell myself to let them have some time with her, my hand refuses to let go.

I look back, and they smile encouragingly, their eyes telling me they get it. We make our way through the lobby, and I check in, requesting a second room next door for Julie, Hailey, and Hana to sleep in. The other women join us at the desk and hand over IDs for their room.

“I got this,” Hailey says, pulling out her credit card. “We’ve stayed at campsites and saved a bit of money. We can’t let you pay for us.”

“Okay, then,” the Beta working reception says. “That’ll be four thousand, three hundred, twenty-two dollars and ten cents.”

Hailey chokes, her eyes wide as they swing to mine.

“Hailey, let us cover it. You’re staying here because of us; we’re happy to pay. Hell, order room service and go to the spa on us. These days, mud facials are a thing, not just a childhood phase,” Ezra teases.

She smacks his chest with the back of her hand. “I was six. But, when you include the extras, it is appealing.”

I hand over my card and get everything settled for both rooms. “We’ve got rehearsal in about an hour and a half, and the show is at nine.”

Hana looks up at me, and she frowns a bit. “How long is the rehearsal?”

“Two hours,” I answer. Her frown deepens. “But you guys go do the spa thing, rest, eat, or whatever. It’ll fly by.”

“Why does it feel like two hours is forever?” she whispers as we move away from the desk and toward the bank of elevators. I don’t think anyone was supposed to hear her mumble, but if my girl needs reassurance, she’ll get reassurance.

“Because we’re scent matches, and we’ve only found each other. Believe me, if we didn’t have to go, we wouldn’t. But we’re the leaders of this company, and if we don’t set an example, we’d be no better than any other suit bossing around employees. I promise we’ll be back as soon as we can.” I

gently squeeze her hand, and she nods, her lips curving into a small smile.

We reach our rooms, and Hana heads into the girls' room. It's spacious, with two queen-size beds and a sleek, modern design. Hana walks over to the window and gasps as she takes in the view of the city.

"This is amazing," she exclaims, turning back to me with a grin.

Hailey and Julie join her, and I hear Ace and Ezra moving around our room next door. There's a knock on the wall in a rhythm I don't know, and Hana leaps toward the wall to continue the beat.

There's a slight smile on Hailey's lips. "They used to have that special knock when they were kids."

I turn in time to see Hana wipe away a tear from her cheek. Her smile is sad, but it's not at Ezra now; it's at the time she lost with him. She's one of us—she always has been—but now it's time to prove it...right after we finish this stupid rehearsal.

I say goodbye and gather Ezra and Ace from our room. We've got a pack room with a massive bed instead of two queens, but it's similar to the one next door.

"That went better than expected," Ace says like he's not on pins and needles with our future one thin wall away.

"It did. But we have to focus. Rehearsal time, and we've never done Las Vegas. This show has to be perfect." I press the elevator button for the needed floor as Ace and Ezra thread their hands together.

We arrive at the space, and the rest of the guys are already there, warming up and stretching. We join them, and I can feel the energy of the room shift when they catch her scent on us.

The group looks at us, curious and intrigued, and I can see the hunger in their eyes.

I address the group, “Yes, you’re scenting an Omega. Her name is Hana. She’s with us, and she’s off limits. Anyone caught harassing or bothering her or her friends later tonight will answer to me. Understood?”

The guys nod, and we get down to business, Ezra barking orders a little more happily than usual. It doesn’t go unnoticed if the sly smirks and raised brows are any indication. The rehearsal goes well, but I can feel the pressure of distance from Hana mounting with each passing moment. Despite the intensity of rehearsal, my mind keeps drifting back to her. I can’t help but think about her soft curves and how she smells. I’m desperate to get back to her, and by the time rehearsal ends, I’m an antsy mess.

Finally, we all head back to our rooms to rest and prepare for the show in a few hours. As soon as we open the door to our suite, sweaty and desperate for showers, there’s a knock on the wall. Ezra smirks and knocks back, using their old rhythm.

He opens the front door, and Hana comes bounding in, throwing herself into his arms.

“Hey, Banana. We were going to shower and then come find you,” he says.

She shoves her nose in the crook of his neck, uncaring about the sweat; in fact, she inhales it like it’s oxygen and she’ll die without it. “Missed you too much to wait.” She whines low in her throat.

“Hana, you’re burning up,” Ezra says, looking at Ace and me with concern.

“It’s already better,” she says, rubbing her cheek against Ezra’s. He looks shocked at the gesture but returns it all the same. “You make it better.”

“It’s your heat, Hana,” Hailey says from the doorway behind her. “Your Omega wants to be close to her Alphas, and it’s pushing you to mate them.”

“I know,” she moans. “Stupid biology.” Logic doesn’t stop her from rocking against Ezra’s body, her thighs around his hips, her breasts pressed to his chest.

Did I mention she’s not wearing pants? She’s bottomless, with nothing but a tank top and black cotton panties.

God, this is torture. Having her so close and not being able to touch her is almost more than I can take. Ace steps up beside me, his hand running over my hard cock. The caress is blissful torture.

“Hana?” Hailey calls, barely getting a reaction from our Omega.

I step forward, out of Ace’s touch, and toward the doorway. “I promise you; we won’t go too far. We have to help ease this for her.”

Hailey narrows her eyes, determining if I’m being truthful or not.

“I swear it, Hails,” Ezra says. “Not until she’s past the fever and begging for it with a clear head.”

“Gross, Ezra. Fine. Knock if you need me.” Hailey turns, giving one last look at Hana, who’s still trying to climb Ezra like a tree, and leaves. I close the door after her and turn toward my pack.

My pack.

Ace steps up beside Ezra, running a hand along Hana's side. "What do you need, Hana? Tell us."

"I don't know," she wails, nuzzling deeper into Ezra.

"We're going to take a shower, Hana," Ace whispers in her ear, flicking the lobe with his tongue as he finishes his sentence. "You're going to get in with us and get nice and clean. Then we'll help you take the edge off, but we're keeping our promise to Hailey."

Ezra carries her to the bathroom, her legs still wrapped around his waist and her arms around his neck. She squirms and moans, rubbing against him for more.

"That's it, Hana," I whisper in her ear as I step up behind her in the large walk-in shower, clothes and all. Her hands reach out to grip my hair, tugging gently.

"I want you. I want you all. I want your hands on me. I want your cocks in me."

I turn on the hot and steamy shower to soothe our Omega. She doesn't ease despite the comforting warm water. In fact, she grinds down harder on Ezra, making him groan and causing his fingers to dig into her pert ass.

Clarity comes in the form of Ace smacking him upside the head, and he gently puts Hana down. I help pull her shirt off, and Ace tugs her panties down.

"No cocks, Hana," I say. "We promised Hailey."

"How badly do you want this, Hana?" Ace asks, his eyes taking in the naked woman before us.

"So much," she moans and lets her head fall back. "I can't think. I can't focus."

I let my eyes trail down her body, from her slender neck to her full breasts. She has a soft stomach and flared hips I want to hold on to as I rut her. There's a small, soft thatch of curls at the apex of her thighs, and her legs are lithe and toned like she's a runner. My cock presses against the material of my shorts, but I keep them on. I made a promise and intend to keep it.

"We'll help you," I whisper into her ear. She shivers as my breath dances across her wet, sensitive flesh, and she whimpers.

I ease her down on the tile, pointing the shower head toward the other side of the space. Ace sits behind her, his hands sliding from her ribs to her hips, anchoring her in place.

Once she's settled, I adjust the shower head again, pointing it between her legs and letting her find the best position. The stream of water falls onto her clit, and she arches upward with a moan. All I want to do is fall to my knees and worship her.

I kneel on the tiled floor and lean forward, pulling her hair back and exposing her neck. I bite down gently, not breaking the skin but putting pressure where my mate mark will go one day.

Her hands fly to her clit, stroking it quickly as she nears orgasm. Ezra is on her other side, his words filtering past the internal monologue I have going about how I will make this woman my mate one day, and the shuddering breaths and gasps slipping from Hana's lips.

"That's right, Hana. Get yourself there. Knowing all the while, the only thing the three of us are thinking is that we wish it were us. That your fingers were ours. That no matter how good this shower feels, it will be a hundred times better

when it's our fingers, our tongues, our cocks, bringing you to the edge of bliss and flinging ourselves off of it together."

Hana groans, her eyes snapping open and wild with lust. "Knot. Need a knot."

"Not today, baby," Ezra continues. "Prove you can take it. Do it, Hana. Come for us. Come all over your fingers, all over us. Imagine how good it will be when we knot you so fucking good we're joined for hours on end. Never ceasing, never coming apart until we're all boneless and satisfied. Only you can do that to us, Hana. Only you."

Hana's head flies back and rests on Ace's shoulder as she comes, her body shivering and shaking as the orgasm washes through her. Hana's scent changes, becoming sharper and more demanding, as if the pheromones are calling us to her.

I lean closer to her, my body moving without conscious thought. Ace's hand on my chest stops me, his eyes boring into mine. "Later, Christos."

I nod, hating that he's right but thankful he's here to keep us in check because he does the same to Ezra a second later.

Hana is a panting heap between the three of us, and I scoop her up into my arms, standing on shaky legs with tented wet shorts.

Ezra gathers a couple of towels, drying Hana and wrapping her into them. She lazily opens her eyes, blinking a couple of times. "When did you get such a filthy mouth, Ezra Barnes?"

He smirks. "Liked that?"

"Very much," she says with a sigh, nuzzling against my chest and looking past my shoulder at Ace. "And you are very, very good at restraining me."

“You ain’t seen nothing yet, Dream Girl.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Hana

I'M A BONELESS MESS, HUFFING IN CHRISTOS'S SCENT LIKE IT'S glue, and I have a massive problem. The four of us are lounging on the massive bed in their suite after the shower escapades.

I pull back, looking up into Christos's ruggedly handsome face. He's chewing his bottom lip, and I tug the swollen flesh from his teeth with my thumb.

"Thank you," I say, lifting my head and looking at Ace and Ezra to make sure all three know they're included. "That was a little abrupt, but thank you for helping me through that."

"Any time, Dream Girl," Ace says. "How are you feeling?"

I take stock of my body, but all I feel is blissful after they surrounded me with their scents and encouraged me to fuck my fingers. "Good. I think the worst of it has passed. It was weird. When you three left, it felt like the room's temperature was too hot, and my skin got tight and itchy."

"Do you think your heat is coming?" Christos asks, his face concerned at the prospect.

"Mmm. Not yet, I think. Doctor Attwood said it would be erratic, so I can expect more of these little flare-ups until it takes hold."

Ezra runs a hand over my towel-covered hip, giving it a light squeeze. "We're here if you need us for anything, but Christ, Hana, that was intense."

Ace smacks him on the chest. "Be sensitive."

Ezra looks properly chastised and mumbles, “Sorry.” He’s perched on the edge of the bed, his towel split and inching higher than respectable but not high enough to satisfy my curiosity. I felt him pressed against me in the shower. I want to discover what he’s hiding under there. He’s no longer the boy I once knew, and I want to learn about the man he’s become.

I should feel ashamed of how my body reacts to them—the way my Omega needs rush to the surface and demand their touch, but I can’t find it in me. They helped, and I’m grateful. But I’m starting to understand why a pack might be a good choice. If this was intense and just a flare-up, I can only imagine how exhausting a heat would be for one Alpha to handle. Sure, there are toys and the things that I used for my first heat, but having all three of them to guide me through it would be transcendent.

Not once did they cross a line, and their restraint only makes them more appealing, if I’m honest.

Men, Alphas especially, who keep their word are hard to find, and I’m realizing how lucky I am that we’re scent matches. Once my heat passes and I get over that hurdle, I can start thinking of the possible future with this pack.

“Do you—” I start, then clear my throat. “Do you think if we’re still together when the heat hits, you guys could, um...”

“We’ll be there if you want us, Hana,” Ace answers gently, and it’s like a weight has been taken from my shoulders. Last time, I was alone, with only Mom to “support” me and a delivery of “self-help” toys to get me through it. This time, even if it’s not everything I imagine, it will be infinitely better.

Without making a big deal about my basically asking them to fuck me when my body demands it, Christos curls up on my right, and Ace takes up my left. Ezra looks down at the three

of us, a corner of his mouth tipping up in the slightest smile. “You fit, Hana Banana. And we’re going to woo the shit out of you. You’re not a passing fascination.”

A yawn eclipses my grin, and strong arms pull me closer. Ace’s beachy scent wraps around me, and his chest thrums against my back.

“Rest, Omega. We’ll wake you for the show tonight.”

True to their word, they wake me a while later, handing me off to Hailey and Julie so they can head down early and we can get ready in our room.

“How did it go?” Hailey asks with glee as we pull on dresses for the night, taking turns to zip each other up.

Julie adjusts her wig—tonight’s choice is a white, chin-length bob—and hikes her tits up to her chin. She looks fantastic, and if the guys don’t hire her as the new emcee, I’d be shocked. She’s confident, alluring, and her whimsical personality makes her relatable in a way I haven’t experienced before. “We heard how it went. These walls are too thin for four thousand whatever dollars a night.”

I shrug, refusing to feel embarrassed over a screaming orgasm. “Jealous?”

“Very,” Julie says, then quickly corrects, “Not about the guys, but that you had a screaming orgasm.”

“Try the shower,” I suggest with a wink. She crows with laughter, and we spend the rest of the evening eating the room service the guys sent up and comparing our weird sex stories.

A knock sounds at the door, and a hotel employee holds out a padded envelope. Hailey takes it and opens it once he leaves. Inside are three lanyards with backstage passes

attached. Julie squeals, gripping hers like it'll grow legs and walk off if she puts it down.

“Meeting you two was the best thing that happened to me all year. And that includes the time six months ago when I found nirvana in an ashram with a Beta named Porter who did this thing with his tongue that toy companies just can't replicate.”

We dissolve into laughter, and before I know it, we reach the line for the show. We're in one of the smaller hotels, but that doesn't mean shit in Vegas. They're all gargantuan.

Xavier, the security guard we're now well acquainted with after our stalking adventures, finds us in line and rolls his eyes at Julie's enthusiastic greeting.

“Come on, you three. This way,” he says after checking our badges and calling Cole. He leads us out of the line and toward a side door manned by two other guards.

“Hey, Martin! Hiya, Jones!” Julie says happily. They do a double-take and start asking questions as Xavier lets us in. Julie barrels on, “I know! I'm happy to see you too, but hopefully more often over the next few years! Fingers crossed, boys! Momma's on the hunt for a new job!”

One guard laughs, and the other groans. That's clearly a pretty common reaction for Julie because she just grins and follows Xavier as he leads us down the hall.

Cole stops in front of us. “A few rules, ladies. No messing with the guys before their performance, no getting up on stage, no chaos. And you”—he points in Julie's face—“I don't know what you did to get an appointment on the books, but if you fuck with them, I will end you.”

“It's *you*,” she breathes.

“Me?” Cole rears back, confused at Julie’s tone.

“Porter. Ashram. That tongue thing.”

“Oh, fuck,” he groans. He turns on his heel and walks away, calling, “Third door on the left!”

“Porter! Wait! Do it again!” She rushes off after him, but Hailey grabs her wrist to keep her with us.

“Porter as in...”

“As in the Beta who made me transcend planes and see God six months ago.”

Well, shit.

“He’s scary,” Hailey says, eyeing his retreating form.

“I kinda love him,” Julie says. “I wonder if he’s single.”

“Worst pairing in the history of romance,” Hailey says, earning herself a smack to the arm. “Watch it!”

“You deserved that.”

“Hey, baby,” an Alpha says as he walks by, his scent of apples and cinnamon making me sneeze. I vaguely recognize him as the Alpha that pulled Hailey on stage last night. The one she put my scent all over so he would bring it back to my Alphas. Not *my* Alphas, but...well, maybe?

“I’m no one’s baby. Keep walking, Romeo,” Hailey says, widening her stance and subtly pushing me behind her.

“It’s Jake, or Adonis, if you prefer. But Romeo works for me.”

“JAKE!” Christos roars from the third door on the left. Taking in the bristling Alpha, my body revs up for a more thorough round two. Jake’s eyes widen as he catches my scent,

arousal now lacing through the gardenia scent. “Go ice your knee.”

Jake turns. “Nice to meet you, Hana. And friends.” He tips an imaginary cap and wanders away.

“In here before the vultures descend,” Christos says.

We scurry inside, finding only Ezra. “Where’s Eros?” I ask, barely remembering to keep his name to myself.

“Off meditating. Cole is probably giving him a five-minute warning. Oh, that reminds me, Cole brought in the NDA paperwork. I know it’s odd, but we’re protective of our lives outside the show. Can you guys sign it?” Ezra asks.

We nod. Of course.

Once the paperwork is signed, Ezra extends his hand to Julie. “I’m Ezra. Nice to officially meet you.”

Julie stands there, starstruck. She looks at Christos, who shakes his head. “It’s much more fun listening to you guess my name.”

She pouts but starts throwing out random names like Ebenezer and Ferdinand, breaking the tense moment with her brand of awesome.

Ace joins us a few minutes later and walks directly up to me. He tucks a lock of wayward hair behind my ear and tilts my face up to his. “Omega,” he whispers, leaning down and kissing me.

I go up on tiptoes, chasing his lips, but he pulls back as Cole’s voice booms outside the door. “It’s go time!”

He releases a breathless laugh and leans close, murmuring against my lips, “We’ll finish this after the show.”

I swoon. Fucking swoon. Ace's hand bands around my lower back, keeping me pressed to him.

Ezra steps up next and kisses me softly, his tongue obscenely flicking at my lower lip and making my slick reappear. He murmurs against my ear, "Until later, Banana."

"Least sexy pet name ever," I grumble.

Christos approaches me last, his overpowering Alphaness wrapping around me like a security blanket. "Stick around and watch. We'll be thinking of you the whole time."

I nod, letting him kiss me too. It feels right. Each kiss is like a glimpse at their personalities. One is playful and fun, another is sexy as all fuck, and the third feels like he's shoring up my defenses.

"Come on," Christos says, taking my hand and leading me into the hall. Ezra, Ace, Julie, and Hailey are behind us, and we're met with the rest of the performers, huddled up before their show starts. "Guys, this is Hana, Julie, and Hailey," he says, pointing out each of us. "Hands off or lose them."

"We all heard your speech earlier," one guy says, and I recognize him as one of the dancers in Jake's group—Four Studs. *Honestly, who picks these names?*

"What speech?" I ask Christos, earning a low *Oooh* from a few guys.

"The one where he told us to keep our distance," Jake says. "Nice to meet you all. We like our jobs, so we'll be keeping a healthy distance. No offense."

"Let's have a good show, gentlemen. Watch those steps, and remember the stage is about two feet bigger in all directions than usual. Use the space as we did in rehearsal, and

we'll be good," Christos says. They put their hands in the center and cheer as they break.

The emcee starts welcoming the crowd and announcing the dancers. Julie, Hailey, and I head toward the wings to the left of the stage to watch their performance.

It flies by in a blur, but when my guys are due to pull someone onto the stage with them, I see they each pick someone's grandmother or mom to join them. No bachelorettes, no feisty women to put their hands all over them, just some comedic relief. As soon as they all have their grannies on stage, I breathe a sigh of relief and let go of the tension in my shoulders. This is ridiculous. It's literally their job to dance on and with their attendees. I have no right to step in and suddenly make them change their entire routine.

Before I know it, Ace is on stage by himself, doing his strip down to his glittery thong. He carefully removes it, teasing the audience and showing us an eyeful from backstage.

Then, instead of launching it into the audience, he throws it at me in the wings. I snatch it out of the air and bring it to my chest.

They may be changing their routine to not fuck with our fragile newness, but I am one hundred percent behind this particular change. After all, I know what happens when a woman brings home Ace's thong. It ends up under their pillow every night, and their dreams are filled with his body doing sinful things to them.

Without one ounce of shame, I shove the thong into my bra to keep it for later. Because apparently, I haven't learned my lesson.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Ezra

I WAKE UP BETWEEN ACE AND CHRISTOS, THE THREE OF US sprawled out on our bed after our performance and talking with Hana late into the night. We walked her next door sometime just before the sun came up, all of us reluctant to separate but knowing she needed sleep. Nightowl hours are tough to get used to, and while we operate on a four-hour sleep and a nap most days, Hana does not.

Since the start of the Omega search, I've always thought it was a pointless endeavor. No one could love all three of us. No one could be okay with both our job and our relationships.

But then Hana showed up, and I could see the future crystal clear. I can't imagine our lives progressing without her, but she's hesitant.

It's understandable, given how we were raised in Houston. We grew up in a community where Omegas were often shunted aside and left to their own devices until they created their own cliques and factions. They were only beholden to their Alphas and the bigoted rules they created within our community. It wasn't until I was out of that life that I realized it was so very fucking different outside that small circle. They miss out on so much of life because they believe in only what they've been taught. They'll never experience the freedom of choosing their partners and building their own life.

I tilt Christos's head to me, kissing his lips with all the passion I harbor for him, Ace, and Hana. The need for them always sits low in my stomach, burning like embers, but like a tendril of flame coming to life, it flares up inside me. He

wakes as he kisses me back, pouring his love into our bond, sparking life in my soul.

Ace hums as his hand slides around my side, settling on my already-hard dick. “Starting without me?”

I turn, kissing him as fervently as I kissed Christos and feeling as much need for him as he feels for me. His mate mark burns with desire on my left pec, and he caresses it before biting my lip. As I slip my hand down his naked body, there’s a knock on the wall, and I grin against Ace’s mouth.

Ready to rock and roll? that knock says. A phrase Hana picked up from a movie she shouldn’t have been watching at such a young age, but the phrase stuck.

I could respond with *No* and drive her crazy. Or I could tell her *Come back tomorrow*, another favorite of ours because we got grounded often enough.

Instead, I choose another. *Five minutes*.

She knocks again, impatient. *Now, Ezzy!*

I relent and knock twice in rapid succession and then once more. *Come in*.

“She’ll be at the door in three, two...”

Knock, knock.

“You have a whole language with that, don’t you?” Christos asks as he gets out of bed to open the door.

“Sure,” I answer. “Treehouses and strict parents require it.”

Hana bounds in, jumping into Christos’s arms as soon as she’s over the threshold. “Hi! Ready?”

“For what?” Ace asks, his hand still holding my cock under the sheet. His thumb flicks the piercings, and I groan as

he smiles wickedly.

“Our date?” she says hesitantly. “I got a little overzealous and planned a whole thing. It starts in,” she leans around Christos to check the clock, “half an hour.”

We scramble out of bed, Ace uncaring that he’s letting it all hang out. Hana gapes at him but doesn’t avert her eyes.

“Goddamn,” she breathes.

“I know,” I say.

She drags her eyes up my body, and I clap my hands. “Move out, boys. Let’s go. We got a hot date.”

Hana laughs and flops onto the bed, and I watch her curl into the bedding and sniff the pillows and sheets, rolling her body in our scents. Warmth suffuses my chest, and I clap a palm over my pec, trying to slow it down just a bit so I don’t die before we see this thing through.

Twenty-four minutes later, Hana leads us down the hall and into the elevator. When we get to the lobby, she directs us out to a waiting car.

“Miss Henderson?” the driver asks.

“That’s me. Are we okay on time?” she asks.

He nods as he opens the door. “It’s not far, and there’s minimal traffic this early in the morning.”

We pile into the limo Hana rented, and he drives for four minutes before pulling up to a creperie place on the strip.

“Come on,” Hana cheers, climbing out and impatiently tapping her foot at us until we hustle. She opens the door, ushering us inside, and steps up to the hostess stand. It smells fucking heavenly in here.

“Reservation for Henderson?”

“Right this way,” the hostess says with a smile. She leads us to a table laden with crepes, spreads, juice, and coffee. “An assortment as requested.” Hana looks from the table to us, hesitantly gauging our reactions.

“What are those?” Christos asks, pointing at the tower of profiteroles.

“Puff pastry filled with cream,” Hana answers. I look over at Ace and see his lips twitching. Mine begin to do the same, and a snort slips out of me before I can stop it, drawing the attention of the other early risers in the restaurant.

Hana puts two and two together and smacks my chest. “Oh, you never grew up, did you?”

I shake my head, shoving a crepe in my mouth to keep the laughter from slipping out.

“How are those six inches treating you?” Ace asks, continuing the playful banter.

I smirk around the mouthful, and Hana sighs, dropping her face into her hands. But then, she mumbles, “It would probably be better if it was drizzled in chocolate sauce.” Her head whips up, and she blushes when she finds all three of us staring at her with wide eyes.

Ace takes the bottle of chocolate syrup off the table and shoves it into his pocket. I shoot him a look. “What?” he asks, all innocent-like. “It’s for science.”

“Ace!”

“Ooh, yeah, shout it just like that.”

Hana throws her head back with a laugh, and we spend the rest of breakfast making horrible jokes about the food, only to

hear that sweet laugh again and again.

Too many crepes and twenty minutes later, we're emerging from the limo again, but this time, we're at a ranch just north of The Strip.

"Hana?" I ask as she clambers out. "What are we doing here?"

"You'll see." She's bouncing up and down, the nervous and excited energy coursing through her body.

"Are you Pack Bakas?" an older woman asks as she emerges from the barn.

"Yes, ma'am," Christos answers, then looks questioningly at Hana.

"I told her it was me and a pack, and they put it down as your name, I guess." She looks shy about the goof, the tips of her ears going a little pink, but fuck, I love how that sounds. All of us as Pack Bakas.

"Right on time. I'm Mrs. Ennis, and I own the place. This way." She motions us into the weathered barn, and we duck under the doorway.

"It's lovely," Hana whispers. Her eyes dart around the space, and she lets out a little squeal when she sees the horse stables. Ace and Christos are looking around the barn, their expressions wary. I guess it's time to see if either of my packmates has ever ridden a horse.

"They tend to love Omegas," Mrs. Ennis says. "All that calm and warmth. They like a thing of beauty and grace." Mrs. Ennis slips a halter on the horse and runs her hand down the beast's face, soothing him. She flicks the latch on the stall, leading the horse out of the stable.

Christos's eyes widen as he watches Hana with the horse, clearly measuring how it will support his massive frame. But Mrs. Ennis sees his trepidation and laughs. "Oh, you might be a big one, but I've had bigger"—insert snort—"and your young miss was clear about your sizes when she called. I've got a few horses that should do the trick for you three."

As if summoned, three heads poke out over the fenced stalls, all massive compared to Hana's little gray pony.

Well, okay then.

My thighs are burning, and the beast under me is no more happy about our situation than I am. We're last in the line of riders as Hana leads us along a trail and toward God knows what.

My foot twitches in the stirrup, sending a cramp up my thigh. Fuck, I haven't missed riding one little bit. The lessons I had as a kid were terrible but expected, and at least now, I can keep my seat if needed.

Hana looks like she's been doing this all her life as she leads the way. Maybe she has. Maybe this is something she enjoys and wants to share it with us.

Ace is a natural, and it makes me want to spank his ass. He's behind Hana, having the time of his life. His body is languid as he lets the horse set the pace, shifting his hips as Hana taught him.

Christos, on the other hand, is struggling. I don't know that I've ever seen him afraid of something, but the moment his ass landed in the seat, his shoulders have been bunched up around his ears, and he's been fidgeting nonstop.

"You gotta relax, man," I tell him. He turns his head a fraction to hear me better but refuses to let go. "They can feel

your fear and unease. Relax into it.”

“Not a chance. If I die up here, remember to give Cole his bonus at the end of the tour. He did a good job.”

“He arrested our Omega,” I counter.

“Fair point. Dock ten percent.”

I laugh, and as Hana crests the hill we’ve been climbing, she lets out a whoop of excitement. “We’re here!”

“Where is here?” Christos asks darkly. “Hell?”

Hana dismounts with ease and loops the reins around a post. She helps Ace hop down as I clamber from my seat, landing on unsteady legs and almost falling on my face. Before she can witness my shame, I help Christos down, the big lug refusing to relax his body, even for a dismount.

“Come on, man. Work with me here,” I tease as I try to shift his tree-trunk thigh. He does this weird slide thing off the saddle in slow motion, and his feet finally reach the ground.

“That was horrible. And we have to go back.” The fear in his voice and the little crack on the last word have me chuckling. He looks over at Hana. “But she’s happy.”

Lord knows what she has planned next, but she’s showing us what she likes, and the opportunity to get to know her is more than any of us could have dreamed of.

Hana seems lost in thought, and I wonder what’s going through her mind. She’s looking out at the vista, and I wave the other two off for a second. I stand next to her and take in the view.

“It’s beautiful,” I say, breaking the silence.

“It is,” she agrees. Her hand reaches toward me, and our fingers lace together, sending a calming wave over me. She turns toward me, and her gaze traces my jaw but doesn’t reach my eyes. “I’m sorry.” She takes a shuddering breath, and I squeeze her fingers, not rushing her to explain but silently sending my support as she works through the words. “I’m sorry my family cut yours off completely. It wasn’t right for Mom to ostracize your mom.”

Here it is. The deep conversation we’ve avoided so far but need to have.

I clear my throat. “She doesn’t know better. I don’t think any of them do. They’re in a vacuum, being born, raised, and buried there for generations. I hate your mom, don’t get me wrong. It was a dick thing to do. But I’m also sorry my father started all of this.”

If he hadn’t embezzled money, we’d still live there, and Hana and I would have grown up together. But then, I wouldn’t have met Ace and Christos. It’s a weird feeling of regret and thankfulness for what my dad did, and it doesn’t make sense half the time.

Hana squeezes my hand, and I can feel the tears prickling at the corners of her eyes. “I wish it didn’t play out that way all those years ago. I wish it weren’t such a disaster of a community,” she whispers.

“It doesn’t have to be,” I tell her firmly. “You and I don’t have to be like our families. We can be better than them. We can move forward.”

She looks up at me, her eyes shining with unshed tears. “I want to move forward with you,” she says, her voice barely above a whisper. “Even if this doesn’t work, I want to be a better person than I’ve been raised to be.”

My heart skips a beat at her words, and before I can stop myself, I lean in and press my lips to hers. It's a soft, gentle kiss, but it's enough to send sparks flying through my body.

When we pull back, she's smiling up at me, her eyes crinkling at the corners. Hana might have been one hell of a surprise, but I will grab onto her with both hands and never let go if she'll let me.

My phone rings in my pocket, and I break eye contact to check it. It's Mom's ringtone, and since I haven't heard from her in a few days, I should answer it. Plus, she doesn't know about Hana, and I want to tell her.

"Speak of the devil," I say, waving my phone in front of me so Hana can see who's calling.

"Mom, hey," I answer with a smile. Hana's smile looks frozen, and I know she's afraid of Mom's reaction. She doesn't need to be. Mom is the most forgiving person I know, which is why I hate that my dad reached out to her.

"Hey, Ezra. It's Ron. Your mom had a little accident. She's okay, but she's a little unsteady."

"What happened?"

"This morning, the new delivery guy left a box on the porch without ringing the bell, so she didn't know it was there. She had a tumble, and I'm with her at the hospital getting checked out. No stress, man, she's okay, but I know if it were my mom, I'd want to know."

"Yeah, thanks, Ron. We're coming home. Can you stay with her?"

"No place I'd rather be, Ezra." Big old softy adores Mom, and I couldn't have picked a better man for her. "Okay. See you soon. We should be there in a couple of hours."

“See you.”

I hang up and refocus on Hana. She’s gripping my hand and looking up at me with concern.

Christos and Ace move closer, obviously feeling my distress across our pack bond. “Mom fell. She’s in the hospital, but Ron says she’s okay. We gotta go to Texas.”

Hana’s eyes are wide, and Christos claps a hand on my shoulder. “Keep calm. Let’s get down the hill, and I’ll book us tickets in the car. Mama Barnes is tough, Ezra. She’s got this.”

This is the one reason I’m not resisting retirement. Once we’re done with this tour, we can always be nearby in case she needs us. Both Ace and Christos have siblings who live close to their parents, but I’m all Mom has. She needs me, and right now, I need her to tell me she’ll be fine.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Hana

THE AIRPLANE TOUCHES DOWN IN DALLAS, AND EZRA GRIPS Ace's hand across the aisle. I'm beside Christos and still shocked that Ezra grew up so close yet far from me.

As soon as the plane slows, Ezra pulls his phone out and starts making calls. I can barely hear him over the sound of the other passengers and the unclicking of seatbelts before the sign turns off, but then he hangs up and calls someone else.

"Mom?" The fear in his voice is palpable, and though his neighbor said she was okay, Ezra wouldn't believe it until he saw her with his own eyes. "Yes, we came! Of course we did. We'll be there in a bit. No, I'm not fussing over you." He rolls his eyes. "Mom. Mom! Ugh, fine. Love you too."

I power on my phone, firing off a text to Hailey and Julie that we've landed. They send back encouragement, and Hailey asks me to tell Mrs. Barnes she says hi. They're going with the rest of the tour to Phoenix and keeping up with the travel so Julie can interview with Cole and Gray, the current DJ, and we can rejoin them when Ezra feels comfortable enough to leave his mom.

"It'll be okay," Christos whispers to me. "She'll end up fussing over us instead of the other way around. I promise it."

His calm and steady presence has helped keep some of my anxiety away. When I'd initially said I would stay at the hotel with Julie and Hailey, Ezra bristled.

Christos suggested I come with, if for nothing other than the Omega vibes I could emit to help calm Ezra. I wanted to be there for Ezra, and if Mrs. Barnes is still upset about the

past, I want to apologize for my parents and their actions when she needed help. But on the flight, I felt like a shaky mess too, which seemed to worsen Ezra's anxiety, so Ace and I swapped seats about ten minutes into the flight. I now realize it was probably another impending heat symptom, so the switch was a good call.

As soon as the plane reaches the gate, we stand with the rest of the crowd and follow the line of passengers to the exit. We didn't bring any bags, having gone straight from our date to the airport, so it's a breeze to pass through the terminal and order an Uber out front to take us to Mrs. Barnes's place. Ace told me not to worry, they have spares of everything at Mrs. Barnes's place, and we could get anything we needed, so long as we made the soonest flight.

Ezra is silent on the drive, but Ace and Christos keep up the encouraging words. Before long, the Uber pulls up to a little white rambler with immaculate flower beds, blue shutters, and a bright red door.

Christos pushes open the car door, and we spill out. The door opens, and there stands Mrs. Barnes, looking the same as she did years ago, but this time, there's a white bandage around her head, and her arm is in a sling.

"I told you not to come," she chides from the doorway, trying to cross her arms over her chest and wincing at the movement.

"Like I'd start listening to you now," Ezra volleys back, crossing the manicured lawn and wrapping his mom up gingerly in a hug. She's smiling as she looks up toward the sky and wraps her good arm around Ezra.

"You smell different," she says, giving his shirt a whiff. "Ezra?"

Ace takes my hand and leads me up the path after Christos, who swoops in and kisses Mrs. Barnes on the cheek.

“You smell different too. But the same. Anyone want to clue an old blind lady in on what you’ve been up to?”

She hasn’t mentioned my presence yet, and I’m almost afraid to draw attention to myself.

“Eh, you’ve still got like fifteen percent of your vision. Not entirely blind yet, just legally. Stop playing the sympathy card.” Ace chuckles when Mrs. Barnes smacks him on the arm. “We brought a new—and old—friend. Mrs. Barnes, you remember Hana Henderson?”

“Hana?” she asks, nearly shoving Ezra and Christos out of the way. She looks toward Ace, and her gaze swings around wildly. It’s then I realize that Mrs. Barnes can no longer see.

“Hi, Mrs. Barnes,” I say quietly. Ace continues pulling me forward, and Mrs. Barnes reaches out. I guide her good hand to my face, and she chokes on a laugh as she feels my face and rests her hand on my shoulder for a squeeze.

“Oh, Hana! Hi, honey!” She pulls me in for a bone-crushing hug despite only having one arm. Any fear I had that she harbored anger at me for my mom’s shunning goes entirely out the window. “My God, you’re not the same little terror I remember from back then. Welcome, sweetheart. Come in.”

She grips my hand and leads me down the hall of her house. Everything is clear of clutter, the halls are bare of side tables, and all her art and picture frames are higher than I would typically place them. The fingertips of her uninjured hand trail along the wall, and I see the slight smudge the

repeated action has left over time, like faint gray racing stripes on the pristine white walls.

Ace, Ezra, and Christos hover behind us, Ezra closer than necessary, but his mom doesn't falter even once.

As we walk through the house, sadness for Mrs. Barnes fills me. Losing her sight must have been a devastating blow, but she handles it gracefully. I admire her strength and resilience and know that Ezra must feel the same way. He's always been close to his mom, and it's clear that their bond has only grown stronger after everything they've been through.

Mrs. Barnes leads me into the kitchen, where the smell of baked goods fills the air. She pulls out a chair for me and starts rummaging through the cupboards.

"I made cinnamon rolls this morning before everything went topsy-turvy. Boys, grab some plates," she orders, putting them to work as soon as they enter the kitchen.

I watch as she effortlessly puts on a pot of coffee and starts mixing icing for the cinnamon rolls, her movements practiced and precise. It's clear that she's done this a million times before.

As the guys finish setting the little round table and bring over the pan that's now drizzled with icing, Mrs. Barnes and I sit.

"How are you, Hana?" she asks. "It's not every day my son brings home a blast from the past."

I chuckle, and Ezra squeezes my hand. "I'm okay, Mrs. Barnes. Just figuring things out," I answer, taking a bite of the warm, gooey cinnamon roll.

"Oh, I bet. You're an Omega, huh? That's quite the plot twist. Your mom was certain you were an Alpha. Hell, we all

were, what with your wild streak and penchant for staring down the boys until they submitted to you.” Mrs. Barnes laughs. “I remember your stare down with Ezra when you guys were little. I think the only reason you both called a truce was that the cupcakes were ready.”

“Sounds about right,” I say with a laugh. Ezra’s eyes twinkle with mirth, and his whole body relaxes now that he’s in his mom’s presence. “It was a surprise to us all. I emerged late.”

“That must have been a shock to everyone, but especially you. I hope you’ve made peace with it.”

“I’m working on it,” I answer. Christos’s hand rests on my thigh, and he gives it a little squeeze. The warmth of his encouragement seeps into my bones.

Since emerging, I’d gone along with the flow—with what was expected of me. But here, surrounded by my scent matches and being reintroduced to Ezra’s mom, I feel more like myself than I have since graduation. Not because of the Alphas around me but because I finally have a small feeling that *this is who I’m supposed to be, and it’s not bad.*

The memory of my graduation, on the other hand, stings. My crowning accomplishment has been shrouded in anguish since that moment, and instead of feeling proud of finishing at the top of my class in college, all I’ve got to show for it is a deep sense of shame and anger at my new designation.

I’ve become an expert in burying my head in the sand, but now, I want to poke out and investigate my surroundings, getting to know these Alphas and seeing what life could be like as an Omega outside my hometown.

“I went to Westbrook University and finished top of my class. I planned on going into business, but that didn’t pan out. I bloomed at graduation and never got to enter the workforce.”

“Oh, honey,” Mrs. Barnes says softly. “I’m so proud of you. And fuck what the Alphas think. If you want to run a company, then you run a company. It doesn’t matter that I haven’t seen you in fifteen years. If you’re even half the hard-headed person you were when you were a stubborn child, anyone would be lucky to have you.”

Tears prick the backs of my eyes, and I busy myself with fixing my coffee to fend them off. “Thank you.”

Ezra reaches across the table, his hand stilling mine. He lifts his brow in question, and I nod.

“There’s something else, Mom,” he says softly. She turns her head toward him, putting her focus on him now. Even though she can’t see me, I’m grateful for the opportunity to wipe my eyes while everyone’s attention is elsewhere. Ezra looks at me, his eyes shining with pride at my accomplishments. “Hana is our scent match.”

Mrs. Barnes lets out an undignified snort. “No shit, Sherlock. The only way you three would bring around an Omega on short notice and be this nervous is if it were serious. Of course, she’s your scent match. But you listen to me, Hana. You don’t have to accept them if you don’t want to.”

“Mom!”

“Hush. Your father and I were scent matches, and look how that turned out. I will never advocate for Fate telling us who we should be with when our brains are screaming for us to run in the other direction. I loved your father once, Ezra,

don't think I didn't. But my gut told me to be cautious, and I wish I'd listened."

"Thank you, Mrs. Barnes," I say. "Ezra and I have been reconnecting, but things take time. And I'm enjoying getting to know Ace and Christos. It would do no one any favors if we rushed into things."

There, that should satisfy her if, after my heat, we decide to part ways. Though, the longer I'm in their presence, the more I doubt my plan. We fit.

I swear, I can feel Fate rolling her eyes at me as if to say *DUH, YOU IDIOT!* But I lived my last few years doing what others wanted, and I'm sure as hell not going to sign myself up for a lifetime of that.

"How's your sister?" Mrs. Barnes asks.

We spend the rest of the evening discussing family and our time apart, barely touching on my parents but reviewing the highlights. By ten o'clock, we're all yawning despite the coffee, and Mrs. Barnes is shoos us off to sleep.

"There's just one bed," Ezra says, "so we'll sleep on the pull-out couch in the living room, and you can have my room." He starts pulling sweats from the drawers and hands me a pair.

I lift the fabric bundle to my nose and inhale the heady mixture of his scent and laundry detergent. Then, I look over at the bed. It's a proper pack bed, and I know when the guys come to visit, this is where they all stay together. "Or, we can all share here."

Christos, who's been pretty quiet all evening, turns to me. "We don't have to, Hana. We can easily sprawl out in the living room."

“Oh.” I twist my hands together at his quickness in offering a different sleeping space for them.

Ace claps Christos upside the head. “We would love to stay, Hana. But only if you’re sure. Christos was trying to be chivalrous, but it came out wrong.”

The big Alpha in question rubs the back of his head and nods sheepishly.

Teeth brushed and sweats on, we all climb into the big bed. Christos is on one side of me, and Ezra is on the other. Ace climbs in last and is on the opposite side of Christos. A sigh of contentment escapes me, and my muscles finally relax.

“What a day,” Ezra whispers into the darkness of his teenage bedroom.

“Mmm,” Christos hums. “I’m glad Mama Barnes is okay. It’ll be easier when we’re settled.”

“Where are you settling after the tour?” I ask, appalled that I never even thought to ask the question.

“Three streets away from here. We bought a house two years ago and have been renovating it. If she gives up the stubborn streak, Mama Barnes will move into the guest house out back so we’re close if she needs us,” Christos answers, and it’s clear from his voice that he loves her as much as Ezra does.

“That’s lovely,” I say. “How hard is she fighting the idea?”

“Super hard,” Ace confirms. “But she’ll be close enough to her usual haunts and favorite organic honey farm that we might be able to sway her. Plus, Christos has outfitted the guest house to be blind-friendly, and the house is becoming a bit much to manage independently. We’ll wear her down when she’s good and ready.”

I chuckle. That sounds about right. She's the type to agree to something, but in a way that makes it seem like it was her idea in the first place.

Ezra snuggles into my side, his hair tickling my shoulder. I stroke my fingers through his inky locks, and he shivers when my nails connect with his scalp.

"Do it again, Hana," he says. His voice is raspy and thick with exhaustion. I repeat the motion, and he presses in closer, his breathing evening out. "My Hana Banana."

A few strokes later, he drifts off, the exhaustion from the day finally having won.

"Did you play with his hair?" Ace asks from the other side of the bed.

"Yeah," I whisper.

Ace chuckles. "Gets him every time." His hand comes over Christos, who's snuggled into my other side, and his fingertips brush the blanket above my belly. "Sleep well, Omega."

"Goodnight," I answer.

Christos kisses my cheek, his lips plush and addicting. "Goodnight, Hana." His eyes connect with mine, and I'm caught up in his light brown irises. He stares back, both of us quiet but looking into our fated mate's soul.

My lids begin to droop, surrounded by my Alphas and feeling anchored for the first time since my ship left the harbor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Ace

SOMEONE IS LICKING MY COCK, AND I'M AFRAID IF I MOVE, I'll wake up from this dream and regret it. Just a few more minutes. Or until I come. Whichever happens first.

Damn it. I know it's a dream when Hana moans and slips my cock inside her mouth. I've always learned that the Alpha pleases the Omega and not the other way around. It's ingrained. Instinct.

At least I can still dream it. I wonder if Hana has the same dream about me. About us? I hope she does. I hope she's sleeping between Christos and Ezra, dreaming about us getting her off. With our fingers. Our mouths. Our cocks. Fuck, even Ezra's dirty talk is enough to get me there sometimes.

My Dream Girl hums around my length, and I manage to keep my hands to myself. I want to grab her, fist her hair, and fuck her mouth with abandon. But I'm self-aware enough to know if I reach for her in my dream, she'll vanish. God, I want to fuck her so bad.

I finish in her mouth and curse that it's time to wake up and clean up. The softness of her lips and her tongue lightly lapping at the underside of my cock are almost too much. I wake as if wading up from underwater and crack my eyes open. I look down to assess the cleanup and am shocked when I see a curtain of brown hair shielding Hana's face.

Reaching down, I part her locks, and her bright blue eyes look up at me. She pops off my sensitive cock, her hand still around my knot, and looks up at me.

“You were calling out to me,” she says, her eyes hungry and lust-drunk.

“How long have you been awake?” I ask, tangling my hand in her hair, feeling the short strands against my fingers and palm.

“Not long,” she says. “Just long enough for you to come in my mouth and call my name.”

My cheeks warm at the admission. “I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“Of course not,” she says, a small smile on her lips. “I couldn’t sleep anyway. It’s like a furnace under the duvet.”

“Sorry about that.”

“I’m not.” She grins, kneading my knot with her fingers and causing my eyes to roll back in my head. If she doesn’t stop, the damn thing will inflate again, and I’ll be ready for round two before the conversation ends.

“I called out your name?”

“Several times.” She nods. “But I liked it.”

“You’re sure it wasn’t Ezra?” I ask, trying to read her face for any tells that she was humoring me.

“Pretty sure. You called me Dream Girl.”

“That is pretty damning evidence,” I say seriously, and she chuckles.

Christos is still snoring beside us with Ezra in his arms. Hana must have slipped out, and they’d found each other without her between them.

“Get up here, Dream Girl. I’m hungry.” My voice sounds more beast than man, sending a shiver through her. I’m not

using my Alpha command, but my need for her is riding me hard, and I'm just shy of it.

"I think there are cinnamon rolls left," she says, sitting back on her heels.

"Oh, no. I'm going to eat you for breakfast. Now get that sweet ass up here and sit on my face."

Her gasp is cute as hell. "Ace—"

"I will not repeat myself. Get on my face." She shucks her sweats and pulls off the T-shirt Ezra gave her, leaving her in nothing but what God gave her, and my fucking God, he gave her a perfect body. The last time I saw it, we were nearly drowning in a shower, but now that I can catalog every dip and curve of hers, I want to etch it into my brain for all eternity.

Pale skin, dusky pink nipples, a soft torso, and gently flaring hips. She's my Dream Girl, all right. She kneels on the bed and crawls over me, shimmying her way up my body. Her slick pussy drags across my cock as she moves. She stops to grind down on me for a second, and I growl. Taking the hint that time is of the essence here, she puts one knee on either side of my head and hovers.

"Sit," I command her, and her legs shift beside my ears. Her pussy is still inches away, but she slowly lowers.

"Relax for me, baby," I mumble against her. "Deep breaths."

My tongue follows the seam of her pussy, licking and tasting her as she inhales deeply. I lap at her channel, drinking in her slick. Her head falls back, and she moans. "Fuck, Ace. So good."

"You ain't seen nothing yet." The words come out garbled, but she understands me anyway.

“I’ll bet,” she says, and I lightly bite her clit. She jumps, but I keep my grip on her hips, holding her still to feast on her sweet pussy.

I wrap one arm around her thigh, my thumb finding her clit and stroking it slowly, alternating it with soft laps. My tongue finds her channel, and I stroke around her opening before spearing it inside. My face is coated in her slick, and air is becoming a serious problem. I tilt my head back, breathing in through my nose and taking in the floral gardenia and lavender scent, and the sharpness of the clove notes is stronger today.

A sound to my right has my eyes flying open. Above me, Hana is writhing like a fucking goddess. Her tits are on full display, and her head is thrown back in ecstasy. Christos’s endless brown eyes watch me, his gaze drawn to where I’m tongue-fucking our girl.

I swirl my tongue again, hoping for that gasp to tell me I’m hitting the right spot. I’m rewarded a second later when she cries out and bangs a fist against the headboard.

Ezra pops up over Christos’s shoulder, and instead of shying away from an audience, Hana reaches out a hand for Christos, and he grips it in his big palm.

“That’s it, Hana,” Ezra encourages from behind Christos. “Ride his fucking face. He’s begging for it. All he wants is your cum all over himself. Do it, sweetheart. Give him what he wants, what we all want. Soak him.” He reaches forward, gripping her hip and helping her ride my tongue. She finds her rhythm, and my nose bumps her clit as my tongue flicks. I press against the top of her mound, putting pressure there and never changing the pace of my tongue.

Her breath shudders, and she comes, her orgasm causing her to lock up, her thighs pressing against my ears, and her

slick running down my chin and over my stubble.

Hana screams out her orgasm as it crashes through her, and her head bows forward, our eyes connecting. Her pupils are blown out like crazy, and her hair is a fucking mess, haloing her head like the filthiest angel I've ever seen.

Her scent changes again, a distinct bite running through her usual calm and comforting scent. My Alpha barrels to the surface, demanding I rut her and give her everything she needs.

Christos leaps from the bed and yanks Hana off of me, holding her close. A whine escapes her lips, high-pitched and demanding in nature. Ezra and I growl at him for taking our mate. "Shh, it's okay," he says, smoothing her hair down her back.

He looks over her head at the two of us still in the bed and mutters, "Fuck."

"Give. Her. Back," I growl.

"Now," Ezra adds.

Christos holds out a hand. "Her heat."

All thought leaves my brain as the words resonate. No, no, no. Not now. Not before we've convinced her we're more than just a heat activator. Not before we could show her how good we could all be together without sex clouding everything. She hates being an Omega. She hates her designation and that her baser instincts have dictated her life since she bloomed. If our connection is based on a few days and a morning oral session, she'll never give us a real shot.

Ezra bolts out of the bed, snatching a duffle from under it and stuffing clothes inside. "The house. We have to get to the house."

I hop up, helping him shove clothes and bedding in the bag, then curse the damn thing as I overstuff it and put a hole in it. I throw it across the room, and suddenly, Christos is there, Hana in one arm and the other reaching out for me. “Relax. Take what we can. I’m calling a car service to get us there. Ezra, tell your mom we’ll be at the house. Ace, gather the shit we’ll need.”

Hana’s shivering in Christos’s arm, gripping his neck and climbing him like a damn tree. Her legs wind around his hips even as she says, “I’ll be f-f-fine. Phoenix. The show. I just need a dildo. With a knot.”

She opens her eyes and immediately shields them against the morning sun streaming through the window. Hana’s right; we have the show in Phoenix and the others in Southern California. But right now, she needs us more than our show does.

Christos uses his Alpha influence to keep her from panicking even more. “You need a nest, Omega. Calm. We’ll get you there.”

Her body relaxes in his grip, and he snatches up his phone. Ezra tears through the room, swinging the door open and calling for his mom. I hear their voices, but I can’t focus long enough to make out the conversation. I find a roll of garbage bags and shove the duvet in one, two pillows in another, and the clothes we’ve been wearing all night. Our scents should help her feel settled, but watching her writhe in Christos’s arms is lighting an uncharacteristic fire under my ass.

He grabs sweats and a T-shirt from the floor and starts helping her get dressed, dragging the material over her fevered skin and whispering encouragement when she complains that it’s itchy.

“We’re not going anywhere, Omega,” I say. “Fuck Phoenix. Tell me now before you’re lost to it. Do you want us with you for this?”

She looks between Christos and me, her teeth worrying her bottom lip. “Yes. I can’t do this alone. Not again.”

“Never again,” I vow. With a swift kiss, I lead us out of the room to the front door, where we quickly say goodbye to Mama Barnes and pile into the car Christos ordered.

The stunned driver takes us four streets away, and Christos is on the phone with Cole as we pull up and are let out at the front door. “I don’t care what the fucking sponsors say, Cole. We’re not leaving her. Find someone else to do the final number. Jake and his pack can handle it. No—Fuck no, I’m not dropping her at a clinic. She’s ours,” he growls. “That doesn’t matter! Fine. We’ll take the penalty.”

Christos hangs up, pressing the red button on his phone harder than necessary, and runs a hand through his hair.

“I can—” Hana grits out. “I can handle this. Don’t get in trouble for me.”

Any hesitations we had go tumbling out the window. She’s there suffering, needing a knot and fighting off the baser instincts taking over her mind and body, and yet still being as selfless as fucking possible.

“Not a chance, Banana. The sponsors can shove it up their asses,” Ezra growls. “We’re not leaving you. You won’t be locked up in this house alone to ride this out.”

We throw the bags into the house after paying the driver. Ezra and I take up posts on either side of the front door as Christos ushers her inside our pack house. Christos reaches up and rechecks her temperature with a curse. He guides her into

Ezra's arms before closing the front door. "I'll check supplies and put in an order. You get her to the nest. If this hits full force, we're going to be prepared."

Her scent wafts through the air, and I can't help but breathe her in, my chest heaving with desire and my dick straining against my pants. She smells ready to mate, and it's driving me fucking crazy. Christos disappears into the house for a while, and Ezra and I guide her up the stairs to the nest we argued over and ultimately built because we're all hopeful fools.

We climb to the third floor, and Ezra murmurs sweet things into her ear, encouraging her to relax if possible.

"I'm okay," Hana gasps before doubling over and gripping her stomach. "Fuuuck," she moans. "Maybe not. Give me my phone."

I open the door to her nest and dive into one of the trash bags. I swept all of our shit off the nightstand earlier, and she smiles when I hand her the device.

She presses a few buttons and says, "Hey, Hailey." She pauses. "Yeah, Mrs. Barnes is okay, but, uh, my heat arrived. Yay." Her tone is pure sarcasm, making me chuckle even though this moment is profound. "I'm at the guys' house in Dallas. I'm looking at a nest right now to ride it out." Another pause. "Pretty great, actually. Yeah, they'll be staying."

Hana nods her head as Hailey continues speaking. "Yeah, fine, but that's weird to talk about. Okay. Hold on."

Hana hands the phone to me with a look on her face that I can't quite decipher. Hailey is already talking when I raise the cell to my ear. "...and you're going to say yes to anything she wants. She's already done a heat by herself, and it damn near

broke her. She's scared, Ace. I need you to do me a solid and do whatever she asks except for bonding with her."

"Wait, what?" I ask, my eyes connecting with Ezra's. Hana is staring down at the floor, and her cheeks are flushed.

"You, Alpha. Knot Omega. Got it? No bitey-bitey!"

I sputter something incomprehensible, and Hailey must figure out my brain is short-circuiting.

"Have fun, Eros. Time to live up to that stage name and give our girl an experience she'll never forget. I like you guys. She'll figure out the rest once this shit is over. Send me the address so I can call the cops if I don't hear from her after three days." Well, that was a perfectly delivered threat.

With that, she hangs up, and I quickly text the address. Ezra is still staring at me with confusion. "What's going on?"

"We're at Hana's beck and call for all of this, but no biting."

Ezra looks at Hana. "Ready for this?"

She nods.

"Words, Banana," Ezra says, his voice a mixture of lust, and fuck me, he really can make "banana" sound sexy.

"Yes. I'm ready."

Christos stomps up the stairs, and he finds us at the entrance to the nest, no one moving or speaking.

"What's going on?" he asks. "Omega, are you okay?"

She nods and then looks between us, her back going ramrod straight as she gathers her courage to voice her wants.

"Yes. Nest, knots, now."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Hana

MY BODY FEELS LIKE IT'S ON FIRE. MY SKIN IS ITCHY, AND every slide of the soft T-shirt against my overheated flesh feels like sandpaper. I need relief, and I need it now. I'm hanging on to my sanity by the skin of my teeth, and it's a losing battle.

Christos is staring at me, his brow furrowed. "Are you sure? We have toys if that would be preferable," he offers.

I'd love to see their collection later, but right now, I want to strip down naked and roll around in the nest they have in their pack house, marking it up with my scent so no one else ever feels comfortable here.

Logically, I know that's a shitty thing to think. What if we don't work out, and they take on another Omega? But my instincts aren't listening to logic. They want to mark the space with our scent and claim these Alphas.

"I'm sure. I just need..." I say lamely as I tug on the T-shirt.

Christos steps up and removes my shirt, leaving me in nothing but the sweats he'd dragged onto me in Ezra's room. "You say stop, and we stop. This is entirely in your control," he whispers. His words make me moan. I haven't been in control of anything in so fucking long that the idea of it is an aphrodisiac all on its own.

"I'm sure." I lean forward, capturing his lips with mine. Gratitude and lust run through me like a live wire. He returns my kiss and then steps back.

My Omega is riding me hard, and I need to make this space my own for the next couple of days, so I shake the

blanket and pillows out of the bag and get to work. I create a raised perimeter out of pillows, grateful they've opted for the fully lined mattress floor, giving us space to sprawl while we're in here.

I ask them to bring me more of their clothing, and moments later, they arrive in armfuls. I carry them from the threshold into my space, lining the areas that smell like unfamiliar Alphas and Betas. Aside from the things I've dragged in, I can't smell my Alphas in here at all. These are the scents of the builders.

Ezra, Christos, and Ace have not stepped into this room. There is a faint, stale whiff of them near the doorway, lying under their current scents, but it seems they've only looked at it from the hall and then shut the door on their nest until now.

Finally, twenty minutes later, the room is how it should be—dark pillows, soft overhead lighting, and heavy curtains to block out the light.

“Omega,” Christos says from the doorway. I look up, finding them standing shoulder to shoulder and barefooted, staring down at me as I roll in their scents. “May we enter your nest?”

“Yes,” I beg, ready for what today will bring. My slick begins in earnest, finally scenting them in my nest—temporary as it is. The clothes from their wardrobes pale compared to their overwhelming scent as they step into my nest.

“You're so beautiful, Hana. You're doing a good job with your nest,” Ezra compliments. He drops to his knees between my spread thighs, staring at me. Christos and Ace hang back, giving us this time.

“Ezra,” I whine. “Alpha.”

“I’m here, Hana. I’m here. Tell me what you need.”

“You.” My mind is growing hazy with the heat now that I’ve nested. My body knows what’s coming, and it’s taking over my thoughts. “All of you.” I look over his shoulder to find my other two Alphas.

“You’ll have us all if that’s what you want,” Ace says. “Anything.”

I whine again, no longer embarrassed by the sound. It calls to my Alphas, and Ezra sheds his clothes so we can be skin-to-skin as he crawls between my legs. He hooks my legs over his shoulders, and I shudder in relief at the contact. His tongue darts out, licking a long, languorous stripe along my seam and making me squirm under him.

Words are gone; all that’s left is sensation and want, my heat riding me so fucking hard I think I’m going to combust.

“Patience, Omega,” Ezra says, pulling away just enough to speak. His breath caresses my most intimate place, and he flicks my clit with his tongue. “I want more from you than a quick fuck. I want it all.” I moan, and some little voice in my head says, *This is how it was always supposed to be. He was always yours.*

Ezra unleashes himself on my pussy, his tongue flicking and his fingers delving into my wet heat. He curls those fingers, finding my G-spot and stroking it expertly. I growl, thinking of how he learned this and how many other women my oldest friend has fucked. The noise surprises me, but the thought flies out of my head faster than it entered when he starts a new rhythm, causing my orgasm to coil low in my gut. It’s right there, my release begging to be set free.

He listens to my gasps and moans as he continues, taking his cue from my body and breath. He holds me still with one hand pressed low on my belly, and a few seconds later, I erupt.

I squirt all over his face, and his eyes widen in surprise, even as his tongue laps up my juices.

“That’s it, Omega,” he says. “Good girl. Good fucking girl. God, you taste like heaven. I could die here and be the happiest Alpha in the world.”

Hana, the human, would balk at the use of “good girl,” but Hana, the Omega, is living for this shit.

I grasp at Ezra’s shoulders, pulling him up to me. I need him now. I need his cock. His knot. His body on top of mine, weighing me down and fucking me into the mattress.

“Birth control?” he grits out through clenched teeth.

“Good for a year. Tested after college and haven’t been with anyone since. You?”

“Tested yearly and in a monogamous, polyamorous relationship.” *Thank the lord.*

“Ready, Banana?” he asks, looking between us where his cock is notched at my entrance. Something feels different, so I prop myself on my elbows and look down.

Oh.

Oh.

“Pierced?” I ask, barely getting the word out as my Omega goes feral.

Ace and Christos join us on the floor while my oldest friend hovers above me. Ace chuckles. “They feel amazing, Dream Girl. Just wait.”

I fucking bet.

Ezra's cock pushes inside me, and while it's mind-blowing, being this connected to him—this vulnerable and this blissed out—I'm craving his knot more than anything. I can feel it as Ezra bottoms out, pressing against my entrance. He rocks in and out of me, his hips pulling back and sliding forward slowly.

“Hana, you feel so fucking good.” He moans my name again as he picks up the pace, fucking into me as he holds himself up. Ace sees the opening and lunges forward, wrapping his lips around my nipple. My back bows, and Christos takes my other breast into his mouth, his tongue flicking in time with Ezra's thrusts.

This is it.

This is how I die. Sandwiched between three Alphas, having all of my erogenous zones tongued and fucked in a nest that screams Hana. I come around Ezra's cock, and I belatedly hear myself chanting, “Knot, knot, knot.”

“You're sure?” Ezra asks, and I love that they're checking in every time we reach a new monumental moment. I nod, then voice my permission when he gives me a look. Right, he's big on verbal consent. “You'll need to be still for this.” His voice is deeper than usual, the Alpha inside coming out to play. I comply, lifting my hips as far as I can under him while he guides himself inside of me. When he's in as far as he can go, he pushes it against the ring of muscle. I bear down on him, my over-sensitized body craving more.

“Shit, Hana,” he gasps. He starts fucking me again, his pierced cock rubbing every sensitive nerve in my body with every thrust. “Fuck.”

“All in,” I urge. “Please.”

His eyes darken, and he comes deep inside me with one final thrust forward. His cock pulses as his knot swells, locking us together. I moan low and long when I’m at capacity, yet he continues to grow within me.

“Oh my God, Alpha,” I gasp, my nails digging into his sides where I hold him dearly. I pull him down to me as Ace and Christos move away to give us a moment together.

Ezra buries his face in the crook of my neck and grunts low and deep. “Fuck,” he chants as he begins to rock inside me gently. The knot makes it so he can’t pull out, but his thrusts are rubbing along my G-spot, and his piercings are driving me insane.

I lick his neck and inhale his scent, marking him with my own. He’s mine. He’s always been mine. All I want to do is bond with him, but I keep my teeth to myself and settle for the temporary scent marking.

His smoke and leather scent surrounds me as he comes again, his cock pulsing deep and triggering mini waves of my endless climax. It goes on and on; the perpetual cycle between us unending for minutes, hours, or days as we remain locked together.

My mind is blank, only knowing that I’m being satisfied by my Alpha and that I’m satisfying him. I’m so wrapped up in Ezra, the feeling of us together and the rightness, that I whine again when his knot deflates. I’m not done. My Omega is screaming for more, demanding everything he has to give. My eyes snap open, my lips parting around the skin of Ezra’s neck.

“Stop.” Christos’s Alpha command has my jaw freezing millimeters from Ezra’s neck. “Pull back.”

I whine, still following his command but hating it all the same. I want my mate. He needs my bite. I need his. I’m being rejected, and I let out a keening wail at the rebuff.

“Look at me, Omega.” My eyes find Christos’s, and his soften with sympathy. “I know, Omega. I know you want to mark him—to make him yours. But we made a promise to you and Hailey, and I’m not starting this with a negative point in our column. No one is rejecting you, Omega. We can’t wait for your bond mark. We need it, and I need you to understand that we will talk about bonding when you decide after your heat. But right now, you need to pull yourself together. Pull your Omega back in. Come back to me.”

He lies beside me and wraps his arms around me, tugging me against his chest as Ezra slips free now that his knot has gone down enough to withdraw.

“Please,” I beg, clutching at Christos’s arms. “Please, I want it. Please.”

“Hana,” Christos says, his voice coaxing me back to reality. “You can do this. Come back to us.”

I look to Ezra, whose eyes are already flashing with desire again. He’s calling back his Alpha, and we need to rein it in. A deep sigh slips from me, and Christos realizes the moment I’ve dragged my Omega back.

“There you are.”

I look up at him, and he leans down to kiss my nose. The gesture is so sweet that it makes me pause and take a deep, shuddering breath.

“What do you need, Omega?” Christos asks, doing a remarkable job of coaching me through this.

“Water,” I answer, feeling a reprieve after the knotting and wrangling my self-control back enough to string a thought together without fighting my instincts.

“I’ll get it,” Christos answers, passing me to a waiting Ezra. I smile gratefully at Christos as he gets up and pads out of the nest.

“You okay, Hana?” Ezra asks, looking a bit wary of the answer.

“Perfect. That was...”

“Everything,” Ezra finishes for me. “Thank you for trusting us enough to see you through this, Omega.”

Hearing my designation from his lips is strange, but I can’t deny how right it feels—like it warms my bones and causes my heart to spark in my chest.

Christos is back moments later, holding a few water bottles. He unseals the first for me as if that little expenditure of energy would be too much when all I want to do is push them down to the mattress and ride each of them into oblivion.

I drink deeply, finishing the first bottle and then a second one. My eyelids feel heavy, and Christos tucks a blanket around me.

“Rest, Omega. We will be here when you wake.” Ezra guides me into the nest, the scents of us all mingling amid the clothing I’ve built up in a barrier around us.

It feels like home. It’s my last thought before drifting off to sleep, my need subsiding enough that I can relax and doze off.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Hana

I WAKE UP LICKING ACE'S COCK AGAIN. FUCK, WHAT IS IT about him that pulls me from sleep and demands I take him however I can?

But he's very awake this time as my lips touch his dick. He moans, his voice cracking as I seal my mouth around him and work him over. He fists my hair and guides me at a pace he likes.

"Dream Girl, you're really living up to your nickname," he says teasingly. My Omega preens at his praise and sucks him harder. "Fuck me," he moans.

Ezra and Christos have woken up to watch the show I'm putting on, and I never knew I was a bit of an exhibitionist, but my Omega loves it—the heat in their eyes, the lust written so plainly across their faces. It makes me wetter and more desperate for all three of them.

"Hana, you have to stop. I want to come inside that sweet pussy. Present for me, Omega."

I drag my tongue along his length, flicking the underside of his cock once more before I turn, putting myself on hands and knees and arching my back so my ass is in the air.

Ace moves behind me, running a hand down my spine and over my ass. "Fucking hell, Hana. This pussy is mine now. Mine," he growls, and I fucking mewl like he's just told me I'm the prettiest girl in the world.

"Do it! Please!" I moan, eager for him to take what's his.

And he does.

He lines up with my entrance and plunges himself to the hilt in one thrust. I scream into the mattress below as his cock fills me. Ace groans, and the sound is echoed by the other two Alphas watching. I'm being claimed. I'm theirs.

I might not have their bite marks, but this is a claiming all on its own.

“Mine, mine, mine,” Ace groans as he pulls back before thrusting in again. This time, he wraps his hand around my throat. “Say it, Hana,” he orders.

“Yours, Ace. All yours,” I gasp, groaning at his thrusts.

“Ah, fuck. Yes, that's it, Omega. You're so tight, I can feel your pussy gripping me like a goddamned vise,” Ace groans, his fingers tightening around my throat a fraction. “One day, I'm going to teach you about delayed gratification and using your mind to draw out your pleasure. But fuck, not today. Today's going to be hard and fast, Dream Girl.”

“Harder,” I gasp, my hands clutching at the padding below me. I want what Ace is offering, but he's right. Today is for hard and fast.

“You want me to fuck you harder?” Ace asks, his voice pitched low and dangerous. It's such a contrast to his usual carefree tone that it takes me by surprise and causes a gush of wetness from me.

“Yes, yes, please,” I beg. I've never been so bold in all my life, but right now, there's no shame in asking for what I want.

With a groan, Ace slaps my ass. I clench around him, and he loses himself in our rut.

His hand returns to my throat, and he continues to pound into me hard and fast, just like I asked—like he craves. I can feel his want and desire, the need coursing through him every

time he slides into me with his punishing pace. His fingers dig into my hip as he pulls my ass back into him, no doubt leaving fingerprint bruises behind, but instead of balking at the pain and the imminent bruises, I lean into it, demanding he marks me as his any way he can.

“Alpha, please,” I beg with a whimper that shakes my entire body.

Calling him Alpha spurs him on even more. “You need to come?” he asks roughly.

“Yes. Yes, please, Ace. Please.”

“You’re going to come so hard for me, Dream Girl. You’re going to squeeze my cock and take everything I can give you,” he grunts, punctuating his words with hard thrusts.

“I’m so close,” I moan as my orgasm gets closer, a low whine slipping from my lips as I lock eyes with Ezra’s icy blues. A big hand strokes Ezra’s cock, and seeing Christos palming my oldest friend sends me into a frenzy. His hand strokes from base to tip, paying special attention to the piercings along the way.

Instead of growling at the other Alpha touching what’s mine, I’m enraptured. The view is erotic, and I want to watch them do everything together. I want to know what sounds they make as they fuck one another. I want to know everything. See everything. Be part of everything. My pussy clenches around Ace as I imagine it, and my release coils tight in my core.

“Come on my cock, Omega. Come now,” Ace growls, and those words are all it takes to send me over the edge.

In a blinding moment, my orgasm crashes into me, and my release takes control of my body. I’m shaking and writhing and screaming into the mattress below as Ace thrusts into my

pussy, one hand on my throat as the other holds me where he wants me.

“Fuck, Hana! Fuck!” He slides forward, the bulge of his knot pressing against my pussy. I gasp as he pushes inside, stretching me and making me his. He comes hard with a tortured groan, his body shaking as he empties into me. He’s so deep that I feel him everywhere.

Ace wraps himself around my body, his hand soothing down my neck and pressing against my breastbone as he comforts me. That beachy scent fills my senses, and his cock throbs within me, his knot locking us in place as he lowers us to the mattress on our sides. He spoons me from behind, holding me close and whispering in my ear, but I’m too overcome to understand the words. All I know is I’m safe and whole in his arms—like I was always meant to be here.

A groan of satisfaction drifts through the quiet space, punctuating the silence with more than just our panting breaths. I tilt my head and see Christos’s lips wrapped around Ezra’s cock, taking him deep as he grips my other Alpha’s hips.

It’s an intimate moment, one that I’m spying on. Ace leans close, whispering in my ear, “They’re beautiful together, aren’t they, Omega?”

I nod, unable to put words to my thoughts.

“I think you like that, don’t you?” Ace says slowly, taking my hand and threading our fingers together. “You’d like to watch them fuck each other?”

I nod again, enraptured by the sight in front of me. It’s erotic. It’s carnal.

“They’d enjoy that as much as you would, Hana. We have nothing to hide from you. Just ask, and it’s yours.”

My Omega is feeling more satisfied than ever before. Though my heat has been sudden and painful, knowing these three are here to care for me through it all lets me relax enough to sleep again.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Christos

IT'S BEEN NEARLY THIRTY-SIX HOURS SINCE HANA'S HEAT started, and we're all exhausted, but she just. Keeps. Going.

I'm returning from the kitchen with another box of food, water, and wet wipes when I hear her keening moan from the nest.

I nearly drop the box as I sprint up the stairs and round the corner toward her nest. The whole house smells like sex, even though we've shut the door to her nest. But it's open now, and Hana is crawling on hands and knees toward me in the hallway.

"Alpha," she cries when she sees me.

"Hana, what are you doing? Are you okay?" I check her over for injuries but don't find any.

I gather her in my arms and rush into her nest to check on my packmates. Ezra and Ace are snoring on the mattress, exactly where I left them when I went on my little supply run, whole and sated, not injured as I feared. They've taken Hana repeatedly, and their energy is flagging.

"Omega, speak," I command, turning back toward Hana in my arms. She's trembling and clutching at my shoulders like she's afraid I'll let her go.

"Need you. I need your knot. Alpha, please." It breaks my heart to hear her begging, and I start a purr low in my chest to try and ease her. Until now, I've been a secondary player, content to watch as she finds her peace with Ace and Ezra.

If I'm honest with myself, I've been jealous of them. The way they worship her, the way she responds to them. I've

wanted that. I've wanted her. And I'm afraid I won't be able to deliver.

I'm her Alpha. I know it in my bones, but this fear of rejection and dissatisfaction has been haunting me since we met Hana. She isn't sure about pack life. She doesn't have the same reverence for scent matches that I do.

What if I disappoint her? Her Omega? What if I'm just an add-on to the perfect pack—her, Ace, and Ezra?

God knows more Omegas have turned us away than we can count. They didn't like that we were strippers. Didn't like our scents. Our personalities. Our relationships with one another. There has been one reason or another to reject us, and now that she's had Ace and Ezra, what if it's me? What if I'm the weak link, even as the leader of our pack? They're mine, and if them finding happiness without me is what's in the cards, I will step aside. A good Alpha does what's needed for his pack, no matter the cost to himself.

Hana's hands cup my cheeks, and she turns my head in her direction. "Need you, Christos. My Alpha," she murmurs as she leans in for a kiss.

She exhales like I'm the relief she's been searching for. Her soft sigh of contentment breathes life into me.

"Ace and Ezra—" I start.

"Are mine. But so are you." Her Omega speaks for her; the pure conviction in her tone rends me to pieces.

"What if I'm not enough?" I whisper against her lips.

She smacks my cheek, the sting registering before the sound. "Hey!" I growl.

She does it again, bringing my Alpha surging to the surface. I catch her hand as she goes to strike again. She growls at me, this tiny thing stepping toe to toe with my Alpha, and my doubts begin to diminish.

I take her mouth with a fierce kiss, letting all my pent-up frustration and passion out in one swift movement. I suck on her bottom lip and pull it between my teeth, pressing down but not breaking the skin the way I want to and starting our bond. Fuck, I want to bond with her so she won't ever let me go, but I grab my Alpha by the scruff and shove him back into the corner of my mind.

“That’s better. What else you got, Alpha?” she taunts. I drop her from my arms, and she lands on the balls of her feet, rolling away from me as I stalk toward her. As I prowl closer, I crouch, looking more like an animal than a man.

She dives behind one of the mountains of bedding, and I follow, barely touching her ankle as she rolls away on the other side.

I growl low in my chest, and the sound wakes Ace. He’s groggy as he looks up at us, and I warn him to stay where he is.

“Hana? What are you doing?” he asks.

“Making him prove it,” she answers, her voice nearly as rough as mine.

“Prove what?” Ace asks, looking from her to me as she darts around the other side of the room, stashing herself behind a column.

“That he’s worthy.”

I growl low, my Alpha taking offense that he might not be considered worthy. It contradicts what I’ve been thinking all

along. He knows we're what she needs, and the thought renews my determination as I pad across the floor, stripping out of my sweatpants with ease.

Ace chuckles and lays his head back down on Ezra's chest, leaving us to it.

I lunge for Hana's elbow, but she spins the opposite way, evading me again and putting my primal instincts on high alert.

"Come and get me, Alpha. Claim what's yours, if you can..." she taunts. It's her Omega speaking right now, using Hana as the conduit to tempt us into a mating bond.

I stalk closer, and she shrieks and darts away. She's a quick little thing, but I'm faster. I was made for the hunt, and she was made to be caught. To be held and cherished. Worshipped like the goddess incarnate she is.

In three strides, I've caught up to her, and I grip her around the waist, hauling her back against my chest. Her slight body fits perfectly against me, all those curves and exposed skin calling to me like a siren song.

"Got you," I breathe against her neck before rolling the tender spot between her neck and shoulder between my teeth, still fighting the urge to bite down and show this Omega that I conquered her. I belong to her, and she belongs to me. My arms tremble around her, holding her close yet resisting the urge to mark her.

I turn her so we're face to face, and she attacks. Her lips crash into mine, and she uses her hands on my shoulders and the mattress beneath us to jump and wrap her legs around my waist. Her hot pussy presses against my lower belly, and the scent of her arousal is thick in the air.

Holding her in my arms and feeling her slick heat against my skin, I realize the fight is over. I can't deny myself any longer and need to claim her as my own—however I can, short of bonding.

I lay her down gently on the mattress beside Ezra and Ace, my Alpha demanding they watch as we make Hana ours. They must feel my need for her in our bonds, the all-consuming rut taking over my mind. They don't interfere or touch; they simply crack their eyes open and watch. We're surrounded by our pack and in our home, where we should be.

I look into my Omega's bright blue eyes and kiss her deeply, tasting the sweetness of her mouth as I slip my hand between her thighs. She's so wet, so ready for me. I can feel the heat radiating off her skin as I position myself at her entrance.

“Ready, Omega?”

“Yes, Alpha,” she mewls. “My Alpha.” She turns her head, baring her throat to me in submission. She hasn't done it with the others. I know because I've been watching for it. But for me, she does the most vulnerable thing an Omega can do. She willingly submits to me, finding me worthy. The gesture sends a bolt of lust through me, making me roar as I slide into her, my cock achingly hard and desperate for this Omega. This woman. My Hana.

As I bury myself inside her, she cries out, arching her back as I start to move. I'm not gentle, not anymore. I need to claim her, and her fingernails raking down my back tell me she needs me as desperately as I need her.

Her head tilts back as I adjust my angle, hitting something new and drawing a keening sound from the back of her throat.

Hana whimpers, digging deeper into my skin as I repeat the movement, driving myself into her. My hands are on her soft waist, my fingers gripping her as I hold her in place and take her. Her scream is loud, echoing off the walls each time I thrust into her. I can't help but kiss her as I rut into her, my Alpha getting louder and more demanding. Her hands grip my hair as I suck and lick at her neck, leaving marks to show the world she belongs to me—to us.

The pressure in my knot grows, the need to release overwhelming me even as my Alpha demands I hold it off for as long as possible. She needs to come first. Twice, if possible. My knot is bigger than the others, and the last thing I want to do is hurt her unnecessarily. It'll be an incredible high, but I need her to come first. I need it. I need my Omega.

“Mine,” I growl, my thrusts slowing as I tease the skin between my teeth again, sating her Omega with the intention of a bite but not completing what my Alpha wants most in the world.

“Yours,” she moans.

As I slip my thumb over her clit, she comes undone. Her hips grind against me as I fuck her, filling her with my cock and nudging my rapidly-inflating knot against her slick pussy. Her scream is loud, piercing my ears and drowning out all other sounds.

She pulls against my hair, yanking me toward her and biting my neck.

I roar as her teeth sink into me, and my knot slides into place. My release rushes through me. “Fuck,” I groan.

I hold her against me as my knot grows, keeping her still as I come inside her over and over again until my knot feels

the pressure on all sides. Some of my cum slips out, filling her so thoroughly there's nowhere else for it to go but out. Her pussy clenches and squeezes me as she comes again, dragging me along for the ride. I've come enough to make her belly bulge with it, and my Alpha instincts are proud of that fact.

Hana's eyes are shining as she looks at what she's done. She looks from my face to my neck, tracing the teeth marks with her triumphant gaze. "Mine," she states, surety ringing clear in her tone.

"Yes, Omega. Yours."

My Alpha is roaring in my head. Our mate found me worthy and chose us, marking me as hers. She belongs with us. She wants our mark too. We can bond her here and now. I look up, my eyes wild when they connect with Ezra. He looks worried, and I growl at him as if he's going to take her away from me. Ezra hands me a washcloth, and I shove it into my mouth. I can't bite her. We promised.

My Alpha instincts begin to release me from the rut now that I've spent everything I have. We've only been locked together for a few minutes, but I have to move. If she realizes what she's done, there's a chance she could try to rip herself off of me and seriously injure herself in the process.

I need out. Now. I wrap my hand around the portion of my knot I've managed to work free and squeeze, painfully compressing my cock and sliding out of Hana's warmth as gently as possible.

Finally, the knot and my cock slip free, and the washcloth falls from my mouth as I groan. "Fuuuck," I breathe as cum spills out of her again. The sight nearly does me in again, but Ace is there, his hands soothing on my shoulders, keeping me from lunging at her again.

Ezra moves beside her, but I notice he's wearing a T-shirt, covering himself up in case she gets bitey again. "Rest, Christos. I've got her," he says as he turns her toward him, keeping her in a little spoon position and her face away from his flesh.

She whimpers at the movement, half-asleep and dazed from our rut, but there's a smile on her face as she drifts off.

Ace wraps an arm around me, keeping me close to him without crowding me. "It'll be okay, Christos. Both Fate and Hana chose you. Her Omega knows her better than we do, and we have to trust in her instincts."

"What if she wants to break the bond?" I ask, feeling like shit all over again. Breaking a bond is possible, especially if it's one-sided. And if she chooses that, I'll be gutted.

"Then we show her why that's a shit idea and what our lives could be like one day. But it has to be that. One day at a time."

I nod, letting my forehead rest against his. My Ace, my rock. The one who brings me back to myself when I get lost in my thoughts or circumstances.

"Okay."

"Her heat should be breaking soon. This can't go on much longer," Ezra says, keeping his voice low so he doesn't disturb Hana.

"I think she was waiting for Christos," Ace says. "She's had the two of us for days, but he held out, always passing her over to us."

"Why?" Ezra asks, genuinely curious.

I sigh. “Two reasons. One, I was convinced I wasn’t worthy after all the responses from the Omega Centers. And two, I knew if we took that step, I’d be even more attached. I’d get my hopes up that things would work out.”

“They still might,” Ace offers.

“After this?” I point to my neck. “She’s going to be running scared when she comes out of her heat. Possibly even embarrassed that she let her Omega out so freely during all this.” I shake my head. “I think this might be the nail in the coffin.”

I pray that I’m wrong, but I have a feeling I’m not.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Hana

I WAKE UP IN STAGES. FIRST, IT'S THE TWITCH OF MY NOSE. Then, the oppressive heat surrounding me. Next, the call of birdsong outside the window. Finally, the ache between my thighs and the lightness in my chest.

It's over.

I sigh in relief as I stretch my aching arms and legs on the bed, feeling the soft mattress against my skin. My body is sore from the previous few days' activities, but it's a good kind of soreness. Memories of the night come flooding back, and I can't help but smile to myself. *This* is what a heat should be like—not a petrifying experience like my first. And I have my Alphas to thank for my reintroduction to Omega perks.

Ace is lying next to me, still asleep, but the others are nowhere to be found. The shower is running, though, so at least one of them is in there. I hope the other is doing a bagel run because, oh my God, a bagel sounds divine right now.

Ace's messy hair and peaceful expression make him look innocent, but I know better. I know how he can make me feel with just a touch, how his lips can send shivers down my spine, and how that small bite of pain he wields so well can bring me to my knees.

I carefully crawl away, trying not to wake him. I slip on a discarded T-shirt stained with questionable substances and tiptoe to the window, admiring the view of the Dallas skyline in the distance. It's a beautiful day, and I'm content knowing that I have no plans, no obligations—just me and them.

Something sparks in my chest, and I rub at the unfamiliar feeling. There's contentment there but also a fair bit of worry. The rest of the night comes to me in bits and pieces, and I gasp the moment I remember biting Christos during my heat.

I hear movement behind me, and Ace's surf and sand scent wraps around me as his arms do. He holds me steady and whispers, "It's fine. Everything is fine, Hana."

"It's not fine," I whisper with a trembling voice. "I bit him. I marked him."

"But he didn't mark you. This is reversible if you want it. The bond isn't complete and won't be if you don't want it."

I turn to face Ace, his reassuring presence soothing my frayed nerves. "What if I do want it?" I ask, almost afraid of the answer. "What if I want all of you as mine?"

"Then we'll figure it out together," he says, cupping my cheek. His thumb brushes over my bottom lip, and lust pools in my belly. My mind is willing, but my body is very, *very* tired, and I can almost hear it groaning about how I'm a thirsty bitch and need to take a damned break.

I lean into his touch, feeling the heat between us but keeping my mind focused. "Ezra and Christos?" I ask, hoping I haven't fucked everything up.

This was supposed to be a way to trigger my heat and maybe get to know the guys Fate picked out for me. But the more time I spend with them, and the more memories of my heat that resurface, I realize I could very quickly get used to being the center of their pack. Their attentiveness is addictive, and they treat me differently than I expected Alphas to treat an Omega based on my upbringing.

“They’re getting ready for the day. Your fever broke early this morning, and your temp returned to normal. Ezra is in the shower, and I think Christos is downstairs making breakfast for us. You were murmuring about bagels in your sleep,” Ace says, leaning in to kiss me. His lips are soft and gentle.

We break apart, gasping for breath. “We should probably get dressed,” I say, smiling at him. “Or, at the very least, open a window. It’s positively pheromone-soaked in here.”

Ace grins back, his eyes dark with desire. “Or we could stay in bed all day and make it worse,” he suggests.

I laugh, and the shower turns off in the ensuite. Ezra steps through the door a moment later, the steam clouding around him like he’s on stage.

“Morning, Hana. How are you feeling?”

“Good,” I answer, looking into his eyes as he saunters closer, the towel around his trim hips playing a dangerous game of will-it-or-won’t-it.

“Not too sore?”

My cheeks heat, and that damn lust stirs low in my belly again. “A bit, but I’ll survive.”

There’s a clatter at the door, and my lust echoes back through the half-bond with Christos. It’s a strange feeling, almost like a shadow of a feeling rather than the whole emotion.

The door opens, and he’s balancing a tray on one arm while the other steadies the vase he placed on the corner where a single white daisy pokes out. This sweet, sweet man.

I rush over to him, feeling all kinds of guilty about biting him without his consent, and throw myself at him, hugging

him around the middle and pinning his arms in place as he holds a breakfast tray out in front of him. He stands stock still for a second, and I know I've caught him off guard.

"Hold on," he says with a wheeze. I lighten up my hug, and he hands the tray over the Ace, then gently wraps his arms around my waist. "Hey, baby. What's this for?"

"For being you," I say. "For bringing breakfast up to the nest. And an apology for the whole biting-you-while-I-was-in-heat thing."

"Don't," he says seriously, pulling away a bit to look into my eyes. His are determined and resolute, not an ounce of trepidation to be found. "We should have probably had a conversation first, but you had my consent. You always will. I saw you coming for me, and I could have moved. I didn't. And maybe that's something *you* should be mad at *me* for. But when I saw you lunge for me, my Alpha submitted to your bite. You found me worthy, and nothing in the world could have torn me away from you at that moment."

I blink up at him, assessing my own feelings. I'm not mad about what happened. Not one bit. But the guilt is still riding me hard, and there's nothing I can really do about it now. If either of us wants the half-bond dissolved, it's as simple as staying away from each other for a few years. Not something I think I'm capable of right now.

"Now, do you want breakfast? We barely got any food in you over the past few days. You must be starving," he says, nodding at a somewhat clean spot in the nest. I reluctantly let go of him and sit down where he indicated. He places the tray in my lap with a soft kiss to my temple and adjusts the little leg stands to keep it off my thighs.

He turns around and brings in three more trays, delivering them to Ace and Ezra with identical kisses, and finally, he sits down with the last one.

The trays are filled with bagels, spreads, and fillings to build breakfast sandwiches. All of it smells delicious, and I realize I'm starving. Before digging in, I catch Christos's eyes. "I'm not mad about what happened. Not one bit."

He smiles at me reassuringly. "Neither am I. But we'll keep talking about it, and if either of us changes our mind, we have options. Now, eat. What kind of Alpha would I be if I didn't see to your needs? You have to regain your strength."

Christos smiles at me again, easing some of that guilt that settled low in my belly. But he's right. We can always talk about it and discuss it when we're not all half-naked and starving. Averting my eyes, I dig in, and the food is even better than it looks.

Ezra and Ace are talking, and I'm trying my best to pay attention to what they're saying, but I'm so focused on the food I can barely string the words together into meaning.

Ezra laughs at my moan as I dig into the bacon and says, "You should see Christos in the kitchen when he's all focused. I swear, he's a damn good cook, but it's better when he practices his stripper moves while he's whisking."

Christos's cheeks heat with embarrassment, and I rest my hand on his thigh. He's barely touched me since we sat down, and my body craves his touch, especially after last night. "I'd like to see that one day."

Happiness, or the shadow of it, effuses my chest through our bond, and I grin at him.

“We need to start packing,” Ace mumbles around his eggs. “And you need to call Hailey, or she’ll call the cops. She’s already driving here, and we sent texts, but if she doesn’t hear from you soon, I think we’ll have a problem.”

“I also want to check on Mom before we go,” Ezra adds.

“Go where?” I ask, taking the mug of coffee off the tray and making a happy noise when it hits my tongue. The caffeine and the prospect of seeing Hailey soon make excitement bubble in my chest.

“We have to get back to the tour. Cole is freaking the hell out, and our sponsors are breathing down our necks,” Christos answers. The frustration in our half-bond causes me to run a soothing hand over his leg to calm him.

“You’re in trouble with your sponsors because of me, aren’t you?” I ask, knowing those contracts are likely iron-clad because that’s how I would have made them.

“There’s a clause about tending to a pack’s Omega if there’s a heat during our schedule. Everyone’s contract includes that by law,” Christos answers.

But I’m not their bonded Omega, so they’re in breach of contract.

Christos didn’t mark me because they promised not to. I’m not sure how I feel about that anymore. My Omega is sad about it, but the woman side of me knows it’s too soon. We’ve only just met, and most of those days were spent writhing around a nest.

Ace reaches out and takes my hand, his eyes soft and apologetic. “We should go. Today. But they can’t say shit because you’re our Omega.”

“But I’m not—”

“You are,” he argues. “You just haven’t fully accepted it yet. It’s okay, Hana. We’ll keep fighting for you, and we’ll take as long as you need. I promise.”

The other two nod and I’m speechless. They’re determined, and the thought doesn’t scare me as much as it did last week—not after they cared for me and kept to their promises.

Ace continues, “Come with us for the rest of the tour. We’ve got three weeks left. We’ll travel together, exploring and experiencing new cities together. And when it’s over, you can stay with us, and we’ll trial pack life. Far away from your parents and that community that makes you feel like you’re less than instead of everything.”

“I can’t ask that of you,” I whisper.

Ace grins, full of mischief. “You’re not asking. We’re offering. The three of us talked last night, and it makes the most sense. We want to give you the whole experience of our pack, short of bonding. We’ll get to know you better, and you can ask us anything you want.”

He looks so damned earnest; I don’t know how to say no to him.

“Do what your gut is telling you, Hana. What’s stopping you?”

“I-I don’t know. I’m scared,” I whisper, knowing I’m safe with them as I untangle my vulnerable thoughts and feelings. “But I need to find a job to help Lana with her school tuition. She starts in the fall, and when I left home, I’m pretty sure I also killed her funding. Then there’s the engagement—”

“Engagement?” Ezra rears his head, the color leeching from his face. He backs away like I’m a stranger instead of

someone who's shared every intimate inch with him.

My cheeks flush, and I glance at my plate, suddenly very interested in the crumbs left behind. "Yeah. My parents arranged it. It's a business deal," I mutter.

Christos growls and the sound raises the hairs on the back of my neck. "And you ended it?" he asks.

"I texted him that I was leaving town and left my parents a note that I wasn't going to marry him. My mom put out a missing persons report with the police station. She refused to believe I'd left of my own volition—like the person I've always been disappeared when I bloomed. But maybe she's right. I fell into my role as the perfect, obedient Omega daughter when I moved back home. All the shock and chaos of it was too much to face, and then when I realized I'd never get to work at a multinational, it was the last straw, and I withdrew. I became a shell of who I once was."

The room falls silent as my words hang in the air. I can feel their eyes on me, but I can't bring myself to look up and see the disappointment in their eyes. The memories of that time are still so raw and so painful.

But then, Christos's hand is on my cheek, tilting my head to meet his gaze. "You're not a shell, Hana. You're the most beautiful, vibrant person I've ever met. And you're one hell of an Omega with an Alpha's backbone. Don't let anyone, especially not your parents, tell you any different."

I appreciate it more than he knows that he's not trying to step in and fight my battles for me. I got into this mess and need to get myself out. Closing my eyes, I lean into his touch, feeling tears prick at the corners of my eyes.

Ace clears his throat, drawing my attention. “So, you never actually broke up with your fiancé. From what I gather, he thinks you left, and your parents don’t want to lose face and are probably feeding him a story about you going missing.”

I wince. Mom probably didn’t tell him I ended the engagement. To be honest, it was something I should have done on my own and not through my parents, even if they were the ones to set it up in the first place. I’d agreed to it, and it was my responsibility to now disagree with it.

“Fucking high-society dipshits,” Ezra grumbles.

“I need to go home.” I realize suddenly, shocking them into silence as I speak the idea into existence.

“What—”

“Hana, no—”

“Not a chance—”

I cut them all off by lifting my hand. “You’re right. I need to end this once and for all. And more importantly, I need to get out from under my parents’ thumbs.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Ace counters. “You can do that from the road with us. We can at least be there to support you.”

I shake my head. “I need to do this on my own. I dug myself into this, and I’m going to crawl my way out. I might be an Omega, but I am still Hana Motherfucking Henderson—the Omega raised like an Alpha.”

Christos beams with pride, that emotion taking root in my chest through our bond. Ezra looks like he’d rather swallow glass than go back to our hometown, and Ace looks regretful

for even bringing it up because now it means I'm not going with them.

“You three have a tour to get back to. As soon as it's over, we'll do this right.” I see the outcome I want clear as day, but it's the steps between now and then that require some planning.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Hana

THE CALL WITH HAILEY IS FILLED WITH AWE AND DISBELIEF that I marked Christos, initiating a half-bond—one he’s been fighting the need to reciprocate. Every time he is within arm’s reach, his body tenses up, and he keeps himself away.

It turns out that Hailey is already on her way to Dallas, having broken up the sixteen-hour drive into two days. She worked it out with Christos during my heat that Julie would stay with the tour so she wasn’t abandoned while Hailey drove here. If I had agreed to go with the guys, Hailey would have joined us for the flight.

Cole is not amused at Julie’s presence but does as his boss says. And it’s not without complaint. Ace leans closer and shows me his phone in their group chat, and it’s hilarious.

Cole: *She is in the way.*

Christos: *Then give her something to do?*

Cole: *Then we have to pay her, and she’s *not* an employee.*

Christos: *She might be. We do need to replace Gray at the end of this tour. Did you do the interview?*

Cole: *Pfft. Interview? She queued up a playlist and did an interpretive dance while voicing Muppet characters to show her “range” of announcer voices while making lewd comments about the dancers.*

Christos: *Be honest, Cole... did you laugh?*

Cole: **middle finger emoji* You don’t pay me enough to put up with this.*

Christos: *How does a raise sound?*

Cole: *How does my resignation sound?*

Ezra: *How was the dancing?*

Ace: *Which Muppets specifically?*

Cole: *You're all unhinged. And you owe me. And yes, her background check is fine. One minor blip about a mistaken identity, but I urge you to consider other options.*

Christos: *I think you're the only person I know who uses periods at the end of texts when there isn't a sentence following it. But fine. We will look at others, but I think Julie might be a winner*

Cole: *You've become senile in your old age. And grammar is important!*

Christos: *Love you too*

As Hailey drives to us, we clean up the nest while acting out the text conversation because it's hilarious, order takeout, and spend our time wrapped around one another, knowing we'll be separating soon.

My Omega is a needy and whiney bitch, demanding each of my Alphas keep their hands on me at all times. Casual touches, soft kisses, and all the cuddles on the couch are only doing the bare minimum to satisfy my cravings, but it's all I'll allow now that my heat has passed. The next time we come together, I want it to be without complications, and my family and ex-fiancé pose significant complications.

I want to get to know these guys, and fucking six ways to Sunday won't do that. So, instead, we're playing Mario Kart as we wait for Hailey, who texted that she's a few minutes away.

Christos's bond thrums in my chest, and I cradle it with my consciousness. He glances over at me, and our eyes meet. The intensity of his gaze sends shivers down my spine, and I have to look away before he can see how much I want to throw my original plan out the window and jump him here on this big gray sofa.

The doorbell rings, saving me from succumbing to my base desires, and I jump up from the couch to answer it. Hailey stands on the other side, looking tired but relieved to see me.

"Hey, girl," she says, pulling me into a tight hug. "You okay?"

I nod, feeling tears prick at the corners of my eyes. "Yeah, I'm good. So glad to see you."

Hailey smiles and steps inside, marveling at the renovated house. I barely paid attention when we arrived, but the work they've done is incredible. It's slightly masculine with the color palette, but it feels homey, like the house is hugging you.

We reach the living room, and Christos stands up from the couch to greet her. "Hey, Hailey. Good to see you." He isn't pleased with my plan to go home and wait until they finish their tour, but he understands.

Ending things with Beau and making my parents see reason will be an epic uphill climb. Still, if I can't move on with their blessing, I'll move on knowing I did everything I could to salvage our relationship and, hopefully, secure Lana's future at college. Because while the guys played video games, my body was finally relaxed enough to let my mind work. And my mind worked overtime to come up with a plan. If I don't try, I'll regret it.

“You guys too.”

Christos and Hailey exchange pleasantries and updates, and jealousy spikes in me as he smiles at her. It’s ridiculous, I know, but I can’t help feeling possessive over him after marking him. I whine in my throat, and all three of my Alphas swing their gazes to me, ready to jump in and right whatever wrong is plaguing me.

I wave them off. “I’m fine.”

“Omega,” Christos says, stepping past Ezra and crowding my space. “I promise that you are it for me. For us. Trust us.”

Sure, trust. It’s the hardest thing in the world, but the way he says it makes it seem so easy. Thinking of them going out on the rest of their tour and having people paw at them when they’re on stage sends a streak of jealousy through me again. But then my mind whispers *They’ve given you no reason to doubt them. They’ve gone above and beyond, showing they want to try this. Give them a chance.*

“I’ll try.”

He nods, and I know he’s satisfied with my answer. It’s all I can give right now, and it has to be enough.

“Okay, well, I guess we should get going,” Hailey says, looking over at me with her brow raised. “It’s another four hours till home.”

I nod and sigh, knowing their tour ends in another three weeks. How am I this attached after only a handful of days together?

Christos wraps me in his arms, his scent and warmth surrounding me and making me feel centered. He leans back and taps my chest. “I’m right here. If you need me, yank on the bond.”

“Plus,” Ace says as he steps to the right of me, wedging himself into our little huddle, “we’ll constantly be in contact. You’ll be sick of us by the end of this. Texts, calls, video chats, carrier pigeons, you name it. We’ll get to know each other despite the distance.” A little sigh of relief escapes me. Ace is looking at me with such earnestness in his eyes that it’s impossible to believe anything other than the words he’s saying.

Ezra joins us, rounding out our circle and tipping my face to meet his lips. His kiss is still challenging and demanding, that little bite of pain making me moan as he nips my bottom lip. “I promise you, Hana, we’re not letting you go without feeling the effects. We’ll be done soon and then be on our way to you. I swear it.”

He holds out his pinky like when we were kids, and he promised we wouldn’t get in trouble for toilet papering the neighbor’s house. Spoiler alert: we did. But we got in trouble together, and that made all the difference.

I wrap my little finger around his and smile. “I know you will.”

“Come on,” Hailey says, gently pulling me away from the warmth of my Alphas. “Let’s go before I get dragged into the whole ‘Omega wants us all for herself’ thing. I love you, girl, but no way, no how.”

A laugh erupts from me as I try to imagine Hailey in our pack. It would never work, first because she’s so independent that a pack would stifle her, and second, I don’t think she’s ready to settle down any time soon. Hailey has always been a free spirit, more in common with Julie than me. But when she is, I know she will be an awesome mate for someone.

I kiss the guys goodbye, each one lingering and full of promise. Our hands touch, our bodies yearn for one another, and it is with an iron will that I manage to take a step backward. Ace hands me a duffle bag, and I peek inside, curious at the contents. We didn't fly down here with anything, and my breath catches in my throat when I see clothing from each of them. He packed me their scents to take with me, and the small gesture is enough to have my heart trip over itself. With a final, lingering goodbye, I follow Hailey to the door, and just before shutting it behind me, I turn back to face three sets of eyes watching me with a mix of longing and sadness.

It's too soon to say I love you. I don't even know if I feel that yet, but it seems like the right thing to say now, even if it doesn't make any damn sense, so I choke down the words. "I'll see you soon," I say, my voice catching in my throat.

"See you soon, baby girl," Christos says with a sad smile.

Turning away is made all the more difficult by the half-bond in my chest emitting a sense of desolation and defeat as I take the last step onto the front porch. I close the door behind me with a soft snick and face Hailey. "I miss them already."

She wraps her arm around my shoulders and pulls me close as we walk to her car. "I know, Hana. But they'll be done soon, and then you can spend as much time with them as you want to." She opens the door to the van and waves her hand with a flourish. "Your chariot, Omega."

I punch her in the shoulder and pull her in for a massive hug, breathing in her familiar scent and welcoming aura. "Fuck, I've missed you."

"You too." She pulls back, and I climb into the front seat. Hailey jogs around the hood and hops in, starting the van and pointing out the window. The guys are all on the porch with

sad looks as they wave goodbye and blow kisses. I return them, and Hailey rolls the van forward, easing our way around the circular driveway and toward the main road.

“So, what’s the plan?” she asks, trying to take my mind off the guys. “Over the phone earlier, you mentioned breaking up with your parents and Beau. Do you need a place to crash through all of that? I know my apartment is small, but we can make it work. If we can share the van, we can share a place. There’s a built-in toilet and everything.”

My best friend is the most amazing person in the world, but I can’t accept her offer. “I love you so much for offering, Hailey, but no. I need to stand on my own two feet. It’s been too long.”

She nods, understanding of my situation and desire to take back some of my control.

“My plan is social media strategy-based marketing. I might not be able to sit on a board or work my way up in a company because I’m an Omega, but I can do that work behind a screen, so my stupid pheromones aren’t an issue,” I say, more than a little determination in my voice. “Hell, maybe there’s even remote work for me without disclosing my designation. Omegas are often passed over because we’re ‘impressionable’ or could sway others with our pheromones.”

“That’s all bullshit, and I’m glad you recognize it. The idiots perpetuating that idea shouldn’t be allowed in public spaces.”

There are a small number of news personalities or radio show hosts who perpetuate those views, but they’re loud as fuck, and sometimes it’s hard to drown out the naysayers when they pop up everywhere.

“I’m going to make a name for myself—designation be damned—fight back against the stereotypes, and start saving to put Lana through college.”

Hailey whoops and pumps her fist, swerving on the road as she backs my little speech. “That’s the spirit! And you know I’ll always have your back, Hana. Whatever you need. But what about your parents? Are you sure you’re ready to cut ties? It’s not easy.”

“I know.” I exhale roughly. “But I have to. They’re too biased and won’t understand. They want me to be a submissive housewife, popping out Alpha babies and keeping my head down as I slot into the little life they’ve tried to carve out for me. That’s not who I am, and it never will be.”

“You know, the guys are doing well for themselves...”

I follow her line of thinking. “No way, no how. I can’t possibly ask them to pay for Lana to go to school. Nor will I ask them for a job. It wouldn’t feel right, and I’ve never been the type to ask for anything.”

Hailey places her hand on my shoulder, a silent show of support. “I know, and you’re right. You’re strong, Hana. And we’ll figure something out for Lana.”

I smile, feeling full of hope and determination. “Thanks. I appreciate you more than you know.”

As we drive home, I can’t help but think about my Alphas and the bond that connects us, even if it’s only a half-bond and only with one of them. It’s like I can feel Ace and Ezra tucked right in close with the thread connecting Christos and me. It’s both a blessing and a curse, this half-bond constantly tugging at my heartstrings. But I know that with Hailey and the promise of a future, I’ll get through anything.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Ezra

WE'RE STANDING BACKSTAGE AT A VENUE IN LOS ANGELES after our show, but my heart is in Texas. I sound like a corny love song, but fuck if I care.

“Chin up, Ezra. We're almost done,” Christos mutters beside me.

I look around the huddled group of guys, everyone looking as forlorn as I feel. I've been pumping out my displeasure for too long, and the whole damn company is feeling the effects.

“Sorry, guys,” I say.

Ace claps me on the shoulder in solidarity and throws an arm around my waist, holding me close. He's feeling it as much as I am, and it's bringing the whole pack's vibe down hard. We're three shows away from the end, and his pre-show meditation takes longer every night. “We know, man.”

“I'm regretting adding extra dates,” Christos grumbles. He feels the same way I do, but as our leader, he's got to hide it more than me. I can't imagine how painful it is for him with his half-bonded mate halfway across the country.

“I'm not sorry for it,” Jake adds, slinging an arm around his packmate, Brandon. “It secured us a better deposit on the house.”

“You bought the house? When?” Christos asks, turning his head toward Jake.

“Three days ago. It's official today, though, so we waited to say something until the ink was dry. It's in downtown Dallas, so it's only about ten minutes from your place, Boss! We can hang out all the time!”

Christos groans while the rest of us congratulate him and his pack, offering fist bumps and high fives for their achievement. The whole time, I'm imagining Hana in our packhouse and our lives. We've been apart for two weeks, and this final week has felt like sand in an hourglass going one goddamned grain at a time through a choked middle.

"Okay, guys. You know the drill. Be good, no jail, no bailouts, just work. We're almost at the end, and I know we're all exhausted. After a few more shows, we earn a long stretch of time off at home." Everyone cheers half-heartedly, and we break, heading for the buses and needing some peace and quiet.

Ace, Christos, and I reach our bus with our phones clutched in our hands. The group chat with the three of us and Hana is already open on my screen because it's the only thing I bother with besides Hana's marketing videos. In the weeks since we've been apart, she's put her nose to the grindstone and is building something unique.

Hana: *Did you guys have a good show?*

Ace: *Yeah, it was fine. How are you?*

Christos: *We miss you, Omega.*

Ezra: *I saw that TikTok today on changing the metadata on websites to increase SEO for better traction in marketing. I've sent your advice to our marketing team and told them if they don't do this already, they need to.*

Christos: *Way to kill the mood.*

I laugh and look across the bench seat at Christos, who's smirking at the phone. When I look down, I see why.

Hana: *Talking numbers and marketing only heightens the mood, Alpha.*

Ace: Mmm, how heightened?

An incoming video call lights up our screens, and I grin. Ace knocks against my shoulder, nodding at my phone for me to answer. I click the green icon and join the call. Hana looks as amazing as she always does, her brown hair falling around her face in waves and her blue eyes bright with excitement.

She sighs with contentment when the video connects. “Hi,” she breathes.

“Hey, Banana. How was your day?”

Christos leaves his side of the table and stands behind us so we can all look at our Omega.

“Good. Fine.” She looks down, and when she raises her eyes again, they’re glassy. “My dad said he never wants to speak to me again.”

I swear under my breath and bring the phone closer to my face. “I’m so sorry, Hana. Forest is an old-school Alpha, and in that community, you know as well as I do that they’re slow to change. He’ll come around; if he doesn’t, it’s his loss.”

She shrugs, looking so defeated. “Mom wasn’t much better, but then again, she’s always held the same ideals as Dad.”

“What happened?” Ace asks gently.

“I was there for a ‘family dinner,’” she says, using the air quotes with one hand as the other holds the phone, “and had just finished packing the last of my stuff. Mom came in, complaining about abandoning the family again, and I snapped.”

She sniffles, but a small smile graces her face. “I told her I was ashamed of how this family treated an Omega. Mom

should know better than anyone about how Omegas are treated like chattel and sold off to the highest bidder. After all, it's the same thing that happened to her. Well, that sent her into a blind rage about how if she hadn't done her duty, Lana and I wouldn't exist.

“It went on and on, and finally, I broke. I told her how disappointed I was that after my designation, I felt like I had become nothing but a bargaining chip—nothing but a nuisance for them to trade off at the first opportunity. She blamed me for ruining the family by running off and wanting to break the engagement, which they haven't mentioned to Beau yet. All I wanted to do was tell her about you guys, not that they'd be welcoming in the slightest, but she's still my mom, you know?”

Ace and Christos look at me with confusion, and I fill them in. “In that community, packs are considered lesser because, according to them, one Alpha should be able to provide for one Omega. If they require more Alphas, it is seen as a shortcoming in providing for their families.”

“Religious nuts?” Ace asks.

Hana shrugs. “I think it's a mix of that and the norm in our society here. It's a pride thing that one Alpha can do it all.”

“You were going to tell them about us?” Christos asks, a bit of hope permeating his voice. Since Hana left, he's been nervous that she would pull away and break the bond, falling into her old life. I didn't do us any favors when I described the security that life had when you were in it. But I knew exactly how it felt when you weren't.

“It wouldn't have been right. Not to share something exciting during an argument.” Hana sighs, but she straightens

her shoulders. “Maybe one day, but not yet. They’re not ready for it.”

“How’s work going?” Ace asks, steering us away from the painful parents’ conversation.

She smiles. “Good. The marketing videos have brought in a couple of smaller clients. Not much, but enough to pay rent and put aside a little money for Lana. I’ll take on loans to pay for her schooling if needed.”

“Hana—” I start, but she interrupts.

“Nope! I’m telling you the same thing I told Hailey. I’m not letting you guys pay for her school. I appreciate the offer so much, but I need to do this alone. Besides, I’d never forgive myself if I went from depending on my parents to depending on you.”

Ace nods. “I get that. But we’re here if you need us. Okay? We could also use your smarts in the business if you ever wanted a job with the Beasts franchise.”

Hana smiles. “I think that goes along the same vein as the money thing, so I will have to politely decline.” A small smile tugs at her lips. “Just knowing you’re in my corner is more than enough. Thanks, guys.”

We chat longer, updating each other on our days and discussing what we’ll do when the tour ends. Hana has settled into an apartment in Hailey’s building and is excited about it. Despite her cheerful demeanor, I can see the exhaustion etched into her features, and I know she’s been working nonstop since we’ve been apart. I want to wrap her in my arms and remove her stress. We’re still about a week away from being reunited, and we all need to stay focused until then.

A surge of protectiveness washes over me. Hana is my Omega, and I will do whatever it takes to keep her safe and happy, even if it means going up against her family and their archaic beliefs.

Ace takes the phone and heads toward the bedroom as the call turns frisky. I turn toward Christos. “We’ll figure this out,” I say, determination threaded through every word. “We’ll make sure Hana and her sister are cared for, no matter what it takes. She’ll want for nothing.”

He nods, but I know as well as he does that we’re not doing anything for Hana without her saying so. She’d resent us, and that’s no way to start our courtship, especially after it all kicked off with a surprise heat and mere days together before we were fucking in our packhouse nest.

We follow Ace to the bedroom, where he’s already set up the TV with the video call. God bless technology. Hana in 4k HD is incredible, and every night, we video chat before falling asleep. Her in her bed and us in ours. But this time, the energy is different. She’s looking through the screen with fire in her eyes and a blush on her cheeks.

“I want to see you,” she says, a quiver in her voice as she lies down on her bed, turning to the side so it’s like we’re all in bed together.

“See us?” Christos asks as he shucks his shirt, the muscles of his chest and stomach flexing as he tosses the garment in the corner of our bedroom. I groan, and my cock stands at attention with his hard body on display and the look of lust on Hana’s face.

“Yes.”

Christos looks from me to Ace, a brow raised.

It clicks for me first. “You want to watch us together, Hana Banana?” I ask, letting the desire drip from my tone. We haven’t done phone sex before, but damn, it’s on my list, and two weeks without the feel of her wrapped around my cock and her moans in my ears has damn near driven me to breaking point.

She looks unsure, so I use my best weapon. My dirty talk. “You want to watch as we fuck each other? I’ll slide my cock into Ace as Christos fucks his face. Then maybe we’ll switch. I’ll let Christos take my ass, pounding into me like he’ll die without his release. Is that what you want, baby?”

Her moan is pornographic as she imagines the scenario I play out for her. “Yes. I want that so fucking much.”

“Mmm, I bet you do, Dream Girl,” Ace says. “On one condition.”

“What’s that?” Her voice is breathy, and I feel her ache from here, or maybe it’s my own.

“You’re going to touch yourself as we do. We want to hear you. I want to look at the screen and see you watching us as I fuck them,” Christos growls, a command, not a request.

She nods and puts the phone down. The blue blouse she was wearing passes over the screen, and there’s jostling on her end as she takes it all off. When she picks up the phone, she pans her body, showing us those tempting dips and valleys, the swell of her breasts, and her rapidly rising and falling chest as she breathes in the excitement.

I want more. “Show me more, Omega. Show me that pretty pink pussy dripping for us—for your Alphas. I still taste your slick on my tongue, Omega, and I want more of it.”

She gasps but follows my orders, spreading her legs and giving us a shot of her glistening pussy, wet with her slick as she runs her fingers through the mess. She trails it up her abdomen and rubs it into the skin of her lower belly.

“Fuck yes, baby girl,” Christos groans as he drops the sweats he threw on after our performance. He slips out of his underwear, fists his hard cock, and climbs onto the bed beside Ace.

I’m the last to join them, still watching the screen like she’ll disappear if I blink too long. Who can blame me? It happened once before, and the itch crawling along my skin to get back to her hasn’t left me since she drove away with Hailey.

“Ezra,” Ace calls. “Come here.”

I strip down and step forward, my cock bobbing in his face. He takes it firmly and strokes me from root to tip, following his fist with his clever tongue. He’s focused on the task at hand, even as he positions himself on the bed so Hana gets the best view of all three of us.

“Fuck,” she breathes, a hitch in her breath.

“Play with your nipples, Omega,” I direct. “Imagine it’s our hands and mouths wrapped around your pert tits, flicking and sucking them. Put the phone on the pillow or something. You’re going to need both hands tonight.”

She pauses for a moment, then sets the phone at the foot of her bed, resting against her footboard or something, and reaches for her nipples. Her intake of breath is audible, and I can almost taste those little nubs.

“Good girl. Now, spread your legs. Wider, Hana. Let us see how wet you are.”

She moans and does as she's told, spreading her legs so we're met with a glorious view as she props herself up on pillows to watch us too. She plucks at her nipples, then slides her fingers through her slick and back down to rub it along her lower lips.

"Tut, tut," Christos chastises. "We didn't tell you to play yet."

She grunts her displeasure at the directions but returns her hands to her perfect tits.

Ace turns on the bed, giving me his ass as he faces Christos.

"Do you know what I want to do to Christos, Dream Girl?" Ace asks, his voice thick with his desire.

"Yes," she breathes, her fingers toying with her nipples nonstop. "Fuck him with your mouth while Ezra fucks your ass with his cock."

I groan. Oh, hell yes. That's what I want. I grab some lube from the bedside and circle Ace's hole. He exhales and pushes back against my fingers until they sink inside him. He relaxes under my touch, letting me prepare him for my cock.

"You ready, Ezra?" Ace asks. "I don't want this to be gentle."

"Yes," I groan as he presses back against me until my cock nudges at his asshole.

"You're going to have to beg," he whispers. "I want to hear it."

"Please," I pant, already imagining how tight his ass will grip me. It always makes me feel like coming home. Like he'll

never let me go, and I don't want to leave anyway. I can feel his need coursing through our bond.

“Then do it,” Ace taunts, pressing further and bearing down so my cock slips in an inch. He grips me, and I throw my head back in bliss. “Hana,” he says, “touch that pussy, but don't come yet. Watch and play.”

She groans when Christos does, his thrust into Ace's mouth sending our blond Alpha back onto my cock a little more. I grip his hips and thrust inside, giving him time to stretch for me.

He pops off of Christos and turns around to meet my eyes. “I said hard.”

I grin wickedly, and on my next thrust, I slide in further. Ace's eyes close as my cock buries into him. He turns and opens his mouth again for Christos.

“Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck,” Hana chants as she watches us. This is nothing new for us. We fuck each other however the mood strikes that day, but having Hana watch us skyrockets the eroticism to a million, and my nerves feel like they're on fire.

Christos grunts, and we make eye contact, the love in our bond shimmering so fucking bright I think it'll eclipse the sun. He smiles at me and then turns toward the screen. “Tell me what you taste like. Run your fingers through your slick, baby, and then suck them. I want to hear you.” The desire in his voice is palpable. This woman fits with us. She is ours, and we are hers.

Even though Fate picked us for each other, nothing could have predicted our compatibility and her willingness to accept us for who we are.

She does as Christos asks, and her groan echoes around the room as she spreads her slick juices and tastes them. Her other hand is at the top of her mound, and her fingers are positioned in an upside-down V so we can see all of her.

“What do you taste like, baby girl?” Christos asks.

She moans and finally says, “Like I’m yours.”

Her words sink into my consciousness as I thrust into Ace. My hands grip his hips, and my eyes flit between them. The only thing that could possibly make this better is having her with us.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Hana

EZRA POUNDS INTO ACE'S ASS AS ACE SUCKS DOWN Christos's thick cock like it's an ice cream cone, and it's the middle of the summer in Texas.

My slick bursts on my tongue, the taste salty, a little sweet, and a lot aroused. I stare at the phone at the end of my bed, propped up in this little room. My own live porn show in the middle of a rented studio apartment next door to Hailey. Fuck, if she hears the moans through the walls, I'm going to have to hide away for a week in shame. Mrs. Mulroney, my neighbor on the other side, is a sweet Beta who never wears her hearing aids despite being almost totally deaf. Unless she's completely changed her stance on the devices in the last two hours, I should be safe from any embarrassment there.

Ezra slides into Ace again, and his movements become choppy. I push my fingers into my wet cunt and am rewarded with a gush of new slick, easing their entry. I match Ezra's pace, and once we're in sync, I look at Christos as Ace swallows him down.

Seeing them makes me moan, and I grab the phone to watch, mesmerized.

Ezra pulls Ace off Christos's cock and turns him over, flipping him until he's on his back. Ace's eyes are so dark and full of lust that they're almost black. He looks at me through the screen, and I know without a doubt that he can feel my eyes devouring him. His cock throbs and I move my hand over my pussy again. My hand goes to my clit, and I rub it in firm circles.

Ezra fists his cock and pumps it over Ace's spread legs. Ace grips Christos's cock from below, working him over as well. A second later, Ezra comes all over Ace's stomach and hard dick, my blond Alpha using it as lube for his own cock.

My orgasm barrels into me as I watch them. My eyes slam shut, and my back bows, but I keep rubbing those circles on my clit, determined to prolong this as much as possible. I want them here with me, but until then, I'll take pleasure from them however I can. They groan as they stare at me, Ace still pumping his cock and Ezra floating back down from his high.

"How does it feel?" Christos asks.

"Good," Ace says, spreading Ezra's seed all over his cock. "So good."

Ezra falls onto the bed beside Ace, and together, they tongue Christos's length. It's erotic and decadent, and they go so deliciously slowly, I don't know how my half-bonded Alpha can stand it. The tension in his body is visible, even through the phone screen. His emotions spark in my chest through our bond. There's a faint whisper of impatience, but mostly, it's pure, unadulterated love flowing so strong that I wonder what it would feel like if we were fully bonded.

"Get a toy, Hana," Christos says, turning to the camera.

I fumble in my bedside drawer and take out my trusty knotted dildo and Ace's glitter thong. He laughs when he sees it, but his smile is pure joy, knowing I have something of his nearby. "Hands and knees, Hana," Christos continues. "I want you to fuck that sweet pussy with that imitation cock and knot while I fuck Ezra. Can you do that for me, sweetheart?"

I nod, unable to form coherent sentences, and turn my body, presenting for the camera at the foot of the bed where

I've propped it up again. Christos groans and moves behind Ezra, who has put himself in the same position I'm in. I look between my slightly spread knees at the screen.

Ezra's cock is hard again, and Christos takes it in his hand, stroking it a few times before working his lubed dick into Ezra's ass. They moan together, and Christos fucks him slowly, working him open for his thick cock. Ezra looks at me and grins, eyes full of lust and want. When he's ready, Christos slaps him on the ass and pounds into him.

Ace stands at the other side of the bed and feeds his dick to Ezra as he's worked over between them. The erotic sight is too much for me, and before they can order me to join them, I'm already pushing my dildo into my pussy and groaning at the feeling.

I slide it in and out with one hand, mirroring Christos's movements, and slip the other down my body to my clit. As I fuck myself with the toy, the knot bumps against my opening, drawing a moan from me as I imagine it's one of them taking me and locking inside me. The knot is big enough that it doesn't slip all the way inside, but the feel of it against my clit is a bonus.

"Good girl," Christos says. "Fuck that pretty pussy for me, Hana. I want to see you come."

"And I want to see you take that knot," Ace adds as he slides down Ezra's throat. "Fuck do I wish you were here."

"Me too," I moan as the knot works its way inside me on each thrust. I handle the flared base with a white-knuckle grip, and my breathing becomes erratic as the orgasm builds.

Their moans echo all around me as they surround me with the sounds of pleasure and lust, and I let them fill me with

desire.

“Fuck,” I say as I come. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!” I scream out my intense release. I collapse from the force of it but keep rocking the dildo against my G-spot, letting the knot spur on my release.

“Come for me, Ezra,” Christos says. “Come all over these sheets as I fuck you.”

Ezra lets out a tortured groan around Ace’s cock, and together, they orgasm right there on camera. The dildo is knotted in me, my orgasm keeping it in place until my body decides to let it free. Thankfully, I’m not in heat anymore, so it should be only a few minutes.

Christos yells out his pleasure as he goes rigid, coming deep inside Ezra, and his pleasure ripples outward through the bond. Christos wraps his big body around Ezra, holding him up with his strong arms and turning them to the side so they can spoon in the bed. Ace lies beside them, running his fingers through Ezra’s hair.

The love that permeates my chest spirals outward, and Christos lifts his head to look at the camera. He smiles softly, that love for his packmates swelling as if it encompasses me too. It’s unbelievable to think that’s happening, but my vulnerable self grips that love with both hands and hangs on tight. Between the texts, calls, videos, and sweet messages they send every time I cross their minds, that little feeling has taken root and has slowly grown.

“That was perfect, Omega,” Christos says, looking up at me but wrapping his arms around his packmates. He usually calls me Hana, but now and then, when he uses my designation, I get a little swell of pride in my chest. It’s

unfamiliar, but I'm coming to grips with it, and I love how it sounds on his lips.

I flop onto the bed, letting my breathing return to normal, and finally removing the dildo with a groan. A gush of slick escapes with it, and I'm thankful for the mattress pad under the sheets.

Grabbing the phone from the end of the bed, I lay my head on a pillow as Ace asks, "How much longer?"

"Three more shows," Christos answers. He turns his head toward me, and his gaze locks on mine through the screen. "Three more, Hana, then we're coming for you."

The promise in his tone bolsters my confidence, and I sigh with contentment as I cuddle with a pillow, shifting over so I'm not lying in the wet spot. "Eight days, right?"

"Right," Ezra answers. "We booked a flight for Sunday morning. We did the math, and it was faster to fly than drive off the night after our company celebration. We've got the final performance on Thursday night up in Sacramento, and then Friday is finalizing everything with our sponsors and making sure all the accounts and payments are balanced. Saturday is the traditional end-of-tour party, then Sunday morning, we'll be in Houston."

"You mentioned the party. Something about getting blackout drunk in one of the hotel rooms, performers only. An unwinding of some sort?"

Ezra nods, but Ace is the one to continue. "We're not getting drunk this time. No way are we missing that flight or reuniting with you while nursing a hangover. We'll be there to monitor the others, but we'll be waiting to get to you the whole time."

“You don’t have to abstain on my account,” I say. I don’t want them missing their flight, but fucking hell, I feel like I’ve put a ball and chain around their ankles.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Dream Girl. It’s what you do for those you love.”

Silence permeates the call, and it’s like no one knows what to say after that little slip.

“Fuck it,” Ace says. “Hana, I’m falling in love with you. And that might be weird or too soon or the scent bond, but there it is.”

“Me too,” Ezra adds. “I love you, Hana. I always have, even if it wasn’t always in the same way. You can’t imagine how fucking glad I am that Ace threw his thong in your face.”

I snort, and the mood lifts considerably.

Christos shifts behind him, and I glance at the screen to see him nodding in agreement, but he doesn’t say the words. I don’t think I can either at the moment. I want to say it in person when I’m sure. When my life is on track. When I can stand on my own two feet and come to them without needing anything or them feeling like they have to solve my problems.

I don’t know what to say or do, so I’m grateful when Ace breaks the tension. “I need tacos.”

He gets off the bed, stopping to kiss Ezra and Christos before moving to the camera. His face fills my entire screen, and I laugh as his unflattering angle worsens. He’s so damn cute; I can’t take it.

“You did amazing, Dream Girl. I’ll text you later. Right now, I gotta steer Robert toward the closest taco joint.”

“Bye, Ace.” I return his kissy face, and then there were three.

As with every massive orgasm these guys trigger in me, my body begins to shut down, craving sleep more than anything else. I checked on it after my heat, and apparently, it’s an Omega’s habit to rest after sex, ensuring they don’t move around too much to give their bodies a chance to fertilize.

That’s clearly not happening, but it doesn’t stop the sleepiness from taking over.

“Hana, we’re going to let you get some rest. Talk tomorrow?”

“Mmm,” I mumble and nod toward the phone beside me.

“Love you, Banana. Goodnight,” he murmurs.

I hear the call end and snuggle into my bed. Must. Change. Sheets.

Fuck it. No one died from sleeping in a wet spot.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Hana

“HANA HENDERSON, YOU ANSWER THIS DOOR RIGHT NOW OR, so help me God, I’ll call the police!”

Great. Mom’s here.

“Please excuse me, Mr. Beeker. I’ll just be a moment.”

The stoic man’s brows are halfway to his hairline, and when I mute my microphone and hide my video feed, he forgets he’s still on the call and lets out a sigh of exasperation.

“If she costs me this job, I’m going to scream,” I mumble as I cross my little apartment and fling open the door.

Mom is standing there in her Sunday best, on a Tuesday, of course, because why not wear that shit every day?

“Mom.”

“Finally. Hana, enough is enough. You must have come to your senses by now.”

I roll my eyes as she brushes past me and into my apartment. “What are you talking about, Mom?” I ask, closing the door behind her.

“Don’t play dumb, Hana. You know exactly what I’m talking about. You can’t keep living like this, on your own and barely making rent by doing this social media thing.” She waves at my sad little desk like it’s diseased, and she’s afraid to get too close to it. But it’s *my* sad little desk, and even though it’s made up of a folding table and a hell of a lot of duct tape, I love it more than words can say.

I resist the urge to snap back at her. Despite taking my dad’s side during the move-out situation and saying she never

wanted to speak to me again, she's texted me every day, demanding I come home and stop being a child.

I haven't texted back or answered any of her calls, but it doesn't stop her from sending rude messages full of condescension and disbelief at recent events. She's been on my case about my life choices since I returned.

But I like my new job, and I like my apartment, small as it is. Sure, it's not glamorous, but it's mine.

"I'm doing fine, Mom. I don't need your help."

She scoffs. "And what about Beau? How long are you going to keep him on the hook during your whole 'experimental phase'?"

My face flushes with anger. "I'm handling it, Mom. He's away for work and should be back on Friday. We're meeting then."

"Hana, this is a terrible idea," Mom says as she dusts off my comforter to sit on my bed. My bed is clean and clutter-free, but she can't resist.

"Mom, I'm in the middle of a meeting." I wave toward my computer, where Mr. Beeker is getting impatient.

"By all means," she says, imperiously waving at the computer.

I take a deep breath and turn back to my desk, sitting down, unmuting the microphone, and turning my video feed back on. Mr. Beeker is glaring at me, but I put on my best smile and apologize for the interruption. He grunts but lets it go, and we get back to business.

As the meeting drags on, I can feel my mom's disapproving gaze burning into the back of my head. She's out

of view of my camera, so at least I don't have to look at the shame in her eyes that I'm not the good little Omega she was when she was my age. I try to ignore the heavy weight of her stare and focus on the task at hand, but it's hard to concentrate with her judging me.

Finally, the meeting ends with an agreement to a contracted three-month period, and I turn back to face her. "There. Now that that's done, is there something you wanted to discuss, Mom?"

She sighs and looks away, fidgeting with her purse. "I-I worry about you, Hana. You're so young and have your whole life ahead of you. I don't want you to waste it on this nonsense."

I feel my temper starting to boil over. "This 'nonsense' is my job, Mom. It's what I went to school for and spent most of my life wanting. It pays my bills and keeps a roof over my head. I'm not wasting anything. I'm making a life for myself."

She looks up at me, her eyes filled with something I've never seen before. "You were supposed to be an Alpha."

The words strike my chest, but not in the way they did before. They feel heavy and sad, like all my mom's plans for me disappeared when I bloomed.

"I know. I thought that too, but it's not the way life went. I'm trying to make the best of my situation, and weirdly, I'm starting to enjoy being an Omega. I just wish I hadn't hidden after graduation. I could have started this business years ago."

Mom sighs. "I tried to get you out of hiding, Hana. But you were so far gone that the only thing that worked was directing you like when you were a toddler. Get up at this time, go here, do this. Months—no, years—went by, and there

was no change. There was no pulling you out of it. Your father and I are getting older, Hana, and we won't be around forever."

She looks down at her hands as they twist in her lap, over the picture-perfect Omega as she composes herself. "It's why I agreed when your father brought up marrying Beau. We want you looked after, and you weren't in a place to look after yourself."

The words land like a blow across my face. "That's not true—"

"It is true. I watched you go from an outspoken, driven woman to a ghost of your former self. I hated watching that, Hana." Tears drip down her cheeks, and she carefully wipes them away, cautious of her makeup. "I know it's partly my fault. I know that. But you were just existing. You weren't living, and as an Omega, your choices for a career are limited. If we'd known earlier, we would have steered you toward something you could have studied and enjoyed doing for work, but there was zero indication you would emerge as an Omega, and you were dead set on business school. There was no swaying you. Do you remember the PowerPoint presentation you made when you chose a school and a program?"

Despite the heaviness of the moment, I laugh. Mom and Dad had been off in different parts of the house working on whatever they did when I gathered them and Lana in the living room. I'd set up my computer to run through the projector and walked them through my fifty-seven-point plan for schooling and joining my Dad's company.

He'd smiled through it all, knowing I was going to follow in his footsteps, and at the end, he nodded and said, "Well

done, Hana. Motion approved.”

I don’t think I’d ever been prouder in my life.

“I want you to be happy and looked after, Hana. Life is hard for an unbonded Omega. I’ve seen it first-hand, and I don’t want you to feel like you’re on your own. Too many Omegas end up at less than reputable heat clinics or match-making centers.”

I take a deep breath and try to remain calm. “Mom, I appreciate your concern, but this is my life, and I’m happy with it. I don’t need you to approve of it; I just need you to respect it. As for caring for myself, you heard me land a contract a couple minutes ago. I’ll be okay, and even if I’m not living in your house or with the amenities I’m used to, I want this. But I also want you guys to be okay, too. I can’t marry Beau. It’s unfair to either of us, and the business shouldn’t hinge on him marrying me.”

I don’t mention the guys because, honestly, I’m not ready to share them with anyone. Hailey knows, of course, but they feel like mine right now, and I’m afraid of how my mom will react when I bring up the pack.

She nods, her eyes still filled with sadness. “I’ll try to respect your wishes, Hana. There are more options for Omegas now than when I was younger. Did you know I wanted to be a dancer?”

I shake my head. “No, you never mentioned it.”

She laughs softly. “I loved to dance. Ballet was my favorite, and though I wasn’t the most athletic, I was passionate. It was clear from the start that I was an Omega, so I would dance in my room alone after Grandma and Grandpa went to bed. I couldn’t be a dancer, but oh, how I loved it. In

high school, before I emerged, I was secretly in a dance club a few other girls created. One day, we were practicing after school in one of the other girl's mom's studio when a couple of older Alphas walked in.”

A shudder wracks my spine, not liking where this story's going.

Mom continues, looking out the window but clearly seeing the past play out. “They seemed charming initially and didn't set off any alarm bells in my mind. Everything was fine until it wasn't. I was small and quick, and while they were distracted, I made it to the front office to call for help. It was horrible, Hana. And by the time help arrived, those girls were damaged.”

She looks at me, her eyes uncharacteristically serious and unwavering. “As an Alpha or Beta, bad things can still happen to you, but far less than as an Omega. One Alpha command, and you're putty. It's why I vetted Beau so thoroughly. He is strong and too focused on work to care what you get up to in your spare time. But he's a layer of protection an Omega needs. Bonding changes scents for an Omega if claimed by an Alpha, making them undesirable to others.”

“Mom,” I start, unsure how to console her.

She waves me off. “It happened a long time ago, and though it may have hastened my engagement to your father, that doesn't mean I regret it. Protection and safety are my priorities, Hana. For myself and you girls.”

I try to put myself in Mom's shoes. Her experience shaped her, no matter how over it she seems to be now. It directed her entire life, and that's no small thing.

I take a deep breath and stand up, walking around the desk chair to kneel in front of my mom. “I understand where you’re coming from, Mom. I really do. But I need you to trust me. And maybe this time, not file a police report that I’m missing if I tell you I’m going out of town for a bit. I’m an adult now, and I’m finally living my life. I’m capable of taking care of myself, Alpha or no Alpha. You’ve done so much for me, most of which I didn’t recognize until now, and I appreciate it more than you know. But I need to figure out my path, even if it’s not what you imagined for me.”

She looks at me, her eyes softening. “I do trust you, Hana. You always were a driven and dedicated young woman, and while I wish you were going ahead with the engagement, I understand if it’s not what you want. Your father will have to figure something else out for the business. I just worry about you living here alone.”

I nod, understanding her concern. “I know, and I appreciate your worry. But I’m strong, even if I am an Omega, and I have people who support me. Hailey is right next door, and you’re a phone call away if I ever need you. I know I can come to you.”

She smiles. “That’s what they don’t teach us when we emerge. I think Omegas are the strongest designation. We hold it all together when the world crumbles around us, caring for our Alpha, our children, putting on a brave face when it feels like all we want to do is cry. We might not be physically strongest, but we are emotionally strong.”

I nod, understanding her words more than ever. The weight of my designation has never felt so light. I feel a sense of pride in being an Omega. We are the glue that holds everything together, and while it’s not always easy, it’s fulfilling in its

own way. My phone lights up on the bed beside Mom, and I grab it before she can see Christos's name on the screen.

“Don't worry, Mom. I'll figure it out and make sure to take care of myself. But I need to end things with Beau. Officially. And that means he and Dad might need to work on a new contract negotiation.”

She leans forward and hugs me tightly. “I know, sweetie. It was what was best for you a few months ago, but it's not now. I'll speak with your father, but it should come from you that it's over with Beau, and who knows? Maybe with our Omega charm and your beautiful brain, we can come up with something else to save your father's company. Promise me one thing?”

I pull back, wary of her ask. “What's that?”

“That you won't shut us out. We may not always understand, but we love you and want to be there for you.”

The weight of her words hits me hard. “I can't tell you everything, Mom. But I promise to tell you things when the time is right.”

With my calendar dinging for my next meeting, Mom and I hug, and I show her to the door, promising to get lunch with her at the club later this week.

Until then, I've got tuition and rent to work for, and I'm not letting myself get off track.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Ezra

OUR FINAL PERFORMANCE ENDS WITH ACE FLINGING HIS THONG into the wings, no longer allowing it to reach the audience. Xavier holds it up victoriously like he has since we found Hana and decided it was best that way.

The burly guard pretends it's a lasso, drawing cheers from the audience as he plays it up. God, I'm going to miss this. Christos stands beside me as we watch Ace hustle off stage, blocking the scandalous bits, and wraps an arm around my waist.

"We're done," he says, his tone one of disbelief. When we started this tour, it felt like it would never end. He was anxious to be finished, I was unsure if I wanted it to ever end, and Ace was excited to do some traveling.

"I know." I tilt my face toward his and kiss his cheek. "You put on a hell of a tour, Christos. You should be proud."

His smile is faint. "I am. But I'm ready to pack it in. My days on the stage are done, but I have a feeling yours aren't."

I try to deny it, but he sees right through me. "Don't bother lying to me or yourself. You enjoy the performing, and while you'll enjoy some time off, you'll be itching to climb back on that stage in a couple of months."

I sigh. "Yeah, maybe."

Ace approaches, throwing his arms around us and joining our little group hug. "That was awesome, but can we go get our girl now?"

"Not ours," I counter. "Not yet, anyway. But I think we're headed in that direction."

Our calls and texts have been more frequent despite Hana's workload with her new job. She finds little pockets of time between creating content and meetings, and it means the world to us that despite the distance, she's putting in the effort.

"We'll be there in a couple of days," Christos says. "Tomorrow, we do the books, Saturday the team bonding and celebration, then Sunday morning, wheels up."

No matter which way we worked it out, we can't get there any earlier and manage to uphold traditions. I wish we could fly off tonight, but there's a mountain of paperwork for us to get through and contracts to close out, *and* we owe the guys an epic celebration for the end of the tour. They kicked ass this summer and made the farewell tour one to remember.

"Give it up for the Alpha Trio!" Julie shouts into the microphone from the DJ booth.

Yeah, she's still with us, and after Gray lost his voice a couple of days ago, she's been filling in. It's safe to say she got the job, but that's a story for another time.

"In their final performance as a troupe, let's give them a send-off they'll never forget!" Julie kicks on Queen's "We Are the Champions," and we step on stage to a standing ovation.

The other guys create a pocket of space in the center of the stage, and we fill it, Ace still shielding his bare cock. Someone hands Christos a microphone, and he clears his throat before speaking.

"This has been the best job I've ever had, and this group of performers is like my second family. I want to thank everyone who bought tickets and came to our shows. I'll still be working in the background, but this was an amazing end to an amazing stage career. Thank you."

The crowd goes wild, and Christos gives his final bow as Ace and I flank him on either side. When our lead Alpha straightens, he wipes at his cheeks, and his smile is so big it warms my heart.

Julie starts going through the rest of the show's ending with an eagle-eyed Cole beside her. He reaches for something on the soundboard, and she bats his hand away. Those two have been at each other's throats since she joined us, and honestly, it's been amusing to see the usually unruffled Cole entirely and utterly bamboozled by this woman.

We exit the stage and head back to our dressing room, where we gather our things and exit the venue after performing for the last time as a trio.

As we arrive at the hotel, we're greeted by a group of fans who managed to track us down. I hastily pull my mask back on before exiting the tour bus. They scream and wave frantically, begging for autographs and pictures. We oblige, signing shirts, posters, and body parts alike. It's surreal to think that this is our life, and while it's been a fun ride, some peace might be what's needed next, especially with Hana.

Eventually, we make our way inside and up to our suite. Christos flops onto the couch, exhausted from the emotional rollercoaster of the final show. Ace disappears into one of the bathrooms to shower off the sweat and glitter.

I stand in the middle of the room, taking it all in. This is it. The end of the Alpha Trio. The end of an era. But it's also a beginning. We have so much ahead of us, and I can't wait to see what the future holds.

"Hey, you okay?" Christos asks, sitting up and patting the spot next to him on the couch.

I nod, moving to sit down beside him. “Yeah, just a lot to process. Lots to look forward to, too.”

“I know what you mean.” He wraps an arm around my shoulders. “But we’ll always have the memories, and I doubt any of us can stay away for long. Between running the shows for me and guest performances for you and Ace, I think we’ll be in it enough not to miss it too much. What do you think about continuing as lead choreographer?”

I lean into him, enjoying the warmth of his body against mine. “I think I want to do that. I know we talked about us all retiring, but I can’t yet. I still have a lot I want to do, and we know I’d drive you crazy pattering around the house looking for projects.”

He presses a kiss to my temple. “You always drive me crazy, Ez. Take your time and think about it.”

Ace emerges from the bedroom, now fully clothed, and flops onto the other end of the couch. “I don’t know about you guys, but I need a drink.”

Christos chuckles. “I think we all do. You raid the mini-bar, and I’ll call Hana.”

Ace nods and heads to the bar, making us drinks, while Christos pulls out his phone and presses Hana’s contact. I can’t help but smile at the mere thought of her voice. It’s been too long since I’ve heard it—if you can count five hours as too long—and I can’t wait to see her again.

“Hey, baby,” Christos says as Hana picks up. “We just finished the last show, and we’re settling into the hotel for the night. How’s your day been?”

I lean against him, listening to the one-sided conversation, wondering how Hana is doing. It’s been hard not being able to

see her as much as we'd like, but we're making it work.

"Sounds like fun," Christos says, grinning. "Yeah, we're going to hang out for a bit. Maybe have a drink or two. You know, celebrate the end of the tour."

I hear Hana's laughter through the phone, and my heart swells with happiness. I can't wait to have her back in our arms.

Ace hands us each a drink and raises his in a toast. "To the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next."

We clink our glasses together and take a sip, savoring the taste of the alcohol. It's been ages since we've had a chance to relax, and it feels good to let loose.

Christos switches the call to video, and in seconds, my gorgeous girl smiles into the camera. "Hey, Banana," I say once I swallow my drink. "Miss you."

"Miss you too, Ezzy. How do you feel?"

"Good. Annoyed we have to stay here and do paperwork tomorrow."

Hana smiles. "I know, but we're almost there. Are you sure you're okay coming to Houston on Sunday? I know this place holds some bad memories for you. I might be able to come to Dallas if that's better."

It's the first time she's brought up that returning to my old stomping grounds could be uncomfortable for me, but as quickly as the thought rolls in, I dismiss it. "It's fine. It's worth it to see you."

"We can always fly you up here to see you sooner," Christos offers.

She looks off to the side, where I know she keeps her calendar on her wall. I've studied every inch of her apartment through video calls and feel like I know it better than our packhouse.

"I can't. I've got meetings I can't miss."

"But they're all online," Ace says. "Just do them from our room. I promise we have Wi-Fi."

Hana laughs at his insistence. "They're not all online. I have to be in town for one."

Strange. I thought most of her consultations were done over video call. It must be a local company, and while I hate the idea of her going out there as an unbonded Omega, I know she can handle herself. Besides, Christos always says in-person meetings are better than video calls for business. Maybe he's trying to convert her to that way of thinking too.

"So, how was your day?" Ace asks, putting us back on topic.

"Good. I had two meetings today. Both were referrals from Mr. Beeker, the stuffy manager who's my contact at a juice company. I thought he hated me, honestly. Especially since our first meeting was interrupted by my mom. Anyway, he's been pleased with my work and the plan I've put forward for their marketing, and I guess he passed my name along."

I smile widely at my girl. She's so fucking brilliant and headstrong. I wouldn't be surprised if her little one-room operation turned into a full-fledged company in a year.

"Oh, and I thought of something for you guys to reduce the need for sponsors. This way, you can set your own schedule and performance obligations instead of being beholden to your contracts."

“Really?” Christos asks, beaming at Hana. “Tell me more because the less I have to deal with the suits, the better.”

“You’re practically a suit yourself when you’re not shaking your ass on the stage,” Ace counters.

Christos puts him in a headlock, but Ace is quick and twists Christos’s nipple. “Take it back!”

Ace shrieks as he vaults over the couch. “Never! I will die on this hill!”

I smirk and grab the phone before Christos can drop it, taking it to the bedroom while they duke it out.

“Idiots,” I say with too much love in my voice.

“Yeah, but hot ones,” Hana says teasingly. “You okay?”

“Why does everyone keep asking me that?” I gripe before flopping onto the bed.

She chuckles, that sound warming my bones and lifting my weirdly low spirits. “Because you’re not the type to follow orders. Come on, out with it.”

I groan and rub a hand over my face, wishing I could bury my face in the crook of her neck and get a good dose of those Alpha-calming pheromones.

“Fine! My dad worked hard as hell, and then it was like he gave up and tried to phone it in. I refuse to be like him, taking the quick way out.”

The words hang between us, and Hana’s face softens.

“I don’t want your pity,” I say, sounding more grumpy than intended.

“Don’t be like that. I’m not pitying you; I just empathize. Hell, maybe better than most. My mom ran my life the last

few years and tried to mold me into Prudence 2.0. I get why she did it after we talked, but when I left the house to find you guys, I rebelled against everything she'd been trying to teach me. If anyone understands respecting your parents and also hating what they represent, it's me."

She looks at the phone, a mixture of sympathy and anger dancing across her face. "So, if you don't want to retire, don't. It's as simple as that."

"It's not, Hana. We're starting something here. I can't be on the road for months doing tours while you're at home."

She scoffs. "You think I won't come to meet you? You think I'll sit at home, simpering over the man who's off doing a demanding job and becoming resentful that you have meaning in your life? Get real, Ezra. We're also talking at least six months away, right? You guys are on a break, and then you've got your usual venue before any tours start again. We've just reconnected. And as much as I want to say we'll be together then, we don't know. If you want to dance, then dance!" She's yelling at me now, and it feels exactly like we did when we were younger, and she was making my dumbass see sense.

"You don't have a problem with me shaking my ass for other women?" I'm grasping at straws now, and I know it. I want someone to lay it out and say it's impossible to keep working because continuing will be hard as fuck, and maybe it is time to hang up my mask once and for all.

"As long as you bring that ass home to me and are faithful to our pack, I see no problem. What you do is fun, and it brings you joy, and you're so goddamned good at it, I would be a jerk to stop you. I won't do it, Ezra. I won't decide for you, especially not when there's a future we're starting to

build. Resentment in ten years isn't my goal here. You have to pick what you want to do, knowing I'll support whatever your choice is."

"Argh! Why are you so reasonable?"

She chuckles, and then it turns into a full belly laugh.

"Glad you find this so amusing."

"Ezzy, you already know what you want to do. So do it!"

"But the guys—"

"Will understand," she says. "Stop living in limbo and tell them."

She's right. I know she is. But that doesn't make it any easier.

"I'm going to miss everyone if I'm alone on the road," I admit.

"Then we'll fly out and be there as often as possible." Her shrug makes it seem so simple. Maybe it is. "Now, I'm going to go to bed because it's nearly dawn here, and you strippers work too late for this Omega to stay up much longer. I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"Okay. Goodnight, Hana. I love you," I say, not expecting her to say it back.

"Goodnight, Ezra. See you in a couple of days."

I hang up and find Ace and Christos making out on the couch in the living room. Finding a free cushion, I sit beside their groping and writhing bodies.

"I'm going to keep dancing," I say into the pheromone-soaked room.

Christos groans as he pulls away from Ace, who's grinning and holding out a hand. Digging in his back pocket, Christos produces his wallet and slaps a wad of cash into Ace's hand.

"Called it," Ace murmurs as he flips through the stack. "This is going in the pedicure fund."

Christos and I groan, but I'm not at all surprised they were betting on this.

"You guys are assholes."

"Eh, you'd have done it too," Ace says. "Besides, we both knew you were going to continue. I had money on tonight being the night you decided. Christos thought you'd last a week before you gave in."

"You're not mad?" I ask, looking between them.

They both look at me like I'm an idiot. Christos clears his throat and leans in for a kiss. "No, we're not mad. We're at different places in our lives. So long as we're still together and prioritize our pack, I see no issue. You love what we do, and so do I, but in a different capacity now. The business aspects intrigue me now that I've been doing this for so long, and Ace is happy to do both, depending on his mood." Our blond Alpha nods. "We'll make it work, no matter what."

He recaptures my lips, demanding everything from me as his strong arms pull me closer. I give in, finally feeling relief at voicing my wants and not feeling like I'm betraying our plan.

Ace joins us, and the three of us trade loving kisses and sensual caresses until the sun rises, and we stumble into the bedroom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Ace

EZRA IS PLAYING FOOTsie WITH ME UNDER THE TABLE AS Christos looks over the contracts the various sponsors sent over this morning.

“This is stupid,” I grumble before shoving a spoonful of some smoothie bowl concoction into my mouth.

“You’re the one who ordered it.” Christos was not impressed when I ordered one for all of us. He’s not a huge fan of the pureed treat, but that sucks for him. We won’t be dancing as much as before, and none of us are getting any younger—it’s time to get healthier.

“Not the food, dude. The meetings and contract shit today.”

“I know, but we have to.”

“Do we?” Ezra asks. “I know this is scheduled and all, but we could call out sick.” *And go see Hana early* goes unsaid, but we all know that’s why we’re irritable.

“Oh, hey, look,” I say, sliding my phone between them on the other side of the table with a travel website already loaded. “There’s a flight at noon.”

Christos laughs but keeps his eyes on the screen. “I guess I could work on the plane,” he muses aloud. “The meetings, well, if we’re sick...”

“Fuck yes!” I cheer.

“The end of tour celebration is tomorrow,” Ezra reminds us, and the mood dampens. We can’t leave our guys hanging. They worked so hard, and everyone opted to keep going an

additional couple of weeks when the tour should have ended, extending their time away from their friends and families.

Taking a chance, I open my text thread with the guys. The one we started when we were deciding what gift to get Christos for his last performance. We couldn't decide on anything, and my follow-through isn't great, so it kind of petered out after three days of throwing out ideas like "Nerf gun" or "spa weekend." Nothing spoke to us, and there's a reason. For Christos, a job well done is the reward he wants.

Me: *Attention, team. We have an opportunity to visit Hana, and our Alphas are getting restless while we sort through things. Thoughts on moving the end-of-tour party to our place in a week or two? House party, pool party, bring your mates and families?*

Jake: *Fuck yes. I wanna go see our new packhouse*

Gray: *He deserves a break*

Ethan: *Anything for Boss*

Brody: *How can we help get you airborne sooner?*

Cole: *I'll rearrange the sponsors and plan the party. But I'm coming with you because there's too much to do and I'll need your input.*

Julie: *Hey, guys! Thanks for adding me! I agree. Go get your girl. She shouldn't be alone tonight*

Julie removed from group chat

Cole: *She added herself from my tablet. Nosy woman.*

Jake: *How did she get hold of your tablet? *eyes emoji**

Tonight? What's tonight?

I look up and meet Ezra's eyes. He mouths, *Tonight?* and I shrug. Whatever it is, Hana didn't tell us about it, but Julie, as eccentric as she is, hasn't been wrong about much. The in-person meeting, maybe?

In unison, my packmate and I look at Christos.

"Pack it up, Christos," I say. "We're outta here."

"What? No, we can't—"

"Aah, but we can," I say, turning my phone so he can read the messages. "Grab your shit, pack the files, and I'll get us tickets."

Ezra's rare smile graces his face, and together, we rush around the room, slurping down the smoothie bowls and getting ready for the airport.

We meet Cole in the lobby, and he hustles us toward an Uber he's arranged. This guy is our fairy godfather, and we're seriously going to lose everything if he ever moves on.

The drive there is torture, and the check-in desk is bustling, but approximately seven billion tense hours later, we're touching down in Houston, and our knees are all bouncing in a row. Cole rolls his eyes and turns his phone on.

His breath stutters, and he quickly tries to hide the screen, but not quickly enough.

Julie: *All I know is the fiancé reserved a table for them at the club so they can get dinner*

An uncharacteristic growl starts in my throat, shocking the passengers around us.

"She's doing what?" I ask, popping Cole's phone out of his hand and showing it to Ezra and Christos.

“Remember she was going to end it in person? It has to be that,” Ezra says, his confidence in her unwavering despite his experience with liars in his past.

Christos nods. “We did encourage that. But I didn’t know it was tonight.”

“None of us did,” Ezra confirms. “Last night, she said she had a meeting in person. I assumed it was work-related, and she didn’t clarify.”

We make our way to the baggage claim area as I demon dial Hana. Every time, it goes to voicemail.

“What time is the dinner?” I ask Cole, who’s typing out messages now that our phones are back on.

“Let me check.” Two seconds later, he answers, “Seven.”

It’s five now, and by the time we deal with traffic, it gives us enough time to get there and be there to support Hana.

“And her parents will be there too. The restaurant is at a members-only club. Fancy.”

His appreciation of the finer things in life is noted, but it throws an obstacle at us.

“The Aldridge Club?” Ezra asks, his anger spiking through our bond.

“That’s it.”

“Of course.” He sounds bitter, and things start clicking for me.

“Is that the place your family were members and then got shunned from?”

“The same.”

“Fuck. Can you do this? Can you go back there?” I ask.

He nods but keeps his lips shut. Stepping into her old life is something Hana's avoided since going home. We know because she's been adamant that she wants nothing to do with the community she was raised in. They're anti-pack, anti-poor, and definitely anti-stripper.

My mind races with questions and uncertainties. What if she's decided not to end things with her fiancé? What if she's already regretting her decision to break things off with him?

As we grab our bags, I feel the tension building between us. We're all on edge and won't be able to relax until we know what's going on. We quickly make our way to the exit, where we hail a taxi to take us toward Hana and Ezra's home.

Cole gasps as we get closer to the city limits, the time on the dashboard reading six o'clock. "You can't get in there dressed like this," he says.

"Watch us," Christos growls.

"No, man. He's right." Ezra looks at our attire, grimacing when he gets to the holes in my harem pants. *Whatever, I like a breeze.* "They probably won't even let the taxi in through the gate to the golf course, and the restaurant is in the middle. We need a way in, and this isn't it."

Cole looks lost in thought and then furiously types on his phone again.

"Driver!" he calls. The guy turns to listen. "If you can get us to the closest mall to the golf course, we'll pay you double."

"Deal," he says, fiddling with his phone's GPS. "The Beta Festival is in town, so the mall should be pretty empty. We'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"What are you thinking?" I ask Cole.

“It’s what I’ve always wanted. A movie makeover montage with high stakes and my own theme music. Julie is sending a playlist now.”

“No music as we hunt through the mall.” I roll my eyes. Of course, she sent over a playlist. If there’s one thing I’ve learned about Julie since she joined us on tour, it’s that she has music for every possible situation, including food poisoning. Trust me, don’t ask. Although, “Down with the Sickness” was a brilliant addition.

The driver drops us at the mall, and true to Cole’s word, Christos hands him double the fare.

“Here we go, guys. Let’s do this.” Cole bounds off with way too much excitement.

As one, my pack rushes into the mall, following Cole as he directs us toward a men’s shop. He grabs jacket after jacket off the racks and bats away the helpful salespeople. “You can’t put him in cream! Look at that blond hair! It’ll wash him out! Is that what you want, Sandra? For this Alpha to meet his Omega’s parents looking like a beige wall in the museum of boring?”

The saleswoman spins on her heel and takes off in the other direction. She’s not upset, but she’s damn close to snapping at Cole, and I don’t blame her. I catch the navy jacket and slacks he throws at me and hustle into a dressing room.

Christos is struggling next door to find something big enough to wrap around those tree trunk thighs of his, but after twenty minutes and a small fortune, we’re dressed to impress.

“Her parents will be there, and this is your first time meeting them. You have to bring something,” Cole fusses as we pass one of those stores selling sentimental shit. I’m much

more of the “appreciate the experience and move on” mindset, but honestly, anything to help Hana tonight means we’ll do it with bells on.

“Wine. We can bring wine!” I cheer, heading to the first rack I see in the store.

“To a restaurant?” Christos asks. “I think they already have that there.”

“What about a clock?” Ezra asks, pointing to the next closest display.

“Lord almighty, you three are hopeless. Here!” Cole shoves flowers at us, a soft as fuck shawl, and a money clip. “There. Gifts for everyone except the fiancé, who should count himself lucky he’s not getting a punch to the nose for trying to marry your Omega.”

Dragging our bags and the gifts, we step out of the mall, and I pull up short. “How are we getting there?”

“So, I have good news and bad news,” Cole starts as he stares at his phone.

“What’s the good news?” Christos asks.

“I found you a ride.”

Collectively, we breathe out a sigh of relief. Then we suck it back when Cole says, “Unfortunately, it’s that.” He points at a low-rider rickshaw lined in what looks like hot pink feather boas, and the driver is blasting “All the Single Ladies” by Beyonce as he pedals toward us.

Ezra spins toward him. “You have *got* to be kidding me. We can’t show up in that!”

“I couldn’t get a limo or town car this quickly. Ubers are all booked, and the wait time is nearly an hour with the festival

going on. It's this or nothing."

The guy cycles closer and shouts, "Hey, I'm Zeke. You ordered a ride on the app?"

"Sure did!" Cole shouts.

"Is the music necessary?" Ezra asks. I'm glad it was him and not Christos because that vein in his forehead looks like it's about to burst, and it probably wouldn't end well for Zeke.

"It's stuck on this volume. And on the song. I don't know what happened, man. One minute I was driving a couple of women into the heart of the festival, and the next, it just kept going and going and going. The only way to turn it off is to shut down the e-bike. And no offense, guys, but I can't pedal you without the help."

"Embrace the weird," I say, sliding onto the bench seat.

Cole grabs our bags and waves us off. "I'll book a hotel for the night and take your bags somehow. Go get her!"

Christos grumbles again and slides in beside me, Ezra climbing in after and squishing us all on the bench seat.

"Where we goin', guys?"

"The Aldridge."

Zeke whistles low. "Fancy shit, man. Fancy shit. Here we go!"

Despite his enthusiasm, we set off at a snail's pace until the motor kicks on, dragging us toward the main road as Beyonce blares in our ears.

Ezra's eyes are wide as we pass various stores and shops, and he comments how things have changed or stayed the same. I smell the flowers I'm responsible for holding and do

my best not to wrinkle my new suit. The song starts anew, and Beyonce bugs us to put a ring on it. We get more than a few catcalls as we pass groups walking on the sidewalks toward the festival area. Christos and Ezra have turned a ridiculous shade of red with embarrassment, and I hold up my phone.

“Say cheese!” I shout over the “Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, o-ohh” lyrics of the song. They glare at the camera, so I switch it to video and capture the moment to show Hana later.

A few minutes later, Zeke reaches the guardhouse of the golf course and tries to bypass it despite the boom barrier stretched across the road.

The guard steps out and yells over the music, “I can’t let you in there on this thing!”

“Come on, man! My pay is crap, and we get bonuses if we beat the time they predict. You’re costing me money!”

“Can you turn that music down?”

“Not a chance, man.” Zeke definitely deserves a tip when he tries to duck his low-riding rickshaw under the barrier. I think we’ll fit if he goes for it.

I reach forward and tap Zeke’s shoulder. He turns around as the guard steps into the little house, no doubt calling for backup to deal with the ruffians demanding entry. “If I give you a hundred bucks, can you drive us under this thing and floor it to the clubhouse?”

“Make it two hundred for damages and bail, and I’m in.”

Christos claps Zeke on his shoulder and hands him a card with Cole’s number from his wallet and the rest of his cash. “I’ll bail you out if you get caught, and I never, ever promise that. Now, let’s do this. Our girl is waiting for us.”

“Well, why didn’t you say it was for a girl?” Zeke grins, a dangerous glint in his eye as he revs the e-bike motor. It takes off agonizingly slowly, and we duck under the barrier.

“Hey! Get back here!” the guard shouts as he starts running after us, but the motor is whirring, and we’re picking up speed.

“No way, man!” Zeke shouts back. “This is for LOVE!”

Ezra laughs wildly as we head down the road toward the clubhouse tucked away between the gently rolling hills of the course.

A security golf cart screeches onto the street from behind us and gives chase and—*motherfucker*—that thing is faster than we are.

“Step on it, Zeke!” I shout, whipping my head back and forth between the clubhouse and the cart behind us.

“Yippie ki-yay, motherfuckers! Let’s goooo! Everyone lean forward!” Zeke shouts.

Ezra, Christos, and I tilt forward in our seats, and it does absolutely nothing to help our speed. We round a final bend, and there it is. The steps leading up to the clubhouse are within reach, and before Zeke has even begun to slow down, Ezra is spilling out from his side of the cart, quickly followed by Christos and me.

In the worst maneuvering ever witnessed by humankind, Zeke pulls a seven-point turn and heads back toward the gatehouse. “FOR LOVE!” He’s got his hand raised in a fist as he charges toward the gatehouse again, considerably faster now that there aren’t three Alphas weighing it down.

Zeke lets out a maniacal laugh, and I wonder if he’s single. He and Julie seem like they’d get along famously.

The guards in the cart look torn about whether they should follow us or Zeke on the rickshaw. Zeke appears to be the bigger threat, so they zoom off after him as we hustle up the stairs toward the doors.

“Through here,” Ezra says, pointing at the hallway to the left. “It’s seven-thirty, so they should already be here. We’ll confidently walk in like we’re meeting them.”

I hold the flowers in front of me as Ezra clutches the bag with the scarf, and Christos checks he still has the money clip in his pocket. This has got to be the weirdest way to meet someone’s parents, but fuck, it’s too late to rethink our plan now.

Supporting our Omega is an Alpha’s primary responsibility, and I’ll be damned if I fail.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Hana

DAD IS SILENT AS HE DRIVES US TO THE CLUB. MOM IS IN THE front seat, fussing with her hair and fixing her lipstick. I'm in the back seat, missing Lana, missing the guys, missing my little studio apartment and the safety it's come to represent.

I stare down at my stilettos, the unique style giving me a little bolster of confidence I so desperately need. They're pointed toe court shoes, but clear like glass with rhinestones for a little sparkle.

"Forest, I think it was lovely you decided to join us," Mom says.

Dad grunts.

I roll my eyes.

Mom scowls at him.

He capitulates, finally speaking in my presence. "I need to salvage what I can of this deal if Hana won't follow through on her promises."

"Of marrying someone I don't know?" I snipe back, letting that rage bubble boil inside me again. Mom explained that they were looking out for me and trying to steer me toward something safe, but now that I've gotten some perspective, instead of being happy I'm taking control of my life, it seems like Dad is resentful.

I cross my arms over my chest, acting like a petulant child, but I couldn't care less at this point. He's acting like a major dick.

“You shouldn’t have agreed when it came up if you weren’t going to follow through with it.”

I’m not arguing about this again, so I continue sulking as the guardhouse to the golf course comes into view, and they wave us through.

Sulking and talking about marketing are my go-to modes. I even turned off my phone today so I wouldn’t be distracted in my sulking by annoying Ezra, Christos, and Ace to no end. I know they have work to do today, and being needy wasn’t a good look on me.

I didn’t tell them I had dinner plans with Beau to officially end it. It’s been hanging over my head and casting a shadow over everything for the last two days. I’m nothing if not a procedural person, and without clearing the air with Beau, it’s like I can’t move on with my Alphas.

Because, yes, they are *my* Alphas. It might be new, strange, and exciting, but I know down to my marrow that those protective, loving, and adventurous men are mine.

Dad parks in his spot and looks at the sign wistfully. We’ll lose our membership here if he can’t right the ship. They’ve been putting on a good front for about a year, but I looked in my dad’s office again while packing my things at their house. It’s not good. Not good at all.

I slide out of the SUV, and my mom links her arm with mine as Dad hands off the keys to the valet. “You’re sure?”

Nodding, I take my first step toward the end with Beau. Dad rounds the car and stands on my other side, the three of us painting the picture of a happy family, the way we’ve been doing since I was young.

“Reservation for Henderson,” Dad says to the hostess.

“Of course. The other member of your party is already here. Please follow me.”

I know it irks Dad that we weren't the first to arrive, but we can do nothing about it now.

The hostess leads us through the tables, Mom and Dad smiling and nodding at their friends as they pass by. Friday night is popular here at the club, even with the festival happening a few blocks away.

Beau stands as we approach, his dark hair swept away from his face and his admittedly gorgeous body making that suit work wonders for him.

“Beau,” Dad greets, shaking his hand.

“Forest.” He takes Mom's hand and kisses the back of it. “Prudence, you look lovely as always.”

“Oh, Beau, you're going to make me blush.”

“Hana, you look beautiful. How was your trip?” Beau asks, kissing my hand like he did Mom's.

“Thank you. It was lovely. Too short, though.”

Beau laughs. “Aren't they always? Please, sit.” He pulls out my chair for me as Dad does the same for Mom.

“So, Forest, how's business?” Beau asks, taking a sip of his wine. The waiter comes by and takes our orders for drinks.

“Fine, Beau. Just fine. Keeping busy, which is good.”

“That's good to hear,” he says, setting his glass down and turning toward me. “I heard a rumor recently I was hoping to get confirmation on.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Oh?”

God, Goddess, Fate, whoever is in charge up there, if you could not let it be that I stalked a stripper act because I scented some dude's thong at my bachelorette kidnapping/party, that would be great.

“Yes. I hear you’ve done wonders with the marketing program over at Simply Beta-utiful,” Beau says, referencing one of the first clients to hire me full-time to manage their campaigns.

I feel a flush creep up my cheeks but keep my shoulders squared. “That’s right. They were working with an outdated model, not considering current social media trends and forecasting what’s coming next. We’re building out their advertising package for the next six months, but that’s only because any longer than that, and the algorithm will likely change. We’re keeping it as current as possible.”

My dad looks at me, and I mean, *really* looks at me for the first time in I don’t even know how long, and my Mom looks like she’s still trying to put meaning to the words.

Beau, however, leans forward, resting his chin on his steepled fingertips. “Interesting. What gives you the impression six months is ideal?”

“Well, it’s a careful formula of calculating historical data and combining that with the increased changes happening over shorter periods. Considering the current probe into information gathering and storing, it’s important to know there are limitations to any marketing program that focuses on social media as the main output for information. TV spots and magazine ads don’t hit the way they did twenty years ago, but depending on the demographic, they are still quite valuable. Oh, and it’s also critical to note the changes in terms of service for many email providers. European laws now mean that

newsletters aren't delivered as frequently as they once were, considering they all end up in spam or promotional side folders."

Beau smiles. "This's the data my team is seeing as well. What approach are you using for your clients if so many avenues are being cut down?"

I tsk at Beau, forgetting he is one of my father's associates and not merely someone to talk shop with. "For that, you'll need a consultation and a temporary contract with me. I don't give away my product for free, the same way you don't, Mister Eighty-four Million in Profits last year."

Beau throws his head back and laughs.

"Could be more," I say quietly.

Dad sits back in his chair, crossing his arms over his chest and sending me a small smile of encouragement.

"Excuse me?" Beau asks. "I don't think that's a number to scoff at."

"True, it is substantial, but you've got holes in your marketing program."

"Hana Henderson, are you angling for a job?"

"Not a job. A contract. I don't work for anyone but myself, and my clients are all very satisfied. If you'd like to discuss a trial run, my office hours are Monday through Friday, nine to five."

My business brain ran away with me, momentarily forgetting I've blocked off next week to spend with the guys, and I add, "Except I'm off next week. Personal time."

The sound of Beyonce's "Single Ladies" blares outside the window, and a fluffy pink bicycle thing whizzes toward the

gatehouse. Today is shaping up to be a weird one.

Beau snaps his fingers. “Drat. And it’s after hours now, so I guess signing on the dotted line will have to wait.” He lifts his glass, and I do the same. “To future contracts.”

I echo it as there’s a commotion behind me.

“Hana?” a voice says with disbelief. I know that voice. I’ve been dreaming of that voice for weeks while they finished their tour.

Ezra stands there, clutching a bag and looking between Beau and me like I’ve ripped his heart out. He shakes it off and leads the other two to our table.

I scramble off my seat. “What are you guys doing here?” I hiss, looking from them to my parents, staring at us in confusion.

“Hana?” Dad asks. “What is the meaning of this?”

“Christos?” Beau asks.

“Beau Richardson?” Christos blinks twice like it’ll change who’s standing before him.

“Will someone tell me what on earth is going on here?” Ace asks. He looks at my mom. “You must be Mrs. Henderson. Hi. Lovely to meet you.”

Mom blushes but then remembers there’s a whole weird introduction thing happening around her. She stands, and Ace guides her from her seat like a gentleman.

“Someone had better clear all this up right now,” Mom demands.

Everyone looks at me, and I throw my hands in the air. “Grab some chairs. Might as well do this all in one go.”

Two waiters hustle up, dragging three chairs and quickly departing. I don't blame them. The amount of Alpha posturing is intimidating as hell.

"Mom, Dad, Beau, this is Christos, Ace, and Ezra Bakas. You might remember Ezra from when we were kids."

"Ezra *Barnes*?" Mom asks with disbelief in her voice.

Dad growls low in his throat, shocking the hell out of me. Besides using his Alpha bark at Lana and me when we misbehaved as kids, I've rarely heard him assert his designation. But there it is, clear as day.

"What are you guys doing here?" I ask, quickly looking from my parents to my Alphas, then back again. "And why is there glitter all over you?"

Ace dusts off his jacket, sending a plume of pink glitter toward the floor before he pulls my chair out and guides me into it.

"Hana, what's going on?" Beau asks as he tries to sit in the seat next to me. Ace pins him with a glare, and Beau scoots over one spot.

"Just sit, and we'll get into it," I say, waving at the rest of the chairs that have been left abandoned as everyone jumped to their feet.

Slowly, they sit down like they're all in some kind of standoff. There's a crunching sound next to me, and Ace pulls the remnants of a toasted breadstick away from his mouth. "What?" he asks. "I'm hungry."

Christos rolls his eyes. "You're always hungry."

"What brings you here, Christos?" Beau asks.

“Hana.” There’s no explanation offered, but the pure possessiveness coming off of him makes me feel cherished instead of owned the way it might have a few months ago.

“Me too,” Beau says before looking at me. “Did you invite every one of my business contacts?” he asks.

“Business contacts?”

Christos laughs. “Beau is one of our sponsors for the tour. His company owns Slick-Be-Gone, one of our biggest contracts.”

You have got to be kidding me. I whip my head toward Beau, who shrugs. “Richardson Holdings is an umbrella company with a lot of plates spinning. Slick-Be-Gone is one of them. Advertising with them made sense.”

That’s...“That’s brilliant,” I admit. “Have you seen an uptick in orders since the tour started?”

“Hana, focus,” Mom hisses. She eyes Ezra like he’s about to run off with the silverware.

It’s a credit to him that he doesn’t snap at her for it. Since when do the sins of the father fall to the son?

“Mom, I am focused. And you need to reel it in.” She doesn’t look ashamed in the slightest, but she does avert her eyes.

“Beau, these are my Alphas.” Happiness suffuses my chest as Christos swells with pride, the emotion sparking in our bond.

My soon-to-be ex-fiancé doesn’t look too put out at the statement. “How did you meet?”

I laugh, but Ezra’s hand on my thigh steadies me. His little squeeze of encouragement bolsters my courage, but I don’t

need it. Don't get me wrong, it makes me appreciate him more, but I can do this. After all, I have my kickass shoes.

“It's a funny story...”

I recount the whole thong to the face, much to Mom and Dad's displeasure. Leaving Lana's involvement out of it, I tell them I caught Ace's scent at the show and then wrestled with the idea.

How my fear of my heat drove me to overload on suppressants for too long and that it would have impacted the wedding, most likely. The doctor suggesting I spend time with Alphas was met with a growl from my father. Apparently, he doesn't like the idea of his little girl hanging around with a bunch of men.

“So, I made a snap decision. Lana was leaving that day, so I called Hailey from the side of the road when I saw a poster of these guys at an intersection. It was like my body took complete control, and I went home to pack, leaving Mom and Dad a note and texting you I was going out of town. We'd barely spoken, and I couldn't face being a bargaining chip in business, no matter how often it's done. It's not me,” I say, imploring Beau to understand.

He nods and looks at my father. “You said she was agreeable to the arrangement.”

“I was,” I add quickly before my dad gets too offended. “But I was also living in denial that I was an Omega. I saw Dad's books and knew a merger with your company would turn the ship around. It felt like my duty, and without any direction in my life, I agreed. It's not like I was doing anything else.”

“Hana,” Mom says, reaching her hand across the table.

“I know.” I look from Mom’s glassy eyes to Beau, still avoiding Dad’s face. “Mom explained what was going on in her mind when the topic came up. I understand she was trying to set me up with a future, and while I don’t like the practice, it’s done all too often around here to be considered out of the norm.”

“It is what we do,” Dad says. “Our families are as strong as our businesses.”

I scoff. “I’d check that logic, considering I saw the ledgers and reports in your office.”

Dad begins to reprimand me. Christos growls, Beau—surprisingly—also growls, and Mom puts a calming hand on his chest. “Shut up, Forest.”

The table goes silent, as does the rest of the dining room. Apparently, we’ve been a little loud.

“Either way, I met my Alphas after stalking them from state to state. I don’t know if this is permanent or if I’ll be welcome in our family for falling for a pack based on your backward-ass leanings, but they’re mine. So, Beau, I’m not sorry to say that the engagement is off.”

Beau’s face is still unreadable as he looks at me. Then he nods once, sips his wine, and his eyes bore into mine. “Fine, but I still want a temporary contract on my desk when you return from your holiday.”

“You still want to work with me? Even after all this?”

Ezra’s grip tightens on my thigh like he’s using me as a stress ball as this all goes down.

“Especially after all this. I always thought it was bullshit that Omegas weren’t welcome in certain workplaces. You know your stuff, and you’ve got a backbone most would be

jealous of. I look forward to seeing what you can do with our accounts.”

CHAPTER FORTY

Ezra

THE SERVER ARRIVES WITH RIDICULOUSLY GOOD TIMING, AND I let out a sigh of relief. “I’ll have the chicken nuggets with fries.”

The Beta taking my order stutters. “But, sir, that’s a kid’s meal. For children under twelve.”

I shrug. “I know. You can double it if the portion size or price is the issue.”

Hana snorts. “Some things never change.”

“What? As much as I haven’t missed this community and the snakes that live here, I have missed their nugs.”

Because someone is hovering over our table, everyone behaves long enough to put our orders in. I guess we’re all staying for dinner then.

“You canceled our meeting today, Christos,” Beau says.

Christos laughs and rubs a hand over his bearded jaw. “Yeah. Hana was more important. Cole, our assistant, should have rescheduled it.”

Beau nods. “Putting your Omega over business is a bold move, Bakas.”

“One I’ll make every time if it means being there for her.”

Mrs. Henderson swoons in her seat, I swear. Mr. Henderson seems to want to strangle everyone at the table except his wife. Beau is assessing Christos and gives him an inclination of his head. Ace and I stare at Hana from either side as she looks across the table.

Finally, Mr. Henderson settles on me. I knew it was coming, but I'm unprepared when his gaze softens a fraction. "How are you, Ezra?"

I'm taken aback by his genuine interest, but school my features. I've got Hana and Ace on one side of me and Christos on the other. I'm surrounded by my pack, not the scared and confused child I once was.

"I'm good." *That's it. That's all I got.*

"How's your mom?" Mrs. Henderson asks, a note of wistfulness in her voice.

I fight the urge to roll my eyes, but I have a choice. I can release all the anger I've been holding on to for over a decade or try to make peace with my Omega's parents, smoothing the way for our future. Weighing the options, I wrestle with which way to go. My loyalty to my mom is unshakeable, but I now have a pack to consider.

Hana, however, has no issue raising hell. "You'd know if you didn't cut her out because her husband was a giant asswipe."

"Hana!" Mr. Henderson reprimands. "Julian Barnes was a no good thief who stole from the company and, effectively, us."

"Yeah, but Mrs. Barnes didn't. Ezra didn't. You chose to cut people out of your life because of pride. When she asked for help, you turned her away."

Mr. Henderson is turning a concerning shade of red, and Mrs. Henderson looks down at her lap. She lifts her napkin and wipes at a tear on her cheek.

"She's good, Mrs. Henderson," I say, unable to resist comforting an Omega in need, even if she's not my Omega.

“She lost her vision completely about two years after we left, but she’s doing well. I’m pretty sure our neighbor has a crush on her, but she’s playing hard to get.”

“She was always so good at that.” Mrs. Henderson laughs, but then it turns sad. “Her vision? Macular degeneration?”

I nod, and she sighs. “Your grandmother had that, and she was worried she would one day inherit it. She never mentioned having symptoms when she was here.”

“She didn’t want anyone worrying.”

Mr. Henderson clears his throat, breaking the somber mood over the table. “Well, I’m glad to hear she’s doing well. And I suppose it’s good to know she’s moved on from her criminal husband.”

I grit my teeth, but Hana beats me to the punch. “Not like he gave her much choice. As soon as he took the money, he fled, leaving Ezra and Mrs. Barnes on their own. It’s why they came to you for help—why they were so shocked when no one in the community would help them despite not having done anything wrong, and ending up penniless when Mr. Barnes cleared out the accounts and fucked off.”

There’s an uncomfortable silence as everyone takes in Hana’s words. I can feel the tension mounting in the air, and I know something needs to be said before things escalate.

“We ended up okay. It was hard for a bit, but we managed. I think it’s time we change the subject,” I say, looking around the table. Beau looks immensely uncomfortable being involved in past grievances and airing our dirty laundry, but he makes no move to leave.

Mr. Henderson nods at my suggestion, and the tension in the air eases a bit. We turn our attention to our food as it’s

delivered, and for a moment, it feels like we're a group of friends catching up.

Halfway through my adult-sized portion of my childhood favorite, Mr. Henderson speaks up. "So, a pack of strippers?"

"Business owners," Christos amends. "We own the company, and yes, we dance as well, but as Hana said, we just wrapped up our farewell tour. I'm off the stage for good, but my pack is free to do what they wish, and if that includes rejoining the performers onstage, then that's what they'll do."

Mr. Henderson harrumphs.

"It's an excellent business model with tons of potential to expand," Beau says as he lays his fork and knife down. He's been tearing into his steak for five minutes, making the damn thing look like a murder scene.

I nod in agreement with Beau. "It's true. We've created a safe and supportive work environment for our performers while providing quality entertainment for our clients. And our business has been quite successful so far."

"That many sold-out shows in a row doesn't lie," Beau adds.

Mrs. Henderson speaks up, her tone curious. "But doesn't it go against the traditional values of the community?"

I shrug, not particularly caring about the standards and traditions of *this* community. "Maybe. But times are changing, and we're adapting to them. We're still a pack, and we still have our own set of values and beliefs. We just choose to express ourselves differently than what's expected. Besides, the public's view of strippers is a double standard, and it's ridiculous. Our goal is to make stripping and dancing on stage acceptable to all, and our ticket sales among both genders

seem to indicate a bigger shift coming in the acceptance of dancers. One of our plans is to create a traveling and just as respected group of female strippers one day. It's not fair this much attention comes to us and not them."

There's a moment of silence before Mr. Henderson speaks up. "Still seems against the cultural norm to me. But from a business standpoint, I'd be interested to see the project and the future expansions you're looking at."

It's not acceptance, but with this many eyes on us in the club, it makes sense Mr. Henderson would want to keep things somewhat civil in public. At least business is always a topic we can discuss.

Christos tuts teasingly. "And give away trade secrets? Mr. Henderson, surely you know it's poor practice to show everyone your ducks when they're not yet in a row. But I'm happy to send over our plan for this last tour."

"Christos," Hana says, pulling his attention to her. "You don't have to do that. It's your business."

He looks at her like she's daft. "Hana, if things go how I want them to, it'll be our business, and your parents' approval is important to me, no matter how long it takes to get it. We might be strippers, but we're honorable men, and family is everything."

Christos looks back at Mr. Henderson. "I'll email it later. But we're not looking for partners or investors, so let's keep that in mind when you see it."

Beau coughs on the other side of the table. "Regarding that, I think I have some ideas that will change your mind."

Dinner passes as we talk business, Christos and Beau leading the conversation with some input from Mr. Henderson.

Mrs. Henderson keeps looking between us all, lingering on me and Hana more than most. And eventually, the bill comes.

It's a fight to the death to wrestle the billfold away from each other. Hana and Mrs. Henderson sit back as the rest of us duke it out over who's paying. Hands are reaching and grabbing, and it's an entirely undignified way to end the dinner, but honestly, it's funny.

As Beau tries to snag it from Christos's hand, it falls onto the table, and Hana swipes it off the tablecloth and grips it with a white-knuckle fist as if we're going to steal it away from her.

"Stop acting like children. I called this dinner, and you're my guests," she says, looking at Ace, Christos, and me. "This is on me."

"But Hana—" her mom starts.

"Nope. I am making money now, and while I'm not flush with cash, it's enough to pay for dinner. Besides," she says, looking at Beau, "the signing bonus in the contract will cover it."

He smirks and tips his glass of wine at her. "Smart. Demanding an investment despite it being a temporary contract. Clients are more willing to stick with you because of a sunk-cost fallacy."

"What's that?" Ace whispers.

Christos whispers back, "Basically, our girl is brilliant. Hook them, make them invest, and they're more likely to stay with her because they've already put money down. A new marketing plan often takes time to start, so this ensures they stick with her long enough to see results."

The server takes the bill and Hana's card to handle the payment. Mr. Henderson is looking at Hana like he's never seen her before. Then, in true snobby fashion, he sends a glare at my pack like it's our fault.

The receipt is returned, and we're all left staring at each other. Beau is the one to break the awkward tension.

"Well, thank you, Hana. I'm not going to say I'm happy about the end of our engagement, especially after having properly gotten to know you tonight, but I think you're strong and smart enough to make the best choices for yourself." The last bit is aimed at Mr. and Mrs. Henderson. "Forest, call me on Monday, and we'll keep working on the merger details."

Hana's dad looks flabbergasted. "But the engagement..."

"Is over. Regardless, that doesn't mean I don't see potential in your company." He stands from the table, bids us all goodnight, and heads toward the door.

"That's great news," Hana says to her dad.

"Strange is what it is," he comments back absent-mindedly as he stares after Beau's retreating form. "He's up to something."

"I doubt it, dear. So, a pack," Mrs. Henderson starts. "I don't know, Hana."

"That's okay. I know, and that's enough for me. All I'm asking of you is an open mind and some patience as we figure out what we're doing."

Mrs. Henderson looks wary, but it's clear she loves her daughter and is only looking out for her. It's a weird thing if you're not used to pack life to imagine people as a group, working together cohesively for the family unit and sharing that love equally among its members. I know because it was

strange for Mom to come to terms with me joining Pack Bakas.

“If you like, Mrs. Henderson, I can give Mom your number. She was unsure when we bonded,” I gesture to Ace and Christos.

She hesitates for a second. “Eloise won’t want to hear from me. Not after we froze her out. If I were in her shoes, I wouldn’t want to talk to me.”

“Mom is forgiving, sometimes to her detriment, but I think she’d like to hear from you.”

She nods, and I make a mental note to double-check Mom is cool with it before handing out her number.

“What about you two,” Mr. Henderson asks, leaning back in his chair. “Who are your families?”

I roll my eyes at the insinuation that it doesn’t matter unless they’re known in Mr. Henderson’s tight circle.

Christos answers first. “I come from a pack family outside Dallas. I have three siblings, all of whom are younger, ranging from twelve to twenty-seven. My family is happy, and they work hard, each in a different field. You won’t have heard of them, but they’re amazing nonetheless.”

Mrs. Henderson nods and looks at Ace expectantly. “I’m also from a pack family, but they’re in Southern California. Mom runs a yoga studio, Dad owns the coffee shop next door, and Pops rents surfboards on the other side. One sister and all of us are close.”

The picture Ace paints is perfect; that surf shop is our favorite place to hang out when we visit. Christos is a talented man, but he can’t float to save his life, so it’s always an entertaining trip.

“I think I’m going to need your mom to walk me through all of this,” Mrs. Henderson says.

I nod with a laugh. “She’ll enjoy indoctrinating you. She loves Ace and Christos like they’re her own sons, and dare I say it, she might even like Christos more than me.”

He knocks my shoulder with his from beside me and teases, “I like her more than you, too.”

Ace and Hana laugh at the comment, and I reward Christos with a pinch to his thigh. He jumps in his seat, and the look in his eyes promises retribution later.

But first, I want to get Hana out of here so we can spend time together. We weren’t expecting the parental inquisition when we set off this morning, but I’m kind of glad it’s out of the way.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Hana

WE SPILL INTO MY TINY APARTMENT, SKIPPING THE HOTEL THAT Cole booked for the guys. We waited for a taxi to pick us up at the guardhouse and ended up with some dude named Zeke and his sparkly rickshaw instead. Thankfully, by then, my parents had driven off.

Ezra said he wanted to see my place with a lustful glint in his eye, and I agreed before he had even finished speaking.

There's stuff everywhere from my earlier dig through my closet in search of a club-approved dress. I'm leaning toward the bed to shove everything off when strong arms band around my waist. Ace turns me in his arms and kisses me so passionately, I decide then and there that air is overrated, and I'd rather breathe him in for the rest of my life.

Ezra steps behind me, running his hands down my sides and filling my senses with his leather and smoke scent.

I moan softly as Ezra's hands trail down to my hips, and his lips reach my neck. Ace's hands move up to cup my breasts, kneading them softly over my shirt. My breath hitches as the pressure builds between my thighs.

I turn around and face Ezra, wrapping my arms around his neck. He leans down and captures my lips in a searing kiss, his tongue exploring my mouth as he pulls me closer. Ace's hands move down to my ass, squeezing it as he grinds his hardness against my thigh.

Christos is noticeably absent, so I break the kiss and turn toward him. He's been clearing the bed of my things, caring for us even as we're barreling toward an orgy. He lifts a silver

glitter thong, hooks it around his thumb, and pulls it back like a catapult. Ezra has a grip on my arms, so I can't stop it as it hits me in the face and rests on my forehead because I'm looking up at the arc it was sailing in on.

"Oh, how we've come full circle," Ace teases with a smirk. He adopts a serious tone, staring at the sparkly underwear still on my forehead. "Miss, I'm afraid I've lost my thong on your face."

"How do I know it's yours?" I counter, tilting my face downward so the thong slides down my nose and lands in Ezra's waiting hand. "I think you'll have to try it on to be sure. It could belong to any Alpha."

Ace chuckles darkly and steps back, stripping out of his clothes in record time. I stare at his gorgeous cock, hard and straining toward me, and whine when he covers it up with the thong that started it all.

It fits him like a goddamned glove, but in his state of arousal, the head of his cock pokes out the top.

"God, that looks amazing," I whisper.

Ezra nips my ear as he holds me. "Fuck yes, it does."

"So, am I your Cinderella?" Ace asks, turning and giving me a spectacular view of his ass. He flexes it, making the muscles dance and bounce for me.

I nod, unable to unstick my tongue from the roof of my mouth. But my slick dampens my core, and it turns out words are unnecessary when everyone can smell my arousal.

Ace turns around again, sauntering closer to me with nothing but confidence and swagger. "Take it off, Princess Charming."

I reach for the waistband of the thong, and he bats my hands away. “With your teeth.”

My moan is obscene. Ezra adjusts himself behind me, his cock pressing into my lower back. Christos lies on the bed on his side, propping his head up with his hand to watch the show.

I drop to my knees, my eyes never leaving my Alpha’s, and lean forward. The scrape of my teeth against Ace’s bronze skin makes him gasp. Gripping the edge of the thong, I start dragging it down, but it refuses to budge.

Ezra steps over my bent legs and joins me on the floor. I look over in time to see him wink at me and lick his lips. He mirrors my motions, and together, we grip the thong on either side and drag it down Ace’s toned legs.

My panties are damp, and I’d be surprised if there wasn’t a puddle between my knees on the floor. Ace grasps his erection as he steps out of the thong pooled on the floor and guides it to Ezra’s mouth.

“Suck,” he commands.

Ezra parts his plush lips and sticks out his tongue. Ace taps his cock on the tip of Ezra’s tongue before guiding himself inside. My breathing changes as I watch, enraptured by them. Ezra seals his mouth around Ace’s length, his cheeks hollow as he sucks. I grip Ace’s thighs, keeping him in place as Ezra glides over Ace’s length more quickly.

Ace hisses in response to my nails digging into his skin, and he puts a hand on both of our heads, threading his fingers through our hair. Ezra pops off, and Ace turns toward me. I do the same as Ezra did, following his lead as he knows better

what Ace likes. My blond Alpha moans as I stick out my tongue, and he paints it with his precum.

“Good Omega,” Ezra whispers darkly.

I flick my tongue over the head of Ace’s cock, and he pushes his hips forward, sinking another inch into my mouth. I suck hard, pulling him in further, and he growls.

“Fuck, yeah,” he grunts, and his fingers tighten in my hair, holding me in place. I take a deep breath and continue sucking his cock. I gag, but he doesn’t let up as his hips move.

“Fucking hell, Dream Girl,” he murmurs, and I hear the tension in his voice. “Your mouth is so hot and wet. You’re sucking me like you never want to let me go.”

I love hearing him vocalize his pleasure. I work my lips even more, taking him as far as possible. All too soon, he pulls back and looks over our heads at Christos lounging on the bed. “Feeling like a voyeur today?”

“Nah, just enjoying watching my pack.” He crooks a finger at me, and I crawl the short distance before joining him on the bed.

“Omega,” he greets me when I’m finally in his arms.

“Alpha.”

“We’ve missed you so fucking much.”

I smile, leaning in to kiss him. “I know. I feel it in the bond. I’ve missed you guys too. We barely spent enough time together before my heat hit and sent me off the rails. But as backward as it all was, I’m glad it happened the way it did.”

Ezra and Ace join us on the bed, piling in until we’re all touching.

“What do you mean?” Ezra asks.

I sigh, a little frustrated with my own hang-ups but content in their arms. “I thought we’d get more time together first. I didn’t want sex and scents to be the thing that pulled us together when we didn’t know one another. Then I went and bonded Christos like a feral Omega.”

My big Alpha chuckles at that. “I’m not complaining, baby.”

“I know. I know. But I think doing things out of order and getting to know you after the heat took away my hesitation. I mean, you’d already all seen every inch of me, been inside me, and cared for me when I could barely string two thoughts together. It bonds people, and it takes away some of those inhibitions. It built the trust I thought we would find in spending time together.”

I realize I wouldn’t change a moment of our story together. “Then, when we were apart, I missed you all with such a fierceness that I barely recognized myself. I threw myself into work, and it’s been amazing, but the highlights of my days are your messages and calls. I look forward to talking with you every night and falling asleep on the phone with you. I want to know the mundane. What kind of toast Ace ordered that day. How Ezra spent twenty minutes perfecting a spin. Which sponsor Christos wanted to strangle that day.”

Ezra kisses that sensitive spot behind my ear as I stare into Christos’s eyes. They soften with emotion as we look deep into each other’s souls, and his purr begins in his chest.

His gruff voice thrums along the same frequency as his purr. “You’re ours, Omega—even if it’s for now. Even if we don’t work out or you don’t think we’re meant to be. We’ll

take this moment and carve out a millennium just for us. We're yours."

"For now and always, Hana," Ace says, cupping my hip and squeezing me.

"Always have been," Ezra adds.

It's time to be brave again, Hana. How often does someone find their soulmate spread across three generous, loving, and accepting people? I'd be stupid not to see what this is. A gift. A twining of fates handed down by the universe itself.

"I want to be yours. Forever," I add when I realize it could be taken as a short-term thing after Christos's beautiful words. "I want to bond."

Ezra's breath stutters in my ear, and Christos stops breathing entirely. Ace is holding onto me like a stiff wind will carry me away.

"Are you sure? We don't have to. Not yet," Christos says, and I know what those words cost him. We've talked about their search for an Omega at length. It hit him harder than the others that no one was picking them. He was the one to initiate them into the pack. He was the one who owned a stripping company. My big Alpha feels responsible for making this pack complete, and while they are great on their own without an Omega, together, we work beautifully.

"I'm sure. Let's complete the bond. I want to feel everything. I want to be linked to all three of you. Just promise you'll never try to cage me when my soul wants to be free."

"Never, Hana. You have my word." Christos leans in and kisses me with all the passion he's been holding back from me. His feelings of unworthiness from my heat have disappeared,

and instead of directing me to the other Alphas, he claims me as his own first.

His tongue tangles with mine as I pour all my love and desire into the kiss. It speaks of promises and a future, of love and acceptance. Of everything.

Christos groans as my hands wander, and I unbutton the crisp white dress shirt tucked into his slacks. The jacket is somewhere on the floor behind us, and mixing their mess in with mine feels so goddamned right.

His chest is broad, packed tightly with his strength. I run my hands over his chest, skirting over the tattoos inked on his pecs and feeling the ridges of his muscles. His nipples are hard and standing at attention as I run my fingertips over them. He shudders, and I grin against his lips.

It's nice to know my touch can still make him react. After all this time apart, I'd nearly forgotten the sound he makes when I do something he likes.

I dip my head, take one of his nipples into my mouth, and suck. His fingers sink into my hair, holding me to him, and my teeth scrape over the sensitive bud.

Ezra's hands wander along my body, unzipping the dress and helping me out of it as I explore Christos. Moments later, Ezra's hard body presses against me from behind, his skin like a balm on mine.

I work my way down Christos's body, licking and sucking until I'm on my knees between his spread thighs as he reclines in the bed.

I grab his pants and yank them down his legs, uncaring of the rip rending the air. Feeling feral, I tug until the material and his boxer briefs are in another puddle on my floor.

Christos's cock springs forward, and I groan at the sight of him. My Alpha's cock is thick and perfect. The head is swollen, and his pre-cum is a shiny pearl on the tip. I lick my lips as I stare at him.

"You missed me, baby?" Christos asks, and I can hear his smile in his voice.

"Yes, Alpha. Every day since my heat."

Ezra's hands move to the clasp of my bra, flicking it open and pushing the straps aside. The simple black lace falls off my shoulders, and instead of covering myself the way I would have before, I let them look their fill.

"Fuck, baby. Come here," Christos says, pulling me up by my arms until I'm straddling him. His hands are everywhere, cupping my ass and squeezing, running up my spine and into my hair.

Ace's hands join in the wandering, sliding between us until he's stroking Christos's cock and bumping the head against my clit. I whine, needing them in me, on me, surrounding me until I can't breathe.

"It's too much," I say, my voice tight with need. "Please. I need you. I need you all."

"You have us, baby," Christos says, and then his mouth is on mine. He's devouring me, his tongue mimicking how I need him to fuck me. He's a greedy man, my Alpha, and I love it.

Ace lines Christos's cock up with my pussy, and without a second's hesitation, I slam down on him, sheathing him completely. Christos shouts his pleasure, and his hands gripping my hips as he holds on, trembling below me.

The bed dips behind me as Ezra joins us, and I can feel his hard cock pressed against my ass. “You take your Alpha so good, Omega. Can you take more?”

He slides the blunt head of his cock along my crack, and I shudder. Wanting his offering, I bounce my ass on Christos’s thighs, sending him into a feral rut and teasing Ezra simultaneously.

“Do it,” I hiss. “Fuck us both, Alpha.”

Ace groans as he fists his own cock, watching the show we’re putting on for him. His hand works faster as Christos grips my hips and holds me still so he can slam into me from below.

“Make her come, Christos. Give me one orgasm, Omega, and I’ll let you have me,” he whispers against my neck.

He helps hold me up, my hands scrabbling for purchase on Christos’s thighs behind me. My breath leaves me in high-pitched moans, punctuated with every impale.

My eyes widen as I look at Ace, his hand working furiously over his cock. The vein on the underside is like a roadmap leading to the head. The pre-cum is thick and slick under his fingers, and I’m dying for his hands on me. His cock in me.

I shift forward, and Christos hits a new angle. I’m nearing release, but I need that last push over the edge into oblivion.

Ace’s hand is there, and he uses his pre-cum and my slick to work his fingers over my clit, thrumming it better than my vibrator ever could. My back bows, and I scream, my slick pouring out of me and onto Christos.

He rears up with a shout and sinks his teeth into my neck and his knot into my cunt. Our bond snaps into place when he

breaks the sensitive skin of my neck, and the burst of emotion swelling inside of him is enough to bring me to tears.

My Alpha pulls away, licking the blood off his lips, and kisses me, our lives and souls now intertwined forever.

“You did so good, Omega,” he breathes. “I’m honored to be your Alpha. Honored you chose us.” His purr kicks in again, and his hips rock gently, stimulating my G-spot incessantly. “I love you,” he whispers.

“You’re mine,” I whisper back, kissing him sweetly and smiling against his lips. “And I love you, too, Christos.”

He smiles against my lips, our bond shimmering in my chest with hope, pride, and determination to make our pack one of love and joy.

Ezra runs a hand down my spine. “Are you ready for me, Omega?”

He gave Christos and me space as we bonded, but my oldest friend is sliding his dick over my hole, gathering my slick and teasing my ass.

“Born ready,” I answer.

“Good girl.” His cock nudges at me, and it will be a tight fit with Christos still inside of me, but I’m determined. “Slow down, Hana. Deep breath.”

I do as he instructs, and he slides in further. “More,” I moan.

Ezra’s dirty talk makes an appearance, causing me to clench around Christos. “Such a good Omega, taking two of your Alphas at the same time. Does Christos feel good in that pretty pussy? Does it feel like home?”

Ace's strokes pick up pace, as affected as I am by Ezra's wicked tongue, and he looks like he's on the edge.

"Come closer, Alpha. Come on me. Come on us," I beg Ace as I watch him.

He doesn't need convincing. He roars out his release, the sweetest of my Alphas, and his cum lands on my lip, streaks down my neck, and spurts across the top of my tits where they're pressed against Christos's broad chest.

He groans below me, and I relax, knowing everyone is finding their pleasure. Ezra sinks in a little further, and Christos rocks into me harder as Ezra slides against that thin wall between them, his cock twitching.

Ace curses and scoots closer. My mouth is on his cock in a flash, my tongue licking the cum off his skin. They groan as I clean him, and their cocks throb in unison.

When my Alpha is clean, I turn back to Ezra, and he gives me a sexy smirk. "Such a dirty girl."

I grin and bite my lip, grinding my ass against his hips. "My Alphas make me this way."

Ezra's expression changes, and he looks almost dangerous. "Do you want to fuck us both, Omega?"

"Yes, Alpha. I need it."

Christos's hand fists in my hair, tilting my head back so I'm looking him in the eye. "Take what's yours, Omega."

It's intense, raw, new, and overwhelming, but my body craves it. I work my hips between them, fucking them both and crying out when I feel Ezra's knot pulsing. His cock is bigger than it looks, and his knot is going to be a tight squeeze,

but it's not painful. It's erotic and hot, and taking control of the bonding is sending me over the edge.

Ace leans forward, taking Christos's lips with his in a kiss that's more battle-worthy than love-making. Their tongues duel, and Ezra's breath catches in his throat. His chest is heaving behind me, and he reaches around my body to take a nipple between his fingertips.

"Mine," he says, making me clench around Christos, who moans as if it's too much. He comes again inside of me, and the feeling of his cock pulsing deep within triggers my next orgasm.

"Yours," I moan, battling for coherency.

Ezra takes a deep breath and then starts to move, his cock filling me and Christos's cock still anchoring me to him.

Ace licks his way down Christos's chest and then over to me, cleaning me up as he goes before Ezra gets the hint and pulls me up by locking my wrists behind my back and tugging. I'm suspended between them, and Ace takes full advantage, sucking a nipple into his mouth and teasing the hard bud with his teeth before moving to the next.

My orgasm is there, hovering out of reach because my body is tired yet still very willing.

"You going to come for me, Omega? Milk my cock with your ass until I knot you?"

Fucking dirty-talking bastard knows all the right things to say. "Yes!" I cry out. "Harder, Ezra. Please, Alpha. Fuck me harder. Make me yours!"

Ezra's hips snap against my ass, his cock pounding into me with fervor.

“My Hana Banana. My Omega,” he grunts as his lips find the other side of my neck, and his teeth cut into the flesh. My head lands against his shoulder as I fall apart in his arms, and he releases my wrists. I hold myself up with a hand on Ace’s shoulder as the other yanks Ezra’s arm toward me, finding a scar he got when we were kids and biting the mark.

His dark and stormy essence floods into me, the bond settling deep in my soul as his love and contentment pour into me.

Ezra lifts his head. “Fuck, Hana. I love you.”

I turn my head to the side, and he leans forward to look me in the eye. “I love you too, Ezra Bakas.”

His bond shimmers in my chest like molten silver. It’s incandescent.

I look down, and Ace is resting on Christos’s chest, looking up at me. He smirks, his carefree smile different this time. Ace is the Alpha who started it all and will be the Alpha to complete our pack bond. It feels fitting, somehow, that he goes last.

I smile back at him, letting him see the emotion in my eyes. “I love you, Ace Bakas. And I’m claiming you too, as soon as these knots deflate.”

Christos laughs, his jostling making Ace’s head bounce around.

“Love you too, Dream Girl. And looking forward to it,” he says with a wink.

With me not being in heat, the knots are quicker to deflate, and Christos adjusts his hips until he slides out of me with a groan.

Ezra's cock leaves my ass in a slow, sensual slide, and for a few blessed minutes, I lie there panting while my muscles fight to work again.

Ace crawls up the bed to lie beside me. He cradles me in his arms, lending me the strength I'm sorely lacking. "You okay, Dream Girl?"

"Marvelous," I answer. "But missing my last Alpha's bite."

He smiles and playfully nips at my shoulder. Ezra and Christos are cuddled on my other side, watching us with love in their eyes and bonds.

"Allow me, Omega."

Ace lays me down, gently resting my head on the pillow as he crawls down my body. He licks and sucks and nips as he goes, revving up my overheated skin and stirring desire low in my belly.

He runs his fingers along my slit and groans when they come away wet with our combined releases. He scoops some up in his first two fingers and then pushes it back inside me. "Not today, Omega, but when you're ready, we'll have a lot of fun adding to our family."

His fingers curl inside me, and instead of pumping them in and out, he only rubs my G-spot. Something heady pools deep inside me, a feeling like it's tugging at the very essence of my being.

"That's it, Dream Girl. Come for me. Come for your Alphas."

My body is already wound tight, and Ace's fingers barely move. My orgasm builds and builds, slow and steady, until it crests, and I come again, soaking the bed and Ace's hand.

I'm boneless and utterly satisfied when he pulls his fingers from me and lifts them to his lips. He licks them, then offers them to Christos and Ezra, who take turns tasting me.

"Oh, fuck," I moan, watching their tongues dance around Ace's fingertips.

My blond Alpha lifts my right leg, laying it on the left so my knees are together and my body is twisted. "Perfect," he murmurs.

His hands run down my body, following the lines of my torso until he reaches my pussy on display for him in this position.

He spreads me with his thumbs, and the head of his cock slips between my lips. He scoots closer on his knees, spreading his stance and lining up with my pussy.

Guiding himself inside slowly, I breathe out a sigh of relief when he doesn't stop but keeps going until his hips are flush against me.

Like this, it feels like he's entering me from behind, but I have the added benefit of looking into his mesmerizing eyes. His fingers pinch my nipples, adding to the overall sensation. It feels like he's everywhere at once, and I'm laid bare for him to take what he wants from me, only all too willing to give it to him.

He withdraws slowly, never increasing his pace, and then thrusts again. His slow, torturous rut makes me believe Ace has at least read about tantric sex or something and is using the guidebook.

His abs flex with every thrust forward, undulating like the most erotic body roll ever performed.

Ace's eyes are my anchor, the emerald color holding me together. They're bright and joyful and so full of love.

He leans over me and bites my shoulder as I explode around him. I lunge and sink my teeth into the flesh of his shoulder, mirroring our marks. Everything that makes up Ace comes pouring through the bond. There's nothing but love and hope in his bright soul, and it winds around mine, lifting me to a new high I've never experienced.

“Love you, Hana. Omega of my heart and soul. Girl of my dreams.”

Ace's hands grip my hips, and I know he's still trying to take it slow. But I refuse. I reach forward, gripping his ass with my fingers and pulling him closer. His knot slides inside me with a pinch and swells as we lock together, coming again as we fit together.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Hana

Three months later

I'M FIDGETING IN THE ENTRYWAY, FEELING A MILLION TIMES more nervous than I have in months. Lana texted me that they were a couple of minutes away, and suddenly, it feels like the walls are closing in and I'm drowning.

"She's going to love us," Ace says as he wraps his arms around me, exuding the confidence I'm searching for.

"How can you say that? What if she doesn't? This could go horribly, horribly wrong." I drop my face into my hands. "My parents aren't even coming. What if they poisoned her against you already?"

"Banana, look at me." I peek at Ezra from between my fingers. "She loves you, and you love us. By the transitive property, she loves us already."

"That makes no sense!" Christos shouts from the kitchen. He emerges a moment later with an apron wrapped around his waist and a pair of tongs in his hand, which he clicks together in Ezra's direction. "I thought you were good at math."

"Eh, it makes me feel better," I admit, leaning up for a kiss from Ezra. "Thank you."

A horn honks outside, and Christos snaps the tongs at Ezra's ass, making him yelp and hop out of range.

My Alphas surround me, and Christos puts his hands on my shoulders. "You've got this. We've got this. No matter what, we're here for you. Okay?"

I nod. “Okay.” Blowing out a big breath, I step forward and grip the handle. I swing the door open with a wide smile on my face.

“You look creepy as fuck,” Lana says from the porch.

Ezra chuckles from inside the house, and I flick my hand back, catching him in the stomach, earning myself a decent grunt. Serves him right.

“Get over here, brat,” I say. Lana throws herself into my arms and hugs me so tight, it feels like my head will pop off my body.

“Missed you so much,” Lana whispers. “Now, introduce me to your hunky dudes.”

“Not yet,” Hailey says from behind Lana. “I need my hug first. I can’t tell you how much I miss living next door to you, but I certainly don’t miss the noises. Good lord, Mrs. Mulronee will never be the same. The one night she used her hearing aids has scarred her for the rest of time.”

I blush, but honestly, who could have known she’d choose our bonding night to listen to her doctor and use the damn things?

Hailey lopes up the steps and throws her arms around me and Lana. “Reunited, and it feels so good!” she sings.

Ace, Ezra, and Christos start singing the following lines of the verse and drag Hailey into the house for hugs. I’m still standing in the doorway, looking at my parents as they stand in the driveway.

“You’re...You’re here?” I say/ask as I stumble for the words.

“We are. They’re your family now, and we’d like to get to know them better,” Mom says. It’s been a rough couple of months, I won’t lie. First, there was the icing out, then the probing questions, then the reactionary icing out to the answers I gave to those questions, and then weird, stilted small talk.

“When are the other strippers coming?” Lana asks with a grin, pulling my attention back toward the foyer.

It’s Ace’s birthday, and he said all he wanted was a house party and for me to ride his face for his present. Little does he know, I got him another present that should be here in about an hour.

Christos got Ace four passes to the local spa he prefers and promised we would all go with him without complaint—the no complaining thing seems to have been the best part of that deal for our blond Alpha. Ezra’s gift looked like he googled what best to get someone who practices mindfulness and meditation and bought them all. There’s a necklace with a long tube for deep exhales and breathing exercises, a few books on mindfulness and mantras, approximately twelve candles, a wearable device to monitor heart rate, blood pressure, and movements, and six boxes of prepacked energy ritual cleansing kits.

In true Beasts of Bacchanal tradition, all the dancers from the company and their families are invited, along with the crew, security team, and anyone I wanted to invite—meaning my family and Hailey, but Mom and Dad said they couldn’t make it when I invited them. I’m guessing Lana talked them into it. She’s home from school for the weekend, so we made the dates work.

I figured it would also be a good way to show my little sister it wasn't all debauchery and thongs all the time the way she's built it up in her head. Although, I have it on good authority that Ace is wearing a thong under his harem pants, so it's debauchery and thongs sometimes.

"Dad?" I ask. "You okay being here?"

He looks around the yard, unsure. It's a weird moment seeing a man who's always so in charge of his surroundings suddenly looking so out of place. "I guess we'll find out. It's still weird for me, Hana. And I think it might be for a while, but I'm getting there."

"And that's all I can ask," I say. "Come in. We've got a bit of time until the others show up."

Lana follows me in, but Mom and Dad whisper back and forth. I shrug, leaving the door open and introducing Lana to Ace, Ezra, and Christos. As soon as pleasantries and handshakes are exchanged, Lana puts her hand on her hip and says, "You're welcome."

"For what?" Ezra asks, cocking his head to the side.

"For kidnapping Hana and dragging her to your show. She never would have gone on her own."

"You did WHAT?!" Mom shouts from the threshold. My dear sister sputters and looks horrified that Mom heard her. "Lana Henderson, you better speak up and tell me what the heck you did. I swear to Cher that I'm grounding you as soon as we're home."

Swear to Cher? Christos mouths.

Mom is trying to watch her language more lately, but apparently, swearing to the iconic and incomparable Cher is okay. I shrug.

“I live on campus, Mom,” Lana counters. “I don’t think you can ground me from afar.”

Bold move, Lana. Bold move.

“Watch me,” Mom says quietly.

Lana steps behind Christos, who ducks away from Mom’s glare.

“Dude! You’re my least favorite now,” Lana grumbles.

“But I’m your mom’s current favorite. I’ll take it.”

Lana laughs, and the corner of Dad’s lips pull up into the tiniest smile I’ve ever seen. Mom pats Christos on the cheek. “Yes, you are.” Then, Mom does what she does best. She organizes the hell out of our situation. “Forest, help Christos with the grilling. Ezra and Ace, you’re with me. Hana, I know you’re dying to spend time with Lana and Hailey, so grab a corner and start gossiping. Let’s get this show on the road, everyone.”

Dad slowly follows Christos as if his glacial shuffling will make Mom change her mind, but when he peeks over his shoulder, she points a finger toward the open patio doors, and he picks up the pace. Everyone else disperses to different parts of the house. I’m relieved they’re all getting along so far, but I know there’s still a long road ahead of us. My parents are trying, but I can see the discomfort in their eyes. It will take time, but I’m hopeful we’ll get there eventually.

Hailey, Lana, and I follow Dad and Christos out the back door and onto the deck. I lead them to the loungers by the pool and open an umbrella so we can relax in the shade. I got Christos to help me with the setup for my present early this morning, so with everything else being handled by my pack and parents, I take this moment to enjoy time with my girls.

Hailey props her feet up, and Lana does the same, folding her hands behind her head and relaxing against the plush cushions. “The only thing that would make this better is a drink.”

As if on cue, Ace approaches with three iced teas on a tray. “You called.”

“Okay, you’re my official favorite right now. Happy birthday by the way. I forgot to say that when I came in. Sorry!”

“Don’t worry about it,” Ace answers. “And I’ll happily take the title of your favorite for the next six months as a birthday/apology gift,” he teases, handing over the drinks. He gives one to Hailey and Lana, and with mine, I get a kiss on my temple. “Have fun.”

I watch him walk away, not at all embarrassed about how long I stare.

“So things are good,” Hailey teases.

“Very good by the looks of things,” Lana adds.

We talk about the guys a bit, then shift topics to Lana’s classes. She’s doing well so far and has decided to become a teacher, which is mind-boggling since she was such a troublemaker at school. I’m hoping her future students give as good as she did when she was younger—karma and all that.

Voices draw our attention back to the house, and I see Julie and Cole emerging from the back door, along with a few of the others I recognize from the tour. Ezra grabs his mom and her neighbor, Ron, from the pool house and brings them up the flagstone path. Eloise and Mom have recently begun chatting on the phone and have started mending fences.

Ron looks at Eloise like she hung the moon, and every time he does, she smirks like she can see it. Ezra was right; she is playing the long game. Ron is all too happy to be her guide for the party tonight, and I think it's because he gets to hold her hand. It's the cutest thing.

Soon, the backyard is full of dancers and my family, mingling like old friends. Julie hugs me fiercely and tells me about the schedule and playlist she's putting together for the upcoming shows at the usual brick-and-mortar venue downtown.

She confuses Mom with her constant reference to her various wigs and their role in her emcee persona, but it's fun to watch. Jake and his pack make small talk and attempt to joke around with my dad, and I sigh as I watch my parents start to relax a little more.

My phone dings, and I hustle toward the house, slipping away as subtly as I can, saying I need to check on the cake. Instead, I rush through the living room and yank open the front door to find Pack Wiles sitting on our porch swing and leaning against the railing.

"Hana!" Becca shouts, striding toward me with sure feet and wrapping me up in a big hug. "Hey, girl! How are you?"

"So good. Thank you so much for coming today!"

"We wouldn't miss it," she answers.

Callum steps up beside her and hugs me too. "Ooh, things have definitely changed since we last saw you. I smell nothing but Alpha all over you."

I wave him off. They all know the story because I explained it all through text when things finally calmed down a couple months ago. They were on the East Coast for their

tour and were going to RV their way back to California when I convinced them to take a small detour to Texas.

“You know exactly why, Callum. Don’t play coy.”

He smirks. “Yeah, but it’s fun, so I’ll do it every chance I get.”

Dane, the tattooed Alpha, gets up from the porch swing and throws a tattooed arm over Callums shoulders, giving them a squeeze with affection. “Brat.”

Callum looks up at him, love shining in his gaze. “You love it. Don’t lie.”

Dane extends his free hand to me. “Nice to see you again, Hana. Thanks for the invite. We have the instruments out in the RV. Just tell us where to set up.”

Phil and Alice join our little cluster, and we exchange our hellos. “There’s a great spot next to the fire pit. I thought that would do. Thank you again for this. It’s going to be so great.”

As a group, they head to the RV parked down the street and come back carrying a few acoustic guitars and a wooden drum box so they can perform without all the wires and speakers necessary for a traditional concert. I lead them around the house to the backyard, and as we make our way toward the firepit, conversation around us slowly goes from a raucous chatter to hushed whispers as our guests figure out who’s arrived.

“Pack Wiles??”

“Oh my God, is that...?”

“Hana for the win.”

I smirk when I hear the last one because, fuck yeah, I definitely won the birthday present game. I’m surrounded by

Pack Wiles as we reach the space I envisioned for this performance, and my Alphas join us.

“Hi,” Christos says, taking the lead as usual. “I’m Christos Bakas. This is Ezra and Ace. We’re big fans.”

Ace is standing there with his mouth opening and closing like he wants to say something, and the words are stuck in his throat. I run a hand down his arm, and he turns his gaze to me, the look in his eyes pleading for some help here. “Ace, this is Callum, Becca, Dane, Phil, and Alice. Otherwise known as Pack Wiles. They’re here to do an acoustic set for your birthday. I used your music app about a month ago, and wouldn’t you know it? The most recent playlists all had a ton of Pack Wiles songs on there. I didn’t know you were such a fan.” I smirk at him, knowing I have absolutely, one hundred percent won this time.

“Hey, Ace. Happy birthday,” Alice says, effortlessly moving the conversation forward. She flicks a bit of her mohawk out of her eyes and looks between my guys. “You better be treating Hana right.”

“Alice,” Phil chides. He turns to us. “What she means is, it’s nice to meet you all. And if you hurt Hana, we’ll be back.”

Damn, Phil. Why is it always the quiet ones?

Ezra clears his throat, and we all fall silent. He still never uses more words than necessary, preferring to have his statements make an impact with how rarely he uses them in company outside our pack. “We would die before hurting Hana, and if we ever did, we would personally call your pack to come finish us off after we did our best on our own.”

Well, okay then.

“Good,” Dane says, flexing his arms around the drum box. “So, can we do this now?”

“PACK WILES!” a voice shrieks, and then Julie comes barreling toward us, arms outstretched as she engulfs the entire pack in her hug. “Hi, guys! Why are you here? Oh my god, are those *instruments*?! Are you going to play? Can I film it? Is there going to be any new material? How was the last show of the tour in Miami? Did you get a tan?”

“Julie!” I shout, and she turns toward me, slowly releasing the members of Pack Wiles, and they finally get to take a full breath. “Calm yourself, woman. I’ll answer everything after their set. Until then, go find a spot to dance, yeah?”

She’s hyperventilating, and when Callum throws an arm over her shoulder, it just gets worse. He carefully removes it. “Hi, Julie. Yes, we’re going to play a set. No, we’d prefer not to have you film since some of the songs will be new and exclusive to this party until the new single drops. The show was good, and yes, we’re all tanned. Can you breathe?”

Julie gulps and nods.

“Great, let’s do this,” Becca says, sending Julie a wink. I swear the woman almost keels over right then and there.

“Yeah, definitely,” I say, pulling Ace with me to help unfold some of the blankets. Christos grabs some stools from over by the bar so they can sit as they play. The rest of the crowd watches with hushed whispers as Pack Wiles gets into formation and Becca strums a few chords on her guitar.

“Hey, everyone,” Becca says loudly. “We’re Pack Wiles, and Hana invited us to play for Ace’s birthday. So without further ado...”

Dane taps on the drum box, which I've since learned is called a cajón. Becca strums along softly while Alice plays a string of notes on a twelve-string ovation guitar. Callum plucks at his four-string acoustic bass, layering the music until it feels like it's everywhere, surrounding us as we stand and watch in awe as they play in the firelight.

Ace wraps his arms around me from behind and whispers in my ear. "This is amazing, Dream Girl. Thank you."

I look over at him as he rests his chin on my shoulder. "You're welcome. And you deserve a private show. And a spa day with us. And all the stuff Ezra bought you."

"And?" he prompts.

I chuckle softly so I don't disturb the rest of the audience watching the performance. "And for me to sit on your face."

"Damn straight."

We listen to song after song, swaying in time with the music as Christos stands to our left and Ezra to our right. I often wonder if I had skipped the Pack Wiles concert back in Denver, would the guys and I have met earlier? They told me they had looked for me at the show after my panties left my scent on Ezra's shirt but couldn't find me.

Looking at Pack Wiles, I realize I wouldn't have changed anything, even if it had meant the guys and I would have had an extra week or so together. I've come to adore this pack, and they showed me how pack life could be. Because of them, I was less hesitant than I would have been even six months ago when confronted with the idea of joining a pack. They showed me how it could be through their unconditional love and support of one another. Love is infinite and isn't made weaker by sharing it. It's made stronger.

As the night wears on, more people arrive, and the party gets going after Pack Wiles finishes their set to raucous cheers and whistles so loud, it feels like they'll reach downtown Dallas. We kick up the speakers and hit one of Julie's playlists to start a dance party.

My parents watch from the sidelines as I dance with my three Alphas and then a few of the kids some of the other performers brought along. I feel their eyes on me, assessing and still not quite comfortable with me in a pack, but they're not outright rude about it. Small steps, I guess. They'll come around, and with the small smile on my mom's lips a few seconds ago, I think that moment is coming sooner rather than later.

At one point, Ace drags Mom onto the dancefloor, and she shows off some impressive moves I never knew she had. It reminds me of her story about dancing when she was younger, and even though it's not a ballet stage, they earn cheers and applause when the song is over. On the other hand, my dad sticks to the food, grilling up a storm and tersely chatting with anyone who comes his way. It feels kinda nice. Homey.

Except for the moment when Jake pulls Lana onto the dance floor, and Hailey shoots daggers at him with her eyes. I don't think anyone sees it but me, and I intend to grill her about it thoroughly later.

Cole and Julie are arguing back and forth, but as they do so, their bodies lean closer toward one another, like it's some kind of weird foreplay the rest of us are clueless about. It ends with her scooping up a handful of mashed potatoes with her bare hand and smushing it onto Cole's head.

He launches a spray of ranch dressing at her, misses, and hits Christos. He looks at his ruined shirt, then back up at

Cole, and launches at the food table.

I rush over to calm him, but I'm met with a slice of pineapple upside-down cake to the face.

An all-out food fight breaks out, my dad shielding the grill with his body so no one ruins the burgers, but he throws roasted tomatoes into the crowd, adding in friendly fire from someone I never thought would be tempted into such childish antics.

As the fight dies down, everyone is covered in pasta salad, mashed potatoes, and salad greens. Pack Wiles threw a blanket over their instruments, so they're safe, but the band members are covered head to toe in what looks like barbeque sauce. The backyard is a mess, and I'm pretty sure there are pineapple rings at the bottom of the pool, but everyone is laughing and smiling, even my parents.

"Okay, I think that's enough for one night," Christos announces, still chuckling as he surveys the carnage. "Thank you all for coming. Ace, we love you and wish you the happiest of birthdays." Ace nods, pressing his hands together in front of his chest in gratitude to our guests.

"To the future!" he shouts as he lifts a beer from the table.

Everyone echoes the sentiment, and slowly, the party breaks apart. Everyone is given free rein in the closets to nab any sheets or towels to protect their cars from the remnants of the food fight on their way home, and all four bathrooms are in constant use as people clean up.

Once the last of the guests leave, I head to the bathroom. I turn on the faucet and splash water on my face, feeling refreshed and happy as I pull bits of food from my hair.

“Tonight was amazing,” Lana says as she leans against the doorjamb, grinning at me in the mirror. “Your Alphas are good guys. I approve.”

“Thank you,” I reply, smiling back. “But even if you didn’t, I was gonna keep them. This will just make holidays and visits much more bearable.”

She smacks my arm and pulls me in for a hug, squishing some potato remnants between us.

“And hey, if school sucks, call me. I’ll help you with anything.” I squeeze her arms to reinforce my point.

“You’re already paying for half of it,” she argues.

“Doesn’t matter. Dad is paying for the other half, but does that mean you won’t go to him for help if you need it?”

She shakes her head.

“Then I expect the same courtesy.”

“Fine,” she groans, being contrary because she can.

I laugh and turn off the faucet. “Come on, let’s find the guys and see if they need help.”

We go back outside, where the guys are already cleaning up the mess. My Alphas are shirtless, their muscles glistening with sweat and sauce as they carry full trash bags and toss them into the bins.

Hailey and Ace laugh as they scrub the grill clean while Ezra and Mom are raking up the remnants of the food fight.

I grab a bag and join Christos as we pick up the errant debris. Surprisingly, Dad pops his head out of the pool with pineapple rings around his fingers and tosses them into a pile

on the side with a scowl. It's a peaceful end to a chaotic night, and as we work, I feel content and secure.

My old life was set aflame as soon as I embraced who I was. I watched the effigy of the old Hana melt away until it revealed my strength underneath.

This is the new me and my new family. Imperfect and messy but full of love and laughter.

And I wouldn't have it any other way.

THE END

AFTERWORD

This story has lived in my head for nearly a year. YES, A YEAR. How did it come about, you ask?

Well, my co-author, my developmental editor, and one of my alpha readers were in London at a male strip show... as one does... and the idea of the glitter thong and the gyrating Alphas hit me like a ton of bricks. Instead of watching their moves and participating when one came into the audience and was singing (didn't know it was a multi-talented show when we bought tickets) right next to me, I was bent over my phone putting plot points into my notes app.

With some refining with Manuela at the airport, and then a weekend of hashing it all out with Steph and arguing over who would do what and why, the story was born.

It has been such a blast to dip my toes into the Omegaverse genre. Please let me know if you want more! I usually have my schedule set, but always plan for one or two additional books through the year outside of my current plan, and if you want more of something, ask! It helps me know what readers are liking, and what things they want from me as I fall down my creative rabbit holes :D

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Mr. Sin, you laugh every time I say knotty peen, and I love you for it. Child Sin, you learned the name Christos when I was talking some plot points through with your father, and now you've named your favorite plushie after one of Mama's characters. My, how you've grown since this writing adventure started. I love you both so much. You're my world, and I can't wait for the next Sin Family adventure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mila is a coffee addict, a bookworm, and an all around awkward woman with absolutely zero chill. She lives vicariously through book characters so she doesn't end up in prison. Her fan club is led by her husband, Mr. Sin, and the ever-charming Child Sin. When she's not imagining murder scenarios for her books, Mila teaches English as a second language and lives in a quaint town on the Croatian coast.

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